

Alt_Shift* Altering Practices for Urban Inclusion Dissertation Studio

Envisioning the Future of Temporary Housing and Inclusive Collective Spaces in Brussels

Burak Pak & Aurelie de Smet

Alt_Shift Altering Practices for Urban Inclusion Research Group*

Across the globe and particularly in Brussels, decades of neoliberal policies resulted in the commodification and marketization of the housing sector. While a parade of governments failed to provide decent accommodation to the citizens, the constitutionally guaranteed “right to housing” has gradually evaporated into a mirage which is strived for but never reached. Added on top of this, the financial crisis of 2008 and the refugee influx in the last decade gave rise to an increasing number of vulnerable citizens in need for affordable housing.

The recent COVID-19 (Coronavirus) epidemic accompanied by an economic crisis and the “Black Lives Matter” protests revealed the structural forms of discrimination and inequality at the global scale. According to a recent brief by the United Nations, at this moment of time we are experiencing the amplification of the inequalities within and across countries which is pushing individuals and families into poverty. Our world desperately needs “*measures that put people at the center of response*” to enable recovery which can lead to better, more equitable and resilient outcomes for all.

Explorations for a “New Social Deal” for Housing in Brussels

Recently, numerous scholars, intellectuals, activists and politicians have made calls for a “New Social Deal” or a “Green New Deal” as a means to inclusively address the needs of all citizens while pursuing long-term sustainability goals. These calls demand an equitable approach to creation, distribution and sustenance of shared social, spatial and economic resources and propose an alternative relation with the natural environment. Responsible and ethical urban policies are central to the emergent ideas of a “New Deal”. The supporters of this model propose that the governments and the civil society should step in to a new role to address social and spatial inequalities and promote sustainable modes of living while making use of the existing resources more efficiently and effectively.

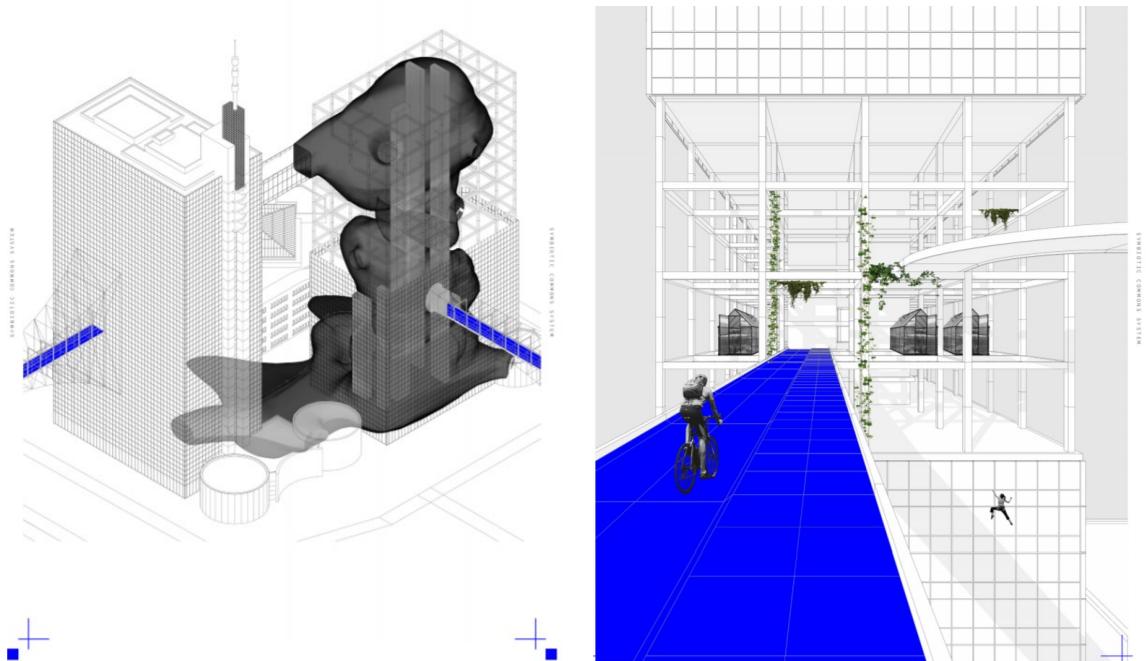


Figure 1. MAIB 42 2020 Dissertation Studio Work by Vilius Balicus (Supervisors Burak Pak and Hulya Ertas)

While 44.332 residents are on the waiting list for social housing in the Brussels Capital Region, a plethora of land and spaces owned by the government and private owners remain dormant and unused. These spaces are potential areas for accommodating the Brusselites in innovative ways. According to a report by Quittelier & Bertrand (2018), in Brussels, the number of people being homeless and/or living in a situation of housing exclusion has more than doubled over the past ten years (+ 142,2 %). This drastic increase in the number of house- and homeless people make it even more necessary to search a “New Social Deal” for Housing. This increase is a clear call for the development and testing of smarter policies and urban strategies enabling novel architectural solutions for the creation of affordable housing together with an equitable use of the urban Waiting Spaces.

The Alt_Shift Dissertation Studio

In this context, the *Alt_Shift Dissertation Studio* is an experimental venture into potentially innovative and resilient housing models. Considering that for many vulnerable citizens, stable and quality housing is the first step towards recovery, this studio aims at co-creating a new model of a living lab as a live project environment with real users and trace the social and spatial impact of this practice. Envisioning the inclusion of the end-users in every step of the conceptualization and the construction of their own houses, this studio targets the empowerment the future inhabitants to incrementally co-create a solidary living community in interaction with the surrounding neighbourhood.

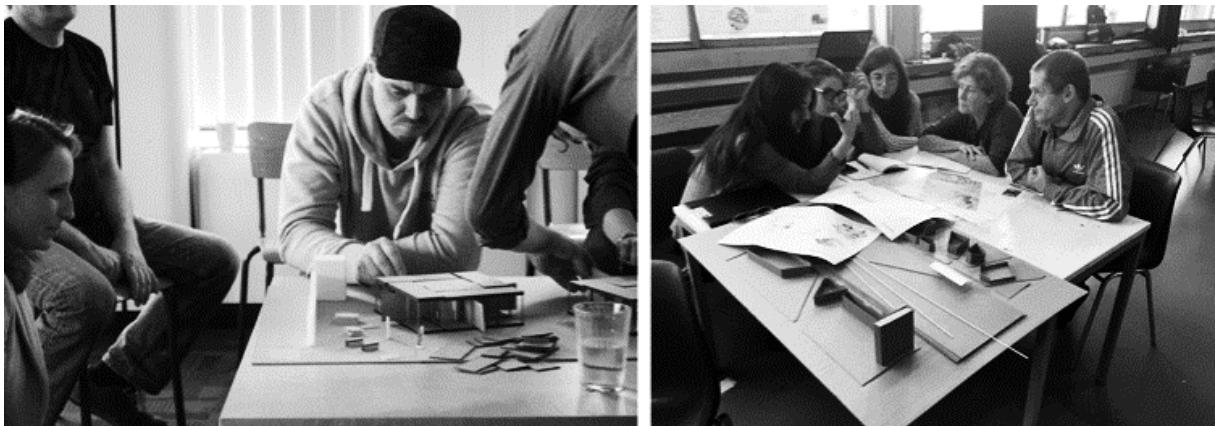


Figure 2. MAIB 24 2018 Co-create Design Studio Burak Pak, Aurelie de Smet and Ken de Cooman (BC Architects), CAW and Samenlevingsopbouw

A parallel aim of this studio is to envision alternative modalities of appropriation of underused spaces. Together with the future inhabitants, Samenlevingsopbouw Brussels, CAW Brussels and the students and professors of the Faculty of Architecture in KU Leuven, we will reframe a wide range of Waiting Space in Brussels as ‘places of negotiation’ and transform these into projects through which questions on the city are raised, a place where experimentation and innovation take place. In this sense this studio will purely be a critical spatial practice, which encourages all of its participants, students and studio coordinators to get out of the comfortable boundaries of traditional expertise in their fields and venture into the unknown, *“the intentional and skillful mastering of incompetence in the ocean of practices”* as Markus Miessen puts it.

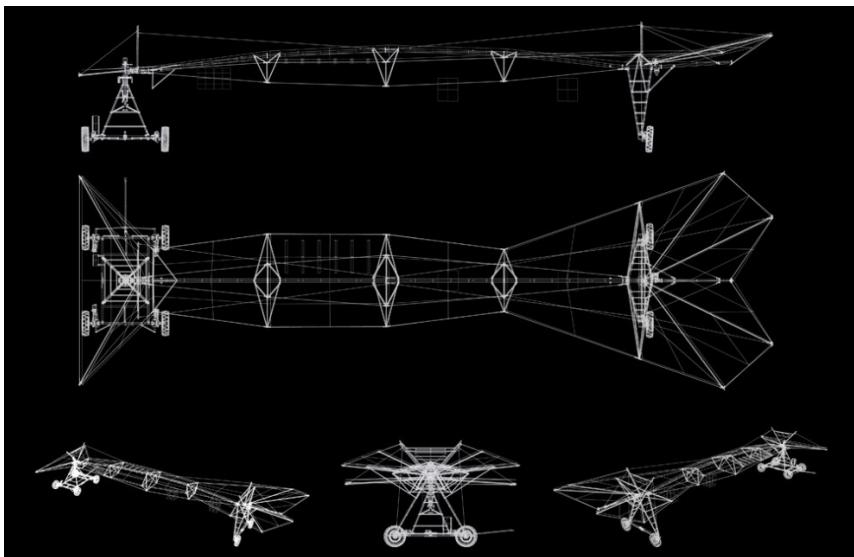


Figure 3. A Mobile Collective Space by Escaravox / Andrés Jaque Architects
Envisioning the Future of Temporary Housing and Collective Spaces in Brussels

In close contact with the ongoing Solidary Mobile Housing research project, we will go beyond practicing architecture as a solely physical product and explore the co-creation of alternate socio-spatial realities. This studio will criticize the existing protocols and invent new protocols in this venture. We will introduce novel socio-spatial perspectives for

understanding and intervening in Waiting Spaces as a means to enable a critical version of the neoliberal architectural practices.

The main output will be the prefiguration and signposting of an innovative housing model and integrated collective spaces as an example to demonstrate that “An Alternative Is Possible (AAIP)”. In this way, we will counter the traditional discourse of “There Is No Alternative (TINA)” by engaging in a prefigurative practice as a socially responsible form of “futuring” the housing in Brussels. Our studio will explore inclusive, dynamic, mobile and adaptable forms of co-creating and dwelling in solidarity.

In close collaboration with Samenlevingsopbouw Brussels, we will open up the architectural solutions, socio-spatial knowledge, co-creation methods and tools produced in this project to a wider audience including citizens (end users), governmental and non-governmental authorities, and experiment with different possibilities of upscaling the SMH project.

The Alt_Shift Hybrid Inclusive Digital Learning Environment

Considering the challenges of COVID-19 regarding interactions with external participants and especially vulnerable citizens, this studio will empower co-creation through strategies combining limited face-to-face interactions, ICT-enabled co-creation spaces and digital platforms for knowledge exchange. This environment will serve as a backbone to support and facilitate the inclusion of relevant actors.

Join us in this journey towards a “New Deal” for Housing!

