

SANS TITRE

Une exposition co-crée par Un Cabinet Photographique, l'Université
Rennes 1, Un Toit c'est un Droit dans le cadre du projet de recherche
Merging.



This photo exhibition was co-produced as part of the action-research project « Merging ».

It was made possible thanks to the association Un Toit c'est Un Droit (UTUD; a roof is a right), the people they house, and the Cabinet Photographique de Maurepas (a photo studio in Rennes).

MERGING	5
<i>MERGING'S PARTNERS</i>	5
UTUD - UN TOIT C'EST UN DROIT	6
<i>UTUD & MERGING</i>	7
<i>WHAT'S A CASE STUDY?</i>	7
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MERGING, UTUD AND THE CABINET PHOTOGRAPHIQUE DE MAUREPAS	8
<i>A TALE OF ENCOUNTERS...</i>	8
<i>TAKING PICTURES AT THE RESIDENTS' HOMES</i>	9
<i>CHOOSING THE PICTURES</i>	9
SOME FINAL THOUGHTS	10
THANKS	10
WHAT'S A HOUSE? – EXCERPTS	11
CONTACTS	12



« Having a roof is a fundamental right. »

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MERGING

Merging is an international and interdisciplinary study on integration of migrants through participative housing initiatives. This project firstly aims at examining existing integration policies, initiatives at a European, regional and local level, as well as individual practices where housing has a leading role. « It is a question of comparing different case studies of reception and integration, to identify best practices. » This first step allows the conception and the implementation of pilot measures of integration through housing in cooperation with the association Quatorze, in order to test them in 3 European Union countries – France (Lyon), Spain (Valencia), Sweden (Göteborg).

The ultimate goal of Merging is to measure long-term effects of participative housing initiatives, and to highlight factors that encourage or impede migrants' integration process. The aim is to give recommendations for the integration of migrants to public stakeholders at a local, national and European level, through factual data.

(Source: https://www.merging-housing-project.eu/main/en_EN/)

MERGING'S PARTNERS

The project brings together 10 partners from several European countries:

- Italy, with the University of Bologna ;
- Sweden, with the universities of Malmö and Göteborg;
- Spain, with the University of Valencia and the association Quatorze (in partnership with France);
- France, with the research centre Arènes in Rennes (University of Rennes 1 and the EHESP), the association Quatorze (which disseminates, develops and promotes inclusive and social architectures for agile and resilient territories), Lyon Ingénierie Projets (a branch of University of Lyon 1) and Jean Moulin University Lyon 3 (coordinator of the project);
- Switzerland, with Social Business Earth (a social enterprise specialised in sustainability, circular economy and social business development);
- Belgium, with the Collectif d'échanges pour la technologie appropriée (COTA).



UTUD - UN TOIT C'EST UN DROIT

UTUD was created about 10 years ago. At the start, the association opened squats, then signed contracts with property developers or cities to occupy houses until their destruction. The occupations can last two or three years, allowing housed individuals to find some material security during this time. An occupation agreement of three years is signed with the owners of the premises, in which the association commits to keep the site as it is, or to improve it. The owner does not initiate eviction procedures for the duration of the agreement. The city council funds UTUD's work for their 15 houses, and the association is supported by the Fondation Abbé Pierre which is in touch with developers and mayors.

The association is also supported by the Compagnons Bâisseurs (a house rehabilitation association) to work on the houses before they're occupied, with help from residents and from volunteers in the association.

Its operation makes the association unique. It can be distinguished from: other associations acting for the state by mainly helping asylum seekers whose request was rejected; associations offering accommodation with private persons by housing individuals in groups; associations and groups managing squats by respecting safety and confort norms. Furthermore, despite its numerous calls to improve displaced and exiled people's conditions, the association keeps a connection with institutions thanks to its ties with cities and the Fondation Abbé Pierre.



UTUD & MERGING

In order to understand and analyse existing integration policies and local initiatives, the team in Rennes had to focus on a Rennes association offering housing solutions for exiled people. The research team chose the association UTUD as a case study.

WHAT'S A CASE STUDY?

For the Rennes team's researchers, it meant doing fieldwork to see how UTUD works, and especially what the housed people thought about it.

The team then wrote a report in order to share it with the European partners. The goal was to then create an operational project taking into account all the field observations. More specifically, biographical interviews were conducted with about 10 people housed by UTUD, and with volunteers.



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MERGING, UTUD AND THE CABINET PHOTOGRAPHIQUE DE MAUREPAS

A TALE OF ENCOUNTERS...

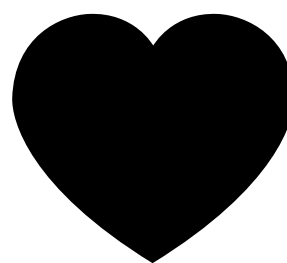
We did not know the residents before meeting them for interviews. These encounters were possible on one side thanks to the volunteers of UTUD – as they shared the information with residents that trusted them –, and on the other side thanks to the first interviewed residents that spread the word to others.

Accepting to be interviewed by « strangers » in a project like Merging meant opening the doors of their home and sharing a bit of their intimacy. It also meant opening up for an hour or more, sharing their story, their feelings on their situation, their life in a group, their family life, etc. We asked a lot from them, and we still thank them to this day for opening the doors of their home to us.

For these interviews, Merging's project team required to take pictures of UTUD's houses. Taking pictures in their living space was not easy for the residents, sometimes leading to anxiety, questions and fear: « who will look at these pictures? », « my house isn't pretty enough to take a picture », « is my house tidy enough? », « will my house be recognisable? », « will you share the pictures with authorities? »

However, we didn't want to give up on this part of the project, and that's how the idea of a photo exhibition came up. Some of UTUD's residents mentioned the Cabinet Photographique de Maurepas, as some of them had taken part in a poetry workshop taking place at the studio. We met with volunteers of this studio to talk about the project, and they were on board! That was the beginning of this collaboration.

The aim of this exhibition is on one side to highlight UTUD, who accepted to take part in this study case, and on the other side to show a reality at a larger scale. These pictures, originally designed for the European project, can be thought-provoking for residents of Rennes. Finally, it seemed fairer to offer a project that could include all the people involved with this study – UTUD's volunteers and residents.



TAKING PICTURES AT THE RESIDENTS' HOMES

The studio's team of volunteers – sometimes joined by the Merging team – went to 8 of UTUD's houses, with all the required materials to have the residents take pictures with pinhole cameras.

THE PINHOLE METHOD

The studio put forward the idea of using pinholes, as they regularly use this method, but also because this allows to keep the anonymity of the residents and their home.

MEANING

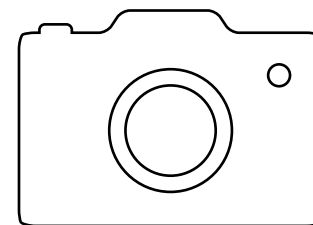
« The word « pinhole » directly refers to a narrow and tight opening which, when applied to optics, is a simple way to project an image in a darkroom. This method is known since at least Ancient Greece, as Aristotle mentions it in his writings. Nonetheless, it only started being described and studied in the 11th century by Abu Ali Ibn-Hasan, also known as Alhazen, an Arab scholar, and after him Bacon, Leonardo da Vinci, Kepler, and so forth.

The first use of the darkroom was the invention of drawing machines: an image was projected on a translucent paper, and it was drawn by following the shape of the image.

Vermeer was able to skillfully use these machines, but it's not until photographic methods were invented that the extremely bright image inside the darkroom could be captured, revealed, fixated and shown.

It could seem paradoxal in this day and age to use bits and bobs to build these picture boxes, in order to print images on media as incongruous as paper or films coated in a silver salts and gelatin suspension. However, it's the bits and bobs that only cost as much as their retrieval and transformation that we're looking for... »

Source <https://uncabinetphotographique.fr/2020/04/06/stenopes/>



CHOOSING THE PICTURES

The photo studio team developed the pictures that were taken in each house. The Merging team and the studio's volunteers then showed the pictures to the residents, who chose the ones that were to be exhibited.

The studio then scanned the pictures so they could be printed and framed for the exhibition.



SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

It was a privilege to be able to hear the life course of the exiled people housed by UTUD. Their resilience, courage, ambitions and desire to live reminded us how important it is to care for, to welcome and to include one another. Knowing a part of their life allows us to remember that exile can be necessary to live, and to survive.

THANKS

A huge thanks to all the people housed by UTUD, who shared a part of their story... We wish them all great adventures and even better news to come!

A huge thanks to the photo studio's volunteers... Thank you for your time, and your dedication... Dominique, Lucien, Pascal, Mireille, kudos!

A huge thanks to UTUD's volunteers, and kudos to you for what you do!

WHAT'S A HOUSE? — EXCERPTS

« The word « house »? Well, for me, it's... (...) a resource or a need. It's the first right »

« Well, if you'd asked me when we came at the start, it was just a roof like, a house. But to be honest, we fit in well with the other residents, with all the boys downstairs, with the association. We feel really good and it's almost like, like a house. It's true it's not as comfortable as having your own keys, your own house that you can decorate, you can do up, it's not the same. But still, we were able, with the others, to make connections and it's a house now »

« Well like, it's a place where you feel safe, where you're with your family and where you're free, like. Where there's love... »



CONTACTS

If you'd like to know more about the Cabinet Photographique de Maurepas:

<https://uncabinetphotographique.fr>

If you'd like to know more about UTUD:

<https://fr-fr.facebook.com/untoitestundroit35/>

<http://untoitundroit35.blogspot.com>

If you'd like to keep in touch on this part of the project:

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M E R C I !



M E R G I N G P R O J E C T X U T U D X C A B I N E T P H O T O G R A P H I Q U E