

Transforming the City for Sustainable Futures? Contestation and Alternatives in Amsterdam

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TRANSFORMING THE CITY FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES?

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CBS PhD School
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PhD Series 24-2024

CHARLOTTE CATOR

TRANSFORMING THE CITY FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES?

Contestation and alternatives in Amsterdam



Transforming the city for sustainable futures?

Contestation and alternatives in Amsterdam

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potentials and limits of the city as a locus for transformative social change promoting just and sustainable futures away from extractive capitalism and neoliberal urbanism. Policymakers, activists and researchers increasingly turn to the city as a site for sustainable practice, political potential and alternative economic thinking. Yet, it remains insufficiently clear how alternative models and ideas are put into practice and how the actions subsequently taken by state and non-state actors are collective and transformative. To inform collective, transformative practice, this thesis develops a theoretical account of transformative social change against the background of the tight interconnections of the urban with capitalism which shape the contingent political-economic conditions for change. It posits transformative social change as consisting of two moments: one of difference and contestation and the other of alternatives and diverse economies. In these moments, post-capitalist subjectivities and decommodified urban spaces arise which challenge capitalism in the city and the ways it is premised on growth, divides society into social classes and relies on unpaid care work and nature.

The thesis explores the potentials and limits of transformative social change in the city empirically through the case of Amsterdam and its emerging Doughnut Economy. The latter is based on an alternative economic model incorporating social and ecological thinking. The Municipality of Amsterdam has embraced this model in relation to its latest circular economy strategy, while a range of urban activists have adopted it in their efforts to transform the urban economy from below. Drawing on qualitative methods and a dynamic research approach that is both critical and generative, the project examines Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy, to distil the potential for alternative practices arising in, and despite, dominant structures while remaining aware of the ways in which these structures condition and limit this potential.

The study shows how social actors working with and beyond the state engage in contestation and promote alternative practices that begin to reconfigure the unsustainable relations of the urban economy with nature and reposit the city as a space for social reproduction rather than (immaterial) production. Yet, the potential for material rather than merely discursive change remains limited as long as the governing of urban space is profit-dependent and sustainability efforts are simultaneously instrumentalised for international competitiveness and green growth. The thesis thus argues that transformative social change requires paying attention to alternative value creation and class relations in the city as well political-economic relations extending well beyond the geographic boundaries of the city. By shedding light on the dynamics present in one local setting, the thesis paves the way for further disentangling the myriad connections of (un)sustainable local practices with geographies elsewhere – something which is needed to enable solidarities extending far beyond the local.

Danish abstract

Denne afhandling udforsker potentialerne og begrænsningerne ved byen som et sted for transformativ social forandring, der fremmer retfærdige og bæredygtige fremtider væk fra udvindende kapitalisme og neoliberal urbanisme. Politiske beslutningstagere, aktivister og forskere har en tiltagende interesse for byen som et sted for bæredygtig praksis, politisk potentiale og alternativ økonomisk tænkning. Dog er det stadig uklart, hvordan alternative modeller og ideer bringes i spil i praksis, og hvordan statslige og ikke-statslige aktørers handlinger kan udmøntes på kollektiv og transformativ vis. Med henblik på at informere kollektiv, transformativ praksis udvikler afhandlingen en teoretisk forståelse af transformativ social forandring i lyset af de tætte sammenhænge mellem byen og kapitalismen, som former de foranderlige politisk-økonomiske betingelser for transformation. Afhandlingen argumenterer for en forståelse af transformativ social forandring som bestående af to elementer, et af forskellighed og modstand og det andet af alternativer og diverse økonomier. Når disse elementer er tilstede, opstår postkapitalistiske subjektiviteter og dekommodificerede byrum, som udfordrer kapitalismen i byen og de måder, den er baseret på vækst, opdeler samfundet i sociale klasser og er afhængig af ubetalt omsorgsarbejde og natur.

Afhandlingen udforsker potentialerne og begrænsningerne ved transformativ social forandring i byen empirisk gennem Amsterdam og byens fremvoksende doughnutøkonomi. Sidstnævnte er en alternativ økonomisk model, der inkorporerer social og økologisk tænkning. Amsterdam Kommune har omfavnet denne model i forbindelse med sin seneste cirkulære økonomistrategi, mens en række urbane aktivister adopterer den i deres bestræbelser på at transformere byens økonomi nedefra. Baseret på kvalitative metoder og en dynamisk forskningsmetode, der er både kritisk og generativ, undersøger projektet Amsterdams fremvoksende doughnutøkonomi. Dette sker med henblik på at udlede potentialer for alternative praksisser, der opstår på trods af dominerende strukturer, men samtidig opretholdes en opmærksomhed på hvordan disse strukturer udmønter sig og dermed begrænser potentialer for forandring.

Studiet viser, hvordan sociale aktører, der arbejder med og ud over staten, engagerer sig i modstand og fremmer alternative praksisser, der begynder at gentænke de uholdbare relationer mellem byens økonomi og naturen, og at omdefinere byen som et rum for social reproduktion i stedet for (immateriel) produktion. Dog forbliver potentialet for materiel ændring i stedet for blot diskursiv ændring begrænset, så længe styring af det urbane rum er profitafhængig, og bæredygtighedsindsats samtidig instrumentaliseres for international konkurrenceevne og grøn vækst. Afhandlingen argumenterer derfor, at transformativ social forandring kræver alternativ værdiskabelse og opmærksomhed på klasseforhold i byen samt politisk-økonomiske relationer, der strækker sig langt ud over byens geografiske grænser. Ved at belyse lokale dynamikkerne baner afhandlingen vejen

for yderligere afklaring af forbindelserne mellem (u)bæredygtige lokale praksisser og geografer andre steder, hvilket er nødvendigt for at muliggøre solidariteter, der strækker sig langt ud over det lokale niveau.

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Optimism has one thing in its favour – its tenacity.

– Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*

1 Introduction

With the significance of human influence on climate change reiterated once more (IPCC 2023), and the current levels of global inequality approximating those at the heyday of Western imperialism in the early twentieth century (Chancel et al. 2022), the unsustainability and injustices of the global capitalist system seem unequivocal.¹ Activists calling for “system change, not climate change” (Foran 2019) are increasingly joined by policy makers, among whom there is a growing consensus that systemic transformation and fundamental change are needed (Feola 2015). This fundamental change “does not require more evidence or data” but “urgent collective action based on a different imaginary” (Banerjee and Arjaliès 2021, 3) invoking “an alternative political economy where planetary capacities and human wellbeing, not economic growth, determine economic and social relations” (Banerjee and Arjaliès 2021, 17).

In discussions about how we might organise our economies and societies more sustainably and justly, cities take centre stage. Cities, the protagonists in the historical development of capitalism, and key to capital accumulation and commodification, trade, human and financial capital as well as real estate, have a long history of extractive relations with nature. These relations have intensified through decades of neoliberal policies, while neoliberal urbanism has given rise to the increased commodification of urban space and life in the city itself (K. Bakker 2015; Rossi 2017). Increasingly, however, the city is considered a key site for sustainability, as climate change is considered a potential for urban transformation (Romero-Lankao et al. 2018). Policymakers connect high degrees of density to energy efficiency and GHG emission reductions, positing cities as “sustainability solutions” that are believed to be able to “save the planet” (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020, 2211–12). This translates into a promulgation of “green urbanism” (Beatley 2000) with, for instance, the “smart city” (Toli and Murtagh 2020), the “resilient city” (Vale 2014) and the “circular city” (Williams 2019). Positing urban sustainability as common sense, these approaches often

¹ As the World Inequality Report 2022 states, inequalities *within* most countries (measured by “the gap between the average incomes of the top 10% and the bottom 50% of individuals within countries”) have “almost doubled”, while global inequalities *between* countries (measured by the gap between the average incomes of the richest 10% of countries and the average incomes of the poorest 50% of countries) are on the decline (Chancel et al. 2022, 11).

promote green growth in technocratic ways, while they overlook political dimensions of power, interests, and equity (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020). Even in the cases where civil society actors are involved through networked forms of governance, their involvement is often limited and selective, whereas dissenting political views or more fundamental questions regarding the underlying mechanisms producing the imminent crises are left untouched. Rather than promoting democratic policy-making processes, these arrangements engender “post-political” cities (Swyngedouw 2018).

Concerns about the status of democracy are not limited to the urban scale. While Western countries and their liberal-democratic values lose influence in the arising “post-Western world” (Stuenkel 2016), the quality of those liberal democracies themselves has been in decline since at least 2006 (Garrido 2020). With evidence of impending ecological catastrophe mounting, polarisation is deepening, while populism has taken root in political arenas across the globe. A varied scholarship has linked this to the rise of neoliberalism. While key neoliberal thinkers in the mid-twentieth century already saw democracy as the most important threat to well-functioning markets (Biebricher 2023), neoliberalism’s critics have analysed how, under “actually existing neoliberalism” (N. Brenner and Theodore 2002), technocratic management has come to substitute democratic deliberation and contestation (Brown 2019). With the strong influence of economic elites in political decision-making, decades of neoliberal governing have led to a form of “post-democracy” in which free market thinking and increasingly sophisticated logics of de-politicisation foreclose democratic politics (Rancière 1999, 95; Crouch 2020).

Against this bleak neoliberal background, the city contains political potential not only through the collective forms of urban life in difference and proximity that it enables but also the connections it forges between shared human life and far-away political institutions and capitalist structures (Lefebvre [1968] 1996a). The urban is a space for strangers to encounter one another, and this proximity between diverse urban dwellers promotes an urban life that is open to difference and otherness (Young 1990). The urban is a key arena in which people engage together in democratic practices of collective forms of self-government through which they challenge global capital (Beveridge and Koch 2022). Inspired by this potential of the city, various strands of thinking and activism have turned to the municipal scale as an opening for wider social transformation (Russell 2019). To counter post-political tendencies in citizen participation schemes, these radical strands attempt to establish alternative relations between the state and civil society (Kohn 2003) by forging coalitions of change – or “powerful assemblages” (Chatterton and Pusey 2020, 31) – between state and non-state actors.

The city as a space for re-politicisation and alterity gained even more attention during the Covid-19 pandemic, which laid bare tensions between ecological questions, economic interests and democratic demands. Moreover, the pandemic triggered and reinvigorated alternative visions of

and for the (urban) economy, some of which potentially challenge the capitalist status quo. Driven by progressive local state actors as well as urban activists, notions of community wealth building (Dubb 2016), the foundational economy (Engelen et al. 2017), new municipalism (Thompson 2021) and doughnut economics (Raworth 2017) posit the city as a laboratory for radically alternative ways of living. These more radical approaches to urban sustainability do not only envision the urban as a locus for sustainability but do so by emphasising the role of democracy and urban activists.

Taking heed of the myriad calls and proposals for more sustainable and just cities, we need to understand how these alternative visions of the urban economy provide pathways to more just and sustainable urban futures. Assessing this requires consideration of how these policy proposals connect to bottom-up activism and democratic projects which challenge neoliberal urbanism, and how they promote collective action, with and beyond the local state, and transformative social change that goes beyond short-lived political insurrections and starts to change the urban fabric in durable ways. One empirical context in which we can study the city as a fruitful locus for addressing multiple challenges is Amsterdam, where, in recent years, radical approaches to urban economy and sustainability have taken hold.

1 Urban sustainability in Amsterdam

In April 2020, in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic, Amsterdam's local government published a circular economy strategy to halve raw material use by 2030 and make Amsterdam a fully circular city by 2050. The strategy proposes to achieve these goals by drawing on the model of "Doughnut Economics," which presents an economic narrative that situates the economy as the doughnut-shaped space between a social foundation that ensures human well-being – the inner ring – and an ecological ceiling depicting the boundaries that should not be crossed to avoid irreversible environmental damage – the outer ring (Raworth 2017). Raworth has been called the "John Maynard Keynes of the 21st century" (Monbiot 2017) and her Doughnut Economics has gained rapid ground as a way of thinking and practicing the economy in ways that are socially just and environmentally sustainable.

In Amsterdam, the local government adopted Doughnut Economics in its circular strategy "as a basis to have economic and social developments take place within socially equitable boundaries (the inner boundary of the doughnut) and planetary boundaries (the outer boundary of the doughnut)"

(Appendix I-31, 17).² For the implementation of the circular strategy, the Municipality of Amsterdam embraces an approach of “learning by doing” as it acknowledges “that much is still unknown about how the transition will proceed” (Appendix I-31, 17-18). In accordance with the municipality’s efforts around community wealth building and democratisation, it is taking on the transformation towards a circular and Doughnut Economy through a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. In what it calls the “Amsterdam Approach,” it promotes “an iterative cycle of co-creation, instigating new action, and amplifying what’s already working” by drawing on “a network of changemakers, bringing government, business and academia together with innovators from SMEs, start-ups, *the commons*, and *community networks*” (Appendix I-2, 14 [my emphasis]). The municipality explicitly refers to bottom-up social actors and envisions the city’s “ready community of changemakers” as the potential “pioneers of this process” (Appendix I-2, 16). One of these communities of changemakers is the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, a diverse group of activists, organisations and citizens “already finding innovative ways to put Doughnut thinking into practice” (Appendix I-2, 15). They are the ones who “practice first and theorise later” (Appendix II-1, 9) and come together at the online platform and events hosted by the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition.

2 Research aims and approach

In this dissertation, I aim to shed light on the urban as a locus for transformative social change through a study of the potentials and challenges of the current developments around thinking and practising an alternative urban economy in Amsterdam. To do so, I take my departure from the following research question:

What are the potentials and limits of the city as a place for transformative social change, promoting sustainable and just urban futures away from forms of extractive capitalism and neoliberal urbanism?

I aim to answer this question through an in-depth case study of Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy as an example of a ‘practice first, theorise later’ or ‘learning-by-doing’ response to the call for urgent transformative collective action. I consider the developments around Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy as a case of “urgent collective action based on a different imaginary” (Banerjee

² Throughout the thesis, I refer to policy documents and documents produced by civil society actors and initiatives by referring to the number of the appendix and the number of the document. For instance, “Appendix I-3, 17” refers to the first appendix, the third document listed in the table in that appendix, and page 17 of that document.

and Arjaliès 2021, 3) of the urban political economy. The strategy of the Municipality of Amsterdam and the bottom-up actions around its implements are inspired by Raworth's (2017, iv) conviction that the pencil is the most "powerful tool in economics" as it enables us to "redraw the world". Although I do not go into burgeoning discussions around social imaginaries (see, e.g., Adams et al. 2015), I do consider the discourse promoted by Doughnut Economics as an attempt at constructing an alternative economic imaginary that can guide collective action. With Doughnut Economics, Raworth (2017, 3) sets out to reveal "the old ideas that have entrapped us and [replace] them with new ones to inspire us," and to introduce "a new economic story that is told in pictures as much as in words". In Amsterdam, this new economic discourse may be a way to bring together state and non-state actors in promoting and enacting collective projects that aim to reimagine the urban political economy and promote a more sustainable urban system.

In examining the potential of Doughnut Economics in Amsterdam, I acknowledge that, while both municipality and a range of civil society actors are engaged in taking urgent action, the role of research may well be "to *stop* and think" (Arendt [1971] 1978, 4). By refraining "from active involvement" and moving into "a privileged position in order to contemplate the whole" (Arendt [1971] 1978, 94), I allow myself to reflect on how actions currently taken in Amsterdam may be transformative and collective. This, in turn, is required to uncover the (un)intended and potentially overlooked consequences that may come with urgent forms of acting.

By studying the role citizens take on in collectively driving transformative social change in the city, working with and beyond the state, I put aside the 'buzz' around the circular economy and Doughnut Economics in Amsterdam. Instead, I examine the potentials of the latter by connecting it to possibilities for the contestation of neoliberalism and the development of post-capitalism in the city. Doing so requires a theoretical understanding of transformative social change, as well as capitalism and neoliberalism in relation to the urban, in order to evaluate current actions. Only through theoretical reflections exemplifying otherwise ambiguous concepts can we begin to understand the 'systems' that are referred to in calls for 'systems change, not climate change'. Such theoretical reflection can also shed light on the meaning of 'fundamental change' or 'transformation' that policymakers and activists call for. And if we want to turn to the city for addressing systemic issues and making social change happen, we need insight into how the city is embedded in this system.

Throughout this project, I accept that any kind of knowledge of the (social) world is shaped through preconceived theoretical conceptions, which are broadened and deepened through the research process (Jessop 2010). In accessing and navigating the theoretical complexity of the urban phenomenon, understood as simultaneously a constitutive element of global capitalism and a site for struggle and contestation, theories are key. Thus, to enable guided reflections on ongoing

attempts at social transformation and economic change, my overall research question begs two further questions:

How are the city and urban processes and practices embedded within global capitalist structures and neoliberal governance?

What is transformative social change in the city, and what roles can urban activists and the local state play in driving it?

In answering these two questions, in the second and third chapters of this dissertation, I develop a theoretical account of transformative social change against the background of the tight interconnections between capitalism and the urban which shape the contingent political conditions for how attempts at transformative social change play out empirically. The notion of transformative social change that I develop contains two moments: a moment of difference and contestation, and a moment of alternatives and diverse economies. This notion of social change is thus not concerned merely with the empirical reality of ever-evolving societies but instead entails a normative demand. It is a normative demand for action towards a form of urban sustainability that is democratic, collective and concerned with justice.

I take justice to be committed to “what citizens have in common” and how this is controlled (Rancière 1999, 5). This implies that justice “include[s] the political as such” in which all decision-making procedures that potentially involve collective decisions are subject to questions of justice (Young 1990, 7). This relates to processes of governance and government and therefore involves questions of power and changing power relations (Swyngedouw 2018). With urban sustainability, on the other hand, I refer to the urban system’s relations with nature that are “sustainable” in the sense that “certain indicators of welfare or development are non-declining over the very long term; that is, development is sustained” (Stern 1997, 145). I acknowledge that the term ‘sustainability’ has become a container for all kinds of orientations, not least green capitalism (Cock 2011). Nonetheless, I do think that the term “sustainable development” as a reference for an approach to development that is concerned with “improvements in human life and conservation of natural resources” (Giovannoni and Fabietti 2013, 25) can help guide policymakers and activists as long as such an approach engages explicitly with the dominant economic system that shapes the here and now, as well as the possibilities for change contained in it.

Departing from this orientation towards justice and sustainability, I employ theoretical notions around capitalism and neoliberalism in the urban as well as transformative social change to examine how attempts at transformative social change unfold empirically. I do this through a qualitative “in-depth case study” (Flyvbjerg 2006, 228) of Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy. In this

study, Amsterdam serves as a case of the increasing attention on – notably *some* – cities as potential places for progressive change and sustainable living. Although a single-case study does not allow for the drawing of connections across cases and the discerning of trans-local trends, something for which conjunctural analysis is more suitable (Castree 2006; Peck 2017), it does enable an in-depth account of specific localities, which in turn add to our understanding of the multiple logics at play in spatial and embodied alternative practices. Even though such specific cases will be imperfect (no city is currently living up to the ideal of a fully circular or inclusive city), we might learn from the ones that are getting slightly closer to such ideals than others (Uitermark 2009).

I engage with the case of Amsterdam on different empirical levels to discern how urban development is impacted by the mechanisms of urbanised, global capitalism *as well as* by local attempts at transformative social change in terms of contestation and alternatives. Thus, the empirical body of this thesis includes the relevant strategies and policy documents of the Municipality of Amsterdam, as well as the developments, strategies and projects within civil society related to the Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam. In my analysis, I first sketch the contours of the political-economic context in which current developments take place. To situate Amsterdam in a wider context of capitalist development and neoliberal urbanism, I trace recent developments of urban policy related to housing, urban space, city marketing and sustainability from the 1970s until now. My objective with this is to understand the policy legacies that reflect the structural conditions for social change in present-day Amsterdam.

In the second part of my analysis, I turn to the bottom-up developments around Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy in order to examine the related actors and their intentions, projects and mutual relations. From December 2020 until November 2023, I engaged in a form of “researching ‘back home’” (Karra and Phillips 2008) through semi-structured interviews with key actors within the municipal organisation and civil society, as well as through participant observations at Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition events and field visits to the place-based Doughnut Economics projects. I have triangulated the data from these observations and interviews with an analysis of the range of documents produced by the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition and several of the place-based projects.

My entire research process has been characterised by a combined approach of “reading for difference” as well as “dominance” (Gibson-Graham 2008, 623) to account for structural conditions and the local actors' responses to them. Departing from a critical-realist standpoint, I aim to uncover the political-economic conditions that shape the potential for transformative social change in Amsterdam *and* analyse how urban actors respond to and deal with these. I therefore develop a dynamic research approach that brings together considerations of both neoliberalisation and diverse economies. This dynamic approach enables me to oscillate analytically between structural

conditions and practices, between system and agency, between strong and weak theory and thus between reading for dominance and difference.

3 Main arguments and contributions

In answering the question as to the limits and potentials of the city as a place for transformative social change towards just and sustainable urban futures, I subscribe to the normative idea that “the task of social science is to move beyond analysis and provide the basis for desirable social change” (Cahill 2014, 151) as well as to the conviction that an adequate response to ecological collapse and social injustice requires “urgent collective action” around a different imaginary of the economy (Banerjee and Arjaliès 2021, 3). Yet, in promoting this urgent collective action, I see a crucial role for social science and its capacities for reflection and critical scrutinising. That is, to provide the basis for “desirable social change,” we need to understand what ‘desirable’ and ‘change’ entail and interpret the ongoing development in terms of these understandings. Therefore, rather than engaging in speculation about “plausible progressive trajectories” (Cahill 2014, 151) myself, I study forms of collective action around what the involved actors have themselves deemed a ‘plausible progressive trajectory’. I aim to further inform the praxis around social transformation and contribute to debates about systemic change and social transformation by analysing how an existing attempt at urgent collective action based on an alternative vision of the (urban) political economy is collective and transformative.

The dynamic research approach that I develop enables me to analyse and evaluate emerging transformative practices on their own terms as well as against the background of structural conditions. By operationalising concepts from neoliberalisation scholarship and bringing them into dialogue with those from diverse economies scholarship, I enable a serious, empirical engagement with how neoliberalism is always co-implicated with “its ‘others’” (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2010, 99) and how it may be altered or countered through contestation from below and by progressive coalitions of state and non-state actors. Although the literature on variegated neoliberalisation widely acknowledges that neoliberal processes are always co-implicated with ideas and practices contesting them, this literature does not engage in-depth with the relations between neoliberal and alternative ideas as they unfold ‘on the ground’. This means that the processes of change involved with the tensions between neoliberalisation and alternatives are empirically understudied.

By combining a structural understanding of Amsterdam’s political economy with “reading for difference” when interpreting the possibilities for change arising in Amsterdam’s Doughnut

Economy, I aim to understand the opportunities for and potential of diverse practices, subjectivities and relations arising in Amsterdam. I seek to move back and forth between “‘strong’ theory” and an openness to diversity (Gibson-Graham 2008, 618) by being open to the surprising elements of diversity inherent in an array of actors who are attempting to find entry points for the contestation of and alternatives to the dominant capitalist system. I do this while also considering the challenges that this system implies for such attempts. Besides developing this methodological approach, the thesis has distinct theoretical and empirical contributions.

3.1 Theoretical contributions

The main theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in its synthesis of diverse critical scholarship to develop a framework of transformative social change in urban capitalism. This framework can be employed to assess how attempts at transformative social change engage with the fundamental, unjust structures and tendencies within capitalist urban life. It acknowledges the urban as both a key element in the flows and functions of global capitalism and as producing the potential for transformative social change through its proximity, which enables forms of contestation and the prefiguration of alternative economic and social logics. I develop this framework in two steps.

First, I develop an account of the urban within capitalism as a global system. I posit capitalism “as project and process” to consider both “the logic of capital and the history of capitalism” (Moore 2015, 13), the latter of which being shaped extensively by processes of “variegated neoliberalization” over recent decades (N. Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010). Acknowledging both the structural logics and some of the historical manifestations of capitalism, I embrace the idea that “while capitalism assumes different detailed forms through time and across space, it nonetheless retains a consistent ‘operating hardware’” (Castree 2010, 1736).

This allows me to develop a Marxian account of capitalism in terms of three main characteristics. The first of these is capital’s inherent need for expansion and growth, in which urban regions have played an important role in increasingly entrepreneurial ways. The second of these characteristics relates to capitalism’s centrality in the ownership of the means of production, which structures society into social classes. Through an updated Marxist class conception, I discuss how the urban is an inherent class phenomenon in which the original Marxist inter-class boundaries become increasingly blurry through the rise of new classes such as the urban middle class and the urban proletariat. Thirdly, I posit capitalism in relation to the non-commodified spheres, which are the “background conditions of possibility” of capitalist production (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 22). Drawing on the scholarship of primarily Nancy Fraser, David Harvey and Jason W. Moore, I outline capitalism’s reliance on unpaid care work and its extractive relations with nature. In enabling

capitalism with these three characteristics, the state plays a central role, which I theorise through Bob Jessop's relational state theory.

In a second step, I draw from scholarship on the city as a place shaped by diversity, difference, contestation and alternative practices taking place in everyday life. Taking inspiration from Henri Lefebvre's neo-Marxian conceptualisation of the city and Manuel Castells's Marxist urban theory, I understand the urban as a space for reproduction and contestation in the everyday. This is one element of what I call transformative social change, which also consists of the enactment of alternative practices – or what J.K. Gibson-Graham (2008) has dubbed “diverse economies”. I theorise the role of the state in these processes and its relation to civil society in driving social change. Especially when situated in dense urban contexts, active reflections on how diverse economic and alternative practices relate to the state are required to sustain them.

In bringing together these structural mechanisms and post-structural attempts at changing them, this theoretical framework can be used to ‘stop and think’ – the activity with which social science can best contribute to desirable social change. We might use this framework to take a step back and reflect on the ongoing attempts of collectively driving social transformation and to interpret the meaning and potential of radical approaches to urban economic development and bottom-up engagement with social issues and environmental sustainability in the city. By assessing how diverse economic practices play into the characteristics of capitalism in the city and how urban activists work with and beyond the local state to escape or counter some of the logics of capital, it also allows an interpretation of forms of contestation of and alternatives to capitalist urban economic organising. Furthermore, through my consideration of neoliberalism as not only a logic of the market or competition but also as connected to the three core characteristics of capitalism (dependency on growth, a class-based society and a reliance on extra-capitalist spheres), I synthesise various insights into how neoliberalism has come to alter the ways in which capitalism infringes upon urban life, how a range of bottom-up practices can challenge these (with and beyond the local state) and what that implies for the operations of capitalism in the city.

3.2 Empirical contributions

This thesis sheds light on how collective action around “a new economic story” (Raworth 2017, 3) unfolds in an empirical context that is receiving considerable attention from researchers, civil society actors and policymakers. It responds to the call for empirically informed accounts of the effects of alternative approaches to local economic development. Although attention to the latter is growing, it is insufficiently clear how a variety of actors put these ideas into practice and how that in turn affects urban economic development (Crisp et al. 2023). In this thesis, I assess how action

that is being promoted in arguably one of the more promising examples of urban sustainability transformations is *collective* and *transformative*.

By providing thick descriptions, enabling weak theory that is “able to describe, appreciate, connect and analyse, identifying strengths to build on and constraints to work around” (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski 2020, 9), I assess how the practices in Amsterdam are collective and transformative. An element of this is showing how coalitions of change between a variety of state and non-state actors – or “powerful assemblages” (Chatterton and Pusey 2020, 31) – may arise, what the internal dynamics are and what kind of change those might imply. By focusing, in considerable part, on the role of citizens, I show how such powerful assemblages can foreground (often marginalised) communities in the process and thereby promote urban sustainability in democratic ways. I make the case that we should not only consider the short-lived moments of political action in the city – however hopeful these islands of autonomy may be. Rather, we need to consider the relations between the state and social movements and how those enable the sustaining of the activities of urban activists on a longer-term basis. I thus engage empirically with the promise of (new) municipalism to redraw the boundaries between citizens and the state (Kohn 2003; Roth, Russell, and Thompson 2023). I also interrogate theorising on diverse economic practices (Gibson-Graham 2008) or urban democratic projects (Beveridge and Koch 2022) which makes compelling arguments around the continued presence of these activities but has, so far, insufficiently shed light on how such alternatives may be fostered and sustained in and against the urban system that they seek to transform.

Looking at how transformative action in Amsterdam is collective and sustainable over time, I bring together ongoing attempts of diverse actors and the structural conditions of the urban system that they try to transform. I thus generate an account of Amsterdam’s urban economy that highlights how the city’s capacities for social reproduction have come under increasing pressure in what Fraser (2022, 20) would note as “boundary struggles”. As economic growth became premised increasingly on entrepreneurialism within the immaterial, creative and knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy, the affordable housing stock shrank and decommmodified while urban space became scarcer, giving rise to Amsterdam “the middle-class city” (Boterman and Van Gent 2023). In response to this, activists in the city, inspired by Doughnut Economics, are engaging in a range of place-based initiatives which, on the one hand, give rise to political contestation and empower citizens in deprived areas of the city and on the other hand, promote alternative practices and diverse economic relations that alter the flows of the urban economy and the fabric of everyday life.

Situated in a policy landscape that is beginning to explore ways to go “beyond GDP” (Crisp et al. 2023), the Municipality of Amsterdam’s latest sustainability strategies paint a more blurred picture of economic growth and instead emphasise the role of citizens in urban development as well as the

environmental impacts of urban economic development. Yet, Amsterdam's urban development is conditioned by neoliberal legacies, which are reflected in the municipality resorting to public-private partnerships for the city's climate-neutrality strategy as well as the orientation towards Amsterdam as an international frontrunner in green innovation and sustainability. This hints at how the sustainable ambitions of Amsterdam's local government may reflect "pro-growth and system-affirmative" forms of "urban sustainability" that invite private sector engagement into the processes of the (re)structuring of urban space (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020, 2214).

Assessing how the sustainability transitions in Amsterdam are "system-affirmative" or enable transformative social change requires a consideration of ongoing developments in relation to the definition of the city in capitalism and neoliberalisation – the system and tendencies that the Doughnut Economics model ultimately aims to transform. Therefore, the thesis considers ongoing developments against the background of the capitalist structures and mechanisms that shape urban space and life, for example in the ways in which urban land is governed, growth-dependencies permeate policy decisions and class relations play a role in shaping the urban social fabric. The thesis also shows the double role of the local state in urban sustainability transitions in Amsterdam as it aims to facilitate post-capitalist, collective self-government and place-based sustainability efforts, while reaching out beyond the city to enforce sustainable urban metabolism on a larger scale and reinforce the image of Amsterdam as a place for sustainable innovation and green growth. With the latter, the municipality is engaging in strategies and actions that aspire to promote entrepreneurial subjectivities and practices and which serve to retain Amsterdam's position in the global structures of urban competition. Reflecting on the different (de)politicising mechanisms, I discuss how Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy may promote transformative social change whenever place-based projects create intentional, collective spaces where everyday politics can be anchored. Where Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy escapes the discursive realm and materialises in the urban economy, an example of actually existing post-capitalist practices appears – as does a glimpse of another urban life that is feasible.

4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows. In the next chapter, I develop a processual account of capitalism and neoliberalism that distinguishes between capitalism's inherent logics and the historically contingent ways it is politically promoted, the most recent of these being through neoliberal projects. I pay attention to the crucial role and position of the urban in the development and functioning of capitalism. This leads me to conceptualising capitalism in terms of its inherent expansionary dynamic, the way in which it divides society into social classes and its reliance on the

extra-capitalist spheres of nature and care work. These characteristics have been altered – but not fundamentally changed – through processes of neoliberalisation. Finally, I reflect on the structural and historical role of the state in enabling and promoting capitalist development.

Then, in chapter 3, I conceptualise the city as a place where contestation and alternatives challenge capitalism's characteristics. After a brief excursion through the development of western urban thought, I arrive at a Marxian notion of the city as a space for transformative social change, in terms of two distinct yet interrelated 'moments': on the one hand, a moment of difference and contestation and, on the other, a moment of alternatives and diverse economies. This allows me to interpret urban movements and civil society actors in terms of how they challenge existing arrangements – the moment of contestation – and to conceive of new ways of arranging urban life through the alternatives that they initiate in urban everyday life. This chapter again ends with reflections on the state. I consider the salience of local government and the city for transformative social change, seeing as both have increasingly come to be treated as sites for progressive change. I also deliberate the potential de- and re-politicising effects of this.

Having laid the theoretical groundwork for this study, I turn to my methodology in chapter 4, in which I detail how I operationalise the theoretical notions to study and interpret the ongoing developments in Amsterdam. Here, I clarify my critical-realist approach, which is attuned to the spatiality of social relations, thereby allowing me to consider both the discursive and material aspects of transformative social change. I then make the case for a dynamic engagement with opposing poles – the key ones being neoliberalisation and diverse economies, theory and empirics, and critique and hope – to capture the multiple logics and the enabling and hampering factors at play in processes of social change. In this chapter, I also present the research design of my in-depth single case study of Amsterdam.

In chapter 5, I further introduce Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy as a case. I briefly touch upon the city's key position in the historical development of global capitalism and its social structure. I then describe its strong economic, social and spatial planning tradition and some of the characteristics of its urban politics and administration. This chapter ends with an introduction of the municipality's recent strategies around circular economy and Doughnut Economy.

In chapter 6, I present my analysis of the historical and contemporary policy context from which Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics strategy emerged. This analysis presumes that the local state aims to balance the tension between its democratic legitimacy and economic interests through strategic engagement with a variety of social actors, and it traces the historical configurations of this balancing act from the 1970s onwards. I analyse how, through various phases of neoliberalisation, growth in Amsterdam was pursued by the (local) state in increasingly entrepreneurial ways, thereby

promoting the knowledge-intensive, immaterial sectors of the economy. While the social housing stock shrank, gentrification intensified. Amsterdam's citizenry became increasingly diverse and highly educated, and the municipality promoted Amsterdam internationally as a 'world city'. Recently, concerns about the social reproductive capacities of the city have become widespread. These concerns include the city's extractive relation with nature and the decreasing accessibility of housing, and they have given rise to the creation of strategies for a circular and Doughnut Economy.

The latter two strategies emphasise throughout that their implementation hinges on bottom-up actions. To engage with these actions in a manner that opens up for difference and alternatives, I provide a thick description of Amsterdam's bottom-up Doughnut Economics activities. I concentrate on the kind of change that the Doughnut Economics model taps into and promotes on different scales in Amsterdam. I interpret the actions of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics activists who, with and against the state, promote a politics of the urban everyday that aims to challenge supralocal forces impacting local places while transforming these places from the ground up. This involves two distinct types of activities. The first of these is contestation through creating a sense of community and proximity in the neighbourhoods that are designated urban growth cores and by making local voices heard to empower local communities. These activities reposit the city as a space for social reproduction, in which strong networks enable forms of mutual care and collective forms of self-government within various neighbourhoods that house lower-income residents, and which are targeted by the municipality's most recent growth strategies. The second kind of activities involves promotion of small-scale alternative and diverse economic practices and relations, which are situated in the urban everyday and which redirect the flows of the economy from below. I distinguish these place-based activities from the activities within the city-wide Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, which engages with the discursive representation of the movement across the city as well as (inter)nationally, and which, despite attempts to diversify, has a tendency to attract mostly white, highly educated middle-class individuals. Through positive logics of knowledge sharing and inspiring, the Doughnut activists as well as the coalition promote hope and forms of 'fun' participation. This positive logic, although working well to enthuse people to join local activities, meets its limits when confronted with structural conditions such as the scarcity of space.

In chapter 8, I analyse the current conjuncture in which Amsterdam finds itself by bringing together insights from both the policy analysis and the analysis of the bottom-up movement. Through combined readings for dominance and difference, I discuss the potentials and limits for transformative social change in Amsterdam. I consider how both state and non-state actors attempt to reimagine urban metabolism and scarcity in the urban economy through growth-agnostic approaches, such as Doughnut Economics, which give rise to post-capitalist practices and spaces. However, as these attempts are unavoidably situated in an urban context shaped by dominant,

capitalist logics, questions of capitalism and neoliberalism should be considered more explicitly. This implies the need for further reflection on how growth-dependencies and class differences permeate the movement, as well as on how the city is ultimately implicated in global, unsustainable and unjust political-economic structures. As the local state is instrumental in addressing the latter, the Municipality of Amsterdam plays a double role. On the one hand, it promotes the power of place and facilitates forms of collective, potentially post-capitalist, self-government. On the other hand, it reaches out beyond the boundaries of the city to enforce sustainable urban metabolism on a larger scale. This creates tensions and ambiguous political effects with respect to the facilitation of collective self-government, as the municipality is *also* (still) engaging in strategies and actions that aspire to promote entrepreneurial subjectivities and practices and which serve to retain Amsterdam's position in the global structures of urban competition.

Chapter 9 concludes this thesis. I make the case once more that if cities are to be spaces for transformative social change, we need to interpret the attempts at instigating such change against the backdrop of the capitalist logics of growth and competition, class divisions and a reliance on and appropriation of the extra-capitalist realms of nature and social reproduction. I also provide an outlook for further research, drawing attention to the need for additional insights into how local, place-based activism can change the rhythms of capitalism locally, and how the democratic project of the city – as it is imagined and practised in the everyday – can be promoted in and against the planetary networks and systems that materially enable and sustain it. Practically, the findings of my thesis stress the need for social actors to reflect explicitly on questions of democratic practices and legitimacy and to engage directly with structural conditions through socio-spatial practices grounded in urban space. At the same time, I acknowledge the key role of these social actors – it is thanks to the tenacity of their optimism that there are attempts at transformative social change that we can analyse, scrutinise and support.

2 Capitalism and neoliberalism in relation to the urban

To understand how transformative social change may take place, it is necessary to carefully define what it is that might be changed. In this chapter, I develop a processual conception of “capitalism as a project and a process” (Moore 2015, 13) and the role and position of the urban within it. By shedding light on capitalism’s logics and the ways in which it is promoted politically, I aim to understand the conditions that shape the possibilities for contestation and alternative practices within an urban context (of which I develop a theoretical account in chapter 3). I thus conceptualise capitalism as a global system characterised by multiple dynamic, mutually transformative socio-natural processes – metabolisms – that operate through locally specific mechanisms.

The chapter is built up as follows. In section 1, I introduce the processual approach that I adopt to both capitalism and neoliberalism – or rather, neoliberalisation as a range of variegated processes that can be observed in empirical policy contexts (N. Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010). Then, in section 2, I develop an account of capitalism in relation to the urban, drawing on Marx’s writings for the basis, acknowledging that “Marx’s pioneering analysis still defines the insurpassable horizon for critical reflection on the political economy of capitalism” (Jessop and Sum 2001, 93). I rely mostly on the first volume of *Capital* for an understanding of capital as the process by which surplus-value is created through the exertion of non-compensated labour-power. However, to avoid the trap of “essentially working with the same reified and abstracted categorizations of class, the market, the state, capital” as orthodox Marxists (Cumbers 2015, 72), I combine this with more recent Marxian scholarship and critical urban theory through scholars such as Nancy Fraser, Jason W. Moore and David Harvey to reflect on how processes of neoliberalisation have come to alter and tweak – but not fundamentally transform – the operations of capitalism.

These operations are shaped by what I identify as capitalism’s three main characteristics, and each of which has a distinct relation with the urban and urban processes. The first of these characteristics is the search for surplus value, an imperative which gives capitalism its inherent expansionary

dynamic. Second, capitalism is dependent on the private ownership of the means of production, which implies a class-based society. Third, capitalism's operations are dependent on extra-capitalist spheres: nature for cheap inputs and for dumping waste, and social reproduction for unpaid care work. I go through these three characteristics and their entwinement with the urban, a relation which has become increasingly inextricable in a globalising and neoliberalising political economy.

Finally, in section 3, I reflect on the role of the state in capitalist society through a relational conceptualisation of the state and state power (Jessop 2008; 2016) and some comments on the historical entwinement of the state and capitalism. Throughout the chapter, I tap into longstanding Marxist and Marxian debates. Rather than discussing these exhaustively – which would, unfortunately, go far beyond the scope of this dissertation – I synthesise some of their insights which I deem most important for studying social change in a western-European urban context in the twenty-first century.

1 A processual account of capitalism and neoliberalism

The definition of capitalism that I employ aims, on the one hand, to bring attention to the core logics that define it as a global political-economic system, and, on the other hand, allow for differences between the historically and geographically variegated manifestations of these logics. Hence, I approach “capitalism as project and process” and consider both “the logic of capital and the history of capitalism” (Moore 2015, 13). With this approach, I embrace the idea that “while capitalism assumes different detailed forms through time and across space, it nonetheless retains a consistent ‘operating hardware’” (Castree 2010, 1736). In section 2, I define capitalism as a process, i.e., its operating hardware, according to three core characteristics. But before delving into those, I outline my approach to the different manifestations of capitalism and, more specifically, neoliberalism as the capitalist project that rose to prominence in the 1970s. An understanding of how this project interacts with capitalism's operating hardware is necessary to understand how it has affected the conditions in the wider capitalist economy and society for struggle and transformation.

The end of neoliberalism – as well as its “strange non-death” (Crouch 2011) – has been announced multiple times in the past decades, especially in the aftermath of the 2007/8 global financial crisis and more recently during the Covid-19 pandemic. The term neoliberalism is contentious and used to describe a wide variety of phenomena and tendencies – most often critically. Due to this conceptual imprecision, the term has come to be considered “a rascal concept” (N. Brenner, Peck

and Theodore 2010, 183) or “an overblown notion” (Dean 2014, 150). The term thus warrants conceptual clarity, and there are three main approaches to achieve that.

The first of these traces neoliberalism back to the ideas at its core. This idea-centred approach takes a point of departure in the ideas of “those who actually referred to themselves as neoliberals” (Biebricher 2019, 20) or as a broader thought collective and political programme (Mirowski 2013), one that turned out “to be one of the most successful, if not *the* most successful, political movements of the second half of the twentieth century, in its influence, capture and appropriation of the powers of national states and other governmental organizations above and below the nation-state” (Dean and Zamora 2021, 21). Such approaches draw attention to the emergence of neoliberal ideas, often revolving around Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, James M. Buchanan and the Austrian ordoliberals, and attempt in varying degrees to trace a unity in neoliberal thought.

A second way of conceptualising neoliberalism is through a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality, positing neoliberalism as an art of government and a process that transforms society and its subjects. In his lectures of 1978 and 1979, Michel Foucault developed an influential account of the ways in which neoliberalism fundamentally alters the conditions under which individuals are governed. Rather than as an ideology, Foucault posits neoliberalism as a form of statecraft concerned with the governing of organisations, notably the state, by working with a range of different actors and through a focus on rationalities and techniques. Foucault also drew attention to the distinct subjectivity that neoliberalism produced. Turning every individual into a *homo economicus*, or an entrepreneur of the self, neoliberalism transforms behaviour into an individual enterprise with an income and investments. This behaviour can be governed through the altering of conditions in the environment that shape it (Dean 2018; Foucault 2008).

While idealist approaches to neoliberalism urge us to be specific about the ideas we assign to the neoliberal tradition, and thereby inform our understanding of the origin of certain neoliberal policies and practices, governmentality approaches spell out the way in which neoliberalism, through the ways in which it affects subjectivity, creates the conditions for human action and thus also for the contestation of neoliberalism. However, neither of these approaches is equipped to tackle the materialisation of neoliberal ideas and forms of government in specific contexts, that is, the forms of and varieties of “actually existing neoliberalism” (N. Brenner and Theodore 2002). To capture the politically induced processes of increased marketisation and commodification that have contributed to uneven neoliberal development across geographies and scales, Brenner, Peck and Theodore (2010) develop the notion of “variegated neoliberalization”.

This third way to understand neoliberalism takes some cues from the Foucauldian governmentality approach but is processual and Marxian at its core. It focuses on the processes of neoliberalisation,

i.e., the reforms and regulatory regimes that enable the institutionalisation of neoliberal ideas. In this understanding, processes of neoliberalisation are aimed at enhancing the conditions for capital accumulation through strategies of privatisation, marketisation, de- and re-regulation (K. Bakker 2015). The neoliberalisation literature has Polanyian roots, in the sense that it does not consider neoliberalism in totalising terms but always posits it in contradictory processes alongside its counterforces (Peck 2013).

This processual account of neoliberalisation responds to the need to consider “the possibility of a more complex and nuanced appreciation of the messy, uneven and multicausal nature of political economic change” while attempting to avoid the reification of neoliberal ideas (Cahill 2014, 28). Aiming to unravel how neoliberal policies play out in concrete settings in which they may be contested, this approach turns to the contextually and institutionally dependent processes in which ideas are translated into practice. Building on the varieties of capitalism literatures and the notion of variegated capitalism, the notion of variegated neoliberalisation rejects the idea that capitalism operates through a single, global logic that materialises in nation-states. Instead, it embraces differentiation across geographical spaces and scales as well as institutional settings (Jessop 2010; N. Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010). Like idea-centred or governmentality approaches, literature on variegated neoliberalisation posits as central the role of state institutions in enabling and facilitating the logic of the market and competition across domains in the economy and society. The latter approach diverts from the former two in its more empirically attuned research agenda to uncover the variegated nature of processes of neoliberalisation.

Despite this attenuation to variegation, neoliberalisation scholars remain concerned with the predominance of neoliberal restructuring programmes:

It is necessary to acknowledge the structural complementarities, connecting threads, commonalities, and family resemblances in neoliberal restructuring programs, even as one remains critically attentive to the variability of the attendant outcomes. Demonstrating non-convergence in economic and institutional outcomes is no refutation of the presence of neoliberalizing tendencies. Even deep neoliberalization should not be expected to produce simple convergence. (Peck and Theodore 2007, 758)

Thus, although processes of variegated neoliberalisation are uneven, they are “cumulatively transformative” and thereby contribute to increasing the neoliberalisation of institutional frameworks (N. Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010, 207). At its core is the aim to reproduce market rule and logics of competition through forms of regulatory experimentation. This aim is inherently uneven due to the unfinished character of neoliberal processes and the constant (re)differentiation of market-oriented policy.

Treating neoliberalisation as a process enables an account of neoliberal development over time in conjunction with political-economic developments and crises as well as the regulatory reforms in response to them. Although the idealistic roots of neoliberalism can be traced back to the early twentieth century, the hegemony of neoliberal restructuring programmes grew stronger when the oil crises and continued conditions of stagflation caused a crisis in the Keynesian regime of accumulation in the 1970s. During the Keynesian era, economic development had been coordinated generally on the national scale through forms of “spatial equalization” and the counterbalancing of uneven development through the decentralisation of capital and relocations of economic activity to peripheral spaces (N. Brenner 2019, 182). During the 1970s, such approaches were gradually substituted by programmes that foregrounded the global competitiveness of specific urban regions, while discourses arose around the reorganisation or downscaling of the local state, making way for the rise of “neoliberal urbanism” (Leitner et al. 2006, 4).

This shift in North America and Europe can be divided into two subsequent phases: first a destructive phase of “roll-back neoliberalism,” starting in the 1980s when the abstract intellectual project of neoliberalism was translated into policy regimes of deregulation and the dismantling of the Keynesian welfare state, notably with Thatcher and Reagan (Peck and Tickell 2002). In the early 1990s, the internal contradictions of these regimes became clear in the form of negative economic consequences and social externalities. This led to a reconfiguration of the neoliberal project symbolised by the Third Way politics of Clinton and Blair, marking a phase of “roll-out neoliberalism” (Peck and Tickell 2002, 384). During this phase, the neoliberal project moved into the sphere of social policy and involved regulatory reform and the active building of state institutions during the 1990s.

When roll-out neoliberalisation of more market and less welfare was faced with such heavy popular protest that it lost traction as a political discourse, a third phase of “roll-with-it” neoliberalisation was initiated (Keil 2009). This largely changed political rhetoric but left political practices unaffected. Roll-with-it neoliberalisation is characterised by the way in which neoliberal governmentality, practices and orientations are so firmly engrained in society that its predominance in all aspects of life have become commonly accepted. Thanks to this, it does not need the aggression of earlier roll-back and roll-out phases. Political and economic actors have largely come to accept the premises of neoliberalism as the basis for their actions. This also applies to cities and urban regions because, under roll-with-it neoliberalisation, there is an intensification of earlier processes of deterritorialisation that posit urban regions as competitors in a global marketplace. This marketplace still treats individuals as the chief locus of responsibility and cities as the locus for entrepreneurial growth, notably through public-private partnerships as well as economic policies around creativity (Keil 2009).

An important aspect of the processual approach to variegated neoliberalisation is acknowledgement of the ways neoliberalism is co-implicated with its ‘others’. Neoliberalisation is seen as a “hegemonic restructuring ethos” rather than a “fully coherent system or typological state form” that can be clearly separated from its alternatives (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2010, 104; Peck 2013). In a way of thinking inspired by Polanyi, the project of intensifying marketisation is considered inherently instable and unsustainable as it is contested from below. This posits neoliberalism not as some kind of master structure of the economy but as having the “same size” as other forces and co-existing with their ideas, practices and programmes (Larner 2014, 193). These contestations and alternatives are ideas, practices and programmes in their own right. Urban politics are “more than neoliberal,” and neoliberal formations always have a non-neoliberal outside (Peck 2015, 173). These competing paradigms shape urban policies just as well as neoliberal policies do. Therefore, to avoid the reification of neoliberal ideas, any account of regulatory and social change needs to pay attention to forms of contestation as phenomena that are more than just opposition to neoliberalism (Leitner et al. 2006; G. Pinson and Morel Journal 2016).

In spite of frequent references to contestation and the close connections between neoliberalisation and its others, the literature on variegated neoliberalisation does not engage in depth with its inherent relations to contestation and alternatives, which implies that there is a gap in our understanding of how potential forms of contestation promote alternatives. I come back to this critique in chapter 4, in which I present my methodological approach. To understand how processes of neoliberalisation might be contested, it is necessary to understand the logics, the ‘operating hardware’ of the system, to be able to see how we might move away from that. I thus allow for a range of core characteristics and tendencies while acknowledging that the uneven and variegated materialisation of these relies on policy regimes and regulatory experimentation.

2 Capitalist and neoliberal processes in relation to the urban

The processes of capitalism can be boiled down to three main characteristics. The first is its imperative for surplus value creation and a resulting expansionary dynamics, which I introduce in section 2.1. The second is capital’s division of society into classes, which I introduce in section 2.2. Capitalism’s third characteristic, which I introduce in section 2.3, is its dependence on extra-capitalist spheres: it depends on nature for cheap inputs and for dumping waste, and on the sphere of social reproduction for unpaid care work. I discuss these three characteristics and their entwinement with the urban, a relation which has become increasingly inextricable in a globalising and neoliberalising political economy.

2.1 Continuous expansion

Marx defines capital as the surplus-value that is generated through the circulation of commodities, which are the result of combined natural resources and labour power, and which are commensurable with money. Money is not only “the metamorphosed shape of all other commodities” that makes all commodities commensurable (Marx [1867] 2013, 74). It also becomes a commodity in itself which can be pursued incessantly by private individuals: “the money becomes petrified into a hoard, and the seller becomes a hoarder of money” (Marx [1867] 2013, 89). This private appropriation of the social power of money means that “a capitalist mode of production is essentially based on infinite accumulation and limitless growth” (Harvey 2010, 85). Moreover, the surplus-value that is generated in the circulation of commodities, through the re-selling of commodities for a higher price (M-C-M’), can be reinvested in the means of production, through which capital is accumulated. This happens through competition on the market, which subjects all capitalist producers to the same impersonal power which follows from the economic logics of the capitalist system (Mau 2022). This competition also makes capitalism “a continuously revolutionary mode of production,” driven by innovation in production and consumption (Harvey 1989b, 126).

The starting point of the capitalist mode of production is “primitive accumulation” (Marx [1867] 2013, 501) – or, rather, ‘original’ accumulation (see Hymer 1980). Original accumulation is the process that marked the move away from a feudal society and transformed, “on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital,” and “on the other, the immediate producers into wage-labourers” (Marx [1867] 2013, 502). This involved the expropriation of the agricultural population of their land as well as the instalment of private property at the expense of social and collective property – in short, the “enclosure of commons” (Marx [1867] 2013, 509). As a result, although freed from feudal suppression, wage-labourers were deprived of their means of production and condemned to selling their labour power.

This process is, in turn, linked to capitalism’s expansionary, imperialist logic. The need to continuously produce surplus value turns expansion into “a coercive law, an economic condition of existence for the individual capitalist” (Luxemburg 1913, 17). Once processes of original accumulation had exhausted most land in Europe, capital sought non-capitalist areas elsewhere. Through the combination of free trade and violence, capital accumulation came to be politically expressed in imperialism. This capitalist “frontier-making” became capitalism’s “lifeblood” (Moore 2015, 63), which continued to animate capitalism well into the twentieth century, increasingly in financialised forms that turn financial flows into vehicles for channelling surplus values. Through such “accumulation by dispossession,” capitalism subjects non-capitalist spheres to violent forms of dispossession (Harvey 2004).

The development of capitalism and its incessant growth imperative are tightly connected to the urban and processes of urbanisation. Although it is often overlooked by accounts of capitalist development that focus on the rise of nation states, the concentration of capitalist and financial power in city-states has been essential to capitalist development (Arrighi 1994). This concentration enabled city-states to bypass inter-state competition and was key to facilitating nation states' international engagement. More specifically, it was thanks to the concentration of power in European city-states that European nation-states could engage in colonialism. Therefore, "the really important transition that needs to be elucidated is not that from feudalism to capitalism but from scattered to concentrated capitalist power" (Arrighi 1994, 11).

The importance of urban regions for the structure of economic life problematises the "mercantilist tautology" of classical political economists such as Adam Smith, which posits nations as primary entities (Jacobs 1985, 31). Instead, we should be attentive to the role of cities in shaping their regional and global economies. Cities play a crucial role in import-replacement and innovation, and they house diverse and concentrated markets – all through which they enable the expansion of economic life (Jacobs 1985, 39–42). Related to this is the instrumental role that urbanisation plays in the accommodation of surplus capital that is in need of profitable investment. The capacity of urban regions to absorb surplus capital posits them at the core of the survival of capitalism and in a salient relation to rural areas. Especially with the emergence of the industrial city, which concentrated production in the centre of power and gave rise to the working class, specific relations of dependency between the city and the countryside were forged (Monte-Mór 2014). The urban is dependent on the rural for the raw materials for the realisation of surplus value. Thus, surplus value is initially *generated* in the countryside and subsequently shifted to the city, where, through production, craft and industrial processes, it is *realised, distributed* and *accumulated* (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 24–35).

Marx and Engels also saw an inherent relation between urbanisation and industrialisation. In *The Communist Manifesto*, they formulate it as follows:

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West. (Marx and Engels [1848] 2012, 78)

This implies that when the bourgeoisie centralised property, the means of production and the population, it brought about processes of urbanisation. Lefebvre rejects this direction of causality. Although he agrees that the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation are tightly intertwined,

he argues, conversely, that urbanisation has become the dominant one. Industrialisation is a step towards urbanisation and not the other way around (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 139).

Regardless of the direction of this causality, the relation between industrial and urban processes implies that the urban should be a core consideration in macro studies of economic and social change. This is the case especially under capitalism, where the logic of capital affects urban processes and urban processes shape the processes of capital accumulation. Urban agglomerations, which enable the collective sustaining of productive activities, are the result of the need to reduce distance and thus save time and money (Harvey 1989a). They are an example of an attempt to establish the “physical conditions of exchange” that enable “the annihilation of space by time,” as Marx ([1858] 1993, 524) famously put it. Such regional economies play a crucial role in the uneven development of capitalism, as thriving urban agglomerations with rich mobility networks, human capital and vibrant markets manage to attract new capital at the expense of regions that are in decline (Harvey 2014).

Since the late 1980s, the attraction of such new capital has increasingly happened through entrepreneurial approaches to economic development. With this entrepreneurial turn, the notion of growth under capitalism changed. Rather than the Keynesian redistributive mechanisms, growth came to be primed on competitive market logics. In dealing with the consequences of economic downturn following the 1973 crash – such as widespread unemployment, deindustrialisation and austerity – local governments became more individually responsible for their own economic results. Therefore, many of them turned to public-partnerships to seek external funding, often in the form of speculative financing. To attract the latter, local governments started to promote place, while concerns about the wider territory were pushed to the background (Harvey 1989a). The Keynesian policies that had sought to redistribute between regions were thus substituted by local policies that aimed at the promotion of place-specific accumulation strategies (N. Brenner 2018). Various types of place-specific accumulation strategies thus promoted competition in various realms: regarding the conditions for production or consumption, the presence of financial or information processing infrastructures and the power of central government to redistribute surpluses (Harvey 1989a).

With the decline of the Keynesianism and Fordism in this era, material production and wage labour as core sources of wealth creation were increasingly substituted by the production of intangible products, powered by science and information. Hardt and Negri have theorised how, through this process, immaterial labour has come to play a crucial role through its capacities to produce symbols and manipulate affects. Although the labouring process itself remains largely material, as it involves human bodies, it yields intangible products, rendering the labour immaterial. This led to the rise of a new cultural economy with a decidedly urban character: it depends on cooperation, networks and communities that are not confined to the factory but extend through the entire city, whose

dense and populous character increases the chances for productive encounters and exchanges (Arboleda 2015a). The associated rise of information technologies has altered the “interaction of capital fixity and hypermobility; the complex management of this interaction has given major cities a new competitive advantage” (Sassen 2001, 96).

Sassen captures this system of entrepreneurial, globally competing cities as the main arena of immaterial labour through the notion of the “global city” (Sassen 2001). This notion highlights the function of international competition between cities in the global economy. The latter, Sassen holds, has become a distinct economic system shaped by the specific locations of major urban centres. Economic activities have become spatially and territorially dispersed, and major cities have gained a new strategic role. Increased capital mobility, a focus on financial services and increased amounts of foreign direct investments imply that cities are “production sites for the leading information industries of our time in order to recover the infrastructure of activities, firms and jobs that is necessary to run the advanced corporate economy, including its globalised sectors” (Sassen 2004, 3). Global cities are the local materialisations of global processes. In this “new geography of centrality and marginality,” certain global cities play a key role in managing and controlling this global network (Sassen 2010, 37). An important reason for the trend towards consolidation within a few centres rather than wide dispersion is the role that social infrastructures play in enabling global connectivity. These specific networks of knowledge and expertise cannot simply be reproduced (Sassen 2004).

Notwithstanding the accuracy of this concept when explaining certain (parts of certain) cities as the motors of globalisation, the global city framework is not universally applicable. Although it is true that globalisation affects cities, which may lead us to categorise them as “global cities,” this usually still only holds true for certain parts of that city. A large share of the population will not be employed in the global knowledge industry and will not be part of any global networks. Hence, global cities are always also *more* than merely global (P. Marcuse 2005). And just as there will always be parts within the city that are marginalised by the global city frame, there may also be cities that fall outside of the category altogether. The rise of the global city is inherently related to uneven socio-spatial development of capitalism and, therefore, to increasing urban precarity in the peripheries. Referring to Davis’s *Planet of Slums* (2017), Biagi argues that the “‘planet of the slums’ is a legitimate child of *global city*” (Biagi 2020, 224 [emphasis in original]). The focus on “‘super star’ cities in the knowledge economy is simultaneously related to the proliferation of “lagging-behind and declining regions” (MacKinnon et al. 2022, 40).

Under such uneven conditions of capitalist development, city regions need to compete with one another, and local governments are enticed to focus primarily on the exchange value of place at the expense of its use value. While the latter is prevailing for those who use the city as a place to live

and work, local elites will coalesce around the city's exchange value and its potential for generating growth. Despite their otherwise possibly diverging interests, they consider the city a "growth machine" for promoting wealth and rent income (Logan and Molotch 2007, 50). Logan and Molotch's diagnosis pertains to cities in the US, where growth entrepreneurs were historically key city builders, not least during the westward expansion, and where growth considerations currently continue to be at the core of local governments, many of which hire external growth consultants. Although US-based analyses cannot be translated to other contexts uncritically, cities in western Europe show similar patterns. In the UK, through growing considerations of the prosperity and competitive position of the overall location, "civic entrepreneurialism has [...] fostered a speculative and piecemeal approach to the management of cities, in sharp contrast to the 'class-based politics' of old in which the local state managed the city through bureaucratic means" (Hall and Hubbard 1996, 154). Likewise, through the metropolitan regionalism that arose in continental western Europe in the 1990s, forms of "competitive city-regionalism" have been promoted there as well (N. Brenner 2019, 207).

One of the main mechanisms through which the urban growth machine is enabled is through urban enclosures as a form of accumulation by dispossession. These contemporary forms of enclosure are part and parcel of the everyday functioning of capital and are a much wider and multifaceted phenomenon than the original accumulation analysed by Marx. With the growing prominence of urban growth coalitions in response to post-Fordist, market-oriented imperatives for economic growth, enclosure has become the main vehicle for boosting cities' exchange value (Hodkinson 2012). Hodkinson identifies three distinct acts through which such modern enclosures take place. First, there is the physical and/or legal act of privatising, of enclosing something and restricting access to it. Second, there is the act of dispossessing someone by depriving them of their land, home, or certain services and sources of knowledge. Third, there is the act of capturing people, place, space and culture within the logics of capitalism. Through forms of commodification that result from processes of capitalist subjectification, elements of urban life are enclosed. As these mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession and ongoing enclosures are inherently related to different social positions in a city, they also concern the ways in which capitalism divides society into social classes.

2.2 Class-based societies

Discussions on social stratification and class are historically attuned and context-specific across national contexts and scholarly traditions, but urban scholarship is broadly in agreement on the salience of employment relations for the concept of class (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 18–19). Class concepts based on employment relations go back – again – to Marx, whose writings on class are rather dispersed and whose class concept needs to be understood in tandem with his societal

analysis (Ollman 1968). For Marx, modern class relations are closely related to the process of original accumulation. With his analysis, Marx does not locate class relations in the market or as embedded within the nation-state, as Adam Smith did before him. Instead, Marx turns to the workplace, where he locates inherent inequalities in the “hidden abode of production” (Marx [1867] 2013, 119). This allows him to uncover class struggle under capitalism and situate this in relation to the world economy rather than the national context (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 2011).

It is widely accepted that Marx distinguishes the *class in itself* – that is, based on the relations to the means of production – from the *class for itself* – which arises when people identify themselves as a class on the grounds of shared experiences or interests (Mau 2022). A core characteristic of the Marxist definition of class based on social relations of production is the emphasis on exploitation – the appropriation of surplus-labour – and the control over the labour process, financial capital and physical capital (Wright 1980). Exploitation alone, however, is not enough to grasp class relations in capitalist society, as it fails to grasp how class also posits human beings in a shared position vis-à-vis economic resources and the conditions for the reproduction of capitalist society. Through the division of people into classes, capitalism exerts an *impersonal* form of power (Mau 2022). Contrary to the personal dependency relations and the widespread exertion of violent power that defined pre-capitalist societies, Mau shows how, in capitalist society, production has become organised by a complex and abstract impersonal form of power, which subjects everyone in capitalist society to the logic of capital. This logic depends on a class-division in society, between the ruling class, consisting of mutually competing producers who control the means of production, and a working class, of those who are ‘free’ to choose to which producer they sell their labour power.

Under late capitalism, a growing multiplicity of class positions has proliferated in between the two opposing poles of working class and ruling class, and which do not always fit easily into the self-employed traditional ‘petty bourgeoisie’. These groups, notably highly educated professionals and managers, small employers and semi-autonomous employees, have “contradictory locations within class relations” as well as “quite complex and often inconsistent interests with respect to capitalism” (Wright 1979, 63). The existence of these contradictory locations within society’s class structure “does not refer to problems of pigeon-holing people within an abstract typology” (Wright 1979, 62). Rather, it refers to the contradictions that arise within the processes of control over the means of production, labour power and investments.

To further understand these contradictions, the original Marxist understanding of class has been expanded by bringing in “opportunity hoarding” (Wright 2009, 104). Although in the core related to the means of production, capitalist class structure is also affected by the process through which the privileged acquire advantageous attributes by restricting the access of the less privileged to those attributes. Opportunity hoarding originates from a Weberian approach to status and class in

relation to social stratification and differentiates the middle class from the wider working class through barriers and privileges. Wright's combination of Marx's class in itself and opportunity hoarding allows for an understanding of class as a relational phenomenon that is attentive to nuances regarding the subsets of classes and to the ways in which privileges that do not directly pertain to employment shape class positions.

Another source of nuance to the original Marxist class understanding originated in feminist and Black Marxism, which flourished especially between the 1930s and 1980s (Fraser 2022). Through critical race theory and notions of racial capitalism, understandings of race have enriched Marxist analyses of power and class struggle (Gilmore 2011; Bhattacharyya 2018; Go 2021). This has led to Marxist approaches to class that seek to avoid "vulgar class reductionism" and pay attention to the "complex racial, gendered and sexual dynamics of power operative in the world" in which class operates "heterogeneously, differentially, and unevenly" (Bohrer 2019, 122; 166).

Class developments and urban processes are tightly intertwined. As became clear in the quote from *The Communist Manifesto* above, Marx and Engels saw an inherent relation between industrialisation, urbanisation and class. Lefebvre also holds that given the centrality of urbanisation for the survival of the capitalist system, political and class struggle are inherent to urbanisation. The absorption of surplus capital, in which urban processes have played an important role, is conditioned by the ones who control surplus capital (Lefebvre [1970] 2003). The allocation of social space, through planning practices, is influenced by and reproduces society's class structure. This is reflected in the differences in the size and quality of the available space for different classes. For Lefebvre, "today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space" (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 55; Elden 2004).

This inscription of class struggle in space posits urbanisation as an inherently class-based phenomenon. And conversely, the urban, as the locus for struggles over spatial resources and as location for social reproductive practices, plays a decisive role in class formation (Boterman and Van Gent 2023). A famous case of this is Paris in the mid-19th century, where Haussman's urban renewal and restructuring led to processes of creative destruction which disadvantaged certain groups – the underprivileged, the marginalised and the poor – while benefitting the capitalist class in search for profitable investment opportunities (Harvey 2008). The marginalised classes have always played an important role in processes of urbanisation, not least because both class reproduction and class consciousness are urban phenomena (Harvey and Wachsmuth 2011).

Processes of neoliberalisation have influenced the constellation of the relation between class and the urban. They played an important part in the blurring of the clearcut class distinctions based on ownership of the means of production and the rise of contradictory class locations. As persistent

logics of competition and marketisation sparked forms of uneven development and urban entrepreneurialism, they also led to the rise of certain new (subsets of) classes that increasingly leave an imprint on urban regions. The precariat and the urban middle class are prime examples of such new classes.

The precariat is a direct result of the proliferation of insecurity under processes of neoliberalisation. A “class-in-the-making” (and not yet a class for itself, in Marx’s terms), the precariat is a group of people who neither have the stability of long-term jobs for local employers with fixed working hours, stable income and union representation, nor any work-based identity (Standing 2014, 11). This class-in-the-making is increasingly concentrating in urban regions across the world. In the Global North, it comprises workers in former industrial towns and cities whose livelihoods have been altered by deindustrialisation and transnational trade agreements, as well as middle-class knowledge workers who face precarious working conditions under global conditions, in part due to loss of union representation. Meanwhile, in the Global South, peasants and indigenous peoples are forced to move to urban slums as a result of the rise of large-scale agriculture and deforestation (Johnson 2011), giving rise to a “planet of slums” (M. Davis 2017).¹

On the other hand, neoliberal, pro-growth policies led to the emergence of the middle classes in urban contexts, which, in turn, have reorientated the local state and shaped western urban regions to a considerable degree (Boterman and Van Gent 2023). In the 1980s and 1990s, when city governments were pushed to take an entrepreneurial approach to economic development, middle classes in North America and north-western Europe began to decisively transform the face of cities. In contrast to the widespread flight to the suburbs of middle-class families during the 1970s, cities started to become attractive again. Urban development and land use change in cities in the West were increasingly oriented towards the interests and demands of the middle class, which became key to the functioning of the post-industrial urban growth machine. This has led to widespread processes of gentrification, “the process by which working class residential neighborhoods are rehabilitated by middle class homebuyers, landlords, and professional developers” (Smith 1982, 139). In the late twentieth century, this process became generalised as a designated “global urban strategy” employed in places as different as Tenerife and Seoul (Smith 2002, 427). In the context of increasingly globalised cities, where vast service sectors and knowledge workers are the main driver of growth, the educated middle classes started to become explicitly urban from the 1990s onwards.

¹ For the sake of brevity, I refer here and elsewhere in the dissertation to the categories of Global North and Global South to discuss the power differentials between countries after the Cold War. However, I do acknowledge that a large share of countries is not neatly captured by either of these categories, as their incomes are too high to be categorised as Global South and too low to be categorised as Global North. These categories neglect, in terms of another short-cut, the “Global East” (Müller 2020).

After previous abandonment of the city during the suburban flight, well-educated and young professionals started to come back to the city and contributed to processes of urban revitalisation and renewal (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, 44). Thus, through combined processes of urban transformations and economic restructuring, post-industrial societies saw the rise of a “new *urban* middle class” (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 25 [emphasis in original]).

This new urban middle class can be understood through the dimensions of occupation, cultural and economic capital, cosmopolitanism, gentrification aesthetics and the use of urban space. This middle class is internally fragmented and diverse, which problematises the idea of a unified “global gentrifier class” (Bridge 2007). It is fragmented in the strategies it employs to socially reproduce itself in ways that secure the continued distinction from the working classes. It is culturally diverse, as it comprises both people with managerial occupations as well as liberal intelligentsia. Nevertheless, the diverse members of the middle class are all “enmeshed in global networks of flows and meaning” through their “cool knowledge” that is independent of specific localities, and which increasingly concerns culture through its promotion of “aesthetic rationality” (Bridge 2007, 35–37). The urban middle class is thus closely connected to the rise of the knowledge economy and immaterial labour that coincided with processes of neoliberalisation (as I discussed in section 2.1 of this chapter).

The rise of the urban class and the discourse favourable to gentrification were strengthened by the emergence of the notion of “the creative class” in the early 2000s (Florida 2002). According to Florida’s analysis, this newly arisen class, made up of all “purveyors of creativity,” is key to the generation of economic growth and to any understanding of the directions of societal change (Florida 2002, ix). The creative class clusters in places where the creative jobs are and where “they like to live” (Florida 2002, 7). Thus, cities, rather than solely relying on production for economic growth, should leverage creativity as a driver for the economy. Benefitting from decreasing crime rates and demographic change, cities have become locations for a certain lifestyle. The new urban middle class seeks out the places that have unique values and characteristics based on “the cultural and emotional aspect of a city’s attractiveness” and the aesthetics of the city (Reckwitz 2020, 281).

Florida’s analysis of the creative class has been criticised, among other things, for lacking a class politics. Summarising the critiques, Peck states that Florida’s analysis does not acknowledge “intraurban inequality and working poverty” (Peck 2005, 756). Rather, its starting point is that everyone is creative in essence, but that this potential is not realised given that two thirds of the population do not have creative jobs. However, Florida overlooks “the nagging question of who will launder the shirts in this creative paradise” (Peck 2005, 757), and thus promotes a narrow focus on “hipster embourgeoisement” and yuppies’ “free-market self-actualization” with the commodification of artistic, cultural and social resources (Peck 2005, 745–46).

With the rise on immaterial labour, gentrification and a focus the free-market self-actualisation and the aesthetics of the city, class relations need to be considered increasingly in terms of “opportunity hoarding” (Wright 2009, 104) under processes of neoliberalisation. Through this, privileges and barriers create nuances between sub-groups of social classes and give rise to notably the new urban middle class. Although members of this middle class occupy contradictory class positions and the class on a whole is fragmented and diverse, I will, for the sake of simplicity, henceforth employ the notion of the ‘middle class’ to refer to professional, highly educated urbanites who have come to play such a key role in urban politics. With the rise of immaterial labour and the urban middle class, the exploitative relation between cities and their hinterlands has altered. This exploitative relation is connected to the dependency of all capitalist production on several extra-capitalist spheres from which it draws legitimacy and cheap inputs.

2.3 Extra-capitalist spheres

Conceptualising capitalism as a system that is structurally dependent on non-commodified spheres for its existence implies embracing Polanyi’s idea “that a capitalist economy must exist in a more-than-capitalist world” (Castree 2010, 1739), as well as Fraser’s conception of capitalism as “an institutionalized social order” (Fraser 2014, 66) and Moore’s work on capitalism as “a world-ecology of capital, power, and re/production in the web of life” (Moore 2015, 14). These views can be summarised as approaching capitalism as an economic system that depends on the appropriation of unpaid work outside of the commodity circuit.

These perspectives draw our attention to the fact that capitalism does not result in the “ever-increasing commodification of life as such” but necessarily implies – and inherently relies on – the existence of non-capitalist, non-commodified spheres of life (Fraser 2014, 59). Because of the impossibility of fully disembedded markets, this approach, as Fraser argues, is a necessary nuancing of Polanyi’s framework of embedded and disembedded markets. In other words, there are always certain connections to the forms of life in which economic activities are situated. To account for these connections, Fraser develops a conceptualisation that allows for the complexity and dynamism of the various realms in the web of life in which capitalism is situated (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018).

Drawing on traditions of social reproduction theory and ecological thinking, this expansive approach strives to think capitalism in terms of “totality as an organic whole rather than an aggregate of parts” (Bhattacharya 2017, 17). Without being too “romantic” about the “inside/outside perspective on capitalism,” it aims to theorise the social, natural and political conditions of possibility of capitalism (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 58). These conditions are enabled by non-economic spheres that each have their own character and logic. The entanglement of these spheres with the

economic realm is historical, according to Fraser, and therefore contingent. Moreover, these non-commodified spheres might also provide a basis for anti-capitalist contestation and alternatives, so-called “boundary struggles” (Fraser 2022, 20). Understanding how this may be the case requires a better understanding of each of them in turn. In this section, I discuss the social and natural background conditions of capitalism respectively, with a specific focus on their connections with urbanisation and the city. I start with capitalism’s social condition of possibility of unpaid reproductive work.

2.3.1 CARE AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

A long tradition in Marxist social reproduction theory has drawn attention to the unpaid reproductive work that takes place in spheres outside of the immediate workplace – such as households, schools, care institutions – and which is fundamental to the reproduction of the labour force and society as a whole. This does not only include social reproduction in the sense of the reproduction of the capitalist system, as Marx uses the term, but also the behaviours, relations and activities that enable the reproduction of the population. Social reproduction theory scrutinises the separations between the public sphere of production and the private sphere of reproduction (Bhattacharya 2017; J. Brenner and Laslett 1991). Under modern capitalism, social reproduction has been institutionalised in a way that strictly separates economic production from social reproduction.

This brings about a social contradiction that is inherent in capitalist society. On the one hand, capitalist society depends on social reproduction and care work – not only to sustain human life and community bonds but also to provide and replenish a labour force that enables the sustaining of capital accumulation. On the other hand, capital’s need for accumulation and expansion drive it to “cannibalize the very social-reproductive capacities on which it relies” (Fraser 2022, 54). By not compensating for them monetarily, the capitalist economy free rides on activities of care and social reproduction. This in turn leads to a crisis in care where the capacities of care are squeezed and a care deficit arises.

This strict separation between commodity production and social reproduction is not universal. Rather, it is historical and specific to various stages of capitalism. Increased women’s and children’s labour participation in western Europe during the nineteenth century in response to further needs for cheap labour was contested by the working classes, whose capacities for social reproduction were threatened further, as well as by the middle classes, who feared it would destroy families and desex working-class women (Fraser 2022, 59–60). The subsequent protective legislation around woman and child labour, resulting in the norm of the nuclear family and “housewifization,” were aimed at

accommodating the contestation while facilitating continued capital accumulation (Mies, cited in Fraser 2022, 61).

Like industrialisation, processes of urbanisation have contributed significantly to the historical changes in the position and role of reproductive work. Early materialist feminists already drew attention to the strict separation between public spaces and the private household, which became especially pronounced in industrial cities. The marginalisation of women in US urban and suburban areas sparked various attempts of feminists over time to revolutionise and equalise urban space. Through industrialisation and urbanisation, which were seen as forms of liberation from the household for the man, who found work outside of the home, the housewife became increasingly “encased in woman’s sphere” without her own income with which to participate in the monetised economy (Hayden 2000, 13 [1981]). This rendered the women’s movement a middle-class movement in various cases. Alongside the pay for housework campaigns that started in 1868, female urban reformers engaged with notions of “domesticity” and “care” to make industrial cities safer and more just (Morrow and Parker 2020, 610).

The rise of neoliberalism affected the conditions for care work and social reproduction. During the dismantling of the welfare state under “roll-back neoliberalism” in the 1980s (Peck and Tickell 2002, 384), social reproduction was (re)privatised through a dialectic between the globalising tendencies of capital and the systems of social reproduction engrained in everyday life (I. Bakker 2007). Meanwhile, the labour participation of women, traditionally the main caretakers, grew, which coincided with the rise of the ideal of the two-earner family in the West. In a curious convergence of movements from the global New Left and free-market thinking, the social-democratic ideal of welfare and protection crumbled, putting social reproduction under pressure due to decreased public provisions and increased working hours (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018). This development also gave rise to “progressive neoliberalism,” which marries liberal social movements around social inclusion (notably feminist, anti-racist, LGBTQIA+ movements) with ideas around an open, globalised economy and financialisation (Fraser 2019, 7). On the other hand, in the Global South, states pulling out of the realm of social reproduction was part of the agreements with international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These institutions actively advocated for cuts in social reproduction spending, thereby assuming that “women’s capacity to reproduce and maintain human resources” has no “breaking point” (Elson 1988, 4).

Female labour market participation has been intensified through recent waves of urbanisation, which have stimulated women’s participation in the labour market. Feminist movements have been demanding expanded social reproduction infrastructures, such as child-care facilities and elderly homes. In urban contexts, where such infrastructures are more easily developed, these struggles

have partially freed women from duties as main care givers (Gibson-Graham [1996] 2006a, 80). However, in other cases, it has led to women carrying the double burden of paid and unpaid work or to an increase in paid domestic work. Despite being considered great gender equalisers by some, urbanisation and increased female participation in the monetised economy cause a shift in the performance of reproductive work. Part of this is accommodated by other unpaid members of the household, while another part is done by paid workers – often migrant women working as nannies or maids for middle-class households in affluent countries (Tacoli 2012).

2.3.2 NATURE

The second background condition of possibility for capitalism is nature. The division between humanity and nature so central to modernity has been subject to long-standing critical debate. This debate goes back at least to Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which argues that western Reason, responsible for humanity's drive to dominate nature, collapses into its opposite, while Enlightenment values such as freedom can never be realised when they are embedded within the operations of capitalism (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002). The domination of nature, whose transhistorical salience was at the core of the Frankfurter Schule's orientation, should be seen not only as the transformation of nature into "human property" without destroying it but as the technology-driven ravaging of nature that allows "societies to substitute its products for nature itself" (Lefebvre, cited in Napoletano et al. 2023, 442).

Thinking about the (destructive) connections between capital and nature has been developed further by ecological Marxism, which, from the turn of the century, has gone through a revival as second-generation ecological Marxists have started to engage more explicitly with the society-nature binary again to uncover the intricate relations between capitalist society and ecological destruction. Although Marx never developed a systematic critique of the ecological contradictions of capital, ecological Marxists hold that Marx himself was in fact pre-occupied with the unsustainable relation between humans and nature, and with "the contradiction between value and its background conditions" (Saito 2022, 17). Marx thought of nature as "the 'inorganic body' of the human being," implying that humanity and social relations always necessarily need to be thought as being embedded within nature (Marx, cited in Mau 2022, 91).

John Bellamy Foster, prominent in eco-Marxist debates, traces and reconstructs Marx's ecological thought and highlights Marx's concept of metabolism as a forceful way to capture the relation between humans and nature, which is mediated by labour and which constitutes the backbone of human life. Metabolism is "the basis on which the complex web of interactions necessary to life is sustained, and growth becomes possible" (Foster 2000, 163). However, capitalism brings about "a

metabolic rift between human beings and the soil” that defies “nature-imposed condition[s] of sustainability” (Foster 2000, 163). This, in turn, causes a “fatal distortion of the relationship between humans and nature” (Saito 2022, 9). Through exhaustion of the soil, notably through the extractive configuration of rural-urban relations but also reflected in colonies and through colonisers, the cycle through which human beings are connected with nature is distorted (Foster 2000). Malm provides the following succinct summary of the idea of metabolic rift:

Nature consists of biophysical processes and cycles. So does society: human bodies must engage in metabolic exchanges with nonhuman nature. That need not be particularly harmful to any of the parties. Over the course of history, however, the relations through which humans have organised their *Stoffwechsel* [metabolism] might be fractured and forcibly rearranged, so that they not only harm the people disadvantaged by this change, but also, at the very same time, disturb the processes and cycles of nature. A *metabolic rift* has opened up. (Malm 2019, 174 [emphasis in original])

Jason W. Moore, who takes inspiration from Malm’s concept of the Capitalocene instead of the Anthropocene to emphasise the impact of capital rather than humanity as a whole on the metabolism of humans with nature, goes a step further than this strand of ecological Marxists. Conceptualising the relation between humanity and nature “as a flow of flows,” Moore aims to overcome the dualism between humanity and nature (Moore 2015, 19). By conceiving capitalism as a “world-ecology” and a specific “way of organizing nature,” (Moore 2015, 2–3) he emphasises the tight interconnection between capitalism and the “nature-as-*oikeios*” (Moore 2015, 13 [emphasis in original]) – with *oikeios* being “the creative, generative, and multi-layered relation of species and environment” (Moore 2015, 4).

Capitalism’s *modus operandi* relies on the cheap – or free – inputs from nature-as-*oikeios*. Capitalism, then, is not only a system of unpaid costs, or externalities, but mainly of unpaid work (Moore 2016, 132–33). This unpaid work is performed by human and non-human species that come as “the Four Cheaps” – food, labour power, energy and raw materials (Moore 2015, 17). These forms of work are not valued under capitalism; a system that merely values paid work. The system does, however, rely on these cheap inputs for reductions in the socially necessary labour-time to the extent that these cannot be achieved through innovations in the production process. Cheap Nature is realised through forms of accumulation by appropriation – in the form of original accumulation and enclosures of uncommodified spheres, as discussed above – and accumulation by capitalisation – the reorganisation and rationalising of the production process within the commodified sphere.

Moore’s position has sparked a fierce debate between ecological Marxists on the monist or dualist analytical foundations of Marx’s and eco-Marxist thought. The core of this debate hinges on the question of whether a world-ecology approach takes a step that is necessary for thinking humans

and social relations in nature or whether it eschews the kind of conceptual approach that is needed to reflect the difference between human relations, on the one hand, and other natural relations, on the other (for an overview of the debate, see Malm 2019 or Saito 2022). Rather than going into depth with this discussion here, I draw on Fraser's position for a productive way out. She rejects any strict dichotomy between nature and humanity but stresses that this does not rule out all distinctions between human and non-human animals – as long as these distinctions are historicised. Fraser suggests the phrase “socioecological relations” to signal “the depth of the nature/society entanglement, while still enabling us to distinguish between them contextually” (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 93). Fraser's position is in line with that put forth by Lefebvre, to whose thought I return in more depth in the next chapter. Lefebvre considers nature not as a passive object but an active force. He argues for the overcoming of the binary between subject and object through a “unity in praxis” which “does not necessarily eliminate the underlying tensions” between them (Napoletano et al. 2023, 436).

Processes of neoliberal restructuring have altered the configuration of nature within capitalism and deepened the nature/society entanglement. This has sparked a round of new enclosures, and the further commodification of nature – for instance, the commodification of water (Fraser 2022). With these new forms of commodification, capitalism does not ‘merely’ rely on cheap natural inputs. Rather, the neoliberalisation of nature has led to active engagement with nature as a market. With the publication of the *Brundtland Report* in the 1970s, the limits to nature as tap and sink started to loom and the reconciliation of environmental policies with economic growth became mainstream – to the extent that Margaret Thatcher proclaimed that “we are all greens now” (K. Bakker 2015, 448).

Through attacks on Keynesian environmental regulations that were considered to limit the free market, environmental protection structures were dismantled and environmental politics were affected by neoliberal logics. This has led to the conviction that, in accounting for capitalism's negative externalities, free market environmentalism is an oxymoron no longer. It has thus given rise to a far-reaching marketisation of nature through the development of tradeable emissions or fishing permits, private resource management, corporate biotechnology and ecosystem services (McCarthy and Prudham 2004; K. Bakker 2015). The capital that these investments attract thus becomes unavailable for investments needed for the transition away from fossil fuels (Fraser 2022). This is dangerous in a world that is captured by carbon capturing and off-setting, fuelling the “collective delusion” of “net zero,” and which fails to deal with the exploitative, polluting system underlying the fossil economy (Buck 2021, 53). Meanwhile, the environmental movement is, at least in the Global North, largely shaped by the professional middle classes, who consider the

environmental crisis as one that can be solved through sustainable consumption and disconnect it from wider class politics or demands for democratisation (Huber 2019; Moore 2023).

The urban has played a key role in the historical development of capitalism as world-ecology. In northwestern Europe, the widespread choice for animal husbandry in urban areas required cheap wheat supply both from the hinterlands and colonies. This led, in turn, to relations between the urban and the rural that were thoroughly antagonistic and related to class inequalities and struggle (Moore 2003). Both Marx ([1867] 2013) and Engels ([1872] 1995) emphasise the crucial role of the urban in capitalism's metabolic rift and lament the extractive relation of the city with the country through which it fails to restore the soil's nutrients that it extracts. Cities necessarily relied on food supplies from rural areas and therefore sought to expand the latter through further processes of accumulation by dispossession (Foster 2000).

These unsustainable, extractive relations of the urban with the rural have only intensified with the expansion of capitalism. Human geographers and sociologists analyse these relations, understood as the interplay between social and natural processes, material flows and the circulation of information that enables the modern city, through the concept of *urban metabolism* (Newell and Cousins 2015). Over time, this concept has been approached in different ways in line with how the city's relations with nature have changed. Early conceptions of urban metabolism, promoted by the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, were metaphorical and posited nature as outside of the social processes of the city. Industrial ecology approaches, later, started to draw attention to the ways in which urban metabolism relies on nature as a tap for inputs and a sink for waste. Urban political ecology posits the city as the socio-natural product of urban metabolism (Wachsmuth 2012). The latter approach considers the relationship between nature and culture a dialectical one whose spatial materialisation constitutes urban processes (Gandy 2004). In these dynamic, dialectical processes, "socio-natures" are mutually transformed (K. Bakker 2003, 50) and the urban becomes "metabolically transformed nature" or "a socionatural hybrid" (Broto, Allen and Rapoport 2012, 858).

Through processes of neoliberalisation, the role of international financial organisations in the facilitation of urban metabolic flows has grown, for instance, through the privatisation of water management in urban regions (Broto, Allen and Rapoport 2012). Neoliberal governance has also spurred green city ideals for the sake of international competitiveness and out of a sense of global responsibility that is promoted through the proliferation of international urban environmental programmes. Conversely, environmentalism has also been incremental in shaping neoliberal urbanisation, as the multi-scalar complexity of environmental governance is perfectly in line with that of global neoliberal governance (Brand 2007).

On the urban scale, processes of neoliberalisation have been going hand in hand with “urban greening” policies through the greening of formerly industrial sites and promoting of “flagship urban-industrial greening projects” (Angelo 2021, 148). Urban environmental management increasingly involves the micro-administration of space. Environmental management interferes with all social activities, institutions and organisations, while environmental policy aims at spanning the entirety of institutions and organisations associated with governance. This means that the environment has become “a responsibility which has expanded across all spheres of public and private life: a question of governmentality” (Brand 2007, 622).

This points to the close involvement of the state in the mutually transformative social and natural processes involved with urban capitalism. The state does not only develop environmental policy but also introduces and oversees the (re)regulation and marketisation of natural resources that negotiates the urban metabolic relations (K. Bakker 2003). Some closer reflections on the role of the state are thus in order.

3 The role of the state

In all capitalist processes of surplus value production, accumulation by dispossession and the expropriation of social reproductive and natural capacities, the state plays an important part. For Fraser, state power is a specific, third kind of background condition of possibility for capitalism which divides private economic power from public, political power (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018). Capitalist accumulation and, by extension, capitalism are impossible without a legal framework that ensures private property, fiat money and market exchanges, all of which are facilitated through state power. To understand how the state is entwined in the development of modern capitalist society, I briefly introduce Jessop’s (2008; 2016) relational understanding of the state in section 3.1. Jessop posits the state as an institutional ensemble within a wider context of societal forces and actors. Then in section 3.2, I turn to some of the historical connections between the nascence of the modern state and capitalism to draw attention to the ways in which the state, understood in Jessop’s open, relational sense has been instrumental in the development of modern capitalism.

3.1 Relational state theory

Theoretical and historical inquiries into the state are manifold, and giving a comprehensive account of these would go beyond the scope of this thesis. However, to understand how the state apparatus with its different branches, institutions and actors exerts power and decisively influences societal processes, I rely on conceptualisations that situate the state in a wider context. These approaches de-

centre the state as the sole political force with a monopoly on power but consider it “as being embedded and levelled into society and its practices” (Lessenich 2010, 305). Bob Jessop has developed an influential account of the state and state power which aims to encompass the multiplicity of state actors and institutions that interact with other societal forces through a variety of logics to promote certain forms of societal and urban change. He defines the state as consisting of four elements:

The core of the state apparatus comprises a relatively unified ensemble of socially embedded, socially regularized, and strategically selective institutions and organizations [*Staatsgewalt*] whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on the members of a society [*Staatsvolk*] in a given territorial area [*Staatsgebiet*] in the name of the common interest or a general will of an imagined political community identified with that territory [*Staatsidee*]. (Jessop 2016, 49)

Building on the work of Marx, Gramsci and notably Poulantzas, Jessop (2008, 1) widens this conceptualisation into an “approach that treats the state apparatus and state power in ‘strategic-relational’ terms”. He arrives at a definition of state power in terms of a specific form, “a complex institutional ensemble” and political struggle, which condensates materially through “a specific pattern of ‘strategic selectivity’ that reflects and modifies the balance of class forces” (Jessop 2008, 126).

Jessop’s account of state power rejects any monolithic conceptions that equate “the state” with the institutions that are associated with it. An institutional ensemble rather than a “real subject,” the state is defined by “various potential structural powers (or state capacities),” which are leveraged by “sets of politicians and state officials located in specific parts of the state system” (Jessop 2016, 48). Jessop draws state power out of narrowly defined institutions and instead considers the relations of these institutions with other societal actors: “the state’s effectiveness is always shaped by capacities and forces that lie beyond it” (Jessop 2008, 126). These relations are never neutral, because institutions, political regimes and forms of government are characterised by “structural, discursive and strategic biases” towards certain groups, interests and purposes in society (Jessop 2016, 51). The state is thus “strategically selective, the site where strategies are elaborated and codified” (Jessop 2016, 54).

This strategic selectivity influences the ways in which various elements of the state’s institutional ensemble connect with and approach civil society actors and other societal organisations and forces in divergent ways. In the relations between the state and civil society, there are different mechanisms at play, ranging from cooperative to more repressive or antagonistic (Jessop 2016), although, given the state’s strategic selectivity, it has a tendency to work with consensual voices, thus avoiding and excluding subversive actors (Bianchi 2022).

Jessop's open definition of state power allows for the possibility that it may be instrumentalised for resolving the structural contradictions in capitalist society and thus serves as a background condition of possibility for capitalism. However, in liberal-democratic societies, the state always *also* needs to ensure democratic legitimacy and popular support (Lessenich 2015a), and it is, in the end, held accountable for the overall stability of society (Jessop 2016). Different parts of the state may employ different methods to meet these demands, and some parts of the state may therefore be open to engage with struggle and contestation from below in various ways to ensure their democratic legitimacy. Acknowledging this internal diversity of the state apparatus implies that the "absolute identification of politics with the management of capital" (Rancière 1999, 113) is rather unlikely. The leading idea in materialist state theory, that the state is a main channel for the interests of the bourgeois class to guarantee favourable conditions for the reproduction of capital, "is actually incorrect and overgeneralized" (Demirović 2011, 42). Conflicting capitalist interests and forms of contestation from subaltern societal groups and forces blur this picture, as does the nature of the state apparatus as an ensemble of institutions rather than a unified agent.

Jessop's relational theory thus offers a dialectical reading of the structure-agency relation in which the actors and their strategic locations co-determine what can and cannot be changed in a given situation, and which therefore becomes structural, while the structure simultaneously helps shape the strategic abilities of actors (Jessop 2016, 52). The state relates to and interacts with the historically contingent configuration of political forces, their strategies and capacities as well as their ability to reflect upon and respond to the state's strategic selectivity. The state, Jessop (2016, 57) argues, "is the site of a paradox". Even though, as an institutional ensemble, it is only a *part* of the social formation and therefore has limited capacities to influence the whole, it is held accountable for the cohesion of the social formation as a *whole* and expected to act as an intervener of last resort. This implies that state power can only be analysed as part of a wider societal analysis that tries to grapple with the (il)logics of the paradox of the state as part of a wider social-relational context. It also implies that the local levels of government and the societal actors they work with play an important role in suppressing challenges from below.

Notwithstanding its theoretical elegance and wide applicability, Jessop's strategic-relational framework is less equipped to analyse the state on a local scale. To bring in scalar thinking, Uitermark (2005) constructs a combined framework of Jessop's relational account of the state and a Foucauldian governmentality interpretation of social policy. This allows for a conceptualisation of power and the state that feature the local levels of government, the specific institutional settings, individual actors and the ways their strategies come into being, as well as the ways these relate to actors and arrangements on other scales. Foucault's concept of power helps to understand how power is produced locally and how these localities relate to overall programmes of government.

Foucault's conception of power, like Jessop's analysis of state power, rejects a general notion of the state. It also posits social change as always incomplete and challenged by counter forces. Modalities of power are formed through local interactions and confrontations which merge with other modalities to form a *dispositif*, the apparatus of power consisting of context-specific, heterogeneous and discursive and non-discursive elements. Institutions, as "local centres' of power-knowledge," contribute to shaping discourse (Uitermark 2005, 145).

This combined framework of relational state theory and a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality connects local (urban) centres to central (national) ones. The central state conditions the translation to other local settings of socio-spatial policy discourses, developed on the neighbourhood level, by altering the conditions under which these discourses emerge and are distributed. Simultaneously, national policy makers draw from local policy developments and processes of knowledge production and in turn aim to influence these. On the other hand, actors on the neighbourhood or local scale strategically invoke discourses and strategies that make the local scale important for the national scale and thereby produce mutual interdependencies between the scales. The local scale, then, informs national policy processes and provides a site of policy implementation and experimentation (Uitermark 2005). In responding to challenges from below, the local state employs "governmental and technological techniques and systems to create productive citizens, controlled spaces, and profitable corporations" (Uitermark, Nicholls and Loopmans 2012, 2550). The latter hints at the – contingent but striking – connections between the state and capitalist interests. The state has played a historically significant role in the resolving of the contradictions of capital accumulation and continues to do so in various ways.

3.2 The state and the historical development of capitalism

The close relation between the nascence of the modern nation state and capitalism have been documented extensively (e.g., Arrighi 1994; Polanyi [1944] 2001). The rise of capitalism and the resolving of the contradictions inherent in the reproduction of capital were enabled by a historical separation between economy and polity; between economic power and political power (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018). The modern market economy – an economic system dictated by market prices – requires such an institutional separation between the economic and a political sphere. Polanyi locates the requirement for this separation in the self-regulating market, which comprises all industry elements, including the "*fictitious* commodities" of "labour, land, and money" (Polanyi [1944] 2001, 71 [my emphasis]). Polanyi deems the latter fictitious since they were not originally produced for the market. Given this fictitious character, they require extensive and active state management to ensure the right level of demand and supply.

The contradictions of the modern market economy arise not only because of the scope of commodities it comprises but also from its impetus for growth and geographical expansion. The nation-state was at the core of the globalisation of modern capitalism when mutually competing European states, with strong centres of concentrated capitalist and financial power, engaged in colonial conquest (Arrighi 1994). Such strong economic centres, aided by the state, have been key in the uneven geographical development of capitalism (Harvey 2004). The state has played an important role in the geographical expansion of capitalism ever since the “highly political process” of original accumulation, and it continues to do so in times of overaccumulation, when idle capital seeks profitable investment opportunities (Dörre 2015, 38). The movement of capital following these crises takes place through what Harvey (2004, 64) calls “spatio-temporal fixes” – by enabling investments in long-term projects or social expenditures that temporally displace capital, by opening up new markets or production facilities and opportunities that spatially displace capital, or by a combination of these two forms. Not only do these fixes provide a solution (or ‘fix’) to crises of overaccumulation, but they also ‘fix’ capital physically in a specific location and temporally for a certain period of time. In such fixes, financial and state institutions are crucial, not least for providing credit.

In accommodating capital accumulation, the state needs to balance the requirements for capital accumulation with the need for democratic legitimacy. Resolving the “capitalist-democratic compatibility problematic” shapes the fundamental logic of the late modern – capitalist and welfare – state (Lessenich 2015a, 116). The balance of this problematic has come to fall less and less in the favour of democratic demands. In the post-war era, democracy was an important economic and social engine for state-managed capitalism, as it ensured the redistribution of wealth and generated aggregate economic demand necessary for economic growth. However, in a diagnosis in line with Harvey’s analysis of spatio-temporal fixes, Streeck holds that the falling rates of economic growth at the end of the post-war era led capital to move abroad in the search for profit so that lower growth could be compensated with higher profit rates. This marked the start of an era of globalisation and widening inequalities, in which democracy was no longer instrumental for economic growth (Streeck 2016).

Despite the salient role of the nation state in global capitalist developments, considerations of the local state are no less important. The local state, with its influence on the urban fabric through its planning practices and conditioning of urban space, is a key locus for the high-modernist logics of the state. With the homogeneity and uniformity of maps and cadastral grids, the local state enables the translation of high-modernist logics of the state into the urban fabric (Scott [1998] 2020). The local state also affects the urban fabric through its facilitation of capitalist production, for instance, by enabling spatio-temporal fixes. In relation to the facilitation of capitalist production, city-regions

have become more important post-1970s, and policy arrangements have increasingly come to target urban regions. This implies that an understanding of transformations in global capitalism requires a consideration of the ways in which city-regions have come to rescale national state power (N. Brenner 2004, 3–4). As discussed earlier, since the 1970s, the global capitalist system became organised less as a neat system of nation-states and more as an uneven and variegated system of places and regions. In this system, the state – on various scales – continues to play an important role in (re)shaping the capitalist urban fabric, as “state spatial strategies continue to mediate, animate, and canalize urbanization, and its associated crisis tendencies, in pervasively powerful ways, across contexts and territories, worldwide” (N. Brenner 2019, 13).

Processes of neoliberalisation were decidedly occupied with state-managed forms of marketisation in spite of an alleged retreat of the state. Through market-oriented policies and regulatory experimentation, not least on the urban scale, the aim was to reproduce competitive market logics. Rather than a retreat of the state through privatisation and deregulation, then, neoliberal governance rather involves “ways in which the state strategically repositions its allegiances and commitments” (K. Bakker 2003, 50). Through such processes, the local state contributed to the transformation of capitalism, for example, through large infrastructural projects. Initially, these were primarily construction projects in the built environment, but since the global financial crisis in 2007-8, investments in urban areas have gradually shifted towards financial infrastructure thanks to the rise of the FIRE sectors of the economy (Harvey 2008). The growth of the FIRE sectors has also given rise to the so-called “real estate state, a political formation in which real estate capital has inordinate influence over the shape of our cities, the parameters of our politics and the lives we lead” (Stein 2019, 5). The real estate state is not an entirely new phenomenon, as landowners have always been influential in shaping cityscapes and housing has been a commodity for a long time. However, especially since the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2007-8, the values of real estate have risen tremendously, thereby adding to the political power of real estate capital. The phenomenon of “global corporate landlords” in an increasingly transnational housing market reflects this trend (Beswick et al. 2016, 322).

Besides its historically salient role in facilitating capitalist production, the local state also plays a key role in enabling processes of social reproduction. I come back to definitions of the city in terms of social reproduction in more detail in the next chapter, but for my purposes here I would note that, through processes of urbanisation, the state has come to be tasked with the provision of social reproduction. Because of urbanisation, populations became increasingly concentrated, and the state expanded its provision of crucial consumption facilities, rendering processes of consumption more collective. This is a direct result of the fact that the capitalist mode of production must grapple with the contradiction between the need to produce commodities at the lowest possible cost and the

need to ensure social reproduction. The state, with its role as the regulator of the system as a whole and seeking to balance economic demands with democratic legitimacy, stepped in to provide the collective and social goods and services that are not produced by private actors as they are not profitable from a capitalist point of view (Castells 1977). This posits the urban in terms of an active state and the (re)production of the spaces, infrastructures and services related to the unpaid reproductive work that takes place outside of waged labour. The main function of the urban then becomes consumption, “the ensemble of spatial realizations derived from the social process of reproducing labour power,” which may translate into either simple reproduction through, for example, housing, as well as extended reproduction through wider “socio-cultural environments” (Castells 1977, 130). I come back to this inherent link between the urban and social reproduction in the next chapter.

4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have developed a notion of capitalism and neoliberalism in relation to the urban, which acknowledges both the underlying logics – capitalism’s ‘hardware’ or the process of capital – and the latest stage of its promotion as political project – through processes of neoliberalisation that aim to translate neoliberal ideas into policy contexts by imposing forms of marketisation, privatisation and re-regulation. Drawing from long-standing Marxist and Marxian studies of capitalism and the urban, I have defined capitalism in terms of three main characteristics. The first of these is the need for continuous expansion, the generation of which has historically been – and still is – closely connected to the rise of urban regions. Since the 1970s, the generation of growth has had an entrepreneurial logic.

The second characteristic relates to the ways in which capital divides society into social classes that relate to the division of economic resources. This is connected to the urban through the related processes of (de)industrialisation and urbanisation. Whereas the urban was reflective of the strongly opposing positions of the working class and the capitalist class in earlier phases of industrial capitalism, this picture started to blur in the late twentieth century, with processes of neoliberalisation and deindustrialisation giving rise to the precariat and (professional, urban) middle class.

The third characteristic is capital’s reliance on the external, non-commodified spheres of care work and nature. Through processes of urbanisation, the distinction between the realm of paid work and unpaid reproductive work has become sharper, with varying consequences for – primarily – women around the world. At the same time, capitalist development and the neoliberalisation of nature have

intensified the extractive relation of the urban with its rural hinterlands through environmentalism becoming associated with nature as a commodity that can help drive up the international competitiveness of urban regions. These processes regarding urbanisation, reproductive work and nature are enabled and facilitated by the state. Whereas capitalism has often – and rightly – been connected to the nation-state, I have argued that the local state is *also* of considerable importance to understand urbanised capitalism because of its capacity to shape the urban environment through urban planning practices and the facilitation of production as well as social reproduction. The state, understood relationally on various levels and within a wider social context, is an ensemble of institutions with a variety of capacities whose elements work with other societal actors in strategically selective ways and according to different logics.

Allowing for this internal variability within the state apparatus, I reject a direct equation of the state with capitalist interests. I do, however, acknowledge that the state, on various scales and with the increasing prominence of the urban, has played a key role in the historical development of capitalism. In this mediating role, state institutions balance the need for economic – capitalist – development with the requirement for democratic legitimacy and the conditions for social reproduction. I come back to the role of the local state in relation to environmental policy and sustainability in the next chapter. After having developed a theoretical understanding of capitalism and the urban in this chapter, by staying close to the theoretical writings of influential scholars in relevant Marxist and Marxian debates. Although I acknowledge that these debates extend well beyond the scope of what I have presented here, I have sought to single out the most relevant elements of these debates for developing an understanding of the intricate relations between capitalism, neoliberalism and the urban. In the next chapter, I zoom in more closely on the urban. As I conceptualise the urban in relation to transformative social change and shed light on the forms of contestation that are always co-implicated in processes of neoliberalisation, I aim to identify potential entry points into systemic structures for where to begin to transform the urban.

3 The urban and transformative social change

In this chapter, I conceptualise the city as a place for transformative change. I start out with a conceptualisation of the city and the urban in section 1. Through a brief discussion of the main Western approaches to urban sociology, especially the human ecology approach of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology and the subsequent Marxian critiques to this, I arrive at a Marxian, expansive notion of the urban as embedded in the uneven development of global capitalism through relations with its surrounding landscapes and distant localities, and shaped locally through struggle and differences encountering one another.

Then, in section 2, I explore how such a Marxian notion considers the urban as a key site for struggle, conflict and social change. This puts urban social movements and their contestations of the commodification of urban space and life at the centre of urban development. Building on this scholarship, I develop an account of transformative social change in the city in terms of two distinct ‘moments’: on the one hand, a moment of difference and contestation and, on the other, a moment of alternatives and diverse economies. This allows me to understand urban movements and civil society actors in terms of how they challenge existing arrangements – the moment of contestation – as well as conceive of new ways of arranging urban life through the alternatives that they initiate in their everyday lives. Both moments entail a strong focus of collectivity or community.

In section 3, I return to the question of the state and offer reflections on the role of the state in relation to transformative social change. Recently, local government and the city have increasingly been treated as sites for progressive change. I present some of the main approaches that do this as well as the potential de-politicising and post-political risks in some of them. I then turn to approaches that engage with the local state to leverage state power strategically for broader transformative social change in terms of the redistribution of economic and political power *and* (re)politicisation in the urban everyday.

1 Conceptualisations of the city and the urban

Philosophical thinking around the city can be traced back to at least Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*. Especially Aristotle's conception of the polis as a natural phenomenon stemming from the political nature of human beings – political animals living together in cities – left a lasting imprint on urban political thought (Ambler 1985; Charbit 2002). It was only centuries later, however, that the discipline of urban sociology started to take shape through Max Weber's historical studies of medieval European cities. Weber conceptualised the city in terms of its economic and politico-administrative functions. The former comprise the city's non-agricultural activities and "economic versatility" arranged through the market (Weber 1958, 66), the latter positing the city as a "partially autonomous association" and a community defined in terms of a bounded system in equilibrium (Weber 1958, 74). This thinking in terms of community and equilibrium was further systematised by the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, which came into being in the 1920s. Critiques of the Chicago School, in turn, gave rise to Marxian conceptualisation of the urban. To make sense of the different theorisations of the city, I briefly consider ecological conceptualisations of the city in section 1.1, before turning to the Marxian critiques of this and the alternative notions proposed in this tradition in section 1.2.

1.1 Ecological approaches to the city

The Chicago School of Urban Sociology arose at a time when the modern city formed an increasingly important part of civilisation and sociology was increasingly established as an academic discipline. The Chicago School of Urban Sociology shaped urban thought considerably with its ecological approach to urban development through "a 'biotic' determinism" – a "social Darwinism of space [in which] the geographical allocation of human types maximizes efficiency for the community as a whole" (Logan and Molotch 2007, 5). Robert Park, who was at the forefront of this school of thought, considered the city "the natural habitat of civilized man" and developed an ecological theory of the city accordingly (Martindale 1958, 21). For him, the city is a distinct and significant human phenomenon whose creation has brought about an irreversible redefinition of human life. The city consists of artefacts that are operated by the human beings inhabiting it according to their needs. These operations can be studied as processes taking place according to certain laws, instrumentalities and machineries that yield the city as "the undesigned product of the labors of successive generations of men [sic]" (Park 1915, 578). Taking inspiration from deterministic ecological models and focusing on spatial patterns, the ecological school conceptualised the city as an organism whose development takes place through a benignly competitive process with an equilibrising tendency and outcomes that are beneficial to all. The

urban landscape is settled through market interactions that determine relations between socially adaptable human beings, whose needs are being met (Logan and Molotch 2007).

The Chicago School of Urban Sociology rose to prominence through Ernest W. Burgess's modelling of the social and physical growth of the city in terms of concentric zones. Inspired by Chicago's urban development, this model was the result of a "study of expansion as a process" that takes place in logically successive phases in which each inner zone expands into the zone outside of it (Burgess [1925] 2011, 164). This process, Burgess held, was characterised by the concentrating and decentralising tendencies as well as a division of labour through economic and cultural segregation. Burgess emphasised the salience of mobility, in the sense of a change of movement in response to a new situation, for the growth and metabolism of the city. Hereby, Burgess implicitly posited the city in terms of urban metabolism and a strict divide between society and nature: the social belonging to the city, while nature remained something outside of it. The city's metabolism was, for Burgess, generated by mobility, leading to disorganisation, which in turn needs to be countered with reorganisation to avoid an unbalanced metabolism (Wachsmuth 2012).

Burgess's colleague Louis Wirth emphasised "the city as a particular form of human association" in his sociology of the city, "urbanism as a way of life," (Wirth 1938, 4). Wirth defined the city in terms of size, density and social heterogeneity. The first two of these ensured a sufficiently large economic demand, which in turn established the city's dominance over its hinterland. The relation between the city and its surrounding nature was also of interest to Lewis Mumford, who took inspiration from human ecology to conceptualise the relations between cities, nature and culture. He emphasised the organisation of a city as having both geographical and social characteristics, where the city's geographical, that is, physical elements must always be instrumental to the city's social character and its capacity to meet social needs (Mumford 2011; Strate and Lum 2000).

The Chicago School, with its orientation towards the natural sciences, continues to be influential in positing the city and neighbourhoods as laboratories for experimentation which contain "an a priori, external and objective reality discoverable and describable by systematic scientific methods" (Gieryn 2006, 7). This drive to measure, rationalise and quantify the physical qualities of a city's zone, however, implies that it risks disregarding the underlying life producing these qualities (Martindale 1958). Moreover, the Chicago School avoids questions about the relations between the urban and capitalism, which are reflected in the connections between class structures and urban social structures and those between urbanisation and capital accumulation. Human ecologists essentially do not criticise the notion that "the modern city [...] is primarily a convenience of commerce and it owes its existence to the marketplace around which it sprang up" (Park and Burgess, cited in Logan and Molotch 2007, 7). To understand how global political-economic

relations influence the urban in various ways, it is necessary instead to turn to Marxian approaches which aim exactly to think the urban in relation to capitalism.

1.2 Marxian approaches to the urban

From the late 1960s, when feminist and anti-racism social movements broadened struggles in capitalist societies beyond the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, Marxist theory turned to the problem of the city. This problem was posed by radical social movements which were concentrated in urban areas and which called attention to social and environmental issues. Following this, Marxian approaches sought to develop a critical theory of the city, thereby criticising existing urban theories, notably the human ecology approach (Saunders 1986, 152–53). Marxian thinkers took issue with the positivist, quantitative approach to the urban for its inability to adequately respond to questions around the relations between the urban, international trade and ecology. The descriptive, spatial approaches advocated by the Chicago School were deemed inadequate to capture how social bonds and relations were embedded in unequal, capitalist structures (Harvey 2009, 128–34). Marxian notions of the city started to emphasise instead that the making and remaking of cities were not only inherently human processes; they were also tightly linked to capitalist development. Relatedly, market processes resulting in urban development were not benign processes, as the urban ecologists held, but based on and generative of inequality and instability (Logan and Molotch 2007).

This changes the notion of the city in two important ways. It draws attention to the instabilities within urban areas through the local processes of struggle and contestation that form place and everyday life in the city (to which I return later in this chapter). It also offers insights into the position of the urban within the global processes of uneven development. As such, engaging with the urban necessarily calls for attentiveness to global structures in which the urban is embedded. Hence, rather than understanding the city as a strictly bounded entity – or ecology, as the Chicago School does – the city becomes intricately related to its hinterlands and locations across the globe.

1.2.1 URBANISATION AS A PLANETARY PROCESS

One of the most influential critical urban theorists was Henri Lefebvre, a French, neo-Marxist philosopher and sociologist. Lefebvre's (2014b, 204) writings were motivated by a dissatisfaction with "urbanism," which he deemed incapable of capturing urban life due to its promotion of technocracy and bureaucracy. Urbanists overlooked "the planetarization of the urban" (Lefebvre 2014b, 205), a process through which the urban fabric has come to permeate all of society, rendering urbanisation a global process (Lefebvre [1970] 2003). Through the rise of the industrial city, an

“urban society” was established that went beyond the narrowly confined built environments of cities and captured the global process and manifestations of the urban prevailing over the country (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 4). The rise of the industrial city invoked an “implosion-explosion” of urban concentration and the dominance of urban over rural areas. Through the rise of the industrial city and its outward extension in its immediate environment, as well as through long-distance logistics networks, the urban configures new spatial divisions of labour (N. Brenner 2014). To capture this phenomenon accurately, Lefebvre speaks of “the urban” instead of “the city,” where the urban points to a horizon of “planetary society and the ‘global city’” (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 17). This process of planetary urbanisation is characterised by uneven development – again a clear diversion from the equilibrium approach to the city of the Chicago School.

Neil Brenner and colleagues have built on Lefebvre’s concept of planetary urbanisation to conceptualise the urban in terms not only of physical agglomeration and concentration but also as a social relation that is defined by contemporary capitalism and that spans the planet (N. Brenner 2014; Brenner and Schmid 2015). Overcoming the divide between the urban and non-urban requires an “urban theory without an outside” (N. Brenner 2014, 15). Going beyond the notions of agglomeration and growth alone, the planetary urbanisation approach takes into consideration all geographical zones with which the urban is connected through communication, logistical infrastructures and extended supply chains for inputs and waste disposal. Yet, focusing on urbanisation as a planetary process does not imply the materialisation “of a singular urban form” but rather a range of “diverse socio-economic conditions, territorial formations and socio-metabolic transformations across the planet” (N. Brenner and Schmid 2015, 152). Thinking about urbanisation as a planetary process enables the consideration of ‘the urban’ and ‘the rural’ as “united – in political practice as much as critical theory” (Goonewardena 2014, 229).

Different critiques have been raised against the planetary urbanisation approach which all share a disavowal of the tendency of planetary urbanisation to neglect “embodied and place-based forms of social difference, either in its production (as a result of situated knowledge), or its application (in a three-dimensional contradictory world)” (Angelo and Goh 2021, 734). By proposing a theory without an outside, it risks the complete neglect of agency, subjectivity and difference. By neglecting difference, then, it forecloses social change, which “might work through the slippages of difference and potentially shift praxis” (Katz 2021, 598).

However, notwithstanding its high theoretical abstractions, the planetary urbanisation perspective offers ways to connect local experiences and observations to planetary processes – acknowledging that such connections are instrumental for global solidarities. At its core, planetary urbanisation framings aim to account for the unevenness, variegation and cross-context divergence of planetary urbanisation. Thus, rather than providing a totalising account, it invites for an “engaged pluralism”

of concepts, methods, analytical perspectives and strategies (N. Brenner 2018). Difference becomes a core quality of the concept of totality, in that urbanisation as a universal phenomenon is to be read in tandem with other phenomena that its critics assume are wholly outside of it (Goonewardena 2018). This way, the frame of planetary urbanisation, instead of being totalising and marginalising embodied, situated knowledges, is meant to fruitfully connect local practices to global tendencies. It enables a multi-scalar perspective that shows interconnections across space not only through large-scale abstractions but also through connections between the small-scale and the everyday (Angelo and Goh 2021).

It is increasingly acknowledged – and criticised – that the planetary urbanisation debates have had a predominantly Eurocentric and western character, even though observations equivalent to Lefebvre’s were made in Latin America around the same time (Vegliò 2021). Three years before Lefebvre’s famous statements about the “urban revolution” as “a planetary phenomenon” (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 113), the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano already spoke of the ways in which the process of urbanisation implied far-reaching changes in urban-rural relations which would “no doubt lead to changes in the global structure of society” (Quijano 1967). Roberto-Luis Monte-Mór is a more recent, influential non-western voice in the debate. Observing developments in Brazil, he defines “extended urbanization” as “the spatio-temporal materialization of the processes of production and reproduction resulting from the confrontation between the industrial and the urban, along with the sociopolitical and cultural issues intrinsic to the polis and the civitas that have now been extended beyond urban agglomerations to social space as a whole” (Monte-Mór 2014, 265). Today, the planetary urbanisation frame is employed to shed light on developments in the Global South in ways that connect locally specific circumstances to global tendencies (Kanai 2014; Arboleda 2015b; Jain and Korzhenevych 2022).

Through the debates on planetary urbanisation, Marxian urban scholars have drawn attention to the global aspects of urbanisation and the inherent relations of the city with its surrounding landscapes. Simultaneously, Marxian approaches add to our understanding of the urban by emphasising the inherently conflictual nature of place in the city. The effects of global processes on specific localities are reflected not only in the fact that urban regions are major nodes for the production and consumption of commodities but also in the commodification of these places themselves. Lefebvre argues that capitalism has come to rely on the urban rather than on its industrial base, and that the production of space as a commodity in itself is crucial for surplus value generation. Lefebvre suggests that space – which could previously be understood as an “indifferent medium” and “the sum of places where surplus value is created, realized, and distributed” – is increasingly bought and sold itself (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 154–55). This does not consider merely the physical qualities of the space (“the earth, the soil”) but “social space” as such, thus transforming

space into the very object of surplus creation (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 154–55). Under capitalism, and especially in a global political economy focused on consumerism and service industries, urban life itself has come to be commodified (Harvey 2008; Schmid 2012).

Thus, what Marxian notions of the urban emphasise is that to account for the uneven, power-ridden processes of development that shape urban space and life, the city should not be considered as a bounded territory characterised by a certain type of built environment. Instead, the city should be approached in an expansive manner, in which it is an inherent part of global, political-economic processes that shape the city in uneven and varied ways, not least through processes of commodification in and of urban life. Taking up Katz's critique of the planetary urbanisation thesis that I mentioned earlier, this runs the risk of insufficiently considering agency and difference and reducing all human and spatial processes as reflections of capitalist social relations. In other words, it is dangerous to see "spatial organization as a mere reflection of the processes of accumulation and class reproduction," given that space is socially produced, and its study therefore requires attention to social agents (Harvey, cited in Logan and Molotch 2007, 12). Not only is all space socially produced, but this also happens in part through affective processes in lived situations (Lefebvre [1974] 1991). I come back to the social production of space in chapter 4. But first, I turn to the role of contestation, difference and conflict in Marxian conceptualisations of the city and the urban to resituate agency in these seemingly totalising processes of capitalist urbanisation. The urban, besides its instrumental role in the reproduction of capitalist social relations, also harbours an entry point into everyday life from where the ways in which capital "impose[s] its logic on social life" (Mau 2022, 46) can be contested and practices of self-government can create transformative social change.

1.2.2 THE URBAN IN TERMS OF DIFFERENCE AND STRUGGLE

The idea of the urban as a key site for struggle builds on the work of Lefebvre and Castell, who respectively emphasise the urban function of mediating between different levels in human life and organising collective consumption. The former has to do with the urban's mediating position on what Lefebvre (2003, 88 [1970]) calls the "spatial grid" of human society that comprises the global, the urban and the private level. The global level is the most general level of abstract relations and includes capital, the state and the politics of space. Going against the Chicago School conception, the private level, for Lefebvre, is not the level of interaction between social and economic actors. Rather, by drawing on Nietzsche and Heidegger, Lefebvre connects the private level to "habiting," which is closely related to lived experiences in the everyday, and which supplies "essence, foundation, and meaning" to human life (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 88). The mediate level, then, is the urban level, the (un)built domain of streets, public spaces and buildings. It mediates "between society, the state, global power and knowledge, institutions, and ideologies on the one hand and

habiting on the other” (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 89). When the global level interferes with the private level, the mediate level interferes and becomes the locus for struggle. Put differently, the urban is “both localized and globalized: that is, it takes form in particular places, but also generates an order of sorts on a global scale” (Magnusson 2011, 5). Hence, “even if [the mediate level] is defined only as a mediator (mixed) and not as something essential or central, it is still the site and nexus of struggle” (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 91).

Besides its mediating role between the global and the private, the urban channels struggle through its capacities for collective consumption. Manuel Castells, who studied under Lefebvre, dismisses the “Lefebvrian humanism” that makes the production of space and society as a whole dependent on human desire, freedom and creation (Castells 1977, 92). Instead, he develops a structural, scientific theory of the urban by making what he calls “collective consumption” (Castells 1977, 460) the real and theoretical object of urban sociology. He arrives at this through an analysis of the economic level that is constitutive of the urban along with the politico-institutional level of local state institutions and the ideological levels of signs and signifiers. The economic level reflects labour relations, which translate into the dialectic between the production and consumption that in turn is mediated by exchange (Castells 1977; Saunders 1986, 187–89). As production is mostly organised regionally, production or exchange cannot be the main function of the urban system. Consumption, on the other hand, inherently pertains to the urban. It is crucial for the reproduction of the labour force and thus a key function of the city, while the processes around collective consumption are specific to the functions of the urban scale. The state plays a key role in providing collective consumption to address the systemic contradictions of capitalism that arise from the need to produce commodities increasingly cheaply while socially reproducing the labour force.

The ways in which this systemic contradiction plays out, through class practices and mediated by state intervention, is dependent on political organisation. Political organisation serves to situate contradictions in practice, that is, to connect various urban struggles and locate the totality of urban struggles in a wider context of class struggle (Saunders 1986, 201). This situating of urban struggles within wider class struggle is characteristic of Castell’s thought. Given the “pluri-class” impact of urban contradictions and the protests that they give rise to, they can be the foundation for alliances contesting capitalism and the state (Saunders 1986, 202).

Hence, for both Castells and Lefebvre, the urban is a locus for struggle. For Castells, this struggle takes the form of contestation by urban social movements that promote the urban in relation to its capacities for social reproduction. With these forms of ongoing contestation, the urban becomes “a social practice in constant flux” in which contradiction and conflict constantly arise between social groups making demands and challenging the existing institutional order (Castells 1972, 93). The state apparatus then responds to these demands by balancing them with the requirements of capital

accumulation – a conflict that the state resolves through the enabling of collective consumption. Lefebvre places more emphasis on the ‘everyday’ as the realm in which citizens demand their “right to the city”. This right is related to the way in which the urban serves as a site for transformative change.

2 The urban as a locus for transformative social change

Given the urban’s key function in channelling struggle and in mediating between the private and collective interests, as well as between the global and private level of human society, it is a key site for what I call transformative social change. By developing this notion, I aim to zoom in more closely on the role that bottom-up initiatives and popular movements can play in giving direction to social change. With this, I aim to further develop our understanding of the interrelations between neoliberalisation and contestation with respect to social change. Despite manifold references to the close relations between contestation and neoliberalisation, terms such as “emancipatory social change” (Peck, Theodore and N. Brenner 2013, 1097) or “progressive projects at the local scale” (Peck and Tickell 2002, 387) remain relatively underdeveloped in the literature on neoliberalisation.

My understanding of transformative social change is inspired by the notions of Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre. Marcuse defines social change as the “qualitative change which would establish essentially different institutions, a new direction of the productive process, new modes of human existence” (H. Marcuse [1964] 1991, xii). For Lefebvre, “societal transformation” is the succession of rural society by industrial society and of industrial society by urban society, which plays out on the three-level “spatial grid” mentioned above (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 88). Urban society is not concerned with meeting the “individual needs,” as they are currently promoted through consumption society, but the *human* needs, understood as “the anthropological needs which are socially elaborated (Lefebvre 1996b, 147). The latter is a notion of “vital social needs” which accepts that needs are grounded in biological necessity, but that their fulfilment is always social, mediated by society and located in time and place (King 2020, 82). They include needs of a wide variety: “the need for security and opening, the need for certainty and adventure, that of organization of work and of play, the needs for the predictable and the unpredictable, of similarity and difference, of isolation and encounter, exchange and investments, of independence (even solitude) and communication, of immediate and long-term prospects” (Lefebvre 1996b, 147).

Besides acknowledging the materialist dimensions of social change in terms of needs, which point to the importance of economic change in line with Marxist theory, I also aim to respond to post-structuralist calls to consider the role of agency, ideas and discourse in social change (Heine 2012).

Scrutinising our discursive practices might lead us to see the world differently and encourage us to build on present activities that already point in the direction of change (Gibson-Graham 2006b). This underlines that alternative visions are at the base for the “hope and imagination that motivate action for social change” (Young 1990, 226) and that social change operates through difference (Katz 2021).

In the next sections, I develop a notion of transformative social change towards an urban society that is characterised by proximity, democracy, collective self-government and the meeting of vital social needs. This notion of change is indeed *progressive* in its promotion of more social equality (Becker 2020). In my understanding of transformative social change, I distinguish two distinct ‘moments’ of such change, based on the observation that Lefebvre’s “right to the city,” to which I return in more detail, “is both a cry and a demand” (Lefebvre 1996b, 158). It is “a cry out of necessity and a demand for something more” (P. Marcuse 2011, 30). The separation between these two moments roughly coincides with the distinction between structuralist, materialist aspects of social change, on the one hand, and post-structuralist, discursive, on the other. The first moment, which I introduce in section 2.1, is that of contestation and difference, of protesting and resisting the supralocal forces that impact life in the city – the “cry out of necessity”. The second moment, which I present in section 2.2, is that of alternative and diverse practices and is generative of alternative ways of organising life in the city. It encapsulates “a demand” – and, indeed, an enactment – of “something more”. These two moments are often entwined with one another, as alternative projects and initiatives necessarily offer a critique of existing arrangements, either implicitly or explicitly. Nevertheless, it is useful to distinguish them – albeit somewhat crudely – to draw out some of the main contingencies and challenges that urban activists deal with in these different moments.

2.1 Difference and contestation in the urban

Notwithstanding their seemingly totalising structural and planetary tendencies, Marxian conceptualisations of the city and the urban foreground the dialectical relation between capitalist restructuring, on the one hand, and conflict and difference, on the other. Following a Lefebvrian conceptualisation of the urban, I consider difference and proximity as crucial concepts for understanding how capitalism and the urban are related (Purcell 2013a). The urban is “a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity. This form has no specific content, but is a center of attraction and life” (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 118). The urban is a place of openness, difference and political confrontation that is brought into being by encounters between individuals and groups. These encounters are the result of the proximity between urban dwellers – “the cancellation of distance” – and the intertwinement of their lives and activities in space, which harbours the unexpected (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 39).

In these encounters, urban dwellers negotiate with one another the kind of city they want to give shape to and thereby encounter the differences between them. The urban creates, harbours and unites difference; it is “the place where differences know one another and, through their mutual recognition, test one another, and in this way are strengthened or weakened” (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 96). Moreover, the city is not merely “a container where differences encounter each other”; it *generates* these differences and constitutes identities in this process (Isin 2002, 283). Thus, dialogue and mutual orientation are key: groups are formed in the process of formulating strategies and claims, and in confronting one another. In the city, as an arena for encounters with unknown others, we construct social identities beyond family ties and increase our understanding of others, their needs and our obligations towards them (Christopherson 2003).

This implies an affirmation of difference without exclusion, which is central to city life, according to Iris Marion Young. She constructs a normative ideal of the city as the space in which different groups co-live and interact out of necessity without forming a coherent, singular community. In its ideal form, city life promotes “an openness to unassimilated otherness” (Young 1990, 227). Different city dwellers refer to urban spaces and institutions as a point of reference and belonging, without this implying that they become a unity. Openness to difference is to help acknowledge the disadvantages that certain groups have vis-à-vis other groups that are more privileged in terms of experiences and social and cultural capacities, without aiming to eradicate those differences per se. This *ideal* account of the city should always contend with the reality of the ways in which state bureaucracy and corporate capital dominate decision-making and create further forms of inequality and exploitation that should be dealt with procedurally.

In the face of such totalising bureaucratic and capitalist powers, Lefebvre has famously argued that urban dwellers co-living in difference can claim their collective “right to the city”:

The *right to the city* cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life. It does not matter whether the urban fabric encloses the countryside and what survives of peasant life, as long as the ‘urban,’ place of encounter, priority of use value, inscription in space of a time promoted to the rank of a supreme resource among all resources, finds its morphological base in its practico-material realization. (Lefebvre [1968] 1996a, 158)

Hence, by claiming their right to the city, urban residents can demand a radically better system in terms of morality and justice. In a kind of critical version of Park’s contention that the creation of the city has brought about an irreversible redefinition of human life, the right to the city “is a right to change ourselves by changing the city” (Harvey 2008, 23). The form this change takes is not predetermined. Lefebvre’s right-to-the-city concept neither spells out a detailed strategy for

resistance nor aims at reform. Instead, it presents an orientation towards the production of a city that meets the citizens' complex and multiple social needs, which are defined in a process of political struggle (Purcell 2002).

The political logic of coming together to collectively claim the meeting of social needs gives rise to an explicitly *urban* understanding of politics in which urbanity has a decisive influence on politics. This notion of politics has three main characteristics: it places politics outside of institutions; it emphasises its collective character; and it draws attention to its spatial dimensions. When seen through an urban lens, politics is located not in institutions but in “the midst of things, within and through the spaces of the urban collective life, scanning the horizon of democracy shaped by urbanization” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 11). Rather than confined to a narrowly defined territory, the processes of urban politics are multiple, and its spaces are “perpetually in flux” (Harvey 1989b, 127). In line with this, urban publics are multiple and ‘crafted’ through collective, bodily and spatial practices (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 107).

These urban-political processes are distinctly collective. As discussed above, Castells understands the city itself as “a social practice in constant flux,” and “a source of contradictions” through institutional logics conflicting with those of social movements (Castells 1972, 93). These social movements become a “new political subject” that derive their unity not from a shared class position but from their shared life as citizens (Castells, cited in Roy 2016, 818). This renders the urban as a distinct space of politics that is only temporarily stable and puts counter-hegemonic urban social movements at the centre of considerations of the urban (Kränzle and Roskamm 2022).

These urban social movements should also be understood in terms of their spatial dimensions. As urban politics consists in the processes through which the governing of space and place are negotiated (Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011) and happens in the spaces of shared everyday life, it has a spatial character. Urban politics is firmly rooted in the power of place, which results from the capacity of socio-physical space to bring people together and instigate action. Place is fundamental for the constitution of the shared physical and social world in which we know ourselves in relation to others (Kohn 2003, 155).

Urban social movements render place important, for it can be (re)shaped and leveraged in the process of struggle (Harvey 2012). The high degree of density in cities brings about struggles and contestation around space, while the fact that cities are large and diverse implies that there are a wide variety of urban movements interacting with one another (Uitermark, Nicholls and Loopmans 2012). Contestation thus has a pronounced socio-spatial character, as space becomes an object of contestation and an element of political strategy (Leitner et al. 2006). The urban and the creation of urban space are the spatial reconfiguration of the social, implying that “(social) space is a (social)

product” (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 26), as I further discuss in chapter 4. In a Lefebvrian framework, the collective reproduction of urban space enables alternative ways of life and the realisation of the right to the city.

The idea of the right to the city has inspired urban movements in various geographies to contest the consequences of financial and economic crises or urban renewal. Given the instrumental role of cities in the history of capital accumulation, as outlined earlier, urban history is characterised by class struggle and anti-capitalist contestation, with early examples in Paris in 1789 (Harvey 2012). More recently in the West, there have been several waves of urban social movements in relation to phases of neoliberal restructuring. In the 1970s, urban social movements were embedded in wider mobilisations on the Left in response to the crisis of Fordism and demanded improved infrastructures for social reproduction as well as a voice in the development of the city. In the 1980s, austerity measures were forced upon local governments, which in turn needed novel ways to implement policies and provide structures for collective consumption. This thus led to the development of cooperative rather than adversarial relations between movements and the state. The 1990s were characterised by the activation of the urban growth machine, which involved the co-opting of the language of urban social movements (with terms such as ‘self-reliance’ and ‘autonomy’). In the 2000s, with global processes of neoliberalisation, notions of ‘the local’ have been reinvigorated to push back against the power of global capital and transnational institutions (Mayer 2012).

This historical dimension is important since “contestation and resistance are the product of many layers of historical experience and experimentation, where each layer arises from a particular period of urban crisis, recuperated or pacified by the political establishment at earlier tipping points, only to take a new form in the coming period with new discourses and political agents added to the scene” (Bayırbağ, Davies and Münch 2017, 2033). This implies that the historical connections between crises and forms of contestation are crucial for an understanding of the urban.

In interpreting these forms of contestation, the right-to-the-city framework is useful as it may shed light on logics, power dimensions and social relations underlying contestation. Yet, some caution is needed when interpreting the relevance and effectiveness of its ideas in practice. Given that many urban social movements do not explicitly refer to the right-to-the-city framework, or to social space as the object of their contestation, right-to-the-city terminology should not be applied forcefully, as this would risk misrepresenting or incorrectly explaining activist claims (Uitermark, Nicholls and Loopmans 2012). Besides this, there is another reason for being careful with claims about the effectiveness of the right-to-the-city framework. Although it may serve to interpret the spontaneous rise of political voices, the longer-lasting potential of the latter is far from settled with this. If we want to understand how transformative social change takes place, we need to be attentive to how

urban movements go beyond contestation alone, and *also* start to conceive of alternative ways of urban living. David Graeber formulates the challenge as follows:

Temporary bubbles of autonomy must gradually turn into permanent, free communities. However, in order to do so, those communities cannot exist in total isolation; neither can they have a purely confrontational relation with everyone around them. They have to have some way to engage with larger economic, social or political systems that surround them. This is the trickiest question because it has proved extremely difficult for those organized on radically democratic lines to so integrate themselves in any meaningful way in larger structures without having to make endless compromises in their founding principles. (Graeber 2009, 210–11)

This implies that there is a need to engage beyond the moment of contesting capitalism in the city. The task of democratic movements is not to merely bring about “momentary democratic explosions” to undermine the existing political order but to translate “the democratic explosion” into a new order (Žižek, cited in Bassett 2014, 895). The key question is thus as to how political action not only disrupts the order in the city but might help shape the constantly changing and developing order into a different one through everyday practices of self-government. These alternative practices constitute the second ‘moment’ of transformative social change, to which I turn next.

2.2 Alternative practices and diverse economies in the urban everyday

The key question is thus “how we move from the micro cracks – the autonomous spaces – that are emerging in the interstices of capitalism to something that begins to join up these cracks” (Cumbers 2015, 68). Understanding how this process may unfold requires attentiveness to the proliferation of diversity and alterity within and despite the wider capitalist context. J. K. Gibson-Graham’s (2006a; 2006b; 2008) “diverse economies approach” provides a fruitful lens to understand what goes on ‘in the cracks’.¹ Despite the apparent pervasiveness of capitalism, diverse practices are an inherent part of the existing economy. In fact, “‘marginal’ economic practices and forms of enterprise are actually more prevalent, and account for more hours worked and/or more value produced, than the capitalist sector” (Gibson-Graham 2008, 617). Drawing attention to this existing variety, Gibson-Graham (2008, 614) invites us to “perform new economic worlds” that consist of sustainable community economies. These diverse practices are concerned with the ethical deliberations around

¹ J.K. Gibson-Graham is the penname of Katherine Gibson and the late Julie Graham, two feminist economic geographers and political economists, who founded the Community Economies Collective in the 1990s.

wealth distribution, livelihood well-being, responsible encounters, access to the benefit of property as well as present and future security (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski 2020, 19).

In relation to the urban, such alternative practices and diverse economies have three main characteristics: they begin to alter urban metabolisms from within the (very) local; they do this through forms of organising that are collective; and they take place in the urban everyday. As developed in the previous chapter, urban political ecologists consider the city the socio-natural product of urban metabolism, which in turn relies on nature as a tap for inputs and a sink for waste. Diverse economic practices contribute to the mutual transformations of socio-natures by altering the circuits of value in the economy from the bottom-up and thus affecting the material and social flows that give shape to the urban. By existing alongside the ‘mainstream’ economy and circuits of value, these diverse practices can redirect flows from the mainstream economy into alternative spaces of economic activity. In these alternative spaces, organisations of various kinds “serve as sinks for resource outflows from the mainstream economy and capture flows of stocks recirculating through the diverse economy itself” through diverse forms of production, consumption, resource use or exchange (Lekan, Jonas and Deutz 2021, 262). These mainstream and alternative economic geographies exist alongside each other, and multiple kinds of systems are simultaneously operative. This, in turn, implies that “the possibilities of diverse/alternative/other economic geographies are ever present – and ever practiced – and their relevance and sense continuously demonstrated in the quotidian activities involved in circuits of value” (R. Lee 2013, 83).

The practices of alternatives and diverse economies are collective and entail prefiguration, through which social actors establish alternative social arrangements and institutions through collective imagination and experimentation in the here and now (Yates 2015). This prefiguration generally takes place in “community-owned and -governed place-based initiatives” (Bhatt et al. 2024, 61). The city, as a place for proximity, difference and contestation, is a fruitful ground for such collective prefigurative practices and experimentation with alternatives. This is because the city is both an actual and virtual space: it is actual as it is “the name for all those spaces where urban publics emerge and act” and virtual in its provision of “the symbolic horizon where different struggles come together and have actual effects” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 65). The city, with its distinctly urban logics, provides opportunities in the urban everyday for the collective self-government of urban life in ways that do not rely on a clearly centred authority. The wide range of activities and actions that fall into this category all have a performative, prefigurative aspect, in that they already enact the social relations that they intend to promote (Beveridge and Koch 2019).

There is an active component in the entwined processes of forging urban publics, which are ‘crafted’ through collective, bodily and spatial practices (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 107), and the residents’ collective (re)production of the city as a commons through which the political comes

into being (Holston 2019). A “new kind of insurgent urban citizenship” comes into being at “the intersection of city-making, city-occupying, and rights-claiming” (Holston 2019, 122).

These different and inter-related practices are situated in the shared realm of the urban everyday, which Lefebvre describes as follows:

It surrounds us, it besieges us, on all sides and from all directions. We are inside it and outside it. No so-called ‘elevated’ activity can be reduced to it, nor can it be separated from it. Its activities are born, they grow and emerge; once they have left the nourishing earth of their native land, not one of them can be formed and fulfilled on its own account. In this earth they are born. If they emerge, it is because they have grown and prospered. It is at the heart of the everyday that projects become works of creativity. (Lefebvre [1961] 2014a, 335)

Everyday life is made up of “human raw material” – the dialectical relation between the irrationality that is produced by the alienation under contemporary capitalism and the “potential rationality” stemming from human instincts and socially mediated needs that are vital aspects of human life (Lefebvre [1947] 2014a, 209). This raw material of the everyday, then, is given in the “immediate,” which in turn can be mobilised “to oppose wider visions” (Lefebvre [1947] 2014a, 209). The everyday, for Lefebvre, is “the vast and intimate arena” in which “reproduction meets production” (Merrifield 2014, 24). It is through the “transformation of everyday life,” by groups being “innovative in how to live, to have a family, to raise and educate children, to leave a greater or lesser place to women, to use and transmit wealth,” that urban reality is transformed (Lefebvre [1968] 1996a, 29).

One particular form through which the transformation of everyday life can take place, according to Lefebvre, is the festival. The festival provides the possibility of escape from the banality of the everyday from within the everyday itself. They are in sync with everyday life, as they draw from “all that [is] energetic, pleasurable and possible from nature, food, social life and [human beings’] own body and mind,” while simultaneously *also* seeking a rupture of the ordinary (Lefebvre [1947] 2014a, 202). The festival is thus an instance of how, from the possibilities of everyday life, concrete utopias can arise. In the immediate, in the moment, contestation and struggle may lead to new definitions of the (im)possible.

However, such moments of contestation, or “isolated explosions of political festivity,” only achieve longer-lasting change in the everyday if they aim for *autogestion* (Butler 2012, 142). For Lefebvre, *autogestion* occurs whenever a social group stands up against the passive compliance with the conditions of their existence and instead begins to master them themselves (Lefebvre 2001, 779–80). *Autogestion* is a term best left untranslated even though various scholars approximate it with ‘self-management’. For Lefebvre, it “requires a radical degree of substantive equality, direct

democracy and contestation, cooperation and self-criticism, and a new social pedagogy that overturns the commodification of knowledge and education” (Napoletano et al. 2023, 434). *Autogestion* is enabled through decentralised, bottom-up organising and decision-making, and it connects to forms of economic democracy and Wright’s idea of interstitial politics that aim at societal transformations that result from the cumulative effects of various actions within the cracks of existing arrangements (Wright 2021). It reduces the dominance of capitalist logics, promotes diverse understandings of the economy and points towards a trajectory beyond capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006b). Given the close entwinement that Lefebvre sees between ecological questions and the rhythms of the body and everyday life, *autogestion* provides a fruitful avenue for exploring an alternative, more sustainable urban metabolism based on different nature-society constellations (Napoletano et al. 2023)

Lefebvre’s turn to everyday life goes further than merely a politicisation of the private that second-wave feminists and social reproduction scholars (as discussed in the previous chapter) have pushed for. Rather, it focuses on the *collective* aspects of urban life. Such collective activities in the urban everyday comprise interventions in public space and are, in the words of AbdouMaliq Simone (2019, 59),

a way of signalling, of making visible a willingness to explore collaborations that go beyond the function of these activities themselves. These activities become devices for finding a proper form capable of eliciting an exchange of perspectives.

Such activities, for Simone, bring about relationships and commonalities between people in the moment of acting and thereby enable new ways of being together. This exchange of perspective between different political actors is also what Young emphasises in connecting democracy to justice. She considers democracy “a condition of freedom in the sense of self-determination” as it reduces domination (Young 1990, 92). Through democratic participation, citizens can ensure that their needs are met while also realising and cultivating their capacities as citizens. This, for Lefebvre, is connected to “an urban life [that] can be fully and entirely realized” (Schmid 2012, 35).

Communities of democratic participation and collective self-government are not devoid of inequalities and power imbalances, despite the typical understanding of the term communities in harmonious terms. Various studies of community-based prefigurative organising show that, in spite of aims to escape or transform mechanisms of inequality, power and domination, these seep back in altered forms (Bhatt et al. 2024). A first step to begin to avoid this would be to approach these communities in an anti-essentialist sense, as the diverse-economies perspective suggests. This posits “being-in-common” as ontological fact but without “a priori significance” (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016, 923). Humans are mutually interdependent, and economic relations therefore need to be re-

socialised, but there is still room for individuality and singularity. Nevertheless, normative expectations around consensus-seeking still play a role, and especially in relation to engagements with the local state. I come back to this in section 3 of this chapter.

Collective, intentional uses of urban space often include a component of commoning practices to resist capitalist enclosures. Spatial enclosures have been part and parcel of capitalist development (as I discussed in chapter 2), and in the realm of the urban today, they depict a multifaceted process of controlling space by promoting its exchange value or by preventing it from being used to challenge capitalist social relations (Hodkinson 2012). Reclaiming this space through commoning practices allows exactly the latter to be achieved through experimenting with new social forms and economic practices and producing post-capitalist subjectivities (Chatterton and Pusey 2020). Through collective practices, a commons is created and cared for, and the diverse-economies criteria of “access, use, benefit, care, responsibility and ownership” are engaged (Kruzynski 2020, 290 [note 1]). One key example of such commoning practices are community land trusts. These re-establish the relations between citizens and land through ownership structures based on land lease, organisation principles rooted in community and schemes to promote housing affordability (J. E. Davis 2010).

Attempts of urban commoning seek to encapsulate economic diversity in alternative ownership structures. They also allow for the production of post-capitalist subjectivities through the everyday cooperative practices which are entailed in their everyday organising and which alter social relations and wider economic processes (Chatterton and Pusey 2020; Habermehl 2021). They promote an element of hope in the use of everyday practices for building desired futures in the present (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010). This way, they enable processes of world-making through mundane yet political practices which are social and collective to the extent that they manage to unite workers, consumers and communities from different social and racial groups (Sites 2006).

By bringing together this variety of change agents that is reflective of the diverse and plural nature of the city, these alternative practices may promote “powerful assemblages” for change (Chatterton and Pusey 2020, 31). These powerful assemblages do not only involve state actors but also require forms of meso-level organising within the community to provide infrastructures from which local alternatives can draw (Ometto, Zafar and Hedberg 2021). For such assemblages to be transformative, they need to bring together social actors from the working and middle classes beyond occupational and social differences into a “progressive majority” that can strike a balance between diverging economic, social and environmental objectives (Rose 2000, 207). Such coalitions, Rose emphasises, can leverage the beneficial organising features of working-class interest-based organisations and of middle-class organising, the latter of which is often concerned with broader environmental and social goals and aims to cast a wide net by appealing to “the

consciousness of other potential allies and adversaries” (Rose 2000, 213). Only through coalitions can disparate social movements appeal to a majority and promote future visions that are inclusive of society’s diversity that stems from factors including but not limited to social class. Through “networks of equivalence,” various groups work together with one another to achieve overarching common goals, while each of them remains autonomous to some degree in the process (Purcell 2013b, 560).

Politics in the everyday is a decidedly non-sovereign politics. In opposition to Scott’s “seeing like a state,” a focus on the urban everyday allows us to “see like a city” (Magnusson 2011), which brings to the fore of how urban logics of self-organisation and a multiplicity of authorities shape the responses to political questions. Such a focus on “local self-government,” or on “what people do by way of governing themselves and governing other people,” acknowledges that the political order is never fixed, despite various interests wanting it to be (Magnusson 2011, 140). On the contrary, the political order is constantly challenged from various sides and is always in the process of becoming and thus inherently instable.

With their focus on collective processes of self-government, alternative practices situated in the urban everyday aim to challenge the prevailing understanding of what the city is. This understanding has come to be influenced by the increasing power of global capital to shape and commodify urban life, which has led to the prevalence of production and financial capital over issues of social reproduction. The urban scale is decreasingly considered in terms of its capacities for social reproduction (Smith 2002, 435). Instead, these alternative practices and diverse economies aim to re-centre social reproduction in the city.

They do so in ways that go beyond the state. Unlike Castell’s state-oriented notion of the city in terms of reproduction and collective consumption, the ideal of the right to the city locates agency to shape the urban within everyday activities of social reproduction. The city is restored as a place of reproduction through movements that do not arise at the workplace in the realm of production but in the urban everyday; in the realm between production and social reproduction. Hence, rather than considering the city merely as a location for production, and the workplace as the core space for political activity, Lefebvre ([1947] 2014a, 110) sought to firmly situate politics in the urban everyday. The urban everyday is the sphere where “different people can come together and develop a sense of collectivity, mostly in view of their needs for consumption and social reproduction” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 63). Reclaiming the city as primarily a space for social reproduction is key to alternative economic practices that aim to challenge existing capitalist logics.

Several frames have been suggested in attempts to reconceptualise the urban in this sense. One of these is the “foundational economy,” which posits the city in terms of its key social-reproductive

functions, such as housing, food and energy provision (Engelen et al. 2017). Community wealth building is another approach that seeks to counter the tensions that arise from the infringement of capitalist social relations upon everyday life by establishing democratic economic institutions that generate wealth that benefits the community (Dubb 2016). Such frames help to promote forms of self-government, neighbourhood governance, de-centralised policy and the inclusion of citizens and community organisations in the shaping of urban development and public services. Through this, citizens can claim their right to the city or an urban life in which everyday needs can be met. The plurality and diversity of the urban allows for experimentation with alternative economic practices and new forms of self-organising.

However, such a reliance and focus on the everyday and the local as sites for collective self-government and emancipation runs the risk of falling in what Purcell has called “the local trap, in which the local scale is assumed to be inherently more democratic than other scales” (Purcell 2006a, 1921). He reminds us of the need to be careful to avoid conflation of ‘localisation’ with ‘democratisation,’ or community-based development with participatory development. Scales are not pre-conceived entities of analysis whose democratic potential can be assessed a priori. Rather, scales result from social struggle, and their specific qualities, such as position vis-à-vis other scales, are to be empirically assessed. This is in line with Marxian pledges for considerations of the urban beyond the strict boundaries of the built environment of the city, as discussed earlier. As Beveridge and Koch suggest (2023), however, the need for attention to the local in relation to democracy does not come from some democratic capacity that is inherent to the local. It instead follows from the fact that all political practice is always enacted by human beings with bodies, which means that it is situated in time and space and is in this sense always local.

So far, I have developed a conceptualisation of transformative social change that takes place through a decidedly urban form of politics and seeks to promote diverse and more equal economic relations and practices. Urban dwellers promote everyday practices of collective and democratic self-government that seek to challenge dominant capitalist and institutional logics. Through this, they promote change in the direction of Lefebvre’s horizon of an urban society in which social needs are met through logics of proximity, democracy and collective self-government. These practices, which are inherently instable, put collective consumption and social reproduction at the core of the urban, and they seek to re-politicise neoliberalised cities. Yet, what remains unclear, so far, is how such urban politics and alternative economic practices relate to the wider institutional context and political institutions (Jonas 2013). Although the political thrust of urban politics lies outside the sphere of political institutions, it is necessary to reflect on the ways in which these institutions, not least those belonging to the local state, influence and interact with urban politics.

3 The role of the state

It is not only activists and social movements that consider the urban as a key site for social change; the city also features prominently in the considerations of researchers and policymakers. The idea that “cities can save the planet” is widespread today (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020). This trust that cities have the capacity to contribute significantly to sustainable development has translated into urban governments employing largely techno-managerial approaches to urban development, green urbanism and the smart city. These approaches are often based on a belief in urban entrepreneurialism which is promoted through international city rankings and international city networks built on mechanisms such as “positive peer pressure” (C40 2021, 5).

In this section, I discuss this rise of the progressive state in section 3.1. I then turn to the potentially post-political tendencies inherent in this way of envisioning social change in the city in section 3.2. In section 3.3, I explore “new municipalism” as a potentially more fruitful way for urban activists to relate to and re-politicise the local state. New municipalism entails a strategic engagement with the local state in new ways to instigate transformative change (Russell 2019). This may imply the redrawing and potential blurring of the boundaries between the state and civil society, and thus go beyond considerations of top-down or bottom-up, to give rise to “a future urban state, a striking mosaic of cooperatives and collectives [...] enmeshed with the state in the development of a localized urbanization” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 134). Such a potential reconfiguration of the relations between urban social movements and the local state as a site for politicisation is precisely what I am interested in.

3.1 The progressive urban state

The urban decay and crises that characterised cities in the West during the 1960s and 1970s have seen a turnaround since the end of the twentieth century, when many cities experienced an “urban renaissance” (Curtis 2016, 1). As discussed in chapter 2, cities became focal points in entrepreneurial strategies from the 1980s, leading to forms of urban governance rooted in competition. The United Nations’ agenda-setting *Brundtland Report* in 1987 notes the urban as a prominent consideration in questions of sustainable development with respect to the growth of cities, the role of local authorities in sustainable development and the challenges with citizen involvement and adequate services to the poor (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). In the face of mounting environmental crisis, these competitive and entrepreneurial governance structures have increasingly come to be driven by the ideal of the sustainable city. In this period, “green urbanism” arose, which grants the city a key role in the shaping of more sustainable places and lifestyles, as it provides a laboratory for testing new technologies and changes in lifestyle (Beatley 2000).

The discourse on green urbanism has been growing ever since and translates into a variety of phenomena that all reflect the focus of urban policy makers on sustainability. Main examples are notions such as ‘urban climate resilience,’ the ‘smart city,’ and the ‘circular city’. The first of these, urban climate resilience, relates to climate adaptation and has taken hold of the urban policy making agenda to respond to the climate change vulnerabilities inherent in processes of urbanisation. The relation between urbanisation and sustainability is understood as twofold: on the one hand, the high concentrations of people and assets in urban areas increases exposure to the consequences of climate change; on the other hand, urban density may be a pathway for efficient and effective disaster risk management and climate adaptation (Garschagen and Romero-Lankao 2015). As climate change is expected to lead to a higher intensity and frequency of natural hazards and sea-level rise becomes an increasingly realistic threat for urban areas in low-elevation coastal zones, there is a growing attention among urban policy makers for climate adaptation and resilience to prepare for expected future climate impacts (The World Bank 2011). Even though the term resilience has become widespread, also in connection to community development, there is a risk of the term becoming an empty signifier that refers to anything ranging from construction techniques to environmental disasters and social capital (Vale 2014).

Second, in many cases, visions of green urbanisms are connected to the smart city. Combining considerations of urban density and the city as a main driver of greenhouse gas emissions, “smart city” solutions aim to complete the “vision of sustainability as dense, green urbanism” (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020, 2203). Among the plethora of definitions of the smart city, most of them include the ways in which city officials and urban planners make use of different types of technology and sources of data – sometimes including citizen science or participatory programmes – to give shape to policy areas such as environment, economy and mobility, with the ultimate objective to promote sustainable economic growth and high urban living quality (Toli and Murtagh 2020). The smart city combines ideas around competitiveness, liveability and sustainability, which are to be realised through city managerialism and urban entrepreneurship (Kitchin 2015). What such accounts of – often post-industrial – smart cities often overlook, though, is that the local reduction of pollution and emissions, through extensive (public) transportation networks and knowledge-intensive, tech-oriented urban economy, in fact hinges on pollutant production elsewhere, notably of batteries and electronic devices (Wachsmuth, Cohen and Angelo 2016).

The third approach to green urbanism worth mentioning here is the circular economy, which has received growing attention during recent decades in response to the incessant extraction of natural resources in the linear “take-make-waste economy” that puts unsustainable pressures on scarce resources (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2013, 2). An often-invoked definition of the circular economy posits it as “a regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission, and energy

leakage are minimised by slowing, closing, and narrowing material and energy loops,” which “can be achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, and recycling” (Geissdoerfer et al. 2017, 759). Increasingly, this thinking is connected to cities as major drivers of economic activity and growth. In short, “the [circular economy] has come to town” (Kębłowski, Lambert and Bassens 2020, 142). The circular city would move away from the extractive, linear throughput of natural resources that currently enables most of the production and consumption in the city towards forms of circular metabolism which link resource inputs and outputs with one another and work towards eliminating waste (Girardet 1996). The ideal of the circular city is pursued predominantly through questions of large infrastructures and technologically driven industrial change (Kębłowski, Lambert and Bassens 2020). Critique of these techno-managerial reductions of the circular economy highlight the need to consider its socio-spatial and urban-political aspects (Hobson 2016; Hobson and Lynch 2016; Lekan, Jonas and Deutz 2021). Critical interpretations of the circular economy have also proposed degrowth perspectives as a way to reformulate the circular economy as a frame through which to address the unsustainability of urban metabolism through a problematisation of waste rather than its revalorisation as underused inputs (Savini 2023).

The growing discourse around sustainability and climate action in cities must be considered in light of the rise of international city networks. Such international city networks aim to connect cities trans-locally in relation to specific policy issues and lobbying efforts. The C40 Climate Leadership Group (C40), established in 2005, is one of the most prominent examples. C40 consider cities and their mayors to be important actors in responding to urgent and complex societal challenges that cause entwined ecological, health and economic crises. C40 argues, in a way reminiscent of Barber’s pledge for a world ruled by mayors (Barber 2013), that the interrelated systemic failures that are responsible for these challenges are best addressed in cities and by mayors. C40 is a prominent example of a network of generally major cities with a relatively high amount of political and economic relevance and power, and whose governments put cities at the forefront of addressing global issues (Cator 2023). International city networks create another level in the contestation between different levels of the state that is compatible with Jessop’s relational understanding of the state. City governments engage in “municipal contestation” when they strategically interact with higher levels and contest adverse policies that are imposed top-down (Verhoeven, Strange and Siles-Brügge 2022), while they interact in international city networks to govern “from the middle” (Román 2009).

The ways in and extent to which citizens are involved in green urbanism and the discourses of international city networks vary greatly. Many of these approaches seem to take a rather straightforward administrative approach, in which consensual governance arrangements shape

urban environmental domains by foreclosing dissenting views and genuinely political engagement (Swyngedouw 2009). The question arises, for example, as to the role of individuals in the circular economy as *citizens* rather than merely as producers or consumers (Hobson and Lynch 2016). Thus, although the “sustainable city” has become central in urban planning and policymaking, and the city features prominently in global discourses around sustainability, adequate political considerations of power, conflicts of interest and equity often lack (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020). Thereby, these discourses risk the onset of the “post-political” city (Swyngedouw 2018).

3.2 The urban post-political

Decades of neoliberalisation have affected the conditions for (urban) contestation. Much has been written about the ways in which the conditions for political contestation have come to be compromised. Such diagnoses have pointed to the proliferation of a “post-political vision” (Mouffe 2005, 48), “post-democracy” (Crouch 2020) and “antidemocratic politics” (Brown 2019, 15) to draw attention to, respectively, practices of narrow consensus-seeking, the power of strong economic elites in political decision-making and the attack of neoliberalism on democracy through law, culture and political subjectivities. Erik Swyngedouw has brought considerations of post-politics into the realm of the urban. He considers the urban the central terrain where “governance-beyond-the-state” arrangements have led to new modes of governance and forms of governmentality which tend towards “post-political and post-democratic consensus” (Swyngedouw 2007, 2).

This has been made possible by the shift from government to governance realised through processes of neoliberalisation. This way, the “more or less calculated and rational activity” of government, which is “undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies [...] and] seeks to shape conduct,” is increasingly replaced by more polycentric, relational and networked forms of governance (Dean 2010, 18 [1999]). Although the term governance is used in myriad ways, it can be defined as follows in relation to the shift from government to governance. Governance is “a way of thinking about the relation of a limited public sector to the individuals, communities and organizations which lie external to it but which are necessary to the achievement of its aims and purposes” (Dean 2007, 47). Governance, therefore, does not have the “fixed institutional reference point” that statehood has (Jessop 2016, 166). It is seen as a third element to the traditional dichotomies between state and market and as the mechanism through which a variety of actors negotiate and aim to reach consensus about a broad range of problems. By involving private and civil society actors, top-down government is replaced by “presumably horizontal, networked” systems through which “stakeholders” engage through relations of trust and interdependency (Swyngedouw 2018, 8). The state apparatus, rather than securing political hegemony, often becomes “little more than *primus inter pares*” (Jessop 2002, 43).

In tandem with the arrangements of global governance that arose in the second half of the previous century, urban contexts have also seen a rise in distributed forms of governing. This is largely the result of the need to attract investments, which has led the local state to shift a range of its capacities and tasks to complex networks of organisations outside its core institutions. The risk of this shift is that global capital and competition are the ultimate drivers of governance at the expense of popular accountability and political legitimacy (Purcell 2002). Even if governance arrangements do involve civil society actors, who are now made responsible for the governing of services previously offered by the (local) state, it is not granted that social differences and conflicts of interest are sufficiently reflected in the processes. There is a tendency among local governments to brush aside social differences and conflicts of interest in favour of quick action, which is, in turn, justified on the basis of imminent crisis and catastrophe. Thereby, they risk promoting consensual, technocratic and exclusionary solutions, an arrangement which Swyngedouw dubs the “post-political” (Swyngedouw 2018).

While such networked, non-hierarchical arrangements may appear participatory and deliberative as they empower certain civil society actors, they might simultaneously hamper the political participation of others. Often in these arrangements, the involved stakeholders are selected beforehand, and those actors who disagree or contest are sidelined. Rather than an open, political process, this silencing of certain voices amounts to the people being declared impotent as a political actor (Swyngedouw 2018). This is in part due to the striving for consensus, compromise and agreement that underly these participation arrangements and the normative presumption that these aims are feasible (Watson 2022). Thereby, these arrangements entail de-politicisation and a narrowing of the political domain to a “technomanagerial apparatus of governance whereby fundamental choices are no longer possible or deemed reasonable” (Swyngedouw 2018, xv–xvi). Historically, in a European context, such techno-managerial approaches to governance and participation have brought about the co-optation of a variety of radical social movements. This happened especially in the 1980s and 1990s, when various forms of partnerships and participatory schemes effectively served to tame these movements (Mayer 2000).

The risks of de- and post-politicisation in the city potentially have devastating consequences for the possibility of including civil society groups into processes of governing in an emancipatory way and for the possibility of urban social movements engaging with the local state in meaningful ways. Yet, whether and how new forms of democratic politics fall into “the post-political trap” is always also an empirical question that requires consideration of the interlinked processes of de- and re-politicisation that redefine and restructure the political (Beveridge and Koch 2017). Empirical engagement may show how initiatives and urban experiments that the post-politics literature dismisses as depoliticising still harbour political opportunity. They may create “environmental,

economic and social arrangements” that attract a wide range of actors who promote “relational forms of governance premised on alternative conceptions of leadership, courage, willpower and fortitude” (Larner 2014, 189–91). Hence, the existence of the post-political “at face value” should be interrogated rather than presumed in order “to understand and work with the political possibilities of the current moment” that arise through the coming together of heterogeneous actors (Larner 2014, 192). Only this way can we engage “with politics as it is and politics as we would like it to be” and reach the political potential inherent in the city (Beveridge and Koch 2017, 41).

3.3 Re-politicising the local state

The interest in progressive localism is currently widespread, as is reflected in a range of approaches that are more or less radical or reformist but all include references to democracy and social justice in relation to urban life (Beveridge and Naumann 2023). These approaches embrace the municipal scale as especially suited for this consideration of urban life, given its reflection of “the micro-materiality of life,” including everything ranging from housing and sewage to food (Cooper 2017, 345). Social movements also acknowledge this and have turned to the municipal state with renewed interest.

A core example in this regard is “new municipalism,” a movement that has been engaging on the municipal scale to realise politics as ‘we would like it to be’. It grew out of a range of citizen platforms across Spain that had started to take control of municipal authorities in 2015 (Thompson 2021). It led to the establishment of the Fearless Cities Network, “an informal global movement of activists, organizations, councilors and mayors that are working to radicalize democracy, feminize politics and drive the transition to an economy that cares for people and our environment” (Fearless Cities, n.d.). New municipalism reflects the aims of earlier forms of municipalism as “a politics of everyday life concerned with the issues that immediately affect citizens, including education, policing, jobs, culture, and services” – as “a political approach to community” (Kohn 2003, 139).

New municipalism aims to radicalise the participatory apparatus on the municipal scale and promote a politics based on neighbourhood governance, de-centralised policy and the inclusion of citizens and community organisations in urban policy development and public services (Blanco and Gomà 2020; Davies 2021). The aim is to re-politicise the city and promote “social and spatial justice and democratic deepening” to constitute a counterweight to neoliberal urbanism (Blanco and Gomà 2020, 393). Permeating this is an inherently internationalist commitment to collaborate and network across places (Barcelona En Comú 2019) by extending local practices vertically to other levels of the state and horizontally to other municipalities (Blanco and Gomà 2020).

Hence, rather than assuming the local scale to harbour intrinsically more democratic potential than other scales, new municipalism aims to avoid this “local trap” (Purcell 2006a) by using the local scale with a specifically broader outlook as “a strategic entry point for developing broader practices and theories of transformative social change” (Russell 2019, 991). Alongside its decidedly trans-local outlook, this radical form of municipalism rejects state-led urban experiments and policy “solutions,” as city networks epitomised by C40 promote, and instead seeks to realise an alternative polity inspired by Bookchin’s communalism (Roth, Russell and Thompson 2023, 2012). This involves an expansion of “the common” as an emancipatory means to overcome the dichotomy between state and market and enable human living independent of capital accumulation requirements (Bianchi 2023, 2120).

With activists and municipal governments increasingly embodying new municipalist logics, alternative alliances between (parts of) the state and citizens may emerge. This emerging alliance is not captured by the strict contradiction between the logic of the state and capital on the one hand, and that of popular social movements, on the other, as theorised by thinkers such as Lefebvre and Castells. On the contrary, a municipalist politics “involves citizens in governing through participation in associations [...] that blur the line between state and civil society” (Kohn 2003, 139). It may well become “a political ‘binary-buster’” (Beveridge and Featherstone 2021, 447) bridging between urban popular movements, institutional politics as well as between the state and the urban everyday (Beveridge and Naumann 2023). Eventually, this may contribute to the establishment of a “future urban state, a striking mosaic of cooperatives and collectives, from local banks to food suppliers and cafes, enmeshed with the state in the development of a localized urbanization” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 134). In such an arrangement, urban activists and bottom-up political projects would strategically engage with the state, an engagement that is unavoidable given the ways in which state power permeates urban everyday life.

However, forms of collective self-government, or *autogestion*, in Lefebvre’s terms, are not likely to yield a harmonious system. They reveal “contradictions in the State, because [they are] the very trigger of those contradictions” (Lefebvre, cited in Napoletano et al. 2023, 437). Thus, by keeping the state at a certain distance, one that is “interstitial, internal,” urban politics based on collective forms of self-government can be grounded in urban collective life while also contending with the local state and potentially transforming the latter (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 69). On the other hand, these attempts to work “in, against and beyond the state” (Cumbers 2015, 69) also carry risks of co-optation and depoliticisation through which the state or other forces can try to instrumentalise alternative values for their own purposes. Yet, as such processes of co-optation are hardly ever totalising and rarely completely succeed, alternative practices always provide *some* potential avenue for change that can be leveraged. Taking heed of the potential in this imperfection, therefore,

alternative projects should go beyond the false hope of purist forms of thinking about alternative practices and attempt to transform state space (Cumbers 2015; Böhm, Dinerstein and Spicer 2010).

Understanding the alliances between urban movements and the state requires not only an understanding of how urban social movements engage with the state but also of how the state engages with urban social movements. The ‘future urban state’ may well entail a prefigurative reimagination of the concept of statehood and the exploration of alternative political governing formations, asking “how else [we might] understand what it means to be a state” (Cooper 2017, 336). Embracing a legal pluralism rather than statehood in strict terms of the sovereign nation-state, this reimagining would involve acknowledging the simultaneous co-existence of different normative orders with different logics and degrees of power.

Given the fragmented nature of the state, as developed in the previous chapter through Jessop’s relational state theory, the ways in which the local state relates to civil society initiatives is contingent and depends on which part of the state’s institutional ensemble is involved. The relation between popular initiatives and (elements of) the state can involve co-optation and antagonism but also – and this is often overlooked – cooperation (Bianchi 2022). Based on an analysis of the engagement of the local state in Barcelona with commons initiatives, Bianchi discerns three characteristics of state-commons interactions. First, the heterogeneous and fragmentary nature of the state implies that the range of possible governance strategies of the local state cannot be interpreted in a single logic – be that cooperative, antagonist or cooptative. Rather, these strategies are contradictory, incomplete and often formed through compromises. Second, when these strategies are enacted, this does not happen evenly across space and over time. Thus, instead of static and pre-defined, these strategies and their implementation are subject to change and evolution – stemming from the same logics of cooperation, antagonism or co-optation. Thirdly and lastly, Bianchi emphasises that the selective nature of the state’s engagement with societal actors implies that even if the local state is supportive of commons initiatives, its support will be unevenly distributed. It is likely that the support goes to the relative moderate and cooperative actors rather than the antagonistic ones (Bianchi 2022).

To sum up, the local state has become a factor of consideration in a myriad of visions and approaches to progressiveness and sustainability. Whereas some of these fall back to rather conventional techniques and forms of top-down management, scholars, activists and policymakers have also begun to explore the possibilities for rethinking the relations between the state and activists. Whether these explorations indeed yield a re-politicisation of urban processes through the inclusion of civil society actors in an open way is ultimately an empirical question.

4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have conceptualised the urban in relation to transformative social change, by taking two main lessons from the Marxian conceptualisations of the urban. The first of these is that the city has to be considered expansively within a wider context of globally uneven, power-ridden processes of development that shape urban space and life well beyond the narrowly defined territory of the city. The second main takeaway is that, even though capital has a seemingly totalising effect on urban place and the configurations with the surrounding landscapes, neo-Marxist thinking spearheaded by Lefebvre has simultaneously stressed the emancipatory potential that is embedded in the city's everyday structures.

This opens up the possibility of seeing the city as a place for transformative social change, which contains two moments: a moment of difference and contestation, and a moment of prefiguration of alternatives and diverse economies. The first moment entails a decidedly urban notion of politics which places politics outside of institutions and emphasises its collective character and spatial dimensions. The second moment of alternatives and diverse economies begins to alter urban metabolisms from within the (very) local. They do this through forms of organising that are collective, and they take place in the everyday. Neither of these moments is all-encompassing in the sense of displacing, respectively, institutional forms of politics or mainstream forms of economic organising. Rather, they exist despite and alongside these hegemonic forms, from where they can grow and thereby enable us to build further on them in efforts of transformative social change.

To understand who the role of bottom-up social actors and the local state in driving transformative social change in the urban, I considered the surging interest in the city as a space for progressive change on the part of both state and non-state actors. The increased interest of policymakers has translated into a range of top-down-directed policies around smart, green or circular urbanism, with the potential risk of bringing about the post-political city. On the other hand, citizen-led attempts to re-politicise the local state engage strategically with the municipal state for transformative change, of which new municipalism is a key example. The extent to which participatory governance arrangements reimagine the relations between the state and civil society, as well as their de- and re-politicising effects, always also relates to empirical questions pertaining to a specific context. In the remainder of this project, I shall turn to one such context, namely that of Amsterdam, to answer these questions. In the following chapter, I outline my methodology for doing this.

4 Methodology

My aim in this project is to answer the question as to how the city might be a place for transformative social change, promoting sustainable and just urban futures away from extractive capitalism and neoliberal urbanism, through forms of contestation and alternatives. In answering this question, I subscribe to the idea that “the task of social science is to move beyond analysis and provide the basis for desirable social change” (Cahill 2014, 151). Doing so requires an understanding of *which kind* of social change is desirable and *in relation to what*. This, in turn, calls for a theoretical understanding of systemic features and social change to understand *what* processes of transformation are about, as I have developed in the previous chapters. It also calls for an empirical engagement with social actors currently driving processes of change which they deem as desirable to understand *how* processes of transformation take place. By studying Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy, this project responds to both calls. It thus engages with “philosophical as well organizational and institutional questions” regarding desirable forms of social organising to avoid “seemingly endless abstract debate” as well as purely empirical descriptions of practices irrespective of the – more or less desirable – principles that motivate and structure them (Held, quoted in Sayer 2000, 187).

The chapter is structured as follows. In section 1, I explain how I deliver upon these aims through a critical-realist approach. This critical realism considers both the discursive and material aspects of transformative social change and is attuned to the spatiality of social relations, the latter of which I introduce in section 2. To study socio-spatial change, Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy serves as an in-depth single case study in this project, as I lay out in section 3. To be attentive to the potentials for social change and the structural mechanisms conditioning this, I study this case through a dynamic engagement with opposing poles such as neoliberalisation and diverse economies, theory and empirics, and critique and hope. I introduce this dynamic approach in section 4. Then in section 5, I reflect on the inherently interdisciplinary character of this research project, and I end the chapter with a presentation of my research design in section 6.

1 Critical realism

In this research project, I take a critical-realist approach to investigating transformative social change. Originally promoted by Roy Bhaskar, critical realism acknowledges the existence of two domains which it aims to reconcile: the transitive and the intransitive. The transitive domain is that of science and knowledge and is dependent on prior knowledge and human activity. The intransitive domain, on the other hand, is that of the objects of scientific thought – “the independent existence and activity of causal structures and things” (Bhaskar 2008, 24 [1975]). The intransitive operates independently of human epistemological capacities; it comprises “the structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena” (Bhaskar 2008, 25 [1975]). Put differently, critical realists hold that observable processes are, on the surface, configured by mechanisms of causation that are independent of observation (Waite 2022, 1220).

Thus, critical realism subscribes to a stratified or “depth ontology” that distinguishes between the real, the actual and the empirical (Jessop 2010, 187). The real is the sphere independent of human observations comprising objects and their structures and powers, as well as causal mechanisms. The actual is produced by the consequences that are produced when the mechanism and powers of the real are effectuated under specific conditions. The empirical is the domain of experience. The reference of this experience is to either the real or the actual, although our ability to discern this is contingent on our knowledge of the real or the actual (Sayer 2000b, 12).

To study this stratified ontology, critical realism “endorses a modified social constructivist position” (Jessop 2010, 187). It recognises that social meaning – which can be the object of study – is created intersubjectively and requires interpretive methods. At the same time, it asserts that social reality is only partially about discourse and meaning; it has a material component as well. Therefore, critical realism *also* requires relating the intersubjective meanings to their referents and contexts to account for conditions and consequences that are irrespective of the understandings of social actors (Sayer 2000b).

To understand how transformative social change in Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy may take place, I acknowledge that such change is “path-dependent yet contingent”; it is “shaped by legacies” as well as by “contingently related processes or conditions” (Sayer 2000b, 26). Hence, I study both these contingent processes and the legacies. On the one hand, I engage with the discursive aspect of change; I consider the actions, practices and understandings of local actors. On the other hand, I situate these within the material context that conditions them. This context is shaped on various scales by a variety of mutually influential forces but is simultaneously independent, to a certain extent, of social actors’ understandings. Thus, I engage with the discursive aspects of Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economics movement as well as with the material conditions.

A critical-realist position allows me to critically engage with the practices of local actors. Rather than only interpreting the aims and strategies on their own terms, I relate them to their context to assess the consequences of their actions, intended as well as unintended, to avoid reductionist or one-sided causal explanations. Language and symbolic elements are an inherent part of this. Studies of the urban, grounded in urban geography and political economy, have, since the late twentieth century, started to consider the role of discourse and immaterial processes in critical political economy. Responding to critiques of historical materialism, scholars like David Harvey started to see language, images and symbols as elements of processes of urban social change (Lees 2002).

To unpack the discursive aspects of change in my object of study, I engage with concepts used by social actors themselves. Yet, I acknowledge that limiting myself to these concepts would be insufficient for they may be flawed or misrepresent certain aspects of social reality (Sayer 2000b, 35). The flawed (self-)understanding of social actors is among Lefebvre's core concerns, as his *Critique of Everyday Life* aimed to study how ideas and everyday life influence and challenge one another:

Many men, and even people in general [sic], *do not know their own lives very well, or know them inadequately* [...] Men have no knowledge of their own lives: they see them and act them out via ideological themes and ethical values. In particular they have an inadequate knowledge of their needs and their own fundamental attitudes; they express them badly; they delude themselves about their needs and aspirations except for the most general and the most basic ones. And yet, it is their lives, and their consciousness of life; but only the philosopher, and the sociologist informed by the dialectic, and maybe the novelist, manage to join together the *lived* and the *real, formal* structures and *content*. Thus ideology is at one and the same time within everyday life and outside of it. It is forever penetrating everyday life, forever springing forth from it, uninterruptedly. Yet at the same time it interprets it, adds to it, transposes it, refracts it (more or less clearly, more or less deceptively). (Lefebvre 2014, 116–17, [emphasis in original])

Since it is in everyday life that abstract phenomena become concretised and can be known, the critique of ideology should start in everyday life, where the “mystification” that blurs reality can be studied (Lefebvre [1947] 2014a, 166). To realise the Marxist aspiration “to transform the ‘world’ (and no longer just interpret it) [...] we need to understand fully what we mean by the term ‘world’” to be able to transform life “in its smallest, most everyday detail” (Lefebvre [1947] 2014a, 246). The everyday is the basis of human life and as such provides an avenue for critical engagement. Through a consideration of “how people live,” we can scrutinise the strategies that have led to current arrangements (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 140). Rather than a mere view into ordinary daily life (*la vie quotidienne*), the concept of the everyday (*la quotidienne*) has the explicit critical capacity to study the rhythms of life under capitalism. It enables the theorising of “the ordinary, trivial, banal and

repetitive characters of life under contemporary capitalism” (Butler 2012, 24), as well as the ways in which human beings actively create the world they inhabit and thereby become conscious of their selves (Lefebvre [1947] 2014a, 183).

To know the everyday, we must take a step back to create a certain distance that allows us to study it and to employ “critical knowledge and action together, theory and *praxis*” (Elden 2004, 113 [emphasis in original]). Studying such everyday phenomena through a critical-realist approach implies subscribing “epistemic relativism” while rejecting “judgemental relativism” (Sayer 2000b, 47). That implies the presumption that while everyday phenomena can only be known through accessible descriptions, hierarchies can be made between different, accessible descriptions in terms of their representation of reality. That is, in this project, I can study the everyday processes going on in Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy through the descriptions and accounts of them that relevant social actors present to me, *and* I can distinguish between such accounts in terms of their representation of reality when compared with other accounts and structural mechanisms.

According to critics, this implies that critical realism presumes a God’s eye point of view. Such critics may, in the case of my analysis, judge my assessment of the structural context to be still somewhat partial as it is produced from my specific position. I do not aim to deny this specificity but conversely seek to be reflexive of it. However, to avoid reductionist or one-sided causal explanations of social change in Amsterdam driven by Doughnut Economics, I aim to take “a bird’s eye view” rather than a God’s eye point of view (Sayer 2000b). This allows me to step back and situate the local practices and aims in a wider context by moving back and forth between different observations (I come back to this back-and-forth movement later in this chapter). I consider the current policy developments as products of earlier policy approaches as well as of Amsterdam’s material, structural conditions. These conditions are grounded in space; “space is a necessary dimension of all material phenomena, social ones included, in that they have a spatial extension and spatial exclusivity” (Sayer 2000b, 129).

2 Socio-spatial relations

During the late twentieth century, the social sciences went through several spatial turns that gave rise to various concepts engaging with the spatial dimensions of social phenomena. These spatial turns reflect the claim of human geographers that the spatial dimension of social processes is formative of those social processes. That is, “*spatiality situates social life* in an active arena where purposeful human agency jostles problematically with tendential social determinations to shape everyday activity, particularise social change, and etch into place the course of time and the making

of history” (Soja 1985, 90 [emphasis in original]). Through decades of spatial thinking in critical geography, it has become widely accepted that “all social relations are spatial relations; social relations develop through, and actively co-produce, space” (Moore 2015, 11). These discussions have given rise to widespread notions of space, scale and place, each of which I discuss in turn.

2.1 Space

One of the key contributors to the theorising of interrelations between spatiality and social processes has been Lefebvre with his investigations into the production of space. He theorises an “epochal transformation” in the history of capitalist geographies with a move from the production of commodities *in* space “to the production of space itself” (N. Brenner 2019, 65). Lefebvre’s processual account of social space is built on the idea that “(social) space is a (social) product” and that every society, or every mode of production, produces its own space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 30). This means that “natural space” – in the more commonsensical understanding – becomes “the background of the picture” (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 30) of how every society “produces a space, its own space,” which contains the mutually related sets of relations of production and reproduction (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 31). It also means that our knowledge of the production of space is performative: “if space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production” (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 36).

To shed light on this performative process, Lefebvre develops a triad model of space including *conceived*, *perceived* and *lived* space. Social space, according to this model, is constructed both mentally and materially, which correspond respectively to the oppositional moments of *conceived* space and *perceived* space. Conceived space is space expressed in terms of mental abstractions and geometrical categories and is bound up with the power of technocrats and planners. Conversely, perceived space is the space that is used in its concrete physical form (Elden 2004, 189–90). Between these two opposing poles, Lefebvre situates *lived* space. This is the space that is subjectively lived in everyday life through representations, meanings and symbols. Lived space is shaped through the history of people and of individuals and is not subjected to strict logical ruled but instead “has an affective kernel” and “embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations” (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 42). For Lefebvre ([1974] 1991, 40 [1974]), an inextricable dialectical relation exists between the “three moments of social space” – the “perceived-conceived-lived triad (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces)” – through which individuals are enabled to move between the different moments seamlessly.

The original contribution of Lefebvre’s writing lies in his consideration of the urban and the creation of urban space as a human act that spatially reconfigures the social (Biagi 2020). Lefebvre’s

work is motivated by a critique of urbanism and the ways in which technocrats and urban planners “identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” and thereby reduce lived experiences to numbers (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 38). Against this tendency, Lefebvre invests space with an emancipatory potential that follows from the fact that, although the state certainly plays an important role in directing the production of urban space, this does not exhaust the concept of space, which is produced, in part, by decisions taken outside of the state (Purcell 2002). To unpack this further, Lefebvre distinguishes between two levels of mediation of which the city is comprised: “the near order” of the mutual relations between individuals and social groups and “the far order” of society, which involves political institutions, legal powers and cultural dimensions (Lefebvre [1968] 1996a, 26; Biagi 2020, 219). This implies that although the city may be predetermined in the far order, it can be reconfigured from within the near order, where human actors have the ability of challenging and reconstructing the status quo. This emancipatory process is inherently unpredictable and plays into the dialects of continuity and discontinuity that shape space.

In this project, I consider the (re)figurations of social space according to this triadic understanding through assessing the ways in which the local state and residents strive for and engage in socio-spatial transformations. In my analysis of Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy, I am interested in lived space at this intersection of conceived and perceived space. As becomes clear in chapter 6, the Municipality of Amsterdam conceives space through a plethora of spatial, housing and sustainability strategies. A part of these documents reflects the state’s salient role in the production of urban space and in “shaping and reshaping the urban process under capitalism” (N. Brenner 2019, 9). Through such strategies, the local state enables capitalism to “attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions” (Lefebvre 2009, 26) through organising space to coordinate, homogenise and hierarchise. Subsequently, in chapter 7, I analyse the actions taken by urban dwellers to challenge what may be called “the far order” of capitalist flows and political institutions from within “the near order” of mutual relations between neighbours and citizens. They aim to challenge the ways in which the municipality *conceives* urban space by bringing in “the affective kernel” – the passions and actions of lived experiences – into the conception of urban space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 42).

The processes through which the state conceives of space have altered over time, as urbanisation and state rescaling from the 1980s onwards have linked state space and urban space intricately to one another. This role of the urban state is multiscalar and embedded in wider constellations of socio-spatial relations, bringing into view the concept of scale.

2.2 Scale

As part of the growing attention for spatiality, scalar notions have flourished within human geography since the 1970s. The leading conception that arose initially was a Marxist one that posited scales relationally, each of them incorporating the others. For Lefebvre, for example, the shift to a capitalism in which space *itself* is produced has created strong operational and material interlinkages across scale; space is social as it becomes “an ensemble of links, connections, communications, networks and circuits” (N. Brenner 2019, 67). Scales, then, are produced through the changes of these interscalar interlinkages, which involve tensions that result from the contradiction inherent in capitalist development. This contradiction, influentially developed by Harvey, pertains to the simultaneous need for fixity and motion. Capitalist production is premised, on the one hand, on fixed physical and social infrastructures, and on the free movement of extracted value to enable capital accumulation on the other (Harvey 2014; Cox 2018). Cox argues that scale and territory are closely bound up with one another, as well as with notions of uneven development, in processes that are “about protecting and enhancing some local advantage while forcing disadvantage on to others elsewhere” (Cox 2018, 63).

Territorial logics were influential especially during the post-war era, when the focus was on national economic growth, subnational policies were coordinated in a top-down manner and territorialisation shaped the inter-state system (N. Brenner et al. 2003). This started to change when the emergence of transnational governance organisations threatened the notion of bounded-off national economies, bringing about the “relativization of scale” and processes of rescaling ranging between relocalisation and globalisation (Jessop 2002, 27). During the 1990s, analyses of these processes that brought about the reconfiguration of local, regional, national and global relations were characterised by a scalar focus that employed hierarchical thinking. It posited larger scales or levels of government as determinant of the smaller or lower ones and considered vertical relations more prominent than horizontal ones. Over time, scale as static, preconceived categories lost traction and was substituted by a social-constructivist understanding of scale. This understanding posits scale as affected by historical, institutional, economic, political and cultural processes, while scale itself helps shape these processes (N. Brenner 2019).

Eventually, scale became so prominent that it was often favoured over other relevant spatial dimensions, which came to be overlooked as a result. In response to this, Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008) develop a comprehensive framework for analysing the spatial dimensions of social phenomena through the dimensions of territory, place, scale and networks (TPSN). Territory, in line with the above, structures socio-spatial relations through principles of bordering and enclosure; place does so through logics of proximity and spatial embedding; scale through vertical

differentiation and hierarchies; and networks through interconnectivity and interdependence. The point of the TPSN framework is that any single one of these four spatialities is not enough to explain socio-spatial relations. Jessop and colleagues thus reject unidimensional studies of socio-spatial relations. Besides the studies with a dogmatic focus on scale, as just mentioned, they also criticise, for instance, globalisation studies conducted solely in terms of the nation state and territory, considerations of places as self-contained units of social-ecological interactions and studies assuming a flat ontology in which rhizomatic networks and flows move without friction. Instead, focusing on one of these dimensions can serve as an entry point into a more complex consideration of socio-spatial relations in all their spatialities (Jessop, N. Brenner and Jones 2008). Rather than providing a set definition for each of the four categories, the TPSN frame is built up of “heuristic elements that emerge from the ‘rendezvous’ between these categories” (Paasi 2008, 408). Although the framework seems to leave little room for agency, it does involve a consideration of how these different spatialities are both durable and changeable. They are durable as they are shaped by material and discursive processes and thus condition the possibilities for action. Yet, they are *also* changeable, as they are constantly challenged and renegotiated from within the conditions for action in a specific historical conjuncture (Mayer 2008).

The TPSN framework is suitable for concrete inquiries of “contestation [...] ‘from below’” (Jessop, N. Brenner and Jones 2008, 397). Hence, an orientation towards the four categories and their structuring principles and patterns allows me to study Amsterdam in a multidimensional way. I thus avoid an analysis in, for instance, exclusively localised terms (by looking at urban place) or scalar terms (by considering the various scales on which Doughnut Economics in Amsterdam is engaged in a static sense, e.g., highlighting networked relations between the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition and Raworth’s Doughnut Economics Action Lab). Instead, I can draw out the connections between different spatial categories and the ways in which they are mobilised in and impact political processes in Amsterdam. In doing this, I do not employ the conceptual orientations of the framework in a kind of “formalistic exercise” to engage with all categories (Jessop, N. Brenner and Jones 2008, 396). Rather, I take them as heuristic guidelines through which to interpret my empirical material on Amsterdam.

In the constantly mutating multiscale landscape under modern capitalism, the urban plays a key role in facilitating the functioning and reproduction of crisis-ridden capitalism on a global scale, as Lefebvre had already argued. Because of capital restructuring and state rescaling in the post-Keynesian era, the urban became a key site for capitalist development, and connections between local levels of government and global processes are key considerations for social analysis (N. Brenner 2004; Harvey 1989a). In analysing ongoing developments in Amsterdam in chapter 6 and 7, I tease

out such scalar aspects through the ways that the neighbourhood, the city, the nation-state and the global are invoked as categories to consider sustainability.

As I described in the previous chapter, the urban is not only a key scale for capitalist restructuring but *also* the scale on which the interference of the global with the local is challenged through struggle (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 88). In these Marxist analyses of the urban scale, the city is understood in terms of capitalist development, which is mediated by the state and contested and resisted by people. This posits place as an important locus for contestation and change.

2.3 Place

The starting point of this project is the urban: the scale where global, political-economic forces materialise *and* where social actors engage in everyday life activities in specific places. *Place* is created through relations, flows and interactions that shape “a unique ensemble of human and physical features on the earth’s surface, including environmental conditions, physical and human landscapes, cultural practices, political institutions, social life, and economic activities” (Coe, Kelly and Yeung 2020, 16). This means that places are not solely shaped by capitalist processes taking place on larger scales. Rather, taking place seriously means to “steer a middle course” and “view location as a fundamental material attribute of human activity but recognize that location is socially produced” (Harvey 1982, 374). It requires a focus on the actors and institutions at the local level: there are social groups that promote accumulation in the urban or the increase of the exchange value of place, as well as social groups that push back against that, by foregrounding the use value of place. Taking place seriously requires acknowledgement of the impact of global processes on places but empirically orientates towards “the meeting of use and exchange values on the urban ground” (Logan and Molotch 2007, 9).

Social actors in Amsterdam use place-making as an explicit strategy against the commodification of urban space and the promotion of its exchange value. In chapter 7, I present various citizen-driven initiatives that aim to contest gentrification by giving a voice to the local – and often socially marginalised – communities that currently live in places considered to be the main areas for urban growth and development by the municipality. While contesting the extra-local forces that influence places, these citizen-driven initiatives also invoke place-making as an entry point into the unsustainable, global processes of capitalism. By changing parts of this metabolism from the hyper-local scale, these initiatives aim to engage with the global processes of capitalism from within their lived spaces.

Places are thus shaped by supralocal forces as well as by local actions and engagements. Studying this through Marxist political economy produces insights into the conditions brought about by the

supralocal forces but may not shed sufficient light on how social actors respond to and deal with those conditions. Local social actors engage daily in activities of “place-making,” that is, “the set of social, political and material processes by which people iteratively create and recreate the experienced geographies in which they live” (Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011, 54). This brings to the fore the city as a distinct space in which residents take charge of their collective life and which can be reclaimed in and against seemingly totalising multi-scalar processes of urbanisation (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 6). The city, in this reading, is localised *and* globalised simultaneously, as it harbours particular places while it is part of a global order as well. In this local-cum-global setting, place is shaped by struggle and political action, forming a process that is undecided and open: “the contours of political space are not fixed, we produce new political spaces through our own political activities” (Magnusson 2015, 180). The city, and place within it, harbour “disorderliness, unpredictability and multiplicity” and therefore “pose the problem of politics in relation to that complexity” (Magnusson 2011, 120). To grasp the radical openness and undecidability of social actors’ responses to the political-economic conditions the city presents them with, we need to “see like a city,” which implies *not* to think in terms of territorial and sovereign power but in terms of “what people do politically [... in] particular cities within the global city (Magnusson 2011, 169).

Processes of place-making have an inherent aspect of collectivity and thereby enable the forming of local communities. Although historically, and especially in a US context, the city was not associated with community (Goist 1971), the collective everyday life of urbanites is increasingly considered a key locus for collective political action. These political communities are to be understood in an anti-essentialist way that recognises the co-existence of human beings and their mutual social, political and economic interdependence, but this does not prescribe a certain a priori form of unified, consensual existence (Gibson-Graham 2006b; Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016). Rather than community as a strict, bounded entity promoted through a logic of identity, which “fus[es] subjects with one another,” denies differences and produces forms of exclusion, this form of being together allows for difference (Young 1990, 227). It is a practice that is performed by urban actors in their everyday life through which shared symbols and experiences arise. This, however, is not a solely local phenomenon or based on personal networks; it is a form of belonging that is possible on multiple scales. The globalisation of politics and the economy as well as the increased movement of people have disconnected community from local place. Instead, community involves the experience of “belongingness,” possibly “on very many scales” (Blokland 2017, 165). This experience is shaped in part by – but cannot be reduced to – networking logics.

Networking logics do shed light on the intertwined processes of politics and placemaking. Uncovering the politics of place necessitates an examination of how actors engage in networks –

rhizomatic, horizontal structures based on interconnectivity, interdependency and reciprocity as well as individual choices and power relations (Jessop, N. Brenner and Jones 2008; and Murphy 2011). Urban actors connect with one another across places to increase their political power in formal and informal ways. Through this, they constitute a new form of “small-p” politics that take place outside of the formal arenas of “Big-P” Politics (Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011, 57), in line with the decidedly urban nature of politics arising in the city that I made the case for in chapter 3.

Networks play a role in my analysis of Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy. Various neighbourhood-based projects connect with one another through the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition. The analysis I present in chapter 7 sheds light on the unfolding of this and on how such a coalition may be part of a ‘powerful assemblage’ of various agents of change, as discussed in chapter 3 (cf. Chatterton and Pusey 2020). To this end, I consider ‘small-p politics’ and take local actors as an empirical starting point. Taking such a local starting point entails a danger of conflating urban processes with limited conceptions of the city. Some reflections on urban terminology are thus in order.

2.4 Clarification of urban terminology

The empirical object of this study is the Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam. This object is somewhat risky, as it is easily ill-defined in various ways. To understand and deal with this risk, I need to consider the meanings of ‘Doughnut Economy’ and ‘Amsterdam’ in my project. Starting with the latter, my analysis of Amsterdam has a local starting point and relies largely on empirical accounts of local actors and their affiliations with their neighbourhoods and networks across the city. This brings forth a rather discursive notion of the ‘city’ or ‘Amsterdam,’ for example, through terms like the ‘Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition,’ which implicitly refer to a commonsensical understanding of the geographic boundaries of Amsterdam as a city. This becomes problematic when taking into account the socio-spatial notions developed in this section as well as Lefebvre’s thesis of planetary urbanisation developed in chapter 3. The latter troubles the notion of ‘the city,’ as it makes it increasingly difficult to discern where ‘urban’ ends and ‘rural’ begins, as various geographies and localities become embedded in urban processes. This leads Lefebvre to adopt ‘the urban’ rather than ‘the city,’ as the urban under capitalism came to be tightly connected to questions of scale.

In light of this, foregrounding Amsterdam as a single city, defined in terms of agglomeration, density and territorial boundedness, and referred to in conventional and commonsensical terms by informants, runs the risk of falling prey to “methodological cityism” (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015; N. Brenner 2019, 15). Such methodological cityism puts forth commonsensical notions of the city

while neglecting the various dimensions of socio-spatial relations, and particularly the scalar imperative of urban scholarship. Such reification of cities can lead to investing cities themselves with agentic capacities, especially when employing an active language about urban development. However, positing cities themselves as agents masks the fact that it is groups *within* cities that promote policies or compete with other actors (P. Marcuse 2005; Harvey 1989a). Thus, the notion of ‘city’ masks internal differences between various groups in a city, and the ways in which urban processes and policies variably impact them. This renders it a “perverse metaphor” (P. Marcuse 2005). In extension of this, ‘Amsterdam’ is also a ‘perverse metaphor,’ unspecified references to which I therefore try to keep to a minimum in this thesis.

Yet, the term ‘city’ allows for an emphasis on local processes and place in social transformation. In processes of social transformation, which are rooted in place and space, social actors invoke notions of ‘the city’ – and, in the case at hand, ‘Amsterdam’ – in relation to their political aspirations, strategies and projects. With this, the city becomes “an imagined and actual place where people come together” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 6) and “a political idea and pledge about a place and the wider world” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 4). In my study of Amsterdam, I am interested in how the city is invoked as a democratic project; I study empirical attempts at realising utopian ideas and thus engage with both utopian ideas and visions *and* with the real conditions under which they are promoted in a dynamic way. In doing so, I navigate the difficulties with employing the terms ‘city’ and ‘urban’ in the two following ways.

First, to do justice to the aspirational, politically strategic invocation of the terms ‘city’ and ‘Amsterdam,’ I employ both the terms ‘city’ and ‘urban’ to acknowledge the political potential of the city as a democratic project while remaining aware of the global embeddedness of this project. At the same time, to avoid falling into methodological cityism in the sense of reifying Amsterdam along the territorial boundaries of its built environment, I trace the interconnections between dimensions of territory, place, scale and network. In other words, I analyse “the mutually constitutive relations among their respective structuring principles and the specific practices associated with each of the latter” (Jessop, N. Brenner and Jones 2008, 393).

More specifically, I investigate how social actors connect local places – Doughnut Economics projects in their neighbourhoods – through networks – such as the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition – to the local state. The local state, in turn, deals with these local logics in its transition to a circular economy, which involves supralocal processes and combines considerations of territory – to distinguish between those areas the local state considers its responsibilities and those which fall outside of that – and scale – regarding the relation between developments taking place on vertically different levels of society. In my analysis of Amsterdam’s evolving policy landscape, I refer to the interplay between the regional and the national despite keeping a primary focus on the local scale.

I thus acknowledge that Amsterdam is a specific locality, but my in-depth engagement with Amsterdam as a case allows me to trace connections between various spatial conceptual categories.

Second, I aim to be specific about the different actors, social groups or institutions to avoid masking potential differences between them, and I allow for an analysis of *how* these differences (which are mediated by social class, among others) affect processes of social transformation. Thus, when concerned with political processes, I refer to the ‘Municipality of Amsterdam’ as the multi-level ensemble of political and administrative institutions that govern urban processes in and around Amsterdam. I introduce the Municipality of Amsterdam and the various districts Amsterdam comprises of in more detail in chapter 5. Furthermore, as I lay out in chapter 6, the Municipality of Amsterdam has become increasingly occupied with the wider urban region – the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area – for the accommodation of urban processes, not least development and growth. When considering such regional concerns, I explicitly refer to the Amsterdam “urban region” or “Amsterdam Metropolitan Area”. That is, in all other cases, I refer to the municipality or the municipal organisation.

Likewise, when referring to ‘Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy’ in its empirical form, I run a risk of reifying something that is in fact an idea, a model or a horizon of possibility on which people act – “a virtual object,” in Lefebvre’s (2003 [1970], 166) words (more on this in section 4 of this chapter). Hence, when I employ the term ‘Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy,’ I refer to something that is aspirational in a way similar to the ‘city’. It is a political pledge or “a cry and a demand” (Lefebvre 1996b, 158) for change. Referring to the ‘Doughnut Economy’ invokes this aspiration – this virtuality. To some extent, then, I buy into the open logic of the loosely organised Doughnut Economics movement in Amsterdam, which I analyse in chapter 7. To enable an analysis of how difference between social actors plays a role in this movement, however, I do commit myself to clarifying as much as possible what kinds of actors I refer to in relation to Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy, in spite of its loose organisation and emerging character. The main distinction of relevance here is that of between the place-based activists and projects on the one hand, and the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition on the other hand. I further introduce the latter coalition in chapter 5, and I analyse all involved actors in detail in chapter 7. Having clarified what I mean with ‘Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy,’ I now turn to its salience as a case.

3 Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy as an in-depth single case study

This project investigates the emergence of Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy as an in-depth, single case study. I regard Amsterdam as both an “extreme” and “critical case” (Flyvbjerg 2006, 229) of the

increased attention for – especially certain – cities as potential places for progressive change and sustainable living. On the one hand, Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy is an extreme case since it explicitly puts forward ideas about the urban economy, sustainability and the role of residents in ways that arguably go beyond the standard commitments of urban governments. These ideas have attracted international attention from researchers, policy makers, activists and journalists (for examples of the latter, see Nugent 2021; Boffey 2020), which indicates that many eyes are focused on the developments in Amsterdam. At the same time, Amsterdam’s urban region is doing relatively well in terms of competitiveness, economic and demographic development, social equality and liveability. As I argue in the next chapter, this prosperous position is enmeshed in the historical development of global capitalism. Although we should engage questions around sustainability and justice not only for such prosperous regions – contrarily, we should *also* and *particularly* engage these questions for regions which, for instance, already experience the consequences of climate emergency to a large degree without having contributed to its causes as much – it is interesting to consider how these questions are answered in a context where it can be argued that the conditions are relatively favourable.

On the other hand, Amsterdam provides a critical case because if the development of Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy runs into problems, this may also have relevance for similar European cities that aspire to be on trajectories towards sustainable forms of urban living. That is, we can learn from developments in Amsterdam even if it turns out to be a case where it is unclear how, under relatively favourable conditions such as a vibrant civil society, a progressive urban government can resist and counteract the competitive, uneven imperatives that are part and parcel of capitalist urban development (cf. Harvey 1989a). We can learn from the challenges arising in these more favourable conditions to say something more general about the envisioned change trajectories.

Single-case studies are limited in that they do not allow for connections across cases to discern trans-local trends in relation to global tendencies, something for which conjunctural analysis is more suitable (Castree 2006; Peck 2017). However, an in-depth single case study is especially well suited to critical-realist research and for research that aims to explain the complexity of changing social relations and interactions within a certain setting. At the same time, it allows for an exploration of social events with respect to their context and of the interactions between structure and agency that they involve (Hu 2018). Indeed, for an understanding of the logics at play through spatial and embodied alternative practices, in-depth accounts of specific localities are needed. Even though such specific cases will be imperfect, as no city is currently living up to the ideal of a fully circular or just city, we might learn from the ones that are getting slightly closer to such ideals than others (Uitermark 2009). To engage with utopian ideals and actual imperfections, I employ a dynamic research approach.

4 Dynamically moving between opposing poles

In this project, I set out to 1) uncover the political-economic conditions that shape the potential for social transformation in Amsterdam and 2) analyse how urban actors respond to and deal with these. The project thus engages with the empirical complexity of the materialisation of neoliberal policies and the various ways in which they are contested in the context of Amsterdam. To grasp this complexity, I take a dynamic approach oscillating between considerations of opposing poles (which are presented in Table 1). Such a dynamic approach embraces the notion of dialectic put forward by Lefebvre, who “is never content with merely describing, explaining, or even criticizing reality, but most importantly seeks ‘the *opening*, the way of escape,’ refusing to surrender to nihilism or defeat” (Napoletano et al. 2023, 438).

Table 1: The opposing methodological poles underlying this project

Neoliberalisation	↔	Diverse economies
Structural conditions	↔	Discursive and material actions
System	↔	Agents
Strong theory	↔	Weak theory
Reading for dominance	↔	Reading for difference
Theory	↔	Empirics
Critique	↔	Hope
Statist logics	↔	Urban logics

In this section, I expand on these dynamics, while section 4.1 discusses my combined approach to neoliberalisation and diverse economies. Related to the neoliberalisation-diverse economies nexus are, on the one hand, structural conditions and system – which I analyse through strong theory and reading for “dominance” (Gibson-Graham 2008, 623) – and, on the other hand, discursive and material actions and agents – which I analyse through weak theory and “reading for difference” (Gibson-Graham 2008, 623). Then, in section 4.2, I turn to my abductive and transductive approach to theory and empirics and, in section 4.3, to the overarching aim of my research to be critical *yet* hopeful, which is related, in turn, to the tension between statist and urban logics.

4.1 Neoliberalisation and diverse economies

Understanding how urban diverse economies can provide a counterweight to processes of neoliberalisation calls for an analysis of the evolving neoliberal policy landscape as well as for an in-depth engagement with the diverse alternatives that are being proposed. In a first step, this relies on the operationalisation of the theoretical and abstract concepts surrounding the notion of variegated neoliberalisation to interpret how Amsterdam's policy developments affect, promote or hamper the sustaining of alternative economic practices. In the latter, I follow Brenner and Theodore's (2002) approach of "actually existing neoliberalism" by looking at the historical developments after the Fordist-Keynesian period, including the related crises, socio-political contestation, socio-political alliances and conflicts. Specifically, I look at how various aspects of the policies of the Municipality of Amsterdam have affected housing, in terms of social housing and the ownership of land, and urban space more generally through the privatisation of space and the promotion of city-marketing. I discuss this in more detail in section 6 of this chapter.

Operationalising the highly abstract theoretical concepts concerning the notion of variegated neoliberalisation requires an engagement with the critiques that have been raised against this notion and which potentially trouble its analytical qualities. The first of these critiques is that its processual definition of neoliberalism does not allow for any rigorous empirical testing. Conceptualising neoliberalisation as a set of processes that are never fully accomplished, and whose manifestations are always at a discrepancy with neoliberal ideas, makes it difficult to observe (G. Pinson and Morel Journel 2016). However, as Gritzas and Kavoulakos (2016, 930) emphasise, economic geographies are an "always-in-a-state-of becoming" topic. Processes and mechanisms through which change takes place thus become of central importance. That they are more difficult to observe than the ideas originally promoted by neoliberal proponents does not imply that it is undesirable for us try. The challenge of understanding how neoliberal ideas are put into practice in a certain context, and how this practice subsequently mutates through processes of negotiation, contestation and proposed alternatives, is exactly what this project takes on. Therefore, in chapter 6, I trace how trends and (incomplete and imperfect) processes of marketisation, privatisation and responsibilisation have influenced Amsterdam's policy landscape as well as how they, perhaps in spite of local policy documents stating otherwise, continue to do so.

A second critique raised against the neoliberalisation approach is that its tendency to subsume a wide variety of developments and dynamics under an unmeasurable or unquantifiable single process of neoliberal change is both inconsistent and imprecise (Storper 2016). Neoliberalisation scholars are aware of the tensions between considering neoliberalism as a unifying hegemonic logic and as a number of mutually incomparable, specific manifestations (N. Brenner, Peck and Theodore

2010). They emphasise the discrepancies that often exist between neoliberal theory and ideas on the one hand, and their real effects on capitalist institutions and development trajectories on the other, which requires a consideration of “actually existing neoliberalism” focusing on the contradictions and destruction that go along with the implementation of neoliberal policies (N. Brenner and Theodore 2002). This, in turn, requires closer attention to the relevant actors and the policy documents that reflect how systemic features operate locally. Bracketing the highly abstract notions of state space restructuring enables a consideration of the level of policy documents that promote divergent logics and different directions for urban development. By tracing these logics over time and with respect to different policy areas, in chapter 6, I shed light on how local processes were reflective of supralocal trends without jumping to all-encompassing narratives about neoliberalism.

A third critique raised against the notion of variegated neoliberalisation is its theoretical character and high level of abstraction, which neglects empirical examples of the relations between neoliberalisation, competing paradigms and forms of contestation. This is problematic since forms of contestation and competing paradigms and ideas shape urban policies just as much as neoliberal policies do (G. Pinson and Morel Journal 2016). Although neoliberalisation scholars firmly agree with this, for instance, in the assertion that neoliberalism evolves through “conflicts with the ‘external’ social world that it encounters” (Peck 2004, 403), many studies of neoliberalisation do not sufficiently avoid putting neoliberal theories at their centre and thereby risk reifying them. Instead, it is crucial to consider how neoliberalisation and the forms of socio-spatial contestation raised against it are co-implicated. Moreover, any account of regulatory and social change needs to pay attention to forms of contestation as phenomena in their own right, which are more than merely forms of opposition to neoliberalism (Leitner et al. 2006) .

This project aims to respond to this call by providing an empirically engaged account of the co-implicated processes of neoliberalisation and contestation. It unpicks how processes of neoliberalisation have unfolded alongside opposing ideas and processes in Amsterdam and which concrete mechanisms the contestations of neoliberalisation are up against. Thus, I do not employ a form of “compression” that forces pre-defined theoretical understandings of neoliberalism onto empirical settings, as this would incoherently mix abstract theory with contextual specificities (Peck 2017, 9). Conversely, taking seriously the local or regional conditions enables a theorising of “difference in embedded sites, concepts, and practices that often challenge general theories ‘from below’” (Callison and Manfredi 2020, 13). Such a situated approach allows for a way of theorising that grasps the rise and development of new practices that arise from the conditions of neoliberalism.

Discerning the political-economic conditions for social change in this first step paves the way for a second step of analysing diverse economic practices in Amsterdam. Gibson-Graham’s (2008, 616)

“diverse economies” approach allows for the possibility of studying the different kinds of economic practices that exist alongside, despite or irrespective of the capitalist economy. With her orientation towards diverse economies, Gibson-Graham (2008, 618) moves away from an essentialist, structuralist approach of what she calls “strong theory,” which promotes a tendency to subsume all kinds of attempts at diverse economic practices under “capitalism in another guise or as always already coopted”. Instead, Gibson-Graham takes a humble approach to what theories can posit or prove by proposing “weak theory” to describe and create a basis for performing a different economy through thick descriptions and tolerance to multiple logics existing simultaneously. Weak theory is “able to describe, appreciate, connect and analyse, identifying strengths to build on and constraints to work around” (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski 2020, 9). By taking an interest in the practices of social actors in their collective urban everyday, I seek to consider how urban activists move beyond “boundary struggles” in relation to the non-commodified spheres of nature and care work that capitalism relies on (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 53). I study these struggles not only as forms of contestation but also in terms of the diverse practices that they promote, which specifically reconfigure these spheres of human and urban life in post-capitalist ways.

However, understanding these practices through weak theorising, describing and appreciating is not sufficient for understanding how they may be sustained in a wider urban context. As Peck et al. (2010) emphasise, progressive local alternatives are imperative for moving beyond neoliberalism, but their long-term feasibility relies on transformative shifts on the macro level which would otherwise continue to frustrate them. Therefore, I approach the case of Amsterdam through a dynamic interaction between “weak” and “strong” theory and aim not only to understand the diverse practices as they take place but also to analyse them against the backdrop of the systemic features and tendencies they aim to transform. This serves to take seriously both how alternative practices are promoted and how they interact with the “macroinstitutional rules of the game” (Peck, Theodore and N. Brenner 2010, 112).

There are three reasons for employing this combination of weak and strong theorising and for considering neoliberalisation as well as diverse practices. The first of these relates to scale. Just as various processes of neoliberalisation take place on multiple scales in interrelated ways, so too are diverse economic practices related to developments on other scales. To avoid falling into the “local trap” by foregrounding the local scale to the extent that its democratic potential is assumed to be inherently greater than that of other scales (Purcell 2006b), it cannot be assumed that neighbourhood-based diverse economies or participatory forms of governance are inherently more democratic. Rather, how they treat the interests of local as well as wider publics should be subject to empirical study.

Second, just as it is necessary to avoid romanticising radical local action, it is also necessary to think it in relation to the heterogeneous governance complex of processes of neoliberalisation and contestation. Therefore, a consideration is needed of how progressive local initiatives may be brought together in a broader, politicised movement and thereby form a more considerable factor vis-à-vis a (potentially hostile) macro-environment. This prompts a consideration of possibilities for horizontal and vertical relations between progressive communities and actors through which the state can potentially play the role of meso-level organiser (Chatterton and Pusey 2020). This requires an analysis of how local projects engage with state actors in both formal and informal ways. Moreover, a strategy of “escaping capitalism,” of constituting anti- or post-capitalist communities completely outside existing capitalist structures (Wright 2021, 38), does not seem a feasible long-term strategy within an urban context, where proximity and scarcity of space likely make engagement with the state unavoidable. Hence, rather than trying to ‘simply’ escape capitalist logics, urban alternatives must contend with the macro-environment with which they share (densely populated) urban space and which is largely governed by these capitalist logics.

A third reason for caution is the need to go beyond idealism and hope alone. The latter are important given that the urban phenomenon is the people’s “dream, their symbolized imaginary;” it is real and concrete “utopia” (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 39). Therefore, understanding urban change requires interrogating people’s dreams regarding the city. The diverse economies approach is apt to do this, as it provides a way to interpret “socialist or noncapitalist construction” as “a ‘realistic’ present activity rather than a ludicrous or utopian future goal” (Gibson-Graham 2006b, 263). Yet, Lee (2013) reminds us that although hope and idealism proliferate in the discourse around diverse economies, the materiality of the economy cannot be escaped. The economy is not only discursive and social but *also* material. “Indeed,” he states, “it is this requirement of material sustenance across space and time which offers the most significant criterion for defining what economic geographies might be” (R. Lee 2013, 75). By engaging both the discursive level of (self-)descriptions of the movement in Amsterdam and the structural conditions, I aim to do justice to the movement’s utopian aspirations as well as the actual setbacks it faces. The objective of Doughnut Economics is to achieve widespread social change beyond purely localised forms of contestation and prefiguration, which is reflected in its global lens on social and environmental considerations (I discuss the lenses of Doughnut Economics in more detail in the next chapter). Moreover, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition aims to bring the whole of “Amsterdam ‘into the Doughnut’ as quickly as possible,” thus alluding to connections and dimensions beyond the neighbourhood (Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, n.d. [my translation]). Such an outward-looking aim calls for an interpretation of the movement against ‘strong theory’ that provides insights into the structural mechanisms that constitute the hardware of global capitalism, and which the movement aims to present an alternative against.

Yet, this study also acknowledges that social change and alternatives do not form a binary question of neoliberalism or post-neoliberalism. Therefore, I consider diverse ideals, visions and practices not only to the extent that they imply resistance but also regarding the degree to which they “are resilient to and rework neoliberalism” (Leitner et al. 2006, 5). Through the combined account of capitalism’s hardware and its changing characteristics, I shed light on how actors in Amsterdam (un)intentionally contest *and* alter the face of the neoliberal city. Doing this requires a dynamic interaction between theoretical and empirical considerations.

4.2 Abduction and transduction

Throughout this project, my research process has been characterised by the dynamic interplay between theory and empirics through a method of abduction as well as Lefebvre’s (2003 [1970]) method of transduction. Engaging with the political, transformative potential in the city calls for attention with the practices that already exist and with the ways in which these challenge dominant logics. This, in turn, “involves the to-ing and fro-ing between concepts and practices,” between our existing understandings and the ways in which ongoing practice seeks to challenges these (Beveridge and Koch 2023, 2).

I have iterated between theory and empirical observations through an abductive approach, through which I moved back and forth between theory and surprising empirical data (Charmaz 2014). Before discussing my abductive analytical strategy in detail in section 6, I discuss the relation between theory and empirics in this project in more general terms here. This project departs from a theoretical interest in the possibility of post-capitalist societal and urban arrangements. I accept that any kind of knowledge of the (social) world is shaped through preconceived theoretical conceptions, which are broadened and deepened through the research process (Jessop 2010). This project attempts to access the theoretical complexity of the urban phenomenon understood simultaneously as a constitutive element of global capitalism and a site for struggle and contestation. Theories are key in navigating this complexity. As David Harvey puts it:

The formation of concepts and the construction of theories have always been vital aspects of human activity. It is through such practices that we grasp who, what, where and (sometimes) why we are in the world. Theories provide cognitive maps for finding our way in a complex and changeable environment. (Harvey 1989b, 2)

Thus, the function of theorising is to create frames through which we can interpret and understand this changing empirical world, whose complexity we cannot understand otherwise. This means that theory needs to be in line with empirical observations and be adjusted where necessary: “the

theoretical and the empirical are thus symbiotic (or certainly should be)” (Harvey, cited in Castree 2010, 1736).

While theories enable our interpretation of the changing social world, this critical-theoretical work is, in turn, influenced by existing practice. Especially given that the transition to a post-capitalist society can be considered a “grand challenge” for which no clear-cut theories exist, episodes of inductive methods are necessary (Eisenhardt, Graebner and Sonenshein 2016, 1113). This is reflected in the empirical object of this study, namely, the aspirations to establish Amsterdam’s economy as a doughnut, which was a surprising instance in the empirical world that sparked further theoretical reflection (cf. Timmermans and Tavory 2022). To be attentive to the existence and proliferation of alternatives to the dominant capitalist forms of organising, Gibson-Graham (2008, 618) emphasises the need to “disinvest in our paranoid practices of critique and mastery and undertake thinking that can energize and support ‘other economies’”. In an urban context, this translates into the acknowledgement of the abundance of specific, local situations that the urban produces and whose particularity cannot be captured by an all-encompassing theoretical account (Magnusson 2015). The openness and undecidability of urban everyday life and the multiplicity of urban experiences have prompted my empirical engagement to be humble and reflexive. Acknowledging my own views and point of departure, as well as my limited knowledge of participants’ lived experiences, I have striven to be open to having my views changed through the research process (Attia and Edge 2017). I come back to this in more detail when discussing my positionality, data collection and analytical strategies below.

Studying the urban with such attentiveness to undecidability is based on the idea that “urban life is as familiar as it is strange and complex” (Magnusson 2011, 7), which implies that it offers a direct empirical entry point that enables us to observe not only the immediate and mundane but also the materialisation of more complex social structures. Through this, it enables the drawing of connections between everyday practices of urban agents and the possible urban futures that are contained in the present. To draw such connections, Lefebvre proposes the method of transduction. For Lefebvre, empirical practices play an important role in constituting virtual objects, such as an urban society characterised by proximity, collectivity and *autogestion*. Such virtual objects can be investigated through the method of transduction, which enables “the exploration of the possible-impossible” (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 166). With this method, democracy and collective self-government are not a certain end state but a horizon – a possibility we may move towards. To understand the possible pathways to foster this potential and to move towards that horizon, Lefebvre proposes engaging with democratic practices that already exist and bringing them into dialogue with theorisations to understand how they can grow (Purcell 2013a). In this study, I

consider the “Doughnut city” or “Doughnut Economy” as a virtual object in a similar way: it is a horizon that we may move towards through existing practices and critical reflection.

Hence, in the iterative process between theoretical and empirical considerations in this project, I seek to understand how certain observed practices might be fostered and promoted further by bringing them into dialogue with theorisations of the urban and urban politics. I observe Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy as a collection of different motivations, visions and practices promoted by a range of actors to understand the kind of social change that they may bring about and the kind of horizon they are moving towards. Given its imperative to build on what is already happening, the Doughnut Economy (both in terms of the strategy document of the Municipality of Amsterdam and the way in which the bottom-up activities are organised) lends itself well to an investigation into the ‘possible-impossible’ of practices in the present. By employing a combined abductive and transductive method that moves back and forth between strong and weak theory and between theory and practice, I *also* oscillate between critique and hope.

4.3 Critique and hope

This project has both critical and generative aims. On the one hand, I engage critically with already-existing practices that potentially produce antagonistic subjectivities and relations. I consider the intentions behind these practices and their (un)intended consequences. On the other hand, I aim to be generative by singling out the desirable characteristics of the already-existing practices that present viable pathways for diverse economic practices to learn from them and further promote them.

This implies that I am not directly engaging in a critique of capitalism. Acknowledging the abundance of capitalism critique hitherto produced, many of which build on the Frankfurter Schule, I do not wish to add to this with further immanent critique. I do not engage normatively with capitalism as such by providing a moral or ethical critique (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018), nor do I provide a social critique through an analysis of the structural mechanisms that hamper the fulfilment of a decent life (Rosa 2015, 71). Instead, I work on the premise that capitalism as a social and economic system has been criticised extensively and that envisioning post-capitalist social and economic systems is desirable. I therefore take a starting point in the empirical observation of the engagement of a variety of social actors in practices that aim to transform or de-centre urbanised capitalism.

I do this with the presupposition, in line with critical urban theory, that “another, more democratic, socially just, and sustainable form of urbanization is possible, even if such possibilities are currently being suppressed through dominant institutional arrangements, practices, and ideologies” (N.

Brenner 2012, 11). This means that I am not placing myself outside of the conditions of society. Yet, I am not merely interpreting a certain form of situated knowledge either. As Young (1990, 5) notes, “social description and explanation must be critical, that is, aim to evaluate the given in normative terms”. This requires not only a consideration of justice in terms of its theoretical and analytical dimensions but also the justice claims that are made from the ground up and which serve as the basis for moral reflection (Brackel et al. 2023). I am interested in excavating possible paths for just futures and transformative social change by looking at the conditions under which antagonistic subjectivities and relations arise and evolve. To do this, I embrace the approach proposed in critical urban theory, which relies on abstract theorisations of urban-capitalist processes while also seeking to discern potential pathways for alternative forms of urbanism that are not based on technocratic market-based forms of governance and instead promote the radical emancipation of urban subjects (N. Brenner 2012).

To shed light on how the pathways to more hopeful futures may be realised, I do not present a programmatic approach for how to get beyond capitalism, as, for instance, Erik Olin Wright (2021) does. Rather than employing such a programmatic or even prescriptive approach, I engage with the plurality of already-existing post- and non-capitalist practices that are built on hope and a drive to promote alternatives. I do this to understand how the potential of these existing practices may be leveraged towards the virtual object of urban society as envisioned by Lefebvre. Yet, I also take a critical approach to these already-existing practices. To learn from existing practices of the evolving Doughnut Economics movement in Amsterdam, I critically interpret the movement’s aims and practices in reference to the contexts and the (un)intended consequences. This is not based on a motivation to be purely critical – on the contrary, I do not wish to foreclose any potential progressive developments – but on the wish to inform a reflexive process of transformative social change.

This implies that I take a normative stance, drawing connections between, on the one hand, empirical observations and descriptions and, on the other hand, normative ideas about unmet social needs and about what ought (not) to be (Sayer 2000b). My normative claims regarding the developments in Amsterdam are based on my definition of capitalism in the urban and my subsequent assessment of how already-existing alternatives may or may not enable a move away from that. By considering how urban actors in Amsterdam engage in processes of change, I aim to shed light on the kind of change they are promoting and the ways in which the urban becomes a site in which to be political. Engaging with this political potential inherent in the here and now, beyond and in spite of neoliberal legacies, requires a different way of seeing. Rather than a clearcut split between two different worlds – one of neoliberal and one of alternative logics – there are multiple logics at play simultaneously in the world. By seeing the world differently, in a way that

still resonates with the logics that prevail but that also emphasises the potential in the alternative logics, we may be able to transform it (Beveridge and Koch 2023).

By specifically zooming in on the interplay between the logics of the state and the logics of urban actors, I move back and forth between “seeing like a state” (Scott [1998] 2020) and “seeing like a city” (Magnusson 2011) to investigate when and how urban actors can work within and outside the state to shape urban politics. Hence, I do not conceive of the proposition that the urban is “a particular way of being political” as an “ontological truth” but as a question (Roy 2016, 819) related to the interplay of state and urban logics – a question which can be answered empirically in the case of Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy.

My dynamic movement between structure and agency, weak and strong theorising, and hope and critique invites a wide range of questions and considerations. This, in turn, calls for a flexible approach to academic disciplines.

5 Interdisciplinarity

This project is an interdisciplinary project in the sense that it takes its cues from, and has sought coherence between, theories and knowledge produced in a variety of disciplines (Ramadier 2004). This is in line with the fragmented and widespread phenomenon of urban studies: almost all social science disciplines have an “urban’ subfield” (Wolman et al. 2022, 1), while urban planning and urban politics are multiple in nature – or “a number of bits” (Ward et al. 2011, 853; also see Pinson 2004 and Ryan 2004) – and critical urban theory rejects strict disciplinary divisions (N. Brenner 2012).

This project draws extensively from urban geography in its theoretical orientations and methods. Geography as a field is characterised by a “disciplinary hybridity” through the multiple, plural ontologies and epistemologies that it embraces (Pierce and Martin 2015, 1289). Yet, urban geography has been influenced largely by political economy (Lees 2002), a tradition interested in questions around the production and distribution of wealth, and whose classical intellectuals have been well-versed in a wide variety of disciplines (Castree 2010; Jessop and Sum 2001). This project also engages with sociological theories, notably within critical and urban sociology. Many of the scholars whose concepts I borrow, however, span multiple disciplines, notably Manuel Castells, Nancy Fraser, David Harvey, Saskia Sassen, Iris Marion Young and, to a lesser extent, Michel Foucault and Karl Polanyi (cf. Jessop and Sum 2001). Lefebvre’s work, another key source of inspiration, has been characterised as “broadly humanistic and trans-disciplinary in scope” (Gardiner 2004, 231; Butler 2012). He calls for an interdisciplinary approach to the urban, and his

critique of everyday life employs “economy and economic analysis, just as it does sociology, psychology, and linguistics” and goes beyond each of them (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 139). This pulls philosophy out of its metaphorical armchair and situates it firmly within everyday life. Thus, in its theoretical orientations as well as the methods and academic (sub)fields it takes inspiration from, this project is inherently interdisciplinary.

In a time when research increasingly aims to go *beyond* disciplinary orientations as a way to deal with complexity (Nicolescu 2014), I want to briefly reflect on the status of this project in relation to transdisciplinarity and post-disciplinarity. Starting with the former, transdisciplinarity as a research approach emerged in response to the question of how academic work could move closer to societal needs, for instance, in relation to climate change and human health. Transdisciplinary research incorporates non-academic stakeholders, such as civil society actors, centrally into the project (Scholz and Steiner 2015). Although I aim to respond to societal needs with this research and have engaged with civil society actors, I would not go as far as to call this research project transdisciplinary. Time constraints, in combination with considerable theoretical interests, have limited my ability to integrate and incorporate civil society actors into the research any more than to the extent I have conversed with and observed them. Yet, I have tried not only to extract knowledge from participants but actively engage with them whenever I was engaging in fieldwork. I did this not only by active listening but also sharing my own experiences and thinking and, to some extent, strategising with them. Here I have been inspired by Gibson-Graham’s call for collective action and research ethics and mentalities that allow for the building of spaces alternative to capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2008; Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016)

Other attempts to go beyond scholarly disciplines are captured by the label post-disciplinarity. As a way to account post-factum for the eclecticism of theories and approaches drawn from in this project, it is tempting to label my approach as a post-disciplinary mixing of political economy and geography in the sense of engaging “in a complex mixing of ideas and approaches – drawn from geography, politics, sociology, philosophy, international relations and anthropology” (Goodwin 2014, 75). Indeed, I have been occupied with learning and with following ideas themselves, rather than with specific disciplines and their boundaries (Sayer 2000a). That is, an interest in direct forms of democracy and political action as a counterforce against neoliberalism brought me to critical studies of the urban rather than the other way around.

However, I hesitate to describe the project as post-disciplinarity since I did not “forget about disciplines” (Sayer 2000a, 89). On the contrary, in order to learn about the differences between the various disciplinary traditions, styles and methods and the ways in which they could inform my project in combined and coherent ways – aims that are broadly interdisciplinary – I have been keen to be explicit about the disciplines that I have had varying degrees of experience with when starting

this project. Therefore, I engaged extensively in multiple forms of the “double hermeneutic” of social science (Sayer 2000b, 17) through which I interpreted the fields of different scientific communities – including critical urban studies, geography, sociology and alternative organising studies – alongside my interpretation of the empirical field of my study. A further synthesis of knowledges across disciplinary boundaries, potentially reaching a post-disciplinary approach, remains for the future. For now, I focus on how my broadly inspired research approach translated into a research design and hands-on research process.

6 Research design

The objective of this study is to understand the interplay between actions of state as well as non-state actors that give shape to urban developments. The design of this study features “a combination of the ‘standard’ urban studies toolbox,” including document analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observations (Van Loon, Oosterlynck and Aalbers 2019, 401), to analyse both the evolution of Amsterdam’s policy landscape and the bottom-up processes around the city’s arising Doughnut Economy. I consider policy developments in relation to their materialisation by examining the related actions, reflections, relations, strategies and intentions of state and non-state actors. Through this, I gain an understanding of the materialisation of policies and of the accomplishments of bottom-up Doughnut Economics projects in the city. This allows me to interrogate the promise of changing state-citizen relations and to shed light on ongoing processes of urban change in Amsterdam. As laid out above, this has discursive and material aspects. There is an aspect of temporal considerations, as the project investigates a constantly changing social object. Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economics movement was articulated as such a year prior to the start of this research project and has been developing and mutating ever since. Moreover, the movement aims to introduce new ways of thinking, relating and working, which poses further challenges. As Lefebvre puts it:

Established and slightly shop-worn concepts are easy to work with. Empirical study of social reality requires more patience. It is not more difficult per se. The real difficulty begins when concepts which are new and as yet not fully clarified come into confrontation with a mass of empirical documentation, and our thinking is prepared neither to give up those concepts in return for innumerable observations, nor give up facts in return for a conceptual abstraction. (Lefebvre [1961] 2014a, 299)

Thus, studying the ever-changing empirical reality in which actors are deliberately working to promote different forms of societal organisation while the body of policy documents grows rapidly, and shedding light on concepts-in-becoming such as urban society and post-capitalism, pose

challenges. To deal with these challenges, I rely on various kinds of empirical data pertaining to Amsterdam's policy landscape on the one hand, and interview and observation data combined with documents related to the citizen-driven diverse economies on the other.

Before discussing the processes of data generation and analysis in relation to the policy landscape in section 6.2 and the bottom-up activities in section 6.3, I first discuss my own positionality in this research project in section 6.1. Despite the realist foundations of this critical-realist research, it cannot be dismissed that I, as a researcher, have been a socially contextualised subject in the research process, which requires reflection of the possible influences of this social context on the research (Sayer 2000b).

6.1 Positionality

Throughout my research process, I have accepted the premise that research cannot escape being part of social action, and that researchers are embedded in social life and need to interact with human beings as human beings (Holliday 2007). This project deliberately focuses on a relatively wealthy, western-European city whose local government considers the city a “pioneer in the transition to a circular economy” (Appendix I-52, 9).¹ I am aware that the selection of this case also brings along a variety of inherited legacies relating to Euro-American-centric research traditions and literatures.

First, various parts of this project engage with western-centric and male-dominated literatures. I acknowledge this, and I do not maintain that I avoid or counter these tendencies in the literature sufficiently. The empirical object of my study, the concept of Doughnut Economics, originated in the UK, and despite the Doughnut Economics movement allegedly being global right now, the majority of the activities are taking place in the West. Adding the case of this movement unfolding in Amsterdam to the generally rather anglophone field of urban studies might not do much to increase the diversity of the field, especially given the relative prominence of Dutch scholarship in urban geography and urban studies (Kong and Qian 2019). At the same time, I think it is necessary to understand the ongoing hegemonic academic debates in order to potentially pinpoint their gaps and biases. I thus consider this project a first step that I have to take almost irrespective of any specific wishes to diversify academic traditions or feminise the economy – regarding the latter of which, Doughnut Economics presents one version.

¹ As mentioned in the Introduction, I refer to the documents I analysed by referring to the appendix and the number of the document in the table. ‘Appendix I-52, 9’ for instance, refers to page 9 of the document on the 52nd row in the table of Appendix I.

Second, my positioning within the empirical field in Amsterdam calls for self-reflexivity in the sense of questioning my assumptions about and my relations with my informants and others (Attia and Edge 2017; Cassell et al. 2009). Amsterdam, despite its social-democratic history and relatively high levels of social equality, is still characterised by certain degrees and dimensions of social segregation (Boterman, Musterd and Manting 2021). I, a White, highly educated Dutch citizen, returned to my former place of residence to engage in research regarding social groups, parts of which I could have been a member of myself. Hence, I conducted a kind of “researching ‘back home,’” which meant that I familiarised myself with the field and context easily and that there were no language barriers (Karra and Phillips 2008). However, it also implied that I had a certain positionality in Amsterdam as a socially stratified urban context. In the project, I engaged with a range of social actors with various social positions. For instance, the project brought me to communities and areas in Amsterdam that I had hardly engaged with while previously living in the city’s more gentrified areas. Therefore, in my contact with informants, I strove to talk *with* people rather than merely *about* them. By talking with people, I developed an understanding of their everyday needs and struggles, as well as their intentions and attempts to change larger societal features and tendencies.

Yet, in my aim to contribute to critical urban theory, I want to go beyond merely interpreting situated knowledge and relate these forms of knowledge to ideas about more desirable forms of societal organisation (see section 4.3 of this chapter). Therefore, I have aimed to use the privileges stemming from my cultural capital and my ethnicity to bring forward the concerns of others while remaining aware that I am not quite the voice that needs promoting when it comes to increasing diversity and including multiple perspectives in urban processes.

6.2 Studying Amsterdam’s policy landscape

To position the efforts around diverse economies in relation to the local state and the wider urban policy landscape, I studied a range of documents in four urban policy areas. The documents I studied are listed in the tables in appendices I and II – the former encompassing all documents produced or commissioned by the Municipality of Amsterdam, the latter those produced by civil society groups and initiatives.

The main purpose of my policy analysis was to trace how today’s policies related to Doughnut Economics as an approach to urban sustainability and economic development could arise and in what wider policy landscape they should be placed. This wider landscape is crucial for understanding current developments around Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy, since, as I discussed in chapter 3, the historical connections between crises and the responses to them both, through policy and contestation from below, are crucial for an understanding of the urban.

Due to time constraints and an abundance of available documents, I studied the documents in a rather strategic way. Hence, I did not engage in open coding but rather skimmed, read and interpreted (Bowen 2009) a range of documents to trace certain discourses and discussions in Amsterdam's policy landscape. I selected which documents were relevant based on my research aims and secondary literature on the (historical evolution) of urban planning and development in Amsterdam. I do not claim that this analysis is all-encompassing or the only one possible. On the contrary, I am convinced several other stories can be told about the evolution of urban policies in Amsterdam. However, the analytical strategy below reflects my interest in the context of Amsterdam's aspirations to be a circular, 'Doughnut' city.

6.2.1 ANALYTICAL STRATEGY: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

From the start of this research process, I considered four policy documents as key given their recent time of publication and topics. These are the "City Doughnut" (Appendix I-3), "Amsterdam Circular Strategy 2020-2025" (Appendix I-31) "Amsterdam Circular Strategy Implementation 2020-2025" (in Dutch: "Amsterdam Circulair 2020-2025 Innovatie- en Uitvoeringsprogramma 2020-2021," Appendix I-32) and "Spatial Strategy 2050" (in Dutch: "Omgevingsvisie 2050," Appendix I-42). These documents provided the initial background for my fieldwork in Amsterdam, and I had familiarised myself with these documents before conducting my first interviews. To get a thorough understanding of these documents, I coded them simultaneously with the first round of inductive coding of my interview data in NVIVO, which I describe in more detail below.

However, the aim of the documentary analysis in this research was not only to understand the strategy documents at the basis of and surrounding Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy but to situate the latter developments in a wider policy landscape and thus go beyond the explicit policies closely related to Doughnut Economics. I did this through an iterative process oscillating between secondary literature and policy documents while balancing empirical curiosity with strategic reading.

Through a literature review of empirical research on (the history of) urban development in Amsterdam, I narrowed down the scope of the documentary analysis in terms of the considered time frame and the policy areas. In line with the theoretical literature on neoliberalisation and the empirical literature on Amsterdam, I was interested mostly in the developments since the 1970s. From 1974, the Municipality of Amsterdam started publishing periodical spatial strategies, which gave me an overall impression of the direction of urban development over time. Most of these documents are available on the Municipality of Amsterdam's rather well-organised and up-to-date

archive.² For the documents not available online, I went to the archive of the Municipality of Amsterdam and the depot of the University of Amsterdam to read the relevant spatial strategies and other documents (Appendix I-4 – 9). For the historical developments prior to 1974, I relied on secondary literature.

This literature also helped me to narrow down my documentary analysis to four policy areas: housing, urban space, city marketing and sustainability. 1) Housing emerged as an important indicator for urban development in theoretical literature (Fainstein 2005; Kadi and Musterd 2015) while empirical studies discussed several shifts in the housing sector in the Netherlands and Amsterdam in relation to demographic change as well as the changing roles of state and market in urban development. 2) Urban space arose as a relevant policy area early on, in line with theory on the role of the (urban) state in restructuring space discussed earlier in this dissertation. I wanted to get a broad understanding of the developments of spatial restructuring in Amsterdam, and the aforementioned periodical spatial strategies since 1974 provided a suitable way to trace this. 3) City-marketing surfaced as a reflection of the increasingly entrepreneurial forms of urban economic growth generation which situate cities in the global competitive arena. The development of Amsterdam's city-marketing bureau and related strategies gave an indication of how this process unfolded in Amsterdam. 4) Sustainability came up as a theme in direct relation to the aims of this research project. Given the municipality's recent, explicit engagement with environmental issues and sustainability, I sought to trace the rise of this discourse through other current sustainability-related policies as well as potential environmental thinking within earlier strategies.

The entire documentary analysis was an iterative process between the secondary literature and the various documents. Through reading and familiarising myself with both forms, I was pointed to other relevant sources. My purpose with the documentary analysis has been to read these documents critically. To avoid "simply 'lift[ing]' words and passages from available documents to be thrown into [my] research report," I engaged with secondary literature to "establish the meaning of the document[s] and [their] contribution to the issues being explored" (Bowen 2009, 33). By situating the documents in the wider evolution of the policy discourse through this engagement with secondary literature, I was able to interpret them within a broader context rather than merely taking the policy texts at face value. Throughout this process, I worked rather deductively, as I relied on secondary literature to interpret the policy prose while simultaneously gaining a better and contextualised understanding of the tendencies and trends described in the literature. I relied on writing as an analytical method, as I made decisions about which parts of the various documents

² <https://openresearch.amsterdam/>

were relevant, how I would present the different elements in relations to one another and the overall narrative about Amsterdam's evolving policy landscape (cf. Timmermans and Tavory 2022).

The policy analysis made me aware of the longer tradition of citizen involvement in urban issues in Amsterdam. Hence, although I was trying to understand the various processes and phases of neoliberalisation in Amsterdam, I was still also trying to remain open to "difference" (Gibson-Graham 2008, 623) and attentive to the possibility of spaces of democratisation and urban alternatives. Especially more recent documents mention the need to engage citizens in urban development quite extensively in relation to having multiple voices heard. This re-emphasised the need for me to employ empirical sources other than policy documents to help me understand the lived experiences behind the written documents.

6.3 Studying Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy

My analysis of the diverse economic practices promoted by the Doughnut Economy projects is based on semi-structured interviews and participant observations at the various project sites and events organised by the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition. Rather than a full-fledged ethnography of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy, my empirical engagement has been more selective and strategic as a kind of "appointment ethnography" that allowed me to engage with participants through specific events and appointments agreed upon beforehand (Verloo 2020). This more selective engagement fits with my interest in connecting the actions 'on the ground' to overarching societal arrangements, which requires me to move back and forth between close-up understanding of ongoing local developments and a broader theoretical understanding of multiscale processes of societal change. Nonetheless, I should also note that, despite my selectivity in when and where I engaged, I always aimed to be as open and curious to difference as possible *while* I was engaging.

6.3.1 SELECTION OF DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS PROJECTS

Given the emerging nature of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy movement when I started the project, I decided to concentrate on the developments of and around the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition as a central point of interest. Through the meetings and events that the coalition organised, I became familiar with the various actors, organisations and projects that were part of the coalition. Through this, I could both follow the developments of the coalition and identify individual Doughnut Economics projects to study in some more detail. Challenged by the changing nature and constellation of the overall Doughnut Economics movement in Amsterdam – as reflected, for instance, by the growing number of persons, projects and organisations that are

featured on the coalition's online platform³ – I decided to guide my initial engagement with the projects in two ways. First, the projects needed to have an explicit engagement with the coalition by being featured on its online platform and actively engaged at (one of the) events organised by the coalition; and second, they needed to have been launched before 2020. The latter implies that although the projects that I consider have been running for different lengths of time, they had all started before the launch of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics strategy in 2020.

With the launch of the Doughnut Economics strategy, the Municipality of Amsterdam emphasises that it depends on “a dynamic network of city changemakers already finding innovative ways to put Doughnut thinking into practice” (Appendix I-2, 15). This is what is understood as the “Amsterdam Approach” (Appendix I-2, 15), and which in practice means that the implementation of the strategy hinges on the actions taken by citizens. With the strategy's emphasis on the actions of citizens, ongoing local projects were incentivised to make themselves relevant for the municipality's strategies by drawing on the language of Doughnut Economics to promote their projects vis-à-vis the local state. This gave rise to a plural network of ‘existing changemakers,’ which provided me with a relevant entry point into studying the current urban developments in Amsterdam.

As my research developed, I closed in on the spatial and material aspects of the Doughnut Economics movement. The most obvious in this regard are the projects which directly restructure urban space through their physical and place-making activities. Through being grounded in urban place, these projects enable citizens to participate in a local community that is directly situated in their everyday lives. Two such projects that I studied also have an explicit networked aspect through which they aim to strengthen their place-based activities. Besides this direct engagement in spatial restructuring, I also selected projects based on their promotion of diverse economic relations and practices through which they potentially alter economic materiality. The Doughnut Economics projects at the core of my analysis are listed in Table 2 (which is presented on the next page). My spatial and material lens led me to focus less on the Doughnut Economics projects that engage with educational and research institutions or (larger) businesses to promote ‘Doughnut’ education programmes and ‘Doughnut’ business models.

Besides the projects in Table 2, which I studied more closely through interviews and participant observations (methods I describe below), I also engaged with people involved with the *Doughnut Bakery* (“Donutbakkerij”), which drives different Doughnut Economics-related projects in Amsterdam's New-West district and collaborates with *Sierpleinbuurt* and *Kaskantine*, among others. I got to know several other Doughnut Economics projects more implicitly through the events organised by the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, which associated a variety of other projects to

³ The platform features 664 persons, 90 projects and 41 organisations as of December 2023.

the emergence of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy. My analysis is indirectly inspired by those projects but does not close in on them.

Table 2: Overview of local Doughnut Economics projects

Name	Since	Purpose	District
De Groene Hub (<i>The Green Hub</i>) ⁴	2019	Community centre	Southeast
CLT H-Buurt	2005	Community Land Trust	Southeast
Sierpleinbuurt	2021	Neighbourhood platform	New-West
Kaskantine	2013	Urban farm	New-West
Voedselpark Amsterdam (<i>Food Park Amsterdam</i>)	2018	Urban garden and food park	New-West
WomenMakeTheCity	2019	Women's councils on urban development	City-wide, North, Southeast, New-West
02025	2004	Renewable energy network across	City-wide

6.3.2 INTERVIEWS

To select my respondents, I initially used the online platform of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition as well as communication on LinkedIn within a specific group about Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam to get an overview of the coalition and key actors. I sent a public message to that same LinkedIn group prior to my first field visit to Amsterdam, through which I identified my first interview respondents. For further interviews, I continued to rely on the public communications on the coalition's platform, as well as on snowball sampling (Parker, Scott and Geddes 2019). During the course of my research, the field kept developing and evolving in terms of actors moving in and out and new forms of collaborations between them arising. Therefore, I did not strive for saturation in the sense that I could "pretty much predict what the next respondent [would] tell me" (Timmermans and Tavory 2022, 133) but instead acknowledged that the rapid developments made saturation unfeasible. Instead, with the empirical observations I have, I aim to reconstruct a picture

⁴ In the cases of *De Groene Hub* and *Voedselpark Amsterdam*, I could find a suitable Dutch translation. In the cases of the *CLT H-Buurt*, *Sierpleinbuurt* and *Kaskantine*, this is not as straightforward, and I will leave them untranslated, just like *WomenMakeTheCity* and *02025*.

of the movement from its inauguration in 2019 until November 2023, when I did my last participant observations. Thus, I do not reject the possibility that I would construct a (somewhat) different picture if I now returned to Amsterdam to interview the same people.

Between September 2021 and November 2022, I conducted 14 open, semi-structured interviews with 15 core actors in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy. Of these interviews, 7 were conducted online through Zoom or Microsoft Teams and 7 in-person in and around Amsterdam. All interviews were conducted in Dutch, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and were recorded. One of the in-person interviews was, unexpectedly, with two rather than one informant. Understanding that generating qualitative data calls for a certain flexibility in responding to unpredictable and contingent factors (Cassell et al. 2009), and interpreting the respondents' interest in participating as a positive sign, I accommodated these changes with a flexible approach. And indeed, this yielded a rich interview in which multiple perspectives were brought forward simultaneously.

I approached each interview "as an interaction between two individuals" and as a process of meaning-making by focussing on "the participants narrative *as it is unfolding*" (Galletta 2013, 76 [emphasis in original]). The main objective of the interviews was to understand the bottom-up movement, the participants' working methods, their mutual relations, their intentions and their considerations of challenges and successes. Given the importance of the collective and social aspect of the movement, I put emphasis on the social context of the respondents. Hence, I did not only consider the meaning-making processes that arose in the interviews; it was also important for me to understand "the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that [were] provided" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 85).

In accordance with my intention to be reflexive, which requires researchers to share things about themselves and their research process and intentions (Cassell et al. 2009), I started each interview with outlining my overall research interest, my reasoning for inviting the respective participant for an interview and the general aims of the interview. Although being aware that, hereby, I "interfered" with the research process (Galletta 2013, 104), I considered this an important element of being sincere and transparent as a researcher (Tracy 2010). My aim with the interviews was, in line with my critical-realist point of departure, to construct a picture, based on discursive and symbolic interactions against a background of the material conditions shaped by capitalism in the urban. To improve reflexivity, and to ensure that the constructed picture resonates with informants' experiences and interpretations, I shared chapter 7 – with the thick descriptions of the bottom-up Doughnut Economy development in Amsterdam – with my informants to check that they feel represented correctly.

Before the interviews took place, the interviewees signed a consent form (see appendix V). A loosely formulated interview guide (see appendix IV) guided the interviews. These guides were tailored to the respondent in question, featuring some general questions that were shared across the interviews but also including questions specifically related to the respondent's role or project in the Doughnut Economics movement. All interviews started with exploratory and general questions, staying close to participants' experiences and their descriptions thereof. As interviews progressed, it was, in most cases, suitable to reflect on the relation of the participants' experiences with overarching societal tendencies. When participants explicitly invoked terms such as "capitalism" and "neoliberalism," or when they voiced a broader society critique, I took this opportunity to bring the interview slightly closer to my analytical interest by reflecting collectively on the relations between the movement they are part of and wider societal developments and change. These were instances in which I deliberately and explicitly embraced the aforementioned collective character of interviews or the contention that interviews are "unavoidably collaborative" interactions where interviewer and respondent(s) both contribute to the process of meaning-making (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, 3). During each interview, I took notes by hand, capturing the most striking or important themes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed manually (which I describe in some more detail below). All data were stored in line with the Research Data Management guidelines of Copenhagen Business School.

6.3.3 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

Through participant observations, I gained access to the practices of and interactions between citizens, civil servants and other stakeholders involved with or implicated in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics strategy and the implementation thereof. Before conducting these field trips, I designed a rough field work plan (Verloo 2020). In this fieldwork plan, I detailed my intentions regarding the sites of my observations, the actors I wanted to observe and my rationale for why, the aspects that I expected to focus on during the observations and the way in which I would introduce myself to the participants.

My observations were conducted on sites that fall into one of two categories: neighbourhood-based Doughnut Economics projects or meet-ups and events organised by the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition. In Appendix VI, I present an overview of the different occasions of participant observations. My main interests regarding the neighbourhood-based projects were the ways in which citizens drive the Doughnut Economics movement within their neighbourhoods, what kinds of projects the city's circular and Doughnut Economics strategies refer to. With respect to these projects, I was interested in how they promoted different kinds of socio-spatial practices, and what the imagined relations between citizens and with the local state were. Regarding the Amsterdam

Doughnut Coalition, I attended various events organised by the coalition, some of which were public and others only with limited access. My aim here was to understand the role of the coalition in organising the movement, as well as how different actors within the network relate to one another, (dis)agree with one another and collaborate.

At most of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition events I attended, I was an ordinary participant. For instance, during online community meetups, I was a participant along with other activists, coalition members and researchers, while at larger public events, I was an ordinary member of the audience. On the other hand, gaining access to events where participants were selected was more difficult. In September 2021, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition organised a full-day co-creation workshop with around 40 selected participants. Eventually, after three months of seeking contact through multiple channels and eventually also through the organisation of Kate Raworth, who was going to be present at the workshop as well, I was allowed to participate by assisting the workshop conveners with making a report of the day. The difficulty gaining access to this event surprised me, as I had expected the coalition to be more of a popular movement that was widely accessible and inviting. Through this, I was prompted to think about mechanisms of in- and exclusion early-on, which I reflect upon in chapter 7.

During the roughly 52 hours of participant observations I did, I took notes, mostly hand-written – but typed in the case of online events as well as some in-person events, such as the workshop in September 2021 – as part of my fieldnotes journal. In total, I gathered a total of around 15 pages of hand-written and around 50 pages of typed notes. The in-situ, go along interviews that I conducted during the participant observations were neither recorded nor transcribed but captured in the fieldnotes as best I could. Most of the fieldnotes were written in Dutch, which means that all quotes in this dissertation pertaining to field work, interviews, or (most of the) policy documents are my own translations.

6.3.4 ANALYTICAL STRATEGY: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In my analysis of the bottom-up movement in Amsterdam, I aimed to “read for difference” (Gibson-Graham 2008) by working as inductively as possible for as long as possible. However, I was aware of the theoretical interest underlying this project, which prompted me to strive for “flexibility in the connections within and between the conceptual (ideas) and empirical (data) planes” while “allowing for a logic of discovery rather than only a logic of validation” (Van Maanen et al., cited in Kreiner 2016, 351). I conducted a thematic analysis with the purpose of “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79). This thematic analysis largely followed the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 87).

In a first step, I familiarised myself with the data by reviewing my hand-written notes of each interview and by listening to the recordings, which I transcribed manually. Given my interest in the participants' ideas and understandings, I conducted minor editing of pauses and hesitations rather than transcribing straight prose. To indicate emotional traits such as laughter or interruptions of the interview, I added a brief description (Arksey and Knight 2011). This yielded 234 pages of transcribed interview data. Then, in a second step, I conducted a round of initial, inductive coding with the help of analysis software NVIVO, which also served to organise my data. In this first-order coding process, I sought to "adhere faithfully to informant terms" (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013, 20). In this "bottom-up" coding process (Braun and Clarke 2006, 83), my aim was to read for difference by being open to learning about what Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement is and does, and what the main aims of its actors are.

Thirdly, from NVIVO I extracted a document with all coded extracts, which I used for another, manual round of coding, grouping first-order codes into themes. In this round of coding, I employed a "both/and approach" (Kreiner 2016), identifying codes stemming from theory (such as "system critique") as well as codes directly coming from the data (such as "a larger we," "community" or "empowerment," as well as codes relating to the scale on which activities took place, ranging from "personal" and "neighbourhood" to "international" and "global"). The themes that I eventually generated during this round were grouped in the categories "actor," "crisis or critique" (referring to the motivation behind strategies or actions), "doughnut," "transformation" and "ends" (the latter two referring respectively to the objects of transformation and the objectives of strategies or actions), "process" (relating to the organising processes), "relations" (between various scales, levels, actors) and "scale". These themes, though they emerged from the empirical data, are closer to theory, as I was looking for concepts to help explain my observations. I was especially on the lookout for concepts arising in my data that were not yet reflected by existing theories, thereby indicating a potential novelty (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013).

In a fourth step, I reviewed the generated themes in relation to my overall research questions and interests, and I went back to my fieldnotes various times. Even though I had not coded my fieldnotes, I read through them repeatedly to familiarise myself with them in relation to my evolving analytical framework. Then, in a fifth step, I deepened my understanding of the themes and their relation to the overall narrative of the analysis. I was looking for the "overall story the analysis tells" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87), which prompted me to become more theoretically informed. In this round, my interpretation of the data became narrower, as I considered more directly how various parts of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement interact with capitalism and neoliberalisation in the city differently.

In a final and sixth step, which I repeated several times, I strengthened the analysis through the processes of writing. I ascribe to the idea that in qualitative research, writing is an important part of the analysis (Holliday 2007; Timmermans and Tavory 2022). To further interpret the interview data, I brought the variety of documents produced by the Doughnut Economics projects and the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition into play. Rather than coding each of these, I read through them alongside the writing process to compare my findings with the projects' self-representation in these documents and to incorporate more details wherever suitable.

Through writing multiple versions of my analysis, which varied in structure, length, focus and theoretical emphasis, my analysis became more rigorous and more closely aligned with the aim of the research project. For instance, in one version of the analysis, I wrote descriptive accounts of each of the individual Doughnut Economics projects I had studied. This allowed me to consider each individual project in its own right before looking for similarities and differences between them. Similarly, I wrote various versions of my analysis divided by the scale of analysis – the city versus the neighbourhood and in relation to the local state. By probing the analysis on different scales, and by selecting and emphasising core themes and quotes in different ways, I carved out the story of my analysis, doing justice to the bottom-up developments through a reading-for-difference approach, before connecting it to my understanding of dominant societal structures.

Given that the interviews took place in four different periods – autumn 2021, spring 2022, summer 2022 and autumn 2022 – I repeated several of these analytical steps multiple times as my dataset grew along with my familiarity with the policy landscape and theoretical understandings. This means that some of the themes that I had identified in earlier stages of the research were reflected more explicitly in my interview guides in later stages. Yet, to remain open to newly arising themes or deviations from earlier interviews during the later stages, I strove to keep this strategy of bringing established themes into interviews “in check” and gave precedence to the conversation at hand as it evolved (Galletta 2013, 77). At the same time, feeding back certain observations from prior interviews at subsequent interviews allowed me to test how understandings and interpretations were shared more widely among the dispersed Doughnut Economics network in Amsterdam, contributing significantly to my understanding of the patterns of (dis)agreements within the network. Given that my interview informants all have different positions and roles within the wider movement, I did not strive for perfect replicability of interviews but focused rather on gaining an understanding of the relations between different interviewees and their relations to the wider movement.

A final round of coding and analysing took place in autumn 2023, in the writing of the final version of the analytical chapters of this dissertation. Having realised that the material aspect of transformative social change plays a key role in my project, I went back to the data corpus and

identified a data set (Braun and Clarke 2006) strictly in relation to Doughnut Economics projects with a material, spatial aspect. For these data points, I went back to the codes generated in step 2 and repeated all subsequent steps with a specific interest in the projects' material and spatial changes in relation to capitalism in the city.

Throughout my research process, I iterated between documents, interviews and participant observations; each of these data sources continually informing my consideration of the other two. As I mentioned above, I had familiarised myself with the four strategy documents I deemed most central to transformations I was interested in. The knowledge I gained from initially analysing these informed my interviews, which in turn pointed me to other relevant tendencies in the municipality's planning and urban development strategies.

7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out my methodology for studying the developments in and around Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy. I do this through a critical-realist approach, which allows me to critically evaluate the discursive aspects of social change, which are created intersubjectively and require interpretive methods, as well as its material aspects, which draw attention to the ways in which the Doughnut Economy projects invoke socio-spatial change in the urban fabric of several of Amsterdam's districts. In this project, I engage the analytical categories of space, place, network and – to a lesser extent – scale and territory to analyse the multiple, simultaneous developments promoted by actors within Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy, which serves as an extreme and critical case of the increased attention for – especially certain – cities as potential places for progressive change and sustainable living.

For my interdisciplinary study of this case, I developed a dynamic research approach through which I uncover the political-economic conditions that shape the potential for social transformation in Amsterdam *and* analyse how urban actors respond to and deal with these. I bring together considerations of, on the one hand, processes of neoliberalisation and, on the other, diverse economies. This, in turn, is related to an oscillation between various opposing poles: structural conditions and discursive and material actions; theory and empirics; system and agency; strong and weak theory; and reading for dominance and difference respectively. This way, I employ a research approach that is generative and critical, as it moves back and forth between critique and hope. This multifaceted approach is also reflected in my research design, which involves an iterative process between strategy documents, interviews and participant observations. This has generated the analysis of the policy context of Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy and the bottom-up

movement, which I present in chapters 6 and 7, respectively, after introducing the case of Amsterdam in more detail in the following chapter.

5 The case of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy

This project investigates the emergence of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy as an in-depth, single case study. Amsterdam serves simultaneously as an “extreme” and a “critical” case (Flyvbjerg 2006, 229) of the increased attention for – especially certain – cities as potential places for progressive change and sustainable living. Amsterdam as a case is salient given its key position in the history of capitalism and its recent strategies for carbon neutrality and a fully circular urban economy, the latter of which is informed by the idea of “Doughnut Economics” (Raworth 2017). In this chapter, I present the background of Amsterdam as a case. In section 1, I introduce some of the city's general characteristics, its historically salient role in the development of global capitalism and its governing tradition. Subsequently in section 2, discuss “The Amsterdam City Doughnut,” that is, the strategy with which Amsterdam committed itself to becoming the world's first “Doughnut city” in 2020.

1 Amsterdam at a glance

Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands and, with slightly more than 900,000 inhabitants, also the largest Dutch municipality. It was established with the damming of the river Amstel around 1250, and since then its development has been characterised by engagement with water, which is not uncharacteristic for a Dutch city. Amsterdam is located on the western seabed of the Netherlands, of which large parts are located below sea-level (Kahn and Van der Plas 1999). The city forms a core node in the Randstad, one of the largest multi-nucleated urban systems in Europe (Dieleman and Musterd 1992). The economic activities in Amsterdam's urban region make up a considerable part of the Dutch economy – with 10.3 percentage points of economic growth in the Netherlands between 1995-2019 generated in the Amsterdam region (Statistics Netherlands 2022). Amsterdam's urban economy has historically been key in generating wealth in the Netherlands through its role in the historical development of capitalism. I introduce this role in the following section, before turning to its planning and political traditions in section 1.2.

1.1 Amsterdam's economy in the historical development of capitalism

In the early phases of capitalism, Amsterdam rose to prominence as “the central entrepot of world commerce and finance” (Arrighi 1994, 139). Whereas Amsterdam's international trade was initially centred on the Baltic Sea area and Antwerp, its scope and scale started to increase significantly in the late sixteenth century, attracting merchants from across Europe (Prak 1999). The Dutch increasingly took on the role of brokers or middle persons for global trade. Most economic activity took place in the province of Holland, the world's most urbanised area at the time (Kahn and van der Plas 1999) and the commercial centre of the Dutch Republic – “the head capitalist nation of the 17th century” (Marx [1867] 2013, 526). The seventeenth century, which came to be known as the “Golden Age” in the Netherlands, was the city's earliest growth period. During this period, Amsterdam's famous canal belt became the central location for the stocking of some of the most strategic commodities. This led to the arrival of a high number of immigrants, mostly from rural areas, making Amsterdam “a giant proletarianisation machine” (Prak 1999, 44 [my translation]). This proletarianisation went hand in hand with the rise of a capitalist class who invested their capital gains in land and agricultural development, giving rise to a regent class in Amsterdam who drew income from land and financial investments rather than trade (Arrighi 1994).

This hints at the decidedly financial character of the Dutch hegemony in that period: Amsterdam was not only “the central warehouse of world commerce” but also “the central money and capital market of the European world-economy” (Arrighi 1994, 138). This was due in part to the establishment of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange as the financial centre of the world, which transformed credit practices on a global scale (Moore 2015). Through a vibrant milieu of commodity transactions and speculations, the demand for money increased and the Amsterdam Stock Exchange was able to attract financial capital from all over Europe. This, in turn, increased the indispensability of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange for businesses and governments all over Europe (Arrighi 1994, 138). Another factor that contributed to Amsterdam's financial hegemony was the launch of the world's first joint-stock companies by the Dutch government in 1602. These chartered companies benefitted from the centralisation of commercial and financial power in Amsterdam because of advantageous outlets for their commodities and access to capital. At the same time, these companies contributed to the increase of Amsterdam's global power, as they connected the capitalist class in the city to producers world-wide (Arrighi 1994).

Amsterdam grew to become the fifth-largest city in Europe by 1800 after London, Paris, Naples and Vienna. Thanks to factors such as improved public health and the high number of labour-intensive production sites that the city housed, the city kept experiencing growth through the nineteenth century (Dieleman and Musterd 1992). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a variety

of road, rail and harbour infrastructures were constructed to connect Amsterdam to the rest of the Netherlands (Janssen-Jansen 2011).

In the post-war era, Amsterdam developed into the largest industrial centre in the Netherlands, even though the city's industrial profile quickly disintegrated again during the 1970s, when the decline and relocation of manufacturing led to the merger and then closure of the city's two major shipyards (Boterman and Van Gent 2023). Because of the historical prominence of financialised services and trade, Amsterdam never developed a clearly industrial profile as, for example, Rotterdam did. This put the city at an advantage in processes of post-industrialisation (Musterd and Deurloo 2005).

The development of the Netherlands' social structure has been characterised by the country's early trade and comparably rapid rates of urbanisation, of which Amsterdam was an inherent part. In combination with the Dutch role in global capitalism and religious sectarianism, processes of urbanisation gave rise to a social structure with a "broad middle" and a large middle-income group (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 21). This made the Netherlands a *Bhurger* society ("*burgerlijke samenleving*") in which the professional class of merchants, bankers and other tradespeople was influential, while the nobility was less powerful economically and politically compared to other European contexts.

1.2 Urban planning and politics in Amsterdam

Given the country's long history of battling against the water, the Netherlands has a strong spatial and urban planning tradition. This tradition is based on principles of cooperation and consensus, captured by the term *polderen* (Christof and Majoor 2021). This is in line with the Dutch political tradition on a whole, which has historically been characterised by corporatism. Arising in the interwar period, this form of governing enabled discussions between the state and social partners, including employers and worker organisations (Mellink and Oudenampsen 2022). Most of the twentieth century was characterised by the consensual governance structure and strong tradition of top-down government planning that had their roots in the post-war era (Kickert 2003).

Government in the Netherlands consists of three layers: central, provincial and local (or municipal). Several Dutch municipalities, including Amsterdam, are governed on an additional fourth level under the local – that of the district. The Dutch constitution dating from 1848 gives considerable independence to municipalities. It emphasises the connection between unity and plurality, as unity cannot be imposed top-down but should result from consensus-seeking processes. In other words, municipalities are independent in regulating and governing internal affairs, with provincial or central statutory rules being the only limits (Korthals Altes 2002).

On the local level, there is a municipal council, which is elected every four years; and an executive board of mayor and alderpersons, which prepares and executes policy. Mayors are not elected democratically but appointed by the central government for a term of six years. Therefore, mayors, whose main task is the implementation of national security policies and the administration of the fire departments, have a rather technocratic character. The alderpersons, on the other hand, are appointed by the council. Following every election, the council negotiates the total number of alderpersons as well as which political party delivers which alderperson(s). The alderpersons themselves are not members of the council and may come from outside, i.e., without having been on the ballot (Devroe 2013; Gradus, Dijkgraaf and Budding 2023).

With respect to the district level, municipal governments appoint district administrators, who liaise between local administrators and residents, execute policy in the neighbourhoods, provide social services and welfare as well as manage financial budgets. District administrators, in turn, play an important role in the implementation by the local government of national policies on the ground (De Wilde, Hurenkamp and Tonkens 2014). In Amsterdam, there are seven district administrations (Centre, New-West, North, East, West, South and Southeast), all governed by a district committee, as well as the administrative committee for Weesp, the municipality that was merged with Amsterdam in 2022. For each district, the executive board of mayor and alderpersons assigns three managing directors, who are backed by an advisory committee consisting of residents of the district (Municipality of Amsterdam, n.d.-b).

Local and urban governments came to play a more important role due to the decentralisation of the Dutch government. Between the 1980s and early 2000s, authority was transferred from central to provincial and local levels, especially with regards to the local supply-side conditions and regional competitiveness (Korthals Altes 2002). This process was heralded with the overhaul of the corporatist framework in the 1980s. In appropriately corporatist fashion, the government made an agreement with employers, and labour unions agreed on labour flexibilisation policies, which weakened the position of workers and aimed at attracting new workers to the labour market (Kloosterman 2014). This gave rise to market-based labour policies aimed at increasing labour participation, a policy orientation which intensified when it became combined with neoliberal governance principles of flexibility, privatisation and welfare-state reforms (Peck 2012). Following this, the central government started to transfer responsibilities to semi-public institutions and local governments and provinces as competition came to dominate urban planning objectives (Molenaar and Floor 1992; Van Loon, Oosterlynck and Aalbers 2019).

This was in line with developments in the Dutch planning tradition. During the post-war decades, characterised by suburbanisation and a housing shortage, the national government played an important role in urban renewal and the construction of housing (Uitermark 2005). The planning

tradition remained highly centralised and comprehensive until the 1990s when the national government formulated new guidelines, which provinces translated into regional plans, while municipalities developed structure plans spelling out their spatial strategies as well as legally binding local land use plans (Van der Veen and Duyvendak 2021). However, the planning tradition started to become more decentralised during the 1990s following the flexibilisation of the labour market and responsabilisation of local governments, with which municipalities came to play a key role in Dutch spatial planning.

Amsterdam's local government is a prime example of the independence of lower levels of government. As "a city sometimes called 'the state of Amsterdam' due to its autonomous behaviour and local focus in the national as well as regional areas" (Janssen-Jansen 2011, 258), it has strong political engagement in the areas of social, economic and spatial planning. Its main instrument for urban development strategies is the development of Structure Plans, of which the first was formulated in 1974, and the rest have been published roughly every decade since (Kahn and Van der Plas 1999).

Over the past two decades, Dutch municipalities have become less well-funded by the national government and more dependent on collaborations with private parties (Van der Veen and Duyvendak 2021). This has led to urban planning in Amsterdam becoming characterised by a "state-led (yet private-oriented) development model" (Savini et al. 2016, 110). This model relies largely on project-based working methods with project offices working across municipal departments, increasingly also on closely managed processes with creative communities. At the same time, the orientation towards civil society and citizen participation has grown (Christof and Majoor 2021).

One key condition of Amsterdam's urban development is the city's ground lease system. Through the system, the municipality leases out land either on a continuous basis, with periodical re-evaluation of the value of the land according to market prices, or on a perpetual basis (Appendix I-30). The ground lease system was introduced by the council in 1896 to curtail speculation, increase the municipality's influence on land use and housing quality, and ensure that increases in land value would benefit the community as a whole (Kahn and Van der Plas 1999). Until today, the municipality owns and leases out a large share of the land in the city: around 80% in 2020 (Appendix I-30). This enables the municipality to govern strongly and reap the benefits of profitable land conversion in times of demographic growth and economic boom.

However, it also makes the city prone to fluctuations in construction costs, land values and interest rates. The proceeds from land use conversion accrue to the city's budget. For 2023, the budgeted income from the ground lease system was about 11.21% of the income that was not coming from taxes or national subsidies (Appendix I-51). The city redistributes its losses and profits from all land-

related transactions in the city in a so-called “off-setting fund” (“Vereveningsfonds”), which affects the city’s general budget (Appendix I-44). The fund covers all revenues and expenses related to projects of urban developments. Historically, housing projects involving social housing and area development operated at a loss for the city. These losses would be counterbalanced by profitable office space developments. The city’s dependency on net profits in this fund have led to the development of extensive risk calculations and close alliances between the financial and the planning departments (Savini 2017, 865). In 2022, the municipality reported that due to rising costs, the size of unprofitable projects and plans had increased, thereby shrinking the financial space for more of these unprofitable projects (Appendix I-44, 39). At the same time, decades of densification policies have led to available urban space in Amsterdam being scarce, while the capacities of the urban region to accommodate further growth are also diminishing.

In recent years, the municipality’s ground lease system has come under public scrutiny, with the debate flaring up from time to time. Amsterdam is increasingly becoming a city of homeowners (Boterman and Van Gent 2023), who are critical of the inequalities created by the system’s leverage effect, through which land value changes are weighted more heavily than the value of the building or macro-economic development (Berenschot 2021).

What arises here is a picture of a city with a rich history (both in a figurative as well as quite literal sense) which rose to prominence in Europe early on and developed a strong urban planning tradition. In the city’s more recent planning considerations, sustainability started to play a considerable role, notably with its plans for a fully circular urban economy based on the principles of Doughnut Economics.

2 Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy

In April 2020, Amsterdam City Council launched a strategy to become the world’s first “Doughnut city” as part of its strategy towards a fully circular urban economy by 2050. The strategy, called “The Amsterdam City Doughnut” (Appendix I-2), draws from “Doughnut Economics,” introduced by Kate Raworth in 2017. It offers an economic narrative that situates the economy as the doughnut-shaped space between a social foundation to ensure human well-being – the inner ring – and an ecological ceiling depicting the boundaries that should not be crossed to avoid irreversible environmental damage – the outer ring (Raworth 2017). After the publication of Raworth’s book, officials in the Municipality of Amsterdam started to work on ways to apply it to the scale of the city. This resulted in the “City Doughnut,” which promises a compass for the “systemic transformation” needed to make Amsterdam “a thriving, regenerative and inclusive city for all

citizens, while respecting the planetary boundaries" (Appendix I-2, 3). Figure 1 depicts the city's reworking of Raworth's Doughnut Economy. With this, the Municipality of Amsterdam posits the city as a pioneer in addressing "climate breakdown and ecological collapse, and [doing] so in ways that are socially just" (Appendix I-2, 3).



Figure 1: Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy model
(Appendix I-31, 14)

"Doughnut Economics" serves as a "tool for transformative action" in Amsterdam and as a "compass" that can guide actions at various stages (Appendix I-2, 3-4). To evaluate this transformative action, the "City Doughnut" proposes four "lenses" that all concern "a different aspect of what it means to be a thriving city" (Appendix I-2, 5). The four lenses are social-local, social-global, ecological-local and ecological-global. Observing the city through these lenses provides "a holistic snapshot of the city, not a comprehensive assessment, and is intended for use in big-picture thinking, co-creative innovation, and systemic transformation, rather than simply as a report" (Appendix I-2, 5).

The strategy was issued by Alderperson Van Doorninck for Spatial Development and Sustainability and developed by the Sustainability Division of the Department for Planning and Sustainability in collaboration with Raworth's Doughnut Economics Action Lab, the consultancy firms Biomimicry 3.8 and Circle Economy as well as C40, the international city network. The strategy posits that its transformative potential will be realised through a translation into action by a wide range of actors with interplays between the local and the global level. Through the so-called "Amsterdam Approach," it promotes "an iterative cycle of co-creation, instigating new action, and amplifying what's already working" and draws on "a network of changemakers" which brings "government, business and academia together with innovators from SMEs, start-ups, the commons and community networks" (Appendix I-2, 14-15).

The "City Doughnut" feeds into the larger Amsterdam Circular Strategy 2020-2025 "as a basis to have economic and social developments take place within socially equitable boundaries (the inner boundary of the doughnut) and planetary boundaries (the outer boundary of the doughnut)" (Appendix I-31, 17). The city's main aims are to reduce raw material use by 50% by 2030 and to be a fully circular city by 2050. In this transition, the municipality embraces an approach of "learning by doing" and acknowledges "that much is still unknown about how the transition will proceed" (Appendix I-31, 18). A combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches is to enable

adjustments when new developments arise. Related to the “Amsterdam Approach” to implementing its Doughnut Economy plans, the municipality acknowledges that, for innovation, it is dependent on “a variety of creative pioneers who, within businesses and knowledge institutions, charter new territory every day,” and it commits “to letting this movement of front runners grow and invite everyone to participate” (Appendix I-32, 11 [my translation]).

In the strategy document outlining its “Doughnut Economy” strategy, the Municipality of Amsterdam refers to “a dynamic network of changemakers who are already using Doughnut-inspired thinking to drive systemic change” (Appendix I-2, 3). This network is a wide range of loosely organised citizens – “pioneers” (Appendix I-2, 16) – who are engaged in projects that largely aim to create space for citizen empowerment and civic engagement. In different ways, the projects aim to establish new kinds of relationships in their respective neighbourhoods which strengthen cohesion, empower citizens and include them in the development of their surroundings. There is a focus on local embeddedness and engagement with citizens who live in the direct vicinity of the projects. The projects, of which a large share is located in the less affluent fringes of the city, thus actively aim to promote the inclusion of less-privileged citizens in considerations of urban development. To establish these relations, the projects concern the freeing up of urban space for citizens to drive projects.

One of the organisations through which these pioneers meet is the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, the first group of “city changemakers already finding innovative ways to put Doughnut thinking into practice” (Appendix I-2, 15). The Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition was formed at the end of 2019 to connect “local change agents and networks” through the abovementioned “Amsterdam Approach” (Appendix II-1, 8). The goal is “to provide one entrance, one space where all doughnut-creators can meet, collaborate and help turn the region of Amsterdam into a doughnut-proof one” (Appendix II-1, 8). They do this through a range of events (mostly in-person but at times online) and an online platform to share and connect initiatives within the city and exchange learnings and inspiration with other movements inspired by Doughnut Economics worldwide.

The way in which the Municipality of Amsterdam conceptualises the role of citizens in processes of social change in the “Doughnut Economics” strategy is in line with developments in other strategies and parts of the local state. For the Municipality of Amsterdam, “Doughnut Economics” serves as a way to conceptualise the circular economy that considers “healthy dynamics between social and ecological issues,” connecting aspects of economy, ecology and society (Appendix I-32, 13 [my translation]). The goal was to “build a sustainable, future-proof city, together with all *Amsterdammers*” (Appendix I-32, 6 [my translation]). In this trajectory, the city envisions around 200 different projects that contribute to change through implementation of top-down policies and

facilitation of bottom-up action. The city acknowledges its “municipal authority” and wants to “set a good example for Amsterdam’s residents as well as [its] businesses” (Appendix I-31, 5). This translates into top-down policies regarding modifications and maintenance of infrastructure and public space, as well as public procurement and waste management. Alongside this, the city strives to influence individual behaviour through working with their partnering societal institutions and associations, as well as national and European policy agendas, developing a lobbying agenda regarding taxation of raw materials and energy, legislating regarding reuse in area development and producer responsibility, and introducing national legislation that allows municipalities to experiment with new circular policies.

At the same time, the city acknowledges the value of bottom-up approaches, which it aims to appreciate, facilitate and inspire. In its circular strategy, it acknowledges initiatives such as Ma.ak020, “Doughnut Deals” and the “Repair Café” that promote Amsterdammers’ engagement in circular activities (Appendix I-32, 22 [my translation]). The Municipality of Amsterdam also strives to connect the “food and organic waste streams” to the democratisation programme, and the Commons Agenda more specifically. In the Southeast district, the government works together with citizens to combine insights from the circular economy and commons to strengthen citizen engagement (Appendix I-32, 104).

The principles of “Doughnut Economics” thus provide a kind of foundation for the circular economy strategy and execution agenda. This execution is envisioned through constant “learning by doing” and improved monitoring. In this monitoring, the “City Doughnut” is to serve as a compass to guide the process and to enable testing policies and policy objectives from an integral perspective, combining ecological, economic and social aspects. Regarding the function of the “City Doughnut,” the Amsterdam’s municipality emphasises that it:

does not comprise a comprehensive study, but rather a holistic snapshot of the city. Nor should it be read as a report, but instead it can be used to define the contours of the transition and encourage co-creative innovation and systematic transformation. In the years to come, this City Doughnut model will be used as a compass for the development of the monitor. (Appendix I-31, 84)

The promises the city makes can thus be understood as humble – or vague, in a less generous reading – as it does not claim to provide answers to questions that no one has hitherto found the answer to and makes space for others to come with suggested answers. It thereby refers to the role of citizens at numerous occasions. The strategy mentions those citizens who are already involved in projects that implement Doughnut-inspired thinking in their projects.

What binds this wide array of projects and people together is a drive to change ‘the system’ by means of ‘Doughnut-inspired thinking’. Although ‘the system’ is not clearly defined, the term is most often

used to refer to the organisation of the (local) economy and related political institutions, including the municipality. When the Municipality of Amsterdam developed its Doughnut Economics strategy, various 'pioneering' citizens started to use the language of this model to strategically connect their aims to those of the municipality. In December 2019, the initiators of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, together with a select group of citizens and organisations, took stock of the people and organisations already working with "the principles of the doughnut" (Appendix II-1, 19). Out of these people and organisations, the coalition selected what it deemed the most promising examples to define the stakeholders that should drive societal change. These stakeholders relate to one another through what the coalition calls the "double triple helix," consisting of the "triple helix" – the combination of governmental institutions, corporations and knowledge institutions – connected to SMEs and start-ups, the commons and community networks (Appendix II-1, 14). This 'double triple helix' is also considered the 'Amsterdam Approach' and promises a significant role for citizens in driving the processes towards a socially sound circular economy.

3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented Amsterdam as a simultaneously extreme and critical case of the increased attention for – especially certain – cities as potential places for progressive change and sustainable living. I briefly presented the city's salient position and role in the history of global capitalism, when it housed some of the world's largest financial and trade institutions and gave rise to a financialised capitalist class early on. I also laid out some of the characteristics and conditions to urban politics and urban planning in Amsterdam as well as the Netherlands. Both have been shaped through decades of corporatism, giving them their consensus-seeking imperative. The comprehensive national planning tradition that arose in the post-war era became increasingly decentralised, while Amsterdam came to feature more prominently in national and regional growth strategies.

As national funding decreased, local governments were prompted to engage with private partners as well as civil society actors. Amsterdam is considered an autonomous city with strong economic, social and spatial planning, enabled not least by its extensive ground lease system. In April 2020, the Municipality of Amsterdam launched its Doughnut Economy strategy in relation with its circular economy strategy. With this, it depicts its circular economy in relation not only to ecological considerations but also social ones. In line with the characteristics of Amsterdam's more recent planning traditions, the strategies for circularity and Doughnut Economics invoke a variety of non-state actors for their implementation. To situate these sustainability-related strategies in a wider context, I analyse the evolution of Amsterdam's policy landscape in the next chapter.

6 The policy context of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy

This chapter examines the policy context in which the Municipality of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy strategy arose. It does so through a consideration of the evolution of relevant urban policies since approximately 1970. It presumes that the local state aims to balance the tension between its democratic legitimacy and economic growth through strategic engagement with a variety of social actors and traces the historical configurations of this balancing act. Moreover, it does so through conceiving (Lefebvre [1974] 1991) and restructuring space. Based on my documentary analysis and literature review, I paint the picture of a city that experienced various phases of growth and demographic change that shaped Amsterdam's class composition and urban politics. Through this narrative, the picture of the evolving project of capitalism in Amsterdam arises. In this project, the implicit growth-dependency of the urban planning tradition (Savini 2021) becomes clear, with the consideration of growth as a precondition for urban development being constant across various phases of urban policymaking, making the promotion of growth a stable, core municipal objective.

Yet, the basis for this growth changed over time. In line with the global developments of neoliberalisation that I discussed in chapter 2, which promoted a "growth-first" approach to urban development" at the expense of "anticompetitive" social welfare (Peck and Tickell 2002, 394), growth in Amsterdam became less redistributive and more entrepreneurial over time and based on the growth of the immaterial and creative knowledge economy, which was promoted through city marketing campaigns. Meanwhile, housing, an important indicator of equitable urban development (Fainstein 2005; Kadi and Musterd 2015) as well as of the city's capacity as space for social reproduction, became increasingly commodified while the social housing stock shrunk in spite of the local state at times attempting to counter this trend. As a result of these developments,

various waves of gentrification took place, while the higher middle class increasingly came to define the city's demographic profile (Boterman and Van Gent 2023).

Recently, the public debate in Amsterdam has become increasingly concerned with the limits to urban growth due to question marks over environmental sustainability and the scarcity of urban space and housing. At the same time, a participatory turn has taken place in urban planning and permeates the Municipality of Amsterdam's latest urban strategies. This potentially indicates that the dominant narrative about urban economic growth is problematised firstly from the perspective of the city's reproductive capacities, in terms of who has access to the city and to processes of urban development. This has led to attempts to bring what Lefebvre ([1974] 1991) calls conceived space – the mental abstractions and technocratic models of urban planners – with lived space, the space subjectively lived in the everyday. Secondly, the growth narrative is challenged based on environmental concerns. These concerns, which follow a period of green growth approaches that coupled environmental and economic considerations, have led to urban development visions that present a more ambivalent stance on growth. The city's Doughnut Economics lens on the circular economy potentially allows for being “agnostic about growth” (Raworth 2017, 207). However, this picture is troubled again when looking at the city's strategy for climate neutrality, for example, in which public-private partnerships feature centrally.

The chapter is structured as follows. In section 1, I provide a brief sketch of early phases of growth in Amsterdam which were based on colonial and economic hegemony and broad social welfare and redistribution in the post-war era. Then, in section 2, I present the neoliberalising tendencies in Amsterdam's policy context by interpreting them in terms of “roll-back” and “roll-out neoliberalism” (Peck and Tickell 2002, 388–89). Subsequently, in section 3, I analyse recent processes of “roll-with-it” neoliberalisation (Keil 2009) in Amsterdam. In section 4, I evaluate the most recent developments in urban policymaking in Amsterdam with its attention on the environment, a participatory turn and a more ambivalent stance on growth.

1 Early phases of growth

As described in the previous chapter, Amsterdam has experienced several periods of growth. In 1935, the city council announced its first plans for accommodating a million inhabitants with its “General Expansion Plan” (“Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan”). This plan defined the development of Amsterdam in the post-war period through the realisation of new industrial areas in the city's peripheries, trade functions in the city centre and residential areas in New-West and South to eventually house a million inhabitants by 2000 (Appendix I-5). These growth considerations were

combined with the development of a robust social housing system and tending to the city as a space for social reproduction, or what Castells would call collective consumption: social reproduction enabled by the local state.

This extensive social housing system was not unique to Amsterdam but part of a nationwide political orientation after WWII, when the country faced steep population growth and an urgent housing shortage. In this period, the Dutch government played a key role in constructing, subsidising and regulating – especially social – housing. Through price controls, brick-and-mortar subsidies and housing allocation, the government set the stage for a strong tradition of social housing provision. Under these circumstances, the Dutch social housing stock grew from 140,000 (10% of the total housing stock) in 1945 to 540,000 (25% of the total housing stock) in 1960 (Van Weesep and Van Kempen 1993). The social housing in this era was not only intended for the lowest income groups or as a form of housing as a last resort but involved a strong social mix from the beginning (Musterd 2014). This picture started to change during the 1960s, when demographic growth slowed down and the number of single-person and two-person households began to increase. This led policy makers to conclude that the quantitative housing shortage from the 1950s had become a qualitative housing shortage. At the same time, the various centre-left coalitions led by Willem Drees of the 1950s gave way to two subsequent centre-right coalitions from 1958, which marked the beginning of a period of deregulation (Van Weesep and Van Kempen 1993).

2 Roll-back and roll-out neoliberalisation

In the decades that followed, Dutch politics went through successive phases of neoliberalisation, with processes dismantling the extensive Dutch welfare state – “roll-back neoliberalism” (Peck and Tickell 2002, 388) – and the active configuration of market-based social policies – “roll-out neoliberalism” (Peck and Tickell 2002, 389).

2.1 The first waves of privatisation, marketisation and gentrification

Under the presumption that housing is an important indicator for urban development, the effects of the deregulation on a national scale initially did not affect the housing sector in Amsterdam. The Dutch government considered the housing sector an important part of its anti-cyclical investment strategy and continued to increase its social housing subsidies during the 1960s, despite the centre-right coalitions that had taken office. This was no different in Amsterdam, where the local state owned most of the land and engaged in strict land-use planning (Kadi and Ronald 2014). Eventually, however, in the early 1970s, the effects of the oil and stagflation crises started to hit the

housing sector more broadly, leading to budgetary restraints first in the form of lowered construction subsidies and narrower targeting of low-income groups for social housing and later, in 1975, with a dynamic cost rents system, further lowering the brick-and-mortar subsidies and replacing them with rent subsidies (Van Weesep and Van Kempen 1993).

Around the same time, Amsterdam faced stark demographic changes due to the arrival of migrant workers from the Mediterranean and people from The Netherlands Antilles and Surinam and the flight of young families with children to Zaanstad-Alkmaar, Purmerend-Hoorn and Almere-Lelystad, the suburbs that were meant to deconcentrate the city's growth (Appendix I-4, 12). The city centre of Amsterdam was unsafe, due to crime and vandalism, which intensified the suburban flight (Fainstein 2005). In this phase, the combination of low interest rates, a young population and commercial disinvestments gave rise to the first phase of gentrification in Amsterdam's city centre (Van Gent 2013).

Over time, gentrification became more deliberate as the municipality started to roll-out large-scale urban renewal projects in the historic inner city to reinforce Amsterdam's "city-functions" that made it "the most important 'city'" of the Netherlands (Appendix I-4, 19 [my translation]). Important in this development was that housing as a fundamental social right was upheld, avoiding "that the less prosperous have to experience the negative aspects of the restructuring process, but are subsequently bereft of the positive aspects when they cannot afford the increased rent prices" (Appendix I-4, 9 [my translation]).

However, housing demand was soaring and the plans for large-scale, modernist renewal invoked strong reactions from the public. Residents revolted against these developments, and the period saw a rise of squatter movements in Amsterdam, leading the labour-party alderperson for urban development to step down (Uitermark 2012). Jan Schaefer took up the post instead and kickstarted a different approach to housing under the striking motivation that "you can't live in bollocks" (Appendix I-59, 16 [my translation]). He gave rise to a different, more democratic, direction in urban renewal with an institutionalisation of residents' rights and the construction of affordable housing (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 112; Christof and Majoor 2021, 45). Thus, throughout the 1970s, the municipality continued its orientation towards broadly accessible (social) housing and residents' rights.

2.2 Further processes of neoliberalisation in a city on the rise

This focus on redistribution started to disintegrate when processes of neoliberalisation took a stronger hold of Dutch politics and planning traditions during the 1980s. In 1982, a new national coalition under Christian Democrat Ruud Lubbers took office. Ruud Lubbers, with the (in)famous

nickname of “Ruud Shock,” was admired by Margaret Thatcher for his hefty cuts in the wages of civil servants. Lubbers, in turn, took inspiration from Thatcher and Reagan in addressing the ongoing stagflation and unemployment crises in the Netherlands (Mellink and Oudenampsen 2022, 162). During this period, which can be characterised as a mix of both roll-back and roll-out neoliberalisation, the Dutch spatial planning tradition substituted its long-standing socialist agenda of extensive housing provision with an agenda driven by economic development in key regions. In its 1988 planning report, the national government presented an agenda for economic development that singled out the Randstad region as key for Dutch international competitiveness and Schiphol Airport as one of the core growth nodes. This new agenda marked the start of two decades of roll-back and roll-out neoliberalisation of planning in the Netherlands with a turn to entrepreneurial competition, dismantling of the extensive social housing provision and increasing private-sector investment in and development of land and housing in especially suburban areas (Waterhout, Othengrafen and Sykes 2013).

The Dutch phase of roll-out neoliberalisation was marked by the entering of Third Way politics with the First Kok Cabinet in 1994, which included the Dutch labour party and two liberal parties, and which moved the labour party away from its traditional socialist ideas in favour of a more moderate compromise between the increasingly polarised disputes between neoliberals and social democrats. In Dutch politics, with its strong corporatist tradition and “polder model” for consensus-seeking, this was achieved through an activating welfare state aiming at equitable access to participation on the market for every citizen (Mellink and Oudenampsen 2022, 214).

2.2.1 AMSTERDAM ON THE RISE: REGIONAL GROWTH AND GENTRIFICATION

In the late 1980s, when national economic development strategies pointed to the Randstad and locations such as Schiphol in line with the general turn to urban regions for economic growth that I discussed in chapter 2, Amsterdam's population had just started growing again, and its demographics were changing. Whereas young families continued to leave the crime- and drug-plagued core of the city for the more spacious suburbs, nationally introduced student allowances attracted young people to Amsterdam while, later in the 1990s, the expanding European Union led to an inflow of international knowledge workers and students (Boterman and Van Gent 2023).

The local government envisioned accommodating the resulting population growth within the existing city mainly through densification. In 1986, the City Council developed plans to accommodate further growth within the existing city in its Structure Plan “The City Central” (“De Stad Centraal”) that laid out its strategy for a compact city. This was in response to concerns that pressure on nature and farmland was unsustainable, calling for more concentrated urban

development to improve amenities, accessibility and cohesion. This led to policies around the compact city, moving away from growth policies in the suburban growth centres and instead focusing on the reconstruction and use of previously vacated urban space within the city (Appendix I-5). Social housing construction remained an objective of urban development, especially in areas outside of the city's historic centre that became designated areas for homeownership in converted office buildings (Terhorst and Van de Ven 2003). This focus on high-end, non-social housing in the city's historic centre marked the start of the second wave of gentrification (Van Gent 2013).

Conversely, a decade later, urban planners in Amsterdam turned to the urban region to address the housing shortage and promote economic growth. This was in line with the national orientations towards the Randstad. In the "Amsterdam Open City" strategy ("Amsterdam Open Stad," 1996), the city marked its regional economy with Schiphol Airport, the Seaport, cruise shipping and the logistics and professional services sectors as important areas in need of support to uphold international competitiveness. To leverage Schiphol as a motor of Amsterdam's local economy, the development corporation Schiphol Area Development Company was founded in the early 1990s to develop the area surrounding Schiphol and to ensure the availability of "sufficient and suitable business locations that could be issued immediately to meet the demand" (Appendix I-6, 101 [my translation]; also see Appendix I-8).

The urban region became increasingly important with the rise of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, which came into fashion as a vehicle for economic growth during the 1990s when it was considered a space for governance experimentation in the areas of growth, housing, infrastructure and sustainability (Savini et al. 2016). With the rise of this metropolitan region, regional considerations and co-production of policy increasingly became part of urban planning in Amsterdam in an effort to constitute Amsterdam as a sustainable metropolis. This region, making up the northern part of the Dutch Randstad and encompassing the Amsterdam harbour, Schiphol and the Zuidas business district, has become a considerable motor for the Dutch economy (Janssen-Jansen 2011). The Zuidas business district was, alongside the city's southern IJ-banks, an important part of Amsterdam's strategy to strengthen regional ties and promote regional growth (Appendix I-6, 9).

Within the borders of the city, the municipality turned to former industrial sites for renewal. In line with a national policy around large cities ("Grotestedenbeleid") initiated in 1994, Amsterdam used the available funds to set up a range of "ambitious urban economy projects," which it outlines in the document "Amsterdam deserves it" ("Amsterdam verdient het", Appendix I-8). Besides its aim to promote Amsterdam towards the outside, this document emphasises the need to take care of Amsterdam internally by creating jobs and a pleasant and safe living environment. Part of this was the restructuring of industrial areas, which the city considered "sleeping beauties" – terrains

that had “fallen asleep” due to a lack of investment and which could be “kissed awake” by the state investing in public space and accessibility (Appendix I-8 [my translation]). Among the terrains under development were Food Center Amsterdam and the business area around Westerpark, both in the western part of the city. In other parts of the city, former industrial sites and spaces were converted to residential areas and small-scale business locations. This was the case, for example, for old warehouses along the IJ-river at “Silodam” as part of the renewal of its banks along with the renewal of the Eastern Harbour (“Oostelijk Havengebied”) and the transformation of the Java Island (“Java-eiland”) into a residential area (Savini et al. 2016).

Alongside these large-scale urban renewal efforts, a new wave of gentrification took place. This was in line with developments on the Dutch housing market, which became marketised further during the 1990s. This further marketisation was triggered partially by the privatisation of the housing corporations in the late 1980s, which created incentives for housing corporations to engage in speculative practices to ramp up profits to finance the provision of social housing. It also diminished the democratic control over the corporations’ actions, even though they remained exempt from paying taxes and kept access to state-backed loans with favourable interest rates (Wigger 2021). The marketisation intentions were spelled out clearly in the national Memorandum on Housing for the 1990s (“Nota Volkshuisvesting in de Jaren Negentig”). This memo aimed at increasing housing quality through deregulation, decentralisation and self-sufficiency, and it constituted a further move towards housing corporations’ independence and entrepreneurialism (Boelhouwer and Priemus 2014; Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 117).

Following this national memo, the Municipality of Amsterdam adopted a “pro-growth and pro-gentrification strategy” (Van Gent 2013, 511). Declining social housing subsidies in combination with the promotion of the owner-occupancy and mortgage markets, which prompted investments in Amsterdam’s relatively low-priced housing, meant that a “third wave gentrification” became reality in Amsterdam. In line with Smith’s (2002) observation of such a third phase in processes of gentrification, Van Gent (2013) argues that gentrification in Amsterdam in this period was led by the local state introducing policies to promote owner-occupancy for middle-income groups. The municipal coalition that took office in 1990 explicitly embedded the aim of a more differentiated housing stock, including more housing “for those with higher income and people that ‘want to work in the city,’” in housing policy (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 115).

In Amsterdam, this coincided – unsurprisingly – with an increase in the demand for owner-occupied dwellings during the 1990s. To meet this demand, vacant space and primarily private rental units had to give way to owner-occupied housing. The increased focus on homeownership went hand in hand with the financialisation of homeownership, made possible by high lending ratios and mortgage interest relief that effectively subsidised home ownership. The resulting

increase in mortgage debt inflated housing prices, which led in turn to a spiral of low interest and high risk in which growth expectations sparked higher loan-to-value ratios, which in turn led to a growth in mortgage debt, a further increase in housing prices and a drop in the share of rental housing in Amsterdam from 92% in 1980 to 70% in 2017 (Aalbers et al. 2021).

Furthermore, during this period, various large-scale urban renewal projects were initiated to promote the regeneration of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These projects reflected market-liberal views on deregulation and privatisation as well as conservative views on the integration of cultural minorities (Van Gent and Hochstenbach 2020). These developments were tempered somewhat by the national state sponsoring neighbourhood-based policies promoting social mixing (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 118) and Amsterdam City Council introducing the norm that 30% of all newly constructed housing should fall in the social segment (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 123).

2.2.2 GREEN GROWTH AND INTERNATIONALISATION

By the time of the late 1990s, Amsterdam's economy was performing well relative to the national average. In the city's core, income and jobs were growing at a higher pace than nationally, and young knowledge migrants found their ways to the city. Amsterdam became the "uncontested cultural capital" of the Netherlands and was in a good position to make the transition to a post-industrial city (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 55). Amsterdam's increasingly young and international demographic profile had electoral consequences. During the 1990s, the Green-Left alliance, a merger between two political parties and several political movements that brought back environmental concerns on the political agenda, arose. Environmentalism, which had been the hallmark of urban social movements in the 1960s and had become incorporated in electoral politics increasingly during the 1970s, was pushed out again during the 1980s when the political discourse shifted to urban renewal and citizen participation. The return of environmentalism in urban politics in the 1990s was in line with Amsterdam's rising middle class (Bossuyt and Savini 2018). This led, for example, to the environment being one of the main themes in the city's Structure Plan in 1996 (Appendix I-7, 9).

During the 1990s, the Amsterdam City Council started promoting the city's international image. To get rid of the historical image of sexual and narcotic liberalism that had arisen during the late 1960s, and which ushered in tourism related to commercial sex work in the Red-Light District and legalised drugs, the city council started to invest heavily in the high-end tourism industry (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2007). For example, through the renovation of Museum Square and the construction of the Amsterdam Passenger Terminal for large cruise ships, to promote high-end tourism, which would, in turn, "also make the city more pleasant and interesting for its inhabitants" (Appendix I-8

[my translation]). By the end of the 1990s, the Amsterdam's Travel and Tourism Office aimed to realise an annual growth rate in tourism of 4% to maintain Amsterdam's position as the fourth-best visited European city (Gerritsma 2019). Following these efforts, Amsterdam started to perform well on the international city rankings that had started to become more influential with the increased interurban competition during the 1990s (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2007). The fact that a relatively small city such as Amsterdam could perform well in global rankings became an important reference point for city officials (Lombarts 2011) and earned the city its nickname of "world village" – as a wordplay on the rising discourse on the 'world' or 'global city' (Appendix I-59, 68 [my translation]).

3 Roll-with-it-neoliberalisation

The Dutch national political climate of the early 2000s was characterised by a common acceptance of the individual as the locus for responsibility, urban regions as competitors in a global marketplace and knowledge industries and creativity as sources for economic growth. In line with New Public Management, the national government strived for policy decentralisation and regionalisation (Waterhout, Othengrafen and Sykes 2013). A political climate, in short, that can be characterised as "roll-with-it neoliberalism" (Keil 2009). At the time, the Dutch political landscape shifted to the right significantly following the rise of Pim Fortuyn. His populist campaign criticised the Third Way politics of the 1990s, bringing up immigration, multiculturalism and "liveability" in neighbourhoods. Just before the 2002 elections, Fortuyn was murdered by an environmental activist, an event that shocked the country and stimulated the support for Fortuyn's party, resulting in its significant electoral victory.

In Amsterdam, the local branch of Fortuyn's party did not rise to power as significantly as in some other large Dutch cities, but it nevertheless affected urban politics through the introduction of immigration as a (dividing) political topic. Boterman and Van Gent (2023) argue that this reflected upon the labour coalition that formed in Amsterdam in 2002, and which had an increased focus on safety and crime while linking employment to immigration and integration. Moreover, the political discourse around migration and multiculturalism gave rise to an orientation towards Amsterdam as a place for emancipation and creativity, paving the way for a demographic profile strongly based in the middle class.

3.1 Strategies for emancipation and creativity

Although populist parties did not gain much ground in Amsterdam, the city was grappling with the consequences of increased ethnic diversity. The population growth that had commenced around

1985 had first been driven largely by migrants from non-industrialised countries, partially substituting ethnic white families leaving to the suburbs. After the turn of the century, however, growth in the city was increasingly caused by knowledge migration, while the middle-class became increasingly urban and chose to stay in the city (Boterman and Van Gent 2023). With the growing number of inhabitants, employment also went up. This implied not only a quantitative difference but also a qualitative difference. In 2017, the municipality reported that in comparison to 2000, Amsterdam's population was more diverse in terms of origin and more highly educated. The highly educated mostly settled in and around the inner city (Appendix I-24).

A political response to the questions around ethnic diversity and population growth came from Platvoet and Van Poelgeest, two local politicians who wrote a book titled "Amsterdam as emancipation machine" (Appendix I-59 [my translation]). In the book, they envision the city as the place to which people arrive to "make a career, be confronted with different lifestyles, norms, values and opinions, emancipate themselves economically and culturally and often times leave again at a later stage of life" (Appendix I-59, 14 [my translation]). Painting a positive picture of "the urban dynamics" of people arriving to and leaving Amsterdam (Appendix I-59, 13 [my translation]), they stress that the city's vitality profits – "like a parasite" – from people with high social mobility who move to the city (Appendix I-59, 19 [my translation]). Social mixing and integration of migrants in neighbourhoods were thus considered crucial elements of urban developments. The essay refers to Richard Florida's creative class to argue that the city can only be an emancipation machine if it is open to newcomers and underprivileged people and should not only act on calls to preserve the city's middle class.

To make housing available for these newcomers, the city council turned mostly to private and rent-liberalised housing to promote economic growth. In line with what Van Gent has described as Amsterdam's third-wave gentrification (Van Gent 2013), the city council approved a housing memorandum in 2008 which explicitly emphasised gentrification as one of the city's qualities to be further developed. The memo criticised the historical focus on affordable and social housing in Amsterdam, which had worsened the position of middle segments on both the rental and owner-occupied markets. The municipality intended to improve this position through, among other things, the sale of social housing. It also actively started to restrict so-called "skewed living" ("scheefwonen") of residents with higher incomes in social housing, who were considered to be unrightfully enjoying public housing benefits (Kadi and Musterd 2015).

These developments continued after the financial crisis of 2007-8, when the rent-liberalised housing market in Amsterdam grew at the expense of social and owner-occupied housing. This was the result of a European Commission ruling in 2009 that Dutch housing associations received unjustifiable state aid, which led to more stringent conditions for the allocation of social housing and reduced

the social housing stock, especially in Amsterdam (Priemus and Gruis 2011; Kadi and Musterd 2015). This happened in combination with stagnating social housing construction, tightened mortgage lending practices and unstable income hampering homeownership. The number of private-rental dwellings grew considerably through the construction of new housing largely by institutional investors, the majority of which falling in the higher segments of the market (Hochstenbach and Ronald 2018). In this period, spatial segregation in the city started the increase while social housing increasingly became a form of last-resort housing for the very lowest income groups only (Musterd and Van Gent 2016).

The combined increase in high-end private rental housing stock fitted with proliferating ideas about Amsterdam as an 'emancipation machine' and the orientation towards Amsterdam as a creative city. In the first decade of the 21st century, Amsterdam was promoted as the creative capital of the Netherlands; the "vanguard of a new society, one in which culture plays a major role" (Peck 2012, 463). This development had started with the redevelopment of the city's former gasworks in its western part during the 1990s. The "Westergasfabriek" became a symbol for Amsterdam as a creative city (Appendix I-8). The festive opening of the "Westergasfabriek," which featured a keynote by Richard Florida himself, turned out to be a crucial marker for Amsterdam's creative-growth coalition. However, Peck, emphasises that already before this, the city had all the necessary ingredients for such creative growth:

The constitutive elements of the Florida model — flexibilized job markets; gentrifying, mixed-use neighborhoods; ethnic diversity and a dynamic urban culture; a globally branded place-image with hipster allure — were all therefore in place prior to the model's touchdown at the Westergasfabriek. (Peck 2012, 465)

During this period of creative growth pursuit in the early 2000s, Amsterdam went through what Oudenampsen (2007, 171) calls an "Extreme Makeover," with large-scale infrastructural development projects, the demolition of post-war neighbourhoods and the new North-South metro line that was to connect the new parts of the city to the old and whose construction implied years of nuisance for inhabitants and subsided buildings along parts of the trajectory. These large-scale projects were part of the city's so-called "'pearl' projects," connected to the city's marketing strategy launched in 2002 (Appendix I-11, 39), and in line with the rise of the "flagship urban industrial greening projects" that were part and parcel of neoliberal processes (Angelo 2021, 148). In Amsterdam, such projects were a response to a drop in Amsterdam's performance in international rankings, which has also prompted the launch of the public-private partnership "Amsterdam Partners" in 2002. "Amsterdam Partners" set out to strengthen Amsterdam as a "business city," a "knowledge city," and a "residential city," while catering to the "creative, innovative,

entrepreneurial, talented people of Amsterdam" (Appendix I-11, 17-22). The so-called 'pearl' projects played a crucial role in doing this.

One of these 'pearl' projects is "Zuidas" ("South-Axis"), Amsterdam's business district, whose development started in the 1990s and is still ongoing. Seemingly continuing the trend of the 1970s and 1980s, "Zuidas" involved the development of business districts in Amsterdam's peripheries. However, the aim of the project involved more than just a business district, as it aspired to become a second city centre. With this aim, the project in fact presented a pivotal point in the municipality's focus in urban planning, as it moved away from strengthening the city's historic centre towards the aim of developing a new city centre in the city's periphery (Trip 2007). The project aimed to include 42% office space, 42% housing and 15% services to be developed over the course of 25 years in the southern peripheries of the city (Jantzen and Vetner 2008). "Zuidas" thus aimed to make up for the limits of Amsterdam's historic centre as "the world's smallest metropolis" (Jantzen and Vetner 2008, 160) as well as Amsterdam's limited available space for urban development (Kahn and Van der Plas 1999). It did so through creating a well-connected hub for international business and high-end shopping while simultaneously aspiring to create a "truly urban environment" through the development of a substantive number of dwellings in the area (Jantzen and Vetner 2008, 160). "Zuidas" has developed as a main orientation point for international business in the Netherlands. With the continuing support of the national government, the further development of the "Zuidas" is still ongoing at the time of writing through the realisation of the mixed city district "Zuidasdok" (Appendix I-13).

The support of the national government indicates the relevance of the Zuidas beyond the confines of the city. In the metropolitan region, "Zuidas" has wide environmental and socio-economic effects, making it an important motor for the region as a whole (Salet and Majoor 2005). These developments around the city's 'pearl' projects such as "Zuidas," as well as the discourse around creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism, were captured by the marketing campaign that the city launched in 2004 under the slogan of "I Amsterdam," which was meant to unify the brand of the city and the city-region and establish it internationally (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2007).

During the 2000s, Amsterdam moved, electorally speaking, away from traditional labour politics towards more liberal-progressive narratives around urban growth, marking the start of an increasingly entrepreneurial approach to economic and urban planning (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 130; Bossuyt and Savini 2018). The central ambition of Amsterdam's spatial strategy of 2009 was to "develop Amsterdam further as the centre of an internationally competitive, sustainable, European metropolis" (Appendix I-12, 10 [my translation]). The strategy emphasised that, at the time, thinking about Amsterdam as a 'world city' was relatively new but rapidly gaining ground. The strategy set out to strengthen the city's position in the world economy, especially through the

“consolidation of the knowledge economy and innovation” (Appendix I-12, 15 [my translation]). In line with this, the city strived to keep the harbour in its prime international position and aimed to leverage Schiphol as an international air traffic hub to establish Amsterdam as “an uncontested international business centre, a conference city of the highest level, and a magnet for tourists” (Appendix I-12, 15 [my translation]). The strategy also emphasised the need to transition towards climate neutrality and water resilience.

In these efforts, Amsterdam aimed to learn from “ex-metropolises like Detroit and Liverpool, which wither away due to a one-sided and outdated economy” by making space for highly educated workers and by profiting from the strong appeal that Amsterdam has to the “creative class” (Appendix I-12, 18-19 [my translation]). Embracing Richard Florida's concept of the creative class quite literally,¹ Amsterdam considers diversity and creativity key drivers of innovation and growth. The Amsterdam City Council was thereby acting in line with programmes of the European Union around the knowledge economy, creativity and technology, which burgeoned towards the end of the 2000s (Bontje and Musterd 2009).

The dedicated city marketing and branding efforts have borne fruit. Schiphol Airport has grown to become the second-largest international passenger hub globally after Dubai, with 61.7 million travellers in 2023 – a number that has been growing steadily apart from the years in which Covid-19 lockdowns affected global air travel (Schiphol 2024). Meanwhile, in the past years, tourism has also come to shape the local economy considerably. Estimates for 2016 showed that the tourism sector generated between 2 and 2.7 billion euros and created 61,000 jobs (SEO 2017), while the number of touristic overnight stays in Amsterdam in 2019 was estimated to be around 21 million (Appendix I-46).

In line with the increasingly highly educated citizenry, Amsterdam's service sector has taken up an increasingly large share in its urban economy. In the 2000s, the urban economy became defined more and more by strong ICT, business services and culture, making “the label ‘creative knowledge city [...] by no means inappropriate for the urban economy of Amsterdam” (Musterd and Deurloo 2005, 83). By 2015, only 6% of jobs in Amsterdam were in the manufacturing and construction sectors (Boterman and Van Gent 2023). Overall, the strong economic growth Amsterdam experienced between 1995 and 2019 was accompanied by the rise of a service-oriented economy as the information, communication and consultancy sectors grew in relative size (Statistics Netherlands 2022). In 2020, more than 1 in 4 businesses and almost 1 in 5 jobs in Amsterdam were

¹ By literally responding to the creativity imperative to “be creative – or die,” and by referring to the need to “attract the new ‘creative class’ with hip neighborhoods, an arts scene and a gay-friendly atmosphere – or they'll go the way of Detroit” (Peck 2005, 740).

in the specialist service sector (defined as “consultancy and research,” including law, accountancy, architect, marketing firms), while its “information and communication” sector (including companies which offer software-development and other ICT services) was amongst the fastest-growing (Appendix I-43).

3.2 Curiously little space for creativity

Despite the municipality's focus on creativity, its approach to reserving and creating – increasingly scarce – space for such creativity has been ambivalent. Historically, struggles for space to foster artistic creativity rather than generating economic growth were spearheaded by groups of squatters and artists. To accommodate such demands, in 2000 the Municipality of Amsterdam introduced its “Breeding Places Policy” (“Broedplaatsenbeleid”), with the slogan “no culture without subculture” (Christof and Majoor 2021, 47). In this period, Amsterdam had started to lose its incubator function for the creative economy due to the lack of suitable spaces for start-ups and artists. According to Oudenampsen (2007), this policy was an indicator that the arts and artistic practices in Amsterdam had moved to the core of the urban economy, thereby shrinking the space for subculture. As it hardly left any (urban) space outside of the economy, possibilities to counter the latter from that outside position also shrank.

Oudenampsen's interpretation is confirmed by the municipality's launch of a couple of initiatives with a clear business-oriented component which aimed at nurturing Amsterdam as a creative city. An example of this is the “Amsterdam Innovation Motor” launched in 2004 to support innovation and businesses, especially in the creative sectors (Romein and Trip 2012, 37). The municipality also sought to accommodate artists in affordable living and working spaces outside of the historic centre, which proved difficult due to a lack of suitable space and the unwillingness of artists to move to locations outside of the city's historic centre (Arnoldus 2004). These developments are in line with those elsewhere in Europe, with city governments engaging in ‘win-win’ policies that provide precarious creative workers with spaces while benefitting municipal finances, not least through the upgrading and rebranding of urban space that these new creative workers enable (Mayer 2013).

These developments have given rise to an artistic scene in Amsterdam that is relatively large. In 2008, the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region housed 40-50% of the people employed in the Dutch creative sector, which was relatively high compared to the 20% of total employment it housed. In that same year, the municipality initiated another strategy around creative workplaces aimed at providing workspace for artists and creative entrepreneurs (Bontje and Musterd 2009). However, that the target group of this strategy was not the same as the group that had contested the evictions at the end of the 1990s became clear in 2019. At the beginning of that year, the creative community

living on the ADM terrain (the former Amsterdam Drydock Shipyards – abbreviated “ADM” in Dutch) was evicted forcefully by the municipality. The community, with a fluctuating number of members averaging around 100, had squatted on the terrain since 1997, where it started to develop “Amsterdam’s Do-it-yourself Society” (also abbreviated “ADM” in Dutch). The community of artists, dancers and craftspeople managed to get connected to sewage, water and the electricity grid (Eshuis, Van Dam and Aarts 2009). Despite numerous attempts to preserve the ADM terrain, which over the years had become a central reference point for diverse, increasingly marginalised groups in the city, the terrain was subject to forced evictions in January 2019 (NOS 2017; AT5 2019). Eventually, the terrain was sold by the owner to an investor who is currently turning it into a marina for luxury yachts called “Dutch Super Yacht Tech Campus” (Olsthorn 2021).

In the summer of that same year, the city issued another policy around artistic spaces and incubator areas, emphasising the importance of artists to Amsterdam because of their contribution “to a complete city” and Amsterdam’s image, which it describes – not so modestly – as follows:

Amsterdam is one of the most attractive and creative cities in the world. The city’s open character and space for unruliness and entrepreneurial spirit are an ideal and inspiring environment for cultural avant-gardes. Therefore, many artists and creative businesses, active in a variety of disciplines, come to Amsterdam to stay. (Appendix I-26, 6)

To foster this environment, the municipality intends to look into more permanent spaces and forms of collaboration with both commercial parties and housing corporations to ensure that a part of newly constructed space includes artistic studios. This, however, implies that artists have become elements of the city’s deliberate gentrification strategies. The municipality as well as developers and investors use artists and cultural entrepreneurs to increase the attractiveness and land and real estate value of unattractive areas in the city (Milikowski 2021). Even where the city is trying to preserve non-commercial, artistic spaces with this policy, these spaces are less anarchistic and unrestricted than the earlier free, creative spaces – of which ADM would prove to be one of the last ones. The transformation of another former dockyard, the NDSM terrain in the north of the city, was in line with this. Whereas it used to be the icon of the city’s programme to promote artistic places, it became a centre for commercial activity of large media companies rather than small-scale creativity (Bontje and Musterd 2009).

The intersection between creative and commercial activities is also reflected by “the practice of self-organization” and “cultural creativity” at the core of Amsterdam’s urban economy (Christof and Majoor 2021, 47). The city has a “makers industry” or “makers movement,” characterised by ecological entrepreneurialism with a focus on environmental sustainability and circular economy (Savini 2019, 685). This started to grow in Amsterdam during the financial and economic crisis of

2007-8 and made up 35% of all Amsterdam-based firms in 2014. This development was explicitly supported by the municipality in relation to the municipal growth strategies promoting Amsterdam as a business location (Savini 2019).

Most of Amsterdam's current policies related to creative and artistic spaces are connected to the city's "Free Space" ("Vrije Ruimte") programme, which was initiated during the summer of 2019, the year that the ADM collective was evicted. This programme was the result of the executive board agreeing on the need to protect existing "free spaces" and create new ones with the launch of its "Free Space" programme. The city defines this type of space as a broad range of "non-commercial places where people meet one another, where they can experiment, reflect and engage with societal issues" (Appendix I-28, 5). These spaces are diverse but have in common that they are created bottom-up and collectively by societal organisations and citizens. Such spaces make up the "fringes of the city" (Appendix I-29, 4) and are "an essential part of the urban living environment: it makes Amsterdam more vital, colourful and social in multiple ways" (Appendix I-28, 5). As part of the initiative, the city aims to experiment with new forms of collaboration to enable an as large as possible group of Amsterdammers to use "free space" according to "principles of openness, accessibility and inclusivity" (Appendix I-29, 6). Free space is "public, collective, self-efficacious, democratic and transparent, multifunctional, societally engaged, open and inclusive, non-commercial, spontaneous" (Appendix I-29, 9). Yet, the allocation of 'free space' is limited and bounded, as the case of ADM shows.

The contradiction between the city's desire to harbour artistic and creative practices while failing to make sufficient urban space available is indicative of Amsterdam City Council's entrepreneurial orientation towards economic growth with an immaterial base. The city as a hub for entrepreneurial, creative growth through high-end tourism, innovation, immaterial labour, the creative industry and the emancipation of people with high social mobility enables entrepreneurial economic growth based on selling the image of Amsterdam as location. This growth strategy attracts highly educated knowledge workers and entrepreneurs rather than promote the decommodification of urban space to the benefit of artistic communities. While these strategies are only accompanied by a limited amount of space made available, they *do* have spatial effects, for example, through the transformation of former dockyard NDSM into a creative-commercial zone and through the instrumentalization of artists for the upgrading of deprived neighbourhoods. This again emphasises the decisive role of the local state in shaping urban space, the close connection between urban space and state space and the commercial interests that are part of shaping this connection.

Alongside the shrinking of creative space, Amsterdam's social housing stock has decreased steadily in the last decades, which indicates a decline of the city as space for redistribution or state-facilitated

collective consumption. The envisioned 'emancipation' in Amsterdam as 'emancipation machine' thus largely pertains to people with high upward social mobility who can freely move within the commodified spaces of the city. Boterman and Van Gent (2023) analyse how the local state in Amsterdam has come to be geared towards the professional middle classes. This has resulted firstly in response to Amsterdam's changing demographic dynamic but, since the turn of the century, also in relation to the municipality's active approach to promoting Amsterdam's international competitiveness. It has led to a workforce of academically trained policy makers and urban planners who share a "professional gaze" on Amsterdam and thus promote a "myopic middle-class view" that conditions the local state's interaction with citizens and the inputs, stories and experiences it engages with (Boterman and Van Gent 2023, 190). In recent years, the promotion of Amsterdam as an international, professional hub has led to a vibrant public debate around the growing scarcity of public space, the negative effects of (mass) tourism and the unaffordability and unavailability of housing, probing questions about the limits to Amsterdam's growth.

This chapter has, so far, given a historical outlook on the evolution of Amsterdam's urban policy landscape, by tracing the processes of demographic and economic change accompanying various waves of neoliberalisation in Amsterdam. As deliberate strategies to promote economic growth based in the immaterial, creative and service sectors have borne fruit, the negative social and environmental consequences of such growth are increasingly considered by policymakers in Amsterdam. It is this context of interrogating urban growth and its limits, that the Municipality of Amsterdam adopted its circular economy strategy along with the Doughnut Economics lens in 2020.

4 The limits to growth?

Since 2010, Amsterdam has been growing by around 10,000 inhabitants a year, which is felt in the city through a pressing housing shortage and, in combination with high numbers of national and international visitors, pressure on the public spaces in various parts of the city. The impossibility of limitless growth is of concern among residents and policymakers alike in Amsterdam. Amsterdam's latest spatial strategy presents plans to accommodate growth through large-scale area development – the transformation of current industrial areas or business districts into mixed areas – as well as densifying existing neighbourhoods. Accommodating this growth is considered unavoidable by the city council:

The city must offer opportunities for everyone [...]. Closing the city off under the pretence that 'the city is full' would only displace problems to the region. (Appendix I-40, 17)

Yet, the city underscores the need to guide this growth through a strategy for polynucleated development. In combination with the regional focus that was promoted in earlier 'open city' policies, these present strategies for polynucleated growth promote leading cities to become influential urban regions through the development of multiple centres (cf. Jessop 2002). This aims to take pressure off the city's overburdened areas by investing in the urbanity of peripheral areas such as New-West, Southeast and North. One of the core strategic choices in rolling out this strategy is that of "collective city-making," that is, to give space to residents to influence processes of development (Appendix I-40, 19). The strategy especially emphasises the need to draw in citizens in the peripheral areas intended as growth cores. At the same time, the strategy prominently features sustainability considerations, for example, regarding the construction of housing, decreased car presence in the city and the greening of the city accompanying densification.

The ongoing discussions about the limits to growth can be interpreted as two types of critique of capitalism's dependency on – and, as Fraser (2022) would say, the cannibalisation of – the non-commodified spheres of social reproduction and nature. In these critiques, the dominant narrative about urban economic growth is problematised firstly from the perspective of the city's reproductive capacities and, secondly, its extractive relations with nature. These give rise to boundary struggles where popular revolt – in a Polanyian sense – responds to this cannibalisation of spheres crucial for life on this planet.

The first source of critique, which I present in section 4.1, regards the city as space for social reproduction. It raises questions as to who has access to the increasingly scarce housing and urban space, and as to who has a say in processes of urban development, which is reflected by the participatory turn in planning and Amsterdam's strategic orientation towards "collective city-making" (Appendix I-42, 248). This potentially posits "active citizenship" as a necessity (Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013) in yet another process of roll-with-it neoliberalisation but might also empower residents belonging to various social classes by allowing them to influence policy making processes and give shape to their urban environments to a larger degree.

The second source of critique, which I introduce in section 4.2, concerns the environment and the extractive relations of the city with nature. Environmental concerns have been prominent on the political agenda in Amsterdam since the early 2000s, when they became coupled with economic concerns, promoting discourses of green growth. Conversely, more recent approaches to urban sustainability in Amsterdam seem to be more ambiguous with respect to economic growth. With the Doughnut Economics lens, which promotes an agnosticism to growth in its circular economy, at least parts of the municipal organisation seem to problematise the self-evidence of economic growth for urban planning.

4.1 Social reproduction in the city

Discussions around whose city Amsterdam is – or who has a right to it – have, arguably, never really been absent. Yet, recently these discussions have become more explicit, for example, with the hypothesis that Amsterdam has gone from being an “emancipation machine” to a “segregation machine” (Milikowski 2021, 78 [my translation]) or a “sorting machine,”² in which a variety of people arrive but only a distinct portion – with certain class characteristics – can stay.

4.1.1 ACCESS TO THE CITY

The debates in Amsterdam around who has access to the city revolve broadly around the topics of housing affordability and accessibility, and (curtailing) tourism.

Attempts to decommodify housing

As concerns about the housing crisis are mounting across the world, housing affordability and accessibility are also prominent issues in the public debate in the Netherlands and Amsterdam, with various housing protests flaring up since September 2021. Despite the Netherlands still leading among OECD countries in terms of the share of social housing in 2020 (OECD 2022), Amsterdam is among the European cities with the highest levels of real estate prices, with growth rates outpacing income growth. From 2017 to 2018, prices surged by a staggering 20% (Wigger 2021). This has led to “expensive skewed living,” a reversal of the previous forms of inhabitation of dwellings by residents whose income is not in line with the housing category. In Amsterdam, the overall price increase of rental housing has coincided with a growth of the group of low-income residents, which led to 16% of expensive rental housing being inhabited by low-income households in 2021 (Appendix I-48, 10).

Already since 2014, affordable housing has had a more prominent position in municipal strategies. In 2017, the municipal executive increased the minimum share of social housing in new construction projects from 30%, which had been continued by all coalitions since its introduction in the 1990s. To increase this share, the city council introduced the 40-40-20 principle, ordering 40% of all housing constructed to fall in the category of regulated rent, 40% in the middle-ranged owned and rented homes and 20% expensive owned and rented homes (Appendix I-25). This not only raised the minimum rate of social housing from 30% to 40% but also marked a break with the trend of newly constructed housing, including up to 70% owner-occupied housing (Hochstenbach and Ronald 2018). At the time, however, social housing made up around 45.7% of total housing stock

² My translation. For more information on the research arising around this: <https://www.amsterdamsortiermachine.nl/en>.

(Appendix I-37), implying that the policy effectively meant a decrease of the relative size of the social housing stock. Noteworthy in relation to this is that, in recent years, dwelling size in Amsterdam has gone down. In the period from 2017 to 2021, the average size of newly constructed housing units in Amsterdam decreased from 69 m² to 60 m², while the size of most of the newly constructed social housing units in Amsterdam lay between 40 m² and 60 m², despite agreements of striving for an average of 60 m² (Appendix I-49, 36).

Alongside the 40-40-20 requirement, the municipality of Amsterdam recently introduced two other policies. In 2020, a rental ban for newly built owner-occupied homes was added to this. The so-called “Self-Occupation Duty” (“Zelfbewoningsplicht”) for homeowners of dwellings constructed or transformed after July 2020 limits rental possibilities and limits the price of such rentals to the maximum rent price of a mid-range rental dwelling. Besides this, the national government introduced the “Purchase Protection Act” (“Opkoopbescherming”) for existing housing. This enables municipalities to prohibit the rental of existing dwellings after sale. In Amsterdam, this has been translated into the prohibition of leasing out any low- or mid-range owned dwelling in the first four years after purchase (Appendix I-49).

These new requirements were introduced against the background of decreasing owner-occupancy rates. In 2019, the trend of increasing rates of owner-occupancy was broken for the first time, while the private rental sector grew that year (Appendix I-37). In the same period, increased economic uncertainty, high inflation, shortage of labour power and materials and higher interest rates lowered the price of owner-occupied units for the first time in 2022 (Appendix I-49). This has limited the municipality's ability to invest in unprofitable projects, such as the development of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, for which there is currently no financial space, a situation that results in “tough decisions” (Appendix I-44, 39).

Besides a focus on affordable rental housing, the municipal executive also investigates the possibility of affordable owner-occupancy. Although it is not envisioned to become a large share of total housing supply, these affordable dwellings (with a market price of up to €355,000) are intended to make home ownership more widely accessible (Appendix I-49). Another way in which the municipality stimulates the housing supply is by promoting housing cooperatives. In 2020, it initiated a strategy to make housing cooperatives more transparent and accessible through changes in regulation, making several locations available, and specific financing models. The twofold rationale is that, through housing cooperatives, the continuously growing need for housing can be met while empowering citizens with respect to their housing wishes (Appendix I-30).

These local policy initiatives are reflective of what Hochstenbach and Ronald (2018, 1635) describe as the process of “regulated marketization” of the housing market in Amsterdam, which “is the

outcome of the national government pushing for marketization and local government now calling for re-regulation, after it had previously also pushed for liberalization". They argue that the marketisation of the housing sector in Amsterdam entails contradictions and tensions in two dimensions: between national and local politics on the one hand, and between the existing stock and newly constructed housing on the other. Although, on the national level, political efforts have gathered around the further liberalisation and expansion of the rent-liberalised housing segment in the last decades, subsequent coalitions in Amsterdam have attempted to lobby for further regulation, for example, around limiting buy-to-let, rent increases and regulations of new construction. The latter is related to a second tension between the stock of newly constructed housing, over which the local government has relatively much control, and the existing housing stock, in which it is difficult to regulate buy-to-let and rent increases. For the latter, the Amsterdam City Council is dependent on national regulation.

Current developments indicate that this national regulation is in fact moving in the direction desired by Amsterdam's local government. Housing accessibility and affordability have become key topics in the national public debate, and measures lobbied for by the Municipality of Amsterdam – such as regulation of the middle segment, as well as for a stamp duty tax on buy-to-let purchases and the aforementioned "Self-Occupation Duty" (Hochstenbach and Ronald 2018) – have now made their way into national policy debates. Yet, at the same time, the national "Good Landlordship Act" ("Wet goed verhuurderschap") from 2023 underlines the need to consider the "business case of investors and developers," which is reflective of the increased role of private and especially institutional investors in the Dutch housing market.³ Amsterdam City Council, as a local centre of power-knowledge (a notion introduced in chapter 2), is thus negotiating with the central ones.

In Amsterdam, the supply of (affordable) housing has also come to rely more on private parties, and the municipality reports indications that private investors' willingness to invest is decreasing as a result of the new regulations (Appendix I-49). In a fashion that prompts comparisons with Stein's (2019) analysis of the real estate state in U.S. cities, the municipality of Amsterdam emphasises the importance of collaboration with not only housing corporations but "also agreements with parties such as institutional investors and large developers" (Appendix I-49, 51). The presence of large-scale institutional investors on the private rental housing market in Amsterdam increased from around a fourth in 2017 to around a third in 2020. As the share of small-scale private investors decreased by 6% in that period, the overall growth of private rental housing in Amsterdam stems from the increased presence of large-scale investors (RIGO 2021).

³ My translation. The Good Landlordship Act can be found here: https://www.eerstekamer.nl/behandeling/20230403/publicatie_wet/document3/f=/vm1wedt4phza.pdf.

The municipality relies on these investors to meet the structural challenges it faces around the provisioning of affordable housing. One of these challenges is that land dedicated to the construction of social and mid-range housing is given out more cheaply – a loss which the municipality needs to compensate with land given out for the construction of high-range rental housing. At the same time, construction costs have risen because of current shortages of labour and construction materials and increased sustainability and quality requirements (Appendix I-49).

Attempts to limit tourism

Another key topic in the debate around space and growth in Amsterdam is tourism. The streams of tourists looking for an authentic experience of urban life in liberal Amsterdam have – paradoxically yet unsurprisingly – contributed to the commodification of place, leading to tensions and to residents' negative perceptions of tourism. As a result, the city has been called a “theme park” and “museum” to describe how tourists dominate public spaces, which in turn increasingly caters to tourists rather than residents of the city (Pinkster and Boterman 2017, 464–65).

The Municipality of Amsterdam formulates the problem as follows:

This sense of freedom [that has made Amsterdam so famous] has become increasingly commercialised and is currently under pressure. Amsterdam's international image as tourist destination is dominated by stereotypes around coffeeshops, sex theatres, the windows at the Wallen [the Red Light District] and a misunderstood idea of freedom as a lack of morality. [...] The city is not a product to make money with, but an ecosystem to take part in. Entrepreneurialism is, in our view, not about big international money but about creating value for the direct environment. (Appendix I-46, 4 [my translation])

Therefore, the municipality aims to “set boundaries on the growth of Amsterdam's visitor economy” and think carefully about the relation between the city's identity and its international image (Appendix I-46, 5-6 [my translation]). Hence, also in relation to its visitor economy, the Municipality of Amsterdam aims to balance considerations of growth with the well-being of its residents through an attempt at finding a balanced approach. Entrepreneurialism is invoked here in a different, more embedded sense.

In 2017, the Municipality of Amsterdam kickstarted the “City in Balance” strategy to “look for the balance between all interests involved, while avoiding that the growth of one causes the decline of the other” (Appendix I-22, 7 [my translation]). It continues to promote Amsterdam as a city of culture, architecture, history, freedom and tolerance, and a place for the “quality tourist” rather than the one that comes after the city's “image of sex and drugs” (Appendix I-22, 54 [my translation]). Hence, it aims to curtail Amsterdam as a destination for certain types of visitors but

not others. Thinking around Amsterdam as a 'world city' thus continues to be promoted ambiguously.

4.1.2 PARTICIPATORY TURN IN URBAN PLANNING

While discussions around access to housing and public space in the city are ongoing, access to urban planning itself has *also* become a hot topic in the Netherlands as well as in Amsterdam. Besides the relatively large role of private parties in urban planning in Amsterdam, the role of residents has increasingly become of concern as well. The municipality acknowledges that the political processes ongoing in civil society "are much broader and deeper than the local government's particular compass" (Harvey 1989b, 153) and therefore aims to expand its 'compass'. Through a participatory turn in urban planning, a "human measure" (Appendix I-3, 28 [my translation]) and a "neighbourhood approach" have been introduced to urban planning and governance considerations (Appendix I-3, 7 [my translation]). As a consequence, civil society actors have received a larger role in the development of (spatial) policy, leading to the dispersion of responsibilities (Savini 2017).

These developments, which may be seen as an attempt to bring conceived, perceived and lived space closer together, took place across Dutch municipalities following the development of the so-called national "participation law" during the 2000s. This law decentralised responsibilities from national to local government and connected citizens' "self-reliance, participation in society, active citizenship and social cohesion with administrative goals such as coherent policy-making, efficiency, custom-made services, increasing the influence of citizens on [...] policy-making at the local level, and freedom of choice" (Verhoeven and Tonkens 2013, 419). In tandem with this, the term "participation society" became prominent. It quickly became connected to the erosion of the welfare state, even though prime minister Rutte defended the notion as something that citizens demanded themselves. There was not only a need for more citizen participation due to limited government funding but, increasingly, assertive citizens also wanted it (Tonkens 2014).

In Amsterdam, this focus on citizen participation brought about a new focus on "neighbourhood-oriented" or "area-oriented" approaches to policymaking, representing a "philosophy and method to look at and act upon the problems and opportunities within a specific area" (Appendix I-3, 7 [my translation]). As responsibilities in the areas of health care, youth and work were moved from the national government to the municipal level, the neighbourhood became the core site where policy would materialise. Neighbourhood teams and monitors were introduced, while the inhabitants of those neighbourhoods increasingly took control of provisions in the neighbourhood (Van der Lans 2011). In a document commissioned by the Municipality of Amsterdam, this development is

considered “the biggest reorganisation in the public sector since World War II” (Appendix I-3, 54 [my translation]).

In Amsterdam, the reorganisation was accompanied by the introduction of “area managers” (“gebiedsmakelaars,” literally “area brokers”) as an addition to the already existing tradition of area-focused development. Perhaps the most literal form of a “street-level bureaucrat” (Lipsky 1980), these area managers constantly manage between, on the one hand, the formal working methods and policy cycles of the municipality – the conceived space – and, on the other hand, the inputs, stories and knowledge from within the neighbourhoods – the lived space (Appendix I-3). Within both the national and local public debate, these two realms are referred to as “the system” and “the lifeworld” respectively, terms that are curiously adopted from Habermas (Mensink 2015 [my translation]). The problem, according to this debate, is the disconnect between the “lifeworld” – the realm of citizens’ lived experiences and perceptions – and “the system” – the realm of “public institutions, governments, laws and financial conditions” (Van der Lans 2011, 30 [my translation]). The solution would be to promote better communication between the two spheres. Thus, in opposition to Habermas, who was concerned about the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system, citizens in Amsterdam want to promote better communication and mutual understanding between the two spheres. This resonates with what Baiocchi (2018, ix) has described as the urgent task of connecting “the vibrant world of movements and mobilization, and the sterile and uninspired world of political parties” – if we add to this the executive branches of state administration.

In Amsterdam, these concerns have translated into a neighbourhood-oriented way of working, which has brought about initiatives such as the “neighbourhood platforms” (“buurtplatforms”), the “neighbourhood jobs” (“buurtbanen”) and the “neighbourhood budgets” (“buurtbudgetten”). The first two of these are aimed at strengthening the cohesion in the neighbourhood. The platforms aim to give the neighbourhood a voice and a means through which residents can meet one another. The Municipality of Amsterdam started experimenting with these platforms in March 2022, after an outcry of a coalition of bottom-up neighbourhood organisations in November 2020. In a manifesto, this coalition criticised the difficult collaboration with the municipality, whose slow bureaucratic processes hamper the functioning of these neighbourhood organisations – often run by volunteers. The manifest argues that despite the crucial function that these organisations proved to play during the Covid-19 pandemic, they have no formal positioning vis-à-vis the local government. Therefore, they demand a neighbourhood organisation in each of Amsterdam’s neighbourhoods with sufficient budgeting (Appendix II-5). At the time of writing, nine organisations in various neighbourhoods (including in the designated growth boroughs North, New-West and Southeast) are included in the neighbourhood platform experiment (Municipality of Amsterdam, n.d.-a).

Along with the neighbourhood platforms, the Municipality of Amsterdam introduced “neighbourhood jobs” as another initiative to strengthen social cohesion within neighbourhoods. The initiative was rolled out city-wide in February 2022 after a pilot project in New-West. Its aim is to enable and empower people who are key persons in their neighbourhoods by transforming their important neighbourhood voluntary work into a job for two years earning minimum wage. The objective with this is twofold. On the one hand, these active residents can use their experience to strengthen the social base in the neighbourhood, while, on the other hand, they develop themselves as potential employees and thereby move into regular paid work or start their own businesses. Hence, “appreciation does not come in the form of a bouquet of flowers or a ribbon, but in the form of a future” (Buurtbaan Amsterdam, n.d. [my translation]).

A third initiative is the “neighbourhood budgets”. This project aims to give decision-making power to residents more directly. The policy was developed in 2021, after a successful pilot project in four neighbourhoods in 2019. In each borough, citizens are invited to send in plans and proposals for the development of their respective neighbourhoods, after which residents and entrepreneurs can collectively decide how to spend the total budget available. In its first year, a total amount of 1.1 million euros was paid out as neighbourhood budgets (Appendix I-45).

These various streams of the municipal democratisation programme are also reflected in the Municipality of Amsterdam's latest spatial strategy in 2021. The strategy is connected to the national Environment and Planning Act, which was introduced (after repeated postponements) in January 2024. This national act obliges every municipality to develop a spatial strategy with an explicit focus on participation.⁴ In line with this, the Municipality of Amsterdam plans to establish formal regulation around citizen participation in 2024. In anticipation of this, the Municipality of Amsterdam made “collective city-making” one of its spatial strategy's five pillars (Appendix I-42, 12 [my translation]), especially in the designated growth areas central to the city's “polynucleated development strategy” (Appendix I-42, 17 [my translation]). This translated into a series of “city conversations” in which citizens formulated their future needs in Amsterdam, as well as the formation of “Club 2050” (Appendix I-42, 263-64 [my translation]). The latter was a group of citizens who were asked to collect perspectives and stories from their respective neighbourhoods and bring those into discussions with the municipality. The purpose here was to have what an involved civil servant explained to me as a “critical watchdog” to read and comment on documents developed in relation to the Spatial Strategy.

⁴ Participation is meant here as giving a larger role and responsibility to so-called “initiators” – a category that includes “project developers, real estate owners, corporations, health care institutions, energy corporations and citizen initiatives” (Soeterbroek 2021 [my translation]).

This coincides with the development of an extensive agenda for democratisation which promotes a politics in line with the new municipalism which I discussed in chapter 3. The Municipality of Amsterdam's democratisation agenda is connected to "De 99," an initiative of the Fearless Cities Network. The municipality's branch working with democratisation is a key player in this network. Its democratisation agenda entails new agreements about the collaboration between the city and local cooperatives to anchor public-civil partnerships (Appendix I-42, 250). The start of these public-civil partnerships has been marked by the so-called "Ma.ak020" agreement between "citizens, initiators of societal projects, the local government and other organisations who want to actively contribute to the development of the city," which has to provide a structural agreement to the "feeling of co-ownership and influence, which is moving from the government to the citizens" (Ma.ak020, n.d. [my translation]).

A one-off magazine published in connection to the Municipality of Amsterdam's democratisation programme makes explicit connections between democratisation and alternative approaches to the urban economy. The magazine presents the so-called "family" of schools of thought around the social economy, comprising the Social & Solidarity Economy, the care economy, feminist economics, degrowth, the commons, the wellbeing economy and Doughnut Economics (Appendix I-1, 26-27).

The municipality also reflects on the alternative approaches to the urban economy in its latest spatial strategy. In reflection on the financial structure of the city, it states that "in the past years it appears increasingly difficult to simultaneously realise the desired quality and generate sufficient revenues for market and government," while "the current model leads to real estate price inflation [...] due to international capital inflows" (Appendix I-42, 241-42 [my translation]). If the latter come to define the city too much, the document reads, the city's function as "emancipation machine" is threatened as equality of opportunity comes under pressure. The city is looking into the ways in which urban development creates value and how this value can benefit local communities. Therefore, the municipality is investigating the possibilities for its role as facilitator of the creation of "long-cyclical value" that enables the development of affordable housing and neighbourhood qualities (Appendix I-42, 58 [my translation]). In this regard, the strategy refers explicitly to the community wealth building approaches taken by the Municipality of Amsterdam's Fearless Cities programme (Appendix I-42, 252-53). This relates to efforts on both the urban and the national scale to develop notions around "broad prosperity" ("brede welvaart") as a way to measure well-being beyond GDP. Since 2020, all regions and municipalities are required to engage in such broad-based measurements (Appendix I-42).

4.2 The environment and the city

The consequences of climate change are increasingly becoming visible in Amsterdam, with more periods of extreme heat, drought, or flooding as a result of heavy rain and rising sea levels, a relatively serious issue for the Netherlands and Amsterdam (Appendix I-39). Environmental concerns had largely been absent from the political agenda of the Municipality of Amsterdam between the 1970s and 1990s, when urban renewal and citizen participation defined the discourse. Since the 1990s, however, the environment has returned as a political topic (Bossuyt and Savini 2018). Initially, this happened through a coupling of economic and environmental concerns in green growth approaches. With the municipality's launch of the Doughnut Economics and circular economy strategies, the municipality's stance towards growth in relation to sustainability seems to have become more ambivalent.

4.2.1 GREEN GROWTH

Environmental concerns re-entered policymaking in Amsterdam during the 1990s and became more prominent during the 2000s, when they were coupled with economic concerns. An example of this is "Amsterdam Smart City," the municipality's strategy to become the first European Smart City in 2009 and a joint initiative between Amsterdam Innovation Motor (discussed above in relation to the business-oriented approach to creative city policies) and grid operator Alliander. At the time, the national minister of Housing, Regional Development and Environment emphasised that the strategy did "not only benefit the environment and health of Amsterdam citizens, but also the spending power and employment" (Euro Énergie 2009). The aims with the smart city strategy were to reduce energy wastage and CO₂ emissions while promoting sustainable economic growth through technological innovation (Mora and Bolici 2017). This coupling of economic and environmental concerns was further strengthened in the Municipality of Amsterdam's Structural Plan 2040 titled "Economically strong and sustainable" ("Economisch Sterk en Duurzaam") (Appendix I-15) (Bossuyt and Savini 2018).

In 2016, the municipality made a range of public-private City Deals. The goal of these deals has been to realise "a sustainable city with sustainable jobs" together with various "City Deal partners" through six different project areas concerning solar energy, district heating, sustainability in real estate, climate adaptation, sustainability in the SME sector and insulation (Appendix I-40, 9 [my translation]; also see Appendix I-35). The type and role of City Deal partners differ from one project area to the next, but all of them rely largely on public-private partnerships. One of the municipality's prominent City Deals is around phasing out natural gas in Amsterdam's built environment by 2040 through district heating, for which the municipality has involved the municipal water company,

various private energy grid operators and private heating district providers, as well as a tenant support agency (Appendix I-35). Relatedly, there is an increasing number of local businesses engaging with the energy transition, mainly within the construction and installing of renewable energy infrastructures and systems (Appendix I-43).

The municipality builds further on these public-private partnerships in its climate neutrality strategy. In 2020, the Municipality of Amsterdam published two main strategies related to sustainability: a circular economy strategy for 2020-2025 and a roadmap for climate neutrality by 2050 (Appendix I-31 and Appendix I-35 respectively). Combined, these strategies aim at a city that is free of natural gas use by 2040 and which has a fully circular economy by 2050, in which CO₂ emissions are lowered by 95% compared to 1990 levels. Both strategies consider the social justice aspects of the transitions crucial: the climate neutrality strategy posits “climate justice [as] a leading principle” (Appendix I-35, 18 [my translation]) while the municipality considers the circular transition to provide “a unique opportunity for social justice” (Appendix I-31, 11). These strategies seem to move away from the pure green growth narrative and instead start to question the outright premise of growth by considering circularity and citizen participation. I first discuss the climate neutrality strategy, before turning to the circular economy.

4.2.2 CLIMATE NEUTRALITY

The municipality's climate neutrality strategy presents a combination of top-down measures, some of which are dictated by (trans)national standards, and bottom-up engagement of local entrepreneurs and citizen organisations. Its climate neutrality strategy states that in Amsterdam

[they] want to be a climate neutral and circular city, where energy is used economically, energy is generated sustainably, and resources and materials are reused infinitely. [They] also want to be a city which copes well with the consequences of climate change, such as flooding, increasing droughts and heat, and the changes in biodiversity. (Appendix I-35, 16 [my translation])

The municipality considers its roadmap for climate neutrality as one of its core overarching sustainability strategies. With the roadmap, the municipality has outlined its plans to reduce CO₂ emissions by 55% compared to 1990 in 2030 and by 95% in 2050, with a focus on 1) the built environment, 2) mobility, 3) electricity and 4) harbour and industry. In an intermediary progress report on climate neutrality, the municipality reports that in 2022, there was a reduction of 6% to 3,760 kilo tonnes, which makes it allegedly the first time that the level of emissions is below the target year of 1990 (3,810 kilo tonnes) (Appendix I-54, 10).

The municipality emphasises the energy transition as a broad societal change in which climate justice should be the guiding principle. In relation to this, the municipality sees its role in this transition in various ways. It aims to direct the overall transition by working both bottom-up and top-down by collaborating with and supporting partners but also by regulating and taking its role as a public actor and provider seriously, ensuring that “public tasks are executed well” (Appendix I-35, 25 [my translation]). The Municipality of Amsterdam considers its directive role inevitable:

We see it as our most important task to direct the process of becoming a climate-neutral city. Without stimulation, public control, regulation from the top and firm agreements with larger parties, we will not meet our CO₂ targets. (Appendix I-35, 20 [my translation])

Just as in the circular strategy, the municipality emphasises its reliance on “front runners” who contribute their free time to the sustainable transition and help inspire others (Appendix I-35, 160 [my translation]).

The municipality's efforts to phase out natural gas in the built environment have, despite its intentions to employ climate justice as leading principle, been met with critique from citizens, especially those in the neighbourhoods targeted for the phasing out of fossil energy and the instalment of renewable energy infrastructure. First, the plans of the municipality to install large-scale (on- and off-shore) wind parks were met with concerns of homeowners and residents about the detrimental effects on the view, nature and health. Following the well-known NIMBY-logics, the wind turbines are now planned to be installed in another part of the city (Koops and Van Zoelen 2021). Second, there is popular indignation about the unsustainability of bioenergy, which plays a considerable role in the municipality's climate neutrality strategy. The municipality acknowledges that the sources for district heating in the city are not or only partially sustainable, as the supply relies on the Swedish corporation Vattenfall's gas-based electricity plant in Diemen and in part on the bioenergy plant newly opened by Amsterdam's municipal waste company. However, the municipality deems bio-energy necessary to meet the demand in the next 15 years (Appendix I-35). When the biomass facility opened, it invoked popular protest, which intensified when it became clear that rather than processing waste from within a 150 km range from Amsterdam, the installation was dependent on the import of biomass from abroad to keep the facility running (AEB 2020; 2022; Van Schaik 2023).

Despite citizens' concerns, bioenergy and district heating are key elements of the municipality's plans for phasing out natural gas in the built environment. This is especially the case in neighbourhoods in the boroughs North, Southeast and New-West – boroughs located closely to the bio-energy plants and with relatively high shares of social housing. The implementation of district heating in these boroughs is third source of citizen protest. Although the municipality promised

that residents would get a role in the formulation of the implementation agenda (Appendix I-35, 63), residents in various neighbourhoods felt that their proposals for alternative heating networks and suppliers were not taken seriously because of pre-established partnerships with large private partners.

Besides objectives of phasing out natural gas in the built environment, the municipality has introduced sustainability principles for the construction of new buildings. These must be “energy-saving,” “energy neutral” or “energy-yielding”. From 2019, the municipality can define energy neutrality requirements through environmental permits, which it does alongside including energy neutrality in its tenders for land issuing (Appendix I-35, 94). Thus, Amsterdam's local government influences the degree and nature of urban development and change, for example, in the development of “Port-City” (“Haven-Stad”), a dense, mixed-use area with the size of Amsterdam's city centre to be built in the former western harbour. The area is envisioned to be not only a prime economic centre but also a harbinger of urban sustainability in terms of circular construction, mobility, waste, energy and water use and clean air (Appendix I-19, Bossuyt and Savini 2018).

Besides the built environment, the municipality focuses on electricity and solar energy through facilitating cooperatives for residents who do not own their own roof – for example by making roofs of (semi)public buildings available – and by entering in agreements with housing corporations around mandatory solar panels in new constructions and renovations as well as accelerated instalment in the existing corporation housing stock (Appendix I-35, 127). Another concern is mobility, for which the municipality considers road traffic, in line with its larger strategy around the discouragement of car use in the city and traffic on its internal waters (Appendix I-27). In late 2023, Amsterdam was the first large Dutch city to introduce a speed maximum of 30 km/h on 80 per cent of its roads (Stoker 2023b). However, the municipality is less bold when it comes to air traffic, regarding which the strategy notes that “emissions in international air traffic and shipping are not ascribed to Amsterdam” and are therefore disregarded (Appendix I-35, 104 [my translation]). Given the ongoing controversy around air- and sound pollution around Schiphol, and the municipality owning 20.03% of Schiphol's shares, this is a convenient line of reasoning.⁵

Lastly, the climate neutrality strategy focuses on harbour and industry, the former of which the municipality intends to become a “sustainable battery for the city, region and Europe” (Appendix

⁵ In December 2023, Amsterdam's Alderperson van Buren, who holds the portfolios of Finance and Air and Sea Port, among others, announced that, going forward, the Municipality of Amsterdam will take a more activist stance in its role as shareholder of Schiphol and demand a decrease in the number of annual flights, no more flights during the night, and no more private jets. The Municipality of Amsterdam holds 20.03% of Schiphol's shares, the Dutch state 69.77%, the Municipality of Rotterdam 2.20%, and Aéroports de Paris and Royal Schiphol Group (RSG) the other 8% (Schiphol, n.d.; Stil and Wagemakers 2023).

I-35, 142 [my translation]). Currently, Amsterdam's harbour contributes directly to the emissions of CO₂ through considerable deposit and throughput of coal and oil products. In 2019, the transshipment of oil totalled 50 million tons and that of coal 15.5 million tons, respectively 50% and 20% of its total throughput (Port of Amsterdam, n.d.). The harbour company (in which the Municipality of Amsterdam owns all stocks) already stopped giving out new terrain for oil terminals and has the goal to eliminate all cargo traffic related to coal for electricity production by 2030, and all other fossil fuels by 2050 (Appendix I-41).

Another part of the city's industry revolves around the growing data centre sector. The Metropolitan Region Amsterdam houses one of the largest internet exchange points in Europe. The Municipality of Amsterdam considers data centres important for the city not only because of the increased importance of internet use and data but also due to the high-paying jobs that they bring and the high correlations between the locations of large-scale data centres and the existence of a prominent, global internet and ICT sector. It is expected that Amsterdam will need an extension capacity of 80 megavolt ampere per year to accommodate the growing demand for data centre space (Appendix I-33). This promotion of physical infrastructures crucial to the knowledge-intensive industry is in line with the municipality's aspirations for Amsterdam as a global city, in which a combination of physical and social infrastructures make the city an enabler of global connectivity. Apart from such energy-intensive infrastructures as datacentres, post-industrial, global cities are characterised by lower pollution and emission levels, as these cities import products from elsewhere. Especially knowledge-intensive industries are caught up in the flows of toxic waste which are growing globally but concentrate in poor communities in low-income countries (Wachsmuth, Cohen and Angelo 2016).

In general, the emission reductions envisioned within the realm of industry and harbour are mostly reliant on policies and actions beyond the city-scale. As the document reads, the impacts of the strategy are uncertain not only due to the uncertainties around the implementation and the magnitude of effects but also to the policy developments beyond the city:

We are utterly dependent on developments on the regional, national and EU scale regarding regulations and means. The Dutch national government is especially crucial for Amsterdam, for example in relation to the instruments available for the programme to make neighbourhoods independent of natural gas, the CO₂ tax for industry and policies around environmental zones. (Appendix I-35, 48 [my translation])

For the development of green hydrogen and carbon capture techniques, the municipality is also dependent on developments beyond the city for research and development and market traction. This indicates that, despite trans-local links and international urban networks, local levels of

governance have not been able to outperform the nation-state in realising climate action in the city (Bulkeley and Betsill 2005).

It also shows that the Municipality of Amsterdam's sustainability strategies do, in some ways, engage with supra-local scales. Most of the strategies envisioning Amsterdam as a sustainable city are mostly envisioned within the territory that is commonly understood as the city through a focus on neighbourhoods and processes within its territorial bounds. However, the dependency on supra-local regulations is one pointer towards wider considerations. I come back to this in my analysis of the Municipality of Amsterdam's circular economy strategy.

4.2.3 CIRCULAR ECONOMY

In tandem with the climate neutrality strategy, the Municipality of Amsterdam published its circular economy strategy. This strategy is a response to the unsustainability of and injustices related to current production and consumption patterns:

Every year, we see more extraction of raw materials, higher energy consumption and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. These trends are in line with the growth of the global economy and population. Clearly, we are exhausting the Earth in this way. In addition, consumption here influences prosperity elsewhere, for example, through working conditions during the extraction of raw materials and the manufacture of products. (Appendix I-31, 10)

To factor in the “prosperity elsewhere,” Doughnut Economics features in the strategy as a lens for considering the entwined local, global, social and environmental aspects of the transition to a circular economy. To realise the circular goals, the municipality engages in a process of “learning by doing” (Appendix I-31, 17) to deal with the duration and unpredictability of the tasks ahead:

Transitions are lengthy and often unpredictable processes. It is essential to speed up and provide direction in these processes. It is also important to continue to identify new, as yet unknown developments, provide room for experiment and ensure that the transition continues to accelerate. (Appendix I-52, 13)

Therefore, through a range of projects that enable “scaling up wherever possible” and are focused on physical developments in the city, research programmes, policy interventions, measurement instruments and innovation (Appendix I-32, 8 [my translation]). All of these are aimed at reducing the use of primary raw materials by 2030 and reaching 100% circularity by 2050. To do so, the municipality focuses on the areas of food and organic waste streams, consumer goods and the built environment (Appendix I-31, 17). The circular strategy promises a combination of top-down measures to reduce legal obstacles in the way of the circular transition and bottom-up engagement

around the sharing economy and recycling initiatives. One of the methods to coordinate and organise the bottom-up engagements and initiatives, is through the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, which was inaugurated at the time of the launch of the circular economy strategy.

The circular strategy focuses on three main areas: 1) food and organic waste streams; 2) consumption goods; and 3) the built environment. In the first focus area, food and organic waste streams, the municipality mobilises policies around the reduction of food waste and the sorting of waste to enable the use of organic waste for composting or bio-based energy. It also proposes to look into urban agriculture, for example, through a food park in Southeast as well as regional food networks (Appendix I-31, 26-30). In 2023, a collaboration with the city's water company was added to look into innovative ways to filter and reuse water (Appendix I-52, 6). In relation to consumption goods, the municipality aims to stimulate a sharing and repairing economy, especially in the textile industry. It also aims to stimulate the "makers industry" through a reemphasis on its "Amsterdam Made" brand (Savini 2019, 685–86) and the stimulation of a new type of "Dutch Design" based on circular principles, enabling circular revenue models (Appendix I-32, 64). In particular, the 2023 execution agenda refers to the need to explore "new circular revenue models" (Appendix I-52, 22).

For circularity in the built environment, the strategy focuses on the biobased and circular construction of public spaces and buildings, as well as subsidies for circular insulation for homeowners. Besides this, the execution programme of 2021 showcases a wide range of local experiments, such as a circular metro station (Appendix I-32, 112), public tenders for circular land and business (Appendix I-32, 126-127) and investigations into the requirement of material passports that are linked to the cost of capital for real estate development (Appendix I-32, 129).

The Municipality of Amsterdam's circular strategy interprets the circular transition through a Doughnut Economics lens. In fact, the municipality considers the circular economy and the Doughnut Economy as two sides of the same coin:

The circular economy is sometimes presented as a doughnut. This is a model that we also use in Amsterdam. [...] Cast in the form of a doughnut, it becomes clear that the circular economy is about healthy dynamics between social and ecological issues. This representation of the circular economy shows how closely everything is interconnected. Because of the interaction, good coordination and cooperation are needed. (Appendix I-31, 13)

With this doughnut lens, the Municipality of Amsterdam potentially goes beyond a single-sided interpretation of the circular economy in terms of material flows and resource efficiency. Rather, it prompts a reconsideration of the circular transition in its local, global, social and environmental dimensions – the 'lenses' provided by Doughnut Economics. The municipality poses the following question: "how can Amsterdam be a home to thriving people, in a thriving place, while respecting

the wellbeing of all people, and the health of the whole planet?" (Appendix I-2, 3). With this orientation, the Municipality of Amsterdam employs Doughnut Economics both as a means to direct and facilitate urban transformation *as well as* a way to influence what potentially transformative agents might do by providing an overarching discursive frame through which to interpret their activities. The "City Doughnut" strategy aims to answer its central question through the aforementioned lenses. Looking at the local through a social lens, the strategy suggests the pursuit of wellbeing in terms of health, enabling, connectedness and empowerment (Appendix I-2, 6). For Amsterdam's circular economy strategy, this translates into considerations of poverty in relation to circularity (e.g., Appendix I-32, 135), while "broad prosperity" is mentioned numerous times as a substitute for economic growth. In relation to diverse measures for welfare, the Municipality of Amsterdam promises to look into "circular revenue models" in its circular execution programme for 2023-2026 (Appendix I-52, 22).

When looked at through the environmental lens, the local scale is apt to "provide water, regulate air quality, regulate temperature, support biodiversity, protect against erosion, sequester carbon, and harvest energy" (Appendix I-2, 8). In relation to the global, considered through the environmental lens, the "City Doughnut" proposes that the Municipality of Amsterdam focuses on becoming a climate neutral and fully circular city and tracking its share in the pressure on Earth's planetary boundaries, through novel metrics. The global, approached through the social lens, on the other hand, mainly proposes to consider global labour conditions in the extended supply chains that Amsterdam's urban economy is implicated in. With this focus on the connections of the city with its (distant) hinterlands, the strategy starts to think of sustainability in terms of urban metabolism (an argument we develop in more detail elsewhere, see Thompson et al., forthcoming).

More than the climate neutrality strategy, the Municipality of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy and circular economy strategies both rely on dispersed governance arrangements for their implementation. The "City Doughnut" mentions a "cycle of co-creation" in which a "network of changemakers," consisting of "SMEs/startups, communities, commons, corporates, governments and academia" use the doughnut as "a tool – a starting point for new ways of thinking, shared inspiration and transformative action towards becoming a city that thrives for people and planet, locally and globally" (Appendix I-2, 14).

Likewise, the circular transition is also envisioned to rely in part on non-state actors, such as education and research, local entrepreneurs (both for-profit and not-for-profit), the Port Authority and neighbourhood-based organisations to stimulate the circular economy in neighbourhoods. Salient in the execution programme of 2023, and mentioned multiple times, is the need to allocate physical space to circular initiatives of local businesses and neighbourhood-based organisations (Appendix I-52). This document, however, also presents the observation that material resource use

in the city has *not* been decreasing since the launch of its circular economy strategy. Therefore, based on lessons drawn from the circular economy activities until that point, the 2023 document presents an execution programme for 2023-2026 to further promote the circular trajectory and extend its initial timeframe for the full current political cycle until 2026.

In line with the directions (or lenses) provided by the Doughnut Economics strategy, the Municipality of Amsterdam increasingly considers circular economy in the city within a global picture of resource extraction, labour relations and CO₂ emissions. In the 2023 execution programme, it refers to the city's CO₂ footprint and budget, which it is gravely overshooting at the moment, specifically in relation to global emissions, targets and resource extraction beyond the city's geographical borders. However, the current strategy still only begins to grapple with the complexity of such global interconnectedness. It is, moreover, insufficiently clear how the scattered local experiments and bottom-up initiatives relate to global problems around, for example, the export of recyclable plastics that end up in landfills or the unsustainability of bioenergy in the processing of organic waste (Appendix I-31).

Nevertheless, the Municipality of Amsterdam considers itself an international frontrunner. The 2023 execution programme (Appendix I-52, 9) states that "Amsterdam is considered as pioneer in the transition to a circular economy world-wide," and that the Municipality of Amsterdam, therefore, considers itself responsible in taking the lead on the sustainability transition. Its density, high level of wealth and vibrant ecosystem of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship offer opportunities for collective and efficient solutions. In line with this, the Municipality of Amsterdam argues for local levels of government to play a larger role in reaching sustainability goals. In its Voluntary Local Review, detailing progress on reaching the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in Amsterdam, the municipality envisions the following:

Most of all, we hope that the report will convince global policy makers of the need to engage all levels of government in drafting new global goals. The local level is indispensable in realising whatever goals are set. Amsterdam is willing and capable to engage. (Appendix I-47, 18)

The Municipality of Amsterdam's latest approaches to the environment and sustainability, epitomised by its climate neutrality strategy and circular economy strategy, and supplemented with documents such as the Voluntary Local Review, show a strong discourse around climate justice, emphasising both Amsterdam's responsibility as a wealthy city and on the inclusion of citizens in the implementation of policy. Yet, the implementation of especially the climate neutrality strategy relies largely on public-private partnerships, which have been overruling the voice of citizens. And for restrictions on industrial emissions and regional transport that are so crucial in the city's economic activities, the municipality refers to its dependency on the regional and national scale for

regulations and the development of new techniques. This seems to indicate that economic viability is one of the leading principles.

At the same time, this Voluntary Local Review is an indicator of the Municipality of Amsterdam's engagement on the international scene. The Municipality of Amsterdam has explicit strategies about international cooperation on a wide range of themes and through networks such as C40, the Rainbow Cities Network, the Strong Cities Network and the World Cities Culture Forum. With this, it argues that cities should "take their responsibility" for larger societal issues and "in return want to have influence on international decisions that hit them directly" (Appendix I-56, 8 [my translation]).

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have painted the picture of the policy context of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics strategy by delving into the historical evolution of capitalism as a project in Amsterdam. Following a strong orientation towards redistribution and social welfare in the post-war era, economic growth became increasingly entrepreneurial, especially from the 1980s onwards, when Amsterdam's urban region featured prominently in national strategies for economic development. Through subsequent demographic changes, Amsterdam's citizenry became increasingly diverse and highly educated. Through various phases of roll-back and roll-out neoliberalisation, the social housing stock in Amsterdam shrank while the Municipality of Amsterdam promoted the city as "world city" internationally and gentrification spread across the city. Strategies for urban development and economic growth were increasingly based on creativity and innovation, while the available space for artistic collectives has been shrinking.

Lately, however, the effects of the pursuit of growth benefiting several groups more than others have sparked debates about the limits to growth in Amsterdam. These debates concern the size and type of tourism in the city, as well as the affordability and accessibility of housing for the lower (middle) income groups. At the same time, citizen participation in urban development and urban policy processes has become a topic of interest both on the urban and the national scale. These discussions reposit the city as a space for social reproduction rather than purely one for (immaterial) production.

Concerns about the city's extractive relations with nature have also taken centre stage. Conversely to earlier green-growth approaches, current strategies around sustainability seem more ambivalent about growth. On the one hand, the climate neutrality strategy relies largely on public-private partnerships related to, for example, the roll-out of a district heating network, while it refers to

regional and national authorities to regulate large industry. On the other hand, the city's circular economy strategy, with its growth-agnostic Doughnut Economics lens, presents a combination of measures to enforce *and* facilitate the transition to the circular economy. Its implementation relies to a certain extent on bottom-up actors, such as local entrepreneurs and citizen organisations, which seems to indicate a two-fold development that simultaneously reconfigures the city's relations with nature *and* responds to calls for the city as a space for social reproduction and policies that resonate with residents. Yet, it also fits well within Amsterdam's vibrant eco-entrepreneurship scene and attempts to attract and retain (higher) middle classes. In the next chapter, I analyse this two-fold development from the bottom up.

7

Contestation and alternatives in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy

The “City Doughnut” strategy document mentions a key role for bottom-up actors and organisations in Amsterdam for the strategy’s implementation. The Municipality of Amsterdam envisions this implementation taking place through the “Amsterdam Approach,” which involves an “an iterative cycle of co-creation, instigating new action, and amplifying what’s already working,” and which draws on “a network of changemakers” bringing together “government, business and academia [...] with innovators from SMEs, start-ups, the commons and community networks” (Appendix I-2, 14-15). As stated in the previous chapter, at the time of the development of this strategy, the municipality and the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences convened the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition to bring together all actors already engaged in activities resonating with Doughnut Economics, mainly through an online platform and recurring events.

In this chapter, I analyse the bottom-up developments around Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy in relation to transformative social change. I have defined the latter as consisting as a discursive moment of difference and contestation, of forging a political subject, and a moment of alternatives and diverse economies, enabling socio-spatial and material change. To analyse the bottom-up developments around this, I take heed of Gibson-Graham’s call for “reading for difference” through “weak theory,” in turn based on descriptions of the “heterogeneous economic practices,” that make up “the ground upon which we can perform a different economy” (Gibson-Graham 2008, 619). I thus provide a thick description of the diverse, bottom-up movement of various neighbourhood-based initiatives as well as networks across the city. This description is based on the interviews and participant observations I did in Amsterdam, triangulated with the

documents produced by various organisations and actors within Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement.¹

Although I will at times invoke the term “movement” for the sake of brevity, I should note that this refers to a rather loose collection of initiatives and individual activists who drive place-based projects and connect to one another through personal relations or, at times, through the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition. Most of these place-based projects are located in Amsterdam's Southeast and New-West districts, two of the areas that are in focus regarding the municipality's latest strategy for multinucleated growth (Appendix I-42), which I discussed in the previous chapter. It is in these districts that citizens demand their “right to the city” through a variety of place-based, citizen-driven projects and activities. As developed in chapter 3, the right to the city has two moments. It is both “a cry out of necessity and a demand for something more” (P. Marcuse 2011, 30). This is reflected to the activities of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement through, on the one hand, engagements with political contestation and empowerment, and, on the other, promotion of alternatives that alter the flows of the urban economy and the fabric of everyday life.

In section 1 of this chapter, I first analyse the forms of contestation and alternatives that the Doughnut Economics activists promote and then reflect on how this enables small-scale transformations of capitalism in Amsterdam. Subsequently in section 2, I delve into the ways in which Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics is organised as a movement by analysing the activities of what the movement calls “pioneers,” people engaged in Doughnut Economics activities who relate to one another in a loose and pragmatic manner and thus form a loosely organised coalition of likeminded, “doughnut-inspired” change actors. I analyse how Doughnut activists aim to alter the relations between citizens and the state in a durable way so that collective forms or self-organising in neighbourhoods get more space and citizens give shape to their urban environments without being dependent on short-term subsidy cycles. In this process, the Doughnut Economics model has been envisioned as a collaboration and translation tool, which has worked to a certain extent but has also run into several issues.

1 Urban everyday politics and small-scale economic transformations

The Doughnut Economics activists in Amsterdam aim to promote a politics of the urban everyday with and beyond the state to transform the local and to protect it from supralocal forces negatively impacting them. A variety of actors do this by engaging in contestation and the promotion of social

¹ I have translated all quotes from interviews from Dutch to English. For each of the quotes from the documents, I indicate if I have translated them.

and political empowerment. They do so not necessarily through acts of protesting or demonstrating – even though most Doughnut Economics would, for instance, attend large-scale climate marches – but through creating a community and giving that community a voice. At the same time, place-based Doughnut activists promote alternative social and economic relations and subjectivities through small-scale socio-spatial transformations of the urban economy.

In this section, I first consider the forms of contestation promoted in Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy in section 1.1. Then in section 1.2, I turn to the ways in which social actors in Amsterdam prefigure alternatives, before reflecting on how they thereby enable small-scale transformation of the urban economy in section 1.3. Even though I examine the different kinds of action in relation to the two moments of transformative social change in turn, I do acknowledge that aspects of contestation and socio-spatial transformation are in most cases entwined. All my informants emphasise in one or the other way that questions of the social, environmental and economic should be considered in tandem. Yet, many informants also emphasise that community-building and social and economic empowerment must take precedence for political and socio-spatial transformation to be possible at all.

This is in line with Castells' notion of urban social movements as a new political subject whose unity does not derive from a shared class position but from its members' shared life as urban dwellers. Moreover, understanding how different parts of the movement in Amsterdam engage with and challenge capitalism in the urban requires detailing the different mechanisms and effects of the different elements of the movement. I do this by first introducing the discursive activities of the movement and then turning to the socio-spatial alternatives and metabolic transformations respectively.

1.1 Place-based contestation and social empowerment

Contestation within Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement happens by building communities first within neighbourhoods and then also across neighbourhoods. These communities are to create a sense of togetherness and common understanding and enable the sharing of knowledge – or, as two informants put it, the leveraging of the “collective intelligence” or the fostering of a “collective consciousness” (fieldnotes January 2023). By creating this togetherness and leveraging the knowledge within communities, the movement aims to legitimise situated experiences and alternative organisational forms (see Ometto, Zafar and Hedberg 2021) and bring, to come back to Lefebvre's spatial terms, lived space and conceived space closer to one another.

1.1.1 CREATING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Parts of the work of the Doughnut Economics movement in Amsterdam revolve around contestation in the sense of developing a collective political voice that challenges the supra-local forces that shape urban space and demands increased equality. These activists aim at creating political agency through a collective sense of community – of collectively being at home in their district or neighbourhood and thus their city. In this regard, the conviction that citizens and neighbours should meet one another more to promote proximity as a key characteristic of the urban (as discussed in chapter 3) is widely shared across the movement.

One example of an initiative that aims to promote proximity and collectivity is the neighbourhood platform *Sierpleinbuurt Platform*. Located in the “Sierpleinbuurt” neighbourhood in the city’s New-West district – one of the three growth nodes in the city’s current multinuclear growth strategy – the project aims to bring citizens together in the neighbourhood and create shared experiences. The project started in May 2020, when a group of neighbours initiated a neighbourhood platform under the municipality’s “neighbourhood platform right” discussed in chapter 6. The aim was to provide a platform where citizens’ concerns and wishes could be heard and be brought into urban planning considerations through closer connections with the district administration. This was directly related to the Municipality of Amsterdam’s latest spatial strategy with its focus on collective city-making (Appendix I-42): the members of the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt* came together to formulate a spatial strategy for the neighbourhood, which features in the city-wide strategy as well. This neighbourhood-level spatial strategy aimed to provide the content for the city’s objective to be “a humane metropolis,” as the subtitle of the city’s strategy promises (Appendix I-42 [my translation]), by laying out a vision for how all inhabitants of the neighbourhood “feel at home, can find one another, can work together well and help each other easily” (Appendix II-14, 4 [my translation]).

Building a community is a necessary step in this, and it got the residents to organise themselves in the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt*. The initiator of the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt* recounted to me how the platform started and how getting a sense for one another and the neighbourhood was crucial from the beginning. This is why residents went on collective walks through the neighbourhood while telling stories about the parts of the neighbourhood that they did or did not like.² Through these collective walks, the residents “strengthened [their] own feeling with the neighbourhood and they became more conscious of [their] neighbourhood,” as my informant recounted to me.

The 10-15 fluctuating members of the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt* all have a large personal network within the neighbourhood. They draw on this network to represent and work with residents. Yet,

² This is in line with methods of the nascent field of psychogeography, which posits walking as critical method and practice (see Mason et al. 2023).

they also go beyond their personal network, for example, by explicitly attempting to interact more with those neighbours who are harder to reach, notably those from lower socio-economic classes and young families. This way the platform aims to continuously get input from different perspectives on what is going on in the neighbourhood and what concerns people may have. Through the platform, residents in the neighbourhood have installed several citizen-managed green areas in the neighbourhood, and they have facilitated a collaboration between the municipality and citizens regarding the process of redesigning a playground whose surrounding residents had been concerned about safety at night due to loitering.

At one of the other outskirts of Amsterdam, in the city's Southeast district, *The Green Hub* ("De Groene Hub") also aims to create a sense of community through its multiple activities. *The Green Hub* is a cooperative and a community centre by and for social and sustainable "front runners" located in an old school building in the "Gaasperdam" neighbourhood in South-East, another one of the city's envisioned three urban growth centres. It was established in 2019 by the *Cocratos* foundation, which, a few years later, received a 1.5 million subsidy from the European Union that it invested in the Hub. With this, *The Green Hub* became an important channel through which ideas and working methods from *Cocratos* were put into practice. The Hub is located at the heart of the neighbourhood where non-White lower-class residents form the majority. Since other parts of the neighbourhood are dominated by White middle-class residents, *The Green Hub* aims to bring different people together through projects and initiatives that empower the less privileged and enable mutual learning.

The Green Hub aims to contribute to an inclusive transition towards environmentally sustainable solutions by first focusing on the social relations in the neighbourhood and encouraging conversations among neighbours. These conversations in turn enable the democratic empowerment of disadvantaged neighbours. The founder of the *Cocratos* foundation and *The Green Hub* explained to me:

We ask people 'do you know how the game is played?' And that game, you know, that is actually quite unfair, so we will teach them how to empower themselves. And then we find creative solutions [...] to engage with circular economy and sustainability.

Although the sustainable transition is at the core of what *The Green Hub* aims to do, this comes only into view after what they see as the social and democratic transition. The latter two revolve around citizens' experiences and around bringing people together in new ways that enable them to understand how they can improve their livelihoods. Social inclusion is thus an integral part of changes regarding environmental sustainability. This has led to projects such as a community

garden (*Tuinen van Brasa*), a bike repair cafe (*Bike Kitchen*), free sewing courses and a team assisting people in insulating their homes to reduce energy costs (*Quick Fix team*).

At about a kilometre's distance from *The Green Hub*, also located in the city's Southeast district, is the *CLT H-Buurt* project. The group has come together to fight the negative consequences of the city's policies for urban growth and development, such as rising housing prices that drive people out of their neighbourhoods. They do this by trying to establish a Community Land Trust (CLT), in which maintaining and further strengthening the strong and vibrant community in the area is an important factor. Since 2005, this community has been centralised in the Maranatha Community Transformation Centre, a religious community organisation. An advisor who is currently assisting the community in the development of the CLT explained to me that contributing to the area development of the "H-Buurt" area is a key objective of the CLT, but it is not the only one:

The goal is also to include the people from the neighbourhood and the community. [...] For example, there is a lady who organises all kinds of activities on the square, and there is someone who likes to cook for the neighbourhood. [...] The goal is to ensure that these linking pins of the municipality get a place and take part in discussions about the development of the area.

Through the CLT, the aim is to find both legal and social structures that empower the community in the neighbourhood and enable this community to own the land they live on together. The CLT project thus aims to leverage the abilities and qualities of the community. This is related to how various Doughnut Economics projects seek to legitimise the knowledge of local community members by making it more widely available and by making voices heard politically.

1.1.2 MAKING VOICES HEARD

Various Doughnut Economics projects in Amsterdam create local networks of expertise to enable forms of collective self-government. One example of this is *02025*, a bottom-up network of renewable energy pioneers facilitated by the Municipality of Amsterdam in relation to its strategies for a climate-neutral and natural-gas-free city. The network consists of "energy commissioners" in each of Amsterdam's one hundred postal code zones who ensure the facilitation of knowledge-sharing among citizens and local businesses around renewable energy. They do this, for example, through recurring "energy breakfasts," which are open to anyone interested in learning more about renewable energy in their respective neighbourhoods. The network's commissioners – all working on a voluntary basis except for the commissioner of the city as a whole – are the contact points for individuals, groups of neighbours or organisations who want to learn more about transitioning to renewable energy sources. With the help of the network, a wide range and variety of energy cooperatives have been supported in residential areas as well as industrial zones in Amsterdam.

The founder of *02025* shared with me that she envisions a network that enables “a new kind of democracy” – one that facilitates people within their neighbourhoods to signal the needs with respect to renewable energy and which channels subsidies more effectively. The commissioners are the facilitating contact points for everyone in the neighbourhood with questions about (renewable) energy; they know their respective neighbourhoods well and are easily reachable by fellow residents. With several of these strong networks across the city, *02025* envisions that a new kind of democracy can arise in which the municipality facilitates processes driven by citizens.

Another city-wide, citizen-driven network is *WomenMakeTheCity*, which consists of women's councils that give women a voice in urban development. The network arose in relation to Amsterdam's latest spatial strategy for multinucleated growth (Appendix I-42). Alderperson Van Doorninck, who was responsible for the development of this strategy as well as for the initiation of the circular economy and Doughnut Economy strategies, wanted to ensure that local, marginalised women were included in the development of the envisioned growth cores. In this regard, she stated that “it is still mostly men who talk about urban development, while womxn³ actually have lots of wisdom and knowledge about their city” (Appendix II-16 [my translation]). To address this, she freed up funds for *WomenMakeTheCity*. Currently *WomenMakeTheCity* runs independently and has expanded from having its city-wide council to also having one in each of the city's envisioned growth cores – North, Southeast and New-West. In the women's councils, diverse groups of women who live in these districts (or the city, for the city-wide council) take an intersectional-feminist approach to urban development by means of the Just City Index.⁴ The women's councils give input to existing plans or advise planners and developers from an intersectional-feminist perspective, referring to themes such as power, aspiration, democracy and justice. The networked approach of *WomenMakeTheCity* is a way through which the experiences of local, and in many cases marginalised, inhabitants get heard in urban policy making processes.

Another initiative that brings together various projects related to Doughnut Economics is the *Doughnut Bakery* (“Donutbakkerij”). Active in the New-West district, it enables collaborations between the various projects that are ongoing in that area of the city. It takes an explicitly neighbourhood-centred approach to Doughnut Economics, organising Doughnut neighbourhood days with workshops to make Doughnut Economics resonate with residents' everyday experiences. The *Doughnut Bakery*, as well as *02025*, *WomenMakeTheCity* and the other projects mentioned earlier

³ This way of spelling, used by *WomenMakeTheCity*, is often found in intersectional texts to be inclusive of trans women and non-binary people, and to avoid the suggestion of sexism through including the word “man”.

⁴ The Just City Index was developed by Toni L. Griffin, Professor of Practice at The Just City Lab, Harvard Graduate School of Design. See <https://www.designforthejustcity.org/>.

– the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt*, *The Green Hub* and *CLTH-Buurt* – all aim at bringing together residents to create momentary shared experiences of safety, creativity and belonging. This in turn enables them to educate themselves about developments in their neighbourhoods and collectively voice concerns. In relation to this, various actors work together to expand the notion of value used in considerations of urban development to include the non-economic value created by civil society actors through strengthening communities, for example.

1.1.3 INTRODUCING DIVERSE VALUES

Doughnut Economics projects in Amsterdam aim to redefine the notion of value in the city by introducing “social value” or “neighbourhood value” as considerable factors in public tenders and urban development. These efforts coincide with wider developments in Amsterdam that combine thinking around Doughnut Economics, community wealth building and the development of *MAEX*. The latter is a “transaction platform for societal value” that is used in the Netherlands more widely. It makes impact analyses based on “Social Handprint” data, which visually represents an organisation’s or initiative’s impact in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals. It also includes an estimate of the financial value of this impact through a comparison with the costs of getting a similar product or service from a market actor or by calculating the forgone damage that the product or service enables. The Municipality of Amsterdam used the thinking behind *MAEX* to collaborate with various civil society initiatives and local funds to include *MAEX* in urban development promoting “broad prosperity,” a notion I discussed in the previous chapter.

This turn to plural thinking is also reflected in ongoing efforts within Amsterdam’s municipal organisation, where the Doughnut Economics model helped to connect social and especially ecological aspects to economic development. The Doughnut Economics model was an important tool for promoting “holistic” thinking in policymaking processes, simultaneously promoting ecological and social terms. A civil servant who was closely involved with the development of the strategy from the beginning put it to me as follows:

One of the biggest insights of making the “City Doughnut” strategy [...] was that we already do a lot of socio-economic research, but that we miss a chunk of ecological research. [...] And] we really don’t have enough insight into the connections between the two aspects [social and ecological]. So after making this strategy, we dived deeper into the ecological part [...]. Ultimately, we want to produce numbers that correspond to the Doughnut model [...] but the link with the social aspects in that remains a very tough one.

Hence, according to this municipality official, the model of Doughnut Economics has been used internally in the municipality to expand the range of considerations related to economic decision-making.⁵

At the same time, the members of *WomenMakeTheCity* have worked on a procurement tool for the municipality based on Doughnut Economics principles to further promote this kind of holistic thinking within the municipal organisation. In an interview with two of *WomenMakeTheCity*'s board members, one of them explained to me why this was necessary:

They [the municipality] realised that for the inner ring, the social foundation of the Doughnut, there are very few ideas for how to apply that to area development. The outer ring, the ecological ceiling, those would be more like sustainability requirements. For some reason that goes much easier, while the social justice requirements are lagging behind.

Data with respect to ecological through-put and its relation to social aspects are often lacking; in the built environment it appears to be easier to include ecological considerations than questions of social justice. With tools like the “Just City Index” and a Doughnut Economics procurement tool, *WomenMakeTheCity* aim to define and include such social justice requirements. Thus, in the municipal organisation, the Doughnut Economics model seems to have brought about further reflections on social and ecological considerations, the interactions between them as well as the role of community organisations in exploring these.

Various of the neighbourhood-based initiatives engage with notions of alternative value such as *MAEX* to define “neighbourhood value” or “social value” to communicate their added value to the municipality. In the New-West district, a group of eight citizen organisations, many of which are also engaged in the aforementioned *Doughnut Bakery*, demanded the district administration to consider the role of citizen organisation in the development of the twenty-years “Masterplan Nieuw-West” (Appendix I-57). Through connecting the Sustainable Development Goals with the “Neighbourhood Doughnut” – showing how the neighbourhood is performing regarding the various social and ecological indicators – and the “neighbourhood value” – the value that is added by citizens and citizen organisations in the neighbourhood – these organisations aim to connect the developments regarding the Doughnut Economy in the neighbourhood with those on the city-level.

Hence, Doughnut Economics projects in Amsterdam engage politically by creating and strengthening local communities, making their voices heard vis-à-vis the local state, and making

⁵ Another example of this is the city's latest mobility strategy, which has adopted a triangle instead of a Doughnut-shaped model, to bring together ecological, social and economic considerations in its development of mobility (Appendix I-53).

their social value intelligible through combined efforts of redefining the kinds of value relevant in policy-making processes. Within Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy, there are networking logics at play through the coalition as well as through more ad hoc, personal collaborations. Before analysing these in more detail in section 2, I now turn to the ways in which Doughnut activists in Amsterdam do not only engage in forms of contestation but also in the prefiguration of alternatives. Alongside the efforts around contestation, which I have examined in this section so far, various parts of the Doughnut Economics movement in Amsterdam engage directly in the enactment of diverse economic practices and relations through which they alter the flows of the urban economy in Amsterdam.

1.2 Socio-spatial alternatives and political-economic transformation

Through small-scale prefiguration of diverse forms of economic organising and relating, the pioneers of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement alter the material and spatial fabric of the city in two ways. The first of these is the decommodification and countering of commodification of urban space and land. The second relates to urban metabolism and the flows in the economy, notably energy, waste, money and food. I discuss each of these two in turn.

1.2.1 PROMOTING DECOMMODIFICATION AND COUNTERING COMMODIFICATION OF LAND

Various Doughnut Economics projects in Amsterdam respond in one way or another to the increasing commodification and growing scarcity of urban space in Amsterdam. These projects can be divided into, on the one hand, projects that aim to decommodify space in the long run by commoning the land, and, on the other hand, projects that make use of temporarily vacant urban space for the time it lasts. Two notable Doughnut Economics projects that aim to decommodify urban space in the long-run are *CLT H-Buurt* and *Food Park Amsterdam* ("*Voedselpark Amsterdam*"), both of which aim to counter the increasing commodification of urban space in Amsterdam by making land a commons. For the former, the spatial anchoring of the project in the form of a community land trust is crucial for the continued existence of the community in the long run, as an advisor to the project explained to me:

The building, the club house in which a lot of activities are organised currently, will disappear, and the social fabric of the neighbourhood will also disappear if we don't do anything [...]. You need a physical space to keep the community together. And if you can combine that with housing for the citizens who are involved, then you can ensure that those citizens do not disappear from the neighbourhood, which can then continue to exist for generations on end.

This should be attained through affordable rental or owner-occupied housing for lower- and middle-income groups. In a white paper, the project group emphasises the need for affordable housing, especially for certain foundational professional groups, such as teachers or health care workers. Importantly, this housing affordability should be guaranteed in the future by making speculation impossible (Appendix II-6).

Realising this, however, is difficult. Due to the city's ground lease system, a cooperative is the only legal form that would allow the city to hand over the land to the community without any further rent payments, but cooperatives do not allow for the inclusion of common spaces not targeted for housing. At the same time, when putting in bids for the land, the project will unavoidably compete with groups of higher middle-class citizens. My interlocutor explained that the city's new strategy for promoting housing cooperatives (Appendix I-30) has attracted many higher middle-class groups putting in bids to obtain land. Until the value of strengthening local communities or countering segregation and gentrification are formal assessment criteria for these tenders, he explained to me that it will be difficult for *CLT H-Buurt* to win any tender to obtain the land. This implies a limitation to the opportunities for decommodifying land in Amsterdam.

A second initiative that aims to call a halt to the further commodification of urban land in Amsterdam is *Food Park Amsterdam* ("*Voedselpark Amsterdam*"), located in the city's New-West district at the far outskirts of the city. Its aim is to save one of the last plots of non-polluted farming land around the city from becoming home to a new distribution centre, "Business Park Amsterdam Osdorp". This business park is one of the points through which the municipality wants to connect the city to the envisioned growth cores in its spatial strategy. The project around *Food Park Amsterdam* instead aims to turn the land into a community land trust that will house an "agroecological landscape park," which forms part of a response to the biodiversity crisis and empowers communities through Community Supported Agriculture (Appendix II-12, 8 [my translation]). By turning the land into a commons, it actively strives to make urban space openly accessible and available to common use and to create opportunities for "recreation and wellbeing for residents, the neighbourhood and the city" (Appendix II-11, 14 [my translation]) and for the "improvement of knowledge exchange around agriculture, sustainability and biodiversity" (Appendix II-11, 47 [my translation]). To realise a community based on the values of "inclusion, diversity and connection" (Appendix II-11, 10 [my translation]), the people involved in the project have lobbied and advocated for the *Amsterdam Food Park* since 2018, to the point that the project has created considerable controversy within the municipality (more on this towards the end of this chapter).

Other projects seek to limit the commodification of land by showcasing the alternative forms of urban living and activity that can take place on temporarily available land. *The Green Hub*, which I

discussed above, is located in an old school building that the project is allowed to use for a limited period of time. Notwithstanding *The Green Hub's* need for prolonging the temporary agreement or finding an alternative instead, they currently repurpose urban space in Southeast to the benefit of local communities.

The ability to use available space on an ad hoc basis is at the core of the *Kaskantine* (whose name would literally translate to "Green House Canteen"), an off-grid urban farm that is built in modules that can be moved easily. The farm has moved around the city since 2013 and is currently located at its fourth location, which it is trying to secure more permanently. By creatively using urban space and nature, the *Kaskantine* aims to educate about and enable ways of urban living that are low in terms of both costs and greenhouse gas emissions. It aims to establish parallel economic relations through a low-cost, low-income approach. This is enabled by the "community values" that they produce with a team of volunteers and an off-grid venue that can be situated on any idle urban space that they have so far been able to use for free. This creates the possibility of partial economic autonomy when "volunteers can, to a greater or lesser extent, 'afford' to be less active in the mainstream system and spend more time in the community" (Appendix II-13, 33). By promoting such decommodified labour and repurposing idle urban space and drawing in neighbouring communities as well as volunteers from across the city, the *Kaskantine* aims to enable new ways of urban living.

Currently, however, the *Kaskantine* is struggling to uphold its low-cost, low-income policy. In about four years from the time of writing, the *Kaskantine* will need to start paying rent to the municipality for the land that they are on. Due to their off-grid nature, the *Kaskantine* can easily move. Yet, they only want to do this if it is for a "good deal" in terms of the land they can use, and no good deal seems to be available at the moment. Therefore, they have experimented with generating revenue streams through brunches, dinners, business events and courses. Currently, they are looking into either a membership model – where people who use the *Kaskantine's* compost services get free courses or food in return – or a special "Doughnut fund" (fieldnotes January 2023). The latter would serve to bridge the gap between the rent that the *Kaskantine* can pay and the rent that the municipality is legally bound to ask. In a pilot version, the fund ran based on some funding from the local state and companies. The underlying logic is that this fund serves to channel money from the regular economy into promising Doughnut Economy neighbourhood initiatives, such as the *Kaskantine*. The fund is, however, insufficient to cover the *Kaskantine's* rent gap, and it is unclear how the situation can be resolved.

While projects like *CLT H-Buurt*, *Food Park Amsterdam* and *Kaskantine* attempt to counter the commodification of urban space and land by repurposing it, several of them also engage within the urban everyday to transform and decommodify parts of the economy by altering the flows of the

urban economy, such as money, waste and energy, and introducing practices that are owned by and benefit local communities directly.

1.2.2 TRANSFORMING THE URBAN EVERYDAY

In relation to the expanded notion of value and community wealth building efforts in various districts of Amsterdam, there are also vibrant conversations about alternative monetary streams and local currencies. While the *Doughnut Bakery* is working on a local currency, *The Green Hub* has initiated *2PING*, a local currency for Southeast to retain value in the area. The area borders the “Bijlmer ArenA” business district. The area around the business district was recently rebranded to “Amstelstad” by the municipality, possibly to get rid of the associations with the area’s troubled history.⁶ It is the area which produces the highest added value per square kilometre in the Netherlands (Appendix I-32, 98). The alternative currency *2PING* is anchored in the cooperative “Local Money Southeast” and is financially supported by the Southeast district administration in connection to ongoing community wealth building strategies.

One of the initiators of the alternative currency explains that the introduction of a local, “circular currency” that explicitly makes “money a means rather than an end in itself” enables “a shift from efficiency to resilience” (fieldnotes October 2022). This idea is to decommodify money by connecting *2PING* to existing money streams. Through agreements with companies and public institutions in Southeast that use *2PING* in their transactions with residents, local organisations or businesses, *2PING* facilitates a system where mainstream money is invested in the alternative monetary streams that solely benefit the local community. By working with the mainstream monetary system in this way, the aim with *2PING* is to “work with the system to escape it and create multiple values” (fieldnotes October 2022). At the workshop in October 2022, it was mentioned a few times that for this local currency to work, sufficient circulation of money is required and thus sufficient awareness around the currency’s existence. The initiators of the currency are currently working on this challenge, for example, by spreading the word through their recently launched website.⁷

Besides its efforts to decommodify money, *The Green Hub* engages in efforts to make energy flows in Southeast more sustainable. It facilitates various projects aimed at empowering residents in the

⁶ The construction of the “Bijlmer” (officially “Bijlmermeer”) was completed in the 1970s. It entailed a large-scale development of 13,000 dwelling units in 31 high-rise blocks. The project soon ran into problems resulting from unrealised plans, poor building management and maintenance and mismatches between supply and demand. The area was plagued by pollution, vandalism and crime (Fainstein 1997; Helleman and Wassenberg 2004).

⁷ The website can be found here: <https://2ping.nu/>.

face of energy poverty, for example, by advising on and assisting with the insulation of social housing, at a point when housing corporations have failed to step in to address energy poverty, and by offering support structures for purchasing infrared heating panels, thereby reducing the amount of natural gas-powered heating. In combination with *02025*, the renewable energy network that contributes to the proliferation of energy cooperatives across the city, *The Green Hub* is slowly but surely reconstituting the sources of heating and electricity in the city.

Another way in which *The Green Hub* intends to change the flows of Amsterdam's urban economy is through local circular economy projects around organic waste. One of *The Green Hub*'s first projects was the introduction of organic waste digesters across the area. The project originated in the Hub's mother organisation *Cocratos* and grew out to be a project for which *The Green Hub* became widely known. It started out with *Cocratos* lending *The Green Hub* its new mini digester of organic waste, with the eventual aim for residents "to reclaim [their] shit" and "to get rich shitting" through the instalment of digesters that are connected to the sewage system, as the founder of *The Green Hub* summarised it to me. The project has run into difficulties at various stages, for example, when the local restaurant business that was the envisioned receiver of the generated gas switched to electric burners as the price of gas skyrocketed in the winter of 2021-2022. However, the *Cocratos* foundation continues to experiment with locally sourced bioenergy, currently through the reinstalment of a "refurbished" version of the mini digester at a different location in the city.

The *Kaskantine* promotes the rethinking of waste in similar ways with composting facilities that can be used by residents alongside rainwater reuse systems and solar energy solutions. These projects thus introduce circular thinking about the value in waste streams in connection to bottom-up, community-driven engagement. Rather than commodifying waste streams, as mainstream approaches to the circular economy may tend to do, these approaches valorise circular streams to benefit and empower the local community at large. The *Kaskantine* also enables residents to grow organic food locally. In its greenhouses, it educates people through courses on climate-friendly and plant-based food growing and cooking. *Food Park Amsterdam* has a similar combined aim of community-based learning and urban agriculture. With the envisioned food park as a commons, it wants to expand its current educational activities about sustainable farming in the city and engage communities in growing the food in the food park.

1.3 Transformations of capitalism in the city

Projects such as the biowaste digester, composting infrastructures, a local currency and alternative food provisioning systems are all small-scale contributions to redirecting the urban flows of money, waste and energy and beginning to transform capitalism in the city from within the everyday. They

enable the provision of social needs – such as food, energy and waste handling – in an alternative way and thereby reconfigure what Lefebvre ([1947] 2014a, 189) calls the “human raw material” that is the makeup of everyday life. Through forms of commoning and collective forms of self-government, they aim to decommodify everyday-life activities and reduce its “irrationality generated by alienation” while promoting its “potential rationality of instincts, needs and activity of all kinds” (Lefebvre [1947] 2014a, 189). The projects reconfigure nature in the city as well as the urban's relations with nature. By producing food locally, or by repurposing organic waste in new ways, the projects produce and retain value locally to the benefit of communities in the neighbourhood. At the same time, these projects aim to decommodify land, urban space and housing, thereby striving for a slowing down of the imperative of economic growth. The introduction of “social” and “neighbourhood” value also adds to this by attempting to introduce social considerations into those around urban development.

By bringing residents' lived experiences and perspectives – Lefebvre's “lived space” – into policy making processes – and Lefebvre's “conceived space” – in this way, the place-based Doughnut Economics projects aim to reposit the city as primarily a space for social reproduction (cf. Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 40). Through social and democratic empowerment, the various neighbourhood-based initiatives aim to establish networks of care in which residents have a common understanding of what their neighbours are going through and what struggles potentially bind them together.

Hence, the place-based Doughnut Economics projects aim to transform the social fabric of their neighbourhoods through which they indirectly influence the urban fabric and the flows of Amsterdam's economy at large. This way, the Doughnut Economics projects can at this point be seen, among other things, as the pioneering citizen-driven initiatives that the Municipality of Amsterdam envisions in its circular economy strategy. However, the change currently created by the different Doughnut projects is to some extent discursive in nature, and they do not yet alter socio-spatial constellations in fundamental ways. While the emerging Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam receives attention internationally, with visitors from abroad coming to Amsterdam to learn about what is going on, long-lasting socio-spatial change remains a challenge. It is hampered by difficulties with securing resources, such as land, space or funding, and with sustainably running these citizen-driven initiatives that are often largely or fully dependent on volunteers. To overcome such challenges, the islands of change that these projects epitomise must link up to one another to form a larger movement of transformation. Understanding how this might happen requires consideration of the mutual connections between actors of change and community-driven projects through their engagements with the wider Doughnut Economics movement and Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition.

2 Coalitions for change

In this section, I analyse the activities of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, which is a group loosely organised around the logic of following “pioneers” and forms a main point of coalescence for all self-acclaimed Doughnut activists. In section 2.1, I start out with an analysis of how the coalition seeks to organically grow the spread of Doughnut Economics activities and projects through the promotion of hope and positive energy by showcasing good examples. Then in section 2.2, I discuss how, despite this loose form of organising, the movement is organised and governed by a group of core members who give direction to the coalition. Finally in section 2.3, I analyse the promises and challenges related to the coalition's aim of establishing alternative relations between citizens and the state – which is in line with a new-municipalist politics. In this process, the Doughnut model is envisioned as a shared language to guide the mutual engagement, which also creates certain challenges.

2.1 An organically growing movement of pioneers

The main driver of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement is the positive logic of following examples of pioneering citizens who are already “putting doughnut thinking into practice” (fieldnotes October 2021). The movement revolves around these pioneers who, as I developed in the previous section, drive Doughnut Economics initiatives and projects in their respective neighbourhoods and who spread positive energy to entice others to join the movement. To ensure that participation remains high, the movement aims to ensure that engagement with Doughnut Economics is “fun” – both when it comes to engagement within neighbourhoods and at events organised by the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition. These events are like the festivals that Lefebvre ([1947] 2014a, 202) describes: they draw from “all that [is] energetic, pleasurable and possible from nature, food, social life and [human beings'] own body and mind,” that is, the everyday, while also seeking a rupture of the ordinary. This potentially enables the arising of concrete utopias that may, through the promotion of forms of self-government, redefine what is (im)possible.

2.1.1 ORGANISING AROUND PIONEERS

The main impetus of the Doughnut Economics movement in Amsterdam is to be organic and promote change by connecting those things that are “already happening” (fieldnotes October 2021). This implies that for members of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, Doughnut Economics becomes a lens through which to interpret existing activities. These activities are then collected on the online platform of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, which features organisations, place-

based projects and individuals.⁸ One activist recounted to me how the model keeps popping up in her activities around climate action, despite her merely loose relation with the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition:

Every time, you know, also when we have Climate Conversations,⁹ we talk about the Doughnut Economy. So I am an unofficial ambassador who time and again calls out 'guys this is the Doughnut, this is yet again an example of the Doughnut!'

This points to a "belongingness" that is possible on various scales, as posited by Blokland's (2017, 165) understanding of community, which I discussed in chapter 4.

A main idea behind the Doughnut Economics movement in Amsterdam, confirmed by Raworth's organisation Doughnut Economics Action Lab, is that "everyone can do with Doughnut Economics what they want" (fieldnotes October 2022). Change, envisioned in this way, is an organic process driven by pioneers who, just like pioneering trees do for the growth of a forest on devastated land, pave the way for a wider process of change. In Amsterdam, such pioneering citizens are crucial in enabling the bottom-up processes. They are the ones who take a leading role within their neighbourhoods and communities, in which they have an extensive network. This enables them to provide the local state with entry points into the capillaries of society, useful in its attempts to avoid merely engaging with the "usual suspects" (Pape and Lim 2019), by facilitating the engagement of those not usually involved with the municipality. Moreover, the municipality puts the emphasis on such pioneering changemakers in its circular economy and Doughnut Economics strategies with the aim of facilitating forms of self-government in the city's various neighbourhoods. Pioneers, in turn, aim to facilitate the participation of their neighbours and bring forth their wishes and demands into the spaces where they meet the municipality.

The municipality's engagement with citizens can be a tricky process. The more formal participatory processes that the city or district administration organises in the neighbourhoods – regarding, for instance, area development – require a form of facilitation through which to establish equality between participants. An advisor who has facilitated various participation processes in Amsterdam and works according to Doughnut Economics principles described to me how facilitation for her is about "making visible that which in a certain space cannot yet be talked about and enable others to see and dare to name that, and otherwise give them a little push by asking them a question". The facilitator is thus in a back-and-forth movement between making space for others to self-govern and taking decisions on how this self-government can best be facilitated both locally and in translation

⁸ The platform featured 664 persons, 90 projects and 41 organisations as of December 2023.

⁹ "Climate Conversations" is a programme that invites people to partake in conversations about ecological footprints and reducing them. See <https://www.klimaatgesprekken.nl/>.

to the local state. My interlocutor calls this movement “the dance of participation” in which the different participants move together according to certain steps in the process but still with enough room to move freely. This implies a humble position for those who guide the conversation.

This is also the case for the coming together of residents who collaborate with one another from the ground up. The founder of the *Sierpleinbuurt Platform* stresses the importance of letting participants slowly move in the same direction without defining any clear objective or strict agreements on how to get there. As he put it to me: “there are very few concrete agreements on how to collaborate, but one way or the other it happens”. He calls this process “swarming”. Like a flock of birds, the members of the community move together organically while learning as they go along. And this learning from others is crucial, he argues: “I tend to include as many people and approaches as possible, because there are things at work that I do not control, and I shouldn't think that I know it all best”. Listening to others and allowing them to take part are thus crucial parts of how he sees his role as facilitator.

To further enable this swarming, affect plays an important role in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement. In the first place, negative affects play a role in mobilising people. Dissatisfaction stemming from forms of perceived injustice and inequality, of being excluded from politics and urban development, is instrumental in initially engaging residents politically. In the case of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement, participation often results from a combination of dissatisfaction with environmental issues and, importantly, social hardship. People feel the need to let their voices be heard and insert themselves as political subjects. After this initial mobilisation, the Doughnut Economics projects aim to invoke positive affect to ensure continued participation. This sense of hope, and of positive energy, permeates the movement in Amsterdam at large.

2.1.2 ORGANISING THROUGH HOPE AND POSITIVE ENERGY

To keep (voluntary) engagement high, the organisers of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics activities highlight the need to make participation “fun” and playful, for example, by calling the Coalition's annual meet-up a festival, by considering breakfast meetups “celebrations,” as the energy cooperative network *02025* does, and by playing around with the visual image of a doughnut. This is promoted in the original City Doughnut strategy document, which mentions “Mmmm” as one of the eight guiding principles for participation in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy, referring to the fact that participation in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics transition should be as ‘yummy’ as eating an actual doughnut (Appendix I-2, 3). During various workshops I attended, the focus on positive affect was clear, for example, when a reflection round at the end of a workshop was framed

by the exercise to build positively onto what one's predecessor in the reflection round had said, thereby creating mutual understanding and consensus. When I asked about the hypothetical case in which someone would have felt the need to share anything negative, several of the other participants backed my question and confirmed that they indeed felt that there was no room for critical reflections. The focus on positivity may thus engender exclusionary mechanisms – more on which below.

Another source of positive energy is Kate Raworth, whose presence is appreciated by all informants I spoke with. With radiating enthusiasm and charisma, Raworth participates at Doughnut Economics events in Amsterdam and thereby gives those events more weight and shows the international relevance of local developments. This gives participants the feeling of taking part in a wider community that enables them to “jump scales” (Smith 1992). Being part of larger tendencies around global issues is important for many of the participants. At a Doughnut Economics event in September 2021 that was important in the further development of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, and where Raworth and her team were present, one of the participants enthusiastically called out: “it feels as if we are solving all the world's problems!” (fieldnotes September 2021). For many participants I spoke with, this sense of collective agency regarding larger-scale questions partially stems from the engagement across neighbourhoods and across (international) places through Raworth's organisation. Another example was the “Global Donut Festival” in November 2023, which took place simultaneously in Amsterdam and various places on different continents.

This connectedness creates a positive sense of empowerment emanating from the hope that the city and society *can* be organised differently. This positive energy is to be spread through “contagious neighbourhood power,” as people in *The Green Hub* call it, while the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition organises around the main principle of “going where the energy is”. Rather than making the effort to convince those people, organisations or institutions that do not want to collaborate with or contribute to Doughnut Economics projects, the members of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition deems it better to move on and find the potential partners that *do* want to collaborate, given the urgency to act upon imminent climate catastrophe. In answer to my question as to whether there are any potential partners or stakeholders of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalitions which seem reluctant at the moment, one of the core members said the following:

Well, it might be a bit of a silly answer, but if things are difficult [with certain potential stakeholders], then we may not consider them yet. (...) For us, the group which can and wants to be involved and work on things is actually very large already. So it is more important to get together and answer the questions you just posed [of what exactly the role of the Coalition should be in the future].

At the same time, he also acknowledges that this large group is not representative of Amsterdam's diversity:

Diversity [...] is a weak spot. When you look around at the Doughnut Deal Day [in October 2022], most of the people you see are white and highly educated. [...] So the whole range of diversity of Amsterdam is not sufficiently connected to the movement.

The coalition hopes that over time the group of people involved becomes more representative of Amsterdam's diversity.

However, this may be troubled by the consensual approach to growing the movement on which both the Municipality of Amsterdam and the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition have relied from the start. The coalition relied on the "90-9-1 rule for participation inequality in social media and online communities" (Appendix II-1, 9). They explain that besides the 90 percent "lurkers" and 9 percent "followers,"

you have 1%, the tiny minority of people in society that can make things move. They are the dancers who don't wait for others to act. We focus on those 1%ers, the creators, initiators, the ones that practice first and theorise later. It doesn't matter whether they are [interns or CEOs], as long as they have that contagious positive energy that we desperately need to make systemic change happen. (Appendix II-1, 9)

The "90-9-1 rule" was initially developed to describe participation on social media and in online communities. However, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition applies this model to Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy to explain how they envision the movement's growth – despite this movement being engaged in transformative processes that are ultimately socio-spatial. Although the core members of the Coalition are slowly moving away from promoting this 90-9-1 logic, their embrace of the "1%" resonates with the visions of the alderperson behind the "Doughnut Economy" strategy. Upon launching the strategy, she explained that the implementation would largely rely on working "with the coalition of the willing," who "could be an example for others".¹⁰ Hence, from the beginning, the initiatives around "Doughnut Economics" in Amsterdam have been organised with the "willing," that is, those with contagious positive energy and those who, as Raworth also says, 'practice first and theorise later' (DEAL, n.d.).

This working method can partially be explained by the fact that the work within the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition is mostly voluntary. The international attention for Amsterdam's Doughnut

¹⁰ Marieke van Doorninck in an interview with Stephen Dubner for Freakonomics Radio, episode 49: "Is Economic Growth the Wrong Goal?" recorded on 12 August 2020, <https://freakonomics.com/podcast/is-economic-growth-the-wrong-goal-ep-429/>, accessed on 8 August 2021.

Economy created a high workload for a select group of volunteers, in some cases leading to health issues. Following the “Doughnut Deal Day” in October 2022, one of the coalition's core members publicly criticised the local government for the lack of structural funding and its reliance on volunteers for the implementation and execution of the city's Doughnut Economics strategy (Roon 2022).

At the same time, the Coalition's seemingly open and organic way of working obscures somewhat that the Coalition is governed to a large degree by a small number of core members. Initially, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition was hosted and financed by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, with one full-time and one part-time team member. This means that, despite the openness of the online platform, on which any citizen or organisation can make a profile, a few members of the coalition curate the network and decide who participates in invite-only workshops and who gets to present ongoing projects. For the co-creation workshop in September 2021 – to which I gained access only after several months of trying to get in contact and receiving rejections – I was told that the organisers chose to invite “participants with a lot of experience with ‘the Doughnut’ who can not only help create the agenda for change but also help execute it” (personal communication with core member of Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, September 2021). Several of the participants at the workshop, however, told me that they had never engaged with Doughnut Economics explicitly before and that they were rather surprised they had been invited for the workshop.

The difficulty of gaining access to this event as well as the eventual selection of participants surprised me, as I had connected the social and environmental aims of Doughnut Economics to ideas of accessibility, openness and inclusion and had thus expected the coalition to be more of a popular movement with low entry barriers throughout. Later, one of the core members of the coalition explained to me that the selection of attendants had been informed by strategic aims of identifying core actors in Amsterdam's ‘double triple helix’ with a wide network in (certain parts of) the city. Another motivation for the workshop in September 2021 was to understand how the coalition could arrive at durable, sustainable ways of organising the coalition that would make it less dependent on voluntary work. To this end, several local entrepreneurs, business employees and high-level civil servants were invited alongside community organisers.

My worries about the potentially exclusionary mechanisms of the movement were shared widely at this co-creation workshop and formulated by one participant in the following way:

How are we really going to interact with different social layers? This should be the main goal. We have a lot of manifestos, but other people are not reading them. (fieldnotes September 2021)

This indeed emphasises that the movement runs a risk of losing touch with the people whom it aims to include but who ‘do not read the manifestos’ due to a discrepancy between lived experiences

within the city's more challenged districts, on the one hand, and the intentions and activities of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition to positively engage and inspire based on an alternative image of the economy, on the other hand. The core members of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition are aware of the risk that the Doughnut Economics model as well as the coalition attract highly educated, white citizens more easily than others. The coalition's answer to this question is, at least for the time being, to collect and connect all Doughnut Economics initiatives that are going on in Amsterdam to foster a pluralist movement. Yet, the coalition's core members, rather uniformly highly educated and White themselves, play an important role in shaping and curating this movement.

2.2 A loosely organised but curated movement

The Doughnut Economics activities in Amsterdam are diverse and connected loosely through a self-identification with the orientation towards "bringing Amsterdam 'into the Doughnut' as quickly as possible," for example, by adding themselves, or their projects or organisations, to the online platform (Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, n.d. [my translation]). The Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition plays a central role in the growth and representation of the movement by collecting and connecting the initiatives that are already taking place and by supporting "pioneers" through the facilitation of mutual learning. In the beginning phase of the coalition, two of the coalition's early members made an overview of all existing Doughnut Economics initiatives in the city in the spring of 2020. One of them recounted to me how the main conclusion of the project was the need for an "intermediate layer" between these bottom-up initiatives:

There is the desire to learn from one another; that desire is always there, and it is strong. This is very difficult to organise, especially because from an operational, very practical point of view, everyone is very busy with their own initiatives. So you also need a well-organised intermediate layer.

The main function of the intermediate layer of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition is to provide learning opportunities between Doughnut Economics projects across the city as a meso-level organiser within the community (Ometto, Zafar and Hedberg 2021). The coalition works according to three pillars: "popularising and activating, strengthening and financing, learning and integrating" (Appendix II-4 [my translation]). The "Doughnut Deal Day" that took place in October 2022 was a prime example of the events at which the learning and sharing of knowledge and concepts happen at various moments. Due to the lack of structural funding, the core members of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition currently focus on organising one annual larger in-person event alongside a handful of smaller, online meetups throughout the year. At these events, they invite pioneers to share their experiences and ways of working with Doughnut Economics. Besides

opportunities to network, knowledge-sharing takes place regarding funding and contacts to actors within different levels of the state.

Part of this knowledge sharing happens through certain methods and working forms that are generated and circulated within the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition. These serve to provide place-based Doughnut activists with a way to interpret their existing activities anew. Various concepts and working methods travel through the city-wide network and feed into the processes through which various actors in Amsterdam practice and try to implement Doughnut Economics. An example of this is the concept of “Doughnut Deals,” which was developed by the *Cocratos* foundation and implemented in its working methods as well as at *The Green Hub*. The Deals prescribe a method for bringing together various partners around different Doughnut Economics themes.

Various interpretations of the term “Doughnut Deals” exist across levels and parts of the movement. For the *Cocratos* foundation and *The Green Hub*, “Doughnut Deals” are forms of collaboration between at least two partners, who come together in an “equal, reciprocal, fair and transparent” way to address at least one ecological theme and at least three social themes (Stijkel 2022; Appendix II-15). These forms of collaboration depart from the conviction that, in order to get money flowing in more equitable ways, the municipality and the community need one another. To this end, public-civil partnerships (PCPs) as well as partnerships with private parties play an important role – I return to PCPs in more detail below. In 2022, the concept of Doughnut Deals got picked up by the wider movement, and the annual event organised by the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition that year became the “Doughnut Deal Day,” with all activities structured around the closure of deals between various partners. At this event, members of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition emphasised that “Doughnut Deals” for them referred to agreements about shared intentions or an initial exploration of collaboration between different partners (fieldnotes October 2022). This variety of interpretations of “Doughnut Deals” is illustrative of the loose coalescence around ideas and the generally flexible forms of relating and organising in the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition.

In line with the aim of pioneers making engagement fun and allowing people to participate in the ways they want, the core members of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition take a non-normative stance towards local projects as much as possible. Rather than providing the entire movement with a unifying approach, strategy or direction of action, various members of the coalition emphasised that the aim is to connect different initiatives and promote pluralism within the movement.

At coalition-wide meetings, such as the online meetups or annual Doughnut festivals, the goal is to support local projects by adding to the “positive energy” from the neighbourhoods by sharing experiences and finding commonalities across projects to promote the feeling of a larger movement.

The one-day workshop in September 2021 mentioned above, for example, served to strengthen the already-existing engagement – and “energy” – of the select group of citizen organisations, city officials and stakeholders from local businesses, as well as large corporations through a process guided by Kate Raworth and her Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL). In this process, DEAL's tools and themes guided the discussions meant to identify best practices, learn from challenges across projects and define the general direction and focus points for the Amsterdam-wide movement. In these efforts of the coalition, the affective dimension of commonalities, “positive energy” and “fun,” again play an important role.

This overarching idea of a loosely organised network through positive energy spread by pioneers who facilitate participation in their neighbourhoods aims to be grounded in the city's neighbourhoods. However, as hinted at above, the coalition does struggle to represent Amsterdam's rich social diversity. Worries about this have been present from the start. Several informants shared with me early on that it was unclear to them how much active consideration there had been about the governance structure of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition and its positioning vis-à-vis the local government. This led to concerns that the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition might lose its activist character and instead come to be coopted, as it would start to resemble the local government in its bureaucratic and inaccessible character.

Indeed, the connections between the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition and the local government are not clearly defined. In its strategy for 2023-2025, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition considers more actively the coalition's organisational structure as well as topics such as financing, governance and ownership. However, this strategy was formulated behind closed doors with a select group of participants and only presented to the wider coalition afterwards. This might be conflicting with the idea, also presented in the strategy, that “the coalition is a commons” (Appendix II-4, 2 [my translation]). As the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition aims to encompass a whole range of partners (from Doughnut-enthusiast individuals to place-based community projects, professional, private partners and the municipality), it engages in a difficult balancing act between requirements from various sides. Further unpacking these tensions would require more access to and research around the Coalition's internal processes, where mine have ultimately been limited. Nevertheless, related to my purposes here, these tensions prompt a further question about the collective subject of change that is promoted in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy, as well as its constitutive elements. Answering this question calls for an analysis of the internal organisation of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition and its implications for the relations between citizens and the state.

2.3 Towards a coalition of state and non-state actors?

The Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition is a central point of convergence between various Doughnut Economics advocates and residents driving projects in their respective neighbourhoods. The movement does not only intend to connect changemakers across the city through the coalition; one of the aims permeating it is to empower citizens through different relations between local communities and the state on a long-term basis. This reflects a municipalist politics that reconfigures the relations between the state and civil society (Kohn 2003, 139) and enables the coming together of social movements and governmental actors in “powerful assemblages” (Chatterton and Pusey 2020, 31) (as developed in chapter 3). In line with this, various state and non-state actors in Amsterdam aim to establish long-term equivalence relations between citizen organisations and the state as an alternative to the current project-driven subsidy system. In this process, Doughnut Economics has been envisioned as a shared language between civil servants and citizens.

2.3.1 RECONFIGURING STATE-CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS – AND THE LIMITS TO THIS

Actors within both Amsterdam's municipal organisation and various citizen organisations are engaged in bringing local perspectives into processes of urban policy making. As part of its extensive democratisation programme, the Municipality of Amsterdam has various programmes that all aim to engage with citizens to get their inputs on what it means to be an “*Amsterdammer*”. As discussed in chapter 6, efforts to bring the realms of the “system” and the “lifeworld” or “living world” are rather widespread through attempts to bring residents' lived experiences and know-how into policy-making processes. State as well as non-state actors, among whom there are Doughnut activists, find that the two realms are drifting apart, speak different languages and counteract one another, which in turn hamper citizen participation. A magazine about democratisation in Amsterdam, created by city officials engaged with the city's municipalist initiatives (which I introduce in more detail below), puts it as follows:

Democratisation turned out to be a tough dossier. In the case of major challenges such as area development and neighbourhood makeover programmes, it always proves difficult to make room for residents to actually have a say. In the jargon of the city makers, this is where the ‘systemic world’ collides with the ‘living world’. (Appendix I-1, 18)

Therefore, the goal is to foster everyday politics in the “living world” and bring these politics into the right level of the system to eventually change that same system. Related to this is how the founder of the *Sierpleinbuurt Platform* described their objective, which is for citizens...

... to get a seat at the table with the system, together with alderpersons, members of the council and civil servants [...], so that city officials and citizens can gain the shared experience of entering into a conversation and listening to one another.

The aim of the *Sierpleinbuurt Platform*, the *Cocratos* foundation that established *The Green Hub* as well as of other Doughnut Economics projects is to forge relations of equivalence between civil society actors and city officials as an alternative to the current subsidy-based system. Many of the citizens I spoke with expressed dissatisfaction with that system, even though they themselves are the ones who eventually learned how to navigate it and have been able to secure funding various times. They emphasised how a system of subsidies creates dependency relations and short-term thinking, as it makes initiatives dependent on the (short) cycles of subsidy allocation. Moreover, it is a slow, bureaucratic and non-transparent system, making it more difficult for some to access than for others. The “neighbourhood budgets” are an example of this. The municipality introduced these budgets across the city as part of its democratisation agenda. Anyone in the neighbourhood can apply for money to use for the neighbourhood, and the applications are reviewed and voted on by a committee that includes citizens. A civil servant working in neighbourhoods with area development and place-making reflects on the shortcomings of this initiative to truly democratise processes:

Imagine you want to apply for such a budget [...]. You can apply with a plan and then you have to wait for I think half a year to hear whether it is approved. And then I am not even sure if you already know immediately whether you will receive the money or that then only the voting starts. So even this is actually a very bureaucratic process. And then, even if it all goes through, it doesn't mean that you can start right away, because you probably need all kinds of permits first.

This lack of an accessible process to obtain funding also applies to the development of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy. Despite the grand announcement and international news coverage of the launch of the “City Doughnut” (e.g., Boffey 2020; C. Nugent 2021), there was no overall structural and transparent funding source for its implementation. Instead, different parts of the municipality contributed in different ways to some of the citizen-driven projects. Despite asking various actors at various points as well as searching myself, I have not been able to find any comprehensive reporting on specific sums. This results in many Doughnut Economics projects, as well as the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, spending a considerable amount of time on getting and renewing funding, much in line with the short-term subsidy-based system they aim to challenge. A core member of the coalition stated in an interview:

Finance means searching per definition. Within the municipality, there are all kinds of subsidies, locally, city-wide, and different regulations, and sometimes you fall in between all of them.

Collaboration with the municipality is very much dependent on with whom you do it and how they go about these things.

Hence, in most instances, funding comes down to getting access to the right part of the municipal organisation through personal contacts. This again points to the key role of the Doughnut pioneers, who have a long history of leading and sustaining civic initiatives in the cities, through which they gained extensive experience collaborating with various departments of the municipality, and who thus become crucial elements for the continuation of the projects.

Instead of such funding arrangements that enforce project-based, short-term ways of working, Amsterdam's Doughnut activists strive for more long-term, structural relations between the local state and citizens that enables citizens to "own" the processes and creates a relation of equivalence between them and the state. Rather than the dependency relation that follows from subsidy-based systems, they aim for citizens to take ownership in these processes. This is necessary if the Doughnut Economics strategy is to work to empower citizens and spark "holistic thinking". Someone who extensively worked with the Municipality of Amsterdam on citizen participation processes stated to me that she thinks that the Doughnut Economy can only be realised if "the municipality does not own it" and the citizens who help putting the strategy into practice are independent of the municipality. This is in line with municipalist objectives to blur the boundaries between state and civil society and give the latter agency.

Thus, the intention is to "flip" the relationship on its side, as the founder of the *Cocratos* foundation and *The Green Hub* puts it. She explains why the municipality and citizens situated in neighbourhoods need to establish a new kind of equivalence relationship rather than engaging in a top-down or bottom-up process:

It has to do, firstly, with one party needing to get away from its arrogance and acknowledging that they cannot get things done in the way they work, because they cannot actually reach the people those things concern. The moment they acknowledge the limits to their own knowledge and abilities, the other party can step in to add to this. And then you're talking. But the community also has to learn, especially here in South-East [...]. Anger about Amsterdam's colonial past surfaces time and again. This needs to get its rightful place [...] and one has to acknowledge that we all have many blind spots.

This also implies the need for a certain degree of humility and trust to enable mutual learning. The Municipality of Amsterdam also recognises that the transition to a fully circular economy acknowledges "that much is still unknown about how the transition will proceed" and therefore embraces an approach of "learning by doing" (Appendix I-31, 18). This learning is necessary because the goals set are abstract and complex, while the ways to attain them are not clear. There is thus a certain agnosticism around the means to achieve an abstractly defined goal or aspiration.

One of the ways to formalise such equivalence relations in Amsterdam is the public-civic partnership (PCP) – sometimes also called public-collective partnership or public-commons partnership (Appendix I-42). PCPs are proposed within the Municipality of Amsterdam's democratisation programme and more specifically by the "The 99 of Amsterdam," a municipalist initiative by the city's "Fearless City Amsterdam programme," which aims to connect initiatives that make the city more fair, just and sustainable. Such PCPs involve...

... about democratic and sustainable connections between citizens and local government, with a much greater say and ownership for (organised) residents, and collective forms of ownership and management. This democratic, collective form of management is ideally suited to public services. After all, they meet the basic needs of human existence: care, water, energy, food, education, housing, waste processing, public space, public transport and mobility. (Appendix I-1, 79)

Public-civil partnerships have gained rapid ground in Amsterdam in the past years, for example, through the working methods of the *Cocratos* foundation and, by extension, of some parts of *The Green Hub*. The attention for public-civil partnerships was boosted by the so-called "Ma.ak020" agreement between "citizens, initiators of societal projects, the local government and other organisations who want to actively contribute to the development of the city," which has to provide a structural agreement to the "feeling of co-ownership and influence, which is moving from the government to the citizens" (Ma.ak020, n.d. [my translation]).

Crucial in these forms of participation is the remuneration of participating citizens. One of the board members of *WomenMakeTheCity* told me that rather than being remunerated merely with "a cup of coffee and a slice of cake," which is currently often assumed sufficient, citizens should be considered of equal importance as other experts, which is to be reflected in their remuneration. Only with sufficient remuneration might it be possible to attract citizens from various backgrounds who need to be "economically free" in order to be able to spend time on democratic participation, as another informant put it. However, the extent to which there is currently remuneration for participation remains unclear to my informants – both those within the civil service and outside of it.

The democratisation efforts in Amsterdam partially overlap with those around the Doughnut Economy. Many of the members associated with Ma.ak020 are also involved with the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition and vice versa. In 2022, Ma.ak020 and the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition started to work together to form "a network of networks" with "ten key figures and pioneers in the city" (Appendix II-3, 15 [my translation]), thus bringing together a variety of different approaches to democratisation and bottom-up change. At the same time, however, the coalition has entered into a partnership with Olympia, a large employment agency. Although having kept a distance from

private businesses first, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition has become more open to learning what the role of business could be in doughnut-inspired transformations now that Raworth's organisation has developed a tool for working with businesses in ways that avoid greenwashing. This tool sets out to redesign businesses as regenerative and distributive organisations, drawing attention to the need to reflect on purpose, networks, governance, ownership and finance (Appendix II-7). Since Raworth's organisation has provided these guidelines, the coalition has deemed it safe to enter into partnerships with businesses to learn about the role of business in the transition, as well as to explore avenues to secure funding (fieldnotes December 2022). This way, the coalition is engaging in 'private-civic' partnerships as well as public-civic partnerships through its engagements with the state.

The Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition thus aims to play a key role in bringing together different activists, organisations and networks around democratisation and sustainability to connect these to state actors in relations of equivalence or in public-civic partnerships. These partnerships, however, remain difficult to establish. In this challenging process, the Doughnut Economics model has been envisioned by various actors to establish a better understanding between citizens and the state.

2.3.2 TRANSLATING BETWEEN THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY – AND THE LIMITS TO THIS

By various state- and non-state actors, the Doughnut Economics model has been envisioned as a shared language that would enable the translation between various spheres of experiences – notably between that of the state and that of lived experiences in the city. One of the core members of the coalition explained that the coalition does not aim to engage in “traditional lobbying,” which they consider the “old political way” (fieldnotes December 2022). Instead, the aim is to support citizen-driven activities that operate at a distance from the local state while strategically engaging with it when necessary. They are, in other words, aiming to operate at an “interstitial distance” to the state that encapsulates the unresolvable tension for urban movements to engage with the state as an unavoidable political force while remaining at a distance to it so that political projects can come into being (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 69).

An example of this is the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt*, for which Doughnut Economics started to play a role only *after* the first steps for the neighbourhood platform and the local spatial strategy (that would connect to the city-wide one) were taken. When the founder of the platform found out about the municipality's engagement with Doughnut Economics, he thought it a good instrument to map social and environmental sustainability in the neighbourhood. In the development of the “Neighbourhood Doughnut,” he came in contact with the *Doughnut Bakery*, an initiative in New-West to support citizens to start up and sustain their Doughnut Economics projects. By connecting

to these wider Doughnut Economics-related developments, the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt* was able to make itself more relevant to the local state. The founder of the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt* puts it as follows:

The idea is that you can map out the neighbourhood with this model and say to the municipality: 'Well, look, this is the situation. What shall we do about it?' And the idea is then that we will do something about it together.

For other projects, such as the *CLT H-Buurt* and *Amsterdam Food Park*, the Doughnut Economy strategy is a way to hold the municipality accountable. Both argue that if the city wants to become a "Doughnut City," it needs to make urban space available for initiatives that are in line with that.

However, the Doughnut Economics model is not always sufficient or effective as translation or collaboration mechanism. There are three sources of complication. The first pertains to Doughnut Economy as a translation tool within the neighbourhoods, while the other two relate to Doughnut Economy as a translation tool between citizens and the state. To start with the former, various neighbourhood-based pioneers have come to realise that, despite the focus on images and visual tools, the Doughnut model is often difficult to render intelligible and relevant to fellow residents. The translation from citizens' everyday concerns to images of the economy is not always straightforward, especially when this happens in relation to the instalment of, for example, a new playground in the neighbourhood. Especially in more socio-economically challenged areas, the model does not always resonate with residents. The initiator of the "Neighbourhood Doughnut" in the *Platform Sierpleinbuurt* became less enthusiastic about the Doughnut model as mobiliser over time. He noticed that thinking in terms of models or certain images is too far removed from everyday struggles. Therefore, he emphasises that community-driven processes of change should not be focused on a specific end – such as achieving a full-fledged Doughnut Economy – or a certain trajectory of change. Instead, they should be about the process and about trying to shape that process collectively according to everyone's needs – in line with the idea of "swarming".

Several Doughnut activists also noted that the Doughnut Economy model lost traction within the municipal organisation after the political changes following the municipal elections in 2022, which made it a less powerful tool in engagements with the local state (fieldnotes January 2023). This is the second challenge to the idea of Doughnut as translation tool. Following municipal elections in March 2022, a new city council and executive board took office. Alderperson Van Doorninck was succeeded by Alderperson Pels, who now holds the portfolios of Sustainability and Circular Economy as well as Public Housing. Various informants I spoke with stated that the agenda of the city council and the executive board that have now taken office are largely in line with that of the previous ones. However, the language of Doughnut Economy seems to have moved to the

background with Van Doorninck stepping down. Instead, related discourses of community wealth building and broad prosperity seem to have taken over. Although some Doughnut activists hold on to the Doughnut Economics model, as they continue to emphasise that this model best captures the necessary transition, the majority of the people I spoke with do not mind which label is put on “Doughnut-inspired” thinking, as long as the change is in the right direction. It remains to be seen, though, how the right direction can be agreed upon or when something is sufficiently “Doughnut-inspired” to guide us in that direction.

At the same time, the combination of an overload of policy discourses and strategies with a lack of alignment between societal actors might hamper such a smooth process of change in the right direction. Instead, there is a danger of a disconnect between scales. As a civil servant with a wide network in the district where he both works and lives puts it:

If I look at my own neighbourhood, I wouldn't even know who the 'active citizens' are. If I'm honest, I don't even know what is happening in my neighbourhood. Everyone is so busy, with two jobs, struggling to make ends meet.

The result of this is that the plethora of strategies promoted by the municipality do not reach these people and do not get beyond the merely discursive level. The municipal ombudsman of the metropolitan area of Amsterdam has a similar concern. He sees “all kinds of great initiatives, but those are projects that fall outside of the normal [municipal] organisation,” while he does not yet see any “systematic improvements” (Stoker 2023a [my translation]). Similarly, when the Doughnut Economics strategy is supposed to draw from what is already happening and from what citizens are already doing, there is a question as to how it would enable any such “systematic improvements”.

Within the municipal organisation, there are struggles with the proliferation of the large number of strategies and policy discourses as well. This complicates the use of the Doughnut model as a translation tool for local state actors. The development of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics strategy was initiated and overseen by Alderperson Van Doorninck, who held the portfolio of spatial development and sustainability. Even though “silo-thinking” within the municipal organisation is of concern to all parties involved with Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy, it is unclear exactly how the strategy might help to overcome this.

Rather than being adopted across the municipal organisation, the “City Doughnut” was mostly in the hands of this one alderperson who used it as a steering mechanism in the Sustainability Department. That the organisational structure of the Municipality of Amsterdam makes it difficult to collaborate across departments, even in the case when different departments belong to the same alderperson's portfolio, was illustrated by a civil servant in the Sustainability Department whom I interviewed. This person doubted how large a role the Doughnut Economics strategy played at the

Department of Land and City Development, the department concerned with urban growth and development of the city which was led by the same alderperson. To this civil servant, it was unclear “how strongly [Aldersperson Van Doorninck] direct[ed] the Department of Land and Development to also use the Doughnut and to introduce different economic thinking there”.

This relates to the last source of complication that arises in relation to the Doughnut Economy's function as translation tool. The positive language of Doughnut Economics proves insufficient when considering trade-offs between different factors of urban development. Neither the original Doughnut Economics model nor the “downscaled” version in Amsterdam includes any specifications regarding the trade-offs between its different social and environmental categories. While urban policymaking must grapple with the scarcity of space, funds and other means, the Doughnut does not provide a viable path out of this. As one informant puts it:

Well, a food park [like Amsterdam Food Park] is a regenerative idea. That is of course beautiful, but in the end, you have to consider who takes the final decision, and then you have a jungle of involved parties, development plans [...], ground lease, market and government, and rules about the minimally obliged land revenue. There are just so many frameworks that, as a citizen, you have very little influence. And of course we are facing a housing crisis, so it is primarily a matter of building houses and cherishing the amount of green in the city that we currently have. Look, everyone loves a food park or permaculture garden at an available plot of land, but you need to have the means to be able to realise that.

Hence, when it comes to the issue of scarce land, it might not be possible for citizens to get the right people at the table and bring citizens and the local state together in new ways. At a Doughnut Economics related workshop about urban land in October 2022, civil servants from the “Free Space” initiative (which I introduced in the previous chapter) as well as from the Department of Land and Development were present to enable a conversation. One of three cases was *Amsterdam Food Park* and their struggles to avoid fertile land being turned into “Business Park Amsterdam Osdorp”. This topic had become so politicised within the municipal organisation that civil servants who were present at the workshop had been ordered specifically not to talk to the people representing *Amsterdam Food Park*. The break-out sessions that were organised to enable a conversation between relevant citizens and civil servants were therefore hampered. One of the convenors of the workshop, also involved in the *CLT H-Buurt*, reflected in an interview with me on a similar difficulty in getting the right civil servants to talk to him regarding the CLT project as well:

It is the people whom you have to deal with regarding the relevant rules and details; they are very much involved in their own working patterns and goals [...]. So in the top it is announced that ‘we want

everything to be organised differently,' but in practice [...] this is much more difficult. With those people we would love to also be in one room to discuss, but they prefer not to.

Hence, it remains a challenge to get the right people to talk to one another and take binding decisions. However, the people engaged in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy admirably continue to draw hope from the small successes they achieve in establishing new relations between different place-based projects, or between activists and state actors, even though these may only be limited or short-lived at times.

3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented a thick description of the bottom-up movement around Amsterdam's arising Doughnut Economy, of which many initiatives have a history that precedes the city's strategy around Doughnut Economics. I presented the two ways in which the Doughnut activists aim to create change. The first is through contestation, that is, by forging political subjects whose voices had hitherto been heard insufficiently. By creating a sense of community and proximity in the neighbourhoods that are designated urban growth cores, and by making the voices of residents heard and their value added to the urban fabric intelligible to the local state, the movement aims to empower local communities. These efforts reposit the city as a space for social reproduction in which strong networks within neighbourhoods enable mutual care and collective forms of self-government.

Second, the movement promotes small-scale alternative and diverse economic practices and relations which are situated in the urban everyday and redirect the flows of the economy. Through these local transformations of the urban economy, Doughnut Economics activists promote small islands of change which slow the pursuit of economic growth by decommodifying urban space, introducing diverse forms of value, repurposing waste to the benefit of local communities or creating an alternative currency to retain value in the area in which it is produced.

These activities come together loosely in the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, which aims to bring together Amsterdam's Doughnut pioneers and which forms a key organisation in relation to Raworth's international Doughnut Economics Action Lab. Through positive logics of knowledge sharing and inspiration, the coalition promotes hope and forms of participation that are 'fun'. However, there is still quite a division, despite attempts to avoid it, between the neighbourhood-based projects centred on the lived experiences of socio-economically challenged citizens who engage with the Doughnut model merely pragmatically and the coalition, which, through tight connections to the University of Applied Sciences and the international Doughnut Economics

Action Lab, has a tendency to attract highly educated, White middle-class individuals – not least researchers like myself.

The various actors within Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy promote a municipalist politics of altering the relations between citizens and the local state through long-lasting relationships that go beyond short-term subsidy cycles. However, its attempts to do so through public-civic partnerships that give citizens a seat at the table with policymakers is an ongoing effort that has run into various obstacles. Currently, subsidies are still the main financing mechanism throughout the movement. The initiatives experimenting with diverse forms of value, such as the biowaste digesters or the alternative currency, are reliant not only on permits but often also on municipal funding. This means that the movement is currently dependent on Amsterdam's healthy financial situation, which in turn is partially dependent on the city's status as an attractive and popular city for visitors, (international) knowledge workers and a favourable business climate. Besides the issue of the scarcity of urban space, which limits the ways in which Doughnut Economics can serve as a translation or collaboration tool between citizens and state actors, this also points to how the Municipality of Amsterdam redistributes the funds it generates through its growth-based activities to citizens who employ these to 'democratise' the city and to generate value locally in different ways.

To counteract this, Doughnut activists work on generating sustainable sources of diverse value. Recently, the Municipality of Amsterdam promises to look into 'circular revenue models,' again pointing at the fact that alternative values are being envisioned. However, the struggles of various place-based Doughnut Economics projects with securing land, space or recognition by the local state indicate that there is some way to go before these projects can promote forms of collective self-government in a durable way and at an interstitial distance to the local state. In the next chapter, I make up the balance of the developments described in this and the previous chapter, to assess the potentials and limits of transformative social change in Amsterdam.

8 Potentials and limits of transformative social change in Amsterdam

In the preceding chapters, I have, informed by theory on capitalism, neoliberalisation and transformative social change in the urban, analysed the efforts arounds Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy and the policy context in which these are embedded. In this chapter, I discuss the potentials of transformative social change in Amsterdam. By positioning the Doughnut Economics movement in relation to the wider policy landscape and the mechanisms of Amsterdam's political economy, I examine how the current conjuncture in Amsterdam conditions the potential for transformative social change towards societies beyond extractive capitalism and neoliberal urbanism.

This implies that I move between "reading for difference" and for "dominance" (Gibson-Graham 2008, 623). By reading for difference, I appreciate the alternative subjectivities, logics and practices that arise from the thick description of Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy that I presented in the previous chapter and which I interpret through the notion of transformative social change in terms of two moments – one of difference and contestation, and one of alternative practices and diverse economies. In doing this, I take seriously the political potential and the unruliness of the city, in and against seemingly totalising processes of capitalist urbanisation. On the other hand, by relating this arising difference to such seemingly totalising processes and dominant structures, I remain aware of how the latter take part in shaping the conditions for transformative social change. This allows me to examine the challenges that the attempts at such change are up against. In this double reading for difference and dominance, I am guided by reflections on the contrasts between the discursive and socio-material aspects of change that are taking place on different scales in Amsterdam.

I discuss the potentials and limits of transformative social change in Amsterdam in two steps. In section 1, I move between dominance and difference readings as I juxtapose the ways in which

capitalism and processes of neoliberalisation have come to shape the city and urban policy processes in Amsterdam against the ways in which Doughnut Economics tries to challenge this. After this engagement with (challenges to) capitalism in the city, I turn to the politics that are promoted in and around Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy in section 2. Here again, I move between dominance and difference readings when first discussing how mechanisms of (de- and re)politicisation are present in a politics that draws on logics of difference as well as consensus, and then turning to the different governing logics that the local state promotes.

1 The potentials for transformative social change in Amsterdam

In this section, I discuss the potentials for transformative social change present in and around Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy by reflecting on the practices of transformative social change in Amsterdam against the conditions for such change as shaped in part through the materialisation of capitalism in the city. To understand the potentials for transformative social change in the city in this project, I have defined "capitalism as project and process" (Moore 2015, 13) in relation to the urban. This means that I depart from the position that cities and urban regions play a key role in the functioning of capitalism. I consider the latter to be operating through certain fundamental logics that materialise differently over time and across space as a consequence of political efforts. Since the 1970s, such political efforts, promoted notably by the state, are best captured through a neoliberal lens, as the variegated processes of neoliberalisation (N. Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010) have come to intensify the ways capitalism shapes the city.

I have identified three main characteristics of capitalism through which it does so. The first of these is capital's inherent need for expansion and growth, driven by the private pursuit of money as a commodity (Marx [1867] 2013; Harvey 1989a). Urban regions have, since the dawn of capitalism through original accumulation, played an important role in accommodating growth. Through processes of neoliberalisation, this role has become entrepreneurial rather than redistributive. The second characteristic is capital's division of society into social classes, which is also tightly interconnected with the urban. Whereas initial, intertwined processes of industrialisation and urbanisation pitted the capitalist against the working class in urban regions (Harvey and Wachsmuth 2011), class relations in late capitalism are more diffuse (Wright 1979). Through processes of neoliberalisation, (de)industrialisation and urbanisation, the initial opposition between the working class and the capitalist class has become increasingly blurry, notably with the rise of the precariat and the professional middle class. Third, capitalism is inherently dependent on the non-commodified spheres of nature and care work, which form the "background conditions of possibility" of capitalist production (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 22). Capitalism's extractive relations

with nature were, from the moment of original accumulation, premised on the uneven relations between the urban and its hinterlands.

To further interpret the conditions for transformative social change in Amsterdam, I summarise, in section 1.1, how these capitalist characteristics currently come to the fore in Amsterdam, starting with growth dependencies and social class and then turning to the arising “boundary struggles” around nature and social reproduction through which subjects contest capitalism and propose alternatives (Fraser 2022, 20). Such contestation from below arises when capitalism is ‘cannibalising’ the extra-capitalist world on which it inherently depends. In this space, potentials for transformative social change may arise – where transformative social change contains a moment of difference and contestation through which (marginalised) local communities draw from their shared proximity and difference to gain a political voice, as well as a moment of alternatives and diverse economies, which begin to alter urban metabolisms from within the (very) local through forms of collective organising in the urban everyday. In section 1.2, I further assess the potentials and limits of Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy by relating its bottom-up attempts at transformative social change to the main characteristics of capitalism in the city.

1.1 Capitalism as a project and process in Amsterdam

As the commercial centre of “the head capitalist nation of the 17th century” (Marx [1867] 2013, 526), Amsterdam, with the early rise of a decidedly financialised capitalist class, had a strong position in the early history of global capitalism. Amsterdam’s history has largely been characterised by demographic and economic growth. Following a strong orientation towards redistribution and social welfare during the post-war era, various waves of neoliberalisation have left a mark on Amsterdam’s urban development since the 1970s. With a steadily growing and professionalising population since the 1990s, Amsterdam’s urban economic development has become increasingly entrepreneurial and based in the creative, knowledge-intensive and service-oriented sectors of the economy. This has been accompanied by a further strain on the hinterlands of the city’s core, whose development has been based increasingly on entrepreneurial growth strategies promoted by both the national and local government. These strategies, aimed at putting Amsterdam on the map as a global city, have resulted in a large visitor economy as well as a function for Schiphol Airport as the world’s second-biggest international air traffic hub.

With the increasingly entrepreneurial character of the municipality’s growth pursuit, Amsterdam’s class profile also changed. Demographic changes that resulted from the municipal strategies made the citizenry increasingly diverse and highly educated. While the promotion of middle-class housing and homeownership promoted gentrification in Amsterdam as a global city, the social

housing stock in Amsterdam shrank. Strategies for urban development and economic growth were increasingly based on creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, pushing artistic collectives further out of the city. With innovation in consumption and immaterial production in Amsterdam, the city's reproductive capacities – notably in terms of accessible housing and public space – have come under pressure.

Twenty-first-century Amsterdam is still characterised by steady demographic and economic growth, while its urban region occupies a key position in national policies around economic growth. Given its ground lease system, the municipality has a large degree of influence over the development of most of its land. The municipal budget for 2023 shows that of the municipality's own income (i.e., the share of income not derived from national subsidies and funds), the proceeds from land development and ground lease make up almost 28% (Appendix I-55, 19). Simultaneously, however, the land use system makes the municipality's land policy inherently dependent on growth. The municipality's profits and losses incurred in urban-development projects are aggregated in a fund that is used for the development of land and space. This has brought about the financialisation of local government since the municipality needs positive returns in the fund for land development to be possible. Such positive returns, in turn, depend on the development and lease of more land at higher prices. This puts financial forecasting at the core of Amsterdam's urban planning bureaucracy, which has a bias towards low-risk, homogeneous projects and a history of tiptoeing around questions of demographic growth and soaring housing demand (Savini 2017).

In line with global tendencies, then, Amsterdam is captured in the gridlock of international urban competition, whose revenue streams are definitive for its urban development. This competitive system drives the municipality to maximise its land value, capture as much of that value as it can and regulate land scarcity (Savini 2021). Due to this locked-in position, it is unclear that even a "progressive urban government" – such as the one in Amsterdam – can resist "the logic of capitalist spatial development in which competition seems to operate not as a beneficial hidden hand, but as an external coercive law forcing the lowest common denominator of social responsibility and welfare provision within a competitively organised urban system" (Harvey 1989a, 12).

This is reflected in the municipality's efforts to keep Amsterdam's urban economy at the forefront of innovation and fostering startup ecosystems. To promote a growth base that is not rooted in narcotic mass tourism, the city's marketing bureau puts its efforts into promoting high-value tourism and knowledge visitors. The bureau tracks the development of the city's position in this regard through a close consideration of various international rankings (I Amsterdam 2023). The focus on high-value tourism, innovation and startup ecosystems suits the city's economic profile, which includes a workforce that is increasingly active in the specialist service sector, a vibrant scene

of eco-entrepreneurs as well as economic growth that is generated largely in the information and communication sectors.

Meanwhile, housing affordability and accessibility have come to be a pressing issue for many, and the social housing stock has been on decline for decades. This has sparked public debate about the limits to urban growth in Amsterdam, which was reinvigorated through the experiences of an empty city during the Covid-19 pandemic. There is increasing agreement about the ecological unsustainability of the current urban system and the pressure on the city as a space for reproduction – the behaviours, relations and activities that enable the reproduction of the population (Bhattacharya 2017; J. Brenner and Laslett 1991) – as public space is shared with increasing numbers of tourists and housing becomes less affordable and accessible. Therefore, themes around the environment and social inequality are currently high on the agenda, pointing towards a revaluation of the city as a space for social reproduction rather than (immaterial) production.

Amsterdam's progressive municipal coalition as well as civil society actors call for countering the negative effects of the strong focus on the city as a space for (immaterial) production at the expense of nature and social reproduction. These struggles around the adverse effects on housing affordability and social equality emphasise the need to revisit the city as a space for social reproduction. This is reflected not only in national and city-wide housing protests, but also in several of the initiatives and projects in and around Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy, which aim to influence the construction of housing (notably *WomenMakeTheCity*).

Hence, capitalism as a process and a project has come to shape the urban economy and life in Amsterdam through increasingly immaterial economic growth and with the Municipality of Amsterdam's marketing of the city's international profile, notably through the promotion of culture and the knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy which has attracted a highly educated middle-class citizenry. The pressure on the reproductive capacities of the city is being met with increasing contestation, not only through, for example, climate marches and civil disobedience but also by the various efforts to rethink the relations of the (urban) economy with nature and to redirect the urban economy through models such as the Doughnut Economy.

1.2 Challenging capitalism in Amsterdam through Doughnut Economics

Doughnut Economics is an alternative approach to the economy that proposes to draw social and environmental considerations directly into economic decision-making. How this implies a fundamental redirection of the urban economy in Amsterdam depends on how the Doughnut Economics model and discourse manage to structurally change the direction of urban development

policy. Observing the rise of another newly arisen discourse – around creative cities – in early 2000s' Amsterdam, Jamie Peck notes the following:

Creativity discourses, as they touched down in Amsterdam, seemed to have carried with them the allure of apparently governing in fundamentally new ways, with new stakeholders and new strategic objectives... while at the same time changing very little. They facilitated a makeover of the discursive representation and political rationale of a loose cluster of urban-development policies (with a social-inclusion accent), without necessitating any substantial reorganization of the policies themselves. (Peck 2012, 472)

A similar question can be raised about the effectiveness of Doughnut Economics in Amsterdam. Given that Doughnut Economics was embraced by the Municipality of Amsterdam as a way of seeing its circular economy – with the four distinct lenses it provides regarding the local, global, social and environmental – it should be considered as a compass that potentially guides decisions surrounding the city's circular economy or even more broadly in relation to urban sustainability.

Thus, understanding how Doughnut Economics 'touches down' in Amsterdam hinges on two further questions. The first is how, if at all, this Doughnut Economics discourse corresponds to developments in the wider policy landscape and how the latter reflect social and environmental considerations in the urban economy. To understand how the Doughnut Economy may give way to 'governing in fundamentally new ways' in Amsterdam, an examination of how the municipality's spatial, economic, and sustainability strategies and bottom-up activities challenge the dominant neoliberal and capitalist mechanisms is needed. The second question it prompts is how this policy landscape, in turn, relates to and facilitates the ongoing attempts at transformative social change in Amsterdam, defined in terms of the moment of difference and contestation and the moment of alternatives and diverse economic practices.

In the following sections, I aim to answer both of these questions by discussing the actions of the local state and civil society actors in relation to the emerging Doughnut Economy and urban sustainability more widely, and by considering how these actions interact with or challenge the main characteristics of capitalism in the city. I start with growth dependencies and the unsustainable relations of the urban with nature and then turn to social reproduction and class. The section ends with a reflection on the status of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy in relation to post- and anti-capitalist practice.

1.2.1 RETHINKING GROWTH DEPENDENCIES AND RELATIONS WITH NATURE

The increasingly entrepreneurial growth strategies of Amsterdam's urban government have led to different social groups benefitting unequally as well as the degradation of nature, in turn giving rise to discontent that can be interpreted as “boundary struggles” around nature and social reproduction (Fraser 2022, 20). These struggles have raised questions about the limits to growth in Amsterdam both on the part of the local government and civil society.

The local government

Urban governments are increasingly acknowledging the limits of urban development policies centred solely on economic growth and are experimenting with approaches that decentre GDP (Crisp et al. 2023). Amsterdam's urban government is a case in point. A sceptical reading would lead to the conclusion that these beyond-growth approaches are “the latest bandwagon” or newest urban buzzwords to which local administrations are so prone (Fainstein 2005, 15; Sonn and Park 2023). A more generous reading, on the other hand, considers how the Municipality of Amsterdam invokes Doughnut Economics to begin to rethink the concept of scarcity in the urban economy, which implies not only a reconsideration of growth dependencies but also of the city's extractive relations with nature. Doughnut Economics takes inspiration from the Planetary Boundaries framework (Steffen et al. 2015), which in turn has been part of the development of the tradition of thinking about scarcity that Jonsson and Wennerlind (2023, 203) term “Planetary Scarcity”.

This tradition has begun to challenge the neoclassical ideas about economic scarcity from the perspective of Earth as a bounded, ecological system. Such a planetary understanding of scarcity, which is reflected in the circular economy as well, posits the economy as limited by nature's finite capacities to be transformed into goods and services. Acknowledging global inequalities and questions of justice, economic thinking needs to come to terms with the new scarcity conditions resulting from centuries of uneven capitalist development by promoting avenues for repair and sufficiency, as well as an “alternative conception of the good life” (Jonsson and Wennerlind 2023, 246). Doughnut Economics does this through a proposition of an economics that helps “to bring all of humanity into the Doughnut's safe and just space. Instead of pursuing ever-increasing GDP, it is time to discover how to thrive in balance” (Raworth 2017, 29).

Jonsson and Wennerlind (2023, 16) – coming from intellectual history – emphasise “the power of ideas” in shaping behavioural, legal, political and economic processes. In a similar way, Raworth (2017, 20) points us to “the power of pictures” to guide us in our efforts to “create economies that are regenerative by design, restoring and renewing the local-to-global cycles of life on which human well-being depends” (Raworth 2017, 174). When followed through, such ambitious ideas and pictures point towards a thorough rethinking of the metabolic relations between humans and

nature, “the basis on which the complex web of interactions necessary to life is sustained, and growth becomes possible” (Foster 2000, 163). In the metabolic rift between human beings and nature caused by capitalist production, the urban has played a salient role through its dependency on resources from rural areas and its continuous physical expansion into the latter. When taken seriously, Doughnut Economics provides an avenue for rethinking urban metabolism, understood as the ways in which the urban is made up by mutually transformative social and natural processes (Broto, Allen, and Rapoport 2012).

This places high demands on the sustainability efforts in a city. In Amsterdam, these efforts are currently promoted by the municipality through its strategies for circular economy and climate neutrality. In these strategies, the municipality refers explicitly to the question of growth. In the climate neutrality strategy, the municipality promises to strive for the “climate-neutral growth” of the city (Appendix I-35), while in the circular economy, it refers more critically to the limits of growth. With the current rates of growth, the circular strategy states, “we are [clearly] exhausting the Earth” and “consumption here influences prosperity elsewhere” (Appendix I-31, 10).

The municipality’s subsequent reports on progress with regards to circularity and climate neutrality show ambiguous results so far. Although first indications show that the city’s climate neutrality strategy is indeed leading to a reduction in emissions (Appendix I-54), this strategy only considers the emissions generated *within* the borders of the city. The transition to renewable energies does not foreclose economic growth but gives way to climate-neutral economic growth. At the same time, the municipality leaves the tackling of indirect emissions related to production and consumption in Amsterdam (i.e., the scope 2 or 3 emissions) to its circular economy strategy. With respect to the latter, the city seems to be making little progress: the recent circular economy update (Appendix I-52) shows that material use is not declining, suggesting that scope 2 and 3 emissions are likely not going down either.

It is not directly clear how Amsterdam’s circular economy would be a natural alternative to capitalist growth and extractivism. Conversely, it may well lend itself to channelling capitalist accumulation in novel ways through the commodification of waste (as we argue in more detail elsewhere – Thompson et al., forthcoming). If the circular economy does not specifically promote post-capitalist forms of organising the local economy by enabling alternative forms of value creation and by giving space to diverse economic practices, it will unavoidably run into the contradictions of ever-shifting frontiers of capital accumulation. The latest of these, waste, transforms the economy’s sinks into taps (see Moore 2023) and relies on extended supply chains for the production of circular technologies and tools which in turn appropriate labour, energy and materials (Thompson et al., forthcoming).

The relation of Amsterdam's climate-neutrality strategy to capitalist growth and extractivism is equally ambiguous. On the one hand, the strategy speaks explicitly about making "Amsterdam natural-gas free by 2040" (Appendix I-35, 4 [my translation]) – a strategy that relies on unsustainable mining practices (see, e.g., Sovacool 2021). Although the strategy document mentions CO₂ compensation a few times, this is only a temporary measure in relation to businesses whose "CO₂ emissions cannot (yet) be decreased" (Appendix I-35, 189 [my translation]). Thus, the municipality does not shy away from language that emphasises the need to deliberately end fossil fuels (Buck 2021, 57–58). It aims to lower the emissions in those areas over which it has considerable influence through its relative autonomy from national politics: energy, mobility, planning and the built environment, and – through its circular strategy – waste management (cf. Bulkeley and Betsill 2005). On the other hand, the city's collaboration with private partners, and citizens' critique of the political decisions regarding bioenergy and citizen participation, trouble the argument that Amsterdam is indeed challenging sufficiently "the exploitation, the pollution, the outrageous profits and corruption" associated with fossil fuel production through a political project that puts citizens, workers and public power first (Buck 2021, 179). Perhaps a hopeful indication in this direction is Amsterdam's strategy for sustainable jobs. In response to the unemployment following the Covid-19 pandemic, the city launched an initiative to promote retraining within sectors related to the sustainability transition, with a focus on quality employment (Appendix I-40).

With these different strategies, the Municipality of Amsterdam could be said to be promoting a combination of greening and "taming" capitalism. The latter, as outlined by Wright (2021), involves not the overcoming of capitalism but the neutralisation of the harms it generates through state-crafted policies and institutions. Through public-private partnerships and sustainable jobs, on the other hand, the municipality seeks to generate economic growth in relation to the environmental transition. In the full range of its actions, however, the municipality's stance on the meaning of "systemic transformation" (Appendix I-2, 3) is dispersed.

The local Doughnut Economics activists

While the Municipality of Amsterdam aims to rethink and change the ways in which the city's consumption and production patterns make use of natural resources near and far, place-based Doughnut Economics activists engage in such transformations from the very local scale. Their projects aim at altering the flows of the economy through promoting small-scale alternative social and economic practices. These practices repurpose urban space, rendering it an object of contestation *and* an element of political strategy (cf. Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard 2006). The varied and dispersed movement promotes small-scale alternatives and diverse economic practices and relations which are situated in the urban everyday and which redirect the flows of the economy. Through these local transformations of the urban economy, Doughnut Economics activists

promote small islands of change which slow the pursuit of economic growth by the decommodification of urban space and the introduction of diverse forms of value, the repurposing of waste to the benefit of local communities or an alternative currency to retain value in the area in which it is produced.

These initiatives seek to promote an alternative to growth-dominated thinking. They do this in the way they organise and bring about a movement: they explore ways of spreading rather than growing their reach by making participation enticing and their initiatives replicable, and by sharing knowledge and learnings. Their activities in the urban everyday also seek to move away from capitalist growth. Some decommodify land and urban space through commonly owned housing and public spaces, whereas others seek to decommodify money through alternative currencies and decommodify work by enabling people to create diverse value beyond monetary value while revaluing waste to the benefit of the community. In different ways, the activists driving these projects aim to strategically interact with local state actors around the diverse values produced through these alternative economic practices and the relevance thereof for the urban economy.

However, because of growth dependencies in planning tradition and land use policy, these projects have to engage in a constant struggle to convince the local state of their relevance to the economy and importance in shaping the urban fabric. As a direct result of the municipality's growth-dependent land development and its regulation of land scarcity, there are severe limits to the urban space and land that are available for alternative and diverse economic practices. The Municipality of Amsterdam has limited abilities to give out urban space to bottom-up circular and sustainability projects which cannot afford paying the market price. The off-grid urban farm the *Kaskantine*, for example, is unable to uphold its low-cost, low-income strategy if it has to pay the market-based rent. Therefore, it has attempted to establish a fund that channels money from the regular economy into the Doughnut Economy, and it continues to establish ways to define and valorise its alternative practices vis-à-vis the local state. Likewise, *Food Park Amsterdam*, despite aligning well with the city's biodiversity and greening plans, as well as its "collective city-making" efforts (Appendix I-42 [my translation]), needs to make space for a distribution park. In the meantime, *CLT H-Buurt* is limited by the ground lease system, which makes it legally impossible to give out land to the community in perpetuity.

These alternatives thus continue to be reliant on land governed by the municipality and dominated by growth-predicated mechanisms from the "regular economy". Although these alternatives promote the use of urban space for various social and economic functions simultaneously (more on this in the next section), the scarcity of urban space will continue to shape decisions around the urban economy. Regardless of how we rethink scarcity through the circular economy – as something that diminishes through the eternal reuse of inputs – or Doughnut Economics – putting

it in a planetary perspective – the centrality of the question as to whether the ultimately limited amount of urban space is assigned to bottom-up alternatives or large-scale distribution centres points to the prevalence of the scarcity of space.

Furthermore, as long as these alternative practices are dependent on subsidies, they are also reliant on the growth-generated budget of the local state, putting growth paradoxically at the centre of post-capitalist urban development. This entails the risk of the Municipality of Amsterdam promoting “neoliberalism with a human touch” (Mayer 2012, 75). In embracing civil society networks as a factor that strengthens efficiency and local growth potentials, for example, in its proliferating scene of creativity and small businesses, citizens’ autonomy may be reconcilable with Amsterdam’s position in global urban competition.

1.2.2 RETHINKING SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND CLASS IN THE CITY

The processes of gentrification, neoliberalisation and entrepreneurial growth – brought about by decades of promoting Amsterdam as a world city for high-value visitors and knowledge migrants – are increasingly being met with contestation. There is a growing sense that Amsterdam is becoming less accessible for low-income groups, in terms of public space and housing. This has led to a number of actions from the local state as well as civil society actors.

The local government

The Municipality of Amsterdam has launched various strategies to reposit the city as a space for reproduction rather than merely (immaterial) production. This strategic orientation reflects a two-fold strategy that resonates with the potentials for transformation inherent in the city. On the one hand, the municipality facilitates the fundamental functions of the city as a space for social reproduction. Hence, it embraces Castell’s idea that collective consumption – the infrastructures for social reproduction provided by the state – is at the core of what the city is (Castells 1977). This is reflected in the municipality’s focus on affordable housing and its attempts to make space available for practices that do not entail any economic production in the sense of monetary value. On the other hand, the municipality attempts to make room for the self-organising capacities and the political potentials in civil society. By emphasising the transformative capacities inherent in the city’s “dynamic network of changemakers” (Appendix I-2, 3), the municipality is pointing in the direction of facilitating a Lefebvrian kind of politics in the urban everyday.

This translates into three specific policy areas that concern social reproduction in the city: public space, housing and citizen participation in urban development. In relation to the first area, the Municipality of Amsterdam is addressing issues around (mass) tourism as well as around the shrinking space for creative, artistic – and unprofitable – practices. In relation to tourism, the

municipality is attempting – once again – to steer the type and magnitude of tourism in the city, as well as the pressures it puts on various districts in the city. The municipality emphasises that the “sense of freedom” that has attracted so many visitors to Amsterdam is impeding that of the city’s residents, and that the visitor’s economy does not produce enough value for its direct environment (Appendix I-46, 4 [my translation]). On the other hand, with its “free space” initiatives, it wants to give space to experimental, non-commercial activities that are organised collectively and from the ground up (Appendix I-29 [my translation]).

Both of these strategic orientations are facing difficulties in their realisation. Regarding tourism, the relevance of the visitor economy for the overall urban economy in Amsterdam appears robust. About two years after the end of the last Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the number of visitors to Amsterdam was higher than in 2019, once again sparking debate about the negative impacts of tourists in the city. Hence, despite the celebrated launch of the Doughnut Economy strategy, many residents in Amsterdam would, when asked about doughnuts, rather think of the controversy around the streets in the city centre being dominated by doughnut and candy stores purely catering to tourists (cf. Khaddari and Ramdjam 2022). At the same time, free space has to be struggled for, as exemplified by the forced eviction of the autonomous collective “ADM” and the difficulties of *Food Park Amsterdam* to save a plot of fertile land from being turned into a logistical hub for Amsterdam’s regional economy.

A second concern regarding social reproduction in the city is housing, especially in terms of its accessibility and affordability for lower- and middle-income groups. The municipality continues to require 40% of all newly constructed housing units to be regulated rent, 40% middle-ranged owned and rented homes and 20% expensive owned and rented homes (Appendix I-25). At the same time, it curtails real estate speculation through the Self-Occupation Duty and the Purchase Protection Act (Appendix I-49) and promotes housing collectives to empower residents and meet housing needs in creative ways (Appendix I-30). These are recent developments, but some initial successes can be seen, with the first housing collectives arising and the 40-40-20 principle being largely upheld. However, it is also becoming clear that the *size* of dwellings is decreasing under this 40-40-20 principle, posing further problems of accessibility, especially for young families (Appendix I-49). Housing collectives, on the other hand, attract principally middle-class citizens. The domination of members of the middle class in housing collectives is a wider trend, as they are the ones with the resources to access the local state and make themselves heard (Gozzer 2019). In richer cities, the social aspect of housing cooperatives has been on the decline for a while due to their high market prices and the wealthy profile of their typical inhabitants (Bengtsson 1992). Moreover, as the case of *Community Land Trust H-Buurt* shows, as long as the social value of community in the neighbourhood is not accounted for in tenders, it will be difficult to turn this trend around. Yet,

the municipality's efforts around community wealth building – which are still in their initial stages – may provide fruitful in this regard.

A third aspect of the struggles around the city as a space for social reproduction is citizen participation in urban development and urban policy processes, which has become a topic of interest both on the urban and the national scale. Through its different strategies for democratisation and participation, the Municipality of Amsterdam aims to bring citizens' concerns into the centre of considerations of urban (economic) development. The municipality's democratisation programme brings in different approaches within “the family” of “the social economy” (Appendix I-1, 26). With this, it links degrowth, social equity and the provision of basic services to a governance structure that strikes “the right balance between citizens, state, and market” and engages in public-civil rather than public-private partnerships (Appendix I-1, 28). This is connected to the envisioned relations between the local state and citizens in sustainable urban development. I come back to this in more detail in the second part of this chapter.

In response to the calls for citizen inclusion in processes of inclusive, sustainable urban development, parts of the municipal profits realised thanks to economic growth are now being redirected to the city's democratisation programme. In this regard, the city's budget for 2024 shows that 10.4 million euros, which is around 0,15% of total spending, is dedicated to democratisation and its neighbourhood budgets, community wealth building and community development plans for New-West and Southeast (Appendix I-55, 246). However, these funds are still based on urban development practices that are inherently governed by a growth imperative, regardless of their proportion of total spending. Similarly, all of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement relies largely on subsidy schemes. Among Doughnut activists, there is an awareness of the ultimately counter-intuitive effects of this for alternative economic practices and going beyond growth. Yet, in spite of their various efforts around alternative value creation – in the form of a local currency, for example – these projects still rely heavily on the local state and larger funding bodies. This points to the difficulties of redirecting economic flows from the ground up.

The local Doughnut Economics activists

In seeking to redirect economic flows from the ground up, local Doughnut Economics projects in Amsterdam promote socio-spatial relations that resist capitalist subjectivities and capitalist production of space by strengthening proximity between urban dwellers and promoting practices that create intentional, collective spaces in the urban everyday. They facilitate structures for social reproduction through their focus on the accessibility of urban space and housing, shared facilities in neighbourhoods and care structures by leveraging proximity between urban dwellers and promoting interactions between them, as well as by raising awareness about the different experiences present in a single neighbourhood and by considering how supralocal forces may

challenge dynamics in the neighbourhood. In these efforts, they also consider nature and sustainability by drawing from Doughnut Economics to think in terms of the local and the global as well as the social and the environmental.

Ethical consideration and practice are at the core of post-capitalist politics and practice. The latter depend on the “ethical practice” or “the co-implicated process of changing ourselves/changing our thinking/changing the world” (Gibson-Graham 2008, 618). For the realisation of a Doughnut Economy, Raworth (2017) argues that economists need to engage seriously with ethics in their decision-making and practices. She proposes that human and ecological flourishing, the autonomy of communities as well as inherent differences and unequal tendencies need to be at the core of economic decisions.

When analysing the local forms of self-government that are arising in Amsterdam through such an ethical lens, it becomes clear that actors are indeed trying to change their thinking and themselves in order to change the world. In this process, Doughnut Economics, in tandem with the various other alternative approaches to the local economy that are circulating in Amsterdam, provides avenues for this change in thinking. Various bottom-up actors take inspiration and motivation from the proliferation of alternative approaches to the economy. Although many of them embrace Doughnut Economics as their key compass for driving change, they also engage with “a mixture of influences, constantly evaluating the usefulness of ideas as they are encountered,” much in line with what Chatterton and Pickerill (2010, 479) observe in their study of anti-capitalist activists in Britain. In Amsterdam, this translates into the circulation of ideas of, for instance, not only community wealth building, community land trusts and degrowth but also feminist economics and Marianna Mazzucato’s thinking around the state and public purpose (see, e.g., Mazzucato 2018).

Inspired by such alternative ways of thinking about the economy and democracy, various social actors in Amsterdam are attempting to change themselves by reconsidering their relation to (vulnerable, marginalised) others as well as the different roles they have in the economy as consumer, producer and worker. On the one hand, through forms of contestation that forge political subjects whose voices had hitherto been heard insufficiently, Doughnut-inspired projects in Amsterdam establish new, stronger relations within local communities. By creating a sense of community and proximity in the neighbourhoods that are designated urban growth cores, and by making the voices of residents heard and the value they add to the urban fabric intelligible to the local state, the movement aims to empower local communities and networks that contribute to positing the city as a space for social reproduction.

Actors in the emerging Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam are also reconsidering the different roles they may take on in the economy. In the circular economy, supply- and demand-side economic

activities converge in the circular economy, as processes of consumption and production come to overlap spatially and temporally. Through practices of “prosumption,” waste become economic input once again, and consumers come to play a role in production processes (Savini 2019, 680). While citizens thus simultaneously take on the roles of producer, consumer and citizen, they *also* soften the boundaries between economic production and social reproduction in their understanding of the city as a space for collective self-government. In this case, social reproduction is a “layered and transversal social phenomenon” that takes place in a variety of social practices on different levels and is inherent to human cooperation (De Angelis 2022, 98). This blurs the historically contingent divide between social reproduction and economic production that has become so strict in late capitalism (Fraser 2022).

By softening this divide, Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy provides a space in which to explore alternative meanings of work in an economy that comes to terms with the unsustainability of capital accumulation. That is, the climate crisis lays bare the need for a variety of everyday forms of *repair* and *care* work. This alludes to the feminist expansive understanding of work, which, rather than maintaining the temporal and spatial distinction between production/paid work and social reproduction/unpaid work, understands work as the large variety of activities through which human beings sustain themselves (Carr 2023). Currently, however, the work of repair and maintenance, so ubiquitous and crucial to human life, remains invisible to a large degree and is undervalued. Yet, practices of repair, maintenance and care also highlight human interdependence and our interrelatedness with the world around us (Corwin and Gidwani 2021). With its focus on social reproduction as well as reuse and repair, the place-based projects in Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy provide spaces of experimentation with such an expanded understanding of work in which the interrelatedness with the (ecological) world around is an explicit consideration.

With the convergence of roles in the economy in combination with collective forms of ownership – through community land trusts and housing collectives – and alternative value creation – through community wealth building and alternative local circulation of waste and money – the potential arises to challenge existing class relations. Many of the Doughnut Economics place-based activities are located in the lower-income and generally lower-educated districts of Amsterdam, which are targeted by the municipality’s current urban growth strategies. Many of these activities specifically aim to invite in people from minorities and lower classes, potentially enabling the cross-class alliances (Rose 2000) that in turn enable the forming of coalitions for change – or “powerful assemblages” (Chatterton and Pusey 2020, 31). These alliances could enable going beyond “first world activism” (Mayer 2013) as they challenge capitalist class logics from the bottom-up. Careful organising, reflective of class-based, gendered, racial and other divides, can shape how people

perceive their own and others' needs and may thus enable common agendas and strategies (Rose 2000).

However, social class is not reflected upon sufficiently in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economics movement. The Doughnut Economics movement reflects the post-capitalist orientation *beyond* capitalism, with the imperative to not get stuck in the dominant mechanisms of capitalism but instead to be attentive to difference and "perform new economic worlds" (Gibson-Graham 2008, 614). Likewise, Raworth (2017) holds that we need to come up with – or draw – wholly new economic categories beyond socialism and capitalism, and that we should 'practice first and theorise later'. Yet, when these practices come to fruit in a context largely shaped by dominant structures – which they inevitably do – then considerations of the conditions under which they develop are needed for a reflective practice. Hence, if we want to be aware of the mutual difference and inherent tendencies of inequality in the communities that are to drive change in the economy (Raworth 2017), we may need to take on questions of social class and capitalism more directly.

This is especially salient in light of urban environmental agendas such as the circular economy which subject individuals to political programmes that constitute citizens as responsabilised, self-governing agents. With the reliance on non-state actors for the execution of such agendas, citizens carry the responsibility of accepting restrictions and changing behaviours in their everyday lives beyond the guidelines and programmes produced by the authorities (Brand 2007). In this way, Brand (2007, 628) argues, "green awareness has been converted into a form of subjection, minor in its social locus and inconsequential in its broader ecological significance, but politically powerful for the management of neoliberal urban economic and social change". Thus, not only has the concern for the social become a matter of individual responsibility rather than of the state or market (Lessenich 2015a), but the environment is *also* increasingly a matter of individual responsibility.

This creates tensions between post-capitalist subjectivity and neoliberal governmentality in the governing of urban sustainability. Such tensions come to the fore especially in an urban setting like Amsterdam, where governance is imagined through the "Amsterdam Approach' to collaborative innovation" and the 'double triple helix' – bringing together governmental institutions, corporations, knowledge institutions, SMEs and start-ups, the commons and community networks – which are at the basis of Amsterdam's circular economy and Doughnut Economy strategy (Appendix I-2, 3). Through this, the urban economy and urban fabric are likely to be shaped considerably by the professional and creative middle class consisting of professionals such as consultants, (creative and eco-)entrepreneurs and academics: responsabilised subjects that reproduce the middle class along with its cultural and intellectual diversity. Ideas of self-management, with their promises of autonomy from bureaucratic structures, appeal widely to members of the lower and middle classes. Friedrich Engels already doubted the ability of the educated middle classes to

instigate social change. In *The Communist Manifesto*, he reflects on socialism as a middle-class project pursued by “the most multifarious social quacks who, by all manner of tinkering, professed to redress, without any danger to capital and profit, all sorts of social grievances, in both cases men outside the working-class movement, and looking rather to the “educated” classes for support” (Engels [1888] 2012, 108). Although important to keep class differences in mind, given the large influence of the professional middle class on urban processes in Amsterdam *and* the willingness of a variety of citizens to collaborate and bridge difference, seeking cross-class alliances might be a more fruitful route than dismissing the middle classes altogether. However, without explicit strategies for forming such alliances, the middle class can be expected to employ strategies to socially reproduce itself in ways that secure the continued distinction from the working classes. Further reflections on the status of Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy in relation to (anti- and post-)capitalism are thus needed.

1.2.3 DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS AS POST- AND ANTI-CAPITALIST PRACTICE IN AMSTERDAM

The relation of Doughnut Economics projects in Amsterdam’s neighbourhoods to anti- and post-capitalist practice is not directly clear, given that they are part of a movement that operates through “going where the energy is” and includes practices around sustainable entrepreneurship and consumption. At the same time, the model of Doughnut Economics itself does not offer any materialist reflection of the economy. Despite its ability to comprehensively depict basic human needs in tandem with the planetary boundaries, the model does not pay any attention to the specific ways in which capitalism subjects the global economy to mechanisms of competition and class. Rather than viewing these as structural conditions, Raworth considers them as the result of the faulty “paradigm” of mainstream economics (Dale 2021, 1242). Moreover, Raworth wishes to go beyond “the -isms of the twentieth century [which] weigh us down in the twenty-first century” and present a model comprising new terminology that enables us to “see new patterns” (The TED Interview 2019) and “think like a 21st-century economist” (Raworth 2017). However, in its attempt to provide a post-scarcity view on the economy, Doughnut Economics risks sidestepping the systemic features of capitalism that condition the trade-offs in urban development. In failing to theorise capitalism and its compulsive power over social life (Mau 2022), Doughnut Economics neglects the single-most important system that has come to define our current conceptualisation of and relation with nature, rendering it unlikely that Doughnut Economics can manage to “get savvy with systems” (Raworth 2017, 113).

However, despite its main focus on ideas and pictures, Raworth’s Doughnut Economics does not foreclose challenges to capitalism. Indeed, it may well go hand in hand with these when it ‘touches down’ in the urban everyday. Here it does so in ways that are interstitial – in the sense that it

promotes “integrationist social change” through “small, incremental changes to the existing structure” – rather than by taking an anti-systemic approach that promotes a “struggle against existing power structures rather than seeking integration within them” (Petray and Pendergrast 2018, 667). Unpacking this requires some consideration of the dispersed Doughnut Economics movement in relation to post- and anti-capitalist practice.

The often-assumed opposition between anti-capitalism, commonly understood as the organisation of revolutionary political power in a communist party, and post-capitalism as developed by Gibson-Graham, in the sense of an ethical subject that is beyond critique and strengthens collective practices in spite of and alongside capitalist logics, is a false dichotomy (Miller 2015). Miller (2015, 366) argues instead for the construction of “forms of action and subjectivity in which critique and experiment, rage and hope, and opposition and possibility coexist and even coconstitute one another”. Such a strategy combines diverse strategies, actions and tactics, and it works to “erode capitalism” by building “more democratic, egalitarian, participatory economic relations where possible in the spaces and cracks within this complex system” (Wright 2021, 56). It brings together forms of contention and opposition with prefiguration and alternatives through enmeshing “‘anti-’, ‘post-’ and ‘despite-’ capitalisms,” which is “the dirty, real work of activism that expresses a pragmatic ‘get on with it’, an antagonistic ‘no’, and a hopeful ‘yes’” (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010, 476).

Many Doughnut Economics activists want to be associated with ‘the hopeful ‘yes’” rather than the ‘the antagonistic ‘no’” by promoting ‘Doughnut’ logics alongside existing logics. The question is, however, to what extent the former might interfere with and transform the latter. Because of its lack of a theory of capitalism, Doughnut Economics relies considerably on entrepreneurs and ethical consumers as a way to drive change (Raworth 2017; Dale 2021). This also reflects on the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, which works with ideas ‘from the startup world’ and has embraced collaborations with private partners like Olympia, a large Dutch employment agency. It rejects ‘old thinking’ as well as the ‘old way’ of doing politics through lobbying. Instead, in line with Raworth’s Doughnut Economics, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition refrains from engaging in discussions about capitalism and does not refer to it publicly.

Yet, given the different activities and strategies it promotes, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition creates the kind of space “where people express contradictory visions, as well as live life despite, but nonetheless beyond, capitalism” (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010, 476). Indeed, in the events and workshops organised by the coalition, there is room for anti-capitalist sentiments, while *also* organising all kinds of real, post-capitalist utopias. Collective gatherings in Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy often have a “festive” touch to spark and retain engagement. For instance, 02025, the renewable energy network, and *The Green Hub*, organise celebrations to share knowledge

and promote their projects. Such gatherings thus create “concrete utopias” by leveraging “the potential that lies within everyday ‘moments’ and collective expressions of festivity” through “spatial practices, aesthetic forms, imaginary symbols and political action” (Butler 2012, 133).

Although there is a politicising potential in these festive moments, the experiences in Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy also show that there are limits to this political potential. No matter how much we try to get beyond ‘old thinking,’ trade-offs remain inherent to urban development. This becomes clear with the spatial dimensions of the Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam, which brings the grand visions of ‘the Doughnut city’ and contagious positive energy back to the soaring scarcity of urban space in Amsterdam. This is reflected most clearly in the case of *Food Park Amsterdam*, which fits within the overall ideals of Doughnut Economics but which would take up space that could also be dedicated to a distribution centre fuelling the regional economy. As a result of this trade-off, the involved activists are being thrown back into the ‘old way’ of doing politics via lobbying and connecting to the right people in the right places in order to get ‘a seat at the table’.

Nonetheless, even if Doughnut Economics downplays some of the trade-offs inherent in urban development, the diversity and unruliness of Amsterdam’s urban fabric, especially in the districts at the city’s fringes that are so active in the emerging Doughnut Economy, are unlikely to be eradicated or suppressed. Potential co-optative processes are thus unlikely to be totalising. This implies that even if a movement is formed in part by neoliberal subjects, or if state or market actors attempt to instrumentalise alternative values for their own purposes, these processes rarely succeed completely. Alternative practices may, besides increasing the exchange value of an unattractive part of the city, also create different kinds of use value for the citizens involved.

These alternative practices are rooted in a sense of collectivity, which is a crucial element of transformative social change. This collective aspect distinguishes post-capitalist self-government from neoliberal self-management. When situated in the wider context of the city, and thus beyond the diversity of specific districts, this collectiveness relies on alliances between the city’s strong middle class and the working and lower classes in which attention is paid to the way arrangements and forms of organising benefit different members of the movement differently. Such alliances and relations point to the vertical connections between place-based urban politics – understood as the unruly processes, not confined to institutions, that negotiate the governing of space and place (Beveridge and Koch 2022; Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011) – with the state and processes on larger scales. This vertical interaction may involve risks of de-politicisation and post-politics.

Hence, despite the lack of explicit confrontation with capitalism through outright anti- or post-capitalist practice, Doughnut Economics in Amsterdam opens up alternative spaces and alternative practices. Parts of these can be characterised as anti-capitalist, in the sense that they create critical

spaces in which people can become aware of the dominant logics that negatively impact their neighbourhoods and livelihoods, for example. However, most of the activities within Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy promote post-capitalism more strongly by creating moments, spaces and practices that point to the possibility of a life in the city beyond capitalism. Doughnut Economics, with its undefined stance on capitalism and thus openness, may serve as an umbrella that can encapsulate these different practices as it provides social actors in Amsterdam with a mechanism to interpret their own work differently and relate to others – both allies and those with dissenting views – in new ways. Thinking about such new ways of relating is crucial in considerations for the potential of coalitions of change made up of both state and non-state actors. This brings into view questions about (de)politicising tendencies and post-politics.

2 The (post-)politics of urban sustainability in Amsterdam

Urban sustainability is a hot topic – and not only in Amsterdam. Green urbanism has been on the rise for several decades now, with the proliferation of concepts like the smart city and the circular city. However, it is unclear as to what kind of considerations around power and conflicts of interest there are in the “sustainable city” (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020, 2202). With the shift from government to governance that accompanied processes of neoliberalisation, political decisions are taken increasingly in polycentric, relational and networked constellations that decentre the state (Dean 2010; Jessop 2016). In urban contexts, this translates into a surge in arrangements that draw in civil society actors in supposedly horizontal, open ways. In Amsterdam specifically, this is reflected by governance through “the double triple helix” or “Amsterdam Approach to collaborative innovation” (Appendix I-2, 3). Swyngedouw warns that, in many cases, such allegedly open governance arrangements exclude dissenting voices in their aim to seek consensus. This renders them more technocratic than they may seem at first sight, marking the rise of what Swyngedouw calls “the post-political” (Swyngedouw 2018, xv).

Therefore, any attempt at transformative social change that enables urban everyday politics and diverse economic practices needs to tread with care when engaging with the local state. One way of engaging with the local state strategically is through a new municipalist politics. New municipalism returns to the municipal scale as a locus for political and economic transformation through the strategic leveraging of local state power in ways that softens the boundaries between the state and civil society (Russell 2019). These strategic interactions with the local state are characterised by an “interstitial distance” that enables activists to take seriously the role of the state in the social order but keep it at a certain distance so as to avoid co-optation (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 69). The ideal

is that the “future urban state,” in turn, facilitates a vibrant civil society made up of a range of collectives and cooperatives (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 134).

Whether participatory arrangements enable (re)politicisation of the urban or collapse into the post-political city is an empirical question. In this section, I engage with this question for the case of Amsterdam. I examine how the state and citizens relate to one another in Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy by interrogating to what degree we can interpret what is going on in terms of a post-capitalist politics driven by diverse economic practices and post-capitalist subjectivities, or to what degree it reflects de- or post-politicising tendencies. This means, just like in the first part of this chapter, that I consider the actions of *both* the local state *and* bottom-up actors, including the place-based project as well as the city-wide coalition.

Besides the oscillation between difference and dominance readings that drives this chapter, I also engage with the (de)politicising tendencies that arise in the promotion of urban sustainability beyond places. To consider the socio-spatial dimensions of the actions around urban sustainability in Amsterdam beyond place-based politics, I take inspiration from the heuristics of the TPSN framework (Jessop, N. Brenner and Jones 2008). I discuss how the power of place is central for urban sustainability in Amsterdam. It is mobilised, on the one hand, to empower citizens vis-à-vis the supralocal forces that negatively impact place, and, on the other, to bring “lived” space into the realm of the “conceived” (cf. Lefebvre [1974] 1991) by prompting policymakers to understand the ‘lifeworld’ of Amsterdam’s residents. Beyond the power of place, observing through the socio-spatial dimensions of network, scale and territory draws attention to the networking logics of knowledge sharing and collective strategising and the territorial and scalar logics that are invoked by the local state to (re)define the municipality’s responsibilities and capabilities vis-à-vis other levels of government.

In section 2.1, I consider the politicising potential in the power of place that is being mobilised in Amsterdam’s emerging Doughnut Economy both by activists and state actors. In section 2.2, I reflect on the depoliticising mechanisms that are produced by the power of the middle-class and a tendency to consensual politics. In section 2.3, I interrogate the Municipality of Amsterdam as a potential instance of the ‘future urban state’ by looking at its role in governing urban sustainability on multiple scales. Here I link the different socio-spatial dimensions to the logics of government and governance.

2.1 The political power of place and the urban everyday

The politics promoted by various state as well as non-state actors in relation to Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy centre on the power of place in repositing the city as a space for reproduction

and in reconstituting urban relations with nature. At the same time, however, these politics of place are related to politics beyond that of place, as they are situated in a wider urban context. I first discuss how the power of place is promoted and then turn to the dynamics beyond that of place-based politics.

2.1.1 THE POWER OF PLACE

At the core of Amsterdam's arising Doughnut Economy, place is mobilised as the locus for collective self-government through the appropriation of urban space for the meeting of *human* rather than individual needs. Needs in this sense can be understood as "anthropological needs which are socially elaborated" (Lefebvre 1996b, 147). This paves the way for an urban society defined by *autogestion*, which is when a group of people actively engage with the conditions of their existence (Lefebvre 2001, 779–80).

The place-based activists in Amsterdam promote a decidedly urban form of politics. This locates residents at the core of processes of (re)making urban society. Rather than what Marx called "political superstition: the illusory idea that the State cements society together," they are convinced that the state is dependent on "the functioning of civil society and its cohesion" (Lefebvre 2014, 113). Activists in Amsterdam locate the political not in state institutions but in the interrelated processes of city-making, city-occupying and rights-claiming (cf. Holston 2019). This is especially the case for the processes going on in the more deprived areas of the city, in part in direct response to the municipality's focus on the peripheral areas for its growth. In line with the decentring of the city that Holston observes in urban politics, the heterogeneous, peripheral districts in Amsterdam rather than the city centre form the arena of urban politics. Rather than being centred on state institutions, this brings about a decidedly urban form of politics across urban spaces which is entwined with the rhythms of urban everyday life. Through this politics, urban activists in Amsterdam aim at transforming urban everyday life and the reproduction thereof rather than the political decision-making processes (cf. Beveridge and Koch 2019).

At the core of these projects is a strategic mobilisation of place with one or both of the following two aims: to shield the local community against supralocal forces impacting it and to transform economic flows from the very local scale. Practices of shielding place against supralocal forces, for example, come to the fore in the community land trust projects in the *H-Buurt* and *Food Park Amsterdam* as well as the neighbourhood platform of the "Sierpleinbuurt," which harness their local communities against forces of urban development, renewal and gentrification by strengthening connections between residents and by creating spaces where they can meet one another and exchange views and opinions. Places as entry points into the flows of urban metabolism and the

global economy, on the other hand, become clear in projects such as the community-led biowaste digester placed at *The Green Hub* and the urban gardening practices of the *Kaskantine*. These projects take inspiration from the scalar thinking promoted by Doughnut Economy, which, through its local and global lenses, makes a first attempt at including metabolic considerations on a global scale in its “city portraits” (Appendix I-2, 5). It starts to connect the local arena of urban sustainability with social, economic and political processes on other scales (cf. Bulkeley and Betsill 2005). This way, place-based Doughnut Economics projects in Amsterdam engage with global sustainability through strengthening their local communities.

Although the “small-p politics” (Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011, 57) in Amsterdam’s emergent Doughnut Economy is not located in or oriented towards state institutions, the related projects do have a clear focus on their relationship with the local state. Possibly due to the years of experience that many of Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economics activists already have with community organising and working with local state actors, they emphasise the need to confront the local state explicitly. Although activists indeed embrace the power of the urban everyday, or the realm of the “lived,” they simultaneously aim to bring this power into the policymaking processes through which space is “conceived” (Lefebvre 1991, 40). They thus connect the city’s “near order” of the relations between individuals and groups with its “far order” involving political institutions and cultural dimensions (Lefebvre 1996a, 26).

Actors and institutions in this “far order” are also interested in connecting with the “near order”: parts of the local state aim to mobilise the power of place vis-à-vis the supralocal forces that have increasingly come to dictate life in the city. With its democratisation programme, as well as with references to bottom-up sustainability and circular economy activities, the municipality aims to promote Amsterdam’s diverse civil society in spite of the challenges posed by wider political-economic structures which make the city increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible for many. This is reflected in the city’s neighbourhood-based approach to urban development and its participation in oriented urban governance, through which it tries to ‘conceive space’ by drawing on experiences in ‘lived space’.

Doughnut activists and parts of the local state thus engage in the promotion of the power of place – places in which citizens come together in forms of self-government and create alternative forms of value by experimenting with alternative currencies and non-monetary economic streams. Understanding, then, how the small-scale, local Doughnut and circular initiatives play into Amsterdam’s political economy on a whole requires a consideration of other socio-spatial dimensions beyond those of place.

2.1.2 THE DYNAMICS BEYOND PLACE

Although place occupies an important position in the sustainability politics in Amsterdam, dynamics beyond place also play a role. Through the various civil society networks in Amsterdam – notably the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition – activists strengthen their local practices through rhizomatic, horizontal structures based on interconnectivity, interdependency and reciprocity as well as individual choices and power relations (Jessop, N. Brenner and Jones 2008; Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011). Networking logics thus help shape the discursive strategies present in the Doughnut Economics movement in Amsterdam. The city-wide networks play an important role in the “active scalar strategy of representation and organisation” through which various political actors form alliances across different backgrounds and exchange knowledge and strategies (Bayırbağ, Davies and Münch 2017, 2035).

Through the various, overlapping networks, activists in Amsterdam learn from one another and strategise together. Furthermore, the international Doughnut network of Raworth’s Doughnut Economics Action Lab enables local activists to “jump scales” and have an international reach (cf. Smith 1992, 60). However, this scale-jumping is of limited relevance when considered in isolation from other spatial aspects of the movement, as this international scale is not the scale at which material change is realised. Although the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition aims to be “a network of networks” and provide the discursive tools, the potentials for politicisation inherent in place should not be neglected. Thus, the networking logics in Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economics movement on the local, national and international scales are relevant for strategising and knowledge exchange, but in themselves they are not sufficient for creating transformative social change in Amsterdam.

Another way in which considerations beyond place enter the place-based Doughnut Economics project is through the considerations of the local state, as argued above. Although these projects care first and foremost about promoting their projects locally, activists in Amsterdam have all experienced their dependence on the state and its inevitability regarding the provision of funding or space. This is needed for the projects’ continued existence, which is at times difficult to secure beyond the initial excitement of ‘festive moments’ or ‘fun events’. The movement’s reliance on volunteers makes it vulnerable in the medium and long term. Although Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy movement fosters “collective, organised and strategic practices that articulate a political antagonism embedded in, but breaking with, urban everyday life through altering – however temporarily – time- and place-specific social relations” (Beveridge and Koch 2019, 143), they are *also* focused on the durability of their projects.

Whereas the politicising impetus of urban everyday politics may be clear, the continuation and relevance of an individual urban-political project in the longer term is not. This poses a challenge for people engaged in such projects. It is also problematic considering the challenges that environmental problems pose to urban societies at large. Facing these requires long-term commitment and the thorough reorganisation of our societies rather than fleeting political insurrections – however inspiring and emancipatory these may be momentarily. Understanding the long-term aspects of urban political insurrection prompts a consideration of how the spontaneously arising antagonistic activities are carried forth by various groups of citizens and how they organise and relate to one another. It also warrants scrutiny of the tension between, on the one hand, the aim for a structural, long-term relationship between citizens and the state, as aimed for in new municipalism as well as Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy specifically, and, on the other hand, the instability and unpredictability of political cycles and civil society projects driven mostly by volunteers, as is largely the case in Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy.

Acknowledging the necessity of the municipality in securing the continued existence of their projects, Amsterdam's Doughnut activists seek out suitable elements of the state apparatus or specific state actors who they think they can work with. The state as an institutional ensemble (Jessop 2016) cannot be identified one-to-one with capitalist interests, as it includes certain departments or institutions which are open to working with and responding to the struggle and contestation from below. Through this engagement, activists engage with state actors to formalise, to some degree, the needs and desires from the lived space into institutional representation and formal policymaking processes. This is required for shaping urban space to the benefit of the individual and collective needs of residents (Uitermark 2009). These strategic interactions are particular and shaped by the micropolitics present in the everyday interactions between activists and state actors (Verloo 2023).

In navigating these micro-politics, Doughnut Economics activists in Amsterdam aim to avoid co-optation by fundamentally altering the relation between the state and citizens. They envision a move from a project- and subsidy-based structure to a more equitable, even and long-term relationship in which citizens 'own' the projects and are at least valued equally in relation to other players in governance arrangements. These democratisation efforts to redraw the boundaries between the state and civil society through establishing relations of equivalence are, so far, still a work in progress in Amsterdam. Where there are small-scale examples of such longer-lasting relationships, for example, through the neighbourhood jobs and peer leaders, these relations are not of equivalence. The neighbourhood jobs indicate an employer-employee relation, while the activists are dependent on space and funding, which are, to varying degrees, governed by the local state. On the other hand, many of the place-based Doughnut projects are working hard from the

bottom up to establish such equivalence relations but, in many cases, struggle to get beyond a reliance on existing subsidy structures.

The local state thus plays a key role in facilitating urban-political initiatives through providing them with financial stability and spatial anchoring. Moreover, it might also act as a mediator between different social groups and different places. The movement in Amsterdam risks falling into the “local trap” insofar as its promotion of lived experiences in Amsterdam’s various neighbourhoods considers local, community-driven projects inherently more democratic. However, if society as a whole is to be organised as a confederation of autonomous local communities in some form of decentralised democracy, “then what would prevent the development of large-scale inequality and injustice among communities [...] and thereby the oppression of individuals who do not live in the more privileged and more powerful communities?” (Young 1990, 250). Indeed, such an overly romantic vision of local democracy is problematic, especially when it concerns democratic answers to questions about global environmental change and economic transformation. When these answers are formulated from within a post-industrial, urban context such as Amsterdam, where the professional middle class has come to shape urban development considerably, the democratic potentials are not straightforward. This warrants reflections on potential depoliticising and post-political tendencies that governing arrangements may entail.

2.2 Depoliticising tendencies

In the emergent Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam, there are two potential sources of depoliticisation, and they both call for more upfront engagement with capitalism as a system. The first of these is the power of the professional middle-class to dominate urban policy and the urban economy in Amsterdam. A second source of potential depoliticisation comes from the consensual tendencies present in the envisioning of the transition towards a Doughnut Economy. While the local state aims to work with the “coalition of the willing,” bottom-up actors “go where the energy is”. This may, in certain cases, lead to depoliticisation. I will discuss each of these two potential sources of depoliticisation in turn.

2.2.1 THE PROFESSIONAL MIDDLE CLASS AND NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

Through the intertwined processes of neoliberalisation, gentrification and deindustrialisation, the class profile of post-industrial cities has come to be increasingly shaped by the rise of the urban middle class. Urban movements in these cities are often divided between relatively privileged movements, which are in line with the locational politics of cities around sustainability and creativity, and movements existing of precarious groups, informal workers and people of colour.

Overcoming this divide demands “critical reflexivity about class and privilege within movements” (Mayer 2013, 17). Although a middle class is crucial for democracy, as it lessens social differences (Garrido 2019, 15), politics in Amsterdam may well have gotten beyond this point, as the influence and strong representation of its middle class in urban politics and municipal administration may in fact intensify such difference. While members of the middle class largely embrace progressive social and environmental values as well as cultural and ethnic diversity, they are *also* deeply concerned about the conditions of their own social reproduction (Boterman and van Gent 2023).

This tension inherent in the middle class is an important pointer when interpreting current developments in Amsterdam. Although this relatively privileged group of citizens is concerned with environmental and social topics, they have also been subject to “pacification by cappuccino” (Zukin, cited in Harvey 2008, 31–32).¹ Through this, neoliberal subjectivity comes to define socialisation, grounding it in individualisation rather than collective engagement in political action. For instance, in opposition to their working-class counterparts, the middle classes have the means to combine strategies of mobility and retreat to deal with the urban transformations around them that they experience as challenging – such as increased pressures on public space due to tourism (Pinkster and Boterman 2017).

The activities around the current turn to sustainability of the Municipality of Amsterdam, epitomised by its circular economy and climate neutrality strategies, reflect Amsterdam’s class profile. The municipality relies largely on “learning by doing” to realise its ambitions. With this, the Municipality of Amsterdam aligns with the wider trend of urban administrations employing a “fragmented, case-by-case approach” in responding to climate change, whose challenges do not usually fall within clear-cut areas of administrative expertise or budgets (Bulkeley and Castán Broto 2013, 362). This fragmented approach translates into an engagement with citizens in relation to the circular Doughnut Economy, which relies on “pioneers” and “a coalition of the willing,” who are all considered to be leading by example. Moreover, the execution programme of the city’s sustainability policy is not coupled with clearly accessible funding schemes but rather connects to the existing subsidy framework, which is considered incomprehensible even by the citizens who have clearly been successful with their bids in the past. Thus, the people who are most likely to find their way into obtaining the means necessary to keep initiatives running for a longer period of time are the ones belonging to the professional middle classes, who can afford to step away from their daily economic considerations and processes of social reproduction.

¹ In the Netherlands, and especially the Randstad and Amsterdam, these concerns are reflected – quite literally – in vibrant debates around the rise of “the oat milk elite”.

With this, the municipality of Amsterdam's programmes around urban sustainability appeal more easily to professional middle-class citizens than to citizens from lower classes and different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The observation that the middle classes have a larger influence on urban policy than the lower classes extends well beyond the context of Amsterdam (Middleton, Murie, and Groves 2005), while environmentalism, especially in the West, is often considered a project of the middle classes (Huber 2019; Moore 2023). Although it could be considered fair that urban sustainability programmes appeal to the middle classes to an extent that corresponds to the class profile of a society, there is a risk that the importance of the working classes in acts of transformation is neglected. This would lead to the movement becoming overly influenced by members of the highly educated, professional middle class who believe in the power of ideas and models, which may not always resonate with the experiences of residents who are not academically educated. Such a movement, then, may be hijacked for the purposes of locational politics and city marketing, through which the Municipality of Amsterdam, like local governments everywhere, aims to attract investments and boost the local economy (Mayer 2013). In Amsterdam, one of the latest utterances of the municipality on tourism and international marketing shows the salience of city marketing for boosting local value creation in its creative and sustainable entrepreneurial scene. The city is not merely a product to make money off; "entrepreneurialism is [...] not about big international money but about creating value for the direct environment" (Appendix I- 46, 4 [my translation]).

Whereas middle-class organising is typically related to broad environmental and social goals and operates through appealing to other potential allies, working-class movements are most often interest-based and are concerned with the economy and livelihood of those whose needs are most dire. Despite differences in orientation, working methods and political strategy, the possibility of a progressive majority hinges on the potential to bring together a consideration for the needs of the lower classes *and* wider environmental and social concerns (Rose 2000). Given the influence of gentrification and segregation on the urban fabric, Castell's (1972) idea that social movements may form a distinct political subject whose unity stems from a shared life as citizens rather than a shared class position is difficult to realise. People's motivations for engaging in the urban everyday are likely to be different and shaped through class positions. Being explicit about this is necessary to face and overcome differences that hamper potential collective organising. This, in turn, implies a certain degree of difference and contestation within the movement. It decidedly does not point to a consensual politics, which is often part and parcel of middle-class organising.

2.2.2 CONSENSUAL POLITICS

The experimental learning-by-doing working methods that seek out willing collaborators, which is promoted by various social actors in Amsterdam in relation to the emerging Doughnut Economy,

warrant some further reflection, as they may risk downplaying the difference and trade-offs that are so inherent to the city and urban development. This, in turn, raises concerns about the post-political city, in which dissenting views are excluded from seemingly horizontal, open governance arrangements beforehand (Swyngedouw 2018).

Perhaps unsurprisingly in a political context with a long history of consensus-seeking and corporatism, there are various consensual logics at play in the emergence of Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy. The learning-by-doing approach that features centrally in the sustainability strategies of the Municipality of Amsterdam also permeates the Doughnut Economics movement within civil society. For the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, the principle of working with the willing, motivated and aligned citizens has translated into a "theory of change" of "popularising and activating, strengthening and financing, learning and integrating" (Appendix II-4 [my translation]).

With this, both the municipality and bottom-up activists render the city a laboratory for collaboration and recursive learning through "participatory experimental urbanism" (Thompson and Lorne 2023). Thompson and Lorne argue that, especially when promoted through professionally managed platforms and when failing to make explicit underlying gender, class and racial power imbalances, this kind of urbanism can be detrimental to democracy. In light of this, it is problematic that Doughnut Economics as a model does not explicitly tackle questions around race, class or capitalism. With its neglect of capitalism and its agnosticism regarding growth, Doughnut Economics aims to avoid disruption and instead promotes incremental changes (Crisp et al. 2023). Its starting point is not antagonism but a universalistic depiction of the economy, made up of separate categories, whose interrelations and mutual trade-offs are insufficiently fleshed out. It thus becomes unclear how trade-offs are to be dealt with and to whose benefit. With this, it risks falling prey to "the synergy illusion," or the tendency of progressive thinking to sidestep potential contradictions: "progressives are eternally convinced that 'all good things go together,' in contrast to the *zero-sum, ceci-tuera-cela* mentality of the reactionaries" (Hirschman 1991, 151). Progressive thinking focuses (often too much) on the potential of various progressive measures to mutually reinforce one another and emphasises the danger in forestalling action due to impending threats (Hirschman 1991, 152).

Although it may well be possible that multiple progressive developments go hand in hand – for instance, evidence is mounting that global poverty *can* be ended without a surge in global greenhouse emissions (Wollburg, Hallegatte, and Mahler 2023) – we need a thorough understanding of the mechanisms that drive these developments to understand their mutual interrelations, their potential trade-offs and the benefits or burdens they imply for various groups. Indeed, scholars conclude that there are currently no countries that meet human needs at sufficiently low levels of energy use, and that trade-offs are inherent to promoting progressive future

visions. Changing this requires an alternative approach to extractivism and economic growth and thus a transformation of the dominant political-economic system (Vogel et al. 2021). This, in turn, points to the need to understand the entanglements between urban and capitalist processes, as I have argued throughout this dissertation. These entanglements are the reason for social analysis and theory often returning to materialist theories of capitalism and the ways it conditions potentials for social change. Once Doughnut Economics is practiced, it may thus benefit from further reflection through categories of twentieth century ‘isms’ that help shed light on the mechanisms for social change.

It is unavoidable that activist groups work with consensual mechanisms in some ways. Activist groups often consist of individuals who have not worked together before, which means that they do not have a standing relationship with one another. Such a relationship is required, for instance, for majority rule, which requires that losses at a certain time can be regained with decisions in the future, minimising the chance for individuals or sub-groups to be marginalised (Mansbridge 2003). This is reflected on the neighbourhood scale, where activists are driven by a consensual approach while also allowing for difference. As the movement develops and grows through processes described as ‘swarming,’ through which social actors collaborate without making too many specific or concrete agreements but instead by listening to one another, the movement promotes a politics built on positive affect to spark and sustain participation.

At the same time, swarming also implies moving along with others. In the ideal setting of the ‘dance of participation,’ as they also describe the process of collaborating and participating, two metaphorical dance partners relate to each other and may even take turns in leading the other. Thus, acting together, participating together, not only implies taking the initiative but also listening to and following the other(s). In this act, antagonisms towards those who are different from us raise fears that may lead us to put up (in)visible boundaries between groups. Facing and overcoming this difference and these fears are a crucial part of urban life. To engage with the plurality inherent in urban contexts, we need to ensure that the borders between different spaces are permeable and that the sense of powerlessness and lacking political representation do not foreclose political engagement (Watson 2022, 265). Therefore, it is crucial that the borders between different levels of organising in the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition remain permeable through clear democratic mechanisms that allow potentially everyone to engage with the coalitions *as a commons*.

Thus, to avoid that governance arrangements concerning Amsterdam’s Doughnut or circular economy are reduced to post-political window-dressing, the activating power and the wide appeal of Doughnut Economics as “a new economic story that is told through pictures” (Raworth 2017, 7) should be combined with more considerations of trade-offs, difference and conflict once it arrives in an urban context with a long history and a position within a global capitalist system with

dominant logics. Especially in a context where the professional middle class has become so politically, socially and economically influential as in Amsterdam, continual processes of re-politicisation are needed through explicit consideration of the class-based and other differences within the bottom-up movement. These differences imply that “thriving in balance” means different things for different (groups of) people (Raworth 2017, 43) and that mechanisms of in- and exclusion should be of core consideration. Reaching back to the conceptual categories for understanding capitalism may be helpful in both interpreting these and in creating spaces that are inviting to a plurality of people.

The need for continual (re)politicisation also arises when collaborating with actors beyond civil society, notably from parts of the local state or (large) businesses. In the efforts to bring the experiences of ‘lifeworld’ and ‘system’ closer to one another, as is a widespread aim of the democratisation efforts in Amsterdam both within the local state and civil society, it may be insightful to go back to Habermas’s concern regarding these two spheres. Rather than trying to bridge the gap between the two, he was concerned about the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system. Thus, even if citizens in Amsterdam want to promote better communication and mutual understanding between the two spheres, the system logics are dominant and may well come to colonise organising in the lifeworld, if they are not held at bay explicitly. Working with the local state and (large) business organisations thus requires that the full, unruly nature of the lifeworld is considered and not only the professional part that fits more easily with the organising logics of the local state or business organisations. The need for continual re-politicisation places high demands on all the involved actors but is needed to ensure engagement with the mechanisms of in- and exclusion that in turn are instrumental in countering the unequal tendencies inherent in any urban context shaped by global capitalism. Despite these challenges, tackling the question of how to work with the local state is a precondition for coalitions of change to arise. The local state in turn is concerned not only with the local logics inherent in urban place but also with logics on scales well beyond that.

2.3 The role of the local state in governing urban sustainability on multiple scales

When promoting the power of place in an urban context, civil society actors unavoidably need to deal with the role of the local state, especially if they are interested in forming coalitions for change. The local state is an institutional ensemble with internal variability in terms of strategies and logics, whose various elements respond differently to the various interests and demands from the social context the state is embedded in (Jessop 2016). Due to this internal variability, the “future urban state” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 134) will not be a unified bloc but a dispersed range of institutions and organisations. Of these, certain parts may facilitate transformative social change by taming

capitalism (Wright 2021), as I mentioned above. With this, the local state protects the ‘islands’ of hope and change that the place-based, citizen-driven projects create from the adverse effects created by the wider context they find themselves in and that is shaped by capitalist logics. At the same time, other parts of the local state may remain more occupied with the structural conditions of Amsterdam’s urban economy, such as land, spatial and economic policy. The position of different elements of the local state is not likely to be clearcut and stable but can instead differ to some degree from one policy to the next.

How these different elements of the local state come to define urban policy and what kind of influence citizens ultimately have in the development of urban policy are empirical questions involving the micropolitics in the everyday interactions between activists and state actors (Verloof 2023). To understand the role that (parts of) the local state may play in coalitions for change, the ways in which urban policy is shaped by the local state beyond place-based politics matters. Moreover, to consider the (de)politicising effects of the local state’s actions beyond places, these actions need to be related to different governing logics that come into play with regard to the different dimensions of spatial politics. I first discuss what these state actions beyond place are and then turn to the different logics they entail.

2.3.1 SOCIO-SPATIAL DIMENSIONS BEYOND PLACE

To unpack how actions of the local state in Amsterdam affect place-based sustainability politics, a consideration of the different socio-spatial dimensions besides place in the urban sustainability efforts of the Municipality of Amsterdam is needed. In this regard, it is useful, first, to look at how the municipality promotes networking logics through its engagement with other urban governments. The Municipality of Amsterdam takes part in different international city networks, and its branches engaged in the democratisation programme have played a considerable role in the Fearless Cities Network, the global network of city administrators, activists and civil society organisations promoting municipalist politics. The municipality has active strategies around city diplomacy, and with its “Voluntary Local Review,” in which it reviews the local implementation of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, it municipality aimed to “convince global policy makers [that] the local level is indispensable in realising whatever goals are set” (Appendix I-47, 18). Besides this, the Municipality of Amsterdam closely follows how it performs in relation to other cities, for example, with its attention to international city rankings regarding liveability, innovation and startup ecosystems, which are in line with its municipal strategies around Amsterdam as a “business city” and “knowledge city” to cater to the “creative, innovative, entrepreneurial, talented people of Amsterdam” (Appendix I-11, 17-22 [my translation]).

On the one hand, with such forms of lobbying, the local government engages with regional, national and supranational scales in new ways in order to bring about regulatory reform or technological developments. This may challenge and recalibrate existing “scalar hierarchies and interscalar relations” (N. Brenner 2004, 3) through forms of “municipal contestation” in which local governments strategically interact with higher levels of government (Verhoeven, Strange and Siles-Brügge 2022). Through such strategic engagement, the Municipality of Amsterdam pushes for and enables circularity and sustainability from the urban scale. On the other hand, to the extent that the municipality’s engagement on the international scene is shaped by its imperative to promote Amsterdam internationally in terms of sustainable and entrepreneurial innovation, it may be rather removed from the everyday experiences in the places from which urban sustainability is grounded.

Considerations beyond place are also reflected in the local state’s invocation of territorial thinking regarding supralocal levels of government. Through this, the Amsterdam City Council draws boundaries between its own abilities and responsibilities and those of higher levels of government. Historically, the national government (with its expansive social welfare state) has been crucial in Amsterdam’s revival after the 1980s. With a focus on values around growth, equity and sustainability, it has provided the city with a framework for effective and durable policy efforts (Fainstein 2005). Currently, the Municipality of Amsterdam is, in some areas, turning around this logic by pushing for further sustainability and circularity regulation on supralocal scales. Yet, through this supralocal engagement, the municipality also promotes an international discourse around Amsterdam as a sustainable, innovative city, thereby potentially attracting people and organisations that confirm the ongoing demographic changes towards a middle-class city.

The municipality argues that sustainability and circularity in the city are utterly dependent on (trans)national regulation, through which it highlights the ways in which economic, social and political processes on a supralocal scale impact urban governance systems. It also emphasises the need for multilevel government in which capabilities and authority are shared between different layers and branches of government (Bulkeley and Betsill 2005). With this, it challenges the common-sense understanding of scalar hierarchies. In a more traditional sense, the Municipality of Amsterdam invokes scalar thinking in its approach to the urban region in relation to urban development strategies. The city, as the centre of the metropolitan region, extracts material inputs from the region and is influential in shaping the latter. The municipality connects the region to themes such as international competitiveness, urban greening, mobility and food. It also increasingly turns to the region, given the limited capacities of the city to accommodate further growth through densification within its territorial boundaries.

Hence, the (de)politicising tendencies in the Municipality of Amsterdam’s engagement with urban sustainability and the potentials for coalitions for change involving state actors depend on the

various ways in which the municipality promotes sustainability in and beyond the locus of the city. While scalar, networking and territorial logics may help to shield place-based sustainability politics from harmful, supralocal impacts, they may also shift the focus from those place-based politics promoted by marginalised communities to the international, innovative aspects of Amsterdam's urban economy. This ambiguous role of the municipality is related to the different governing logics it promotes with regards to urban sustainability.

2.3.2 DIFFERENT GOVERNING LOGICS

When considering the strategies of the Municipality of Amsterdam through the lens of different socio-spatial dimensions, it becomes clear that the municipality promotes different governing logics. On the one hand, it engages in the facilitation and mobilisation of self-government, while, on the other hand, it employs logics of government to shape the political-economic context in which this self-government is embedded. In its development of a climate-neutral, fully circular urban economy, Amsterdam's local state is indeed, as Jessop (2016, 57) argues, "the site of a paradox". While it has limited capacities to influence the entire social context in which it is embedded, it is nevertheless held accountable for the latter's social cohesion. In line with this, the Municipality of Amsterdam is held accountable for the successes of the city's progress on urban sustainability transitions, even though it does not have unlimited abilities to influence this. Much of what it can do comes down to facilitating and nudging, especially concerning aspects of the transition outside the city's municipal borders.

This tension is reflected in the two-fold strategy of the Municipality of Amsterdam regarding social reproduction in the city, presented earlier in this chapter. On the one hand, the municipality facilitates the fundamental functions of the city as a space for social reproduction and collective consumption – the infrastructures for social reproduction provided by the state (Castells 1977). On the other hand, the municipality attempts to make space for the self-organising capacities and the political potentials in civil society, pointing towards the facilitation of a Lefebvrian kind of politics in the urban everyday. The former comes with government logics through which the Municipality of Amsterdam expands its remit, as it takes an active role in providing the legal framework for social reproduction in the city and the circular economy, insofar as it is independent of supralocal legal developments. The local state thus plays a large role in regulating business, facilitating waste management and developing larger-scale sustainability infrastructures, such as district heating infrastructures in social-housing dominated neighbourhoods and large-scale (on- and off-shore) wind parks. Both of these examples invoked citizen protests; in the former because participation processes did not turn out to be as participatory as promised and, in the latter, because homeowners and residents were concerned about the detrimental effects on the view, nature and health. With

the well-known NIMBY-logics, the wind turbines are now planned to be installed in another part of the city (Koops and van Zoelen 2021). Because of such controversy, but also the duration and unpredictability of the tasks ahead, the Municipality of Amsterdam considers its directive role in the sustainability transitions inevitable: “without stimulation, public control, regulation from the top and firm agreements with larger parties, we will not meet our CO₂ targets” (Appendix I-35, 20 [my translation]).

At the same time, the Municipality of Amsterdam is also expanding the scope of governance, potentially in relation to the Lefebvrian kind of politics it implicitly promotes. It sees a larger role for small-scale projects driven by citizens and local entrepreneurs. Beyond the administration’s gate-keeping role through the permits it gives out, it aims to mobilise the self-governing capacities of its citizenry and activate the innovative qualities of its local business and startup milieu. The local state’s strategic selectivity influences the ways in which various elements of the state’s institutional ensemble connect with and approach civil society actors and other societal organisations and forces in divergent ways (Jessop 2016). This is reflected in these governance arrangements. Different civil society and activist projects are approached differently by different parts of the local state – through logics of antagonism, co-optation or cooperation (Bianchi 2022).

For example, the relations between civil servants of the city’s land department and the advocates of *Food Park Amsterdam* are mostly antagonistic in nature, which became clear when the former were specifically ordered not to engage in conversation with the latter at a Doughnut Economics workshop. Conversely, the involvements of the district administration in Southeast with the local currency developed by *The Green Hub* is more cooperative in nature. Thus, the local state relates to civil society in heterogeneous, fragmentary and at times contradictory ways. Governance, therefore, should always be understood as a form of “emergent messy governance” which captures “the actual governance of a given entity (a neighbourhood, a city, a region, a nation, etc.) as it springs from a potentially messy variety of models and practices of governance, all of which pursue different and often contradictory objectives” (De Angelis 2022, 99).

The extension of governance structures in Amsterdam may be seen as a step towards the realisation of the “future urban state, a striking mosaic of cooperatives and collectives, from local banks to food suppliers and cafes, enmeshed with the state in the development of a localized urbanization” (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 134). Yet, it also brings about new forms of governmentality. The co-optative logics are not straightforward in the case of Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy, but the tensions between the post-capitalist subject and the neoliberal subject discussed in the previous section point to the ways in which alternative subjectivities end up contributing to developments they would not initially support. A large part of the city’s Doughnut activists fits within the municipality’s new vision of entrepreneurialism, which is “not about big international money but

about creating value for the direct environment” (Appendix I-46, 4 [my translation]). In line with this, the various urban programmes oriented to alternative forms of value (e.g., community wealth building and broad prosperity) coexist and interrelate with monetary value, as they feed into the local state’s promotional materials and reports while benefitting the city’s position in international liveability and innovation rankings as well as the municipality’s position in international city diplomacy.

Under the heading of “learning by doing,” the Municipality of Amsterdam promotes programmes of what Foucault would note as “the conduct of conduct,” animated, in this case, by positive affect. Despite the looming environmental catastrophe that makes acting imperative, the local state aims to make participation “irresistible: be creative, have fun, share learning and stories of success – and celebrate” (Appendix I-2, 3). Furthermore, with its adherence to learning by doing, the Municipality of Amsterdam embraces a kind of “incremental planning”. Stein observes how proposals for such “incremental planning” in the US came from the political right and led to the adoption of “the science of ‘muddling through,’ or a trial-and-error approach that valued stability over transformation (Stein 2019, 24). Contrarily, in this case, a trial-and-error approach is adopted for different purposes, valuing transformation over proven pathways. In an attempt to “think big, act small, start now,” the Municipality of Amsterdam aims to break up the overwhelming task of “real and substantive urban transformation” into “manageable chunks that can be tried out” through small-scale experimentation and testing (cf. Chatterton 2019, 115). As Chatterton (2019, 115) emphasises, this is not “anti-organising” but a “radically different approach to organising the future sustainable city”.

This indicates that, despite the indications of some aspects of Amsterdam’s arising Doughnut Economy reflecting the sedimentation of neoliberal logics in our societies (“roll-with-it-neoliberalisation” [Keil 2009]), this embrace is never totalising. In relation to the production of neoliberal governmentality, an important – albeit contested – concept in Foucauldian literature is *resistance*. Despite Foucault’s understanding of subjects as subconsciously produced by power relations, he considers resistance an empirical possibility. He bases this possibility on the conviction that there are no social groups whose hegemony is absolute, thereby allowing them to control all mechanisms of power. Rather, there is always the possibility that the latter are re-appropriated for counter-hegemonic ends; “as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance” (Foucault, cited in Heller 1996, 78).

This implies that potentially post-politicising and entrepreneurial tendencies promoted through certain governance arrangements can always be contested. Moreover, these governance arrangements are likely to involve arrangements in which a wide range of actors *can* promote alternative forms of relational governance (Larner 2014, 189–91). Thus, there are openings for

resistance and alterity in such forms of governance. The strategic engagements of urban activists and bottom-up political projects with the local state are never stable or finished. Rather, these projects continue to work to keep the state at an “interstitial, internal” distance (Beveridge and Koch 2022, 69). This way, they confront the contradictory elements of local state policy which are not only reflected in Amsterdam’s policies around the circular and doughnut economy but also in its wider policy landscape where logics of responsabilisation and financialisation are deeply embedded.

In highlighting the tensions that arise when the local state promotes different governing logics as it facilitates place-based politics as well as engages beyond place, I have taken inspiration from the heuristics of the multidimensional TPSN framework. However, with its main focus on the local scale, there is still a chance that my in-depth single study case study of Amsterdam reproduces a kind of “methodological cityism” (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015). Therefore, I end this chapter with some critical consideration of the potential limits of this case study.

3 The limits of cityism

By taking a local starting point in the politics of place, in which local actors understand and refer to the city most often in commonsensical understandings, I risk engaging with the ‘city’ as a ‘word’ rather than a ‘concept’. This is problematic since, following Paasi (2008, 405), words such as ‘city’ “imply the qualities that have for a long time been associated with them (e.g. a certain boundedness or hierarchy), while this should not lead us to take these qualities for granted”. I consider my analysis of the strategies and practices of the municipality and the civil society actors in Amsterdam, then, as a first step in a richer account of the logics, powers and dynamics involved in attempts to realise urban sustainability in and beyond the boundaries of the (capitalist) city. Yet, to understand what learnings we can draw from such a single case in relation to wider dynamics, reflection is needed on 1) the wider political landscape in which that case finds itself, which is reflected – albeit imperfectly – in electoral politics; and 2) the relation between place-based transformative social change and the planetary processes that they aim to challenge, which in turn connects to my dynamic methodological approach. I discuss each of these in turn.

Regarding the first reflection, considering Amsterdam as a city without drawing sufficient connections to its wider contexts and hinterlands is politically salient, as it risks intensifying the political divide between Amsterdam and most of the rest of the Netherlands. This divide came to the fore once more in the national elections in November 2023. In these elections, Amsterdam was one of the few municipalities where a left-wing party became the biggest, while Geert Wilders’s

populist Party for Freedom (*PVV* in Dutch) became the largest in most Dutch municipalities. There are (at least) two implications of these electoral results.

First, the urban politics in Amsterdam may now be even less representative of wider Dutch politics than they already were. Amsterdam is at the centre of the Netherlands with its generally knowledge-intensive economy, where the lower classes and those with a practical education feel left behind by cultural elites. The recent election implies that the rift between Amsterdam and the Netherlands as a whole is perhaps even larger than previously understood. Hence, saying something about the potentials and limitations of progressive politics calls for careful thinking about what it means to do so on the basis of developments in Amsterdam. It also affects the engagements of local levels of government (in Amsterdam) with higher levels of government. Although it is too early to assess how these elections will change national politics – especially given that a coalition still needs to be formed at the time of writing, and it is unclear whether the formation processes will result in a coalition at all – the first indications are that “a new political reality” is already here, which could result, for example, in anti-immigration policies being put into practice (Du Pré 2023).

Second, the election results emphasise once more that “the climate politics of the 2020s need to be in dialogue with rural areas, and they need to center health, center workers, and identify the ways in which fossil fuel phaseout and new industries can provide new choices for communities” (Buck 2021, 182). This implies that considerations of social class are key. A considerable share of those voting for Geert Wilders’s populist party belong to the lower (middle) classes and voted out of a sense of protest and concern for social security and migration (NOS 2023). Although Amsterdam may be a left-wing beacon in a political landscape that took a sharp turn to the right, not everyone in Amsterdam is affluent and privileged. As Amsterdam City Council reports, the average income in Amsterdam is 2,000 euros lower than the national average, while the income inequality is higher than the national rates (Appendix I-43, 132).

Notwithstanding the levels of segregation within Amsterdam, these high levels of inequality may also provide an opportunity. If – and only if – social actors engaged in the realisation of a ‘Doughnut city’ manage to bring together the livelihood concerns of the lower classes with wider concerns about urban sustainability, Amsterdam may prove a context in which the urban begins to produce a political subject based, first and foremost, not in a shared social class but in collective urban life.

The second reflection on the relevance of Amsterdam as a case concerns the connections between place-based transformative social change and the planetary processes they aim to challenge. Through the local and global perspectives on the economy that Doughnut Economics proposes, Doughnut-inspired, place-based attempts at transformative social change in Amsterdam are implicitly driven by both local and global concerns. Although this implies scalar notions of some

kind, they are rather static and simplistic ones. When employing scale as an analytical category to understand social, economic and political processes, social-constructivist conceptualisations of scale are more apt to inform how scale and such processes mutually shape one another than static ones (N. Brenner 2019). Hence, the binary proposal of scale through a global and a local lens is not likely to do justice to such nuances in the production of scale. Similarly, the social and environmental lenses of Doughnut Economics are not likely to fully capture the mutually transformative social and natural processes that are at the basis of urban metabolism. Yet, in both cases, Doughnut Economics spreads awareness around the existence of such categories and may thus bring some scalar and metabolic reflection to local practices.

Further unpacking this is crucial for understanding how the difference inherent in the local relates to the planetary processes that they aim to challenge. Given that this project has a local empirical starting point, any further unpacking is unfortunately beyond its scope. I have attempted to emphasise throughout that I am aware of the limits of thinking, enacting and studying sustainable urban futures from within a specific urban setting, especially when this is a relatively wealthy, western one. This means that further multi-scalar perspectives are required for a deepened understanding of the intricate relations between the local, the planetary and the various scales in between and outside of that.

These perspectives would draw interconnections across space not only through large-scale abstractions but also through connections between the small-scale and the everyday, as proposed by planetary urbanisation thesis (Angelo and Goh 2021). In order to have a sufficiently rich understanding of the processes of difference, subjectivity and agency that are present in the small-scale and everyday, and from where social change might arise (Katz 2021), a first step is an in-depth understanding of what is going on at the local scale and the unruliness and unexpectedness that it harbours. It is in the local, the everyday, that processes of transformative social change are diverse, dispersed and *already happening* in the cracks of capitalist urbanism. Promoting transformative potential depends on our ability to see and engage with transformative processes on their own terms – based on a sensitivity to difference. This requires the development of epistemological categories “which both resonates with the present but [help] us see, and move, beyond it” (Beveridge and Koch 2023, 8). Beveridge and Koch argue that, in order to understand and promote the political potential in the city, we need to shift the way we see democracy – not through statist but through urban logics. Such a shift is crucial for a rich understanding of the processes of difference, subjectivity and agency.

Yet, I have argued throughout this thesis that any effort to read and interpret for difference needs to be balanced with a consideration of dominant logics. I have developed a methodological approach that engages with the dominant logics brought about by capitalist and neoliberal

processes and structures in the city as well as with processes of difference in a dynamic way. In doing this, I have brought together an attentiveness to processes of difference, subjectivity and agency with wider structures and mechanisms that impact and condition this political potential of the city, especially over time. Rather than solely focusing on such dominant logics and on criticising them, this consideration of the statist and capitalist logics that are present serves to keep scholars, activists and academics aware of the challenges that processes of transformative social change are up against, especially in any term beyond the momentary, and to help overcome them.

4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how the current conjuncture in Amsterdam conditions the potential for transformative social change towards societies beyond extractive capitalism and neoliberal urbanism by positioning the Doughnut Economics movement in relation to the wider policy landscape and the mechanisms of Amsterdam's political economy. Through a reading for both difference and dominance in two steps, I have discussed the potentials and limits of transformative social change in Amsterdam.

I have moved between dominance and difference readings to juxtapose the ways in which capitalism and processes of neoliberalisation have come to shape the city and urban policy processes in Amsterdam against the ways in which Doughnut Economics tries to challenge this. Amsterdam as an urban region plays an important role in national strategies for economic growth and its urban economy, which is increasingly shaped by its immaterial, service-oriented sectors. The municipality's strong planning tradition is characterised by a dependency on profitable land use change, and its economic development strategies include promoting Amsterdam internationally in terms of its vibrant innovation and startup ecosystem, for instance. As the city's reproductive capacities have been suppressed by logics of growth, neoliberalisation and gentrification over the past decades, city officials as well as urban activists have begun to challenge growth dependencies and the extractive relations with nature. While the municipality explores paths towards a circular, Doughnut urban economy, bottom-up activists aim to decommodify spaces, practices and flows in the urban economy. Through the latter, they promote spaces in which ownership is rethought and the sharp distinction between economic roles – concerning production, consumption and reproduction – softens. However, activists run into problems when they encounter the municipality's growth-dependent land development practice. To the extent that activist projects depend on municipal subsidies, they implicitly rely on urban economic growth. In this regard, a further promotion of alternative value streams – through an alternative currency or the valorisation of waste to the benefit of the community – could help.

Another consequence of these alternative practices is the beginning of a reconsideration of the class divide in society. Alternative forms of ownership – with community land trusts and the commons, for instance – empower lower classes and are a move towards more equality of access to the city. The Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition and other networks in Amsterdam explicitly aim to form coalition across social divides. However, given the strong position of the middle class in Amsterdam as “the middle-class city,” explicit reflections on class and its influence on the movement are needed so that the higher middle-class members, driven largely by universal values and inspired by the power of ideas and images, do not lose touch with the daily reality of the lower-class residents who are engaged in the place-based Doughnut projects across the city’s designated growth districts.

Doughnut Economics, when touching down in Amsterdam’s neighbourhoods as a frame of thinking that can strengthen activist projects, may be a way to reinforce the politicisation of urban sustainability transformations. Insofar as Doughnut Economics is driven from below and enables the creation of decommodified space, it differs from the ways in which, for instance, creativity discourses affected the city in the early 2000s. Put differently, Doughnut Economics, when practiced from below, is *not* a way to further commodify the city for immaterial production through images and symbolic language. Rather, it may be a way to decommodify urban space for collective arrangements intended for care and social reproduction. However, to maintain this political potential and to avoid the movement being reduced to images and neoliberal, green governmentality as it loses touch with the lower-income groups in the districts where the local projects are based, more careful organising reflective of the challenges posed by capitalism and the class-based, gendered, racial and other divides it creates would help.

This also points to the need to consider the (de)politicising effects on different scales and levels. Given the density of the city, the scarcity of urban space and the city’s embeddedness in global political-economic structures, the local government plays a key role in promoting sustainable urban futures. Through both difference and dominance readings, I have drawn out the different mechanisms of de- and re-politicisation that are present in different aspects of the sustainability policies and different governing logics that are promoted in Amsterdam. At the core of Amsterdam’s arising Doughnut Economy, place is mobilised as the locus for collective self-government through the appropriation of urban space for the meeting of socially mediated human needs. In this sense, Amsterdam’s Doughnut Economy opens up a decidedly urban form of politics located outside of formal institutions.

At the same time, the local state may help facilitate and protect place-based politics and ‘islands of change’ by setting the right regulatory conditions. The Municipality of Amsterdam aims to promote the power of place in relation to urban sustainability combined with other alternative approaches to urban economic development, such as community wealth building. It also engages beyond places

by engaging horizontally with other cities through international networks and lobbying on (trans)national levels of politics for wider regulatory frameworks enabling circularity and sustainability in the urban region. The meaning of this (inter)national engagement for the politicisation of urban sustainability in Amsterdam is not directly clear. Although supralocal regulatory frameworks around sustainability and circularity may help facilitate the post-capitalist self-governing practices in the city, they may also reinforce the image of Amsterdam as a place for sustainable innovation, attracting organisations and people with an already strongly represented (class) profile to the city.

These logics beyond that of place point to the need to engage further with the relations between local processes around transformative social change on the one hand, and political processes beyond the city and planetary processes of capitalist urbanisation on the other. Studying the local developments around transformative social change on their own terms by reading for difference is a crucial first step in promoting transformation. The second step, then, is to relate these developments to dominant supra-local logics that impact the local context. A third step, which remains for a future work, is to explore ways to coherently link these local experiences to the multi-scalar processes and experiences which are connected to the functioning of an urban economy such as Amsterdam's through the global, uneven processes of urbanisation and capitalism.

9

Conclusion

Intensifying ecological crises pose a key challenge to democratic politics and to urban development. The latter, often seen as a balance between democratic demands around equity and (economic) growth, is now being confronted with considerations of the planetary metabolic relations and questions of global justice with which capitalist production is implicated. In this thesis, I have been concerned with the limits and potentials of the city as a locus for transformative social change; a locus produced by forms of contestation and alternative practices that promote sustainable and just urban futures away from forms of extractive capitalism and neoliberal urbanism. Through an in-depth engagement with ongoing developments in Amsterdam's emerging circular economy, in which both state and citizen-driven projects feature prominently, I have analysed how activists in the city with and beyond the local state seek to put alternative economic thinking into practice, thereby challenging the intricate relations between global capitalism and the urban.

1 Potentials and limits of transformative social change in Amsterdam

To add to our understanding of the potentials and limits of the city as a locus for transformative social change, I have, in chapter 2, developed a framework to theorise capitalism and neoliberalism in relation to the urban. Drawing on Marxist and Marxian scholarship, I have defined capitalism according to its largely stable logics that materialise differently across contexts, which since the 1970s has notably been through neoliberal processes. I have discerned three main characteristics of capitalism, all of which having a distinct connection with and impact on the urban. These characteristics have remained largely stable over time, notwithstanding the nuances and intensifications caused by processes of neoliberalisation. These main characteristics are 1) capitalism's inherent drive for capital accumulation, growth and expansion, 2) its division of society into social classes, and 3) its reliance on the non-commodified, extra-capitalist spheres of nature for cheap inputs and waste disposal, as well as social reproduction for unpaid care work. These capitalist mechanisms are enabled and facilitated by the state, which I have conceptualised in an expansive,

relational sense. The role of the state in capitalism has altered through decades of neoliberalisation, as neoliberal policies, despite seemingly advocating for a smaller state, rely on continual state intervention.

While being key nodes in global capitalist development, cities are *also* sites for contestation and radical political action. In chapter 3, I have drawn from Marxian theorisations of the urban, to conceptualise it in relation to transformative social change. I have developed an account of transformative social change that takes place in the urban everyday; the shared realm that is immediately given, and which brings together the realms of production and reproduction. This transformative social change has two distinct yet interrelated moments. The first of these is rooted in the city's diversity and proximity, which enables residents to live together in difference, to encounter unknown others and to make collective claims regarding the meeting of social needs. This gives rise to spontaneous instances of urban-democratic politics in the micro-cracks of capitalism in the city.

The second moment is that of diverse practices and alternatives in which commons are created and cared for collectively. The state plays a key facilitating role in processes of transformative social change in an urban context. Although various approaches to state-directed sustainability transitions risk ending up in post-political arrangements, urban activists must continually search for political possibilities in the moment. The state, as an internally discontinuous institutional ensemble, does not operate according to a single logic. Therefore, parts of it can be mobilised to promote municipalist logics which blur the boundaries between the state and civil society and posit the state as the enabler and facilitator of collective practices of self-government in the city.

Given that processes of neoliberalisation, (de/re)politicisation and diverse economic practices always *also* pose an empirical question, I have developed a methodology for studying these processes in chapter 4. I have adopted a distinct, dynamic approach to study and analyse the messy realities of evolving policies and transformative social change against their structural background conditions. My method has enabled me to uncover the political-economic conditions that shape the potential for social transformation in Amsterdam *and* analyse how urban actors respond to and deal with these. It brings together considerations of, on the one hand, processes of neoliberalisation, and, on the other hand, diverse economies. This method is also related to an oscillation between, on the one hand, structural conditions, system, strong theory and reading for dominance, and on the other hand, discursive and material actions, agency, weak theory and reading for difference. I employed this method to consider the case of Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy, which I have introduced in chapter 5.

To understand the context in which the municipality's Doughnut Economics strategy arose, I have analysed Amsterdam's policy context in chapter 6. Through a dominance-attuned reading, I have discerned how decades of neoliberalisation have come to shape Amsterdam's policy landscape. As the urban region of Amsterdam came to feature increasingly prominently in Dutch growth strategies, economic growth in Amsterdam became more entrepreneurial and based in the immaterial, creative and knowledge-intensive sectors. This has put pressure on the social-reproductive capacities of the city, giving rise to struggles around housing, sustainability and space. It has led to a more ambivalent policy discourse on growth – reflected, for example, in the 'growth-agnosticism' of Doughnut Economics.

However, I have argued that this seemingly alternative discourse connects well to Amsterdam's vibrant eco-entrepreneurship scene and the municipality's attempts to attract and retain the professional middle classes and 'high-quality' visitors. This indicates that policymaking processes are still oriented towards growth, albeit a more implicit kind of green or climate-neutral growth. The growth dependencies of urban development in Amsterdam are also sedimented in urban land development, as the city's ground lease system makes the municipal planning tradition dependent on the profitable development of land. This ambivalent status of growth stems from the internal variability of the state, which, as an institutional ensemble, does not operate according to a single logic. However, some logics – notably the growth-oriented ones structuring land development – are more dominant in the operations of the local state than others – for example, those promoting citizen inclusion and sustainability initiatives driven from the bottom up.

Despite such dominance logics, the growth-agnostic, alternative discourses around urban economic development emerging in Amsterdam may carry political potential when they meet political actions taking place in Amsterdam's urban everyday. To read for difference in the current developments in Amsterdam, I have provided a thick description of the place-based activities around Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy in chapter 7. These projects promote a sense of community and proximity in neighbourhoods that are designated urban growth cores, and they empower local communities by giving them a voice vis-à-vis the local state. At the same time, several of these initiatives start to redirect the flows of the urban economy by engaging in small-scale alternative and diverse economic practices and relations situated in the urban everyday. These different place-based activists meet in the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, which operates according to positive logics of energising and sharing knowledge in relation to the tools proposed around Doughnut Economics. Be that as it may, these positive organising logics struggle to do justice to the social diversity of Amsterdam, and they meet their limits when confronted with structural conditions such as the scarcity of urban space and the dominant operating logics of the local government.

To make sense of these efforts around economic change on various levels and what they imply for the limits and potentials of the city as a locus for transformative social change, chapter 8 has brought together the bottom-up actions of Amsterdam's loosely organised Doughnut Economics movement with the wider political-economic context that condition them. Through a reading that oscillates between attenuation for dominance and difference, I have discussed how attempts at instilling alternative economic thinking in policymaking and bottom-up attempts at creating transformative social change interfere with and are affected by the mechanisms through which capitalism operates in Amsterdam.

First, state and non-state actors are beginning to challenge the prominence of growth in Amsterdam's urban economy. The municipality's sustainability strategies are beginning to question and criticise the unsustainability of urban growth dynamics and bottom-up activists have organised around economic activities that decommodify various aspects of the urban economy. Yet, because of the municipality's dependency on healthy municipal finances based on economic growth and the activists' difficulties in getting beyond subsidy financing schemes towards equivalence-based relations with the local state, most parts of Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy still rely on the municipal budget and thus urban economic growth. To overcome this, alternative value creation from below should be pushed for more in order to make diverse economic practice in Amsterdam more independent from the capitalist logics dominating the rest of the urban economy.

Second, the inequalities produced by capitalism through its division of society into social classes are starting to be contested widely, though largely implicitly. Activists in Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy are aiming to challenge and overcome inequalities by creating place-based as well as city-wide communities across class- and other divides. However, in Amsterdam "the middle-class city," there is a risk that the middle-class parts of the movement, concerned largely with universal ecological and social values depicted in an alternative image of the economy, loses touch with the lower- and working-class residents in the city's districts where most of the place-based projects take place. Alternative forms of ownership – through community land trusts and commons – and more deliberate forms of democratic organising should be explored further, not only to soften the boundaries between the spheres of production, consumption and social reproduction but also to organise more carefully across class-divides.

Third, the activities around Doughnut Economics in Amsterdam contest capitalism's exhaustion of nature and capacities for social reproduction in the city. Activists advocate for holistic thinking that combines economic with ecological and social considerations as they start to reconstitute the relations between the urban and nature from within the very local through various forms of decommodification. Although they begin to do so in the very local, the extractive relations upheld by large industry and beyond the geographic boundaries of the city bring into view the importance

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of the local state in pursuing urban sustainability. The shared objective between parts of the local state and civil society to establish equivalence-based relations between them through coalitions for change calls for considerations of the double role of the urban state in promoting urban sustainability. On the one hand, the urban state facilitates post-capitalist, collective self-government of place-based sustainability efforts by allocating scarce urban space and promoting community wealth building. On the other hand, the urban state protects these islands of change and reaches out beyond place to enforce sustainable urban metabolism on a larger scale. The Municipality of Amsterdam engages in (inter)national lobbying for circularity and sustainability in the urban region. This has ambiguous implications for the politicisation of urban sustainability in Amsterdam. While supralocal regulatory frameworks around sustainability and circularity may help enable the post-capitalist self-governing practices in the city, the municipality also reinforces the image of Amsterdam as a place for sustainable innovation, attracting organisations and people with an already strongly represented (class) profile to the city. The Municipality of Amsterdam simultaneously promotes governmental programmes that facilitate forms of collective – potentially post-capitalist – self-government while *also* (still) engaging in strategies and actions that aspire to promote entrepreneurial subjectivities and practices and which serve to retain Amsterdam's position in the global structures of urban competition.

This ambiguity may hamper the potential of transformative social change as a process that transforms urban life and space in the long-term. For this to be sustained, the hopeful developments around place-based activists joining together in a city-wide coalition have to be connected further to the multi-scalar processes and experiences entailed in the functioning of an urban economy through the global, uneven processes of urbanisation and capitalism. It remains an open question as to how wider solidarities beyond single places can become a reality. I have shown that forging local commonalities and solidarities already proves challenging in a generally wealthy and progressive context such as Amsterdam, which confirms once more that forging such relations across widely diverging geographies and political contexts will be even more difficult. To face this difficult task, we may draw from the argument, which I have promoted throughout this thesis, that we should interpret developments around urban sustainability politics and transformative social change through combined difference and dominance readings. This would help shed light on the unjust and unequal mechanisms shaping local experiences while keeping open the potential for difference and transformative practices that spontaneously arise in the shared spaces of the urban.

2 Avenues for further research

With this project, I have aimed to provide a nuanced and non-reductive reading of the current conjuncture in Amsterdam by considering multiple aspects of ongoing developments and analysing them against their historical and structural background. My analysis of how local actors promote forms of transformative social change – through giving (often marginalised) communities a political voice that enables them to contest the conditions of their life in Amsterdam and by prefiguring alternative economic practices and relations – provides insights into the internal dynamics of attempts at realising economic change through collective action. I have laid bare the tensions that arise in Amsterdam as place-based diverse economies meet their wider context of a city shaped through decades of neoliberalisation and of an urban government ultimately steered by growth-seeking logics.

This research opens up several avenues for future research to unpack these tensions further and thereby add to the reflexivity of transformative practice. To do more justice to the diversity and difference inherent in the social fabric in Amsterdam, a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to interpreting the internal dynamics and democratic practices as well as mechanisms of in- and exclusion within the place-based projects and in (relation with) the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition are required. I imagine that such further studies could benefit from decolonial theories and methods, to generate data and subaltern perspectives on the relations between different parts of the movement in Amsterdam. Rather than reproducing the Eurocentric paradigms and studies of political economy, this produces epistemologies that assume “the decolonial geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge as points of departure to a radical critique” (Grosfoguel 2007, 215). Such perspectives would not only yield important insights into the dynamics internal to urban politics in Amsterdam but also into the relations between the economic and political practices in Amsterdam and geographies which have developed through Amsterdam’s colonial history.

Further data generation could also give more insights into the potentials and challenges with forming coalitions between state and non-state actors, and in particular the translation mechanisms between the realm of the local state and that of the lived space of Amsterdam’s residents. At the beginning, the Doughnut Economy model was considered as a translation tool between the ‘different worlds’ of citizens and the urban administration. As various activists lost trust in the workings of Doughnut Economics in this way, it would be interesting to understand why it did not work as hoped and what the linguistic aspects and translation mechanisms between different realms are that enable a municipalist blurring between the state and civil society. Insights into those mechanisms also requires further analysis of the ways in which local state actors employ models such as Doughnut Economics to create social and ecological transformations from within the local

government (Vestergaard and Schmid, forthcoming) and how they impact the micropolitics in interactions between state and non-state actors (cf. Verloo 2023).

As part of this, a more detailed discourse analysis of the Doughnut Economics discourse – both on a general level and regarding the ‘downscaled City Doughnut’ – could provide insights into how change is envisioned. Yet, I have chosen not to go down this path, given the large focus the “Amsterdam City Doughnut” strategy places on experimentation and practice. With my explicit aim to look further than the discursive promises of holistic thinking, I have aimed to interrogate how such promises and intentions materialise in an urban context where progressive economic and social ideas are proliferating but whose conjuncture is premised on a long history within the development of global capitalism. To build on this, it would be interesting to consider more precisely which elements of a discourse such as Doughnut Economics works well in a certain empirical setting such as Amsterdam and consider in more detail how they are put to practice. This, in turn, would further inform the connections between “plausible progressive trajectories” and “desirable social change” (Cahill 2014, 151).

To further explain urban sustainability politics, it would also be interesting to unpack the aesthetic elements of the politics arising in Amsterdam. Doughnut Economics posits the pencil as “the most powerful tool in economics” as it allows us to “redraw the world” (Raworth 2017, 7). This is reflected in the movement in Amsterdam, where actors deem the power of models and visuals essential. The curious connections of such visual approaches to transformation and the related class profile of the movement engaged in such transformation with the aestheticisation of the city can be unpacked further. Whereas the latter has been linked extensively to the power of capital to penetrate further into urban everyday life through processes of gentrification and the rise of the middle class, aestheticisation may also interact with a politics of difference that can make processes of image-making collective and meaningful (Jacobs 1998). To understand how the contradictions between design and democracy, and between facilitation and substantive participation (Thompson and Lorne 2023) may be overcome, we need further insight into the role of aesthetics in a politics that is facilitated and ‘staged’ while also promoting equitable and accessible participatory structures. Hence, the ‘curation’ of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, its forms of deliberate organising and reliance on images calls for further reflection on the potentials for cross-class alliances that bring together various political interests.

Furthermore, additional ethnographic data could inform studies about urban sustainability by focusing on how the place-based alternatives form a collective power to change the rhythms of capitalism in the city. My analysis in Amsterdam has shed light on how place-based diverse economies aim to alter the flows in the urban economy and expand the notions of value that pertain to it. However, given their challenges in sustaining their organisations and projects as they face the

tensions following from engaging with the state or being spatially situated in the capitalist city, more insights into the local working of urban metabolism could help understand how such challenges may be overcome. In taking the study of urban metabolism more seriously, such a study could draw from Lefebvre's ([1992] 2004) proposals for rhythmanalysis to engage in more participant observations of how the place-based Doughnut Economics projects aim to alter the material flows in Amsterdam's urban economy. Such research could connect observations about rhythm to the politics of the moment – or Lefebvre's account of festivals, which are the ruptures or the everyday-life cracks in capitalism – to emphasise how the everyday enables a break with the seemingly totalising rhythms of capitalism.

Such a fine-grained analysis of the rhythmic patterns of transformation in Amsterdam could also shed further light on the related spatial aspects. Although I have sought to conduct a spatially attuned analysis, I acknowledge that the spatial aspects could be unpicked further. Engaging more with socio-economic and urban transformations as they take place on the ground could highlight how space is actively *produced* and historically contingent. Such an analysis would reduce the risk of employing a “seemingly unproblematic, commonsense notion of space as container or field, a simple emptiness in which subjects and objects are ‘situated’ or ‘located’” (Gibson-Graham 2006a, 73). Indeed, merely ‘sprinkling’ a text with spatial references does not make that text “about actual spatial configurations”; they serve as a reminder of the spatial extension of cities at best (Sayer 2000b, 112).

I leave it for future research to investigate in more detail how the myriad sustainability programmes in Amsterdam alter spatial dynamics beyond the local. Although I engage the TPSN framework to probe the analysis on multiple scales, my account of Amsterdam's urban sustainability efforts is only a first step towards interpreting the changes to urban metabolism and globally uneven and unsustainable capitalist flows. Adding to our understanding of the global dynamics of Amsterdam's circular transitions requires a study of its metabolisms on a global scale. Rather than tending towards reifying a form of ‘cityism,’ such a study would take the global lens of Doughnut Economics more seriously to provide insights into the dimensions of the seemingly unavoidable “leakages” of the circular economy's imperfect cycles of repair, reuse and recycle (Webster 2021, 116). Such leakages may well be of considerable magnitude, given the finding of supposedly recycled Dutch plastics in Asian oceans (Navarre et al. 2022). Insights into such global flows and metabolisms are also paramount in answering questions around global solidarities in the face of the starkly uneven impacts of environmental change across various locations which are (in)directly connected to one another through global networks and systems.

Put differently, further analysis is required of the democratic project of the city – as it is imagined and practised in the everyday – against the background of the planetary networks and systems that

materially enable and sustain it. This, I imagine, is a rather demanding research agenda requiring extensive engagement not only with the immediate hinterlands that sustain a wealthy city like Amsterdam but also with the distant locations that are implicated in its urban economy – no matter how circular that may be. Such a research agenda might take inspiration from Anna Tsing's (2005) inventive ethnographic approach to studying global connections under capitalism by focussing on certain products, actors and practices and the ways in which the local and the global mutually produce each another. It may also draw from conjunctural analysis, which engages "midlevel concepts [...] to mediate between the macro and the micro, the epochal and the everyday, the structural and the contingent, the historical and the quotidian, while disengaging from none of these" (Peck 2023, 4). Such analysis could take inspiration from comparative or global urban studies, drawing connections between different local experiences while remaining aware of the unavoidable limits of locally produced insights (Robinson 2016).

3 Practical implications

The findings of my study have implications for practical considerations about democratic as well as structural mechanisms. First, my findings point to the need for more explicit reflection on the democratic mechanisms underlying any approach to urban sustainability, no matter its scale, to reduce exclusionary mechanisms and make power dynamics explicit. Although a 'learning-by-doing' approach is understandable to the extent that 'wicked problems' do not come with clear-cut solutions, such problems do not absolve the need to reflect on democratic mechanisms. One way in which the Municipality of Amsterdam is working on this in more systematic ways is through its recent policy framework around citizen assemblies. The municipality plans to invite people to a citizen assembly on waste in 2024 (Appendix I-52) after having organised one on CO₂ emissions in Amsterdam in November 2022. Such citizen assemblies, also called 'mini-publics,' are designed to facilitate democratic deliberation among a selected group of ordinary citizens under ideal conditions.

Although critiques emphasise that these forms of participatory democracy focus too narrowly on single issues or brush over social differences through their consensus-seeking mechanisms (Böker 2017; Machin 2023), more innovative and creative approaches to designing settings for engagement with complex urban challenges have been proposed, for example, through the use of theatrical elements, whose forms enable explicit engagement with dimensions of conflict and power relations (Sachs Olsen and Van Hulst 2023). Of course, such momentary forms of facilitated politics can never be sufficient in themselves. They should take place in combination with various other forms of local politics, some of which I discussed in this thesis, and others which undoubtedly still need

to be developed. A question remains as to how the conclusions and reflections from these political instances are taken further and what happens when they confront the structural conditions that globalised urban capitalism impose on any locality.

This is related to the second practical implication, which concerns the impact of structural mechanisms on local, small-scale economic alternatives. As has become clear from my theoretical framework, capitalist and neoliberal processes impact not only the material fabric of the urban but also its social composition and the subjects who may potentially drive change in the city. Only with an awareness of these structural conditions can activists, as well as policymakers seeking to engage with activists, understand how seemingly alternative governing practices may (not) instantiate substantial changes. One source of contradiction is the need for considerable scope for any alternative form of collective self-government to run autonomously and durably. An alternative local currency, for example, requires a sufficiently high number of participants to function properly. This puts local alternatives in the contradictory position of having to strive for sufficiently large scope without reproducing harmful logics of growth. Another challenge is caused by the internal inequalities within Amsterdam's diverse and dispersed Doughnut Economics movement. Despite widespread acknowledgement of these unequal tendencies, more head-on consideration of social class and the implications it has for the various, diverging interests included in the movement may be helpful to enable cross-class alliances that bring together the lower and middle classes in a powerful coalition for change.

Acknowledging the challenges in establishing lasting, alternative structures in the city may – somewhat unexpectedly perhaps – point to the need for research to take a step back. Although research can identify certain neglected, harmful tendencies in forms of organising, it ultimately falls short in creating change. After all, in the words of Lessenich (2015b, 238):

The 'beyond' capitalism will not come – that is, if it ever comes – from the 'exterior,' but rather from below; and it will come, in terms of Weber's classical typology of actors, not from the thinking academic, but from the willing individual.

It is the willing individual who makes the activities of hopeful, positive minded individuals of central importance, as they collectively make “post-capitalist practice mundane, but also exciting, feasible and powerful” (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010, 488). It is the tenacity of their optimism (cf. Lefebvre [1970] 2003) that provides the starting point for transformative social change. Such change will never be completed or finished, yet its potentials are always present, as they are embedded in the collective political moments that arise from the proximity between people observing and challenging the unjust and unsustainable aspects of current social, political and economic processes. Research may nurture this potential through diverse social research that is critical as well as

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generative as it sheds light on how solidarities can arise across widely diverging geographies and political contexts. Such solidarities, in turn, might give rise to a broad, progressive and diverse movement that engages strategically with state power on different scales and challenges the injustice and unsustainability of global capitalism. This research is necessarily conducted from various angles, positions and orientations, as it attends to the potential of difference that arises when people begin to contest the harmful conditions created by planetary political-economic processes and propose alternatives from within their shared everyday life.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Analysed documents – Municipality of Amsterdam

The table below lists all documents produced or commissioned by the Municipality of Amsterdam that have been part of my document analysis. Wherever available, it includes a link to the online location where the respective document can be accessed.

Documents produced or commissioned by the Municipality of Amsterdam			
#	Author	Year	Title
1	De99vanAmsterdam	2022	Change the world, start with the city https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/86169/change-the-world-start-with-the-city
2	Doughnut Economics Action Lab	2020	The Amsterdam City Doughnut: A Tool for Transformative Action https://doughnuteconomics.org/stories/1?users_page=3
3	Majoer, Stan (<i>commissioned by Municipality of Amsterdam</i>)	2016	Werken in een gebied: gewoon doen in Amsterdam https://pure.hva.nl/ws/files/730850/werken_in_een_gebied_gewoon_doen_in_amsterdam.pdf
4	Municipality of Amsterdam	1974	Structuurplan Amsterdam
5	Municipality of Amsterdam	1986	De Stad Centraal: Structuurplan Amsterdam
6	Municipality of Amsterdam	1996	Amsterdam Open Stad: Deel I
7	Municipality of Amsterdam	1996	Amsterdam Open Stad: Deel II
8	Municipality of Amsterdam	1998	Amsterdam Verdient Het
9	Municipality of Amsterdam	2003	Structuurplan Amsterdam: Kiezen voor Stedelijkheid
10	Municipality of Amsterdam	2004	Wat Amsterdam beweegt: Sociaal Structuurplan Amsterdam 2004 - 2015
11	Municipality of Amsterdam	2004	The Making of... the City Marketing of Amsterdam

12	Municipality of Amsterdam	2009	Concept Pijlernotitie Structuurvisie Amsterdam: Gebouwd op Palen
13	Municipality of Amsterdam	2009	Zuidas Vision Document
14	Municipality of Amsterdam	2011	RFPRCHT: 111 Jaar Erfpacht Amsterdam
			https://www.amsterdam.nl/wonen-leefomgeving/erfpacht/brochures/
15	Municipality of Amsterdam	2011	Structuurplan 2040: Economisch Sterk en Duurzaam
			https://openresearch.amsterdam.nl/page/42693/amsterdam-structuurvisie-2040
16	Municipality of Amsterdam	2016	Koers 2025: Ruimte voor de stad
			www.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/869895/koers_2025_-_ruimte_voor_de_stad_versie_april_20161.pdf
17	Municipality of Amsterdam	2016	Visie Zuidas
			https://openresearch.amsterdam.nl/page/74910/visie-zuidas-2016
18	Municipality of Amsterdam	2016	Circular Amsterdam: A vision and action agenda for the city and metropolitan area
19	Municipality of Amsterdam	2017	Haven-Stad: Concept Ontwikkelversie Verkorte Versie
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/image/2020/7/1/ontwikkelstrategie_haven_stad_30_mei_2017.pdf
20	Municipality of Amsterdam	2017	Nieuwe aanpak integrale citymarketing Metropool Amsterdam
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/image/2020/6/17/nieuwe_aanpak_integrale_citymarketing.pdf
21	Municipality of Amsterdam	2017	Ruimte voor de Economie van Morgen
			https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/economie/ruimte-economie/
22	Municipality of Amsterdam	2017	Stad in Balans Startdocument
			https://amsterdamcity.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/stad_in_balans.pdf
23	Municipality of Amsterdam		Tussenrapportage Ruimte voor de Stad: Naar een Metropool op Menselijke Maat
			https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/stedelijke-ontwikkeling/koers-2025/

24	Municipality of Amsterdam	2017	Visie Openbare Ruimte 2025
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/61225/visie-openbare-ruimte-2025		
25	Municipality of Amsterdam	2017	Woonagenda 2025
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/58802/woonagenda-2025		
26	Municipality of Amsterdam	2019	Atelier- En Broedplaatsenbeleid 2019-2022
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/103045/amsterdams-atelier-en-broedplaatsenbeleid-2019-2022		
27	Municipality of Amsterdam	2019	Agenda Amsterdam Autoluw
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/49784/amsterdam-autoluw--amsterdam-maakt-ruimte		
28	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Verkenning Vrije Ruimte: Inventarisatie en Evaluatie
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/65211/expeditie-vrije-ruimte		
29	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Expeditie vrije ruimte 2020-2021
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/65211/expeditie-vrije-ruimte		
30	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Aan de Slag Met Wooncoöperaties!
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/60235/aan-de-slag-met-wooncooperaties		
31	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Amsterdam Circular 2020-2025
	https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/sustainability/circular-economy/		
32	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Amsterdam Circulair Innovatie- en Uitvoeringsprogramma 2020-2021
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/51667/strategie-amsterdam-circulair		
33	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Amsterdam Duurzaam Digitaal: Vestigingsbeleid gemeente Amsterdam 2020 – 2030
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/62735/vestigingsbeleid-datacenters-gemeente-amsterdam-2020-%E2%80%93-2030		
34	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Amsterdam Green Infrastructure Vision 2050
	https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/policy-green-space/		
35	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Nieuw Amsterdams Klimaat: Routekaart Klimaatneutraal 2050
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/74677/nieuw-amsterdams-klimaat		

36	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Transitievisie Warmte Amsterdam
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/63522/transitievisie-warmte-amsterdam
37	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Wonen in Amsterdam 2019
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/77960/factsheet-wonen-in-amsterdam-2019-woningmarkt
38	Municipality of Amsterdam	2020	Aanpak Binnenstad: Uitvoeringsagenda
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/66416/uitvoeringsprogramma-aanpak-binnenstad
39	Municipality of Amsterdam	2021	Uitvoeringsagenda Klimaatadaptatie
			https://www.amsterdam.nl/wonen-leefomgeving/groene-stad/samen-slag-klimaatbestendig-amsterdam/
40	Municipality of Amsterdam	2021	Duurzame Stad, Duurzame Banen 2021-2022
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/71653/uitvoeringsagenda-2021-2022--duurzame-stad-duurzame-banen
41	Municipality of Amsterdam	2021	New Amsterdam Climate: Report 2021
			https://www.amsterdam.nl/wonen-leefomgeving/duurzaam-amsterdam/publicaties-duurzaam-groen/klimaatrapportage/
42	Municipality of Amsterdam	2021	Omgevingsvisie Amsterdam 2050: Een Menselijke Metropool
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/41852/omgevingsvisie-amsterdam-2050
43	Municipality of Amsterdam	2021	Staat van de Stad XI
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/75039/de-staat-van-de-stad-amsterdam-xi-enorme-impact-van-corona
44	Municipality of Amsterdam	2022	Concept Actualisatie Meerjaren- perspectief Grondexploitaties: Vereveningsfonds en Reserve Zuidas
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/90440/meerjarenperspectief-grondexploitaties-2022
45	Municipality of Amsterdam	2022	Jaarverslag 2021
			https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/financien/jaarverslag-2021/
46	Municipality of Amsterdam	2022	Visie bezoekerseconomie in Amsterdam 2035
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/90775/visie-bezoekerseconomie-amsterdam-2035

47	Municipality of Amsterdam	2022	Voluntary Local Review 2022: Impact of the Sustainable Development Goals on the City of Amsterdam
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/88765/rapport-implementatie-van-de-sdg-s-in-amsterdam		
48	Municipality of Amsterdam	2022	Wonen in Amsterdam 2021
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/81631/onderzoek-wonen-in-amsterdam-2021		
49	Municipality of Amsterdam	2022	Woningbouwplan 2022-2028
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/92965/woningbouwplan-2022-2028		
50	Municipality of Amsterdam	2022	Voortgangsrapport Klimaatadaptatie
	www.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/937292/def_amsterdam_voortgangsrapportage_klimaatadaptatie_2022_web_versie.pdf		
51	Municipality of Amsterdam	2022	Begroting 2023
	https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/financien/begroting-2023/		
52	Municipality of Amsterdam	2023	Implementation Agenda for a Circular Amsterdam 2023-2026
	https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/sustainability/circular-economy/		
53	Municipality of Amsterdam	2023	Amsterdam Maakt Ruimte: Koersdocument
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/101669/amsterdam-maakt-ruimte--koersdocument		
54	Municipality of Amsterdam	2023	Klimaatrapportage 2023
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/101589/klimaatrapportage-2023		
55	Municipality of Amsterdam	2023	Begroting 2024
	https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/financien/begroting-2024/		
56	Municipality of Amsterdam	2023	Visie en uitvoeringsagenda internationaal beleid
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/95198/visie-en-uitvoeringsagenda-internationaal-beleid		
57	Municipality of Amsterdam, District New-West	2022	Samen Nieuw-West: Waarom een Masterplan?
	https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/77348/samen-nieuw%E2%80%93west.-waarom-een-masterplan		

58	Municipality of Amsterdam, District Southeast	2021	ZO=ZUIDOOST: Masterplan Zuidoost 2021-2040
			https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/page/68231/masterplan-zuidoost-2021-2040
59	Platvoet, Leo and Maarten van Poelgeest	2005	Amsterdam als emancipatiemachine

Appendix II: Analysed documents – civil society

The table below lists all documents produced by relevant civil society groups and initiatives that have been part of my document analysis. Wherever available, it includes a link to the online location where the respective document can be accessed.

Documents produced by civil society groups and initiatives			
	Author	Year	Title
1	Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition	2020	Annual Report 2019-2020
	https://amsterdamdonutcoalitie.nl/message/55481/amsterdam-donut-coalitie-jaarrapport-2019-2020		
2	Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition	2021	Donut Actie Agenda
3	Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition	2022	Donut Deal Dag: De Resultaten
4	Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition	2023	Verandertheorie ADC 2.0
5	B5	2020	Manifest B5: Een van onderop ontwikkeld kader voor het inzetten van het buurtbudget in Ontwikkelbuurten
	https://www.wooninfo.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Manifest-B5-kader-voor-inzet-buurtbudget-gecomprimeerd.pdf		
6	CLT H-Buurt	2020	Een Community Land Trust (CLT) in de Bijlmer: Whitepaper Betaalbaar wonen in verbondenheid met buurt
	https://www.clt.amsterdam/		
7	Doughnut Economics Action Lab, Centre for Economic Transformation	2022	What Doughnut Economics means for business: creating enterprises that are regenerative and distributive by design
	https://doughnuteconomics.org/tools/191/#paper		
8	Doughnut Bakery	2020	Verkenning Donut Deals
	https://doughnuteconomics.org/Creating-City-Portraits-Methodology.pdf		

9	Doughnut Bakery	n.d.	Eerste Hulp Bij Donuts Bakken
	https://www.donutbakkerij.nl/_files/ugd/da9121_de58ffad459d42e89fd0d98b5ee8c000.pdf		
10	Doughnut Economics Action Lab	2020	Creating City Portraits: A methodological guide from The Thriving Cities Initiative
	https://doughnuteconomics.org/Creating-City-Portraits-Methodology.pdf		
11	Food Park Amsterdam	2023	Oogst voor de Toekomst: Bodemplan Lutkemeerpolder
	https://voedselparkamsterdam.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Bodemplan-Lutkemeer-mei2023.pdf		
12	Food Park Amsterdam	n.d.	Een Toekomst voor de Lutkemeer als Agro-Ecologisch Landschapspark
	https://voedselparkamsterdam.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Voedselpark-Amsterdam-v1.0.pdf		
13	Kaskantine	n.d.	Experimental Network Autonomy: A lifeboat for the disembedded
	https://amsterdamdonutcoalitie.nl/engine/download/blob/gebiedsplatform/69870/2020/36/Bijlage_6_Handleiding_ENA.pdf?app=gebiedsplatform&class=9096&id=3977&field=69870		
14	Platform Sierpleinbuurt	2021	Omgevingsvisie Sierpleinbuurt: Groeiend Verhaal
	https://www.humanemergence.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Groeiend-Verhaal-Sierpleinbuurt.pdf		
15	Stijkel, Anne	2019	1 ^e Donut Deal Amsterdam
16	WomenMakeSoutheast	n.d.	Wie Zijn Wij
17	WomenMakeTheCity	n.d.	Wie Zijn Wij
18	WomenMakeTheCity	2020	Top 10 Adviezen Amsterdam
19	WomenMakeTheCity	2021	Just City Handout
20	WomenMakeTheCity	2022	Een reflectie op de Ontwikkelstrategie K-Midden vanuit de Just City Index

Appendix III: Interviews

I conducted the interviews at various points in time, and with informants whose roles within Amsterdam's emerging Doughnut Economy vary widely. Therefore, the (translated) interview themes below are all themes that I brought up in interviews, but not always all of them in the same interview, and sometimes in slightly different ways, with slightly different nuances.

#	Date (M/Y)	Role	Length (h:min)	Modality
1	09/2021	Founder of <i>02025</i>	00:52	In-person
2	09/2021	Founder of <i>Sierpleinbuurt Platform</i>	01:06	In-person
3	09/2021	Doughnut activist, involved with <i>Doughnut Bakery</i>	01:10	In-person
4	10/2021	Co-Director <i>Commons Network</i>	00:55	Online
5	04/2022	Founder of the <i>Cocratos</i> foundation and <i>The Green Hub</i>	00:48	In-person
6	04/2022	Doughnut activist	00:49	Online
7	04/2022	Founder and board member of <i>WomenMakeTheCity</i>	01:44	In-person
8		Board member <i>WomenMakeTheCity</i>		
9	04/2022	Facilitator of participation processes in Amsterdam Municipality	01:28	In-person
10	04/2022	Civil servant, Municipality of Amsterdam	00:54	In-person
11	08/2022	Project Lead Innovation, Municipality of Amsterdam	00:51	Online
12	08/2022	Area manager on project basis, Municipality of Amsterdam	01:03	Online
13	11/2022	Core member of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition	00:50	Online
14	11/2022	Core member of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, engaged with <i>Doughnut Bakery</i> in New-West	00:51	Online
15	11/2022	Advisor for <i>CLT H-Buurt</i>	01:01	Online

Appendix IV: Interview guides

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Introduction

- How do you reflect on [recent Doughnut event we both attended]?
- Could you tell me more about the organisation/project that you are engaged in?
 - o Who are involved in the project?
 - o What are the aims?

The Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam

- What is the Doughnut Economy strategy about for you?
 - o What does it aim to change, according to you?
 - o What is needed for its implementation?
- What is the status of the Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam according to you?
 - o What, if anything, has the Doughnut Economy strategy changed in Amsterdam?
 - o How does it relate to other policy discourses that are currently in fashion (i.e., community wealth building, broad prosperity)

The Doughnut Economy and individual projects

- How do you use the Doughnut Economy in your work?
- What are your motivations for engaging in this project?
- How is the project financed?
- How does the project organise?
 - o How are decisions taken?

The Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition

- Is your project connected to the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, and how?
- What is your role within the coalition?
- How do you perceive the role and practices of the coalition?
 - o What, if anything, has changed since the coalition was founded?
 - o Are there any ongoing activities of the coalition that are less visible to an outsider like me?
- How is the coalition organised?
 - o What is the role of core members?
 - o How is the coalition governed and steered?
 - o How does it relate to the municipality?
 - o How does the coalition deal with trade-offs or diverging interests related to different parts of 'Doughnut thinking'?
- With whom do you collaborate, both within the coalition and outside of it?

- Are there any desired collaboration partners with whom it has, so far, been difficult to collaborate?
- How has the role and position of businesses in the coalition changed over time?
- What are your future plans within the coalition?

Relations to other projects/organisations

- How do different organisations, individuals and projects collaborate?
 - What is going well, and where do challenges arise?
- What is the relation between your project and other projects/organisations across the city?
- What are the challenges in the project?
 - Are there challenges related to funding, urban space, collaboration?
 - What kinds of situations have you encountered in which the Doughnut Economics model proved difficult to work with? Were there, for example, cases in which the ‘win-win’ kind of thinking from Doughnut Economics, which does not engage with trade-offs, fell short?

Relations with and role of the municipality

- Do you know how the municipality’s Doughnut Economics strategy came about, and did you play any role in that process?
- How do you view the municipality’s role in implementing the strategy?
 - How do different departments and elements of the local state play a role?
 - What is the role of citizens here, according to you?
 - Are the participatory processes (if any) different from earlier participation processes?
- What do you think that the results of the municipal elections in March 2022 mean for the political landscape and the Doughnut Economy in Amsterdam?
- How do you perceive the connections between the different strategies, projects and initiatives (notably democratisation efforts)?
- How do you engage with the municipality?
 - With which parts of the municipality do you work and how?
 - How do you reach the municipality?
 - How (often) do you communicate?
 - What kinds of (financial) support do you receive from the municipality?
- How do you perceive the relations between the municipality and citizens?
 - Which party plays what role in the implementation of Doughnut Economics in Amsterdam?
 - How does the municipality work with citizens?
 - How can citizens reach the municipality with new (possibly radical) ideas?
 - How much space is there for radical ideas within the municipality?
- How do you see the relations between your project, the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition, and the municipality?

Social change and scale

- On what scale does [your project] work on change in the city? (neighbourhood, district, city, elsewhere)
- On what scale do you think social change happens?
- What is the function of the Doughnut Economics model in this?
 - o And what is the role of Kate Raworth and her organisation DEAL?
 - o How does the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition connect local projects in the neighbourhood to larger scales, e.g. on the level of the city?
- How do different levels of the local state relate to one another (city, districts, neighbourhoods)
- What is the role of Doughnut Economics Action Lab in your work?
- (How) do you collaborate (inter)nationally?

Future outlook

- What are your hopes for Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy and your project(s)?
- Are there any important events, dates, happenings in the near future that you think might be relevant for me?
- Do you have any recommendations for people I should talk to?

FOR LOCAL STATE ACTORS

Introduction

- How do you reflect on [recent Doughnut event we both attended]?
- What is your role within the municipality?

The Doughnut Economics strategy

- How did the strategy come about?
- What was the role of citizens in this process?
- What is the status and importance of this strategy compared to other strategies and local policy documents?
 - o What is the relation between the city's circular strategy and the Doughnut Economics strategy?
 - o What is the relation of the Doughnut Economics strategy to the latest spatial strategy and the city's Democratisation programme?
 - o What does the Doughnut Economics model imply for the circular monitor?
 - o How do the ecological, material aspects of the Doughnut relate to the social ones?
- How did the vote in the City Council go, where there any parties against the proposal?

The implementation of the Doughnut Economics strategy

- What happened after the launch of the strategy?

Appendices

- What, if anything, has the Doughnut Economy strategy changed in Amsterdam?
- What has the budget been for implementing the Doughnut Economy?
- What are the political obstacles with implementing Doughnut Economy and circular economy?
 - How do vested interests come into play, for example of parties owning land, or overseeing large material flows?
- What do you think the recent 2022 elections will mean for the implementation of circular economy and Doughnut Economy?

The role of non-state actors

- How do you perceive the role and practices of the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition?
- How, if at all, are you connected to the Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition?
 - Have you been involved closely until now?
 - What are your future plans within the coalition?
- What has the process around citizen participation been? Has it been different than with other participation processes?
- What is the role of citizens, activists, businesses and other organisations?
- What is the role of citizen science in Amsterdam's circular monitoring?

Social change and scale

- Do you think the city is a good place to ignite social change, and why?
- On what scale does [your project] work on change in the city?
- On what scale do you think social change happens? (neighbourhood, district, city, elsewhere)
- How do different levels of the local state relate to one another (city, districts, neighbourhoods)
- If the City Doughnut is a monitor, how do we relate macroeconomic snapshots to the micro-level of lived experience?
- (How) do you collaborate (inter)nationally?

Future outlook

- What are your hopes for Amsterdam's Doughnut Economy?
- Are there any important events, dates, happenings in the near future that you think might be relevant for me?
- Do you have any recommendations for people I should talk to?

Appendix V: Interview consent form

Interview consent form

Thank you for agreeing to being interviewed as part of the below research project. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation in this research project.

Research project title: Social Transformation and Local Politics in the City

Short summary of the research project: This research project considers instances of social transformation and local democracy in cities, and situates these in a wider framework of political economy and social transformation. Empirically, it takes Amsterdam and its doughnut economy as a starting point, and looks at the democratic processes that form its basis locally as well as in relation to other scales.

Researchers name and title: Charlotte Cator, PhD fellow, Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy

Purpose of the processing: This interview will be used to understand the social and political processes around the doughnut economy in Amsterdam. After transcription, the interview data might be used indirectly or directly to inform academic publications.

By signing this consent form below, I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I do not have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time or refuse to answer any questions without any consequences of any kind,
2. I do not expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation,
3. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future,
4. The interview will be video and audio recorded and a transcript will be produced.
5. The transcript of the interview will be analyzed by the above researcher,
6. Access to the interview transcript will be limited to the researcher and academic colleagues and partners with whom the researcher might collaborate as part of the research process,
7. With regard to being quoted directly and being identified in any summary interview content that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets, I have made an **X** next to the statements that I agree with:

<input type="checkbox"/>	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation before it is published.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree that the researcher may publish documents that contain direct quotations by me, where my name is published.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Any statements/quotations etc. made by me during the interview will be anonymized so that I cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify me is not revealed.

Consent

The information regarding you will be processed based on the consent, which you provided when the information regarding you was collected.

If you for any reason do not wish to have your information take part in the research project, you can withdraw your consent at any time by sending an e-mail to the data controller. Withdrawing your consent will not impact the processing, which has already taken place prior to your withdrawal of your consent. However, it will ensure that your information is not processed after the withdrawal of the consent.

Am I obligated to provide information?

Any participation in the research project is voluntary and if you do not wish to provide the requested information, the only consequence is that you will not be able to participate in the research project.

How long is your information stored?

Your information will be stored from the time when the information is collected and for a period of five years after the completion of the research project.

Your rights

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, you have the right to:

- withdraw your consent and have your information deleted.
- be informed of what information regarding you CBS has stored and is using as well as a right to receive a copy of this information.

The above rights can be exercised by contacting the Data Controller or the Data Protection Officer.

Data Controller

Copenhagen Business School
Solbjerg Plads 3
2000 Frederiksberg
Phone: + 45 38 15 38 15
E-mail: cc.mpp@cbs.dk
CVR-no.: 19596915

CBS' Data Protection Officer

Jesper Smedegaard Madsen
Department: CBS Legal
Phone: +45 38 15 21 17
Mobile: +45 41 85 24 85
E-mail: dpo@cbs.dk

Complaint

If you wish to complain over the processing of your information in connection with the research project, you can direct your complaint to:

Datatilsynet

Carl Jacobsens Vej 35
2500 Valby
Phone: +45 33 19 32 00

e-mail: dt@datatilsynet.dk.

I have read and approved the above

Participants name

Participants signature **Date**

Appendix VI: Participant observations

Date	Occasion
December 2020	Attendant of <i>community meet-up Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition</i> (online)
September 2021	Attendant of the <i>Donut Actie Agenda</i> , closed all-day co-creation workshop (in Amsterdam)
April 2022	Attendant of public event about Doughnut Economics and Redesigning Ownership (in Amsterdam)
	Field visit <i>The Green Hub</i> (in Amsterdam)
October 2022	Attendant at <i>Donut Deal Dag</i> , city-wide event open to the public, with various workshops throughout the day and a common event in the evening. With workshops at <i>The Green Hub</i> and <i>The Doughnut Bakery</i> .
November 2022	Attendant of <i>Doughnut Economics knowledge-sharing meet-up</i> (online)
December 2022	Attendant of <i>Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition – Q&A students & researchers</i> (online)
January 2023	Field visit <i>Food Park Amsterdam</i>
	Field visit <i>Kaskantine</i>
	Field visit <i>Sierpleinbuurt</i>
February 2023	Attendant of <i>community meet-up Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition</i> (online)
November 2023	Attendant of Amsterdam's edition of the <i>Global Donut Festival</i> . I attended several Doughnut Economics workshops during the day and was an invited speaker during the evening programme.

TITLER I PH.D.SERIEN:

– a Field Study of the Rise and Fall of a Bottom-Up Process

2004

1. Martin Grieger
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En systemteoretisk analyse af moderniseringen af et amtskommunalt sundhedsvæsen 1980-2000*
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A product development strategy that is based on online communities and allows some firms to benefit from a distributed process of innovation by consumers*
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An empirical investigation of cognitive segmentation and effects of integrating a TM system into the translation process*
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Et socialkonstruktivistisk casestudie af partnerskabsaktørers virkelighedsopfattelse mellem identitet og legitimitet*
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8. Carsten Mejer Plath
Strategisk Økonomistyring
9. Annemette Kjærgaard
Knowledge Management as Internal Corporate Venturing
10. Knut Arne Hovdal
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Norsk ph.d., ej til salg gennem Samfundslitteratur*
11. Søren Jeppesen
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– A Critical Realist Approach*
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Norsk ph.d., ej til salg gennem Samfundslitteratur*

19. Thomas Lyse Hansen
Six Essays on Pricing and Weather risk in Energy Markets
 20. Sabine Madsen
Emerging Methods – An Interpretive Study of ISD Methods in Practice
 21. Evis Sinani
The Impact of Foreign Direct Investment on Efficiency, Productivity Growth and Trade: An Empirical Investigation
 22. Bent Meier Sørensen
Making Events Work Or, How to Multiply Your Crisis
 23. Pernille Schnoor
Brand Ethos
Om troværdige brand- og virksomhedsidentiteter i et retorisk og diskursteoretisk perspektiv
 24. Sidsel Fabech
Von welchem Österreich ist hier die Rede?
Diskursive forhandlinger og magtkampe mellem rivaliserende nationale identitetskonstruktioner i østrigske pressediskurser
 25. Klavs Odgaard Christensen
Sprogpolitik og identitetsdannelse i flersprogede forbundsstater
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Et studie af velfærdens organisering i perioden 1990-2003
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A.s erfaring
Om mellemværendets praktik i en transformation af mennesket og subjektiviteten
 29. Sine Nørholm Just
The Constitution of Meaning – A Meaningful Constitution?
Legitimacy, identity, and public opinion in the debate on the future of Europe
- 2005**
1. Claus J. Varnes
Managing product innovation through rules – The role of formal and structured methods in product development
 2. Helle Hedegaard Hein
Mellem konflikt og konsensus – Dialogudvikling på hospitalsklinikker
 3. Axel Rosenø
Customer Value Driven Product Innovation – A Study of Market Learning in New Product Development
 4. Søren Buhl Pedersen
Making space
An outline of place branding
 5. Camilla Funck Ellehave
Differences that Matter
An analysis of practices of gender and organizing in contemporary workplaces
 6. Rigmor Madeleine Lond
Styring af kommunale forvaltninger
 7. Mette Aagaard Andreassen
Supply Chain versus Supply Chain Benchmarking as a Means to Managing Supply Chains
 8. Caroline Aggestam-Pontoppidan
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The UN and the global governance of accountants' competence
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 10. Vivienne Heng Ker-ni
An Experimental Field Study on the

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Measuring Ad Recall and Recognition,
Purchase Intentions and Short-Term Sales</i> | | <i>An empirical study employing data elicited from Danish EFL learners</i> |
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<i>Essays on the Pricing of Corporate Bonds and Credit Derivatives</i> | 20. | Christian Nielsen
<i>Essays on Business Reporting
Production and consumption of strategic information in the market for information</i> |
| 12. | Remo Stefano Chiari
<i>Figure che fanno conoscere
Itinerario sull'idea del valore cognitivo e espressivo della metafora e di altri tropi da Aristotele e da Vico fino al cognitivismo contemporaneo</i> | 21. | Marianne Thejls Fischer
<i>Egos and Ethics of Management Consultants</i> |
| 13. | Anders McIlquham-Schmidt
<i>Strategic Planning and Corporate Performance
An integrative research review and a meta-analysis of the strategic planning and corporate performance literature from 1956 to 2003</i> | 22. | Annie Bekke Kjær
<i>Performance management i Proces-innovation
– belyst i et social-konstruktivistisk perspektiv</i> |
| 14. | Jens Geersbro
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<i>GENTAGELSENS METAMORFOSE
Om organiserings af den kreative gørem i den kunstneriske arbejdspraksis</i> |
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<i>Capacity Development, Environmental Justice NGOs, and Governance: The Case of South Africa</i> | 26. | Ann Fogelgren-Pedersen
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| 18. | Signe Jarlov
<i>Konstruktioner af offentlig ledelse</i> | 27. | Birgitte Rasmussen
<i>Ledelse i fællesskab – de tillidsvalgtes fornyende rolle</i> |
| 19. | Lars Stæhr Jensen
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<i>Remerger
– skabende ledelseskrafter i fusion og opkob</i> |
| | | 29. | Carmine Gioia
<i>A MICROECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS</i> |

30. Ole Hinz
Den effektive forandringsleder: pilot, pædagog eller politiker?
Et studie i arbejdslederes meningstilskrivninger i forbindelse med vellykket gennemførelse af ledelsesinitierede forandringsprojekter
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Master i IKT og Læring – et casestudie i hvordan proaktiv proceshåndtering kan forbedre praksis i virtuelle læringsmiljøer
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Seduction, Conquest and Discovery
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Leveraging Social Capital for Market Uncertainty Management
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