



Istanbul; vestiges of gecekondu in the urban fabric.  
Altıbeyköy, 2012



Lagos; public square. Makoko, 2013



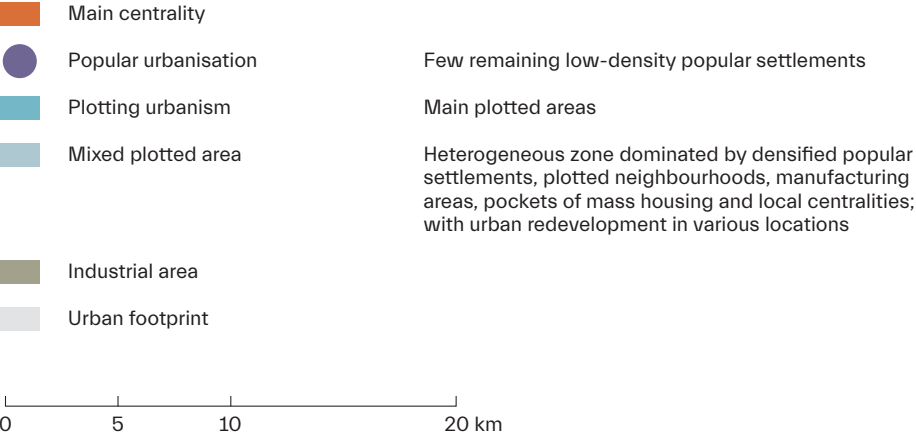
# POPULAR URBANISATION

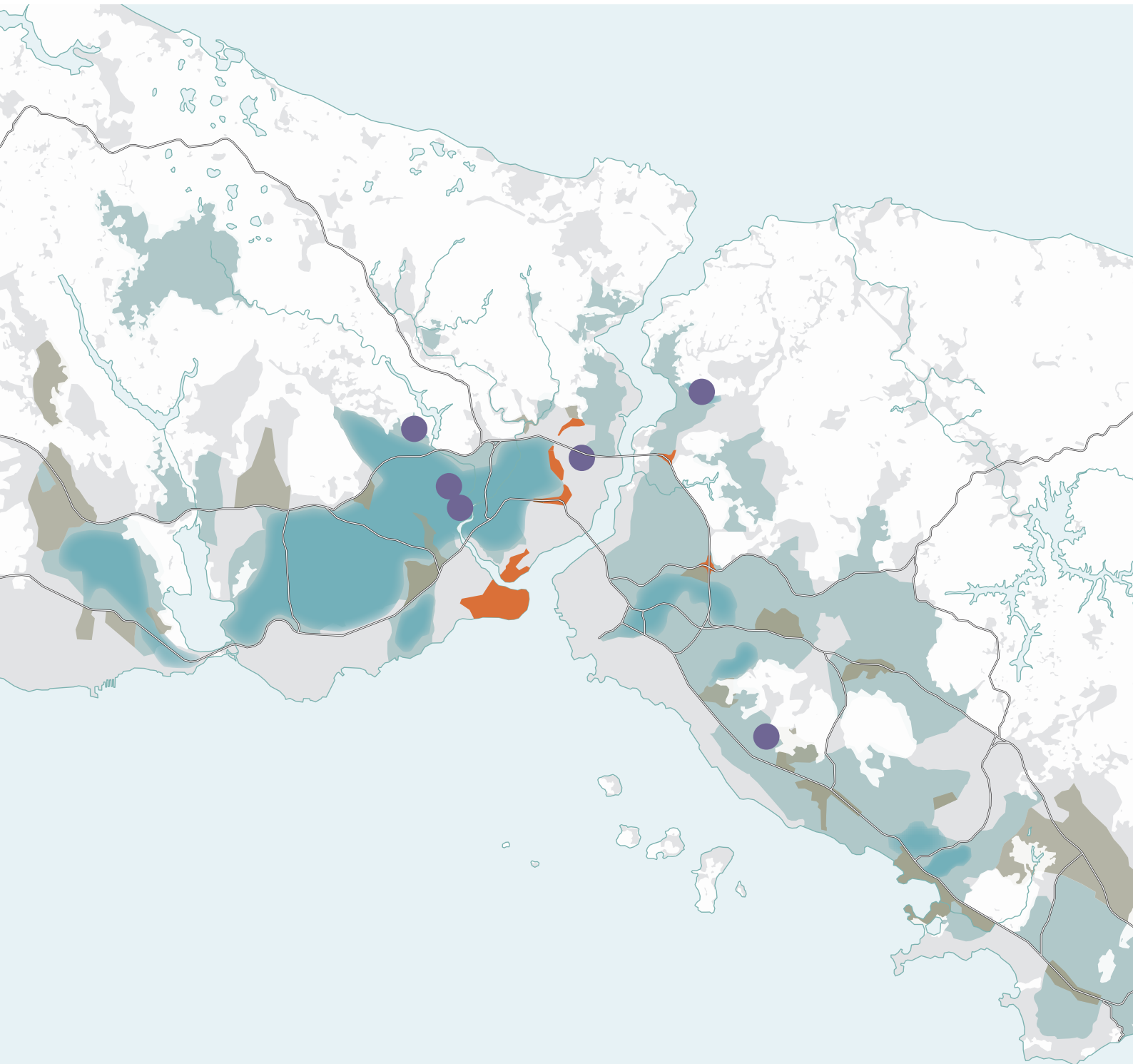
## CONCEPTUALISING URBANISATION PROCESSES BEYOND INFORMALITY

Mexico City; Santa Catarina, 2013



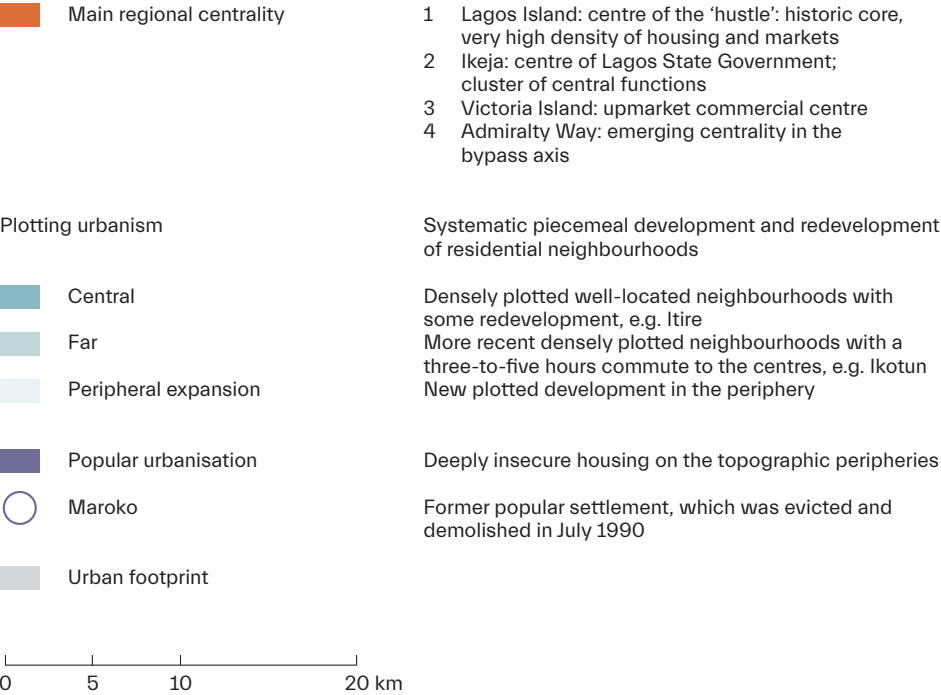
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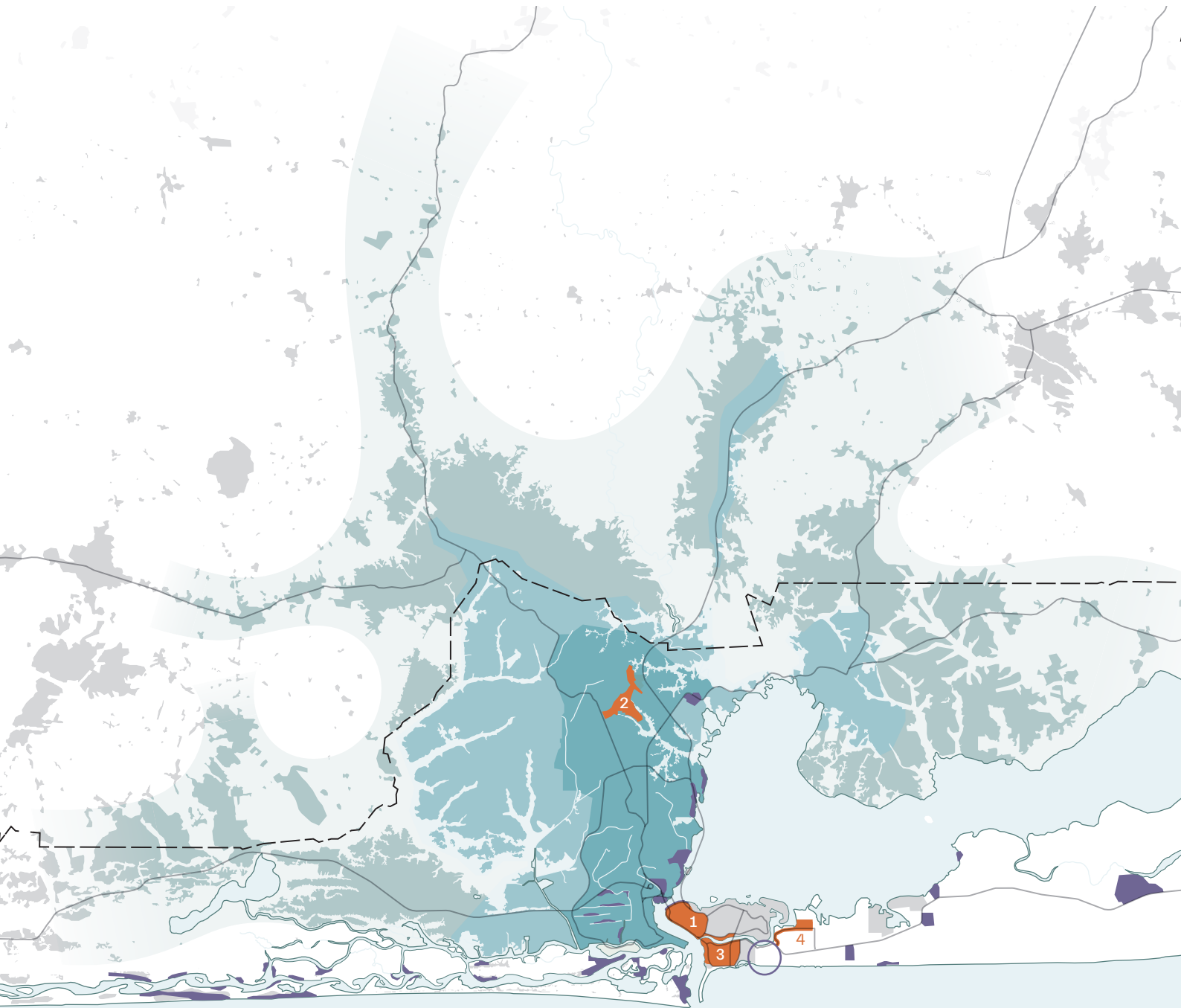




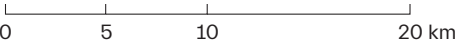
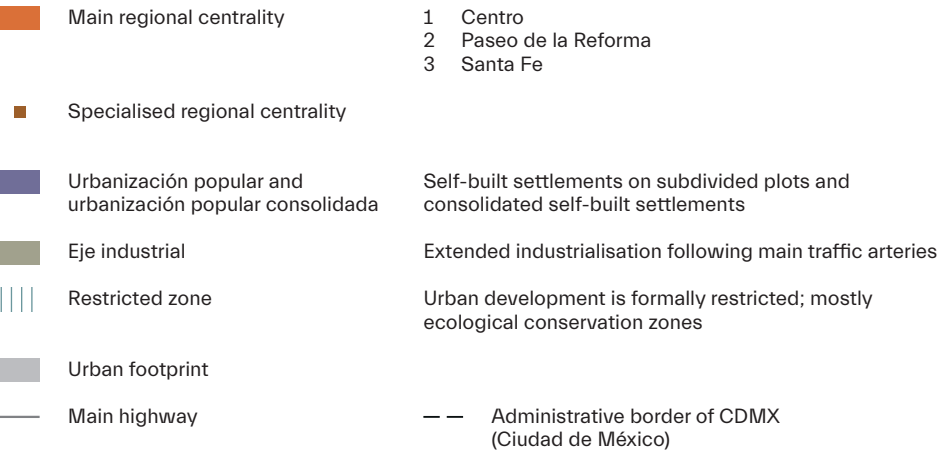


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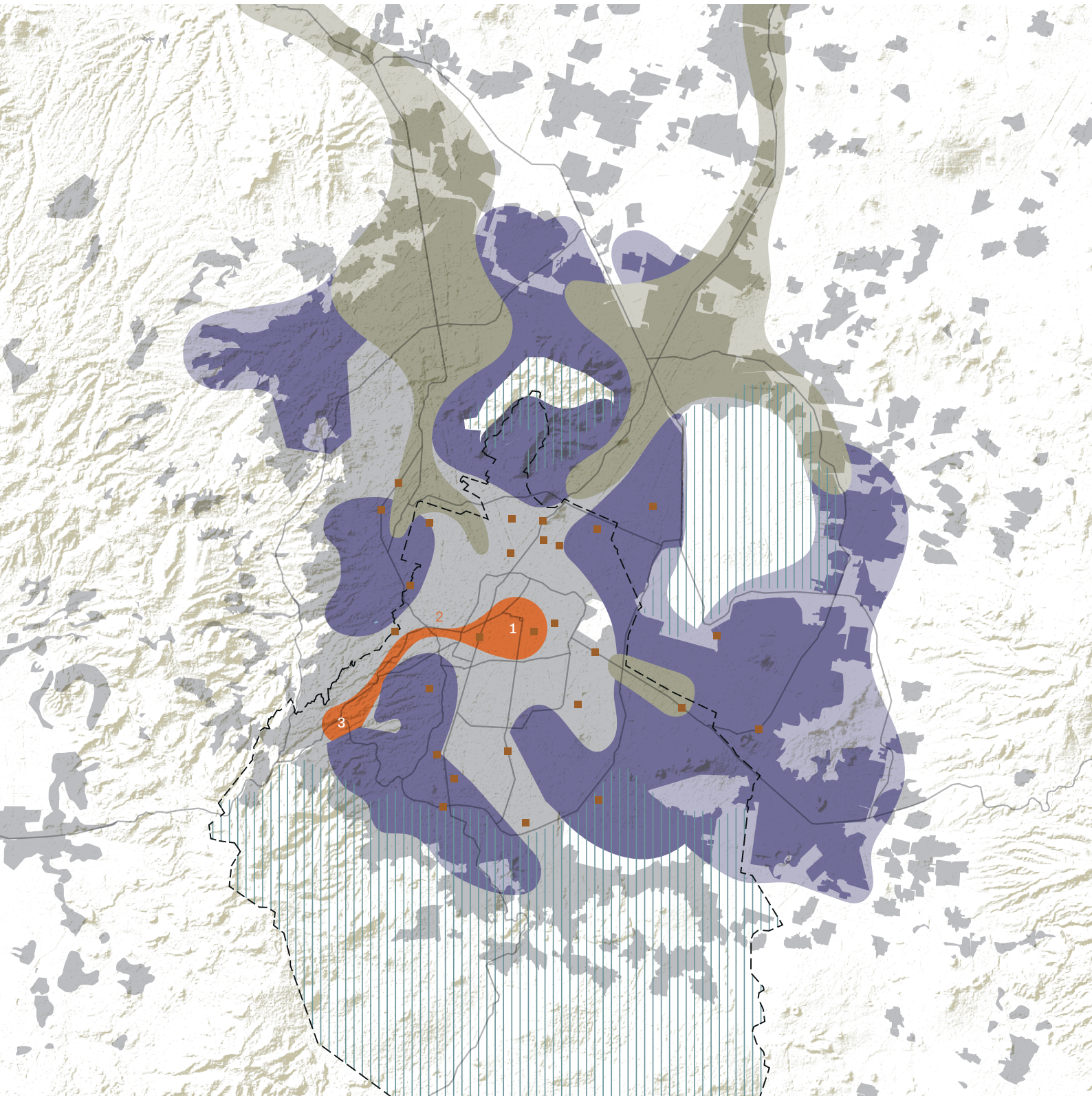




# POPULAR URBANISATION







## URBANISATION WITH AND BY THE PEOPLE

This chapter introduces the concept of popular urbanisation and uses it to define a specific urbanisation process based on collective initiatives, various forms of self-organisation and the engagement and labour of mostly poor or low-income people, which has become an important part of the everyday reality of many cities around the globe. We understand popular urbanisation as the strategy by which an urban territory is produced, transformed and appropriated by people. While this process is often subsumed under broad concepts such as ‘urban informality’, ‘incremental urbanism’ or ‘peripheral urbanisation’, we suggest that it may be helpful to distinguish popular urbanisation from similar urbanisation processes as primarily led by the people themselves, and one in which commodification and state agencies play minor roles. As popular urbanisation unfolds in diverse ways depending on the wider urban context, specific political constellations and actions, it results in a variety of spatial outcomes and temporal trajectories.

The concept of popular urbanisation focuses on the actions of people involved in the construction and maintenance of their own houses and their neighbourhoods. Its popular aspect refers to a wide range of actors producing urban space, mostly without obvious leadership or overarching ideology, but with a shared interest in producing urban space for themselves as well as their community. These social groups often fall into categories such as kinship, friendship, place of origin, religion or political affiliation. They appropriate and produce urban space through a wide range of collective action, starting from the interaction of individuals to neighbourhood coordination up to high-level collective mobilisations. In meeting popular aspirations to produce and preserve urban neighbourhoods, the spatial practices of people generate both material outcomes and deep local knowledge. These daily practices and experiences result in other spaces, which have the potential to offer an alternative to hegemonic visions and strategies of the production of urban space.



Popular urbanisation is thus a strategy through which urban territories are produced, transformed and appropriated by the people. In proposing this concept, we do not intend to idealise collective efforts and projects, as they, too, are saturated with self-interest and realised in power hierarchies (Simone, 2014). But we suggest moving the analytical perspective towards a dynamic understanding of the social production of urban space to shed light on how these spaces emerge, how they are transformed over time and how they differ from spaces produced through other related but distinct urbanisation processes.

We developed the concept of popular urbanisation through a collective comparative analysis of Lagos, Mexico City, Istanbul and Kolkata, which is not treated in this chapter (see Chapter 4). This text relies on an abundant set of theoretical resources and empirical data, particularly on fieldwork in Ecatepec, Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, Valle de Chalco Solidaridad, Santo Domingo and Chimalhuacán in Mexico City (Streule 2018, 2020); Badia and Ajegunle in Lagos (Sawyer 2016) and Başibüyük (Karaman 2013a, 2014), Zeytinburnu and Eyüp in Istanbul.

We begin with a critical review of some important existing concepts that could be used to analyse popular urbanisation and focus on the debate on urban informality, evaluating its limits as well as its critical and innovative reappropriations. We then discuss the alternative concept of *urbanización popular*, as defined by Latin American scholars, which has proved to be particularly fruitful for our analysis and conceptualisation. In a conceptual move, we decontextualise this concept to construct our own definition of popular urbanisation, based on our own comparative study. Finally, we recontextualise the concept, applying it to the three case studies of Mexico City, Lagos and Istanbul. In the main part of the chapter we examine how people organise themselves in these three contexts to build, occupy and secure their housing, their neighbourhoods and their everyday space through intricate webs of negotiation with each other, as well as with landowners and state actors, to win incremental gains in infrastructural provision, facilities and security of tenure. In the last section we outline the main characteristics of popular urbanisation to put these analytical insights of our comparative study into a wider discussion. In offering the concept of popular urbanisation for further examination, we seek to contribute to the collective development of a decentred vocabulary of urbanisation. This is therefore a revisable and open concept.

## POVERTY OF TERMS

When we started our comparative project we soon found some striking similarities between urbanisation processes in low-income neighbourhoods of Mexico City, Istanbul, Lagos and Kolkata.

We discerned a process that is based on self-organisation and collective action, which includes aspects of informality, illegality and social struggle, and proceeds incrementally by constant improvement of houses and neighbourhoods. As we applied a range of existing concepts to this process we were confronted with many ambiguities and shortcomings. 'Slum', one of the most common terms used to delineate areas with poor living conditions, describes only a material form and does not encompass the dynamic aspect of urbanisation. Furthermore, it has become synonymous with poverty and precarity, and its use has been roundly criticised for contributing to the marginalisation of such spaces and obscuring the diversity of urban experiences within them (Rao 2006; Gilbert 2007; Huchzermeyer 2011a; Varley 2013). We followed Roy's critique of the term, based on the position of subaltern urbanism, and sought to account for heterogeneous urbanisms that 'cannot be contained within the familiar metonymic categories of megacity or slum' (2011: 231). Similarly, the terms *gecekondu* or *favela*, which are regional terms for Turkish and Brazilian experiences respectively, share many of these pejorative characteristics. *Gecekondu* literally means 'built overnight' and thus gives at least some indication of the starting point of the process. The Portuguese term *favela* can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and basically means self-built (Valladares 2006). However, terms and concepts like 'auto-construction' and 'self-help housing' that refer to building one's own house with little or no professional help, are highly context specific. While they are relevant in Mexico City and are also observed in Istanbul, auto-construction is not a defining characteristic in Lagos.

A range of other concepts, which do not express the specificity of the process we identified through our comparative research yet highlight certain important aspects of it, also informed our conceptualisation. For instance, as we discuss in the following sections in more detail, we drew substantially on the idea of 'incremental urbanism' (e.g. Turner 1976; McFarlane 2011; Dovey 2014) to grasp the characteristic step-by-step building process of popular urbanisation and thus to rethink the specific challenges that this emergent dynamics holds for practitioners like planners or architects. In a similar way, 'occupancy urbanism', a term introduced by Benjamin (2008), helps us to understand the complex relationship between inhabitants of popular settlements on the one hand, and state actors and large land developers on the other. Benjamin says that in India this relationship results in highly politicised forms of urbanisms. Likewise, the concept of 'insurgent citizenship' proposed by Holston (2009) helps to address questions of illegality and land occupation using the lens of citizenship. He shows how new forms of democratic citizenship are emerging from urban peripheries of São Paulo, and brings to the fore two important

aspects we are discussing in detail in the following sections: that is, territorial regulation and experiences of solidarity in everyday life. Caldeira (2017) recently proposed the concept of 'peripheral urbanisation' to characterise southern urbanisms. It provides a multidimensional definition of urbanisation, grasping the production of space in different urban areas and bringing together a wide range of experiences. This overarching concept, which characterises 'a set of interrelated processes' (Caldeira 2017: 4), addresses questions similar to those we address in our own project. Therefore, we discuss this concept in the final part of our chapter.

Finally, we also engaged with the widely applied concept of 'urban informality'. Introduced in the 1970s and originally applied to designate the labour conditions of poor immigrants working in street markets and undertaking all sorts of precarious jobs, this concept contrasts the informal aspect of urbanisation with the highly regulated 'formal economy' that generates a regular and secure income. The term informal was soon extended beyond the field of labour to designate the production of housing and finally even a certain way of life. However, as a scientific concept, and even more so as a tool for policy-makers, planners and state agencies, the concept of informality has long faced widespread critique for its binary conception of formal versus informal, its lack of differentiation of the various ways in which informality emerges and develops and its focus on one aspect of the regulation of urbanisation to the exclusion of others. Thus, these initial approaches were, as Kudva puts it, 'splintered in discursive realms' (2009: 1615), hampering the understanding of the different aspects of informality and their interrelationships. While some scholars have questioned the formal/informal dichotomy and highlighted linkages and continuities between the two (e.g. Papola 1980), others have noted that urban informality should not be reduced to marginality, but rather be seen as a process that is fully, albeit unevenly, integrated into society (e.g. Perlman 2010).

In recent years postcolonial scholars have reclaimed the concept of urban informality from its dualistic origins in an attempt to disrupt hegemonic ways of thinking, knowing and doing by emphasising diversity, plurality, complexity and fluidity, and they have called for scholars to differentiate features existing *within* informality (e.g. AlSayyad 2004; Soliman 2004; Roy 2005). Informality has thus been interpreted as a 'complex and shifting phenomenon' (Huchzermeyer 2011a: 75) with many different facets that change over time (Gilbert 2007). It has been seen as a 'complex continuum of legality and illegality' and even understood as an 'idiom of urbanisation' (Roy 2005, 2009). Some scholars have analysed the broad spectrum of actors involved in urban informality, including state actors, wealthy people and the middle classes (e.g. McFarlane and Waibel 2012), while others have

shown that informality is not only widespread but is also capable of being organised and effective (e.g. Simone 2004b; Denning, 2010). Another important move was to give a political interpretation of certain instances of informality, recognising them as acts of everyday resistance that are quite distinct from the large-scale mobilisations that have received the most attention in these discussions so far (e.g. Castells 1983; Benjamin 2008; Fawaz 2009; Kudva 2009; Bayat 2010).

These critical explorations, appropriations and revisions show that the concept of urban informality embraces a wide and complex set of aspects and processes. While postcolonial critiques help to understand internal differentiation, and while it remains a useful term that speaks across disciplines, the very reach and breadth of the concept of informality does not allow for a precise definition of an urbanisation process. In our own research we identified a number of clearly distinct urbanisation processes in which informality plays an important role (see e.g. the concept of 'plotting urbanism' discussed below). Furthermore, the concept of urban informality still remains one-dimensional and highlights a certain form of regulation of the urban process. It is unclear how other important aspects of the production of space, such as social composition (e.g. social class or income level), the dominance of individualised or collective forms of social organisation or the degree to which the production of space is commodified or self-organised intersect with informality. Therefore, very different urban constellations can be subsumed under the term informality, such as collective squatting in Delhi (Datta 2012) or the (partly illegal) individual construction of expensive mansions in Belgrade (Diener *et al.* 2012). For all these reasons, we propose to go beyond the concept of informality to develop a more differentiated and nuanced understanding of urbanisation and to conceptualise more specific urbanisation processes.



# URBANIZACIÓN POPULAR: A NEW VANTAGE POINT

A starting point for our new comparative conceptualisation was the term *urbanización popular*, which is used in Mexico and in other parts of Latin America. This term seemed to be particularly useful for several reasons. First, it is directly linked to urbanisation. The Spanish term *urbanización* has an active connotation: initially coined and defined by Catalan urban planner Ildefonso Cerdà in 1867, the term designates the production and extension of settlement areas and can thus be used to indicate the active production of new neighbourhoods (see Sevilla-Buitrago 2014). Secondly, the term *popular* refers not only to the urban poor in general; it has a strong social class connotation and is used here to designate those who are involved in the process of urbanisation. A literal translation of the term '*urbanización popular*' thus would be '*urbanisation by the people*'. This term comes very close to the idea we wanted to express and we found it a valuable and inspiring basis for our comparative conceptualisation. To make it useful for our analysis we first had to explore its definition in the Latin American context and then to revise and rebuild it by confronting it with our own comparative results. In the following section we look at the Latin American understanding of urbanisation processes in general, and specifically what it means to Mexican scholars, with the aim of developing a broad understanding of the terms with which we may comprehend *urbanización popular* as a 'contradictory form of self-organisation of a society' and thus also as a 'disposition of the subjects in search of survival and modes of articulation outside the hegemonic formal system' (García Canclini 2013: 35).<sup>1</sup>

The concept '*urbanización popular*' has been widely used in Latin America since the late 1980s to analyse the social dynamics in marginalised urban areas (e.g. Navarro and Moctezuma 1989; Schteingart 1989; 1996; Duhau 1992, 1998; Azuela 1993; Vite and Rico 2001; Duhau and Giglia 2008; Moctezuma 2012). Along with other concepts like '*informalización*' or '*favelização*', it is one of the most frequently used terms to designate the process of the self-production of neighbourhoods by their inhabitants that plays such a paradigmatic role in Latin America (e.g. Connolly 2009, 2013; Perlman 2010; Salazar 2012; Hernández and Becerra 2017). In early conceptualisations the prevailing understanding of *urbanización popular* was very similar to a widespread definition of informality, as the following quote exemplifies: 'A very large number of families solve their housing problem by acquiring land under irregular conditions and self-producing their habitat. This is what we call

*urbanización popular*. This urbanisation process takes place in the form of subdivisions and irregular land operations on the margins of the officially recognised urban area; in this way, the population has access to land at a lower price than on the regular market, but it also means lower material conditions' (Duhau 1992: 48). Conventional definitions of the term '*urbanización popular*' echo to a certain extent the well-known debate between structuralist and functionalist approaches towards urban informality. From a historical structuralist perspective, dependency theory scholars conceptualise *urbanización popular* under the aspect of the reproduction of cheap labour and uneven capitalist development. From a legal functionalist perspective, developmentalist scholars emphasise the entrepreneurial activities of people through auto-construction and the creation of informal jobs, and identify the state as the essential regulatory actor (for a wider discussion of these different perspectives, see Rakowski 1994; González 2012). In contrast to those classic understandings, neo-Marxist urban scholars Navarro and Moctezuma (1989) developed a more dynamic conceptualisation of *urbanización popular*, which was inspired by Castells' (1977, 1983) concepts of 'collective consumption' and 'urban social movements'. Based on their empirical research in Mexico City, they outlined two specific characteristics of *urbanización popular*: the institution of a collective working day (*faena*) and the emerging urban social movements and their struggles for basic services and land titles (*movimiento urbano popular*). In both aspects, they argue, territorial relations are constitutive 'since in the specific urban context ... [the poor] are the ones who are able to organise themselves collectively in pursuit of their common interests' (Navarro and Moctezuma 1989: 84). Despite these analytical efforts to elaborate this concept, the established understanding of *urbanización popular* has faced continuing critiques for failing to address subjectivities, particularly from the perspective of cultural studies. Thus, Hiernaux and Lindón (2000: 21) argue: 'Until recently, urban studies have made few distinctions between the residents of peripheral areas. The concept of '*urbanización popular*', which has been used to characterise the process of advancing towards peripheral urbanisation by disadvantaged groups, does not offer enough clues to analyse the difference between groups, according to the ways of seeing the world, the culture and lifestyles in the periphery. It is from the rise of so-called 'urban cultural studies' that a further distinction is made as to who are residents of the city in terms of their subjectivity.' As this short discussion shows, the term '*urbanización popular*' is widely used in the Latin American context and it meets many criteria that we want to meet; it offers therefore a very useful starting point for our analysis. We were especially interested in the term '*popular*' as it has a range of connotations in

Spanish, especially in referring to ‘the people’ and to social class. However, its wide and sometimes contradictory definitions, which often make it almost synonymous with urban informality, blur the concept of *urbanización popular*. Furthermore, to make it applicable to a wider range of examples, it has also to be decontextualised from the specific Latin American situation to which it is tied. To give this term a more precise meaning we opted for a transposition and adopted the English translation ‘popular urbanisation’ to indicate the distance we place between the inherited understandings and definitions of the term and our new comparative conceptualisation, while at the same time explicitly acknowledging the roots of the term and the concept.

Departing from this critical understanding of *urbanización popular*, we adapted and enriched the concept in the course of our comparison. In our definition, we maintain both the focus on urban social movements and the emphasis on collective work, but recognise the need to address subjectivities, as suggested in recent Latin American debates. Moreover, we strive to move beyond post-colonial critiques of the urban informality debate by stressing the multidimensional and dynamic understanding of urbanisation processes. Thus, we focus on the central role of everyday experiences and on the agency of subjects in their production of space. This theoretical perspective also directs our attention to the residents’ aspirations to claim urbanity and centrality and thus the right to the city. ‘Popular’ designates for us the spatial practices of people that generate different urban experiences and challenge the vision of hegemonic urban space by producing territories of resistance (see Zibechi 2012; Schwarz and Streule 2016; Streule and Schwarz 2019).

## MEXICO CITY, LAGOS, ISTANBUL: DIFFERENT URBAN EXPERIENCES IN CONVERSATION

The process of popular urbanisation unfolds in different ways in the specific urban contexts of Mexico City, Lagos and Istanbul. Consequently, we framed it as the result of the complex entangled histories of diverse actors. As will become evident in the following sections, it is a highly varied process that has also changed significantly within each urban area over the past decades. How could we bring such a variety of experiences in different urban contexts into conversation with each other? How is it possible to compare seemingly incommensurable experiences from different places without omitting their specific qualities and intrinsic characteristics? We found inspiration from a variety of comparative theoretical and empirical engagements with urban processes across space and time (see Chapter 2). In such comparisons ‘elements of the past gain new meanings for the present, produce new futures for the past and open up a space of action towards possible futures from the present’ (Robinson 2013: 664). To respect the multidimensionality of urbanisation processes, we built on Lefebvre’s three-dimensional theory of the production of space (Lefebvre 1991 [1975]) and developed an understanding of urbanisation that highlights how social space is produced through material interactions, territorial regulation and everyday experience. We cannot go into the details of our theoretical considerations here, but the most important aspect of our approach is to conceive of these three dimensions as being linked to each other through dialectical relationships (see Chapter 1; see also Schmid 2008, 2022).

The specificity of the concept of popular urbanisation can be fully understood only on the basis of a relational conception of urbanisation that analyses an urban territory as the result of the interplay of several distinct urbanisation processes. Thus, in the course of our comparative project we identified and defined two other urbanisation processes that are related to but clearly distinct from popular urbanisation: ‘plotting urbanism’ and ‘mass housing urbanisation’. Plotting urbanism is a process in which an urban area is developed in a piecemeal way, plot by plot, wherein commodification and market mechanisms play a key role (see Chapter 13). Plotting urbanism shares many of the features of popular urbanisation, such as informality, illegality and an incremental building process; however, it is dominated by commodification, and the mobilisation and collective efforts of inhabitants are significantly

weaker than in popular urbanisation. Mass housing urbanisation, another related concept, entails heavy intervention by the state, often in combination with the powerful business interests promoted by private developers and financial institutions and it can be understood as an alternative and in many ways opposite model to that of popular urbanisation (see Chapter 16). Popular urbanisation, then, stands out as a process that is not dominated by the state, like mass housing urbanisation, and it is also not strongly determined by market mechanisms and commodification (even if these factors may play some role in it).

#### MATERIAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE URBAN TERRITORY

Popular urbanisation was the predominant process of urbanisation in Mexico City as well as in Istanbul in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapters 7 and 10). At the turn of the century, areas of popular urbanisation constituted about 60 per cent of the urban area of Mexico City (Connolly, 2009) and large parts of Istanbul. More recently, however, urbanisation changed dramatically in both places. Whereas in Istanbul hardly any new *gecekondu*s are built anymore, popular urbanisation still takes place in Mexico City, particularly in some peripheral areas (e.g. Hastings 2008; Gilbert and de Jong 2015; Vega 2015; Streule 2018). In contrast, popular urbanisation never reached the same importance and scale in Lagos; it was always marginal and largely overshadowed by 'plotting urbanism' as the dominant process of space production (Sawyer 2014, 2016; see also Chapter 8).

How can we explain these different pathways of popular urbanisation? All three case studies are made up of large urban regions and major political, cultural, financial and commercial centres which exert great influence beyond their regional hinterlands. They have all experienced heavy migration for many decades, leading to massive population growth rates, which have increased dramatically the demand for housing. Whereas Turkey and Mexico, starting from the 1940s, followed a developmentalist model of industrialisation that initially drew people to the main urban centres for manufacturing and services, Lagos attracted people mainly because of its role as the political, cultural and commercial centre of Nigeria and because it housed one of the busiest ports in West Africa. Despite this massive urban growth, there have been few state-led housing programmes in Lagos, while in Mexico City and Istanbul the state mainly targeted groups that were already relatively affluent or were in formal employment (Buğra 1998: 308; Özdemir 2011; Çoban 2012: 86; Streule 2017a). Thus, popular urbanisation developed as an alternative pathway and enabled millions of people to get access to housing. Our analysis suggests that this should not be seen as an isolated urban phenomenon: it has to be situated in the context of the transformation of the entire urban territory and its complex interrelations of social, economic and political processes.

In all three cases a broad variety of actors is involved in the process of popular urbanisation. In Mexico City the first popular settlements were constructed by the migrants themselves, as the broad body of literature on this topic shows (for an overview, see Connolly 2013). In the initial stage,

Istanbul; gecekondu. Kartal, 2014





groups of people invaded and settled on *ejido* land with the previous agreement of the collective owners of the land, the *ejidatarios*. Middlemen (coyotes) often played a vital role in getting the consent of these landowners and informally selling the former farmland plot by plot for a commission (Cymet 1992; Jones and Ward 1998; Gutmann 2000). In the following few years, residents had to deal with many hardships and they organised to install and gradually improve services like electricity, water and drainage. They also cooperated with each other to raise money to construct schools and churches and to get the streets paved (Schteingart 1989; Azuela and Tomas 1996; Hiernaux and Lindón 2000). The self-built shelters were initially very basic as well, often being not more than a single room built with flimsy materials such as wooden planks, metal sheets or adobe bricks. Over the years, people improved their housing and living conditions by investing in more durable materials, incrementally expanding their homes and adding more rooms and floors, as in the classic and well-researched example of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl (Ribbeck et al. 2002; see also Bazant 2003; Andrade Narváez 2011).

As we observed, these self-help housing strategies basically remain the same today. Confronted with the notorious absence of a proactive housing policy to provide sufficient affordable housing, the second and third generations of people living in popular settlements are currently building on newly subdivided plots in remote areas of Mexico City, such as the municipalities of Chimalhuacán, Chicoloapan and Nicolás Romero. During the past decades, however, the close relationship between popular urbanisation and

rural-urban migration changed; today, relocation from older settlements, together with circular migration to and from the USA, play a much more prominent role in this process (Streule 2018). As most of Mexico City's inhabitants cannot afford or are not eligible to participate in the national mortgage finance system, they often rely on remittances from family members who have migrated to the USA as a major source of the funding for construction materials and to pay the deposit for the plot (*enganche*) (Mendoza and Bartolo 2012; Streule 2018).

Additionally, government-related clientelist organisations, such as the well-known mass organisations Antorcha Popular or the Frente Popular Francisco Villa, have also intervened aggressively in these popular urbanisation processes, orchestrating land occupation and land distribution on a large scale (Vega 2015: 285). These organisations play a key role in improving today's popular neighbourhoods. Their main function, however, is to mediate between different residents, landowners and state institutions. They are hierarchically structured and have good contacts with local governments, negotiating complex clientelistic deals to acquire urban equipment and public services or to regularise land titles for their members.

We can observe a similar diversification of actors and modes of popular urbanisation in Istanbul. Each neighbourhood—and even different sections within a neighbourhood—had its own unique experience of urbanisation depending on a variety of factors; most notably, the timing of establishing the settlement, its landownership status and its specific position within the wider urban region as well as the organisation of its relationships with



Mexico City; Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, 2010



state officials. Nonetheless, some broad general contours can be identified. At the very initial stages of popular urbanisation, the dominant model was that rural migrants constructed their makeshift shacks on land that was primarily public (Şenyapılı 1998; Keyder 2005). As informal land markets developed, popular urbanisation acquired a more commercial character (Tekeli 1992; Torlak 2003: 66). By the 1980s mafia-like groups and religious and communitarian organisations were heavily involved in the parcelisation and allocation of land (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 167–168; Pérouse 2011: 62–63).

The construction strategies adopted also show a high variation, even within a given urban area, such as self-building, using hired workers or by mutual assistance within the community. These strategies also changed dramatically over time. The first generation of popular settlements in Istanbul, for example, was often built overnight by the prospective residents themselves; an experience that is reflected in the term ‘gecekondü’. As commercialisation increased, small-scale construction teams led by foremen oversaw the whole process (Torlak 2003: 66). Over time, commercial private interests became more dominant at the expense of mobilisations by residents for housing and infrastructure provision. In our understanding, when commodification becomes dominant, the process of popular urbanisation turns into plotting urbanism.

Popular urbanisation has not always been successful. What is vital for the persistence of the newly established neighbourhoods is the extent to which they are able to take hold and are developed into less precarious settlements. In Istanbul and Mexico City most popular settlements have acquired a robust character over time and have

decent infrastructure and sanitation. In contrast, Lagos’ popular settlements have struggled to survive under very low security of tenure and they have maintained their makeshift appearance. For instance, large portions of the notorious Makoko settlement, currently the largest area of popular urbanisation in Lagos (population estimates range from 40,000 to hundreds of thousands) have been demolished and rebuilt several times in recent decades. This settlement occupies a prominent central location on water in the Lagos lagoon and its name is often used as a symbol for the ‘slums of Lagos’. Maroko, which is an even larger settlement of 300,000 people, was demolished in 1990 to make land available for the private residential development of Lekki (see Agbola and Jinadu 1997). Today, this area is one of the most expensive real estate assets in Lagos. As these examples show, there are very different pathways to and many possible outcomes of popular urbanisation, ranging from demolition to consolidation. To understand them as results of the same basic process, it is necessary to analyse the specific territorial regulations that underlie, enable and guide popular urbanisation.

#### STRUGGLING WITH TERRITORIAL REGULATION

The crucial precondition for popular urbanisation is to get access to land. Popular urbanisation embraces many different routes to settling—such as squatting land, constructing on legally protected land and buying illegally subdivided plots. In Mexico City, popular urbanisation mainly developed on collectively owned ejido and communal land. Ejido

Lagos: housing on stilts. Makoko, 2013



is collectively owned agricultural land established 1934 after the Mexican Revolution of 1910, which until a constitutional reform in 1992 could not be sold legally and thus constituted the largest source of land for popular urbanisation. Communal land is the collectively managed land of urban villages and belongs to Indigenous communities. Both communal and ejido land are subject to the same laws (see Cymet 1992; Azuela 1993; Siembieda 1996). Landowners and real-estate promoters often sell illegally subdivided land to newcomers (Schteingart 1989; Azuela and Tomas 1996; Jones and Ward 1998). In contrast, people in Istanbul installed themselves on public land, as the state was generally more tolerant of emerging settlements (Buğra 1998: 309; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 115). At later stages, unofficially subdivided agricultural land was used to provide popular housing (Yonder 1987; Tekeli 1992: 64).

Another way to access land is to make exposed and hostile locations, such as flood-prone areas, steep slopes or canyons habitable by improving it; examples are landfilling with residual materials in the swampy land of Lagos's Ajegunle or removing large amounts of lava rock in Mexico City's Santo Domingo. According to the different land regimes in place, the territorial regulation of the three case studies differs profoundly. Land regulation policies in Istanbul and Mexico City have undergone longstanding and well-studied trajectories (for Mexico City, see e.g. Eckstein 1977; Azuela 1993; Schteingart 1996; Salazar 2012; and for Istanbul see Tekeli 1992; Buğra, 1998; Şenyapılı 1998; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Demirtas-Milz 2013). In Lagos, in contrast, there has been less research on land regulation (e.g. Akinleye 2009; Sawyer 2016).

Land property rights were relatively clearly defined in Istanbul (ownership by local and central state, charitable foundations or private individuals) and in Mexico City (primarily ejido and communal land, and to a lesser extent, private and state-owned land). In Lagos territorial regulation is far more complex because it is constituted by the dual land systems that apply simultaneously, leading to widespread confusion and insecurity over land and title (for a detailed analysis, see Sawyer 2016). The formal procedure for obtaining an official land title in Lagos is extremely bureaucratic, time-consuming and expensive. Additionally, people who seek to build a house in Lagos have to engage with the traditional landowners. However, these transactions do not confer any security, but are necessary to settle who has the customary claim to the land. This means that a piece of land can easily have more than one claim of ownership, all with some validity, leading to frequent lengthy disputes (Aluko 2012).

One major outcome of this specific territorial regulation in Lagos is the individualisation and commodification of urbanisation leading to 'plotting urbanism'. People in areas of popular urbanisation engage in similar agreements with traditional

landowners to secure access to land, but the vital difference between these and agreements in plotted neighbourhoods is that they usually have a time limit or the landowners may renege upon them, sometimes by prohibiting permanent structures from being built while they wait for the value of the land to increase (Aina 1989). The familiar tradition of portraying neighbourhoods of popular urbanisation in Lagos as slums, with the full pejorative connotations of the term, is used to justify the forced eviction of residents and the demolition of their homes (Agbola and Jinadu 1997). In brief, the Nigerian state—whether colonial, military or civilian—has acted with seeming impunity time and again against popular urbanisation, usually in collusion with traditional landowners. Therefore, there has never been a chance for these neighbourhoods to consolidate.

In contrast, Istanbul has a form of territorial regulation that has accommodated and retroactively regularised popular urbanisation for decades. Numerous laws, known as *gecekondu* amnesties (*gecekondu afları*), have been passed to formalise concessions to *gecekondu* dwellers (see Torlak 2003; Tercan 2018). In the very early stages *gecekondus* were widely regarded as a 'social disaster' that was encroaching upon the city proper (Şenyapılı 1998: 308) and the immediate state response usually was to demolish them. From the early 1950s onwards, however, at a time of rapid industrialisation, *gecekondu* neighbourhoods became increasingly tolerated and accommodated (Torlak 2003; Şenyapılı 2004). This stage is characterised by a tight and symbiotic relationship between factories and *gecekondus*, manifested in their geographical proximity to each other (Tekeli 1992: 38; Esen 2011: 469). Having become tacitly accepted and formally recognised, *gecekondus* became increasingly commodified (Torlak 2003). In the aftermath of the military coup of 1980, policies and laws on tenure were put in place, authorising the redevelopment of plots on which *gecekondus* had been built with multistorey buildings (Ekinci 1998).

This resulted in the densification and commercialisation of erstwhile *gecekondu* neighbourhoods. As their commercial and monetary character became more dominant at this stage we have subsumed this transformation under the term 'plotting urbanism'. Today, some areas still retain their *gecekondu* character due to legal complications or the lack of a political initiative to implement regularisation policies. There are also some more recently constructed areas in the 1990s that have never attained legal status. Since the mid-2000s these remnants of popular urbanisation have been targeted for demolition by various redevelopment schemes, most notably with the involvement of state agencies that construct mass housing such as TOKI and KIPTAS (Lovering and Türkmen 2011; Karaman 2013a; Türkün 2014; see also Chapter 7). The history of popular urbanisation in Istanbul thus shows there has been a visible shift in its basic urban policy. For decades

the state failed to develop proactive policies to address the housing needs of low-income citizens in the public or private sector. Instead it used ad hoc measures to legalise and regulate them via successive *gecekondu* amnesties. This situation facilitated the rapid growth of informal land markets, favouring those who were able to participate in the earlier rounds of land occupation (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001) and the subsequent emergence of plotting urbanism as a dominant process in Istanbul. With the urban policy shift in the 2000s towards urban renewal, *gecekondus* ceased to be an effective option for the urban poor as a means of upward social mobility (Esen 2011: 486).

In a similar way, but with a different outcome, the pathway of popular urbanisation in Mexico City illustrates the conflicting but also entangled relation between government and a large majority of urban society (e.g. Azuela and Tomas 1996). In an effort to adapt urban policies to the ongoing urbanisation processes, the state tolerated popular urbanisation but also sought to control and regulate it. When the Federal District (the state that governs the central area of Mexico City, recently renamed CDMX) implemented restrictions on illegal subdivisions and the trade of *ejido* land in 1954, this redirected the process of popular urbanisation out towards adjacent federal states (Azuela 1993; Duhau 1998). In this way, new popular settlements for millions of inhabitants spread out to what were then remote, but are today relatively central locations, such as Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl or Ecatepec (Bassols and Espinosa 2011).

However, this policy did little to stop popular urbanisation in central areas, but instead gave rise to a new strategy of land invasion called *paracaidismo* (parachuting urbanisation), in which people occupied land overnight (e.g. Vega 1996; Gutmann, 2000). Similar to the case of Istanbul, the regularisation of popular urbanisation seemed to be the most promising governmental approach to these neighbourhoods, at the same time providing a strong foothold for the then ruling party, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). However, federal and local policy on popular urbanisation is still embedded in a complex patron–client system and embraces a selective strategy of regularisation and eviction (e.g. Varley 2002; Guarneros-Meza 2009; Wigle 2014; Vega 2015). Up to 1970 approximately 10–15 million inhabitants of Mexico City had purchased a plot on *ejido* land to build their homes. These transactions usually proceeded without overwriting regular land titles and accordingly were situated beyond state control, albeit with the implicit involvement of local authorities (Cymet 1992; Jones and Ward 1998; Hiernaux and Lindón 2000; Lombard 2016; Connolly and Wigle 2017).

A far-reaching shift of territorial regulation in Mexico City accompanied the neoliberal land reform in 1992, when the collective use rights of *ejido* land were changed into individual rights

and the sale of *ejido* land was eventually legalised. With this reform, over three million hectares of land in the urban periphery of Mexico City became potentially available for market speculation (Sambieda 1996; Jones and Ward 1998; Salazar 2014). The state explicitly declared agricultural *ejido* land to be a reserve zone for potential urbanisation, leading to the massive increase of commercial mass housing urbanisation in the peripheries of Mexico City, the *mega conjuntos habitacionales*. However, popular urbanisation did not decline as much as it did in Istanbul and it remains one of the important processes for producing urban territories in Mexico City (e.g. Hastings 2008; Connolly 2009; Vega 2015: 275; Gilbert and de Jong 2015; Streule 2018). These examples of territorial regulation clearly show the important role of state strategies, embedded as they are in wider political constellations and power relations and influenced by contradictory goals and interests in facilitating, shaping and bringing to an end popular urbanisation.

#### EXPERIENCES OF SOLIDARITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Popular urbanisation cannot be fully understood without illuminating the essential role of social mobilisations, collective experiences and learning processes in shaping it, and thus without taking into consideration the question of residents' lived experiences in the production of space. The very beginnings of popular urbanisation in Istanbul were very dependent on social networks, based on kinship or a shared place of origin in the countryside (*hemşehrilik*), not only for finding and creating a livelihood and a place and materials to construct a *gecekondu*, but also in providing the main platforms for everyday socialisation (Gunes-Ayata 1991). As migrants faced many challenges in their new neighbourhoods, they also had to develop local networks based on their shared experiences and daily struggles. These were largely based on patronage relationships and relied on charismatic and commercially driven leaders able to negotiate with state actors (Erder 1996; White 2002: 104–107; Keyder 2005). Additionally, in the second half of the 1970s, *gecekondu* mobilisations in many neighbourhoods took a radical turn in reaction to the exploitative practices of emerging, mafia-like groups cashing in on the commercialisation of land (Tekeli 1992: 91–92; Aslan 2004). The squatters' struggles to claim space outside the formal system aligned with the objective of socialist groups of 'creating cores outside the control of formal institutions in practically all realms of social life' (Aslan 2004: 81). However, these radical inclinations were undermined first by the 1980s military coup and then by the laws on tenure that followed (Erman 2001: 987). Nevertheless, today regional associations



remain major centres of solidarity and socialisation, particularly in late-stage gecekondu areas, which are now targets for urban renewal schemes (Pérouse 2011: 84; Karaman 2014).

In Mexico City, relatively hierarchical neighbourhood organisations guided by charismatic leaders perform most of the routine functions required to solve their daily problems and needs. In these organisations, a specific participatory and collective practice has developed, characterised by general meetings and consensual decision-making. Framed as 'urban self-management', as many scholars have argued, such strategies in Mexico City do not mean simply 'managing the misery', but can be understood as an alternative urban strategy of self-organised administration and the collective control of urban space (see e.g. Schteingart 1991; Coulomb 1992; Moctezuma 2001; 2012; Ortiz Flores and Zarate 2002; Streule 2017b; Díaz-Parra 2019). Whereas these organisations fight mainly for land tenure and the provision of basic urban infrastructure such as electricity and a water supply, as well as access to health care and education, the residents themselves also take a long-term perspective: a house is most commonly seen as a *patrimonio* (legacy), a space of belonging that is constantly being improved and adapted to new needs, such as accommodating new family members or starting a small business (see Gilbert 1999; Calderón 2012; Ward 2012; Grajeda 2015).

In Lagos, social organisation in popular settlements emerges mostly from various member-based religious, ethnic, home town and trade associations or patronage networks that are not necessarily organised locally, however. These associations can perform vital functions in problem-solving and conflict resolution or as a basis for savings groups (called *esusu*). There are also neighbourhood vigilante groups that provide security. Since the 1990s community development associations have been formed to provide an interface between traditional power structures, the local and state governmental actors and the people (Abegunde 2009). However, the elected representatives of these associations are sometimes co-opted by landowning families and governmental actors, and can even end up working against the communities. There is a huge variation in how well a community is organised and this can depend largely on how well the residents of a street or building get on with one another and whether private connections to influential people can be activated (Sawyer 2016). In our study, the Lagos case provides an important reference point for expanding our understanding of the 'popular' that does not rely on notions of mass mobilisation or a well-organised collective structure.

There is therefore a broad spectrum of ways that residents are organised to promote, implement and sustain popular urbanisation, from individualism to collective organisation. In Istanbul, many

gecekondu settlements emerged as the cumulative outcome of individual decisions, without any overarching plan. In cases where the parcelisation and selling of land were greatly commercialised there is some semblance of coordination at the scale of the overall settlement. This is clear in the overall layouts of these areas. Classic gecekondu neighbourhoods on state-owned land are marked by an organic street pattern that is aligned more or less with the topography, whereas gecekondu on illegal subdivisions of agricultural land are parcelised with a standardised street width so as to maximise developable lots (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 162). Another form of land







Istanbul; gecekondu amidst new developments. Karadolap, 2014

occupation is based on formally organised grass-roots initiatives. In her study of a gecekondu neighbourhood in Ankara, Duyar-Kienast (2005: 124–130) gives an example of an informal housing cooperative, which carried out the land occupation, parcelisation and gecekondu construction in a well organised (yet, from the point of the state, illegal) fashion under the leadership of a community leader. In improving their living conditions, gecekondu residents often rely on the tradition of *imece*, where they collectively provide the necessary labour and resources for infrastructural improvements on a voluntary basis (Duyar-Kienast 2005: 42, based on the case of Ankara; Esen 2011: 468). *Imece* is reminiscent of the collective faena workday in Mexico City, which is used to meet daily needs of the inhabitants—a basic element of popular urbanisation relying on collective work engaging in practices of commoning (Leitner and Sheppard 2018; Petropoulou 2018).

In Lagos, by contrast, people are more likely to procure their power supply and water individually (by buying small diesel generators and buying water in sachets or jerry cans), although this relies on well-organised and competitive private suppliers. As residents are not able to improve their houses and environment over time, their living conditions are often extremely poor and unhealthy, and present huge daily challenges. Forms of collectivities that are not necessarily based in the neighbourhood, such as youth, home town, religious and trading groups (Osaghae 1999; Akinola 2007) provide many sources of support; for instance, savings and loans to low-income earners in a country where access to banking services is not inclusive. As discussed previously, there is a long tradition of unaddressed brutality and injustice meted out by the national state on its poorest residents in terms of forced evictions, slum clearances, market clearances and the confiscation or destruction of property. A few organisations are able to fight forced eviction; however, in the absence of an effective formal justice system and very little political accountability, residents seem to have given up on applying for relief to formal channels of justice (Amnesty International 2018). Nevertheless, recent protests against evictions in Badia in 2014 and Otodo Gbame in 2017 have achieved small but significant and unprecedented gains, such as modest monetary compensation for those evicted, pressure from international organisations and an acknowledgment from the State of its actions.

Popular urbanisation is shaped by collective social processes. In the struggle to claim land, win access to basic services and produce their own neighbourhoods, inhabitants generate shared experiences and specific knowledge. In this contradictory process, popular urbanisation may also result in other spaces with specific urban qualities (Streule and Schmid 2014; Streule 2017b). Thus,

various venues, shops and street markets have emerged in neighbourhoods like Valle de Chalco Solidaridad or Chimalhuacán in Mexico City that not only offer a livelihood for many of their residents, but also contribute to the improvement of everyday life and the creation of centralities in these seemingly peripheral places. The production of urban qualities is particularly visible in more established and consolidated popular neighbourhoods such as Nezahualcóyotl, with its wide range of facilities (such as universities, schools, health centres, hotels, markets and sport facilities). In Istanbul, the remaining low-density gecekondu near the centre provide unique qualities beyond infrastructure, public transportation and basic amenities. A neighbourhood like Başibüyük, located on top of a breezy hill, commanding magnificent views of the sea and largely retaining its village-like character, is a very liveable place. In presenting alternative forms of social and spatial organisation, the inhabitants and users of such neighbourhoods also articulate claims to difference and non-commodified forms of urbanity. In this way, popular urbanisation is able to challenge the hegemonic practices of the production of space, which are mainly based on market mechanisms or state strategies (see e.g. Fawaz 2009; Kudva 2009; Huchzermeyer 2011a; Zibechi 2012; Keenan 2015; Díaz-Parra 2019).

# OUTLINING POPULAR URBANISATION

In her recent article on peripheral urbanisation, Caldeira (2017) identifies some central characteristics of urbanisation in the Global South. In comparing dissimilar cases in Istanbul, Santiago de Chile and São Paulo, she describes very diverse modalities of urbanisation, including self-built settlements as well as state-controlled housing programmes, which she brings together under the term 'peripheral urbanisation'. She focuses on the everyday efforts of residents to improve their neighbourhoods, the 'transversal logics' which the various actors use to engage with formal institutions and the distinctive modes of political engagement they generate. Certainly, these aspects were present in our case studies of Mexico City, Istanbul and Lagos.

However, our comparative project proceeded in a complementary direction: instead of searching for overall similarities across different kinds of settlements, we sought to identify specific urbanisation processes and to reveal their distinct inner logics. Instead of widening, we therefore narrowed down the scope of our concepts. In doing so, we identified systematic differences between various urbanisation processes that we consider fundamental; namely, marketisation and commodification; the role of state agencies and collective activities and experiences. Accordingly, we propose three different types of urbanisation processes that are dominated by clearly different aspects but might all fit under the conceptual umbrella of peripheral urbanisation. While 'plotting urbanism' has a clear orientation towards market mechanisms, and 'mass housing urbanisation' is initiated and determined by state actors, popular urbanisation is mainly based on self-organisation, political mobilisation and collective action. To the extent that this set of three concepts is the result of our comparative study, it is greatly influenced by our selection of case studies. It is therefore an open list and the concepts should be seen as revisable.

How, then, can we define popular urbanisation? As we have shown, this process unfolds in various ways according to concrete urban contexts and thus it exhibits a great variety of spatial outcomes and temporal trajectories, even in the same city. Nevertheless, it is possible and useful to identify some of the main characteristics of popular urbanisation as a specific urbanisation process, and thus to distinguish it from other closely related processes. The definition of popular urbanisation starts with the primary feature of people creating their own neighbourhoods. This can be understood as a strength and not seen as a lack or a deficiency. Popular urbanisation is thus a form of production of urban space that is based primarily on the collective initiative of the people. This distinguishes it from mass housing urbanisation, which is

defined by the initiatives of state agencies, and from plotting urbanism, which is dominated by commodification and market mechanisms.

In our comparison, we first focused on the material aspect of the production of space; namely, the physical transformation of the urban territory and the interactions that are necessary to produce new settlements. This includes the analysis of migration processes and the different agents involved: migrants and settlers embedded in various social, cultural, political and religious networks and creating their own urban spaces, as well as organisations that support and enable the construction and improvement of buildings and neighbourhoods. While popular urbanisation is thus a process in and through which an urban territory is continuously produced, transformed and appropriated by its inhabitants and users as the main protagonists of the urbanisation process, state actors and state strategies always play an important role, and market mechanisms are involved to a lesser or greater degree. But the specificity of popular urbanisation consists in the collective process of the production of space through the initiative, engagement and labour of the people, often accompanied by strong social and political mobilisation.

These basic characteristics are shaped to a considerable degree by the concrete urban conditions and social relations that underlie urbanisation at particular places and times. In Mexico City, Lagos and Istanbul the starting point of popular urbanisation was the massive migration of low-income people from rural areas and the resulting need for affordable housing in the urban area. As there were no state strategies for constructing large-scale public housing, popular urbanisation

Mexico City; Santa Catarina; 2013





offered an alternative for bringing about new neighbourhoods. However, popular urbanisation has played very different roles in these three urban territories. In Mexico City and Istanbul, for decades it remained the dominant form of urbanisation, during which time large urban areas were constructed, improved and consolidated. The speed and massive scale of urban growth in these two metropolises was to a large extent based on popular urbanisation. In contrast, popular urbanisation never played a major role in Lagos because the dominant urbanisation model there was a reliance on individualised and market-oriented forms of urban development that we conceptualise as plotting urbanism. The

analysis of the pathways of popular urbanisation also sheds light on the longevity and the different trajectories such processes can take: from the eradication of popular settlements through slum clearance policies, such as in Lagos, to a certain consolidation as in Mexico City, or formalisation and marketisation as in Istanbul. However, as discussed above, the importance of this urbanisation process in Mexico City has declined in recent years, while in Istanbul the *gecekondu* is a rarity.

To understand these different trajectories, it is necessary to look at the different ways in which state agencies intervene in the process. While the state is not a key actor in the process of popular urbanisation, popular urbanisation can nevertheless only fully unfold if there is a tacit agreement between parts of the population and powerful state actors. In all three cases, the state intervened in various ways in the process of popular urbanisation, whether through mediations, negotiations, active support, silent tolerance, the development and implementation of competing strategies or open repression and demolition. Struggles between the inhabitants and state actors are therefore constitutive of popular urbanisation. These struggles are sometimes open and explosive, but mostly occur within the prevailing system of power, for example in the form of co-optation and corruption. Thus, informality and illegality should be understood as constitutive aspects of popular urbanisation (see also Roy 2005; Schmid 2015: 301).

In all three examples everyday struggles for maintaining and improving the neighbourhoods and the collective fights for access to the land, achieving land tenure and for the provision of basic infrastructure generate experiences and processes of learning that shape popular urbanisation in specific ways. While in Lagos collective struggles against precarity predominate, popular urbanisation in Mexico City is based on home ownership and the importance of the house as a legacy for the extended family. The self-built house that is constantly adapted to the needs of family members thus also has a strong symbolic value. It is interesting that market mechanisms did not evolve within popular urbanisation in Mexico City: rooms usually are not let out to tenants and houses are rarely offered for sale. In Istanbul, however, market mechanisms were present relatively early on. With the consolidation of those neighbourhoods, processes of commodification intensified. This explains to a certain degree the different pathways of popular urbanisation. While popular urbanisation in Istanbul mostly turned into plotting urbanism, it still subsists as a distinctive process in Mexico City. In Lagos, popular urbanisation has faced violent repression and demolition for a long time, leading to precarity and inhibiting any form of settled status.

These different pathways of popular urbanisation can be fully understood only if they are contextualised in the ensemble of urbanisation



Lagos; creeks reclaimed with waste. Ajeunle, 2012

processes that shape a metropolitan territory. Because of the lack of social housing in Mexico City and in Istanbul, there was almost no other option to accommodate the massive influx of migrants. However, as our analysis reveals, there were also certain decisive conditions that enabled popular urbanisation to come about, starting with the availability of land (mainly public or collectively owned land) that allowed the construction of the first illegal settlements. Another important condition was the state strategy to tolerate and even negotiate the construction and consolidation of these settlements. The presence of collective networks, a certain degree of political organisation and specific collective traditions were other necessary conditions for the success of popular urbanisation. In Lagos, however, none of these conditions were present and thus plotting urbanism, as a strongly individualised and market-oriented strategy, became the dominant model of urban development, while popular urbanisation was an option only in very specific and often precarious conditions in relatively small areas. In contrast, in Mexico City neighbourhoods consolidated and developed urban qualities that were greatly appreciated. In Istanbul, however, this consolidation process gradually turned into plotting urbanism. Finally, in both Mexico City and Istanbul the state intervened and implemented a new urban strategy at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; namely, state-led mass housing urbanisation, which involved the neoliberalisation, financialisation and commodification of urban development using developers and financial institutions (see e.g. Hastings 2008; Karaman 2013a; Gilbert and de Jong 2015; Erman 2016). Popular urbanisation has therefore to be seen as a specific historical and geographical phenomenon: it is an urbanisation process that under certain conditions might emerge and flourish, but under other conditions it might be fundamentally transformed or even disappear. Thus, it is important to understand the historical moments that generate, enable or hinder popular urbanisation as the result of the entanglements of numerous actors and urban constellations.

What are the specific advantages of popular urbanisation? While it is born out of the specific and often precarious circumstances that people find themselves in, it can also bring about utopian moments of collective action, engagement and mutual self-help. Moreover, it provides some very practical advantages: it offers residents a high degree of flexibility and adaptability, permitting an incremental evolution of the settlement that responds to the needs and requirements of the inhabitants, together with the ability to adapt to changing socioeconomic situations and offer opportunities for social inclusion. These positive qualities of popular urbanisation are further highlighted by contrasting them with current state-led programmes of mass housing urbanisation that

have ended in various failures and massive urban sprawl in Mexico City, as well as in dense and inflexible housing estates in Istanbul.

The concept of popular urbanisation might be able to inform policy-making and develop credible and plausible alternatives to current state housing policies. However, while this urbanisation process remains desirable in many places around the globe it is currently being devalued by discourses about 'slum-free cities', by large-scale urban renewal programmes and by various forms of state-led and developer-led housing (see e.g. Huchzermeyer 2011a; Leitner and Sheppard 2018). Against these tendencies, renewed models of popular urbanisation could offer an inclusive, collective and radical perspective for the production of urban neighbourhoods. In this way, the term 'popular urbanisation' expresses the positive and progressive potential of this particular urbanisation process: urbanisation with and by the people.

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