

Houseboat Communities as Floating Neighbourhoods for Degrowth

How Living Afloat is Reshaping the Urban Morphology of European Metropolises

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Abstract: Houseboating is an interesting model of housing for degrowth, that provides accommodation to thousands of people in Europe.

London, Paris and Berlin, are examples of the different development of this bottom-up phenomenon. All these cities are adapting themselves to the rising number of houseboats but they are struggling with the absence of dedicated infrastructures, the lack of attention to the needs of the boaters and the connections between the existing neighbourhoods and the new floating ones.

These 'liveboards' belong to different generations and lifestyles, but they mainly live in communities, tied together by a genuine sense of sharing and need of each other's experience. They have organised themselves into "associations" to make their life on water easier and to face local authorities in order to claim their rights, being stronger together.

This research enlightens the strength of these communities and how they are taking an active role in urban development. The aim of this work is to illustrate how this dwelling contributes to rediscover values such as the sense of belonging to a neighbourhood and the responsibility for waterways, bringing back waterfronts to its city.

1. Introduction

Houseboats are boats designed or adapted for the purpose of dwelling. Many of them remain static and are moored to a fixed location and often linked to land to provide utilities in order to be used as permanent homes. These kinds are more correctly called "floating houses". Others, instead, are autonomous units, capable of navigating and producing their own energy. Houseboating is a very popular recreational activity around the world involving people of all ages, culture and social backgrounds.

Modern houseboating had its main kick-start after World War II, when working-class families, who could not find affordable accommodation on land, decided to settle on board disused working boats. This original dwelling grew in popularity during the '60s and '70s with the city's counterculture and hippie movements. It is in those times that many houseboats started to be equipped with proper sanitation and luxury fixtures, becoming like regular houses, but afloat. However, it was only at the end of the past century that a significant number of Europeans started taking up residence on water. This phenomenon has continued to grow in recent years

and journalists started to talk about a “mini-boom”, mainly caused by the increasing housing costs and the technological advances that make life on board easier and more comfortable than ever before.

After extravagant artists, bohemian architects, retired couples and students trying to save money, many more people started to buy and restore boats instead of renting more expensive tiny studios in suburban areas. In fact, this trend looks very appealing for many Gen Xers and Millennials as a reaction to the real estate crisis in the most expensive European cities like London, Paris or Berlin. In fact, living afloat – even if still considered *naïf* – seems a reasonable way of investing in “floating estates” and, for many, the only possibility to own their house, reaching a sense of achievement and freedom from long-term loans and mortgages.

Nowadays, this phenomenon has become so popular that finding a berth in those “houseboat friendly” cities is getting more difficult, transforming the life afloat almost into a luxury. Canals and rivers are congested and the waiting list for a place in a marina seems endless. The waterfront of those cities is facing a constant change since the riverbanks become the connection between the existing urban areas and the new floating ones. Meanwhile, prefabricated houseboats spread in the market and gain big popularity on Airbnb, giving birth to new scenarios that now involve new actors not necessarily related to the world of boating, if not for a weekend.

More recent movements such as the “tiny houses”¹ and “degrowth”², surely played an important role in the diffusion of this bottom-up phenomenon, sharing their core values with the ones of many houseboaters.

2. Methodology

The aim of this paper is to present different approaches to deal with this bottom-up phenomenon that is shaping the waterfront of many cities, presenting houseboat communities in London, Paris and Berlin as case studies.

Academic literature about history and management of inland waterways is not enough to understand this complex phenomenon nowadays. Indeed, not only houseboating is relatively recent but also it is still growing and evolving. This is why the research methods are a combination of documentary sources – such as press articles, forums on dedicated websites, annual reports of the main agencies about inland navigation, statements collected after conferences, meetings and surveys made by the associations of houseboaters – as well as field observations and interviews. The results of this data collection are the main actors’ portraits and the definition of the current scenario, trying to give shape to a possible near future.

1. In 1997 the architect and designer Sarah Susanka, wrote the book “The Not So Big House”, that is considered a sort of manifesto of the ‘small houses movement’. The movement is based on the value of quality materials and reduced volumes with an essential design. In a few years this philosophy attracted more and more people. Jay Schafer is the co-founder of Tumbleweed Tiny House Company, the first company dedicated to Tiny Houses from the design to their construction. He claims that the key to living in a tiny home is smart design and attention to detail. Aesthetics aside, Schafer also believes that people can discover a sense of freedom in living with less, though at the base of the “less is more” lifestyle.

2. ‘Degrowth’, a type of ‘post-growth’, that is becoming a strong political, practical and cultural movement for down-scaling and transforming societies beyond capitalist growth and non-capitalist productivism to achieve global sustainability and satisfy everyone’s basic needs.

3. Analysis/Results

London, Paris and Berlin: are case studies about how this practice is taking place challenging the actual urban schemes and local authorities, showing how communities of houseboaters are working together to defend their rights and achieve a better life quality.

3.1. London

The UK has old traditions about inland waterways; in fact, during the Industrial Revolution many canals were built to allow commercial carrying narrowboats to navigate around the country. These systems of waterways counted rivers and artificial canals since the eighteenth century and it is with the arrival of the railways that many of the artificial navigations closed. However, even if this was a common destiny for many other countries, the UK has been one of the first to reinvest in the inland waterways for recreational use. Most of the navigable canal system survived thanks to the work of several charities³ that in the last fifty years have rediscovered inland navigation, mainly devoted to tourism and leisure activities.

The city of London has more than 100 miles of waterways, not counting the Thames River (other 42 miles). Communities of houseboaters in London have always existed but nowadays there is an unprecedented growth of canal goers. In fact, British canals are living a second golden age and they are more popular than ever.

London has the highest average property prices in the UK and with soaring rents, life on the water seems like a good compromise to many Londoners – if not the only possible alternative – to keep living in the city. According to the Canal & River Trust (CRT), which manages the canals of England and Wales, the boat numbers in London has increased by 57% between 2012 and 2018. “The Trust offers two types of licenses for boaters: permanent moorings [...], and ‘continuous cruiser’ licenses, which are around £1,000 a year, but require the boater to find a new location every 14 days – the latter have increased in number by 153% to 1,615 boats since 2012” (Monks, 2018).

Another article published in December 2017 was reporting that, according to the CRT data, “the number of boats in London rose from 2,326 in 2012 to 4,001 in 2017 – representing a 72% increase [...]. Of those, the number of boaters without home mooring more than doubled from 638 in 2012 to 1,880 in 2017” (Agbonlahor, 2017). To solve the problem, the CRT is working on new mooring rules and it is proposing higher fees. In fact, in 2018 the Trust has proposed to restrict some of London’s mooring spaces and start charging for others. Boaters are fighting against the authority managing Britain’s waterways since mooring fee increased of up to 89% between 2017 and 2018 and they feel being “priced off” their properties. Most of the people accuse the Trust to prefer leisure cruisers rather than permanent houseboaters, making impossible for them to stand the new fees, as a result of gentrification (Manzoni, 2018).

In June 2018, after months of consultations with boaters and other stakeholders, the CRT released a mooring strategy for London to deal with the increasing number of boats on canals

3. In UK there are several charities operating in different ways to preserve canals for pleasure boating, recreation, and industrial archaeology. First of all there was the British Waterways (BW), a statutory corporation owned by the government. It served as the navigation authority for the majority of canals and a number of rivers and docks. In 2012 all of British Waterways’ assets and responsibilities in England and Wales were transferred to the newly founded charity the Canal & River Trust (CRT). The CRT cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. In Scotland, British Waterways continues to operate as a standalone public corporation under the trading name Scottish Canals. Other charities are, for instance: the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) and Waterway Recovery Group (WRG). All of these organizations were born thank to passionate houseboaters that started working together restoring and then managing their parts of canals.

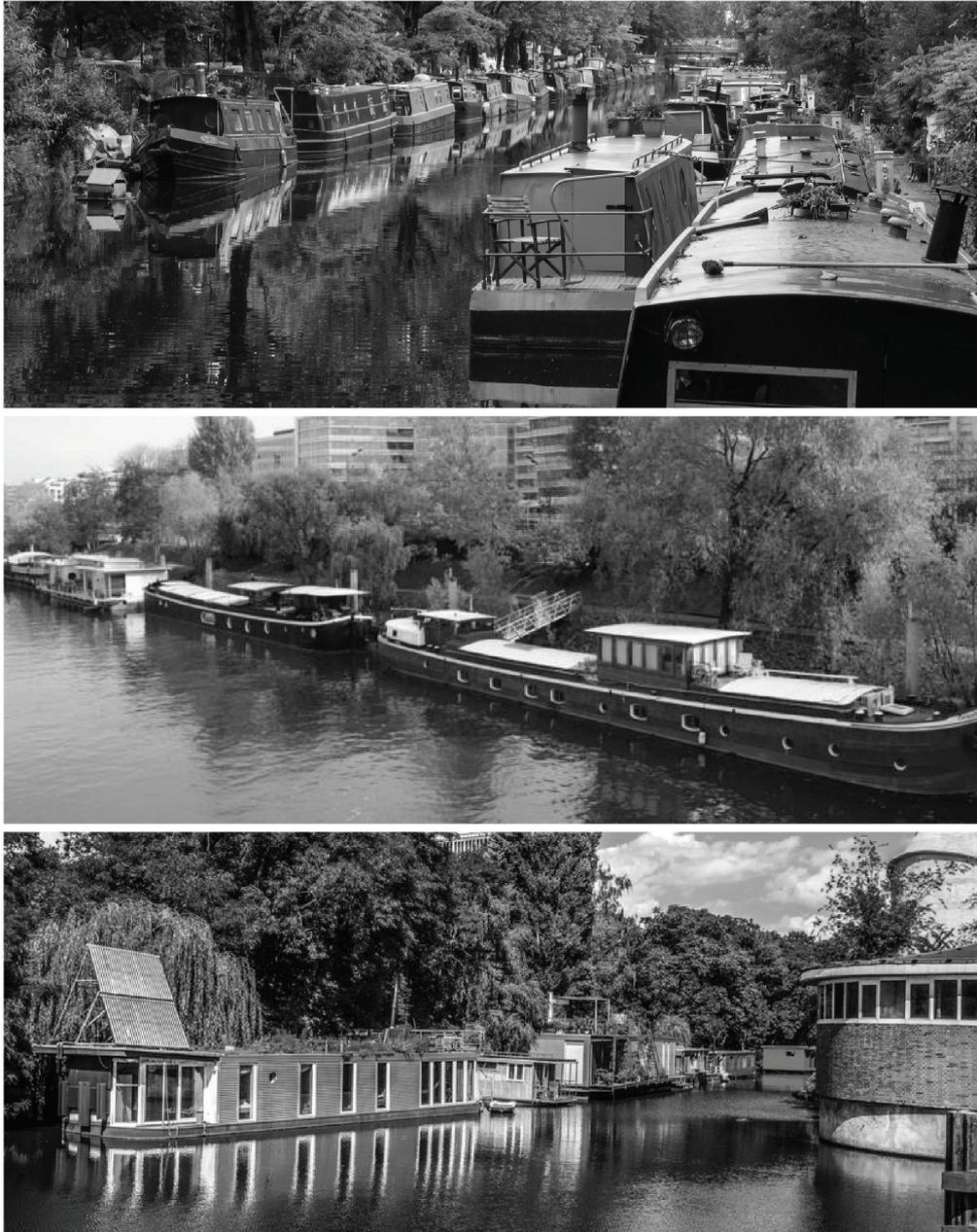


Figure 1. *Narrowboats in Little Venice (London), Péniches in Paris, floating houses in Berlin.*

and rivers. The London Mooring Strategy press release document says: “While a number of trials have been carried out and there have been some positive changes, it is clear that a plan of action that covers all aspects of London moorings, developed with waterway users, is necessary to make a significant difference”.

Matthew Symonds, CRT boating strategy and engagement manager, concludes: “London’s waterways are some of the busiest in the country and we need to manage the finite space effectively. We need to face the challenges head on, as well as taking advantage of the opportunity to develop a really world-class water space that people will be able to visit and enjoy. [...] We believe waterways have the power to make a real difference to people’s lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to

transform their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day”.

3.2. Paris

The River Seine was once an important commercial waterway, plied by cargo-carrying barges, the *péniches*. As it happened for narrowboats in the UK, when the inland waterways gave way to the railroads, barges declined in importance. Today, most of them have been converted into floating restaurants or river cruisers, while some others have been transformed into floating homes or BnB.

Parisians know the houseboating phenomenon since more than a hundred years, when some painters and writers like Robert Louis Stevenson⁴ decided to move on board. Not only artists preferred a *péniche* to a house on the land, but also important personalities of their time, like Marshal Joseph Joffre, who lived there during and after the Great War, setting up his office, which he even linked by a telephone line. These original characters inspired the wealthy and aristocratic population of Paris; most of them equipped their boats of all comforts. Almost all of these boats had a generator and running water, stored in tanks on the roof. Meanwhile, ashore, only a few people had this type of comfort at that time.

After World War II, it was the turn of the Americans who remained in Paris, including actor Sterling Hayden⁵, to settle on the banks of the Seine.

The generation of ‘68 was also tempted by the non-conformism of houseboats, the “*bateaux-logements*”. Architects discovered the possibility of exploiting the zenith light and creating an innovative interior design according to the spirit of the loft.

In 1975, Parisian barges created associations to defend river habitat in order to resist their expulsion, but it was only twenty years later that they obtained some recognition and status. The number of berths was regularized and new facilities favored the installation of residential and entertainment barges along the Seine.

In the ‘80s and ‘90s, French personalities belonging to the show business as well as diplomats and many others were seduced by the life on the water. The crisis of inland navigation and the soaring price of real estate had prompted many landowners to buy a commercial barge to be converted into a residential boat. This formula made it possible to have a large living space in the heart of Paris for a derisory price. Indeed, buying a barge in Paris can be more accessible than a traditional apartment, since the cost per square meter can be up to 40% lower than that of Parisian real estate. This is why this phenomenon still has not lost its charm and is expanding even more rapidly than before in Paris as in the rest of France. Nowadays the inhabitants of rivers and canals come from all walks of life. Between them reigns a cohesive atmosphere, where the experience of the elders is often useful to the novices of the community, increasing the dominant spirit of sharing.

According to the latest estimates made by *Voies Navigables de France* (VNF) and the *Port Autonome de Paris*, there are more than 1,150 houseboats only in Île-de-France. According to some associations of houseboat inhabitants, the number is more likely to be around 1,500. The majority of them are stationed in Paris and in the departments bordering the capital.

Over the past ten years, the green water of the river has become clearer and the banks clean-

4. Apparently the first draft of the *Treasure Island* – published in 1883 – was written aboard Stevenson’s Parisian barge, called *Les onze mille vierges*.

5. Sterling Walter Hayden (1916–1986) was an American actor. His most famous role probably was General Jack D. Ripper, in Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). Once back in the US, he joined the houseboats community of Sausalito in California.

er thanks to public policies for waterfront development and re-naturalization of the waterways. Shops, restaurants and sport centers are approaching the now rediscovered riverbanks and the inhabitants of the river, while appreciating these new features, fear to be deprived of their environment. Since the mooring places are rented and cannot be bought, boaters are starting to add value to the décor, becoming part of the attractions offered by the waterfront and so indispensable in the cityscape.

As in Amsterdam or London, owning a boat in the age of sharing economy can represent a good investment by simply renting a guest-room or the whole boat episodically or regularly on Airbnb. Some boat dwellers are starting to develop different operations to justify their presence surfing on the wave of unusual places to be rented for private parties or special events.

Houseboats are anchored in little ports all over Paris, but there is a long waiting list for an available spot allocated by the VNF, *Ports de Paris* or the *Mairie de Paris*, that together are operating in the city. However, because of the increasing number of boaters, the authorities are delimitating the areas dedicated to the houseboats. There are more than 30 “ports” and they take their names from a nearby street or the closest monument. Most of them are on the Seine and can be few hundred meters to few kilometers long. Apart from the famous *Port des Champs-Élysées* with a nice view of the Tour Eiffel, other residential ports have been designed for long-term as well as short-stay moorings along Parisian canals, protected by locks. Located at the foot of the Place de la Bastille, *Port de l’Arsenal* welcomes more than 170 boats all year round⁶ since the ‘80s, when it was converted in a marina after its past as a commercial port. Much smaller than the Arsenal port, *Port de la Villette (Halte Nautique de La Villette)* is located in the north of Paris.

3.3. Berlin

Berlin is the most fascinating and contradictory case study. Berliners have always been known for living in uncommon places: while rents are constantly rising, more and more people have avoided conventional houses, but even the unusual life models adopted so far, such as squats, living in Bauwagen (van or construction wagons), houseboats, tiny houses and even Tipi tents are now under pressure.

Berlin has rivers, canals and lakes that together make up around 6.5% of the city’s surface that is equivalent to about 60 km² – not even Amsterdam is so rich in water (52 km²). Despite this huge surface available, there are only a few communities of boaters and none of the city authorities that manage permits for boat moorings can estimate the real number of houseboats. In 2011, only 25 berths were registered with the Berlin Water and Shipping Authority (WSA) but there were about twice as many unregistered houseboats in the city. According to the WSA, nowadays this number is around 60 boats. About ten boats have been docked – some for decades – in the flood canal of the Tiergarten lock, in the affluent residential area of Charlottenburg. According to many, this is the oldest houseboat community in Berlin. Its water residents have recently developed a taste for modern luxurious prefabricated houseboats; protective fences and intricate pathways and hedges have appeared and they have started to pay significantly higher mooring rents. Another dozen are moored in the Plötzenseer Kolk near Spandau. The formerly fourth Berlin residential floating colony at Treptower Park disappeared completely after about twenty years of permanence when the owner of the area revoked the permissions to the boaters. Only five boats have found a way to join the other existing colonies.

6. It is curious to note that in this port to live on board permanently is technically forbidden, but an unspoken deal with the port authorities guarantees to the residents that this rule is not enforced.

A few new berths were set up in Niederschöneweide for some of the Treptower Park movers, while part of this former colony probably joined those who, according to WSA, are moored in that unknown number of other city's banks.

In Berlin there are no designated berths for residential houseboats, owners have to make suggestions to the authorities themselves and be prepared for a long march through institutions and sub-institutions, because unlike in London or Paris, there is no central "houseboat commissioner". Spots directly adjacent to the water are often designated as purely commercial areas in which residential homes are not permitted. Other hurdles are boat traffic, tidal range or nature conservation issues. For all of these reasons the berth must be approved by the respective district, which examines demands and, in individual cases, must also give its consent as the owner of the riverside property. The licensing procedure for houseboat moorings is still new territory for the authorities, so the issue is often handled carefully and with great restraint. Because of the complexity of the procedure, the WSA in the first place recommended consulting an expert with experience in the relevant administrative law when searching for a location and applying for a berth. Despite many enquiries from interested parties, this immense demand does not change the insufficient supply. Apparently, the easiest way to get a houseboat in Berlin is to wait for another owner to sell their boat with its approved berth. However, in order to be allowed to moor in marinas, most of the houseboats are officially licensed as recreational boats – and not as first permanent residents.

Living permanently afloat in Berlin is still something for a few enthusiasts, and authorities do not seem to work in favor of the fast development of houseboating. However, this attitude does not reflect the interests of the flourishing business of pontoon houses and floating homes that is taking place in the whole Germany, with Berlin playing a key role in it. In fact, the annual expo "*Boots und Fun*" in Berlin is more and more focused on the market of houseboats, with brand new shipyards presenting their houseboat projects every year. It was the first nautical expositions with a whole pavilion dedicated to the world of houseboating in the whole Europe.

According to the several platforms of houseboat renters, Berlin has a lot to offer in terms of attractions, with its kilometers of navigable waterways and its marinas surrounded by nature only a few minutes away from the city center. A couple of examples are the Rummelsburg City-marina in eastern Berlin or the most recent "Humboldt Island" on the banks of Lake Tegel, that offers floating homes as part of an exclusive lakeside new suburb.

With the exceptions of *péniches* and Dutch barges, which have a habitable surface around 100 m², most of the houseboats – with narrowboats⁷ as the best example – are considered as floating tiny houses. On the other hand, if tiny houses undoubtedly represent a housing solution for degrowth, houseboating deserves to be taken into account as an interesting model for even more reasons.

"Degrowth (*'dècroissance'* in French) was launched in the beginning of the 21st century as a project of voluntary societal shrinking of production and consumption aimed at social and ecological sustainability" (Demaria *et al.*, 2013).

Living afloat on converted old working boats, abandoning the mainstream housing narratives (Nelson, 2018), enriches the cityscape with colourful inhabiting waterfronts. First of all, houseboating gives a second life to non-recyclable big and complex objects, as boats are. Even when boats are no longer available for cruising, their hulls can be used as "floating" basements

7. British narrowboats were never wider than 2.13 m (7 ft) while their maximum length is 21.95 m (72 ft). Anything wider or longer will be unable to navigate most of the British canal network (to access the entire network the maximum length is 17.37 m – 57 ft).



Figure 2. A 'Scharck' built on the hull of an old Dutch barge, Amsterdam.

for new arks or better “scharcks”⁸, avoiding the economic and environmental costs of divestment and the ones related to the construction of a new square hull in concrete. This specific kind of arks is often turning out into very original and beautiful exemplars.

Most of the time, the boats that are now converted into houseboats are part of a local historical heritage that needs to be protected and preserved, keeping both the boats and the waterways alive. The last original narrowboats belong to the Industrial History of Great Britain and, on the contrary of most of yachts, their value may increase with the years, representing a true investment for their lucky owners.

Next to restored working boats and their replicas, prefabricated houseboats spread in the European market, giving birth to new scenarios that now involve new actors not necessarily enthusiasts of historic boats. Indeed, new pre-fab pontoon boats are representing a sustainable option, by requiring less work and construction materials of any similar-size building on the land. Fully equipped with the last “green” technologies such as hybrid or fully electrical engines, solar panels and so on, these new floating houses are often following those values of the ‘Tiny House Movement’, such as living with less according to the “less is more” philosophy and leaving a low impact in terms of consumes and pollution.

London based architect Carl Turner has developed the design for a prefabricated floating living-unit leaving the plans available to download via the open-source architecture platform, Paper Houses. Described as “Part-house and part-boat”, it was thought as a solution to the global prob-

8. Arks are floating houses rather than houseboats since the ‘hull’ on which they are constructed is often not motorised and the superstructure resembles houses on the land. This kind of craft is typical of the Netherlands. However, some arks are simply hulls of old ships used as empty shells. These kind of arks are friendly called ‘scharck’(‘ship’ + ‘ark’) as explained on by the Houseboat Museum of Amsterdam.

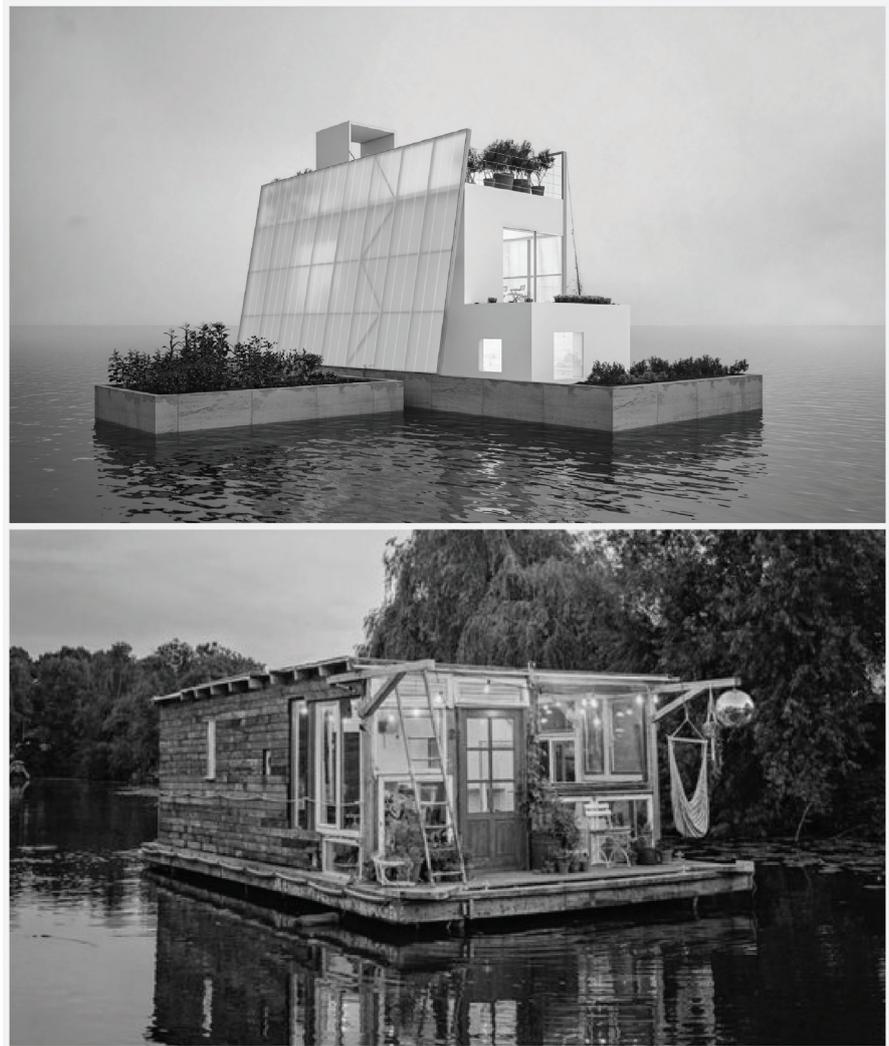


Figure 3. *Floating House* prototype, Carl Turner, *DIY houseboat* example by Claudius Schulze.

lem of flooding and thus it was designed to deal with any flood-prone site. The design comprises a simple lightweight structure, which could be constructed on traditional pile foundations but could also be built over a concrete hull that would allow it to float. According to Turner's philosophy, anyone can access the project, being able to build his own DIY floating house.

A similar concept is at the base of tiny house movement, where designers offer the possibility to buy only the project, leaving the construction to the DIY fans. Shanty houses, the American floating houses, are quite often DIY experiments and there are several websites offering projects, tutorials and advice. Of course, this sharing behaviour helped to create communities of passionate people with the same values and ideas about these alternatives housing possibilities. Down-sizing the houses' volumes and taking care of the construction in terms of quality and quantity of materials and workmanship, makes this kind of dwelling more sustainable from different points of views and so perfectly compatible with the Degrowth ideals.

4. Discussion/Conclusion

The fact that living on board is still an emerging trend is shown by a new urbanization wave of European waterways and the following gentrification of their waterfronts. Nowadays, houseboats are a permanent presence in many neighbourhoods in London, Paris and Berlin, as well as

many other cities in Europe and they surely represent a new flourishing business characterised by several potentialities. All these cities are adapting themselves to the rising number of 'live-aboards', people simply looking for more sustainable and closer to the nature ways of settling, without leaving the city-life. Despite these houseboaters belong to different generations and lifestyles, they often create local communities tied together by a genuine sense of sharing and need of each other's experience in order to deal with the daily maintenance and reparation works on board and with the authorities on land.

Houseboating is a bottom-up phenomenon, but even if the first settlers were mainly spontaneous users, with the rising number of boaters a change in the European metropolises started to take place, including important top-down actions. New services and facilities arrived on the waterfronts, simplifying life for boaters.

Houseboats are a cultural enrichment not only in terms of living examples of a nautical tradition. In fact, many little communities of enthusiasts helped their own suburbs to gain popularity, as tourist attractions, inviting the curious to witness this charming lifestyle. After an initial reluctance, "landowners" had to admit that the presence of houseboats is actually making certain areas safer and more enjoyable, assuring from both sides a re-appropriation of the waterfront, with an improvement in terms of quality of life for the whole neighbourhood.

It must be remembered that the firsts to move onboard were very passionate people, with a strong desire to protect their waterways and preserve the right and the ability to navigate them. Doing so, these urban pioneers were contributing to safeguarding canals and riversides, improving their accessibility for all. Nowadays those who decide to live afloat are more often pushed by the idea of owning an alternative dwelling, possibly leaving a low impact on the planet, rather than being simply attracted by life on water. Since its rebirth, during the reconstruction after World War II, houseboating was not only a simple glamour phenomenon, but it represented a more complex settling choice defined by several factors.

"Some actors working on the development of alternatives argue that the change of individual values and behaviour should be the main target of degrowth. This is manifest in the lifestyles of people who practice voluntary simplicity, living better with less, downshifting and slowing down life's pace" (Demaria *et al.*, 2013). According to this statement, many houseboaters -often unaware- are the authors of a positive change, a virtuous example able to make the difference in cities like Amsterdam, which nowadays makes part of her fortune on houseboating. On the same article, it is explained how a "degrowth approach" works once a 'diagnosis' is made. "The diagnosis consists of identifying the causes of a social problem. Degrowth as an interpretative frame diagnoses that disparate social phenomena such as the social and environmental crises are related to economic growth. Degrowth actors are thus 'signifying agents' engaged in the production of alternative and contentious meanings which differ from the ones defended by the mainstream (i.e. mass media, most politicians, economics professors and financial experts and industry CEOs)" (Ivi).

Living afloat is a kind of dwelling that cannot be ignored as an insignificant market niche anymore. While designing the cities of tomorrow it is now impossible not to wonder about the needs of this kind of settlers, representing a new challenge for architects, designers and urbanists. According to a report on the urban planning potential of living on water, the BBC recently interviewed Koen Olthuis, the founder of Waterstudio, an architecture firm specialized on floating homes, and co-author of the book *Float! Building on Water to Combat Urban Congestion and Climate Change*. "For some time now, Olthuis explained, he has observed that the original defensive attitude of city authorities has turned into support. "They're [houseboats] becoming more interesting to municipalities, because they're treating



Figure 4. *The Chichester on Chichester Canal in southern England, Baca Architects, 2016.*

them as real estate, which generates property taxes”. Olthuis envisions a buoyant future for water living as urban congestion increases and climate change brings on stronger rains and more flooding. [...] In addition, Olthuis contends [...]: “Cities will need to brand themselves and make themselves more interesting, and water living will be just the thing to attract young, high-net-worth individuals... and floating communities will only increase the functionality and flexibility of cities” (Wysocky, 2016).

Experts say that by 2020 at least 60,000 new dwellings will have to be built in Berlin, and they doubt whether the massive demand for new buildings can be met at this rate. Moreover, in the 2018 Revision of World Population Prospects, the UN reports that 54% of the world’s population lives in urban areas – and that figure is expected to increase to 66% by 2050, so it is clear that many metropolises are meant to acquire new citizens. Considering that in the city of Amsterdam there are about 5000 people living on board their 2500 houseboats, and more than 8000, in London, the need of living space can be solved – even if only partially – colonising waterways. In a city with limited space, residential boats can satisfy the “right to the city” (Nelson, 2018) of new inhabitants offering, at the same time, a good opportunity to create exclusive domiciles, playing a key role in medium-term urban development planning.

In 2015 London-based Baca Architects has developed a floating prototype with British company Floating Homes, for a housing competition to seek solutions to London’s housing crisis hosted by think-tank New London Architecture (NLA). According to some interviews, the prototype, named ‘the Chichester’ had been inspired by the design of canal boats and houseboaters lifestyle. Moreover, Baca Architects has developed a number of concepts that aim to move growing urban populations into floating communities. These concepts follow the recent surge of interest in floating buildings, which respond not only to the rising sea levels but also to the lack of housing solutions on overcrowded cities. This boxy floating house, characterized by a replicable design, was installed on Chichester Canal (southern England) in 2016 as a demonstra-

tion of how it could be widely exploited across London's waterways. The project aims to install prefabricated floating housing on disused space along rivers and canals in London. According to the Baca Architects press release, the scheme could deliver up to 7,500 affordable homes – at £150,000 for a two-bed unit – in the city center.

As a consequence of the development of inland waterways navigation systems promoted by the European Community and the spread of the so-called tourism “fluvestre”⁹, houseboating – not only as a fancy form of slow-tourism – will keep on rising its popularity in the name of the “Little Venice”¹⁰ dream... and it will play a key role on the future urban design of European waterfronts.

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9. It is a form of integrated tourism, sharing the same values of slow tourism. The term “fluvestre” is a French neologism made by the words *fluvial* (riverine/fluvial) and *terrestre* (land based).

10. Little Venice, Westminster, is a neighbourhood of London, nowadays famous because of houseboats presence.