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## HOUSED by CHOICE, HOUSED by FORCE - Homes, Conflicts and Conflicting Interests

January 21 – 22. 2016

Architecture\_MPS, University of Cyprus; Cyprus Institute

### Abstract / Initial Proposal Form:

**1. Paper / Proposal Title:** Occupied São Paulo. Insurgent Housing in Central Margins

**2. Format:** Written paper + verbal presentation + photo exhibition

*Written paper / verbal presentation / screening / short film / other – please specify*

**3. Author(s) Name:** Jeroen Stevens, Bruno De Meulder

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**5. University or Company Affiliation:** University of Leuven (Belgium)

### **6. Abstract (300 words):**

Since the 1980s, the central districts of São Paulo have tremendously lost population while peripheral urbanization kept expanding. The exodus of middle-class residents to peripheral gated communities, conjoined with the state-led deportation of urban poor to large peripheral social housing projects increasingly leaves the central city behind as a residual territory. The result is a striking spatial inversion: urbanized areas of the so-called formal city are increasingly eroding while peripheral expansion escalates. Paradoxically,

the centre still accumulates most of the urban services, and is well-equipped with urban infrastructure and job availabilities, while peripheral investments lack any of these.

This way, central São Paulo is successively balancing between urban degradation and urban innovation, marginality and centrality. More and more, the so-called 'formal' city is formalizing, the centre is peripheralizing, accumulating vacancy and abandonment. Since the 1997, the vast numbers of empty homes and buildings, contrasted with the city's housing deficit has mobilized urban social movements to re-occupy this available building fabric, claiming rights not only to the city, but to the centre of the city. These occupations resulted in various forms of collective dwelling in the vicinity of the centre, revitalizing informally and insurgently declining central urban neighbourhoods.

The main aim of this research project is to investigate how these 'insurgent' occupations in the central city have a spatial agency that could be understood as a kind of 'Insurgent Urban Reform' in its own terms. It therefore explores the architectural and urban impact of building occupations on the city, interrogating its performativity as a genuine form of radical yet inclusive urbanism. The project is funded by the Belgian Development Cooperation and developed in close collaboration with social movements, human rights associations and governmental institutions.

## **7. Author(s) Biography (200 words maximum for all authors):**

**Jeroen Stevens** is architect and urbanist. After concluding masters in Human Settlements and Urbanism and Strategic Planning he started a Phd. project that seeks to distillate new methods of urbanism to integrate informal social and cultural practices in formal urban planning mechanisms.

**Bruno De Meulder** studied engineering-architecture at the Department of Architecture, University of Leuven (Belgium), where he also obtained his doctoral degree, and where today he teaches urbanism its history, theory and practice. His teaching takes place through urban design studios that he also cherishes in research and practice. He co-edits UFO: Explorations of Urbanism (Zurich, Park Books) and publishes regularly on issues of urbanism in the postindustrial and postcolonial era. He is program director of postgraduate program in Human Settlements and Urbanism and Strategic Planning at the University of Leuven.

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