

Planning with mold. Exploring the role of infrastructure, housing and public health.

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Project description

In Dutch cities, mold and fungi have become significant issues affecting housing quality and public health, especially in poorly maintained private rental and social housing (RIVM 2015; Woonbond, 2023). Mold thrives in damp environments which are common in the Netherlands. It also thrives in homes with poor insulation, outdated heating, and inadequate ventilation, exposing residents to health risks. At the same time, older buildings are susceptible to pile rot [paalrot]. Pile rot occurs when wooden foundations deteriorate due to wood-decaying fungi, a process caused by fluctuating water levels. (Deltares, 2023). Fungi and mold spread through mycelium, which infiltrates wood, soil, and walls. Infrastructure failures and underinvestment exacerbate fungal growth, linking them to urban inequalities.

This research project explores the relationship between housing, infrastructure, mold, and public health, focusing on the role of urban planning in addressing these issues. We now envision exploring these issues in the city of Rotterdam, but this is open for discussion. The project has three objectives: 1) to explore how these interactions have been conceptualized in the academic literature, particularly through the lens of the "more-than-human" turn (Bridle 2022), which challenges traditional, human-centered approaches to urban planning by highlighting the agency of non-human entities like mold; 2) to investigate the urban planning and policy interventions currently aimed at mitigating mold-related risks; and 3) to explore how planning can address mold-related risks and associated inequalities. As a Bright Minds assistant, you will: 1) review literature on mold and fungal growth in relation to infrastructure and health in urban environments from a "more-than-human" perspective. 2) analyze planning measures, building codes, policy interventions, and enforcement practices that address mold and/or housing quality (e.g. local government regulations, housing policies, and planning strategies aimed at controlling mold proliferation, insulation, or ventilation in homes), 3) conduct a limited number of interviews with planners, policy-makers, health and building inspectors, and housing associations.

Job requirements

- Dutch proficiency
- Strong experience in conducting literature reviews, with foundational skills in policy analysis, and interview techniques.
- Knowledge/affinity/interest in 'more-than-human' perspectives and planning

References

- Bridle, J. (2022). *Ways of being: Animals, plants, machines: The search for a planetary intelligence*. Penguin UK.

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- Deltares. (2023, January 30). Foundation damage in the Netherlands mapped out for national approach to foundation problems.
- Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu (RIVM). (2015, April). Schimmel- en vochtproblemen in woningen: Een vochtige woning is niet comfortabel en kan uw gezondheid beïnvloeden.
- Woonbond. (2023). Ik heb schimmel in huis, wat nu? <https://www.woonbond.nl/faq/ik-heb-schimmel-huis-wat-nu/>