Co-producing routes out of the housing emergency

A Manifesto
for Just and Democratic Housing in European Cities

FAIRVILLE

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Context of Co-Production

On 4-5 October 2025, the Fairville Consortium, in close collaboration with the Roubaix-based collective *Non à la démolition dans le quartier de l'Alma-Gare*, convened a pan-European discussion of the European Housing Emergency. The event brought together grassroots housing activists, intermediary organisations, engaged academic researchers and progressive professionals from across Europe in a moment of reflection and action.

With housing (re)emerging as a central topic of concern in Europe and beyond, and the European Commission consulting on the production of an EU Affordable Housing Plan, the following Manifesto represents a distillation of the housing priorities and aspirations which emerged from the weekend's discussions. Taken together, this list of demands functions as both a route map towards more just, democratic and sustainable housing futures in European cities, and as a collective reference point around which to anchor ongoing scrutiny efforts as the EU Affordable Housing Plan moves forward into its adoption and implementation phases.

A Note on Contributors

Coordinated and consolidated by researchers from the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London, and Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (LAVUE-CNRS), this manifesto draws on a collective exchange involving individuals connected with the following institutions/organisations.

AKS GemeinwohlStadt e.V.; ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy; Alternative Pour des Projets Urbains Ici et à l'International (APPUII); On le fait pour Nous (Marseille); Atelier Populaire d'Urbanisme du Vieux-Lille; Centre culturel du Brabant Wallon - Réseau brabançon pour le droit au logement; Centre national de la recherche scientifique (LAVUE-Cnrs) and Université Paris 8; Centre Social Alma Gare; Collectif Airbel; Collectif Anti-Démolition Roubaix Epeule; Collectif des Habitants Organisés du 3e (CHO3); Commoning Spaces Network; Community Land Trust Brussels; Un centre-ville pour tous (CVPT); Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen (DWE); Droit au logement (DAL); The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London (UCL); Etats Généraux de l'Eau à Bruxelles (EGEB); Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C); Habitat International Coalition (HIC); Inter-Environment Bruxelles; Just Space; La Baraka, Université Populaire et Citoyenne de Roubaix; London Tenants Federation; Métropole Label; Miethäuser Syndikat; MOBA Housing SCE; Non à la démolition dans le quartier de l'Alma Gare – Roubaix; Pas Sans Nous; Rassemblement Bruxellois pour les droits à l'Habitat; Refurbish Don't Demolish; Territoire Zéro Passoire; Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB); University of Regensburg; Universidad Politécnica de Madrid; World Habitat; ZEF (Cooperative for Ethical Financing).

Please note: whilst this Manifesto reflects the views of the Roubaix workshop as a whole, it should not be assumed that all contributors agree with every word or recommendation.

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1. Reclaim the Housing Narrative

We face a global housing emergency that has specific characteristics in Europe, and which is closely intertwined with the climate emergency. Housing as a social good and human right is increasingly under threat. Member states have a legal obligation to secure the human right to affordable, dignified housing, and the EU can play a key role in providing guidance, support and pressure on them to act. Tackling the housing emergency *with* inhabitants, however, is not just a pressing necessity. We believe it is also a significant opportunity for the EU to renew its democratic contract and to advance the urgent need for a just and ecological transition.

For this to happen, the overarching housing narrative in Europe must shift to recognise the below fundamentals:

- **The Right to affordable, dignified housing is a fundamental human right** (*Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights / GC No. 4 CESCR*) which states have an obligation to secure.

- **Recognising housing as a right means prioritising the social function of housing over its exchange/commodity value.** This prioritisation also means recognising housing as *habitat*, a critical reframing which demands attention to the fundamental role housing plays in mediating access to individual and collective services, environmental goods and risks, care and kinship networks, and civic participation. In short, **housing as habitat must be placed at the centre of the urban planning process.**

- **The housing emergency is not simply a market supply issue**, it is the systemic result of financialisation processes which have transformed homes into commodified, financial assets. As such, it cannot be resolved by market measures alone but rather requires **strong public action along with empowered civil-society oversight and co-leadership.**

- **Social, public and otherwise affordable housing should be championed as one of society's most effective shields against poverty, inequality and socio-spatial segregation.** Access to adequate and affordable housing should be (re)positioned as a universal right rather than a residual social benefit and these housing forms and their inhabitants must be actively destigmatised.

- **The housing emergency is fuelling a democratic crisis in Europe.** Addressing housing adequacy and affordability should be central to any attempts to rebuild trust in democratic, public institutions - locally, nationally and regionally.

- **The housing and climate emergencies are strongly connected**. Issues concerning housings production, maintenance and environmental performance must be seen as fundamental components of any and all efforts to achieve a just environmental transition.

2. Defend and extend access to adequate and affordable housing for all

Any path towards securing a universal right to affordable, dignified housing must begin with recognising, defending, repairing and extending existing affordable housing assets in their diversity. Successful past and present forms and practices for delivering and maintaining decent affordable housing should be the foundation of future intervention and innovation. From this principle flow the following demands:

- **Defend what exists:** Protect the existence, classification and affordability of existing social, public and otherwise genuinely affordable housing stock as the most effective bulwark against evictions and evictions-induced homelessness.

- **Build and enable what is needed:** Affordable housing should not be contingent on *unaffordable* development. Municipalities should be resourced and capacitated to directly and indirectly expand the stock and diversity of permanent de-commodified housing options in their territories, in ways which break their dependence on ring-fenced real-estate developer profits and reduces public exposure to socially and economically ruinous temporary accommodation forms.

- **Refurbish, don't demolish:** The well documented social *and* environmental costs of demolishing existing affordable housing must underpin a clear policy priority in favour of refurbishment over demolition-led housing projects.

- **No to managed decline:** Establish an effective *right to maintenance* that empowers existing affordable housing tenants to contest the managed decline of their homes and neighbourhoods by establishing an enforceable obligation for public and private landlords to maintain.

- **Guarantee a meaningful right to remain** for existing inhabitants and their activities. Too often state-led housing (re)development programmes fail to balance the needs and aspirations of new and existing inhabitants, triggering displacement and destroying social solidarity.

- **Safeguard against forced evictions:** Redevelopment, relocation and resettlement protocols must ensure that no individual or family is deprived of their home without due process, adequate legal remedies, and safeguarded recourse to adequate, alternative accommodation in the same neighbourhood (if desired).

- **Control rents and stop the sell off!** Under-regulated private rental markets, and public housing privatisations are an increasingly key driver of poverty and inequality in European cities. Action against both is urgent and overdue.

- **Use it or lose it:** Municipalities and communities should be empowered to create and / or utilise fiscal, planning and / or expropriation mechanism to address the spread of vacancy and land speculation in cities. For example, municipal rights of pre-emption should be bolstered and extended to organised community groups.

- **Push back against the wall of money:** Establish strong, contextually grounded, regulatory instruments to curb and reverse the financialisation of housing such as rent controls, eviction moratoria, expropriation mechanisms (of empty-buildings and of large state owners), zoning plans that prevent speculation, requirements of social housing construction to developers, regulation and banning of short-term rentals etc. And then enforce them!

- **Curb the influence of short-term lets on housing affordability and availability.** Housing policy must be rebalanced to tackle the profoundly negative impacts that short-term letting platforms (such as AirBnB) have on the availability of affordable, secure, long-term housing options in desirable, well-served inner-city neighbourhoods.

- **Recognise and nurture a diversified network of affordable housing solutions and providers.** Affordable housing policy should recognise and actively invest in supporting a broad array of affordable housing forms (including light-housing) and actors including those located beyond state and market e.g. cooperatives, community-land-trusts etc.

3. Not without us![1]
Housing is a democratic issue

1. Not Without Us / Pas Sans Nous is the name of a French Association created in 2014 following the publication of the Bacqué-Mechmache report: "For a radical reform of urban policy. This won't happen without us anymore". Composed of active citizens, collectives, and representatives of associations from working-class neighborhoods in France, Not Without Us / Pas Sans Nous defines itself as a voice for such neighborhoods in the context of urban policy.

2. See Footnote 1

Housing is central to both individual well-being and a shared sense of belonging. Conversely, rising housing precarity and deepening inequalities are undermining participation in community life and democratic decision-making. This erosion of social and affordable housing contributes to growing disenchantment with democratic governance.

To address this, our call is to:

- **Recognise adequate, affordable housing as a key lever in addressing the impact of rising inequalities on the crisis of democracy in Europe.** This means as starting point establishing clear and transparent criteria for affordability (for example, housing costs and bills should not exceed 30% of household income), alongside robust quality standards for social and public housing.

- **Acknowledge the diversity of housing needs and aspirations across communities and prioritise the protection and expansion of affordable housing stock in its diversity.** Citizens and inhabitants should not be compelled to own homes. Home ownership should be treated as a choice rather than the singular focus of the housing rights framework. In most contexts, rental protected housing remains by far the most viable option for the majority.

- **Recognise and support the full set of affordable community-led, non-commodified, self-managed housing and habitat options as appropriate and legitimate living choices** – including community-led right-to-use housing cooperatives, community land trusts or various forms of 'light housing'. This means rejecting repression, ensuring access to land for these times of dwellings and expanding or decentralising regulatory frameworks to enable and sustain affordable housing for all.

- **Not without us! / Pas Sans Nous![2]** Centre, support and resource homed and un-homed residents, inhabitants and tenants' decision-making in all processes relating to their neighbourhoods from the design of participatory mechanisms, through planning and design processes, to the democratic governance of buildings and common spaces. This statement should also apply to homeless households (and children), who should be the first priority.

- **Level the playing field:** Empower and support tenants and renters to advocate effectively for their rights vis-à-vis landlords and developers, and enforce housing as a legal human right with concrete remedies and sanctions. Importantly, the right to self-organise and to be heard must be enshrined in law.

- **Enforce transparency, public consultation and broad representation of tenants and affected people in all decisions** related to housing, development projects, initiatives and policy related to housing.

- **Enable meaningful participation in housing related policy and development through the design of accessible engagement processes**, production of translated and plain-language materials and provision of independent technical assistance at every stage of the planning process. Public agencies or regeneration programmes that fail to comply should face sanctions. Ombudsmen and rights defenders must be properly funded and easily reachable.

- **Resource affordable housing in its diversity as a priority.** Create or enable non-profit institutions to fund social, community-led and affordable housing: Establish non-profit financial institutions at EU, national, regional, and municipal levels to channel capital into social and affordable housing, support housing co-production and its enabling processes, and ensure accountability of governments, private actors, and developers to housing as a right and a social good.

4. Housing Justice is Climate Action

Housing is an environmental issue and the call for housing justice is at once an urgent call for climate action. From prioritising refurbishment over demolition, to promoting zero- or low-carbon construction methods, EU governments and institutions must treat the ecological transition as more than a mechanism to improve energy efficiency, and instead reclaim the transformative ecological impact of genuinely affordable housing for all.

- **Promote, protect and resource zero-land, zero energy retrofit movements:** Movements safeguarding zero land take and zero energy upgrades across the existing housing stock must be promoted, protected and resourced. Local authorities should be mandated and equipped to fund and coordinate shared training programmes for workers and community members to support such initiatives.

- **Democratise retrofits with real tenant power:** Tenants of public housing estates / popular neighbourhoods should be supported to shape any de-carbonisation, retrofit or refurbishment programmes impacting their neighbourhoods. Meaningful tenant representation in decision making should be mandated from the outset via a guaranteed right to co-production backed by autonomous resourcing and training provision.

- **Prioritise low-impact, non-extractive construction materials and methods:** Recognise that achieving just and ecological transition is about more than energy efficiency. Publicly funded housing initiatives should exclude extractive, deforestation-linked, and polluting construction materials and methods, using their procurement powers to promote durable, low-impact alternatives.

Fairville: Facing Inequalities and democratic challenges through Co-production in Cities

The Fairville project is an international and collaborative research project that intends to address embedded urban inequalities and the challenges they pose to democracy in large cities and urban regions by supporting co-production and bottom-up collaboration of citizen initiatives in low-income neighbourhoods. The project aims to use participatory action-research and the co-production of knowledge as strategies of spatial justice to address urban inequalities affecting cities, mainly in Europe, but also in Africa. For more information : https://www.fairville-eu.org/

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