WAITING SPACES AS SPACES OF NEGOTIATION IN THE SWOT-MOBILE DESIGN STUDIO

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ABSTRACT
This article discusses the topic of temporary use of Waiting Spaces in the framework of the Solidary Mobile Housing Design Studio, organised as part of the Innoviris Co-create project 'SWOT-Mobile'. We claim that this project is an illustration of how safeguarding the solidary character of temporary use of Waiting Spaces with citizens in need can help establishing landscape democracy. First we elaborate on the methods we developed and tested to empower houseless people, who usually don't have a say in their housing situation, and how we put them at the heart of the project. Then we illustrate how fostering a dialogue about urban Waiting Spaces with different stakeholders (students, houseless, NGOs, experts and authorities) in the design studio, created opportunities for spatial and community development. We describe how the Solidary Mobile Housing Design Studio turned urban Waiting Spaces into 'spaces of negotiation' where questions on the city were raised and experimentation and innovation took place.

Keywords: temporary use, houselessness, Solidary Mobile Housing, Living Lab, co-creation

INTRODUCTION

The Innoviris Co-create project 'SWOT-Mobile', is an ongoing Living Lab intending to increase social and urban resilience by developing and testing a model for the co-creation of solidary living in mobile homes for houseless on Waiting Spaces in the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR).

The stakeholders included in the SWOT-Mobile Living Lab are:
- eight future inhabitants: houseless people who have lost their grip on their housing track,
- employees from the NPO Centrum voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk (CAW), an association providing personal support on general wellbeing,
- employees of the NPO Samenlevingsopbouw Brussel (SLO), an association focussing on community building,
- lecturers and students from the Faculty of Architecture at KU Leuven, campus Sint-Lucas Brussel,
- employees from the NPO Atelier Groot Eiland, an association focussing on training and social employment,
- the surrounding inhabitants and neighbourhood organisations,
- the local and sub-local authorities (the local council, social services, the Housing and Urban Planning departments of the BCR, social housing associations, ...).

Together, these partners are co-creating eight affordable mobile housing units and one or more collective spaces, enabling interactions between the inhabitants and with the neighbourhood. Throughout the project, the SWOT-Mobile Living Lab is taking on different forms with the aim of co-creating a learning environment with all the partners - including the houseless, a group that is usually not involved in this and that generally doesn't have much to say on their housing track.

By taking part in every step of the conceptualisation and the construction of their own houses, the future inhabitants of the SWOT-Mobile project are not only co-designing and co-building their individual housing units, but they are also gradually co-creating a solidary living community, in interaction with the surrounding neighbourhood. Through this, besides regaining a grip on their own housing track, they will regain a grip on their whole life. As such, in this project, with the aim of increasing social resilience, experimental forms of empowerment and inclusion, with a focus on interaction and solidarity, are being explored.

By locating (temporarily) on Waiting Spaces, the project also aims to address the emergent urban issues. With 44.332 residents on the waiting list for social housing and an increase in the number of

house- and homeless people by 33% since 2010, the BCR is clearly facing an affordable housing crisis (Romainville, 2015). The SWOT-Mobile project is an exploration of alternative forms of housing, that would take advantage of the abundant amount of derelict and/or un(der)used spaces that can be found in the BRC (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1.** An example of a Waiting Space in the BCR
(Photograph: Aurelie De Smet)

As vacant lots and leftover spaces are often 'spaces of conflict', associated with speculation and possible dangers and thus creating a negative atmosphere, in recent years many cities started to experiment with temporary use as a way to upgrade the city and increase social and spatial resilience. Research has shown that practices of temporary use of Waiting Spaces (Faraone & Sarti, 2008; Studio Urban Catalyst, 2012; De Smet, 2013) can indeed play an important role in the (re)development of the city (Overmeyer, 2007; Bishop & Williams, 2012; De Smet, 2013; Oswalt et al., 2013) and offer an alternative approach to the creation of collective spaces (Ferguson, 2014).

However, as practices of temporary use of Waiting Spaces are becoming more and more common, questions are rising on which users are entitled to claiming these spaces, previously neglected by the mainstream urban actors and therefore pre-eminently available to alternative, more fragile actors. In this paper we are investigating how the solidary character of temporary use of Waiting Spaces can be safeguarded. More precisely, we are illustrating which methods were used, in the SWOT-Mobile project, to put the future inhabitants at the heart of the Solidary Mobile Housing (SMH) Design Studio and we are demonstrating how this enabled them to have a shaping power over the way in which their city is made and remade (Harvey, 2013). For only when all citizens are able to execute that power, Landscape Democracy can truly be realised.

MATERIAL AND METHODS
The Living Lab methodology employed in the SWOT-Mobile project involves three big action research cycles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), each with particular goals, to be realised through smaller steps

(Fig. 2). The action research approach provides us with an open framework enabling the use of different tools adapted to the particular goals of each cycle (e.g. focus group meetings, semi-structured discussions, surveys, participatory mapping).
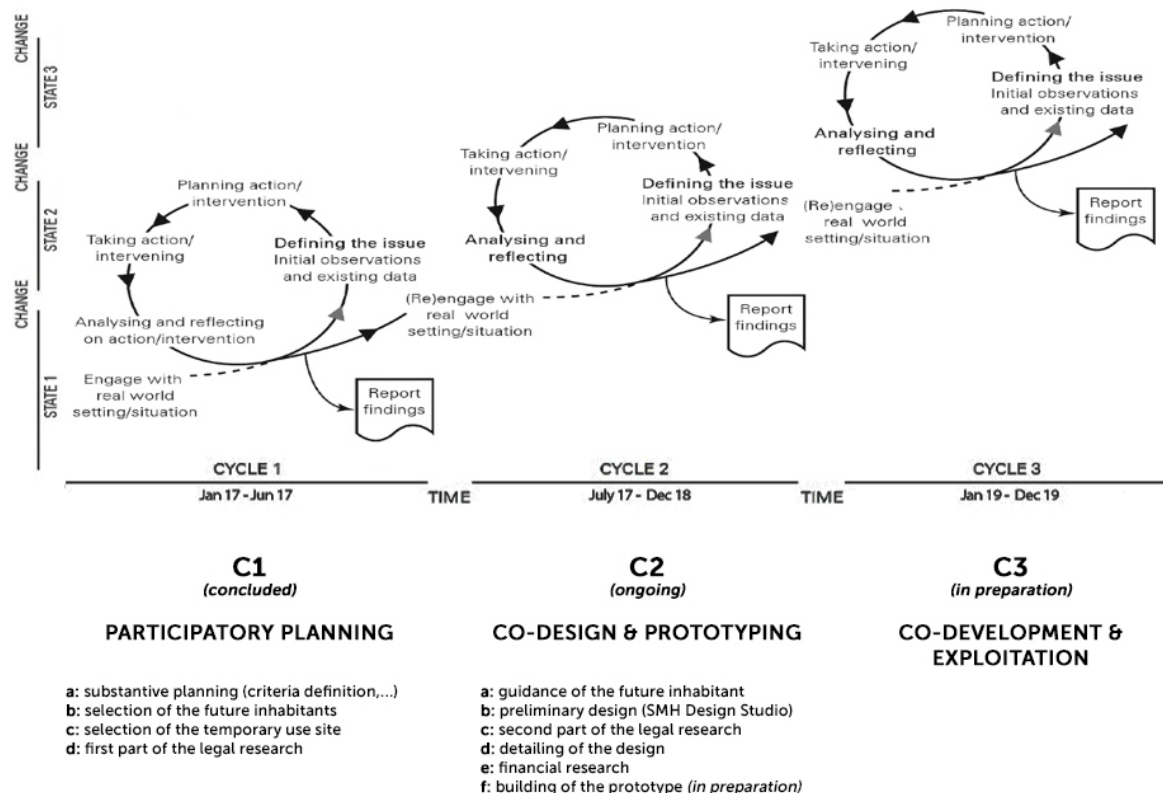
Figure 2. Schematic Representation of the Three Big Action Research Cycles of the SWOT-Mobile Project (Image: Action research cycles by Kemmis & McTaggart (2005), adapted by Burak Pak)

In this paper we are focussing specifically on the smaller action research cycle C2b: the preliminary design of the housing units and collective space(s) in the Solidary Mobile Housing (SMH) Design Studio.

The topic of the SMH Design Studio, organised at the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, was the (preliminary) design of the individual housing units and collective space(s), according to the criteria collectively defined in the Co-Planning cycle (C1). During 14 weeks, the studio coordinators Burak Pak and Ken De Cooman, interacted with the students on a weekly basis. Aurelie De Smet took part in this as a participating observer, focusing on co-organizing, observing and documenting the overall process. The CAW-guided future inhabitants were invited to participate in the studio whenever they liked. Every week, Geraldine Bruyneel and/or Tineke Van Heesvelde from SOB and/or Dieter Vanden Broeck from CAW were also 'butterflying' in the studio to consult with the students and give them feedback. On a very regular basis internal and external experts were invited in the studio to give presentations on specific aspects related to the project (first half of the semester) and/or to give consultation on specific questions (second half of the semester). As a location for the studio we wanted a less institutional, more low-threshold workspace, where we could collaborate freely with the students and future inhabitants. From this perspective we joined the temporary use of the WTC tower 1, organized by the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture. To accommodate the involvement of the future inhabitants and of the SLO and CAW representatives in the SMH Design Studio three main methods were used.

Firstly, during the second studio session, the six sites, selected for the design studio in the participatory project planning and site selection cycles (C1a&C1b), were visited together with the project team, the future inhabitants and the students. The aims of these **Participatory Site Visits** (C2b1) were to explore

the sites and organize a first encounter between the future inhabitants and the project team, including the students. To facilitate the travel we rented a bus and to enabled eating together as a convivial activity, we organised a picnic on one of the terrains during lunchtime. On beforehand the groups of students were asked to prepare leaflets, covering their first analysis of the sites using comprehensible communication techniques. We provided these leaflets to the future inhabitants, as a tangible memory of the trip.

Secondly, in the middle of the semester, a week-long workshop was organised. For the students the aim of this **Participatory Hands-on Workshop** (C2b2) was to work intensively on the design studio project and become aware of the 'buildability' of their designs and the need for 'conscious use of materials'. They were given the assignment to design and realise a building detail on scale 1/1, 1/2 or 1/5. We also organised a number of lectures, workshops and visits for them addressing the topics of materiality and buildability. For the future inhabitants the aim was to think and talk about the notions public and private on the level of the units and the neighbourhood and to communicate ideas and needs to the students. Together with SLO and CAW they got involved in group conversations on this topic and they also used cardboard and tape to test out different spatial configurations for the interior of a small scale housing unit on 1/1. Also, a number of joint activities has been organized with students and future inhabitants. Among these were visits to other temporary housing projects such as Home for Less (Brussels) and Labland (Ghent). On the last day of the week, the broader network of project partners and stakeholders were invited to come and see the results of the workshop-week in a final exhibition.

Thirdly, monthly **Participatory Review and Evaluation Moments** (C2b3) were organised to encourage the future inhabitants and the representatives of SLO and CAW to reflect on the work in progress (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Review & evaluation moments with the future inhabitants and representatives of CAW and SLO in the SMH Design Studio at the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture
(Photographs: Burak Pak & Aurelie De Smet)

For these review and evaluation (R&E) sessions, we tried out three different approaches to organise the knowledge exchange between the participants. As illustrated in figure 4, the involvement and role of the 'experts', the grouping of the participants and the interaction modes varied in each case.
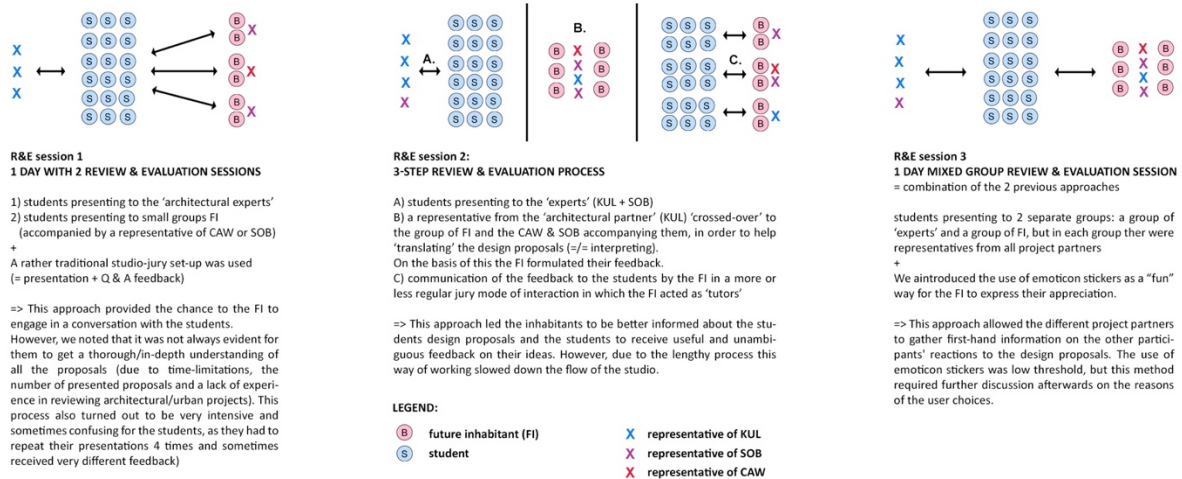
Figure 4: Schematic representation of the three different approaches used to organise the knowledge exchange between the participants of the SMH Design Studio (Image: Aurelie De Smet)

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the Participatory Site Visits (C2b1) the participants were able to visit the sites and discuss about them together. This enabled students to see the sites from the eyes of the inhabitants and vice versa. As a result of this process, one of the initially selected sites was rejected and, for or the purpose of the studio, replaced by one of the 'backup-sites'.

In the Participatory Hands-on Workshop (C2b2), the students and future inhabitants at certain moments participated in design conversations together and collectively searched for creative and innovative solutions. Through the hands-on 'making' activities, both the students and the future inhabitants started to consider the 'buildability' of their ideas. In their search for 'conscious use of materials', the students tested out the possibilities and constrains of different traditional and non-traditional building materials and they became more aware of the (natural) conditions of the site and its surroundings and of potential usable elements already present there. The future inhabitants' 1/1 mock-up-exercise led to the collection and selection of possible design solutions for the interior design of small scale housing units and in the drawing of their own interior plan. The group conversations lead to more clarity on their wishes concerning the notions of 'private', 'collective' and 'public', which were made explicit in a list of requirements for the collective space(s). The results of the week were presented and discussed together on the last day. The final exhibition allowed also the broader network of partner stakeholders to get informed about and give feedback on these more detailed and practical aspects of the project.

During Participatory Review and Evaluation Moments (C2b3) the students received feedback both from 'experts' from different fields (architecture, building techniques, community building, social welfare) and from the future inhabitants themselves. However, one of the biggest and very clear barriers between future inhabitants and the students was the language (French vs English + the technical jargon). Moreover, we noted that time-limitations, the quality of the provided materials and a lack of experience in reviewing architectural / urban projects can sometimes inhibited a thorough understanding of and in-depth knowledge exchange on the design proposals. Therefore, on one hand, we worked on providing good quality, comparable communication and illustration materials; besides clear floorplans and sections, we asked the students to provide scale models, axonometries, perspective drawings and/or renders and reference images. We saw that this indeed facilitated the understanding of the different architectural proposals. On the other hand we are also gradually developing a 'common language', by exchanging a lot among the project partners. Going along, we learned that providing accompaniment by 'professionals' from each field during important review and evaluation moments greatly facilitated the knowledge exchange between the students and the future inhabitants, as they could (literally but also figuratively) help translating the conversations. Moreover,

this also allowed the different project partners to gather first-hand information on the other participants' reactions to the different proposals.

CONCLUSION

In the SMH Design Studio it became clear several times that Waiting Spaces can turn from 'spaces of conflict' to 'spaces of negotiation', where questions on the city can be raised and experimentation and innovation can take place.

Firstly, from professionals point of view Waiting Spaces are often seen as the residual spatial products of contemporary urban planning or useless leftovers (Tonnelat, 2018). For ordinary users they can seem intimidating and potentially dangerous. Although one of the initially selected sites was rejected at the start of the design studio, there were more sites the project partners were not all feeling very enthusiastic about. This brought up discussions as to why these future inhabitants should be assigned these sites no one else wants. However, during the design studio, the students' research-by-design helped to illustrate the affordances of each of these places. This helped to overcome the initial prejudice towards Waiting Spaces and helped to see the potential of Brussels' un(der)used spaces for citizens in need (Fig. 5).
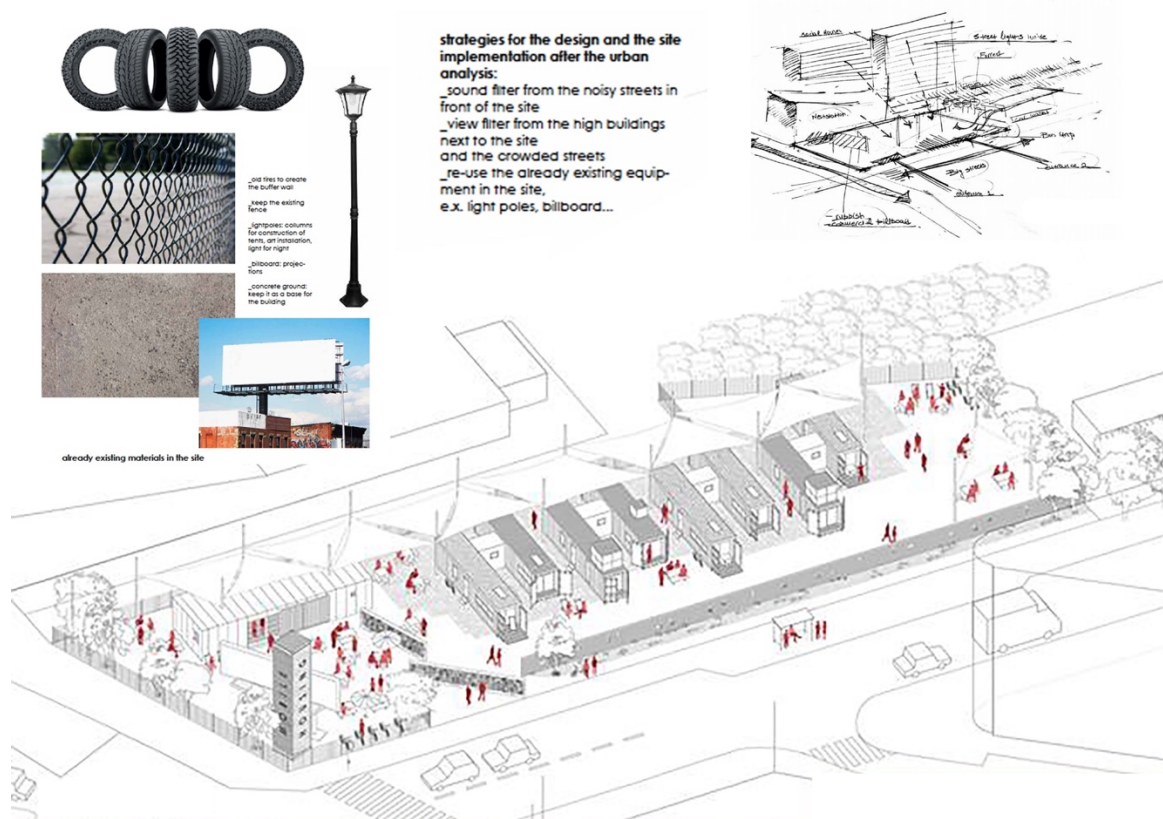

Figure 5: Student design illustrating how, even on a site initially perceived as 'vast and inhospitable' can be rethought as a hospitable, inviting and inclusive space (Image: Char Chau)

Secondly, as a result of the challenge of locating the project temporarily on Waiting Spaces, during the SMH Design Studio some of the 'traditional values and characteristics' of architectural and landscape design were put into question. The temporality of the design invoked a dynamic understanding of space and use, and brought to the front other values and characteristics like mobility / demountability, reversibility, incrementalism / adaptability / flexibility and openness / informality. Design thinking about temporary use also helped the students to establish a novel link between space and time, overcoming the past conception of programmatic statis by reframing the project as a 'process of change' (Boeri & Pak, 2017) in which (a) understanding space and everyday activities through time, (b) creating space-time scenarios for an urban project and (c) and solid strategies and architectural solutions for time-based use are central. The liminality and envisioned performative nature of design in Waiting Spaces, the extensive appropriation of readily available, light and reversible materials combined with a respectful attitude towards the natural elements already present on-site brought in a new aesthetics (Fig. 6).
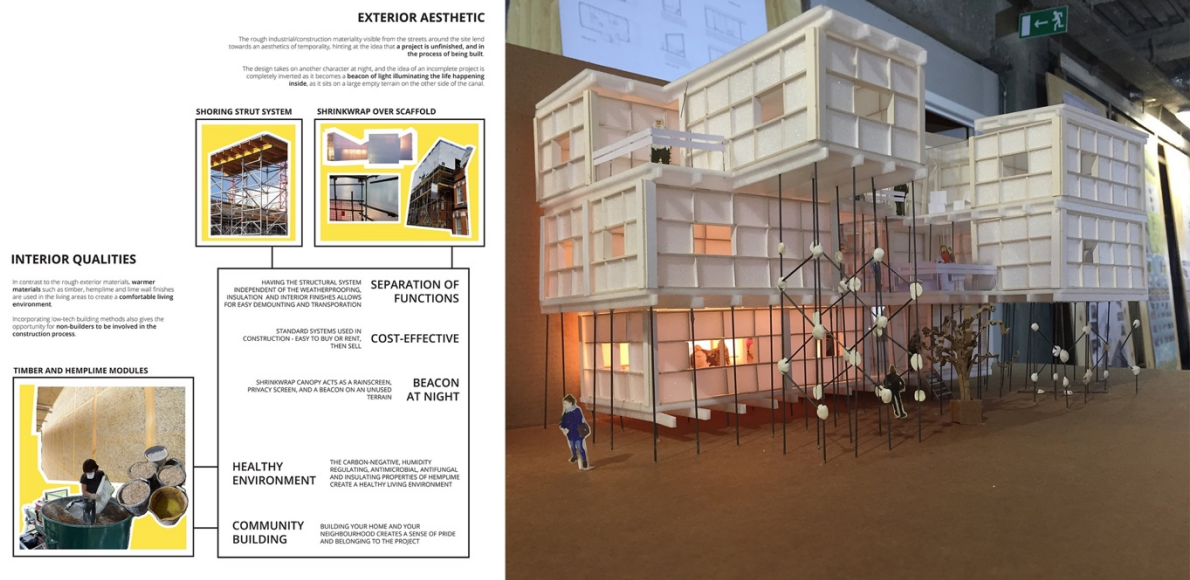
Figure 6: Student design illustrating a new aesthetics resulting of questioning the 'traditional values and characteristics' of architectural and landscape design (Image: Melissa Jin)

Thirdly, focusing on Waiting Spaces also evoked questions on how to share these spaces with others and turn these into (temporary/alternative) public spaces. Designing for temporary use thus also questions the traditional notions of 'private' and 'public' and brings about a different approach to landscape. Reimaging the surroundings of the housing units as part of a dynamic collective space enabling interactions between the inhabitants and the neighbourhood resulted in experiments with what we call 'non-invasive design'. The temporality of the planned interventions and limitations of the appropriation below the ground triggered innovative design explorations. Rethinking the design of the landscape as an ephemeral, low cost collective space the students explored the potentials of soft and dynamic interventions and avoided static element difficult to remove or adapt (Fig. 7).

Figure 7: Student design illustrating the design of the surrounding landscape as part of the dynamic collective space(s) (Image: Ioanna Dimaki)

Finally, we noticed that participation does not always and everywhere mean the same thing for all participants. In this context the studio itself served as a 'space for negotiation', through which the partners learned how to communicate with each other. Co-creation as a participatory design practice does not mean leaving your own field but joining knowledge (both professional and experience-based) from different fields together. As a result of this negotiation which took place during designing, teaching, learning, facilitating and participating in temporary use, we noticed that our roles as designers have shifted. The role of the architect and landscape designer has expanded towards transdisciplinarity and social practices with a stress on particular engagement strategies such as networking. This also resulted in truly welcoming and valuing the ideas of users and NPOs in the design process, which was in a way a transfer of authority.

In conclusion we can say that Waiting Spaces prove eminently suitable to allow for negotiating the right on the city. The SMH Design Studio illustrates how putting citizens in need at the heart of projects for urban Waiting Spaces, can help contribute to establishing landscape democracy by safeguarding the solidary character of temporary use. In the studio the future inhabitants were facilitated to participate equally in the design of the landscape surrounding them. As such, these houseless, a group that is usually not involved in this and that generally doesn't have much to say on their housing track, gained a shaping power over the way in which their city is made and remade. As illustrated above, the studio created opportunities for spatial and community development by fostering a dialogue about urban Waiting Spaces with the different stakeholders (students, houseless, NGOs, experts and authorities). This was achieved through using adaptive methods and techniques, providing collaborative accompaniment and allowing for an open & informal process. The knowledge gained throughout this process, combined with the knowledge we are gaining from the other action research cycles is currently contributing to the development of a model for the co-creation of solidary living in mobile homes for houseless on Waiting Spaces.

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