

Housing Migrant Workers: The Form of the Corporate City Along the Rotterdam-Venlo Logistics Corridor

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Containerised and flexible housing

In April 1966, a container ship of the company Sea-Land sailed from the United States to the port of Rotterdam for the first transatlantic voyage.¹ A year later, in the article 'Flatscape with Containers', Reyner Banham stated that architecture is the 'victim' of containerisation, describing ports and other intermodal terminals as expanses of concrete and asphalt surfaces without buildings on which countless containers smoothly move in perpendicular trajectories.² He argues that the containers offer protection from weather, similar to the function served by warehouses before they became obsolete.

The container is the established volumetric module, the 20-foot equivalent unit (abbreviated TEU)³ that revolutionised and standardised the shipping industry, using multiple modes of transport, minimising the time and cost of loading and unloading goods, and channelling enormous quantities of commodities.⁴ Echoing its military origin, the container has disciplined the labour force, which historically interfered in the continuous flow of goods, extending and stretching the factory's assembly line to the territorial scale of logistics corridors.⁵ Over the years, journalists and researchers have made many incognito visits and written reports to describe the arduous working conditions within distribution centres.⁶ Examples include the repetitive actions carried out in a standing position for many consecutive hours, the daily distance covered along trajectories generated by an algorithm, the strict control of bodies through GPS and body

scanners, and the routine of inspections to prevent corporate theft.⁷

Since the start of its commercial use, the shipping box has been adapted to container homes for residential purposes. The short article titled 'Containerscape with Flats' – a play on words – placed alongside Banham's piece shows the alternative functional use of containers, illustrating the prototypical study called a 'home-tainer'.⁸ It is a living unit consisting of two assembled 20-foot containers that can be shipped and moved like any typical goods container. Predicting the potential of a large-scale supply of these boxes, the article's author claimed that the 'home-tainer' might fulfil the needs of 'the growing horde of migrant workers.'

Since then, containerised housing has acquired an extensive meaning and widespread use. Other modular boxes, such as foldable containers, mobile and trailer homes, prefabricated and preassembled units, and even houses packaged in cardboard boxes, have been introduced to fulfil housing needs. Capable of accommodating a large number of people in a short time, the construction of flexible boxes rapidly increased. Displaced people looking for a new home after natural disasters, refugees and asylum seekers looking for a new life in a different country, and migrant workers looking for a better wage working in remote extraction and construction sites or distribution centres have all been housed in structures of this type.

The topic of contemporary workers' housing is largely unobserved by architecture discipline. Because it is supposedly designed 'for a market with

low aesthetic standards' and as they are 'similar all around the world,' this mass-produced and low-cost containerised housing is only read as 'useful' to the world economy, therefore not interesting to consider from an architectural perspective.⁹ In this article I would like to suggest a broader view of the phenomenon, and to investigate workers' housing with the concept of 'analytic borderlands' in mind. Coined by Saskia Sassen, this concept understands the 'spaces of intersection' as overlapping global and local strategies where operations of power and a logic of domination take place.¹⁰

The so-called platform economy offers digital shoppers 24/7 access to the infinite space of online consumption. Gigantic distribution centres represent the physical dimension of the flow of goods in which invisible algorithms efficiently process orders, coding, sorting and shipping commodities.¹¹ Real and digital, that is, visible and invisible aspects of the platform economy, constantly merge, generating hybrid logistical infrastructures. This article investigates workers' housing as a concrete aspect and direct result of the platform economy, and as characterised by a structural integration of digital services. Governing data on accommodation, transportation, payment and the management of shifts and work activities through digital applications, among other things, are essentially embedded into the complex structure of contemporary workers' housing.

I focus here on the corporate city where migrant workers reside, which in fact consists of a multiplicity of residential zones spread throughout the Netherlands, and constitutes the materialisation of different forces, domains, and modes of production. Due to its size, development, and the presence of more than six hundred employment agencies, the Rotterdam-Venlo logistics corridor can be considered an emblematic case to study the nature of this housing sector. Particularly affected by the 450 million tons of transhipped goods per year in the port of Rotterdam,¹² the Netherlands became the leading logistics platform serving the entire European continent, providing 146 million square

metres of distribution centres, comprising 12 per cent of the entire and existing built-up surface in the country.¹³

Due to corporations' lack of transparency and reluctance to share information, for this study my approach is based on field research, interviewing dozens of migrant workers in the Rotterdam-Venlo corridor. I asked them about their living and working conditions, about their nationality, age, the task at work, their employer and employment agency, and their perception of dormitories. Since November 2020, I have also conducted semi-structured interviews with experts on labour migration to the Netherlands, with representatives of non-profit organisations (FairWork, Barka Foundation), the secretary of Stichting Normering Flexwonen (SNF), members of the trade union FNV and employers' organisation ABU, developers, politicians, inspectors, residents of neighbourhoods near dormitories, employees and former employees of agencies.

Although the predominant narrative in architecture critique seems to focus on the boxing in of the landscape and the growing spatial footprint of distribution centres, this phenomenon is also a matter of people. The Dutch economy relies on a substratum of migrant workers from the European Union, a vast labour force of around 750 000 people arriving in the Netherlands from Central, Eastern and Southern Europe.¹⁴ Recruited directly and individually from abroad and through online platforms, this workforce seems to live in a parallel society. Migrant workers mainly reside in remote, segregated sites such as specifically-designed labour hotels and campsites, or former holiday parks and military bases, primarily located behind distribution parks and greenhouses, within forests, and next to highways. Journalistically stigmatised as *Polenhotels* (hotels for Poles), the workers' housing and recruitment are neither temporary nor spontaneous solutions, nor are they the result of uncoordinated strategies. Rather, they are precisely and logistically structured by a network of companies external to production, the international employment agencies. These corporations



Fig. 1: Landscape: infrastructure, in between production, control. Photos: author.

expect an increase of 50 000 migrant workers per year, to reaching 1.2 million foreign labourers within a decade, almost double the current 750 000 workers.¹⁵

Due to the general lack of suitable housing, the government has the ambition to stimulate the construction of 15 000 *flexwoningen* (flexible housing), 15 per cent of the massive development of 100 000 new units per year, with the aim of achieving 900 000 by 2030.¹⁶ The *flexwoningen* are a new emerging segment in the housing market. They are defined as living units that can be 'moved, stacked, connected, or split', and only if 'one of the following aspects has a temporary character: the house itself, the occupation through temporary lease, or the location'.¹⁷ Mentioning only the mobility and temporary character of the *flexwoningen* implicitly excludes users' customisations of single units. Focusing exclusively on standard units, agencies provide both *flexwoningen* and flexible workers according to a complex logistical supply chain.

A set of digitalised operations conducted on online platforms and software installed on workers' personal devices enables these corporations to efficiently organise hiring procedures, schedule work activities, control work performance, and even enable workers to digitally open and close the living units' doors with smartphones. In addition to corporations, public institutions too, in joint ventures with technology developers and agencies, test and launch digital applications for migrant workers. For instance, municipalities that develop these platforms aim to provide information about regulations on living and working in the Netherlands, to answer the specific questions of workers registered on the apps, and thus, to subtly extract data from them. The applications can also offer 'extra information layers' to affiliated agencies that can then customise their specific digital service.¹⁸ Data mining and analysis are the extractive processes that help agencies to identify patterns, which supports the solution of problems, the removal obstacles, making more informed business decisions, and the prediction of

future trends within the labour and workers' housing markets. Although the objective is to achieve a seamless workflow beyond the factory, these pervasive forms of control hyper-rationalise the layout of workers' housing and increase the employees' stress.

Workers' housing in motion

Global logistics corridors have a dual nature – they form infrastructural connections, and they enact operational processes. For example, a corridor facilitates the negotiation of customs practices across several national borders, moving goods and workers, but it also contributes to the formation of new borders along the transportation trajectories of global flows.¹⁹

Workers' housing is dispersed, clustered and confined within frontier zones along corridors. The typical 'dormitory labour regime' is characterised by the spatial proximity of the dwellings and the workplace.²⁰ These factories-cum-dormitories enable employers to strictly control a sizeable migrant workforce, adapting it to flexible just-in-time production, stimulating the mobility of single workers according to the corporate's needs, and reducing their collective bargaining power.²¹

The Rotterdam-Venlo corridor can be considered unique, in that the workers' housing does not adjoin distribution centres; the distance can be a hundred kilometres in extreme cases. The centralised control practised by agencies organises the dispersed activities and locations along the corridor. Analogous to the companies that ship and deliver goods worldwide, these logistical actors optimise the use of existing infrastructures and vacant sites to distribute people, calibrated according to distance and time.²² So, for instance, shifts are scheduled to avoid rush hour traffic, and dormitories are placed on empty plots near highways.

Echoing the Taylorist character of factories organised through the scientific management of workflows, minimising cost and efficiently using time, the agencies enact material and digital forms



Fig. 2: Architecture: flexibility, modularity, containerisation. Photos: author.

of labour exploitation. These corporations orchestrate the daily lives of workers, regulating the workers' behaviour through inspections and warnings and organising shifts and transport with the use of algorithms, revealing the coercive nature of workers' housing. The twenty-seven-year-old Polish Natalia works as a picker at XPO Logistics in Tilburg and lives thirty-five kilometres away in a forest in the North Brabant region. Describing the atmosphere of the holiday park transformed into a 'labour camp', she commented that despite the rather claustrophobic scale of the rooms of the 'bungalows', living in the forest is 'nice'.²³ For her, sharing the quiet of the terrain's shared park enables the inhabitants to discuss experiences and information about their life at work. 'Sometimes you really feel [like you are] on holiday,' she said. Suddenly, a private guard of the security service interrupted our conversation. Equipped with a chest-mounted body camera, he paternalistically reminded Natalia that it is prohibited to receive visitors; he then noted the data from her identity card on his mobile phone and informed her that he was forwarding a notification of this – second – warning to the employment agency. Natalia expressed her deep frustration over this 'domestic incident', saying: 'sometimes this place seems like a prison.'

The mixed feelings about the dormitories as places of both freedom and control are common among workers living within the corridor. The disorienting character of workers' housing seems unaffected by the bucolic surroundings. I interviewed residents of various sites – such as a renovated resort in Hellevoetsluis, old holiday parks near Oss, Oisterwijk, Oosterhout and Kaatsheuvel, purpose-built labour hotels within the logistics sites in Waalwijk and Greenport, the new parks for mobile homes in Venray and Maasbree, and the former military base in Weeze, Germany – and they alternately considered living there either liberating or oppressive.

In an analysis of the architecture of Familistère Guise, a labourers' housing complex, consisting

of three four-storey blocks with large courtyards, Michel Foucault claims that although the building 'manifested the power of ordinary workers to participate in the exercise of their trade,' its panoptic qualities could also 'have allowed it to be used as a prison.'²⁴ He further explains that 'no one could enter or leave the place without being seen by everyone.'²⁵ Considering that architectures are based on many appropriations rather than having an univocal meaning, Foucault suggests to focus on the 'convergence' between the intentions of the architect and the effective practice of freedom.²⁶

In this light, the Dutch workers' dormitories only seem innocent; their nature is, in fact, panoptical. Isolated in suburban areas far from local Dutch communities, one could read the residential sites as places outside the established juridical order, where exceptional practices become the rule. According to Giorgio Agamben, the camp consists in the materialisation of what he calls the 'state of exception' in which law is suspended, and in the subsequent formation of a 'space of exception' in which 'bare life and juridical rule enter into a threshold of indistinction.' Although Agamben's well-known concept of the camp does not explicitly focus on the topics of migration and labour, he states that 'we find ourselves virtually in the presence of a camp every time such a structure is created, independent of the kinds of crime that are committed there and whatever its denomination and specific topography'.²⁷

Subjecting the inhabitants to the condition of 'bare life', workers' housing seems instrumental in developing a disciplinary code to educate the workforce and can be considered to exist within an exceptional regulatory condition, a lawless space outside the jurisdiction of the state. Reusing existing holiday parks and hotels or designing dormitories as simulacra of vacation accommodations enables agencies to reinforce their pervasive presence and constant surveillance.

Regardless of the building type, workers' housing invariably reiterates a set of functions: a living room, a shared kitchen, a collective laundry



Fig. 3: Interior: minimum liveability, social media, leisure. Photos: author.

room, a fitness room, in some cases a grocery store, outdoor recreational areas with barbecues, a reception desk to control access to the location, and a parking lot where agency cars and buses constantly arrive and depart from and to the workplaces. The rhythm of the factory directly influences life in the dormitories. Each day is divided into the three consecutive factory shifts: the morning from 6:00 to 14:00, the afternoon from 14:00 to 22:00, and the night from 22:00 to 6:00. When they are not working, the workers' main activities are to rest, exercise, do laundry and shop. Most of them do not own cars, and therefore spend the majority of their time in the camp or in the near vicinity. Their distance from the active life of urban centres adds to a feeling nostalgia for their country of origin. The remoteness of the housing produces alienation and loneliness that are only partially mitigated by mobile phones, tablets and laptops, used to communicate with friends and relatives and to help with orientation in the new environment. Through phone calls, electronic messages and posts on social media platforms, workers share information mainly about their leisure time and pleasant aspects about life in the Netherlands, reporting only positive facts about the work experience abroad with their real and virtual communities. Exposure to social media tends to inhibit the workers' freedom of expression, making them careful not to publish information about or images of the precarious housing and working conditions. By contrast, workers share their repressed opinions on Google Maps, publicly but mostly anonymously. Dozens of negative reviews reveal geographical sites that accommodate workers and divulge workers' impressions on the quality of housing. The workers post photos of the actual condition of dwellings, openly criticise the management of residential sites, comment on their alienation from the corporations' digital applications, and award scores to various locations; most are given the lowest rating. 'Poor conditions. And I made a friend called João, a mouse,' Nivaldo writes ironically, giving two out of five stars. 'Looks like

Birkenau,' Viktor comments about the rigid grid of a mobile home park in Venray, with one star. 'When I got there I thought I was in a refugee camp. The agency's coordinators are beyond rude. They put me in a trailer home with three twenty-year-old boys whom I never met before and I am a thirty-seven-year-old female. Ninety-five euros per week plus you pay for laundry. There should be some standards for renting,' Stip Stip describes in detail, giving one star. 'One of my problems was not knowing how to lock the door via the app and I had to leave the house open even when at work,' Sorin posts, with two stars. By contrast, the enthusiastic, or perhaps sarcastic, Lucy in Space says: 'I am giving four stars only because I had to share my accommodation, everything else is good. I wouldn't suggest it to people who don't feel good surrounded by peaceful nature. I love it!' According to most of the interviewed workers, the reviews on Google Maps are an essential and reliable source of information, directly explaining tangible aspects of their lives without the filter and eye of 'lying' agencies. The messages on this platform can be seen as an explicit return of the repressed, through which workers intend to make the entire community of migrant workers aware of the agencies' modus operandi.

Single and double bedrooms are the most typical options within housing units. Most workers move to the Netherlands as individuals or couples, while families and groups of friends travel in the summer for working holiday periods. Workers' children, who are not allowed in agency dormitories, live with grandparents in their country of origin. Agency coordinators usually group new arrivals according to their nationality and workplace, trying to keep couples and families in the same living unit and separating groups of friends. The single bedroom is the favourite option because of the privacy it affords, allowing residents to relax after an intense working day without the interference of people with different lifestyles and schedules. According to most of the interviewed workers who occupy double rooms, having to share a room of just a few square metres

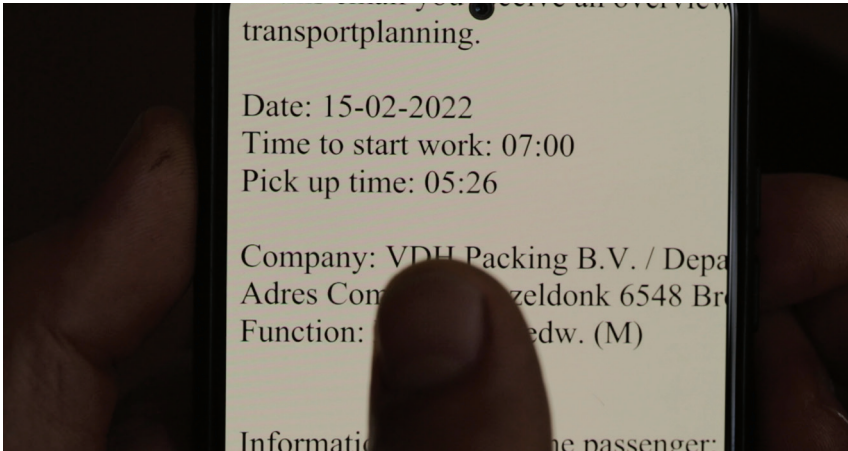


Fig. 4: Working: night shift, algorithm, homelessness. Photos: author.

with an unknown person is the worst part of the stay.

The rental cost makes the parasitic nature of agencies conspicuous. Regardless of the agency, location, building type, or room size, a single bed costs around a hundred euros per week, amounting to four hundred euros a month per person. Rather than recruitment, real estate activity is in fact employment agencies' primary source of profit.²⁸ Workers are doubly exploited by both employers and agencies. Employers extract the Marxian surplus value, the difference between the sale of a product and the labour cost to manufacture it, by extending the work shift or intensifying productivity. At the same time, employment agencies focus on extracting profit by extending the stay of its tenants. For instance, during low production seasons, the zero-hour contract enables agencies to employ workers for only a few hours a week, letting them earn barely enough to survive. This contrasts with the workers' aim, which is to work hard and return to their country of origin as soon as they have saved enough.

Workers incur additional costs – apart from rent – that are related to their conduct. Stela, a thirty-year-old Slovak, lives near Tilburg and works in the Den Bosch distribution centre of the Jumbo supermarket chain.²⁹ For her, living in a 'labour camp' follows a predictable and standard pattern and 'abnormal behaviour' immediately stands out. The employment agencies have a strict code of conduct in the dwellings. Smoking cigarettes at home is prohibited; visitors are only allowed with the approval of the camp authorities, and the bedroom and kitchen must be kept clean. Although inspections are weekly scheduled, agency coordinators can also enter the rooms unannounced when employees are not at home, and can order the eviction of dwellers that violate rules. A warning can result in a fine of fifty euros. Anomalous conduct can also be reported by workers themselves, who can thus actively participate to the monitoring of the dormitory. 'There is no privacy and I don't trust anybody here. This is modern slavery, really!' as Stela lamented.

Apart from control and privacy, workers' leading concern is healthcare. Agencies deduct monthly insurance fees from the salary. Although the worker is enrolled at the municipality, insured, and entitled to the care of a general practitioner, finding available doctors for the thousands of unexpected new clients in small towns has become difficult. The only dedicated health care facilities were installed to vaccinate the entire population of workers during the Covid-19 emergency. Workplace accidents are most common in the logistics sector, almost 3 per cent of employees have accidents.³⁰ Health problems can also appear once the worker has returned home. Wojciech, a thirty-two-year-old Pole employed at XPO Logistics, managed to find a doctor five kilometres away from his dormitory. However, when he broke his knee, the agency did not accept the medical advice, exerting pressure on Wojciech to quit his job and granting sixty days of sick leave only after a few weeks, when surgery would have been necessary to save the limb. Generally, the workers' mobility and flexibility keep them from accessing health protection.

Workers' housing in the corridor is extremely unstable. Very rarely does a worker reside in a dormitory for a full year. The agency often moves migrants from one dormitory to another, regulating the flows of people and following the demands of production. At the same time, the worker constantly tries to find better working and living conditions, and as a consequence, frequently changes agency and dormitory. For each migrant worker, housing is the outcome of a hectic, itinerant and multidirectional trajectory linking various dormitories in the corridor.

Self-regulated box

Dutch governmental institutions focus exclusively on the essentials of living units, rather than the management of housing for migrant workers. In 2012, various parties including the Ministry of the Interior, trade unions and employment agencies' associations launched *Stichting Normering Flexwonen* (SNF, the foundation for flex living



Fig. 5: Roma community: extended unit, extended family, leisure. Photos: author.

norms). Based on self-regulation, this foundation establishes standards of flexible housing for migrant workers, enables agencies to self-register accommodations and self-monitor the adherence to standards, and annually schedules inspections in agreement with agencies to check if the registered locations meet the requirements.³¹ Agencies can display the 'mark of quality', and an information sheet downloadable from the SNF website, on every registered living unit.³² Currently, 15 000 locations for migrant workers are registered, almost 75 per cent have already been inspected, and two hundred workers' complaints have been forwarded to the foundation, which is processing them.³³

During our interview, Jolet Woorders, secretary of SNF, gestured with her mouth and index finger, implying that much of their work was guesswork (referring to the Dutch proverb *natte vingerwerk*, literally wet finger work). She alluded to the foundation's estimate of the minimum area of a migrant worker's single room, is 3.5 m². The SNF defines the standards on the 'minimum liveability' of workers' housing, defining, for instance, the minimum amount of square meters per person, the minimum volume of cupboards, and the minimum dimensions of beds.³⁴ The well-known report *Geen tweederangsburgers* (No second class citizens) mildly criticises the SNF approach. Its suggestions include higher requirements for the SNF quality mark, such as a minimum area bedroom of 5.5 m² square metres per single room, unannounced inspections of buildings, the separation of work and rental contracts, and certification for housing providers and not only for buildings.³⁵

The non-restrictive standards on minimum liveability by both of these authorities seem adapted to potentially register as many locations as possible, perhaps to provide an overview of this phenomenon and bring it under the institutional radar, or to validate the agencies' strategy. The defined minimum area for single bedrooms, 3.5 and 5.5 m², respectively, corresponds to the size of single bedrooms of old and new mobile homes, the standard living units

of 'labour camps'. A prefabricated mobile home, which workers usually call a 'bungalow' or 'chalet,' consists of three bedrooms, a bathroom and a living room with an open kitchen, and can host three or four people.

The *Geen tweederangsburgers* report also states that mobile homes can be occupied only for the harvesting season, from the 1 April to 1 October, but also this recommendation is not commonly followed. Ciprian, a twenty-nine-year-old Romanian employed in a pharmaceutical distribution centre in Venlo, lives in a mobile home park nearby Arcen; his room is 3.9 m². Especially in the old type of mobile home, the thermal insulation is unsuitable for an extended stay. 'During the summer the chalet is very hot, in autumn and winter it is full of condensation. Everything gets wet, including the walls, floors, windows, clothes, and mattresses. It's horrible!'³⁶

Migrant workers occupy a vulnerable position. Playing the dual role of landlord and recruiter, agencies evict workers when their work contract expires and then, when the rent exceeds the wages earned from a few-hours-a-week job, converts them into debtors.³⁷ The morality of debt turns the debtor into the guilty party.³⁸ With no savings, most evicted workers avoid returning to their country of origin, preferring to live on the street. There were approximately a thousand homeless people living in Rotterdam during the first six months of 2022; 75 per cent were EU migrants, and were current or former employees of logistics companies in the Netherlands.³⁹ Homelessness can be the end of the worker's migration trajectory or the beginning of a new life cycle within the productive machine of the corridor.

Out of the box

Before the digital age and the opening of the Dutch labour market in 2007, when the passport of 15 European countries allowed access without a work-permit requirement, seasonal workers, notably from Poland, came to the Netherlands mostly without the intermediation of recruiters, counting on the

support of their community of origin.⁴⁰ Relying on word-of-mouth advertising, relatives, friends and fellow villagers embarked on the same journey as the pioneer workers.⁴¹

Currently, migrant workers live an individual life. The agencies bring single workers from abroad, following standard procedures of recruitment and housing, arranging job applications on global online recruitment platforms, either on websites or social media, and offering weekly payments, a wide range of digital services, and suitable accommodations without specifying or showing locations.

One campsite in North Brabant, close to the Belgian border, seems an exceptional case of self-tailored mobility. Marius and Lavi, two 'Gypsies' from Bistrița-Năsăud county in Romania, came to the Netherlands in 2020 during the Covid-19 emergency.⁴² After their first work experiences under the agencies' yoke, they emancipated themselves, finding another place to reside without the recruiter's intermediation and living with their children, who are not allowed in agencies' dormitories. Reaching an agreement with the Witte Plas campsite owner and settling there with their families, they invited, essentially through digital communication, relatives and fellow villagers living in different European regions. Currently, the Romani community comprises almost three hundred people living at the campsite of which nearly a hundred primarily work as pickers at Bol.com, a well-known Dutch webshop, in the distribution centre in Waalwijk. They act as a sort of trade union that can directly negotiate with the factory management about specific requests and benefits, such as days off on Saturdays, Sundays and religious holidays, a forty-hour working week with a fixed schedule during afternoon shifts, fair remuneration for the cost of transport to the workplace, and the training of newcomers to the community in Romanian.

The exceptional bargaining power and mutual aid at work reflect their living situation, emancipated from the agencies' control, including the use of apps. The Witte Plas became a collective form of housing

with specific rituals such as going to church on Sundays, sharing outdoor areas for everyday activities and available rooms to house newcomers. The notion of flexibility tout court is back.⁴³ The single units, which are mobile homes bought or rented at the campsite, are genuinely flexible, and are adapted, customised, rearranged, refurbished and extended to meet the needs of single.

By excluding agencies and the control they exercise, this Roma community organizes the living place according to their own needs and beyond 'bare life', disrupting the dormitory labour regimes and imagining housing in terms of class struggle.

Conclusion

In the digital age, our society cannot function without migrant workers, and the entire platform economy is dependent upon them. Although the figures show how wide-spread a phenomenon this is, in Dutch specialised and mainstream media the representation of workers' housing is limited and stigmatised. This housing is based on a logistical regime, moving workers according to the fluctuating demands of production, connecting remote residential sites and workplaces through the reuse of existing infrastructures, and managing the everyday deployment of workers by governing and mining data. Agency housing entirely subsumes workers into corporate operations through specifically-designed digital technologies and standardised living units. The direct results of the cost-efficient and self-regulatory practices reflect on the hyper-rationalisation and minimum liveability of housing, inhibiting and limiting workers' conduct and behaviour. The agencies with their pervasive surveillance control workers' real and digital lives, increasing their alienation, estrangement, stress and debts. Rather than facilitating their lives, the digital service package offered by agencies is essentially indifferent to workers' needs and preferences. It dictates orders, representing a barrier between corporations and workers.

By contrast, the community of Roma people can be considered an exception. Their truly flexible

housing is the product of the disruption of the coercive agencies' strategies. Perhaps workers' housing could be reimagined, beyond its spatial and digital panoptic qualities, as a new architecture where political intermediation and action can take place.

Notes

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 17. Housing Expert Team, 'Flexwonen', (Flexible Housing), 27 January 2021, <https://www.rvo.nl/onderwerpen/expertteam-woningbouw/flexwonen#wat-is-flexwonen%3F>. Note that *flewoningen* (flexible housing) and *flexwonen* (flexible living) can be considered synonyms.
 18. For instance, see the municipality of Waalwijk; many migrants reside and work in its logistics hotspot. In partnership with OTTO Work Force and Covebo Uitzendgroep (two employment agencies) it tested for two years and recently launched MYinfoNL, a digital application available in five languages and designed by BookThat Group, a company specialised in digital platform development. Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), 'Gemeente Waalwijk helpt arbeidsmigranten op weg met app', (Municipality of Waalwijk helps migrant workers on their way with app), *VNG.nl*, 9 June 2022, <https://vng.nl/nieuws/gemeente-waalwijk-helpt-arbeidsmigranten-op-weg-met-app>.
 19. Giorgio Grappi, 'Logistica e Stato nel presente globale: Sovranità, corridoi, confini', *Teoria politica, Nuova serie Annali* 10 (2020): 247–62.
 20. Antonella Ceccagno and Devi Sacchetto, 'The Mobility of Workers Living at Work in Europe', *Current Sociology* 68, no. 3 (2020): 299–315.
 21. Ibid.
 22. For instance, the use of existing airports by logistical actors in Clare Lyster, *Learning from Logistics: How Networks Change Our Cities* (Basel and Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2016), 83–85.
 23. Interview with Natalia, 11 April 2021.
 24. The architect Jean-Baptiste André Godin designed the Familistère Guise in the French city of Guise in 1859. Michel Foucault, 'Space Knowledge and Power', interview by Paul Rabinow, trans. Christian Hubert, *Skyline*, 1 March 1982, <https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.spaceKnowledgePower/>.
 25. Ibid.
 26. Ibid.
 27. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998), 21, 169–170. Agamben focuses on the Ancient Greeks' dual meaning of life: *bios*, the biological aspect of life, and *zoē*, the form in which life is lived, while contemporary languages have lost this distinction. 'Bare life' indicates the predominance of biological dimension rather than the quality of life.
 28. Interview with Francien Winsemius, communication coordinator at the non-profit organisation FairWork, 21 June 2021.
 29. Interview with Stela, 1 July 2021.
 30. These figures refer to 2021. Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 'Meeste ongevallen met verzuim bij transport-en logistieke beroepen', (Most accidents involving absenteeism among transport and logistics professions), 18 January 2023, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2023/03/meeste-ongevallen-met-verzuim-bij-transport-en-logistieke-beroepen>.
 31. Stichting Normering Flexwonen (SNF), 'Information for residents', <https://www.normeringflexwonen.nl/information-for-residents>.
 32. It is mandatory to display the following information on the 'mark of quality': the address of the location and unit number, the maximum number of beds allowed, an explanatory text for residents in Dutch and English with instructions on how to digitally register complaints, SNF's QR code, and a blank

- space where the inspector can put a sticker during the site visit.
33. Interview with Jolet Woorders, the secretary of SNF, 8 December 2022.
 34. Stichting Normering Flexwonen (SNF), 'Standards for housing migrant workers', <https://www.normeringflexwonen.nl/cms/files/2022-03/norm-voor-huisvesting-arbeidsmigranten-per-1-maart-2022-engelse-versie.pdf>.
 35. Migrant Workers Protection Team, *Geen tweed-erangsburgers*, 30 October 2020, 41–43, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/10/30/tweede-advies-aanjaagteam-bescherming-arbeidsmigranten>.
 36. Interview with Ciprian, 26 February 2022.
 37. In 2022, interviewed workers confirmed that evictions still occur when the contract expires. According to the Collective Labour Agreement (CAO), 'when the temporary employment contract ends, a transition period of four weeks applies in which the temporary worker must leave the accommodation he rents from the employment agency.' See Trade unions and the collective labour agreement, 'CAO voor Uitzendkrachten 2021–2023, Versie augustus 2022', (Collective Labour Agreement for Temporary Workers 2021–2023, Version August 2022), 55, <https://www.abu.nl/app/uploads/2022/08/CAO-voor-Uitzendkrachten-2021-2023-versie-augustus-2022-webversie.pdf>.
 38. Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(E), 2012), 29–31.
 39. Interview with Municipality of Rotterdam and Barka Foundation members, summer 2022.
 40. Roos Pijpers, 'International Employment Agencies and Migrant Flexiwork in an Enlarged European Union', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 7 (2010): 1079–97.
 41. Ibid.
 42. Interview with Marius, 2 July 2022.
 43. For the notions of flexibility, adaptability and customisation, see Corinna Anderson, 'Good Life

Now: Leisure and Labour in Cedric Price's Housing Research, 1966–1973', *Footprint* 13, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 2019): 11–30.

Biography

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