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# Zero Flat: The Design of a New Type of Apartment for Chronically Homeless People

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Daniel Cid, Francesc Pla and Eva Serrats

Winchester School of Art – University of Southampton, UK

Leve Projects, Barcelona

Leve Projects, Barcelona

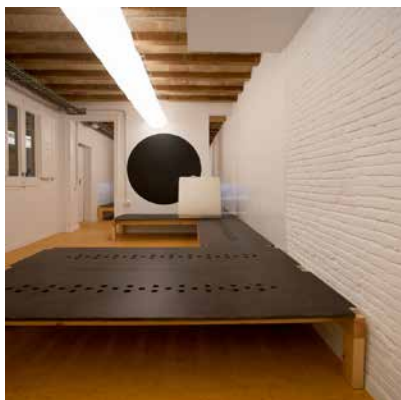
➤ **Abstract\_** *Zero Flat is a new type of apartment for chronically homeless persons with difficulties adapting to any other housing resource due to the high degree of their social exclusion. Combining the characteristics of a night shelter with the minimal requirements for sleeping rough as well as the warmth of a home, this new space proposes new ways of living that respond to the real needs of long-term homeless people. Situated in the historical city centre of Barcelona in a municipally owned apartment, Zero Flat began as a design project developed with the intention of providing Arrels Fundació, a non-governmental organisation that assists homeless persons, with useful input. During the first year of operation, after its launch in January 2017, more than 74% of Zero Flat's users were able to improve their situation and move on to another apartment or residence for the elderly. This paper reviews the design process and the results of this collaborative project.*

➤ **Keywords\_** *Chronic homelessness, street, housing, low demand, design, collaborative projects*

## Introduction

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Zero Flat (see Figures 1-4) is a new type of apartment for chronically homeless persons who, after many failed attempts to climb the “staircase of life”, surrender and lie down on the lowest step: the sidewalk. It is a low demand apartment intended for persons with difficulty accepting the common, basic cohabitation rules of most homeless shelters: no alcohol, no smoking, no pets, and no shopping trolley. Although named Zero Flat from the very start, on many occasions Arrels staff would refer to it more informally as the “street flat”. It was considered from the outset as a pilot project for testing possible solutions for chronically homeless persons in the context of Barcelona, where in 2019 the number of people living in public, outdoor spaces was 1195 according to the latest Arrels Census.



Figures 1-2: Agora, Figure 3: Sleeping area, Figure 4: Terrace (photos Serrats)

The project was collaborative, bringing together a non-profit organisation (Arrels), companies and experts from the construction sector (AIA, Isolana, Frobo, Lamp, Gabarró, Wisa Plywood, PCL, Decolnna, Foampsa, Bruc Jardí, Schüco and Persiana Barcelona), and a design team comprised of architects and researchers (Leve Projects, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton) to explore the intersection of innovation and social policy. Experts in assisting homeless people and Arrels volunteers contributed to the project with their experience-based knowledge, while engineers and construction sector companies contributed technical knowledge, expertise and funds.

Remarkably, Arrels was open to the possibility of not achieving the desired results. The project was conceived as an experiment, with failure contemplated as a possible outcome, something perhaps associated with any innovation process (Manzini, 2015, pp.161-162). Despite lacking experience with this kind of design research, Arrels was able to collaborate in this social design experiment thanks to its broad vision and its capacity for teamwork. The responsibility of the design team was to share, listen, detect and interpret, producing drawings merely to visualize ideas arising in the communal work process.

This paper explains how this project was born, how the research process unfolded, and how the results of this research became an innovative programme that finally lead to a real prototype that has now been in operation for more than a year. Although this text focuses on design processes, the authors of this text consider it highly pertinent to present the results of this practice-based research in a journal that stands as a reference in the field of homelessness studies. They want to contribute toward a better understanding of the value of design research in social projects and the importance of establishing spaces of experimentation, as well as to promote critical reflection about this innovative project for homeless people.

## **Starting Point**

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Prior the Zero Flat project was formulated, the design team decided to propose to the Elisava's Interior Architecture students the challenge of working on a workshop about Arrels apartments for people who have decided to leave the street. This speculative act of academic experimentation led to a mutual exploration between social work and design that was fundamental to building trust and encouraging further possibilities for a professional collaboration. Indeed, it was through this mutual recognition that Arrels director Ferran Busquets came up with the idea of introducing the variable of design research to the development of a new, real project

for homeless persons with difficulty adapting to highly structured environments; a project that would be realized in a municipally owned dwelling situated on the second floor of a typical building on Barcelona's Carrer del Carme 84.

Fundamentally, the idea was to create a spatially sensitive apartment that would impose few restrictions upon occupants. It is known among Arrels workers and volunteers that in many cases, people sleeping rough perceive hostels or shelters as overly regulated, restrictive institutions. Studies of unsheltered homelessness also confirm that people residing on the streets are unlikely to access services located in a shelter that stipulates sobriety or that lacks basic facilities for pets (Burn, 1992; Larsen *et al.*, 2004; Cloke *et al.*, 2010, pp.69-72; Farrell, 2010; Donley and Wright, 2012). Farrell (2010) points out the paradox whereby the routinization of homelessness is often precisely what makes ending it difficult, despite every wish to do so. According to the author, solutions for chronically homeless people depend primarily on the establishment of a therapeutic relationship, but also on the availability of "low-demand" housing support. In this sense, says Farrell, despite the success of strategies like the Housing First model, it cannot be expected that all chronically homeless persons will accept available housing because unconscious conflict can be a barrier to successful housing placement. It is useful to mention, in this regard, the example of Safe Harbour, a "low barrier" emergency shelter in Ontario, Canada (Evans, 2011). Situated on the margins of the care system, this space provides an alternative form of community for marginalised people an "inclusive-exclusion" space (Evans, 2011.p.31).

As a first step toward breaking the closed circle caused by long-term familiarity with being dispossessed, the Arrels team recognized clearly the necessity of easing regulations, as well as distancing users from the kinds of environments that have a "markedly homeless identity" (Perry, 2012, p.433; see also Wasserman and Clair, 2010). The aim was to provide support and attention in an environment that distances itself from the "powerful affective atmosphere" that characterises most places of support, where a series of very characteristic elements –the ritual of queuing, noises, smells or anonymous encounters– produces and reinforces "the experience of feeling homeless" (Lancione, 2016, pp.155-158). The initial decision to locate Zero Flat in a context of domesticity –a 90m<sup>2</sup> apartment accessed by a stairway or elevator– already distanced it from being associated with a night shelter where large spaces, often on a ground floor, serve as many people as possible. At this stage, the challenge was to design a versatile but also warm and welcoming apartment; a kind of night shelter without a sterile or cold appearance. It had to be different, both in its design and in its ability to propose new forms of everyday life, since homeless people, after all, deserve good interior design as much as anyone else. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the research undertaken by Davis (2004) about designing housing for homeless persons in the United States. He argues that

the *design* of housing is as important in addressing the problem of homelessness as the overall programme and its strategy. That is, an attractive built environment preserves and promotes dignity, respect and inclusiveness (see also Pable, 2015, p.281; Petrovich *et al.*, 2017). At this point, it is important to note that the capability of social organisations to counter homelessness through high-quality interior designs is very difficult due to funding constraints (Johnsen *et al.*, 2005). It was therefore important for this project to involve building sector partners that would contribute technical knowledge and financial support from the earliest stages of the design process.

In short, the idea was to create a flat for homeless persons who do not adapt well to other types of housing due to their consolidated, high degree of social exclusion. A low demand apartment located in a central neighbourhood, able to accommodate about ten persons along with two volunteers who keep them company and ensure that nights in the flat would be as peaceful as possible. This sleeping area would be open from 9pm to early morning, but with unlimited length of stay.

## Combined Actions

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The research process consisted of a series of combined actions overlapping in time, during which phenomenological approaches or observations of the context were combined with listening and learning from Arrels' experience, and in which findings from this process were contrasted and compared.

Understanding the problem of homelessness from the perspective of Arrels was a key point. As this institution itself recognises, homeless people provide knowledge through their experience and critical viewpoint. Their team of volunteers therefore enables bonds to be made with highly vulnerable people, while professionals contribute technical skills to ensure continuity of process. Little by little, trustful relationships are created, and needs are identified. Arrels' approach, far from an attitude of philanthropy or even rehabilitation, emphasizes the value of empowerment (Waters, 1992), providing support and resources to facilitate a process of transition from the street to a home. However, the decision to stop living on the street is taken exclusively by homeless persons themselves, never for the satisfaction or peace of mind of Arrels staff. Arrels has multiple spaces of attention in the city – a drop in centre, a residence, shared flats and an occupational workshop – where the daily life of homeless persons participating in their programme takes place. These are places where the emotional situation of being homeless person is in synchronicity with the concerns of professionals and volunteers who respond to the real needs of the homeless people (Cloke *et al.*, 2010, pp.40-41, 91). This form of collaborative ethical praxis, as opposed to more one-sided relationships,

informed the Zero Flat project from the beginning. In fact, if the chronically homeless person didn't adapt to an existing living situation, it would be necessary to make sure that the project responded positively to the emotional and practical reality in which the fact of sleeping rough is circumscribed. That is, the key to their inclusion would be found where their exclusion developed.

As professionals related to the world of design and architecture, the design team was aware of contemporary debates about inhabitation, even contributing to them (Cid and Sala, 2012). The idea of private space has been omnipresent throughout the second half of the 20th century, with contributions made by authors as varied as de Certeau and Girard (1994, pp.205-210), Bachelard (1969) in *The Poetics of Space*, or Perec (1997) in *Species of Spaces*. In general terms, there is a point upon which everyone seems to agree: that inhabiting is not an issue of interiority versus exteriority as much as what kind of transition or what type of relationship the inhabitant establishes between interiority and exteriority. The way people inhabit the world unfolds in a continuous movement from one space to another. In other words, it happens on a journey through intimacy, privacy, the communal and the public. It is in this transition from one point to another where dwellers create their personal territory, an individual space built day by day, an environment in which things are arranged *comme il faut* thanks to the repetition of the same familiar actions. It is in this idea of the interior where the intimacy is built, something that is not related to property or possession but rather to shelter or refuge. As the Catalan philosopher Esquirol (2015, p.45) explains in his book about intimate resistance, this is the circumstance that allows the person to retreat and not be lost or dispersed.

But how does the "intimacy" of someone sleeping rough unfold? Those who have been deprived of the emotional, cultural and familiar aspects of a home lack an interior space where the essential, highly intimate bodily functions of sleeping, washing, having sex, urinating and defecating can be performed (Kohn, 2004, p.132). In the case of the homeless person it develops out of doors and in the open, yet it is invisible, which doesn't mean, however, that it doesn't follow specific codes. Codes are dispersed in everyday practices, and explains Lancione (2013, p.239, 240) in his essay about living on the streets, as evident as it sounds, homelessness is co-constituted with the urban fabric (see also Lancione, 2016, pp.157-158). For this reason, the work carried out by Barcelona artist Miquel Fuster was considered fundamental. Through a drawing that falls into a mesh of nervous lines that obscure everything, he reveals the codes of a dispossessed intimacy and unperceived topographies that constituted his everyday life when he was sleeping rough. Fuster was an active comic illustrator in the 1960s and 1970s who ended up on the streets for fifteen years until Arrels helped him move on, and recently he published a book about his life, illustrated with compelling drawings. In the story of his life as a homeless person, certain types of street furniture often come up at dusk, like a

bench, a streetlight or a drinking fountain; a misplaced experience that occurs in the open, continuous transitions of appropriating and re-appropriating public space. This image (Figure 5) is highly significant; in it, a group of people is seen gathered at night but apart, sharing the glow of streetlights in a square, an in-between zone. Thus, the intention of the project was to transform this memory of a permanent exterior –street benches and non-places such as ATMs, train stations or passageways– into a place for sleeping comfortably.



Figure 5: Miquel Fuster. Vignette from his book *15 años en la calle* (Chula Ink, 2016)

Parallel to this analysis of the codes of the homeless city, Barcelona's Espai Vincles was also examined. It is an organisation managed by the Daughters of Charity that temporarily accommodates homeless persons in an old ground floor commercial retail unit in the centre of the city. This community aims to establish bonds with people who live and sleep on the street, visiting them every night and accompanying them in their trajectory. This protected space, with rickety beds and worn Formica chairs, is offered as a complimentary place where homeless persons can simply get some rest. They begin to arrive at around eight o'clock in the evening, but before they can enter and choose their bed, they must queue up to chat with volunteers for a few minutes, sharing their experiences and establishing bonds while seated on those worn chairs. This welcome room of Espai Vincles becomes an area of mutual recognition; namely a recognition of the fragility of the other and –as Alba Rico (2016, p.18) expresses on the idea of greetings– a clear affirmation of our vulnerability. Inspired by this experience, as will be seen, the first design

action of Zero Flat was to design a warm, welcoming space for exchanging friendly greetings. A place where small gestures of daily coexistence, like a welcome greeting, become a kind of fulcrum to some extent.

In the above process of embracing the philosophy of Arrels, another important point became apparent; their aim isn't to integrate homeless people into the community because they already form a part of society (Julià, 2013). What they hope to achieve is for the rest of society to accept this fact; that they learn to live with this disturbing reality. Homeless persons must be able to change their outlook and realise that it is possible to make a fresh start, but those persons who have a home must also learn to look at the matter differently. If for homeless people the issue is "not being seen", for people with a key and an address the question is "how should they see or perceive them?". At that point, it became clear that it was important to place Zero Flat in a typical apartment block in a regular community of neighbours, in the centre and not in the marginal spaces of the city, normalising and making visible the invisible. Almost a decade ago, Bosch (2009) was arguing precisely in favour of urban planning as a more sensitive and inclusive praxis; one committed to fighting homelessness through inclusionary housing that, moreover, improves a city's social mix. Zero Flat is intentionally located in the city centre in an ordinary building of flats shared by an ordinary community of neighbours.

## **Programme**

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In this process of conceptualising a new type of housing, the design team realised that they needed to rethink their vocabulary and reconfigure the constituent verbs of the act of "zero inhabiting". From street to bed, Flat Zero was both an interior design project as well as an exercise in urban and landscape design. Conceived as a temporary support for helping homeless persons get back on their feet, and the first step in their climb back up the "stair of life", the apartment had to be able to provide the essential features of a house without losing the versatility of a public space. Essential and minimum, the flat had to be urban in character but also welcoming; a new concept toward which the municipally owned flat at Carme 84 had to be adapted. In the process of reflection and exploration, a programme for Zero Flat began to emerge; a programme that defined both the functional requirements of the flat as well as more qualitative considerations having to do with the idea of "zero inhabiting" and the definition of its spaces.

### ***Functional aspects***

Zero Flat had to contain a sleeping space for homeless persons and a separate sleeping room for volunteers. It had to be a place integrated with the neighbourhood. It needed to be acoustically insulated to avoid disturbing neighbours and, for



this reason, equipped with an odour absorption system. It had to be adapted for people with reduced mobility; as is well known, living homeless has a significant impact on health. Shopping trolleys and dogs would be permitted, and smoking and drinking alcohol permitted. Finally, it had to be built of resistant materials, obtaining the maximum possible spatial quality within a limited budget.

### ***Immaterial quality of space***

It had to be able to create the conditions favourable to spatial appropriation and generating the possibility of intimacy. The final result of this “street flat” should be able to mediate the transitions between exterior and interior.

### ***Spatial definition***

The apartment had to contain the following spaces: a welcome area called “Agora” equipped with a kitchenette (this space could also function as a bedroom), a versatile sleeping area for homeless people, a terrace connected to the sleeping area by an entranceway, a bedroom for two volunteers, storage space, and a bathroom accessible to those with disabilities (an exclusive toilet for volunteers was added later).

## **Manual of Transitions**

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At this point, in order to start the formalization of the project, the design team decided to draw up a manual of spatial transitions encountered during the journey from street to bed. A kind of user’s manual –loosely inspired by the poetical inventory of spaces Georges Perec describes in his book *Species of Spaces*– with a description of uses and possible habits of an inhabitant. More than designing a floor plan by drawing plans and sections, they preferred to begin working on the imaginary production of the spaces and the transitions or thresholds between them. In this prefiguring of this new flat’s different moments and possible occurrences, and through a fluent and cooperative process, each of the constituent elements of “zero dwelling” was sequentially established.

### ***Around 9pm – arrival***

A volunteer in an ample space, one that provides access to the apartment, welcomes a homeless person (Figures 6-8). Denominated Agora (Figures 1-2), it is an interior plaza equipped with a bench and a water fountain (sink), a place where people can sit down and catch up, a meeting place designed to encourage bonds between volunteers and users of the apartment. This space is equipped with a kitchenette where soup or coffee can be made. At night, it can also serve as an extra space to sleep.



Figures 6-8: Stills from a making-of video about Zero Flat

### ***Welcome pack***

In this entrance hall / plaza that is the Agora, the newcomer is provided with a welcome kit consisting of a mattress, a blanket and a portable lantern (Figure 9). This mattress (the white of the bed of Perec) is a critical component of Zero Flat. Designed as a flexible and functional piece that can be easily moved throughout the flat, this foldable and transportable mattress allows the inhabitant to choose between different places to sleep, thereby favouring the idea of appropriation. It is a beginning (welcome pack) and at the same time an end (intimate space) of Zero Flat, incorporating a headboard to enable retreat and optimize intimacy. The portable lantern (a rechargeable camping lamp) permits the inhabitant to move around the flat at night without switching on any lights.

### ***Around 11pm – bedtime***

The lights are turned off, and it's time to go to bed. The Agora incorporates a “topography” that extends throughout the sleeping area and reaches the terrace, creating a versatile “landscape” of surfaces upon which to place a mattress and sleep. Benches or tiers (Figure 9), constructed out of phenolic plywood, provide a continuous, flexible and functional structure throughout, enabling different configurations so that the inhabitant can choose a spot that looks comfortable. Phenolic plywood is coated with a dark brown, durable resin, ensuring that every furniture

piece is highly resistant to wear and tear as well as infection. But at the same time, good design is not renounced: wood is visible throughout to create a warm atmosphere, and is of high quality craftsmanship. This more domestic furniture, nobly aging over time, breaks with the idea of furniture that is clinical and uniform.

The bed, together with the headboard of the mattress and the Barcelona shutter (a traditional Barcelonese wooden roller shutter fixed to the exterior of windows and balconies) hanging from the ceiling favours the creation of a cosy nook inside the dwelling (Figure 9). The previously mentioned study by Burn (1992), about environmental control in homeless shelters, suggests that the sense of helplessness and passivity in night refuges increases proportionately with both the rigidity of the rules and the lack of privacy. Since privacy has significant implications upon identity, the project tried to encourage it through small but significant design decisions.

As already mentioned, an antechamber connects the sleeping area with the terrace. This is a covered passageway open to the exterior; an intermediate space that allows, for example, cigarettes to be smoked outdoors but under cover. Past this spacious doorstep lies the terrace, which has benches similar to those in the sleeping area, but made with paving stones. These benches enable sitting and even sleeping outdoors, but within the flat's domain. The terrace is also equipped with a drinking fountain for dogs.

During the night, volunteers have their own space, an easily recognisable traditional bedroom with two "normal" beds.

### ***7am – Wake up, and arrival of the cleaning team***

The arrival of the cleaning team marks the end of the journey of Zero Flat as a place to sleep, and allows the apartment to be used again that evening.

### ***9am – 8pm Multi-purpose meeting room***

At this point, while discussing the project with Arrels, it was decided to add a second diurnal use to the space, during the hours when Zero Flat is empty. By designing beds that can be turned into tables or seats (Figure 9), Zero Flat converts during the day into a classroom or a multi-purpose meeting room for training volunteers and for educational visits; an idea that enriches the Zero Flat concept (Figures 10-11).

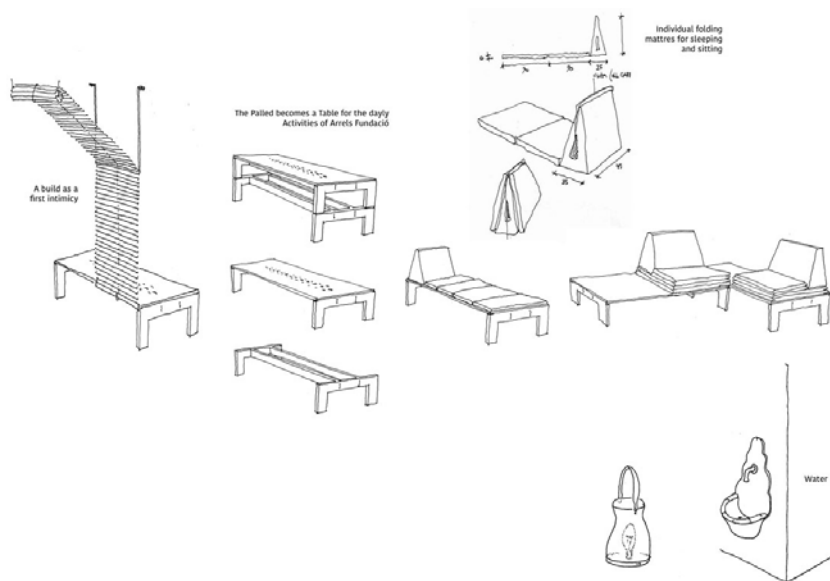
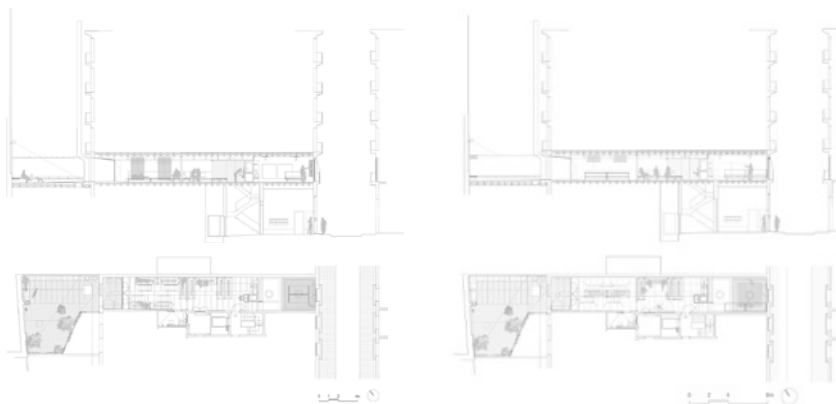


Figure 9: Zero Flat Tools – Barcelona blind, pallet and bench, bench or pallet turned into a table, folding mattress, portable lamp and drinking fountain



Figures 10-11: Nocturnal and diurnal uses of Zero Flat

## Resistant Materials, Domestic Interfaces

Early on, the story of Zero Flat began to be shared with the building industry, which brought essential knowledge and creativity to the project. For instance, Forbo provided a flooring system used in hospitals that withstands the daily wear and tear of a healthcare environment, but which also creates a relaxing atmosphere. Gabarró Woods provided phenolic plywood developed by WISA that is commonly used in the

transportation industry. To overcome odours inside Zero Flat, the engineering firm AIA designed an odour-absorbing ventilation system that consists of a long, tubular air duct such as those used in gyms, except here the ducting is made of fabric cloth and doubles as an innovative lighting system (Figures 1-3), a design made possible thanks to the collaboration of the lighting company Lamp. These design solutions express very well the philosophy of Zero Flat: highly sophisticated engineering systems using very resistant materials, but with warm, domestic finishes.

## Making Visible

When Zero Flat was still in its draft form, the project was selected to take part in an exhibition titled *Piso Piloto* (meaning “Demo-Home”) organised by the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB) and the Museo de Antioquía of Medellín. Rather than showing up with drawings, plans and sections, the design team preferred to explain the apartment’s manual of transitions along with an audio-visual animation (Figure 12), a short film describing Zero Flat in the context of its neighbourhood during a twenty-four hour period, for which the Cinema Studios of Catalonia contributed one of the largest studios in the country. The animated video, produced by Leve Projects, a studio of architects and filmmakers, was shot with volunteer actors from Arrels and Elisava over a full-scale floor plan of Zero Flat that was reproduced on the floor of the film studio. It shows the 24-hour life of Zero Flat within an architectural section of the building and street. Motion Graphics students from Elisava put the finishing touches on this video, a truly multidisciplinary audio-visual project.



Figure 12: Still from the audio-visual animation of the 24-hour life of Zero Flat (see credits) Available at: <https://vimeo.com/181916892> [accessed 20/11/2019]

## Final Reflections

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Zero Flat is a pilot project, an experimental model whose design process continues while the facility is in use. The idea of replication, which is to say opening more Zero Flats in other parts of the city, is viewed as a desirable possibility, in which case daytime uses would be determined by the necessities of a given area. If the proximity of the first Zero Flat to the offices of Arrels suggested a space for dissemination and education on the phenomenon of homelessness, in another context other uses would suggest themselves. The main idea is that diurnal uses of new Zero Flats be determined according to the specific needs that the local community might have (adult education facility, cooperative or musicians' practice spaces). Circumstances such as these favour encounters between the world of Arrels and that of a neighbourhood, perhaps even –why not? –encouraging neighbourhood members to participate in the management of a new Zero Flat. At the moment, Arrels is working to open a second apartment like this in Barcelona.

As has already been mentioned, after two years of operation, 74% of Zero Flat users improved their situation (January 2017 to January 2019). During this period, this housing resource accommodated seventy-seven people (sixty-seven men, ten women), four dogs and one cat. During this period, 51 per cent of them moved in a more stable home (individual, shared or assisted flat, rented room or nursing home); 17 per cent of them remained at Zero Flat; three per cent of them went to another night shelter like Espai Vincles.; four per cent of them returned with their families. On the other hand, nine per cent of them did not manage to be linked to Zero Flat and returned to street homelessness. Finally, 17 per cent of them were people forced to leave their home (no chronic homeless people), and Zero Flat acted as a temporary solution. This confirms two significant facts. Firstly, easing regulations of “zero living” enables homeless shelters to provide the inclusive intimacy of an apartment and a bed. Secondly, design matters when it comes to spaces for inhabitation with characteristics such as these. That is, in building a place that provides a welcoming and comfortable retreat that removes some of the stigma and of feeling like a homeless person.

It is in this regard, within the general context of the policy debate on providing support for the homeless people and access to social housing (Fernández Evanelista, 2015; Fernández Evangelista, 2016), that Zero Flat must be appreciated; a debate in which the Housing First model has captured attention and resources precisely because of its capacity to turn problems of homelessness around. But it is important to understand that many of the people who have been living in the street for years would simply never choose to live in a “normal” home even if they had access to one (Farrell, 2010). It would, therefore, be important to dedicate resources toward a reflection upon and action toward the idea of “zero living”.

Despite the permanent emergency in which the Arrels non-profit organisation lives, it has been able to introduce the variable of innovation and collaborative work as a tool to improve situations in which many existing models have not been successful, thereby improving the lives of the people who make up their community. At the same time, projects such as these have allowed to our students of Design and Architecture to experience a real learning situation, while companies have equally been able to show the importance of social variables in the contemporary economy. The construction industry has already largely adopted environmental sustainability within its business strategy; the next challenge is the full incorporation of social sustainability.

Complex challenges, as already mentioned, require the encouragement of prospective projects based on collaboration, which is to say a multiplicity of points of view. Some years ago, two of the authors of this article, Eva Serrats and Francesc Pla, organized a conference on cooperative architecture at the Catalan College of Architects (<http://www.arquitecturacooperativa.org>) [accessed 20/11/2019]; A project that highlighted the importance of sustainable and organic architectural solutions, with less restrictive standards and, therefore, more adapted to new urban needs. At the very least, as the French architects Lacaton and Vassal affirm, building codes should not impose a particular way of life (Kaminer, 2017, p.119). Amid all these discussions, Zero Flat demands that norms be less restrictive in order to attract users who do not adapt easily to existing housing resources. This housing proposal has led to reflect, from the perspective of the street, on the condition of interior space, a space capable of being possessed without being dominated.

Finally, just to mention that before the last local elections were held in Barcelona (May 2019), Arrels Fundació wrote an open letter to the candidates for mayor that included five proposals for the newly elected government. The letter was published nineteen days before the elections on the organisation's website. The second of the proposals was "Less shelters and more low-demand spaces".

"In Barcelona there are three shelters directly open to the homeless, but there's a waiting list of months to get in. On a second tier, there are also specialised centres for homeless people with other issues that can only be accessed by referral from the social services. The shelters are located in outlying areas of the city (to get from the heart of Barcelona, the person has to walk between an hour and an hour and a half) and are also costly: the overnight price for a place is about sixty to seventy euros. Here at Arrels we launched a low-demand space known as Zero Flats two years ago and we've seen that smaller, more flexible spaces located in more central areas of the city are a useful response.

What are we proposing? To open Zero Flats in each neighbourhood of Barcelona so that people sleeping on the street don't have to travel long distances and can safely find a place to spend the night, enter with all their belongings and spend the time they need there. Opening up Zero Flats is also a cheaper option than a place for one night, as they cost twenty euros. The proposal can be carried out in partnership between the local government (providing spaces) and social organisations (managing spaces)".

On June 14th of 2018, Zero Flat was awarded best design project of the year by the ADI Culture Awards, organised by a Spanish non-profit organisation ADI-FAD, the Industrial Design Association linked to FAD, Fostering Arts and Design).



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