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# Politics, citizenship and disobedience in the city of crisis: a critical analysis of contemporary housing struggles in Madrid

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## Abstract

The city region of Madrid can be considered as an exponent of the striking contradictions associated with the contemporary market-oriented production of housing. Given the increasing economic constraints of many middle- and working-class households because of the crisis, property values have been declining for practically seven years now, and tens of thousands of households have been evicted from their homes because they were unable to pay back their mortgages. Simultaneously, since the outbreak of the *indignados* movement in May 2011, a contestation of the structural forces ruling the real estate sector has been taking place, and questions about the right of housing became a prominent part of the public debate in an increasingly politicised society. Alongside the background of literature about the post-political city and subversive citizenship, this article pursues three key aims: It analyses the consequences of the persistent crisis with a special focus on the residential housing market in Madrid. Secondly, an analysis of the new social and political dynamics that have been emerging during the crisis is developed. Finally, it pinpoints to the way how the emergence of new actors within contemporary housing struggles has been shifting the social and political discourses in this political arena. Such an approach brings together discussions from the field of Political Science with the new geographies of contested crisis urbanism that relate to debates about the social construction of the city, citizenship and disobedience.

## Zusammenfassung

In der Stadtregion von Madrid produzierten die inhärenten Widersprüche des marktorientierten Wohnungsbaus der vergangenen Jahrzehnte einen explosiven Cocktail. Nach dem Platzen der Immobilienblase befinden sich die Wohnungspreise seit nunmehr sieben Jahren im freien Fall. Aufgrund der ökonomischen Engpässe zahlreicher Mittelschichts- und Arbeiterhaushalte konnten zehntausende Haushalte ihre Hypotheken nicht bedienen und wurden sukzessive aus ihren Wohnungen zwangsgeräumt. Gleichzeitig hat sich seit der Eruption der Bewegung der *indignados* im Mai 2011 eine tiefgreifende Hinterfragung der Strukturen des Immobilienmarktes etabliert, und Debatten über das Recht auf Wohnen haben sich zu einem wichtigen Bestandteil der politischen Auseinandersetzungen in einer zunehmend politisierten Gesellschaft entwickelt. Aufbauend auf der Literatur zur post-politischen Stadt und zu *subversive citizenship* verfolgt dieser Artikel drei zentrale Absichten: Erstens erfolgt eine Untersuchung der Konsequenzen der langanhaltenden Krise, mit einem speziellen Fokus auf die Widersprüche auf dem Wohnungsmarkt in Madrid. Zweitens wird eine Analyse der neuen sozialen und politischen Dynamiken durchgeführt, die sich während der Krise entfaltet haben. Letztlich wird aufgezeigt, wie die

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Herausbildung neuer Akteure im Kampf um das Recht auf Wohnraum die sozialen und politischen Diskurse in dieser politischen Arena sukzessive verschoben hat. Der hier vorgestellte konzeptionelle Entwurf zur Analyse der politischen Auseinandersetzungen bringt dabei Ansätze aus der Politikwissenschaft mit den neuen Geographien eines kontroversen Krisenurbanismus zusammen und verknüpft so Debatten zur sozialen Konstruktion der Stadt mit Fragen von *citizenship* und passivem Widerstand.

**Keywords** Urban crisis, housing politics, housing struggles, post-political city, subversive citizenship, Madrid, Spain

## 1. Introduction

The city region of Madrid can be considered a prominent example of the contradictions associated with the contemporary market-oriented production of housing. From the mid-1990s to the eve of the global financial crisis, the metropolitan area converted into the leading exponent of the intensive growth period experienced in Spain. With an average annual GDP rise of 3.8 per cent, its regional economy outperformed national values during that decade, attracting roughly two thirds of the foreign direct investment allocated to the country (Villa-verde and Maza 2012). More than a million migrants transformed Madrid into a vibrant and multicultural place that apparently offered almost unlimited employment and business opportunities. However, these processes were accompanied by an accelerated and at long sight unsustainable growth of the built environment (Hewitt and Escobar 2011). An astonishing expansion of the real estate sector was indicative of this – the stock of housing units grew from 1.9 to 3.0 million, thus doubling the increase in household numbers. Such development required not only a massive consumption of land and other resources (García-Palomares 2010), but it also provoked a profound internal restructuring, generalising the gentrification of the historic city centre and of adjacent areas (García Pérez 2014; Sequera and Janoschka 2015), and intensifying simultaneously the existing socio-spatial fragmentation processes (Fernández and Roch 2012; Méndez and Prada-Trigo 2014). Despite the overproduction of housing, nominal property values nearly tripled between 1996 and 2007, outnumbering considerably the inflation rate (40.5 per cent in the same period). Average house prices rose from 1,081 € to 3,006 € per square metre in the whole metropolitan region, and to more than 4,000 € in the municipality of Madrid (Idealista 2015). Such data illustrate the speculative nature of the real estate boom that was taking place; similar to the one occurred in countries like the US, the UK and Ireland.

The institutional arrangements of the real estate market proved harmful to vulnerable social groups, as

more than 360,000 homes were repossessed or subject to foreclosure since 2008 (Álvarez de Andrés et al. 2015). This is equivalent to 6.8 per cent of all mortgage holders and means by far the highest repossession rate experienced anywhere in Europe. Contrary to other countries, no active anti-eviction policies have been applied by Spanish administrations (Cano Fuentes et al. 2013). Such absence has consequently formed the breeding ground for the development of an important social mobilisation related to housing and in support of the problems that ordinary people face to pay loans and rents (Abellán 2014; Barbero 2015; Romanos 2014). As part of the general mobilisation cycle, the observed housing struggles have also contributed to diffuse counter-hegemonic, autonomous and often allegedly anti-capitalist positions into the mainstream society, especially since the indignados movement in May 2011 (Abellán et al. 2012; Flesher 2015; Taibo 2013).

This article focuses on the housing struggles that evolved during the crisis in Madrid, from a theoretical perspective that interweaves three narratives: First, as cities are considered a “global category of conflict” (Holston 2011), the housing struggles may be conceptualised as an expression of new and insurgent forms of citizenship. Secondly, I assume that the materialisation of the conflicts produces fissures in the hegemonic neoliberal consensus. Introducing Jacques Rancière’s (1998, 2001) emphasis on the presupposition of the ‘equality of the excluded, of those who are not counted’ in policy discourses, the housing struggles in Madrid may be interpreted as a rupture with the ‘police order’, and as ‘political moments’ that rescind the consensus modes of common political negotiation. Such a perspective will be further developed through literature focusing on ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin 2009). By this, nuanced narratives and imaginaries of citizenship that include conflict and the counter-hegemonic construction of livelihood and urbanity will be elaborated. The framework is informed by recent discussions that interpret citizenship as more than a formal legal status and a territorially defined membership of community (Stephens and Squire 2012). As the boundaries

of citizenship have been circumscribed by multiple hierarchies of racial, gendered, class-based and spatial nature, the ways will be explored by which citizenship is constituted in and through space and conflicts about space. Based on the example of the housing struggles in Madrid, a relational understanding of the nexus between spatiality and citizenship (Meltzer and Rojas 2013) will expand some of the common narratives in urban geography. This idea goes hand in hand with the claims of Staeheli (2008), who points to community and citizenship as sites of contestation and struggle, drawing attention to recent epistemological shifts within urban studies that have been re-constituting and re-placing 'the citizen' as an analytic category.

This approach brings together discussions from the field of Political Science with those rooted in Urban Geography. It is based upon original empirical research, which has been carried out since May 2011 in the framework of different research projects<sup>1</sup>. In the course of this research, a variety of different approaches have been applied, such as: (a) open-ended interviews with dispossessed individuals in different neighbourhoods of the city and the metropolitan region of Madrid; (b) in-depth interviews with activists; (c) participant observation, and (d) context analysis of media discourses. Constant work in the broader environment of the housing movement in Madrid provides us with a deep insight of the changing geographies of contestation. The resulting analysis is developed in two steps: First, the theoretical discussion will establish a specific lens for approaching the contemporary cycle of contestation in Madrid. Subsequently, the housing struggles will be analysed, (i) taking into consideration the structural economic and urban transformations that have taken place since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2007/8, and (ii) analysing the repertoires of the movement in relation to the conceptual framework. By this, this article will shed light on the way how alternative futures of socio-spatial justice have been imagined in and through the housing struggles in Madrid.

## 2. Cities, citizenship and disobedience – conceptual reflections about politics and conflict

### 2.1 From neoliberalisation and the post-political city to democracy in space – an approximation

Like many countries of the Western hemisphere, Spain has experienced for decades the practical construction

and successive reorganisation of the now prevailing intellectual, moral and ideological project of neoliberalisation. In general terms, the construction of neoliberal hegemony involves the capacity of dominant actors to generate consensus and legitimation around a manoeuvre that transforms a particular political project into a universal one (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005). In terms of Gramsci's approach to hegemony (1971), such a predominance of a social group over others implies not only political and economic control, but also the ability to project the ways of interpreting the world so that all other groups and actors accept it as common sense. The extensive literature about the neoliberal city has commonly recognised that neoliberalisation successfully achieved to camouflage its condition of being a project of class domination. Accordingly, Aiwa Ong (2006) calls neoliberal hegemony a technique that de-politicises the public sphere, mainly through institutionalised governance processes that are based on supposedly a-political and non-ideological criteria derived from scientific and technical expertise.

Such a suggestion relates to approaches that have incorporated debates from political theory into critical urban geography to better develop the conceptual links between space, politics and 'the political' (Dikeç 2005). These questions were also raised in different places by activists of the 2011 Occupy movement, criticising the assemblage of representative democracy and claiming for 'real democracy'. This has given prominence to the question of how the substance of 'the political' can be conceptualised, and which differences exist between real politics and 'the political'. With regard to this, the term of the 'post-political city' – initially introduced by Swyngedouw (2007) – also refers to neoliberal consensus: It criticises contemporary politics as a formation that has displaced the conflictive nature of 'the political', while, at the same time, intending to suppress 'political moments', since they are considered as a disturbing element (Rancière 2011).

This assumption is based on the writings of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, whose political theory helps to better understand contemporary reformulations of concepts such as democracy and representation. Rancière (2010) goes back to the political philosophy of Aristotle, who defined the eminently political character of human beings, while stating that only humans have the authority of the word – the logos – whereas all other animals only possess a voice to indicate pleasure, pain and sorrow. In this regard, the political character of human beings would be witnessed

by the possession of logos. However, the domination exercised by economic, social and political elites deprive those who have no part in the hegemonic logic of representation from the authority of the word. Thus they are not heard as valid interlocutors. This condition is supposed to be the common state in modern representational democracies that have developed mechanisms, scales and sites of governance to extort the logos from those who have no part in the sensual distribution of the world (Rancière 1995). Such naturalised order of domination, as established within consensual democracy, is defined as 'police' (Rancière 2006). In other words, Rancière delineates most of what is commonly understood as politics through the term of 'police' – for instance, the institutions and processes that govern the organisation and representation of communities, the exercise of power, the way social roles are distributed and the ways this distribution is legitimated (Davis 2010). In this sense 'politics' only begins and emerges through establishing dissent with the existing police order. However, such dissent does not only mean a confrontation of interest or opinions. It means an interruption of the natural order of domination, whenever a body changes its assigned position in the social hierarchy or the destiny of a place (Rancière 2010). During the creation of 'political moments' aspects that had no reason to be seen become visible, and a discourse is developed where formerly only a noise was heard. This necessarily involves that 'politics' is thought as a disputed way of cohabitation. 'Politics' occurs when those who appear to be unequal declare to be equal and when the regulatory work of the police order is shown to be arbitrary. In other words, 'politics' unravels the sensible divisions of the established (police) order and gives logos to actors who are regularly excluded from a political debate that has vanished from its 'political' – that means conflictive – sense.

In recent years, Jacques Rancière's political theory has received increasing attention in critical urban studies: It has been discussed in approaches that focus in general terms upon the struggles for a more democratic world (Purcell 2014), the irruptions of democratic demands in the course of the Occupy and indignant movement (Bassett 2014; Lorey 2014; Swyngedouw 2014), the occupation of squares (Davidson and Iveson 2014; Kaika and Karaliotas 2014), and the emergence of common spaces in cities of the crisis (Stavrídes 2014). Such academic reception has in common to recognise that the urban assemblage in contemporary democratic societies in the Western world can be better understood by the dialectical resource of the 'police order'.

Hence, the visible and invisible relations of neoliberal capitalism, the material and discursive spaces of the invasion of politics by supposedly aseptic and technical processes of governance but also the spaces of the materialisation of counter-hegemonic struggles that try to give voice to those excluded both from political and material space have been addressed within these debates (Swyngedouw 2011; MacLeod 2011). Moreover, the relational aspects of power inherent to the production of space can also be realised under the scheme, bringing therefore together logos with praxis. If the symbolic production of 'politics of place' is approached, it can be deciphered how places are conceived and produced. This includes the question which specific constellations of meaning, aesthetics, values and other naturalised social rules underlie this production, as well as which alternative projections, priorities and ideas might arise from conflicts in and about space and place. But the propositions to conceptualise Rancière through theories of space go beyond this, and they have been further reflecting on democracy in and through space. In this regard, the concept of 'democracy in space' discloses the potential to better articulate a spatial dimension from Rancière's philosophy. In this regard, 'democracy in space' "... can be described as a disagreement that disrupts, challenges and ultimately shifts the dominant (spatial) order, which is fixed in and through space. The spatial order of the police allocates practices, audibility, identities and visibility through specific places, it demarcates, fixes and controls. [...] Democracy in space disrupts this order and produces a democratic moment, when a political subject becomes visible in space, thus appears in space. But it takes also space as a means to illustrate the demand of equality. It acts through space. [...] This disturbance takes place as a conflict, a disagreement over space and in space. In such a comprehension, democracy in space is a conflictive political intervention that claims equality *in* space, *over* space and *through* space, directed against the apparently fixed logic of spatial distribution" (Rosemann 2013: 48; translated from the German original by the author).

The recognition of the concept of democracy in space brings together the inherent logics of 'politics' with the lens of conflict as a constitutive element of space. However, it relates also to reflections that were addressed by authors such as Dikeç (2012) and that consider space as a specific 'mode of political thinking'. And as it will be further addressed, the idea of democracy in space should contribute to make Rancière's Political Theory also more operational for empirical research.



## 2.2 Alternative explorations into acts of citizenship – in and through space

By focusing on insurgent forms of self-organisation, the previous discussion has prepared the ground for exploring critical ascriptions to a second key concept in Political Theory, which is citizenship. In this regard, citizenship expresses the relationship between people and the state, but in a distinct way from Occidental political scientists, who constantly reaffirm the link between nationality, citizen and a regime of universal rights and duties. *Holston* (2011: 336) understands citizenship as a “membership in a political association or a community that articulates a relation (not a dichotomy) between structures of power and practices of social lives”. As urban citizenship he characterises citizenship that targets primarily the city as the most important and geographically closest political community, addressing a series of claims that refer to the different agendas of a decent social life, such as housing, transport and other infrastructures. And relating to insurgent urban citizenship, he points out the “political transformations that occur when the conviction of having a right to the city turns residents into active citizens”, mobilising their demands to confront deep-rooted regimes of inequality. This conceptualisation opposes the modernist political project that absorbs citizenship into a plan of state building, but also the modernist spaces that dominate many cities today as an outcome of common planning practices (*Holston* 2013). At the same time, it provides a ground to understand contemporary housing struggles as expressions of insurgent citizenship.

In an attempt that seeks to decolonise the notion of citizenship, *Taylor* (2013: 607f.) claims to shift from the discussions about rights – which are entrenched within capitalist modernity and closely related to the Occidental project with its bodies of law, legal processes and state institutions – towards the concept of equality and dignity. Contrary to rights, dignity does not depend on external validation to exist, because it is constituted by human experience. And if dignity and the claim to humanity are engendered and located in the person, then citizenship develops out of subjectivity. This idea builds bridges to how *Rancière* speaks about political ‘subjectivation’, or the way the struggle for existence as a political subject is assembled, namely through three mechanisms: argumentative demonstration, theatrical performance and heterologic disidentification (*Rancière* 2006). Additionally, citizenship is hereby conceived as an active concept that focuses on

the multiple micro-resistances in daily life as well as on active struggles to ‘crack capitalism’ (*Holloway* 2010). But how can we better think this active and at the same time conflictive dimension of citizenship?

As a first step, *Engin Isin* (2008) proposes to concentrate on the ‘acts’ of claim-making subjects in and through various sites and scales. Such ‘acts of citizenship’ focus on the constitutive role of rupture, disorder and deviation and explore the ways in which citizenship is created anew (*Aradau et al.* 2010). In other words, citizenship does not look at the citizens as already defined political subjects but seeks to understand the processes through which people constitute as citizens (*Stephens* 2010; *Isin and Nielsen* 2008). These processes are widespread and implicate reflecting upon the expressions, places and scales of identification. As it always exceeds any pre-constituted territorial scale or spatiality, the radical subjectivity of citizenship enacts the conception of the political. However, the borders of citizenship are everywhere – at the physical boundary of national territories, in communities, in political practices and policies, in social norms, or embodied in the individuals themselves (*Sequera and Janoschka* 2012). This means also that the sites of citizenship embrace simultaneously the spaces of formal power, spaces of interaction and the sites of ordinary lives. It is in these sites that citizenship conquers its meaning, through permanent contestation and transgression of social realities, by means of “the manifold acts through which new actors as claimants emerge in new sites” (*Isin* 2009: 370).

For this proposition, it is crucial to better understand the term of ‘acts’. In opposition to practice, which is a matter of routine, repetition and of habitual activity, acts explicitly focus on unique situations or, in terms of *Rancière*, the creation and mise-en-scène of political moments. Instead of just following a script, a routine or a common way to do things, acts of citizenship produce (intended or non-intended) ruptures and create new scenes. They explicitly aim at breaking habits and thus establish a way to protest against the discipline and routine of the confined ‘police’ order. In this regard, acts of citizenship transform the forms and modes of being political by creating new actors as activist citizens (*Isin* 2009: 383). Hence, citizenship is enacted by an ongoing process of formation and reformulation of subject positions in and through conflicts. But these struggles for recognition produce also new identities. This means that acts of citizenship can be a frame to analyse identities and the scalar politics engrained

in collective action (see Fig. 1), but as subjective constructions that are independent from membership in a nation-state or any other given polity. However, the research of insurgent acts of citizenship might then reflect on how subjects become activist citizens; i.e., through an analysis of the created scenes, the re-interpreted scales and the established sites of contestation.

The theoretical discourses presented hitherto suggest an understanding of housing struggles as a way of political action that constitutes new actors, creates and makes active use of new sites and challenges the existing power relations of political scales as a specific mode of political thinking. The perspective of acts of citizenship allows reflecting on the ways how in the course of the development of conflicts an agglutination of demands that question the dominant ‘police’ logics can take place. Moreover, acts of citizenship can also be constitutive elements for producing interruptions of the ‘police’, through the creation and invention of ‘political moments’. And finally, acts can also be considered as a creation of new, emancipatory ‘spaces of citizenship’ (Tamayo 2006: 32). This permits to analyse the intrinsic power relations that are inscribed in space through the term of citizenship, relating accordingly to ‘democracy in space’. And it refers also to debates raised by Massey (2004) about the sense of place, in terms of a discourse that is charged with meaning and power and that guides the cultural and cognitive frames underlying collective action. In this regard, it is important to consider how space is constructed as a specific political arena, and how specific struggles reject subject positions that have been pre-established by the hegemonic production of spatial relationships. In the subsequent empirical discussion, this idea will be brought together with the question of how housing struggles recover logos and establish common people’s demands to be valid interlocutors; how political moments are produced through acts of citizenship, and how these moments create new scripts that subsequently transform the police order.

### 3. Contemporary housing struggles in Madrid – constructing political moments through acts of citizenship

#### 3.1 Urban crises, uprisings and the substance of housing struggles in Madrid

In his genealogy about the expansive waves of neo-liberalisation, David Harvey (2005) argues that the fi-

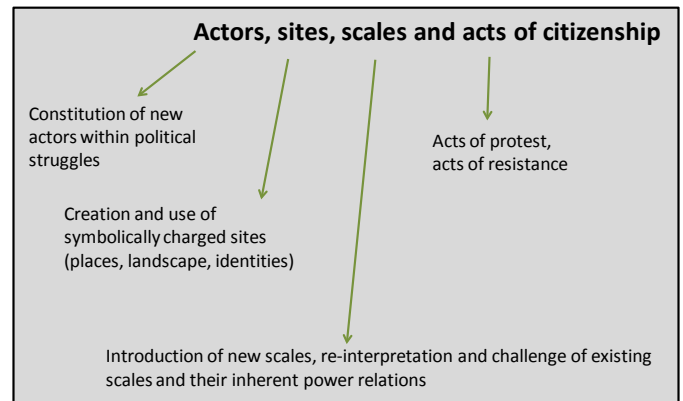


Fig. 1 Acts of citizenship – a concept to understand political moments in and through space (author’s design)

nancialisation of the economy is one of the structuring methods for the dispossession of broader parts of the population – an assumption that has now made its way to the mainstream of political debates, due to the painful experience of millions of heavily indebted households that have been trapped into overvalued properties. Cassiers and Kesteloot (2012: 1911) resume that “every cycle or regime creates new forms of capital accumulation each time the potential of the former one has been exhausted”. The politics of housing and real estate speculation was in many places a key element of capital over-accumulation during the 2000s (Stephens 2007), and this is also the case in Madrid. Such policy arrangements had different expressions, ranging from the liberalisation of property and land markets as a hotbed for subsequent construction booms to the successive abandonment of social housing policies and the privatisation of public housing units.

Inspired by the results of an aggressive liberalisation of the planning legislation tested first in the autonomous region of Valencia (Naredo and Montiel 2011), a new national land law (*ley de suelo*, 1998) set the legal basis for an expansion scheme in which land developers, construction companies and real estate enterprises became the decisive agents of spatial planning (Janoschka 2010). Additionally, the regional authorities did not develop the mandatory guidelines for spatial planning as foreseen in the new legislation. And both regional and national administrations realised important investment in transport infrastructures (i.e., motorways, railway and metro network, expansion of the airport). Finally, in a panorama of unlimited growth expectations, the vast majority of local governments adopted their development plans to boost construction and thus to increase local tax revenues. The central state granted substantial tax breaks to

subsidise homeownership, while the financial sector contributed cheap and abundant credits, which were a necessary asset to feed a bubble based on private debt (García 2010; López and Rodríguez 2011). The result was on the one hand an astonishing expansion of the real estate sector: the number of newly-built housing units in the metropolitan area of Madrid rose from 15,000 in 1995 to a maximum of 61,000 in 2006. In its heydays the direct employment in the construction sector accounted for over nine per cent of the workforce in the region, thus exceeding the share of industrial employment (Méndez and Sánchez 2011). On the other hand, as private homeownership had reached a maximum of 87 per cent of all households by 2007, it can be considered the dominant access to housing, independent from economic status or social class. Additionally, 35 per cent of the population owned two houses or more (López and Rodríguez 2011).

However, the growth model had reached its apogee well before the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis, accumulating both internal contradictions and negative social and economic externalities. Since then, the persistent crisis has brightened a series of troubles caused by the real estate hypertrophy. Three aspects portray the dramatic transformations of the real estate market in the region: First, the production of housing

decreased by more than 95 per cent (to only 2.691 units in 2014). Second, given the more restrictive credit conditions, the number of real estate transactions fell to one third (from an average of 109,000 between 2004 and 2006 to a minimum of 40,180 in 2013). Third, housing prices decreased by more than a third in average until March 2015. This decrease has been much stronger in districts with predominantly less affluent social groups in the southern and eastern peripheries of the city and the metropolitan region. For instance, housing prices dropped by a quarter in the five most expensive districts in the northern part of the city of Madrid and roughly a third in the six most expensive municipalities in the north and north-western sector. However, housing prices plunged (to less than half) in the least expensive municipalities of the metropolitan region and in the five cheapest districts of the central city (see Table 1), demonstrating exemplarily the uneven geographic impacts of the crisis.

The crisis has exacerbated another structural mismatch in the housing market. Given the dramatic rise in unemployment, many individuals now face huge problems to pay back mortgages that had been (too easily) granted during the boom. Backed by legislation, banks can simply begin legal proceedings against defaulting debtors, expropriate properties

Table 1 The geographically uneven 'boom and bust' cycle – evolution of real estate prices in Madrid between 2001/2002 and 2015. Source: own calculations based on statistical data retrieved from Idealista 2015

Highest real estate prices				Lowest real estate prices			
Districts of the City of Madrid	Increase (%) 2001 – max. price	Maximum price: €/sqm (Date)	Decrease (%) max. price – 2015	Districts of the City of Madrid	Increase (%) 2000 – max. price	Maximum price: €/sqm (Date)	Decrease (%) max. price – 2015
Salamanca	113	5,202 (4 <sup>th</sup> q/08)	21.5	Villaverde	158	2,867 (4 <sup>th</sup> q/06)	56.8
Chamartín	99	5,029 (3 <sup>rd</sup> q/08)	26.1	Usera	140	3,096 (4 <sup>th</sup> q/06)	52.6
Chamberí	120	4,985 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/08)	27.2	Puente de Vallecas	133	3,138 (4 <sup>th</sup> q/06)	55.6
Centro	140	4,454 (2 <sup>nd</sup> q/07)	26.3	Carabanchel	138	3,228 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/07)	50.4
Retiro	105	4,427 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/08)	26.1	Vicálvaro	119	3,294 (2 <sup>nd</sup> q/06)	48.7
Metropolitan region (North, Northwest)	Increase (%) 2002 – max. price	Maximum price: €/sqm (Date)	Decrease (%) max. price – 2015	Metropolitan region (East, South)	Increase (%) 2002 – max. price	Maximum price: €/sqm (Date)	Decrease (%) max. price – 2015
La Moraleja	n/d	6,062 (3 <sup>rd</sup> q/08)	32.3 %	Parla	107 %	2,534 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/07)	56.0
Pozuelo	72	4,322 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/07)	32.5 %	Ciempozuelos	n/d	2,642 (4 <sup>th</sup> q/05)	51.4
Majadahonda	73	3,917 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/08)	34.5 %	Móstoles	88 %	2,666 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/07)	51.2
Boadilla del Monte	105	3,779 (3 <sup>rd</sup> q/07)	36.8 %	Arganda del Rey	96 %	2,700 (3 <sup>rd</sup> q/07)	46.7
Las Rozas	68	3,726 (3 <sup>rd</sup> q/06)	36.2 %	Fuenlabrada	91 %	2,656 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/07)	48.4
Tres Cantos	73	3,488 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/07)	34.7 %	Torrejón de Ardoz	97 %	2,830 (1 <sup>st</sup> q/07)	52.4

and evict owners. In Spain, more than 360,000 households have been repossessed or subject to foreclosure since 2008, while the annual number of evictions more than tripled in Madrid. Evictions concentrate in specific neighbourhoods, thus contributing to the geographically uneven urban geography of the crisis. The less affluent neighbourhoods in the south of the city (Villaverde, Carabanchel, Puente de Vallecas, Usera, Vicálvaro) and the southern and eastern suburbs, in which the prices fell far above-average, are the places with the highest repossession rate. Additionally, in many cases the legislation locks people into debt with the banks even after they have lost their property, pushing them into further economic and social exclusion (Abellán et al. 2012). Given the untamed and state-assisted market forces in the real estate sector, broader parts of the population are suffering now a structural eviction from the constitutionally anchored 'right to use of decent and adequate housing' (Art. 47 of the Spanish Constitution). This mismatch provides the breeding ground for the initially mentioned cycle of intensive housing struggles, which will be successively addressed alongside the lens of the previously developed theoretical frame.

### 3.2 Analytical insights into the housing struggles in Madrid – acts of citizenship and the construction of a new hegemonic discourse

Since the eruption of the indignados movement in the heart of Madrid on 15 May 2011, major transformations of political discourses have occurred in Spain. Different factors have influenced the expansion of a vocabulary that is capable to express to ordinary people the domination and contradictions obeying capital accumulation and dispossession (Charnock et al. 2012). The housing movement widely contributed to this rearticulation and transformation of discourses related to the historiography of the debt crisis. For instance, during the boom cycle banks approved mortgages in an irresponsible way, to individuals in unstable labour conditions and with very low incomes, extending the duration of loans to a maximum of 50 years and its amount to 130 per cent of the property value. By blaming the key actors of the real estate economy, especially the banks, for liability for these practices of credit endorsement, the housing movement was able to 'release' individuals in problematic circumstances from the individual 'fault' that had been burdened to them by the hegemonic political discourse. This re-interpretation of the societal discourse sounds logic.

But it has taken years to unravel these practices and change the common vision that losing your house is primarily an individual problem and fault and not a quasi 'natural' outcome of a systematically orchestrated dispossession. – But how did this discursive shift take place, which actors and repertoires were involved in this process and how can the claims of the housing movement in Madrid be addressed through the theoretical lens developed previously?

In order to provide a response to this question, it is in a first step important to characterise the actors that criticise the dispossession that many households experience, thus constituting themselves as claimants. In this regard, the housing struggles in Madrid are an example of a social movement constituted as a widespread social network without any headquarter. A vast number of collectives, platforms and assemblies interact and cooperate to enact struggles that take place on different scales, establishing also different relationships with institutional actors. Within this multiplicity, the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH, platform for people affected by mortgage) can be considered the most visible branch of the movement. It emerged first in 2009 in Barcelona and spread to Madrid during the first months of 2011. The PAH is a decentralised group, and it has two assemblies in the municipality of Madrid and another 14 in the metropolitan region. Officially, these assemblies provide advice to people who are suffering the threat of foreclosure. But they connect also to other actors, both to those which are struggling on a more institutional level (e.g., the Regional Federation of Neighbourhood associations in Madrid, FRAVM; or CONADEE, the National Coordination of Ecuadorians in Spain) and to those which act from less institutionalised positions. For instance, it can be considered an intermediary between different collectives such as the neighbourhood assemblies and the more than 30 housing groups of these assemblies that emerged after the decentralisation of the 15-M movement in June 2011. Additionally, the broader network of the housing struggles embraces more groups, such as the Housing Office (*Oficina de Vivienda*), the Squatting Office (*Oficina de Okupación*), several self-organised and autonomous social centres, or the Housing Assembly of Madrid (*Asamblea de Vivivenda de Madrid*; for a more detailed characterisation of the actors of the housing movement in Madrid, see Abellán 2014).

However, all the last-mentioned actors have in common that they concentrate their protest predominant-



ly on strategies of disobedience, on specific acts that claim a re-articulation in, of and through space. By this, the movement aims at challenging the practice of repossessions, demanding an indefinite moratorium of evictions and a profound modification of the Spanish credit law. But these demands can be considered only as a first step to claim the right to the city and another way of producing urbanity beyond capitalist domination (Abellán et al. 2012). In this regard, the following discussion will explore the 'acts of citizenship' and the inherent creation of scripts, identities and sites that help to understand how the hegemonic discourse about housing (policies) has been modified for the last years by the struggles of the housing movement. These acts aim at constructing new subjectivities and at producing ruptures of the hegemonic policy consensus, and can be subdivided in five different repertoires, which will be addressed subsequently:

(i) The assembly as a political space: The effusive occupation of the central square of the Puerta del Sol in Madrid that materialised after the 15th of May 2011, giving birth to the *indignados* movement, introduced not only a new protest repertoire into the common discourse. It also transformed the square from a geographical place into an 'unexpected event' that agglutinated the discontent with an increasingly distorted 'democracy', expressed by a new 'generation' of activist citizens under the umbrella of demands for 'real democracy' (Lorey 2014). The 'political moment' that arose from the construction of the protest camp produced the foundation myth of the 15-M movement that at least temporarily abolished some of the existing barriers between different factions of counter-hegemonic struggles in the city. But beyond this, it created the script for a very important rupture of the hegemonic police order: Activist citizens were claiming the political dimension of public space, conquering new spaces of encounter, debate and protest that paved the way for developing new subjectivities (Janoschka and Sequera 2012). In this regard, it recovered logos and transformed existing claims that previously were lacking a procedure to be heard as a voice into a political discourse. At the same time, the protest camp had an inherent spatial connotation, claiming equality in, over and through space. However, the occupation of the Puerta del Sol set also the base for the housing movement addressed here, and the assembly as a political space has since then been constructing new sites of struggle with a high symbolic charge. Especially after lifting up the protest camps and re-locating the struggle into the neighbourhoods, the

assemblies produced nodes for the production of new subjectivities, through a redefinition of public space as political space in a network of dozens of squares across the city – a re-articulation of power relations that has been now constantly inscribed into space.

(ii) Stop evictions: This action consists in the organisation of a massive affluence of people during the moment when the eviction of a house shall take place. The key aim is to impede the employed police officers and lawyers to enter the corresponding housing unit. Stop evictions have developed into one of the distinguishing actions of the PAH and the housing movement in general. In this regard, it is important to state that the public act of stopping an eviction includes more than bringing together a critical mass of people that overtly challenge the state authorities. It is a sign of close cooperation between common neighbours and activists (i.e., the PAH and the neighbourhood assemblies), and it actively involves the affected person or family in the creation of networks. Additionally, this process contributes to the construction of new identities that regularly shift from defaulting debtor into someone who is affected by capitalist dispossession. Although it starts from the house as the prominent scale of struggle, it implies networks that range from the very local neighbourhood to the national scale. Hence, it is important to stress the symbolically important site of these acts, which is at the interface to the private sphere of a household. This produces a very novel form of subjectivation, making use of the threshold between private and public space. More than 300 evictions have been stopped thus far in Madrid, and this means that the city is now riddled with a dense network of signs of resistance and the construction of subjectivities of activist citizens that produced new forms of solidarity and subjectivity. Additionally, it is important to notify that rather untypical actors such as middle-class households, migrants or retirees participate actively in these acts. This indicates how far the ruptures of the hegemonic discourses have approached towards the mainstream of the Spanish society.

(iii) Occupation of banks: Another innovative act consists in the organisation of occupations of branch offices of banks that have started the legal procedures to evict a neighbour from his or her house. As it was previously described, the mortgage practices of banks, paired with the depreciation of flats and some specific details of the Spanish credit law, have led to the situation that the devolution of a house is by far not enough to cancel a credit – people often maintain

in debt of tens of thousands, sometimes even six-digit euro sums after losing their house. This situation has motivated the PAH in 2012/3 to present a popular legislative initiative aiming at a profound modification of the credit law. But despite of gathering more than 1.4 million signatures and thus forcing a parliamentary debate on the proposition, no significant changes were introduced into the law. Proving thus an – at least temporary – impossibility to transform the legislation, many affected households have taken the destiny of their economic situation in their own hands. For this purpose, the occupation of local banks branches sorts out to be a useful tool. It transfers the place of protest to the place of decision-making of a loan – the bank. This place is additionally one of the key symbols of failure of contemporary capitalism in the Spanish society, and it stands exemplarily for the dispossession of common people. This is especially the case after the recapitalisation of nationalised banks by taxpayers' money. Banks have received billions of euros from the government to re-float economically, but no means to protect ordinary people from being dispossessed from their homes have been introduced. This situation has created a strong sense of injustice amongst the population. However, the occupation of banks has now been pursued by people of all ages, classes and nationality. It introduces a new scale of struggle and produces different legitimacies. And it creates often spectacular acts of citizenship that produce at least temporarily a suppression of the police order, by deliberately ignoring and challenging private law.

(iv) Exposure of politicians (*escrache*): In the aftermath of the previously mentioned popular legislative initiative, a new way of exposing politicians to popular anger has emerged, the *escrache*. By this term, an act is meant that disturbs the privacy of a politician: for instance, when a demonstration in front of his/her private house, in front of or inside a restaurant where he/she eats or during whatever regular traditional political practice (usually related to other fields) is organised. This activity subverts some of the general procedures of public life, namely the respect of a minimum of privacy of politicians. By breaking with this rule, politicians are reminded to evaluate from a much more personal standpoint the consequences that their decisions have for the daily life of the population in general. It is also a spectacular way of breaking the police order. The creation of political moments that bring together the decision-makers with acts in public space creates a series of scenes that innovate in terms of how democracy in and through space can be

grounded on an everyday level. It alters the ascriptions of what is a political space, by introducing different sites that are usually not identified as political spaces into the struggle of activists.

(v) Liberation of vacant buildings: A spectacular increase of occupations of vacant housing has recently been taking place in Madrid – especially of buildings owned by some of the now nationalised banks that were rescued by the government. This is a way to relate to a structural mismatch of the housing market: The city region has several hundred thousands of vacant houses, and in some areas more than 30 per cent of the stock is empty. At the same time, banks have accumulated tens of thousands of houses in their portfolios which they received through the forced evictions. However, many of these flats stay empty, as banks hope that a shortage of the offer may stabilise the prices in the housing market. In this scenario, the liberation of vacant buildings has now developed towards a legitimate way to resolve collectively the social drama occurring in the housing market, and it has lost at least partially its primarily countercultural significance. The PAH has named these acts as 'social work' (*obra social*, in a persiflage to the *obra social* that many Spanish banks have with the same name and that usually finance urban cultural activities due to a substantial tax break that is foreseen in the national legislation), and this discursive transformation is part of the constitution of new actors that has taken place in the course of the housing struggles. Such acts of resistance originated from the occupation of a vacant hotel in the heart of the city in the aftermath of a massive demonstration on 15 October 2011 and its latter conversion into a temporary home for evicted families. Although the national police forces evicted the hotel only 50 days later, it served as a laboratory for redefining the social ascriptions to squatting in Madrid, and as a subversive political academy (Abellán et al. 2012). In this regard, the term 'squatting' was first replaced by 'occupation', and now activists usually refer to the 'liberation of vacant housing' to help those who have lost their homes because of the consequences of capitalist domination. The sites of constructing activist citizens consist here in the re-appropriation of buildings, usually in the hands of nationalised banks or the public sector – which is a symbolically very important scene that is created. And although the scale of the struggle is a building, wide networks have been spanned during the preparation and execution of an occupation. The political moment that is created in the course of an occupation challeng-

es one of the key components of contemporary capitalism – private property, its associated legal frame and the relations of domination that it produces.

#### 4. Final reflections on the housing struggles in Madrid

The five mentioned strategies and repertoires can be interpreted as very successful ways to transform the Spanish public sphere and to introduce ruptures of the hegemonic police order. They have brought together a wide range of actors that are concerned about the consequences of the contemporary policy consensus, evaluated subjectively as negative. Such collaborations do not extend only to the five repertoires that were addressed in this article, but have also established a refreshment of local associational life in many neighbourhoods in Madrid. Additionally, the described processes of resistance recognise the important role that local assemblies may have to enable citizens to participate in different subjectivation processes. For instance, this could take place by introducing procedures that engage against the structural forces of domination that had deepened in course of the long-lasting financialisation of the housing sector. In this regard, the processes of self-organisation may be an important step for creating new mechanisms of political negotiation that help to ‘crack’ the hegemony of the police order from below.

In the previous chapter, it was shown how different acts of citizenship produce interruptions of the natural order of domination, in *Rancière’s* sense. But our research demonstrates more than this: The challenge of supposed legal procedures within the property market by a broad range of citizens from different political and social backgrounds and opinions redefines urban commons and develops a sharp tension between legitimacy and legality. Paraphrasing the words of *Engin Isin*, it can be affirmed that people constitute themselves as subjects in such a political struggle, mainly through acts of citizenship as those that have been previously addressed. Such acts challenge the power relations of the police order that is accomplished by state authorities. They also introduce a series of shifts that transform the dominant (spatial) order, which is fixed in and through space and has distorted ‘real democracy’. For instance, the political moment of rupture and disorder of the assembly produces permanent redefinitions of the police order that can then be recalled for further struggles. Or, the overt challenge

of the banks as legitimate owners of buildings and the extortion of the exchange value of a house through the process of its liberation creates new scenes and sites of citizenship that anchors democracy in space. In this regard, it is irrelevant if the analysed acts of citizenship may lack a proper legal basis. They primarily require a moral legitimacy to provide activist citizens with a coherent argumentation.

Yet, this is the framing that has recently been constructed successfully in the struggles for the right to housing in Madrid. In this regard, citizens have not only constituted themselves as activists, but created also the necessary scenes that can re-politicise the field of urban politics – a field that had remained within a post-political consensus during the decades of neoliberal hegemony. The described political moments have produced a series of new discourses that have now entered the police order and provide hope for many who have suffered during the long crisis. The victory of a municipal coalition in the local elections held in May 2015 in the city of Madrid that was built through channels of direct democracy and was mainly composed by citizens who actively participated in the mentioned or other struggles against the police order exhibit the dramatic shifts of the hegemonic discourse that have taken place in recent years. In similar terms to other many cities in the state, the former neoliberal police order has now been irrupted and transformed by local coalitions that place the ideal of a democratic city, of a city that invites its inhabitants to be part of the social configuration, as a key element of future urban policies. In this regard, the struggles against evictions are at the forefront of the demands that have been transformed from disruptive acts of citizenship into a part of a renovated police order.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Since 2011, I have been developing empirical research in the framework of the research projects NEOLIBERAL\_CITI (European Commission, 2011-14, PERG08-GA-2010-277115), CITY AND CRISIS (Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, 2013-15, CSO-2012-34729) and CONTESTED\_CITIES (European Commission, 2012-16; PIRSES-GA-2012-318944) that deal with the effects of the housing crisis and urban contestation in Madrid. As coordinator of the research group on ‘Urban Studies and Social Theory’ at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, I have directed several Bachelor and Master theses about the questions addressed in this article, and I am current-

ly supervising the PhD theses of *Jacobo Abellán* and *Israel García-Calderón* about housing struggles in the city region of Madrid. In our research group, we develop regular debates regarding our experiences with the housing struggles in Madrid, and most of the members of our team also actively participate in different struggles related to the manifold consequences of urban politics applied in Madrid. All this provides a sensitive and thoughtful perspective for the analysis of housing struggles that is developed here.

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