

Unveiling the Right to the City

**Representations, Uses
and Instrumentalization
of the Right to the City**





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The Habitat International Coalition (HIC) is the global network for rights related to habitat. Through solidarity, networking and support for social movements and organizations, HIC struggles for social justice, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, and works in the defense, promotion and realization of human rights related to housing and land in both rural and urban areas.

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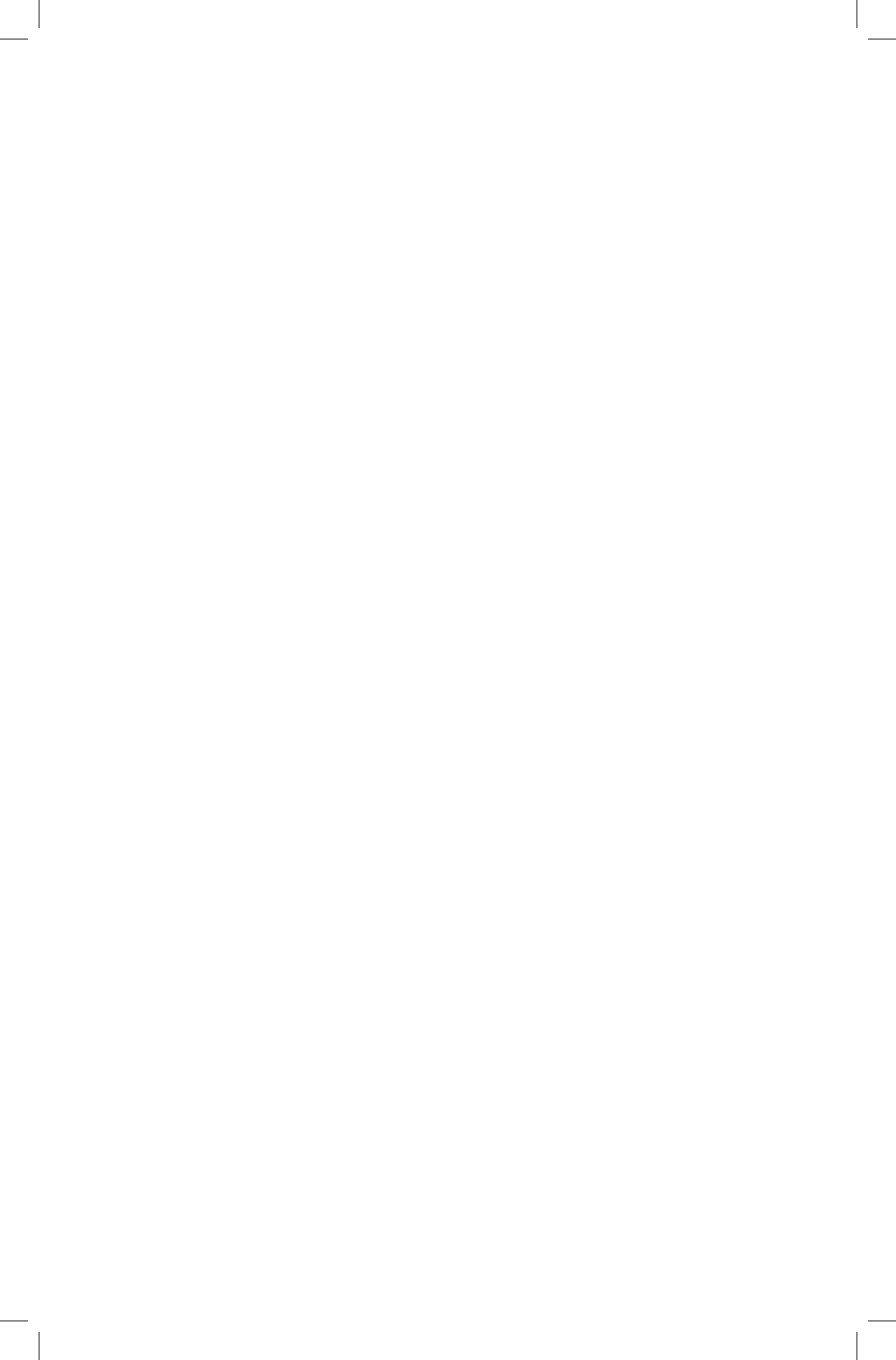
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Introduction

Highs and Lows of the Right to the City

CHARLOTTE MATHIVET

Coordinator and editor of this publication.

The right to the city concept has seen a large number of setbacks, back and forths, interpretations and has been given different meanings. Many different agents have claimed the right to the city, from Nanterre University back in the 60's to the favelas of Rio, the German self-governed groups or even the UN-Habitat.

It is surely of interest to liven up the debate on a concept. Nothing is more pointless than having some principles stated in a book with no practical application of them. Naturally, very often the implementation stage generates disagreements. It is useless for some social movements and inevitable for some others, while some people do not use the term but concretely apply its components. Some, however, use the concept in order to alter the emancipatory potential Henri Lefebvre had thought out.

How can we clarify it? How can we understand what the operators claiming the right to the city actually want? And, how do we connect the militants, researchers and local authorities who, without talking about it directly, try to achieve this essential utopia, the right to the city?

This publication is a result of all of these questions, through several significant events. Particularly, in Europe and in the United States, where there is a resurgence of conservatism or even a renewal of fascist movements, but simultaneously a hope raised by social movements which resist neoliberal policies. In France, homeland of the right to the city concept, it can be said that the *Nuit Debout* movement falls within this path. It is significant for two main reasons: firstly, the



Occupied house, Santiago, Chile 2015 "No people without a home, no home without people" - © Claudio Pulgar Pinaud

movement occupies a public area and claims the right to use it; and secondly it is occupying the area in order to practice politics. It is an obvious opportunity to revive the old meaning of the word "politics" (in ancient Greek, the word "polis" means "city"). While Spain and Greece had already experienced major episodes of the taking over of a city, France seemed to stay away from such events. The gatherings however, which take place as much in the central squares of the cities as in the working-class neighborhoods, are an effective way of applying the right to the city. In Latin America, the decline of the progressive governments has led to a reduction in the application of regulations aimed at applying the right to the city (through people's participation, budget management, and direct democracy institutions etc.), in turn leading to further increases in inequality.

In October 2016, the third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development, Habitat III, will take place in Quito. The Zero Draft of the New urban agenda published in May does not provide great hope as regards the actual conditions for the implementation of the right to the city. The right to the city is not recognized as such: UN-Habitat prefers the concept of "cities for all", and most importantly it develops in a very precise manner the concept of a "competitive city", in which every step must be taken in order to enhance its economic attractiveness.

Worse still, Habitat III may "show serious retrogression in relation to Habitat II and Habitat I. This retrogression is related to the progression of the global situation and the battle for the cultural hegemony. The global situation is characterized by the arrogance of the dominant social classes on a global scale. It is reflected by

the rise of reactionary and conservative ideas in several societies and international institutions.” (Massiah, 2016)

This does not bode well for the effective implementation of the right to the city. Indeed, many States and delegations are firmly opposed to the right to the city: The European Union, the United States, Colombia and Argentina have made clear what their position was about it. Ecuador and Brazil defend the right to the city, but only by territorializing the rights, not by creating a new right.

The advocacy work of networks such as the European action coalition for the right to housing and to the city, or the Global platform for the right to the city is all the more essential in this context of the widespread decline of rights. The platform claims a certain view of the right to the city; it carries on the work achieved over more than twenty years in the social forums and in particular with the World Charter for the right to the city, for which Habitat International Coalition was one of the main driving forces. It also (and especially) continues its work concerning practical experiences of resistance and alternatives, which has succeeded in making the right to the city an achievable utopia where the value in use takes priority over the exchange value, where social function prevails over private ownership, and where the collective interest takes precedence over private interests.

Thus, the right to the city is a concept to be improved. For some the concept is unclear, for others there is not enough protesting, some see it as utopian while others see it as being used as tool. Some agents, such as those in Brazil, are



Demonstration of DAL (Right to housing) organization, Paris 2016 - © Claudio Pulgar Pinaud



working hard to make this right properly judiciable. However, these experiences show that we cannot successfully achieve the legal implementation of the right to the city without social pressure or a balance of power. It is through conflict, from the constant claims of the social movements, that the right to the city can be materialized. This is not an original analysis. Machiavelli asserted that *“in every republic, there are two parties, that of the nobles and that of the people; and all the laws that are favorable to liberty result from the opposition of these parties [...] Nor can we regard a republic as disorderly where so many virtues were seen to shine. For good examples are the result of good education, and good education is due to good laws; and good laws in their turn spring from those very agitations which have been so inconsiderately condemned by many”* (1531/1952).

Thanks to different types of agents, alternatives are put into practice and these words into action, changing people’s lives and giving real value to this definition of the right to the city: *“it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart’s desire”*. (Harvey, 2008)

This work analyzes the content of the right to the city such as it is understood by the agents who claim to be part of the struggle for it, or who, even if they don’t refer to it, still apply it. Within the various chapters, we will see who is concerned by the right to the city, how the social movements have been claiming the concept, and also how it has been instrumentalized by some people who completely distort it, changing its emancipatory nature. Finally, using examples throughout the world, we will see how resistance movements use the right to the city before taking a look at the local initiatives working to implement the right to the city in their cities

This work is made of different texts and visions, sometimes contradictory on the right to the city. The content is far from being homogeneous and it subsequently reflects the nature of the discussion on this matter, its richness and liveliness.

We wish to thank all the authors who contributed to this work with their writings and interviews. We hope this work will enhance your understanding of the right to the city, and we hope you will find it interesting and informative.

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Will There Be Room for the Right to the City in the New Urban Agenda?

LORENA ZÁRATE

President of the Habitat International Coalition, HIC.

The preparatory process of the third Conference of the UN on Housing and Sustainable urban development¹ is the opportunity to develop contents that are more specific for what shall be the “New Urban Agenda”. In this framework, various organizations from civil society and networks of local governments have mobilized during the past two years, in institutional spaces as well as in self-organized spaces, in order to broaden the discussions, think over the progresses and challenges, and formulate common messages and actions plans for the decades to come.

As a network, which has the privilege and responsibility of having taken an active part in both previous conferences (Habitat I in Vancouver in 1976, and Habitat II in Istanbul, in 1996), HIC has publicized its concerns and proposals. We structured the proposals of many actors since the first preparatory events in Medellín in 2014, and organized them in three core ideas:

- the necessity to maintain a holistic and global approach of the territory, which is not only restricted to urban areas, and the evaluation of the implementation of commitments undertaken by the various stakeholders who are part of the Habitat Agenda (1996);
- the mandate to integrate a transversal and imperative approach of human rights, in compliance with international standards and the progresses in the various cities and countries over the last twenty years;
- the strong demand to have non-state actors take wide and substantial part in the debates and decision-making spaces, offering particular relevance to the voices of the communities and people traditionally excluded.

[1] Known as Habitat 3, the conference will take place in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016.

Such demands were echoed and specified in the context of the work initiated by the Global Platform for the Right to the City, an international network made up of more than 250 organizations from civil society, social movements, academic institutions and local governments². This platform was created in November 2014 after the mobilizations and advances concerning the right to the city dating back to at least the first World Social Forum, which took place in Porto Alegre in January 2001. It has played an active role in the path towards Habitat III, both inside and outside the institutions spaces. Among the most relevant activities, it is worth mentioning the involvement in regional and thematic preparatory events as well as the incorporation of contents in various declarations and documents. In addition, many of the representatives have integrated groups of experts in the different groups of policy units, and were in charge of elaborating the basic contents for the urban agenda.

Simultaneously, self-administrated and coordinated encounters were regionally organized in Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia in order to broaden the mobilization, the discussion and the joint proposals, and to advance the agenda of the right to the city at local and national level. There were numerous experiences sharing and training workshops, but also research, compilations and relevant-case analyses, public policy recommendation and tools for a democratic, inclusive and sustainable urban planning management.

At this current stage of the process, it is possible to assert that the draft of the New Urban Agenda includes a general reference to the right to the city and many of its essential elements, such as: a comprehensive vision of the territory; the respect of the human right and gender equality; the social function of the land and the capture of capital gains generated by urban development (though without specifying on what they should be spent); the guarantee of the citizen and social engagement in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies and budgets; the need for enhanced coordination inside and between the various government spheres; recognition of the contributions of the informal sector to the urban economy; and the commitment for a responsible and sustainable management of the natural, energy, heritage and cultural resources. At the same time, it is important to emphasize the responsibility of the sub-national stakeholders and local governments to progress towards cities that are more inclusive, participative, resilient and sustainable.

[2] Among which: the National Forum for the Brazilian Urban Reform, the Latin American Social Sciences Institute/Latin American Council of Social Sciences (FLACSO/CLACSO), the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, Habitat for Humanity, Huairou Commission, International Alliance of Inhabitants, Intercontinental Network for the promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), the Latin American Women and Habitat Network, Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), Street Net International and WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing).



Street artist JR, favela, Rio de Janeiro – © Thiago Trajano

However, we may highlight major limits and contradictions, which we hope will be discussed and overcome within the provided dialog and negotiation spaces before the approval of the final text during the Quito summit. Among them, the following stand out:

- An incorrect approximation between the phrases “cities for all” and “right to the city”, which does not consider the discussions and the theoretical, legal, programmatic developments and the organized social practices that the right to the city brings about in different places around the world.
- A vision, which pretends to be focused on the people but which repeatedly refers to competitiveness and creation of a business-conducive environment in several parts of the text.
- Very few mentions regarding the need to put a stop to forced evictions and guarantee the security of tenure for housing and land, providing special protection to the marginalized and vulnerable classes.
- The lack of recognition of the social production of habitat as an option that is not only viable but also the main one in a large part of the cities of the global south. However, this option enables the mobilization of a broad range of stakeholders and financial and non-financial resources and contributes significantly to the national, regional and local economy. Therefore, it requires a consistent support system with regulatory and financial tools and specific technical assistance.
- Very limited reference to the social and solidarity-based economy, with no mention of the role it currently plays and that it could play for social cohesion, the struggle against inequality and the reduction of the ecological footprint.

— A limited and contradictory vision of the public area, which puts aside a large part of equipment, community facilities and self-administrated projects, and thus does not consider their political and pedagogical dimensions. This vision puts the promotion of cultural diversity and the generation of income and property value increase at the same level!

Retrospectively, if we take a critical look, fundamental questions arise and they shall be answered: what does the new urban agenda add to the Habitat Agenda? What vision does it offer of transformation in the future? How can the fulfilment of the commitments be guaranteed?

Hundreds of cities and citizen collectives are currently testing a multicolored range of possible utopias for the construction of territories that are fairer, have more solidarity and take special care of the common goods with respect to the needs and rights of the coming generations. Millions of people and local governments demand today all over the world the enhancing of participative, direct and community democracy values as a path to the construction of equality, well-being and the peace so badly needed.

Will the New Urban Agenda succeed in bringing about this reality?

Restoring the Revolutionary Meaning of the Right to the City

INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-PIERRE GARNIER

by *Claudio Pulgar Pinaud*, June 2016, Paris

What is the right to the city for you?

We hear a lot about the right to the city, to such an extent that it is a clichéd concept. However, we ought to come back to the concept created by Henri Lefebvre, sociologist and philosopher. According to the definition of Henri Lefebvre himself, the right to the city is not a right you beg for; you don't claim it from the rulers. It is a right we ought to impose. And by "we", I mean the lower classes. The right to the city is the collective claim for the urban area, it is taking over what exists, but it is also the right to reshape the urban space, or to shape it – when it does not exist yet – according to the needs, the aspirations of the lower class. This is the right to the city. From time to time, Lefebvre would identify the right to the city restrictively as the right to urban centrality. But center implies outskirts, which means that the lower classes would have the right to live in the inner-city just like the bourgeois and petit-bourgeoisie classes. I don't have any proper conception of the right to the city, I only draw on what Lefebvre says when he takes the concept further and asserts that it is the right to take hold of the urban area. It is about relieving the owners of the power they have over the city, as the anarchists would say in the 19th century; building it, organizing it and using it.

Among the people who talk about the right to the city, is there the same emancipating, or revolutionary idea, or is the concept used as a tool for other purposes?

Yes, in France the concept was used as a tool right after it appeared, when Giscard d'Estaing came to power. There was a whole wave of urbanists and architects coming from the leftist Maoist and Trotskyist movements in particular, who robbed this notion and only to get rid of the actual revolutionary



Jean-Pierre Garnier – © Claudio Pulgar Pinaud

notions within it. The right to the city must be achieved by expropriating the owners in general, i.e. the bourgeoisie. Yet, at that time, the right to the city began to appear in urban and territorial plans, urban studies, and in short, it became the right for the people to provide input regarding urban and territorial plans. It was strongly related to the idea of participative democracy. Lefebvre was against that as he recognized that it distorted the meaning of his thesis. You can find some texts in which he says: “I never use the word participation, I use the word intervention of the lower classes” because when you participate it is like attending a play, directed by others, i.e. the rulers: the promoters, the entrepreneurs, the builders, the elected representative who work hand in glove with them, and the people are invited to take part into something that is already settled. Therefore, “intervention” means the emergence of discourse and, of course, those words are accompanied by actions taken by the lower classes in order to impose their views on what should become of the city. Until the 1980’s, Lefebvre believed that the right to the city could become into reality only if the working class took power. Lefebvre was a member of the Communist Party and he left it in 1956 after the intervention of the Soviet Army in Budapest, but he maintained relationships with the party and helped push Marxism forward on a somewhat radical pathway. He had therefore long believed that an urban revolution could only happen if it was the working class who were responsible for it. Nevertheless, when Mitterrand came into power, he became aware that the working class would not have its revolution, because another class had taken hold of the State, namely the educated middle-classes, who took charge of town planning and its development for the benefit of private capital. In his articles, works and conferences, he would say that his ideas were stolen and he



was not given credit, and, as well as that, his words were misquoted. Getting back to the present, the right to the city has become commonplace and appears not only in official speeches by planning managers but also among citizens' movements or anti-globalists. To them, the right to the city is very compatible with the preservation of capitalism. This produces those theories based on Saul Alinsky and empowerment, with which we have the right to participate, but never to question the system.

Are the social movements claiming the right to the city faithful to the Lefebvre's concept?

I will talk about the French movements. Gone are the days of May 68 when a part of the intellectual petit-bourgeoisie had the illusion of a possible revolution with a radical transformation of social relationships. We had the idea that we were opening a new front against capitalism, which could have been the urban front. Today, you do not hear this in any speech or movement, for example in the struggle against the renewal and rehabilitation programs, against the segregation and eviction of the lower classes, I don't hear about any revolutionary perspective. These are resistance struggles; they are not counteroffensives for the suppression of capitalism. In the speeches or slogans, you never hear the word socialism or communism because political parties, organizations and States made them lose their credibility. There are no words in the claims or the slogans which mention a social system going beyond capitalism. The same happens to the right to the city: you only hear about the right to urban centrality and not the right for the lower classes to take the urban space over, to be able to intervene as Lefebvre would say: not participating but actually intervening in the reshaping of the urban area. Instead, it is a right that is restricted in time and space, but only for a given and short-lived moment, in order to keep the speculators, promoters and their political allies from continuing to chase the lower classes towards the city's outskirts.

Given this context, is it still realistic to claim the right to the city?

Yes, it is, if you claim the right to the city based on Henri Lefebvre's definition or even David Harvey's one, though the latter doesn't provide the means for the struggle. It is essential because the struggle against capitalism has to take place not only in working places but also in strategic urban life places that are the transport infrastructures and the collective facilities, or by occupying the places of power like the town hall or administrative centers. Self-governed lower classes must occupy these places physically, as happened in Barcelona in 1936, and they must do it while making these areas work again. You don't just occupy the metro or the hospitals. The activists and all the workers involved in the struggles must make them work for the population, in agreement with the population, and with committees organized on a local scale, as inhabitants and city-dwellers, not only as workers. The right to the city is not the right for the

workers to occupy the space, it is the right for the dwellers to occupy public areas, to have the city serve the majority of the people who live in it.

So, to me, it is still worthwhile provided that the right to the city recovers its revolutionary meaning, which means having the city transformed to serve the lower classes, and with the solidarity of the educated middle-classes, including the storekeepers who are also the victims of capitalism today. To illustrate my point, many small storekeepers are obliged to close their stores because the supermarkets challenge them. During the Paris Commune, the people who would occupy the city were not all workers, but also shopkeepers and artisans. Nowadays, it is a bit different, there are the laborers but also what we call employees and all the classes that are in the position of subordinates, and not leaders. For now, in order to transform the city, we need to change the elitist way of using it, the infrastructures and equipment must be used collectively and democratically. This requires the socialization of the means of production, not taken in charge by the state, but a recapturing by the community. It deals with trying and reducing progressively the mercantilization of social relationships and urban area practices for the benefits of use. That is what Lefebvre talked about when he said that the city had become a product which is bought and sold. He said, "We must return to an idea of the city as an endeavor, that is to say the product of a practice based on use."

Are there tangible examples of alternatives that are practical and based on these ideas?

There are very few examples of them and they took place in certain areas, during popular uprisings. In villages like in Marinaleda, Andalusia, where the population took action and elected representatives in order to put in place a system which meets the needs of the people. There are other examples, in Denmark, in the Kristiana district which was a ghetto occupied by radicalized and anticapitalistic intellectual petit-bourgeoisie activists who organized the daily life regarding commerce, health structures, education and housing based upon self-governed communism method; unfortunately, it has become a bit like something from a bygone age and the people would go there as if it were a pilgrimage. Originally, this neighborhood was left behind and was occupied by self-governed squatters. As the city of Copenhagen grew, this block has become interesting and central. So it ended-up, as usual, with the eviction of the self-governed people.

So, the right to the city can only be built on a local scale.

In the anarchist tradition, the recapture must always start on the base level, that is to say the local scale. If there are various simultaneous experiments on a local level, there can be a cross-contamination effect, spreading all over the country and then after should come the issue of coordination. The leaders have imperative, revocable revolving mandates, which permits the rotation of management tasks.



What is known in France as urban policy is a central state policy carried out in order to cope with what was called the “banlieue” revolt, that is to say marginalized areas where the working class is confined: the idea was pacifying these areas and in order not to use repression they preferred prevention: that is the urban policy. It dealt with social prevention at educational, cultural but also urbanistic levels to transform the urban space and make it a space that is less segregated. Valéry Giscard d’Estaing started the urban policy at end of the 1970’s with the urban planning operations known as the HVS¹ program. The point was to change the habitat in these marginalized zones to improve social life, based on the following idea: social life had deteriorated because housing had deteriorated. Therefore, housing and public areas in these zones needed to be improved.

When the left-wing government succeeded, it launched programs called “social development of the neighborhoods”. The urban planners, the architects, the social workers and the local representatives of that left wing were “leftist” students in 1968. When they started to play politics, they threw away their ideals and became reformers. Once they took power, they believed they could resolve the social issue by urban space planning. Whereas social issues are not local or spatial: it is global and social. Simultaneously, the left wing adhered to capitalism and neoliberalism. From 1983, they adopted so-called “strict” policies. Formerly, the right wing would call it austerity measures, and the left wing carried on the right-wing policy but changed the name of it. The names, the ministers, the laws changed but the idea was still the same, resolving the social issue through urban space planning. That is an ideology called spatialism which absolutely does not resolve the social issue. It is a direct intervention on the consequences, not on the causes.

Is there a contradiction between this spatialism and the ideals of modern town planning and architecture in the 1930s?

Back in the 1920’s, the social democratic urban policies would mainly consist of mass housing and equipment construction for the lower classes, which went hand in hand with capitalism because the proletariat needed to be housed. At that time, some social democratic city halls, mainly in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and few in France started the mass production of housing. This municipal socialism gave priority to collective housing and equipment. This mass production would go hand in hand with the industrialization of the building trade: then, the small building business had become major groups which applied the techniques of mass production of industrial objects to the construction of housing and equipment. It was the time of the welfare state: they would try to combine growth and social justice, that is to say the equal distribution of the

[1] Habitat et Vie Sociale = Social life and Housing

benefits of the growth, as the politicians would say, through collective equipment and housing in particular.

What link can we make between the right to the city, urban policy and the neoliberal turning point in the 1980s?

Urban policy is a French designation for a French situation. It is a consequence of neoliberalism which meant the lower classes' living conditions worsened through privatization, supremacy of competition, destruction of social achievements etc. This was reflected by mass casualization, impoverishment and marginalization. The question the rulers are faced with is how to manage this situation since it generates troubles, rebellions in the banlieues, riots, and it caused the level of delinquency to rise. Officially, urban policy is carried out in order to recreate "living together", to fight against segregation, to involve the people in the urban development through participation and participative democracy. However, these are only words to legitimize the existing power, translated in reality into piecemeal reforms that do not question neoliberal policy. On the contrary, this neoliberal policy continued and even gradually intensified afterwards, since the social-democrat left wing in France and in other European countries has become social-liberal. As the opposition organized and structured by socialism-oriented parties and trade unions disappeared, liberalism and capitalism went on the offensive. It is the time when the US billionaire Warren Buffet made his famous statement: "There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." The bourgeois are aware of their interests, identity, they know how to organize, and they know how to be united, they carry out their political activity consistently and logically. As on the other side, there was no actual opposition, the city has become more and more segregated. Trotsky said that the essence of the capitalist dynamic is the "uneven and combined development": uneven is a result of the complementary interconnection between wealth development on the one hand, and poverty on the other hand, and they go hand in hand. This is reflected by the spatial inequalities: that is what is known as social segregation. The policies carried out as regards to town planning attempt to reduce, to restrict the increase of the social-spatial inequalities and we called it urban policy. The urban policy is less policing than preventing. I always say in my articles that urban policy means city police services as defined by the philosopher Jacques Rancière, that is to say the planned organization of the policing by any means, whether they are economic, financial, institutional, ideological, but also spatial and ultimately repressive.

What do you think of the concept of gentrification and the dialectics between the spatial justice and the right to the city?

I don't believe in this gentrification concept: etymologically speaking, the word does not say anything of the class nature of the social strata concerned by the



working neighborhood colonization. The term comes from the word gentry which means landholding minor nobility and it is silent on the class nature of the invaders of the working class areas; these people are not bourgeois but they belong to the intellectual *petit-bourgeoisie*, those people who own intellectual and social capital. The reason why we don't talk about the class nature of these invaders is because the sociologists and geographers who study this matter belong to this class. Many urban researchers that I know, experts of gentrification, take part, willingly or not, in this process. And I don't agree with this concept mainly for political reasons because we put emphasis on the people who arrive and not on those who leave, we pay far less attention to those who are driven out. But we don't know how they go, where they go and what happens to them. We focus a lot on the habits and way of life of the so-called "bobos", a journalistic notion I use only in quotation marks, ironically because I refuse this intermediary class who occupies the inner-cities, make pretty leftist speeches but behave as if they were in conquered territory in the former working-class neighborhoods and impose their lifestyle and habits.

Actually, gentrification means eviction of the working classes from the working neighborhoods so we ought to use another term. We should talk about depopulation of the working classes from the neighborhoods, with a specific meaning: not with the demographic or geographic meaning of desertification, but with the sociologic meaning of elimination of the popular classes. In France, this suggestion is merely unacceptable in the small academic world because most of the researchers who work on gentrification are very aware: on the one hand, they criticize gentrification but in practice not only do they not fight practically against this phenomenon, but many of them take part in its progression by taking over the working-class neighborhoods to live there. Finally, the question is: what are the studies on gentrification useful for and to whom? Some are very happy with these studies, for instance the real estate agents, the property traders, the Bouygues' or Vinci's research departments. Indeed, the studies on gentrification show how a district is attractive, what population just settled and why they do. Once, I pretended to be a bobo prospective purchaser, I asked some real estate agents and I was told "it is not worth doing a market study, we look at the critical researchers' studies and we see that in Bas Montreuil² for example the prices are rising, there are really good bargains there, there are lots of warehouses, factories, industrial wasteland with deteriorated working-class habitat, that is where we ought to invest".

What is the way to fight against it?

It is hard given that the so-called critical researchers absolutely do not fight against gentrification; only some few isolated examples of students or university lecturers and researchers do, but the great majority never fights. To them,

[2] Name of a district of the city of Montreuil



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gentrification is a study topic that allows them to have a career at university. But the role of a self-considered leftist researcher should be helping people thanks to his knowledge, to go into action, organize and retaliate. As for me, for example, five years ago, I took part in a struggle against the “urban renewal” with students in the northern neighborhoods of Marseille. Our role was to help the people understand what the strategy of the dominant classes was to evict them, what would lie behind the urban policy, how they were trying to requalify their neighborhood by evicting a part of the population. It was also helping the dwellers to elaborate alternative plans, for them to be able during the consultation meeting to respond to the speeches of the local representatives, the architects and urban planners who would tell them: “what we are going to do in your neighborhood is wonderful”, whereas they were just duped with comforting and misleading speeches by politicians and experts of urban development.

In Latin America and in Spain there is a long self-governance tradition in the lower class districts to fight against gentrification or depopulation, in the meaning I used before. A lot more architecture, urban planning or sociology teachers and students are alongside dwellers to fight and, whatever the speech of a mayor or an expert or anyone else, they are able to speak and sabotage any so-called consultation meeting. We can say then that a part of the intelligentsia, as we used to say, is radicalizing and putting their knowledge into practice for the benefit of the proletariat.

In “right to the city”, we hear “right”: are you in favor of the judicialization of the right to the city?

Law with a capital L can be very dangerous. I shall not go back to Marx and Engels, but let me remind you that Marx had criticized “Hegel’s philosophy of law”. Law is mainly something granted by the rulers, you are given the right to something. Law is a bourgeois juridical notion and rights only exist because of major social struggles. As Pierre Bourdieu would assert: “Law is always the codification of power relationships”. So we ought not to fetishize it. The 1789 Human rights are the result of a revolution. There are no acquired rights, there are only conquered rights. The rights ought to be conquered, claiming them is hazardous because it is asking to the State to recognize a right. Well now when you are a weighty communist or anarchist, you attack the State, because it is unlawful as a power institutionalized by the ruling classes. Therefore, concerning the right to the city, you ought not to ask for it from the State, rather you have to impose it on the State. We should not ask the State to legalize the right to the city because it would be useless. Politicians can use it as a slogan to justify their policies. The right to housing is enshrined in the constitution and yet it has never been applied. In Paris alone, there are 1.2 million unsatisfied demands for public housing. The right is a State-related notion and if you are not critical about the State, well you keep on depending on the State, you are a complainant and a beggar. The right to city must be imposed by a power relationship, whatever this power relationship is, just as the right to work. All rights are conquests and conquest means battle. That is class warfare.



THE RIGHT
TO THE CITY:
IN THEORY

Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives on the Right to the City

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Introduction

“Let’s try out different ways, create confusions, with the things, we have to say, unexpectedly hit the center and find visibilities” (La rage 2014, own translation).

Right to the city actions and feminist actions are often separated from each other even though both movements could prove to be fruitful for one another. We, Linda and Lea, are involved in both and would welcome a more open engagement in feminist topics from our group which fights for a right to the city. This is why in this article we ask what a feminist/intersectional perspective on right to the city looks like. As *La rage*, a group of feminists involved in the right to the city movement in Hamburg noticed, there are different aspects to focus on, such as power and norms, gender stereotypes, work, street harassment and the division between the public and the private (La rage, 2014). This shows that the right to the city perspectives are always gendered. Subjects in public space are perceived differently because of their gender, for example men on the playground and women*¹ in the underground carpark.

Even though there are a lot of projects which interlink feminist struggles and right to the city around the world, the context on which we focus is European/

[1] We write women* with a gender-star because in German we would use the term FLTI* which stands for women* Lesbians Trans and Inter. By that we want to emphasize that there are a lot of different subject identities inherent in the term.



Girl Gangs against Street Harassment Project - © Tobias Frndt

German speaking since we ourselves are active in this context.

We begin with a very short description of the right to the city movement and a possible feminist critique. From there we will outline some feminist/intersectional perspectives on city and then turn to groups and projects which connect feminism and right to the city claims. We want to present their struggles and by that illuminate the many different understandings of the right to the city and all the things we need to reconsider.

Right to the City and Feminism

Right to the city is a diverse worldwide urban protest movement which confronts neoliberal hegemony with

own demands for urban development. The claims of the movement can be traced back to the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre who had already introduced a right to the city claim in the 1960s (Holm 2011). Right to the city is not limited to the actual use of public sphere; it also includes the access to political debates and developments in the future. Lefebvre names two rights; “the right to centrality” and “the right to difference” as central elements for the right to the city. The first refers to the access to urban places of infrastructure and knowledge. The second sees the city as a place of dispute and coming together (Holm 2011: 90). The city should hence be able to conciliate its inherent diversity and in doing so create individual and social profit. By that the city becomes collective, a place where people come together. It is furthermore important to note that today, the “fordist city” (originally background to Lefebvre’s thoughts) is no longer the center of critique, but rather the “neoliberal city” which is associated with new methods of production and the rise of new exclusions (ibid.). E.g. the participation of displaced citizens, which had to leave their homes due to gentrification, the migrants affected by restrictive immigration policy, and all the other marginalized groups in our current capitalist system that are troubled by the exclusions which a “neoliberal city” produces. In that light, the right to the city demands a redistribution in favour of oppressed groups, a recognition and consideration of difference, and the possibility for democratic decision-making for all (ibid.). Moreover it is important to consider that there are many different groups from diverse contexts involved in the movement.

Nevertheless there is a feminist critique that the Lefebvrian notion of right to the city is not paying enough attention to patriarchal power structures which affect the movement and use in/of the city and therefore the right to the city of individuals (Fenster, 2006). The inscription of gendered power relations into women*s bodies is represented in the daily use of urban space. We now will present some feminist perspectives on city in the following section.

Feminist Critiques on the City

Feminist scholars (such as Valentine) have long been discussing the gendered division of public and private space, where private space is connected to women* and the public sphere to men. Private space was connected to the area of recreation and the public sphere to wage labour but more often than not, the household wasn't the area of recreation for women* but their work place. In the urban context these binary categories stand often unreflected (Frank, 2004). There is hardly any research on the perception of the gendered subject in the urban space. This division of gender has a long tradition where white middle-class women* are seen to be the keeper of family and household. The public space was recognized as a dangerous male domain and women* were to stay out of this sphere (La rage, 2014). Even though this division has its roots in the rise of the bourgeois family of the 19th century it is still a powerful categorization for gendered and racialized bodies and affects their rights to the city (Sweet & Escalante, 2014).

Again feminist scholars have pointed out that space is a resource of society which is not equally distributed. The use of public space differs between gendered subjects (Becker, 2008). For example the discursive construction of places of fear has an influence on women*s everyday performance, which might lead to an avoidance of specific places or areas in a city. Women* were asked in a survey how they felt about going for a run in the darkness (Strüver, 2010:220 f.) Some of the participants were scared of darkness and the potential threat of sexual abuse in the public sphere. Others saw the darkness as a protection when they did not feel comfortable in their bodies – for example if the women* didn't feel thin enough. In the darkness their bodies were safe from a spectator's gaze (ibid.) Furthermore it is important to keep in mind that during her life almost every woman* will experience street harassment or cat calling, from verbal forms like whistling to physical abuses.

The gendered access to space starts very early in our socialization of gender roles, which we are expected to perform. Boys, for example, will more often play games which are room taking/loud and require a use of physical strength, such as football or martial arts. Girls on the other side have less expansive hobbies, like French skipping/jump rope or playing with dolls. With these games children not only learn to perform gender connoted roles, these practices result in



a different appropriation of space (Strüver, 2010:221). This socialization stays powerful until much later in our lives.

All of the examples above show that places and their use reflect power structures and cultural meaning which constitute bodies. In this light we need to consider spaces and places as social phenomena where gendered subjects are positioned, controlled and – if they don't perform the "right" way – sanctioned. Moreover it shows how women*'s practices are influenced by patriarchal structures which restrict their movement in the city!

Claims for a Feminist City Planning

Sociologist Paula Soto Villagrán pointed out that men are set as the normative subject in the organization of urban space. City planning doesn't consider the above mentioned specific gendered division of labour. This is why urban city planning is eminently sexist. Urban space results from a society which does not see different, gendered subjects, but sets men as the norm. Consequently the functionality of the city's space is male. The male perspective is therefore vantage point for interpretations and localizations of genders. By that practice, gender is made invisible (Soto Villagrán, 2013). Binary oppositions (like public-private) are reproduced as a result of ideological constructions. The invisibility of women* in the urban life is perpetuated through a patriarchal social order. This increases female and male stereotypes in the process of re-/production. Modern urbanism claims that spheres of living, working, consuming and free time are strictly separated. A feminist perspective shows that these spheres differ in their gender identities. The home is seen mainly as a place for reproductive work which is until now mostly done by women*. Modern urbanism consequently renders reproductive work invisible and misappropriates how women* are triple-burdened by wage labour, reproductive work and tasks of the public sphere (ibid.) A gendered perspective on city denaturalizes this dichotomy (public-private), and understands gender as a social and cultural construct. This perspective highlights hierarchies, power relations and essentializations in the city.

Right to the City Movement in the German Context

In the European context a lot of different people are involved in the right to the city movement. Andrej Holm noticed that, for the German context, there is a stark difference between e.g. the fight of "Kotti & Co.", a group of migrant receivers of housing benefit from Kreuzberg, Berlin, against their displacement and the struggle that the middle-class fights for the common right to the city (Holm, 2011). *La rage*, a group connected to the right to the city movement in Hamburg seconds this observation: The German right to the city movement is mostly a white middle-class movement. This is why intersectional perspectives are often missing in the right to the city debate (ibid.)



Girl Gangs against Street Harassment Project - © Tobias Frindt

La rage claims, as do we, that feminist perspectives are excluded especially within the above mentioned activist groups. Often these groups identify as feel of a wider leftist scene, where feminist knowledge is easily agreed on but is not integrated into organization and political action (La rage, 2014). In group discussions we often find men talking a lot more than women*. Dominant talking behaviours (and for sure there are also women* with dominant talking behaviour) are often not reflected in groups. Groups must ask themselves frequently: Who is talking? Who is excluded? Who is not there?

Another point *La rage* discusses is the division of work within groups. Often the activities fit into to the role model men and women* are expected to perform. They ask the question: “Which work is in high regard?” Often women* do the work behind the scene which is organizing the meetings, writing the e-mails, caring about the group, moderating, writing protocols etc. Men on the other side represent the group, they talk to the press, etc. The same thing happens with the role of the moderator: women* fulfil this task more often from the background while men might use these moments for their own favour (from our own experience).

All these examples show that, even within those groups, a feminist perspective is still in dire need. “*There must be more we can do than rant women* have to take the place they already have*” (La rage, 2014)!



When we claim the right to the city for everyone, it is necessary for us to reflect our own privileges and hierarchies within the group, along with power relations such as gender, race, class, and body.

Strategies for Cities for All

Luckily there are groups and activists who do not take the given conditions for granted and reclaim the public space in a city for women*. One example is the project “Girl Gangs over²...” which sets feminist street art against street harassment (girl gangs over). With photography print outs a violent girl gang can be placed on public spaces where women* have been threatened before or places that are known as dangerous. The women* on the print outs are armed and staring at the street with an aggressive expression. This presentation of women* is the opposite from how they are usually represented in advertisement and in public sphere (where they are portrayed mostly as half naked sex objects). In our eyes, this project is a wonderful strategy against the objectification of women*, street harassment and the construction of places of fear. The print outs can be collectively placed on walls, windows etc. so that women* can reclaim the city as subjects with agency. It is empowering to take back the places in a city which are discursively not created for women*.

In the last years, in different German cities, women* and girls reclaimed the night. They were protesting in women*-only formations to take back the streets at night. This is a strong sign against the debate of places of fear and the assumption that women* shouldn't go out at night because it's too dangerous for them. These reclaim-the-night-demonstrations underline the strong connection between right to the city and feminist perspectives. In their book, *La rage* present a lot of other good examples where right to the city and feminist perspectives are connected.

Through a “Sperrgebiet” regulation, the Hamburg senate forced people to stop wearing short skirts at Hansaplatz. This regulation was directed at sex workers who were working there, the initial plan of the senate being to displace them. *La rage* and other right to the city groups supported the fight of the sex workers and a lot of people came to Hansaplatz one day, wearing short skirts to expose the absurdity of said regulation and how little it was going to prevent sex workers from working there (and for sure not all sex workers wear short skirts). As said before there are a lot more projects around the world that connect right to the city and feminism, for example the “harassmap” in Cairo, Egypt, where sexual violence in Cairo is made visible through a virtual map. Or the group *Territorio Domestico* that brings “feminine” care work on the streets of Madrid. It is their aim to get care work out of the private sphere and by that making it visible.

[2] See : <https://girlgangsover.wordpress.com/portfolio/the-project/>

For us it is important to see why feminist critiques are necessary in the right to the city debates since, as seen, it is possible to interlink feminist and right to the city actions.

It must begin with group reflections, learning to listen, to be patient and show solidarity with other fights and perspectives. In these practices we see a starting point for a feminist approach for groups involved in the right to the city.

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Right to the City. A Political Action Agenda?¹

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Introduction

The diversity and complexity of the more and more frequent “urban conflicts” in our cities obliges us to rethink the reference framework that helps interpret society’s contemporary contradictions. In this context, we observe the emergence of a series of concepts, which consider space as an intrinsic dimension of the object’s claim, just as, or even more important than the traditional social or historical dimensions are for the understanding or possible solving of such conflicts. Space is considered to be much more than the mere ground or scene where social phenomena just happen (Soja, 2010). It is considered to be independent from the superstructure perspective, not strictly depending on society’s material production bases, hence an object per se, a product and producer of social relationships (Lefebvre, 1985). This is the case, for instance, for new social movements, which are working on different scales, breaking traditional space-time barriers and organizing a discontinuous process at local and global scales (Sassen, 2007). This is also the case for numerous more or less organized movements fighting for urban justice and which relaunched, little by little, the idea of right to the city when understood as a political claim, a little simplified and decontextualized from the urban general process that is the source of the concept (Lefebvre, 1968).

In addition to this, it seems that traditionally in Latin America a Marxist perspective is predominant as regards the analysis of urban and territories problems, along with the influence of Castells (1971) and the conceptual and methodological

[1] A version of this article was published in the book *Lefebvre revisitado: capitalismo, vida cotidiana y el derecho a la ciudad*, Carlos A. de Mattos y Felipe Link (Ed.), RIL Editores, Santiago de Chile, 2015

apparatus, “The Urban Question”. For this reason, it is more probable that our understanding of urban environment in our region is much closer to the classical Marxist idea that considers “*the city as a cultural product consistent with the economic action of a historically hegemonic social class, the bourgeoisie that uses it as a tool for its domination*” (Bettin, 1982:51). Therefore, it is less considered as an element more or less independent from society’s material production structure, reversing the relation between the industrialization processes and subordinating them to the generalized urbanization and social reproduction field. What, in Lefebvre’s words (1985) is referred to as: “*The concept of (social) space and space itself cannot be classified as ‘basis – structure – superstructure’*”. His assumption is based on the fact that “*space appears, is shaped and emerges sometimes on one level, other times at different levels, at work and in relations of domination (ownership), as in superstructure functioning (institutions). Unevenly but completely. The production of space appears to be not “dominant” in the production mode, but seems to tie the aspects of practices together by coordinating them, precisely gathering them within a ‘practice’*” (Lefebvre, (1985:56).

Therefore, on the one hand, there is still an orthodox tradition in the Marxist interpretation of space and city, while on the other hand there is some kind of simplification and abstraction of the idea of right to the city which is related to urban justice. Urban justice must be understood as a desired city model that goes beyond the equity of redistribution and should move towards a city which supports the total development of human capacities for all (Marcuse, 2009). Considering the paradox, and despite its limits, the right to the city concept opened the way to relatively new, revalued claims, offering (according to the Lefebvre interpretation) possibilities for the socio-spatial transformation, eminently urban. That is the possibility for a revolutionary outcome in a parallel or complementary field of the traditional struggle for production and labor.

From our perspective, the “right to the city” seems to be a sort of post-capitalist ideal, impossible within the current modernization conditions and very far from a concrete political action program that any social movement could use for its purposes in a given territory. Under no circumstances does it imply that, as an ideal, it is not precisely helping to rethink the limits of what is possible. To Lefebvre, according to Merrifield’s interpretation (2006), the political utility of a concept does not lie within the fact that it has to correspond to reality, but precisely, that it should allow us experiment with the reality. Consequently, the right to the city cannot consist of an easy and abstract claim for something that is around us.

Therefore, what is the right to the city? It is certainly not an easy question, given the tendencies described before, which are on the one hand the Marxist orthodoxy and on the other hand, the simplification and instrumentalization of the concept. However, there seem to be two possible answers.



First, it is necessary to carry out a critical reading of the original concept, based on its definitions and the global thinking context of Lefebvre. It can then be concluded that there are no concrete elements of a political action program beyond the isolated possible actions in specific territories. This perspective shows us that in Lefebvre's work, you find a system of thought based on a vision ranging from the State to everyday life forms, to which the right to the city is related abstractly and understood as an open field for the achievement of the subject.

On the other hand, it is possible to understand the idea of the right to the city in accordance with Thomas' theorem (1928), to which "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences". That is to say, the concept of right to the city changed and became different from the original thinking, depending on the number of claims and punctual urban conflicts, which modified its meaning and links to the general conception of space production.

In this article, we take the first interpretation and analyze the concept of the right to the city in the light of Lefebvre's global thinking system, and especially, the idea of space production as being inherent to the right to the city. This work is certainly not exhaustive given the scale of the author's works, but it pretends to be a contribution to understand it.

The Object and Subject of the Right to the City

Both Castells (1971) in *"The urban question"* and Lefebvre (1968) in the *"Right to the city"* point out the importance of the role of grassroots organizations for the production and transformation of urban space and society in general. According to Castells (1974), the urban social movements tend to generate a structural transformation of the urban system seeking a new relation between civil society and State. The general objective that could define the so-called "grassroots organizations" is related to Lefebvre's original idea (1968) to make "*the control of liberty and assertion of a new humanism, a new type of man for whom and by whom the city and his own daily life in the city become work, appropriation and use value*" a reality. This often contrasts with the dynamics and structural understanding of urban space production. Therefore, even though we are not facing a new phenomenon, we have been observing for some time an increasing interest among citizens to express their will to take part in urban processes, thus generating initiatives to achieve their goals and in which the institutional policy as traditional space for participation lost its leading role. New social movements are pushing back the limits of political interference and institutionality and they question the forms of participation and traditional alliances (Offe, 1996). In this context of global policy transformation, the right to the city is understood as an alternative to the traditional claims field. As a field of "non-reformist reforms" (Fainstein, 2010), but in which it is possible to move forward to the creation of more *just city*.



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Thus, the subject of the right to the city seems to be each of the urban individuals, inhabitants in a context of general under-politicization and decline of institutions. Regarding the object of the right to the city, it seems to be any punctual claim that implies a fairer redistribution of goods within the territory.

However, for Lefebvre, it seems to be a false interpretation. The right to the city is not, as mentioned, a punctual or concrete claim, nor the sum of them. Indeed, the production of urban space generates structural contradictions with circumstantial consequences. In this regard, *“Urbanization of society often means deterioration of urban life [...] There is a contradiction here and I call it contradictory space. On the one hand, the ruling class and the State accentuate the city as a ruling and political decision center; on the other hand, the domination of this class and its State breaks up the city”* (Lefebvre, 1972:130). Consequently, *“the right to the city is not a right in the legal sense, but a right similar to those stated in the famous Declaration of Human rights, constitutive basis of democracy. These rights are never literally applied and are always referred to when defining the situation of society”* (Lefebvre, *ibid.*)

The Right to the City as a Form of Encounter and Self-Administration?

When reading Lefebvre, it is understood that the right to the city is not contractual or natural, but it is related to the essential feature of space. This essential feature has to do with the possibility to reorganize the urban alienation process, in which *“the city and daily life in the city become work, appropriation and use*



value" (Lefebvre, 1968). In this matter, the right to the city cannot be conceived as a "a mere access right or a right to return to traditional cities. It can only be defined as a right to urban, transformed and renewed life" (Lefebvre, 1968). This idea appears to be a new and revolutionary citizenship concept in relation to a general transformation of the production of space process. That's to say a transformation process of the capitalist production mode. There is no possibility to reestablish the lost connections within the system: "the revolution of space implies and magnifies at the same time the concept of revolution defined as a transfer of ownership of the means of production" (Lefebvre, 1979:194). Therefore, if global urbanization seems to be inevitable and necessary for the reproduction of the capitalist system, the most probable consequence is what Merrifield (2011) identifies as the emergence of "a tragic intimacy". That is to say "of proximity without sociability, of presence without representation, of encounter, without real meeting", in which the idea of right to the city is understood as: "the 'urban', a place of encounter, propriety of use value, inscription of space in a time promoted to the rank of a supreme resource among all resources, finds its morphological base in its practical-material realization" (Lefebvre, 1968:138) is very improbable. Lefebvre again, about the situation in France, pointed out that "despite our revolutions and democratic constitution, almost all the elements of social life are bogged down. Inequality is everywhere. You see everywhere the signs of a life completely fossilized by its rules" (Lefebvre, 1976:138), which seems to be related to a global system of social production of space in its complexity as physical, social and mental space.

Of course, all of this is not encouraging because "there is a contradiction between space produced and controlled by the State and space produced by private interests, in particular capitalist interests. This phenomenon is particularly visible in cities in which space is missing and homogenous, divided and at the same time equal. [...] There is intense contradiction between center and periphery [...] contradiction between hyper-organization ranging from family to State and a unbridled trend towards individualism" (Lefebvre, 1977:146). In no cases do authors like Merrifield or Lefebvre abandon the idea of the city as a form of encounter, admitting that while urban reality modifies the production relations, it cannot transform them. In this perspective, Lefebvre pays particular attention to the subjects who produce space to claim emancipatory possibility, even though it remains far from a coordinated action plan. On the one hand, the role of town planners and architects, on the other hand, knowledge revaluation aiming at production of space thanks to use value. At the "macro and micro architectural level", as intermediary space in which it might be possible to obtain something in this matter. "Turning the world 'back on its feet', according to Marx, implies overturning dominant spaces, placing appropriation over domination, demand over command, and use over exchange". Therefore, the idea of self-governance turns out to be a mechanism and an objective, as a goal and a means of space transformation. "In a transformed space, the transformation of relations between

productive activities and the return of the internal market can and must exist, orientating deliberately towards space themes. It is space as a whole and its production that must be redefined, as it should then encourage necessary subversion and conversion to this end" (Lefebvre, 1979:194). Self-governance is basically an orientation. There is something perceived, imagined, conceived and thematized, but not yet systematized by society itself. Merrifield (2011) outlines what is previously mentioned as follows: *"If we accept the 'urban' as a specific ground for political struggle, what will be the actual image of the right to the city?"* If urban process is global, encouraged by financial capital, democratization must also be global (Merrifield, *ibid.*), therefore the image and possibility of self-governance is softened. Merrifield, before this, proposes an alternative: a new elaboration of the idea of the right to the city. He develops the idea of a politics of encounter, radical, lefebvrian moments, a "scattering of moments" with no claim of anything, but acting as an actor between individual life and an emancipatory fusion in a group (Merrifield, *ibid.*)

Final Considerations

As a conclusion, it is necessary to insist on the indispensable nature of an idea like the right to the city. Precisely, by linking this concept with the idea that: *"production is defined by Marx as production for social needs. These social needs, in great part, concern space: housing, equipment, transportation, reorganization of urban space, and so forth. These extend the capitalist tendency to produce space while radically modifying the product"* (Lefebvre, 1979:193). Therefore, based on the concept of space, it is necessary to cope with a general tendency of alienation in this field. However, it is necessary to be clear-sighted as regards the actual possibilities of this concept and other theoretical concepts, to be able to implement them better, without creating wrong expectations. The right to the city in Lefebvre's work is possible only in a global context of transformation of the capitalist system, in particular through the transformation of ownership rights. A transformation of the capitalist system does not only take place in the field of production and work, but on the contrary, it is nurtured and organized in the city. As per Lefebvre: *"The revolution of space implies and amplifies the concept of revolution, defined as a change in the ownership of the means of production. It gives a new dimension to it, starting from the suppression of a particularly dangerous form of private property, that of space (in its various forms)"* (Lefebvre, 1979:194).

Moreover, the general context of production of space commits the State, understood as a relevant actor in the coordination of actions and repression, in accordance with production of instrumental space. *"(In the world of state production), the State is not only a business owner, but it also produces simultaneously a space built for itself. Space planning being the most refined and subtle method for planning with stock or goods balance or financial balance. Spatial planning in the hands of State [...] is developing through ways that are hard to understand: control*



over communication, electrical networks, highways etc.” (Lefebvre, (1976:141). Therefore, the State is a stakeholder of one mode of social production of space that restricts even more the right to the city possibilities, and even more when it deals with global scale contradictions. *“Class warfare, workers-bosses, is an outdated idea, [...] the essential phenomenon now takes place at State level or at the level of the whole society, and concerns the global added-value redistribution”* (Lefebvre, 1976:144).

From this viewpoint, for Lefebvre, total democratization seems to be the only alternative, based on a rather orthodox approach of traditional Marxism. That is to say: *“Reinforcing State from the bottom-up, which leads it to merge with society and thus diminish itself, is the only way that will provide the current State with an efficient means of action against multinational companies. In other words, democratization, the invention of a democracy more profound and concrete is the only way of struggling against these terrible powers of which we are just starting to estimate the efficiency and dangerousness. Only democracy allows us to avoid disasters.”* (Lefebvre, 1976:147). This can be considered as the global concept of the right to the city, understood as an element of the explicative matrix of production and reproduction of space. This concept is related to political practice. It inspires, enlightens and generates concrete actions on territory, but remains on the field of critical theory. According to many studies and authors, social movements claim things related to the socio-territorial consequences of these processes, underlining the unbearable and destructive nature of the current forms of urbanization, which make necessary an alternative in different dimensions and scales of urban life. Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (2012) clearly show how the context of cities is one of hyper-mercantilization that generates consequences, which intensifies the contradictions of the model and leads to social mobilization and pressure for change. As such, it has become urgent to define a critical urban theory that can report, as honestly as possible, the urban phenomenon, which passes its own frontiers to find an alternative to the status quo of the urbanization process of capitalism (Brenner *et al.*, 2012).

The idea of right to the city must be kept as a global ideal of urban policy and changed into political practice going beyond punctual claims that can be exclusive. The idea of right to the city must conceive the whole society and its relation to territory in order to implement efficiently the general right to the city. That is no easy task precisely because there is no plausible alternative to make this concept move. Smith’s sentence (2009) about the dead but in force capitalism is not that clear anymore. On the contrary, according to Harvey, for each crisis and contradiction, the system can count on strong support: *“The forces of the traditional left (political parties and trade unions) are plainly incapable of mounting any solid opposition to the power of capital. [...] What remains of the radical left now operates largely outside of any institutional or organized oppositional channels, in the hope that small-scale actions and local activism can ultimately add*

up to some kind of satisfactory macro alternative. [...] Autonomist, anarchist and localist perspectives and actions are everywhere in evidence. But to the degree that this left seeks to change the world without taking power, so an increasingly consolidated plutocratic capitalist class remains unchallenged in its ability to dominate the world without constraint. This new ruling class is aided by a security and surveillance state that is by no means loath to use its police powers to quell all forms of dissent” (Harvey, 2014:14). Face to it, the right to the city must be implemented rapidly as political action program.

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Global Platform for the Right to the City: First Steps for the Internationalization of the Right to the City

NELSON SAULE JR.

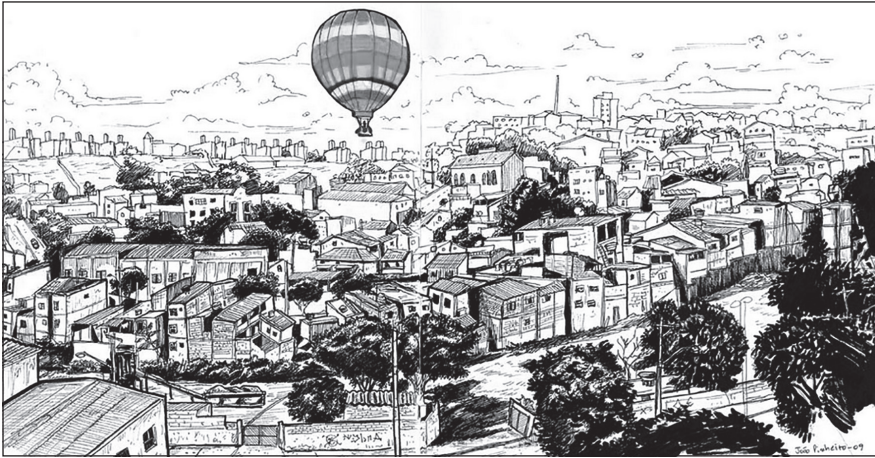
*Coordinator of the Pólis Institute (Brazil) and member
of the Global Platform for the Right to the City.*

The Construction of the Global Platform for the Right to the City

The Global Platform for the Right to the City is an initiative led by a group of organizations working on this issue around the world. It aims to raise awareness and mobilize national, local and sub-national governments – as well as international and regional organizations in order to achieve wide-spread recognition of the right to the city as a new paradigm for the development of more just, inclusive, sustainable and democratic cities, towns, villages and large metropolises.

The Global Platform is the result of international actions and mobilizations led by civil society movements demanding an agenda on human rights for city, town and village inhabitants. These actions were launched during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 where the Urban Treaty “Toward Just, Democratic and Sustainable Cities, Towns and Villages” was produced.

The basic principles underlying this treaty are the right to the city understood as (1) the participation of inhabitants of cities, towns and villages in deciding their own future; (2) the democratic management of citizenship; and (3) the social function of the city and property understood as a fair and social use of



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urban space which ensures that citizens can take ownership of their territory by participating in democratic decision-making processes regarding their spaces of power, production and culture within the parameters of social justice and the creation of environmentally sustainable conditions.

In the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) held in 1996, this Treaty stood as an important reference for the debates defending the right to housing in the Habitat Agenda and particularly, for the principle of the social function of city and property. This is a vital legacy for the Global Platform for the Right to the City and the World Charter for the Right to the City, both proceeding from a number of international actions and mobilizations which took place during the first World Social Forums held in Porto Alegre (Brazil) from 2000 to 2005. The Charter defines the right to the city as the equitable usufruct of cities within principles of sustainability, democracy, equity and social justice. It is a collective right of the inhabitants of cities, especially of the vulnerable and marginalized groups, that confers upon them legitimacy of action and organization, based on their uses and customs, with the objective to achieve full exercise of the right to an adequate standard of living. The right to the city is interdependent of all the internationally recognized and integrally conceived human rights.

Since the International Meeting on the Right to the City held in Sao Paulo in 2014, the Global Platform for the Right to the City is conceived as a space for the joint production of knowledge, information and dissemination of good practices and public policies which promote the right to the city through four strategic axes: (1) human rights in cities; (2) democratic and participatory governance in cities; (3) urbanization and sustainable use of the territory; and (4) social inclusion. The Global Platform aims to contribute to the adoption of commitments, policies, projects and actions by United Nations' bodies as well as national and local governments, addressed at developing fair, inclusive, democratic and



sustainable cities and territories – and, above all, focused on giving visibility and strengthening local and national social vindications and struggles which contribute to achieving this goal. To help advance towards the implementation of these actions, working groups for communication, research and capacity building, alliances and advocacy were created during the meeting in order to elaborate the Guiding Document which also contains the Action Plan.

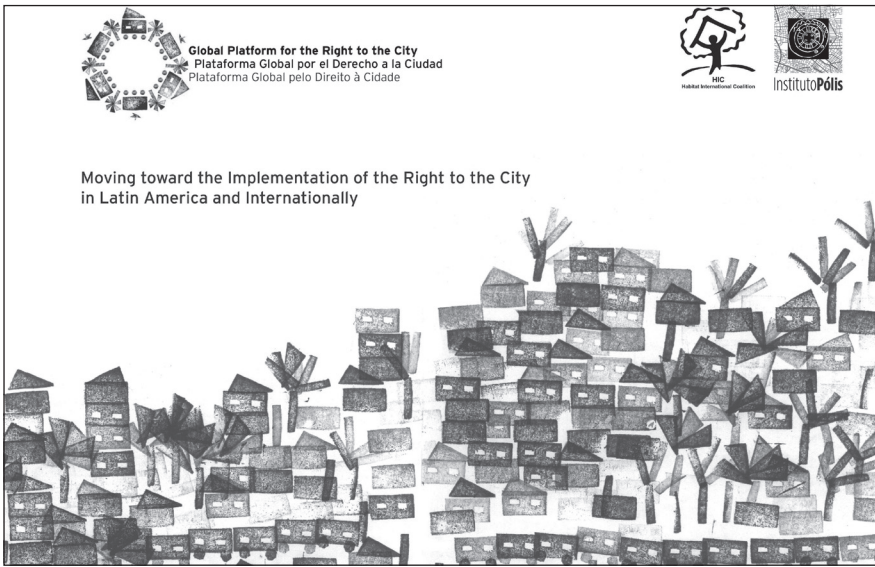
How the Global Platform Understands the Elements of the Right to the City

According to the World Charter for the Right to the City, the right to the city is the collective right of the inhabitants of cities, in particular of the vulnerable and marginalized groups, that confers upon them legitimacy of action and organization, based on their uses and customs, with the objective to achieve full exercise of the right to an adequate standard of living. Respecting the right to the city means respecting minorities, ethnic, racial, sexual and cultural plurality, and respecting migrants and gender equality. Urban territories and their surroundings are also spaces for the exercise and fulfilment of the right to the city as a collective right in order to ensure an equitable, universal, just, democratic and sustainable distribution and enjoyment of the resources, wealth, services, goods and opportunities cities offer.

The principle of the social function of the city and of property, understood as a fundamental element of the right to the city, means conceiving a city in which all its inhabitants actively participate to ensure that the distribution of the territory and the regulations regarding its use guarantee an equitable usufruct of the goods, services and opportunities cities offer. A city which prioritises public interest – collectively defined – ensures a socially just and environmentally balanced use of urban and rural territories. The right to the city should be understood as the equitable usufruct of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity and social justice; it confers upon its inhabitants legitimacy of action and organization, based on their uses and customs, with the objective to achieve full exercise of the right to free self-determination and an adequate standard of living. As happens with the rest of Human Rights, the right to the city is interdependent of all internationally recognized human rights, integrally conceived and therefore, it comprises all civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights – including the dimensions of the territory and urban life.

Being a collective right, the right to the city is not limited to respecting, protecting and ensuring individual human rights at a local level; since it is a collective right it has a territorial and comprehensive dimension of human rights in cities, towns and villages.

Moreover, consideration should be given to strengthening local power through political and economic decentralization of cities as a strategic element of the



Global Platform

right to the city – institutionally organized as a local government unit with the capacity for decision-making and for choosing its own governmental authorities, for accessing public resources and for achieving decentralization of power, autonomy and self-management of public programs and projects within the framework of the right to the city.

The Global Platform's Action within the process of the United Nations Conference Habitat III

The Global Platform for the Right to the City has been working on the Habitat III process (Quito, 2016) towards the recognition and adoption of the right to the city in the New Urban Agenda. The Platform produced several documents for debate with national governments, members of the United Nations' bodies and several civil society sectors.

The Public Request to support the Right to the City is an important initiative. It promotes defending the right to the city as “the right of all inhabitants, present and future, to occupy, use and produce just, inclusive and sustainable cities, cities that are defined as essential common goods for enjoying a full and decent life”. This notion of the city as a common good entails conceiving a city that: is free from any form of discrimination; is inclusive, with enhanced political participation; fulfils its social functions; has quality public spaces; respects gender equality, cultural diversity, and has an inclusive economy and a shared ecosystem which respects rural-urban linkages. The right to the city can be exercised in any city, town or village that is institutionally organized as a local administrative unit at a district, municipal or metropolitan level. This includes urban space and the rural or semi-rural surroundings which make up its territory. Being a collective



and common right, the right to the city can be exercised or appropriated by groups of neighbours, neighbourhood associations, NGOs, public advocates and public defenders, among others.

Considering the inclusion of the right to the city in the New Urban Agenda, the Global Platform defends setting up an International Observatory for the Right to the City to serve as a tool for monitoring the implementation of such agenda. This would be a global tool with which to gather information (relevant initiatives, urban legal frameworks, case studies) and promote the right to the city – similar to a Forum or Commission within the scope of United Nations on the right to the city. Its objective would be to bring together the efforts of all actors committed to working for the effectiveness of this right – including international NGOs, all levels of governmental bodies, civil society and the socially responsible private sector.

Moreover, the Global Platform also defends establishing a working group within the United Nations starting from the year 2017. It would have the mission of raising the necessary awareness and social mobilization needed for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and also of elaborating a triennial final document on the State of the New Urban Agenda at a regional and national level.

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From Inclusion to Resilience: The Magic Words for a “Just City”¹

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The just city is a typical case of this new way of thinking about these socioeconomic inequalities that are expressed in urban territories. However, its conceptual framework is based on a reduced number of words that can be qualified as magic. Indeed, seeking the unanimous consensus of all the parties of society only leads to developing neoliberal public policies, which disguise or hide business strategies in the battlefield of a contemporary city. This is how you can find in the Habitat III² opening document a mix of the revolutionary vision of Henri Lefebvre and the progressive ideas of president Rafael Correa so as to design a new interpretation of the right to the city: “Ecuador is the first country to recognize the rights of nature on its Constitution, enacted on 2008. It also includes the recognition of the right to the city, the right to a healthy and safety habitat, and access to an adequate housing as well. The activities developed by UN-Habitat in Ecuador are totally engaged with the Constitution and with the National Plan for Good Living, as it is the road map for public action to construct people’s rights”³.

It seems therefore crucial to me to consider the just city such as it should be, that is to say, a myth in the service of the social groups that manage and use it as a tool, with the indirect or direct help of an academic world in search for new critical horizons.

[1] A first version of this text was published in the review *Bitacora Urbano Territorial*, n° 25, October 2015, with the title “The myth of the just city, a neoliberal sphere”.

[2] <http://tinyurl.com/hb7nnhp>

[3] <http://unhabitat.org/ecuador/>



To deal with this conflictual theme, we will firstly see that the city has never been just and that socio-territorial inequalities are not an invention of the modern or post-modern city. Secondly, we will see that the idea of a just city, directly related to the development of neoliberal economic and urbanistic pattern, is both an ambiguous and misleading concept. It follows from this that, paradoxically, in appearance, the neoliberal city is not unjust, on the contrary. As a conclusion, we will see how this supposedly just city finds itself at the crossroads of academic utopia and urban marketing.

The City Has Never Been Just

One of the permanent features of the discourse on the fragmentation of the contemporary city is the division of urban areas into autonomous and independent units, which materialize in the space the extent of economic disparities. Peter Marcuse (1995) spoke about partitioned cities to describe postmodern cities divided into well-defined and separated areas, sometimes surrounded with walls, which interact between them, on a hierarchical basis, depending on the power relations. Marcuse is not the only one who has developed this notion and we could trace back to the pioneers of the School of Chicago the building of tools and analysis methods, which allow the estimation of the segregation process and separation between human groups in a North American city. Nevertheless, even though we can consider these divisions as morally unjust (from the political or ethical viewpoint of observer or inhabitants), they are not an invention of modern occidental society. De facto, the city was never just and segregations between social groups situate in the dual space and time perspective that we ought to question.

Spatial Proximity and Social Distance: a Problem of Scale

The first perspective, space, shows us that inequalities and injustices can be concealed by territory proximity, which never erase social distance, in fact quite the opposite. That is what Norbert Elias stated in his doctoral thesis in 1933, *The court society*, in which he reminds us that the masters and the servants in the society of the Ancien Régime could stand alongside day after day in the same place, but the former would always consider the latter as a foreign and inferior race. The organization of the home in which every bedroom was provided with one or several antechambers [space for servants], is the very illustration of the space proximity combined with great social distance: an intimate contact together with strict separation of both social strata (Elias, 1993: 26).

In some ways, this iniquitous organization of the court society is still in force in many Latin American countries where the masters of the houses from urban bourgeoisie behave physically and symbolically violently against their domestic servants.



Favela, Rio de Janeiro - © Erin Williamson-

In the same way, Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Madeline Lemaire (1970) had strongly criticized utopian thought, which, in the France of years between 1960-1970, would pretend to gather different social classes together in housing estates: the HLM (rent-controlled housing) cities. It was then thought that when gathering laborers, artisans, office laborers and even lower middle class executives' families, we could achieve a new society, with no "classes", through a social and cultural mix founded on daily meetings and exchanges. In fact, the project totally failed because forced spatial proximity did not help encourage social closeness. Thanks to interviews carried out by sociologists in these housing projects, we realized that while laborers were very pleased with having accommodation that they shared with superior classes, the *petit-bourgeoisie* would complain about this promiscuity and consider itself as devalued, uprooted. To them, the system was "unjust". Because of all this, we may not analyze and question the concept of just city without considering the temporal perspective and the long-term notion introduced by Fernand Braudel (1990) in order to give meaning to current situations.

The Just City: an Ambiguous and Misleading Concept

Antanas Mockus, the controversial mayor of Bogota elected for the second time in 2001, highlighted the need to create a just city in order to achieve peace in a country devastated by decades of civil war. In his Economic and Social Development and Public Works Plan for Bogota D.C 2001-2004 "Bogota for everyone to live on the same side" (*Bogotá para vivir todos del mismo lado*), the reformist leader underlined that "The aim of the development plan is to move towards a city collectively built, inclusive and just"⁴. However, in spite of the rhetorical newness, this new development plan was only recycling ideas that were widely spread in the global circles of urban thinking.

In fact, Johannes Novy and Margit Mayer (2009) showed that the just city is a North American invention created to support and ease neoliberal urban policies with the more or less explicit purpose of erasing the concept of equality, considered as a Marxist concept. Therefore, since John Rawls works (1987), the fact

[4] <http://tinyurl.com/jzogyxd>



that equality must be replaced by equity is widely accepted. Equity is considered to be just, contrarily to equality. Indeed, when you have an equal treatment of individuals who do not have the same personal capacities and who contribute differently to the collectivity, the brightest, and more competitive and efficient people would then be prejudiced (Musset, 2010).

Nevertheless, we ought to criticize the very concept of “inborn talents” introduced by Rawls (2010) to legitimate the predominance of equity over equality. Depending on the culture, and in every culture at a given time, a society tends to select the capacities that seem useful and each member can or has to develop them on an individual basis for his own benefit, and accordingly to a collective need. In this matter, the authentic equality (or the equal treatment of all individuals) should be the recognition by the collectivity of the personal capacities of everyone (socially identified) as well as their endeavor and participation in the common project. However, when considering the notion of equity as unsurpassable, we accept, explicitly or implicitly, the neoliberal capitalism ideological frame, which one refuses the very idea of equality.

Injustice as a Product of Culture

From this point of view, the problem has to do with the relativity of perceptions as well individual as collective (in distinct cultural backgrounds) and it questions the universality of socioeconomic criteria. However, the very notion of social justice must or should be founded on this universality, as analyzed by Amartya Sen, former student of John Rawls, in his book, *The idea of Justice* (Sen, 2009).

Furthermore, in the framework of society, the perception of injustice depends on the age, the gender and the social statuses of the persons. It can be stated that the feeling of injustice depends on the observer’s viewpoint, and also on the individual and groups observed, taking the “just” city as that which does not allow developing of capacities and does not correspond to personal or collective needs, as every member belongs to a community. Paradoxically, even the most vulnerable people or the people who seem to be the victims of an oppressive system do not usually complain about a condition, which we could consider unjust.

We could see it as a lack of political conscience because the supposed victim of the oppressive system does not understand the fact of not having access to basic urban resources as unjust per se. However, we could also question our own methodological frame of interpretation and analysis: another way of perceiving the just city, a perception that is not directly linked to the individual and the fulfilment of his needs, but linked to the community and recognition of his being. That is the issue examined by Nancy Fraser in her book *What is social justice? Recognition and distribution* (Fraser, 2005). The issue of justice becomes more urgent when even the most indigent people take the dominant discourse to explain and legitimize their poverty, putting themselves in an alienation situation.



Barrios Cordillera, Naciones Unidas y Alpes, Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, Colombia - © Rafael Núñez

They accept the most shameless inequalities because they find them normal (and fair) in a world divided, by nature or divine law, between the rich and the poor.

The Neoliberal City and its Poor People

In this case, the difficulty comes from the fact that while it is possible to quantify inequalities, it is not so for injustice. It is not possible to evaluate the tolerance threshold in a field, which is more related to social psychology than quantitative economics (Musset, 2010).

But who actually are the urban poor people? Talking about poverties instead of poverty is very fashionable. Indirectly, it is a way of dividing up and segmenting the social classes horizontally using isolated subjects or objects as discriminative criteria, instead of thinking it through as a system: financial poverty, energy poverty, alimentary poverty, capability poverty (as per Amartya Sen, that is to say the potentiality to develop one's aptitudes and abilities, or else choose the way of acting in society). This is how, according to the neoliberal city technocrats and their academic allies, there is not only one class of poor people anymore (with various economic levels corresponding to vertical divisions), but many communities of poor people (with horizontal divisions, less conflictive, which enables the creation and targeting of new social policies).

These new social policies, founded on neoliberal instructions and formula, have culminated with the Conditional Cash Transfer programs (CCT). They pretend to eradicate poverty by stopping generation to generation transmission, as if poverty were a genetic disease that is transmitted from parents to children (diachronic verticality), instead of being considered as the product of a social, economic and cultural system (synchronic horizontality). Just as the myth of the just city born in the limbos of capitalism with a human face, the CCT (Bolsa familia in Brazil, Oportunidades, in Mexico, among others) are just a political and economic illusion as demonstrated by Enrique Valencia in his studies (2008).

Considering the supposed diversity of poverties, not only do these programs focus the aid on families considered the poorest households (in return, they have to fulfil their commitments as they sign a contract with the lead agency), but



also they operate with specific terms: health, education, food, energy. Following a purely capitalist logic, the parents have to invest their economic aid in the “human capital” of their children.

Neoliberal logic based on State refusal to commit itself and the belief of empowerment of “vulnerable” social groups was translated into territorialization of slum upgrading policies supported by UN-Habitat (Challenge of Slums). This is the case, for example, of PROMEBA (Poor districts improvement program), which aims as a priority to regularize the settlement of illegal houses in order to encourage social and spatial inclusion of the dwellers. Using the other magic word of neoliberalism vocabulary, “inclusion”, the program coordinators just accept the dominant discourse and do not recognize that the so-called inclusion only means that, thanks to their ownership deed, the poorest can be integrated to the uneven urban market system.

Nevertheless, PROMEBA in Argentina, as Favela Bairro in Rio de Janeiro o Morar Feliz in Campo dos Goytacazes (among other of these kind of projects) will never make the neoliberal city more just, because instead of upstream poverty eradication, they only aim at reducing it downstream and making it more bearable. In some ways, they are the most cynical reflection of the *maximin* principle elaborated by John Rawls (1987) according to which social inequalities are acceptable when they contribute to the improvement of the fate of the most disadvantaged people.

The Neoliberal City is a Just City

As asserted by Henri Lefebvre (1968), the city does not make a society, but quite the opposite. As a summary and physical expression of an ideology, the city only dramatizes and imposes within a territory (in architectonic forms) the ideas, rules and prejudices of a dominant social group in a given time of its history. In fact, several ideologies can superimpose on the urban land as time passes and political systems come and go. The city is only the ideological palimpsest shaped by the urban sedimentation of past cultures. The primary illusion is to think that we can eradicate social injustices by taking actions on the urban forms. Metaphorically, acting this way is like painting on a mirror to erase the wrinkles from the face that is reflected on it: unjust society will always produce an unjust city.

We ought to think of the city as Karl Polanyi (2009) thought of the economy, that is to say to say, not like an independent structure, autonomous and “essentialized”, but like a system embedded in a social and cultural system. Subsequently, if we consider justice only as a value judgment, then the neoliberal city is just within the social, economic and cultural system that corresponds to it.

Accordingly, the expression “everyone has his place, according to his financial capacities and social capital” is a just form of urban territory organization not only in the contemporary neoliberal city, but also in the cities of the Ancien Régime. Social inequalities (seen as the fair consequence of individual’s and groups’ own merits) are clearly reflected in the classist organization of territories (Mazzei de Grazia y Pacheco Silva, 1985).

In the contemporary capitalist cities where market value is higher than use value, the shantytowns, informal settlement of houses, lost cities or favelas that are located in prized urban centers can be judged abnormal or unfair by the supporters of the free market. Indeed, people with low revenues are occupying these spaces and the price they pay for does not correspond to the potential prices of the urban land (Saglio-Yatzimirsky y Landy, 2014).

Currently, many of these renovation policies in marginalized neighborhoods, in Northern as in Southern countries, have a hidden agenda that is to chase the inhabitants out and integrate these “lost” territories to the profitable channel of the new urban economy, using, for those purposes, a set of words among which are: equity, resilience, durability, participation, inclusion and innovation. De facto, apart from being sustainable, the city of today and tomorrow must be resilient, as stated by UN-Habitat in its presentation of the world urban campaign “Better City, better life” (2013): These practices correspond to the main campaign themes: a resilient city, green city, safe and healthy city, inclusive city, planned city and productive city⁵.

The word resilience is from now on widely spread in almost every branch of social sciences and included in the performative speeches of the global development agencies like the WUF (World Urban Forum) and UN-Habitat. However, the concept of resilience is rather misunderstood and ambiguous – not to say damaging – since it leads to assuming that, for example, the preservation and attenuation of “natural” or industrial risks are not necessarily to be founded on public policies for territory planning, but on the endogenous capability of individuals and social groups to cope with a threat (risk potentiality) or a disaster (consequence of the event). Paradoxically, by encouraging the capacity of adaptation and resistance, the faculty of resilience of poor and marginalized inhabitants can increase their degree of vulnerability.

[5] <http://mirror.unhabitat.org/pmss/listItemDetails.aspx?publicationID=3497>



A new magic word, “security”, is now gaining more and more strength in official speeches, as asserted by Ban Ki Moon, United Nations General Secretary, on October 31, 2015: *“On the occasion of World Cities Day, top United Nations officials are highlighting the key role of urban design in building sustainable, socially integrated and prosperous cities and human settlements. Good design can help tackle climate change. It reduces the impacts of disaster. It can help make our cities safer, cleaner, and more equal and integrative. The theme of this year’s observance is ‘Designed to Live Together’”*.⁶

These different notions (which do not correspond to any scientific concept, at least in the field of social sciences) shape the current ideological framework of “just” neoliberal city which, according to the participants who signed this final declaration of the 7th WUF in Medellín, shall allow us to *“integrate urban equity into the development agenda, employing all means and resources available to ensure that cities are transformed into inclusive, safe, prosperous and harmonious spaces for all.”* (Seventh World Urban Forum, 2014: 1).

Conclusion: Just City, Between Academic Utopia and Urban Marketing

This is how we can gradually go from norm to dogma, when considering that the criteria used to evaluate the “equity” of any urban policy cannot be questioned or criticized because they have managed to reach almost universal consensus. It is not hard to assert that we all want to improve the living conditions of poor people, in more inclusive cities. However, it is riskier to say that we do not want poor people anymore.

By assigning to the city a key role that does not correspond to its actual status that is a mere battlefield in the capitalist processes of creation and appropriation of urban (and rural!) territories, even the most brilliant academics fall into the trap of territorialized utopia (a double paradox when we consider the etymology of the word utopia invented by Thomas More to design an ideal society based on justice).

In a text published in 2009, Peter Marcuse insists on not only the just city, but also the good city. *“The Just City sees justice as a distributional issue, and aims at some form of equality. However, a good city should not be simply a city with distributional equity, but one that supports the full development of each individual and of all individuals, a classic formulation”* (Marcuse, 2009: 2).

We could endlessly list the titles of items or books that refer directly or indirectly to the just city myth, from the less known to the most famous ones, as *The Just City* by Susan Fainstein, published in 2011. It is no coincidence that researchers

[6] <http://www.un.org/es/events/citiesday/2015/sgmessage.shtml>

of the working group on Urban Development of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLASCO) published in October 2008 a declaration of principle in reference to a just city in the framework of a meeting entitled *Utopías practicadas en ciudades de América Latina. Los nuevos rumbos del desarrollo* (Utopias as practiced in the Latin American cities. The new orientations of the development) (CLASCO, 2008). Their ten proposals are in line with the debate initiated by Rawls and Harvey more than 40 years ago, but with a reflection renewed by the necessity to reconsider the world after more than twenty years of neoliberal ideological hegemony.

Even so, all this academic literature on the just city clashes with the two difficulties above mentioned: justice is too much of an ambiguous and changeable concept to help create a sustainable ideological framework, and the city is only the physical expression of the forms of domination elaborated by a society in a given moment of its history. That is what Peter Marcuse asserted in the text mentioned above:

“Spatial remedies are a necessary part of eliminating spatial injustices, but by themselves insufficient; much broader changes in relations of power and allocation of resources and opportunities must be addressed if the social injustices of which spatial injustices are a part are to be redressed” (Marcuse, 2009: 5).

The politically correct slogan of the just city, which never encouraged any authentic critical thinking on the capitalist modes of production of space, appears to be an arm for urban marketing. In the general context of competition between globalized metropolises, cities of tomorrow will be competitive, but just. To put it in another way, they will be competitive because they are just according to the extent of their capacities and needs. This is why the just city is actually a myth, in the true sense of the word, that is to say an explanatory story, which is the basis of a discourse, promotes a social practice and gives legitimacy to those who produced it.



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II

THE RIGHT
TO THE CITY:
IN PRACTICE

**A/ Misrepresentation
and Instrumentalization
of the Right to the City**

The Right Against the City. Athens during the Era of Crisis

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The Right to the City: between Marxism and Sovereignty

Since the book of Henri Lefebvre *Right to the city* was published in 1968 it served as a great inspiration for several social movements. Being the point of departure for various urban movements, it contributed to a wave of resistance and destabilization of sovereignty in many parts of the western world during the turbulent decades of the 60s and 70s. Various forms of sovereignty, however, used its revolutionary and innovative rhetoric in an attempt to ground radical contexts in their political agendas. In this direction, a Greek political party, under the name of “Right to the City”, adopted aspects of the Lefebvrian rhetoric in order to form its political agenda and win the municipal elections of 2010 in Athens, Greece.

This article confronts two antithetic approaches of the right to the city. On the one hand, we explore the Lefebvrian notion of the 1960s and on the other hand we unfold the Athens’ mayor (George Kaminis) appropriation. The first approach is considered as an effort to introduce the Marxian thought in spatial thinking, in order to contribute to the emerging emancipatory movements, and the second as a fine example of distortion of contexts in favor of gaining power and promoting neoliberal policies.

We will never be able to attend a live debate between Lefebvre and Kaminis. Still, bringing to surface neo-interpretations of Lefebvre’s analysis is not just for



enlightening the subversion of the original contexts or highlighting them as stolen contexts from sovereignty. We point out that not only is it a great opportunity to explore once again and rethink what Lefebvre was writing during the 60s but also a motive to question and think beyond and challenge it in the contemporary contexts of urban uprisings and revolts.

The Right to the City and the Lefebvrian Approach

In the late 60's, Henri Lefebvre wrote his famous work *Le Droit à la ville* (The Right to the City). The book was published on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the publication of Marx's *Capital*, just before the revolutionary outbreaks in Paris, Prague, and in many other cities of Europe and the US. *The Right to The City* was influential in several radical scholars and urban movements. One of the basic thesis and point of departure of Lefebvre (1996/1968: 109) was that 'the city [is] a projection of society on the ground that is, not only on the actual site, but at a specific level, perceived and conceived by thought, [...] the city [is] the place of confrontations and of (conflictual) relations [...], the city [is] the 'site of desire' [...] and site of revolutions.'

Lefebvre used the Marxian thought in order to understand urban space. For our purpose the most significant contribution of Lefebvre's point of view is that he identified the space and the city as a result of social class antagonisms. He demonstrated the space's trialectical character as conceived, perceived and lived. Moreover, he focused in the right to belong to and to determine the fate of the urban space that urban dwellers create. He stressed people's right not to be alienated from the spaces of everyday life. In his words: "*the right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city*" (Lefebvre, 1996/1968: 173-174).

In this context Lefebvre aimed not only to understand the city but also to encounter all those forces able to change it. According to Stavrides (2007: 8): 'Lefebvre, like so many other scholars and artists of the interwar period and of the mythical decade of the 60s, encountered in the city not only horror but also hope, not only orderliness but also disorder, not only the reproduction of the dominion principles but also challenge, not only the normalization of routine but also the liberation feast.'

Moreover Lefebvres' concept of the right to the city challenges the notion of citizen. As he based his thought in the social production of space, he focused in the "everyday life" ("la vie quotidienne"). In this context, citizenship is not defined by membership in the nation-state but is based on membership in inhabitation. As Purcell (2003: 577) notes "*those who go about their daily routines in the city,*



Exarcheia, Athènes – Flickr

both living in and creating space, are those who possess a legitimate right to the city (Lefebvre, 1991/1974)".

In this sense, over the past few decades several social movements and individuals confronted neoliberal sovereignty policies around the world. The “Abahlali baseMjondolo” in South Africa, the “Right to the City Alliance” in New York, the “Movimiento Urbano Popular” in Mexico during the decade of the 70s and the “Other Campaign”, or the “nail-house” owners in China, to name of a few, they confronted lethal state policies, fought racist policies, rebelled against evictions, demanded public housing and defied displacements and gentrification. Even though not all of them were aware of Lefebvres’ work, they shared some common perspectives on their presence to the city and on their right to form the urban space.

“The Right to the City” and the Sovereignty Approach in Athens

At the dawn of the socioeconomic crisis, in 2010, a new party with the name “Right to the City” appeared in the Athenian political arena. Under the leadership of George Kaminis, a former ombudsman, the party was the winner in the municipal elections of Athens.

The manifesto of the party “Right to the city” focused on citizens, public space (cleanness and security), private property, social services, green development and innovative entrepreneurship. Within this optic, Kaminis (2010a: 5) consid



ered the city as a ‘collective oeuvre created by the inhabitants, the visitors and everyone that lives and works in the city and creates its actual wealth’.

Moreover, Kaminis (2010b) adhered: *“I am referring to our common perception that life in the city essentially means an aggregation of rights. Rights that are nowadays under massive attack. From the right to mobility in public space without spatial and temporal limitations, to the right to work, to private property, to the freedom of creation. For all of us, ‘demanding the city’ means demanding our right to the city. All the rights for all human beings. We want and demand a civilized city, open to its citizens and open to the world.”*

Reading, however, in depth Kaminis’ manifesto we come across several contradictions. First and foremost, the inclusion of as many as possible in “the collective oeuvre” that forms the city is indicative of the gap between form and content in Kaminis’ rhetoric. In this context, Kaminis himself was presented as “a citizen for the citizens” (Kaminis, 2010a: 2). The above invocations were made in order to target potential voters and to reinforce the pluralistic profile of the party. Still, the way he conceived the notion of citizen involved several inconsistencies and contradictions. Though he referred to citizens, inhabitants, workers and students in general, he posed a clear distinction between indigenous and newcomer population. Likewise, in his political manifesto appears an underlying bias for young couples or students that should inhabit the city center and change its character, not only due to their economic status but mainly because they are regarded as members of the city’s “creative class”. Kaminis adopted much of the government’s rhetoric for “preferable citizen”, a creative class that would inhabit the freshly gentrified areas of the city center.

However Lefebvre (1996/1968: 170) argued that: *‘The right to the city, complemented by the right to difference [...], concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller [...] and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center; [...] instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the “marginal” and even for the “privilege”).’*

In contrast to Lefebvre’s approach Kaminis’ manifesto endorses the analysis of the ghettoization of the city center and introduces security, urban development and entrepreneurship as a response. Thus, he is in accordance with gentrification processes that appear as a salvation of the so-called “city’s decay”.

Furthermore, it is interesting the way the relation between the city and the rest of the world is interpreted. This relation with the “outside” was filtered through the tourist industry. Lefebvre’s internationalism is surpassed by a universal industry of cities. Athens is considered as the “face of the country” and therefore a

highly important touristic destination. Kaminis unfolds a strategic of city-lifting, including both large and small scale projects and targets to promote the city like a product ready for consumption. The Kaminis' city-commodity reflects the absolute subversion of the Lefebvrian city. The key words of the manifesto under the title "urban development" are: entrepreneurship, city identity and tourism (Kaminis, 2010a: 7). This constitutes an explicit contradiction to Lefebvre's critique for deification of the city image and its transformation to a commodity.

In addition to the above, the right to the development of the city, in other words the right to a touristic city, is directly linked to entrepreneurship and for this reason Kaminis announces measures against excessive bureaucracy. In the first Greek memorandum¹ context though, the overcome of any possible delays in order to facilitate investments or *entrepreneurship* is directly connected to new investment laws the so-called "fast track" policies, a governmental tool that was invented in order to skate over any legal difficulties or oppositions concerning private investments. Thus, Kaminis' "right to the city" appears to be the "right" to fast track policies.

On deconstructing Kaminis' manifesto, the ostensibly radical intentions are ultimately weathered. The patchwork of rights, from private property to public space, along with strong indications of neoliberal policies and governance, leave no doubt that there is no common space between Kaminis' and the Lefebvrian *Right to the City*.

"The Right against the City" as a Sovereignty Practice

The Athenian urban space is engraved indelibly by policies of the municipal authorities. These policies facilitated, if not commenced, the segregation of various people, indigenous and newcomers, which did not fit in Kaminis' ideal city scenery.

As Kaminis (2010c) noted in an interview: 'Greece is a country in which you cannot just make a sudden move, gather 5.000 people and take them to three concentration camps. This is not practically possible and does not comply with the fundamental coexistence principles of a coordinated community'.

However, since 2010 hundreds of police operations have taken place in Athens. According to statistics of Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection (2013) within seven months (8/2012-2/2013) 77.526 migrants were prosecuted, that means in most cases beaten, deported, arrested or abused. At the same time several concentration camps, the so-called "hospitality centers", by the authori-

[1] The First Economic Adjustment Program for Greece that was signed on May 2010 between the Greek Government the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund It was introduced as a financial assistance to the Greek state in order for the Greek government to cope with debt crisis. More details can be found in: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2010/op68_en.htm



Athens - © Nikos Niotis

ties, have been created, one of them in the wider district of Athens. Migratory populations are often thought to come from an outer sphere; therefore they appear as if they have no actual connection, references or rights to the city they inhabit. Along with the government Kaminis explicitly targeted migrants from the beginning of his administration. In his words (Kaminis, 2011): *“our policy concerning migration should aim to the social incorporation, to manage illegal migration and all illegal migrants that already inhabit our country. This population should come out to light and be recorded. All the illegal migrants should return to their home countries”*.

Using the “illegal trade” as a pretext, Kaminis separated the indigenous populations from the newcomers. The latter became the scapegoat of the recent crisis accused for the collapse of the commercial sector (Kaminis, 2010c; 2011). Significantly, the attitude of the municipality authorities, on 2011, towards one of the biggest hunger strikes that have taken place in Greece was indicative. While 300 migrant hunger strikers in Athens and Thessaloniki claimed the legislation of all migrants in Greece, Kaminis washed his hand of their demands by refusing to provide them accommodation during the strike and transposed any responsibility to the government. Subsequently, the municipal authority has been making a furious attack against migrants indicating their expulsion from the public space of the city since they are considered as non-citizens. This massive pogrom in which Nazis, racists, state police and municipal police (Vradis, 2012) took part has had several victims like Cheikh Ndiaye, an African street vender who died on February 2013 while hunted by a municipal policeman.

The pinnacle of municipal policies' brutality took place in December 2011 when a vicious pogrom took place in the city center. Several sex workers, the majority were migrant women, were arrested and imprisoned for over a year. They were slandered of being HIV positive and accused of "*transmitting diseases to the Greek families*" (Loverdos, 2012) by the Minister of Health. A few days later, Kaminis signed a protocol of cooperation with the Minister concerning measures for the improvement of citizens' everyday life and the reassurance of a better living condition.

Moreover, since 2011, several groups and individuals have expressed openly a strict negation to the austerity measures. Their spaces of reference have been targeted constantly from the various aspects of sovereignty, including the municipality. During the last years several evictions of squats, occupied buildings and social centers have taken place in Athens. The eviction of such spaces equates with an effort to dislocate and to exclude certain people and ideas from the city in order to produce a sterilized city environment. As formulated by Kaminis (2011a) "*the city center decay due to two things: illegal trade and manifestations*". The peak of this urban conflict was the eviction of Syntagma Square occupation by Indignados. The 29th of June 2011 a big riot took place in Syntagma square. The next days the mayor (Kaminis, 2011b) stated: "*It is inconceivable that those who called themselves Indignados think that they can occupy the central or any other square of Athens. The square should be clean, open and available to all citizens and inhabitants of the city with no exceptions or discriminations. This applies for all the squares of the city and especially for the first one.*"

In a similar spirit, in March 2016, Kaminis invited 'all to cooperate in order to clean the city from stains and defacements'. He referred to the cleaning of the city walls from graffiti as "a big and constant struggle in which we would like all the inhabitants and the active citizens groups. We want guarding of the public space' (Kaminis, 2016).

The policies of exclusion go hand in hand with certain inclusive practices. The rhetoric of the municipality reflects the dominion of the capital over city space and promotes a specific and restricted topology of rights. The production of the desired space derives from the exclusion of the "flagitious" and the concomitant inclusion of the "desired" population. The production of the city space following Kaminis "rights" and guidelines come to direct opposition with the thought of the French philosopher. In Kaminis' ratio the city and especially the city image turns into commodity, a suggestion that is directly opposed to Lefebvre's suggestions. In Kaminis case, the collective oeuvre of the inhabitants refers to the creation of pleasant scenery to host tourists and investors. In this context they create new spatialities taking as guiding principles not only major projects but also small-scale interventions in the daily life. The contemporary manufacturers familiarize with tools like "the everyday life", introduced from



Lefebvre (1991/1947), but use them in order to include the city into the market and turn it to an antagonistic tourist spot on the map. Thus, it is under the cloak of revolutionary ideas that the sovereignty plays the game of the neoliberal contemporary politics. Nevertheless citizens and social movements fight back such distortive practices, create cracks in such power structures and form spaces of resistance and emancipation in the city core.

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Urban Reform and the Right to the City in Brazil

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The origins and principles of the urban reform movement in Brazil come from the people mobilizing at the beginning of the 1960s within the context of the debate on “the Grassroots reforms plan” which questioned many facets of Brazilian society during Joao Goulart’s administration. While the measure that drew the most attention at the time was the agrarian reform, the urban reform progressively became a part of the discussion. The concept of urban reform strengthened after the Seminar on Housing and Urban Reform (SHUR), which took place in the city of Petropolis, in 1963. The 1964 *coup d’état* would however impose silence on all the debates on the basic reforms.

The struggle for urban reform

This matter was raised again by the end of the 1970s, following the slow ‘opening up’ of the democratic process. The report by the Catholic Church “Urban land and pastoral action” lent an urgency to the rethinking of urban policies. Published in 1982, during the 20th National Council of Brazilian Bishops, this report relaunched the debate on urban reform and asserted that “*reforms are legally feasible only when we are aware that they are socially necessary*” (CNBB, 1982 : 115). In this context, and with the influence of the most progressive sections of the Catholic Church, the National Urban Reform Movement (NURM) was created, aimed specifically at unifying the various urban social claims under the same legal and political discourse.



A new constituent assembly was convened in 1987: it proved rapidly to be an opportunity to strengthen the dialogue around urban reform. The internal regulation of the Constituent Assembly provided the direct participation of society into the law-making process through the introduction of people projects, supported by at least 30,000 signatures. On this basis, several social movements would affiliate with the NURM, which, by bringing together the various social claims on urban issues into one people's project, struggled to introduce it into the new Constitution. This popular proposal received significant legitimacy through its backing from several professional organizations, social movements, and approved by almost 160,000 signatures.

This proposal would highlight the question of the social function of property with new legal tools allowing the regularization of ownership of the land occupied. It would also enhance the importance of building social housing on a large scale and carrying out a transportation and public utilities policy likely to attach public price adjustments to wage adjustments. Political mobilization is then engaged in in-depth thinking about the city, going far beyond the analysis focused only on housing. This proposal would also consider the establishment of democratic governance of the city with several procedures such as the creation of democratic councils, the establishment of public hearings, plebiscites, referendums, or popular legislative initiatives.

The content of this proposal has been partially absorbed by the articles 182 and 183 of the Constituent Assembly on the chapter dedicated to the urban policy of the 1988 constitution. As we may see, article 182 dealing with urban development policy by local authorities aims at structuring the full development of the social functions of the city and guaranteeing the well-being of the people. The constitution does not mention the phrase "right to the city", but it reaffirms the social function of property and it introduces the concept of "social function of the city". These are measures promoting the improvement of quality of life through an appropriate organization of the urban space. The aim is to ensure and provide dwellers with access not only to housing, but also to all the economic and social benefits that are too often restricted to wealthy neighborhoods of Brazilian cities.

Although the phrase "right to the city" – spread worldwide by Henri Lefebvre's works – is not used, the "social function of the city" notion is in line with the thinking of the author. Lefebvre's works are in fact spread extensively throughout Brazil and social movements use it to a considerable degree. The 1988 Constitution had a major legal impact, but it is still complicated to implement of a large part of the legal tools it includes. The constitutional principles are supposed to provide ethical guidance to complete legal order and to set limits on administrative and legal acts, as well as their own content. Nonetheless, the reinterpretation of the legal order based on the new principles mentioned in the



Cité Frei Caneca, Sao Paulo – © Rafael Gonçalves Soares

federal Constitution has suffered deep inertia. The city councils keep trying to apply some of the constitutional provisions, but the local initiatives are doomed to failure because of absence of federal legislation to regulate these provisions.

After the 1988 Constitution, the NURM became The National Forum for Urban Reform (FNRU) and it took an active part in several negotiations inside the National congress. The FNRU always devotes itself to institutionalizing its schedule through the introduction of new rules in the country's legal structure, as for instance, the City Statute (law n°10257). This law was eventually promulgated only in 2001, thirteen years after the Constitution. It refers directly to the right to the city concept, clumsily mixed with the notion of sustainable city, in article 2:

The purpose of urban policy is to give order to the full development of the social functions of a city and urban property, based on the following general guidelines:

I – to guarantee the right to sustainable cities, understood as the right to urban land, housing, environmental sanitation, urban infrastructure, transportation and public services, employment and leisure, for current and future generations.

The creation of the Ministry of Cities and the Council of Cities in 2013, when the Workers' Party came into power, renewed the urban policy in Brazil and, for the first time on the urban policy path, several players of civil society were then included in the institutional sphere of the urban policies. It was an opportunity to finally apply the City Statute principles. However, as is usual in Brazilian politics, this ministry turned into a bargaining chip to recompose the allied base of the government inside the National congress. The ministry was passed into the hands of allied parties and is not controlled by the Workers' Party anymore. Thus, the technical team, who founded the ministry and so much involved in



the urban reform, left the ministry one by one. They gradually lost their original mission as an agent for the formulation of policies and finally got bogged down in murky corruption cases with the major construction companies of the country.

An urban counter-reform?

In this context, we shall provide a critical review of the progress and limitations of the content and application of the right to the city concept in Brazil. The first critical comment may be that a large part of the legal tools initially provided were never used, particularly the ones supposed to restrict real estate speculation. Even though the constitution and the City Statute provide the means to overtax ownership in order to combat real estate speculation, local authorities have rarely regulated and applied these provisions.

Decentralization in Brazil also raises questions. The urban policies fall within local authorities' jurisdiction and, even if other ruling circles are involved in land planning, the municipality keeps control over the process through the production and promulgation of the urban development plan, which must be renewed every ten years. According to the Federal constitution, private ownership fulfills social function terms when it fairly meets the requirements provided by the local development plan. However, some of the capitals and major cities of the country have sufficient financial resources and personnel to permanently carry out the decennial revision of the development plan. This is not the case for most of the 5,570 municipalities. This revision must be conducted on a participation basis, but most of the time, the people's participation is too institutionalized and is rather restricted. In spite of some innovative experiences during the 1990s, these plans have gradually lost their innovative and progressive nature.

As acknowledged by Paulo Arantes (2013), the democratic people's program of the urban reform chapter was not that perceptible and, on the contrary, has turned into a kind of counter-reform. The business-oriented administration of the city, the public service concessions or even the difficulties in people's participation in the major urban projects show that urban reform principles are questioned and the right to the city concept has in fact become a rhetorical argument. Procedures fitting with market interests and an occasionally fragmented management of the social matter cancelled out the social aspect of the reform.

Urban reform certainly provoked criticism of the urban model in Brazil, but even so, it appeared to be limited. Private ownership has always been a core aspect of housing policy. Urban policy would aim to share access to home-ownership, but would not consider other forms of access to housing. There is no such thing in Brazil as policies for rented social housing. Land property has always been an obstruction in urban reform and has never been overcome. There is, even within social movements, a confusion between the right to housing and the right to property. In most public projects, the State provides subsidies for housing



Protest against Temer, Opening of the Olympic Games, Rio 2016 - © ideasGraves

access; even in the case of free access, it is always through private ownership.

The *Minha casa, minha vida* (My house, my life) project, has invested considerable resources to allow access to property for poor people. The project actually provides the housing market with resources and it ensures heavily subsidized financing. The number of houses built via this project is surprising, but from a town-planning viewpoint, the outcome is a disaster: low quality houses built on the outskirts. Worse than that, it indirectly contributed to the destruction of favelas during the preparation for the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. This event served as a pretext to rehouse thousands of people and in most cases it was clearly violating the rights of these persons. Very often the rehoused people have been transferred to houses built by this project (Gonçalves, 2016).

Lastly, the urban reform movement had a dualistic interpretation of the city. The 'informal', or illegal part of the city had to be renovated and regularized. In spite of the effort to understand the urbanistic specificities of the favelas, a large part of the urban works was centered on the idea that they should overcome this rudimentary step of urbanization, based on a supposed linear urban development. Even though access to informal housing kept the inhabitants from having access to the same right as other citizens, paradoxically it ensures a precarious but actual access to the city, which would be extremely hard for inhabitants if they had to do so on the property market or through state-built housing. Informal housing is a kind of complex political arrangement, which indirectly allowed a great majority of the Brazilian population to have a right to the city.

Urban informality works as a social function and cannot be considered only as a problem to be solved. The legal precariousness is not a marginal aspect



of the informal neighborhoods, but rather the analytical key that allows for an understanding of how they work. The irregularity of these areas is precisely the space where private and collective interests can become entangled.

It seems to us that, apart from the institutionalization of the social requests, we ought to maintain political mobilization in order to truly change the extremely uneven social structures of Brazil. Beside the traditional issues such as housing, transportation or even culture, the struggle for the right to the city ought to give priority to collective rights and assets, against the centrality granted to private ownership and the business-oriented administration of the city. The struggle for the right to the city must overcome the strictly urban issues by claiming for example the reform of the unfair Brazilian tax system, or even reform of the political system, in particular regarding the private financing of political campaigns, which promotes all types of lobbying by powerful economic sectors on Brazilian city management. It is enough to mention that the crux of the current political crisis is precisely to be found in the widespread corruption in the context of the major public works, with the bribes given being used to finance the electoral campaigns of most of the political parties.

It is more urgent than ever to take back the utopic nature of the Lefebvre conception of the right to the city.

Let us be realistic and demand the impossible!

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Nuit Debout: Occupying Town Squares, Convergence of Struggles and Right to the City in France

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“What distinguishes a social movement from other mobilizations is the fact that it is more focused on the project for another society than on a specific claim”¹

Introduction

Since March 9th, France has been living under the pressure of one of the most significant social movements over the last twenty years. This time, the last straw was the bill reforming the labor code, an authentic institution of what remains of the French social protection. It was built thanks to the struggles of the workers back in the 19th century, especially the Popular Front’s major strikes (1936), the program of the National Council of the Resistance after World War II and the student and laborers riot in May 1968. French society has been a pressure-cooker for years. The current socialist government only accelerated the process with successive neoliberal reforms and austerity policy. The two attacks in 2015 reduced the pressure, but did not demoralize the people who massively occupied the street during the national mourning in January.

The United Nations conference on climate change (COP 21) in December 2015 with its violent repression – pretexted by the post-attack state of emergency –

[1] Geoffrey Pleyers



against social movements and the environmental activists who tried to mobilize, did not discourage the people. The parliamentary debate on the bill for the deprivation of nationality for dual citizens (proposed by the far-left wing, adopted by the socialist government and rejected by the Senate), as well as the extension of state emergency after the European Football Cup in July, the continual hunting of migrants, rising unemployment, political and financial scandals, the tax evasion cases that came to light, all this just fueled the general discontent already fostered by many sources and anterior struggles.

Convergence of Struggles and New Social Context

The citizen appeal, at the root of the first major strikes and demonstrations day on March 9th, was the most striking fact of the 2016 protest cycle. This was not a call by the formal unions, which still have weight in France. This unprecedented fact shows that since the first step of the movement in the street, something new was incubating. By the end of February, when the government announced the labor code reform, all the conditions had been met that would lead to a great social movement. Among these noticeable events was the release of the documentary *Merçi Patron*, a satirical critical analysis of the excessive ambition of the French great fortunes against the backdrop of factory relocations and the consequences of unemployment in people's life. The movie, while not promoted in the media, has been an unexpected massive box-office success. This was an incentive for a group of activists around the documentary director to meet with unionists and organize meetings with the motto "Scaring them". During these meetings, the idea of occupying a town square emerged, in direct line with the occupation of public spaces that took place over the world in 2011. This heterogeneous group's name was "convergence of struggles". They chose March 31st, which was the day of a general strike called by the great majority of the unions as well as university and high school students. Another unprecedented fact was the creation of an online petition against the reform, which collected more than 1 million signatures in very few days.

The République Town Square Occupation

The demonstration of March 31st, with more than 1 million demonstrators in the streets despite the relentless rain, showed the strength of the social movement and its two historical components: the workers – unionized or not – and the university and high school student movement. A third front, new in the history of French social movements, appeared the same night: the occupation of town square.

The main difference with the other occupations of town squares over the world is that, from the first day, *Nuit debout* was prevented by the police force from occupying the square night and day. The first week, every morning at 5 am, the police evicted the people who were camping on the square. The movement adapted and succeeded every day, at midday, to set up a new camp, with remo-

vable structures, because every night everything had to be dismantled. It became customary to see the police start to attack the people who occupied the square with teargas and batons.

This daily occupation of the town square restored its meaning, giving to this public space, that had been reshaped a short time ago, a political content. The large esplanade and the elimination of a large part of the traffic made occupying and taking over the square easier. Thus, the secret designs of any town planner and architect to build an “agora” was made true by thousands of inhabitants who met every night to discuss on specific themes or on general assembly, which would sometimes gather thousands of participants.

On the square, a sort of village was organically built, a village in which you could find from the first night a nursery, a canteen with free food, as well as a media center in charge of communication on social networks, another major element of the movement. As the occupation went on each day, other permanent programs were established such as the library, the kitchen garden, the children’s area, the workshop for the design of placards, exhibitions, collectives’ stands, among other things. In addition, the three official communication media channels grew stronger: a newspaper, a radio and a television channel broadcast daily on the Internet from the square. This infrastructure allowed the building of an actual anti-hegemonic independence, which would be hard to implement without occupying the square.

The occupation was festive from the first day; there was a huge concert on a huge truck, art and theatre interventions, movies, symphony orchestras, etc. On



Nuit Debout, place de la République, Paris - © Claudio Pulgar Pinaud



a daily basis, assemblies and political discussions were organized on the east side of the square, while on the west side, the festive activities were taking place and the people went from one side to another indifferently. Some historians and anthropologists reminded us that all the revolt or revolution movements had a significant festive atmosphere. Parties and carnivals have always been moments conducive to uprisings, hence they were distorted and put under control.

***Nuit Debout* and the Right to the City**

The occupation of town squares is a process nor an outcome or objective in itself. The significant rotation of participants and the assembly used as a discussion and decision-making space turned *Nuit Debout* into a radical and horizontal democracy school. Many of the participants were already activists, but many others were politicized during the occupation process. You could observe the existence of a “convergence of struggles” inside more than 80 commissions working in the square. They gave a systemic character to the movement, which goes beyond the protest against the labor code, and has constructed a certain “intersectionality”, in the sociologic meaning of domination/protest forms crossing. The most visible struggles were those of the feminists, the right to housing, the struggle against colonization, the environmentalist struggle and a permanent but not predominant participation of the unions and student struggles.

The right to the city, such as defined by Lefebvre as a recapture and predominance of use value, is embodied within the occupation of town squares and works at the same time as a protest against the merchandized and privatized city. *Nuit Debout* works as a common production laboratory to use Situationist language, from space production through doing and praxis. Not only do you capture the space, but also the time: hence, the night becomes a time that is taken back for self-organization, democracy and discussion. The occupation of the town square means to build space-time for experimentation, the constitution of another type of city, legitimizing in practice what the public local authorities stigmatize as illegal.

The fact that the town square was renamed Place de la Commune (after the Paris Commune of 1871), a decision made in the general assembly on March 32nd (the dates were then counted from the day of the occupation, March 31st), is anything but trivial. The Paris Commune is known as a revolutionary period, the city being self-administrated autonomously by the armed people of Paris. It is considered by many to be the unique moment in history when people tried to implement a self-ruled socialism at the scale of a whole city.

The occupation of the town square as resistance and disobedience is in contrast with other processes that developed in recent past years in France and which can be used as the point of origin or comparison. The ZAD (zone to be defended), occupation of territories by activists and inhabitants against useless imposed

major projects (such as the Notre Dame des Landes project on a rain forest site) and the migrants or Roma people's camps, the most emblematic example – but not the only one – being the Jungle of Calais, are spaces where “territory autonomy” are being constructed and they are challenging society and the city such as they are nowadays, by building alternatives here and now. Occupying the town square also means being opposed to the privatization of public areas, so much trivialized and naturalized with the bars terraces and brand marketing private elements, authorized by government authorities. It is also an exchange and interaction space for the inhabitants who, in “normal” times, do not pay attention to one another or who do not even have the opportunity to meet: precarious young people, migrants, poor workers, unionists, and people on the streets, among others. The occupation works as a space for confidence and empathy that are hard to find in the city as it is today, made up of flows and consumption.

***Nuit Debout* participants**

The media and the political class constantly attacked the *Nuit Debout* participants, arguing that they were “graduated young white people from petit-bourgeoisie (the bobos) or hippies playing drums”, but more than 30 sociologists evaluated on the ground the reality regarding *Nuit Debout* participants: more than a half are over 33 years-old and 20% are more than 50 years-old. Two thirds are men, 40% of the participants come from the suburbs and the people from Paris mainly come from the Northeast neighborhoods, the most working class district of the capital. Sixty percent of them are graduates (the national average is 25%) and 24% are laborers or office workers, more than twice the Parisian average. The investigation and the review shows that the diversity of the participants is high, but that there is an under-representation of young people from the suburbs revealing the rifts in French society.

From occupying the center to occupying the neighborhoods

The occupation of town square movement started in Paris and simultaneously in 20 other cities. More than 200 occupied town squares have been identified to date. Three weeks after the beginning of the occupation of Place de La République in Paris, neighborhood assemblies were initiated in parallel, and they appear to be the possible future of the movement. The transfer of the assemblies towards other squares in other cities and neighborhoods was an unpremeditated effect of *Nuit Debout*. The people who could not or did not want to go to this “centrality” could also take part. This also allowed discussion about themes and actions that were local and that went beyond the struggle against “the labor law and its world”. These meeting spaces contributed to making neighbors who never met before know each other, or links between neighborhoods, like for example between the Paris 19th and 20th district assemblies (Place des Fêtes, Ménilmontant and Belleville). The struggles could therefore converge at different scales: the struggle



against labor law at a national level, the struggle against the implementation of new supermarkets in neighborhoods, with a systemic analysis of the problem.

What happened in France during spring 2016 is a key to understanding what will happen in Europe and over the world regarding the progress or regression of neoliberalism. Not for nothing has France been a political laboratory of revolutions and counterrevolutions over the course of history. France is still to date the last country in Western Europe, which resisted the implementation of structural neoliberal policies. Even though the neoliberal agenda progressed especially in the 80's, it could not break, until today, the complex basic outline of social security, as it did in England or in Germany. It is still surprising that it was the socialist or labor governments of these countries that were responsible for the neoliberal reforms which occurred there, as Jean-Pierre Garnier affirms when he refers to them as the "other right wing". This new era of resistance that began in France in 2016 brings some fresh air to the global resistances against neoliberalism. Occupying the city and the town square, one of its innovative features, highlights again the role of the right to the city within the anti-capitalist struggles.

During the months of May and June, the social movement went through one of the most critical moments, when unionists who played a key role took a series of actions aimed at blocking the economic flows, in doing so diminishing the "spontaneous" nature of the *Nuit Debout* town square occupation. During these months, oil refineries were almost completely blocked and half of the gas stations ran out of gas. Electricity and nuclear power plant unionists joined the strikes to block the economy. Many harbors were blocked, trade unions in all types of transportation companies went on strike also (trucks, buses, trains, metro) as well as the garbage collectors, and Paris was covered with garbage for more than a month. All the sectors of convergence demanded the revocation of the bill. From the beginning of the movement in March until July, more than 12 large-scale national demonstration days took place. During the first months especially, students blocked hundreds of high schools and universities and joined the strikes and demonstrations, which provided initial force to the movement, which were afterwards developed by the town square occupations, trade unions and strikes. Despite the force of the movement and all the action fronts, the socialist government remained intransigent, so much so that it overrode the parliamentary discussion – since it did not have the majority – and passed the bill, using article 49.3 of the French constitution. Meanwhile, the social movement celebrated the hundredth day even though it is less intense – everything seems to be going against it: intense repression for 4 months, the media against the movement, the beginning of the summer vacations, the European Football Cup, the Tour de France, etc. – it introduced new forms of organization and struggles. Clearly, France is not the same as it was a few months before. The next few years will allow us analyze the long-term effects.

The Dissemination of the Right to the City Concept in Germany

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The book *The right to the city* by Henri Lefebvre (2009 [1968]) was published in Germany in March 2016, 20 years after the English version. The social movements claiming the right to the city may not necessarily be the readers of this manifesto nor the other reference work *The urban revolution* (1970). However, they do inspire them (Vogelpohl, Jul-Sept. 2015).

In this article, we examine the expansion of the right to the city movements in Germany and draw up an appraisal, using the example of a middle city in ex-GDR: Jena. We observe that the current struggles are highly focused on the new housing issue, but not exclusively.

In Hamburg: Amateur Gardeners and Autonomists

The first right to the city movement named as such began in Hamburg in 2009¹. From the beginning, the initiatives were just a part of a network, which is still active but mainly concentrated on central neighborhoods. The ESSO-houses initiative even became professional and created a partnership with local administration (Plan Bude). Today, apart from the solidarity with refugees, the struggle focuses on maintaining the self-governed centers and neighborhood initiatives.

[1] For further information, read VITTU, E. (2012), *The "Right to the city" in Hamburg : a network that should be more widely known*, in MATHIVET, C. (ed), *Housing in Europe : Time to evict the crisis*, Review Passerelle N°7, Ritimo, Paris.



For example, the initiative named “making St Pauli city yourself” (“St Pauli selber machen”) organized demonstrations, publishes a neighborhood journal, and also organizes neighborhood assemblies working as a counter-power to elected authorities, and in which resolutions are voted by and for the neighborhoods’ inhabitants. The Hamburg network groups are so diverse that they continuously have to federate and recreate their conception of the right to the city. They define it through their activities. The fatigue of the discussion and the activists perpetually questions the network. Besides, it is over-represented by the inner-city initiatives. Other newer collectives (“Nord Netz”, “Wilhelmsburg solidarisch”) are therefore seeking to counterbalance the action in Hamburg’s remote neighborhoods.

Local Groups and National Networking

Around twenty movements across Germany, Switzerland and Austria – initiatives, collectives, groups, organizations etc. – are explicitly named “Right to the City” (*Recht auf Stadt*) or have assimilated names such as “The city belong to us”, “We are the city” or “City for all”, for example. They all agree on the question: “To whom does the city belong?” and they all answer “to the people, not to the investors”; *Cities for People not Profit!* They are concerned with matters such as housing, urban neighborhoods or public service continuity; they stand up for emancipation, self-governance and alternative cultures. They use different types of protest, from squatting to referenda.

Institutionally, they are associated with IL (*Interventionistische Linke*)² and BUKO (*Bundeskoordination Internationalismus*)³. BUKO is a platform in which a national network of initiatives is developing. A collective wiki is one of the communication tools, but they also organize yearly encounters to exchange about the groups’ practices and experiences. During the last encounter in Cologne in April 2016, upon the request of the participants, the workshops focused on: 1/ Housing, 2/ Neighborhood initiatives and 3/ Occupation. One hundred and twenty activists from eleven different cities talked over three days about these different themes in workshops concerning very concrete questions of militant practices; from claims at federal level to thinking over network internationalization. On this occasion, a picture to show support to the PAH – the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages which is losing the battle for the law against the evictions – was taken and relayed through the networks.

[2] IL is the alliance of leftist radical and emancipative groups which claim interventionism, that is to say the construction of a counter-power which largely defends its positions <http://www.interventionistische-linke.org> [27.04.2016].

[3] BUKO exists since 1977 as a leftist emancipative movement’s network. It is a space for discussion with different themes: education/emancipation, relation between nature and society, city/space. Apart from the yearly encounters, there are several spaces for discussion and meeting.



Support to the PAH from the German groups of the Right to the city – © AK

Example of Jena (Thuringia)

The Actors

Jena is a city of 107,000 inhabitants, one fourth of whom are students (around 23,000), located in ex-GDR. It is going through an economic and demographic boom. The population has increased by 8.3% since 2000 and companies of international renown settled there after 1990. Growth in Jena is a special case in a depressed region. We can see that the population is cosmopolitan when anti-Nazi demonstrations take place⁴. The quality of life is rather idyllic in this city, which has a natural setting within the hills, rivers and forests on the edge of the town. By the end of the 1960s, the heritage advocates would take part in discussions around urban development, questioning socialist town-planning and they were, for example, opposed to the construction of the only tower in the city. This tower has become the symbol of the city (Heckart, 2006).



View of Jena with the emblematic tower and the hills – © Elodie Vittu

[4] The new right-wing regularly organizes demonstrations in Germany and especially in ex-GDR, demonstrations linked to far-right groups, “movement against islamization” activists Thügida and the so-called “alternative” party AfD.



Student campaign against houses over-occupation: poster (left) and door labels (right). (Scans: Jan Goebel)

Translations: "überbelegt" = "over-occupied". On the left: "For more student housing!"

On the right: "For more social housing!" "Accessible housing instead of consumption temples!" "Overoccupied! housing problem in Jena"

Jena is a city with many students and hence has representation and organization structures such as the Student Council. This council takes action with students on matters that affect them. For instance, the campaign "over-occupied" ("*überbelegt*"), a campaign resulting from a lack of houses adapted to students' needs, in particular at the beginning of the semester. The action modes of this group were to occupy the city council with sleeping bags, prefabricated building on public areas or placing door labels stating they were "over-occupied": harmless protests which were conducted until 2012 and which no longer take place. As in the present case, students' initiatives are often abandoned when they leave the city or university.

The far-left wing – the so-called alternative left because the far-left wing "Die Linke" is in government in coalition with SPD in Thuringia – is also active in the city. A group called "Wolja" carried out two illegal occupations in 2012 and 2013; two buildings formerly occupied have become self-governed centers (*Inselplatz, Haus*). The Antifa campaigns are the ones that gathered the most activists: the protests during the scandal of the NSU whose far-right partisans came from Jena (2011), the anti-Nazi demonstrations in 2015-2016, etc. are partly organized in the youth centers and are frequent. They gather several generations and strengthen the shared feeling of living in a city open to the world. It is also interesting to notice that the protestant church plays a role in bringing people together, in particular among these groups of young people.

There are groups concerned by urban and housing matters, but they are not coordinated in organization. Some groups of tenants defend their rights, and there is an organization for the housing of the impoverished people, working for them so as to not become homeless. Apart from these institutionally identifiable groups, some “disobedient people” simply refuse to put their lands, their workers garden etc. at the municipality’s disposal, which slows down its development projects. But the most significant protest took place during the referendum against the development project of the city’s central square, which is currently a car park (*Eichplatz*); the protest was often contradictory to parties that would oppose one another. Because it lost its credibility, this experience gave local authorities the will to actively claim for the participation of dwellers. This route towards participation based on consensus does not however satisfy all of the claims.



Campaign for Eichplatz : “Stop the sale, making the city ourselves !”

During the encounters organized to build an alliance or set up a network of the actors mentioned here above, they assert that their experiences fall within the right to the city claim. The right to the city is understood by these groups to be the opportunity to have citizens involved in decision-making; and also to have the outlying neighborhoods be considered as an integral part of the city (right to the centrality); or to have projects built under self-governance etc. The communication between these groups is horizontal and not hierarchical. Regarding the themes, there are two streams: the claims for housing and urban development on the one hand, and the struggle for non-market areas and alternative cultures.

Birth of a Right to the City Movement in Jena

The BUKO meetings are yearly and gather activists from all over Germany and neighboring countries into working groups in order to share their experiences. In 2013, they took place in Erfurt; in 2014 it was in Leipzig. Following their participation in BUKO, a group of people from the non-parliamentary political arena decided to create the “Right to the City Action Day” in July 2014. A variety of actions take place in the public area: community cafés, a slow march, critical masses on bike, and so on. The event most covered by the media was the



squatting of an empty building belonging to the university. The will to build up a network of initiatives collapsed but the groups still exist. Each group has its own thematic: public area, socio-culture or non-conventional cultures, acquiring collaborative spaces, areas planted in *urban gardening*, urban development and housing. Each group works differently and protests its own way: action days, critical walks, press work, meetings, talking circles, gardening, demonstrations, etc. It would be premature to establish a picture of the current situation, but we shall focus on a group whose main interest is housing.

Urban development strategy in Jena complies with neoliberalism indicators: supporting the middle-class households for them to build affordable houses, orientation of aid to individuals not to stone, dubious arguments to build new luxury houses, the refusal to build social housing under economic pretexts, etc. Since housing issues are not an individual problem, the “STATT⁵” collective in Jena created a dialogue circle about housing matters in order to be in contact with a large part of the population and to help overcome housing problems collectively and in solidarity. The organization that created this group offers counseling to people concerned by the Hartz-IV law (supplementary welfare allowance).

Beside mutual assistance, collecting testimonies enables to call before the City council and other parliamentary bodies for a housing and urban development policy more socially responsible.

In Jena, the rise in rent by 18% between 2008 and 2013 is the highest in former East Germany. The gross average rent is 8.6 euro per square meter and is beyond the regional and national averages (Germany: 8.3% ; Thuringia: 5.7%). Lastly, the few rooms available with a 2% vacancy rate does not help.

With regards to the incomes of a certain part of the population (students, seniors, single parent family, households called “Hartz IV”), they are low: the part dedicated to the average rent, also called “affordability ratio”⁶ is 35% on average, and for households with low income (1/4 of all households), amounts to 50%. Refugees awaiting regularization are not included in the statistics. The local opposition and the citizens are not really taken into consideration in this particular field of the municipality policy.

[5] “STATT” – it is a preposition, its means “instead of something” and must be used with a common name like “instead of housing problems”. This name is also a play on words with the word STADT = city, which is pronounced almost the same way.

[6] The affordability rate should not be over 1/3 (33%) for the households to provide for their needs.



Leaflet of the Housing circle – Translation: "Instead of housing and rent problems in Jena. Rent increase? Rental contract termination? Does the property owner stress you out? Do you have housing problems? Scheduled meeting for mutual support and dialogue, together, independent, united".

Right to Housing and to the City

The collapse of the great railway project, "Stuttgart 21"⁷, made people in Germany realize that protest is not restricted to anarchists and squatters and that participative democracy has reached its limits. During the same period (2009-2010), the right to the city movement in Hamburg was highly publicized. This term was unifying: it still is. Through the example of Jena, we sought to understand why the right to the city is a claim for housing, but not only that. It is a utopia for urban social movements, since they concur in their vision and they do not need to agree on the path to take.

The ideas of Lefebvre are shared: right to centrality, to difference, access to the possibilities and qualities of the city and self-governance. From the crisis of the post-industrial city that Henri Lefebvre described, we are now living in a crisis of the neoliberal city in which the right to the city notion has become more than a slogan which simply sounds good (Vittu, January 2011). In big cities, but also in Kassel, Bonn, Freiburg, Munster, Tubingen etc. demonstrations for the right to the city are organized. However, concerning urban development in local contexts, housing – all types of housing – is the main concern. And it goes beyond access to decent housing: it has become a request for a new urban

[7] The project for the remodelling of the Stuttgart station arouse a massive opposition in 2013 and demonstrations which led to a total questioning of the project



life; housing became a public good which ought to be shared and the access to services is included. That is why both the notion of right to housing and the right to the city cannot be treated separately.

When looking at an international level, the term is taken over by politicians, for example by the *United Cities and Local Governments* (UCLG), to make it a human rights project in the city. The United Nations use this social movement phrase for institutional purposes. Lastly, in France, it corresponds to a project for the participation of inhabitants. In Germany, in the working-class areas, on a daily basis, some activists who collectively help to solve housing problems, to stop evictions, to take action with the neighbors, to produce or defend collective self-governed areas etc., claim the “right to the city”. Left wing radical movements claim it and it has not been taken over institutionally. Even amid the growing debate on the integration of refugees into the city, the term “right to the city” is not explicitly mentioned. The “*Recht auf Stadt*” is rather a utopic ambition of social movements with very pragmatic achievements.

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LINKS

- > BUKO Bundeskoordination Internationalismus: <http://www.buko.info/aktuelles/>
- > Networking of the German speaking movements: <http://wiki.rechtaufstadt.net>
- > Hamburg Right to the city network : <http://www.rechtaufstadt.net/>
- > Jena Right to the city : <https://rechtaufstadtjena.noblogs.org/>

B/ Urban Resistances

Towards Political Town Planning for the Right to the City

YVES JOUFFE, CHARLOTTE MATHIVET AND CLAUDIO PULGAR

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When asserting a right to live in the center of the city, the shantytowns demonstrate that they are resisting established order. What if, from marginalized spaces, they were to become a space of emancipation? The authors advocate political town planning in which the “invisible people” become the makers of the city, instead of a policed town planning which orders and excludes.

The shantytowns are at first sight a center of social and urban dysfunction. They are actually calling for transformations that are beyond them, transformations to the city and of the society that contain and produce them. The “right to the city”, the slogan formulated by Henri Lefebvre in 1968 as a common right to reside and build, demands this radical transformation. Many social movements got hold of it and implement it, particularly in Latin America. It is true that the



Slums in Pachuca, Hidalgo, Mexico - © Kevin Dooley

magnitude of the favelas contrasts with the few slums we have in our wealthy metropolises, but the struggles in the South are changing our perception of our own poor districts. They show us the path for a city made by all the people who live in it. They highlight the need for political commitment and remind us of our shared responsibility.

¡No Queremos Vivir Así, Queremos Vivir Aquí! (We Don't Want to Live this Way; We Want to Live Here!)

*Bidonvilles, slums, villa miseria, población callampa, shantytowns*¹... In many languages, the expression used comes from a word with a negative connotation. However, in most cases, the cities have been built spontaneously and precariously, with no imposed planning. The rural populations and the migrant ones wanted to have the possible benefits of a city, so they built it. The “right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1968) names the obviousness of an ordinary right that is most often denied. The urban struggles managed to integrate the idea into a few laws and constitutions in the form of a set of rights to housing, health, mobility, work, involvement in the institutions, etc. It remains a unifying slogan for the inhabitants to take back the power that governs their lives and cities.

Concentration of people, activities, exchanges, wealth and powers defines a city. The desire to reside in the center is the basis of the city, as it is of the slum. That is what Amparo García, a community leader of a shantytown in Puerto Rico, asserts: “We don't want to live that way, we want to live here!” The desire for centrality, proximity to the facilities and sources of income that the city provides: this is an incentive for the dwellers of the shantytowns to cope with very hard and precarious living conditions. The Brazilian favela is the most glaring example, standing alongside wealthy buildings with swimming pools and armed guards in the very center of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. It is the same for the gated communities in Mexico, whose very high walls neighbor enormous shantytowns.

This desire and need for centrality is one of the cornerstones of the right to the city (World Charter for the Right to the City, 2005). This centrality also refers to the links they forge within a community, which are vital to the dwellers: leaving it behind, even for more stable but more distant houses is a price that few are ready to pay. In Chile, for instance, some families who could benefit from access to social housing in housing projects in the outskirts would rather go back to their central *campamento* community.

The choice of living area should not be such a privilege. The shantytown in the very heart of the metropole offers an alternative to the inequality between a city

[1] Used in many countries, the English word *slum* firstly refers to a shady street in a poor neighborhood. *Villa miseria*, literally misery neighborhood, is the name of the slums in Argentina. In Chile, the *poblaciones callampas* are working-class neighborhoods that were built informally by occupying illegally a land and that grew up here and there, as mushrooms or mold (*callampa*). Shantytown means literally neighborhood with hovels.



center and its outskirts, namely a “differential space” where territorial projects are plentiful. However, the right to the city is not confined to the right to reside in the center; it includes a right to build. The right to participate is added to the right to take over.

Building One’s City Together

Past and present dwellers of French shantytowns tend to shape new parts of the city despite State repression. The shantytown, when it resists, can then become a political space. Self-construction based on need is often the first step to self-governance of a territory, as illustrated by numerous examples in Latin America.

With the *Movimiento de pobladores en lucha* (Mathivet, Pulgar, 2010), in Santiago, Chile, the inhabitants have taken control of the destiny of their living space by designing housing projects, building schools and through the creation of a control plan. They are implementing the right to the city through their involvement in neighborhood life. Harvey asserts that “The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.” (Harvey, 2011). Changing the city is first and foremost building one’s house and fitting out one’s neighborhood.

However, this way of building a city obviously does not imply that you get the power to administrate it, nor the recognition of self-sufficiency to build one’s own housing or environment. On the contrary, the priority of the State becomes to destroy the shantytowns before the dwellers succeed in proving it to “make a city”. The illegality argument simply hides established power relationships, particularly visible in the case of the colonial cities whose foundation is rather recent.

A Mirror of Our Fears and Injustices

The right to the city is also a call for resistance and it is precisely the inhabitants of shantytowns who are in dire need of building a home, and also resisting its destruction. This endeavor leads them to take back the power to build the city, to change it in order to have a lawful place in it. Consequently, the shantytowns and some other marginalized spaces are potential territories for counter-powers that produce political alternatives, and not only a place of survival, subjected to humanitarian response. Now, this potential is largely cancelled out by the fears they create and the violence they endure. The popular precarious city made by its inhabitants continues to be the most widespread habitat in the world². Why is there such violence towards the makeshift houses that make up these self-built districts? Above all, what does this reveal?

The destruction of these precarious places of survival seems all the more cruel because it has proven to be ineffective, expensive and there are technical options

[2] See Center SUD exhibition:
<http://www.center-sud.fr/exposition-populaire-precaire-regards-croises-sur-un-habitat-majoritaire/>

available. The charitable organizations assume this cruelty is anchored in former prejudices and faced with it, they want to enforce the respect for human rights. It's in vain: forced evictions increase in frequency precisely in the name of the protection of the inhabitants against some pseudo-imminent danger!

Besides political and property interests, shantytowns suffer from the many fears that they generate, no matter whether they are well-founded or not: invasion, poverty, delinquency, epidemics, poor housing, and social breakdown. All these fears intermingle within the shantytown but are not the primary cause. We should stop believing however that this is the source of the problems and not just their point of convergence. The normalization of shantytowns will not be the solution to the problems and the fears that are developed there. Conversely, the transformation of the city and society will allow the suffering that is concentrated in the shantytowns to be solved. The sheets of metal that are inhabited in the slums are becoming a banner and make the claim for the right to housing, and to the city, for all city-dwellers.

Ordinary State Violence

Shantytowns also reveal the violence of institutions. Their methods of control over the slums are a representation of government mechanisms that are exercised on all of society.

The inhabitants of the slums are publicly pointed out as foreigners, Romanians or Romani, with living habits that are drastically different to French people's. They are used to gathering the nation together against difference and mutual threat. The racialization of these people enables them to be deported as illegal immigrants in the city and in the country they live in, however – even if it involves an infringement of national laws and European agreements. The violence used to annihilate shantytowns demonstrates in itself that a war is ongoing against people who are presumed to be attacking the nation.

Subtle police surveillance prevents land takeover of the 'nooks and crannies' within the territory and informal activities all over the city. These are "illegal acts" inasmuch as the right to ownership prevails on the other rights. Nevertheless, these informal places provide the *savoir-faire* required economically and politically justifiable. Covering a territory thus cancels out any of the survival practices of all the poor inhabitants.

Does denouncing the continuing clearance and covering mean lauding attempts to adapt social rights to the assumed peculiarities of the inhabitants, by sending them into integration villages or breaking up communities and placing them into social housing in medium-sized towns? The law is not often enforced this way however compared to simple evictions, and its application is generally based on potential tests of integration such as a clean criminal record, schooling,



ZAD, Notre-dame-des-Landes, France - © Claudio Pulgar Pinaud

work contract, and so on. This *social sorting* is creating a new category of poor people whom are considered good for integration in order to deny rights to the bad ones (Castel, 1999). These people are evicted while the others are separated from the community base; they are prevented from performing their survival practices and are placed under control. Urbanizing only for certain people means evicting the others.

These methods of control against the shantytowns appear to be intensifying, but they are actually used on the whole population. Admitting that state violence is widespread shows us that there are new areas for alliance and for action outside of the shantytowns, in order to transform them.

Shantytowns, Unwitting ZAD

There are criticisms against government methods; resistance is organized against their violence and alternatives are emerging. The most current one is the ZAD (*zone à défendre*) – zone to be defended –, which superimposes itself on the future development of the zone³ for useless and imposed major projects, such as the Notre-Dame-des-Landes airport. The ZAD combines territory occupation strategy with extraterritorial alliance strategy. It questions the sovereign ability of the State to prescribe its territory development projects and provides radical criticism of the social mechanisms that produce this endless development.

[3] In French, *future development zone* means *Zone d'Aménagement Différé*, whence *Zone A Défendre*.

ZADs and shantytowns also share the fact they are both something of a creative removable habitat, in which people who migrate bring about links to other places. Despite the obvious differences regarding their population and their purposes, the shantytowns could hence consider themselves as a type of ZAD. By gathering and denouncing urban projects and an oppressive state order, the inhabitants, currently racialized as foreigners, surveilled as delinquents, sorted as marginal people, pass from denial and repression to conditional and even full rights, i.e. political power.

This transformation is already occurring with the shantytowns inhabitants' mobilizations against some local authorities that finally put aside the option to evict them. This transformation is expressed in claims for all, women and men: the right to housing for all women and men, "equality or nothing", "manifesto for a political anti-racism", etc. The politicization of the shantytowns may seem out of reach for some people. Actually, it already outlines immediate action lines, towards a precisely "political" town planning.

Turning our Backs on Police Town Planning

From a historical point of view, town planning is tied to disciplinary logic: from Hippodamus of Miletus' plan in ancient Greece to the current urban renewal projects, such as the planning of new colonial cities by military engineers, or within the Parisian plan by Baron Haussmann serving urban financial speculation, or even in the *tabula rasa* of modern architecture. Planning is then a "police" operation, in the meaning of Jacques Rancière: "*The police is thus an order of bodies [...] and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity another is not, that this speech understood discourse and another as noise. [...] Policing is not so much the "disciplining" of the bodies as a rule governing their appearing; a configuration of the occupations and the properties of the spaces where these occupations are distributed*" (Rancière, 1995)⁴.

"Police" town planning thrives upon the very widespread idea that the city is a "refuge for liberties" and a "haven of peace". Notably expressed this way by UN Habitat, this idea legitimizes the criticism of the informal districts considered as places of urban inequality and ends up with their standardization through eradication. In France, the ambition of a pacified city tends to reduce the "policy of the city" to a "police of the city" (Garnier, 2012). The latter pretends to renew the poor-class neighborhoods, including the informal ones, in order to merge them to the rest of the city. However, these interventions just further their racialization, covering and social sorting. The shantytowns are policed spaces but they are not permitted to be political. This is the challenge.

[4] Translation by Julie Rose, *Disagreement – Politics and Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis&London, 1999



Emancipating Spaces Without, Against, From the State

Considering the possibility of such “political” town planning means that the notion of shantytowns can drop its negative connotations that invalidate the inhabitants and to link it to the idea of possible emancipation. This idea naively seems to ignore their hostile living conditions. Actually, this presupposition of great misery, social marginality and political disorganization has proved to be mistaken for many poor districts. In the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, consumerism is what breaks community links down. Furthermore, social movements that struggle for the right to the city show how to overcome the visible contradiction between emancipation and poverty, and which one encourages dependence on the State. These movements do not directly demand the enforcement of this right, they simply implement it through pragmatic action while relying on resources granted by the State (such as the slum-consolidation plan *Chile barrio* or *Favela-bairro*), with a perspective of empowerment.

In Santiago, Chile, the *Movimiento de pobladores en luchas* (MPL) thus structures “struggles without the State, via territorial control and self-governance, against the State, via direct action in order to erode the leading order, and from the State, as an accumulation of anti-system forces” (Renna, 2014). It proposes a complex and autonomous strategy, capable of being on several fronts at the same time, in order to go beyond welfare-oriented demands. A proposal that has had an impact on other Latin American movements (such as the workers without a roof in Brazil or the *piquetero* movement in Argentina), which walk “together with the State, in spite of the State and against the State” (Lopes de Souza, 2014).

Town planning, like education, is not progressive or conservative *per se*. It depends on the operators that make it. A shantytown is structured in two steps: the self-construction firstly enables a sociopolitical process separate from established procedures. Town planning by the people can transform territories of exclusion into territories of emancipation, in areas with radical political involvement – through the absence of the State. Secondly, the consolidation of the shantytown is based on procedures and institutions. Hence, a tension emerges between becoming an autonomous subject and establishing oneself as a citizen subjected to the law⁵. The danger is that the action “from the State” (as opposed to “without” or “against”) becomes a collaboration, which changes the involvement into a political trap. Autonomy and self-governance remain essential principles in this type of movement in Latin America.

Political Town Planning from the Shantytowns

When preparing another form of planning, from below, through social movements, the town planners can play the role of the intellectual “rearguard” who are

[5] The example of the Romani is very well studied by Alexandra Clavé-Mercier in her dissertation, which she defended in 2014, “Of States and ‘Romanis’: an anthropology of the subject between transnationalism and integration policies for Bulgarian migrants in France”

implicated in the process, neither guides nor people in charge of a “consultation”, but ready to make their knowledge available for these processes.

In other forms, but with the same purpose, groups of “neighborhood architects” (*Arquitectos de la comunidad*) work via participative methods in Cuba, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. In France, collectives of professionals such as *Alternatives pour des projets urbains ici et à l’international* – (Alternatives for Urban Projects Here and Abroad), or APPUII, which for example was involved in the social housing neighborhoods of La Coudraie, or the *Pôle d’exploration des ressources urbaines* (the Center for Exploring the Urban Resources), or PEROU, in the shantytowns⁶. These professionals support the inhabitants who are involved in processes they do not fully understand, and they are committed to work alongside them, even radically changing the methods, the rhythms and the usual objectives. Other professionals in urban planning, even institutions like the Architecture, Urban Planning and Environment Councils⁷ (*Conseils d’architecture, d’urbanisme et d’environnement*) are getting closer to them, but the will to aid empowerment is restricted by institutional dependency.

Social movement has an approach that consists of going and getting the skills it needs. The Council for the social movements of Peñalolén in Chile was thus able to support the inhabitants in preparing a town planning program, which allowed them to win the referendum against the city council’s official plan. While these practices bring high hope, we ought to bear in mind the context of criminalization that has intensified in France in the shantytowns.

Town planners can support inhabitants’ initiatives without and against institutions’ guarantee of urban order and established injustices. They can also act from within their institutional position, and maintain a committed collaborative posture and not that of being consulted to serve powerful people. These various methods would make “political” town planning a reality that lets the “invisible people” become subject makers of their city. They would actually take part in the right to the city, which is not so much a right to attain as it is a permanent struggle for a city in which everyone can fulfill himself or herself by being fully involved in its collective transformation.

[6] <http://appuii.wordpress.com>, <http://www.perou-paris.org>.

[7] See here, as an example, how the Architecture, urban planning and environment council of the Eure is interested by the inhabitants initiatives <http://www.caue27.fr>.

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Community Organizing Neighborhood Trade Unionism

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What is *Community Organizing*?

Implemented and theorized from the end of the 1930s by Saul Alinsky¹, community organizing comes from across the Atlantic. The practices are similar to those of the *Wobblies*, IWW's² activists at the beginning of the 20th century; we also find these principles among the struggles of the Californian farm workers organized around César Chavez in the 1960s and there are similarities with the analyses of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. In France, these methods have been developing since 2010.

The term “*community*”, such as is understood by North-American people, refers to the people you feel close to, for one reason or another. Everyone belongs very often to several communities: block, parent-teachers, organization, profession, belief, etc. Community organizing is based on these communities and aims at having popular classes get into action, and organize themselves as a sustainable and structured counter-power³.

[1] Saul Alinsky, 1909-1972, is considered the founder of community organizing. You can learn his conception in his most famous book *Rules for radicals* (1971). Editions Aden published a translation in French entitled *Être radical. Manuel pragmatique pour radicaux réalistes*, 269 pages.

[2] *Industrial workers of the world*, labor union created in 1905 in the United-States of America, members of which were termed the *Wobblies* and their founding principle was the unity of the workers inside one big union as one social class sharing the same interests.

[3] The word “organizing” refers to the process that leads to organization, not the structure itself.



The locale, the place where you reside, the one where you work, where you live is therefore at the center of the process.

That is why we can call *community organizing* “neighborhood unionism”: what gathers is not the profession or the company, as is the case for the unionism we know, but the place where you live. It is also a “multi-terrain unionism”, since its objective is to take action with an impact on all the issues that affect the people organized; the scope of action can be very broad.

Hence, the *Alliance citoyenne de l'agglomération grenobloise*⁴, the first organization of this type created in France, has already run campaigns at the neighborhood scale concerning urban renewal, the struggle against the cockroaches, the repair of poorly insulated windows, the overbilling of heating and hot water, the conservation of car-free zones and the rebuilding of a school. It also ran more varied campaigns such as cleaners’ working conditions, the right to schooling for unaccompanied foreign minors or the simplifying of administrative processes for foreign students.

The Objectives of Community Organizing and their Ambiguities

With a view to developing popular counter-powers, community organizing is a method of collective action and organization whose primary aim is to confront the domination and injustice that people suffer in material terms. It has three aims.

The first aim is pragmatic and reformist. It consists of considering the world “as it is” and struggling collectively via direct action in order to gain improvements in living conditions for the popular classes (as a trade union could, but within areas as varied as housing, education or work).

The second aim is to have a true dynamic of political popular education. It can be achieved when the people struggle and win collectively, because then they can go beyond their sense of fatalism and overcome actual political exclusion. Furthermore, the struggles may be the framework in which they develop class-consciousness based on a certain understanding of the social antagonisms.

The third aim is to create a revolutionary project: indeed, the goal is to build a power relationship through collective organization for those whose real power is in their numbers.

All of these projects can be compared to multi-terrain revolutionary unionism and the grassroots is not the company but the neighborhood. People who seek to get into action, to truly fight with a materialist and pragmatic perspective,

[4] To follow-up the current campaigns and learn about the old ones : <http://www.alliancecitoyenne-38.fr/category/actus/>

initiate these projects. They are convinced that direct action is a powerful means of popular education and condemning domination can only be efficient if you fight concretely against the goings-on that result from them.

A Popular Education Objective

Community organizing aims at achieving victories and actual improvements. These victories enable members to develop confidence in their ability to act collectively and to draw attention to their social interests. Because of their experience inside a community organization and their involvement in very concrete actions, the people become aware of social conditioning and the structural inequalities they endure and they experience an alternative through the practice of radically democratic processes. The victories they achieve enable them to develop political emancipation and autonomy, and little by little to structure a mass organization and power relationship that becomes more and more advantageous to them.

The main method of rallying of community organizing is door-to-door. The first meeting serves to consider the worries of the people you meet, their real day-to-day problems. This radically materialist posture enables a first moment of political awareness-raising. The aim indeed of this conversation is to question oneself in order to identify the structural injustice that underlies each specific problem: why is the local authority letting things getting worse in our neighborhood while it is investing in neighborhoods that are supposed to draw new populations? Becoming aware then of the many people in the neighborhood (and in others) who are enduring the same injustice leads them to imagine how strong one group can be if it took collective action in order to make things change.



On the way to collective action, city of Aubervilliers, June 28, 2016 - © Paul Barlet



On the one hand, conflict is demonized by our society, which accuses the troublemakers of preparing a civil war, and on the other hand, countless numbers of men and women are driven into submission and loss of interest by fatalism. Community organizing is based on the belief of the inclusive nature of social conflict. Paradoxically, by accepting to fight against the institutions, one can take up her/his place in society. However, feeling that you belong to a society is an essential precondition to wish to have it change.

The Potential Neoliberal Reclamation of a Libertarian Method which Aims at Emancipation

Emancipation is a self-constituted process: you cannot emancipate someone else. Thus, emancipating processes require the calling for individual responsibility, because when exercising their responsibility, people can build and acquire their freedom. Hence, wanting to support the emancipation of another is a highly paradoxical approach which must find the balance between, on the one hand, the risk of paternalism, namely “doing things for them”, and on the other hand, the risk of going back to the neoliberal way, namely “figure it out for yourself!”.

That is how approaches based on supporting emancipation all include a potential risk to becoming neoliberal. Community organizing follows this rule. Indeed, while acknowledging that liberty and responsibility are intrinsically linked, we can apply very different practices depending on the function you give to the individual and the collective dimension.

While emancipation is taken in a libertarian sense, i.e. defending a position by saying “don’t free me, I’ll take care of it!”, it considers that individual responsibility cannot be conceived without taking into account structural domination and the struggle against it, and thus a collective solidarity. That is precisely what community organizing seeks to be: a collective framework for a struggle against injustice, and for the individual and collective emancipation of its members.

However, the drift towards a neoliberal interpretation is easy if we do not pay attention, especially because this interpretation is highly dominant today. Also because neoliberalism considers that liberty and responsibility are intrinsically linked.

The difference between both conceptions – libertarian and neoliberal – lies in the fact that the former’s aim is to establish a society based on solidarity, while the latter aims at reaching a contract society, in which will in itself is enough to achieve one’s choices: “Where there is will, there is a way”. On the contrary, the libertarian vision considers that liberty is possible only with equality, and that individual contractual agreement cannot be conceived where there is inequality in social relations. Thus, you can reach liberty by struggling against domination and by seeking equality, while individual liability is linked to collective solidarity.

This is how, if we don't pay attention, community organizing, just like other tools that enhance the concept of "empowerment"⁵ (Bacqué, Bieweler, 2013), can be used to implement increased empowerment of the people, forcing them to be actively involved in finding a solution to "their" problems, and help, even justify, the disengagement of the State.

That is what happens when community organizing drifts towards community development. In this framework, it is about self-organization to improve things for ourselves. This movement is well developed in the US; it is about choosing to implement oneself a direct solidarity inside the neighborhood (academic support, soup kitchens, social support etc.) through self-organization. Yet, the risk with the "do it yourself" approach is to see all the collective energy used to cure the symptoms. This may have two consequences: first, this enables the State not to bear, even to give up, its social and distributive responsibility; secondly, it means that you do not drive for social change which would allow the root causes of the difficulties (educational inequalities, precariousness, right to housing, and so on) to be tackled

In the community-organizing world, the neoliberal attraction implies a cooperation with institutions and public agents for the purposes of building what is called "social development of the poor neighborhoods". This is an injunction to the poor for them to take charge of the resolution of their problems, and the mobilizations come down to campaigns for the creation of shared gardens or self-organization for neighbor watch zones. All this leads to shelving the main objective of community organizing: the transformation of social relations while keeping up the pressure on the institutions through the class demands.

Social Peace or Social Justice?

Like unionism, community organizing can be used as a tool for the management of social interests: a tool to channel social conflict that aims at producing consensus, a win-win situation, co-management. They will try to soften the consequences of the inequalities, but the dominated will remain so; and softening the consequences means pushing farther the prospect of a radical questioning of the inequality balances. Without belittling the interest in limiting the consequences for the dominated people, we notice that we are now at the center of the debate on "social peace or social justice", "reform or revolution".

Internal Democracy and Functioning

The core principles of community organization are as follows:

- The people concerned are the ones who decide
- It brings together varied members (a mix of communities)

[5] The notion of empowerment emerged in social struggle radical movements in the 70's in the USA. UNO and World Bank used it from the 1990's and made of it a neoliberal concept by restricting it to its individual dimension.



Debates a neighborhood assembly, city of Aubervilliers, La Frette, June 18, 2016 - © Paul Barlet

- It is totally independent from public authorities and political parties
- It is involved in various struggles (multi-terrain), vertical (oriented against the institutions)
- It aims for winnable victories
- It operates under collective non-violent direct actions

From Local to Global

Community organizing is above all a local dynamic and it is mainly interested in local combat (housing, school, neighborhood, etc.) However, the will to conduct broader campaigns and to change things on a wider scale soon emerges.

In France, community organizing was imported and has been used in such a way since around 2010 (Mouvements review, 2016)

Some activists and social workers, disappointed by the limitations of their practices, discovered the concept of Saül Alinsky and became interested in it. Since 2010, they started the creation of *Alliances citoyennes* in the city of Grenoble, then in Rennes⁶ and recently in the city of Aubervilliers. Today, these organizations are structured in several neighborhoods of these cities, and are composed of several hundred members. They conduct campaigns for better housing, schools, neighborhoods and even work. Other groups are likely to be created in the near future in other cities, too.

[6] The organization's name is *Si on s'allieit* (Let us form an alliance) (<http://www.sionsallieit.org>) whereas the two others are called *Alliances citoyennes* (Citizens' alliances) (<http://www.alliancecitoyenne.org>)



Negotiations with the manager of OPHLM (social housing office) on water consumption regulations, Aubervilliers, June 28, 2016 - © Paul Barlet

The second community organizing family in France relates to Studio Praxis. It concerns working class neighborhood activists who educated themselves to community organizing during a trip to the USA in 2010 in order to use the method for their own mobilizations. They are the ones who, for instance, organized the campaign *Stop le contrôle au faciès* (End racial profiling)⁷. Moreover, they accompany and support other mobilizations from a methodological and strategic viewpoint (*La voix des Rroms*, etc.)

As the community organizing groups are structuring themselves, the question arises of the scale of intervention: if we want to affect social balance more broadly, indeed we ought to go beyond only local action.

In the USA, united campaigns were launched for instance in order to help change banking practices. In the work field, broad rallying enabled improvements to be made for precarious communities and those who are not unionized such as building caretakers or cleaners. Currently, the campaign Fight For \$15⁸ demands a wage increase for fast-food restaurant employees. This campaign is becoming global today and French organizations (union trades and community organizations) have also joined it.

In order to conduct these campaigns on a broader scale, some community organizations choose a functioning that is structurally coordinated. There are therefore some large federations in the USA which gather tens or even hundreds of

[7] <http://stoplecontroleaufacies.fr>

[8] <http://fightfor15.org/>



thousands of members throughout the territory (Talpin, 2016). In France, while there is cooperation between organizations, it remains informal. However, some members want to structure a national network, which would allow it to grow a greater strike force, at a national or even international level, by connecting to other networks.

In all cases, leading such organizations requires a certain number of people with technical skills specific to this activity and working on a full-time basis. These persons are called *organizers*. In the USA, thousands of them are practicing what has become a real profession, which you learn following specialized courses at university or in independent training centers. In France, there are around ten activists who are practicing this activity on a full-time basis and they all had to start working with no salary for several months: particularly because they accepted this precarious situation (it takes a certain level of comfort to willingly take such a risk), very often the organizers do not belong to the same social groups as the people they organize. This produces an exteriority of the “professionals” regarding the group organized. However, this exteriority is influential and Saül Alinsky has theorized it as such: the members are coerced into not denying the power/counter-power logic that is applied inside the organization between the members who have the democratic power over the organizations and the organizers who in reality make up a large share of the group.

In society as in the organizations it creates, from the local to the global scale, community organizing represents a democracy founded upon the opposition and arbitration between powers and counter-powers.

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Airbnb in San Francisco: a New Struggle for the Right to the City?

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Since the boom in the number of ads for furnished vacation apartments and the combat waged by the different local authorities in some of the world's big cities (New York, Paris, Barcelona, San Francisco), all eyes are on Airbnb and the social and territorial consequences of its success.

In a referendum electoral fight, which pitted Airbnb against a municipal activist coalition, since year 2014 the city of San Francisco has become the theater of company strategies to keep its illegal control over the market of vacation rentals. Until 2014, the law for peer-to-peer vacation rental platforms such as Airbnb or VRBO allowed the renting of an apartment or a room for a period of 30 days as a maximum. In October 2014, a new law, called "Airbnb-law" by local organizations, supported by a supervisor, David Chiu, whose campaign financing broadly arose from Airbnb financiers¹, legalized the majority of the ads by extending the legal term to 90 days. What is more, while providing the creation of a political entity inside the city council in order to check the lawfulness of the online ads, this new law would make this control impossible because it did not make the registration of hosts at the city hall mandatory.

After losing the fight, many organizations and independent collectives have used their last resort: the municipal poll. A coalition named ShareBetter SF was initiated in November 2015, it gathered the 15,000 voters' signatures required

[1] The Anti-eviction Mapping Project collective built a connections map on the different financial links between local politics and technology sector in particular:
<http://www.antievictionmappingproject.net/conway.html>, accessed May 11, 2016.



to submit the proposal to the vote and launched an electoral campaign for “Proposition F”. This measure sought to limit vacation rental of a living area to 75 nights per year for main residences. It also provided the creation of a legal option for inhabitants and organizations: the petition for the investigation on the lawfulness of the rental practices of their neighbors. At the end of the most expensive electoral campaign in the city history – Airbnb spent \$8.2M on political subsidies, communication and miscellaneous events² – Proposition F failed by a weighty margin, showing the limited and territorialized nature of the protest.

The City Hall Ballot as the Last Resort for Citizens

The launching of the election campaign to legislate Airbnb and the activist device implemented for it are a good illustration of how San Francisco’s democratic institutions deal with the matter of struggles against housing speculation and tenant evictions.

While the city is going through a housing crisis, the controversy around Airbnb practices takes on a connotation particular to the San Franciscan context. The ShareBetter coalition was initiated in New York before a background of high protest regarding the role of Airbnb in the housing crisis. This battle was imported and initiated as the coalition ShareBetterSF, which gathers local organizations, NGOs and independent collectives at the root of Proposition F. The criticisms of Airbnb are many: “Every independent study to date has concluded that the current law is unenforceable and won’t work. Right now, 94% of Airbnb’s 8,500 listings for San Francisco are unregistered and illegal and the current law allows them to do it”³. By insisting on the illegal nature of the listings and the fact that it is impossible to check them, ShareBetterSF points out the damages caused by these online sharing platforms on the housing market: “Airbnb and VRBO alone account for roughly 4,500 entire homes and apartments having been removed from the San Francisco rental market. That is 1,000 units more than the 3,500 new units that were built over the year 2014”⁴.

The election campaign, which raged over this matter between September and November 2015, reflects the political turmoil generated by the Airbnb issue in particular and housing issues in general. The city of San Francisco regularly undergoes periods of housing crisis and the latest one is related to the strong growth of Internet-based economics by the end of the 1990s (Tracy, 2014). The bursting of the housing bubble and the return to a quasi-normal situation of the housing market allowed for a break in price rises. However, since the end of the 2000s, a new property crisis, related to the geographical proximity of big

[2] Read Sara Shortt, leader of the Housing Rights Committee, in 48Hills “The Truth Behind the Airbnb Lies”, October 12, 2015. URL: <http://48hills.org/2015/10/12/the-truth-behind-the-airbnb-lies/>, accessed May 12, 2016

[3] http://www.sharebettersf.com/why_we_need_regulation, accessed May 11, 2016.

[4] http://www.sharebettersf.com/why_we_need_regulation, accessed May 11, 2016.

companies like Google, Facebook, Appel, Twitter or Uber, has helped the boom of property and rental prices, and also tenant evictions (Opillard, 2015).

Activist response to this context of a sharp increase of the prices and tenant evictions is commensurate with the housing crisis. The election campaign for Proposition F relies on structured networks and on some traditionally committed institutions, political forces composed of eight trade unions (teachers and the building industry in particular) and forty neighborhood organizations (*Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Council*), organizations such as *Anti-Displacement Coalition*, the *Sierra Club* or the *San Francisco Tenants Union*. The originality of this coalition lies in the fact that this alliance is unexpected, since it is supported by property owners associations such as San Francisco Apartment Association, which went into action in order to chase the tourists out the upscale and bourgeois residential areas in the west of the city, and is also known as NIMBY (*Not In My BackYard*).

The practical organization of the campaign relies on a militant *savoir-faire* arising from unionism and Community Organizing (Beitel, 2013): neighborhood meetings organized by political groups supporting the initiative, leafleting door-to-door, a small number of volunteers dropping leaflets in mailboxes organizing meetings to discuss in Neighborhood Community Centers for different neighborhoods in the city.

The campaign appears *de facto* as a moment of crystallization of the underlying debates that have been concerned with the struggle practices for a contextual right to city for decades (Tracy, 2014). It permits the creation of spaces in which issues such as Airbnb practices, the place of the technology companies in local politics and more generally the eviction of working and middle classes due to gentrification can be publicly discussed (Céfaï, 1996). In these discussions, the right to the city as such is very seldom mentioned among the local collectives, but references to “right to stay put” or slogans such as “Hell no, we won’t go” or even “Whose city? Our city!” directly refer to similar claims. You need to scale up in terms of organization to hear a speech structured around the right to the city as a core concept. Thus, the organization *Right to the city Alliance* includes several local collectives in San Francisco and organizes national encounters across the USA for the training of leaders or discussion webinars.

The Professionalization of Airbnb in the Context of a Housing Crisis

Besides these institutionalized political devices, several independent groups and collectives are fighting against the illegal conversion of apartments into short-term rentals, in particular through Airbnb.



Walking tour against the illegal conversion of units into Airbnb hotels, October 1, 2015 – © Peter Menchini.

During the Proposition F campaign, the *San Francisco Tenants Union* and *Eviction Free San Francisco*, a direct-action local collective which fights against tenant eviction⁵ alongside several activists belonging to various collectives, organized a walking tour in the North Beach neighborhood that they called *Death by Airbnb: a walking tour*, on October 1, 2015.

This walking tour was the opportunity to link several buildings that had been subjected to mass evictions because of a local regulation⁶. These buildings were afterwards rented on Airbnb. Jennifer Fieber, an employee of the Tenants Union reports, during the first step of the tour: “We are here in front of 1937 Mason Street. This building was purchased in the year 2000, it had four lovely families that lived in it, the owner bought it for \$830,000 and within one year they Ellis Acted it, they kept it vacant for a while and eventually started doing Airbnbs on the entire building. The Tenants Union complained to the city a lot, nothing ever happened, so finally we came here one year ago to take matters into our own hands [...] we stuck these stickers on all the illegal hotels we could find in North Beach, and it was pretty successful. Within 2 months, the owners put the building back on sale and made a profit of 1.25 billion dollars after the EA.”⁷

[5] See their website: <https://evictionfreesf.org>, accessed May 11, 2016.

[6] Ellis Act, law in the State of California, was adopted in 1986 and aims at making the housing market flow by giving the property owner the unconditional right to evict his tenant. The Anti-eviction Mapping Project mapped the Ellis Acted tenants:

<http://www.antievictionmappingproject.net/ellis.html>, accessed May 11, 2016

[7] Link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYMY8extUhQ>, accessed May 11, 2016.

This description shows the way the service offered by Airbnb combines with a context of very high real estate profitability and flaws in Californian law. The purpose of this building purchase, as for several other buildings⁸, is not to create long-term rentals in a city in which more than 60% of the buildings are rented. The aim is rather to convert it into an illegal hotel through Airbnb or resell it rapidly after its renovation in order to make substantial property profit. Furthermore, some studies proposed by local activists and investigative reports from San Francisco Bay reveals the progressive structuration of a professional network parallel to Airbnb which offers the management of rental assets for owners using Airbnb – the e-concierge service for example. Far from offering a mere apartment sharing service, as the company may define it in its communication campaign, it proves to be a political tool that confirms the influence of finance on local political decision-making and a new means to take advantage of the very fast profitability of the local real estate market.

Conclusion

This struggle is an illustration of how local discontentment crystallizes, a discontentment that is growing in a context of sharp increase of tenant evictions, and therefore an illustration of the ability for the poor and middle classes to remain in San Francisco. A struggle for the right not to have one's home taken. And a struggle for a broader idea: to whom is the right to remain in town and produce the urban social fabric granted?

What Airbnb is generating in terms of tenant evictions, the conversion of houses into illegal hostels, the destruction of neighborhood solidarity or political pressure on local regulation is actually a strategy for the company and for the people who wish to benefit from the economic opportunity it offers. In this context, remaining at home and remaining in the city are two claims with two scales but are in reality connected. They oppose a right to the city for entrepreneurial strategies, and this right has a particular meaning in the context of super-gentrification in the city of San Francisco, where income inequalities are among the highest in the USA.

[8] See map “tech dorms” mapped by Anti-eviction Mapping Project: <http://www.antievictionmappingproject.net/digeratidorms.html>, accessed May 11, 2016. These dormitories offer steep price bunk beds and are more and more commonly use to accommodate technology employees.



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The *Pobladores* Movements, Socio-Natural Disasters and the Resistance to the Neoliberal City in Chile

CLAUDIO PULGAR PINAUD

The recent period – from 2010 to 2014 – is a point of inflexion in Chilean society (this process is still ongoing) and within the pobladores movement. After the dual telluric and social movements in 2010 (Pulgar, 2010a), in 2011 we witnessed (Pulgar, 2010b) the eruption of a broader social movement that is the most “significant of the past twenty years”, after the resistance movement against dictatorship in the 1980s. This is related, according to our hypothesis, to the structural contradictions of the “model”. It is important to emphasize the spreading over the territory of the social movement, in which the pobladores movement played a decisive role. In the first part, we will study two social movements: on the one hand because they are different because of their sudden eruption and novelty; on the other hand because of their interconnection at the national level and their ability to negotiate and make proposals in various fields. We talk about the FENAPO – Federación Nacional de Pobladores (Pobladores national federation) and the MNRJ – Movimiento Nacional para la Reconstrucción Justa (National movement for the just reconstruction): both of them operate as local movement federations.

Both movements, FENAPO and MNRJ, are “movements of movements”, “networks of networks that are building a new historical subject, pluralistic and diverse”. Concerning FENAPO and MNRJ, “from being strictly protest movements, they became movements proposing solutions, technically supported by NGOs, academics and people who are graduates from different fields. Their demands are also broad. Far from restricting themselves to matters specifically related to their local needs, many movements started to criticize the development



Protest of the National Federation of Inhabitants, Santiago, Chile, 2016 © Eugenia Paz

model. The fact that they have a network-based organization partly explains the broadening local vision to a more inclusive and universal vision”.

Urban social movements at the same time turn into spaces of non-formal education in civilian society, as suggested by Gohn. The pobladores movements (including homeless people, or *allegados*¹ who are deeply in debt and have suffered damage) gathered in the FENAPO were about to announce their proposals for the housing urban policies in March 2010 when Sebastian Piñera, an entrepreneur supported by a right-wing coalition, became president of the country. Nevertheless, because of the earthquake of February 27, 2010, they appeared few weeks before the change of presidency. Thus, their direct action, organization and growth have been built upon the humanitarian response that they provided to the people who suffered damages, what they called themselves a help *de pueblo a pueblo* (from people to people)².

This action shows an organic resilience regarding resource mobilization. The public appearance of FENAPO took place in April 2010 during its first street mobilization, in front of the Presidential Palace when they demanded a meeting with the President of the Republic; then, in June 2010, in another street mobilization “to demand the commitments be fulfilled and to be informed about its position regarding social housing, debt and reconstruction³”. After a series of

[1] *Allegados* : a word for the people who, because they don't have housing, are obliged to live in their families' or rent a room in a house

[2] *Ayuda de pueblo a pueblo* : assistance provided directly by grassroots organizations to the victims of the earthquake and tsunami, with no intermediary (government or NGO)

[3] “700 pobladores de la FENAPO se movilizaron en Santiago” [“700 pobladores from FENAPO rallied in Santiago”], *El Ciudadano*, 4 junio 2010.

major mobilizations, the movement succeeded in creating a group that worked directly with the minister and his closest advisors at that time, in January 2011. Thanks to the negotiations, the Ministry stopped its plan to liberalize housing policy and the grassroots organizations obtained its commitment to support them in developing self-governed social housing projects⁴. This victory of a resistance strategy highlighted the capabilities of social movement.

Simultaneously, the movements of people affected by the earthquake and tsunami of 2010 joined a wider network called the National Movement for the Just Reconstruction (MNRJ) and this network turned into citizens' main representative for the defense of those people affected by the earthquake. It enables all of these issues to be made visible at a national level. In the context of the emergence of these new collective actors, the FENAPO is the "heir" of a historical social movement, the Chile *pobladores* movement. However, the MNRJ appears to be a response to the reconstruction process, a response from the people affected by earthquake who are allied to components of the *pobladores* historical social movement. These new social movements emerge within the context of a subsidiary and neoliberal State that is contested. Faced with obvious limitations as a result of this type of State, new social demands are emerging in order to obtain more autonomy or self-governance.

Four years later, with the emergence of this "dual telluric and social movement" which induced a change in the government coalition, we observe some continuity in the action of the *pobladores* movements. Without going in details about internal discussions, the reorganization of the forces that compose it, the splits of the movement of the people affected by housing debt and other problems, we can notice the FENAPO continued to progress throughout these years on both local and national scale⁵. Moreover, the MNRJ⁶ has become less important because the 2010 reconstruction (not to mention the neoliberal policies going on) progressed very rapidly, which made a large part of the grassroots activists go back to their territories in order to help further their projects; or they disappeared once their main demands were fulfilled.

[4] This work was supported by Chile University with the "Consultorio de Arquitectura FAU" [Consulting agency of the Faculty of Architecture and Town planning of Chile, architecture, housing, community and participation]

[5] In 2014, the FENAPO experienced another year of strong mobilization. The major one concerned the occupation of Mapocho riverbanks in the very center of Santiago, during 74 days in the middle of winter. After this brilliant action, which the media completely eclipsed whereas more than 4000 people had gone there to support the occupation on August 19, FENAPO decided to occupy a building in the center of the capital, in Bellas Artes district, a gentrified and very touristic area. Families were living in this building, they were demanding to exercise their right to the city and the pledges of subsidies for housing finally fulfilled. After occupying the building during three months, the police violently evicted the families on December 3, 2014.

[6] Even though one of the spokesperson takes part, as a representative of civil society, at CNDU [Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano = National Council for Urban Development], grassroots are not mobilized anymore, nor organized.



The Response of the *Pobladores* Affected by Damages in Iquique and Valparaiso Before the Reconstruction

Concerning the earthquake of 2010, the mobilizations for the reconstruction took months of organizing, while in Iquique in 2014, they were initiated few days after. This shows that the *pobladores* organizations had improved their empowerment and organization, which was due to the change in the country's "social climate" since 2010. The main difference is that in 2014, no new *pobladores* movements had been created or consolidated, nor were any federations, in either Valparaiso or Iquique, except for some groups of people who were affected by the earthquake and who became allied to either FENAPO or what remains of the MNRJ.

In Iquique, demonstrations started three days after the earthquake⁷ and they went on until September. During our fieldwork in Iquique and Alto Hospicio, six months after the earthquake, we could observe that the reconstruction process had not yet begun.

As the people affected have actively joined forces, the government responded by providing rapid aid for renting during the emergency period, which enabled them to calm people and avoid potential resistances.

A large proportion of the victims of the earthquake in Iquique, as in Alto Hospicio, lived in social housing that had been built over the past thirteen years. We can assume that lots of them preferred to deal with the current approach, a "top down" solution that is the result of many years of alienating subsidiary politics. Indeed, this strategy consisting of providing case-by-case solutions was a trap for collective organization. In Iquique, we managed to develop of a public-private alliance with a mining company, which offered 240 emergency houses of good quality. In Alto Hospicio, the context was less praiseworthy, as six months after some families were still sleeping in tents. The lack of mobilization in Iquique as in Alto Hospicio may be due to the vulnerabilities that already existed, in addition to the vote-catching approach. In addition, as the damages were mainly concerned with social housing, reconstruction faced obstacles and mobilizations faced neutralization attempts.

In Valparaiso, the main difference with Iquique-Alto Hospicio is that there is a social fabric and a very significant form a social production of the city, as proved by the "urban phenomenon of the *tomas de terrenos* in Valparaiso ravines", in the very area where the huge fire took place. As soon as the emergency phase started, self-governance played an essential role in Valparaiso, which allowed thousands of volunteers to clean the debris and build emergency dwellings. The authorities were overwhelmed by a myriad of volunteers who were moved

[7] "Habitantes de Iquique encienden barricadas para protestar por falta de ayuda" [City dwellers of Iquique set fire to barricade in order to protest against the lack of assistance], EMOL, April 4 2014.



Protest of the Movement of Inhabitants in Struggle, Santiago, Chile, 2016 © Eugenia Paz

by the violence of the fire and thousands of them went to help the harbor. The preexisting territorial organizations such as the social and cultural centers, but also inhabitant organizations etc. helped channel the aid. At the beginning, the State relied on grassroots organizations but rapidly decided to forbid volunteering because it would start turning into an authority in parallel to the institutional authority. Contrary to Iquique, the Valparaíso pobladores started to rebuild via their own means only a few days after the fire. Six months later, we could observe on the field the continuous process of self-governed reconstruction. Mention should be made of the initiatives such as conflict mapping⁸ or the collaborative projects, which – not only because of the fire – demonstrated the capabilities of organizations in Valparaíso and their bottom-up way of functioning. This allows them to anticipate long-term resistances.

Final Considerations

Construction processes, and therefore the production of Chilean cities, must be understood as a conflict. A conflict between on the one side agents who take the money and who take advantage of the transfer of public wealth to the private sector through the real estate market and subsidies; and on the other side the majority, who resist this logic and who defend use value against market exchange value. Social movements propose to move forward towards spatial justice in order to go beyond the subsidiary model of housing and therefore reconstruction, in order to build cities with a social function of the land and self-governance, and

[8] “¿Te invité yo a vivir aquí? Cartografía colectiva crítica de Valparaíso”, [Did I tell you to come and live here? Collective critical cartography], Iconoclastas, July 2014.



to stand up against the current market supremacy. It is clear, therefore, that through pragmatic initiatives, we can actually build post-neoliberal cities.

However, we ought to set the emergence of these urban social movements in a broader historical context and understand that the current movements are a part of the historical pobladores movements in Chile. Our assumption of the dual telluric and social movement is based on this: the earthquake was actually a catalyst or mobilizing call for processes that were in action but underground. The proposals and projects, in particular FENAPO's, wanted more autonomy based on self-governance and questioned the welfare-based dependency relationship to the State which was increased by neoliberal policies. This conflict demonstrates the dialectics between alienation due to neoliberal policies and the emancipatory processes that started to emerge within the territories. The resistance and resilience processes entwine and this increases the dialectical complexity of the issue.

In some previous work we studied one of the movements that founded FENAPO: the MPL⁹. We want to draw attention to it because of its knowledge of how to vary its action modes, from urban housing to education, proving its resistance and resilience capabilities during a struggle. The definition of the MPL is to manage "struggles without the State, through territory control and self-governance, against the State, through direct action in order to crumble the leading order; and from the State, as a build-up of anti-system forces". The MPL proposes a complex and autonomous strategy capable of being on several fronts at the same time in order to go beyond welfare-based demands. It is interesting to notice how this proposal is consistent with the analysis of Lopes de Souza on the autonomy of other Latin American social movements, which grow "together with the State, in spite of the State, against the State". Especially, indeed, in the case of the Movement of the Workers without a roof in Brazil, or the piquetero movement in Argentina.

So, how do we combine the concepts of right to the city and spatial justice with the action of the urban social movements in Chile? Soja explains the difference between both concepts as follows: spatial justice is an analytical approximation that can "be operational" in various ways locally, whereas, the right to the city can be understood as a common global and political horizon, which combines several demands. We note that the neoliberal agenda is still in force: while the MINVU¹⁰ is discussing the new urban development policy, simultaneously, the pobladores movement is fortifying its vision, which, as we have seen, evolved from claiming a right to housing towards a broader horizon, based on right to the city.

[9] *Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha = Movement of Inhabitants in Struggle) (Translator's note)

[10] *Ministerio de Viviendo y Urbanismo = Ministry of Housing and Town Planning

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C/ The Right to the City
at the Center
of Local Power?

Rojava: a Municipal Autonomy Experiment in Times of War

INTERVIEW WITH ENGIN SUSTAM,

Academic guest, University of Geneva, InCite, Associate researcher, IFEA-Istanbul.

By Claudio Pulgar and Charlotte Mathivet.

What is the current situation in the Rojava and in particular in the cities?

While the war against ISIS is ongoing, Rojava (Western Kurdistan or “Little Kurdistan”) is built upon a democratic self-governance revolutionary project. In this war context, female Kurdish fighters (people’s protection units lead by the female Kurdish commander Rojda Felat) are moving towards the most important city from a strategic viewpoint for ISIS: Raqqa. A lot has been said about the revolution in Rojava because of the fact that women are at the very center of the armed action. However, what is at stake is less a political struggle against patriarchy than a revolution against the nation-state with a self-governance approach, which goes beyond the form of nation-state.

The co-leaders of the Rojava cantons (Cizîrê, Kobanê, Afrîn) are implementing a self-administrated society and establishing a micro-economic system regarding ownership and land as provided by Rojava’s constitution, called the Social contract¹.

Despite the war, revolutionary militants continue to question society, ecology, the alternative economy and cooperation between the different peoples. They are doing so thanks to an organization with no hierarchy, gender or ethnic discrimination in order to create a common life in the canton. Since April 2016, the

[1] The Syrian Kurdistan has a “democratic and autonomous authority”, adopted on January 6, 2014 its constitution (Social contract), which defines Syria as a “Democratic, free and independent State” and divides the Kurdistan into three cantons.



Social contract of the Rojava canton decided to add an article for the animal rights and their protection (animal liberation)², a right to conscientious objection to mandatory military service (civil and military disobedience)³. The Social contract of Rojava defends society's collective rights, the education against masculinity and self-governed economies for political reasons based on the emancipation of women and society.

The three cantons continue to "strengthen" their objective of self-sufficiency in times of war. Since the liberation of Kobanê, the cantons began to intensify the armed fight against ISIS in order to liberate the regions from the jihadists, particularly the line from Kobanê to the canton of Afrîn, which is caught between Turkey, ISIS and Al Nosra. It should be added that the borders between Kurdistan in Turkey (Bakur) and in Syria (Rojava), are a smuggling market between the Kurdish families from Turkey and Syria. This enables the creation of a political relationship between the two colonized areas of Kurdistan. Lastly, this gives us a comprehensive idea of the memory of the struggles and relationships between divided people.

The repression by authority in Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan is the cause of the current sociopolitical struggle. The militarization of Kurdistan by the Kemalist and Ba'athist regimes forced the inhabitants to flee. This forced migration gave Kurdish people the ability to create urban political movements such as in Istanbul where the Kurdish community numbers 5 million inhabitants.

In this context, it is hard for the inhabitants of Syrian Kurdistan to express a desire for self-governance and revolution, as their day-to-day life is punctuated by embargos and blockades, from both sides of the Rojava's border⁴, at the heart of ethnic and religious conflicts. However, we can note a paradigm change since the beginning of the war in Syria with the declaration of self-determination of Rojava's Cantons in Syrian Kurdistan. The Kurdish movement started to claim the name of Rojava, which refers to the Kurdish memory. Thus, during all the Kurdish revolts from the beginning of the century, Rojava has remained a center for Kurdish protesters, combatants and revolutionaries. Rojava has become a place of a growing memory of Kurdish resistance, the place of an alternative economy⁵ against capitalism as well as a territory where utopias like democratic libertarian municipalities are pragmatically developed.

[2] See: <http://www.jiyanaekolojik.org/arsivler/3461>

[3] See: <http://www.jiyanaekolojik.org/arsivler/3266>

[4] From one side, Turkey has totally blocked the crossings on the borders after Kobanê's victory, and on the other side, the regional federal government of Iraq Kurdistan (headed by PDK) has a control to block the crossing to Rojava

[5] On the analysis of a self-ruled alternative economy, see documentary with Azize Aslan: <http://www.jiyanaekolojik.org/arsivler/2682> (in Turkish)

How does the municipal administration of these cities work?

The first thing to say is that the Rojava revolution promotes democratic self-governance based on ideas of libertarian anarchism, but not orthodox. Therefore, the revolution is influenced by Abdullah Öcalan's theories, the experience of the Kurdish movement in Bakur (Northern Kurdistan), the PKK's (and its municipal experiences in the region and its armed fight for 40 years) and by philosophers like Murray Bookchin. We can also recognize the legacy and history of self-governance or experiences of anarchist governance like in Spain. Rojava is therefore influenced by a complete urban ecology tinkering around the "Kurdish issue" in the Middle East.

This revolution proposes an ontological case study which consists of conceiving and applying a change of the political and social values of life. We are talking about a micropolitical emancipation within the Kurdish area in Turkey and Syria that takes root in a heterogeneous movement (Kurdish political movement, LGBTI, feminist, gender movements, etc.) which fights against the capitalist system. I must add that this tendency towards a micro-revolutionary form is comprised of various realities. It talks about a type of politics that aims to create a Kurdish space with self-ruled municipalities in which the inhabitants can actually participate. As I said, the "democratic federalism" such as conceived by A. Öcalan is an influence; and so is the libertarian municipalism as developed by Murray Bookchin or other philosophers like Foucault or Guattari. These influences are the roots of the construction of "bottom-up" democratic municipal politics with an ecological approach.



Engin Sustam



The outcome of all these influences is the need to rebuild a pluralistic democratic society, a shared neighborhood, an alternative micro-economy centered on social and “humanitarian” benefits, on environment and women’s emancipation, in order to prevent an “individualistic” or state controlled model. The famous references previously referred to are not just stimulating national reflection on the movement, but also express a policy of dissensus (as per Rancière) in the Kurdish area.

The canton structures the self-governance, and the population is organized into various assemblies: neighborhood, women, religion (Alevi, Muslims, Yazidis, Christians, etc.), ecology, energy, youth, etc. The current strategy is to consider the canton as self-ruled and independent of the state executive power. According to the social contract, the cantons self-ruling is “bottom-up” structured. In this political context, the self-ruled governments have a dual exercising of power (from security to civil disobedience). Within this context, the democratic confederal system proposed by Abdullah Öcalan is a system that rejects the nation, patriarchy, positivist scientism, hegemony, state administration, capitalism with Fordist or post-Fordist industrialism, and is the place of a democratic autonomy, of a social and alternative economy in the cantons.

It can be said that Rojava is a place for the experimentation of this democratic “federalism” theory. The canton is a place where all peoples, minorities and genders are equally represented. The social contract of the Rojava is also developing thanks to the political integration of all the elements of society (Yazidis, Alevi, Kurdish, Arabs, Assyrians, Christians, Armenians, etc.) The canton system is in charge of the environment via the assemblies; it withstands the assimilation of the dominant identities that Kurdish people have been enduring for centuries, and has a different approach than that of the typical conception of territory autocratic governance.

Is the (re)building of the dwellings self-managed, for example? How are the schools and hospitals administrated? Does a relationship with the State exist?

Some buildings were constructed in accordance with the environmental project, carried out by the local authority and the neighborhood assemblies. An anarchistic way of thinking is used to fight against inequality and implement the right to housing for each individual in every canton. There is also a project carried to ensure that school education becomes a right as it is in any democratic society. The restitution of disciplinary knowledge bring about major changes; indeed, it includes a vision of gender and class equality while rejecting the centralized model based on sexism especially. Moreover, there is no hierarchy between teachers and students.



Rojava – Kurdish YPG Fighter

Lastly, I would like to explain the Kurdish political ecology vision within the canton. The canton organizes public hospitals by putting them in relation with the assemblies' actors, then by enhancing the role of the new actors who are in charge of rethinking the anarchist interpretation of the public space and questioning the institutionalized approach of school and hospital. The political ecology in Rojava is a new challenge for a geopolitical approach free of the orthodox political conception of the conventional leading cultures. That is thereby a way of having an anti-capitalist way of thinking within colonialism. According

to Kurdish ecologists, governmentality in times of war must not be limited to a matter of identity and territory, but on the contrary, it must be built on social values. This approach is due to Fanonian interpretation of the Kurdish political movement. It is the expression of a micro-territory rejecting the capitalistic State practice, which considers health, education and housing as interchangeable goods.

Even though war structures the everyday life in Northern (Bakur) and Western (Rojava) Kurdistan, there is a fierce desire to live. This desire implies a total break with colonial life and the existing order of Arabic state-nation such as under Bashar Al Assad's regime. Such a process of radical overthrowing of the Arabic nationalism gave birth to an important dialogue between the several populations of the region. The inhabitants continue to improve the canton system. The Mesopotamian Social Sciences Academy (especially in the Afrîn and Cirîzê cantons, Kobanê, having been totally destroyed by the war) continues, in spite of everything, their research and teaching with an anarchistic, pedagogical approach, and they notably teach gender studies in some social and political sciences departments. The academics invite foreign professors to come and lecture, such as David Graeber, Janet Biehl or ourselves. From this point of view, the students of the Mesopotamian University of Cirîzê (the Mesopotamian Academy) have a great opportunity to study and practice through bottom-up radical democracy.



Despite the war, numerous initiatives have been launched. Along with members of the university and students, the municipal institutions of the autonomous cantons organized a campaign to create a multilingual library. Women's local assemblies are organized to cultivate and collectivize the land. Thereby, not long ago, about a hundred people (especially women) started to cultivate the land in accordance with the rules of organic agriculture. Meanwhile, some activists of the city and village urban gardens in Bakur (Northern Kurdistan: Amed Hevsel Bostanlari-Hevsel Amed's gardens) are starting to make real social ecology in some of the villages. Peasants and villagers have organized themselves to self-administrate the green areas and to have an environmentally-oriented farming. The crops of the local producers are shared among the regions' populations, depending on their needs.

What are the demands and claims of the social movements in Rojava? Are the authorities criticized?

Currently, we cannot clearly refer to Rojava as having social movements, except for the feminist and ecologist movements, which try to constitute the values of the social contract revolution. Indeed, it most likely deals with actors trying to question the complexity of the area where the rebellion is taking place and generate a new micropolitical perception through counter-power dynamics and counter-cultural reproduction.

To date, after the Kurdish self-ruled resistance in various canton regions, the jihadist regime is still a brutal threat to the revolution's gains. This jihadist threat is still there and drives the population of Syrian Kurdistan into diaspora or exile. Two approaches of the sociopolitical uprising coexist: a civil resistance with the ecologist and feminist movement and an armed resistance against the nation state, the jihadists, violence and state military domination.

A citizen at Madrid City Hall.

INTERVIEW TO MANUELA CARMENA

Mayor of Madrid

By Claudio Pulgar Pinaud, december 2015

According to you, how did the social movements and their supports came to local power? Is the right to the city a matter you deal with at Madrid city hall?

I think it is very interesting to broaden the discussions on the right to the city, but with an inclusive perspective, which means right to the city for all. I think that, really often, the social movements, as hard to believe as it is, have a very exclusive attitude, and they think the city only belongs to social movements, but this is not so: the city also belongs to companies and opposition sectors. I think we ought to have a broader vision and consider the city is everybody's, including companies and markets. We ought to find our ways to communal living in this space in which we all live.

What policy did you undertake concretely in order to change the city?

One thing is clear: we tried to implement major projects for employment. The unemployment rate in Madrid is highly localized in some blocks and districts. In these districts, there are employment agencies of the town council, which were already there before the project, and they have an essential objective that is to promote the employment of the most disadvantaged social classes in that matter. We are implementing a cooperation policy with the companies. When we interact with a company, whatever the circumstances, we systematically ask them to carry out an employment project, and we are reaching many agreements. Some agreements are very relevant, because they have a twofold interest. One of the companies is a famous supermarket chain, Mercadona. We reached an agreement according to which the company should employ a high number of unemployed workers from the town council agency. Mercadona is interested in the proposal because the people it employs hence come from the same districts



Manuela Carmena – © Elvira Mejías

as the supermarket, so the commute time is very short and we think that it is a major energy saver. When the people do not waste their time commuting, it is more than saving energy, it is also quality of life. Therefore, we think that we have to carry out a policy of consensus, establish agreements with the market, the companies and be clear that the right to the city implies the right for all, including the market.

How is the relationship between the Madrid city hall and the social movements going?

They are represented inside the city hall. We have also been generating constant debates between the city hall and the movements and I myself go to the different districts in order to have a permanent debate with them. We also initiated a very interesting project to strengthen all the social movements, which consists of letting them occupy the city hall premises for activities, they were empty or badly occupied. Therefore, we created a protocol for a homogeneous and correct allocation of the premises, avoiding privileges for some groups in particular. This enables us to have movements of all types, including movements that are against us, opposition movements. We have already achieved the protocol and now the applications are open.

Concerning housing policy, what are the concrete actions you took to deal with the crisis?

First, we created a mortgage mediation office in order to avoid evictions. We asked all the banks we interacted with to commit themselves to not evicting and they all complied. We actually have good relations with the banks' representatives.

So, some of them let us have housing that we can use for the accommodation of people who lost their houses, when the owner is not a bank or a credit institution but a private individual. The private individuals can rent their houses, but when the tenant cannot pay the rent anymore, you cannot oblige them to rent without remuneration, that is why we need to have housing so that no one is left outside. We gave a social aspect to a municipal housing company; we have changed the statuses and defined it as a social company. The objective is to support social housing and be able to provide more and more housing that people need.

Do you plan to build municipal social housing?

We do not have enough money to build, but we do want to buy many of the vacant houses that the people had to resell to the banks. We want to buy and provide them to the citizens.

Lastly, do you have any message for the social movements about your arrival at the local authority?

To me, the most important thing is that the social movements should always be inclusive. We ought to be very generous and open-minded and realize that the right to the city is for all, not only for left wing people, but for all, including markets and companies.

The Right to the City at Barcelona City Hall

INTERVIEW TO VANESA VALINO

Town Councilor for Barcelona City Council

By Charlotte Mathivet, november 2015

What is your current position and what is your professional background?

My name is Vanesa Valiño, I am the Head of Cabinet for Housing within the Barcelona City Council. It is a political position, one of trust, and I am in charge of coordinating and advising the housing department at the city hall. Before working at City Hall, I was managing the Observatory for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (DESC) in Barcelona. I was working for the promotion of right to housing, in relation with social movements, which at the beginning were V de Vivienda (V for Vivienda) and the Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH – Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), neighborhoods organizations, etc. When the citizen platform that was driven by Ada Calau of Guanyem Barcelona ran for city hall, a call to the citizens and political parties was made to join the platform and try to win the mayoral elections. I had been working for 7 years with Ada on housing questions, so I decided to coordinate and drive the housing question within Guanyem Barcelona. There are two working units in Barcelona en Común (formerly Guanyem Barcelona): one of them gathers groups of people who work on producing documents, taking positions on themes such as education, health, labor, housing and so on. The other groups work within the neighborhoods. I was coordinating and driving the group concerned with housing. The current Housing Councilor, who is one of the people responsible for promoting the subject of housing, is an architect. When it was decided to invite him on the list and when we won the election on May 24th, 2015, he was assigned to lead the Council and told me: Vanesa, we have been working together for one year and you know the social fabric perfectly. So he offered me the opportunity to integrate myself into the Council as Head of Cabinet.

How did you decide to go from a social movement status within PAH (Ada Colau was the spokesperson) to taking part in the electoral game and Barcelona en comú, running for City Hall?

I think most of the people who started Guanyem were linked to social movements. The most visible face was Ada's, but there were hundreds of people who were coming from anti-globalist movements, or movements against external debt, collectives against privatization of health and education, and many people who became aware that we had to take things a step further. The traditional parties, in Catalonia at least, could not meet the need for the expected change of direction, so we made this call, which didn't mean replacing the parties, but rather calling for those presenting themselves as left wing and having them join us on practical matters such as housing, education, health, wages and restrictions in public service. This is a change of era, with 15M, the crisis, the limits of the two-party system, the parties who were used to being within and outside of the government, with no change at the end. The citizens decided to organize themselves in order to see how we could try and deal with it, instead of staying at home or in our local struggles, we wanted to get organized to take things a step further and take over the institutions. This doesn't mean that people should stop going onto the streets, organized and putting pressure on.

Is it like a double movement: keeping one foot in the social movement while having the other in local authorities?

That's it, a movement heading in various directions. Towards traditional political parties to inform them that it is useless to stay alone and use archaic ways of doing politics. A movement towards people related to social movements to tell them that this is the moment to take over the institutions. A movement towards the people who do not want anything to do with institutions and remind them that it is very important and we need them.

As manager of the DESC Observatory, you worked on the right to the city. As the Head of Cabinet within the Housing Department, are you working with this concept in the same way as before?

The subject of right to the city is in the air. When we begin working with the logic of a right to housing in mind, this can lead us to meet someone who has lost her house because she lost her job and because she lost her job and house she gets sick; therefore, you obviously ought to adopt a global approach, not based only on housing. The right to the city approach is a global approach. The public administration approach is rigid, organized by sectors, very partitioned: we wonder whether it is able to satisfy human needs that are constantly changing and all related one to another. It's a big challenge. We are creating an organization, a public administration in which you have a single referent who

accompanies you for work, housing, access to good education; not like now where each different service takes charge of one part of the problem which is never considered as a whole. Housing is a classic example: we give the people home, emergency houses, but they do not have income and we do not help them to have one, so the people become dependent for their whole life and this is the organizational challenge.

Is coming to power essential in order to implement the right to the city?

We work at local scale with very pragmatic powers that are not the big global powers. Barcelona is a city that is really affected by mass-tourism which is destroying the social housing plan. We have to bear in mind that this global logic is at the root of the problems that Barcelona's inhabitants are enduring. Now, what does working with a right approach mean? First, it means starting to point out who is responsible: there are rights and obligations, some people comply with their obligations while others don't. This is the first step: we started to publicly denounce on any infringement of rights. Secondly, the right to the city is a City Council program, not the Housing Department's. To make the right to the city a reality, the City Council should work in coordination with all the departments. This implies coordinating with people who work in migration, when migrant people have troubles with their housing, or coordinating with health, and so on. It is necessary to change the paradigm, to put an end to welfare-oriented approach that avoids the root of the problems. We have to understand and deal with them in a coordinated way.



Vanesa Vatiño - © Marie Bailloux

How do you view the “Barcelona model”, this creative and touristic city which is exported to the rest of the world? What other projects would you propose to implement in your city?

One month after the election, the first decision we made was taking a moratorium against the construction of hotels or any other type of tourist accommodation. Barcelona has reached its capacity, the neighborhoods can't take it anymore – whatever the media say – apart from those who make a living from tourism or who live in the mountains or the upper classes, who are not impacted. What we did is approve a one-year moratorium to block the licensing of hotel and youth hostels etc. Throughout this year, we've brought together hotel organizations and neighborhoods associations in order to reach an agreement on tourism in Barcelona.

You need to understand that we do not wish to put an end to tourism. Tourism is a good thing in itself, but it is not the case when it is concentrated in one district, when it exceeds the capacity of the district or when it is drunkenness tourism. Tourism can be an opportunity to create jobs and open up to different cultures, but it is not the case for the moment. What we are doing now is elaborating a plan to know where the hotels can be built and decide what type of touristic accommodation can be built or not. This decision must be made with the neighborhood's inhabitants.

What other type of measures against “touristification” have you taken in Barcelona? Is there a campaign against Airbnb or any other type of action?

There is a campaign to convert tourist apartments in the districts most impacted by mass tourism, that is to say the historical center. The 400 owners of illegal tourist apartments – i.e. those who are renting their apartments to tourists with no license through Airbnb or other platforms – were offered to have their fine cancelled if they handed over their apartment to social housing service. Another measure we took was to review all the Airbnb ads to check whether they had the license required by the City Hall. In some districts, we don't provide any tourist licenses anymore, not even for subletting through Airbnb.

There was a campaign for the people to understand that this is not only a restriction of liberty. Indeed, two issues brought down the previous government: the bursting of real estate bubble, speculation and evictions on the one hand, and on the other, not being able to say 'no' to tourism. Barcelona en comú had to work hard because the districts that were affected rose up in rebellion and some neighbors would throw eggs and tomatoes at the German tourists. Barcelona en comú had to calm the neighbors down, carry out the moratorium and bring back order, but there was no need to raise awareness because they had been putting up with this situation for years.



What are the main challenges for the year to come in terms of right to the city?

The moratorium on tourism was a hard measure to take because there was a lot of pressure, but still we did it and this brought some peace. The other measure was the fines that were given to banks that left vacant apartments in the city. This is a prerogative that city halls have in Catalonia and the previous mayor had been obliged by PAH to fine the banks. What we did first when we came to power was to speed up the procedures for the fines. Now, we are talking about €5,000 fines, these are not huge amounts, but still it is important symbolically. We took another symbolic but important measure in a country where monarchy is implicated in corruption cases: we took the portrait of the king out of the council meeting hall. This encouraged other city halls which do not have the same media coverage as Barcelona to do the same. The creation of a council for a social and solidarity-based economy was another symbolic measure. As the City Hall has many employees, we added social clauses to contracts and public service entrance exams, for instance wages must be above the minimum wage or the difference between the lowest and highest wages must be small. So, we mixed symbolic and practical measures to change people's life.

Does the city hall have the power to take measures that change people's life like the struggle against evictions and real estate speculation?

We certainly cannot change the urban rental laws. One of the problems in Barcelona is that the rents are very high. No measure can stop the owners: every three years, they can evict you, even if they don't need the accommodation, they can leave it vacant or increase the rent as they wish. This is the kind of legislation which is extremely perverse for a city like Barcelona. Nor can we oblige the banks to date in payment. The Generalitat has the power in terms of housing. However, the city of Barcelona has sound finances and thanks to political will, we are managing to find resources for the people. It is true that our mayor receives a lot of media coverage and she has a strong power to mobilize, so when she criticizes a financial entity or economic agents, they do not like it. We ought to use this fact as an arm.

What is your plan to implement the right to the city in Barcelona?

When we came to power at City Hall, we decided to implement a measure to encourage renting. In Barcelona, 80% of evictions are related to lack of income to pay rent, not mortgages. So we decided to implement an aid for families that cannot pay rent. In countries like France, there are aids for payment of rent for years and it is normal, but it didn't exist in Spain. These aids were conditional on having incomes: you can pay €300 and the rent is €500, the city hall can pay the remaining €200. But there were indispensable conditions to have access to the aid, like for example having stable income, which was a contradiction when



Protest against mass tourism, Barcelona – © Fotomovimiento

helping people who are most in need. This was a temporary aid, so the first thing we did was to change the nature of this aid: the people with no income are the ones who need it. Obviously, what should be implemented is a basic income, but as we do not have it, at least the aid for the rent must be a 100% aid for the people to be able to keep their house.

Another measure was developing participation: instead of giving orientations and explanations, the idea is to work hand in hand with people, because inhabitants know what is happening in their neighborhood better than we do. So we are now working on topics like occupying vacant apartments, there are hundreds of apartments occupied. We are going to work together to find solutions.

So there is a program for citizens' participation?

Indeed, the third major sector of city hall is participation. It is involved across all of the subjects that are dealt with by the City Hall. This is a major change: it means that organizations are no longer only invited once everything has been decided. For instance, the first thing we did in housing during summer was to call a big round table meeting with all the organizations in order to initiate the work and see what can be done. We are currently working on a municipal action plan which is based on proposals that emanate from districts and are used to structure government work. We carry out this work with neighborhood associations that are organized and then we go into the neighborhoods in order to share the proposals worked on with the associations and try to reach a consensus. Another topic is the use of technology for people so they can participate from home.



Is there a participative budget for the Barcelona municipality?

There are two parallel measures. There is a participative process for the budget of each of the ten districts of Barcelona, and we are thinking about implementing it at city level.

What is your strategy for this mandate to actually change people's life in Barcelona?

Barcelona en comú is an alliance between Podemos, Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds, Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, Equo and other minor parties. Instead of acting within the logic of traditional coalition in which each one has its charge, we paid attention to working together in order that the central organization is Barcelona en comú. We are also running for state elections with this alliance in order to continue the construction of the alternative and because the most important issues are in the power of the Generalitat, like for example land policy. Urban policies are decided on this level and as we want to obtain the 80,000 social houses needed in Barcelona for instance, we ought to lead at state level.







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