

Housing informality as policy innovation:

Flexwonen in the Netherlands

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Project description

While housing informality was once primarily viewed through perspectives from the Global South, a growing body of research empirically investigates informality in the Global North (Chiodelli, 2019; Durst, 2015; Durst & Wegmann, 2017; Jaffe & Koster, 2019; Lombard, 2019; Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2015; Sullivan & Olmedo, 2015; Wegmann & Mawhorter, 2017). This project focuses specifically on the relationship between housing informality and planning in the Netherlands. This is a highly interesting case for understanding housing informality as the Netherlands has a reputation for being a “planner’s paradise”, with a strong ‘affinity for spatial order’ (Faludi & Valk, 1994).

There is evidence that an on-going crisis of affordability, accessibility, coupled with a migration governance crisis, has prompted a proliferation and intensification of housing informality in the Netherlands. At the same time, little empirical work has addressed the topic of informal housing in the Netherlands, and few authors have researched informality in planning more broadly in the country (Jaffe & Koster, 2019; Meijer & Ernste, 2022). The project will explore state responses to housing informality in the Netherlands, both qualitatively and spatially. By juxtaposing residents’ experiences and planning responses to growing housing challenges, the project enriches the debate on housing informality in the Global North. The central hypothesis of this project is that policymakers strategically embrace housing informality as a form of policy innovation. The state strategically departs from legal transparency and codified procedures to enhance policy efficiency and effectiveness, resulting in contradictions and exclusionary outcomes.

The project understands informality not only as legal transgressions [at production, exchange and use¹], but also as a strategic state response. The main focus will be on ‘*flexwonen*’, newly built prefab housing units, which can easily be installed in vacant urban spaces. The analysis interrogates how flexwonen is negotiated, governed and planned across scales.

The topic will be studied through a mixed methods approach. Questions will address: (1) modes of housing informality; (2) the spatial distribution of housing informality at the city-regional level; (3) planning and policy responses; and (4) resident experiences. Methodologically, the project involves different research methods. These may include fieldwork observations, semi-structured interviews, and an analysis of secondary sources.

¹ This includes, but is not limited to, different aspects such as lack of building permission, unauthorized use in light of planning codes, or illegal sublet and sale (Chiodelli 2019). These involves practices such subdivisions, house extensions, holiday homes, *volkstuin*tjes, houseboats, office buildings, squats and others. while illegal occupancy of holiday homes may appear highly mundane, it is estimated that between 55.000 to 160.000 people live permanently in such holiday homes (Boonstra 2018, Kraniotis 2018).

The research assistant will engage in the following activities:

- Contact, arrange and conduct semi-structured interview exploring residents' experiences and their interactions with planning and policy authorities.
- Collect and analyze planning documents and legal regulations to identify the ways in which planning and policy frameworks shape and are shaped by informal housing practices.
- Map the spatial distribution of informal housing in the Netherlands at the city-regional level.
- Participate in networking activities in preparation for a grant proposal for a project on housing informality

The data will be used to write an academic publication, which can be co-authored by the student.

Meetings with the team can be planned flexibly (on-site and online).

Job requirements

- Working Knowledge of Dutch
- Background in urban planning, human geography, development studies, among other disciplines
- Qualitative research skills, experience in conducting interviews. GIS skills are desirable but not

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