

ADAPTING A BRUSSELS URBAN REGENERATION TOOL TO THE SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A LARGE SOCIAL HOUSING ESTATE. THE CASE OF THE SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTRACT (CQD) PETERBOS

MORGANE BOS

UCLouvain, LAB-SUPER-POSITIONS, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM.

GIULIA MARINO

UCLouvain, LAB-SUPER-POSITIONS, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM.

ALEXANDRE BOSSARD

UCLouvain, LAB-SUPER-POSITIONS, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM.

CHIARA CAVALIERI

UCLouvain, LAB-SUPER-POSITIONS, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM.

#13

ABSTRACT

In the early 1990s, against a backdrop of social tensions, the Brussels-Capital Region implemented Sustainable Neighborhood Contracts (CQDs, *Contrats de quartiers durables*) to encourage projects respectful of the existing urban fabric and socio-ecological conditions rather than resorting to prevalent demolition-reconstruction methods. These contracts, funded regionally and implemented at the municipal level, target specific neighbourhoods grappling with social, economic, and urban challenges. Their focus includes public property projects to enhance housing, revamp public spaces and infrastructure and establish community facilities. Additionally, they incorporate socio-economic initiatives to stimulate local societal and economic vitality, emphasizing resident participation.

CQDs have evolved over 25 years, adapting governance and strategies to address the region's diverse needs, extending their scope to new territories. The CQD Peterbos stands out by exclusively targeting a large post-war social housing estate, departing from earlier approaches focused on older traditional urban fabric.

The paper discusses the transformation of Peterbos Park (1968-1981), the Brussels' largest social housing estate built on the outskirts of the city centre, emphasizing the need for urban renewal tools to align with the unique social, morphological, and architectural aspects of such context. Successful intervention requires deep engagement with local communities and a thorough understanding of the site's history and original goals. The challenges of intervening in large-scale social housing estates located outside city centers underscore the need to adapt CQD objectives and resources.

This contribution is an opportunity to put post-war social housing intervention policies in Brussels into perspective, including in terms of architecture practices.

This contribution is based on the results of the "LOGOS/RES-E3" research project (*Le logement social comme ressource : énergie, économie, environnement social*)¹.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Brussels, as in many European cities, the post-war period was characterised by urban modernisation and economic development. Numerous districts, were renovated, completely rebuilt, or built ex novo as part of ambitious urban development projects, sometimes by using questionable methods. It was only with the regionalisation process initiated in 1989² that Brussels embarked on a revitalizing campaign of its historic neighbourhoods, spurred on by citizen protests highlighting persistent social divisions and calling for more humane intervention that would be more respectful of the existing urban fabric.

Born in the early 1990s, the Neighbourhood Contracts (CQs, *Contrats de Quartier*), which would evolve into Sustainable Neighbourhood Contracts (CQDs, *Contrats de Quartiers Durables*) in 2010, are urban renewal tools developed and implemented by the Brussels-Capital Region with the aim of providing comprehensive solutions in neighbourhoods facing social, economic, and urban challenges.

2. DEFINING THE CONTOURS OF URBAN REGENERATION

Inspired by the scheme introduced in France in the 1980s, known as for Neighbourhood Social Development (DSQ, *Développement Social des Quartiers*), the Brussels tool is based on 4 key principles: (1) Actions on different levels: housing construction and renovation projects are combined with the redevelopment of public spaces and various initiatives to promote social cohesion; (2) Collaboration between stakeholders: the Brussels Region, as subsidising authority, and the municipalities are the main players in the partnership, but the dynamics to be put in place also involve the CPAS (public centres for social assistance), public interest organisations, private investors, associations and local residents; (3) Multiple scales of interventions: the block and individual building policy is extended to a neighbourhood policy, thereby establishing the boundaries of a new administrative unit; (4) A given timeframe: the program is being developed over a four-year period, extended by two years to finalise the implementation of the operations. The new urban regeneration policy is therefore defined as a reciprocal commitment - hence the term ‘contract’ - to draw up and implement an integrated programme, negotiated collectively, in a given area and over a given period.

CQDs are selected based on a priority zone that has undergone various name changes over time, such as ZPR (*Zone à Protéger et à Réover*, 1984), EDRL (*Espace de Développement Renforcé du Logement*, 1993), and EDRLR (*Espace de Développement Renforcé du Logement et de la Rénovation*, 2002), evolving into Urban Revitalization Zone (ZRU, *Zone de Revitalisation Urbaine*) in 2012, amended in 2016 and 2020 to incorporate socio-economic indicators, extending beyond the condition of buildings. This adjustment allows for a redefinition of priorities and, consequently, a reshaping of the geography of the most vulnerable neighborhoods. These are gradually forming a contiguous space, commonly known as the ‘poor crescent’ of Brussels, contributing to the “representation of a continuous,

1. Research project (2022-2025) funded by Innoviris via the Prospective Research Program UCLouvain – Saint-Louis, proff. G. Marino (dir.), C. Cavalieri, G. Ledent, A. Courbebaisse, G. van Moeseke, N. Bernard ; Université libre de Bruxelles, prof. M. Hudon.

2. In 1989, Belgium undertook a process of regionalisation aimed at transferring political powers from the federal institutions to the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels regions, in order to better respond to the country’s regional and linguistic aspirations.

unified territory of poverty and blight, at the core of a Region whose other territories remain relatively unknown and under-investigated”³.

3. BEYOND ‘CELLULAR THINKING’

Over the last 25 years the tool has evolved both in its mechanisms and modes of governance to address the region’s contemporary challenges, refining its objectives through a succession of organic ordinances and diversifying consequently his resulting urban production. Thanks to a constant interest for innovation, this instrument has become a veritable “machine for renovating the city”⁴ and which today extends to more remote areas in the second ring of the Brussels region. The urban regeneration policy that initially consisted of successive interventions in neighbourhoods as “disconnected cells”⁵, has gradually evolved into a more global policy (**Fig. 1**).

In particular, a new ordinance adopted in October 2016⁶ proposes new tools to go beyond ‘cellular thinking’⁷ by promoting better connectivity between ‘pockets’, working on connections and interfaces.

Another output of this ordinance is the inclusion of new types of neighbourhoods in the ZRU perimeter, including social housing estates. Within this framework, the first CQD whose perimeter was defined exclusively around a large social housing estate, was Peterbos Park.

4. PETERBOS PARK BETWEEN THE LINES

Built in Anderlecht between 1968 and 1981, Peterbos was designed as an inhabited park to support the densification of this district on the outskirts of Brussels, through a logic of green continuity⁸ and car accessibility. Nowadays, it represents the largest social housing estate in the Brussels Region, with a total of more than 1,400 dwellings on 17 hectares, representing around 4,000 inhabitants, almost all of whom are social tenants.

Managed by two distinct public housing companies⁹ who have taken turns to carry out renovations, some of them major, without any long-term strategic vision, the site has gradually lost any overall coherence (**Fig. 2**). For many years, it has received a rather negative reception both from the public and its own residents. The park is regularly in the news due to incidents of delinquency that have gradually tarnished its image. In addition, public and open spaces have suffered particularly from neglect and lack of maintenance, leading to a loss of interest and attractiveness to residents. And yet they are an essential feature of large housing estates as they are the main meeting places for residents, the first “commons”, and therefore a key issue.

However, the site has outstanding features. Designed in the spirit of a ‘park system’¹⁰, Peterbos is an important landscape piece in a network of green spaces on a metropolitan scale, linked by the ‘green promenade’ that borders the site to the north. The concept of a residential park is embodied in the spatial organisation of the site and the layout of the buildings. The distance from the road allows the green to take centre stage in the relationship with the outside world. This ‘open-order’ urban feature, which is the identity of Peterbos Park, has remained largely untouched until now.

3. Mathieu Berger, *The lifetime of a policy. Chronicle of Brussels Neighbourhood Contracts*. (Brussels, Belgium : CIVA, 2019), 47

4. Mathieu Berger, *op. cit.*, 109.

5. Françoise Noël, *La ville rapiécée. Les stratégies de la réhabilitation à Bruxelles*, (Bruxelles : Presses de l’ULB, 1998)

6. The 2016 ordinance is the result of a rigorous study to redefine the tools carried out by an external consultancy entitled “Plan-guide de la rénovation urbaine durable”.

7. Mathieu Berger, *op. cit.*, 54.

8. Commune d’Anderlecht, *Anderlecht commune verte : urbanisme en action*, (Bruxelles : Meddens , 1963)

9. Public social housing in Brussels is overseen by the Brussels-Capital Region Housing Company (SLRB, *Société de Logement de la Région Bruxelloise*), which supervises Public Housing Companies (SISP, *Sociétés Immobilières de Service Public*) of which there are currently 16 spread across the Region. These entities manage housing units and ensure access to social housing for low-income households, in collaboration with public authorities.

10. Leloutre Gery, “Le Park System d’Anderlecht. Construction d’un espace public pour la couronne verte bruxelloise,” *Bruxelles Patrimoines* 22–23 (September 2017):114–129.

Furthermore, it is representative of a widespread practice in Europe during the post-war period.

5. RECREATING LINKS BY THE GROUND

As part of the CQD diagnosis, the municipality commissioned Studio Paola Vigano and vvv office to produce a masterplan aimed at “recreating links” between the various entities on the site, but also beyond.

Their analysis suggests that the ground “is a monumental base-ground, with low walls, slopes, staircases, inspired by the Italian Renaissance Garden”¹¹. Indeed Peterbos Park is built on a slope, and the design of its spaces is based on a meticulous topographical design. The ground project, established subsequently to the site development plan, is uniformly based on functionalist principles of flow separation: cars remain at the edge of the site, in parking areas arranged around the main access roads. As at the Cité Modèle (R. Braem, V. Coolens, L’Equerre, R. Panis, Groupe Structure, J. Van Doosselaere, 1956-1972), the ground beneath the towers is levelled to create a unified plateau, resulting in differences in height, naturally separating pedestrian areas and car parks. The park features pathways cross the area at a distance from the buildings, creating green spaces at their base. These distinctive characteristics are primarily evident in the initial phase of site construction, whereas the later-built southern part appears to be more fragmented.

Similar to other social housing developments built at the time, financial and logistical imperatives have gradually eroded Peterbos’ foundations, leaving the neighborhood devoid of social amenities and essential businesses. What was intended to be a model inhabited park has progressively transformed into an isolated enclave. The progressive development of regional road infrastructure around the perimeter reinforced the rupture and today contributes to the site’s introversion and thus, his negative perception.

Based on this diagnosis, the masterplan’s proposal aims to extend the identified qualities and the spirit of “monumentality” outwards, towards the city, while at the same time bringing the ground of the city into the Peterbos. This ambition is reflected in the creation of a system of squares located on the edges of the site, “aiming to transform physical or visual ‘barriers’ into potential places that reinforce the link with the natural ground, the slope of the valley”¹². The most significant project involves the enhancement of a new entrance in the east of the park. Based on a deep analysis of existing mobility dynamics, it aims to develop a genuine multimodal platform along the main boulevard, which currently acts as a border. At the western part of the site, a similar approach is being adopted with the creation of a local-scale square connected to the neighbouring *Cité Jardin*. Optimization of the parking areas promotes new public spaces whose clarity is ensured by uniform material choices, providing a new coherence and identity to the site.

6. NEW CENTRALITIES

Another specific strength of the CQD tool is that it is based on involving local residents in the planning of their living environment. Participatory

11. Paola Vigano & vvv
architecture urbanisme, *Peterbos*.
Vivre le parc, habiter la ville.
Masterplan, 2020, 21.

12. Paola Viganò & al., op cit.,
162.

workshops highlighted the need to move away from the monofunctionality of the neighbourhood, firstly by integrating projects that could attract an external public to the site, and secondly by opening up the possibility of creating employment within the Peterbos. Indeed, the site is currently inhabited by a highly marginalized population with a high unemployment rate (**Fig. 3**). With the support of the masterplan, the CQD has undertaken: (1) the requalification of the ground floors of the buildings and (2) the construction of new social facilities, initially planned in the first plans of the site but never really achieved¹³. The CQD therefore plans to build a nursery and a facilities hub, itself designed as one of the park's new centrality. This hub is designed to integrate into the landscape, transition smoothly with the relief through adapted features, and ensure the fluidity of movement. His rooftop terrace provides a panoramic view of the surrounding.

7. LIMITATIONS & ADAPTATIONS OF THE CQD TOOL

While the CQD and its masterplan strive to reintegrate Peterbos into society via social and spatial initiatives, it is evident that this approach alone won't address the deeper social challenges emblematic of many housing estates.

Indeed, by concentrating on the public space as the only area for action, Studio Paola Viganò and vvv office highlighted a first limitation of the tool. They are aware that the space for manoeuvre in such a context is both wide and narrow.

*Wide, because it fulfils a plurality of practices, ordinary and extraordinary: public space concerns everyone. Narrow, because our project does not have the power to transform the inequality concentrated at this site, which is linked to past decisions that have turned out to be ineffective from the perspective of social integration.*¹⁴

Another particularity of a site like Peterbos lies in the multitude of actors involved in its slow and gradual transformation. The CQD must accommodate (but can also rely on) projects led by other stakeholders benefiting from their own specific budgets, particularly for building renovations carried out by Public Housing Companies (SISP), which began in 2010, ten years earlier. It is clear that the qualities of the site highlighted in the masterplan have always been overlooked in SISP decisions. From the beginning, and in response to years of neglect in maintenance, these have favoured interventionist attitude, deep renovations, leading to the detriment of the site's integrity and the complete metamorphosis of its buildings.

In addition, this decision-making complexity is not without consequences for local residents. Researchers from the SOHOLAB project (2017-2020), whose main objective was to explore effective ways of involving residents in the regeneration of large social housing estates such as Peterbos, have identified two significant impacts arising from the overlapping of actors and funding sources, as well as the associated temporalities, along with the lack of a comprehensive vision of the site on the part of the residents.

13. Commune d'Anderlecht, *op. cit.*, 40.

14. Paola Viganò, Bertrand Plewinski, Guillaume Vanneste, & Nicolas Willemet, "Peterbos: Living in the Park, Inhabiting the City," in *Urban Living Lab for Local Regeneration*, N. Aernouts et al. (eds.) (Cham : Springer, 2022), 157.

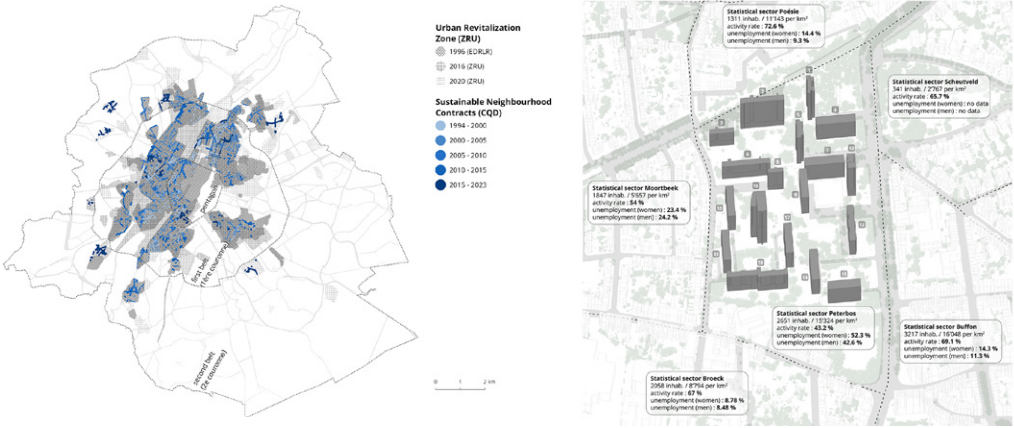


Figure 1. Mapping of the evolution of the Urban Revitalization Zone (ZRU) and the Sustainable Neighbourhood Contracts (CQD). Data source: BruGIS WFS; UrbisAdm

Figure 2. Peterbos park, Anderlecht, 2023, aerial view. The overall coherence between the different buildings has been lost in the course of renovations. © Authors, 2023.

Figure 3. Layout of the blocs in Peterbos Park and socio-economic features. Data sources: Urbis-Adm 3D; Urbis-Lidar; IBSA – taux d'activité et de chômage 2021; Statbel – population 2022

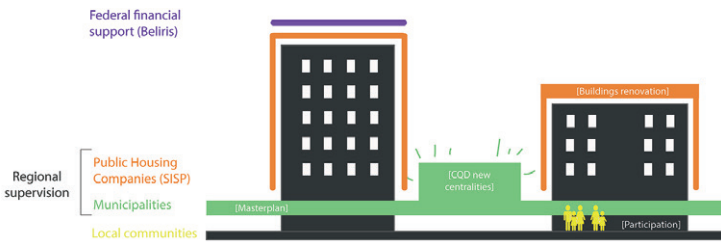


Figure 4. Overlap of stakeholders and tools in Peterbos Park. © Authors, 2024.

On the one hand, the multi-actor regeneration of the site created a lot of confusion. The missions and structure of the different agencies are hardly understood. On the other hand, the ad-hoc interventions, consultation processes without actual interventions, malfunctioning transfer systems during renovation works and poor communication about renovations, contributed to feelings of powerlessness regarding the resident's living situation.¹⁵

When we consider both the shortcomings of the Peterbos site and the efforts undertaken by the CQD to address them, alongside the recent adaptations in the CQD tool, doubts raise about its suitability for addressing the challenges of a social housing estate. Indeed, by concentrating the intervention efforts of a CQD exclusively within the

15. Maranghi, E., Cognetti, F., Ryckewaert, M., Aernouts, N., Mosseray, J., Lefrançois, D., Wachter, S. & Labied, N. "5 themes from urban living lab experiences in large-scale social housing estates", (Brussels: Soholab, 2020)

perimeter of a large social housing estate, is there not a risk of repeating the same mistakes as the initial project? As the challenges of these neighbourhoods are not isolated - they are intrinsically linked to the wider socio-economic and urban dynamics of the Region - extending the scope of the CQD to the surrounding areas, as recommended, and favouring a broader approach could have significant benefits.

8. CONCLUSION & PERSPECTIVES

While it is important to distinguish between the renovation of buildings, carried out by the Public Housing Companies (SISP), and the socio-spatial actions as part of the CQDs, it is clear that by operating at the same time in the same area, i.e. large social housing estates, the actions overlap. The resulting project is a fusion of their respective tools, even if they are, most of the time, not really linked (Fig. 4).

In this respect, an analogy can be drawn between the observations made in this article about CQD tool and the intervention policies on social housing buildings in Brussels.

First of all, the overlapping of actors and funding sources, while inherent to the Belgian institutional system, is not beneficial. The Peterbos' transformation will have lasted 20 years. The fragmented interventions, both spatially and temporally, not only have had detrimental effects on daily life and resident trust but have also led to an irreversible loss of architectural coherence and quality.

Secondly, the CQD mechanism is often politically influenced by power dynamics between the regional authority with its own objectives, and the municipalities, which defend their autonomy. A comparison can be made with the issues surrounding the renovation of buildings, which often involve a blend of conflicting quantitative goals regarding energy efficiency, environmental impact, logistical and economic limitations, cultural values.

To address these issues, it would be useful to rethink the CQD tool with a more integrated approach, bringing together all stakeholders to establish a comprehensive strategy based on a common diagnosis and action plan before any renovation. In the case of large social housing estates, this would facilitate greater interactions between the ground floors of buildings, owned by the SISPs, and the public spaces owned by municipalities, which they help to animate.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of urban planning as an action tool. Just like architecture, it can't be solely blamed for the social issues within it. Nor can it claim to solve social divides.

More generally, it would be interesting to move beyond well-meaning rhetoric and address fundamental questions about the position and significance we envision for these neighborhoods in our future societies. To continue fulfilling their social role while maintaining their original identity, large-scale social housing estates requires, above all, a political stance. ■

#13

REFERENCES

Aernouts, Nele, Maranghi, Elena, Ryckewaert, Michael. *The regeneration of large-scale Social Housing estates. Spatial, territorial, institutional and planning dimensions*. Brussels, Belgium: Soholab, 2020.

Berger, Mathieu. *The lifetime of a policy. Chronicle of Brussels Neighbourhood Contracts*. Brussels, Belgium : CIVA, 2019.

Commune d'Anderlecht, *Anderlecht commune verte : urbanisme en action*. Brussels, Belgium : Meddens , 1963.

Leloutre Gery, "Le Park System d'Anderlecht. Construction d'un espace public pour la couronne verte bruxelloise," *Bruxelles Patrimoines* 22–23 (September 2017):114–129.

Noël, Françoise. "La politique de revitalisation des quartiers : à la croisée de l'action urbanistique et sociale." in *Bruxelles [dans] 20 ans*, edited by Agence de développement territorial pour la région de Bruxelles-Capitale, 213-33. Brussels, Belgium : ADT, 2009.

Noël, Françoise. *La ville rapiécée. Les stratégies de la réhabilitation à Bruxelles*. Brussels, Belgium : Presses de l'ULB, 1998.

Maranghi, Elena, Cognetti, Francesca, Ryckewaert, Michael, Aernouts, Nele. *5 themes from urban living lab experiences in large-scale social housing estates*. Brussels, Belgium : Soholab, 2020.

MSA & IDEA Consult. "Plan-guide de la rénovation urbaine durable." Etude, 2013.

Viganò, Paola & vvv architecture urbanisme. *Peterbos. Vivre le parc, habiter la ville*. Masterplan, 2020.

Viganò, Paola, Plewinski, Bertrand, Vanneste, Guillaume & Willemet, Nicolas. "Peterbos : living in the park, inhabiting the city." In *Urban Living Lab for Local Regeneration*, edited by Nele Aernout, Francesca Cognetti, Elena Maranghi, 155174. Cham : Springer, 2022.

BIOGRAPHY

Morgane Bos, graduated with a master's degree in Architecture (ULiège, 2012), started her professional career in architecture's offices in Barcelona and Brussels. Since 2018, she has been a researcher and teaching assistant at LOCI Faculty and LAB Institute. She is currently working on a doctoral thesis under the supervision of Prof. Giulia Marino, investigating the interventions carried out on Brussels social housing built between 1949 and 1980 to address contemporary challenges, with an attention paid to their heritage identity.

Giulia Marino graduated in architecture from the University of Florence and PhD in science from the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne. She is professor at UCLouvain, LAB Institute Brussels, and EPFL Lausanne. Her scientific interests are centred on the strategies for the conservation of the modern and contemporary heritage, and on the history of construction techniques and twentieth-century building services. She is Vice President of Docomomo Switzerland since 2015 and ICOMOS Member.

Alexandre Bossard, geographer (University of Lausanne, 2016) and holder of a master's degree in urbanism (Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2022), has worked mainly in the field of cartography for the Labo XX+I research project on the 20th century belt around Brussels, for the INEG research project on environmental inequalities and for the 3Dcit-is research project on environmental impact assessment. He is currently working under the supervision of Prof. Chiara Cavalieri on the LOGOS-RES prospective research on the future of large-scale social housing estates.

Chiara Cavalieri, architect and PhD Urbanism (IUAV, University of Venice), is associate professor of Urbanism and member of the scientific committee of Louvain4City at UCLouvain, and member of the steering committee of Metrolab Brussels. She coordinated and directed several research activities and regional visions such as "The "Blue Space", Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai (StudioPaolaViganò, Lab-U, EPFL Lausanne), "The Horizontal Metropolis" (exhibited in 2018 at Bozar, Brussels), "The Language of Water" (UCLouvain with Latitude), LABOXXI (Atlas, L'urbanisation du 20e siècle dans et autour de Bruxelles). She is currently developing landscape urbanism research throughout transboundary city-territories.

18th International Docomomo Conference & Students Workshop
Santiago de Chile, 2024

M O D E R N SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY F U T U R E S

Editor
Horacio Torrent

**M O D E R N
F U T U R E S**

CREDITS

MODERN FUTURES.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Publisher

Docomomo International
Ediciones ARQ

Docomomo International

Uta Pottgiesser – Chair
Wido Quist – Secretary General
Louse Noelle – ISC Representative
Horacio Torrent – Conference Representative
Sophie Karchkhadze – Administrator

Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Estudios Urbanos, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

Mario Ubilla – Dean

Docomomo Chile

Horacio Torrent – Chair
Claudio Galeno – Secretary General

Scientific Committee

Scott Robertson – Docomomo Australia
Ruth Verde Zein – Docomomo Brazil
Marta Peixoto – Docomomo Brazil
Fernando Pérez Oyarzun – Docomomo Chile
Horacio Torrent – Docomomo Chile
Uta Pottgiesser – Docomomo Germany
Ola Uduku – Docomomo Ghana
Sonia Fuentes – Docomomo Guatemala
Cecilia Chu – Docomomo Hong Kong
Louise Noelle – Docomomo México
Wessel de Jonge – Docomomo Netherlands
Ana Tostões – Docomomo Portugal
Henrieta Moravcikova – Docomomo Slovakia
Theodore Prudon – Docomomo United States

Editor

Horacio Torrent

Coordinating Editor

Trilce Bravo Guzmán

Reviewers

Rosario Bernstein
Amílcar Garrido
Vicente Osorio
Fernanda Zangheri

Ediciones ARQ

Stephannie Fell – Editor-in-chief
Stephen McKenna – Proofreading
Carolina Valenzuela – Design
Carolina Valenzuela, Julieta Marchant – Layouts

Printing

Andros Impresores
Santiago de Chile, 2024

ISBN: 978-956-6204-22-0

Indexed by: SCOPUS

© of the edition: Docomomo International,
Ediciones ARQ
© of the texts: the authors
© of the images: authors indicated in image captions

All rights reserved

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form without written permission from the publisher

Proceedings of the 18th International
Docomomo Conference
10-14 December 2024
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

18th International Docomomo Conference & Students Workshop
Santiago de Chile, 2024

M O D E R N
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY
F U T U R E S

Editor
Horacio Torrent

do.co.mo.mo_
international

ARQ
ediciones