

# **Urban mobilizations and municipal policies for a radical right to housing: The case of Barcelona.**

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In the period 2013-2018, 17,841 evictions were carried out in Barcelona. According to the data elaborated by Consejo General del Poder Judicial (CGPJ), 83% of these evictions (14,436) were linked to rent-related problems. According to this data, it seems that the housing crisis affecting Spain since 2008 is not over. In Barcelona the social consequences of the housing crisis overlap with the long-term effects of urban transformations and the growth of tourism promoted by the so-called 'Barcelona Model' since the end of the seventies. However, Barcelona can be also considered the epicentre of a grassroots response to urban and housing precarity. This response has been promoted by social movements and later, municipal institutions. In this paper, starting from the experience of Plataforma Afectados por la Hipoteca - PAH ('Platform of People Affected by Mortgages') I consider the strategies used by social movements since 2009 to defend the right to housing. Then I look at how between 2015 and 2019 the municipal government led by Barcelona en Comú - BeC ('Barcelona in Common') faced housing and gentrification-related problems, considering the main strategies adopted in these fields, their impact and limits. Using this twofold analysis, I will argue that, thanks to the strategies, counternarratives, mobilizations and policies developed by social movements, and later the municipal government, a new and radically different housing model is being elaborated. Using a rights-based approach, the focus is moving from the needs of markets, profit and economic growth to the needs of those affected by housing precarity and gentrification.

## **Key words:**

Urban social movements, Housing precarity, Barcelona, Radical Right to housing, Municipal policies

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## Introduction

In a context of economic and housing crisis and despite the recognition of the right to an adequate housing by Article 47 of Spanish Constitution<sup>i</sup>, the last decade in Spain has seen national governments prioritise the rescue of the financial system and the application of austerity measures over the right to housing as well as other social rights. In Barcelona the wave of evictions and mortgage repossessions caused by the housing crisis overlap with gentrification and rent increases that are the long-term effects of the urban transformations promoted since the end of the Francoist regime. However, in the same period, Barcelona also became one of the main laboratories of urban mobilizations and municipal intervention in defence of the right to housing in Spain and beyond. By considering the strategies and the results of responding to housing precarity developed by urban social movements and municipal institutions, this paper intends to contribute to the increasing literature on mobilizations and housing policies in times of crisis and austerity (SqEK 2013 and 2018; Di Feliceantonio 2016; Grazioli and Caciagli 2018; Lancione 2018; Fierro 2018; Domaradzka 2018; Annunziata and Rivas 2018; Palomera 2018; Rolnik 2019).

In order to investigate the link between urban transformations, housing precarity and the different grassroots and institutional responses, I will apply to the case of Barcelona the concepts of *pre-making*, *in-making*, *un-making*, and *re-making* proposed by Lancione (2018) to analyse the intersecting processes of urban (housing) precarity linked to forced evictions in Bucharest. As explained by Lancione (2018, 184) this approach aims to answer four questions related to urban precarity: ‘How does the historical context intersect with the present? (Pre-makings); How is the subject affected? (In-makings); What can a body do to resist? (Un-makings) and how is governance reasserted? (Re-makings)’. Consequently, the first section of this paper focuses on the so-called ‘Barcelona Model’ which for decades, through deep urban transformations, reshaped the city and brought about state-led gentrification, as the *pre-making* of urban housing precarity. The second section considers how the social consequences of these transformations overlapped in the last decade with the wave of mortgage repossessions and evictions caused by the housing crisis that is affecting a large part of Spanish society, representing the *in-making* of housing precarity in Barcelona. By focusing on the case study of PAH, the third section analyses the strategies ‘*challenging*’ and ‘*changing*’ the law used by this social movement since 2009 to defend the right to housing, contributing to *un-making* housing precarity. The fourth section looks at how between 2015 and 2019, the municipal government led by Barcelona in Common (BeC) dealt with housing and gentrification-related problems, setting up an *institutional un-making* of housing precarity instead of *re-making* it.

By considering how these processes are mutually interconnected, this paper aims to provide an analysis of (a) how urban social movements can respond to housing precarity through a rights-based approach; (b) whether it is possible to set up, at the municipal institutional level, policies supporting a radical right to housing (Madden and Marcuse 2016); and (c) on how the un-making of urban housing precarity elaborated by social movements (Lancione 2018) can be continued and supported by an institutional un-making of municipalities.

Methodologically, this study draws first on fieldwork carried out in Barcelona from January 2015 to November 2019, during which I carried out participant observation within PAH Barcelona, participating in assemblies, actions, campaigns, and mobilization of the wider urban housing movement in the city. Second, I analysed official data regarding evictions, repossessions, rent increases, and press releases, official documents and the political programs of BeC for the municipal election of 2015 and 2019. Third, I complement the field notes and the official data with 38 semi-structured interviews carried out with PAH Barcelona activists and members of Barcelona in Common.

### **Housing precarity, urban mobilizations and radical right to housing.**

Access to housing is a central need for everyone. Indeed, it can be considered the *conditio sine qua non* for work and leisure (Madden and Marcuse 2016) that grants security and refuge from external physical threats and provides the material base from which ‘to build a livelihood and take part in the life of the community and the state’ (Hohmman 2013, 4). The concept of the right to housing has been developed at the international level starting from article 25.1 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. At the European level, the right to housing is included in Article 31 of the European Social Charter and in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. However, in Europe, the diffusion of neoliberalism, coupled with the consequences of the global economic crisis and the ensuing austerity measures, contributed to the acceleration and expansion of precarity (Lorey 2015; Neilson and Rossiter 2008). Especially in the last decade, as a consequence of the Global Financial Crisis, the spread of precarity, meant here as both a work and life condition, increasingly affects housing access, calling into question the effectiveness and meaning of the ‘right to housing’.

This process of *precarization of the right to housing* can be linked with the tendency of neoliberalism to consider all goods as commodities (Harvey 2005) and to the long-term process of hyper-commodification of housing through deregulation, financialization, and globalization (Madden and

Marcuse 2016). The privatization and the dismantling of social housing systems - where they exist - and the liberalization and deregulation of rental contracts make tenure more insecure, contributing to housing precarity (Carr, Edgeworth and Hunter 2018). It is important to avoid any idealization of a past in which housing was secure and to consider precarity (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008) and 'eviction-related forms of precarity as an exception to the norm' (Lancione 2018, 189). The precarization of the right to housing can also be seen as a long-term neoliberal governmental process (Lorey 2015) linked to the diffusion of debt (Graeber 2011; Lazzarato, 2012). Since mortgage loans offered one of the main ways to own a home, the level and diffusion of indebtedness increased, even for low-income households, (Rolnik 2019) contributing to the development of the housing bubbles that then caused the mortgage crisis which started in 2007 that brought a wave of repossessions and evictions (Aalbers 2009).

In Europe the response to the crisis of most of the governments has been oriented to the bailout of the financial and bank systems and to the contemporary promotion of austerity measures. Cities, in Europe as in the US, have been particularly affected by the social consequences of the crisis (Di Feliceantonio 2016) and 'austerity urbanism' (Peck 2012), that often overlap with the effects of the long-term processes of dismantling of welfare states and privatization of public services and space (Soja 2010), urban transformations, mass tourism and gentrification (Lees et al. 2008; Slater 2009; Cocola-Gant 2018). Evictions, mortgage repossessions, the growth of homelessness, the expulsion of low and middle-income population from the central neighbourhoods and the growing difficulties of accessing affordable housing are the symptoms of the precarization of the right to housing at the urban scale. As Mayer (2016, 36) points out: 'Both the spatial-polarization and the social-precuarization aspects of neoliberal urbanism were only intensified through the measures by which policy managers have sought to cope with the fall-out of the 2008 crisis.'

Nevertheless, cities can be also considered as a space of resistance in which radical attempts to un-make precarity and imagine alternative conceptions of city and future can be elaborated (Vasudevan 2015; Simone 2016; Lancione 2018). Indeed, while neoliberal cities are transformed and reshaped according to the needs of the market and profits and to detriment of people (Harvey 2008), they have also been the epicentre of the rise and development of urban social movements (Mayer 2009). As argued by Domaradzka (2018, 1): 'Urban mobilization takes many forms, including traditional civil society organizations (grassroots neighbourhood organizations, housing associations, local interest groups, politically or culturally oriented pressure groups), as well as protest initiatives (against profit-oriented urban policies or commercialization of public resources) or political movements for environmental and social justice.'

In many cases, these urban mobilizations have been inspired by, and include in their demands, the right to the city. Defined as a ‘cry and a demand’ by Lefebvre (1968), the right to the city is not just a juridical right (or set of rights) but can be considered also as a political and mobilization frame in opposition to the existing neoliberal urban model (Harvey 2009; Mayer 2009) which considers human rights and social and spatial needs of people as a priority over profit. (Soja 2010).

Urban resistance has been also associated with ‘the right to stay put in the face of exclusionary, neoliberalizing forces’ (Annunziata and Rivas 2018, 395) and can include many different and often incoherent practices of resistance to the commodification of urban space. Indeed, as the literature increasingly shows, the mobilizations in defence of housing can also take a variety of forms including (and not limited to) squatting, social centres, anti-eviction actions, neighbourhood associations and tenants’ unions (Squek 2013 and 2018; Madden and Marcuse 2016; Grazioli and Caciagli 2018; Palomera 2018; Rolnik 2019). In the Spanish context, PAH represents one of the most relevant social movements engaged in the struggle for the right to housing. As emerges by the systematic review of the academic literature concerning PAH elaborated by Sala (2018), more than 100 articles, papers, chapters and theses have focused on PAH and its mobilizations, considering how the movement was created and structured, its influences and relationship with the ‘15M’<sup>ii</sup> on the collective awareness and empowerment processes and its effectiveness. Nevertheless, there is a gap in this literature regarding the relationship of the movement with the law. In response to this gap, this paper considers how, by combining a double strategy of challenging and changing the law, PAH has successfully used a human rights discourse to respond to housing precarity.

Drawing on the concept of the right to the city and looking in particular at the housing crisis, Madden and Marcuse (2016) argue that the demand for a radical right to housing can represent a response to this crisis, but only if it goes beyond a mere recognition of a right and radically challenges the current housing system. As they point out, ‘more than a simple legal claim, a real right to housing needs to take the form of an ongoing effort to democratize and decommodify housing, and to end the alienation that the existing housing system engenders’ (Madden and Marcuse 2016, 99). In the last chapter of their book *‘In Defense of Housing’* (Madden and Marcuse 2016) formulate a series of proposals or ‘potential directions’ that include the decommodification and de-financialization of housing; the defence and expansion of public housing; the experimentation, innovation and democratization of housing policies and management in order to prioritize the needs of inhabitants; and the strengthening and connection of housing movements. Starting from these ‘potential directions’ this paper analyses how in a context of crisis, austerity measures and housing precarity, the combined action of urban social movements<sup>iii</sup> and then the municipal government of Barcelona in Common are together

elaborating an ‘alternative Barcelona Model’ through mobilizations and municipal policies, inspired by and oriented toward a radical right to housing.

### **1. The ‘Barcelona Model’ and its problematic consequences: Pre-making urban housing precarity.**

In order to understand the contemporary housing crisis and the precarization of the right to housing it is necessary to focus on the ‘interweaving historical and economic conditions that ground precarity’ (Lancione 2018, 185). In the case of Barcelona this means considering the features of the so-called ‘Barcelona Model’. Since the end of 1970s, Barcelona has changed greatly through a series of overlapping processes including urban renovation, the massive increase in tourism, and the creation of a ‘Barcelona brand’ that, especially since the Olympics, has put the city on the international map. Although the recognition of a coherent ‘Barcelona Model’ is disputed, it is possible to trace some consistent features of the city’s development since the end of the Francoist regime (Marshall 2000, Monclus 2003; Degen and Garcia 2012). Formerly segregated areas of Barcelona were connected through the opening of new public spaces that were meant to create greater social cohesion. Through the cooperation between the public administration and the private sector, the preparation of the 1992 Olympics accelerated the process of urban renovation and developed the process of tertiarization of the economy - in a context of deindustrialization - particularly through the massive development of tourism.

The growth of the tourist industry overlapped with the promotion of Barcelona as a cultural capital, as urban regeneration, especially in the central neighbourhoods, was linked with the development of cultural strategies and infrastructure such as festivals, events, museums and civic centres. In terms of governance, the Barcelona Model, at least during the socialist governments that ruled the city between 1979 and 2011, included (Blakeley 2005) or even co-opted (Salvini 2013) parts of civil society and social movements in the decision-making process. However, in the 1990s when the economic and strategic priorities shifted toward the integration of Barcelona into global markets, this openness was replaced by a more managerial governance style. Amid the widespread acclaim of the success of Barcelona’s urban developments, there have also been critical evaluations of its results, impact and consequences in terms of gentrification and ‘tourism-phobia’ (Arbaci and Tapada-Berteli 2012; Degen and Garcia 2012; Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró 2018). The division between the city of Barcelona as an internationally known, high-class representation of the Mediterranean urban ‘good life’ and its metropolitan residential area has widened in the last decades. The further liberalization

of land promoted at the national level in 1998, and the increasing presence of international real estate funds and developers seems to have subordinated the urban transformation of Barcelona to profit, over and above the city's real needs. Considering the long-term effects of the Barcelona model, Salvini (2013) argues that an economic system based on culture and creative clusters, the precarization of labour and urban redevelopment caused the expulsion of the poor from the centre.

To sum up, the Barcelona model can be seen as a process of accumulation by dispossession and commodification of the city (Smith 1996; Harvey 2009), that through an alliance between public power and private investors caused gentrification. The consequent rise in housing prices and the reduction of affordable rents in turn fostered the expulsion of part of the population from the city centre (Delgado 2007; Harvey 2009; Salvini 2013; Blanco-Romero et al. 2018). This analysis fits into and contributes to broader academic and general debates on gentrification (Lees et al 2008; Slater 2009; Brenner et al. 2011; Annunziata and Lees 2016). In particular, Barcelona is emblematic in terms of how tourism influences both housing demand and prices and consequently fosters gentrification (Spirou 2011; Cocola-Gant and Pardo 2017; Cocola-Gant 2018). As stated by Blanco-Romero et al. (2018, 6) *'In the case of Barcelona, this gentrification dynamic is reinforced by the emergence of "Airbnbification", which adds pressure by means of a new concept in rental housing that is mostly temporary and aimed at tourists'*.

The report *Pla Estratègic de Turisme de Barcelona 2020, Impacte del lloguer vacacional en el mercat del lloguer residencial de Barcelona*<sup>iv</sup> shows the effects of this trend on the housing market: in Barcelona 15,881 houses are used for tourism (HUT), corresponding to 7.7% of the 205,912 rental houses and reaching 15% or more in some neighbourhoods. The report shows that homeowners can make between 2 and 2,5 times more by renting their houses to tourists than by putting them on the normal rental market. Despite the importance of the increase in tourism, other factors also contributed to the rent bubble in Barcelona. The lack of social housing, the growth of a floating residential population and the increased pressure on the housing market from international investment capital looking for speculative projects also push up rents and cause gentrification (Blanco-Romero et al. 2018).

## **2. The Precarization of the right to housing in Spain: the in-making of urban housing precarity**

The consequences of the Barcelona model overlapped with the housing crisis that since 2008 has caused a wave of mortgage repossessions and evictions, representing the *in-making* of urban precarity in Barcelona. Since the Francoist regime, the main way to promote access to housing in Spain was ownership, at the expense of renting and social housing. Housing was considered a tool of economic growth through an alliance between the construction, tourism and financial sectors which fostered housing and construction bubbles and an increase in family debt. These processes created the conditions for the mortgage crisis that exploded in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis (López and Rodríguez 2011; Palomera 2013; Rodríguez and Espinoza 2018). When the housing bubble burst, hundreds of thousands of people who lost their (often precarious) jobs started struggling to make their mortgage payments, facing the risk of losing their homes through repossession, which meant that not only would they be evicted, but that they would often still have a huge debt burden. Analyses of the official data on mortgage repossessions and evictions elaborated by the Consejo General del Poder Judicial<sup>v</sup> reveals that from 2008 to 2017 there have been 725,134 repossession proceedings registered in Spain, of which 632,019 have been executed. In the same period, 582,372 evictions have been started and 367,457 have been executed. As Casellas and Sala (2017, 3) put it: ‘the government prioritized national economic stability and debt repayment, leaving those evicted, many of whom were unemployed, migrants and/or working class, shaken by the economic downturn and feeling abandoned.’

According to the report on the financial and bank crisis ‘*Informe sobre la crisis financier y bancaria en España, 2008-2014*’<sup>vi</sup>, 76,410 million Euros have been used to support the financial sector. Up to 2018, only 5.4% of the total has been recovered and the Bank of Spain’s prediction is that 79.3% of the total, 60,613 million Euros, will be never recovered. As a consequence of austerity measures, from 2009 the housing budget<sup>vii</sup> has decreased considerably, being in 2017 one third of 2008’s budget: just 474 million Euros. By granting tax advantages, the Government attracted large companies and real estate funds (SOCIMIS - Sociedades Cotizadas Anónimas del Mercado Inmobiliario) that are increasingly buying entire buildings for tourist rentals (Blanco-Romero et al. 2018). Parallel to the bailout of banks and in order to favour the restructuring of the financial sector, in November 2012 the SAREB (Sociedad de Gestión de Activos Procedentes de la Reestructuración Bancaria) was created as agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the Spanish Government and its European partners. As a result of the ‘processes of financial detoxification’, SAREB acquired 76,000 empty houses and 61,000 loans to already-built properties, becoming the



biggest real estate owner in Europe (García Lamarca 2016; Berglund 2017). SAREB, along with other Spanish banks, then sold some of these properties - which often came from repossessions - to international speculative real estate actors. As shown by Gutiérrez and Domènech (2018), in Barcelona the banks that benefited from public aid own now many of the properties repossessed during the crisis. Moreover, many evictions occurred in the most deprived neighbourhoods, which contributed to a further divide between the middle and upper-class zones of the city and the poorest ones.

The mortgage crisis was just the first symptom of the precarization of the right to housing in Spain. The second symptom is rent increase which, especially in big cities, is closely linked to mass tourism and gentrification. The rent increase accelerated after the law 4/2013<sup>viii</sup> promoted by the conservative Government led by Mariano Rajoy in 2013: this law reformed the Urban Lease Law (Ley de Arrendamiento Urbano) to develop the Spanish rental market, making it more flexible and reducing protections for tenants (Nasarre 2017). Since 2013, data of Consejo General del Poder Judicial have included the reasons for eviction. As shown in Table 1, the majority were linked to rent-related problems. These data do not record the so-called ‘invisible evictions,’ i.e. cases in which tenants leave the house at the end of their contract because they cannot afford the proposed rent increase.

Year	Total number of evictions	Mortgage-related evictions	Percentage	Rent-related evictions	Percentage	Others	Percentage
<b>2013</b>	67,189	25,811	38%	38,141	57%	3,237	5%
<b>2014</b>	68,091	28,877	42%	36,044	53%	3,170	5%
<b>2015</b>	67,359	29,225	43%	35,677	53%	2,457	4%
<b>2016</b>	63,037	26,397	42%	34,193	54%	2,447	4%
<b>2017</b>	60,754	22,330	37%	35,666	59%	2,758	5%
<b>2018</b>	59,671	18,945	32%	37,285	62%	3,441	6%

**Table 1: Reasons for evictions in Spain 2013-2018. Source: elaboration of the author from data of Consejo del Poder Judicial.**

To sum up, since the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the precarization of the right to housing in Spain has been closely linked to the financialization and commodification of housing and overlaps with the increase of tourism and global capital’s influence in the housing sector. The resulting repossessions, evictions, rent increase and housing precarity are affecting a large part of Spanish society and in Barcelona these problems overlap with the long-term consequences of the ‘Barcelona Model’.

### 3. The PAH – Plataforma Afectados por la Hipoteca: Un-making urban housing precarity

Resistance to evictions, contesting gentrification and *un-making housing precarity* is possible, as shown by the urban mobilizations emerging in the recent years in different contexts (SqEK 2013 and 2018; Di Feliceantonio 2016; Grazioli and Caciagli 2018; Lancione 2018; Annunziata and Rivas 2018). In Spain one of the main actors in the struggle of the right to housing is PAH, a social movement that was established in Barcelona in February 2009 to provide grassroots activist support to people at risk of losing their homes through mortgage default. The first effort was helping affected people overcome the feelings of isolation, fear and guilt that make the other problems and practical necessities harder to cope with. These problems include first fighting the risk of eviction, then looking for solutions regarding their debt and home and finally, finding alternative housing solutions in eviction cases. The strategy used by PAH is based on the elaboration of a counter-narrative concerning the mortgage crisis and the empowerment and collective awareness of the affected people through weekly assemblies (Colau and Alemany 2012 and 2013).

#### 3.1 Responding to the housing crisis by ‘challenging the law’

PAH has elaborated three different action protocols and campaigns that directly involve the affected people. All these campaigns are ‘challenging the law’. Firstly, activists attempt to stop evictions by gathering as many people as possible in front of the door of the family threatened with eviction, using a form of peaceful passive resistance. During the last decade, PAH has stopped thousands of evictions across all Spain. Since January 2018, PAH Barcelona has recorded the eviction cases in which the movement has become involved. In January 2018 and 2019, 474 eviction cases have been tackled, of which 68 (14.3%) were related to mortgage issues, 243 (51.2%) to rent problems and 161 (34%) to squatting. Thanks to the PAH’s intervention, in 433 cases (91.3%) the eviction was avoided, either blocked ‘in front of the door’ (43%) or suspended before the date (48,3%). The eviction has been executed in 17 cases (3,6%)<sup>ix</sup>.

Secondly, in order to find solutions to the debt and housing problems, PAH creates protocols, ‘useful documents’ and shared strategies for use in direct negotiations between affected people and banks in by-passing Spanish mortgage law. There is a variety of possible solutions depending on different situations. Often, they are assigned as ‘*dación en pago*’, which is the cancellation of the debt by handing back the property of the mortgaged house to the bank, and *alquiler social*, which is an

affordable rent contract for the mortgaged house, even after the bank has repossessed it. What emerges from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of almost 1,000 direct negotiations promoted by PAH Barcelona is that this strategy is effective and has produced positive results in most cases (D'Adda, Delgado and Sala 2018). In case all the available tools (negotiating with owners, pressuring the social services to provide alternative solutions, etc) fail, PAH, via the Obra Social campaign, promotes what it calls 'recuperación'. This can be translated as '*repossession from below*' that is occupying empty dwellings owned by banks in order to rehouse evicted families. This campaign, reframing the narrative and the language around squatting, contributed to innovating and legitimizing this political practice, which can be considered as an effective way to radically challenge a housing model like Spain's, strongly rooted as it is in private home ownership through indebtedness. Through all these daily practices, PAH is supporting thousands of people with their housing-related problems. However, in order to find structural solutions and effectively grant the right to housing, PAH also elaborated a long-term strategy in order to change the legal framework of housing.

### **3.2 'Changing the Law': The long-term strategy to grant the right to housing**

The *ILP - Iniativa Legislativa Popular* (Popular Legislation Initiative) promoted by PAH in collaboration with NGOs and unions in 2012 has been the first attempt to respond to the housing crisis legislatively. The ILP was intended to introduce mechanisms to make the *dación en pago* automatic and retroactive and to enact a moratorium on evictions for economic reasons and promote social rental of housing (Martinez 2018). The ILP campaign overlapped with the rise of the 15M or 'indignados movement' which in turn contributed to its success (Romanos 2014). Having gathered 1,402,854 signatures, PAH presented its proposals to the Spanish Parliament. However, the Popular Party (PP) having an absolute parliamentary majority, opposed the ILP and PAH withdrew it. Although this first attempt failed, PAH's demands were now considered legitimate and were then used as the basis for other proposals to change the legal framework on housing at the local level (Martinez 2018).

The *Catalan ILP* has been the second campaign to change the law promoted by PAH. Since the PP's opposition made the approval of the ILP at the national level impossible, the movement modified its strategy and began working at the autonomous level. At the beginning of 2015, more than 140,000 signatures were collected to support the presentation of another ILP to the Catalan Parliament. This proposal was presented just a few months before the autonomous and municipal election, to put pressure on the Catalan parties involved in electoral campaigns, making them more likely to accept

the proposal. Thanks to the mobilization and negotiations with the parties, the ILP's proposals were passed on 23/7/2015, giving rise to Catalan Law 24/2015. This law responds to the housing crisis and guarantees the right to housing in several ways: first, it introduces mechanisms to resolve the over-indebtedness of consumers and measures to avoid evictions that could produce homelessness in people at risk of residential exclusion, including through the obligation for major landlords<sup>x</sup> to make a social rent offer in case of repossession proceedings or non-payment of rent. Second, it sought to expand the public housing stock by introducing the compulsory transfer to the local government administration of empty houses owned by legal entities and big owners. Third, it introduced mechanisms to guarantee access to basic supplies (water, electricity and gas) for vulnerable households. Catalan Law 24/2015 was the first Spanish law to be approved starting from an ILP elaborated by social movements. It can be considered one of the most advanced autonomous laws in terms of the way it developed housing as a subjective right and also the mechanisms to grant it (Quintia 2017). However, the Popular Party Government filed an appeal to the Constitutional Court on 04/29/2016 claiming that some parts of the law were unconstitutional, causing the suspension of several articles. In October 2018, the Generalitat - the Catalan Government - and the central government, led since June 2018 by the PSOE<sup>xi</sup>, agreed to withdraw this Constitutional appeal and from 22/2/2019 most of the articles of the law 24/2015 have returned to be in force.

The '*30% measure*' in Barcelona represents one of the biggest of PAH's successes in terms of promoting new policies at local level. As we have seen above, in Barcelona the intensification of mass tourism and gentrification, plus the consequences of the mortgage crisis and the increasing presence of international funds that are investing speculatively in the city, fuelled the rent increase. Indeed, according to the data collected by CGJP<sup>xii</sup>, 83% (14,436) of the 17,841 evictions carried out in Barcelona in the period 2013-2018 were linked to rent problems. In response to this situation, a coalition of social movements of Barcelona – PAH; FAVB the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona; Sindicat de llogaters - the Barcelona Tenants union; the NGO Observatori DESC; and ABTS, the Neighbourhood Assembly for a Sustainable Tourism – presented a motion to the City Council to foster the increase of social housing. On June 2018, the City Council voted that from October 2018 on, every new construction or refurbishment of more than 600 square metres must include 30% of apartments covered by VPO - Vivienda de Protección Oficial. VPO is the main mechanism for social provision of housing in Spain and allows the acquisition or construction of housing, or even access to rental property, according to specific criteria and with a regulated rent (Pareja-Eastaway and San Martín 2016). According to the prediction of the municipal government, through this measure around 300 VPOs will be realized every year.

PAH elaborated a long-term strategy to change the legal framework on housing that completed, supported and contributed to legitimizing its illegal practices. In this sense, PAH campaigns represent an attempt to introduce a structural and legal mechanism to un-make precarity that is complementary to the campaigns of civil disobedience analysed above. This strategy of ‘changing the law’ has been developed through a trial and error procedure, facing the institutional blockage of PP and its re-making of housing precarity by taking advantage of, and contributing to, changes in power dynamics within the political system to open up new political opportunities. The case of Barcelona, where, in 2015 Ada Colau, one of the six founders of PAH and for many years spokesperson of the movement, won the municipal elections and became the new Mayor, is emblematic of how PAH did not just challenge and influence the political system but also contributed to changing it.

#### **4. The municipal Government of BeC: ‘Institutional un-making’ of urban housing precarity**

The institutional response to the mobilizations and demands of social movements is often controversial. Lancione (2018) speaks about *re-making* of precarity as the strategy of the institution to minimize the effects of urban protest, maintain the status quo and again atomize the precarious subject. As shown by the attempts of PAH to change the legal framework on housing it can be argued that the Spanish political system was completely impermeable to emerging social movements and their demands. The 15M and the mobilizations against austerity measures and for the right to housing can be considered the first step of a journey that led to a revolution in the Spanish political system, first with the creation of Podemos in 2014 and then with the victory of ‘citizens’ platforms’ in the municipal elections of Barcelona, Madrid, Cadiz, Zaragoza and Coruna, among other cities (Castro 2018; Eizaguirre et al. 2017).

In the summer of 2014, Barcelona activists created a citizens’ platform to participate in the municipal election of May 2015. As explained by Castro (2018, 189), *‘Many of those who started discussing and building the platform belonged to previously-existing movements, such as the PAH, neighbourhood associations, free culture activists, etc.’* Later, left-wing political parties joined platform that became Barcelona in Common. When elections were held on the 24/5/2015, BeC won with 25% of the vote, electing 11 municipal councillors out of 41. Ada Colau became Mayor of Barcelona. Since the electoral campaign, housing issues have been central in the discourses and programs of Barcelona in Common, which has adopted a critical discourse regarding the Barcelona Model and its consequences (Blanco, Salazar, Bianchi, 2019) and narrative coherent with those of social movements defending the right to housing and fighting gentrification. In order to limit the

effects of mass tourism and the spread of HUT (Houses used for Tourism), BeC extended a moratorium on new licences for tourist accommodation, approved in 2014 (Blanco-Romero et al. 2018). In 2016, the City Council approved a Special Tourist Accommodation Plan (PEUAT)<sup>xiii</sup> that divided Barcelona into four areas. Area 1, which includes the majority of the city centre where there is the greater density of tourist accommodation, is a negative growth zone. Area 2 is a maintenance zone that caps the existing number of establishments at its current level and forbids them to expand their physical footprint. Area 3 is an expansion area that covers the external parts of the city: here the number of establishments can increase, and they can expand. Area 4 includes three big redevelopment zones where new HUT will be not allowed. PEUAT has been controversial. On one hand, *'the hotelier trade association has filed a judiciary appeal against the PEUAT for them to cease, and they demand the elimination of restrictions imposed on the growth of tourist accommodation in the city'* (Blanco-Romero et al. 2018, 13). On the other, social movements such as ABTS consider the measure only partial because it does not consider the city as a whole and contains rather than reduces the growth of tourism. To deal with illegal tourist apartments, awareness campaigns against illegal apartments and fines of up to 600,000 Euro for advertising unlicensed tourist apartments on platforms such as Airbnb that *'are considered to have contributed to the rise in rents and to processes of gentrification and touristification'* (Castro 2018, 199) have been promoted. In May 2018, Airbnb agreed to delete 2,557 adverts for unlicensed apartments. According to the Barcelona City Council, from 2016 until July 2018 a team of 100-plus people analysed more than 13,000 ads on web platforms listing illegal tourist apartments and issued 4,148 dismissal orders. Of these, 2,129 voluntarily stopped their activity and 226 have been banned. Additionally, 5,503 fines have been imposed, five times more than from 2014 to 2016<sup>xiv</sup>.

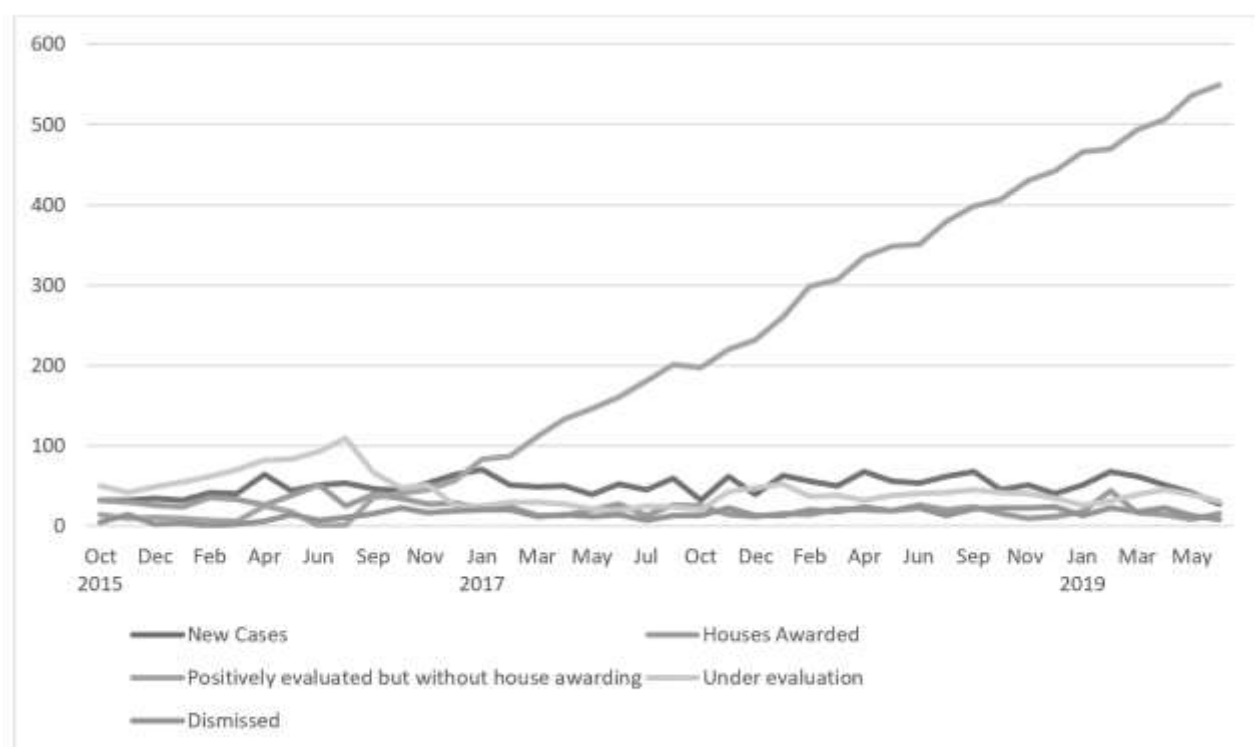
Along with the adoption of measures to prevent gentrification and limit the use of HUT, BeC prioritized policies oriented toward defending the right to housing. A working group to propose new housing policies that included members of social movements and collectives has been created. Many of the proposals that emerged have been included in the new Housing Plan (Plan de Vivienda 2016-2025)<sup>xv</sup> approved in 2016. According to this plan, the municipality will invest 1,681 million Euro, a 58% increase on the previous plan. The first objective is to prevent social and residential exclusion by providing direct financial support to tenants and more tools for social services. A new service called the Unit Against Residential Exclusion (Unidad Contra la Exclusión Residencial - UCER)<sup>xvi</sup> has been created. It *'tries to locate, prevent and solve evictions through negotiations with owners, or by providing financial assistance or other solutions'* (Castro 2018, 200). The creation of this unit and its intervention protocols to prevent evictions 'on the ground' was inspired by the 'stop evictions'

campaign by the PAH. As is evident from Table 2, from 2015 to 2017 UCER handled 4,945 cases and 7,171 evictions, finding a solution in 2,723 cases.

Year	Cases handled	Evictions handled	Cases solved
2015	1,020	1,092	592
2016	1,574	2,303	769
2017	2,351	3,776	1362
Total	4,945	7,171	2723

**Table 2: Cases and evictions handled and solved by UCER. Elaboration by the author.<sup>xvii</sup>**

One possible solution in eviction cases is the ‘Emergency Committee’ (Mesa de Emergencia) a service of the *Consorci de l’Habitatge de Barcelona*<sup>xviii</sup>, a public institution organised by the City Council and the Generalitat, and created to develop and manage public housing in Barcelona. The Emergency Committee meets monthly to evaluate new cases proposed by the social services and provides (according to a series of criteria) social housing to vulnerable people or families at risk of residential exclusion or eviction. From October 2015 to June 2019, it handled 2,110 new cases, awarding 994 families social housing and positively evaluating 549 other cases without awarding housing, because of a lack of availability. Another 663 cases were dismissed. The number of cases that were positively evaluated but not awarded housing and thus stuck on a waiting list has constantly increased, peaking in June 2019 at 549 cases. Clearly the Emergency Committee does not have a sufficient number of homes to cover new cases, much less the waiting list, so it can be argued that without radical changes, the number of people and families eligible for social housing having to wait will continue increasing. This shows that the housing crisis and its most virulent symptoms – repossessions and evictions – are still a stark problem in Barcelona.



**Figure 1. Cases handled by the Emergency Committee. Elaborated by the author using the data of Consorci de l'habitatge de Barcelona<sup>xix</sup>.**

To deal with this lack of social housing, the *Plan for the Right to Housing*, through different measures, will provide a total of 4,644 units of public housing to be available in the future, an estimated growth of 50% in six years<sup>xx</sup>. Another strategy used by the BeC to increase the public housing stock while avoiding evictions linked to real estate speculation is the so called '*Tanteo de Retracto*' that is a legal instrument that gives to the public administration a preferential right to acquisition for repossessed dwellings or buildings. Since 2015, the City Council has bought 531 dwellings this way, with 251 more planned for the future, at a total expense of more than 70 million Euro. This practice seems to be particularly effective in preventing real estate funds from acquiring entire buildings, renovating them, and renting then to tourists. To deal with empty dwellings, a building census has been created, and 10,052 empty dwellings have been detected in Barcelona, corresponding to 1.22% of the total housing stock, while the 2011 housing census estimated that in Barcelona 10.9% of dwellings were empty<sup>xxi</sup>. The municipal administration aims to offer private owners '*the possibility of incorporating their homes into the city's rental market by granting guarantees on rent payment, facilities and benefits for renovating the dwellings*' (Blanco Romero et al. 2018, 10). The municipal government has initiated the sanctions process according to Catalan Law 18/2007 for any dwellings that have remained vacant for over two years and is owned by financial entities. The BeC Government also created a specific unit to ensure compliance with the social function of housing, sanctioning illegal



conduct with fines of between 90,000 and 900,000 Euros. To protect the renters, a centre to prevent real estate harassment (mobbing) has been created, and more than 10,000 families have benefitted from rent support with an investment of the Municipality of more than 57 million Euros, corresponding to an increase of 82% over the previous mandate. As a tool to deal with the emergency and the lack of social housing, the Provisional Proximity Allocation (APROP) program has been launched, which aims to give temporary use of housing to vacant areas, reducing the construction cost by 50% and time by 30%. Moreover, six cooperative cohabitation projects have been promoted through the assignment of the rights of use with more than one hundred apartments.

### **Barcelona: an effective combination of ‘grassroots’ and ‘institutional’ un-making of housing precarity**

Barcelona can be considered an emblematic case of how the long-term effects of urban transformations such as the growth of tourism, gentrification (pre-making) and the consequences of the precarization of the right to housing in terms of evictions and repossession (in-making), overlap and reinforce each other. However, in the last decade it has also been the centre of the struggle for the right to housing in Spain. First social movements and then the municipal Government, autonomously and each with their own strategies and tools, organized to defend the right to housing, proposing new narratives, legal frameworks and policies on housing.

The mobilizations promoted by PAH represent an effective example of un-making urban housing precarity through a rights-based approach. By challenging the law, PAH elaborated and successfully uses daily action protocols to stop evictions, promote direct negotiations between affected people and banks and rehouse families, thanks to the Obra Social campaign. (Garcia Lamarca and Kaika 2016; Di Feliceantonio 2017; D’Adda, Delgado and Sala, 2018). By changing the law, PAH aims to foster structural changes in the Spanish housing model and legal framework, for example, promoting tenant protections and the development of public housing stock (Martinez 2018). In the last ten years, PAH combined these strategies to promote awareness<sup>xxii</sup> and to support thousands of affected people (Colau and Alemany 2012 and 2013; Suárez 2014; Garcia Lamarca 2017). PAH successfully overcame the fear, loneliness and guilt of the affected people – breaking their isolation by promoting a process of collective empowerment and involving them to join in a campaign of civil disobedience to guarantee their own right to housing. In a context of crisis and austerity measures in which the mass media, the financial sector and the political system blamed affected people, accusing them of living beyond their means, PAH imposed a counter-narrative on the housing crisis and the neoliberal processes behind

it. The movement used a human rights discourse both to legitimize its illegal practices and campaigns, providing practical solutions to the affected people, but also to challenge the Spanish political system elaborating alternative proposals, policies and laws on housing (e.g. The Catalan Law 24/2015, or the 30% measure in Barcelona). In this sense, the case of PAH confirms the argument elaborated by Fierro (2019), that - drawing on the case of el Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Teto (MTST) of San Paolo (Brasil) - argues that a rights discourse can be used radically by social movements by combining legal and extra-legal strategies and forms of struggles to challenge the existing hegemonic system. PAH's counter-narrative, strategies, practices and campaigns inspired other social movements and, in Barcelona, with the victory of BeC in the 2015 municipal election, this influence reached the institutional level. The election of Ada Colau seemed a turning point in the struggle for the right to housing in Barcelona.

However, despite BeC Government's efforts there are limits on what it could do. First, Barcelona in Common had only 11 city councillors out of 41, which means that negotiations with other parties – in a political context that is highly fragmented and in constant upheaval due partly to the question of Catalan independence – were necessary for every measure. A second problem is the role played by actors that Castro (2018, 208) defines as *'influential economic 'shadow powers' and the lobbies and coalition of local elites capable of imposing their agendas on the local government.'* In this sense, for example, the construction sector lobby tried to block the measure of 30%<sup>xxiii</sup>, but its final approval shows that the mobilizations of social movements effectively countered this pressure as argued also by Blanco, Salazar and Bianchi (2019). A third constraint is the limited competence of the municipal administration in key sectors including housing and tourism. BeC's efforts to guarantee the right to housing clash, for example, with the national legal framework and the Generalitat's lack of investment.

Despite the limits which emerged in terms of the possibilities and results of the BeC Government, some radical change is happening, especially on housing and gentrification issues. First, in terms of language, narrative, and engagement, there is a radical move toward a real recognition and guarantee of the right to housing. This new attitude is confirmed by the measures adopted to deal with the housing crisis (UCER, Emergency Committee, expansion of public housing stock, Plan for the Right to Housing 2016-2025). The measures approved to contest gentrification (PEUAT, limitation of HUT, etc) at least limit the impact of mass tourism, a radical turn compared to the policies of former administrations. Second, BeC in government has invested financial and human resources and political capital to fight gentrification and defend the right to housing. In a context of austerity measures, social spending cuts and neoliberal policies, this is not obvious or easy. It's worth noticing here that, at least

up June 2018, the Barcelona Municipal Government was acting in a political context in which the central Government of the Popular Party was clearly against any decentralisation or radical change in the legal framework on housing. Third, in terms of governance approaches, BeC has opened new spaces of dialogue and participation for citizens, civil society and social movements. The ‘30% proposal’ is an interesting example of how social movements can influence the political agenda of the municipality and effectively counter-lobby for their own interests.

The overlapping effects of housing precarity and gentrification are still evident in Barcelona, as demonstrated by the number of evictions, the waiting list of the Emergency Committee, and the continued increase in rents. In this context, urban social movements engaged in the struggle for the right to housing did not spare their criticism of the BeC Government<sup>xxiv</sup> for not doing enough. However, thanks to the combined but autonomous action of social movements and the Municipal Government, I argue that at least the narrative and the policies of housing are evolving toward the conceptualization of a radical right to housing and its ‘potential directions’ elaborated by Madden and Marcuse (2016). As they put it (2016, 99): *‘We are interested in what we can identify as transformative demands. They seek to address the systemic causes of inequities and injustices, looking comprehensively at the sources of a particular problem and at the systemic and institutional factors that nurture it’*.

What we see now is an international context in which not only housing but also cities are increasingly commodified and financialized, a Spanish context in which the housing sector has historically been subordinated to general economic development, contributing to the housing bubble and then a crisis that caused a dramatic wave of evictions and mortgage reposessions and, last but not least, a political context in which the traditional main parties always supported the housing model that caused this crisis. Within these contexts, the combination of the demands and mobilizations of social movements as well as the public policies introduced in Barcelona can be considered radical. The focus is moving from the needs of markets, profit and economic growth to the needs of people affected by housing precarity through a rights-based approach. The grassroots mobilizations and the institutional policies to deal with the housing crisis in order to defend and expand social housing and contest gentrification represent a relevant attempt toward the decommodification and de-financialization of housing (Madden and Marcuse, 2016), and of the city more broadly. Looking at the concepts proposed by Lancione (2018), my claim is that the policies on housing promoted by the BeC Government can be considered an attempt at ‘institutional un-making’ of urban housing precarity that continues the ‘un-making’ developed by social movements, thus reinforcing it.

## Conclusion

This paper has considered the features and the consequences of the ‘Barcelona Model’ as the pre-making of housing precarity in Barcelona which overlapped, in the last decade, with the wave of evictions and mortgage repossession caused by the Spanish housing crisis (in-making of housing precarity). Focusing on the case study of PAH Barcelona, the paper aimed to underline how it is possible for urban social movements to un-make housing precarity through a rights-based approach that combines strategies and campaigns, challenging and changing the law. Moreover, considering the case of the Municipal Government led by Barcelona in Common between 2015 and 2019, it underlines that despite the difficulties and limits of this experience, it is possible to establish municipal policies to defend the right to housing which respond and continue to the work of social movements. This approach can be considered as an ‘institutional un-making’ of housing precarity, which becomes a possible alternative to the re-making of urban housing precarity elaborated by Lancione (2018).

The effects of the policies promoted by the municipal Government are slow and their long-term results are linked to external factors such as the possible changes in the Spanish legal framework on housing or the evolution of the Spanish political system, which will have to be further analysed in the future.<sup>xxv</sup> However, the sum of the struggles of urban social movements and the policies promoted by the BeC Municipal Government in Barcelona, which are reinforcing each other, represents both a powerful challenge to a political system that has not yet provided effective solutions to the housing crisis, and an original and effective combination of strategies to un-make urban housing precarity.

Drawing on the thoughts of Lancione (2018), the analysis developed in this paper aims to be a modest attempt at examining urban and housing precarity, not only to shed light on its premises and dramatic consequences, but also the possibilities elaborated both by grassroots social movements and municipal institutions to resist these forces through a rights-based discourse, elaborating counter-narratives and also alternative housing and city policies. Unfortunately, the housing crisis and the spread of housing precarity are far from over, in Spain as well as elsewhere. Fortunately, the struggles for the right to housing also persist in many different ways. Thus, further research could explore if similar analytical approaches might be useful for other case studies and urban contexts.

## Notes:

<sup>i</sup> *'All Spaniards are entitled to enjoy decent and adequate housing. The public authorities shall promote the necessary conditions and shall establish appropriate standards in order to make this right effective, regulating land use in accordance with the general interest in order to prevent speculation. The community shall participate in the benefits accruing from the urban policies of the public bodies.'*  
<https://www.boe.es/legislacion/documentos/ConstitucionINGLES.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> The '15M' or 'Indignados Movement' started its mobilizations on the 15 May 2011 by occupying the main squares of Madrid (Puerta del Sol) and Barcelona (Plaça Catalunya) in order to protest against the austerity measures approved in Spain as consequence of the Global Financial Crisis, as well as against the Spanish political system.

<sup>iii</sup> It is important to underline that PAH is one of the most formally-structured and influential urban social movements active in Barcelona and in Spain, but also that there are many other organizations and movements engaged in the daily struggle for the right to housing.

<sup>iv</sup> Available at:

[https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/turisme/sites/default/files/160921\\_informe\\_impacte\\_lloguer\\_vacacional.pdf](https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/turisme/sites/default/files/160921_informe_impacte_lloguer_vacacional.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> The data of Consejo del Poder Judicial are available at: [www.poderjudicial.es/cgpj/es/Poder\\_Judicial](http://www.poderjudicial.es/cgpj/es/Poder_Judicial)

<sup>vi</sup> The full report is available on the website of Bank of Spain:

[https://www.bde.es/f/webbde/GAP/Secciones/SalaPrensa/InformacionInteres/ReestructuracionSectorFinanciero/Arc/Fic/InformeCrisis\\_Completo\\_web.pdf](https://www.bde.es/f/webbde/GAP/Secciones/SalaPrensa/InformacionInteres/ReestructuracionSectorFinanciero/Arc/Fic/InformeCrisis_Completo_web.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> The data on the general state budget are available at:

<http://www.sepg.pap.minhfp.gob.es/sitios/sepg/es-ES/Presupuestos/Estadisticas/Paginas/Estadisticas.aspx>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2013-5941>

<sup>ix</sup> Elaboration of the author starting from the data of PAH Barcelona:

<https://pahbarcelona.org/es/category/stop-desahucios/>

<sup>x</sup> Every legal entity that owns a living area of more than 1,250 square metres is considered a major landlord.

<sup>xi</sup> Partido Socialista Obrero Español is the Spanish Socialist Party, whose leader Pedro Sanchez became prime minister on June 2018 after a no-confidence vote against the former prime minister Mariano Rajoy of PP.

<sup>xii</sup> Consejo del Poder Judicial: <http://www.poderjudicial.es/cgpj/es/Temas/Estadistica-Judicial/Estadistica-por-temas/Datos-penales--civiles-y-laborales/Civil-y-laboral/Efecto-de-la-Crisis-en-los-organos-judiciales/>

<sup>xiii</sup> The text of PEUAT is available at: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/pla-allotjaments-turistics/en/>

<sup>xiv</sup> Press release of 5-7-2018: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/180705-DOSSIER-Balan%C3%A7-dos-anys-pla-xoc-huts.pdf>

<sup>xv</sup> Available at:

[http://habitatge.barcelona/sites/default/files/documents/pdhib\\_volum\\_ii\\_pla\\_pel\\_dret\\_a\\_lhabitatge\\_2016-2025.pdf](http://habitatge.barcelona/sites/default/files/documents/pdhib_volum_ii_pla_pel_dret_a_lhabitatge_2016-2025.pdf)

<sup>xvii</sup> Press release of 28/4/2018: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/2018/04/24/la-ucer-es-consolidada-baixen-un-22-els-processos-judicials-de-desnonament-i-alhora-lajuntament-augmenta-un-245-latencio-de-lemergencia/>

<sup>xviii</sup> Consorci de l'Habitatge de Barcelona:

[http://www.bcn.cat/consorcihabitatge/es/suport\\_emergencia\\_social.html](http://www.bcn.cat/consorcihabitatge/es/suport_emergencia_social.html)

<sup>xix</sup> [https://www.bcn.cat/consorcihabitatge/es/suport\\_emergencia\\_social.html](https://www.bcn.cat/consorcihabitatge/es/suport_emergencia_social.html)

<sup>xx</sup> Press release of 5/9/2018: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/2018/09/05/barcelona-te-en-marxa-72-solars-publics-per-construir-hi-4-644-habitatges-assequibles/>

<sup>xxi</sup> Available at: [http://www.ohb.cat/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Habitatge\\_metropolis\\_2018.pdf](http://www.ohb.cat/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Habitatge_metropolis_2018.pdf)

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<sup>xxii</sup> To deal with the lack of data regarding the consequences of the housing crisis for the affected people, several public reports have been elaborated by PAH in collaboration with other actors, and are available on PAH Barcelona website: <https://pahbarcelona.org/ca/informes-i-estudis/>

<sup>xxiii</sup> On February 2019 an administrative appeal to block the measure has been presented.

<sup>xxiv</sup> In 2017 PAH Barcelona published a report which evaluated the first 2 years, underlining some criticisms. On the 18th of July 2019 PAH Barcelona occupied (for a whole day) part of the offices of the municipality in order to protest against the conditions of hostels, where most of the families evicted are relocated, and to demand the creation of institutional working group including the municipal, regional and national government to deal with this emergency situation, which PAH considered unacceptable.

<sup>xxv</sup> The municipal elections 26/05/2019 had a controversial result, with the victory of Ernest Maragall, the candidate of the independentist party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), who obtained less than 5,000 votes over Ada Colau. However, the two parties had the same number of Councillors – ten in a Council of forty-one - and after weeks of negotiations, Ada Colau was re-elected mayor of Barcelona on the 15/6/2019 thanks to a coalition with Partido Socialista de Catalunya – PSC (eight councillors) and the controversial support of three councillors elected with the centre-right party Ciudadanos. Even though now the Municipal Government led by Colau has 18 councillors, once again it does not have a majority and will still have to build further alliances to approve any proposed legislation or initiative.

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