Special Issue Distances

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory, Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Anna Maria Zaccaria
Maria Camilla Fraudatario

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Editorial manager: Carmine Urciuoli

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Gabriele Qualizza, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia

Summary

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FUORI LUOGO INTERVIEW

Struggles for the Right to Housing between Physical and Social Distances. Interview with Miguel A. Martínez[1]

Miguel A. Martínez is Professor of Housing and Urban Sociology at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF), Uppsala University (Sweden) https://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/. During his academic career, he has held teaching positions at several universities in Spain, Portugal, and Hong Kong. In addition, Martínez has worked in the Housing Department of the Municipality of Vigo and as a consultant on various urban plans in Spain.

His research focuses on the analysis of urban movements and activism, with a special interest in participatory processes in urban planning. His study topics include housing policies, socio-spatial segregation, public space use, urban commons, sustainable mobility, labour and social structures, local governance, and gentrification. Being also interested in migration and globalization, since 2011 Miguel Martínez has broadened his critical gaze by going on to study anti-neoliberal, pro-democracy and pro-common goods movements as well, such as the Indignados in Spain or the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Methodologically, his approach is predominantly qualitative and developed from his early interest in Participatory-Action-Research methods and processes. His studies have been conducted in different urban settings, such as Porto, Vigo, Madrid and Hong Kong, where he spent long research periods. He also spent shorter periods of research in Medellin, Chicago, Beijing, Berlin, Amsterdam, Buenos Aires, Belo Horizonte, etc. Participating firsthand in various social movements that were developing in these cities, Martínez focused his studies on this issue.

As Martínez himself points out in one of his latest works, there are not many comprehensive critical analyses of the various research conducted on squatters' movements in Europe. The author proposes one in the volume *Squatters in the capitalist city. Housing, Justice and Urban Politics* (2020), highlighting the opportunity to study the historical trajectories of the various housing movements in order to guide progressive policy perspectives. In general, the theme of housing is necessarily linked to issues of justice and social inclusion, which Martínez refers to the sphere of urban politics. But his attention to the spatial dimensions of social movements is focal in all his work. In the volume just cited, he compares different movements in different cities and contexts, framing squatting not as an illegal and marginal practice, but as a long-lasting transnational urban movement with important political and social implications. In this way, he highlights the distance that often exists between urban policies and the right to housing.

In the volume *Resisting Citizenship. Migrant Housing Squats Against State Enclosures* (2021), Martínez addresses the study of migrant squats, noting how they are incorporated into the broader framework of movements engaged in anti-racist, anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics. These coalesce with migrants' squats to share spaces for claiming civil rights, thus narrowing the distance "between hosts and guests" and building networks of solidarity on which processes of social inclusion are structured.

The most usual form of protest for squatters is the unauthorised occupation of buildings and land, which according to Martínez represents a well-established repertoire of protest. It is the main socio-spatial practice (condensing means and ends of protest) used by European squatting movements over the last forty years.

The concept of the 'right to the city' generally underlies Martínez's analytical reflection (Lefebvre, 1968). However, it must be said that with respect to this concept, Martínez himself takes a critical position (*European squatters' movements and the right to the city, in Routledge Handbook of Contemporary European Social Movements*, 2020). Indeed, according to the author, the concept can help to understand squatting movements insofar as activists take over urban spaces; they are

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Foto: www.miguelangelmartinez.net

centrally located and connected to urban structures and networks; they practice self-management, direct democracy and the empowerment of the marginalised. However, it neglects other sources of oppression and social division such as gender, ethnicity, citizenship and housing status, which can generate other equally significant movements. As Martínez states, the right-to-city approach is valid, but fails to capture modern complexities; therefore, comparative case studies are needed to better understand urban activism. And this is the main avenue of research he follows.

***QUESTION**: Distances have long been a focus of public, political, and scientific debate.*
During the long COVID period, physical distancing as a preventive measure inspired pandemic governance strategies. In the post-pandemic phase, the logic of distancing has been incorporated into the practices and discourses of associated life; it has helped define new forms of cooperation and labor organization. However, it has also activated social, political, and scientific contrasts. Increasingly, therefore, the concept of distance eludes an unambiguous definition; conversely, it lends itself to multiple declinations in the various scientific and political domains.
With respect to your research interests, what do you think is the source of this difficulty in converging on a shared definition?

ANSWER: In urban sociology we like to distinguish spatial and social distances, only to combine them afterwards. To complicate our analyses, we assume that distances across physical spaces are socially relative, depending on the available material means of transport and technologies of communications, their efficiency, affordability, regulation, etc. but also on more straightforward social constraints such as their individualised or collective character, the meaning we assign to them, the social forces that push or restrict us to move, etc. Distance, therefore, is just one of the multiple spatial features (as locations, volumes, geographical scales, etc.) that are socially produced, shaped, transformed, appropriated, communicated, represented, planned, regulated, contested, etc. Moreover, we should not investigate distance independently from other closely related socio-spatial phenomena such as physical mobility, commuting flows, migrations, and the transportation of goods, people, and information. And we should know the different spatial and social scales that are concerned with the specific phenomenon of distances under examination. For example, residential mobility within a city may substantially differ from residential mobility within a metropolitan area, a country, or across national borders. What do the authorities rule about all those different moves? What labour conditions and political regimes press people to move? How do different social groups and networks help each other to mobilise resources and information able to facilitate such moves? Who moves, why, and with what consequences at each pole of the move, or during their trajectory? These are some of the core questions that, in my view, should ground empirical inquiries about the notion of socio-spatial distance.
The most obvious illustration of this approach is offered by the deadly migrant moves across the Mediterranean sea. Most migrants and war refugees pay more for these trips with a high likelihood of dying, than the cost of a regular flight. They only do so because European authorities do not issue travel visas for non-wealthy citizens from the countries of origin of those migrants. In addition, the European Union invests large amounts of money to patrol the costs (e.g. Frontex) and pay third countries with no democratic rule of law (Libia, Tunis, Morocco, etc.) to prevent migrants from arriving European territory and return to conditions of slavery and torture. It is not the available technology and means of transport what is crucially at stake to understand these itineraries in order to bridge a certain physical distance, but the criminal European policies that foster human rights violations and the endless death of thousands of people every year in this and other routes of migration (see, for example, the reports and statements published by Alarm Pohone: https://alarmphone.org).
The Covid-19 pandemic was an additional extraordinary period calling to explore socio-spatial issues. Since my current research is very much focused on grassroots housing and anti-home evictions struggles (see, for example: http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco/article/

view/26872), I observed many social problems and contradictions associated to the public policies dealing with the pandemic. These three ones were especially striking: 1) In many countries staying at home was compulsory, even for the homeless, despite the lack of available shelters; 2) Leaving home was only allowed, and even forcibly requested, to so-called essential workers, usually those with the lowest income; 3) Working from home became normalised in many professions, especially in service and managerial positions. The restrictions to physical mobility and face-to-face, real life social contacts were entirely new for millions of human beings who were not prior subject to this kind of infectious diseases (e.g. the SARS outbreak in Southern East Asia in 2003, the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2013-16, etc.). Policies changed very much from month to month, but also from country to country, mostly hinging on the scientific data and remedies suggested by experts.

However, many people lost their jobs and their income, which eroded their rights to secure and affordable housing, in case they already had a home to dwell in. Home evictions due to mortgage or rent arrears were still rolling out in countries such Spain, despite certain policies to mitigate or postpone the implementation of court ordeals. Internet and phone communications kept some social ties alive without the need of moves to meet up, at least at a superficial level, but mental disorders, isolation, pain, frustration, and health issues in general also increased dramatically all over. The elderly were especially hit, subject to poor—or the denial of—assistance, as extremely shown in the case of the Madrid region with more than 7,000 casualties in elderly homes, which represented a 20% higher figure than in the rest of Spain because the regional government refused to provide transportation to hospitals (https://doi.org/10.3390/epidemiologia4020019; see a similar approach to the elderly with a seemingly deadly outcome in Sweden: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-022-01097-5#change-history). Working class and poor families had no resources (laptop, Internet connection, studying space, etc.) or cultural capacity to help their children with school work from home. Furthermore, the right to protest in public spaces often became prohibited, although grassroots organisations, for example, managed to set up free food deliveries and other forms of mutual aid in deprived neighbourhoods (https://www.interfacejournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Martinez.pdf).

These scattered phenomena may illuminate the interconnected configurations of socio-spatial distance. On the one hand, there is no absolute distance (or space, for the matter) because its definition depends, above all, on the unequal distribution of resources, information, and social capital among different social groups and classes. On the other hand, we can accept or question physical distance, stay put or move across spaces, but these hardly are individual choices without constraints. On the contrary, our belonging to specific social groups and classes; the material, cultural, and social support of others; and the state regulations at play, all set limits to our socio-spatial practices. Finally, most people in the world live under the rule of the capitalist global market and corporate powers, which also affects how distances are conceived and produced, how significant they are, and how are contested by a global and intersectional working class. Whether on daily commute, residential mobility, or transnational migration, all these moves imply different degrees of comfort and hazardous conditions which differ between the well-off and the worst-off, let alone its environmental impacts. As a consequence, far from essentialising any socio-spatial category like distance, I would suggest to investigate the specific ways that social distances (and its antagonist, proximity) between groups and classes, are translated into physical spatial distances, with more or less symmetric reflections according to significant historical, political, economic, and cultural contexts.

QUESTION: *From the postwar period until the early 1980s, Italy saw a strong push for public housing. Then there was a significant slowdown, partly due to the resulting conurbation. This emphasized the gap between housing policies and housing demand. What strategies could rebalance this gap? What is the role of social mobilization?*

ANSWER: It was no only Italy, but many other Western countries too experienced a similar rise and decline of public housing policies. Neoliberalism from the 1970-1980s onwards was especially damaging in this respect. The promotion of homeownership with many formulae (tax breaks for homeowners, privileged access of former residents to the privatisation of public housing, subsidies to mortgage loans, etc.), the promise of unearned returns by engaging in the speculative housing market with increasing financial deregulations, and the bad reputation of many public housing estates in terms of quality standards and the concentration of bureaucratically designated "social problems" (unemployment, isolated ethnic minorities, crime, etc.), all contributed to erode the popularity of public/social housing as social welfare. Cuts to state spending, large transfers of wealth and fiscal benefits to private corporations with the futile intention of attracting and fixing capital in every given territory (either cities, regions, or countries) came hand in hand with the same stream of neoliberal policies. The 2008 financial crisis and the austerity policies that followed suit did not help to recover a renewed imaginary of the great benefits that public housing policies carried on in the golden period after the WWII (1940s-1960s or until the 1970s in the case of Sweden, for example).

The bad news is that housing crises became more acute over the last decades for other reasons too, although the rise of urban neoliberalism certainly is at their roots. The main gap or contradiction at stake here is between housing policies, housing markets, and affordable, secure, decent, adequate, high quality, well-located, and low-environmental impact housing. In other words, the main conflict is between the right to housing for all, as a basic need to be guaranteed by society and state administrations, and the collusion of state and market actors who just approach housing as a for-profit commodity and investment asset. It is not merely the number of housing units produced or the available amount of land to be developed with residential purposes, what should lead housing policies, as is falsely highlighted in many public debates which are animated by pro-development (or YIMBY) lobbies, but the measures to protect the right to housing for everyone who experiences hardships in this respect. The latter have to necessarily start with a strong promotion of non-commodified housing, not only with a large and well-managed state-owned housing stock, but also with support to true cooperative housing (limited-equity coops instead of fake ones as market-oriented condominiums, for example), "housing first" programmes for the homeless, the regularisation and decriminalisation of squatters, the protection of tenants, and policies to improve under-standard and overcrowded housing. None of these measures can be implemented without restricting private property rights and the operations of real estate capital and global asset managers and investors. These restrictions are common in labour markets (e.g. by establishing a minimum wage and health regulations), in setting prices of strategic commodities such as energy, in setting the rules of road traffic, in military defence affairs, and in issues related to human rights such as trafficking, for example. Hence, there is no essential objection to not apply crucial regulations in the field of housing too. The history of past successful public housing policies should also be a mirror where to look at in order to learn lessons of what is possible and what is needed to be improved nowadays.

In terms of current struggles, my reflections above clearly echo the demands of many contemporary housing movements. There are tenants' unions and an international federation (IUT), especially fighting for the expansion of third-generation rent controls. There also is a network of organisations working on homelessness (FEANTSA). Squatting movements in relation to housing but also combined with demands of self-managed social centres, and in solidarity with migrants and refugees in urgent need of accommodation and support networks, are more alive than ever, especially across Europe and despite the latest legal changes that criminalise them. Campaigns opposing the privatisation and demolition of social housing are thriving too. Anti-home evictions struggles in Spain (with the PAH, Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), Italy, or Ireland, for example, have opened up new avenues of joint direct action and institutional litigation in housing activism. So did the campaigns to expropriate and socialise the real estate assets of large housing corporations (Deutsche Wohnen & Co in Berlin) and banks (Credit Suisse

in Switzerland, La SAREB es Nuestra in Spain), which aligned with protests against international vulture funds such as Blackstone (in Denmark and Spain, for example). The revival and rise of bottom-up housing cooperatives is another indicator of civic initiatives that revitalise and energise housing movements. Residents' struggles against the displacement effects of low-income households due to gentrification and the construction of infrastructures, mega projects, parks, and other public works add to the same tradition of urban and housing activism.
Many housing campaigns and struggles are local, but international networks such as the ECRHC (European Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City) provide an umbrella of expertise and mutual support that was unknown just a couple of decades ago. These are just a few illustrations of the crucial significance that struggles for social reproduction in the realm of housing, with a clear intersectional and multi-scalar character, are representing as grassroots responses to the increasing financialisation of the economy, the precarisation of working and living conditions especially for women, and the state-sponsored subjugation and repression of migrants.

QUESTION: *In one of your essays (Grassroots struggles challenging housing financialization in Spain, 2022) you state that "popular protests and campaigns are not powerless when they criticize, expose and fight the holders of financial power." In your opinion, how generalizable is this statement to other contexts?*

ANSWER: It is always difficult to imagine that lay citizens, workers, and even local governments can question and challenge the rule of powerful large corporations and institutional investors whose assets are even bigger than the GDP of some countries, let alone financial institutions such as the IMF and the European Central Bank where the US and the German governments, respectively, rule and veto their agendas. However, it is not impossible, in addition to represent a moral and political obligation if we are to save the most basic democratic rights, and guarantee a minimum well-being for everyone affected by the operations of all those powerholders.
In the past two decades there were anti-globalisation campaigns and boycotts to large corporations such as Nike, Nestlè, Apple, Coca-Cola, Inditex-Zara, Microsoft, Google, etc. which were only partially successful. The extraordinary referendums calling for the expropriation of DW in Berlin and the numerous protest actions against vulture funds and asset managers such as Blackstone, have proven that there are many more possibilities and cracks to expand than it was prior imagined. In Spain, a small group of activists (15mPaRato) launched a crowdfunding process and endured a long legal trial asking for accountability of the major savings bank in Spain, Bankia, that was bailed out by the government in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. Ethical finances, participation in urban planning, legal litigation, and international networking and media strategies, thus, show activist routes that can be explored in order to empower grassroots activists when facing financial powers.
Struggles against banks involved in criminal money laundering and the hypocritical tolerance of tax havens, for example, also require deep legislative changes that need alliances between activists and members of parliaments. Similar joint efforts of direct action protests and institutional initiatives are needed to enact rent controls and increase affordable and high-quality public housing. As usual, the generalisation of one political campaign to other contexts is not as easy for activists as it is for global capital when moving across national boundaries. Grassroots activism, above all, is very much dependent on local political opportunity structures and their own legacies, background, and networks from previous movements, in addition to new allies and the involvement of third parties, as I have described in the article you mentioned and in my latest book on squatting movements (https://www.routledge.com/Squatters-in-the-Capitalist-City-Housing-Justice-and-Urban-Politics/Martinez/p/book/9781138856950). Capital investments, however, can easily flee to other localities where their return rate is more rapidly achieved, so more international cooperation is needed to interfere their operations and disclose their both illegal and anti-social activities.

QUESTION: *Currently in Italy, the demand for the "right to housing" has taken the form of university students' protest against high rents. In some cities, many rentiers are also converting their properties into bed-and-breakfasts or vacation homes, greatly reducing the supply for off-campus students. The physical distance of university locations is another relevant structural factor in these dynamics. Compared to the contexts you studied, do similar problems emerge? Do you see trends in this direction at the transnational level?*

ANSWER: Yes, this phenomenon is on the rise, especially in large and touristified cities. University students are only one of the social groups experiencing rising rents and displacement far away off their educational centres. Migrants, single-parent households (often led by female parents), precarious workers, the elderly, and even substantial factions of the middle-class who are not homeowners, are subject to similar blows by largely deregulated housing markets. For example, a few years ago, I was shocked with the media coverage of a wave of rapes to female tenants in New York which were instigated by landlords who wanted to evict them in order to raise the rents. Landlords-led harassment, nuisances and criminal activities targetting tenants still are an under-researched field in housing studies, but also an urgent political and judicial matter that demands rapid and effective response. Another example is the combined effect of the global investors landing in the university students' dorms sector and the higher international mobility of tertiary students, not only within Europe after the Erasmus Programme and the Bologna Process over the last two decades, but also due to the rising trends of international educational mobility from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries. The industry of "studentification" also has impacts beyond speculative and inflationary moves in their accommodations, including their surrounding urban areas and many associated forms of consumption.
Nevertheless, not all the above mentioned groups are equally organised when it comes to protest and rallying against this increasing housing exclusion and inequality. The lobbying power of companies such as Airbnb and global investors should not be dismissed either. These firms are extremely busy with their attempts to prevent rent control measures and regulations of short-term rentals from being approved or implemented, at all legislative and political levels, which keeps a large range of illegal practices active (documented, for example, here: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/09697764231155386). Other entrepreneurial organisations and right-wing politicians are fully aligned with them, let alone the Court of Justice of the European Union that fiercely defends free market competition, regardless of its social benefits to increase equality.

QUESTION: *Staying on the university mobilization, it is expressing the needs of a particular social category (students, youth, out-of-towners, cross-gender, etc.). In your opinion, does the connotation of this protest risk marking distances on the broader level of housing demand? How far-reaching could the social effects of this struggle be?*

ANSWER: All struggles and campaigns are led by specific social categories and target the either same or other social categories as opponents, allies, and supporters. There is no magical recipe to decide which social selection will be more successful in these endeavours. Sometimes, activists can hide or downplay their own social background if they appeal to a wider potential social basis of mobilisation to join their claims. Labour struggles, more often than not, for example, use to have more symmetry: organised workers call for solidarity and unity with other workers. Residents, tenants, and students activism, on the contrary, tend to combine a diverse range of social categories and groups, so it is their specific demands which need to be framed in a convincing discourse to be appealing to sympathisers, and challenging for their opponents. Eventually, both the political discourse that activists manage to efficiently convey and spread, and the impact of the protest actions they choose to perform, are crucial to decide whether their social identity plays out a significant role in the movement's achievements. The historical context of political configurations and capitalist development are crucial alike.

University students are a typical imprecise social category in which class, gender, and ethnicity—just to name the main categorical social features and cleavages—may be blurred or significantly diverse. Young age, high educational status, and their particular transitional life stage from depending on their parents' resources to initiate income-earning activities on their own, are often perceived by society as a very specific social condition, even a privileged one despite its internal and often hidden diversity, that is not shared by most. I will recall one clear illustration of this problem. In the decade of the economic boom in Spain before the financial crisis, 1997-2007, there was a social movement, V de Vivienda, that protested about the housing exclusion experienced by the youth given the disparity between precarious jobs and housing prices, plus the shortage of rental options and social housing. Some scholars argued that the movement failed because it was led by university students who were fully isolated from the concerns of the rest of society, who, in turn, were highly drawn into into the mortgage and homeownership whirlpool. Activists were sharply correct in articulating their claims, but even the working class youth, let alone the migrant population, became easy targets for the tricks of banks and real estate developers trying to sell houses with loans and future expectations of rising prices and increasing private wealth. Housing became a massive investment for all social classes. Therefore, the housing movement declined quickly
(https://revintsociologia.revistas.csic.es/index.php/revintsociologia/article/view/348/355).
Housing was indeed a structural problem of the Spanish economy and homeownership was a highly risky decision for many households, but only V de Vivienda activists were prescient about all its implications. Looking back, however, we can assess that this students-led housing struggle paid off in the long-term. They raised awareness about housing issues, pioneered innovative ways of online and offline mobilisations, and trained activists who were crucial in the following housing mobilisation in the aftermath of the financial crisis: the anti-home evictions PAH (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages). We can thus argue that the PAH learned the lessons of the failed V de Vivienda, by continuing its political framing while also widening the social basis of such form of activism. In so doing, the PAH attracted impoverished working class (and even some low-middle class) people, and especially migrant households led by women. Hence, university students in a previous economic cycle, paved the way for the largest housing mobilisation in Spanish history ever, only in the next economic cycle.
As a conclusion, I do not see a problem with the fact that university students get concerned about housing issues if they articulate an efficient discourse and deploy protest campaigns able to build strong alliances with other affected and supportive social groups. It is also important that they speak up about their own housing problems because, first, they anchor the struggle in concrete and contradictory real conditions of living, and second, because they trigger critical analysis that help distinguish their experiences from the housing precarity and exclusion which is overwhelming other social groups. In fact, there are different types of landlords, rental situations, and housing regimes that may suggest specific strategies for advancing housing claims. Either students alone or in collaboration with other social groups, have to identify them and do some research that grounds their campaigns.

QUESTION: *In your opinion, is it possible to institutionalize housing movements? What could be the added value of this in terms of democratizing housing policies? How much could this reduce the distances that still exist today between housing policies and the right to housing?*

ANSWER: Many social movements in general, and housing movements in particular, have become institutionalised. In Sweden, for example, it is very well-know the case of the Tenants' Union (Hyresgästföreningen) established in 1941, one of the largest in the world with more than half a million members. It became a key player in the rise of the social welfare model in Sweden, tightly connected with the decades-ruling social democratic party, and even linked to cooperative housing construction. The Tenants' Union was also granted with the right to negotiate rents

with landlords on a general basis, which resulted in very limited rent rises over many decades. Researchers hold different interpretations about the development of this paradigmatic case of institutionalisation. Most agree that it played a very positive role to effectively apply rent control that made housing quite affordable in Sweden for a long period of time, until the 1990s at least. Critics argue that the organisation became too bureaucratic and was unable to efficiently respond to the market-oriented policies that changed housing since the 1990s, but especially during the last two decades with the privatisation of around 10% of public housing, the rise of corporate landlords, shortages of affordable housing, and a worrying wave of renovictions (see, for example, https://radicalhousingjournal.org/2021/resisting-renovictions/). Others argued that, once institutionalised, such housing organisations do not resort to direct and disruptive actions of protest, such as rent strikes, any longer, despite these being regularly employed at their very origins.

Another example is the legalization of squatter houses that has been possible in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom since the Eighties. Legalisation is not the only form of institutionalisation, but is especially contested when it comes to radical housing movements such these. On the one hand, not all squatters are convinced that gaining social housing or housing subsidies for them is a fair outcome for everyone experiencing housing problems, and a consistent result with their intended anti-capitalist goals. On the other hand, when the legalisations of squatting becomes a large phenomenon, including many social groups who were active in the struggle and especially social categories more prone to be oppressed in the housing markets and welfare systems, it is usually seen as a victory. In my main book on squatting I first argue that repression against squatters force and constraint negotiations, and it is harshly applied, above all, to those who do not negotiate with the authorities. Second, there exist other forms of social and state institutionalisation that do not entail legalisations of occupied buildings or access to social housing elsewhere. Long-standing squatting movements, for example, have contributed with 'anomalous institutions' that combined housing and other social needs of social, cultural, political, and economic life in cities with certain stability in time, durable self-organised grassroots organisations, and true sharing de-commodified economies (or commons, in short). The dark side of the legalisation processes is not only the likely split between different factions of the movement, but also the unpredicted problems that arise later on (rent rises, end of leases, lack of social support, end of commoning, etc.) and the more repressive policies that authorities feel entitled to implement afterwards, as a way to compensate their concessions (for example, the full banning of squatting, making it a criminal offence).

As sociologists, we should not pre-empt judgements regarding the convenience or benefits coming out from the institutionalisation of social movements. Each movement organisation has the rights to identify their goals of more or less institutional achievements, and the more or less institutional ways of protest. Very often, legal litigations are necessary means of institutional defence for the movements, even if these are not specialised or limited to them. I also think that the history of the labour movement and class struggles always shows many different paths that emancipatory claims can take. Housing movements have strong links with workers' struggles but also present specific demands and features that, in direct or indirect ways, contest existing housing policies and the democratic process to address them. Therefore, researchers need to consider institutional forces and institutionalisation dynamics as part of the problem in which movements are always involved, but not as the only and circumscribed framework to analyse housing needs and possibilities to fight the economic and political elites responsible for the housing question.

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