

Master's thesis

Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

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# **Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats Rotterdam**

Performing urban citizenship through acts of solidarity and collective practices of repairing.

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## Introduction

With a majority of the human population living in cities or metropolitan areas, growing urbanization has become one of the most immense planetary phenomena of our times (Jaffe and De Koning 2023). Social life increasingly concentrates in cities worldwide. This phenomenon brings along pressing issues encapsulated in what is presumably the biggest-ever product of capitalism – the conglomerate of oil and tech industry, plantation ecologies, imperial politics, and extractive modes of accumulation that is often termed the Anthropocene – a geological era in which livability is threatened (Tsing 2017; Patel and Moore 2017). Indeed, dominant urbanization processes rely directly on capitalist and market-based power relations, which dictate cities' shapes and qualities (Harvey 2008). This causes diverse experiences of precarity, exploitation, alienation, and discontent to spread among city dwellers, deprived of rights to actively shape their own living environments.

Meanwhile, voices of disobedience are getting louder. People gather to re-imagine and re-shape their localities, to challenge the socio-political status quo (Benson 2023). As James Holston (2019, 121) notes, “we live in a time of extraordinary – and especially urban – rebellion in which the city has become once again the most salient site for a dramatic expansion of political life.” This may sound ominous and pretentious, but the defiance and need to reformulate cities from the perspective of living in them, rather than making money out of them, is real. The pursuit of making sense of such emergent, dispersed, often grassroots activities – which can organize collectivities to claim rights to shape the cities in which they live, in accordance with their needs and demands – has recently become a focus of interest for researchers (Jaffe and De Koning 2023, 159; Ren 2018).

Anthropology has proven to be a productive discipline in this area so far, especially due to its unique and critical capacity to connect the often granular, everyday dimensions of social life with a thorough understanding of broader processes of cultural, historical, political, and economic provenience (Shah 2017; Jaffe and de Koning 2023, 168-169). An important outcome of the anthropological work is the coinage of a term – urban citizenship – that is proving useful for capturing the transformative and political dimensions of these collective movements and actions, and giving weight to their urban context. Urban citizenship, although a subject to further critique and discussion, can be understood as a “form of association for which the making of the city is both the context and the substance of belonging, for which

making is understood as the sum of activities of residents, and for which residence is the primary criterion of membership.” (Holston 2019, 129).

However, while many studies that tackle the phenomena of urban citizenship concentrate their scope and focus on activism, protests, and emergent social movements localized in Latin America, Africa, and Southern Europe, little attention is put on such issues in Western European Cities. This thesis, thus, aims to bridge this knowledge gap and contribute to the debate on urban citizenship directly, but also by incorporating another key and relevant theme, that recently has been under anthropological scrutiny. One, that takes as its field of interest various attempts to formulate notions and practices of solidarity, that seek responses to failures of neoliberal politics and ways of going beyond neoliberal programs for organizing life in the cities. As Jaffe and De Koning (2016, 166) point out, these solidarity responses try to “develop alternative modes of cooperation and exchange that diverge from those offered by neoliberal capitalism, for instance by experimenting with a wide variety of sharing economies or forms of communal farming”. Although significantly less visible and loud, as well as leaning more towards peaceful than violent modes of contestation in comparison to rebellious movements, solidarity initiatives are no less productive in challenging the dominant power relations and offering alternatives to capitalist and neoliberal frames of governing and making the cities (Rakopoulos 2016). Moreover, their often overt anti-violence agendas constitute genuinely radical alternatives for social relations, build around care and reciprocity instead of hierarchies and coercion. Therefore, studying these initiatives closely, allows for a critical understanding of how they operate, and how they contribute to their urban political communities.

The subject of this thesis – the *Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats* (Do-It-Yourself Workshop) located in Agniesebuurt, Rotterdam – is one such solidarity initiative, that can be conceptualized as seeking responses and alternatives to neoliberal modes of framing and organizing social life in an urban context. The main idea behind the workshop is to offer free access to tools, space, materials, knowledge, and help to anyone who wants to repair or build something – predominantly a bicycle, although other objects and ideas are also welcome. The Workshop is a non-commercial, donation-based space run by a collective of volunteers, who through their time and engagement shape and maintain its existence. The Workshop operates as a squat since 2009 and, due to evictions, has changed its location several times, yet it always remained within the boundaries of Rotterdam. Currently, it is situated in a shipping container, standing in a small green park, between residential buildings on Baanierstraat. In

the spring of 2022, the collective started a community garden at the back of the container, where they planted herbs, vegetables, and flowers. Besides vegetation, it provides possibilities for learning and experimenting with urban gardening, and as such extends the scope of activities taking place in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. The garden, although a parallel project to the workshop and part of my research location, is not, after all, an important element of this text. Since I conducted my research during a period of negligible garden activity (February to April 2023), the vast majority of my fieldwork was devoted to the workshop.

What therefore constitutes the central focus of this text is an attempt to answer the following main research question: “How is urban citizenship articulated and performed in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats through acts of solidarity and practices of repairing?” The question is primarily about urban citizenship, which, in the perspective I have adopted, I treat as a non-state-centric formulation of citizenship, that aims to conceptually capture ways in which people organize themselves in grassroots political communities, strongly embedded in an urban context (Crossan et al. 2016; Holston 2019). Moreover, it puts forward the multiplicity and intermingling of possible citizenships, for the city can never be treated as unity, rather a heterogeneous and dynamic assemblage of actors that continuously overlap and interact with each other (Lazar and Nuijten 2013).

Throughout the thesis, I approach this central question from angles of practice and solidarity. The former situates my effort in that tradition of anthropological studies of citizenship that, while criticizing the formal-legal conceptualizations as too narrow, arbitrarily universalizing, and inadequately abstract (Ong 1996; Rosaldo 1994), have laid the groundwork for research that operationalizes citizenship(s) as something that is done and practiced, therefore the articulations of which take on a performative, not prescriptive, character (Isin 2002; Lazar 2013; Yuval-Davis 1999; 2011). I use this angle to operationalize the main question by looking at the relationship between repair and urban citizenship, specifically through the lens of the learning together approach, which constitutes the central agenda of the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. The answer builds upon a description and analysis of the characteristics of the learning together approach itself, which, as a radical epistemological proposition, seeks – through experiments with repairing bicycles – alternative, non-violent forms of knowledge production and exchange.

The second angle – that of solidarity, being a normative slogan on the one hand (Rakopoulos 2016), and an analytical concept on the other (Rozakou 2016) – grasps DHZ as a

bundle of ideas and practices, aiming for a radical reconfiguration of social relations. A reconfiguration that touches upon both particular interactions as well as forms of political organization of collectivities. By tracing how learning together practices cohere and constitute Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats as a solidarity initiative, I pursue to capture and understand the processes of inclusion and exclusion of individuals in/from the initiative – a theme that has recently become central in the broader academic and specifically anthropological debate around solidarity (Bauder 2021; De Jong and De Koning 2017; Giani and Gelepithis 2022). My contribution here is a detailed analysis of solidarity criteria of belonging, which, starting from objections to hierarchy, coercion, and segregation, introduce action-based and participatory forms of both inclusion and exclusion.

Therefore, this thesis is situated at the intersection of urban anthropology with citizenship studies and anthropology of solidarity. Adopting a practice-oriented perspective, merged with an epistemological inquiry into learning together approach on one side, and a socio-politically vigilant analysis of solidarity initiative on the other, allowed me to create a multi-angular account of urban citizenship, that has not yet been academically explored. I hope my contribution will prove helpful to further research in the respective, above-mentioned domains, as well as encourage interdisciplinary cooperation, that could take this thesis as a foundation.

## **Research location and participants**

To engage with such concerns ethnographically, I conducted fieldwork in and around Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, between February and April 2023. The workshop is located in the Agniesebuurt in Rotterdam Noord, in a small, green park in between residential buildings on Baanierstraat. The workshop operates from a container, situated on a squatted fragment of land, with a community garden operating at the back of the container. I chose this location because the workshop is a space where all the elements, central to my research questions, gather, and intersect. It functions precisely as a place that offers people access to the resources needed to repair. Moreover, it is a non-commercial, donation-based initiative, run by a collective of volunteers that work along the virtues of solidarity and mutual aid. Lastly, the workshop's situatedness in one of Rotterdam's central neighborhoods, combined with the fact that Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats remains the only long-lasting and still operating squatted social

center in this city (Dee 2018), thus a place strongly embedded in radical ideas about both dwelling and governing the city, made it a perfect location to learn about subtleties of transformative urban citizenship.

The research participants I focused on primarily, were the current volunteers who form the collective and run the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. This group of people turned out to be well suited for this study, because they were most tightly connected to the phenomena, taking place in the workshop. In consequence, they were the ones who constructed the general frames and the small details of how the workshop functions, both in the very practical layers and as a hub for giving meaning to urban citizenship. They were the ones who set the framework for how solidarity was enacted, understood, and formulated within the workshop. My secondary focus was directed at both the visitors of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats as well as no longer active volunteers and collective members. The former enabled me to situate my research process in a broader urban context of Rotterdam through encountering those of its dwellers, who happened to pass by and make use of the workshop. The latter provided me with a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how the workshop has changed over time.

## **Methodology**

Throughout the fieldwork, I used and relied on ethnographic methods. My main tool was participant observation, defined as a method “in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (De Walt and DeWalt 2011, 1). The core elements of the method were therefore the long duration of the research, which allowed me to build rapport, the focus on relations and dynamics, holism, and flexibility, as well as negotiations between proximity and estrangement (Shah 2017, 51). Indeed, throughout my fieldwork, I participated not only as a researcher-outsider, but I stepped into the role of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats volunteer, which enabled me to meet people who form the collective from the insider and horizontally aligned position, thus dive into the everyday interactions and details of participating in the collective.

Working as a volunteer gave me a hands-on perspective to engage with, experience and observe the routines and practices of repairing (Downey 2014). Encountering how skills and knowledge of such practices are produced and shared, informed me directly about the

learning together approach. Moreover, being and working together with other volunteers gave me multiple opportunities to observe, talk about, and experience how they express their thoughts and emotions, how they relate to each other, how they relate to the city of Rotterdam, how they articulate their understandings of urban citizenship and solidarity, what meanings they give to the workshop, what concepts and discourses are present in daily communication. Finally, volunteering served as my contribution to Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, in exchange for the possibility to conduct fieldwork. I already had some mechanical knowledge and experience with repairing bicycles, as I worked as a bike mechanic in the past, which situated me in position to productively engage with the repairing practices.

Besides participant observation, I conducted ten individual, open-ended, and semi-structured ethnographic interviews with, either currently active volunteers or past members of the Doe-Het-Zelf collective. According to Karen O'Reilly (2005, 137), "Ethnographic interviewing goes on all the time and can take the form of spontaneous interviews, informal chats and questions asked on the spur of the moment during participant observation. However there often comes a time when an ethnographer wants to take someone aside and ask some things in a quiet, comfortable setting." So did I, which therefore gave the participants opportunities to verbalize their experiences, thoughts, and emotions, related to the workshop, the collective, urban citizenship, and the other elements at the core of this research in a more distanced and reflexive ways. Since the interviews were conducted with elements of the oral history interview method (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2013, 15), I was also able to obtain more in-depth expressions, and contextualize perspectives and narratives of both the current and past themes.

The last method I relied on, was extensive note-taking. For me, it was a key element of ethnographic research methods, as it is where the observations, comments, ideas, and seeds of understanding and interpretation, that emerged in my consciousness during participation, eventually landed and materialized in a stable form. Note-taking was an essential foundation for grasping the processual character of fieldwork, for being able to navigate and gradually move on to the next steps, especially for most of the analytical aftermath, which eventually led to the writing of this thesis.



## **Ethics and positionality**

An elementary ethical aspect of conducting this ethnographic research was obtaining informed consent from research participants. Since the fieldwork was a dynamic and variable process, obtaining such consent was not always a single act, but a process of informing participants and negotiating. It usually took on a form of discussions about aims of the research, protection and subsequent usage of the materials, anonymity of participants, and my obligations towards Utrecht University. I consciously did not use any written declarations, as I consider informed oral consent based on transparency, mutual understanding, and trust between me and the participants way more meaningful than any piece of paper can provide. That is because such approach places the consent in the consciousness and memory of a given participant, instead of some external archive of files, thus enables them to be directly causative over the consent. On top of that, I informed participants of their right to withdraw consent at any time.

Since Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats operates as a squat, and squatting in the Netherlands is a criminal offense, the anonymity of the participants made a key issue. To protect the identity of the participants and thus ensure their safety, we jointly concluded that it was necessary to anonymize them as fully as possible. As a result, all names appearing in the text are pseudonyms. Moreover, unless it was necessary for the making of a scientific argument, all other characteristics and contexts specific to the person invoked are omitted, and their presence in the narrative is limited to their actions in specific situations.

To ensure that conducting the research was not an extractive process, I decided to step into the role of the volunteer. In this way, I took on the responsibilities of working in the workshop, the fulfillment of which contributed its functioning. Furthermore, I wanted the participants to actively participate in the research not only as personified sources of data to be consumed by the scientific grinder of information, but as critical knowledge makers, meaning people with whom and from whom I learn. Such an approach, aimed at including participants as co-authors of the research, made it crucial for me to actively engage with their needs and expectations, that is to identify their ideas and together explore possibilities for incorporating them into my anthropological work. The most visible outcome of this, was translating a desire for capturing oral histories about the past of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, expressed by current volunteers, into a second part of Chapter 1, which merged these stories into a narrative on workshop's past.

## Structure

The core of the thesis consists of three chapters. The first focuses on presenting Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats as a place, an initiative, and a collective, to build a clear foundation for the later, more analytical chapters. Being aware of the ephemeral character of the workshop, which effectively eludes simple classifications, I decided to frame it by combining the perspectives of the various research participants. The result is a multi-vocal narrative, which presents the heterogeneous and changing nature of the DHZ. To complete the present-day overview, the second section traces the DHZ's past, from the emergence of the idea, through the squatting of first place in 2009 and subsequent events, to its status in spring 2023.

Chapter two focuses on learning together – an approach to the repairs carried out in DHZ, according to which, instead of doing them for visitors, volunteers repair with visitors, because the goal here is not the fix itself, but a process of collective learning. For many volunteers, this approach is the essence of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. Looking at the various repair practices I participated in during the fieldwork, I describe and analyze the learning together, conceptualizing this approach and the epistemological postulate it entails, as the foundation of both solidarity and urban citizenship performed in the workshop.

Chapter three revolves around the main research question. It follows an argument, that the functioning of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is directly related to the learning together, as characteristics of this approach glue the collective together, and shape both actions and meanings, embedded in the initiative. Moreover, because acts of solidarity, that emerge from and around collective practices of repair, allow residents of Rotterdam to actively participate in DHZ, they become accustomed to the prefigurative urban citizenship inherent and performed in the DHZ. In consequence, this urban citizenship – directed at, on the one hand, the objection to violence, hierarchies, and neoliberal frames of both city-making and education and, on the other, the encouragement of participation, dialogue, collective creativity, and consensus-based decision-making – invites Rotterdammers to undergo a transformation from atomized consumers of the city to engaged, integrated, empowered urban citizens.

## Chapter 1: Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a closer look at what the workshop is – as a place, as an initiative, as a group of people, but also as a story about the transformation of a certain irreverent and lively idea into action. Given this, it will also be an attempt to talk about where the workshop came from and how it took its current shape. What happened along the way, what problems it brought, and what consequences it gave rise to. The thing is, there is no one way here. If someone already insists on sticking to the notion consisting of lines, I suggest seeing the workshop as a dense tangle that does not maintain a fixed form for a particularly long time, but shows a sincere desire for, perhaps unhurried, but continuous alternations. A peculiar tangle of paths, and walking along it are the bodies, voices, characters, intentions, objects, and life stories of people who have imprinted or left their contributions in the workshop. Many of these people could tell significantly different stories than mine. Some would probably face dilemmas of what variant or angle to present these stories from. Only some of them I had the opportunity to talk to, to get to know their perspectives. Therefore, what I present below I prefer to consider a riot of stories and histories – selected and processed by me, from what the patchy messiness of lived and narrated experiences offered. The result is only one of many multivocal and possible variants of the workshop's story, the intention of which is by no means to exhaust the threads, but to familiarize the reader with the workshop and encourage them to learn about its subtleties in the following chapters.

Concerning the conceptual framework of the thesis, this chapter engages with the concept of urban citizenship. Through presenting different meanings and narratives people attach to the workshop, as well as a conjoined story of its functioning, I take a closer look at three different layers of the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats – place, initiative, collective – with an intent to capture how they interrelate in processes of performing and articulating urban citizenship. This question takes into account not only dynamics between the three layers, but also how they related to broader urban politics within Rotterdam, over time of the workshop's up-to-date existence, that is between the years 2009 and 2023. The chapter consists of two sections. First I begin with delineating the current workshop, by means of merging multivocal accounts into a single narrative, which provides a nuanced understanding of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats as a place, an initiative, and a collective. Building from there, I argue that urban citizenship, performed in the workshop, resonates with David Harvey's formulation of the right to the city (2008), by collectively influencing and interfering broader city-making

process, thus also renegotiating how the city makes its citizens. The second section dives into the past and presents a story of the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats from the initial idea, through various turbulences with its implementations, to the current situation. This, together with the former section, provides a detailed account of how DHZ negotiates its autonomy with those who hold power over Rotterdam. Therefore, it adds to the debate on urban citizenship a proven example of how it can be performed beyond market-based forms of organizing life in cities, through collective initiatives that object monetarization of their actions.

### **Place, initiative, collective**

What, then, is the workshop? The answer, I contend, depends on who is asking and who is answering. Let's suppose, for the outset, that someone who has never been to the workshop asks someone who has already had a look, maybe even used a few tools and a little help. The person can then answer:

“Listen, it's such a place that you can come there with your bike and fix it for free. If you don't know how to do it, it's no problem, because there are people out there, I think volunteers, who will help out, show you, teach you. It's a little chaotic there, maybe a bit weird, I don't know. People are super nice though, open, helpful. Overall, a great place. Once I came there just for a moment. I wanted to ask if they had any saddles, because mine was uncomfortable. In addition to a saddle, I also got a cup of tea, and all in all, I spent half an evening just sitting there and having conversations.”

Another person with a slightly different experience might answer the same question as follows:

“It's a free workshop. Ok, there is a box on the door and you pay how much you want, but you don't have to. If you don't have money or you just don't want to, it is still ok. You can also pay with your phone, there is this QR code next to the box. It is mainly a bicycle workshop, but the first time I happened to come with this small commode where I wanted to fix a drawer, and I didn't have this specialty wrench. They had one, so it went smoothly. Just a great place when you want to fix something, but you lack tools or space. Then I came with a bike in which the gears stopped shifting, but they told me that repairing it is a bigger deal, because you have to take the whole

hub apart, maybe replace something, and there are a lot of parts there and so on. It's complicated and takes time so to say, and it was already late. So well, nothing came of it eventually, but at least I know what the problem is. Interestingly, when I asked later at a different bike shop if they repair such hubs, they told me that it depends, but usually it does not calculate and they recommend just buying a new wheel. So I said thanks. I ride as it is, because it works. It spins well. Ok, there is only one gear, the others don't shift, but it doesn't bother me much. Certainly not enough to buy a new wheel.”

Yet another person might answer:

“Don't even get on my nerves man! A neighbor told me that there is a cheap bike shop there and that they sometimes repair for free. As if it was run by the gemeente or something. Anyway, when I came there, one of them dudes told me that I had to fix it myself, because they wouldn't do it for me. He showed me where the tools were. Literally man, swear to god! What kind of shop is this then, you know what I mean? If I wanted to fix it myself I wouldn't look for a professional, would I? Also, it's not even a proper place. Like, it's in this tiny little container, so there is not even a way to go inside, so they spread out in front, on the grass or on the sidewalk. Misery and waste of time.”

All of the above statements prove to be accurate in their own way. They undoubtedly describe the workshop, moreover, they show that what it is or is not depends largely on the mix of expectations and experience. The workshop is multifunctional. It is also indeterminate. Sometimes it turns out to be a place that serves the purpose of visitors, at other times not quite, and at yet another time just the opposite, nevertheless each such situation defines it, adds someone's line to the contour. Everyone can add their line. The most visible ones, however, are the work of volunteers, so now let us suppose that someone who has never been to the workshop asks a volunteer: What is this place?

“So the workshop itself is like a physical space. It's a shipping container next to a small park in Rotterdam. The shipping container next to it has on one side a terrace, which we might want to build into like a full covered house, and on the other side there is a community garden where people come to do the gardening and grow things. Yeah, so that's a physical part of it. In the container, it's a small container, we have a

lot of spare parts, mostly bicycle parts, we have the electricity, we do have a workbench to work on, some stands and lots of tools to fix bikes. Maybe not always the best ones but you can do the job. Ok, not everything but you can certainly fix bikes and other things. So that's a bikeshop itself and then I think the idea for this is that we are a collective of people, maybe like 15, it's very loose I would say, some are more committed some are less committed to spend their time in the workshop. Currently, we open once a week. It's a set time, every Tuesday, from 6 to 9, and in that time volunteers are trying to help people fix their bikes or provide that space and tools, if people already know how to fix their bikes. Also, if someone wants to make an appointment in between and reaches out, we try to help, if we have time. Also for many people it is a kind of platform to connect. Here there are a lot of things shared about the squatting scene in Rotterdam but also more broadly, you can build connections and meet other people through it.”

I would like to reiterate those three layers, mentioned in the first paragraph, of which the answers to the question of “What Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is?” consist: space-place, people-collective, action-initiative. In the above volunteer's words, the first two layers were clearly indicated. First, he described the physicality of the space, then he characterized the group of people associated with the space. Although the third layer was not explicitly mentioned by him, it was present in almost every sentence, whenever he said what happens in the space and what people can do in it. This rather trivial observation is meant to build the ground for a hermeneutic thesis – a proposal for perceiving and understanding reality, whose task is to work within the narrative of this chapter, for the sake of its coherence and clarity. I do not intend to pack it with some truth about reality. I am concerned with convention, the following: I am slicing the reality of the workshop into three layers (while pointing out that this is an interpretive move and I do not think that reality as such can be sliced into layers). The relationship between these layers is, to say the least, that action mediates and binds together people and space. More precisely, actions – performed by people in space – form and transform both those people and that space. As a result of people's actions, space becomes a place, as it acquires character, quality, context, and meanings, identifiable by those who engage with the place. This interpretative reasoning is loosely inspired by Tim Ingold's idea of place-making (1993), in which he objects to capturing a place as a topographical act, arguing that such framing represents a movement of attaching meanings to materiality, thus imposes abstraction instead of realizing reality. On the contrary, he proposes to understand a

place as growing from and with activities and experiences of those who spend time there (Ingold 1993, 155). I draw on this logic, first, by recognizing the lived and experienced rather than inscriptive (topographic) character of a place, thus putting my focus on the performances of making Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats into what it is. For instance, I consider turning a shipping container (space) into the workshop (place) not an act of declaration but a conglomerate of actions. Second, I follow this logic of performative transformation along the remaining layers of DHZ (people into collective; action into initiative), however, I strongly object treating them as separate lines. People, I argue likewise, acquire – in relation to actions they undertake, places they inhabit and act in, as well as to other people they interact with – peculiar elements of their identity, habits, and attachments. Sometimes these are shared, and then it happens that people form distinct groups, for example, a collective of volunteers. The action itself is also subject to transformation. Grouped with other activities around a place and people, it can turn into an initiative. Finally, there is also the idea, as mentioned by the volunteer. I will not insist that an idea is some other layer, for example, a perpendicular one, that cuts through all others. I will only state that without ideas, all these layers and the reality relevant to them, sliced or not, would not mobilize any clear, collectively shared meanings. And the workshop mobilizes meanings. Some were put into words when I asked the volunteers what the workshop was for them, personally. They answered, for example:

“So for me it's a place to behave very I think normally, because I'm studying in a very corporate space, where I always have to kind of behave business-like I guess. Somewhat talk myself back a little bit. And in the workshop I can just basically live out and say whatever I want. I don't have to tell myself back. Of course I'm still trying to be nice and help people. Also I can build things and tinker which is something that I really like, I can get my hands dirty so for me it's often like a relief after a day full of working on my computer, having meetings and stuff.”

Or:

“It's a place for building friendships or social relations more generally. You know, like learning about other people by doing something together. To me it's engaging and fun. Also, I think that is something quite unique and rare, because there are no such spaces, where you can just walk in freely, start interactions, meet new people, but also have multiple opportunities to build further relationships with them. I met most of my friends here in Rotterdam through workshop, actually. (...) Also now, for me it's a

space for mixing people, local activities, and helping the neighborhood. It allows me to be more of a giver and sharer, which I really value.”

It can be thus said that Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is a space that, despite its limited physicality (the container is rather compact), turns out to be a place that brings people together and enables them to do a lot. Repairing, building, helping, resting, entertaining, feeling comfortable and free, creating and sharing knowledge, getting involved in collaborative and local activities, getting to know people and the city, creating community, building friendships. Since fourteen years ago the workshop turned from an idea to its implementation, it is also a place where you can get into an argument, experience disappointment, get hurt, or waste your time. How this happened – or in other words, how the different layers of the workshop formed over time – I will explain in the next section.

Before I proceed, however, I would like to highlight how the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is created through the efforts of people. This simple realization turns out to document not only the agency of the collective in creating a widely accessible space of diverse, practical, and social qualities but also an objection to the monopoly of city authorities, developers, housing corporations, and large investors on the shaping of urban space. In fact, the functioning of the workshop is a clear example, presenting how a group of people, with access and the ability to act autonomously in a space, are capable of organizing themselves and working together to build a place, that serves an important role not only for themselves but also for their neighbors and common surroundings. To act successfully and efficiently, they don't need huge capital outlays or external mechanisms of bureaucratic control, thereby proving that the city's residents are not only capable of identifying their own and their community's needs but can competently shape the city, so that it enables them to meet those needs.

In this light, Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats can be understood as a place-initiative-collective that performs urban citizenship along the lines of an anarchist reading of the right to the city (Lefebvre 1996; Venturini et al 2020; Rushton 2018). I hereby refer to David Harvey's argument that, under the dominance of capitalism, urbanization, or the process of city formation, is essentially a process of investing surplus capital in housing and urban infrastructure. Urban development is therefore guided by the interests of investors, instead of residents, and the cyclical crises, inherent in capitalist economies, deprive residents of successive capacities to shape their living space, in favor of the already-rich beneficiaries of the crisis. Moreover, since living space directly influences how life is lived in it, surrendering



control of the city to the rules of the market and the capitalist process of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005) subjects the inhabitants to the same framework. This reasoning led Harvey to reintroduce Lefebvre’s concept with an emphasis, that “The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart’s desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization.” (Harvey 2008, 23).

Urban citizenship performed in DHZ resonates with the above formulation of the right to the city in its concern with a collective claiming of power over urban space, that is exercised by its inhabitants and to be used by the inhabitants. Through squatting the place and negotiating its existence beyond the legal framework of rental and ownership rights, the container, together with the fragment of park surrounding it, are turned into a common that no longer serves the capital of its owners, but the community of its users, in which everyone can put their imprint on running and shaping Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. Harvey's formulation also allows us to see another important element of performing urban citizenship. It is not only a collective process, but also a multidirectional one, in which city-making urban citizens are also made by the city. This becomes evident in the words of the volunteer cited earlier, who described DHZ as a place where he can behave normally, in contrast to corporate spaces in which he studies. Engaging with the workshop, thus turns out to hold a possibility for liberation from spatial constraints of behavior. By claiming right to transform a space (container/park) into a place (workshop/garden), volunteers (re)gain a significant portion of influence, control, and power over the formation of their selves, because they simply have somewhere to do so.

### **Implementing ideas: the story of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats**

It all started with an idea Frank once had. It was the mid-2000s and I have no clue what kind of city Rotterdam was back then. However, Frank lived there. A young Dutchman, a bit shy and distanced, with a gaze that was both warm and scrutinizing. His growing frustration with capitalism at the time pumped him with will and the energy to act. Together with a group of people, he was involved in squatting and political activism. However, after

two years of collective action, some of these people decided to leave Rotterdam, and Frank was faced with a decision: to follow their footsteps and move out of the city, rather dreary in his opinion, where he had only recently started living, or to stay, give himself and the city a chance and try to start something new and different here? He chose option two, at the time not yet thinking of setting up a workshop. He did, however, carry within himself a love for tinkering and fixing things. Partly from his high school days, when he was more interested in computers and electronics than people, and partly from squatting, through which he learned the kind of self-reliance called autonomy, which was based on the skills of repairing houses on the cheap, getting food by dumpster diving or keeping his bicycle – the foundation of his mobility – in working order without spending much on it. He learned the latter from his neighbor, a former bicycle mechanic. With their help, Frank quickly fell down the rabbit hole of love for tinkering with bicycles.

In the meantime, he came across a new, UK-based, grassroots social movement called Transition Towns. The movement proposed a framework for community projects designed as local and resilient responses to the effects of climate change and growing economic problems. Transition Towns' starting point was a radically positive approach, treating the coming and already present crises not only as a threat but more importantly as an opportunity to re-imagine and re-build a far more livable world (Hopkins 2008, 5). The carrying force of this movement were enthusiastic activists. Among them were those who brought this idea to the Netherlands, and whom Frank met not much later. Together they became part of what is now known as Transitie Nederland, and their work and ideas gave rise to various projects across the country, such as permaculture urban gardens, Repair Cafes, or energy cooperatives (Transition Towns NL 2023).

Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats was Frank's contribution to the Transition Towns initiative and also a way to stay in Rotterdam. It was 2009, and a few of his friends were squatting an apartment in Kralingen at the time, owned – like most of the neighborhood – by Woonstad Rotterdam, the corporation that manages a vast amount of social housing in the city. Part of the neighborhood in question was intended for demolition and rebuilding within a few years. Residents were gradually being evicted, and the commercial premises were becoming vacant. Exactly like the one on Vlietlaan 46, located directly below Frank's friends' apartment. Combining the idea with the opportunity presenting itself downstairs, they decided to squat this premise and launch a publicly accessible workshop space, based on donations, and focused on sharing repair skills. The inspiration came from DIY community bike shops that

already existed in the United States and the United Kingdom, with the difference being that the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats was not going to be dedicated just to bicycles. They succeeded. It took a lot of work and quite some time to prepare the place, which had previously been a butcher shop, but as a result, the workshop's doors opened to residents, and the first item repaired turned out to be a sewing machine.

The beginnings were, as befits putting innovative ideas into practice, full of surprises and improvisations. The actual repairs were rather among the easier tasks. More complex problems involved organizational and local socioeconomic issues. The very idea of a do-it-yourself workshop took hold, in the sense that fewer and fewer people came expecting to hand something in for repair and pick it up ready in a few days, and more and more people engaged with the concept of sharing knowledge and resources, whether for more practical or idealist reasons. Some neighbors, already antagonistic to Woonstad Rotterdam, sympathized with the squatters, seeing in Frank and his workshop an ally against the common enemy. One of them decided to squat an empty place next door and create a free shop with building materials. At the time, the neighborhood was undergoing rough deprivation, but rents remained high, which left little room for conventional activities or experiments, but invited more radical actions. This, in turn, displeased some of the neighbors, gave rise to local tensions, and caused growing concern about the decline in their sense of security. Two residents were highly unhappy because they had been trying to get this particular premise from the corporation for a long time, and here suddenly someone forestalled them. Owners of nearby stores were frustrated that squatters might not pay rent, while they had to. A bicycle store owner accused Frank of unfair competition. Woonstad Rotterdam did not treat the workshop favorably either. In fact, it tried to get rid of Doe-Het-Zelf through intrigue and court cases.

Frank – who at the time strongly identified with the anarchist critique of city-making, according to which the right to the city should rest in the hands of residents, not corporate capital and subservient accountants – when a final eviction warrant hung over the workshop, decided to squat another empty space. It was located on the same street, a few numbers away (Vlietlaan 14), and owned by the same corporation. After the space was squatted, neighbors helped move furniture, tools and set up the place. It was a sunny summer day, so they ended it by having a common dinner on the sidewalk, under the spreading trees growing in front of the new workshop.

Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats at the beginning was indeed not just a bicycle workshop. A lot of furniture and electronics were also repaired there. Over time, however, bicycles began to prevail. Partly because they were easy to transport, partly because they were highly common and essential in Dutch city, partly because of Frank's passion for them, and partly on a snowball effect. As more and more of them were repaired there, the number of parts and tools with purely bicycle-related provenience grew. Consequently, the workshop began to be recognized as a bike workshop, and so it stuck. It also became a place where the neighborhood kids eagerly spent their free time. A kind of accessible space giving them freedom to endlessly do something interesting and fun together. As Frank claimed, this suited many parents, because they could peek inside through the shop's window, whenever they wanted to check if everything was ok, while not stepping into the middle of the turmoil.

The operating model of the workshop stabilized somewhat during that time. The cost of maintaining a squatted shop, that is without paying rent, was low. Donations, scavenging of necessary materials, and purchases of additional tools financed by Frank ensured smooth running. The initiative grew roots in the neighborhood, became vibrant, found its rhythms. Regular visitors began to offer their volunteer work, started taking on some of the shifts. For the most part, they were not declared anarchists. Rather neighborhood tinkerers, eager to get involved in fixing and teaching others some mechanical skills. None of them were interested in the idea of forming a collective, and they also distanced themselves from squatting and legal issues, necessary for securing the place. This was Frank's domain.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2010, the rules of the game changed. A law, introduced by the Dutch parliament, that criminalized squatting took effect (Dee 2018, Prujit 2017). When Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, after months of public campaigns and legal maneuvers meant to keep it going, got eventually evicted for the second time in June 2011, squatting and securing another location seemed far less feasible than before. Frank decided that the dual responsibility of running the place and squatting was too intense. He did undertake some talks with youth and social work organizations, who could possibly offer more stable spaces for the workshop, yet ultimately never reached any agreement. The workshop disappeared for an extended period.

It returned not until three years later, in May 2014. Nearby, although in a different neighborhood, at Burgemeester Roosstraat 45, in the building of a long-standing squat. As before, it was an abandoned commercial space. The convention also did not undergo major changes. It was still a public DIY workshop space, sustained by donations. Frank was still the

main person running and responsible for the workshop. However, the profile of the volunteers began to change, as in addition to tinkerers from the neighborhood, some young and enthusiastic people began to show up, attracted not so much by the smell of grease, rubber, and steel, but rather by anarchist ideas and their practical implementation. Some of them, nonetheless, were more than eager to learn bicycle mechanics. Although the group of volunteers kept changing – some ceased their involvement for various reasons, meanwhile others appeared – the workshop had by that time reached a high level of expertise and skill in repairing a wide variety of even rare and complicated bicycle components. It also became an important squatted social center in this part of the city (Dee 2018; Dee 2018a).

At some point, Frank began to think more seriously about moving out of Rotterdam. However, he wanted the workshop to remain in existence. He saw the place as needed for many reasons, therefore made a conscious effort to gather people, willing to take over the initiative after him. This involved time, as well as discussions about what could or should be rearranged in the organization of the workshop. The result was formation of the collective of people, who divided among themselves the responsibility of running Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. Frank parted ways with his project in 2016.

In February 2020, a fire broke out in the building next door. In what followed, the workshop was evicted due to the structural hazard of the space it occupied. In addition, several volunteers were arrested when they tried to retrieve the tools, parts, and equipment from inside the workshop, which was closed by the police. One of the options available was to move all the stuff to a container standing a few streets away. Initially as a makeshift solution, but Stad in de Maak – a foundation, which had the container at their disposal – turned out to be interested in establishing the workshop there for the long term. Volunteers were skeptical about this. Because they identified Stad in de Maak and the projects they run as activities, that encourage the gentrification of this part of the city, they feared that by agreeing to the proposal, they would in fact become complicit in the gentrification of Rotterdam. The alternative was to look for another place to squat. On the one hand, this would mean staying true to the anarchist and leftist tradition of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, and on the other, having to further face the precarity and instability, resulting from the lack of available spaces for radical or alternative social initiatives, that strive for their autonomy. The final consensus of the collective was to stay in the container. The decision was significantly influenced by the continuity of the workshop, the prospect of greater stability, the possibility of using the gentrifier's space for a genuinely local project, and the fact that the site, located partly

outdoors in a park, was physically much more open and inviting than the previously occupied indoor spaces.

Today, the workshop consistently attracts people, both visitors and volunteers. It continues to perform locally important practical and social functions. It serves long-time Rotterdam residents and newcomers. Its existence is not threatened now, particularly by eviction. Quite on the contrary, the container has expanded to include a terrace, its roof is under construction, and the horizon of the plans is articulated by the collective members with the phrases like "for longer" or "for good". However, this stability is not guaranteed by any formal contract, and DHZ's presence in the container is not based on rent-market relations but is the result of existing in a certain gray area. Stad in de Maak, which owns the site through an agreement with the Municipality of Rotterdam and a housing corporation named Havensteder, allows DHZ to use the container and its surroundings, in exchange for paying bills and performing activities that keep the space from looking empty and neglected. City and neighborhood officials act as if they haven't seen the workshop, which in no way legalizes the presence of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, but expresses permission in practice. As a result, the collective is not directly subject to the overarching directives of the owners or administrative authorities, because the non-market form of this agreement deactivates market-based tools of influence and control, such as renegotiating rent or offering subsidies that dictate spending structures. In addition, because DHZ does not pay rent, which drastically reduces operating costs, it does not need much income and all expenses are covered by donations. This makes the collective's actions only marginally guided by financial criteria.

As noted by E.T.C. Dee (2018a, 233), the fundamental problem of grassroots and alternative social initiatives in Rotterdam is the scarce supply of spaces, which is not due to a physical lack of them – depending on the district, the level of empty spaces in buildings ranges from 10.2% to 37.4% – but to a system of distributing these spaces, based on profitability criteria. This creates a situation where to gain access to a space (I am skipping the need to wait in lines of competitors and go through a multi-stage administrative procedure) an initiative should generate revenue to pay for the space, and not every socially needed activity does. In addition, not every socially valuable activity can be monetarized without significant interference with its substance. Consequently, an initiative that is not eager to conform to the neoliberal rules of city-making is doomed to collapse by eviction or exhaustive persistence against those who decide over the city. The fact that the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats has developed their niche in this system, where they can negotiate which activities are possible

and which are disruptive or forbidden, not with those in power, but within the collective and with those who live next door, adds further significance to the urban citizenship performed in the workshop. This urban citizenship establishes a firmly local autonomy that prioritizes locally specific relations over the broader framework of organizing the city. It does not recognize the supremacy of the municipality or the market but demands and exercises the right to act in accordance with those directly affected by these actions.

## Chapter 2: Learning together

This chapter, unlike the previous one, does not focus on capturing the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats as a whole. The object of interest here is an element, a subtlety that exists within the workshop. Volunteers call it learning together. This is how they term an approach to the repairs carried out in DHZ, according to which, instead of doing them for visitors, they repair with them. By helping, assisting, and enabling, volunteers aim to give visitors as much room to act on their own as possible, because the goal here is not the repair itself, but learning how to repair. In other words, the idea is not to give a person instructions on what to do with a given problem but to show them how they can actively search for the knowledge they need, as well as create it autonomously, through trial and experimentation, often having quite a lot fun along the process.

For many volunteers, the learning together approach forms the essence of the workshop, or at least a crucial pillar – one that gives tools not just to fix things, but to empower people with abilities to gain some control over technology they rely on. Taking learning together as the main theme of this chapter, I decided to capture this essence, not so much to encapsulate and classify it, but to describe and understand, in relation to the conceptual framework of this thesis, set by urban citizenship and solidarity. What resulted was an initially unintended but key argument. For I argue, that learning together, in addition to what I have briefly indicated above, includes an epistemological postulate of de-hierarchizing knowledge and finding possibly non-violent ways of producing and transferring knowledge. This postulate, while ultimately taking a largely practical form, starts from a conceptual recognition of violence embedded in hierarchical relations between a knower/teacher and a learner/follower. Consequently, it calls to act upon this recognition by seeking possibly egalitarian relations, that emerge around multidirectional processes of making and sharing of knowledge. This postulate, I conclude, holds a potential for liberating cognitive activity from the constraints of neoliberal knowledge economy (Coombe 2016; Patrick 2013), by moving away from a training-like process to an open-ended learning adventure.

What follows, I begin by recalling a sequence of events that took place in the workshop, to illustrate some of the differences between hierarchical and anti-hierarchical approaches to learning how to repair. On this basis, I briefly conceptualize knowledge – using the notions of performativity (Madison and Hamera 2005, Butler 2011, Gatt 2019) and situatedness (Haraway 1988) – as a dynamic and culturally mediated, thus socially loaded



phenomenon. I then take a closer look at this load, linking the hierarchical qualities embedded in some modes of knowledge to broader structures of violence and inequality. This closes the section on the recognition of violence. After it, a section opens on how the seeking of egalitarian forms of repairing and, more broadly, making and sharing knowledge, takes place through learning together. The chapter concludes with a proposed descriptive definition of the learning together approach, which in chapter three functions as a starting point for conceptualizing this essence of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats as a centerpiece of a solidarity initiative, that through and around practices of repairing, creates a hub for performing and giving meanings to transformative urban citizenship.

## **Ways of repairing**

Pablo, visibly out of breath, rushed into the middle of the workshop terrace letting everyone know that he had exhausted himself mercilessly while transporting two bicycles here. Once recovered a bit, he turned his gaze in my direction.

“Yo! I need your help. Can you help me?”

“I think so.” I replied with a smile, not yet having a clue what was about to come. We set up the stand and secured the other bike in it. The one that looked like it had survived a rather nasty crash.

“I don’t know how to put it back together so it’s all good and tight, you know...” Pablo began, but didn't finish because Ben – one of the new volunteers – popped out of the container with what a ready-made repair instruction in his mind, which he laid out to the slightly frozen Pablo in a couple of imperative sentences. The latter, having received such clear guidelines, merely nodded and took off without delay to search for the missing component. Unfortunately, Ben’s diagnosis was more incomplete than Pablo’s battered bike. Not wanting to complicate the situation, based on what seemed to me to be a lack of communication and mutual understanding, I decided to wait until Pablo found the actual missing component in question and got to the point where he again did not know what to do next. Then we tried to conclude what his needs and requirements were for the condition of this bike, and from there work out a feasible solution.

Meanwhile, around the corner, a little distance away, more even in the park than in the workshop, Martha was taking apart and cleaning her long-defunct rear brake. She had never done this before, so she carefully laid out the parts in the right order so as not to miss anything when putting them back together. Two weeks earlier she had managed to replace the drivetrain on this bike. I explained and assisted her then, as she learned step by step how to unscrew the freewheel, unbolt the old chain, and measure the proper length of the new one. A smile, that emerged on her slightly grease-stained face, as she noticed that installing the new drivetrain was not at all more difficult, was truly wide and contagious.

Today she no longer asked anyone for help. For she decided that repairing a brake was even less complicated, in the face of which two youtube tutorials and mastering a minor fear of the unknown should be enough to make it work again. It did! With only a little help from another volunteer, who made it easier for Martha by lending her a third hand and a few bits of advice.

The above sequence of events evokes few specific, yet diverse tensions and interplays that occur between knowledge, communication, and power. Relationships that happen to unfold around repair, and will serve as a central conceptual bundle of this chapter. Let me therefore briefly re-read the situation to illustrate and open the sphere of inquiry here. Pablo and Ben entered the very center of events in a manner that was not only loud and forceful but also demanding and commanding. There was little attentiveness in their words or gestures, whereas they managed to attract quite a lot of attention to themselves and accumulate a substantial portion of control over the situation around them. Even when Pablo didn't say anything, he made it clear by his body language that he had come with quite a problem and was more than ready to tackle it head-on, even if it required forging iron, bending rods, or any kind of effort measured in liters of sweat trickling down one's weary back. Yet ultimately, it was Ben who emerged from the scuffle in a leading position. His words brought silence and organized actions according to his directives. No wonder, since he walked out of the container as a volunteer, one of the workshop's own kind of hosts, someone associated with knowledge, expertise, and authority with conclusive potential. Someone who is trusted and listened to because they know better.

Both of these attitudes indicate, first, that knowledge can be performative, and that references to it allow for the organization of interactions and relationships between actors. Second, that knowledge can be performative in a way that activates specific hierarchies,

particularly ones where knowledge can be greater(better) or lesser(worse), and the actor who is associated with this greater(better) knowledge becomes the holder of an important tool of power – they are most probably right.

Martha's attitude, on the other hand, shows an important contrast. It introduces only a few subtle differences, but in effect tells the story of a very different relationship between knowledge and power. One in which repair is not a consequence of command-instruction (here, articulated by Ben-volunteer), subordinated to (his) expectations of effect and order, but rather a process of learning and knitting knowledge together, through intuitive experimentation with what is available. A process that does not perpetuate the power over the bike in the hands of the technological authority (here, again of the volunteer-knower) but shifts it into the hands of the person who uses the bike and is by far the closest to it, both practically and emotionally. While Ben and Pablo engaged with technical, bike-related knowledge through subordination and command, Martha tried to find her own way to a solution, integrating different resources (youtube tutorials, volunteers, workshop tools) into an experiment. Being initially unknowledgeable about her intended repair, she did not follow any external command of knowers, but took the process into her own hands, welcomed some help, and set off to try what works. On a more abstract level, this can therefore indicate that the aforementioned performance of knowledge, while undoubtedly sets hierarchies in motion, at the same time provides an opportunity to negotiate those hierarchies. It carries the potential for an overhaul of power relations, for resistance and unlearning, for playing and learning, the result of which may not only be a repaired bicycle but also a small repair of a few oppressive inequalities. This non-technical layer is indeed no less important here. Repairing against violence and hierarchies lies beneath and motivates actions at DHZ. It may not be the most visible aspect in comparison to the practical functions of the workshop, nonetheless, in the long run, it substantially contributes to how DHZ remains purposeful.

In the remainder of this chapter, I work in reference to this scene to further explore and characterize the ways of learning more egalitarian approaches to knowledge, that I came to learn about during my fieldwork. These approaches – termed learning together – depart from disobedience to instructive commands of expertise, which they render potentially oppressive. In the next section, I proceed to unpack how performances of knowledge (Madison and Hamera 2005) can activate and perpetuate hierarchical social relations and what is actually problematic with it.

## **Knowledge and violence**

The first conceptual step, that lies the foundation for recognizing violence embedded in knowledge, is a deconstruction of objectivity. Stated otherwise, a move that will enable us to see how knowledge is not transparent nor neutral, but deeply social (Mbembe 2015), meaning that a social position of a person who knows is an important aspect of not only what they know, but also how they know it, and what consequences it bears for their relationships with others. It is worth noting, however, that such reasoning is by any means necessary for practical engagements with learning together and repairing bicycles in the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. My inquiry is purely academic, in that it seeks to capture the abstract and conceptual thinking, tied with learning together, yet I contend that it is necessary for a more complete understanding of the approach.

By claiming that knowledge can be performative, I intend to point out that it is not just an abstract and static resource of the kind of repository or archive (which could be equated with affirmative knowledge), but also something dynamic and variable, present in action and interaction, both shaping it and being shaped by it (Schieffelin 2003, Hastrup 2018, Marchand 2011). I refer here to that strand of anthropology, that associates performativity not so much with theatricality or ritual distinguished from everyday life (Turner 1986), but precisely with everyday expressions and practices, by which humans articulate intentions, situations, or relationships (Schieffelin 2003, 195). While learning how to repair a bicycle brake, Martha did not engage much with rational discourse, although she did listen to a few spoken suggestions from a volunteer and watched a tutorial on YouTube. The most important phase, however, she learned by performing the repair, that is by bodily interaction between her hands, tools, and elements of the brake. In effect, Martha undoubtedly gained knowledge, for she now knows how to fix her brake, thus the repair itself can be treated as both an expression of that knowledge as well as a formation of it.

In addition to the expressive-formative character of performativity, I have in mind what Donna Haraway (1988) included in the notion of situated knowledge, that is, the relationship of knowledge to the socially constructed body-subject (Butler 2011). In that sense, objectivity, like universality and neutrality, are not qualities of knowledge as such, but the epistemological camouflage of the person affirming the knowledge in question, which

most often conceals such associations as white, male, cisgender, heterosexual, eurocentric, educated, human (Haraway 1988, 591). Simply put, what I know, how I know it, what meaning and significance it carries or performs, depends on the social position in which I came to learn or find it out and the social position from which I refer to this knowledge. Following this reasoning, if the objectivity of knowledge is largely a testimony to the privilege of the subject-knower, then all knowledge turns out to be subjective in the sense that it is never entirely impersonal, suspended in an abstract, disembodied vacuum. Instead, its quality turns out to depend on the position of the subject, person, or group associated with that knowledge (Bal and Chaberski 2021). Importantly, this deconstruction of the objectivity of knowledge does not result in a shift to ultimate relativism, in which truth ceases to exist and all judgments are nothing more than equivalent opinions. On the contrary, this deconstruction of objectivity does not arbitrarily and forcibly equate judgments or competencies with each other but allows one to see the diversity and multiplicity of knowledges, together with their spatial and social contexts. Consideration of those contexts offers the possibility of understanding how knowledge is situated, that is, how power structures and inequalities shape its meaning and actual significance.

In the workshop, thinking with concepts of situated and performative knowledge has proven helpful and relevant. This was because it is a workshop, a kind of place constructed out of mechanical-technical knowledge and materiality, which in the Western tradition are closely associated with heteronormative ideas of masculinity (Lohan and Faulkner 2004). Let's think for instance about screws, welds, cables, boxes full of bicycle parts and unidentified crap, hammers, wrenches, screwdrivers, drills, and angle grinders. These tools and other gear are undoubtedly essential attributes of stereotypical masculinity, whose socially dominant manuals scream to those who identify differently: *You don't know me! You don't know how to work with me! You lack strength and agility! Leave me before more harm than good comes from it!* In such spaces, being "insufficiently masculine" often means being out of place, and what comes along with it, having to measure up to constantly repeated orders to either conform or disappear (Holth and Mellstrom 2011). While Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, given the context of its materiality, can easily be – and often actually becomes – another such shrine to dominant patterns of masculinity, the people who co-create this space try to recognize the situatedness of technical knowledge they work with, and perform it in ways that go beyond the oppressive and patriarchal frameworks.

How do they pursue this? Generally speaking in not-too-spectacular ways based on learning. Particularly trying, making mistakes, engaging in reflection, trying again, sharing the process with others, and finally not worrying too much when as a result nothing succeeds – after all, failure on this ground means that not much has changed and the world or some small element of it is as broken as it was just a moment ago. However, to be able to intentionally influence such a state of affairs, it is worthwhile taking a step back to see and identify this brokenness, that is to understand the violence and injustice contained in it. To illustrate this, I will return to Ben – one of the new volunteers I evoked at the beginning of the chapter – because his approach to acting in the workshop suggests that Ben is in an excellent position to learn about the brokenness. First, he does not seem to be actively aware of it yet. Second, he is a young, strong, white, male, equipped with some mechanical-technical experience and knowledge, thus in the space of the workshop, finds himself (just as I do in fact) in a multidimensionally privileged position. Third, the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is a convenient place to learn.

The repair instruction Ben articulated at that moment was a blatant example of a one-way command relationship, in which he subordinated both Pablo's position and actions to his own will, making them an obedient executor of his intention. He didn't ask questions, didn't wait for Pablo's explanation to develop, let alone end. He cast his eyes over the handlebar they were holding and commanded:

"There's this little thingy that is missing. It's a kind of a nut, it looks like this. You'll have to find it and screw it to this stem, exactly here to this bolt. Otherwise, it won't hold. Every stem has one, and it's there to keep it stable. If you screw it on, everything will work."

"Ok, thanks. Where can I find it?"

"Down there, on the left is the red crate with handlebars and stems. I think they are all the same, so whichever one you take it should fit."

Let's pause here and make room for someone who could now step in and counter with a conciliatory remark that Ben, after all, wanted to help. Since he was confident that he knew how to solve the problem, he decided to convey to Pablo in a simple message, what he thought needed to be done. What was wrong with that? He meant well, he just got it wrong or maybe underestimated the problem a bit. After all, nothing much happened there, no one got hurt, all the glass and dentition remain untouched, just a little misunderstanding.

On one thing I would be able to agree with this standpoint: indeed, blood did not spill. Only, as Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (2004, 1) rightly pointed out, "Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning." Such observation also makes it possible to point out that the direct use of physical force is not at all a necessary condition for an action to be violent. In my understanding, even the threat of such force need not be overtly present, or even mayhem somewhere in a distant, barely visible implication. Instead, a sufficient condition is that the person in a position of privilege (a position of power over) omits or prevents communication. In other words, the action by which the privileged person exercises the advantage derived from their position in the structures of inequality – which in the case of the volunteer's instruction discussed here can be reduced to being the one who knows better – to enforce their own will. When I speak of communication, however, I do not mean here a broad and neutral understanding of it as an exchange of information. Instead, I precisely refer to communication based on reciprocity, understanding, and dialogue, much in line with the argument of David Graeber (2012, 116), who cogently stated, that although violence, just as any other human action, involves communication, "it is perhaps the only form of human action that holds out even in the possibility of having social effects without being communicative", because violence makes it "possible to have relatively predictable effects on the actions of a person about whom you understand nothing" (Graeber 2012, 116).

Returning to Ben, he did not try to understand Pablo's problem from their perspective, for which he would have needed communication. Thus, calling Ben's instruction an example of a one-way command relationship, I conclude that it can be seen as a violent action, primarily because of its patriarchal and superior language of command, which owes its effectiveness to being steeped in a tradition of coercion and the threat of force. That is precisely the exercise of a position of physical superiority, as engraved in culturally normalized patterns of stereotypical masculinity. Patterns that invariably support and are supported by structures of inequality, in my understanding synonymous with structural violence (Farmer 2004; Lee 2019).

This may sound overly serious, and maybe there is already an aura of punishing the culprit hovering somewhere between these words, but my intention is in fact far it. The anti-violence function of recalling and discussing this situation stems from an orientation against

violence, not against the perpetrators. Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats has little to do with judiciary. Instead, it is a place, that enables and fosters the learning of nonviolent behaviors and approaches, thus also unlearning the violent ones. As I showed above, the latter occurs when individuals choose to influence the actions of others, bypassing communication and initiating a one-way command relationship. However, the initiation of such a relationship is not equally possible for everyone. In order to effectively use such a form of coercion, one needs an appropriate social position that legitimizes the command, to a large extent regardless of its content. If this is the case, then, first, this bypassing of communication lies with the privileged, that is, those who can afford it. Second, the social position from which knowledge is performed directly affects the situatedness of that knowledge, and thus its causality and meaning. This recognition, in particular, makes it possible to conclude that the relationship between the knower/teacher and the learner/follower can take on a one-way character because it is based on structures of inequality, traditionally stabilized by violence. Here is where the epistemological postulate, embodied in learning together, draws its strength from. In the next section, I will take a closer look at how the identification of violence, provides opportunities to counter it and negotiate related hierarchies.

### **Learning together against violence and hierarchies**

Before I proceed one remark is to be made. Not everything in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is directly concerned with learning together. The workshop grows out of a need and an objection. More so even out of various weaves and expressions of both. The need to repair and take care of that, which is regularly used and run, and which consequently wears out, breaks down, falls apart – exactly like a bicycle in Rotterdam. The objection to the fact that many defects are classified as irreparable, not because repair is impossible, but because it is cheaper and faster to replace with new, and throw away the old. The objection to handing over a personal object to someone else's hands, often strangers, who look at it through the prism of a professional approach, deliberately ignoring emotional bonds of its user. The need for a place, where tools and materials are available that allow one to attempt repairs on one's own. The need for a place, where such an attempt is possible without the pressures of time and effect. The objection that such places do not exist, or if they do, they remain hidden or reserved only for an exclusive circle of initiated experts. The need for a local, open, inviting place that, while offering the opportunity to meet practical and technical needs, will also offer



space conducive to getting to know other residents, doing something together, something that is not monetizable, but valuable otherwise.

While the workshop, for many, satisfies these needs and provides answers that do not negate but follow the voice of objection, I would not be tempted to call it a solution, because the term suggests closure, something complete, while I invariably see the workshop as something blurry and unspecified, open to change, to otherness, to the unexpected, to experimentation and reinterpretation. The same happens to be true of the learning together approach, as it is far from being bound to a single, prescribed way of conduct. Of course, the workshop also takes on entirely concrete forms. It can be a place where someone has learned how to true a wheel or replace a bicycle chain. A place where someone got to know some of their neighbors, whose faces they already knew, but somehow hadn't had a chance to chat before. A place where someone had the opportunity to share their skills and, as a result, feel the joy of shared success and the meaning that comes from giving someone else help and support. All these people – varying and indeterminate, but consistently invited – concretize this place. Each time they come, their presence and action influence whether the workshop on a given day is more of a library, or a repository of strange metal objects, which then served as musical instruments in an art installation, or perhaps a covered veranda at the edge of the park, where a few people engrossed in a conversation about labor collectives and Dutch bureaucracy are enjoying a freshly made penne with tomatoes, unhurriedly sipping red wine (donated by yet someone else a few weeks earlier).

Similarly, learning together also takes concrete forms. After all, it is a practice, a performance, something existing as an activity of bodies, by no means a mere theoretical creation. Since bodies – as Judith Butler (2011) noted – perform their social positions in relation to other bodies, in order to be attentive to the inequalities between positions, it is necessary to pay attention to those involved in the performance of repairs. Moreover, if, by using the concept of situated knowledge, we have succeeded in deconstructing objectivity, then the immediate consequence is that a universal and top-down instruction on how to create and transmit knowledge in a non-violent way would be nothing more, than a replacement of one seemingly objective interpretation with another one, that only better camouflages the privileges and dominant position of whoever dictates that interpretation. In view of this, opposition and departure from violence, identically to violence itself, are closely linked to the situatedness of knowledge and the position of the knower. In other words, whether the performance of knowledge is violent or not, depends on whether a person uses their privileges

to force obedience on someone else. Privileges, though structural, are tied to a particular person, and it is up to that person to thoroughly understand their position and gradually learn how to act from it in an egalitarian way. There is no ready-made formula, saying do this or that. Such a formula would be, as I said, a violent absurdity, a top-down order defining the only rightful doing. Each volunteer, including Ben and I, therefore faces the necessity, but also the possibility, of seeking our nonviolent behavior, and learning together gives us a chance not to face it alone.

The collective character of this approach indeed comes not from the name, but from the practice. When I spoke to one of the volunteers about what he learned in the workshop, a statement came out of his mouth that aptly glued together the social and collective with the cognitive:

“Not just me, but me personally, I always saw the workshop not just as a repair shop, but with some more layers and some more meanings on top of it, which is... Yes some of them you have already mentioned like repair things that are broken instead of just trash them and buy new ones, so there is maybe the ecological and economic side of it. But there is also this collective learning, so that the place is accessible for people who don't know how to fix a bike and would like to learn and there is not really other way to learn than by trying and also make mistakes and make a mess. So the workshop for sure was giving this option, because yeah there was I don't know, all the parts could be used and also destroyed, there was no pressure to get anything fixed. So this was a good gym, a good school for volunteers but also people who attended the space to just try out and play with bikes and parts and learn together. Also for the volunteers it's like a going over this concept I know more than you so I teach you, but it's more learning together. Maybe you already have this experience of learning how to teach, but also understanding that learning is like a non-binary, not one-directional process. It's more so the person that has more knowledge is also constantly learning other things that is not specifically technical knowledge.”

Indeed, "going over this concept of I know more than you so I teach you", closely reflects my experience of learning how to learn together. Since before I came to Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, I worked as a mechanic in a bicycle workshop, I had the technical-mechanical

knowledge right from the start. The repairs happening at DHZ were already quite familiar to me. What was new to me, and therefore both difficult and interesting at the same time, turned out to be precisely communicating my knowledge to others. Accustomed to having my voice supported by the authority of a rather professional experience, I initially pursued either a command discourse of “do it this way”, or performed the repairs myself, instead of the visitors. It partially irritated me to observe clumsiness, but I also believed that if I showed someone the way I do something, it would somehow flow down to them, so they can repeat it, thus learn it.

Over time, as I observed volunteers and talked with them about their approaches to visitors and repairs, I started to realize that my practices largely imposed my perspective on others, rather than giving them space to explore and learn. While I undoubtedly helped people make repairs, the consequences of my interventions were limited to satisfaction with the technical outcome and did not encourage the search for autonomy in this technical-mechanical area. I began to be more critical of myself and pay more attention to how the fact of being a cis-gender male with extensive technical-mechanical knowledge situates me in relation to others in the workshop, what it allows and facilitates for me, and what barriers it places in front of others. The remarks presented earlier about violence and structures of inequality, stemmed partly from noticing the freedom and ease, with which I could subordinate the actions of less technically-knowledgeable people to my will. Given this, I will not preach on how to learn together. Instead, combining the personal experience of learning how to teach with the situated and thus strongly individual character of learning about non-violent forms of making and sharing knowledge, I give some insights, that I developed during the fieldwork, and that guided me toward a more egalitarian performance of my volunteer position at Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats.

The fact that I know something does not mean that I am in some superior position to the person who does not know it. Instead, this means that I have had the opportunity to learn it before, analogously to how that person has the opportunity to learn it now. What's more, we are in this now together, sharing a current and relevant context, so we can jointly shape this knowledge and way of communicating it. I don't have to repeat exactly as I was taught.

Combining knowledge with the concept of ownership, often leads to the conundrum that the one who knows, at the same time controls access to this knowledge, becomes its guardian and distributor, and the fact of its possession provides them with a certain and

desired position in the social structure. They are not willing to disclose their sources, as this would risk losing their position, competitiveness, or attractiveness. Treating knowledge as property makes the freedom to learn(teach) very difficult to exercise, it also takes away a lot of the cognitive fun and introduces unnecessary hostility into the process.

The fact that I have technical knowledge about a particular piece of machinery does not mean that I know more about that machinery than the person who uses it every day. Rather, it is their knowledge and experience that is crucial to their, often long-term, relationship with that object. My expertise, or idea, is, therefore, a kind of external intrusion, which as such can prove helpful from the user's perspective, but for that to happen, it is better to start with a question: Hey, how is it going? Can I help you somehow?

From my fieldwork experience, I also find that a person asked in this way usually decides to invite me inside what they are working with at the moment and guide me through some, in their opinion, important details, which sometimes turn out to be more curiosities, and sometimes puzzles that refuse to be solved in any way. In the latter case, if I know or have an idea how a problem can be bitten, I share my proposal and its anticipated outcome. I ask if the person wants to try, and seeing a face full of uncertainty, I try to encourage. If I receive permission I explain, show, assist, giving the person the opportunity to use what I know, keeping in mind their needs rather than my own. I don't force the person to imitate my movements. Our bodies and their motilities are different, after all. I give the person space to try, explore, fail, play, frustrate, reinterpret, do things their way. If, on the other hand, I don't have a clear idea of a solution, but my help is most welcome, then perhaps the most interesting action unfolds. We both don't know and together we face the possibility of putting the collective imagination to work. As a volunteer, I know what tools and materials are in the workshop and where to find them. This is already quite a contribution, which embeds creative potential in materiality, gives shape to intuitions, and prompts the unexpected, because when a clear script of procedures does not apply, improvisation is unleashed and objects become multipurpose. For example, when a gas-fired paint stripper turned out to be an effective tool for extracting a pair of solidly stuck bearings, as well as for heating a few tortilla slices and making a round of warm snacks thanks to it.

This is what lies behind the statement that collective learning is non-binary and not one-directional, and what I will term multidirectional, which indicates that the learning process does not follow an arbitrarily determined, one-track path of expert solution, but is

guided by both knowledge and intuition, the personal and the collective, the actual and the necessary, the currently available and the potentially possible. It does not aim for a clearly defined result. It does not uphold the maintenance of social roles and positions, but offers a chance to cheerfully and creatively poke fun at boundaries. In addition to conventional tools and sources of knowledge, such as books or memory, it leaves room for messiness, for chance, for the surprising and unexpected. Consequently, one never quite knows what will result – a fix, a more serious mess-up, an acquisition of a new skill, a discovery of a soulmate, or a new and eye-opening perspective on a matter about which we already had a rather well-established opinion – and I argue that this is what makes collective learning an act of liberation, that can give some breathing space to the essence of cognitive activity. For can one call cognitive a process where the outcome is previously known and expected? Or to put it crudely: if I already knew what I was going to learn, how could I actually learn anything? Rather, it would be a training, a kind of activity that consolidates already acquired knowledge and skills. Possibly a practice aimed at formation.

From this argument emerges a point, that allows us to see learning together in yet another light, thereby expanding the relevant contexts. Clearly, the opening toward the unexpected, as well as the objection to coercive forms of knowledge transfer, are based on a shift from a one-directional perception of learning processes to a multidirectional one. This is because one-directionality is an attribute of the hierarchical structure that determines and ensures the legitimacy of a given direction. As Fiona Patrick (2013, 1-3) notes, this structural one-directionality, aimed, on the one hand, at the production of knowledge as an economic good and, on the other hand, at the "commodification of the learner as a potential knowledge worker" (Patrick 2013, 1), turns out to be a distinctive feature of the neoliberal knowledge economy, which dominates and subjects to its rules mainly formal education, but also non-institutionalized learning processes. Looking at universities alone, it is not difficult to see (especially from a student's perspective) that only marginally are they spaces of discussion, free-ranging exploration, critical probing, or collective creativity. Instead, efforts and activities focus on cramming students into the cogs of machinery, designed to equip them with skills, useful from an employability perspective (Krause-Jensen and Garsten 2014; Noonan and Coral 2015). This machine, to ensure adequate throughput and smooth operation, motivates students to work by drawing them into a competitive measurement culture. As a result, many graduates become highly atomized citizens, shaped by an education system whose goals do not reflect their needs as individual and social human beings dwelling a

common planet with others, but are "subjugated to the needs of capital and the economy" (Patrick 2013; 6). Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, where learning takes place collaboratively, critically, freely, and starts from attentiveness to the needs of individuals, can be seen as a subversion of the neoliberal education order. Indeed, for many visitors and volunteers, it turns out to be a place where they can learn differently, together with others, without feeling the pressure of failure, but the curiosity of consequences and the joy of exploring what is yet unknown.

In conclusion, I would like to assemble the materials, observations and recognitions presented in this chapter, dealing respectively with – performativity and situatedness of knowledge; deconstruction of objectivity; the relationship between violence, inequalities and knowledge; the vigilant seeking for egalitarian and collective ways of learning; as well as the objection to the neoliberal knowledge economy – into a working definition of learning together, which will serve as a reference point in the next chapter. In doing so, I note that I do not find it universally useful to lock this approach into a strict definition, mainly because of its open-ended character, closely dependent on those who choose to engage with it. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity and precision of further reasoning, I propose the following formulation, which remains open to disruptions and critique from anyone interested.

*Therefore, learning together is a fluid and processual approach to practices of exploring, probing, and learning how to make and share knowledge in non-violent ways.*

Fluidity indicates that it is not a strict and stable approach, but one that is open to interventions, adjustments, and transformations made according to the will, need, knowledge, and intuition of those who practice of the approach. Processuality indicates that it is not focused on the effect of an action, but on the action itself, on participating and being together in the acts of finding out, constructing problems, selecting tools, and seeking solutions. Practices of exploring indicate that it is an approach focused not on following ready-made instructions, but on free-ranging and often playful movement among available resources, reaching for conventional and unconventional sources of knowledge, trying out in practice which ideas work and why. Probing indicates vigilance toward the practical (example: is it safe) and social (example: is it violent or exclusionary) consequences of actions. Learning indicates the cognitive quality of this approach, namely that the joint effort does not evaporate, but is generative and perpetuates in the form of knowledge. Making indicates, that the approach operates in realms of creating, dismantling, and remaking rather than producing.

Sharing points to the commonality of the approach to making, as well as the horizontality of knowledge transfer, not necessarily present in the concept of distribution.

As for the violence addressed through this approach, It relies in essence on, as already mentioned, "going beyond the concept of I know more than you, so I teach you.". To put it a bit more academically, the anti-violence of learning together approach is contained in attempts to move away from the hierarchical relationship between the subject who holds and makes knowledge available (who a priori knows more, that is better, so is entitled to teach) and the subject who receives knowledge (who a priori knows less, that is worse, so is obliged to trust and obey the directives dictated to them, consolidate these directives and possibly reproduce them). Active violence, present in this relationship, occurs when the knower uses the advantage afforded by the status of their knowledge and their position to impose their will on the learner. Structural violence, on the other hand, is present as whatever enables and sustains these hierarchical structures of inequality.

Moving away from violent action, given the above, can be simplified into two steps. First, being attentive to the situatedness of knowledge (Haraway 1988), with an emphasis on the specificity of the position occupied by the knower and recognizing the resulting inequalities present in the relationship between knower and learner. Secondly, to act in ways that are not based on exploiting the advantage that results from such inequalities. Moreover, treating the learning process as multidirectional turns out to be a good signpost for finding specific ways to perform the learning together approach. Ways that lend themselves to being calibrated to the specifics of the people and situations in which those people participate.

## **Chapter 3: Performances of solidarity and urban citizenship in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats.**

This chapter revolves around the main research question. Building on what has already been discussed – that is, the characteristics and history of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats as a place, an initiative, a collective (Chapter 1), and the learning together approach as the essence of DHZ on the one hand, and an epistemological postulate on the other (Chapter 2) – I return to the question of how urban citizenship is articulated and performed in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats through acts of solidarity and practices of repairing?

The answer follows the argument: How the workshop works, is directly related to the learning together. The characteristics of this approach prove to be the glue of the collective, and at the same time shape and drive the solidarity initiative, providing it with both practical and ideological senses. The former, practical ones, which mainly concern repairs and other forms of technical mutual aid, function as anchors for socialization and community integration. In consequence, the practices of solidarity performed around them, by way of collective education, allow the various residents of Rotterdam to become accustomed to the prefigurative urban citizenship inherent in the DHZ. The ideological senses, stemming from learning together, therefore contained in the urban citizenship – directed at, on the one hand, the objection to violence, hierarchies, and neoliberal domination of city-making and cognitive processes, and, on the other, the encouragement of participation, dialogue, collective creativity, and consensus-based decision-making – invite Rotterdammers to undergo a transformation from atomized consumers of the city to engaged, integrated, empowered urban citizens.

The structure of this chapter is thus determined by a conceptual trajectory: from learning together, to solidarity, to urban citizenship. The first two sections look at how learning together functions as the central nexus of the DHZ, and what it implies for visitors and volunteers. The next two sections focus on solidarity. Both the one practiced in the workshop as well as the concept undergoing academic debate, which oscillates around the question of how, within the framework of solidarity, communities form their boundaries. The fieldwork experience allowed me to speak on this issue and conclude that radical inclusivity,



articulated within the framework of solidarity, by no means abandons exclusion, but significantly transforms how and whom it excludes. This transformation relies on replacing static criteria of belonging – such as, for instance, the constructs of race, gender, education, class, ethnicity or nationality – with activity-based criteria, linked to specific actions that are either welcomed or not tolerated. Moving forward, section five situates issues of solidarity within the broader framework of the question on urban citizenship, in particular pointing out directions for prefigurative urban politics driven by solidarity. Section six closes the chapter with a look at what elements and qualities of urban citizenship can be learned in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats while fixing bicycles together.

### **Initiative binder**

In the early years of Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, what cemented and propelled the workshop was primarily Frank, particularly his commitment, ideas, and charisma. However, the anarchist principles of mutual aid, inclusivity, and aversion to hierarchy on which the workshop was based also made it a communal endeavor. A multitude of people participated in shaping and running the place. Some helping with repairs, some as donators, some helping with squatting issues, and some as visitors whose constant presence legitimized the fact that the workshop was socially needed. It's hard to overestimate the contribution of all these people, but their roles tended to be accompanying or supporting, not central. Therefore, when Frank decided to move out of Rotterdam, the workshop's existence depended primarily on whether a subject could be found, eager to take over the responsibility of running and squatting DHZ after him.

This subject, as I said in Chapter 1, turned out to be a group of volunteers who decided to form a collective and together fill the gap left by Frank's departure. This also required a reorganization of the workshop, in particular the decision-making processes. Previously taking place in the head of a single person, the procedures regarding key issues were now subordinated to the rule of consensus, namely the horizontal and dialogue-based development of decisions that, in order to take effect, must receive the approval of all members of the collective. This and other accompanying changes, while undeniably important – after all, they redistributed responsibilities and obligations, thereby formulated the DHZ anew – turned out to be secondary to something that mobilized the volunteers. The changes were a consequence,

not a cause. What was it then and how did it attract and consolidate the group to form the collective? This question has a continuation: How did the collective maintain its integrity in the years that followed, even though its composition changed over time (currently only one person from that group is actively involved in DHZ)?

The first could be answered sparingly by saying that Frank persuaded them. He got them interested and attracted. He trusted them, taught them about mechanics, engaged in running the workshop, and then gathered around a shared sense of belonging and local agency. However, in addition to Frank and his mobilizing mediation, something separate was needed, that did not evaporate and lose its meaning with Frank's absence. I contend that this something was and still is the learning together approach performed in the workshop. Of course, the individual motivations of those who choose to engage in DHZ are most relevant here, and I do not mean to deny their significance. Nonetheless, from the heterogeneous constellation of personal reasons emerges a common denominator, that is precisely the learning together approach shared by the volunteers, which invites a variety of people to interact and socialize around repairs, to help each other, to have fun, and to co-create the place and the community, that make this solidarity initiative happen.

### **Learning together – a central nexus of solidarity initiative**

As I have mentioned in the introduction, Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats can be termed a solidarity initiative. First, because this is claimed by DHZ volunteers, who refer to the notion of solidarity and reciprocity when they talk about the more conceptual layers they find in the workshop. Second, because the definition of solidarity that I have adopted not only resonates with what I have learned during fieldwork, but allows me to see, name, and relate these more conceptual layers. The former is self-explanatory: as an anthropologist, I am obliged to take seriously the concepts used by research participants – traditionally called *emic* – because they are the primary experts in the field. The latter requires more explanation.

The concept of solidarity I evoke in this thesis became a key theme within anthropology since its reintroduction in the context of responses to the financial crisis and austerity, that emerged in Greece during the previous decade. Dismantling of welfare and health care, together with strict anti-debt policies, introduced by the IMF and the EU, left many Greek citizens without access to basic necessities and raised strong anxieties about

livelihoods (Rakopoulos 2016). In the absence of state- and market-provided support, activists helped to form and organize bottom-up initiatives, build around principles of sharing, communality, and reciprocity, that aimed to mitigate the crisis (Rakopoulos 2016).

Examples – ranging from food distribution (Rakopoulos 2014), organizing housing for refugees through squatting (Rozakou 2016), to solidarity medical clinics providing free health care to those who could not afford one (Cabot 2016) – urged anthropologists to study how these emergent forms of solidarity give life to alternative economies of cooperation in the frames of scarcity, as well as how they reconfigure socio-political relations in counter to the failure of the neoliberal paradigm. The insights, provided through ethnographic studies, highlighted the complexity and heterogeneity of the initiatives (Rakopoulos 2016), thus paved a way for further problematization and analysis of solidarity in different contexts (Arab and Rasch 2017). In order to enable comparative studies, that connected different sites, scales, and temporalities of solidarity outbursts in southern Europe as well as other parts of the world, a wider understanding of the concept was needed. As Edwin de Jong, together with Anouk de Koning (2017, 12) noted, the new conceptualization had to encompass not only the idealist connotations, articulations of equality, and the local character most commonly affiliated with the concept, but also the less visible acts of solidarity that relied on self-interests, negotiations of privileges and inequalities, and establishing the boundaries of communities. What they therefore proposed was to “take solidarity to connote a recognition of communality or fellowship, and the willingness or obligation to act upon this recognition. Solidarity, in this broad definition, touches on core questions of the social: what are we prepared to do for others whom we identify as our fellows and whom do we identify as such? How are such connections and actions conceptualized and enforced?” (De Jong and De Koning 2017, 13).

Attaching the above formulation of solidarity to learning together makes it possible to see that the repairs performed in the workshop are, on the one hand, precisely such an activity derived from the recognition of communality and fellowship. On the most basic layer, DHZ recognizes the communality of the needs for resources for repairing bicycles and subsequently acts upon this recognition to provide shared access to those resources. Furthermore, the repairs are carried out based on the contention, that the knowledge required for them need not be reserved for technical-mechanical experts, but can be made, shared, and practiced as a common resource to which everyone should have the right of free access. For to deny such access to knowledge is to scrap a good that, while it could be common, in effect becomes the property of the expert and a key component of their competitiveness and attractiveness in the

knowledge market. Finally, how this knowledge is shared derives from recognizing the violent structures of inequality on which the dominant patterns of learning, and more broadly of knowledge production and transmission, are based. Learning together is, therefore, an objection to these – an idea of how to treat learning processes multidirectionally and not hierarchically – in which it comes close to many other solidarity initiatives, that offer practical alternatives to local and global orders of inequality and economies of exploitation (De Jong and De Koning 2017; Hobart and Kneese 2020).

On the other hand, performing repairs in the spirit of learning together is not only based on recognition of communality, but proves to enable and foster further recognitions of both communality and fellowship. Repairs, in addition to their practical function, carry an opportunity for conversation, thus work as an anchor for socialization. The volunteer is not a salesman who takes orders, but someone who is willing to help, and for this to take place they need to open towards the visitor. In addition to interest in the object of repair, there is space for interest in the person who brought the object to the workshop and cares about its repair. Besides the act of repair, a multidirectional cognitive activity is triggered. The volunteer and the visitor learn from each other and about each other. They need to do so in order to agree on a shared understanding of the problem, and subsequently work out a solution. Mutual understanding allows collaborative work, which then often leads to shared success. It sometimes happens that from several repetitions of such sequences, an acquaintance is formed. Consequently, it opens up new relationships (at times leading to friendships), weaving more people into extensive networks of familiarity. Collective learning how to repair brings people together, opens them up to each other, gives them a chance to recognize mutuality, and builds fellowship. It makes ground for single acts of solidarity and complex solidarity relationships.

### **Boundaries of solidarity**

Let me move on to the issue around which the academic debate on solidarity remains open, and which turns out to be an often invisible reverse of the community-making qualities of solidarity initiatives. For the creation of a community invariably requires the establishment of boundaries of that community – something to distinguish its members from others, who are not considered members or do not identify as such (Ong 1996). Despite the radical inclusivity

declared and advocated by solidarity initiatives or collectives, as well as anthropological studies of solidarity that employ vernacular definitions (Mezzadra 2020), they have so far failed to negate the trivial observation that the act of inclusion is based on a dichotomy and cannot exist without a countervailing exclusion. Therefore, I argue here, that the radical inclusivity inherent in solidarity does not deconstruct nor abandon the act of exclusion, but formulates a critique of inclusion/exclusion criteria that derive from violence, coercion, and inequality, and substitutes them with newly generated criteria. Looking at and examining them is hence the duty of the social sciences, since in these criteria, lie new and transformative approaches to what Jaffe and de Koning (2017, 13), taking up the thought of Komter (2005) rightly called "core questions of the social" – who and how do we identify as our fellows and what are we prepared to do for them?

Following the question of inclusion/exclusion I begin by determining who is included in the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats and how. To do this I will propose to classify the people I met in the workshop into groups. This will be an arbitrary simplification, which I do deliberately not to satisfy the need for order, but to highlight the inclusion and exclusion criteria practiced in the workshop. These groups do intersect, meaning that one person may be classified into more than one group.

The first group consists of people who think about political issues using predominantly leftist and anarchist perspectives. They are deeply skeptical of various forms of power, coercion, and domination, and are concerned with respect, understanding, and equality in social relations. They are attracted to the workshop by the like-mindedness of those in the collective, which corresponds to their views, and the possibility of action emerging from this like-mindedness. The second group is made up of avid tinkerers, enthusiasts of solving technical puzzles both through inventive tricks and rude hammering. These are people who associate the sound of an angle grinder with a leisurely afternoon and choose the taste of chips to go well with the smell of grease on their fingers. They are drawn to the workshop by the opportunity to freely do what they enjoy, combined with the social benefit they find in helping others, by sharing their passion and knowledge. Another group is made up of bicycle enthusiasts. Riders and builders, associated with various sub-genres of bicycle culture, particularly DIY or bike-punk alignments, although regular commuters, travelers, as well as mountain bikers also find their ways into the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. Group four is made of gardeners. Among them are absolute novices, experienced gardeners, ex-farmers, botanists, plant lovers, adepts of permaculture, advocates of greener cities, people striving for food

autonomy, and those who choose to contribute to the garden for other reasons. The fifth group is the neighbors. Residents of Agniesebuurt, for whom Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is the closest bicycle repair shop, a place where a wide variety of repairs can be done, and a local community center located in a park. The sixth group is made up of people who don't live in the neighborhood, but know about the existence of DHZ from elsewhere. They visit the workshop occasionally, mostly out of practical needs, because they have something to repair and want to do it themselves. Some also come out of curiosity, because they want to learn a little more about the place that interested them.

People classified in the above groups are included in the workshop primarily in the sense that they are welcome to be there, make use of the place and actively engage with it. Some enter more into the role of users or beneficiaries (visitors), while others enter more into the role of givers (volunteers), which to some extent differentiates the form and intensity of inclusion, but in no way makes any of them excluded from solidarity relations. Who, then, is outside? Are there any specific groups particularly unwelcome? No, there are no such groups. Instead, a placard hangs on the door of the container, indicating what is not possible in the workshop:

„No tools are loaned outside of the werkplaats and we emphasize that the spare parts should be used for working at the werkplaats, as we like the space to be more of a workshop than a take-away shop. The volunteers are here to help for free, not to provide a paid service (but we love to help!), and they are entitled to refuse access or ask people to leave in case they don't behave respectfully towards others or the volunteers. No racism, sexism, or homophobia, and please be aware of the space you take up (especially the know-it-all dudes!).”

This short announcement makes it clear what is not accepted in the workshop, and – as is not hard to see – this is about activities, not about classifications of people or their affiliation with any groups. Even the know-it-all dudes in question are defined by activity. It doesn't matter who they are or how they identify. What matters is what they do and how they do it. What is also noteworthy, is that the request formula makes the prohibition an incentive to move away from violent and hierarchical ways of sharing knowledge, and additionally informs that Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is a place to learn about different ways. The same is true of the division of welcomed people into the groups I presented above. The inclusion of these people within the DHZ (as well as my arbitrary classification) is not based on whatever

their status or social positions are. Instead, it is action-based and performative, since it depends on what they do and how they do it, not how they identify or are identified.

I, therefore, propose the following reasoning: the solidarity criteria of inclusion and exclusion in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats – in other words, the criteria for recognizing communality with others and building on that basis a willingness to act for and with those others – take on an action-based character. To be included in this solidarity initiative, one must agree and be open to the learning together approach. This consent, however, is not a formal declaration, but a practice. It is also, like learning together itself, multidirectional, in the sense that it is not given by any authorized body but lies with each person consensually participating in a given situation.

On the part of those seeking inclusion in this solidarity initiative – whether as visitors or volunteers – the decision to open up to the learning together approach implies a sequence of acceptances, occupied by corresponding resignations. First, acceptance of consensus and dialogue-based decision-making, requiring abandonment of the practice of imposing one's will on others. Second, acceptance of multiplicity and equality of diverse perspectives on the same issue, requiring abandonment of the pursuit of the only correct and best solutions. Third, acceptance that in DHZ the technical aspect of repairs is not the only important one, let alone the most important one, and that the social realm around repairs is equally important. This requires abandoning strict expectations about the technical quality of repair outcomes and letting go of the requirements of professionalism typical in client-vendor relations. Fourth, acceptance to recognize the peculiarities and problematic nature of one's own position and the privileges associated with it, coupled with a willingness not only to educate oneself about them, but also to identify and give up the active exercise of one's privileges in interactions and relationships with others.

Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats is therefore an initiative and collective that excludes people who are not eager for such acceptances and resignations. People who are unwilling to open themselves up to the learning together approach. Since, these acceptances are performative, not declarative, meaning that they are about continual effort and learning (also by making mistakes), there is no arbitrary nor permanent exclusion. On the more conceptual level, it indicates that the radical inclusivity of solidarity is not a single act or declaration, but a work in progress and a learning process. Herein lies the contribution to the academic debate around solidarity: what is specific and differentiates solidarity from other concepts of organizing

social relations are precisely the performative forms and criteria for including and excluding people in/out of communities. Solidarity inclusion/exclusion does not take place in relation to universalized, static, external categories like race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, class, species, or education. Solidarity inclusion/exclusion takes place by noticing concrete mutualities and asking questions about how specific individuals can act in relation to each other, in relation to larger communities, and to what is common for these communities. Thus, these are questions not from a ready-made questionnaire, but situated questions, directed at specific and differing individuals, about how they can and want to participate in a community. Moreover, since declarative or formal membership is absent here, these questions are just as much applicable to already included participants. Returning to the initial problem, it can be therefore said that the reconfiguration of the criteria for inclusion in the community inherent in the phenomenon of solidarity is to make them dynamic and functional. In other words, ones that allow the boundaries of a community or initiative to be determined through actual dialogue and action, not identification or classification, thus avoiding arbitrary selection and substituting it with egalitarian negotiations.

### **Urban citizenship within and around Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats**

If the burning academic question about solidarity is how it relates to practices of inclusion and exclusion to/from communities, how it contests dominant criteria of belonging, and how it thereby reconfigures social relations, then in a broader sense, it is also a question about how people organize themselves and live with each other in political communities. This is precisely the domain of citizenship studies, which already more than 20 years ago moved away from treating the concept of citizenship only in the context of the formal-legal status of an individual, defining their relationship with the state (Caglar 2015, Roy and Neveu 2023), in particular contracting the interchange of rights and obligations between individuals and nation-states (Lazar 2008). Contemporary citizenship studies is a broad and interdisciplinary domain that is unified by, among other things, an interest in how people live with each other in political communities, both in perspectives focused on formal and institutional aspects, and perspectives that treat citizenship as practiced and performative (Lazar and Nuijten 2013). This heterogeneous academic assemblage, grown around a single concept is, as Nira Yuval-Davis (2016) noted, a fairly faithful representation of the fact that citizenship is both



formulated and performed in multilayered ways, as individual citizens most often live in, identify with, and belong to multiple and overlapping communities.

The perspective I take in this text focuses on the practices of citizenship and engages in dialogue with those researchers who operationalize the concept as processes of subordination and/or empowerment (Holston 2009, Isin 2009) as well as those who seek non-essentialist accounts of citizenship that are sensitive to specifically local variables (Crossan et al. 2016; Schwiertz and Schwenken 2020, Morrison 2023). Here, this primarily means making a zoom-out and recognizing that the immediate surrounding of the workshop and its relevant domain of political is the city of Rotterdam. The concept of citizenship I use is thus specifically urban (Bauder 2016, Isin 2012), and the question I pose using it is how urban citizenship is articulated and performed in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats through acts of solidarity and practices of repairing.

In doing so, it is important to note several specific ambivalences shared by solidarity and citizenship. Both concepts constantly balance between emancipation and subordination, both touch on liquid potentialities and static structures, and finally, both can serve as analytical optics as well as normative slogans. Nonetheless, neither is stable and perfective, and a practice-oriented perspective suggests treating both concepts as performative articulations of prefigurative urban politics – something that may not be achievable, but is recursively feasible, much like "democracy to come" (Derrida 2005).

These politics grow as responses. First, to the disintegration and compromise of the "container model of society" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), which continues to naturalize the social "as a political, ethnoracial, sociocultural and territorially bound community" (Jaffe and De Koning 2017, 14), while the common experience makes us treat these categories as external tools of exploitation, segregation, and domination, rather than fields of close reciprocity. Second, solidarily enacted urban citizenship responds to the neoliberal production of atomized citizens, which constructs urban residents as consumers of the urban economy, bound by market relations of competition, with which it simultaneously intensifies precarity and antagonism (Wrenn 2014). Since the answers formulated in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats are not definitive, but open-ended and exploratory, I propose to treat the workshop as a hub for the experimental production of practices and meanings of urban citizenship. In what follows, I will present some practices of solidarity urban citizenship that

can be enacted and learned through and around repairing alongside the learning together approach.

### **Learning together the practices of urban citizenship**

Because the repairs in the workshop are done together and require the participants to be attentive to each other, each such activity fosters a mutual recognition of people who initially have little in common, facing an apparently broken object, and thinking together about what they can do about it. Any repair, therefore, requires identifying and understanding each other's needs and capabilities, and then factoring them into the decision of what to do and how to do it. This is an excellent exercise in egalitarian dialogue, between people who do not know each other, often radically differ but turned out to share a common cause. A dialogue that helps break stigmas, indifference, and isolation, and fosters integration through mutual comprehension.

Taking it a step further, along the desire to actually make repairs, one arrives at a fairly typical *Doe-Het-Zelf* practice: looking around and rummaging through all sorts of boxes and crates of which the container holds far more than might appear. Indeed, the strongly anti-consumerist attitude of the volunteers creates a situation in which the purchase of a new component is scrupulously avoided. It is not treated as a solution but as a last resort. Solutions are built from what is currently available. Shortages are cured by seeking alternative uses for tools and parts. Barriers of the unknown or inaccessible are crossed by trying, observing the effects, and calibrating further attempts. Foreheads wrinkled in puzzlement then smooth out, and lips that express excitement say for example: "We don't have such a professional press for bearings, but I think I know how we could install it with a piece of wood and a hammer. Would you like to try?". Indeed, such explorations are an exquisite lesson in attentiveness to the environment (social and material), the ability to observe, analyze and combine what is needed with what is locally available, through creative interventions and bold imagination. They thus equip citizens with the ability to work out solutions through locally embedded cooperation, rather than by consuming ready-made, external models.

Before arriving at a solution, however, one goes through a stage of identifying and formulating the problem. In the case of bicycle repair in the spirit of learning together, this requires recognizing that the opinion of the person who actually rides the bike is at least as

important as that of someone knowledgeable about bicycle mechanics. Practicing this often means encouraging people to get past the "I don't know much about bikes" barrier and in their own words tell what is wrong and how they would like their bike to work. On a more political level, it's a movement that communicates that the right to define problems should not only lie in the hands of external, disciplinary experts but first and foremost in the hands of the people who experience the problem. In doing so, the expert is not arbitrarily redundant, but their role should be to help diagnose and then look for and implement solutions, not to impose them.

In turn, this cannot be done or implemented without communication, because its absence implies coercion, as I discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The communication practiced in the DHZ, not only regarding repairs, is geared toward finding non-violent forms. Since finding them requires a person to understand their social position and the privileges associated with it, the whole process is based on learning how social inequalities shape specific human interactions, what is violent about it, and how to act differently. Importantly, this education does not take on the form of assimilating universal laws but encourages those participating to learn about themselves in relation to others. It is also education through practice and reflection on it. Repairing bicycles turns out to be an excellent training ground for this, firstly because the highly masculinized technical knowledge turns out to be the domain of non-trivial challenges to flush it out of coercion and hierarchy, and secondly because the possibility of serious harm to others is quite negligible here.

The skills of non-violent communication built through learning together obviously find applications beyond bicycle mechanics. In the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats itself, they are an important component of decision-making processes, both the more formal ones, when the collective gathers for a quarterly meeting to discuss and consensually decide on currently important issues, and the smaller, partisan, situational ones. Consensus not only solves the problem of the majority outvoting the minority, that is, ignoring or subordinating the most vulnerable individuals and groups, but also – unlike decision-making systems based on competition between different "selves" – builds an ethic of desiring the participation of others (Spade 2020, 145). Since, in the collective, any person present or interested can block a decision, everyone sincerely wants others to feel heard, satisfied, and accept the decision that has been worked out.

Exercising and practicing such processes in a relatively small group makes its members aware of, and teaches them about, the political procedures available for organizing

communities and collective initiatives, so that people actively participate not out of fear of coercion or a hierarchical sense of obligation, but out of a desire to work together on something meaningful. Moreover, this combined with the fact that Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats does not belong to anyone in particular, but is a common good determined by the collective and visitors, makes the distribution of duties and responsibilities happen not on the basis of coercive directives, but on a mutual understanding of willingness, ability, and capacity. Such bottom-up and intrinsic motivation makes people willing not only to feel responsible but to actively take this responsibility and care for the workshop as a whole, not just some private section of it that belongs to them.

Likewise is the case with conflict, inherent to group activities. As Spade (2020, 145) notes, “working and living inside hierarchies deskills us for dealing with conflict. We are taught to either dominate others and be numb to the impact of our domination on them or submit with a smile and be numb to our own experiences of domination in order to get by. We learn that giving direct feedback is risky and that we should either suppress our concerns or find sideways methods to manipulate situations and get what we want. We are trained to seek external validation, especially from people in authority, and often have minimal skills for hearing critical feedback, considering it, and acting on what is useful.”. The workshop's prevailing ethic of openness, transparency, and dialogue promotes approaching conflicts with a willingness to first reach a mutual understanding, then collectively define the problem, and only on that basis begin the search for solutions that can provide consensus. Not coincidentally, these three stages coincide with the previously described model course of repair at Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. The anti-violence foundation of solving technical problems through the learning together approach is also the foundation of conflict resolution, hence it is not surprising that the two practices take similar shapes. Mastery of building and handling them, meanwhile, is a key political attribute of an urban citizen, first because conflict is capable of subverting and shattering even the most determined initiative, and second because it is inevitable, especially in cities, where the density of differences and physical proximity force residents to interact.

It is therefore clear that the solidarity and learning together practices of the workshop build an ethic of egalitarian participation and integrate different people through shared activities. They teach dialogue, understanding of others and the environment (both material and social) as well as cooperation in defining and solving problems. They support the development of non-violent decision-making and organizational processes, break down

stigma, and make differences and the unknown something interesting instead of something to be feared. They lend themselves, therefore, to an exercise in normative and prefigurative political practices that equip city residents with critical skills through which they can undergo a transformation from consumers of the city to engaged, integrated, empowered urban citizens.

Moreover, this transition also transforms education itself. In addition to acquiring the aforementioned skills, learning together, as a radical and subversive epistemology, gives DHZ participants the space and opportunity to learn how to learn in autonomous, supportive, holistic, practical, and meaningful ways. This, I conclude, is a truly transformative and generative tool for empowerment. Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats embodies this tool. It is at the same time not ideal and not sufficient to affect and influence the city as a whole, but it proves that a radically different, solidarity-based space, community, and activity, is possible, and capable of long-term functioning. It gives skeptics a vivid and clear example, encountering which allows them to realize that this otherness is not at all vaporous or harmful. On the contrary, its existence is indispensable so that residents can not only reimagine the city but also create it truly habitable and livable both now and in the future.

## Conclusion

This thesis, drawing on materials collected during fieldwork in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats in Rotterdam, has explored the articulations and performances of urban citizenship through acts of solidarity and practices of repairing. By adopting the practice-oriented perspective (Ong 1996; Isin 2002; Lazar 2013) combined with the focus on solidarity (Jaffe and de Koning 2017; Schwiertz and Schwnken 2020), this study has provided a multi-angular account of urban citizenship, that contributes to the fields of urban anthropology, citizenship studies, and anthropology of solidarity.

The central research question of this thesis focused on understanding how is urban citizenship articulated and performed in Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats through acts of solidarity and practices of repairing. Urban citizenship, in this context, was conceptualized as a non-state-centric formulation that captures the multiple and overlapping ways in which people organize themselves in grassroots political communities (Lazar and Nuijten 2013), specifically embedded in an urban context, with aims at reshaping and governing their urban habitat (Holston 2019). The first main angle, concerned with practices, examined the relationship between repair and urban citizenship, specifically exploring how this relationship unfolds through the learning together approach. Learning together, as an emic term used in the workshop, signifies a central and constitutive agenda of DHZ, that – through and alongside repairing – seeks alternative, non-violent forms of knowledge-making and sharing. The analysis of the learning together approach contributes to the understanding of urban citizenship as a performative and non-prescriptive concept, highlighting the importance of practical engagement and collective knowledge-making.

The second main angle focused on the role of solidarity in shaping and constituting the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats. By exploring the processes of involvement within the DHZ, this thesis analyzed how enactments of solidarity do not abandon exclusion per se, but reorganize criteria of belonging, fostering action-based and participatory forms of inclusion and exclusion. The findings contribute to the broader academic and anthropological debates on inclusion and exclusion in regard to solidarity, providing insights into those alternative forms of social relations and prefigurative political organization, that go beyond vernacular understandings.

The first chapter revolved around the multi-vocal narrative of the workshop as a place, an initiative, and a collective. A detailed look at contemporary Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats was complemented by the history of the workshop, closely linked to the person of Frank – the originator and initiator. Analyzing ethnographic materials collected through participant observation, notes, and individual interviews with volunteers, I argued that urban citizenship, performed in the workshop, resonates with David Harvey's formulation of the right to the city (2008), by collectively influencing and interfering broader city-making process, thus also renegotiating how the city makes its citizens. Moreover, I explained how the DHZ, by creating a specific niche next to the rental property market, builds the local autonomy of its operations, largely independent of the actions of the municipality and housing corporations.

Chapter two focused on detailing the learning together approach and conclusively defining it as a fluid and processual approach to practices of exploring, probing, and learning how to make and share knowledge in non-violent ways. This was accompanied by the argument, that learning together contains an epistemological postulate. The postulate starts from conceptual recognition of violence embedded in hierarchical relations between a knower/teacher and a learner/follower. Through adopting and practicing this approach, it carries the potential for liberating cognitive activity from the constraints of neoliberal knowledge economy, by moving away from a training-like process to an open-ended learning adventure.

The third chapter builds upon previous discussions about the characteristics and history of DHZ, as well as the learning together approach and its epistemological significance, thus proceeds to examine the relationship between solidarity, learning together, and urban citizenship. There, I argued first, that the successive functioning of DHZ is directly tied to the learning together approach, which serves as the cohesive force for the collective, but also turns repairing practices into anchors for socialization and community integration. Merging this argument with the above-mentioned analysis of solidarity-based criteria of inclusion and exclusion, I concluded, that the practices of solidarity, facilitated through learning together and collective repairing, enable Rotterdam residents to embrace the prefigurative urban citizenship enacted and performed in DHZ. This form of citizenship opposes violence, hierarchies, and neoliberal dominance, while promoting participation, dialogue, collective creativity, and consensus-based decision-making.

In conclusion, the acts of solidarity and practices of repairing – performed in the Doe-Het-Zelf Werkplaats, by means of the learning together – foster egalitarian participation, mutual aid, and integration among diverse residents of Rotterdam. Through shared activities, these practices teach non-violent communication, consensus decision-making, understanding of others and the common environment as well as collective problem-solving. They also help to transform differences and uncertainties into something intriguing rather than fearsome. By giving Rotterdammers a place where they can playfully engage with learning these skills, DHZ offers them not only tools for repairing bicycles but also for changing themselves from atomized consumers of a neoliberal city, to active, integrated, and empowered urban citizens. While the direct influence of DHZ on the city of Rotterdam is rather local and marginal, it serves as a tangible example of a radically different, solidarity-based space for transformative urban activity. Its existence demonstrates that such initiative is generative for reimagining and creating a livable city, both in the present and future.



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