



The Research Group

Cosmopolis Centre for Urban Research

has the honor to invite you to the public defense of the PhD thesis of

Jeanne Mosseray

to obtain the degree of Doctor of Sciences

Joint PhD with KU Leuven

Title of the PhD thesis:

Investigating the renovation of the large social housing estate of Peterbos. Insights for a reflexive practice at the nexus of urban planning and ethnography.

Promotors:

Prof. dr. Michael Ryckewaert (VUB)
Prof. dr. Viviana D'Auria (KU Leuven)
Prof. dr. Nele Aernouts (VUB)

The defense will take place on
Thursday, January 18, 2024 at 16h in auditorium D.2.01
of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Pleinlaan 2 - 1050 Elsen

Members of the jury

Prof. dr. Fabio Vanin (VUB, chair)
Dr. Valerie De Craene (VUB, secretary)
Prof. dr. Guido Geenen (KU Leuven)
Prof. dr. Maria Anita Palumbo (ENSASE)
Dr. Marie Stender (Aalborg University)

Curriculum vitae

Jeanne Mosseray was trained as an anthropologist at UCLouvain, where she conducted research on immigration and European cities. She pursued studies in Urbanism and Strategic Planning at the KU Leuven. Now, as an “urbanist-anthropologist”, she is combining socio-spatial research and urban planning. Her main research focus is on social housing neighborhoods and the residents' inclusion in the city through urbanism. She had the opportunity to complete her Phd trajectory thanks to her participation in the European research project ‘SoHoLab: the regeneration of large-scale social housing estate through LivingLab’.

Abstract of the PhD research

This thesis examines how crossdisciplinary research combining ethnography and urban planning can contribute to a situated and integrated regeneration of large-scale social housing estates. The regeneration of such estates in Europe has been characterized by a piecemeal and sectoral approach. This is also the case in the Brussels Capital Region, where different services of the social housing sector operate independently, with technical departments focusing mainly on the renovation of the building envelope, and social departments responsible for supporting residents. Recent regeneration programs have aimed at adopting a more holistic and participatory approach. However, these programs often start from conventional assumptions about high-rise estates, focusing primarily on the relationship between the spatial form of modernist estates and “deviant” social issues such as social isolation, crime and social disorder. Although various social and planning theories address the social-spatial context of residents in large-scale social estates, also in academia a disciplinary divide persists. Theories and approaches have remained clustered in either spatial or social disciplines, with limited interaction between both.

This thesis started from the hypothesis that the current urban planning practices falls short of fully understanding the social and spatial mechanisms and dynamics in regeneration processes. Through action research in the large social housing neighborhood of Peterbos, Brussels, it explored how recognizing the everyday practices of residents, through ethnographic methods, could support the future transformation and maintenance of the site. At the methodological level, it explored how ethnography could adopt a transformative and prospective perspective on the one hand and how urban planning could incorporate social knowledge on the other.

Building on the concept of “architectural anthropology” (Stender and Yaneva, 2021), the thesis proposes a novel approach that combines “institutional ethnography” and “spatial ethnography”. By integrating methods, concepts, and epistemologies based on empirical experiences gathered from the fieldwork in Peterbos, the PhD seeks to overcome the social/spatial and analytical/projective dichotomy between anthropology and urban planning. Specifically, it outlines a set of elements necessary for reproducing the approach of inquiry adopted in this thesis, including discussing the researcher(s)' positionality and skills, defining the settings to be examined, and advocating for a situated and transformative stance of all actors involved.