

HOUSING SOLUTIONS PLATFORM THEMATIC BRIEF

2022

WHAT ROLE CAN ARCHITECTURE PLAY IN COMBATTING HOMELESSNESS?



in partnership with



INTRODUCTION

THEMATIC BRIEF: WHAT ROLE CAN ARCHITECTURE PLAY IN COMBATTING HOMELESSNESS?

The Housing Solutions Platform is an expertise- and practice-driven initiative to identify, debate and promote innovative solutions for affordable housing in Europe through connecting people, ideas, and tools and practices. It is a joint initiative of FEANTSA, Housing Europe and the Fondation Abbé Pierre, to address the deteriorating housing situation for low-income and vulnerable people in Europe.

In 2019, The Housing Solutions Platform published the 50 Out-of-the-box housing solutions, a compendium of some of the most innovative examples of housing solutions for those who are locked out. The 50 selected projects focused on providing safe, decent, and affordable housing through many different means, including innovative architecture.

During the first part of 2022, the main thematic focus of the Housing Solutions Platform has been to further explore what role architecture can play in tackling homelessness, in light of the New European Bauhaus initiative.

This thematic brief contains a summary of the discussion from our two latest debates on the New European Bauhaus from a homelessness perspective and how it can foster architecture for urban inclusion. We highlight some innovative and inclusive architectural projects from **Peter Barber Architects**, **Michael Maltzan Architecture** and **Agile Property and Homes**. The brief also includes an in-depth interview with designer **Hanna Hoyt** from Michael Maltzan Architecture and concludes with a summary on current trends and a discussion on the possibilities and limitations of architecture to address homelessness.



THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

FROM A HOMELESSNESS PERSPECTIVE



The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is one of the latest and most important EU initiatives within the field of architecture, putting it at the forefront of EU policies for the first time. The aim of the NEB is to improve the lives of the European citizens by improving the quality of buildings and the availability of quality homes as well as contributing to the **European Green Deal** and the **Renovation Wave**.

About €85 million are to be dedicated to NEB projects from existing EU programmes during 2021 - 2022. The NEB will mobilise funding from different EU programmes including the Horizon Europe programme for research and innovation and the European Regional Development Fund. Learn more about how to apply for funding, how to become a NEB partner and other ways to make use of the initiative [here](#).

The core values of the NEB are **Beautiful**, **Sustainable** and **Inclusive**. The question is for who? To discuss this and to question the place dedicated to homelessness in this initiative, the Housing Solutions Platform have organised two debates. A first one focusing on the inclusive dimension of the NEB and what it can achieve in terms “prioritising the places and people that need it the most”.

The **debate** was opened by the Member of European Parliament **Marcos Ros Sempere**, who highlighted the importance of the inclusion of the lowest income groups and the prevention of gentrification. He stated that:

“Architecture can change our lives, but good architecture can improve them, Good architecture should never leave anyone behind.”

Juha Kaakinen, senior advisor at Y-Foundation shared his initial scepticism towards the NEB efficiency to solve homelessness but praised the work of the architects as a source of great hope. Although he warned about the too specific differentiation between “housing for homelessness” and “normal housing” and claimed that:

“There should not be a homeless type of housing because it is not different from a normal affordable, sustainable, and beautiful housing.”

Sorcha Edwards, Secretary General at Housing Europe praised NEB's work in highlighting inspiring projects and recalled the importance of collaboration between associations and European institutions to ensure that what can be done will be done, concluding:

“We are happy to take up this challenge.”

Read the summary of the debate on [our website](#).

THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

HOW CAN IT FOSTER ARCHITECTURE FOR URBAN INCLUSION?

As a follow-up to the discussions on the inclusive dimension of the NEB, the Housing Solutions Platform organised a second debate focusing on [how the NEB can foster architecture for urban inclusion](#). The debate brought inspiring thinkers, practitioners, and politicians together to discuss the role of architecture in delivering disruptive practices for urban inclusion and fostering cross-sectoral cooperation, both through conceptual approaches and concrete delivery. **Ciarán Cuffe**, Member of the European Parliament, summarised his contribution by stating that even though the NEB is not a magical solution to all housing challenges:

“it is an opportunity to put end users in centre, making better use of what we already have, and it can help us improve the quality of housing and make us think again about tackling the root causes of homelessness.”

In the debate that followed, architects, researchers and practitioners presented and discussed innovative as well as inclusive architectural ideas and projects that provide housing solutions to homelessness. The projects included [Solidary Mobile Housing](#), [The BLOCK Project](#), [Alojamientos Dotacionales](#), [Loft Study House](#), [Village Co-living](#) and [VinziRast mittendrin](#) and [Lokal mittendrin](#).

All speakers agreed that architecture alone cannot solve homelessness but that there is a lot to be done through collaboration with other societal actors and disciplines.

In summary, architecture does have an important role to play in introducing disruptive practices for urban inclusion and there are already a lot of inspiring, innovative cross-sectoral projects across Europe that deliver affordable housing and solutions to homelessness- through architectural ambition. The NEB can offer some opportunities to foster cooperation across sectors and disciplines and to bring architecture at the forefront of housing solutions.

However, in order for the NEB to fulfil its inclusivity goal, it needs to put greater emphasis on disadvantaged groups, including people experiencing homelessness. Some of the speakers underlined that in order to foster more cross-sectoral cooperation, more direct funding needs to be directed towards inclusive housing solutions for people in poor housing conditions and people experiencing homelessness. Architect **Alexander Hagner** argued that:

“The solutions cannot only be about shelter, it needs to be about hope and future, but in order to achieve this more money is needed.”

If the NEB would put greater emphasis on the inclusivity goal, it could be used as a tool in working towards the goal of ending homelessness by 2030, stated in the [Lisbon declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness](#).

Read the full summary of the debate on [our website](#).

WHO'S NEXT?

HOMELESSNESS, ARCHITECTURE AND CITIES EXHIBITION COMING TO THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS FESTIVAL 9-12 JUNE



The first ever **New European Bauhaus Festival** will take place from 9th to 12th June 2022 in Brussels, featuring debates, speakers, artistic performances, exhibitions and participatory activities that showcase the values of the NEB.

FEANTSA will bring a selection of the **Who's next? Homelessness, Architecture, and Cities** exhibition to the Festival, which will showcase projects that provide local solutions for innovative, sustainable, inclusive and beautiful ways of re-housing people experiencing homelessness. The aim of bringing the exhibition to the festival is to awaken new discussions and ways of thinking about the roles and responsibilities of architecture, in light of the NEB.

The exhibition was developed by **Daniel Talesnik**, at the Architekturmuseum der TUM in Munich and will be exhibited in full again in Hamburg at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe from 14th October, 2022 to 12th March, 2023.

Find us and Daniel Talesnik in our booth in **Gare Maritime**, Brussels on the 9th to 12th of June.



DESIGNING TO END HOMELESSNESS

**AGILE PROPERTY AND HOMES, PETER BARBER ARCHITECTURE AND
MICHAEL MALTZAN ARCHITECTURE**



Architectural firms, both small and well-established, have found ways to contribute to the community through the built environment. **Agile Property and Homes**, **Peter Barber Architects** and **Michael Maltzan Architecture** are three examples of architectural firms that are leading the way for more inclusive, beautiful and sustainable architecture. We want to highlight some of their most innovative and architectural projects for re-housing people that are experiencing homelessness. Architecture that comes with cutting-edge creativity and fresh approaches to design can challenge our way of thinking about housing solutions.

Michael Maltzan Architecture

A Los Angeles-based architecture and urban design practice founded in 1995. They are committed to the creation of progressive, transformative experiences that shows new trajectories for architecture, urbanism, and the public realm.

Peter Barber Architects

Established in London in 1989. It is a design-orientated practice with numerous ground-breaking mixed-use and residential schemes and radical urban housing.

Agile Property and Homes

A U.K based firm that focuses on safe, civil, high quality, low carbon affordable homes for those in housing need. Their vision is to create a people-centred housing model as a radical alternative to the current housing market.

AGILE PROPERTY AND HOMES

EMMAUS ROOFTOP COMMUNITY, BRISTOL, U.K



EMMAUS ROOFTOP COMMUNITY

AGILE PROPERTY AND HOMES, BRISTOL, U.K



EMMAUS ROOFTOP COMMUNITY

In cooperation with the Emmaus Bristol charity, Agile Property and Homes co-designed a rooftop community with low-carbon, affordable eco homes on the roof of the Emmaus office in central Bristol.

It is a community-led project where Emmaus Companions are not only the clients but also the co-designers of the project. The development will give people the option to live independently when they are ready to but also keep them connected to support system of Emmaus Bristol. The design aims to make the most out of our current land resource and will have a light carbon footprint, making them cheap to run with energy use up to 90% lower than a conventionally built home.

The project includes 11 one-bedroom two storey homes, 3 two-bedroom single storey homes, 1 one-bedroom single story home, and food growing and share spaces.

Each home will have its own private space but will be well connected to a shared landscaped courtyard and rooftop garden allotment for both communal and private use by residents. **Craig White**, CEO at Agile Property & Homes on the ideas behind the design of the rooftop community:

"Our rule was simple - no corridors. Why? In apartment blocks shared corridors quickly become 'no man's land' that are unloved and spaces where people never really want to be. They also drive apartment designs that only have access to daylight from one side. Our approach was to create homes, not apartments, arranged around courtyards. We create spaces where people want to be and share."

Find out more on their website: www.agile.property.

PETER BARBER ARCHITECTS

HOLMES ROAD STUDIOS, LONDON, U.K

HOLMES ROAD STUDIOS, LONDON,
PHOTO: PETER BARBER ARCHITECTS

HOLMES ROAD STUDIOS

PETER BARBER ARCHITECTS, LONDON, U.K



HOLMES ROAD STUDIOS,

Holmes Road Studios is a beautiful new facility in North London, U.K, providing high quality residential accommodation for people who have experienced homelessness. The project provides accommodation for 59 people alongside with counselling spaces, education and training facilities, and social enterprise space.

Residents of the Holmes Road Studios, receives support with resolving health problems, securing a long-term solution to their housing needs, learning basic life skills and, entering into training and with finding work.

Most of the accommodation is arranged in little studio houses with terraces fronting the garden. These micro houses have a double-height brick vault with an ensuite bathroom at the back of the plan, and a mezzanine bed space raised above the bathrooms. The rooms are lit via a partially glazed door, pretty-looking circular windows and a roof light. The buildings are constructed in a rustic-looking brick with a crinkle crinkle parapet which gives the project a relaxed domestic scale. All of the rooms look out over the garden. Find out more on their website: www.peterbarberarchitects.com

MICHEAL MALTZAN ARCHITECTURE

STAR APARTMENTS, CARBER APARTMENTS AND CREST APARTMENTS



STAR APARTMENTS

Judging by their aesthetic, the Star Apartments on Skid Row, Los Angeles, could be mistaken for expensive luxury apartments. A previous one-story commercial building has been transformed into a six-story high complex and is designed after the needs of people who have experienced long-term homelessness. Today the apartments house more than 100 residents who were formerly homeless, side by side with other residents. The Star Apartments are also incorporating a new type of shared public space within the building, including public health facilities, counselling, exercise and art rooms, a library, and a community garden.

CARVER APARTMENTS

Located in Los Angeles, Skid Row Housing Trust's New Carver Apartments consists of 97 units that provide permanent housing for formerly homeless elderly and disabled residents. The project explore how architecture can create both new possibilities for its highly vulnerable, dramatically under-served residents as well as for the city at large. The project aims to construct a new way of looking at public housing in Los Angeles, as well as work as a framework for change through architecture.



CREST APARTMENTS

The Skid Row Housing Trust new Crest Apartments transformed an existing open site in suburban Los Angeles into a 64-apartment complex for formerly homeless veterans. It is located on a busy thoroughfare near two freeways with easy connections to public transportation and area resources. The client's permanent supportive housing model includes individual efficiency apartments with on-site social services and community spaces. These combined programmes effectively support the highly vulnerable residents in an effort to reduce chronic homelessness.

INTERVIEW WITH HANNAH HOYT

DESIGNER AT MICHAEL MALTZAN ARCHITECTURE

Hannah Hoyt works as a designer on Michael Maltzan Architecture's (MMA) housing projects. Hannah received her Master's degree in Architecture with Distinction at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, where her research on affordable housing was published by the University's Joint Center for Housing Studies and the Brookings Institution. The Housing Solutions Platform had the opportunity to do an exclusive interview with her on her experiences and thoughts on the role architecture can play in tackling homelessness.



Why did you become an architectural designer?

Architecture reflects the political, social, economic and cultural context it emerges from, but it also has the capacity to raise questions, to frame how we experience places and types of buildings. It is this capacity that drew me to working in architecture and to designing housing in particular.

What moral responsibility do you think architects have to address homelessness? And how do you believe that architects can contribute in the best way?

As architects, we have a deep understanding of how policy, design and construction intersect and impact affordable housing. We see how national financing sources dictate unit counts, how local zoning helps or hinders projects, how environmental regulations drive costs, how community meetings influence local support for housing projects. Given the magnitude of the affordability crisis, it is imperative that architects use our comprehensive understanding of housing to help residents, policymakers, developers and our colleagues in architecture be informed advocates for affordable housing.

Finding ways for architects to participate in the early stages of a housing project is crucial to building progressive housing. Many decisions that ultimately dictate the terms of design are set early on — site selection, unit mixes, community programs, open space, construction budgets, sustainability targets — all of these are areas where architects can serve as advocates for inclusive housing if they are at the table with partners early on.

Given the magnitude of the housing crisis, finding opportunities to work at a larger scale than the typical 50 to 150-unit affordable housing projects built in the U.S. is essential. Jumping scales requires enormous political leadership; public officials at all levels of government need to set policies that encourage large-scale affordable housing development. Additionally, designing inclusive housing requires a fundamental shift from thinking at the scale of the individual building to considering affordable housing as an essential part of mixed-income, mixed-use communities.



"As architects, we have a deep understanding of how policy, design and construction intersect and impact affordable housing"

- Hannah Hoyt, Michael Maltzan Architecture

Add a subheading

INCLUSIVE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

INTERVIEW WITH HANNAH HOYT

How is MMA taking its place on the issue of inclusive, affordable housing?

Over more than two decades, MMA has been designing and building affordable housing across the United States. Much of the office's housing work has been built in our home city of Los Angeles, where an acute shortage of affordable housing and a growing homelessness crisis means we have a dual imperative – to work as architects designing housing, but also to work as advocates for affordable housing, using our projects to spur conversation and generate new ideas.

Many of the office's projects directly address the homelessness crisis by providing permanent supportive housing (PSH) for people who are formerly homeless. PSH emerged as an alternative to temporary shelters or single room occupancy (SRO) housing models and pairs stable housing with robust social infrastructure such as clinics, job-training facilities and community spaces. Part of our role as architects is to create buildings that diverse constituencies – future residents, current neighbours, city officials – view as a vital part of their neighbourhood.

As an office, our most innovative work has occurred by building long-standing relationships. Over more than a decade, MMA has built four different projects with Skid Row Housing Trust, a non-profit affordable housing developer based in Downtown Los Angeles. These strong relationships also let us take big leaps in innovation, for example, building [**Star Apartments**](#). Building Star Apartments required innovation at the scale of the building design, but also at the policy scale as our office worked closely with project partners to make prefabricated housing permitted by local code.

Given the complexity (legal, political, economic, technical, aesthetic...) of building affordable housing in the U.S., we believe that innovation in housing comes from bringing together creative groups of people to work on projects, rather than searching for a panacea in the form of a single design tool, financing strategy or construction material.

How do you think architects and homelessness organisations can better work together to find housing solutions for people in poor housing or experiencing homelessness?

The more that architects and affordable housing organizations understand each other's missions, objectives and constraints, the more teams can work together productively to build housing that generates multiple benefits for communities. Strong relationships with partners let us consider how a housing project can generate benefits at multiple scales – for the residents that call the building home, for the neighbours, for the city and beyond.

"We believe that innovation in housing comes from bringing together creative groups of people to work on projects, rather than searching for a panacea in the form of a single design tool, financing strategy or construction material"

- Hannah Hoyt, Michael Maltzan Architecture



QUALITY STANDARDS AND RENOVATIONS

INTERVIEW WITH HANNAH HOYT

In Europe the quality standards for housing are really high and demanding. Some people argue we should be able to overrule them in some occasions to develop temporary rapid rehousing solutions while others argue that a Housing First strategy is the only long-term sustainable vision - Where do you stand in this debate?

We come from the perspective that affordable housing should represent our highest aspiration for what housing can and should be in our communities. We know from decades of experience that design and construction costs are only the first challenge for affordable housing developments. Affordable housing projects often struggle with maintenance and high operational costs, so it is essential that we make investments upfront in design, building systems, site and landscape that make a durable building over many decades. We also try to build for quality of life by delivering the required program creatively. For example, by creating generous entryways and hallway sequences, making required services like laundry rooms destination within a building, orienting the building and individual units to provide multiple directions of light, and deploying colour and materials to differentiate spaces. These design strategies drastically improve life in the building without generating additional costs.

In Europe there is also a major push to massively renovate the housing stock. We are concerned the cost of the renovations might push even more people away from accessing affordable housing. Do you have similar concerns in the U.S.?

The affordable housing landscape in the United States is highly fragmented and varies significantly state by state and city by city. While some states and cities have large stocks of affordable housing built by the public sector during the 20th century, other cities have very little publicly constructed affordable housing, instead relying on voucher or other subsidy programs to create affordability. This means the impact of energy retrofitting (or any other type of needed renovation) is borne differently by renters, depending on whether the building owner is a public housing authority, a non-profit developer or a for-profit developer. Additionally, variations in local and state policies (such as solar incentives, or water management requirements) mean that the requirements to retrofit vary significantly from place to place.

Read more about the work of Hannah Hoyt and Michael Maltzan Architecture on their website: www.mmaltzan.com.

CURRENT TRENDS

WSUPPORTIVE HOUSING, COMMUNITY, BEAUTY AND ADAPTIVE REUSE

DESIGN FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Architecture can foster the establishment of long-term solutions, providing stability as well as individual tailor-made support. There are several examples of new re-housing projects where social services, training, health facilities are all combined with housing in the same buildings, e.g. in [Star Apartments](#) and [Emmaus Rooftop Community](#) as previously mentioned, but also in [Meinzuhaus](#) in Salzburg, Austria, where the intensity of the support is agreed by the residents together with the cooperating facilities and the employees of Meinzuhaus before moving in. Rather than simply providing spatial solutions, these are examples of process-led, systematic approaches to the causes and immediate needs of people who experience homelessness.

CREATING SPACES FOR COMMUNITY

New architectural projects like Holmes Gardens [Holmes Road Studios](#), [Village Co-living](#) in Finland and [Xystudios](#) in Jankowich, Poland have also found ways of integrating a community-based approach, focusing on shared community, living spaces and integrating indoor and outdoor spaces where individuals have the chance to create support networks and reintegrate into communities rather than becoming more isolated. In the U.S., the controversial ["Community First!" village](#) is built around community gardens, medical facilities, a cinema and a market, aiming to foster exchange and build up the social fabric.

BEAUTY AND AESTHETICS

Another aspect of recent developments worth highlighting is the emphasis on aesthetics, such as in [Craver Apartments](#). A nice design might not always be thought of as an important part of housing with the aim of addressing homelessness, but why should it not be beautiful? The visual aspects of housing solutions should not be underestimated. The building we live in can have implications for how we feel about the value of our life. Housing with the aim of re-housing people who experience homelessness has often been surrounded by stigma within society. But through the power of design, housing have the possibility to better deliver on dignified living conditions, reduce stigma and inspire people in its surroundings.

ADAPTIVE REUSE: QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY AS A MUST

Taking advantage of already existing and empty buildings and housing stock and repurposing them into affordable or social housing is another important development in re-housing, that goes well in line with the New European Bauhaus initiative. It could be one part of the solution to the lack of affordable adequate housing. The [Holland Harvey Architects](#) project in London transforms disused London supermarket into homeless shelters.

CURRENT TRENDS

CO-HOUSING AND MODULAR HOUSING

FOSTERING INCLUSION THROUGH CO-HOUSING

There is a growing interest in the concept of mixed or co-housing projects, where different groups of tenants come together with members of vulnerable citizen groups to create a community, such as [VinziRast mittendrin](#), a housing project in Vienna which brings together students and people who were formerly homeless. Mixed-income housing solutions is also an important development that can create better preconditions for social and economical integration rather than segregation and exclusion. The ["Lazare" network](#) in France and Spain have the same objective with a house-sharing project between young professionals and people who were formerly homeless.

MODULAR HOUSING: A STEP FORWARDS OR BACKWARDS IN SOLVING HOMELESSNESS?

Modular architecture often utilises pre-made materials like shipping containers and wooden pallets. This technology allows one to build homes cheaply and quickly, often with an original modern design. In combination with new technology such as 3D printing, it is a tempting approach. Agile Property and Homes [Transportable Accommodation Module](#) shows a good example of an inclusive and sustainable use of modular housing.

However, it is a double-edged sword as it risks perpetuating stigmatisation and unfit housing if it is not integrated in the community and built with quality sustainable materials. In order for this approach to work, [it is crucial](#) that it provides a home-like environment, meet housing quality standards, is appropriately integrated into the community, and always offers pathways to mainstream housing.

FURTHER READING:

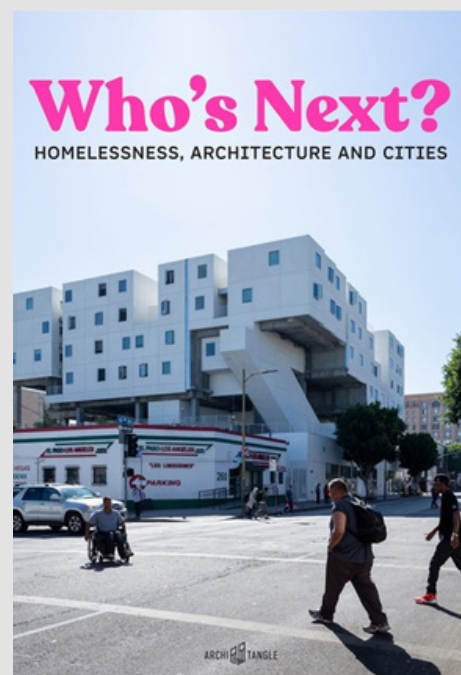
[Who's next? Architecture, Homelessness and Cities](#), Edited by Daniel Talesnik and Andres Lepik. →

[Give Me Shelter: Architecture Takes on the Homeless Crisis](#). Edited by Sofia Borges & R. Scott Mitchell.

[Architecture in the process of social inclusion of homeless](#). Written by Adam Rybkał & Anna Brudnickał.

[Insights into the use of modular housing in addressing homelessness](#). Written by Dr Katy Karampour & Dr Gemma Burgess.

[Upcycling buildings - Converting multi-unit non-residential buildings into permanent housing for those in need](#). FEANTSA, the Fondation Abbé Pierre and the Council European Development Bank.



CONCLUSION

Homelessness has been increasing in Europe for more than 10 years. Simultaneously, housing prices for both renting and buying have also been going up. Consequently, a growing number of low- and middle-income people have an increasing difficulty affording housing. Many are overburdened by housing and maintenance costs, live in unhealthy, low-quality, inaccessible, energy-inefficient, or overcrowded housing, or are at risk of eviction and homelessness.

Meanwhile, the European Commission is working on several initiatives that will have a decisive impact on housing. The “renovation wave” aims to trigger massive renovation in Europe to improve energy performance and contribute to achieving climate neutrality, and will include a proposal for the establishment of mandatory energy performance standards to the residential sector. The New European Bauhaus, proposed as an incubator for innovation and creativity, aims to drive sustainable design across Europe and beyond.

In this context, the Housing Solutions Platform works to ensure visibility and replicability of housing solutions and initiatives that will combine design and sustainability with affordability and accessibility, so as to ensure the inclusion of those who are most excluded as a key priority.

Reaching the goal of ending homelessness in 2030, set out in the Lisbon Declaration, will require much more than awareness in design - that is why advocacy is fundamental. At the same time, ending homelessness will only happen with the contribution and effort of every part of the housing conundrum. This cross-sectoral approach is also at the core of the Housing Solutions Platform as we work to be a platform that connects people, ideas, tools and practices and that facilitates exchange and transnational learning to help generate inclusive housing solutions.

There is no “one size fits all”. The solutions for those excluded from the housing market should be as diverse as the causes, situations and experiences of homelessness. Architects, designers, and planners play a decisive role in the physical shaping of the built environment and must, therefore, take the measure of their influence in shaping a quality affordable housing community. They are essential in leading the way for identifying and developing innovative housing solutions, prioritising the people who need it the most and helping to shape the future towards more inclusive societies. We hope this thematic brief will contribute to inspire architects in that direction, and for other actors to find inspiration on how to work together with architects. If you would like to take the debate further, please get in touch.