MERGING
INTEGRATION FOR MIGRANTS

POLICY BRIEF

Learning from housing innovators: How can we support constructive housing solutions for immigrant integration?

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Innovative housing for integration is context specific, addressing the needs of the target group, it is **not** one size fit all policy.

• Connecting housing to labor market integration promotes **sustainable solutions** and leads to better integration.

• Planning for housing should include **additional actions and activities** for integration in order to facilitate social cohesion at the neighborhood level. **Local strategic partners** and networks should be leveraged to better achieve this goal.

• **Mixed housing** which brings together different age groups, nationalities and socioeconomic backgrounds has a strong potential for integration

• A governance model which allows **inhabitants to take part** in decision making (collaborative, participatory governance) is recommended to build social interactions.

• Designing a **social business model** for the project that can both rely on the availability of public funding and even generate revenues in order to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

• **Collaboration** between governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as engagement with local communities is essential for overcoming challenges

Since 2015 forced migration has been on the frontline of EU politics. Reception and consequent integration of people who arrived in 2015 and 2016, as well as those who continue to arrive till today posed challenges for both administrations, civil society and immigrants. Indeed, migrants still struggle to become included into local communities, social and economic life of the countries where they now reside despite political decisions and integration programs. In this process we have identified the key role of individuals and organizations with a vision of innovation for housing and integration.

Within the MERGING project, we analyzed immigrant reception and integration policies in Spain, France, Italy, and Sweden on national, regional and local level. In many cases the local governments have no say in how many asylum seekers and refugees they need to provide housing for and in all cases across Europe municipalities have no say in asylum policies overall. Thus, on top of being actors who close the policy gaps caused at the national level, cities identify larger roles for themselves and organized horizontally as networks addressing refugee issues and bypassing the national governments (Doomernik & Ardon, 2018).

Zooming further at the processes happening at the local level for this policy brief we have identified and interviewed

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three actors who work hard to bring innovation and change in relation to housing for immigrants and refugees. Our three innovators come from the three cities where the MERGING pilot projects will be implemented, namely Gothenburg in Sweden, Lyon in France and Valencia in Spain.

Tinna Harling is an architect, project manager of the NGO Egnahemsfabriken (https://tjorn.egnahemsfabriken.se) and the coordinator of the biannual conference for social building (https://socialtbyggande.se) She is based in West Sweden and Egnahemsfabriken is a partner in the Gothenburg pilot which will be a boat house.

Mario Jordá Vidal, is the Deputy Director of Social Integration of the Valencian Entity of Housing and Ground (EVHA- the public enterprise managing public dwellings of the Valencian Community, linked to the Regional Ministry of Housing and Bioclimatic Architecture). He has been collaborating with MERGING for the pilot in Valencia together with Pura Peris-Garcia, who is the General Director of Housing Emergency, Social Function of Housing and Observatory of Habitat and Urban Segregation and the Second Vice Presidency and Ministry of Housing and Bioclimatic Architecture. Peris-Garcia has made it possible the provision of 8 apartments and a street-level venue for the pilot project in Valencia. The latter will serve for the creation of a community. All properties are located in the same neighborhood in the old city centre of Valencia and have been already renovated, but still need to be furnished.

Last, **Marion Veziant-Rolland**, is the director of the association Le Foyer Notre-Dame Des Sans-Abri (https://www.fndsa.org), a leading NGO working with homelessness in the region of Rhône and in Lyon.

Policy Innovation for housing and integration

Defining policy innovation and success in relation to housing and integration is very complex and multidimensional. Policy innovation is defined "as the formulation, realization and diffusion of new problem understandings, new political visions and strategies for solving them." (Sørensen & Waldorff's, 2014:3). Assessments of policy success consider factors such as problem definition, selection of policy tools, access to resources, or the performance of the actors involved in the policy implementation process (Howlett, 2018; McConnell, 2010). Successful programmatic

performance is about choosing policy tools that will have an impact on the issues they are supposed to tackle and thus producing valuable social outcomes. In our case housing which facilitates and enables social cohesion and integration.

Successful attainment of political legitimacy for a policy involves the extent to which both the social outcomes of policy interventions and the manner in which they are achieved are seen as appropriate by policy makers, policy implementers and the inhabitants. To sustain success over time it is necessary that the key stakeholders involved in the policy process maintaining coalitions of stakeholders to persuasively propagate the success of the policy and influence elite and public perceptions of the policy intent and outcomes.

The area of Ringön where the houseboat will be docked in Gothenburg, Sweden. ©UGOT, 2022

Our three interviewees although they are coming from different contexts and different positions emphasized that *innovation comes with experimentation, flexibility and a vision that is going beyond housing.* As Marion mentioned "innovative is to address the unmet needs of the larger group, while also meeting the specific issues concerning smaller groups, while experimenting with organizational methods or alternative practices to be more relevant in the way of managing our activities". Tinna emphasized the vision of "both building houses that people need and in the same time learn to know each other, learn the language and learn how to build". According to Mario "a fundamental innovation has been to introduce in the management of the public housing stock and in the treatment of the people who

live in those dwellings, *processes of listening and participation*. People must be listened to!"

Challenges in achieving innovative housing

1. Cost and financing

The issue of the cost of housing was identified by all interviewees. Tinna specified that in Sweden the cost is so high and the building process so specialized that it excludes many people from accessing housing. This is also a barrier in further advancing alternative solutions such social building.   As Marion also mentioned in relation to the French case "it is difficult to find funding for innovation, both in relation to investment and even more so for operation, the specificity and the temporary nature, specific of a pilot raise less support from funders than large-scale or long-term projects.

2. Legal and policy barriers

Although the right to housing is recognized in all three countries, the specific policies and practices facilitating access to housing are not always there. Especially when it comes to innovative ideas which could propose housing for innovation. As Marion puts it "experimenting requires understanding the financiers, their leeway, and being able to discuss with them, while also having established a relationship of trust with them. Once the innovation is successful, the difficulty remains to bring it into 'common law' and sustainable funding."

Mario brings to the forefront the issue of structure and regulations and explains how the right to housing is better addressed in Valencia since 2019 with the introduction of the Regional Ministry of

Housing. He also mentioned a series of regulatory changes that help them look more on the people and beyond the dwellings.

The plot where the tiny houses will be built in Lyon, France. ©Quatorze, 2022

3. Local context and segregation

Segregation is a very important problem is Gothenburg and it affects the possibility of migrants to integrate in the city. Overall, housing projects for migrants and refugees have been causing a lot of local resistance (Grange & Björling, 2020). This is a rather universal phenomenon as Marion mentioned "the reaction of local residents to the installation of an accommodation activity for people in precarious situations, whatever it may be, is rarely positive. It is therefore important to be ready to face forms of hostility, and to educate people to open minds and transform this hostility into something constructive for everyone."

Often, as in the case of Valencia there have been previous policies which led to ghettos. Mario explained in detailed how the administration is trying to reverse the negative effects of the long term policies of the past which pushed vulnerable people to the margins and the strategies to avoid returning to ghetto inducing policies.
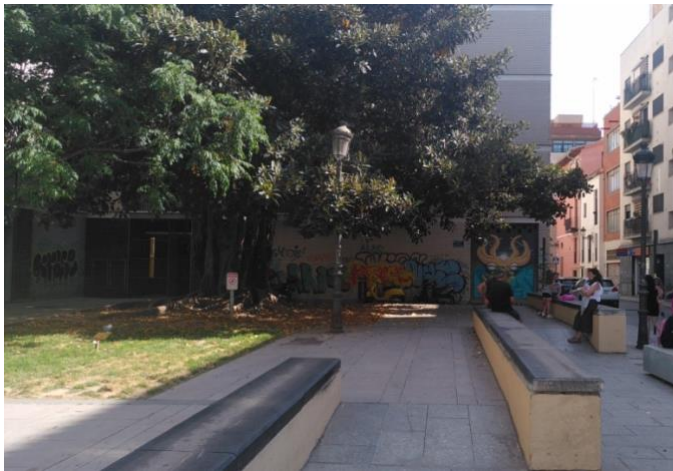
Synergies and collaborations to advance innovative visions for housing and integration

Both our empirical work in MERGING so far and the three interviews point to the absolute essential role of *collaborations and synergies* to achieve innovation for housing and integration.

The area where the pilot in Valencia will be located, Spain. ©UVEG, 2022

Tinna describes their strategy for building synergies around the same needs. "There is an urgent need for affordable and sustainable houses and also a lot of people that dream about building their own home." This led them in Egnahemsfabriken in designing different educations in relation to building houses. Education becomes thus a vessel of widening the networks as well as giving/enhancing empowerment.

Marion talks about complementarity of skills between the partners. Taking the example of MERGING she describes how research, management and public support have been complementary assets brought by different partners on the table. She also stresses the need for local support from the municipality especially when it comes to securing building permits and facilitating the mediation with the residents of the district. "State services are an essential partner for the orientation of people on the system." Last but not least she stresses the need of both public and private financial support for innovative pilot projects.

Mario discussed in length the collaboration between the municipalities, the region and local NGOs and civil society organizations. Especially in cases of emergency homelessness such as such a sudden eviction, a flood, a fire, or any situation that leaves people without housing. The collaboration between these entities provides quick and efficient solutions. Also, in situations of long term homelessness NGOs and civil society organizations can provide bridge solutions till the state can offer housing.

About MERGING

MERGING is an international interdisciplinary study of immigrant integration and social inclusion through participatory housing initiatives in Spain, France, Italy and Sweden. MERGING reviews existing knowledge, integration policies and initiatives in which housing has a central place. It provides evidence-based policy recommendations with the aim to facilitate policy and practice innovation for immigrant integration in Europe, among other. Furthermore, the project aspires to study the feasibility of participatory immigrant housing through the construction of pilot housing to implement, test and evaluate them in three European countries (Spain, France, Sweden).

MERGING focuses on policies and practices related to a specific part of immigrant population – refugees and beneficiaries of international protection, including subsidiary protection and protection based on humanitarian grounds.

This policy brief is based on the analysis of the governance of housing for immigrants in different local contexts in Europe. It draws on studies of participatory housing examples from France, Italy, Spain and Sweden, qualitative interviews with stakeholders, policy analysis, literature review and other case relevant document analysis.

More information: www.merging-housing-project.eu

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