

# Hospitality & Ownership of Spaces

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How can art open up new forms of hospitality and commoning in the city?  
Dillon's *URBAN HUT* taps into this question of living art shaping civic reality in the city.

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**Urban  
Hut**  
*URBAN HUT* is a free-to-use hut where two to four guests can stay for one night in the city. Providing a unique perspective on the city, the hut is collectively built and managed by members of the community where it's situated. Imagined as an open, living art object and civic hospitality offering, members of the surrounding neighbourhood act as 'carers'

and 'greeters', managing the hut as a collective community resource and providing access for guests by welcoming them to the city.

Conceived for the city of Helsinki, the first steps of the project were carried out as part of the British Council, HIAP and Helsinki Design Week Residency in Summer 2015. This residency allowed for work and research on potential locations for the *URBAN HUT* and made contacts with neighborhood partners and Helsinki city council. Community-guest interactions were explored in further research.

Elements of *URBAN HUT* are inspired by the **Wilderness Hut and Scottish Bothy**, which are countryside huts or shelters that people can stay for free. Often located in remote areas of natural beauty, Wilderness Huts and Bothies are specially built, or reclaimed estate and farm cottages, which have been restored and made available to provide shelter and basic provisions for people when they are walking, hiking or roaming the countryside. For the most part, these spaces are left open and unlocked. Given such characteristics, they are examples of an open, common resource governed by a general set of principles which are mutually shared and understood codes of care, respect and maintenance. You leave the hut as you found it, replenishing the resources used so it is ready for another to use with little evidence anyone else was there in the place and its surroundings.

In Finland, Wilderness Huts fall under what is called the 'Everyman's Right'. Established in the late 1940s, the right sets a precedent whereby the general public have the right to access certain public or privately owned land for recreation and exercise. This 'right' means that **everyone living or visiting Finland has the freedom to temporarily stay and camp out overnight in a tent, vehicle or boat, as long as it causes no damage or disturbance to the landowner**. This right presents a unique relationship to nature in Finland, acted upon for example, when people go berry and mushroom picking. Although this right is not officially part of Finnish

law, it is considered as an agreement where everyone has the same privilege.

**'Freedom to Roam'**  
In Scotland the 'Freedom to Roam' provides a similar level of access and is protected in law under The Land Reform Act 2003, which gives everyone the right to access land and inland waters (subject to exclusions) as long as they behave responsibly. A comparable right exists in England but is restricted by what is known as open or access land. *When it comes to the city, such open and free-to-use resources are very rare, mainly due to the commercial potential of cities and its land.* Although some forms of open resources do exist for example in the interim use of vacant lots, disused buildings and community gardens these resources often tend to have complicated attachments, requiring intermediaries to unlock and manage. Compared then to Wilderness Huts or Bothies, such city examples sit on what I would call a 'spectrum of open city resources' but operate in quite a different manner to the rural examples. This means that when transposing ideas such as the Wilderness Hut or Bothy into the urban space, we need to pay attention to these irregularities and protocols which allow them to exist in the first place, including those relating to the built environment, land ownership, management, care and usage. *URBAN HUT uses these incidents to unlock accepted norms by provoking alternatives to current city thinking.*

**Living Urban Art**  
In paying attention to protocols and regulations, it is necessary to understand how the *URBAN HUT* is defined. *URBAN HUT* is a *living, public artwork*. Other works which I consider a useful reference here include *Agnes Denes Wheatfield, a Confrontation (1982)* and *Nuage Vert (2008)* by the group *HeHe*. For *Wheatfield, a Confrontation*, Denes transformed two acres of prime real estate in Lower Manhattan, New York, into a wheat field. This called attention to value systems, finance and land use in urban spaces. Denes and her assistants cleared trash from the site,

spread topsoil, planted the wheat and installed an irrigation system to regulate the crop's growth. The grain was later harvested, distributed to various cities and the seeds were taken all over the world. In making *Nuage Vert*, HeHe worked with vapour emissions from the Salmisaari coal-burning power plant, which is situated in Helsinki's Harbourside. Using laser technology and energy consumption data gathered from the factory, HeHe literally turned the vapor cloud green in real-time with the intention, according to the artist's website to 'confront the city dweller with an evocative and aesthetic spectacle' and shift 'the discourse about climate change and carbon from abstract immaterial models based on the individual, to the tangible reality of urban life'. These works could also be referred to as public, environmental or land art are situated within cities. They are 'living', as the material (wheat, vapor), which they work with has a quality, which we could describe as 'alive' and temporal in that the core material emerges and can even close, die or disappear in real-time. My main point in defining the works as 'living urban art' is to differentiate from static and fixed public art (statues, plaques, pillars) by attempting to broaden our imagination and understanding of what even temporary, public art works might constitute. In the case of *URBAN HUT* the living refers to the encounters between the people, the guests who stay for one night in the hut and hosts, the local citizens. More specifically, *URBAN HUT* is a living sculpture, whose organisational design and aesthetic moves beyond the conceptual or theoretical by offering an active space for commoning, hospitality and encountering to occur.

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**Long  
time**  
Another aspect of projects such as *Wheatfield*, *a Confrontation*, *Nuage Vert* and *URBAN HUT* is that they take what I refer to as a 'long time' approach to making. Long time refers to how the work intentionally plays with, incorporates or orientates towards a particular tempo and scheduling, which literally requires a long time to make happen. This can be

seen across the production, emergence, experience and framing of the work. For example:

*Production:* requires that all relevant partners and stakeholders be on board.

The work avoids passive participation by intentionally setting up the conditions from which deep engagement with all the main stakeholders and actors can occur, even if some are difficult, reserved or hesitant.

*Emergence:* When the work gets the green light, it can take time to fully appear. It takes time to grow a field of wheat and harvest it, to open land, or to work with factory emissions.

*Experience:* The time required for the work to appear demands that those who experience it, may have to synchronise with the pace of the project, or directly engage with it to help it appear or disappear.

*Framing:* The work is often situated within a broader critical and ecological mind-set or framing, in which interspecies, infrastructural, techno-civic and environmental issues are exposed.

With *URBAN HUT* the long time processes relate to the following: securing the access to land, which defines the approach to the hut build; working with local craft practitioners to build the hut, designing and developing the 'Welcome and Hospitality' pack with members of the local neighbourhood, and exploring with them what it means to welcome a guest. In this respect the *URBAN HUT as a living art object, facilitates processes of access, craft, community care and hospitality.*

However in order to understand the forms of hospitality that *URBAN HUT* activates. It is necessary to understand how hospitality has been understood from a city context. From the perspective of the city *the effects of commercial hospitality* have received the most attention. Commercial hospitality relates to for-profit services, such as food, drink and accommodation with authors addressing how party-, alco- and gastro- tourism enable cities to rebrand themselves as attractive, tourist and entertainment centers. Since the 1970s the influential urban sociologist Sharon

# Hospitality and the City

Zukin has written extensively on city regeneration and in particular how loft living in 1970s New York transformed neighborhoods but also displaced communities, often replacing them with a economically privileged other. Extending Zukin's thinking geographers such as David Bell, Peter Lugosi and Donald McNeill began to focus on how 'spaces of hospitality' such as commercial food and drink services were been used as a means to regenerate cities. Lugosi and colleagues examined such effects in Budapest, and the vogue for rom (ruin) venues, operating in dilapidated or disused buildings. This trend is also evident in other major cities with Berlin being a prime example. While McNeill's work focuses on on hotels, which he considers as statements of civic confidence and prosperity. In the last year, hospitality and economy researchers such as Oskam and Boswijk have published their work on how networked hospitality businesses such as AirBnB, now play a major role. Adding to such urban narratives are the car share and food delivery service such as DriveNow, Deliveroo, Foodoo. For Bell, these forms of the so-called hospitality industry and its synonyms – conviviality, sociality, and vitality – have become essential elements of urban regeneration scripts where nighttime, leisure and visitor economies are highly valued. While van der Broeker Chávez and van der Rest make a compelling case for how local governments can be considered as hosts, whose influence can shape policy and in turn affect how a city can act in an open, agora-like or closed, fortress-like manner to guests and newcomers.

In the context of such work *URBAN HUT* explicitly challenges the commercial hospitality scripts, which dominate research, policy and urban thinking. With the rise in cities as 'brands', their associated living and hospitality costs continual increase. This limits how we experience the urban landscape, which becomes increasingly marginalised, affordable only to those who have money and mobility. Looking to the work of critical urban thinkers such as David Harvey, Sharon Zukin and Neil Brenner

to name but a few, who urgently call for a move towards cities, which address human social needs rather than capitalist, for profit imperatives and spatial enclosure. *URBAN HUT* imagines the development of city resources where profit is not the primary mode of value. Instead openness, as opposed to enclosure, social wellbeing as opposed to commercial gain is privileged. In this way *URBAN HUT* provides a living example of the necessary civic realities, which we urgently need not just to imagine but also activate and practice.