How to activate urban waiting spaces for affordable and solidary mobile housing in brussels?

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› There are numerous Waiting Spaces across the Brussels-Capital Region. These public or private sites that have been abandoned by their prior users, either with an unclear or delayed future function, can offer opportunities for temporary use, particularly for temporary housing.

› When organising temporary use of Waiting Spaces, answering vulnerable citizens' urgent needs, such as housing, needs to be prioritized along with other exigencies.

› Realizing Solidary Mobile Housing in urban Waiting Spaces can, in the short-term, help to alleviate the affordable housing crisis; in the long term, the Solidary Mobile Housing Co-creation Model (SMH/M) can help to diversify the Brussels-Capital Region housing production system.

› Housing co-creation can function as a social and spatially innovative approach to guiding and helping vulnerable people.

› A legal framework needs to be created for temporary modular and mobile housing.

The Brussels Region is facing an ever-increasing shortage of affordable housing and an increase in the number of homeless people. The 'conventional approaches' seem insufficient to cope with the current housing crisis. For many Brussels residents, the right to housing is not guaranteed today.

In contrast, there is a large amount of undeveloped land and buildings waiting to be redeveloped. These places can offer opportunities to experiment with innovative approaches in response to the challenges and urgent needs of our society. By making these spaces available for temporary, neighbourhood-oriented (housing) projects of a social nature, citizens can help make the city.

In this context, Solidary Mobile Housing experiments with activating urban waiting spaces through the co-creation of alternative forms of housing, oriented towards the housing of vulnerable target groups.

Key messages

Introduction
Summary of the problem

The Solidary Mobile Housing (SMH) project is being developed through a design driven Participatory Action Research process in a Living Lab environment. The co-created project results are the Solidary Mobile Housing Model (SMH/M) and the Solidary Mobile Housing Architectural Design Prototype. The SMH/M is based on involving the end users (houseless people), social workers, community organisations, students, teachers, researchers, and professional builders throughout the entire housing co-creation process. Solidarity, flexibility, and openness, as well as affordability and quality are at the heart of the SMH Architectural Design.

The hypothesis behind the SMH approach is that, by collectively taking part in every step of the conceptualisation, construction and exploitation of their own houses, the end users are empowered not only to participate in the co-creation of their individual housing units, but also to gradually create a solidary living community, through interactions with the surrounding neighbourhood. As a result, they will gradually regain a grip, not only on their own housing process, but also on their whole life.

On the one hand, the SMH/M offers a method and tools for social guidance, skill-building and co-creation, as well as strategies for integration into the neighbourhood and in the applicable legal and urban planning frameworks. On the other hand, the model also includes a mobile and modular construction system, focusing on living on a limited surface, circular construction, and partial self-construction / assembly. The design combines mobile and modular structural units with sanitary units, interchangeable facade panels and a flexible inner wall system. The material used is local and durable and the technics used are partially self-sufficient. This will allow users to realise houses (and other spaces) on urban Waiting Spaces in a fast and affordable manner.

Projects like SMH offer an answer to several problems at the same time: the lack of affordable and quality housing, the vast vacancy rate, and the very negative impact this has on the urban living environment. Moreover, the co-creative approach to these problems empowers all the participants in the project and, more particularly, the vulnerable end-users.

As the SMH/M temporary housing co-creation model has the potential to intervene within the three components of the housing system. Building upon Romainville (2015) (Figure 1), in the longer-term, this model holds the potential to structurally transform the Brussels-Capital Region's housing system.

Therefore, such projects should be politically facilitated.
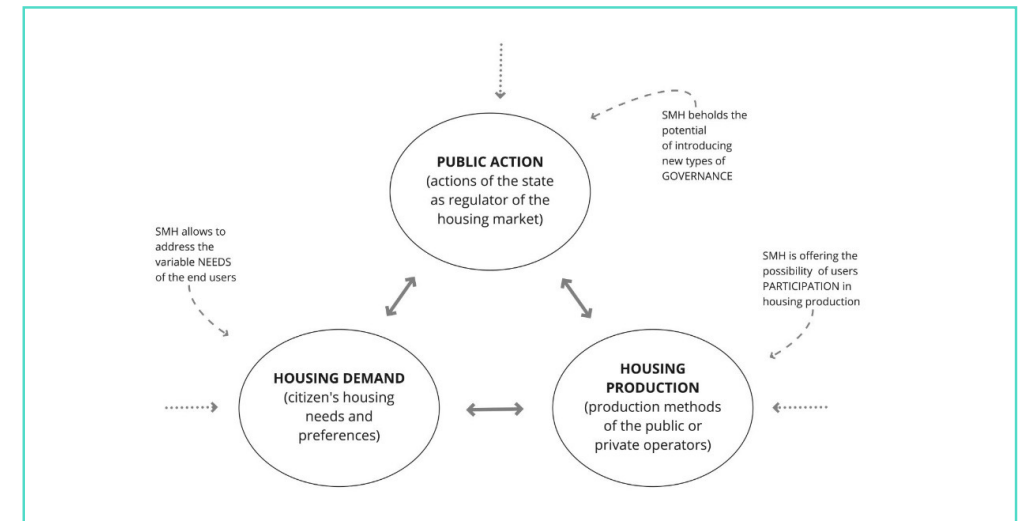

Figure 1: Building upon Romainville (2015), the potentials of The Solidary Mobile Housing (SMH) model to structurally transform the Brussels-Capital Region's housing system (Source: SMH Co-create Project supported by Innoviris).

Methods, approaches and results/body

Conclusions

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1. Develop a clear legal framework for temporary, solidary mobile / modular housing

a. with respect to urban planning:

> Develop clear, adapted standards and a flexible and speedy application procedure for temporary housing projects. In this context, the draft bill approved by the Brussels government (21/05/2021) regarding time-limited permits is a step in the right direction, but it needs further detailing: a swift procedure should be established to expedite the permit procedure for modular housing for social purposes. Also, clear quality, safety and hygiene standards need to be developed. These need to be adapted to easily relocatable, small-scale housing. In this context, the Region could possibly draw on the framework recently adopted by the Wallonian government (see here)

> Allow flexible granting of temporary zoning changes for temporary projects

b. with respect to production:
develop simple public tendering procedures: speed should be one of SMH's major assets.

c. with respect to management and social rights:

> Assure future inhabitants have the possibility of domiciliation.

> Assure future inhabitants have the possibility to co-habit while retaining their social rights as individuals.

> Assure future residents can volunteer for the co-construction of their homes and communal areas, without possible penalties related to their replacement income.

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2. Facilitate access to urban Waiting Spaces / un(der)used urban buildings and terrains for social/solidary initiatives and/or vulnerable users:

a. Put public land and buildings at the disposal of projects of general interest (housing, infrastructure, services...). In this context, the Region should limit the selling of public real estate and even consider buying up more land for this purpose.

b. Encourage owners of vacant land to make their land and buildings (temporarily) available for projects of general interest, by making it

unattractive for them to leave it unused.

c. Compile an up-to-date, online, and accessible geo-database of vacant terrains and buildings and put them at the disposal of social organisations.

d. Facilitate matchmaking between spaces and users, building in the necessary guarantees that they will get their land back when they need it.

e. Compile a list of contact points within the various administrations and agencies (Sibelga, Vivaqua, the various communes) to expedite the connection to water, electricity, gas and sewage. Also, negotiating special tariffs with these agencies should be considered, as the cost of the installation is very high for short-term projects.

f. Monitor and evaluate all the above and adjust where necessary and support further innovative housing research and co-creation by funding innovative initiatives bridging between university, industry, governmental and civil sectors to accelerate the transfer of research and innovation results to contribute to Regional urban resilience, with the goal of providing a quality alternative for vulnerable residents. In this context, extending/upgrading the 'Agence Occupations Temporaires' could be a good option.

3. Prioritize social / affordable housing in temporary use, in combination with other (semi-) public functions. Modular housing projects should be included in the "Plan d'Urgence Logement" of the Brussels government.

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4. Offer support for the provision of sustainable guidance, tailored to the situation and the individual users. In this way 'housing as a verb' can be realised, which means end users can be empowered through housing co-creation (Turner & Fichter, 1972).

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5. Enable involvement of local stakeholders and users, to ensure that temporary use projects are serving local needs and creating/supporting small-scale solidarity networks/neighbourhood integrations.

Policy recommendations

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Books

De Smet, A., Pak, B., Schoonjans, Y., Bruyneel, G., Van Heesvelde, T. (2021). *Solidary Mobile Housing*. KU Leuven, Faculty of Architecture, Campus Sint-Lucas Brussels.

Journal articles (not peer reviewed)

De Smet, A., Pak, B., Schoonjans, Y., Bruyneel, G., Van Heesvelde, T. with De Smet, A. (corresp. author) (2020). *Mobiel wonen, Luxe, lapmiddel of potentieel duurzaam model?* Ruimte, 46, 28-33.

De Smet, A., Pak, B., Schoonjans, Y., Serroen, F. (2018). *Wonen in de tussentijd*. Ruimte, 37, 60-63.
Book chapters (peer reviewed)

De Smet, A., Pak, B., Schoonjans, Y., Bruyneel, G., Vanlerberghe, K. (2019). *Wonen in de tussentijd als springplank naar een stabielere huisvestingssituatie.* In: T. Vandromme, D. Vermeir, S. Winters, B. Hubeau (Eds.), *Sociale Huisvesting in Vlaanderen, Blikken naar de toekomst*, (73-90). Oud-Tunhout / 's-Hertogenbosch: Gompel&Svacina. ISBN: 9789463711364.

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Deceur, E., De Smet, A. (2019). *Tijdelijke invullers maken stad*. In: P. Griefing, F. De Keyser (Eds.), Hedendaagse architectuur in Leuven 2015/2019, (42-51). Leuven: vzw Stad en Architectuur. (professional oriented)

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De Smet, A., Pak, B., Schoonjans, Y. (2018). *Waiting Spaces as Spaces of Negotiation in the SWOT-Mobile Design Studio*. In: Landscapes of Conflict, ECLAS Conference 2018, Ghent, Belgium, Conference Proceedings, (502-510). Presented at the ECLAS Conference 2018 - Landscapes of Conflict, Ghent, BE, 09 Sep 2018-12 Sep 2018. Ghent, Belgium. ISBN: 978949 1564 130.

De Smet, A., Pak, B., Schoonjans, Y. (2018). *A Participatory Exploration of the Potential of Waiting Spaces to Increase Urban Resiliences*. In: CA[2]RE, Conference for Artistic and Architectural (Doctoral) Research, PROCEEDINGS, (97-107). Presented at the CA[2]RE - Conference for Artistic and Architectural (Doctoral) Research, Aarhus, DK, 13 Apr 2018-16 Apr 2018. Aarhus. ISBN: 978-87-90979-78-2.
Accepted Abstracts/Presentations/Posters

De Smet, A., Pak, B., Schoonjans, Y., Vantournhout, S., Bruyneel, G., Van Heesvelde, T., De Cooman, K. (2020). *Architectural Design Service-Learning as Critical Spatial Practice, Unpacking the case of the Solidary Mobile Housing Project*. Presented at the Teaching-learning-research: design and environments, online, 02 Dec 2020- 04 Dec 2020. Recording of this can be found here: https://youtu.be/ixosYTq1BEc

Reports

De Smet, A., Pak, B., Schoonjans, Y., Bruyneel, G., Van Heesvelde, T., Pincé, P., Van Hoecke, B., De Cooman, K. (2020). *Final Report of the INNOVIRIS Co-create project Solidary Mobile Housing, A real-life laboratory on the co-creation of mobile housing with houseless people on Waiting Spaces in the Brussels-Capital Region*.

List of publications

The author & project

Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel engages in social development work. For more than thirty years, Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel has stood up for less well-off Brussels residents and their right to the city. Community workers work together with socially vulnerable groups to improve their living and housing situation. They support people by bringing them together and by organizing them jointly, step by step. What the people themselves know and are able to do is the starting point. They set up projects with the aim of investing in the strength of people so that they can regain control of their lives and their environment (empowerment). Together with these people, they strive for structural policy change in the broadest sense.

The Faculty and Department of Architecture KU Leuven specialize in inter- and transdisciplinary research and education in the discipline architecture and urban design. The SMH project is a joint effort and integrates knowledge from two Research Groups organized under the Department of Architecture: The Altering Practices for Urban Inclusion (Alt_Shift*) Research Group - focusing on altering practices (Petrescu, 2007) which

question and transform the socio-political conditions of the spaces into which they intervene and test the boundaries and procedures of their own disciplines - and the Urban Projects, Collective Spaces and Local Identities research group - investigating how people and built or open space relate to each other, how space is appropriated and local identities are formed, how it contributes to the built and social environment of urban life.

CAW Brussel is a welfare organization with low-threshold first-line assistance for various vulnerable target groups in the Brussels-Capital Region.

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