

REFLECTIONS

This investigative journalism project delving into the housing conditions of temporary migrant workers in the Netherlands has been a sobering experience. What began as a broad exploration of migrant experiences quickly narrowed to a laser focus on 'spoedzoekers' (urgent seekers) exposing the stark reality of their precarious living situations against the backdrop of a wider housing crisis. This necessary shift in focus underscored the critical importance of adaptability and responsiveness in research particularly within a context as dynamic and complex as temporary migration.

Navigating the fieldwork itself proved challenging fraught with ethical dilemmas and logistical hurdles. Accessing and interviewing vulnerable groups within highly controlled and often dehumanising settings revealed the deeply ingrained power imbalances inherent in such research. The stifling regulations imposed by authorities ostensibly designed to maintain order, created environments that felt more like prisons than homes. This necessitated a constant reassessment of interview techniques, abandoning the rigidity of a semi-structured guide in favour of a more empathetic and situational approach. The very act of disguising myself, shedding the formal role of a researcher to adopt the guise of a friendly visitor, laid bare the ethical tightrope one walks when engaging with vulnerable populations. This worked, the interviewees felt more relaxed talking to somebody who probably understood what they were going through. They just wanted to be heard.

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As a non-EU (Indian) student conducting fieldwork within a European context, I was acutely aware of the cultural and personal dynamics at play. Negotiating these cross-cultural complexities demanded a constant self-awareness, carefully calibrating my attire, dialogue and even modifying my accent to build trust and rapport. This experience served as a stark reminder that research is never conducted in a vacuum - our identities and perceptions inevitably shape both the process and the outcomes. The open-ended structure of the Complex Cities graduation studio while providing a degree of freedom, also exposed a need for more structured guidance, particularly when navigating ethically sensitive research. While regular site visits provided valuable contextual grounding, a greater emphasis on immersive observation and sensory engagement could have further enriched the understanding of these lived experiences. The project's findings are a damning indictment of the current system. The relations between official regulations and the lived realities of migrant workers exposes the hollowness of policies that fail to prioritise basic human dignity. This research contributes to a growing body of work that challenges the often-romanticised notion of 'hospitality' in the context of migration revealing instead a system rife with control, exclusion and marginalisation.

Moving forward, research in this field must prioritise direct engagement with migrant workers, actively involving them in the research process. This necessitates building trust and rapport potentially through partnerships with local advocacy organisations and the use of translators. I used a translator to convert three sentences in Ukrainian

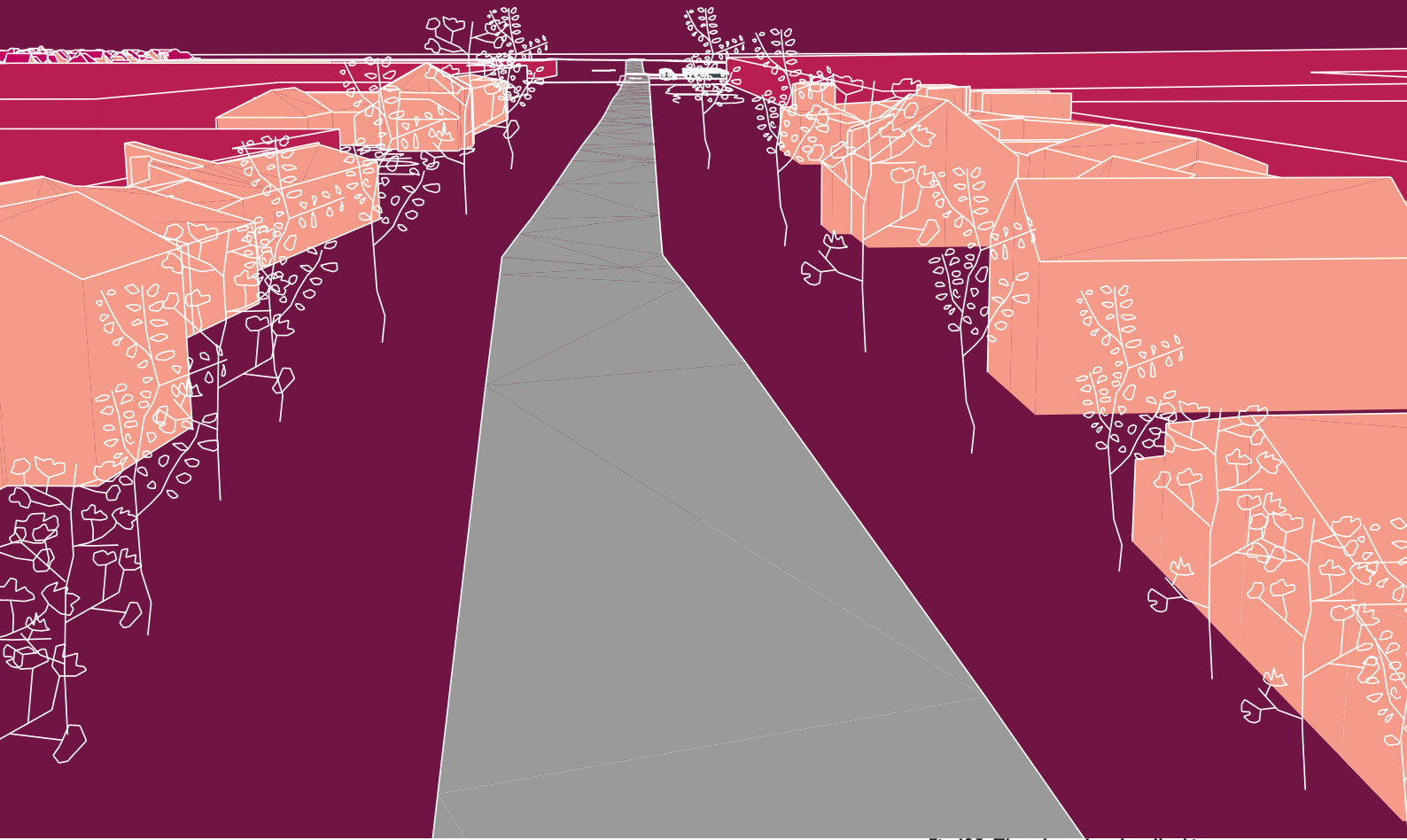


Fig 125: That day when I walked in

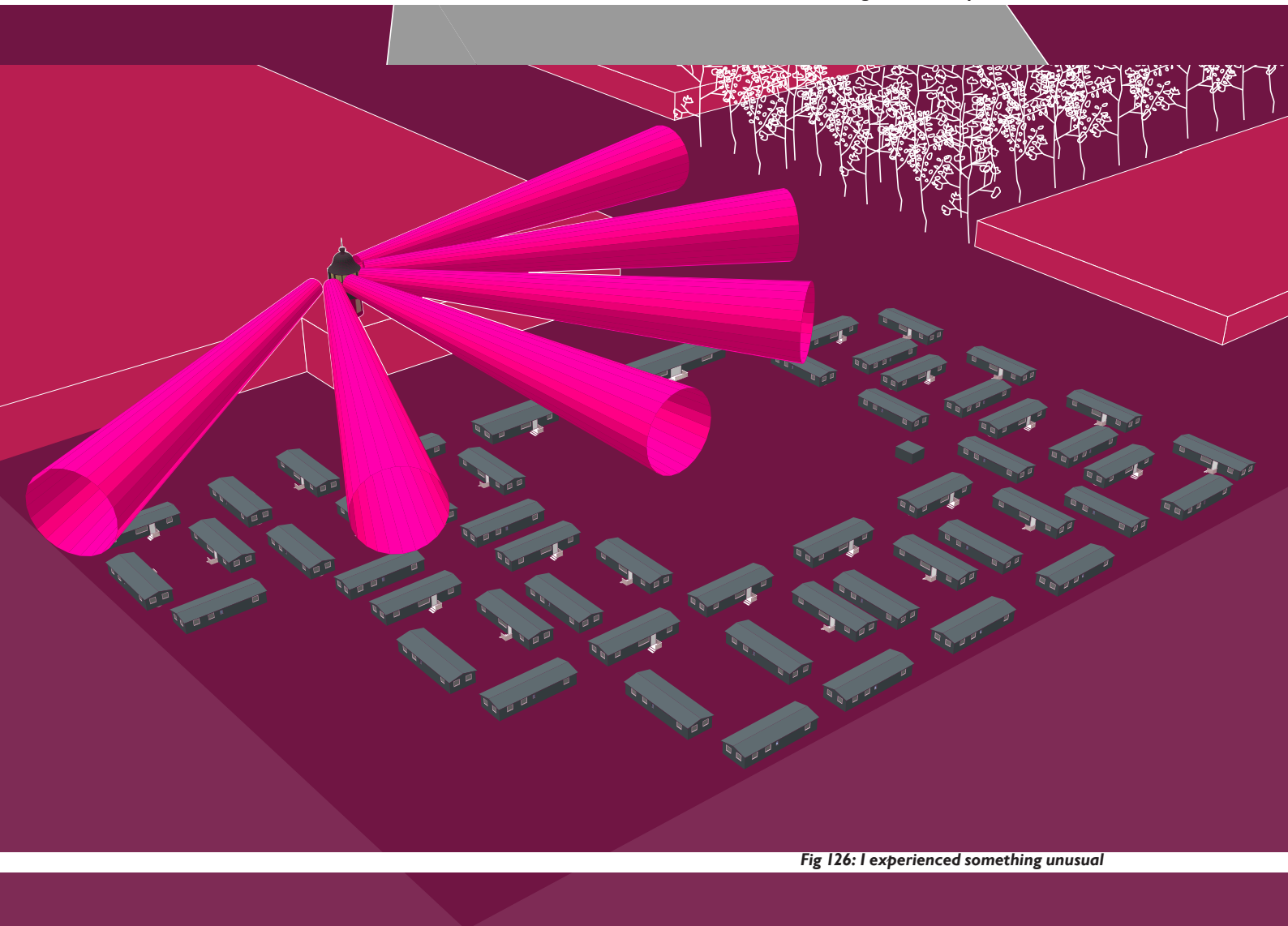


Fig 126: I experienced something unusual

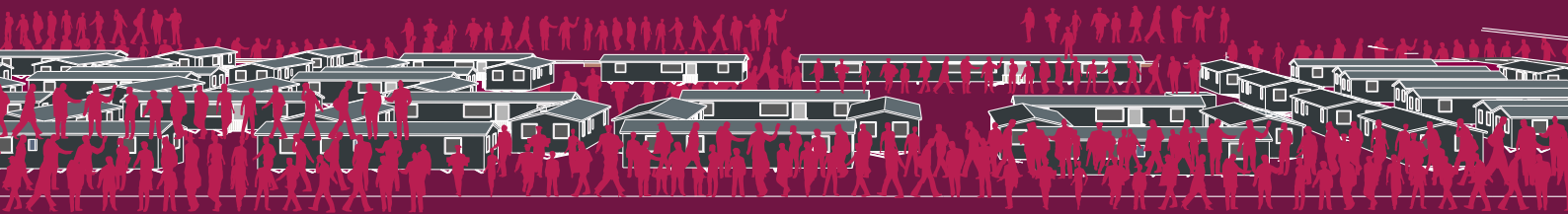


Fig 127: I thought it would be like this

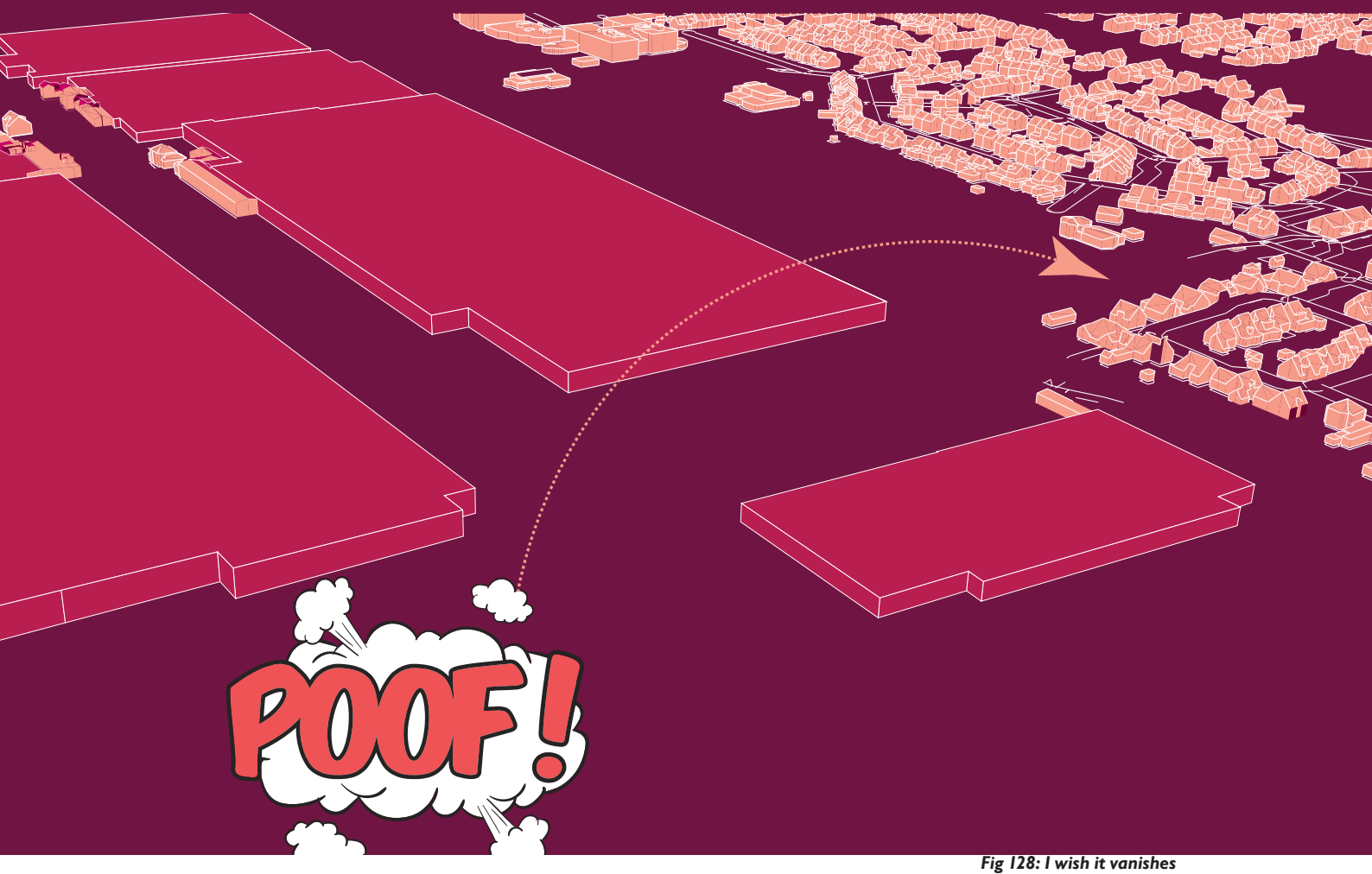


Fig 128: I wish it vanishes

to English. Probably, some meanings were lost in translation but I grasped the primary words from it. Longitudinal studies are crucial to understanding the long-term impacts of these precarious living conditions on individuals' well-being.

Despite the bleak realities uncovered, the act of proposing design and pilot strategies offered a glimmer of hope. This project reinforced the belief that urban design and spatial planning when approached with a critical and empathetic lens have the power to effect positive change. The constant influx of new research and publications throughout the project's duration only served to underscore the urgency of this issue, demanding that we remain vigilant, adaptable and above all, committed to finding solutions.

Relation between thesis topic and graduation track Urbanism:

This thesis is fundamentally intertwined with the master's program's critical urbanism approach emphasising nuanced understandings of local contexts, cultures and the intricate networks impacting marginalised communities. While the project's foundation lies in a sociological exploration of temporary migrant workers' housing precarity, it expands outward to engage with broader discourses within urban design and planning. This trajectory is particularly relevant given the Netherlands' ongoing housing crisis and the rise of "flexible housing" as a contentious solution. This thesis challenges the often-hasty and technocratic responses to such crises which frequently exacerbate existing inequalities. By foregrounding the experiences of marginalised groups - often disproportionately affected by both housing shortages and precarious labour conditions - the project advocates for a more just and equitable approach to urban development. Through the development of contextually grounded design strategies and principles, this thesis aims to contribute to a more socially responsible and inclusive Dutch urbanism, one that prioritises the needs and experiences of all its inhabitants, not just the privileged few.

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Relation between thesis topic and MSc AUBS:

This thesis directly confronts the timely and multifaceted challenges at the forefront of the MSc AUBS curriculum positioning itself at the intersection of pressing social, political and spatial concerns. The Netherlands' evolving landscape marked by increasing migration flows and the rise of precarious, "temporary" work arrangements presents a critical spatial dilemma particularly within the context of limited buildable land. This research argues that these challenges are not merely logistical but demand a critical and ethical response from future architects, urban designers and planners. By examining the nascent yet rapidly proliferating field of "flexible housing," including recent projects by prominent Dutch firms, this thesis seeks to move beyond superficial solutions and engage with the complex realities faced by migrant workers. This exploration aims to contribute to a more nuanced and socially responsible approach to spatial design, one that acknowledges the urgent need for innovative housing solutions that prioritise

equity, dignity and the long-term well-being of all inhabitants.

Relation between thesis topic and graduation studio:

This thesis emerged from a critical inquiry within the graduation studio questioning the very nature of migration as a potential site of territorial conflict. Drawing upon observations of spatial disparities witnessed in previous TU Delft projects, the research narrowed its focus to the lived experiences of a particularly vulnerable group: seasonal labourers from Central and Eastern European countries, often rendered invisible within broader migration discourses. This shift in focus, prompted by the EU's eastward expansion and its subsequent impact on labour mobility, underscored the studio's emphasis on evidence-based research as a means of unpacking complex socio-spatial phenomena. By directly confronting the often-overlooked realities of seasonal workers whose presence in the Netherlands fluctuates dramatically, creating unique spatial and social challenges - the thesis aligns with the studio's broader exploration of migration's profound implications for Dutch society. This investigation moves beyond simplistic narratives of victimhood, recognising these individuals as both essential contributors to the Dutch economy and active agents shaping the urban fabric.

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Societal Relevance:

The glossy facade of recruitment campaigns often masks the harsh realities awaiting temporary labourers in the Netherlands. Employment agencies, through their marketing materials, entice workers with promises of opportunity, only to subject them to highly controlled environments where they are often dehumanised and treated as mere tools in a machine. My research, through visual investigations, site visits and interviews, aims to expose this stark contrast between the advertised reality and the exploitative lived experiences of these labourers. Often, Dutch citizens themselves are unaware of this issue so it would be an eye-opener to a wider audience, outside of the academic field.

By shedding light on the precarious employment, substandard housing and inequitable wages faced by temporary workers, this project challenges the normalisation of these exploitative practices. The normalization serves to perpetuate a system that benefits from the vulnerable position of temporary labour within an increasingly globalised economy. Ultimately, this research seeks to raise awareness about these critical issues and advocate for more inclusive urban planning strategies that value the contributions and safeguard the well-being of all residents, regardless of their migration status.

Scientific Relevance:

This project employs design strategies and storytelling as methodological tools to unravel the complexities of flexible housing for temporary labour within a Dutch society that predominantly values permanence. Building on the work of Seasonal Matters Rural Relations by Seasonal Neighbours, Landscapes of Trade by Merten Nefs, Automated Landscapes by Merve Bedir, Ludo Groen, Marten Kuijpers, Víctor Muñoz Sanz and Marina Otero Verzier and Housing Migrant Workers: The Form of the Corporate City Along the

Rotterdam-Venlo Logistics Corridor, this research addresses a critical knowledge gap by critically assessing the housing conditions provided to this often-invisible group and aligning their needs with potential areas for improvement. By visualising the spatial implications of temporary migration and giving voice to the lived experiences of these workers, this project offers a novel perspective on the rise of flexible work arrangements in the Netherlands. This research contributes to emerging scholarship on 21st-century mobility by examining how these trends, while presented as opportunities for some, often function as precarious necessities for others.

How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

My research and design process unfolded as a dynamic and iterative dialogue. The initial research into intra-European mobilities unearthed a distinct housing typology specifically designed for temporary workers, all throughout the Netherlands. This discovery, with its inherent regulations and spatial configurations became a crucial point of departure for the design interventions. The existing rules, spatial arrangements and potential shortcomings of these housing solutions served as both constraints and opportunities shaping the design recommendations for more equitable and humane living environments. Conversely, the design process itself prompted further research, raising new questions about alternative housing models and the broader business ecosystems shaping these built environments. This cyclical exchange between research and design fostered a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding temporary worker housing, ultimately leading to more informed and impactful design outcomes.

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How do you assess the value of transferability of your project results?

The value of this project's transferability lies in its methodological framework offering a replicable, step-by-step approach to unpacking and addressing complex housing challenges. By meticulously deconstructing the issue and acknowledging the specific contexts and situatedness of seasonal worker housing in the Netherlands, the project provides a valuable roadmap for other contexts grappling with similar issues.

While the Netherlands finds itself at the forefront of this flexible housing typology within Western Europe, the project's insights particularly its emphasis on systematic analysis and context-specific solutions hold significant relevance for other countries experiencing an influx of seasonal workers (for example – Spain). The project's findings, therefore, have the potential to act as a catalyst encouraging other European nations to move beyond ad hoc solutions and engage with the complexities of seasonal worker housing in a more thoughtful and equitable manner. By adapting the project's methodological framework, these countries can begin to develop contextually appropriate design interventions that address the unique spatial dynamics at play within their own borders.