

Mapping Housing Informality

Using Digital Platforms to Study Informal Housing in the Netherlands

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Project description

This project aims to investigate housing informalities in the Netherlands through the lens of digital platforms. We define informal housing as practices that operate in spaces shaped by the limitations, contradictions, and implicit assumptions of legal implementation (Haid & Hilbrandt, 2019). These practices arise due to ambiguous regulations, strategic deregulation, or lack of enforcement. In this project, we focus on informal rental housing in Utrecht. While informal housing practices are traditionally associated with the Global South, recent studies have shown that informality a widespread phenomenon in the Global North, producing different housing practices that cater to a wide range of social groups (Bouwmeester et al., 2023; Chiodelli et al., 2021; Hilbrandt, 2021).

Young populations and low-income groups such as students and migrants in particular rely on digital platforms such as Kamernet and Pararius to find housing. These platforms mediate a range of informal housing options, such as unauthorized rentals, shared accommodations, or units that fail to meet building standards (Gurran et al., 2024). While informal arrangements help people meet their housing needs, they can also expose them to precarious living conditions and insecurity (Durst & Wegmann, 2017). Still, digital platforms play a dual role: they can facilitate unauthorized practices like illegal subletting and exploitative rental (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2022; Maalsen et al., 2021), but they also generate valuable real-time data on housing listings (Boeing & Waddell, 2017). This data provides researchers and policymakers with insights into hidden housing practices that are often ignored by official statistics.

The Bright Mind Fellow will assist us with 1) the development of a comprehensive database that captures different forms and prevalence of informal housing and 2) spatializing this data to explore how various institutional contexts influence informal housing outcomes. The focus will be on the province of Utrecht, which allows us to identify differences between municipalities that have different housing policies. Key indicators for analysis include property type, location, price information, lease conditions, regulatory compliance, and physical characteristics (based on images).

Job Requirements

We are looking for a motivated student with a strong interest in housing studies, housing affordability and digital platforms. Ideally, you should have a basic understanding of or experience with quantitative data collection, as this will be a key component of our research. Familiarity with web scraping techniques is highly desirable, but if you're new to it, a willingness to learn is equally important.

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