

APP94052: Countercultural Cities: Housing, Art and Everyday Life

Application overview

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Countercultural Cities: Housing, Art and Everyday Life

1. Details

Summary

Countercultural Cities: Housing, Art and Everyday Life investigates the intertwined histories and contemporary practices of housing struggles, artistic production and refuge in London and São Paulo, in dialogue with Rome, Buenos Aires, CapeTown and Athens. Leveraging the extensive existing archive (Vasudevan; Burgum; Sheba), the project examines how squatting and urban occupations operate simultaneously as material infrastructures of survival and as laboratories of political imagination, cultural production and collective world-making. Rather than treating occupations as marginal or exceptional responses to crisis, the project approaches them as historically situated practices through which communities reconfigure everyday life, labour, care, and urban belonging under conditions of racial dispossession, and housing precarity.

Historically, London's post-war and late-twentieth-century squats provided infrastructures of arrival for migrants and artists, fostering countercultural scenes that shaped the city's artistic and political landscapes. Since the criminalisation of squatting in 2012, these spaces have been progressively

dismantled, closing off vital routes to affordable living and cultural production. In contrast, in Brazil, contemporary occupations such as *9 de Julho*, *Ouvidor 63*, *Aldeia Maracanã* and *Kasa Invisível* remain central to struggles for housing and cultural survival. They combine refuge with artistic production, political organising and ecological experimentation, while operating under permanent threat of eviction. Drawing these divergent trajectories into sustained comparative dialogue allows the project to interrogate how different political economies, racial formations and legal regimes shape the possibilities of collective dwelling and cultural production.

The project adopts a multi-method, participatory and comparative design organised through four interdependent Work Packages (WP). WP1 grounds the research in long-term participatory ethnography and co-production with Brazilian occupations, examining them as countercultural infrastructures where housing, art and everyday life become inseparable. Through collaborative research with community-based researchers and the development of material infrastructures (community libraries, print workshops, fashion ateliers and collective kitchens), WP1 produces experimental pedagogical devices. WP2 expands the analysis transnationally through comparative and longitudinal research on squatting and housing movements across Europe, LatinAmerica and Africa, building a translocal platform of learning. Through embodied practices of walking, reading and writing, WP3 develops a living counter-archive of (re)fugitivity that resists extractive logics of documentation. WP4 mobilises knowledge and people for policy engagement and long-term impact.

By integrating storytelling, artistic methodologies, counter-archival research, and transnational comparative analysis, the project constructs a living, collectively generated account of squatting praxis while producing culturally grounded, non-prescriptive tools for collective reflection, pedagogy and public debate. Rather than substituting technical or legal services, the project operates as a university-based space of research, experimentation and mediation, strengthening the symbolic, organisational and pedagogical capacities of occupations and their international alliances.

The research addresses urgent global challenges: intensifying housing precarity, the criminalisation of homelessness, racialised displacement, and the erosion of collective infrastructures of care. Its impacts extend across academic, community and policy spheres. For social movements and artistic collectives, it amplifies visibility, translocal solidarity and mutual learning. For scholarship, it advances debates in housing justice, decolonial urbanism, political aesthetics and commons theory. For policy and public audiences, it

offers grounded evidence and alternative imaginaries for housing and urban futures rooted in care, redistribution and post-capitalist experimentation.

Ultimately, *Countercultural Cities* asks not only how occupations and squats emerge under conditions of crisis, but how they actively reinvent the everyday—reconfiguring space, labour, culture and belonging in ways that expand what cities, and collective life within them, can become.

Start date

January 2027

Duration

36 months

2. Core team

Name	Role	Organisation
	Project lead	University College London
	Project co-lead (UK)	University College London
	Project co-lead (UK)	University College London
	Project co-lead (UK)	University College London
	Project co-lead (UK)	University College London
	Project co-lead (international)	Federal University of São Paulo
	Project co-lead (international)	Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
	Specialist	University of Edinburgh
	Project co-lead (international)	University of Sao Paulo

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Countercultural Cities offers a theoretically and methodologically distinctive contribution to urban studies, housing justice, decolonial thought and political aesthetics by reframing urban occupations not as marginal, illegal or reactive practices, but as historically situated infrastructures of dwelling, cultural production, care and political world-making. By placing London and São Paulo in sustained dialogue—while extending the comparative frame to Rome, Buenos Aires, CapeTown and Athens—the project advances a plural understanding of occupations as practices of collective *re-existence* under conditions of racial capitalism, displacement and urban dispossession.

The project is novel in both scope and approach. While existing scholarship has addressed squatting cultures in Europe or housing movements in Latin America, no study to date has developed a long-term, transnational and practice-based comparative framework that centres the intersection of housing, art, fugitivity, refuge and everyday life. By constructing a living counter-archive of occupation practices—connecting sites such as the 491 Gallery or the Winter Shelter (London), 9 de Julho and Ouvidor 63 (Sao Paulo), with Porto Fluviale (Rome), Gondolin (Buenos Aires), Prosfygiká (Athens) and Cissie Gool (CapeTown), the project generates new conceptual and empirical insights into how occupations function as infrastructures of arrival, survival and collective imagination. It challenges dominant policy and academic narratives that reduce occupations to crisis management or illegality, demonstrating instead how they sustain cultural economies, political consciousness and alternative modes of belonging.

The project is exceptionally timely. Across the global urban landscape, housing precarity, the criminalisation of homelessness, and hostility toward refugees are intensifying. In the UK, the criminalisation of squatting since 2012 has dismantled key infrastructures that once enabled the urban inhabitation of racialised and migrant populations. In Brazil, occupations continue to operate as vital refuge and cultural laboratories, yet under permanent threat of eviction and state repression. At same time, the current conjuncture of polycrisis—marked by austerity, authoritarianism, and climate breakdown—has profoundly destabilised everyday life and intensified struggles over housing. By placing these divergent trajectories in dialogue, the project directly engages with the most urgent socio-political questions facing cities today.