



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 the demographic, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious makeup of already diverse European cities and suburbs and rural communities. This may represent an opportunity, but also a significant challenge if taking place in an unorderly manner, as occurred in Europe since 2014.

In view of their magnitude, these phenomena generate two major sources of tension. They destabilize countries of origin because of the flight of talent abroad and challenge countries of arrival to welcome and integrate migrants. This is particularly the case in Lebanon, in Turkey, in Northern America but also in Europe, which accounts for 30% of global migration flows – 82.3 million migrants (International Organization for Migration, 2020). They challenge social services to support populations suffering from deep trauma. They challenge politicians and elected officials to maintain the unity of populations in a context of a deep social divide. They challenge urban planners to host migrants in cities already under stress in terms of housing – immigrants tend to be more present in urban or border departments (INSEE, 2017).

In this context, the main challenge is to provide policy makers at local, regional, national and supra-national level, civil society organizations and other relevant actors with effective, responsive, flexible, context-specific and culture-specific proposals for measures to address socio-economic integration and inclusion as well as access to rights and services. This includes sustainable and participatory strategies, also with the involvement of citizens, civil society actors, education institutions and the private sector.

To meet these challenges, we propose to address the issue of reception and integration policies from the point of view of housing since it is one of the key factors for successful integration of immigrants

The MERGING project is an interdisciplinary study of migrant integration through participatory housing initiatives.

General objectives are to develop, implement and test a participatory housing program dedicated to immigrants involving various stakeholders (citizens, civil society actors, education institutions, private sector and beneficiaries) in order to propose recommendations for inclusive measures to local, regional, national and European authorities and other stakeholders, and disseminate the findings.

The project brings together 7 disciplines from 10 partners to test an innovative approach aiming to facilitate and ensure the sustainability of migrants' integration process.

MERGING reviews existing knowledge, integration policies and initiatives across macro (EU migration policies), meso (regional economic & social systems) and micro (individual practices) levels in which housing occupies a prominent place. This will enable us to study the feasibility of participatory pilots in order to implement, test and evaluate them in 3 European regions. To ensure the success and the sustainability of the project, both immigrants, hosts, volunteers, NGOs, companies, citizens will be involved in the construction (or renovation) of housing.

The innovative, multi-method approach (e.g. interviews, focus groups, policy analyses, quantitative data analysis and participatory action research) provides in-depth analyses of:

- 1) the long-term effects of participatory housing initiatives;
- 2) factors fostering or hindering integration processes of migrants and access to civic rights in local communities; and
- 3) how diverse stakeholders can support migrants by strengthening their socio-economic integration through participatory initiatives (notably the ones related to housing).

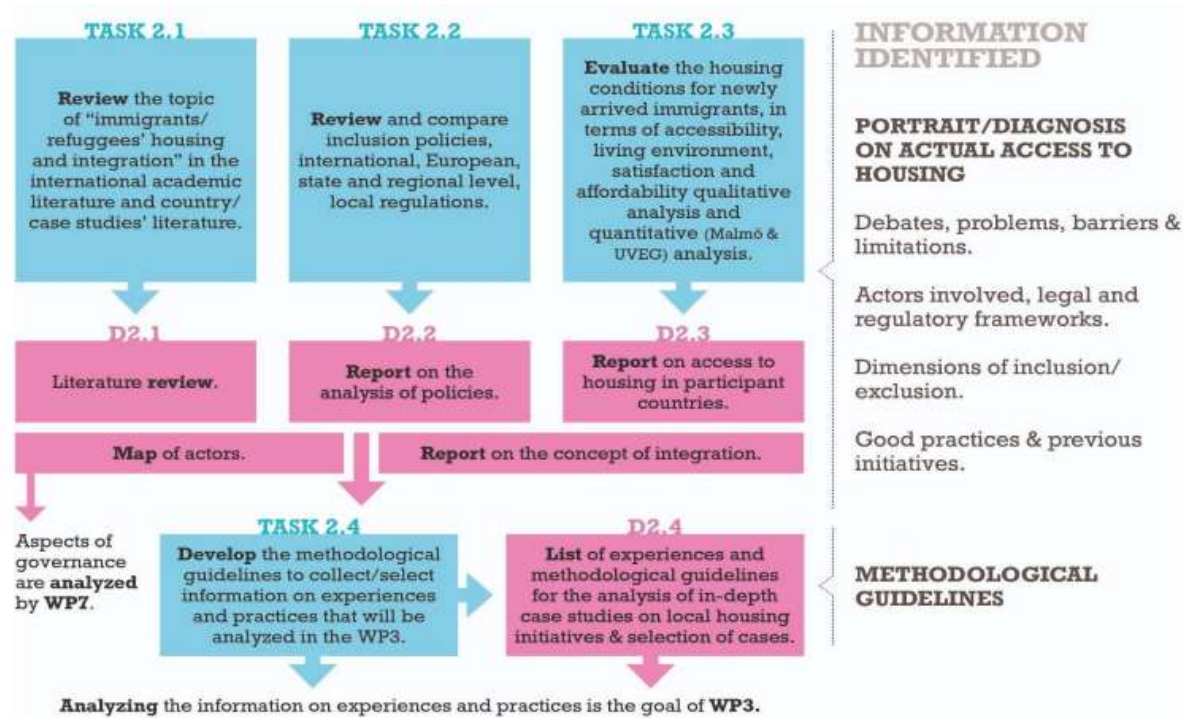
MERGING will contribute extensively to integration studies - empirically, methodologically and conceptually - through its place- and migrant-centred approach. MERGING offers direct benefits to migrants and evidence-based policy recommendations will help to push policy and practice innovation in the field of migrant integration in Europe.

Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far

In 2021, two work packages (WP 2 & 3) have been completed and three have started (WP 4, 6 & 7). WP2 aimed at identifying existing knowledge (and gaps) related to housing and inclusion policies for exiled people in Europe. WP7 aimed at analysing governance systems to make recommendations to policy-makers through policy briefs. The objective of WP3 was to conduct case studies in order to identify key success factors, propose social business and governance models for the pilots (WP4) and make recommendations to actors related to immigrants' integration through housing.

The objectives of WP2 and 7 were to 1) Review the topic of "immigrants' housing and integration" in the international academic literature of participants' countries; 2) Review and compare inclusion policies; 3) Evaluate the housing conditions for newly arrived immigrants and 4) Develop the methodological guidelines to collect information on experiences and practices that will be analysed in the WP3. To do so, a research strategy has been designed, combining literature review, statistical analyses and expert interviews. Figure 1 summarizes the research strategy designed and implemented to conduct WP2 and 7.

Figure 1. Research Strategy



The analyses conducted in WP2 allowed us to identify similarities and differences among partner countries in terms of actors involved, procedures, access to civic rights, immigrants’ freedom of action, difficulties faced and solution found. Several lessons were drawn from our analyses.

Immigrants and Integration

In WP2, we started by analysing how the notion of immigrant has been defined and treated in the academic and institutional literature of each partner country. A great variety of denominations, administrative statuses and situations are being used to analyse migrants’ integration journey. Our literature review pointed the effect of immigrants’ administrative categorization on the integration journey: the status attributed to migrants influence the type of housing/accommodation they will be able to benefit, the speed and ease to access to civic rights (healthcare, education, labour...) - thus, to take part to the local society. Among immigrant populations, asylum seekers, isolated minors and undocumented migrants are the most vulnerable individuals due to the uncertainties associated to their status and their impossibility to engage in any economic activities (thus to gain financial autonomy).

The cross-country analysis highlighted the disparity of actions engaged by governments regarding immigrants’ reception policies and procedures. Indeed, the success rate of asylum seekers is very different from one country to another within the European Union: some countries (e.g. Ireland, Austria, Luxembourg) granted refugee status to almost 50% of the petitioners in 2021, when others (e.g. Spain, Bulgaria, Cyprus) only granted 10% of the requests of refugee status (Eurostat, 2021). This clearly differentiates the resources to which each type of population can have access depending on the country of reception. Furthermore,

some EU countries tend to limit the access the welfare system despite benefiting from subsidiary protection.

Immigrants and Housing

Regardless the country studied, academics and institutional actors agree on the critical nature of housing. It is the first step in being able to guarantee the other resources that make it possible to integrate into the host society, because it provides the minimum security to cope with everyday life and it is needed in order to access to basic rights (Firang, 2018; Teixeira & Drolet, 2018; Balampanidis, 2020; Buchen-Knapp, Fakh & Spehar, 2018; Leh, 2018). However, it is also critical due to the difficulties faced by the most vulnerable ones to access to it. The lack of social or affordable housing in cities, associated with the rising bargaining power of housing providers, makes it harder and harder to access to a decent housing. Indeed, accessing to a house is a long and expensive process, worsened in some cities by the emergence of tourist-oriented rentals, speculation or the effects of COVID. This is particularly true for immigrants, which see their access to housing slowed by the rigidity of national/local policies, the time spent in administrative limbo, their lack of financial autonomy, the existence of discriminatory practices – as some housing providers applying ethnic quotas when selecting their occupants.

Which role do governments play?
Governments play different roles regarding immigrants’ access to housing. In countries like France or Sweden, the state administration plays a very important role in housing provision. Decisions tend to be centralised and financings are attributed by the central state. In other countries, like Italy and Spain, this role is shared by regional, local governments or even nongovernmental organizations

In Europe, most asylum seekers live – albeit temporarily - in reception centres. This means that, although they have access to housing, it is not individual, but shared. This occurs, in general, while asylum is being processed, thus marking a transition in what the literature has defined as a pathway (Wyckaert, Leinfelder & De Decker, 2020).

Interestingly, it appears that discrepancies exist between countries and actors regarding immigrants’ decision-making related to where and how they will be housed. Immigrants’ freedom of action is situated on a continuum, from the total

absence of decision power to the full cooperation of beneficiaries and housing providers, and from decision taken by the central state to local authorities. In countries like France and Sweden, immigrants are dispersed on the territory by national institutions to reduce pressure on large cities with more or less restrictive policies. In other countries like Italy and Spain, these decisions are taken at the regional level, opening the door to more adapted but also diverse policies. In some cases, immigrants will be able to select a destination while in others, the destination will be imposed without leaving any room for changes. The work conducted in D 2.2, D. 2.3 and D 7.1 was dedicated mapping the international, national and local actors involved in the housing process. At the policy-level (D 7.1), we analysed the governance of migrant housing at the local/county level, the national level and the regional/EU level. We have mapped the different governmental and non-governmental actors involved and we have pointed to the challenges and opportunities for collaboration while building in research produced in WP2 and WP3. At the societal level, it allowed us to have a better understanding

of contextual differences by observing local ecosystems, mapping local actors through a multi-level governance mapping system and identifying their roles, actions and difficulties faced – notably at the housing level.

Furthermore, it allowed us to identify more precisely the stakeholders which we will address, and we have produced the first policy brief targeting policy makers and practitioners in all levels of administration (as part of WP7). These efforts are, indeed, important to reach our final objective which is to provide stakeholders with the necessary tools to ensure the efficient governance and the successful implementation of constructive housing initiatives for immigrants

Regarding access to housing, a critical moment for beneficiaries of International Protection lies between the moment of leaving the reception centre and the establishment in a home, as there is usually a gap in terms of help from the administration. This gap may be characterized by the existence of formal or informal aid, or by the absence of any kind of aid. Four main strategies are being implemented by immigrants in order to overcome the administrative gap and access to housing: 1) getting help from the migrant community (sharing flats...), 2) getting help from local citizens/actors (solidarity housing, mentoring...), 3) using the private resources of the rental network and 4) the welfare path, dedicated to isolated minors and mothers (Aigner, 2019).

Main difficulties in accessing to housing

Besides the negative consequences of COVID-19, multiple factors make the access to housing difficult for immigrants in Europe. First and foremost is the problem of social housing, which is very limited in many countries, especially those that receive more asylum applications, notably the Mediterranean area. This lack of social housing affects the most vulnerable people, including immigrants, as well as asylum seekers and refugees. Second, there is discrimination caused by xenophobia in access to housing that limits access to certain racial profiles, in part caused because landlords think that either tenants will not be able to pay the rent, or they will create problems in the neighbourhood (Acolin, Bostic & Painter, 2016; Bonnet et al., 2016, 2018). Third, there is an increase in rents, which leads asylum seekers and refugees to take some measures: first, living in cheaper areas, which are often degraded; second, going to live in the company of other people and share expenses; third, occupy homes or built spaces that are abandoned; or, ultimately, living on the street (Bhagat, 2019). Fourth, the administrative complexity and the non-consultation of immigrants’ needs during the settlement process pushes some of them to leave public systems to remain located in the same city;

Geography and Access to Housing
Major differences exist between the settlement process carried out in large cities or in semi-urban or rural areas. In urban areas, the housing problem is serious as prices are high and the competition fierce (Weidinger & Kordel, 2020; Bolzoni, Gargiulo & Manocchi, 2015; Gardesse & Lelevrier, 2020). Existing policies of territorial dispersion and delegation of powers to regional or local governments end up producing situations of inequalities within the same country in the application of rules, and to notable differences between state macropolitics and initiatives being developed at the local level (El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018; Meer et al., 2021)

close to their own communities. We can add also that a major difficulty in the case of Sweden at least is the overall lack of housing which limits the possibilities for refugees in accessing housing and it also fuels the competition across the lines of refugees versus locals in accessing housing. This is both a practical issue and a political barrier as it holds back the municipalities from offering long term housing for refugees under the threat of the high political cost.

The work conducted in WP2 led us to establish the methodological guidelines (case selection template, interview grid, template for data restitution, data analysis strategy, etc.) necessary to run the case studies planned in WP3.

Case studies

In 2021, five case studies have been conducted in France, Italy, Spain and Sweden on housing programs selected for their innovativeness and heterogeneity on the basis of five dimensions: 1) audience targeted, 2) urban planning, 3) integration goals, 4) governance, 5) welfare.

The case selected are:

- The Swedish SällBo project (temporary co-housing example of interethnic and intergenerational mix)
- Two French cases:
 - Les Cinq Toits project (temporary housing solution embedded in a community of practices)
 - Un Toit c'est Un Droit project (scattered housing project based on grassroots engagement and refugees' activation)
- The Spanish Agermanament Comunitari Valencià project: multi-stakeholders' provision of temporary and scattered urban housing solutions
- The Italian Housing First Co.Bo (multi-targeted and educationally-lead scattered housing solutions)

All cases represent multi-target projects that were made possible by the existence of multi-stakeholder networks, while also contributing to enlarging and strengthening them.

A total of 106 interviews has been conducted with immigrants, volunteers, social actors, local authorities and policy-makers within the scope of WP3. In addition, the MERGING partners took 23 pictures and did 8 days of non-participant observation in the selected housing facilities. Data have been analysed by each team using a double coding technique, based on a grid (deductive coding) established by UNIBO and SBE and an inductive coding using software like N'vivo and Atlas.ti.

The work conducted in WP3 highlighted the discrepancies existing in the institutional and governance contexts, different actors and competences of local and metropolitan authorities, varying NGOs' exposures, and role as well as diverse forms of civil society's grassroots engagement on the subject of immigrants' access to housing. Our work revealed that both formal and informal institutions determine housing practices at local level. The first recognition deriving from both literature and policy review, as well as exploratory stakeholders' interviews, revealed that formal institutions mainly concern the legal and

administrative fundamentals of spatial and temporal housing measures, while the informal institutions primarily comprise the cognitively anchored patterns of perception, beliefs, shared values, and behaviour of the actors involved in the field. This means that refugee housing projects are not exclusively dependent on the legal-administrative systems, but also on the different socio-economic, political, and cultural structures and dynamics prevailing in each country, and on how they are articulated at the local level. Such considerations are significant in shaping problem perceptions/definitions and responses in different national and sub-national settings.

From a Business Model Canvas perspective, the comparison of the selected cases also allowed us to identify similarities and differences, as well as the specificities of each site in terms of targets (beneficiaries), social value propositions, temporality, integration activities, strategic partners/networks, housing typology, key resources and costs, governance, scalability/replicability and, finally, social and environmental benefits. Participatory initiatives, long-term solutions, external networks and the provision of integration activities proved to be critical to ensure a rapid and successful integration. Based on these comparisons, and on the extensive literature review conducted in WP2 and 3, we were able to propose two new typologies of operating models regarding housing solutions for immigrants.

First, we built an integration service governance based on two dimensions: the breadth (from the most housing to the most individual-focused) and the degree of internalisation of the provided services (from the full internalization vs outsourced). Four models have been identified: the intermediary, the housing manager, the networked individual-based and the integrated individual-based models.

Second, we built a typology of space for integration based on two variables: the degree of social mixing (from the integration within to extra housing) and the architectural centralization (from the most centralized to the most decentralized). Four categories have been identified: the co-housing space organizer, the integration space manager, the network organizer and the collector.

The work conducted in WP2, 3 and 7 lead us to formulate a set of 12 recommendations related to the design and construction of housing initiatives for refugees. These 12 recommendations aims at guiding actors when providing refugees with a place to live, as well as services that could foster their integration. These recommendations will be particularly useful to the MERGING partners involved in WP4, 5, 6 and 7.

Finally, WP4 and 6 were initiated, starting with the design of the pilot projects, the definition of the goals and expected outcomes of the pilots.

Progress beyond the state of the art, expected results until the end of the project and potential impacts

The multidisciplinary nature of the MERGING team, and the work conducted, allows us to build a rich analytical framework related to immigrants' integration through housing. Several gaps have been identified in the literature. First, the work conducted in D 2.1 and D 2.2 shed light on the fact that housing has rarely been studied per se, but rather as a component of social integration of immigrant populations. Consequently, measuring the impact of housing of immigrants' social integration remains a topic insufficiently addressed. Second, most of the literature analyse immigrants' integration from a static point of view, but not from a dynamic perspective. However, many difficulties faced by immigrants are related to the evolution of their status and conditions in the host country. Third, we build a whole methodology to map stakeholders, select case studies, collect and analyse data. We also proposed two new typologies combining governance/business models and architectural aspects to analyse housing projects. These typologies should allow us to better understand the importance of housing (typologies, location...) on migrants' inclusion by including in the analysis local architectural specificities, building facilities and support activities.

Expected results

In line with the work already conducted and the goals set in the evaluation framework of the pilot projects (WP6), the MERGING project intends to contribute to reaching the following objectives:

Objective	Explanation
Improving exiled people's social inclusion	Exiled people are included in the host society and are full-fledged actors. Their needs are covered and they have access to their rights.
Building inclusive governance models	Stakeholders act together to respond effectively to the challenges of reception and inclusion of exiled people. Exiled people participate in decision-making processes.
Improving housing and living conditions	Living spaces are open, accessible, respectful of the environment and fulfilling. They promote social interaction, improve community life and contribute to the satisfaction of the needs of the territory's inhabitants.
Building capabilities and Empowering	The actors involved in the reception of exiled people have adapted capacities, they enrich each other through the different interactions. The rhythm of each person is respected. The practices evolve allowing a quality accompaniment.

A set of indicators has been designed in order to monitor the impact of the MERGING initiative on immigrants' social inclusion, notably in term of number of beneficiaries, time necessary to access to the labour market, etc. In the same vein, objectives are being defined for 14 types of stakeholders involved in the project, namely: Social landlords, Employment actors (public employment service, companies, associations, etc.), Public authorities (National, regional and local), Health professionals, Educational professionals, Culture and sport actors, Local Residents, Managers of the housing facilities, Project leaders, Media, Support associations, social workers, Builders/architects, Funders, Exiled People.

From an academic point of view, the MERGING partners aim at developing new methodologies to conduct research on and with exiled people – taking into consideration the ethical challenges related to their vulnerabilities. The dissemination of our results will be ensured through different channels: scientific events and medias, forums and other public events, workshops, social medias, etc. We intend to publish articles in major reviews, policy briefs, vulgarization articles and a collective book by the end of the project.

Expected impacts

The MERGING project contributes to improving the social, institutional, economical and educational-research spheres.

Institutional and social impacts

At the institutional and social level, the MERGING project aims at better understanding the nature of barriers to the inclusion of migrants with a view to improving integration policies, increase the effectiveness of accompanying measures and the rate of integration of migrant women into society. The work conducted in WP2, WP3 and WP7 already allowed us to identify X set of barriers: 1) the lack of affordable housing in major cities; 2) the difficulties in accessing to the private rental market due to high prices, discrimination practices and the lack of social capital locally; 3) the eclectism of national and local policies; 4) the negative effect of administrative complexity and categorizations; 5) the difficult access to civic rights (notably health, education and labour); 6) the politization of immigration and, subsequently, 7) the differential treatment offered to beneficiaries of an international protection (considered as “desirable”) and economic migrants (considered as “undesirable”)

The social fractures observed in Europe and the lack of calm discourse on immigration testify to the limitations of our current policies while advocating for greater integration of citizens in decision-making. It is commonly accepted that access to housing is the basis of any process of social integration and personal reconstruction. By developing the concept of participatory hospitality, our project aims to evaluate the effectiveness of citizen involvement in the processes of reception, acceptance of exiled populations by the locals as well as integration (professional and social) of migrants in the territory. The UN migration statistics highlight the difficulties faced by migrants in accessing employment and the precariousness they often experience. Indeed, the unemployment rate is 4 to 7% higher among migrants than among locals, jobs often more precarious (and undeclared) and wages up to 50% lower at equivalent work according to countries and sectors of activity (Migration Data Portal, 2020). These differences are particularly important in low-skilled sectors such as agriculture. It is also

important to note that unemployment also affects skilled migrants, the lack of recognition of diplomas greatly constrains access to the labour market.

Oriented towards collaborative and co-constructed housing, our project is in itself an innovative experience in connection with current societal demands, that is to say, the inclusion of stakeholders in the design and implementation of social policies. It is a unique opportunity to recreate social ties and to reduce the current divisions, not through political measures, but by making citizens involved in community life. Lessons learned from the implementation of this pilot project will also help to raise awareness among officials on migration and inclusion policies and to support elected officials in their efforts (1) improving urban planning policies to take account of new forms of urban mobility and (2) improving their knowledge of the messages to be communicated to their fellow citizens on social inclusion. It will also help to understand how relations between locals and migrants who benefit from innovative housing and inclusion schemes have developed in different countries. Citizen participation is indeed the main key factor for the success of the project and, on a larger scale, the long-term inclusion of migrants in our society.

Economic impacts

From an economic point of view, it aims to participate in the dynamization of territories through the integration of exiled people into local societies. Many sectors are now struggling to recruit because of a shortage of labour. Facilitating access to employment for migrant populations arriving on the territory helps both facilitate their social inclusion and support the growth of businesses by giving them access to a new pool of talent with high experience and skills diversified. This last element will be particularly interesting for companies wishing to internationalise and/or accelerate their development in foreign markets. Their entrepreneurship is then seen as a priority circumvention strategy allowing them to take part in local economic life while ensuring a source of income – an essential condition for their access to independence, the way to overcome discriminations and to participate in the dynamization of territories.

At the crossroads of public and private spheres, the MERGING project aims to contribute to the improvement of inclusion practices through work by participating in the definition of policies (recruitment, training...) for immigrant workers – designed to improve their employability.




Impacts on Education, training and research

In terms of training, the MERGING project intends to improve the existing supply at two levels. It aims to strengthen students' intercultural and operational skills (notably Entrepreneurship and cultural diversity, two elements part of the UN SDGs). The involvement of students will first of all increase the ERS dimension of the teaching provided while making students involved in the project. Real-world case studies and testimonials from stakeholders may be derived from the research carried out by the MERGING partners and included in the training courses. This will allow both the results of the work to be disseminated and the theoretical concepts to be operationalized. In addition to pedagogical interest, the participation of stakeholders will provide students with new opportunities for vocational integration.

In terms of research, the MERGING project will participate in enriching the debates existing in the academic literature regarding 1) immigrants' access to housing – and its impact on social inclusion; 2) the impact of participatory projects on local inclusion; 3) migration policies and 4) social operating business models and inclusion. The results of the work conducted in WP 2 to 7 will be communicated at national and international scientific conferences such as the IMISCOE Annual Conference, the International Conference on Immigration and Labour Market Integration, Migration Conference, the Nordic Migration Research Conference or the RENT conference, for example. These communications may lead to publications of scientific articles in classified international academic journals such as Comparative Migration Studies, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of International Migration, Integration, and Policy Studies, among others. They may also be popularized in order to be communicated to communities, institutions and businesses through publications in managerial journals. Finally, they will enable teacher-researchers to operationalize their teaching, thus creating bridges between the worlds of teaching and research.

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PARTNERS

-  Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 (UJML) - France
-  Lyon Ingénierie Projets (LIP) – France
-  Quatorze (Quatorze) France
-  Université Rennes 1 (Arènes) /EHESP – France
-  Università di Bologna (UNIBO) – Italy
-  Universitat de València (UEVG) – Spain
-  University of Gotenburg (UGOT) - Sweden
-  Malmö University (MAU) -Sweden
-  Social Business Earth (SBE) - Switzerland
-  Collectif d’Echanges pour la Technologie Appropriée (COTA) – Belgium



Project WEBSITE : www.merging-housing-project.eu

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