

We All Need a Home

How to raise awareness of homelessness

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Abstract

According to a flash report estimate, 15,000 people are homeless in Hungary.

To raise awareness of this serious social problem and change this situation at the local level, as a member of the Research Group for Solidarity in Architecture, I established the WE ALL NEED A HOME project in 2016, on the third of February, the coldest day of the year. Continuing the tradition, this year the Group organized another WE ALL NEED A HOME event, a two-day workshop with university students. The task was to design a temporary installation of aluminum beverage cans in the public space that could address the issue of homelessness by confronting city dwellers with the issue.

The public bench, a symbol of homelessness, appeared in the winning concept. The starting point

was a bench built around a living tree in the city's main square. Reminiscent of an unfinished house, the construction provided a seating area for dialogue between the homeless and the city dwellers, the fallen and those providing help.

Students who participated in this year's workshop provide a good example that solving serious social problems is only possible with open eyes, open hearts, and empathy for our fellow human beings. Although the third of February is the coldest day of the year, and thus one of the most difficult times for homeless people, programs like this offer hope that future generations will be more sensitive and receptive to social issues.

The project was successfully presented in Chicago at CAB 2019.

WE ALL NEED A HOME

and accordingly we all live somewhere, under some circumstances. In a big city, on a farm, in a village, alone, with a friend, with a girlfriend, with a family, in a community, in a housing estate, in a family house or maybe in a hut made of shipping pallets. However, having a lid over our head does not necessarily mean that we have a home. But home is one of the most important things in our lives. It is good to go back to where they are waiting for us, to where we have memories, where we love, where we can hide, where we can invite guests, where we feel safe, where we can live with dignity.

A night shelter will never be able to fulfill this role. The thousands of our companions in Hungary who may not have this feeling deserve to be listened to by us, the lucky ones who have homes, and we, architects who create homes. According to a recently published flash report, at least 2,300 people sleep without a roof over their head in the country. This, together with the traffic figures for hotels, suggested that at the beginning of 2019, about 15,000 people might have been homeless. These people were mostly in big cities.

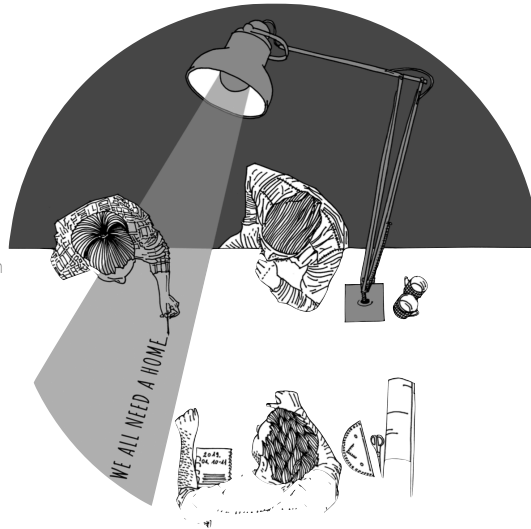


Figure 1. Homelessness in Hungary.

According to the Tamasz Foundation, approximately 1,400 homeless people are registered in Pécs, a city in the south of Hungary. At the local level, the Research Group for Solidarity in Architecture, founded in 2016, organizes annual awareness-raising events on the third of February, the coldest day of the year, to raise awareness of this serious social problem. Continuing the tradition, in 2019 the University of Pécs Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, the College of Architecture, the b2 Interdisciplinary Special Interest Group and The City Is For All, Pécs group organized the WE ALL NEED A HOME event, which was a two-day workshop with university students. The participants' task was to design an installation of aluminum beverage cans in the public space that could address the issue of homelessness by addressing city dwellers. During the two-day program, students were given lectures on domestic and international research on the topic, and with the help of homeless activists, they had a close-up insight into the everyday struggles of homeless people. Twenty-three students looked for the best solution in four groups. Faculty instructors, students at the Marcell Breuer Doctoral School and volunteers helped with the design process. An important consideration in the evaluation was the message conveyed by the proposed work, its feasibility, its economy and the minimal environmental load. For the winning team, among the issues affecting the homeless, exclusion, isolation, exclusion and lack of integration were the most important ideas that shaped the design concept. Around these, they organized an installation called "WITHOUT A ROOF", which was jointly built by the organizers, participants and helpers on the main square of Pécs.

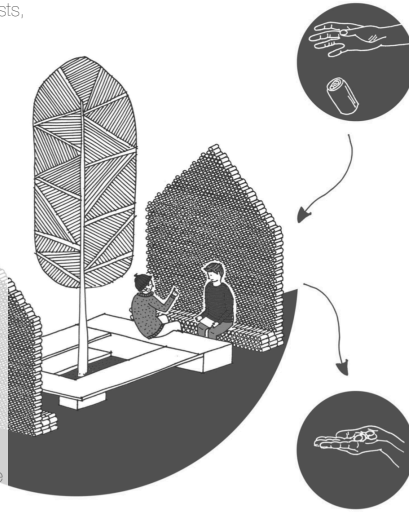


Figure 2. The task of the workshop.



The public bench, as a symbol of homelessness, appeared in the winner's concept, making their creation the starting point for a bench built around a living tree in the city's main square, Széchenyi square. The construction around it depicting an unfinished house symbolizes the want for a home. If this house is unfinished, it can mean homelessness, vulnerability or even the possibility of building or continuing a house. The tree at the center symbolizes the indeterminacy of being both outside and inside, the path of life and the possibility of breaking out. Széchenyi square, with its benches and everyday social relationships represent inclusion. However, homeless people are excluded. The installation changed this situation for at least one day. The artwork built around one of the benches further enhanced the original function of the bench. Reminiscent of an unfinished house, the construction is made of aluminum boxes and provides a seating area for dialogue between the homeless and the city dwellers, the fallen and those providing help. Beyond raising awareness and generating social dialogue, the goal was to help the homeless in a tangible way. About four thousand recyclable aluminum cans and all the recyclable building materials that could be taken away at the end of the day were donated. In addition, three hundred and fifty copies of the event leaflet were produced, and we also offered the distribution and the proceeds from it. Students who participated in this year's WE ALL NEED A HOME workshop provide a good example that solving serious social problems such as homelessness is only possible with open eyes, open hearts, and empathy for our fellow human beings. Although the third of February is the coldest days of the year, and thus one of the most difficult times for homeless people, programs like this offer hope that future generations will be more sensitive and receptive to social issues. We would like to repeat the series of programs that started in 2016 year after year, and we hope that we can reach an ever wider community through joint thinking and creation.

The installation was designed by
 Ágnes Engel, Evelin Szűcs, Katinka Gábris, Patrícia Tisóczki, Réka Guzványi, Valentina Ördög

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Figure 3. The winner project in 2019.