

Housing for immigrants and community integration in Europe and beyond: strategies, policies, dwellings and governance

Public Summary
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Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project

The arrival of migrants contributes to diversifying European cities, suburbs and rural communities. It represents an opportunity, but also a significant challenge if taking place in an unordered manner, as occurred on several occasions in Europe since 2014.

In view of their magnitude, these phenomena generate two major sources of tension. They destabilize countries of origin because of brain drain and challenge host countries to welcome and integrate migrants.

They challenge:

- social services and NGOs to support populations suffering from deep trauma.
- politicians and elected officials to maintain the unity of populations in a context of a deep social divide.
- urban planners to host migrants in cities already under housing shortage.

In this context, the main issue is to provide stakeholders with effective proposals and tools to address socio-economic integration. This includes sustainable and participatory strategies, involving citizens, civil society actors, education institutions and the private sector.

The MERGING project is an interdisciplinary study of migrants' integration through participatory housing initiatives aiming to develop, implement and test a participatory housing program dedicated to migrants involving various stakeholders to propose inclusive measures and recommendations to facilitate and ensure the sustainability of migrants' integration process.

Work performed and main results achieved

In MERGING, we first mapped existing policies, programs and initiatives to better understand the reality of integration and access to housing while identifying the barriers and obstacles faced by immigrants in Europe. We conducted literature reviews and interviewed national and local stakeholders (policy makers, activists, etc.) to have a complete understanding of the phenomenon and the difficulties met by each actor. This allowed to highlight the complexity

of the integration scheme in each country, but also to point out the critical role played by housing in this regard – housing being closely related to access to education, training, employment and social cohesion. Housing also has a strong influence on people’s mental and physical health as good quality housing can help start a new life while a bad quality housing can have negative consequences on one’s mental and physical wellbeing.

We studied some relevant and innovative housing initiatives in Italy, Spain, Sweden and France. The objective was to better understand how these facilities were built and managed, identify the type of activities offered to residents and see whether these types of hybrid facilities influenced in facilitating immigrants’ integration and at what speed. This second step allowed us to highlight the specificities and common characteristics of hybrid housing, establish typologies of operating models (with regards to governance, for example) and ultimately propose a social business model canvas to support the design phase of the three pilot projects.

These preliminary efforts allowed us to assess the feasibility of participatory pilots before implementing, testing and evaluating them in 3 European Cities: Valencia (Spain), Gothenburg (Sweden) and Lyon (France).

Under the supervision of Quatorze and with the support of local stakeholders, we built three pilots having their own personality, their own soul and specificities.

Merging’s overall process also led to two different evaluations and sets of propositions: one dedicated to policy makers and one relative to the consortium, its collaborations and productions.

At the end of the project, we have reached the following results:

-16 livable houses adapted to the local context:

- Cocon in Lyon: **5 + 2 tiny houses and a yurt** as a common space connected to the neighbors, with social mix and individual social follow-up
- Anna in Gothenburg: **an ecological floating tiny house** in a neighborhood with a strong sense of community.
- Caliu Urba in Valencia: **8 renovated flats and a common space** in the historical center of the city allowing social mix and connection with neighbors.

- 3 multi-actor local networks

- Several dozens of inhabitants’ effective mobilization

- **Social follow-up** provided to 18 people in Valencia, to 1 in Gothenburg and to 5 in Lyon

- **recommendations** for local actors, national and European decision-makers.

Our recommendations come directly from our experience within MERGING. They are addressed to decision-makers at the local, national and European levels, and can be summed up in 3 key messages:

- support innovative initiatives - think on the long run -develop relations and networks
- ensure multi-actor approach and a participative governance
- disseminate the experimentation

Results were discussed and disseminated at a final conference in Brussels on April 18, 2024.

Public reports, a handbook for project leaders for pilot replication, **policy briefs** and a **brochure with recommendations** are available on the project web site.

Impacts of the project

Scientific Contribution: The project's multidisciplinary approach integrated various perspectives, resulting in a social integration model (WP2), a social business model canvas (WP3), and innovative pilot designs (WP4-5). The project emphasized collaborative work, creating a multi-stakeholder methodology and using collective intelligence to enhance the integration-housing link (WP6). Beneficiaries were central to the process.

Economic Impact: The project revitalized local areas by reintroducing socio-cultural activities and enhancing local associative networks. Public-private partnerships ensured financial sustainability. Additionally, mobile solutions in France and Sweden allowed rapid redeployment, offering economic and ecological benefits through eco-responsible materials and avoiding extensive construction efforts.

Social Impact: Several social impacts on NGOs and local communities can be mentioned. For NGOs, it provided shared spaces to implement new social support methodologies and encouraged self-assessment of existing practices to enhance inclusiveness. It challenged traditional top-down and compulsory customized approaches in social work, promoting a more collaborative model. This shift aimed to empower beneficiaries and avoid dependency by involving various actors (companies, NGOs, neighbors). In local communities in France and Spain, the project transformed neighborhoods by introducing new activities that foster integration and creating spaces for social exchanges. Designed with community input, these spaces hosted various activities (language, yoga courses), fostering engagement and empowerment. The project also enhanced citizen interaction with local representatives, opening discussions on program implementation and neighborhood transformation.

Political Impacts: The MERGING project facilitated relationships between project partners and various levels of government, with varying outcomes: strong political support in Spain and minimal interest in Sweden. In Valencia, the project aligned with regional administrative integration, optimizing public funds and reinforcing links between housing and integration. The involvement of local housing administration improved policy deployment. In Lyon, the project garnered significant local authority interest, aligning with the city's new hospitality policy. Key political figures supported the project by overcoming administrative hurdles and providing financial aid. Although not involved in facility co-design, local authorities remained active stakeholders. The project's European dimension attracted local authority support, potentially securing new funds and inspiring similar initiatives for unaccompanied minors.

Anna: the pilot in
Gothenburg © Quatorze



Caliu Urbà : the pilot in
València © Quatorze




COCON: the pilot in Lyon
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Project WEBSITE : www.merging-housing-project.eu

This report reflects only the author’s views and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein”

MERGING CONSORTIUM MEMBERS



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