

The Research Group
Cosmopolis Centre for Urban Research

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

Céline Drieskens

to obtain the degree of Doctor of Sciences

Joint PhD with KU Leuven

Title of the PhD thesis:

HOUSING AS A MATTER OF JUSTICE: Politics & Practices beyond the Right to Housing in Brussels

Supervisors:

Prof. dr. Michael Ryckewaert (VUB)

Prof. dr. Nele Aernouts (VUB)

Prof. dr. Viviana d'Auria (KU Leuven)

The defence will take place on

Friday, September 11, 2026 from 15:00 to 17:00, followed by a reception from 17:00 to 19:00

Please confirm your presence by filling in [this](#) form

Location:

Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies (BRIAS) - Polina Mendeléef Seminar Hall

VUB Usquare Campus - avenue General Jacques 210, 1050 Brussels

Members of the jury

Prof. dr. David Bassens (VUB, chair)

Prof. dr. Eva Swyngedouw (VUB)

Prof. dr. René Kreichauf (VUB)

Prof. dr. Manuel Aalbers (KU Leuven)

Prof. dr. Jeroen Stevens (KU Leuven)

Dr. Maria Anita Palumbo (Université Lille Nord de France, FR)

Dr. Ana Vilenica (University of Belgrade, RS)

Abstract of the PhD research

This research departs from a fundamental tension. On the one hand, growing housing precarity is largely experienced as an individual issue and treated as an individual responsibility. On the other hand, the housing crisis is often framed as a technical concern, obscuring housing's political and structural underpinnings as well as uneven power relations. In this context, how do collective forms of resistance for housing justice take shape?

The research turns to Brussels as the backdrop for its empirical study, where the right to housing is legally enshrined, yet housing politics are fragmented and growing housing precarity is largely normalised. It asks how housing justice struggles are organized and sustained in this context. More specifically, it focuses on movement building, autonomous renters' organizing and the re-activation of community archives on housing struggles to generate insights into the political claims and collective demands which emerge from within struggle.

Situated within housing justice scholarship, this research advances housing justice as an analytical lens through which to politicize the housing crisis and reframe it as a collective and systemic issue. Advancing housing justice serves as a way to expand the political horizon of right-to-housing frameworks, allowing us to understand how rights acquire meaning and political force through collective struggle. It shows how collective action articulates moral values and demands which extend beyond a rights discourse, and how political identities and imaginaries take shape within these struggles. By approaching housing as a continuous process of collective struggle and political experimentation from below, housing justice shifts the attention away from housing as an individual or material entitlement focused on minimum sufficiency standards, and instead places collective and radical housing responsibility at the centre.

Housing justice also acts as a methodological and epistemological red thread, centring the idea of housing justice as research justice. The field work builds on traditions of militant ethnography as a politically engaged method, focusing on activist participation from within struggle and rooted in the principles of mutual aid, accountability and long-term embeddedness. Research is understood as relational more than extractive. It becomes intertwined with the coming and goings of movements, as well as with the everyday organisational and affective labour which makes collective efforts possible.

Through its multi-sited militant ethnography, this dissertation reframes the right to housing through housing justice, demonstrating how collective practices often exceed what is commonly articulated within rights-based frameworks. In doing so, it advances housing justice as a lens through which housing struggles become visible and politically central.

Publications

Anastasiou, A., Drieskens, C., Aernouts, N., d'Auria, V., & Ryckewaert, M. (2025). Prefiguring the right to housing. Right to the city approaches in alternative housing initiatives in Belgium. *Housing Studies*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2025.2472790>

Drieskens, C. (2025a). Spaces of resistance: Re-activating archives through community exhibitions for housing justice. *Radical Housing Journal*, 7(2), 77-98. <https://doi.org/10.54825/AFOU8150>

Drieskens, C. (2025b, March 5). *Dusting off the Archives: Connecting Historical Renters' Activism to Contemporary Housing-Justice Efforts*. Metropolitics. <https://metropolitics.org/Dusting-off-the-Archives-Connecting-Historical-Renters-Activism-to-Contemporary.html>

Drieskens, C., Swartzentruber, L. R., Aernouts, N. (forthcoming). *Het organiseren van of voor huurders? Spanningsvelden in het toepassen van Community Organising in een sociale woonwijk in Brussel*. Jaarboek Armoede en Ongelijkheid.