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Mapping Brussels' Displaced Housing Ecosystem: Palais des Droits' Post-Eviction Geographies and "Weird Alliances"

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Abstract

As displaced people arrive at European cities, the experiences of displacement caused by forces of bordering and securitization do not end at the point of arrival. Due to a pre-existing housing crisis characterized by critical shortages in affordable housing, a series of urban displacements ensue. The intersectionality between the border regime and neoliberal housing systems produces gaps in migrant housing needs which neither the reception nor the housing governance adequately addresses. In this vacuum, moments of encounter between displaced migrants and non-migrants, who share a need for housing, can be witnessed in the limited affordable urban space where they attempt to address their own precarity. Through stories from housing struggles in Brussels, this article maps what we term a "displaced housing ecosystem" through the geographies and alliances that emerge along the trajectory after the eviction of Palais des Droits. Here, migrants and non-migrants come together and employ various tools, ranging from (political) occupations of vacant buildings to inventive ad hoc partnerships with state and non-state actors towards the provision of housing and other hospitality infrastructures. Building on Lancione's notion of "weird exoskeletons," the article aims to map such constellations. By focusing on infrastructural objects that reflect the emerging non-conventional alliances to respond to displacement, narrating the solidarities as well as antagonisms within them, the article sheds light on displaced housing governances from below. The purpose is to highlight the diverse and hybrid forms of actions, actors, and coalitions constituting an ecosystem for housing displaced migrants, shortly "displaced housing," in relation to and beyond formal reception and housing systems.

Keywords

bordering; Brussels; displaced housing; eviction; housing ecosystem

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1. Introduction: A Displaced Housing Ecosystem Beyond the Formal/Informal Binary

As the 1,000 displaced people occupying no. 48 Rue des Palais started calling their squat "Palais des Droits" (Palace of Rights), the imaginations of the media and the public in Brussels were already occupied by images of unruliness, with a ministerial spokesperson deeming the situation "out of control" (Taylor, 2023). And indeed, the squat had emerged from outside the control and terrains of governance that destined its inhabitants to liminality, compelling them to inhabit the uninhabitable. A small group of homeless asylum seekers sought refuge in the empty building to escape the streets during winter; their homelessness a result of the Belgian government's failure to accommodate thousands of asylum seekers. Palais des Droits eventually housed about 800 registered applicants for international protection (""Palais des droits": Près de 800 demandeurs," 2023), together with a diverse group of displaced people who have no entitlements to housing in the eyes of the state: undocumented people, transient migrants falling under the Dublin Regulation, homeless people including those struggling with addiction, and more. The lived realities in Palais des Droits very quickly discourage any urges towards its romanticization. It was chaotic and rough, with frequent outbreaks of disease and violence. Nonetheless, within its "thrown-togetherness," and the fragile alliances that coalesced this group of people to make a home, lies a language of housing, and an assertion illegible to those who deem it "out of control."

In this article, we attempt to make legible the socio-spatial infrastructures that underpin making home in the precarities of displacement. The intersectionality between the border regime and neoliberal housing systems produces gaps in migrant housing needs which neither the reception nor the housing governance adequately addresses. Through stories from housing struggles in Brussels, such as the trajectories that emerged after the eviction of Palais des Droits, we map how migrants and non-migrants who are experiencing displacement navigate the limited affordable urban space where they attempt to address their own precarity. In doing so, they employ various tools and create displaced geographies and alliances that extend beyond normative notions of housing, what we term a "displaced housing ecosystem." Building on Lancione's (2019) notion of "weird exoskeletons," the article aims to map such constellations. The purpose is to highlight the diverse and hybrid forms of actions, actors, and coalitions constituting an ecosystem for housing displaced migrants, shortly "displaced housing," in relation to and beyond formal reception and housing systems. In the remainder of this introductory section, we will first establish the theoretical groundings of our argument, linking border and urban displacements and disrupting the binaries of in/formality to trace a displaced housing ecosystem consisting of "geographies" and "weird alliances." In the following section, we will delve into the case study of Palais des Droits, contextualizing it within the Brussels scene, and following the trajectories that emerged after its eviction as a method to map a displaced housing ecosystem. Finally, we will zoom into three specific displaced housing geographies and their alliances, before offering some conclusions.

1.1. Connecting Border Displacements and Urban Displacements

In European cities, the experiences of displacement caused by bordering and securitization do not end at the point of arrival. Due to a pre-existing housing crisis characterized by critical shortages in affordable housing, a series of urban displacements ensue. Many scholars draw attention to how bordering is entrenched into the urban, where asylum accommodation acts as "internal border spaces" (Thorshaug, 2018; see also Fontanari, 2015) that transform the experience of forced displacement into "forced arrival" (Kreichauf, 2018).

The intersectionality between the border regime and neoliberal housing systems produces gaps in migrant housing needs which neither the reception nor the housing governance adequately responds to. Hence, cross-border displacement folds into urban displacement, with a diverse population that shares spaces of housing marginality. By examining the diverse experiences of urban displacement, insights emerge on the limitations of categorizing border displacements through the legal asylum procedure (asylum seeker, refugee, undocumented migrant, etc.), which does not accurately reflect the living and housing conditions for people within each category and neither accounts for the commonalities between them and non-migrant citizens experiencing displacement and housing precarity. To this point, Ramsay (2020) argues:

> There is a persistent tendency to approach displacement in terms of politico-legal categories of exclusion, or through a mobility paradigm, or as a kind of liminality. Taken together, these theorizations render displacement into an exceptional experience that is precluded on differentiation from a supposedly stable non-migrant other. (p. 405)

Indeed, moments of encounter can be witnessed between displaced migrants and non-migrants, who share a need for housing in the limited affordable urban space where they attempt to address their own precarity.

The focus on migrant mobility misleadingly stresses the movement of people as the main aspect of displacement. Such focus underestimates the impoverishment and deprivation displaced people experience during the crisis and/or disregards the fact that said movement is a phenomenon shared among many groups, who do not necessarily share these vulnerabilities. Assal (2002) points out the need to differentiate between displacement as a spatial/geographical movement and as a socio-economic process, stating that "displacement and forced movements of people are always only one aspect of much larger constellations of political, economic and cultural processes and practices" (p. 71). Thinking of displacement as the outcome of an ensemble of many devices, it can then be largely viewed as a process that entails "the alienation or dispossession of the displaced persons from their former means of subsistence and the uprooting of their cherished values" (p. 74). It is this process of dispossession and its rhythms that define displacement as a condition shared between migrants and non-migrants within the urban. Ramsay (2020) argues that "recognizing the shared temporal rhythms of displacement, and how these manifest broadly as the effects of global capitalism and neoliberal restructurings, is one way [to] strengthen our analyses and critiques of bordering structures" (p. 385).

The idea of de-exceptionalizing displacement across a border, refusing to place it in contrast to an emplaced non-migrant is complemented by what Huq and Miraftab (2020) term a state of "citizenship in wait" and "in-situ displacement," where they foreground the precarious relationship to citizenship for both those displaced across a border and those displaced within the urban. Following this, embracing an "open urban citizenship" (Oosterlynck et al., 2018) and a "politics of presence" (Darling, 2017), it becomes significant to further scrutinize the dynamics that come into play in confronting bordering and housing apparatuses. Through these shared practices, displaced people enact negotiations that are grounded in survival and pose critical questions on subjectivities and ideas of citizenship, opening possibilities to imagine "new political constellations which work both within and beyond citizenship" (Turner, 2016). In this line, Casas-Cortes (2019) offers the notion of *care-tizenship* based on the work of Spanish feminist activists in precarity movements, which suggests "a community of practice forged by ties of caring relationships, mutually attending to basic needs in a context of increasing vulnerability among local, migrant and emigrant

populations" (p. 19). Housing, in this context, is attempting to counter a process of dispossession that impacts, albeit differentially, those who are displaced across the border into the urban as well as those displaced within it, and thus we qualify it as "displaced housing."

1.2. Beyond the Formal/Informal Binary

Often, housing displaced people is reviewed in binaries of, on the one hand, the formal reception system charged with accommodating displaced people during the asylum process, and, on the other hand, the alternative housing produced by displaced people themselves and/or non-state actors. Scholarship, particularly from the Global South, has been increasingly drawing attention to the urban nature of displacement, placing the camp and informal settlement in conversation. Huq and Miraftab (2020) argue that "informal settlements and camps are spatial and institutional constructs that produce differentiated forms of political subjects vis-a-vis citizenship, state, planning, and humanitarian agencies" (p. 365). They also stress that, as part of deepening the Southern turn in urban theory, "an ontological blurring between informal settlement and camps…is crucial for a new grassroots politics that organizes the globally dispossessed across citizen and refugee divides" (p. 364).

To consider the actual offer of displaced housing in cities, it is important to move away from the exceptionalization of "informal" or "alternative" displaced housing. A relegation of the "informal" is a shortcoming, in that, as Agha and Lambert (2020) assert, "the 'informal' designation is a definition based on the fallacious institutional belief that certain self-built bodies do not have a form." Looking across the field at both "formal" asylum infrastructures and "informal" housing infrastructures for displaced people, we find that both feature high levels of instability, manifested in a continuous cycle of moving around, threats of eviction or closure, or short envisioned timelines for their existence. They seem to be widely characterized by chronic and long-term temporariness (Awan, 2020; Vandevoordt, 2021; Welander, 2021). The shared temporalities are an indication that it is possible to read "formal" responses to reception using the same urban dynamics that condition "informal" displaced housing. Fawaz (2016) points to how "the perception of temporariness and 'crisis management' has placed 'refugee policies' at odds with the long-term future-oriented approach of planning" (p. 101), whereas she argues "it is possible to activate some of the frameworks developed for the study of informality in order to inform our understanding of processes of refugee settlement as well as ongoing responses to the refugee crisis" (p. 102).

The line in the sand between the formal and the informal in housing displaced people becomes especially blurry when we trace their housing trajectories, where people move in-between various forms of displaced housing. Darling (2017) emphasizes that "a focus on informality and urban presence has suggested, the city may become a space for a politics of critique relative to the state, a politics that refuses specific forms of governmentality—most notably the abjection of those displaced" (p. 192). We argue that it is important to center those lived realities by mapping the different geographies of displaced housing as part of an urban ecosystem. We therefore view the multiple geographies in the displaced housing ecosystem as interdependent since people appropriate and circulate between them. They are all, formal or informal or a combination of both, largely governed by the political economy of the city and the bordering practices of rising xenophobia and racism in Europe. Indeed, the political projects they contribute to, as well as the processes of space acquisition and appropriation, drastically vary. However, by reviewing an overall "displaced housing ecosystem," and embedding it in urban governance dynamics, it is possible to uncover

how the work of local, regional, federal, and transnational actors battle the restrictions within urban space towards the ex/inclusion of displaced people.

1.3. A Displaced Housing Ecosystem

In this article, we foreground an urban perspective in reading displacement, choosing to "see like a city" (Amin & Thrift, 2017) to de-center the nation-state and its borders when addressing displaced housing. In this line, Darling (2021) theorizes "seeing asylum like a city," where he argues:

> Discussions have overlooked how the conditions of urban life shape refugee experiences, and how cities and their politics are reworked not just by the presence of refugees, but by the presence of claims to authority, sovereignty, and governance that come with attempts to order mobility at different spatial scales. (p. 901)

By proposing to read an urban displaced housing ecosystem beyond the limitations of border categories (migrant/non-migrant), and beyond the binaries of in/formality, in effect, we consider what it would mean to "take desperation seriously" as Lancione (2020) invites, and focus on the housing strategies of displaced people as propositional politics. Our aim here is, as Lancione and Simone (2021) suggest, to see "how that inhabitation brings to the fore rhythms of endurance that are pointing beyond the status quo of inhabitation, of how it's currently and acceptedly done, theorized and spoken of" (p. 970).

In framing a displaced housing ecosystem, our interest here is twofold. First, it is to investigate how, like cross-border displacements blend into urban displacement, the asylum system and the housing system impact one another as their governance structures at various scales meet in urban space. Second, it is to examine how the practices of migrant and non-migrant displaced people constitute a form of governance that operates in relation to the asylum and housing systems, but also transcends them. To address these research questions, we explore the different ontologies of displaced housing that we encountered along the displaced housing trajectories after the Palais des Droits eviction, which have their distinct geographies and are supported by different alliances and together constitute the displaced housing ecosystem. Hence, in the following section we elaborate on the two interrelated dimensions of the displaced housing ecosystem: its geographies and its alliances.

1.3.1. Displaced Housing Geographies

In intimately navigating the patterns of bordering and extractive urban transformations in European cities, certain displaced dwelling ontologies are developed, where housing practices engage with and transcend state imaginaries of "home" and certain bodies' entitlement to it. In tracing housing trajectories of displaced people, there are recurrent ontologies that emerge where displaced people's experience of dwelling in liminality also becomes, as Lancione and Simone (2021) put it, the "method of a way of being urban, of performing the in-between of spaces that are taken away and of bodies and existences that are marked as foreclosed" (p. 970). Hence, we conceptualize these ontologies and their correlating geographies as the different types of housing (co)produced within a condition of displacement, that a displaced person may encounter along their journey of displacement. These geographies are not fixed but rather represent an ambivalent negotiation between displaced people and the processes and spaces of asylum and the city.

Our mapping of displaced housing ontologies and corresponding geographies is not a catalog of inhabitation categories but is rather an attempt to situate certain nodes that kept emerging throughout our investigation, occupying a certain position vis-à-vis the governance of asylum and urban displacement. In this, we follow Darling's (2021) argument that "seeing asylum like a city" as a method "entails a concern for staying with multiplicity and focusing attention on the temporary stabilization of orders" (p. 909). Indeed, even within existing forms of government, displaced people have different capacities to shift and temporarily (de)stabilize order; these temporary stabilizations become significant places to study the governance of displaced housing from below. As such, we regard these displaced housing geographies as both spatial sites as well as institutional positions within asylum and urban governance informed by displaced subjectivities. Indeed, as Darling (2021) asserts, any critical reflection on what he terms "refugee urbanism" requires both "an examination of how those arrangements are embedded within, and enacted through spatial relations, and a consideration of the varying intensities of governing and being governed that are brought to attention through urban conjunctures of governance, agency, and subjectivity" (p. 900). Though we locate displaced housing geographies as sites, within that is an interplay between spaces, bodies, regulations, materials, and relations that is concurrent with the urban, which we explore as displaced housing alliances below.

1.3.2. Displaced Housing "Weird Alliances"

Behind the production of displaced housing geographies there are always "weird alliances" that posit an urban dwelling otherwise. Lancione and Simone (2021) affirm that "despite whatever hegemonic ordering ensues, there remain strange alliances among all of these elements—materials, buildings, designs, bodies, voices, choreographies" (p. 971). Hence, we frame displaced housing alliances as the solidarities that underpin the production of different displaced housing geographies, and the constellations of actors, together with material and immaterial elements, that facilitate forms of inhabitation within a condition of displacement. This does not suggest, however, stability or fixity within these alliances as they are "based not on negotiated settlements but on the mutual unsettling of provisional anchorage" (Lancione & Simone, 2021, p. 973). Displaced housing alliances are not weird in their unlikeliness; they are "weird" in that their membership and their propositional homing practices are deemed "weird" through their liminality. Lancione (2019) describes the practices of a community of homeless drug users in Bucharest, asserting that they "[constitute] a propositional politics of a *weird* kind because it is made from 'weird' stuff. It is assembled by self-describing *ciudați* [strange people]" (p. 547, emphasis in original).

Lancione (2019) underscores that "the 'weirdness' of these assemblages needs to be maintained to avoid a sanitized and romanticized reading of the underground as home" (p. 548). Here, we attempt to trace displaced housing alliances that present interesting contradictions and imperfect negotiations, transcending their romanticization, following Darling's (2021) suggestion that "a concern with how the capacity to navigate tensions of uncertainty and stability is unevenly distributed is one means of developing an account of refugee urbanism that eschews urban romanticism or exceptionalism" (p. 909). Indeed, different subjectivities of displaced people impact their "reach" and capacity to navigate between uncertainty and stability. This differentiated capacity within the weird alliances of displaced housing allows us to bring urban space, governance, and displaced subjectivities into conversation.

Henceforth, the article will apply the framework outlined above to the case of Palais des Droits in Brussels. In doing so, we explore the displaced housing ecosystem in Brussels, detailing some of its geographies and

weird alliances. We argue that such framing of displaced housing practices underlines an infrastructural perspective to seemingly fragmented housing interventions and highlights the openings towards expanded solidarities in the project of homing displaced people, migrant and non-migrant, in the urban context.

2. Evicting the Palais des Droits: Investigating Displaced Housing Trajectories After the Eviction

Palais des Droits sits on Rue des Palais on what is referred to as the "tracé royal," which connects the royal residence at Chateau de Laeken and the Palais de Bruxelles in the city center, and includes Rue Royale, Rue des Palais, and Avenue de la Reine. The *tracé royal* echoes colonial history, as the route has been taken by the Belgian king to run the affairs of colonies in his offices downtown, and in the mid to late 1800s it saw a construction boom of "mainly bourgeoise houses and mansions of neoclassical style" (Inventaire du patrimoine architectural, n.d.). Today, the *tracé royal* remains significant as "this urban axis not only hosts major vacant public buildings, but also displays past and ongoing struggles for the right to housing" (d'Auria et al., 2023), with multiple notable Brussels housing occupations situated along it such as the occupations of 123, the Gesu Church at Botanique, and Rue Royale 312. Cutting across Brussels, the *tracé royal* reaches the Northern Quarter which has, over the years, hosted subsequent waves of migration and displacement with many migrant communities settling there; first in the 1930s with displaced Jewish Europeans, then migrant workers from Mediterranean Europe, mostly Italy and Greece, then a later wave of migrant labor from Morocco and Turkey, and today it remains an arrival space for many new migrants (Daher, 2019). Most notably, the Northern Quarter witnessed massive transformation in the 1960s and 1970s with the introduction of the Manhattan Plan, a master plan of modernist office buildings envisioned as Brussels' World Trade Center. The process to partially realize the Manhattan Plan resulted in the expulsion of some 15,000 people (Daher, 2019). New waves of urban renewal have targeted the area's fragmented urban fabric, including the canal redevelopment, where the part approximate to the Northern Quarter is envisioned to become "a place for recreation for many people in Brussels" (Canal Brussels, n.d.).

In Belgium, displacement and housing struggles are further exacerbated by a "reception crisis," where for the past few years no accommodation has been provided for thousands of recognized asylum seekers ("UNHCR: Reception crisis in Belgium," 2023). The Northern Quarter is marked within its geography by the recurrent reception crisis in sites such as asylum infrastructures such as the former reception center located in one of the World Trade Center blocks and the Humanitarian Hub, as well as various migrant occupations. Notably, in the aftermath of the 2015 "summer of migration," the Maximillian Park was occupied by displaced migrants as their processes to apply for asylum were delayed and they found themselves facing homelessness, with their camp garnering massive citizen solidarity (Daher & d'Auria, 2018). For those who do go through the asylum procedure and are offered shelter, the critical moment of acceptance as a refugee is another confrontation with potential homelessness, as they are expected to arrange their own housing within two months, at which point they get evicted (Beeckmans & Geldof, 2022; Wyckaert et al., 2020). Beyond the asylum procedure, transient and undocumented migrants also must navigate an unaffordable housing market finding themselves among the broader group of urban dwellers experiencing housing insecurity and displacement.

The occupation of Palais des Droits falls within this local history where cross-border displacement and urban displacement meet in the physical space of the *tracé royal* and the Northern Quarter. The vacant building of the Palais des Droits is a representative of the vacancy problem in the city contrasting increasing housing

insecurities, with over 1.2 million square meters of undeveloped public land and vacant buildings in Brussels ("Over 1.2 million m^2 of undeveloped public land," 2023). In 2001, the public building, formerly the tax office, was sold by the federal state to the German investor DEKA in a sale-and-lease-back operation until 2026. In 2018, the tax office left the premises while continuing to pay 2.7 million euros in rent until March 2021. In September 2022, the real estate company Banimmo and the Antwerp project developer LIFE started the purchase process, planning to redevelop the office building into a mixed-use environment with co-living housing units for young professionals. Both developers made a deal with the Brussels Region entailing that, in exchange for property tax exemption, the Region would be allowed to use the complex free of charge for two years for the temporary housing of 500 Ukrainian refugees. By October 2023, the building remained empty, and the occupation reportedly started when a Burundian family and some unaccompanied minors made their way into the building after being rejected by the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil; "Près de 300 demandeurs d'asile occupent un bâtiment à Schaerbeek," 2022), slowly snowballing into hundreds of occupants, and eventually becoming Palais des Droits.

On the 14th of February 2024, Palais des Droits was eventually evicted in a bewildering fiasco of a process. The contents of the narration hereafter are built on our entry into the fieldwork at the critical moment of Palais des Droits' eviction, where we carried out an ethnography as part of the "stop the reception crisis" movement that accelerated in the weeks after the eviction. We participated in many post-eviction mobilizations, including being involved in the opening of squats, mutual aid initiatives, and different forms of protest. This enabled a direct engagement and a co-creation of the narratives displayed here as they were experienced in community with a diverse group of interlocutors. The ethnography is supported by a media review, including news articles about the Palais des Droits, and social media pages of activist collectives and other relevant actors involved. Finally, some insights come directly from those evicted, through their own documentation of their circumstances shared in an online group. In addition to ethnography, visualization is a method utilized to both process and represent the collected data. The layering of maps, images, and diagrams was integral to processing the mapping. Having initiated the fieldwork at the moment of eviction, our interest is to trace the housing geographies displaced people sought and produced in their post-eviction trajectory, and the network of alliances that supported the formulation of these displaced housing geographies. This choice is a critical methodological approach as it allowed us to follow along, in real-time, the processes of negotiation towards the formulation of alliances and selection of geographies, using these trajectories as the evidence for what the displaced housing ecosystem in Brussels constitutes of, and what geographies and alliances are most relevant. By mapping the eviction and the challenging trajectories of residents thereafter, we hope to reveal the resistance that, notwithstanding repeated displacements, emerges as a seed for rethinking the homing of displaced people, and reflects the multiplicity of organizational set-ups, forms of activism, and communal support that facilitate a form of housing, however precarious.

During the Palais des Droits' eviction, recognized asylum seekers were given blue wristbands that would identify them during the relocation to another site. In reality, many people were left behind and were not offered alternative solutions despite legal entitlements. Figure 1 maps the post-eviction housing trajectories of displaced people after Palais des Droits, what we call the "displaced housing" trajectories. For some, this eviction was a process of dispersal by Fedasil into temporary accommodation across Brussels and Flanders, including gyms and hotels. In Brussels, there are about 9,000 temporary accommodation places, with slightly above half of them being in fixed locations. With such high levels of instability, this means that each year about 15 new accommodation sites must be found (Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale,
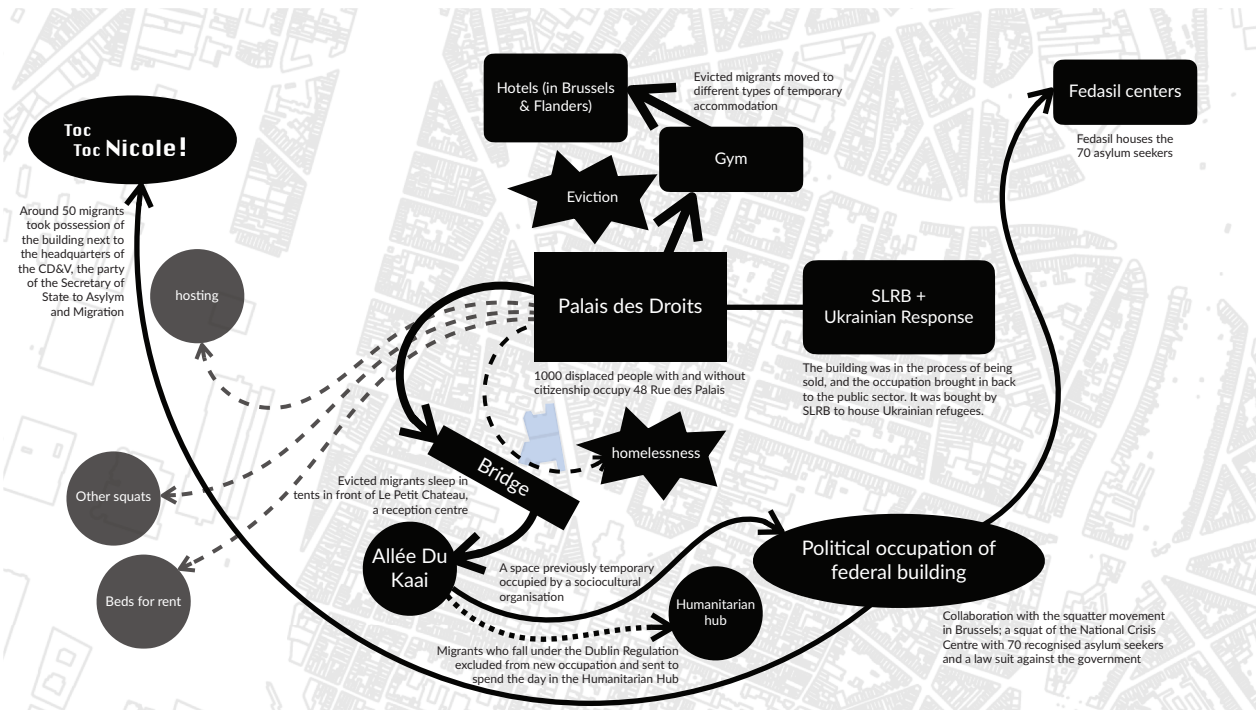
Figure 1. The displaced housing trajectories of Palais des Droits after its eviction. Notes: SLRB = Brussels Regional Housing Association.

2022). Apart from those housed by Fedasil in temporary occupations, for those deemed without entitlements or falling through the cracks, Palais' eviction was an expulsion back onto the streets. Many of the remaining people moved to various locations within the Northern Quarter, with each site constituting a link in a chain of further displacements. The journey started with a tent camp established by a bridge along the canal, in front of the reception center Le Petit Chateau. This encampment was a way to make a claim to housing addressed to the authorities responsible and accompanied by various protests and political actions. After three weeks, the camp was eventually evicted and dismantled. Some of its inhabitants moved to Allee du Kaai, a building temporarily occupied by a sociocultural organization, only to be evicted again after three nights, under the pretext that the building was due to undergo demolitions. Another temporarily occupied sociocultural space Citizen Corner stepped in and allowed the evicted residents to spend the night. At this point, a more strategic form of organizing housing for the now thrice evicted displaced people was imminent, and it was manifested in the political occupation of the National Crisis Center building. The occupation of the brand-new federal building was a way to enter into negotiations with the federal government, and it ultimately succeeded as Fedasil eventually housed the recognized asylum seekers after about two weeks of occupation. After the dissolution of the National Crisis Center occupation, for many unrecognized displaced migrants another political occupation was started next to the CD&V (Christian Democratic and Flemish) headquarters (the party of the current Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration). Outside of the trajectories above, there are traces of displaced people who have turned to hosting infrastructures where they are housed in private homes, have moved to other squats, or have found access to the ("informal") private rental market.

The eviction of Palais des Droits is a peculiar case, though not an isolated one, where displaced people were removed and further displaced to make way for a form of "formal" displaced housing, showcasing how

in/formalities overlap, sometimes within the same building. The building's occupation drew attention to its sale. As a result, the Brussels Regional Housing Association decided to execute its right of pre-emption and bought the building for 8 million euros. As this association is part of a task force to address the situation of Ukrainian refugees, it envisions that the building, after renovation, will be used to house them. The involvement of a major social housing actor in Brussels in migrant housing through the task force, although limited to the Ukrainian response, unlocks possibilities for integrating refugee housing into the broader housing question. Meanwhile, the differentiated response and policy mechanisms have resulted in 1,000 displaced people being scattered across a myriad of temporary accommodations or ending up homeless. As such, the eviction of Palais des Droits was a moment in time when hundreds of people had to figure out how to organize housing, navigating the very asylum infrastructures from which they were excluded as well as other infrastructures of urban hospitality. Navigating an ecosystem of displaced housing geographies to match people to where they may "battle" spaces in their homemaking constituted a puzzle, with the subjectivities of displaced people greatly impacting their "reach." Apart from the differentiation along places of origin, which was the case with Ukrainian refugees, other factors such as gender played a role. Minors, women, and families—in that order—were more likely to move through networks to accommodation, even if precarious, while the reach of, especially racialized, single men was far more limited. This culminated in the Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration Nicole de Moor suspending asylum housing for single men in August 2023, until the decision was ruled unlawful by Belgium's Council of State (Walker, 2023). Likewise, documentation status blocks the reach of undocumented displaced people, not just to asylum infrastructures and state accommodations, but even to some occupations and parts of the rental market.

In tracing these displaced housing trajectories, certain sites within which displaced housing is (re)produced kept emerging repeatedly. They are spatial locales, but also sites in the institutional make-up of asylum and housing governance and the politics of displaced housing. It becomes difficult to not consider these geographies and the alliances that support them as an incomplete lexicon. As such, this article is an attempt to trace, along the housing trajectories of displaced people, the ecosystem they navigate and (re)produce.

3. Mapping Brussels' Displaced Housing Ecosystem: Three Displaced Housing Geographies and Alliances

In this section, we have chosen to map displaced housing geographies and alliances, as part of a broader displaced housing ecosystem, to illuminate the entanglement of the asylum and housing systems (and by extension of migrant and non-migrant displacement), the porous boundaries of in/formalities, and how displaced housing showcases "an increasingly ephemeral typology from a robust building to tent and cardboard box" (Daher, 2019, p. 348). Though we trace multiple geographies within the case of the Palais des Droits eviction such as the temporary accommodation and hosting networks (see Figure 1), in this article we address in more detail the first three geographies the displaced groups accessed after the eviction. We focus our attention, as showcased in Figure 2, on the tent camp in front of the reception center Le Petit Chateau, the inhabitation of the temporary occupied sociocultural space Allee du Kaai, and the political occupation of the National Crisis Center, using them as examples to represent the geographies of homelessness, infrastructures of (in)hospitality, and squats respectively. Each of these geographies represents a certain position from which displaced people practice dwelling in liminality and have required a network of alliances to enable its production.
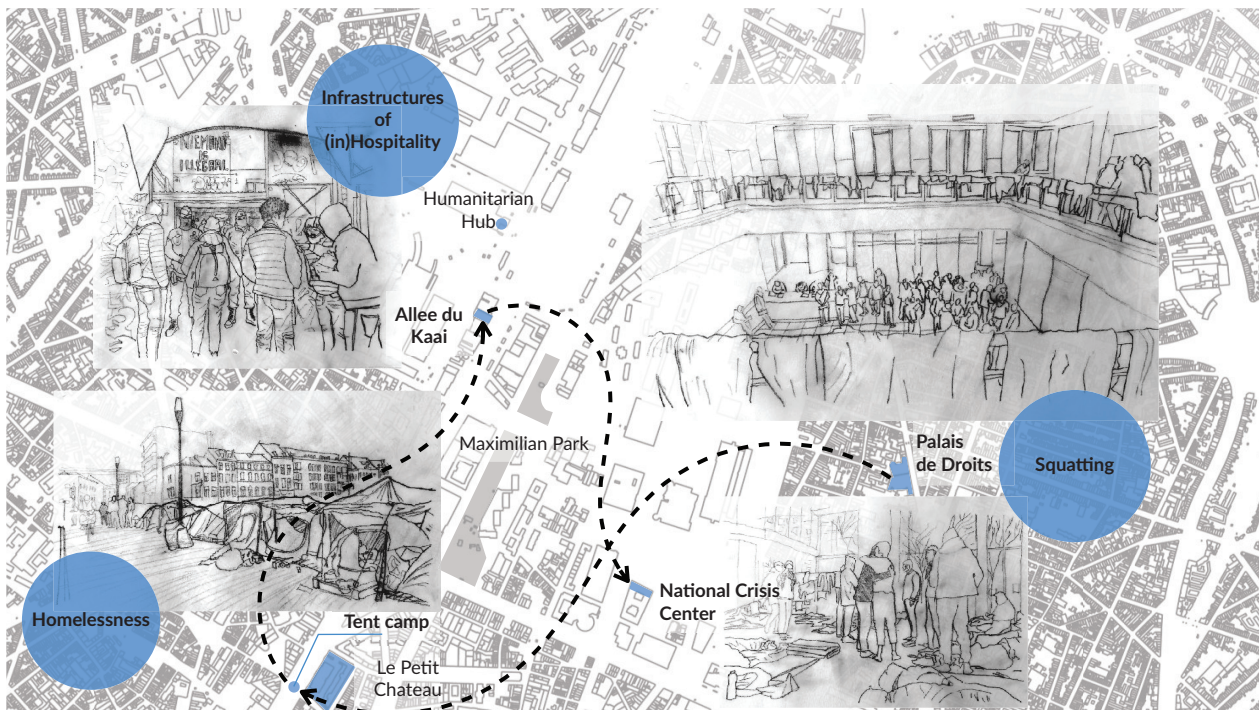
Figure 2. Displaced housing geographies along the Palais des Droits eviction trajectories.

Following Beeckmans et al. (2024), we use infrastructure as a feminist method to "condense the complex interplay between hosts, guests, space, and history by grasping concrete temporal and spatial instances through infrastructural objects" (p. 114). By highlighting certain infrastructural objects, and their double meanings within the geographies and alliances of displaced housing, it becomes easier to capture broad and complex urban dynamics. We have tried to embed this position within asylum and urban governance dynamics that cross multiple scales, in order to begin to make more legible the articulations of displaced housing practices in these geographies and the "weird" alliances that bring them to life; assemblages of people, objects, relations, not without tensions and contentions, but a moment of collectively (de)stabilizing order, enabling and carving space for displaced housing.

3.1. Homelessness: The Mattress

After the eviction of Palais des Droits, around 200–250 former occupants of the Palais des Droits spent the night next to the Fedasil reception center Le Petit Chateau. Tents started being set up on the sidewalk along both sides of the canal and the connecting bridge. The mattress became an element that represents the geography of homelessness and its tensions. As the camp began to emerge, it became evident that many displaced people left their mattresses at Palais des Droits as they expected to be rehoused, and in the process of eviction, they lost the mattress as a valuable asset. Collected through mutual aid efforts and neighborhood solidarity, the new mattresses and sleeping bags became the physical manifestation of inhabitation. A displaced housing geography was in the making, creating "rooms" with mattresses, tents, sleeping bags; offering food, through many people cooking and sharing; maintaining hygiene, through a cleaning system and gathering supplies. The distribution of tents, blankets, and mattresses was organized through citizen groups and neighbors in the Molenbeek neighborhood who rallied through a social media appeal. The displaced group of mostly men from Afghani, Burundian, Eritrean, and Palestinian origin would

articulate their needs together with members of a collective that offered support in Palais des Droits to launch the appeal. Soon, there were stories of other caring infrastructures that made the canal camp more inhabitable such as a woman who came from Antwerp to bring warm Middle Eastern food in big patches, or messages organizing the camp's daily cleaning.

With echoes from the Maximilian Park occupation, displaced people, citizen activists, and neighborhood residents rallied for modes of inhabitation in homelessness while also making an explicit demand to end it. The rules of engagement here, though humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross were present, were not of a humanitarian nature. The utilization of these networks represents an alliance, where citizens' differentiated "reach" to social networks and governance levels was employed to facilitate the camp's inhabitation and to highlight the reception crisis. With all the media attention they drew, the state had differentiated responses. The municipality of Molenbeek requested that all displaced people by the canal be rehoused by the federal government, while the federal government maintained that only those registered for asylum would be rehoused. Eventually, a consortium of the Brussels-based organizations The Citizen's Platform, Samusocial, and the Red Cross stepped in, with regional support, to open a temporary accommodation center to house around 140 displaced people. Shortly after, government bulldozers arrived to clear the camp, making sure to confiscate the mattresses as well. The iconic imagery of state workers pulling mattresses across the floor and into a dumpster represents the state's intolerance for such a mode of inhabitation and its view of any form of even the most precarious dwelling as claim-making. The mattress remains at the crux of the homelessness geography of displaced housing as even the more formalized homelessness infrastructures such as shelters are closely tied to asylum centers in their logics and conceptions of "home," where the number of beds is the optimal measure.

Homelessness appears to be an inevitable outcome of apparatuses of the border regime and neoliberal housing systems alike. As such, the infrastructures that address homelessness are relevant in the context of both migrant and non-migrant displacement. Important images in the memory of Brussels stem from the Maximilian Park camp, which marked and generated a different collective understanding of how asylum is governed and how it creates homelessness. More significantly, it indicated how civil action may be mobilized across a wide array of actors to respond to it. A similarly mobilized infrastructure emerged at the tent camp of Le Petit Chateau. These infrastructures vary from shower infrastructures to services offered to unsheltered homeless people such as communal kitchens, and collectives that offer clothing, blankets, tents, transport tickets, etc. They have developed certain rhythms and modes of operation that emerge and dissolve in moments of crisis, and are often mobilized in moments of solidarity across displaced struggles.

3.2. Infrastructures of (In)Hospitality: The Skeleton

After being evicted from the tent camp at Le Petit Chateau, 60 displaced people, including asylum seekers, sought refuge in Allee du Kaai, a sociocultural temporary occupation. In 2014, pending the regeneration of the canal zone in Brussels, the Department of Environment sanctioned the temporary use of the site made up of two storage structures and a plot of wasteland. The public tender was eventually won by Muriel Claeys, Brussels Cooperation, Oiseaux Sans Tête, and Toestand and was transformed into Allee du Kaai (Flanders Architecture Institute, n.d.). It was one of the first temporary use projects of such a scale envisioned as a form of citizen activation. This redevelopment, and many others in Brussels, call for sociocultural organizations to activate buildings under temporary use terms. Many of these citizen activations naturally engage with

important causes in the city and endorse a right-to-the-city approach. They are also becoming more aware of the role temporary use plays in urban transformations. As an example, the Permanent collective critiques the appropriation of the arts into generating cultural value in spaces that end up being gentrified and exclusionary, drawing a line between the precarity of artists and those displaced.

The eviction of the tent camp at Le Petit Chateau prompted a wide search for such spaces of hospitality where displaced people could urgently be housed. Allee du Kaai, Citizen Corner, and other sociocultural temporary use spaces became important sites to do so. The forms of governmentality here might be materialized in the building's skeleton. It highlights the vacancies of Brussels and the lack of permanence. Among the shifting functions and uses, displaced housing is scarcely considered. Noteworthy is that the same temporality is experienced by formal asylum infrastructures, where 15 new infrastructures must be found every year because many are closed frequently. This produces competition as fervent "real estate prospecting" by Fedasil, Samusocial, and other asylum housing operators—as well as sociocultural organizations that include displaced housing in their programs—is constantly taking place in Brussels.

The occupation of Allee du Kaai came at the tail end of the temporary use period as the building was scheduled to undergo demolition to be transformed into a public park. With claims of the building's uninhabitability due to asbestos, an eviction took place after three nights of occupation. This eviction displayed police officers and officials in hazmat suits removing displaced migrants from the building, as well as workers on the ceiling of the building drilling holes to prevent the building from being used. Noteworthy is that two weeks prior to this eviction, a 2,000-people memorial party took place in the same structure. It is worth exploring how such spaces of hospitality become spaces of inhospitality as the users appropriating them change.

By highlighting this geography, we draw attention to how institutions that were not initially intended to offer housing for displaced people, such as cultural institutions, become relevant. Some explore the possibility of adding a housing component to their profile, offer housing search help, or become part of referral networks for hosting displaced people in private homes. Utilizing an infrastructural lens allows regarding such practices as the facilitation of homing the city. Through everyday practices of pooling resources and maneuvering into the small openings that exist in funding, policy, and planning spheres, such organizations and their displaced communities attempt to secure permanence in the city (Nagi et al., 2023). They engage with different actors in these pursuits, and in doing so they confront their own precarity as well as that of their communities.

3.3. Squats: The Window

After the eviction of Allee du Kaai, a more intentionally political occupation was organized by 70 recognized asylum seekers with support from squatter movement activists. Together, they selected the brand-new National Crisis Center building, which was yet to be officially opened. The building, falling under the jurisdiction of the federal government, allowed the occupants to be in direct negotiation with the federal level. However, the building was also carefully selected as it falls within a commune with a friendly local government, which offers some protection in dealing with the police. The Palais des Droits post-eviction momentum had reached a critical point where the movement to "stop the reception crisis" had a stronger voice in drawing attention to the 3,000 homeless asylum seekers who have the legal right to housing. Nonetheless, the first nights of the occupation were tense, with a large-scale police presence. While the occupation started with people with more secure residence and citizenship status creating body blockades

in front of the building doors to prevent an eviction, by the morning the police had blocked the access of any food, medicine, or anyone including lawyers into the building. The direct confrontation was amplified by the floor-to-ceiling glass windows that created complete transparency to the outside, where the inhabitants lived in a fish-tank effect.

In this geography, windows represent the important tension around visibility. In the National Crisis Center occupation, this heightened visibility was part of the program to make specific demands to the federal government. In contrast, many squats sustain a much lower profile as their purpose is not to garner the public's attention, but to facilitate life for displaced people in the here and now. In both cases, it is the squats' ability to confront speculative logics in urban space and the exclusions of bordering that is central. The re-appropriation of vacant buildings to reclaim their use-value towards housing displaced people, even in its most fragile ways, is political. Nonetheless, these logics at times produce contradictions. In the National Crisis Center occupation, because of the heightened visibility and the articulation of "legal" rights to housing, unrecognized asylum seekers were excluded from this squat and were referred to spend the day at the Humanitarian Hub or to be housed in other displaced housing geographies. The regional government offered to house the displaced people within this squat in temporary accommodation, but the inhabitants refused. In their statement, they critique the frequent circulation in and out of temporary occupation, where residents have a 28-day shelter limit, and urge a more long-term solution asking federal authorities to "act swiftly to prevent people from sleeping rough by requisitioning buildings and staff to house the thousands of asylum seekers without shelter" (Chini, 2023). After three weeks of occupation, the 70 recognized asylum seekers within the National Crisis Center were rehoused by Fedasil and the squat was dissolved.

The majority of squats encountered during fieldwork seem to champion a "politics of presence" (Darling, 2017), where they included people experiencing different forms of displacement, and were implicated in both migrant and non-migrant housing struggles. They vary in scale and level of organization, some more explicitly politicized by residents towards specific aims and demands, and some in more subtle ways, whereby the implicit aim is the facilitation of life for disenfranchised groups. Nonetheless, both types of squats rely on familiar alliances for support, where often messages circulate within similar networks to arrange furniture, food, etc. The knowledge acquired during a long history of squatting tradition allows for the utilization of tactics and strategies in navigating urban governance. This includes learning to navigate various levels of governance to gain protection from eviction or to leverage certain demands beyond the squat itself. In the context of Brussels, this is a strategy utilized even by groups with precarious citizenship, where collectives of people without papers have employed squatting both as a means to housing and as a way to galvanize a political movement towards regularization, choosing to open or close the figurative windows to the public as they see fit.

4. Conclusion

The case of Palais des Droits offers a glimpse into the displaced housing ecosystem in the city and the circulation of displaced people within it. Mapping the trajectories of displaced people after their eviction from Palais des Droits, and following the geographies and alliances along these trajectories, was a way for us to de-center the binaries of migrant/non-migrant and of in/formality, focusing instead on the lived experiences of displaced people as they navigate the urban space. In transcending the migrant/non-migrant binary, we recognize how the infrastructures that address displacement cater to a broad network of people experiencing

urban precarity and housing insecurity. In transcending the in/formal binary, we recognize how asylum accommodations go through similar temporalities to their "alternatives," where practices of real-estate prospecting and the collapsing and building up of stock are dynamics that may mirror squatting practices as an example. In doing so, we uncover a displaced housing ecosystem that engages multi-scalar levels of asylum and housing governance and spans across and between categories of citizenship and housing.

Within the span of six weeks, the displaced people evicted from Palais des Droits have moved through multiple displaced housing geographies, supported by various displaced housing alliances that sustain inhabitation within said geographies. In this article, we chose to expand upon the geographies of homelessness, spaces of hospitality, and squats, but the post-eviction trajectories of Palais des Droits also reveal the geographies of "asylum accommodation," "hosting," and "beds for rent" in the private rental market. All of these displaced housing geographies are interconnected, not just in the circulation of displaced people between them, but also in that they represent different positions in the asylum and housing systems within which different forms of displaced housing are produced. Furthermore, investigating the displaced housing alliances complicates the roles of actors and the built environment, where navigating the various levels of urban and asylum governance opens negotiations and interpersonal exchanges that are situated and more nuanced.

As Lancione and Simone (2021) contend:

> What makes a certain inhabitation of the liminal "political" is not the adherence to a defined form of redemption, but the capacity to interlace concerns and to use them as a gateway to set loose a position, to elaborate an affirmation. (p. 972)

The reading of displaced housing geographies and alliances as an ecosystem allows for an understanding of urban displacement and refugee governance not just as the work of the state and marginal alternatives, but as infrastructural interventions into the urban that produce forms of inhabitation and care networks serving displaced migrants and non-migrants. This displaced housing ecosystem is not limited to Brussels but is a global ecosystem, where migrants are transnationally connected. Many displaced people anecdotally share instances of similar geographies that they have witnessed along their migratory routes, attaining displaced housing ontologies they import and employ into a new urban context. This global scale can be an asset, as knowledge of displaced housing from below may circulate and multiply. It further allows for an expansion of potential solidarities and articulates a shared project against displacement, encompassing a broad alliance of those impacted by the border regime and housing precarity. As such, displaced housing mobilizes the contradictions and complexities intrinsic to urban morphologies and urban politics, orchestrating choreographies that are at once pragmatic and transformative, flawed and creative; essentially, weird.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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