

HOME-SHARING IN BRUSSELS

Understanding Citizen-run Forms of Home-Sharing through the Analysis of an activist list: Berta

Chloé Salembier

Uses&Spaces, Louvain Research Institute for Landscape, Architecture and Built Environment, UCLouvain
Rue Wafelaerts 47/51, 1060 Brussels, Belgium
e-mail: chloé.salembier@uclouvain.be

Gérald Ledent

Uses&Spaces, Louvain Research Institute for Landscape, Architecture and Built Environment, UCLouvain
Rue Wafelaerts 47/51, 1060 Brussels, Belgium
e-mail: gerald.ledent@uclouvain.be

Abstract

Home-sharing is a growing phenomenon across high-income economies. However, it is not very documented and often confused with other types of shared living such as co-housing and co-living. The aim of this research paper is to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon in Brussels in particular.

In order to do so, the paper investigates the “Berta List”, a platform that connects residents that desire to share dwellings in Brussels. This 11-year old platform is managed by is a single woman, Sandra, who has dedicated her time to maintaining the list and federating a home-sharing community. In Brussels, where nearly 50% of people live alone and housing is becoming less affordable, new households emerge in this new housing segment. The research combines a quantitative analysis of data from the “Berta List”, highlighting the social and spatial supply and demand for home-sharing. It is complemented with interviews with Sandra. Eventually, the research gives an insight into an unknown phenomenon, and clear distinctive features from its commercial counterpart, co-living.

Keywords: *Brussels, Home-sharing, Co-living, Alternative Households, Liste Berta.*

Understanding non-commercial home-sharing in Brussels

In the last two decades, a double evolution can be noticed in the housing sector in large cities in Europe, Northern America and Australia. First, there is a rise of rental housing combined with a decline of home-ownership (Maalsen, 2020). Second, alternative tenures are on the rise, chiefly with “shared private renting” (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016, Druta et al., 2021, Clark et al., 2018), leading to what some call “generation share” (Maalsen, 2020). In New York city, for instance, 40% of singles now share with unrelated adults (Walker, 2017).

The development in shared living (Kenyon and Heath, 2001) is evolving from a marginal, transitional and low-cost form of tenure of young tenants (Druta et al., 2021) to a more common, long-term tenure addressing a broader segment of people, both in age and socio-economic backgrounds (Druta et al., 2021, Maalsen, 2020). If the economic constraint remains a main driver for home-sharing, other motivations arise, such as pooling material and non-material resources, setting up alternative and social living arrangements, finding a solution after losing a job or ending a relationship (Druta et al., 2021), etc.

Despite this recent boom and evolution, little attention has been paid to home-sharing beyond its stereotype as transitional housing for young adults (Maalsen, 2020). In addition, while co-living (Heath et al., 2018, Bergan et al., 2021, Casier, 2023a) and co-housing (Lang et al., 2018, Tummers, 2016) are widely documented, a segment of shared living, home-sharing as non-commercial sharing in the private rental sector, is much less studied (Druta et al., 2021). In Brussels, for instance, despite its expansion, it has gone under the radar of both quantitative and qualitative studies.

The purpose of this paper is hence twofold: (1) Identify the phenomenon of shared living in Brussels in quantitative terms, with a (2) specific focus on non-commercial home-sharing. Once this overview is completed, our research will turn to a qualitative study of various non-commercial home-sharing case studies in Brussels.

Definition and drivers of home-sharing in Brussels

Home-sharing will be described in general terms and then in view of its specific situation in Brussels.

Definition and drivers of home-sharing

Since the 1990s in Europe, Australia, and Northern America, shared living has been “an emerging solution in the housing market” (Fijalkow and Maresca, 2022, Maalsen, 2020). Its basic principle relies on living with someone outside of one’s own family (Ischer, 2012, Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016). Hence, these new households are defined as “unrelated individuals living in self-contained houses and apartments” (Heath, 2004). In this framework, housemates rent a dwelling together, without necessarily sharing the rent, as some landlords draw up a lease for each room. To some, home-sharing is the pragmatic version of the “living communities” that failed in the late 1960s (Klapisch et al., 2020). If those utopian communities implied sharing ideas about politics, sexuality and everyday rules, home-sharing is a loose, more reasonable version of these communities. Kitchens and bathrooms are shared, but not necessarily opinions and lifestyles as the “community is what we bring, what we agree to share” (Klapisch et al., 2020).

Based on this definition, two types of shared accommodations can be found, depending on whether they are externally managed or not. On the one hand, mercantile, market-led forms of housing are initiated and owned by real estate firms and developers. They emerge “as a commercial response to the specific needs of young professionals sharing in large cities” (Bergan et al., 2021). In this case, shared housing is an investment product (Druta et al., 2021) that has been specifically designed to be shared, and it encompasses solutions that range from exclusive residential hotels (Grundström, 2021) to co-living projects, which market home as mobile, a place for work and a social hub (Bergan et al., 2021) (Uyttebrouck et al., 2020).

On the other hand, citizen-led, collaborative and non-commodified forms of housing arise in an general trend of decentralization from a welfare society (Tummers, 2016) and its conventional ways of living (Czischke, 2018). Two kinds of segments can be distinguished within this category of “self-managed collective housing” (Tummers, 2016, McCamant and Durrett, 1988): co-housing and home-sharing. Co-housing features participatory procedures, where domestic spaces and governance are designed by the residents themselves (Van Geest, 2013). Within the co-housing model, residents live in individual homes while sharing collective spaces and amenities. In contrast, home-sharing is a model where a dwelling is shared and self-organised by a number of unrelated persons (Heath et al., 2018). Home-sharing usually takes place in homes that were not designed to be shared, giving way to a fair share of

bricolage. These tenures occur mostly in privately-rented dwellings. The owner, however, is not “organised” in such a way as to build an unusual profit from this annuity.

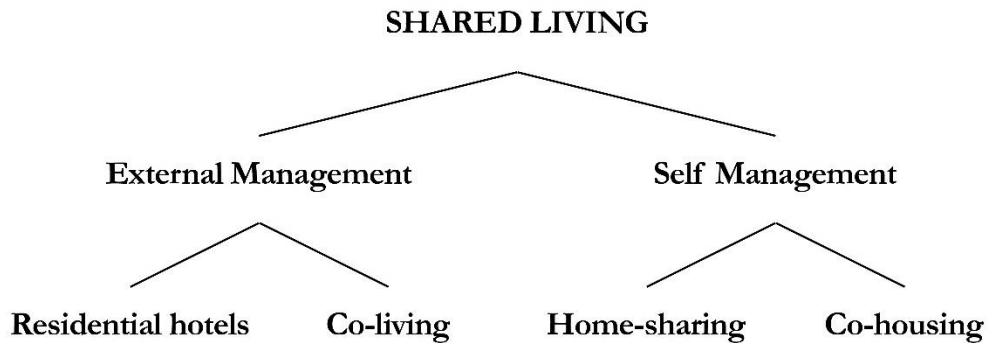


Figure 01. Forms of shared living

Within home-sharing, an additional distinction can be made - cold and warm (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016) – the first refers to a non-choice, while the second corresponds to a choice. While both have in common the overwhelming importance of economic constraints, in cold home-sharing, lives run in parallel and there is little to no social exchange, emotional connection or meaningful relationships (Green and McCarthy, 2015). In warm home-sharing, however, social activities such as cooking, eating or watching films happen on a regular basis and/or on special occasions.

Home-sharing is a growing phenomenon across high-income economies due to the “changing features of late-capitalism” and “intensified globalization and urbanization” (Druta et al., 2021). Recent research has pointed five main drivers to explain this growth.

First, costs of living have been rising (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016, Druta et al., 2021) as a consequence of growing property prices combined with a more precarious labour market delivering lower wages. This economic driver is clearly the most dominant one (Kenyon and Heath, 2001).

Second, a growing proportion of people face short-term perspectives. This can be caused by an increased mobility, notably of young people during their higher education years and more precarious and flexible jobs (Rugg, 1999, Hoolachan et al., 2016).

Third, during the second demographic transition, domestic configurations are evolving (Druta et al., 2021). In many Northern cities, one-person households account for more than half of all households. This is partly due to the development of new forms of relationship and intimacy such as juvenile cohabitation (Kenyon and Heath, 2001; Heath, 2004) and the lengthening of the transition towards professional and marital stabilisation, with “prolonged periods of trial-and-error in couple formation” (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016, Fijalkow and Maresca, 2022, Delorme, 1998, Després, 1991, Pastinelli, 2005).

Fourthly, home-sharing is increasingly mediated by the internet (Maalsen, 2020). Searching and finding shared accommodation has been boosted by digital technologies (Druta et al., 2021).

Eventually, shared accommodation has also become an appealing lifestyle portrayed on social networks, dedicated websites, in the press, films or TV series (*Friends*, *L’auberge espagnole*¹, etc.) (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016). These portrays of shared households no longer show “lonely individuals or impoverished students, but groups of young professionals living affluent lifestyles in comfortable surroundings” (Kenyon and Heath, 2001).

¹ The year after its release, the number of applicants for Erasmus grants doubled. KLAPISCH, C., MUXEL, A., BURGUIÈRE, A. & HEINTZ, M. 2020. L’Union européenne et les jeunes. Regards croisés d’une sociologue et d’un cinéaste. *Ethnologie française*, 50, 575-580..

Distinctive characteristics of Brussels

Brussels is no exception to this trend. In particular, in terms of living costs, Brussels has undergone a constant rise of rents² (De Keersmaecker, 2018) and of property prices coupled with an impoverishment of the population over the last fifteen years and a shortage of affordable housing for low-income households (Dessouroux et al., 2016). Several factors explain this trend, including a population growth in the past two decades, an increase of high-income international workers, an increased borrowing capacity due to lower mortgage rates and longer loan periods, rising construction costs, and a growing number of properties purchased by investors (Godin, 2021).

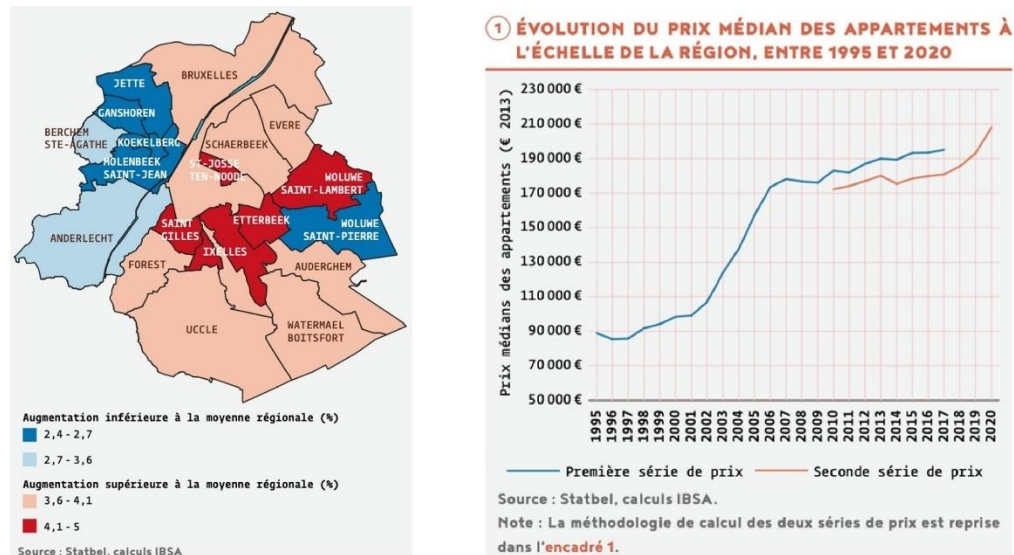


Figure 02. Average annual growth in the median price of apartments between 1995 and 2017 (Statbel)

Second, due to its international status, being the seat of many international institutions (European Commission, Parliament, NATO, etc.)³ (Deboosere et al., 2009a) and a central geographical position, Brussels displays an “over-representation of lower-income classes, including some external migrants, but also young graduates who are sociologically middle-class, but whose income remains modest during the increasingly long phase of professional and financial stabilisation” (Dessouroux et al., 2016). In addition, there is an over-representation of young people in Brussels compared to the rest of the country (Statbel).

Third, in terms of demographics, the Brussels-Capital Region has the highest proportion – 58.4% - of single people and single-parent families in Belgium (Roman, 2023).

In addition to these common general characteristics, Brussels displays two additional factors that have boosted home-sharing in the past two decades. First, the average population has grown poorer⁴, with a

² “Independently of rent indexation, rents for housing in Brussels have risen by almost 20% since 2004”. DE KEERSMAECKER, M.-L. 2018. Observatoire des loyers. Région bruxelles capitale: SLRB.

³ The internationalisation of Brussels is linked, on the one hand, to the migration of highly qualified people from the EU and, on the other, to the migration of less qualified people from outside Europe. In the Brussels’ region, only one person out of four is Belgian of Belgian origin, 39.1% are Belgian of foreign origin and 35.3% are non-Belgians. STATBEL 2023. Diversité selon l’origine en Belgique. Bruxelles: Statbel

⁴ The *Observatoire de la Santé et du Social* describes the economic situation in Brussels as paradoxical. The Region is home to both the richest and poorest municipalities in Belgium. The Region also holds the sad record of having the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate in the country (35% of the population). ENGLERT, M., MISSINNE, S., MENDES DA COSTA, E.,

particular increase of single-parent families, which have the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate (familles, 2022, Sierens, 2016, Wagener, 2013). As was pointed out in the preceding section, poor economic conditions are a strong driver for home-sharing. Second, the relatively progressive stance of Belgian lawmakers towards the LGBTQIA+ community and singles⁵ has opened the way to the emergence of new types of households and non-heteronormative shared accommodation.

In terms of housing stock, unlike many European cities, but as in other capitals such as London or Amsterdam, Brussels' housing has developed around the individual terraced houses that were built at the turn of the 20th century. They still constitute more than one third of Brussels' housing stock (Ledent and Porotto, 2023). These row houses were designed initially for large families and their domestic staff. They are defined by four characteristics (Ledent, 2014): they are set in closed urban blocks that create a clear distinction between the fronts and backs of the buildings, have a maximum height of 10 to 15 m, display an individual aspect illustrated by distinctive façades, and show a repeated internal layout that takes place in an average width of 6m. This layout displays a large with two to three adjoining rooms and smaller one with the staircase and one or two smaller rooms. Individual variations were developed from these four characteristics, with dwelling surfaces that range from 150 m² to more than 500 m² (Ledent and Porotto, 2023).

VERBEKE, A., VERDUYCKT, P., D'ÉOGRATIAS, M., YANNART, M. & MATHYSEN, D. 2022. Baromètre social: rapport bruxellois sur l'état de pauvreté 2021. Bruxelles: Observatoire de la santé et du social Bruxelles.

⁵ In Belgium, same-sex marriage is authorised since 2003, single-parent or homosexual adoption since 2006, access to medically assisted procreation for female single women and homosexual couples since 2009, etc.

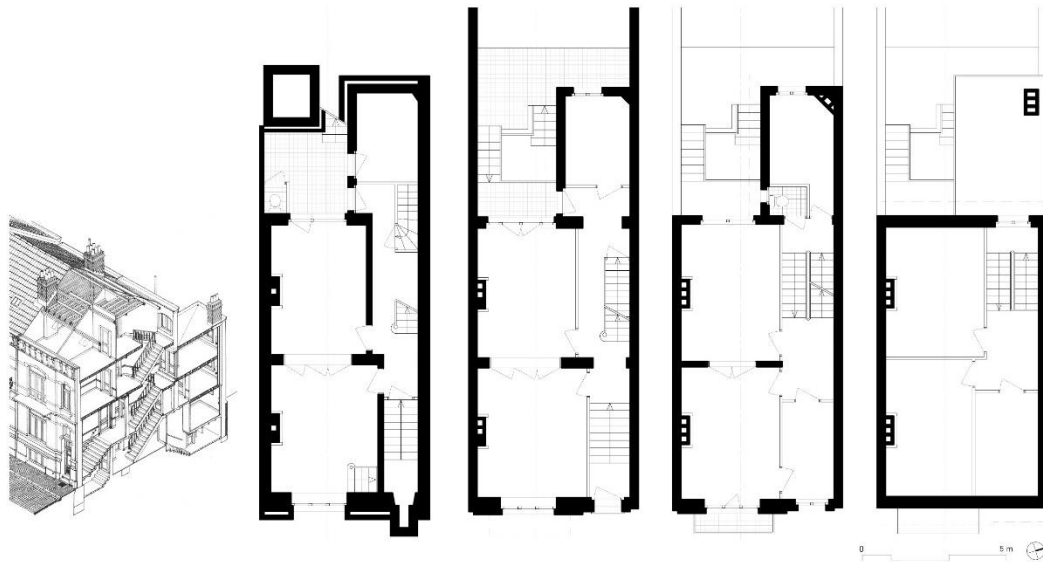


Figure 03. Brussels' traditional row house, 12 avenue de Jules de Trooz, 1912 (Author's drawings)

Alongside this typology, apartments buildings were late to appear in Brussels, and developed only from the beginning of the 20th century. Roughly, two main typologies of apartments can be found. Prior to WW2, the first category displays dwellings with generous corridors, large rooms, and usually polyvalent spaces, while the second, based on modernist principles, shows more specific and function-oriented spaces. As Bricocoli and Sabatinelli point out, this latest category, built after WW2, is usually less fit to house non-related housemates (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016). Compared with the traditional Brussels' row houses, these apartments are smaller and offer a limited number of bedrooms (the two-bedroom apartment being the most common by far).

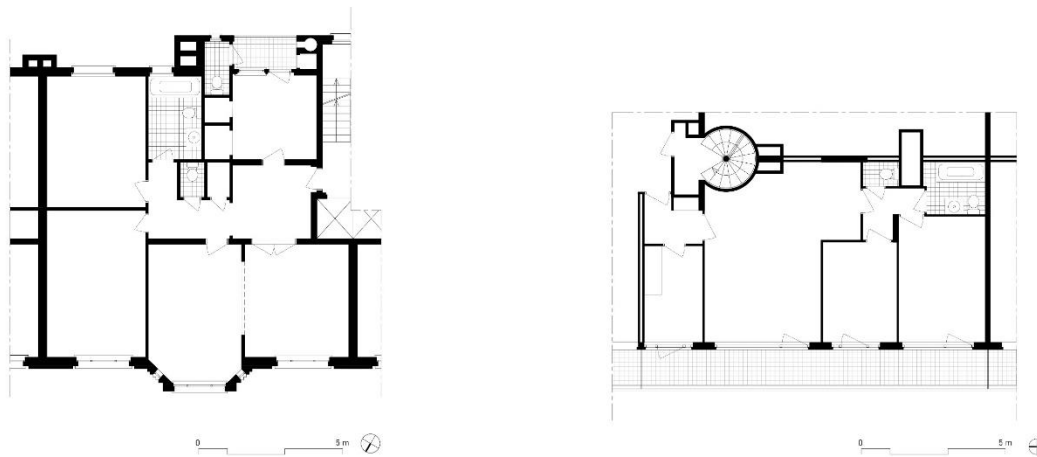


Figure 04. Two types of apartments, *Les Pavillons Français*, 1934 ; *Résidence Parc Albert I*, 1964 (Authors' drawings)

There is very little data concerning the housing stock that is currently occupied by home-sharing. However, statistical figures from 2018 (De Keersmaecker, 2018)⁶ provide a series of information. In terms of the size of shared accommodation, 50% is larger than 90m² and 56% has more than two bedrooms. In terms of type, 21% of shared accommodation takes place in houses, although houses only make up 6% of the stock of rented dwellings. In terms of amenities, a second bathroom, storage and recreational areas are also more common. On the other hand, energy performance is much the same as for other types of rented accommodation.

Obstacles to understanding the phenomenon

Despite the growth in this housing type, very little research exists in Brussels. While co-living (Bergan et al., 2021, Casier, 2023a, Uyttebrouck et al., 2020, Casier, 2023c) and co-housing (Lang et al., 2018, Tummers, 2016, Lenel et al., 2020, Ledent, 2021, Ledent and Salembier, 2021) have received a lot of attention in the last two decades both internationally and locally, home-sharing has not been researched much, if not on a specific aspect, that of studentification and houses in multiple occupations (Kinton et al., 2018, Holton, 2015). In Brussels, the lack of research on home-sharing⁷ is counterbalanced by

⁶ In these figures, no distinction is made between co-living and home-sharing.

⁷ By way of exception, we can cite the work of lawyers at the private law centre (CéPri) in Saint-Louis.

knowledge produced by the civil society, particularly in the fight for the recognition of certain rights (right to housing, individualisation of social rights, rights of minorities, etc.).

Outside Brussels, research on home-sharing has been carried out in several cities in Europe (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016, Kenyon and Heath, 2001, Ischer, 2012, Heath, 2004) and North America (Després, 1991, Pastinelli, 2005). These researches were implemented through qualitative data (spatial observation, individual interviews and focus groups in shared accommodation) and quantitative data (questionnaires, analysis of national or regional statistics).

In addition to the lack of empirical data on home-sharing (Despres, 1993), and in Brussels in particular, two difficulties arise in the understanding of the phenomenon: (1) a general lack of statistical data and (2) a poorly defined legal status.

In general, national or regional statistical units of measurement do not identify with precision the extent of home-sharing. Often, this category is included in a broader category of multi-person household (Heath, 2023).

With regard to this obstacle, a 2014 Belgian study on experiences of shared living (Anfrie and Cassilde, 2014) identifies the different statistical units of measurement used in different national contexts (Belgium, France, the UK, Canada and Germany). The researchers highlight the fact that in all contexts, shared accommodation is not included as a category in its own right in the statistics. This lack of evolution in the statistical units of measurement leads to a dilution of shared accommodation in different categories (for example, in Canada, shared accommodation can be found in multi-family and non-family households of more than one person) or aggregation with other types of household (for example, in the United Kingdom, in the “other households” category).

By aggregating the figures for all the categories, Anfrie and Cassilde come up with the following statistics: in Belgium, shared accommodation accounts for a maximum of 2.83%, in Canada for a maximum of 6.1%, in France for a maximum of 5.2%, in the UK for a maximum of 7.69% and in Germany for a maximum of 10% of all households. It should be noted that these figures should be interpreted with caution for three reasons: a decade separates us from this study, so the figures are relatively old and do not take potential changes into account; these are maximum values, so other types of cohabitation may be found among shared dwellings (homes for elderly people, homosexual couples, brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles, etc. living together); some categories of the population are not included in these statistics, while often living in shared accommodation (e.g. students who do live in shared dwellings while being domiciled at their parents’, undocumented migrants, and mobile workers who live in undeclared residences).

In Brussels, two types of data help understanding the phenomenon a little more clearly: *Statbel* and the *Observatoire des loyers*⁸. *Statbel* processes individual demographic data from the National Register⁹ according to the LIPRO typology. In 2022, the Brussels Region had a population of 1 222 637 inhabitants, with a density of 7,528 inhabitants/km² (Roman, 2023). In 2022, out of all “private households”¹⁰, 3.8% are included in the “other household” category (Roman, 2023). Shared households fall into the latter category, blended among “atypical households” (Deboosere et al., 2009b). However,

⁸ At national level, there is also the “Flora” survey ran by Ethias on a sample of 2,000 people. Its scope is limited however since it only collects data from the middle class home-shares who have taken out insurance.

⁹ These figures do not include: foreign diplomatic personnel and non-Belgian members of their households; asylum seekers, people staying illegally in Belgium, non-domiciled students, homeless persons, and Belgians living abroad.

¹⁰ Besides the “private households” category, “collective households” include religious communities, elderly and care homes, orphanages, student and worker residences, hospitals and prisons.

if this category involves sharing a home, it also encompasses brothers and sisters living together, or unmarried cohabitants, homosexual couples, etc. before the “cohabitation” category was introduced in 2001¹¹. We can see that in the evolution of household forms, shared living outside of the family is shaking up the normative categories of the nuclear family, but that the available data is too imprecise to produce international comparisons.

If national data from *Statbel* is too imprecise to qualify home-sharing, regional data from the *Observatoire des loyers* provides more substantial figures. Its 2018 release was based on a sample of 5,000 rental properties, i.e. 1.5% of all rental properties in Brussels, and provides quantitative data about shared living (De Keersmaecker, 2018). This survey highlights much higher figures in shared living than *Statbel*'s with 11% of Brussels homes that are rented out as shared accommodation, and 18% of newly moved-in homes are occupied by shared tenures. According to the author, this type of housing has grown over the last ten years since it was 6% in 2012. This increase may be caused by the rise of rental prices and a fall of the percentage of inhabitants able to access the rental market¹².

In terms of rent, shared accommodation is significantly more expensive than for individual households (921 vs 739 euros on average). According to the author, this difference is linked to two factors. First, shared tenants are not necessarily looking for the best value for money, as they divide the rent and are therefore less aware of the differences. Second, shared accommodation is located in neighbourhoods where rents are higher (Centre and eastern municipalities). House-shares seem to favour accessibility to services (shops, transport, educational facilities, etc.) and a qualitative environment, rather than low rents.

Figure 6 – Les logements loués en colocation (2018)

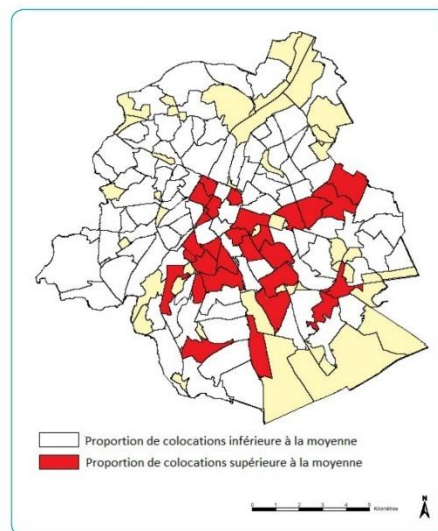


Figure 05. Distribution of shared accommodation in Brussels in 2018 (*Observatoire des loyers*, 2018)

¹¹ In 2001, the General Socio-Economic Survey includes questions on unmarried cohabitation for the first time, with the creation of a new “cohabitation” category. From this point of view, the legislator has provided for new administrative statuses and recognised the validity of certain forms of living together in line with changes in contemporary households DEBOOSERE, P., LESTHAEGHE, R., SURKYN, J., WILLAERT, D., BOULANGER, P.-M., LAMBERT, A. & LOHLÉ-TART, L. 2009b. *Ménages et familles en Belgique*. Bruxelles: Direction générale Statistique et Information économique.

¹² For example, a household with a monthly income of 1932 euros can only access 28% of the rental market with a rent that does not exceed 30% of its income. Home-sharing can therefore be a strategy to lower the strain on household budgets, a sacrifice some already make, as couples and single-parents with children spent between 36% and 44% of their budget on rent in 2018.

Shared tenants pay an average of 425 euros in rent, and 38% of shared tenancies are governed by a shared tenancy agreement¹³. Overall, shared tenants stay in their homes for shorter periods than other tenants. The duration of shared tenancies is one year in 31% of cases, 1 to 3 years in 50% of cases and long term in 19% of cases.

Figure 44 – Durée du bail des logements loués en colocation (2018)

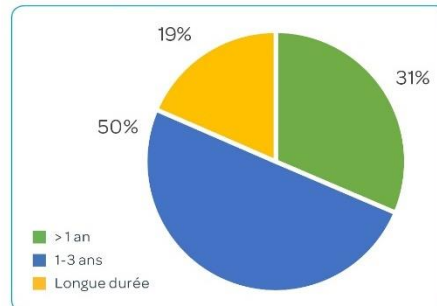


Figure 06. Duration of shared tenancy in Brussels in 2018 (*Observatoire des loyers*, 2018)

In terms of sociological profiles, the study reveals that shared living is a “young” way of living, with 75% of flatmates aged under 35¹⁴. However, it also highlights an increase in the number of couples¹⁵ with or without children living in shared accommodation. This trend calls into question previous studies on shared living, described as “moments of transition” for “singles living with others” (Pastinelli, 2005) that would be “the antithesis of the household model” (Fijalkow and Maresca, 2022), intended exclusively for young adults. Brussels households’ data suggest new forms of parenthood and families, challenging the heteronormative and patriarchal norms of statistical categories.

Figure 38 – L'âge des colocataires (2018)

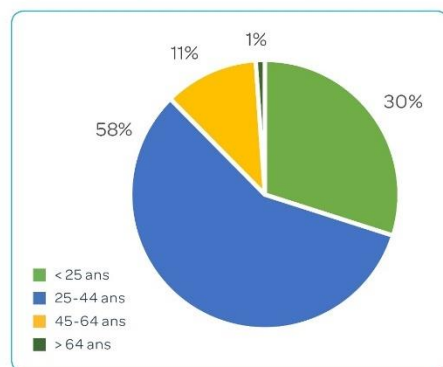


Figure 39 – Composition familiale des colocataires (2018)

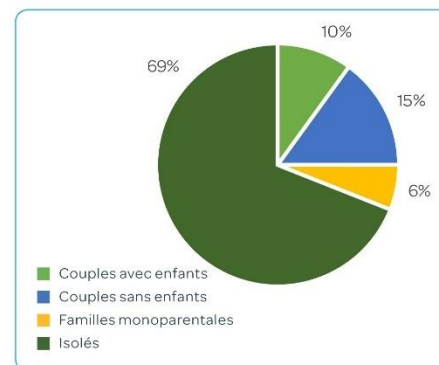


Tableau 33 – Statistiques relatives à l'âge des colocataires (2018)

ÂGE DU LOCATAIRE EN COLOCATION	Années
Moyenne	31
1 ^{er} quartile	24
Médiane	28
3 ^e quartile	35

Figure 07. Age and household composition in shared living in Brussels in 2018 (*Observatoire des loyers*, 2018)

¹³ The shared tenancy agreement is described later.

¹⁴ 48% are aged between 25 and 44, 30% are under 23, 11% are aged between 45 and 64 and 1% are over 64.

¹⁵ 69% of roommates are singles, 15% are couples without children, 10% are couples with children and 6% are single-parent families.

In terms of residential mobility, the spatial qualities of shared accommodation is the most significant factor (61%)¹⁶ in the residential choices, with 32% relating to dwelling arrangement (size, comfort and outdoor space) and 29% relating to housing situation (location, accessibility, environment, or a new place altogether). Life cycles (moving out, marriage, separation, birth, etc.) are reasons for moving in only 20% of cases¹⁷.

These results should be interpreted with caution however. First, because the data does not distinguish co-living and home-sharing, which mitigates their interest. Second, as Casier points out, because the censuses vary greatly from one municipality to another, and even from one official to another (Casier, 2023c), often without any logic, as, for example, singles and cohabitants can be found in a same shared accommodation.

From a legal point of view, roommates very rarely have any real legislative recognition. In Milan, for instance, the lack of specific contractual tools makes it difficult to “achieve the housing solution that best fits their needs and expectations” (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016).

In Belgium, leases have been regionalised in 2018. As a result, the Brussels-Capital Region has been able to determine its own rules on residential leases in the Brussels Housing Code (Bruxelles-Capitale, 2013). The legislator took advantage of this new jurisdiction to add articles referring to shared tenancies, student leases and short-term leases. Article 2.34 defines shared tenancy as “*the rental of the same dwelling by several tenants who opt, with the express or tacit agreement of the landlord, for the application of the system specific to shared tenancy by signing a shared tenancy agreement as provided for in article 261, formalised by the conclusion of a single contract between the tenants and the landlord*” (Bruxelles-Capitale, 2013). A shared tenure is thus secured by two elements¹⁸. First, a lease contract between the landlord and the tenants that stipulates that the tenants are jointly and severally liable to the landlord, and sets out specific departure arrangements. Two types of lease exist, depending on whether or not the housemates are domiciled on the premises¹⁹. Second, a “shared tenancy agreement” sets out the practical arrangements for living together. This agreement does not concern the landlord. It provides a minimum framework for relations between tenants²⁰ with elements such as: rent distribution key; breakdown of possible rental damage and how it will be charged to the tenants; maintenance and repairs; division of operating expenses; furniture inventory; insurance premiums (fire, etc.); and the procedures for the arrival, departure and replacement of a housemate.

If a legal status exists for home-sharing, it is not mandatory, and public policies do not necessarily encourage the development of this housing segment (except in the case of socially-cohesive housing²¹) while failing to handle the dangers of co-living, its mercantile counterpart (housing financialization, compliance with health standards, gentrification, etc.).

For all these reasons – lack of proper scientific research, imprecise statistical data, non-mandatory legal status – there is a genuine need of both quantitative and qualitative research to frame growing home-sharing in Brussels.

¹⁶ As a comparison, this factor accounts for 52% for regular renting.

¹⁷ For regular tenants, this reason accounts for 26% of residential choices.

¹⁸ <https://logement.brussels/louer/bail/>

¹⁹ *Bail de colocation de résidence principale, ou en droit commun.*

²⁰ The “shared tenancy agreement” recognises this growing housing segment. It imposes obligations and grants rights described in the Housing Code. BERNARD, N. & DEFRAITEUR, V. 2019. *Le bail étudiant et la colocation à Bruxelles*, Bruxelles, Éditions Larcier..

²¹ *Habitat solidaire*

Home-sharing in Brussels through the lens of the *Liste Berta*

Following this literature review, a two-stage methodology was set up to evaluate the phenomenon of home-sharing in Brussels.

As a first step, a desk survey was carried out on websites posting offers and applications of home-sharing to generate a first overview of the problematic. Similar explorations have already been carried out in Brussels concerning co-living (Casier, 2023c). We began our empirical work with a study of social networks to identify the extent of the home-sharing phenomenon: typology, number of members, description of the group, etc.

Then, a focus was given to a specific listing – *Liste Berta* (Berta) – because of it has existed for a long time (since 2012) and was able to provide valuable data in terms of home-sharing dynamics. Diving into a specific listing allowed for two things: to find out more about the demographics and drivers of Brussels home-sharers, and to build up a typology of home-sharing in Brussels to launch a qualitative survey in the coming months. The analysis of the Berta itself was done in two phases.

First, we met with Sandra, the person who has been behind the list for more than ten years. We met her twice, to find out more about her aspirations and the way she handles the list. These meetings enabled us to build trust and Sandra gave us access to Berta’s ten-year data.

Investigating this data was the second phase of the analysis. This material had been stored on *Domaine Public*²², a non-commercial internet hosting structure that manages between “400 and 500 association accounts with dedicated email accounts or just mailing lists under the name @collectifs.net”²³. The data from Berta was extracted in a large .pdf document with 7579 entries, corresponding to all the posts published between October 2012 and April 2023. After extracting this data, an analytical table was set up, gathering the following information: function, type, offer, housing type, sex, professional activity, rental price, number of home-shares, household situation, animals, location, lease duration, shared spaces, shared moments, focus. A sample of 1000 posts was read and analysed against this table.

Annonce		Fonction		Type	Type d'offre		Bien	Sexe	Métier		Loger		Nourrir		Ménage	Animaux	Lieu		Transport		Espaces partagés		Moments partagés	
Num	Tit	Av	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De	De
7579	1																							
7578	1																							
7577	1																							
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Figure 08. Analytical table of *Liste Berta* (Authors’ production)

²² *Domaine Public* was set up in the early 2000s. This cooperative is an independent, non-commercial internet hosting structure managed collectively by all its members. *Domaine Public* aims to encourage the autonomous use of IT tools for dissemination and communication, among a broad public, particularly non-specialists. <https://www.domainepublic.net/>

²³ Interview with Denis, a volunteer for *Domaine public*, on April 11th 2023

Eventually, the data extracted from Berta was used to generate a typology of home-sharing in Brussels. The aim of the typology is to select a series of case studies in which to carry out a qualitative survey combining individual interviews and on-site observations.

Results

Given the two-stage methodology, the results of this research are presented in two phases: a portrayal of home-sharing platforms in Brussels and of the data extracted from Berta.

Brussels' shared-rental platforms: between professional supervision and citizens' lists

The empirical work started with a study of social networks to determine the extent of the phenomenon of shared living: type, number and specificities of members, description of the group, etc. In Brussels, different types of shared living networks were identified. Firstly, co-living websites, managed by professionals, owners, investors, managers and inhabitants directly in touch with each other thanks to technological developments. These accommodations count an average of 10 rooms per dwelling and are rented mainly to young international expats. Rents are on average higher (735 euros for a room in 2021) than for other shared accommodation, justified by a “community experience” (Casier, 2023a) and shared amenities. Locally, five companies “organise and share this growing market: *Cohabs*²⁴, *ShareHome Brussels*²⁵, *Ikoab*²⁶, *Colive*²⁷ et *Colochousing*²⁸” (Casier, 2023a). In a similar spectrum, a number of sites - as *brukot*²⁹, *appartager*³⁰, *spotahome*³¹, *erasmusu*³², etc. - offer shared student accommodation to Belgian or foreigners arriving in Brussels. These two fast-developing trends – co-living and studentification – must be distinguished from regular home-sharing because they are run by professional actors who contribute directly to the financialization of housing in Brussels (Casier, 2023c).

In order to study the specific characteristics of home-sharing in Brussels, two other venues remained to be explored: Facebook groups and citizens' lists (eventually, Berta was the only list we identified). With regard to the former, around forty private groups (obligation to join the group to access the details, and, in some cases, to give details about the reasons for joining) were listed. Altogether, these groups count several hundred thousand members: *Colocation Bruxelles-La carte des colocs*³³ (27,7k members), *Colocation Brussels & Flatsharing Bruxelles*³⁴ (13,7k members), *Colocation Bruxelles*³⁵ (19,8k members), *Bruxelles : Loc & Coloc*³⁶ (63,2k members), *Desperate People looking for a room in BXL!*³⁷

²⁴ <https://cohabs.com/cities/brussels>, 42 houses in Brussels, between 8 and 22 rooms/house, average age of members: 28 years/65 nationalities/863 rooms/8 neighbourhoods.

²⁵ <https://www.sharehomebrussels.com/>, 76 houses in Brussels.

²⁶ <https://www.ikoab.com/>, 32 houses in Brussels.

²⁷ <https://colive.eu/>, 28 houses in Brussels.

²⁸ <https://www.colochousing.com/>, 39 houses in Brussels.

²⁹ <https://www.brukot.be/colocations>

³⁰ <https://www.appartager.be/bruxelles/colocation-bruxelles>

³¹ <https://www.spotahome.com/fr/s/brussels--belgium/>

³² <https://erasmusu.com/fr>

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/367491103433177/>

³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/373319039493392/?ref=browser>

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/338217609581003/>

³⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/551842041574913/>

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/170094846460459/?ref=browser>

(14,0k members), *BXL A LOUER – de bouches à oreilles*³⁸ (115k members), *Chambre à louer à Bruxelles*³⁹ (7,3k members), *BXL A LOUER <500 euros*⁴⁰ (24,2k members), *Wonen in Brussels*⁴¹ (39,8k members), *Colocation Bruxelles pour travailler (étudiant exclus)*⁴² (9,8k members). Some groups display a more specific orientation: *Logements alternatifs – ateliers – logements mixtes à Bruxelles*⁴³ (5,0k members), *Colocation/Apartment sharing Brussels Lgbtqi+*⁴⁴ (3,2k members), *Colocation de parents solos (Bruxelles et ailleurs)*⁴⁵ (357 members, since april 2021), etc.

Eventually, some international institutions (particularly European ones) also provide for such services via their intranet, to accommodate mobile workers and trainees, but we have not investigated this further.

These initial results show that, (1) shared living is far from being a peripheral phenomenon, (2) there is a coexistence of co-living and home-sharing in Brussels, (3) new sociological profiles aspire to share their accommodation, out of necessity, in search of social contacts or networks, or to promote a fulfilling “*entre-soi*” (e.g. single parents), or a sense of security (e.g. safe space for LGBTQIA+ communities). The home-sharing market also displays strong divisions between groups of people: young workers with cultural and economic capital, students, or residents who have chosen for home-sharing as a way of life rather than a temporary housing solution.

Analysis of the Liste Berta

To deepen our understanding of home-sharing in Brussels, we looked closely into Berta. We did so by interviewing the person who has been behind the list for nearly ten years, and by analysing the content posted on the list for the past eleven years.

Interview with Sandra

To find out who was behind the classified ads of Berta and how this citizen network was run, an email was sent to an address reserved for the list’s subscribers. When Sandra replied a few days later, she told us that the list had existed since 2012 and that she “*runs it alone, behind the scenes and on a voluntary basis, as the other founders left to pursue other projects around 10 years ago*”⁴⁶. She writes that “*she has been home-sharing herself for some thirty years, and although this housing type is exploding in Brussels, times are hard due to price inflation, current societal changes, and laws concerning the status of singles*”. Enthusiastic about her reaction, we decided to interview this dedicated worker behind Berta.

According to Sandra, Berta’s history can be traced back to a network of Brussels’ activist involved in alternative cultural and political venues. Its initiators, “*Anne-Sophie and Katia*”, first called it “*la liste*

³⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/virtueljojo/?ref=browser>

³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/chambresbruxelles/?ref=browser>

⁴⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1525522444394631/>

⁴¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/188519461195986>

⁴² <https://www.facebook.com/groups/515936218482888/>

⁴³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1495663833998670>

⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/167918317215069->

⁴⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/colocationentreparents>: The aim of this group is to bring together single parents who want to set up or join home-sharing (...) and not just sharing the rent (...) sharing a place to live can provide access to more comfortable accommodation, as well as enabling parents to exchange services.

⁴⁶ Email from Sandra, list manager, 25 February 2023.

*des immobilistes*⁴⁷. It was a system of “classified ads within the ‘Nova community’ (...) to find places for people who were invited for concerts, screenings, events, etc.”. Afterwards, the list was expanded to “encourage home-sharing and fight against the traditional estate agents”. To host and expand Berta’s network, the activists teamed up with *Domaine Public*⁴⁸. Eventually, Berta also has a little brother: the “Roberts”, where objects and services are listed.

From a practical point of view, all one needs to join Berta is to send an email and introduce yourself in two lines, “to avoid anonymity”. Then, to publish an advert, you will have to send it to Berta’s email address so it can be distributed to all members. Behind this simplicity lies a lot of hard work. Sandra currently receives between ten and fifteen requests per day, which she selects and classifies according to criteria and values she has set herself. First, she finds a equilibrium between offers and requests, publishing more offers “because otherwise it creates too great an imbalance”. Second, she selects ads that offer a minimum of one month’s shared accommodation, “it used to be three months but given the crisis, I accept shorter periods”. Third, only fair rents are selected, even though, with the inflation, there has been “a drastic increase in prices, a room is 650 euros, before it was around 400”. Fourth, she needs to receive a clear description of both the people and the accommodation, “people have to introduce themselves, sometimes I get rid of people who address the list as if it were Facebook”. Eventually, Sandra pays a special attention to people in desperate need to find accommodation, making then exceptions to her own rules. Once the ads are selected, the list is compiled and sent to all members once or twice a week. Members can then directly communicate with one another.

From Sandra’s interview, several elements could be pointed out. First, Berta has a clear posture regarding affordable housing. On its webpage, Berta is described as “a solidarity network (...) on good ideas for home-sharing, flats, workshops and sublets, because it has become difficult to find decent accommodation at an acceptable price (...). Ads offering unreasonable prices will not be published”⁴⁹. Accordingly, Berta does not cater for all audiences, as “the list is closed to students and trainees” and welcomes Brussels residents as a priority. In addition to supporting low prices, specific sociological profiles, and a clear demarcation from co-living and Facebook models, Berta promotes home-sharing as a fair way of life based on the values of exchanging, mixing, meeting and solidarity “in a society that is excessively individualistic and consumerist”.

Second, Berta tries to keep a “human scale, unlike the current wave and some gargantuan sites”. This approach of not becoming “oversized and unmanageable” ensures that “everyone [has] a chance of finding their match”.

Third, a series of evolutions can be noted. In addition to increases in prices and demand, Sandra has also observed a change in the type of people who turn to the list for accommodation, such as “a rise of single women (...), one out of ten are single women with children, and sometimes single fathers too (...), migrants (...), elderlies who complain that the ads target a younger audience (...), women in situations of domestic violence, or being harassed by their landlord (...), young women in squats (...), families (...), and lots of couples”. In addition, new communities of home-sharing arise, such as “single-sex home-sharing (...), and LGBTIQIA+ oriented”. According to Sandra, the available dwellings are also changing. More adds come from “outside Brussels, where rents are lower”, while the rooms become “smaller (...), between 10 and 12m²”, and larger homes-sharing units appear, ranging from “6 to 8 people, whereas before it was more like 3 or 4”. In addition, more appartements turn up in the ads, where “houses used to be a majority. Some people rent out a room in their flat to generate extra income”.

⁴⁷ Translation! > ask Sandra

⁴⁸ See description above.

⁴⁹ <https://chahut.domainepublic.net/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/bertha>

Eventually, Sandra differentiates ads that use the word “*home-sharing*” to describe their living arrangements, and those that offer “*communal living*”, a genuine aspiration for a collective life.

Despite the expansion of social networks in recent years, Berta is a great success as “*three or four people subscribe every day*”. The work is repetitive, tedious and uninterrupted throughout the year, “*there used to be calmer periods in winter and autumn, but it is no longer the case now*”. Although she finds a lot of meaning in her work by “*putting people in touch with each other (...) helping out (...) and getting things moving in Brussels with my little hands*”, in the past few years, Sandra has been looking for ways to join forces to lighten the load of managing Berta on her own.

Berta's data

With Sandra's approval, Berta's data was analysed thoroughly. It tends to confirm tendencies highlighted by Sandra, in terms of demographic dynamics, residential trajectories, the struggles of militant communities, or the attitudes facing successive housing crises.

In terms of encountered situations, two kinds of ads can be found: offers and demands. 80% of these ads relate to housing, while other relate to workshops, offices, etc. Three main types of dwelling offers can be read: one or more rooms in shared housing, sublets, or dwelling exchange. Four kinds of requests can be registered: setting up a home-sharing scheme; looking for a dwelling on your own or with others: friends, couples, couples with children, etc.; looking for one or more rooms in a shared flat; or looking for a sublet. Within all dwelling adds, home-sharing are the most common by far (80%) for, ideally, an indeterminate period. Several distinctions in home-sharing can be seen: with peers (like-minded persons) or with less familiar persons (Kenyon and Heath, 2001); with or without children, whether singles or not; home-sharing with two or with more than two persons.

In terms of sociological profiles, it is noticeable that women are, by far (over 70%), the ones posting the most adds. Besides posting more, women are also the ones who sublet part of their flat for short/medium/long term periods (sometimes to pay for their holidays), and who post ads for third parties (men, undocumented migrants, artists in residence, artists travelling for concerts, exhibitions, mothers in emergency situations, etc.).

In addition, most adds come from people working in the artistic and cultural sector (60%), which can partly be explained by the origins of the list. If the site is multicultural, a large majority of members are European (mostly from France, Spain and Italy). A majority of adds are looking for parity between male and female home-shares, ideally “*non-smoker*”, “*sociable but autonomous*”, “*not too messy but not too manic*”.

Often, the reason to move in or out of such an accommodation is mentioned in the ad. It ranges from arriving in Brussels for work, the owner getting his home back or carrying out works, the arrival of a child, a problem in the current home, returning or travelling abroad, the end of a lease, the need to get Belgian papers, the need to be closer to work or school, problems with current roommates, couple separation, problems at home (minor taken in charge by the social services), etc.

In terms of housing types, contrary to Sandra's impression, data reveals that 70% of Berta's home-sharing ads relate to apartments. However, the number of ads concerning houses has doubled between 2012 and 2023. The financial strain on housing may explain this major trend. Houses become interesting from an economic point of view as rental prices per m² decrease as the size of accommodation grows, and houses can host larger numbers of persons, spreading the rental costs on more persons.

In terms of inhabitants per dwelling, they vary between one and thirteen. Two-person accommodations account for 20% of the ads, while 73% concern home-sharing between 3 and 6 persons. Despite their small numbers, large shared accommodations (7 bedrooms or more) have tripled between 2012 and 2023, which confirms the trend we saw earlier regarding the growing number of houses, the only housing type in Brussels capable of accommodating large home-sharing.

In terms of geographical location, most of the home-sharing listed on Berta is set in the East part of Brussels, with preferences for the municipalities of Saint-Gilles (23%), Ixelles (16%), Uccle (11%), Schaerbeek (11%) and Forest (10%). However, a geographical shift towards the outskirts is noticeable from 2012 to 2023, with a decrease in municipalities such as Ixelles and Etterbeek and an increase in Uccle, Forest Watermael-Boitsfort and Schaerbeek.



Figure 10. Home-sharing evolution on Berta between 2012 and 2023 (Authors' drawing)

In terms of prices, there is no noticeable change between 2012 and 2023 if inflation is considered. The average price for a room with rental expenses is 450 euros in 2012-2013 and 490 euros in 2023. This can probably be explained by the general movement of home-sharing stated above, from the eastern part of the first urban belt to the second urban belt and by one of the criteria imposed by Sandra (the democratic price of the room to be put on the list).

The identity of the home-sharing place is also a common topic. In some cases, it is marked by the general spirit of the description or a distinctive name, that relates to the street or the initial name of the house (*Les Atrébates*, *Villa Germaine*, *Villa Henriette*, etc.). In some cases however, the name reflects the community's practical, or ideological identity (*Les mains sales*, *La cerise noire*, etc.). Some ads make a clear statement about the character (feminist, LGBTQIA+, etc.) of the dwelling, which becomes the foundation of life in common. While most ads demonstrate care and benevolence as basic principles, some make it their intrinsic identity. For example, *Les trois pommiers*⁵⁰ organises, among others, home-sharing and supervised accommodation for people with mild disabilities and single parents with children.

Besides asserting a specific identity, recurring words appear in the descriptions, such as “*dream, bottle in the sea, adventure, paradise, rare pearl, secret garden*”, etc. They all reflect the longing for a real home. The word “possibility” occurs frequently in the ads posted. This may reflect an ethos of freedom and autonomy, as well as an opportunistic attitude on the part of the housemates. In addition to these

⁵⁰ <https://www.lestroispommiers.be/>. Founded in 1982, *Les Trois Pommiers* is an intergenerational living environment that accommodates over 200 people in 105 homes on 5 sites in Brussels.

terms referring to a homy atmosphere, spaces are often described using real estate rhetoric, “*superb flat, large living room, bright, lots of character, spacious dwelling, lots of appliances*”, etc. The descriptions are often more oriented towards the spaces of the dwelling than its social character. However, a constant motor is the balance between “*sharing time together, while allowing everyone to go about their personal or professional lives*”. In terms of social moments, meals are the most commonly advertised (40%), while other ads mention watching movies, discussions or board games.

Discussion

From an economic constraint to a way of life

202302/007493 : COLOCATION FAMILIALE À FOREST - 1 espace se libère

COLOCATION FAMILIALE À FOREST - [redacted] près du parc du Bempt

Qui veut habiter avec nous à la Villa Germaine ? Un espace scilbère début avril, 477€/mois+ charges.

Idéal pour un parent solo avec un enfant en garde alternée.

En effet, nous sommes 3 parents solo avec 5 enfants (de 5 à 13 ans) en garde alternée à mi-temps. L'ambiance est vraiment bonne, que ce soit dans les moments calmes où chacun vit sa vie que dans les moments partagés en grande tribu : des repas, des cabanes éteint dans le salon, des soirées karaoké (ou pas :-p), des bricolages, des bbq, des balades... ce que chacun amène, ensemble :-)) Il y a Julie, maman de J. 11 ans et E. 13 ans, scénographe, qu'on aime de bonne humeur et pousse la chansonnette toute la journée. Arno, papa de T. 5 ans, street artiste, lui il préfère danser (même en faisant le ménage!) : c'est un vrai calme-actif (le combogagnant!). Et Marie, maman de H. 7 ans et L. 9 ans, prof de français langue étrangère, elle elle va plus s'exprimer en écrivant, en dessinant et en peignant, même sur les corps des gens.

C'est une grande maison de 3 étages avec un petit jardin dans un quartier calme, tout près de très jolis parcs et pas très loin de la place Saint-Denis et de la gare de Forest Est. Nous partageons une grande cuisine, un grand living, une cave buanderie et une cave-espace de jeu.

L'espace qui se libère se compose d'une chambre et d'une petite pièce attenante qui peut faire office de chambre d'enfant, à côté d'une grande salle de bain partagée avec Marie et ses 2 enfants. (il y a 2 autres salles de bains pour les 2 autres familles).

L'aventure tente ? Contactez-nous (on a aussi des photos).

Figure 11. Example of an ad in Berta (2023)

The ads posted on Berta give the impression that the search for a quality living environment, both spatially and humanely, takes precedence over the search for low-cost housing. In fact, home-sharers are primarily looking to highlight features relating to the spatial qualities of the accommodation: “bright flat”, “large volume”, “sunset views”, “flat with character”; or of the neighborhood: “nice neighborhood”, “lots of little shops”, “cultural life nearby”, etc.; or again, to the qualities of the atmosphere: “warm”, “friendly”, etc. The human qualities of the housemates are also highlighted in various qualitative terms: “super friendly housemates”, “open-minded”, “quiet”, “respectful”, etc. On the other hand, the modes of governance and communication at work within the flat-shares are almost never described (only once out of 1,000 ads analysed), except in relation to the economic operation (distribution of rents, etc.). This gives the impression that community life is a matter of course when it takes place between people with cultural and social capital. This lack of consideration for governance issues may come as a surprise to those who have taken an interest in collaborative/participative housing, where the group’s operating rules sometimes take precedence over other aspects of shared living. Some shared accommodations also propose to manage functions and events together that go well beyond the question of housing. We have listed home-sharing that organize a homework school for local children in Etterbeek, and others that organize events (concerts, screenings, political events, publications, etc.). These different observations remind us that Berta is reserved for a specific public, mostly young, working in the socio-cultural, health and social sectors, who are concerned about their environment in its socio-spatial dimensions, without investing energy in

governance issues, but the shared housing could be seen as a school for collaboration, where later, in their residential journey, the home-sharers will aspire to more collaborative models of living?

Political, social and spatial evolutions

Berta's analysis reveals a series of constant elements such as gender roles, where the overrepresentation of women posting ads shows that they tend to stay in charge of domestic matters; ecological and sustainable issues that are a common thread throughout all ads; and the important balance between a desired collective life and the preservation of the persons' intimacy. Despite this stability, a series of evolutions can be noted, from a political, social and spatial point of view.

From a political point of view, a major shift can be noted from the origins of Berta to today. Indeed, in the beginning, there was a strong desire to fight for the right to housing. This was marked by the aspiration to create a physical community (party organisations, call for demonstrations, etc.). This desire to create a genuine community was embodied in a meeting - *Fiesta Berta* - of Berta's members in the *Tricoterie* in Saint-Gilles in 2013. This physical meeting was aimed at those "*who are desperately looking for accommodation*". It was seen as an opportunity to "*meet people with whom, why not, to create home-sharing*". In addition, regular calls to support the RBDH⁵¹ or IEB⁵² events were posted on the list.

With time, these political aspirations gave way to other issues such as inclusiveness, benevolence, or tolerance. This evolution is also characterised by a specific attention to emerging social issues such as the rise of single-parenting, queer-friendly communities, gender-based groups, precarious women and minorities. For instance, ads about LGBTQIA+ and feminist home-sharing appear more than 20 times more in 2023 than in 2012. This trend questions the nature of the relationship within these new types of households. Indeed, they recall the concept of "neo-tribalism" coined by Maffesoli (Heath, 2004), where sharing from both a practical and symbolic point of view combined with the ritual of the everyday life creates new types of "peer-shared" households. In some cases, these households can "take on the characteristics of 'quasi-communes', marked by the institutionalization of friendship within a domestic setting" (Heath, 2004).

From a spatial point of view, several evolutions can be noted too. First of all, it is important to remember that most descriptions revolve around the spatial assets of the home.

In terms of dwelling arrangements, two main changes can be seen in the last ten years. On the one hand, gardens have become a major asset, appearing twice as much as in the early ads. This element may find an explanation in the covid pandemic that pressed people to find accommodations with qualitative outdoor spaces, as they could not enjoy the public spaces any more. On the other hand, there is a trend towards more populated shared accommodations. This trend can be coupled with a rise of houses used for home-sharing in recent years.

In terms of geographical spread in Brussels, there has been a clear shift of Berta's home-sharing offer towards the outskirts of the Brussels region, the so-called second ring. This phenomenon could be explained by competition with co-living projects, the commercial version of home-sharing. As Casier shows (Casier, 2023b), co-living is concentrated in the south-east neighbourhoods of the inner ring.

⁵¹ *Rassemblement Bruxellois pour le Droit à l'Habitat* is an association that works to defend the right to housing for all, with a particular focus on vulnerable people.

⁵² *Inter-Environnement Bruxelles* is an association of residents of the Brussels region who are active on urban, ecological and social issues.

Given the high prices charged by these co-living projects⁵³ (almost double of home-sharing), this concentration has been pushing real estate prices upwards, and hence, home-sharing outwards.

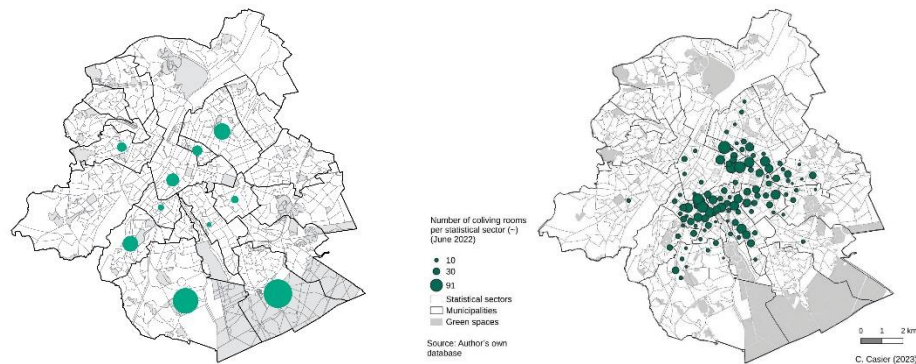


Figure 12. Co-living vs home-sharing distribution (Authors' drawing; Casier 2023)

Home-sharing typology

The analytical work around Berta's data helps understanding some of the dynamics around home-sharing in Brussels. In addition, these results help build up a home-sharing typology that will be used for the next, qualitative step of our research. Indeed, several distinctions can be made:

- 1/ Two-person versus larger home-sharing: between singular colloquium and community life,
- 2/ Within larger home-sharing, several sub-families emerge:
 - a. Community of young professionals,
 - b. Families living together (single parents or not),
 - c. Families living with singles,
 - d. Home-sharing with a strong, claimed, identity
 - LGBTQIA+
 - Feminist
 - Political.

Shared living, between precarity and resilience

Sharing living has increased tremendously in the last two decades and has become for many a way of life, either by choice or necessity. In Brussels, it has also become a solution to dwellings, row-houses in particular, that are too large to house nuclear families, and often too complex to divide in apartments from a legal point of view. However, within shared living, two very different trends can be noticed: co-living and home-sharing.

Co-living is literally the commoditization of the “co” (Casier, 2023c). It can be seen as a market capture of the home-sharing principles and its values of collective living and solidarity. In Brussels, this phenomenon dates back to 2016 and accounts for over 3000 rooms today (Casier, 2023c). Compared to regular renting prices, the co-living rents are 50 to 200% higher, and the leases are usually short-term. Bergan et al. argue that this phenomenon evidences that “*new economic logics are reshaping the domestic imaginary*” (Bergan et al., 2021), generating more precarity down to the domestic sphere. While the precarity turn was usually associated with work, parallels can be made here with precarious

⁵³ Casier has calculated the minimum median price for a room in a Brussels co-living projects at 760 euros in 2022. CASIER, C. 2023c. *Experience the future of living. L'émergence du logement flexible et financiarisé en ville. Étude à partir du coliving bruxellois*. ULB.

work in terms of “*uncertainty, hyper competition, hypermobility and insecurity*” (Bergan et al., 2021). In this senses, “*coliving is not a solution to housing affordability, but rather, housing suitability*” (Bergan et al., 2021). This phenomenon poses a real challenge, as a risk of collective deterioration in housing conditions is at stake. Given this close relation between co-living and precarity, there is a real need to regulate this housing segment (Uyttebrouck et al., 2020) by supplying housing that is not aimed at making profit through rent regulation and ensuring sufficient qualitative space. Among the possible measures, supporting home-sharing could be one. We have also identified risks associated with the privatization of services that, in shared accommodation, are supported by the community, such as, for example, goods delivery, cleaning, laundry, wellness services and so on. In co-living, these various services are privatized, anonymized via subcontracting systems and participate in the exploitation of the labour of some of the Region’s poorest and most racialized residents. In this model, the inhabitant is a consumer, whereas home-sharing would be more like a school of citizenship, where rules are set, people learn to live with differences, etc. The co-living phenomenon contributes to the privatization of housing and the creation of residential products that can be compared to homes for elderly that are also developing in all major European cities. This development is contributing to widening inequalities and the privatization of housing in Europe’s major cities. If, however, the welfare state is retreating from its housing responsibilities, the legislator should at the very least be concerned with regulating this market.

For home-sharing, there is a paradox between the potential resilience offered by these forms of housing and the precariousness they can entail. This resilience relies on a new kind of - self-chosen - household. Home-sharing is more intimate than co-living in the relationships it generates, that can be qualified as “family by choice” (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001) or “domestic situated friendship” (Heath, 2004, p. 172). Through self-organised housing solutions, “*extended kinship networks*” (Arundel and Ronald, 2016) are generated, a re-familiarization that produces support for the people that live there. Within this home-sharing households, an through the “*non-standard use of private housing facilities*” (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016), social relations are developed, resources are pooled together, and skills are developed to manage collective life. Legislators should therefore seize the home-sharing experiments to facilitate the production of this type of housing. The legal and fiscal recognition of this type of socio-spatial arrangement should be the subject of new regulatory approaches, which should better recognise this strategy that residents are developing to live better (by changing statistical units of measurement, by facilitating planning permission, for example), or at least not disqualify them (for example, by reducing their social security benefits under the pretext of cohabitation), while protecting against the risks associated with abuse (health regulations on minimum floor areas), etc. May this research contribute to a better understanding of home-sharing, and distinguish it clearly from its market-oriented counterpart, co-living.

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