

## Diàlegs d'Habitatge

# *The housing crisis in cities: causes, effects and responses*

Summary of the talks given at the Barcelona Housing  
and Renovation Forum

MACBA auditorium, 19-21 March 2019

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Organised by: Barcelona Municipal Institute  
of Housing and Renovation

Rapporteur: Irene Peiró Compains





# Introduction

**Guaranteeing the right to decent housing is one of the main political and social challenges in many cities around the world and in Europe. All the more so in Catalonia and the rest of the Spanish State, where public housing policies are accumulating historic arrears compared to other European countries. Analysing their causes and consequences and, above all, suggesting alternatives, as reflected in pioneering policies being implemented in countries such as the Netherlands, Austria and Germany, constituted the goal of the Barcelona Housing and Renovation Forum (FHAR), held between 19 and 21 March 2019. The forum brought together some 50 Spanish and international speakers at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA).**





This publication contains a summary of the main contents of the FHAR, arranged in thematic areas, which together offer a general overview of the housing challenge. It focuses on Catalonia, Barcelona and its metropolitan area in particular, but sets the problem in a European and international context. In fact, it attributes its main cause to the commercialisation of housing and its conversion into investment assets in global financial markets.

There are numerous perspectives on the housing challenge and the following pages bring together the viewpoints of the various sectors involved in solving this problem, namely, public authorities, social movements, the property sector, the financial world, architects, the academic world, the social, solidarity and cooperative economy, the third sector and so on.

You will also find a wide range of measures and policies for guaranteeing the right to decent housing, a challenge that can be tackled from many fronts, ranging from initiatives requiring more immediacy in the fight against the housing emergency to others requiring strategic planning with a medium-to-long-term vision. The following sections deal with measures for combating rent hikes, the phenomenon of gentrification and the scarcity of affordable housing, measures for regulating tourist accommodation, promoting the renovation of buildings, guaranteeing property's social function and mobilising vacant flats for the social rented housing stock. It should be noted that, if such measures are to be implemented, there will have to be public-private collaboration as well as collaboration between the authorities themselves. Cohousing alternatives, driven by the social and cooperative economy to ensure the availability of affordable housing and create new household models, are also highlighted.

In short, this publication aims to offer a contextualised, diverse and complex approach to the challenge of housing in cities, which we hope will be of interest to you. 🏡



Above, picture of a visit to Can Fabra during the FHAR. Left, Lucía Martín, Barcelona City Councillor for Housing and Renovation, next to Josep Maria Montaner, her predecessor in the post. Right, inside a public dwelling. Below, the forum reception.



# 02

## The challenge of housing in the context of global capitalism





SESSION  Global challenges and local solutions  
to the right to housing



**RAQUEL  
ROLNIK**

SÃO PAULO

Architect and former United Nations' Rapporteur for the Right to Housing.

INTERVIEW  Raquel Rolnik

To understand the problems for ensuring the right to housing in Barcelona, Catalonia and the rest of the Spanish State, we must first widen our focus and analyse the issue from a global perspective. That is the aim of the summary below of the talk that **Raquel Rolnik, a lecturer in architecture and urban planning at the University of São Paulo** and an international expert in the field, gave during the official opening of the Barcelona Housing and Renovation Forum. Rolnik was also the United Nations' Housing Rapporteur from 2008 to 2014 and has stood out for tackling urban planning from the perspective and needs of the most vulnerable collectives.

In her opinion, the housing crisis in Barcelona and also many other cities round the world "is the result of a more extensive structural condition of the current stage of capitalism's development". Housing at this stage is no longer regarded as a mere market commodity, instead of a social right, but as a financial asset too, subject to the circulation flows of international capital.

This process has involved separating the financial value of housing from the real needs it meets. Only this can explain why the big investors have a large number of properties left unused, as "the important thing is not to use them but to exploit them as an investment fund", and why private property has been prioritised over other forms of housing tenure. For citizens, ownership is not the safest way to access housing, as the mortgage crisis of 2008 showed. For capital, on the other hand, it is the easiest way to turn it into a financial asset.

RAQUEL ROLNIK

**"Deterritorialised capital with no ties is restructuring cities and changing our lives"**

RAQUEL ROLNIK

**“What is in crisis are not just the policies of a political party, but rather the way of organising the State and how it relates to capital”**

To reproduce and expand their gains, international capital is buying up more and more properties in the big cities and turning them into financial assets, with the consequent impact that this has on their social and urban fabric. In addition, the profits generated by this economic activity are not reinvested in the cities, because many of the investors are not subject to local taxation and deposit their profits in tax havens. The architect highlights this paradox: “Deterritorialised capital with no ties is restructuring cities and changing our lives”. She defines this phenomenon as a “colonisation” process of capital, which goes beyond mere territorial occupation and has effects on cultural, social, political and community levels.

This colonisation and dispossession process has occurred in two stages, which are perfectly distinguishable in Spain’s case. The first was the gestation period of the property bubble, which involved an exponential growth in housing prices and, as a result, in the mortgage indebtedness of many families. This stage continued in Spain until 2007, when a wave of foreclosures and evictions began. The second wave of dispossession is the one encouraged by the rental bubble, which is currently causing “a systematic expulsion of local residents from Barcelona’s centre and their removal to its outskirts”.

She blames the rental bubble on vulture funds, which are buying up thousands of dwellings for speculative purposes and, in particular, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs): investment companies dedicated above all to purchasing properties to be let out and which enjoy certain privileged tax conditions. Second, she highlights platforms such as Airbnb, which encourage the tourist accommodation business, with the consequent impact this has on the rental market generally.

In the face of these waves of dispossession, Rolnik does not believe the answer lies in states. She points out how, from their very beginning, nation states were conceived of as a tool for enabling the expansion of markets and not for empowering citizens and that, more recently, they have seen their margin of sovereignty reduced in the context of economic globalisation. “What is in crisis are not just the policies of a political party, but rather the way of organising the State and how it relates to capital”, insists Rolnik. In that sense she criticises the incapacity of states to regulate the flows of financial capital: “It is the states themselves that put up walls to prevent the circulation of people, the very states that have not blocked the circulation of financial capital”.



Pictures taken from the 'Global challenges and local solutions to the right to housing' session, moderated by the journalist Cristina Fallaràs.

She believes the alternatives for encouraging city residents to reclaim public spaces will be driven by social movements and a cultural change in society. She does not believe these alternatives correspond to a clearly defined model, rather she understands them as a "political process built from practices of resistance against evictions, the organisation of a tenants' union...". She also puts strong emphasis on the alternatives for guaranteeing the right to housing driven by the social and cooperative economy.

RAQUEL ROLNIK

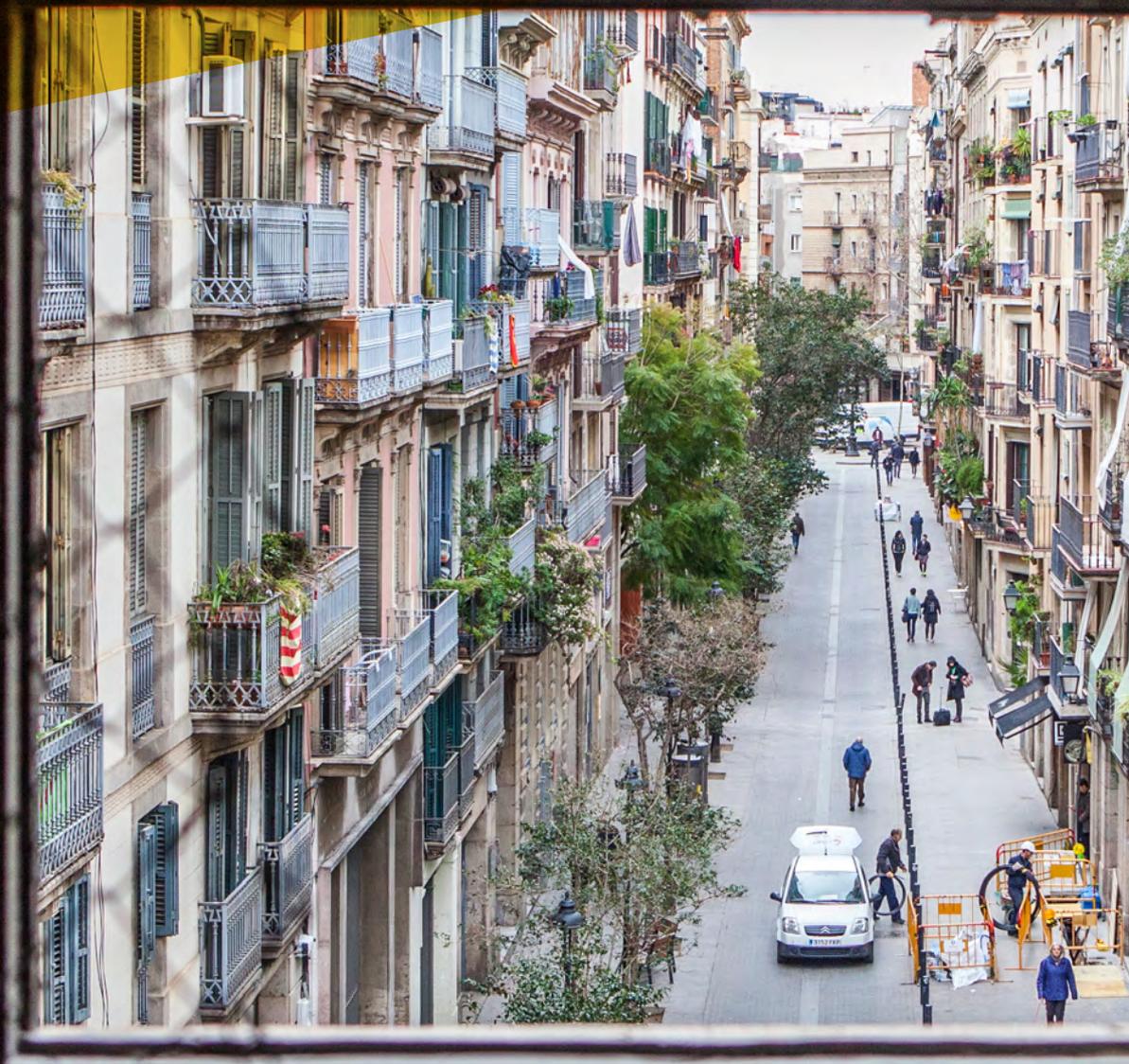
**"The central issue for the survival of housing for the people is to cut the link with the possibility of it circulating in financial markets"**

Rolnik believes city councils have a big role in this process of reclaiming the cities and that it should not be one of imposing a model but one of recognising and nourishing the new non-commercialised forms of citizen organisation to guarantee social rights such as housing. In that regard she recognises that municipalities in various parts of the world, including Barcelona, are "desperately trying to change paradigms".

Even so, she warns that, if we are to end the housing crisis in cities we shall have to go further and pressurise the authorities to tackle its structural causes. She therefore concludes: "The central issue for the survival of housing for the people is to cut the link with the possibility of it circulating in financial markets". 📌

# 03

## The housing crisis in Barcelona: state of play and main initiatives



# State of play of housing in Barcelona



SESSION ► Measuring for planning.  
Creating indicators and presenting the state of play

## CARME TRILLA

BARCELONA

Chair of the Barcelona Metropolitan Housing Observatory.



PRESENTATION  
The Barcelona Metropolitan Housing Observatory



Preparing a good diagnosis of all the social factors that have an impact on public access to the right to housing has to be the starting point for planning housing policies in cities. This point was made by **Carme Trilla, an expert in this field in Catalonia and currently the Chair of the Metropolitan Housing Observatory of Barcelona.** Her talk at the Housing Forum analysed factors such as the needs of the population, depending on its demographic development, the available housing stock, types of housing tenure and the conditions and prices of flats.

As regards uses of Barcelona's housing stock, **Fuensanta Alcalá, the Technical Director of the Housing Discipline Unit at the Barcelona Municipal Institute of Housing and Renovation,** also presented Barcelona City Council's programmes and studies for detecting whether or not its social function is being fulfilled.

The following sections summarise the contents of their talks, which help to analyse the state of play of housing in Barcelona.

## FUENSANTA ALCALÁ

BARCELONA

Technical Director of the Housing Discipline Unit at the Barcelona Municipal Institute of Housing and Renovation.



PRESENTATION  
Department of Housing Discipline and Inspections



## Analysing demographic development to plan housing policies

While the number of city residents – currently 1,620,343 – has stabilised since 2010, Carme Trilla warns that changes are being recorded in the population's profile. On the one hand, the Observatory has detected an increase in the number of foreign-national residents. In 2000 it represented 5% of Barcelona's total population, but by the end of 2018 it had risen to 24.2%.

Added to this phenomenon is “the ageing trend of Barcelona's population, something that ought to make us reflect on the city profile we are building”, Trilla notes. Since 1996, the percentage of young people living in the city has dropped 5 points, from 20.4% to 15%. So now, the percentage of people over the age of 65 (21.54 %) exceeds the percentage of young people. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that more than a quarter of the elderly people live alone, and three out of every four are women. In most cases it is a situation of unwanted solitude, which the authorities will need to take into account when planning housing alternatives for elderly people.

CARME TRILLA, Chair of the Barcelona Metropolitan Housing Observatory

**“We currently have sales prices that are very similar to the ones we had during the bubble”**

## There is a growing distance between rent prices and what city residents can afford to pay

Historically speaking, in Catalonia and the Spanish State as a whole, the prevailing culture for gaining access to housing has been one of ownership rather than letting. However, this trend has started to go into reverse in recent years, especially since 2011, when banks restricted access to credit following the outbreak of the mortgage crisis. In Barcelona's case, the percentage of households living off rent rose from 30.1% to 38.2% between 2011 and 2017.

This rise in demand in the rental market is being matched by a strong hike in prices. Since 2013, rent prices in Barcelona have gone up by 36.4%, with the monthly average reaching a historical high of 929.60 euros in 2018. Despite the continued rise of rent prices in Barcelona in the last year (6%), it is worth noting that the growth rate has dropped, having been 9.8% in 2017.

If we look at the trend in rent prices by neighbourhood, we find the more pronounced increases are in those parts of the city where rents are lower: Ciutat Vella, where they have gone up by 43% during the last 4 years, Sant Martí (+38%) and Nou Barris (+35.1%).

This upward trend in rent prices is causing a growing gap between the rent that people can afford to pay and market prices. At present the most common rental demand ranges from 600 euros to 800 euros a month (35% of the total), whereas most rental offers (68% of the total) are over 1,000 euros a month.

We also need to take into account that at present the rental bubble coexists with a moderate trend towards recovery in

the property sector and a rise in purchase prices, after years of crisis in the construction market. A total of 1,251 dwellings were completed in Barcelona in 2018, more than twice the number in 2014.

As for house prices, these went up by 38.1% in the new-build market and by 50.3% in the second-hand market between 2013 and 2018. “Maybe it is being obscured by the rise in market rental prices, but we currently have sale prices that are very similar to the ones we had during the bubble”, warns Carme Trilla.

Thus a rise in purchase prices is being added to the rise in rental prices and worsening the growing separation between people’s income levels and housing costs. Whereas gross available family incomes rose by 63.4% between 2000 and 2018, rental prices went up by 127.7% and purchase prices by over 144% during the same period.

The growing difficulty people face in meeting the cost of housing has many consequences. First, young people are having more difficulties living on their own: the emancipation rate dropped by almost 10 points between 2007 and 2017 (from 32.6% to 23.8%). Second, more and more people are finding themselves forced to move out of their neighbourhood or even the city. The percentage of people moving house but staying in the same city has fallen in the last few years, from 77.6% to 72.7% between 2013 and 2017. At the same time, the percentage of people remaining in the same neighbourhood has fallen from 41.8% to 36.4%. These are still high percentages, but declining, showing the consequences of the gentrification phenomenon.

Nor can we forget a reality which, while not as visible now as it was during the harshest years of the crisis, continues to affect a large number of households: evictions. In 2017 there were 2,519 evictions in Barcelona, 9% fewer than in the previous year. At present, the overwhelming majority (84.1%) are due to rent defaults.



Carme Trilla warned about the ageing of Barcelona's population and the effects that it could have on housing.

## Housing ownership, highly fragmented and mainly in the hands of individuals

The latest estimate of the number of dwellings in Barcelona is lower than the figure from the count taken in 2011. While that recorded 811,106 properties, the current estimated figure is 774,190, according to an analysis done by the Metropolitan Housing Observatory using data from the city's property register.

Two features characterise the distribution of ownership of Barcelona's dwellings. First, it presents a high degree of fragmentation: there are 512,178 natural or legal persons (or tax-payers) that possess the city's 774,190 dwellings, in other words, the average number of properties per tax payer is 1.5. Second, most of the flats (84.6%) are in the hands of individuals, whereas legal persons (companies, organisations etc.) own 10.7%, and the public authorities a meagre 1.6%.

Nevertheless, this high degree of fragmentation should not make us lose sight of the existence of large-scale property owners in Barcelona. More specifically, 1,087 owners (0.2% of the total) own 75,767 dwellings (9.8% of the housing stock). In other words, each of them possesses an average of 69.7 dwellings. Most of these large-scale property owners (53.6%) are companies and organisations (legal persons).

## Guaranteeing the social function of ownership in Barcelona



SESSION  
Collaboration and control to ensure the proper use of housing

On the basis of legally protecting the social function of property established under the Catalan Right to Housing Act of 2007, in recent years Barcelona City Council has initiated studies and programmes to identify whether this function is being performed effectively, failing which the relevant disciplinary and corrective measures would have to be applied.

Cases where the social function of property is not being carried out in line with these regulations include maintaining a dwelling vacant for more than two years without justification and not using an officially protected dwelling (HPO in Catalan) as a regular or permanent residence. In recent years, Barcelona City Council has stepped up its work to detect these kinds of non-compliance in particular, through the Housing Discipline Unit at the Municipal Institute of Housing and Renovation, which is run by Fuensanta Alcalá.



FUENSANTA ALCALÁ, the technical director of the municipal Housing Discipline Unit,

**presented the results of the first exhaustive census of vacant flats in Barcelona.**

The first exhaustive census of vacant flats in Barcelona was initiated towards the end of 2016. Its results were presented during the Housing and Renovation Forum. An observation team from Barcelona City Council has since visited 103,864 dwellings, all likely to be vacant, because they had zero or very little water consumption, because there was no one registered in the city residents' register or because they were owned by a bank.

As a result of this fieldwork, 10,052 vacant flats have been detected in Barcelona, 1.2% of the total number of the city's dwellings. This figure is below the City Council's initial estimates of 12,000 to 13,000 vacant flats in the city. Moreover, in most cases where information was obtained, the dwellings had been unoccupied for less than two years.

Where vacant flats are in the hands of large property owners, it should be recalled that the articles of Catalan Act 24/2015 against evictions and energy poverty enabling such properties to be mobilised for social letting are back in force, following the Spanish Constitutional Court's lifting of their suspension. Of course, Fuensanta Alcalá warns of the difficulties that this entails in practice, given that dwellings owned by banks are often not vacant but squats: "When we began in 2016, 59% of squatted flats were owned by banks". She also believes that, as most squatting families are in a vulnerable situation, fining owners is not always the best option, whereas mediation and negotiation are.

## More tourist flats or offices than vacant dwellings in Barcelona

Inspections made in drawing up the census of vacant flats have also enabled other uses and needs of Barcelona's housing stock to be detected. One of the most significant pieces of data is that more dwellings used for non-residential purposes, such as tourist apartments or offices (13,852), have been

detected than empty flats (10,052). Among the tourist apartments, 881 have also been detected lacking the corresponding licence, as a result of which disciplinary proceedings have been started against their owners.

These same inspections have also revealed problems regarding accessibility to the city's housing stock, which will have to be taken into account in the city's renovation policies. As many as 69.8% of the dwellings inspected are not accessible for people with reduced mobility and 35.8% have no lift. By contrast, the percentage of dwellings in poor condition has dropped to 3.4%.

Besides its vacant dwelling census, Barcelona City Council has also developed a programme to ensure that HPO properties (classified for sale and with that classification in force) comply with the use they are intended for, namely, the regular and permanent residence of the people they are awarded to.

A total of 2,091 officially protected dwellings were inspected between December 2017 and February 2019, out of the city's 16,000 HPO flats. This resulted in 265 anomalies (12.65%) being detected in 51% of the cases for subletting the dwelling to a third person, considered a very serious offence which can lead to fines of up to 900,000 euros. In 33% of cases, dwellings were resided in by people other than their owners and in another 10% they were unoccupied. A further 5% concerned cases where a flat not used as the main residence was partially rented out or had uses incompatible with housing.

Finally, it should be noted that Barcelona City Council recently imposed a hefty fine of 2.8 million euros on two vulture funds for keeping two blocks of buildings empty for over two years in the Eixample district. Social movements appear to be satisfied with this penalty, although they feel the municipal government should have imposed more fines of this kind throughout its term of office. 📌

# Public housing policies promoted in Barcelona



SESSION • Global challenges and local solutions to the right to housing



**JOSEP  
MARIA  
MONTANER**

BARCELONA

Barcelona City Councillor for Housing and Renovation.<sup>1</sup>

During the forum, the Barcelona City Councillor for Housing and Renovation, **Josep Maria Montaner**, explained the policies pursued by the Council during its 2015-2019 term of office to tackle the numerous challenges involved in guaranteeing the right to housing in the city. This refers to the measures included in the **Barcelona Right to Housing Plan for 2016-2025** that have been implemented so far.

He highlighted the considerable public investment that the City Council has made in housing policies. The annual municipal housing budget quadrupled during this term of office, from 45 million euros in 2015 to over 180 million euros today. According to Montaner, during this term Barcelona City Council “has spared no means” to promote the right to housing and combined several public policies to that end, which are summarised below.

One of the main priorities has been to expand the affordable housing stock through several channels. One of these involves the preemptive (or preferential) right of purchase, which

Barcelona City Council has exercised over 650 properties to allocate them to social or affordable housing, according to the latest report published by the Council. Another more recent channel, to do with urban planning regulations, concerns the obligation to allocate 30% of new private developments or major renovations to affordable housing. Montaner pointed out that this pioneering measure received full council approval at the end of 2018 on the proposal of the social movements.

Another mechanism would be public construction of affordable housing, mostly for public rental, but also by incentivising cohousing models being promoted by the solidarity and cooperative economy. The most extensive is assigned-use housing, where a cooperative is the owner of a block of dwellings and its members can live there in definitely indefinitely by paying an affordable monthly amount. In other words, they have an exclusive right to their dwelling even though they are not its owners.

<sup>1</sup>Josep Maria Montaner was the City Councillor for Housing and Renovation until the end of the 2015-2019 term of office.

Inside the La Borda housing cooperative during a visit from the FHAR.

JOSEP MARIA MONTANER

**“Cohousing is better able to resist in the face of neo-liberal policies than is public housing, which can be sold”**

The City Council has helped to incentivise cohousing by assigning it the use of publicly owned land. Montaner believes it is particularly important for the City Council to help to nourish these experiences and make people aware of them through educational and awareness-raising work. In his view “cohousing is better able to resist neo-liberal policies than public housing, which can be sold”, and he recalled the case of Madrid City Council which, when Ana Botella was mayor in 2013, sold 1,869 HPO properties to vulture funds.

To make access to housing easier, Barcelona City Council has also increased its expenditure on rent aid, which currently stands at about 24 million euros a year, compared to 10 million in 2014, according to the Council’s latest figures. During this last term of office, the Barcelona Intervention and Mediation Service in Housing-Loss and Occupation Situations (SIPH0) was set up to provide support for people facing residential exclusion, as explained more extensively in Section 5.3.

The Councillor for Housing also asserted that Barcelona City Council has carried out intensive inspection work to detect illegal tourist flats and issue their owners with fines

ranging from 30,000 to 60,000 euros during this term of office. According to the City Council, the number of unlicensed tourist properties advertised on the various online platforms has dropped from 5,875 to 272 during this term. Moreover, he highlighted the changes that have been made to the Special Tourist Accommodation Urban Development Plant (PEUAT) to regulate and limit its presence in certain areas of the city with greater tourist pressure.

JOSEP MARIA MONTANER

**“Renovation creates jobs for the local population; it is harder for big capitals to intervene there [...] it is based on a much more local-economy logic”.**

Montaner also put special emphasis on promoting housing renovation: “Renovation creates jobs for the local population; it is harder for big capital to intervene there and you’ve got more guarantees if you control it. It is based on a much more local-economy logic”. In that regard, he noted the considerable investment that Barcelona City Council has made in this field. According to the latest housing evaluation conducted in 2017, some 42.5 million euros were allocated to renovation policies, compared to an annual average of 17



million euros during the 2011-2015 period.

He stressed how the City Council was no longer giving out renovation permits in cases where tenants’ rights were not being complied with, a measure for combating bad practices. In fact, he pointed out that in 2019 Barcelona City Council issued the first fine for property mobbing in the Spanish State, following the protocol approved for that purpose. As for monitoring the social use of housing, he also mentioned the preparation of the first exhaustive census of vacant flats.

“A lot has been achieved, but there is still plenty to do. Housing policies are not consolidated in just four years”, he concluded. He also called on both the Catalan government, given its jurisdiction over housing policies, and the Spanish State, on which key housing regulations (such as those for letting and the mortgage market) depend, to collaborate much more with Barcelona City Council and increase its public spending to promote housing policies. 📌

# 04

## The role of public authorities in the face of the housing crisis in cities

ESTEM CONSTRUÏT  
13 HABITATGES PÚBLICS

DATA PREVISIÓ FINALITZACIÓ:  
DESEMBRE 2019

 Institut Municipal  
de l'Habitatge  
i Rehabilitació

Ajuntament de  
Barcelona



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What role do the various public authorities play in the face of the housing crisis in cities? This was the topic of one of the roundtables held at the Barcelona Housing and Renovation Forum, in which **Javier Martín**, the Managing Director of Architecture, Housing and Land at the Ministry of Public Works, **Judith Gifreu**, the Director of the Catalan Housing Agency and **Javier Burón**, the Manager for Housing and Renovation at Barcelona City Council took part.

The talks by the speakers were followed by contributions on the topic of housing by representatives of various organisations from a "row 0". Taking part in that were **Jaume Artigues**, a member of the **Barcelona Federation of Local Residents' Associations** and the **Chair of the Dreta de l'Eixample Residents' Association**; **Irene Escorihuela**, the **Director of the DESC Observatory**; **Elena Massot**, the **Deputy Chair of the Catalan Association of Promoters and Entrepreneurs**, and **Pau Pérez**, **Barcelona Global's** spokesperson.

A summary of this roundtable's contents is given below, organised in thematic areas.



SESSION ● The role of public authorities in the face of the housing-access crisis in cities



**JAVIER MARTÍN**

MADRID

Director-General of Architecture, Housing and Land at the Spanish Ministry of Public Works.



INTERVIEW

Javier Martín



**JUDITH GIFREU**

BARCELONA

Director of the Catalan Housing Agency.



**JAVIER BURÓN**

BARCELONA

Manager for Housing and Renovation at Barcelona City Council.

# 41

## Promoting affordable public housing

The deficit in affordable public housing in the Spanish State is a problem recognised by all public authorities. Javier Burón, the Manager of Housing and Renovation at Barcelona City Council, referred first of all to the enormous gap between the affordable public housing stocks of other EU countries and that of Spain. To give an example, in the Netherlands over 30% of dwellings fall into that category, compared to under 2% in Spain. He is in favour of making the leap to at least 15% affordable housing, the target set by the Catalan Right to Housing Act of 2007 to be met within 20 years and which has not been implemented since then at the pace required for achieving it.

Secondly, he believes there is a “money problem”, given that “Spain invests between 15 and 20 times less in housing policies than various other EU countries did when they were developing their housing systems”. While EU states continue to allocate 1% of their GDP to housing – and between 1.5% and 2% during times of economic prosperity – the equivalent figure for Spain is around 0.1%.

Burón therefore called for more involvement from both the Spanish and Catalan governments

JAVIER BURÓN, the Manager for Housing and Renovation at Barcelona City Council,

**called on the Catalan and Spanish governments for more involvement and investment in housing.**

in tackling the housing crisis and bemoaned the fact that, while local authorities have the fewest powers over housing issues, in many cases they are the ones doing the most to deal with situations of residential exclusion. The latest report on the Barcelona Housing Plan for 2016-2025 shows the City Council invested four times more per resident on housing than the Catalan government did in 2017 and ten times more than the Spanish State.

Thirdly, he warned that there was a problem with space, as Barcelona has very little land for building housing on, but above all with time: “European countries such as the Netherlands and Austria have been implementing housing policies for a hundred years, but we don’t have a hundred years at our disposal. We have to do things urgently”.



JAVIER MARTÍN, the Director-General of Architecture, Housing and Land at the Spanish Ministry of Public Works,

**insisted on making the private sector jointly responsible for the production of affordable housing.**



INTERVIEW  
Javier  
Martín

The Managing Director of Architecture, Housing and Land at the Spanish Ministry of Public Works, **Javier Martín**, admitted there is a need to increase the public budget in this area and insisted on making the private sector jointly responsible for the production of affordable social housing: “If we only expect the public authorities to play this social role, we will be making a mistake too”.

In his opinion private players have to be given an incentive to take part, including cooperatives and social-action organisations from the third sector. He added that, for the private sector to be able to produce housing faster, public authorities would have to speed up the process for granting building permits for properties, an opinion shared by Elena Massot,

the Deputy Chair of the Catalan Association of Promoters and Builders. In addition, the Barcelona Global spokesperson, Pau Pérez, asked for greater regulatory clarity over urban planning and housing in the wake of the current confusion.

One of the aspects of the current regulations that the Catalan government is considering changing is the one allowing officially protected housing (HPO) to return to the free market after a period ranging from 10 to 30 years (depending on the autonomous region, the classification of the land the housing is on, whether it received direct public aid to be built and so on.) According to the Director of the Catalan Housing Agency, Judith Gifreu, the new rent decree proposed by the Catalan government this March<sup>2</sup> makes HPO permanent in Catalonia, as had already been the case in the Basque Country since 2003. Despite that, the Manager for Housing and Renovation at Barcelona City Council, Javier Burón,

<sup>2</sup>The Catalan Parliament rejected the Catalan government's executive decree on 26 June 2019. All the opposition parties voted against it. The Comuns and the CUP consider it falls short and fails to meet the social movements' demands. The other opposition parties argue that the issue comes under the jurisdiction of the Spanish State.

warned that the permanent HPO classification proposed by the Catalan government would not be given in every case. According to the text of the decree, HPO classification would remain in force provided these dwellings were kept for use as housing with public protection under the urban planning regulations and integrated into the public land

JUDITH GIFREU, the Director of the Catalan Housing Agency:

**efforts are being made “to redress” the lack of affordable housing and lines of loans have been launched for public and private developers, local authorities and the third sector to that end.**

and housing assets. Of course, where none of the above cases arose, the protection would be for a certain length of time.

In the case of Catalonia, the Catalan Right to Housing Act of 2007, a pioneering piece of legislation throughout the Spanish State, was fundamental for promoting the

growth of the affordable social housing stock This legislation envisaged that in 20 years had to achieve the following target: that 15% of its housing stock would be affordable, to reach European standards. So far, however, its growth has been far below the rate required for achieving that target.

Gifreu puts this delay down to the outbreak of the financial crisis just after the Act was approved: “As soon as the financial crisis broke out, the provisions were put on hold”. The Director of the Catalan Housing Agency explained that the Catalan government is now attempting to redress the situation, although its scope for action is hampered by jurisdictional and budgetary limitations. Given that, she stressed its determination to find creative solutions within its possibilities for tackling



Javier Burón highlighted how important it was for local authorities to promote the affordable housing reserves.



the deficit in affordable social housing. As an example, she highlighted the two lines of loans that the Catalan Housing Agency has launched together with the Catalan Institute of Finances (ICF) to expand the public housing stock. The first of these is a line of subsidised loans for public and private developers officially protected rental housing, at a fixed rate of interest of 2%, with a total budget of 140 million euros. Priority will be given to building housing within municipalities with proven strong demand, and the forecast is to build a thousand rental flats measuring 70 m<sup>2</sup> for a monthly rent of 450 euros.

The second is a line of loans local authorities, non-profit and third-sector organisations, and social developers, so that they can acquire vacant dwellings for social renting. This line of funding, with an allocation of 110 million euros, is in a context where banks are selling off a large part of their dwellings. It should also be borne in mind that the public authorities have preemptive (or preferential) right of purchase. Thanks to this mechanism, social rental offers in Catalonia are expected to expand by 1,800 dwellings, which will be allocated as a priority to individuals being assisted by the emergency boards and then to other groups with housing needs in each locality. Despite all that, Judith Gifreu warned that they are having difficulties in Barcelona finding dwellings adapted to the purchase conditions, given that these loans have a legal maximum ceiling of 80,000 euros.

Apart from the two lines of loans launched with the ICF, Gifreu highlighted the fact that the Catalan government has given initial approval to the Catalan Sectoral Territorial Housing Plan, which aims to increase the protected housing stock taking into account the demand from municipalities. It should be borne in mind that the Catalan Act provided for the drafting of this plan within a one-year deadline, essential for planning how to achieve the targets set out in the Act. However, it kept on being delayed until the target was taken up again in this legislature.

JAVIER BURÓN

**“An extraordinary context, given the difficulty people living off their salaries have of getting a home, also requires extraordinary measures”, such as the 30%.**

One of the measures implemented by Barcelona City Council for expanding the city’s affordable housing stock has been to make it mandatory for at least 30% of new private developments or large-scale renovations to be allocated to affordable housing. More specifically, the measure establishes that developments or renovations of over 600 m<sup>2</sup> have to allocate 30% to the general protected housing system, within the urban development uses of land, for their sale or letting.

Burón recognises that these properties will basically be sold and that the City Council will be able to buy them of its own volition – in fact, it aims to do so through its preemptive right, so it can allocate them for affordable renting – or if they have marketing problems.

He rejects the voices in the private sector that have accused the City Council of promoting the figure of 30% owing to its inability to promote effective right-to-housing public policies, and transferring a public authority responsibility to businesses by means of a measure which will paralyse the activity of some players in the property sector. He maintains that the City Council is implementing the Right to Housing Plan (2016-2025) with a total budget of 1.6 billion euros but, despite that, they need to go further: “An extraordinary context, given the difficulty people living off their salaries have of getting a home, also requires extraordinary measures”, such as this 30%.

He gave several reasons to justify the need for this measure, starting with the fact that the property market “does not produce affordable housing endogenously” so that requires incentives from the public authorities. According to Burón, in Catalonia’s case, it is even more important than in the Basque Country – his birthplace and where he worked as a deputy minister and the regional government’s housing planning director – that a local authority promotes affordable housing reserves.



He explained that in Catalonia “housing reserves are much lower than in the Basque Country” and that too much of this responsibility is being delegated to local authorities. In his opinion it is assumed that all land which developers are legally obliged to hand over to local authorities (corresponding to 10% of the new plots for development) and the protected housing reserves are two connected realities: “It is all ready for 100% of the land allocated in the future to protected housing to stay in the hands of the public authorities, basically local councils, which are also the weakest from the economic and financial point of view”, he bemoaned.

By contrast, Basque legislation makes it mandatory to reserve 40% of developments on urban land and 75% on developable land for protected housing and, furthermore developers have to hand over a higher percentage of new land plots to local authorities for development (from 15% to 20%). In this context, Burón said it was “impossible” for all protected housing to fall into the hands of public operators, in contrast to Catalonia: “In the Basque Country, the private sector is also making protected housing, building, selling, spending money and some are even letting their properties”.

In addition to reversing the lack of protected housing reserves, Burón believes the 30% measure approved by the City Council towards the end of 2018 on the initiative of social movements will guarantee that part of the profits from the new property developments and large renovations of the private sector will be reinvested in the community. From his point of view, that is fair, because if a developer can sell a flat for more, after renovating it or demolishing what was there before and building a new one, in many cases that is also possible thanks to the urban improvement processes promoted by the authorities and, therefore, paid for from everyone’s taxes. As he pointed

out, “part of this capital gain originates from public initiatives and the community needs to be compensated for that”.

For the Manager of Housing at Barcelona City Council this technique was essential in Barcelona, which practically has no space to grow in but he said the city still needed close to 20,000 dwellings to be at its full capacity. Under these circumstances, the only alternative will be to “rebuild what is already built”, with the aim of achieving affordable housing. Despite his estimation that all the other municipalities in the metropolitan area still have land classified for building 75,000 protected dwellings, he warned that the same thing would happen sooner or later and that this technique had therefore “come to stay” and “will be copied by other authorities”. Moreover, he defends its “constitutional” character.

Burón considers it essential to take extraordinary measures such as this to match Europe in terms of affordable housing and commented on the need for “binary” thinking: looking for land-based solutions, expanding the creation of affordable housing, and above-ground solutions, in other words, by reshaping the city working with the space above the ground.

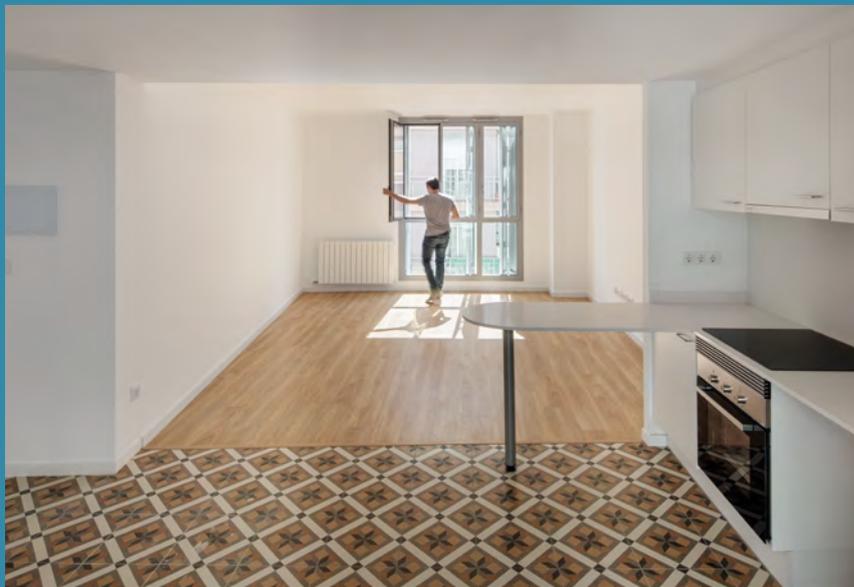
For all the above reasons, he concluded, it is clear that the measure does not tally with the alarmist discourse of some of private sector players, rather it represents “a change in the rules of the game”: “The city will be rebuilt from within and it will have to do that”. 🏡



Public at the 2019 FHAR.



IMHAB development of public housing for the elderly.



Interior of a publicly owned flat.

# 4

## Adopting emergency measures in response to the housing emergency

The lack of a public social housing stock has overwhelmed the public authorities faced with the wave of evictions that started in 2008 with the outbreak of the economic crisis. Initially they were caused by mortgage foreclosures but now by rent hikes. In 2018, evictions due to the latter went up by 4.5%, reaching 37,285.

So long as the number of public dwellings required is not achieved, “the only solution that remains are benefits, financial help to pay the rent of the dwelling of a family about to be evicted or of the new one the family might be relocated to”, admits Javier Martín, the Director-General of Architecture, Housing and Land at the Spanish Ministry of Public Works.

In the case of families in vulnerable situations, he says it is necessary to “provide a solution”, wherever possible a preventive one, anticipating evictions: “We need to develop coordination with the courts, social services... so they do not act on the day of an eviction but before”. He is of the view it is necessary guarantee at least the temporary suspension of an eviction, while the authorities seek alternative housing for the people affected.

The Spanish government recognises the “enormous difficulties” that the autonomous regions have in tackling this problem and he insisted on mutual collaboration, with everyone doing as much as possible from their jurisdictional area.

JAVIER MARTÍN

**“We need to develop coordination with the courts, social services... so they do not act on the day of an eviction but before”**

JUDITH GIFREU:

**“Since the lifting of the suspension of Act 24/2015, the Catalan government has a much wider margin of action”**



Judith Gifreu remarked the Catalan Housing Agency is providing the means for communicating with banks, asset-management entities or investment funds to reach agreements so empty dwellings can be mobilised for social housing and families in vulnerable situations protected against evictions.

She believes the Catalan government has “a much wider margin of action” for these purposes since the lifting of the suspension of most of the articles in Act 24/2015 and Act 4/2016, under which the Catalan government attempted to dodge the suspension of the former by the Spanish Constitutional Court but which was likewise appealed against. First, she highlighted the recovery of Article 5 of that Act, which forces big housing owners to offer a social rent to the families affected by eviction processes if they find themselves in vulnerable situations. The price of the social rent can never exceed 18% of the family unit's income (18% where they have a weighted income equal to or above 0.95 of the Catalan adequate income indicator, 12% if it is below 0.95 and 10% below 0.89%).

Second, Gifreu mentioned the recovery of Article 7, which makes it mandatory to hand vacant flats over to the social rental housing stock, where the owners are legal persons (not people). Nevertheless, on that point, she warned that the Spanish Constitutional Court did not lift the suspension of

Article 17 of Act 4/2016, which directly affects the conditions under which owners may be legally obliged to hand over the use of their dwellings. The Spanish Constitutional Court ruled that compensation has to be granted to owners compelled to hand over the use of their dwellings, to guarantee their patrimonial indemnity, and that the compensation could not be reduced to the value of the social rent, as initially provided for under the Catalan Act.

To ensure the feasibility of these regulations, Gifreu explained that the Catalan government's option is, primarily, for owners to reach an agreement with families so that they stay in the flat by paying a social rent. Failing that, they will resort to a rule established under the Land System Act for cases of compulsory expropriation. The regulations provide that, where an owner is failing to fulfil the social function of the property, a reduction of up to 50% of their property's value could apply. On the basis of this regulation, the Catalan government would compensate the owner with a sum corresponding to a 50% reduction in the market price of the expropriated dwelling.

Besides referring to the application of Act 24/2015, Gifreu also explained that the Catalan government aims to increase its public stock of land and housing for special housing. This is intended for people with difficulties accessing the housing market (young people, the elderly, groups at risk of exclusion and so on), where the authorities retain ownership of the land and promote its development. According to Gifreu, municipalities will have more facilities for expanding their number of dwellings of this kind thanks to a legal amendment that will enable the integration of the current concept of special public housing urban planning system into that of community facilities.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A measure provided for in Decree 5/2019 on urgent measures for improving housing access, the vote on which was withdrawn from the full Parliamentary session of April 2019 for lack of support.



JAVIER BURÓN:

**“Despite the fact that local councils are the authority with the least jurisdiction over housing, they are often the ones that make the most effort”**

Despite these measures, the reality is that the authorities are overwhelmed by the housing emergency and social services are often burdened with the responsibility for dealing with the consequences of a problem that is structural, such as the lack of public housing. **Jaume Artigues, a member of the FAVB and the Chair of the Dreta de l'Eixample Residents' Association**, criticised the scarcity of public and affordable housing. While he recognises the municipal government has taken measures in the right direction, such as the one on 30% affordable housing in new private developments or large-scale renovations, or for regulating tourist apartments, he believes that is not enough.

Given the incapacity of the public authorities to provide housing alternatives for all the families in situations of residential exclusion, over the last few years we have seen a growth in the phenomenon of squatting, or occupancy without legal tenure, which Javier Burón reflected on. The Municipal Manager for Housing and Renovation highlighted the efforts being made by Barcelona City Council, despite being the authority with the fewest resources for and jurisdiction over this matter, through such services as the Barcelona

Intervention and Mediation Service in Housing-Loss and Occupation Situations (SIPHO), the housing offices and the municipal legal teams. They are working on detecting cases of evictions and squatting to provide temporary or, if possible, permanent solutions for families who find themselves in such situations.

With regard to blocks occupied by squatters, he noted that many of these have been changing hands in recent years owing to movements in the financial and property market: “First the developers went bankrupt and their dwellings passed into the hands of banks. The banks were called by Brussels [...], who did not want them to take on systemic risks, to tell them to remove property assets from their accounts, so then they sold them to investment funds”.

In this situation, while he is in favour of increasing the legal obligations of big housing owners towards people at risk of eviction or who have no legal tenure, for example, by regularising their situation, he does not believe that will be enough for solving this problem. In that regard, he pointed out the possibility of the authorities buying blocks occupied by squatters in the hands of large-scale property owners. He recognises there are ethical dilemmas with this option, because it means buying houses from banks already bailed out with public funds but, at the same time, he stressed the urgency of seeking solutions for families who find themselves in very precarious situations and why he is therefore in favour of at least studying this option. 🏠



Javier Burón, above; Javier Martín and Irene Peiró, journalist, in the middle, and Lucía Delgado, the PAH spokesperson, below.

# How should rent hikes be tackled?

Rent hikes over the last few years are due to numerous factors coming together, as explained by Javier Martín, the Director-General of Architecture, Housing and Land at the Spanish Ministry of Public Works. Among these, he mentioned the increase in rental demand, a rise in the number of tourist apartments, the financial difficulties of families caused by the crisis and the reforms of the Leases Act of 2013, which, among other changes, shortened the minimum term for leases from five to three years. All that has led to a “perfect storm” which not only hinders access to rented accommodation but made family over-indebtedness worsened the over-indebtedness of families. The current percentage of

JAVIER MARTÍN,

**“Rental offers need to be increased”**

families in debt because of rent (40%) is now above that for accumulated mortgage arrears (30%).

In view of this situation, one of the first steps taken by the Spanish government was to approve the Rent Decree Act (7/2019) and restore the minimum term for leases to five years. “Lengthening lease terms is now an anti-inflationary measure”, asserted Martín. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that the effects of the decree act will be noted in the medium term and that the effects of this and other measures

JUDITH GIFREU:

**“We have to adapt prices, not restrict them”, with reference rent indexes.**

will be limited in the short term: “It is impossible to deal with the problem of reducing prices efficiently on a local level in the short term”.

Among the other measures he considers necessary, Marín stressed above all the need to increase rental supply, which he presently believes to be insufficient, a diagnosis that both Judith Gifreu and Javier Burón agree on.

Both Martín and Gifreu explicitly rule out intervening in and limiting rental prices. The director of the Catalan Housing Agency argued: “We have to adapt prices, not limit them [...], we have to bear in mind that the right to housing may be constitutional but so too are the right to private property and free enterprise. It is in the middle point that the satisfaction of general interests lies”.

In the same vein, Martín justified the Spanish government's ruling out of rent-price restrictions. It does not believe they would guarantee short-term reductions either, after discussing the European model used in countries such as Germany, where they have gone for this option. Martín is more in favour of regulating restrictions so as not to transfer the authorities' management deficits to individuals: "A high percentage of dwellings are owned by individuals, many of whom are not rolling in money and only survive on the income they receive from their properties".

For the representatives of the Spanish State and the Catalan government, the formula for adapting prices are the reference rent price indexes. Catalonia was a pioneer in 2017 when it established a reference price index, and now the Spanish decree extends that index to the rest of the State and makes its scales compatible with those of the autonomous regions which already had their own (such as Catalonia and the Basque Country).

Martín and Gifreu share the view that such types of indexes helped to bring transparency to the rental market, because consumers can find out what the average prices is at any time and whether what they are being offered is consistent with this reference or well above it. This helps to put an end to the "opaqueness" currently occurring in this market, according to the Spain's director-general of housing.

## The Spanish State and Catalan government are opting to reward owners who lower their rent prices below reference indexes

They also agree that linking these price indexes to tax credits could have anti-inflationary effects. In other words, property owners would have to be encouraged to keep their rent prices below this index, through tax breaks.

As for the method of creating the index, this still has to be decided on a Spanish level as the process was interrupted when the general election was called for 28 April 2019. In the case of Catalonia, which has had its own price index since 2017, data from the rent finance register and the Catalan Land Institute (Incasòl), geolocated by area, are being used to set an average value of the dwellings per area. Gifreu explained how the average prices are set by the Catalan Housing Agency: "We take account of the street, locality, useful floor area... We also ask about energy efficiency, how old the building is, its height, its accessibility, whether it's got parking spaces...". Depending on that, maximum and minimum reference price limits are set according to the various criteria.

The Catalan government's aim is to make it mandatory for all leases to highlight these reference indexes

and transparently inform consumers, failing which an offence will be deemed to have been committed. The same would also have to apply to rent offers. According to the Director of the Catalan Housing Agency, this "will indirectly limit market prices through the information that is given to consumers".

For his part, Javier Burón, the Manager for Housing and Renovation at Barcelona City Council, is in favour of attempting to implement mandatory rent price restrictions in Catalonia and the Spanish State, following the example of other European countries. Also in favour is **Irene Escorihuela, the Director of the Observatori DESC** (Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Observatory). She believes to set the scales for these price restrictions it would be necessary to take social and economic criteria into account, so rental costs really are adapted to household disposable incomes.

The Manager for Housing at Barcelona City Council also linked resolving rent problems to promoting structural policies for expanding the affordable housing stock, which would mostly have to be for leases.

JAVIER BURÓN:

**“Despite the housing crisis’ current focus on rent, we cannot leave aside the problem of mortgage indebtedness”**

On the other hand, he warned that, despite the housing crisis’ current focus on rent, the problems of mortgage indebtedness still plaguing many families and which could grow again in the future could not be left aside. We have to bear in mind that property sales and the mortgage market are showing signs of a recovery.

And in that regard, he stressed that many of our neighbouring countries already have “a manual of instructions against indebtedness and have done things we are not doing”. For example, he explained how it has been established in Portugal that families cannot have financial obligations in excess of 30% of their regular income. He also pointed out that this could be achieved by giving credits to those able to return them or by not granting mortgages in excess of 80% of their property’s cost, because otherwise that would jeopardise the financial situation of families and the entire economy.

It was on this issue that Javier Martín underlined the importance of the recent mortgage reform approved by the *Congreso de Diputados*, the lower chamber of the Spanish Parliament, this February: “It improves the measures for transparency in mortgage contracts and limits abusive practices, thereby giving consumers greater legal security”. Spain is therefore adapting its mortgage regulations to the European Directive in defence of consumers, despite a three-year delay and failure to satisfy all the demands made by social

movements in defence of the right to housing. For her part, Judith Gifreu explained that the Catalan government was working with Ofideute to promote out-of-court mediation between owners or creditors and debtors, in mortgage cases and rent cases alike.

In short, taking on the housing crisis in cities required numerous and complex responses. As Javier Burón remarked, there were no “magic thoughts” for tackling it or, to put it another way, the simple solutions defended by the various groups involved, depending on their interests or points of view: “Public developers say: ‘you give me land and money and I’ll make protected housing’; urban planners, that it only involves classifying land, because then we’ll build housing, that will increase supply and prices will come down; and private developers, that there is a problem with supply so more has to be produced... Social movements say large property owners have to be pursued and some politicians say that tax incentives have to be given to owners, and both these things have to be done, although in themselves they will not change things”.

In contrast to this magic thinking, Burón supports implementing several measures simultaneously: “Building or buying public housing, mobilising empty dwellings, looking for solutions for affordable renting, imposing fines on those who fail to respect the social function of their properties, simplifying administrative procedures and procedures for obtaining building permits...”. There is, therefore, a wide range of possibilities for rolling out public housing policies. 📌

# 05

## Taking on the housing emergency

This section summarizes the contributions from several speakers at the forum on how to tackle the chronic housing emergency in Barcelona and many other cities in Catalonia and the Spanish State. These contributions deal with this issue from the perspective of the social movements, third sector and public authorities.



# Social movements: the PAH's experience during a 10-year fight



SESSION • Responses to the emergency: preventing, halting and accommodating

If we are to deal with the housing emergency and evictions, it will be crucial for us to take account of the experience and perspective of the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH), the social movement championing the right to housing with a longer history behind it in the Spanish State and which reached its tenth anniversary this year 2019. **Lucía Delgado, the current spokesperson for the Barcelona PAH**, had the task of contributing this perspective to the Housing Forum.

Delgado reminded her audience of the origins of the PAH in 2009: "It came about to support people affected by mortgage foreclosure processes and who had lost everything, often with a debt for life". Since then, the PAH has multiplied its presence throughout Catalonia, especially after the 15-M movement burst on the scene in 2011. There are currently two hundred PAH groups throughout the Spanish State.

## Empowering the people affected and acting in different fields, the keys to the PAH's success

For Delgado, one of the keys to the PAH's success is to have overcome the welfare approach and managed to empower the people affected to take the step towards activism.

Another essential element in her opinion is the PAH's capacity to act in different fields: "At the PAH we provide collective advice, empower people with information and tools to fight for their case. We defend the right to peaceful civil disobedience... we don't just stop evictions". She puts particular emphasis on the need for information for the people affected, who often do not get any guidance or advice from the institutions on the steps they have to follow in their cases.



**LUCÍA DELGADO**

BARCELONA

The Barcelona PAH's current spokesperson.

The PAH's demands have gradually changed over time, depending on the change in the social, political and economic context, although the essence is still the same. It began in 2009 by putting three minimum demands on the table: retroactive dation in payment, a moratorium on evictions for vulnerable families and the creation of a public stock of social rented housing.

Later on, in 2010, the "Stop evictions" campaign was launched. The same year it managed to stop its first eviction, involving a resident of La Bisbal del Penedès (Tarragona). Since then many other cases have followed and to date the PAH has stopped over 2000 evictions throughout the Spanish State. After that first experience in 2010, the PAH also produced a guide as a protocol that all activists have to take into account when proposing to stop an eviction.

LUCÍA DELGADO, the PAH's spokesperson:

**"The banks have been rescued with everyone's money and have to comply with a series of obligations".**

A year later, having reflected on what to do in the face of evictions that could not be halted to provide housing alternatives for the families affected, the PAH launched the "PAH Social Work" campaign. Still in operation today, it involves the occupation of vacant buildings owned by banks or vulture funds to house families that have been made homeless. Referring to this, Delgado remarked: "The banks have been rescued with everyone's money and have to comply with a series of obligations".

In her opinion occupation, or squatting, is the last remaining option when the authorities offer no alternative or when, despite the PAH's efforts to negotiate

with banks and persuade them to offer a social rent to the families, the eviction ends up going ahead anyway. She added that not all the alternatives offered by the authorities for housing evicted families could be regarded as decent dwellings, meaning referrals to hotels or pensions. The PAH understands that this might be a temporary option for one or two days, but warns that there are individuals and families in Barcelona, as in other cities, who can end up spending six months in those types of accommodation.

Other PAH initiatives and campaigns are aimed at having an effect on structural measures and changing the housing regulations it considers unfair. A first step was to submit motions to local councils, for example, calling on them to change and fine vacant flats. Delgado highlighted the case of the city council in Terrassa, the first council to fine a bank for having a vacant flat and a city where this measure has had a greater impact.

LUCÍA DELGADO:

**"While we lost the legal battle (over the ILP at the Congreso de Diputados in 2013) we did win the social battle, the communication battle".**

She also recalled the case of the popular legislative initiative (ILP) for dations in payment and social rent discussed in 2013 at the *Congreso de Diputados* but which ultimately failed to get through the first hurdle, under a Partido Popular government with an absolute majority. Nevertheless, Delgado noted: "While we lost the legal battle we did win the social battle, the communication battle". The debate over the ILP held at the *Congreso de Diputados* raised the profile of the PAH's demands through the mass media, which had a big impact on public opinion.



Lucía Delgado's talk at the FHAR, where she called for more co-responsibility from the private sector in guaranteeing the right to housing.

Having lost the legal battle at the *Congreso de Diputados*, the PAH, accompanied by other social movements such as the Alliance against Energy Poverty (APE), among others, attempted it in the Catalan Parliament. Act 24/2015 against Evictions and Energy Poverty was unanimously approved in the Catalan chamber in July 2015, the result of the ILP presented by several social movements, a large part of whose contents were blocked by Spain's Constitutional Court towards the start of this year (2019). The PAH was also mobilised to get the Spanish government to withdraw the appeal against unconstitutionality, especially after PSOE's motion to censure the PP government in June 2018. Now it is celebrating having recovered it, warning that it will be monitoring its compliance.

Finally, she highlighted the validity of the PAH's demands today, given the chronic nature of the housing emergency. In 2018 there were nearly 59,700 evictions throughout the Spanish State, mostly for rent defaults. She also warned of the *modus operandi* represented by open evictions, where families do not know when an eviction will go ahead and which makes it hard to organise the social movements to stop it. The new State decree on rent

(Decree Act 7/2019 of 1 March) bans this procedure, although it will be necessary to verify that it is stopped in practice.

Delgado also warned of the collapse afflicting emergency boards tasked with assisting and assigning social housing to people evicted at this time. There are 443 families on the waiting list in Barcelona, according to the PAH.

Delgado believes more effort and commitment is needed from the authorities and the rules of the game have to be changed so they impose more obligations on the private sector. For example, she is for legally obliging large property owners to regularise the situations of families without security of tenure, as many of them are victims of mortgage foreclosures that the banks carried out years ago. She is also in favour of compelling the asset management company Sareb to assign the use of all its properties to the public housing stock. "It's not right that Sareb is selling its assets to other banks, if they're ours! How can the State possibly allow that?". In short, she calls for more co-responsibility from the private sector in guaranteeing the right to housing. 🏠

# 5

## 2

# Social organisations in the face of residential exclusion: the Càritas housing diagnosis and programme



PRESENTATION  Residential exclusion and social intervention in Barcelona



**FERNANDO DÍAZ**

BARCELONA

A Càritas representative.

Along with the protest actions of social movements, the third sector's organisations have also doubled their efforts in the face of the housing emergency afflicting above all the groups at risk of social exclusion assisted by social organisations. Càritas launched a programme to assist the homeless and people with difficulties accessing housing four years ago that attended to 3,000 people in 2018 alone. In addition, residential exclusion has become a subject for analysis in the organisation's studies on vulnerability.

During the Housing Forum, **the Càritas representative, Fernando Díaz**, gave advance notice of some of the main conclusions from the report *La llar és clar* (Households are the key). The full results will be presented during the second half of 2019. The report consists of a qualitative analysis, based on interviews with people in situations of residential exclusion situations assisted by Càritas, and quantitative data, from the Survey on Integration and Social Needs (2018) conducted by the Foessa

Foundation, which collaborates with the Càritas's studies. The survey was based on a sample of 29,952 people, of whom 4,883 were from Catalonia and 1,694 from the diocese of Barcelona. Dioceses are also the territorial form of the Càritas organisation, a social organisation answerable to the Catholic Church. The Barcelona Diocese, which Fernando Díaz represents, covers many of the municipalities of the Barcelonès, Maresme and Baix Llobregat counties. Here, Càritas assists some 20,000 people a year.

Fernando Díaz explained that the results of the report show we have an "increasingly dual" society, where severe social exclusion has increased by 40% around the Spanish State, since the start of the economic crisis. Half (50.5%) of the people at risk of exclusion also suffer from employment and housing exclusion.

## The four categories of residential exclusion: rooflessness, homelessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing

Residential exclusion situations can be divided into four categories, according to the ETHOS classification proposed by the European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). These are people without a dwelling living out on the street; people without a dwelling residing in institutional spaces; people living in insecure accommodation or in situations of family violence and people with inadequate accommodation, owing to its unhealthy state, overcrowding or unconventional structures.

FERNANDO DÍAZ (Càritas Barcelona):

**“36% of the diocese’s population experience residential exclusion”**

Díaz asserted that, throughout the Barcelona Diocese, 36% of the population suffers from one or more of these four situations and that, in Càritas’s experience, they are all interconnected. In other words, those suffering from a specific residential exclusion situation (for example, an insecure dwelling) could be suffering from another type (e.g. homelessness).

Given the worsening of the housing problems, Càritas has also intensified its work to tackle them in recent years. “During the crisis, we were providing more onsite assistance but now we are turning towards more community care”, he explained, highlighting the social workers the organisation has in the area, a total of 150 in the Barcelona Diocese alone.

## The Càritas housing mediation service achieves 50% reductions in mortgage and rental debts

Díaz highlighted above all the housing mediation service that Càritas uses to negotiate with the banks to reduce the mortgage debts of the people it assists and with lessors, to reduce the amount of rent they pay. At present, in many cases they are managing to reduce the amount of mortgage and rent debts by nearly 50%.

Besides the mediation service, Fernando Díaz also referred to many other Càritas projects and services for dealing with residential exclusion, such as 25 shared flats with social and educational support, 6 day shelters with a dining room, 2 residential centres for prison inmates (1 for men and 1 for women) and 348 single-family flats. These are flats for families with temporary housing problems, but where the turnover was increasingly less, given lengthier precarious situations. Càritas has a total of 1,321 places at its disposal in single-family and shared flats and in residential centres. In addition, it offers a rights help service which, among other things, supports roofless persons facing disciplinary measures for living on the street.

The Càritas representative stressed the priority nature of the housing programme given the importance of a home for ensuring people’s well-being. In that regard, he referred to the following definition of home: “It is the place that gives you security and stability, where you build your identity; it is the communal area for socialising and developing the family project; it is the place where you can rest, watch and plan your life and dream... It is through the home that we can establish ties with our environment”. 🏡

# The Barcelona Intervention and Mediation Service in Housing-Loss and Occupation Situations (SIPHO)



PRESENTATION Responses to the emergency: preventing, halting, accommodating, mediating and accompanying



**JUDITH COBACHO**

BARCELONA

SIPHO's  
Manager.

Faced with the housing emergency caused by evictions, in 2015 Barcelona City Council launched the new Barcelona Intervention and Mediation Service in Housing-Loss and Occupation Situations (SIPHO). The service was originally set up in a few districts as pilot test and then extended to the entire city in 2016. During the Housing and Renovation Forum, **Judith Cobacho, head of SIPHO** and the Vinclé Association, explained how this service works.

The SIPHO intervenes to prevent people losing their homes, by accompanying the families affected and helping them to mediate and talk with the owners of the property and the other parties involved.

## Nearly seven evictions a day in Barcelona

Judith Cobacho firmly advocates the importance of a service such as this in the present context: "While it's true that the number of evictions has dropped overall, this isn't the case everywhere". She emphasised that several of Barcelona's districts still present a high risk of evictions, notably Nou Barris, Sants-Montjuïc and Ciutat Vella. And she reminded the audience that eviction figures are still very high. There were 2,519 evictions in Barcelona in 2017 alone, the equivalent of seven a day.

In this situation, the SIPHO acts in coordination with Barcelona City Council's other units, mainly the 10 housing offices and the 40 social services centres spread around the city which also assist people in residential risk situations. Also part of this circuit is the Barcelona Social Emergencies Centres (CUESB), which attends to people in emergency situations and

where most cases dealt with by the SIPHO are referred from.

To show how the SIPHO worked within this circuit, Cobacho said: “This service acts as a last resort, prior to the fortnight leading up to the date of an eviction”. Before that point is reached, many cases are dealt with by the housing offices, which offer information, guidance and legal advice, as well as support in securing financial help for accessing or maintaining housing, mediation services and so on.

The SIPHO has two techniques in the larger districts and one in the smaller districts to carry out its intermediation and mediation work. Practically all the staff are women.

### The cases assisted by SIPHO is more than double that of 2015

The number of cases attended to by the service has continued to grow since it was set up, from 1,020 in 2015, to 1,674 in 2016, 2,351 in 2017 and 2,270 in 2018. As regards the eviction orders the SIPHO has been involved in, the figure is even higher, reaching 3,114 cases in 2018.

Over half (56%) of the cases attended to last year were related to evictions for rent defaults, 34% to squatting and 5% to mortgage foreclosures. There was no information on the remaining 5%. As for the claimants, 51% were big housing owners and 49% were small owners.

“Most of the people we attend to are below the poverty threshold”, explained Judith Cobacho. The incomes of the families attended to by the SIPHO are less than 1,200 euros a month (for a household of 4 members). In other words, they do not amount to 1.5 times the Catalan adequate income index (IRSC).

The functions of this service also include attending to especially vulnerable cases. We are talking about family units at risk of losing their home or job made up of people over the age of 65, children, pregnant women, people with a disability, serious illness or mental disorders or affected by gender or intra-family violence or by serious social and economic problems.

Bearing in mind the complexity of the cases attended to, Cobacho emphasised the results obtained by the SIPHO. Of the cases attended to in 2018, evictions were postponed in 66% of cases and halted by a court in 4%. On the other hand, 17% of the families helped by the SIPHO decided to hand over the keys to their flat after securing alternative housing. The remaining 13% were unable to escape eviction.

Besides assessing these results, Cobacho also listed several challenges they face the future. She pointed out the SIPHO was still a young service that had to establish itself and continue making progress in its cross-cutting work with the social services. She also insisted on improving the

JUDITH COBACHO  
(SIPHO):

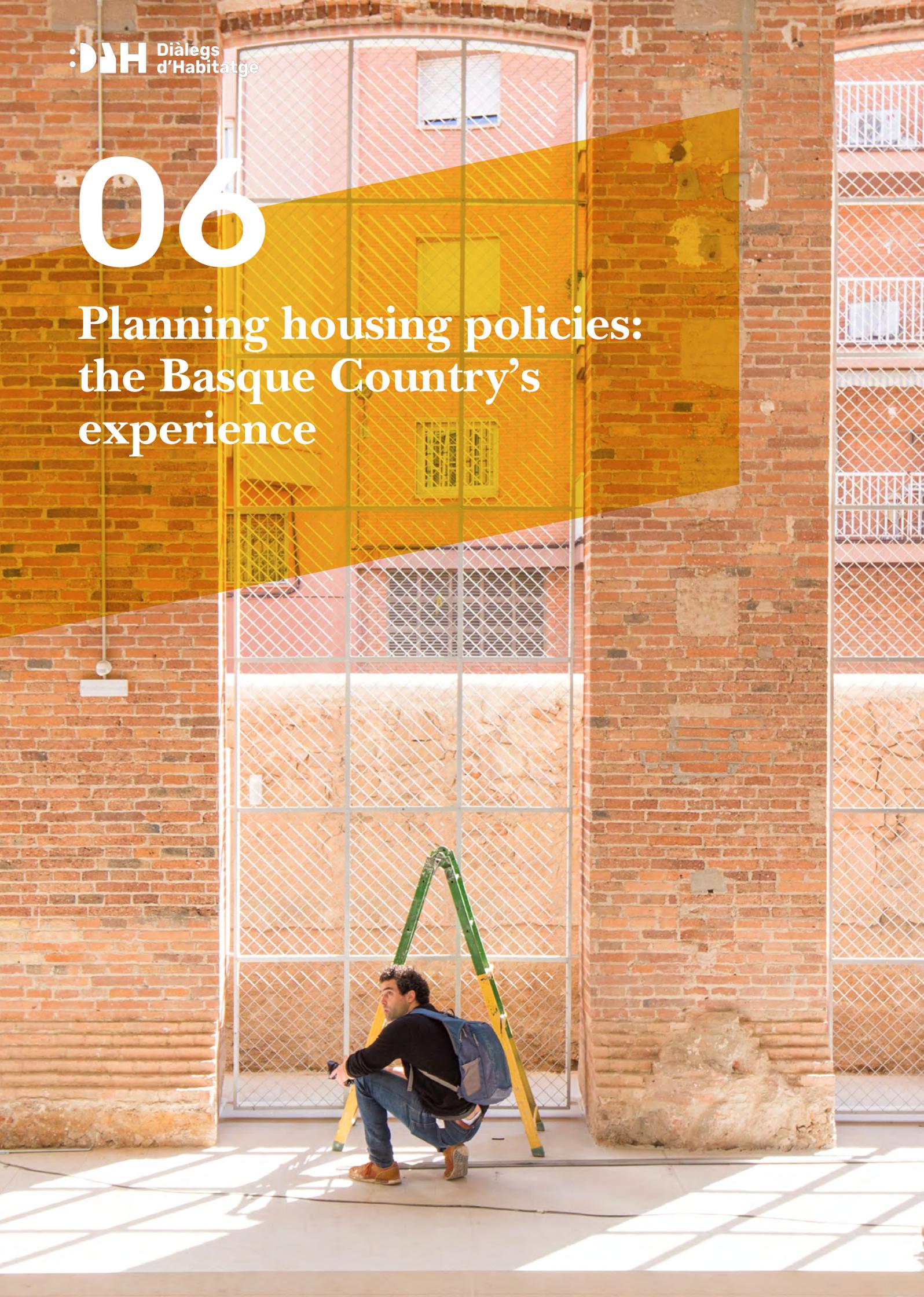
“Evictions were halted in 87% of the cases attended to by the service in 2018”

preventive protocols with the Catalan High Court of Justice, to detect whether evictions without a fixed date were occurring – despite their being illegal – and to help to prevent them, as well as coordinating new strategies for temporarily keeping the people who were affected by eviction processes in their homes.

In conclusion, Cobacho spoke about a new avenue they are starting to work on in 2019: buildings occupied by people in vulnerable situations. The number of blocks this year is 27. Several lines of action are being pursued in this area, among others reaching agreements with owners, relocating families to other dwellings and exploring the public authorities’ preemptive rights over these buildings. 🏠

# 06

## Planning housing policies: the Basque Country's experience





SESSION  Measuring for planning. Creating indicators and presenting the state of play



**MARIO YOLDI**

BASQUE COUNTRY

Director of Housing Planning and Operational Processes for the Basque government.

INTERVIEW  Mario Yoldi

PRESENTATION  'How to use data to make housing policies'

The Basque Country is a benchmark for housing policies in Spain. Despite not being one of the most populated autonomous regions – it has 2.1 million inhabitants – it is the second largest in producing protected housing, only behind Madrid, according to data from the Spanish Ministry of Public Works. The Basque government currently has 13,600 public rented dwellings, while municipal public companies have a further 22,700. Also worth noting is the considerable public investment made by the Basque government in this area: 267 million euros in 2019, with a further 80 million euros in housing benefits.

**Mario Yoldi, the Director of Planning and Operational Housing Processes at the Basque government,** addressed the Forum to explain how public policies in the Basque Country are planned and assessed. To understand and contextualise this planning and assessment model, Yoldi also went over the Basque Country's public housing policy model and the progress made since the 1990s.

## A pioneering public housing service in the Spanish State, created in 1997

The Basque Country has had a public housing service, the first of its kind in the Spanish State, since 1997. Yoldi explained that one of the cornerstones of this service is the register of officially protected housing (HPO) applicants, **Etxebide**. Everyone who wishes to opt for an HPO, whether to purchase or rent it, has to register with the register to apply for housing through a specific municipality, thereby enabling the Basque government to continuously monitor the level of demand in every part of the region. Subsequently, everyone who is listed in the register receives information on the available HPO developments and applicants have to sign up for the ones they are interested in.

By means of the Etxebide register the authorities then award all the officially protected dwellings, whether they are built directly by the public sector or through private developers. The Basque

government also monitors the system for awarding private developments, which is based on the lists of awardees defined by the authorities on the basis of public scales. The Etxebide register, which can be accessed online, has a million annual hits.

Until 2001, public rental housing in the Basque Country – as in many other parts of the Spanish State – was practically non-existent. Since then the number of dwellings in the public rental housing stock had risen to 13,600 and the target number that the Basque government has set itself is now 35,000.



One of Yoldi's areas of work is assessing housing policies.

## The Basque Country, a pioneer in making officially protected housing a permanent classification and in the subjective right to housing

It should also be noted that Basque Country was the first autonomous regions in Spain – and so far the only one, as early as 2003 – to make the officially protected housing classification permanent.

Two years later, in 2005, the Department of Planning, currently run by Yoldi, was created. This is a unit made up of permanent and independent civil servants, so their work continues irrespective of who heads the Basque government. “We do strategical planning” as in the private sector, stressed Yoldi.

Another very important leap in Basque housing policies was the Act approved in 2015 by the Basque Parliament. The new Housing Act recognised for the first time the subjective right to housing, a pioneering measure throughout Spain compelling the public authorities to guarantee a dwelling for people meeting certain income criteria and registered with Etxebide for at least three years. Yoldi acknowledged that it was not easy to comply with this right because of the high demand. Since the law came into force in January 2016, there have been 5,600 applications and 4,000 dwellings were awarded.



MARIO YOLDI,  
the director of Housing Planning and Operational  
Processes for the Basque government:

**“Planning is essential  
for designing long-term  
housing policies”**

Yoldi highlighted the importance of data for designing housing policies, in particular with a long-term approach, and for their subsequent assessment. The Basque Country is also a pioneer in assessing housing policies, which on the State level was “is non-existent”, despite the multitude of technological and digital tools there are at present for in-depth analysis, in Mario Yoldi’s opinion.

He explained that strategic housing policies in the Basque Country are set out by the government and approved by Parliament, and that they are presently incorporated in the Master Housing Plan for 2018-2020. For the purposes of elaborating these strategic plans, citizen participation processes are held to enrich their contents, with contributions that can end up being very significant. For example, he explained the proposal to make the HPO classification permanent and the current

Gaztelagun youth housing plan arose from citizen participation. Many social players are involved in these processes and they have the support of a digital participatory platform: Etxebizitza.

Once the strategic housing policy plan has been designed, the Basque government then has a mechanism, made up of several programmes and inter-connected units, to implement it. There are currently 200 people, all civil servants, working on the housing programme and a further 200 in three public housing companies. Yoldi believes the essential thing is “coordination” between the parties involved, “the use of shared work systems” and “a model based on business processes”, which faces the challenge of constantly updating, depending on how social needs and new digital and technological media develop.

For YOLDI

**the Department  
of Planning is the  
brains behind the  
entire system.**

For Yoldi, the Department of Planning is the brains behind the entire system. Currently, some 2.5 million euros are being allocated every year to planning and assessment systems, and a further 250,000 euros a year to statistical operations, a public investment that Yoldi considers essential for staying on track and managing housing policies: "Otherwise, we wouldn't know what we were doing well and what we were doing badly". He also stressed that the planning and assessment system and the civil servants involved are periodically evaluated by standard quality management systems such as ISO, and that they are managed under efficiency criteria.

Besides the data that the management system itself is contributing, based on cross-referencing data from the various parties involved, the Basque Country has a **Housing Observatory** to prepare more in-depth research.

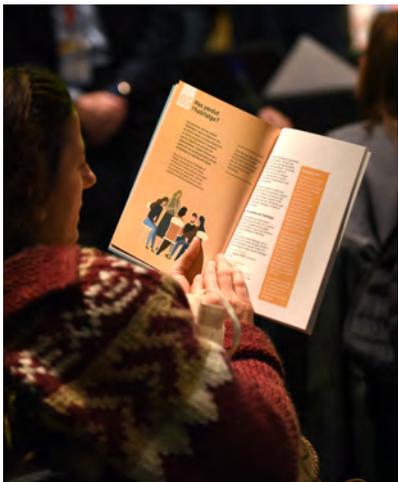
Another central analysis feature is the Housing Use Survey conducted by the Basque government every two years (the last one was carried out in 2017 and the one for 2019 is presently under way). This survey examines dwellings that have been left vacant for over two years without any justified reason because, where that is the case, they can be mobilised for social housing under the Basque Housing Act of 2015. In collaboration with the Basque Institute of Statistics, it has been possible to detect 20,800 vacant dwellings so far, two thirds of which required renovations (and a third on a large scale), the overwhelming majority (96%) of which are in the hands of individuals. So far 5,300 vacant dwellings have been mobilised for social rent. The use of officially protected housing is also being monitored and, where its social function is being not carried out – for example, if the successful applicant is not using it as a first residence – then the corresponding disciplinary measures are applied.

## Big data applied to housing policy planning

Another tool that has begun to be used more recently is big data, with much more advanced processing systems allowing much more to be extracted from the data as regards forecasts, assessments and so on. In the case of housing the Basque government has implemented big-data processes with technical building inspections (ITEs). An analysis of the state of dwellings, for example, revealed the need for more thorough improvements in their accessibility, after years of emphasis on energy sustainability issues, and these changes have been applied. Housing inspections have been speeded up over the last few years, with 30,000 carried out in 2017 alone. They all feature in the Euskoregite register.

Big data has also been applied to analysing and assessing the trend in purchase and rent prices and for making forecasts over the number of people who will have the subjective right to housing in each part of the region and for building developments wherever there is more demand. The Basque government estimates that there will be 18,000 up to 2025, although the number is currently below those forecasts. The analysis tools also enable the causes to be discovered. They have detected that there are people with limited financial resources who are receiving supplementary housing benefit (to pay for their flats) and the guaranteed income, amounting to nearly 1,000 euros a month, benefits they would lose if they were awarded a flat. So they do not apply for one.

The large availability of information also makes it possible to assess whether the planned targets are being met and, if not, to analyse the causes. Yoldi gave the following example: "We had proposed starting 850 rented dwellings in 2018, but we've only started 652. Why? Municipal initiative has failed."



Of course, “we’re keeping to the target of creating nearly 1,000 public rented dwellings a year and combining that with renovations, which has always been our primary policy, more than promotion”, he insisted.

Information and objective data were likewise an tool for combating rumours. Civil servants monitoring citizens’ comments on social networks about housing also reply to some of them sometimes to debunk false information such as the myth that most of those receiving supplementary housing benefit are immigrants. The reality is that 60% of the people receiving supplementary housing benefit are Spanish nationals and only 40% are from abroad.

MARIO YOLDI

**insists that personal data protection is one of the main concerns of the Department of Housing Planning.**

The volume of information that the Department of Housing Policy Planning has at its disposal is so large that one of the main concerns of its director at present is to ensure that it is used correctly, that it does not infringe data protection regulations. “We have access to all the information on people, properties, incomes, assets... It worries me because it’s very easy to misuse this information”. That is why he believes one of the main challenges of his department is to look more deeply into the safeguarding of this data.

Another future challenge is to reverse the service’s current saturation of the service, which had speeded up above all since the approval of the Act of 2015 recognising the subjective right to housing. The last three years have seen his department move from a certain normality to very high levels of stress, cannot meet all the existing demand at an optimum rate. That in turn has led to a rise in the number of people off work, which is why the Department of Planning is putting more emphasis on the emotional management of its staff. Yoldi also considers it a priority to expand the number of staff and apply urgent reforms so they can deal with the demand.

Thus this pioneering system in housing policy planning and assessment is presently going through a growth crisis but efforts are being made to resolve it, so they can continue providing their citizens with a good service. 📌

# 07

## Regulating the rental market: putting a halt to gentrification

7



# What is gentrification? Causes and consequences



SESSION **Fight against gentrification**

The term *gentrification* is used on a recurring basis to describe the social and urban transformation processes that many cities are experiencing, although **the architect and consultant at Barcelona City Council, David Bravo**, warns that this concept is used in an ambiguous and vague way at times.

To give a more precise meaning, he links this term to the phenomena of “spatial segregation”, which threaten the urban mix, in other words, the mix of buildings (residential, workplaces, tourist attractions, cultural facilities and so on) and the profile of the people living in the different parts of a city.

DAVID BRAVO, architect:

**“Gentrification threatens the ‘urban mix’ of building uses and population profiles”**

As regards population profiles, David Bravo provides evidence that we are a long way from what this urban mix would represent: “If we take the population and divide it into upper, middle and lower classes, in an ideal situation, we’d have to have all three represented in every space, but instead of that, we see how the working class is forced out to less central areas”.

The same could be said regarding the use of buildings. In Bravo’s opinion, we find ourselves in a “hyperactive city”, for example, Ciutat Vella in Barcelona’s case, with a surplus of metropolitan and global facilities, in contrast to “an outlying dormitory city”, where there is no economic activity, jobs, work and so on. Therefore he insists on doing some “re-balancing work”.

To exemplify the tension that the distribution of building uses in urban centres implies, he pointed out the case of the Capella de la Misericòrdia, a space disputed by the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and the neighbourhood’s primary healthcare centre (CAP) for their respective expansions. The expansion of the healthcare centre is a demand



**DAVID BRAVO**  
BARCELONA  
Architect.



of a large part of the social and residential fabric of the neighbourhood that clashes with the expansion projects of the MACBA, one of the city's most important cultural facilities, planned by the public authorities.

To tackle the phenomenon of gentrification, David Bravo argues we need to examine its causes and consequences rigorously and scientifically, and avoid ambivalence. Therefore he believes it is crucial for the public authorities to have data at their disposal on its consequences in their city or region and he criticised the authorities' slow response on this issue compared to the private sector, which presently enjoys "hegemony over data" and use of the most modern big data systems for exploiting it. He also highlighted the need for a taxonomic approach to the various types of affordable housing, where he sees a certain terminological confusion (between terms such as *public, social and protected*) and for quantifying what percentage of housing of this type there is in each of the city's neighbourhoods. Subsequently it would be necessary to

establish neighbourhood targets for expanding the affordable housing stock, and an implementation schedule capable of being transparently monitored.

With these goals, Bravo insisted on the need to promote a "cross-cutting approach" between authorities (and between the departments of the same authority) in order to get a "coordinated view" that would, for example, enable the cross-referencing of data or managing policies that coordinated the points of view of the urban planning and housing policy areas.

DAVID BRAVO:  
**"We need a paradigm change in the city and urban planning model"**

Finally, he pointed out the main challenge posed by the gentrification process we are experiencing is "a paradigm change in the city and urban planning model". To reflect on the city model, Bravo offered a historical view of the construction of urban centres: "In the 1950s, rich people began moving to the outskirts of cities and the historical centres gradually became social ghettos in Barcelona, Madrid, Paris, New York and so on. However, from the end of the last century, this has been steadily changing and historical centres are no longer social ghettos but, as the example of El Raval shows, they have numerous cultural and tourist facilities".

Bravo commented that it was now time to reclaim the urban centres for their residents and re-humanise cities, as championed by Jane Jacobs, the urban-planning activist and theorist. In that regard, he highlighted the important role played by social and residents' movements in countering power of the financial lobbies, although at the same time he warned that they could not be regarded as a single subject. He also mentioned "two big enemies" of the urban mix within the residential fabric: "green populism", whose supporters can prefer a park to officially protected buildings opposite their homes, and the "Nimbies", who reject any facility close to their home which they consider could cause a nuisance, despite it being necessary for the running of the city or the inclusion of groups at risk of exclusion.

Finally, Bravo mentioned other challenges in building the city model: making the most of spaces that are not yet completely developed to promote the urban mix (the seafront, França station, Fira de Montjuïc, etc.) and deciding which economic activities are to be given priority. In that respect, he warned of the issue that many cities face after experiencing de-industrialisation processes: "What are we going to dedicate ourselves to now, to attract big events, businesses...?".

In short, Barcelona has to decide where it is going and, in Bravo's opinion, architecture and urban planning could also play a fundamental role in combating inequalities. 🇪🇸

# The perspective of social movements: the Tenants' Union



SESSION ▶ Generating affordable rental housing



**JAIME PALOMERA**

BARCELONA

Spokesperson for the Barcelona Tenants' Union.

A recent addition to the movements in defence of the right to housing is the **Tenants' Union**, which was set up in May 2017 in Barcelona. Faced with rising rent prices, people decided to organise themselves following experiences from other countries such as Germany and Austria.

**Jaime Palomera, a Barcelona Tenants' Union spokesperson** and a PhD in Social Anthropology, points out: "It has been organised civil society that has put the rent bubble at the centre of the public debate". Having raised awareness of the problem, he says it has to be the tenants who ensure *de facto* that rent prices do not rise, because "changes will not happen on their own".

To start applying pressure in that sense, the union's first campaign, entitled "Ens quedem" (We're staying put), called on tenants to disobey the Urban Rent Act (LAU), by refusing to accept abusive price increases and staying in the same flat paying the same as before or even a little bit more, in an act of civil disobedience. "Barcelona is a city in the vanguard of civil disobedience. There

JAIME PALOMERA

**"Barcelona is a city in the vanguard of civil disobedience. There are already 1,200 people who have disobeyed the LAU".**

are already 1,200 people who have disobeyed the LAU".

The Union is working to get these acts of civil disobedience and negotiations with owners done in an organised and collective way. Palomera explains: "There are many tenants with the same owners. We are dedicated to organising tenants by neighbourhood and owner; we aim to build tenants' communities". For example, he says they intend to force negotiations with Goldman Sachs, the owner of a large number of flats in the metropolitan area, because, according to Palomera, the investment fund could have received preferential treatment from the authorities to acquire dwellings at knock-down prices.

Just like the PAH, the Tenants' Union believes it is crucial to celebrate "small victories", not just for the self-motivation of those involved in the struggle, but also to encourage others to do the same, on seeing others achieving their goals.

Of course, the ultimate aim of the Tenants' Union is not civil disobedience but rather to bring about the change of a piece of legislation they consider unjust. Their legislative proposals include the regulation of rent prices, a measure shared by eight out of ten people in our country, according to Palomera. Even so, it was not included in the Spanish government's recent Executive Decree on Rent.

JAIME PALOMERA:

**"There is no study that says price regulation has reduced the number of offers or increased the black market"**

In Palomera's view, some members of the financial and property sector, as well as certain political forces, discredit price regulations, dismissing them as ineffective, with few arguments. "Have they given us any empirical evidence that not limiting prices works, that tax deductions for buying really guarantee the right to housing or that the tax privileges of Real Estate Investment Trusts have done this?", he asks.

Arguing against such unfounded criticism, Palomera asserts: "There is no study that says price regulation has reduced supply or increased the black market [...]". He explained that scientific articles on price control show that no categorical conclusions can be drawn

in that regard, although price regulation does indeed help to provide tenants with security and stability. On the other hand, he notes "if we observe what has been happening in Europe and the United States since the 1980s when housing prices were deregulated, we can see that this was the prelude to Europe's biggest price boom".

That's why he insists on implementing price controls in Spain: "It's no panacea, as it will have to be accompanied by many other measures, but it's not the apocalypse either".

He argues that regulating prices "is not about eliminating profit, but limiting it, because the rent will still be profitable for the owner". What is more,

landlords enjoy tax advantages:

"In Spain, an owner who rents out a dwelling only pays tax on 40% of the gains it generates, receiving the remaining 60% free of taxes. By contrast, a worker has to pay tax on 100% of their salary".

He also believes a cultural change is necessary, not just for big property owners but for small ones too: "The latter think of their dwelling as an asset; they are imitating investors. We have a cultural problem".

For JAIME PALOMERA,

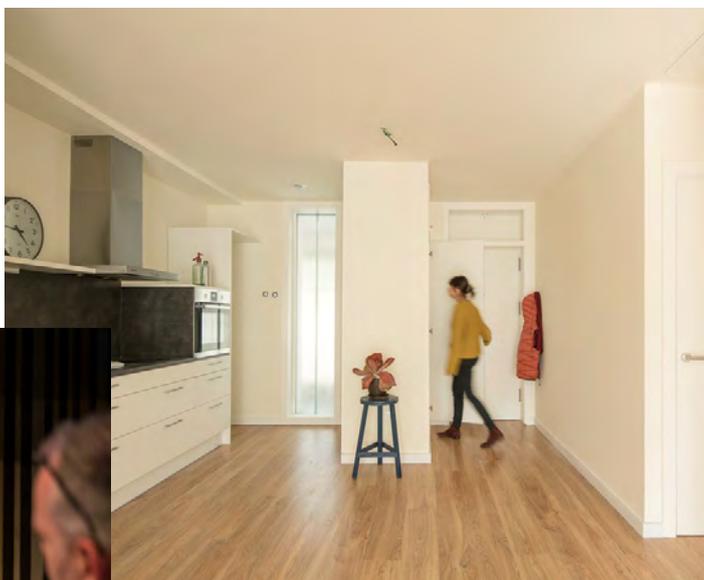
**the index for regulating rent has to be based on accessibility criteria and not on current market prices**

The Tenants' Union has also thought about how to build the index that would serve to regulate and limit prices. He explained that it could not be an index based on market prices, such as the one created by the Catalan government in 2017 and the one proposed by the Spanish State under the recent executive decree, but rather on accessibility criteria. In his opinion the Catalan government's current reference price index "equated... [it] with a property portal" and "legitimise market prices".

The Tenants' Union is therefore opting for a price index determined by social and economic variables, relating to rent, each area's rate of unemployment and so on. They say that the index has to be binding and that, in the event of non-compliance, it would lead to fines for repeat-offender property owners

and mandatory transfers of the use of their flats to the public housing stock.

"We are falling into the trap of bringing price regulation into the technical arena, but it's not a technical problem. It's a question political will", he maintains. The root problem is that housing is not regarded as a right, in contrast to healthcare, education and pensions. He argues that housing has "to be seen as another pillar of our system". 🏠



During his talk at the FHAR, Jaime Palomera championed the implementation of rent price controls



# 7.3 European benchmarks in housing and letting



SESSION ▶ Generating affordable rental housing



**ELGA  
MOLINA**

TARRAGONA

Manager of the Tarragonès County Council's Social Rental Housing Pool.



**REINER  
WILD**

BERLIN

Executive Director of the Mieterverein Berlin (tenants' association).



PRESENTATION

The German system of rent control  
– odds and deficits



INTERVIEW



**RUI NEVES  
BOCHMANN FRANCO**

LISBON

Lisbon City Councillor for Housing.

# 7.3.1

## Analysing successful models in Europe to import them into the Spanish State



PRESENTATION  
'New rent  
regulations in line  
with EU law'

Compared to several other EU countries, Spain's rent policies lag far behind. That can be deduced from the presentation given by **Elga Molina, the Manager of the Tarragonès County Council's Social Rental Housing Pool, a PhD in Law and adjunct lecturer in Civil Law at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili**, who called for an analysis of successful models in Europe in order to evaluate implementing them in the Spanish State.

While the last few years have seen an increase in the percentage of tenants in Spain – where the culture of ownership has prevailed historically – it still remains a minority option, especially when compared with neighbouring European countries. The renting level in Spain is 16.9%, well below the European average of 30.7% and even further below the percentages for countries with higher levels of renting, such as Switzerland (57.5%), Germany (48.3%) and Austria (45%). In fact, the renting level in Spain is even lower than that found in other southern European countries, such as Malta (19.2%), Portugal (24.8%), Greece (26.1%) and Italy (27.7%).

In countries where this level is lower, "letting continues to be perceived as a temporary option for people unable to buy a flat, but not as a voluntary choice for maintaining a stable life project",

according to Elga Molina. By contrast, in the countries with higher levels, renting is perceived more as a desired option for maintaining a stable life, among the middle classes too.

That is also closely related to the lengths of leases. In countries with a higher renting level, there are normally two types of lease: short fixed-term ones for temporary needs and periodic tenancies for meeting long-term needs. Periodic tenancies enable tenants to continue staying in their flats indefinitely, provided they meet their obligations, and can only be terminated by landlords for justifiable (personal, financial) requirements, but not for merely speculative aims.

### Ten EU countries have periodic tenancies

Periodic tenancies are currently found in the following ten EU countries: The Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, Germany and Austria. In France's case, this type does not exist as such but "when a lease's term expires, it is automatically renewed, unless there is some justifiable reason to the contrary, so in practice it is open-ended", explained Elga Molina. By contrast, leases for individuals in Spain used to terminate every three years, although

the recent Executive Decree 7/2019 extends that period to five.

Molina warned of many other problems in the Spanish rental market. Particularly serious is the fact that 41.4% of the activity is carried out on the black market, or that only 20% of tenants declare themselves satisfied with their rent.

To improve the situation in the Spanish rental market, she pointed out the factors that need addressing, in order to improve the rights of tenants and landlords alike, providing examples of good practices already being carried out in other European countries. In her opinion, those factors in the case of tenants are affordability, stability and flexibility, while in the case of owners they are profitability, obtaining sufficient guarantees and above all the possibility of quickly recovering their flat.

## Improving tenants' terms and conditions: affordability among the top priorities

It is worth recalling, in the current rent bubble in many Spanish cities, that many European countries are establishing regulations on rental incomes to limit rental prices, including Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden.

**In France's case**, an Act was passed in Paris in 2014 that banned exceeding the price per square metre set by legislation by 30% (or reducing it by more than 20%). It was initially suspended by the law courts, which considered that it could not refer exclusively to the city of Paris but also had to refer to 400 areas around the country with a strained rental market. The Act was subsequently extended to cover the whole country and has been back in force since the end of 2018 (ELAN Act).

**In Germany's case**, there has been a system for regulating rents since the 1970s, which was voluntary until 2015. This system is based on the Mietspiegel index, which sets a price per square metre according to the dwelling's features, year of construction and location. Molina pointed out that the establishment of prices responds to a "consensual system, as they are negotiated between owners' and tenants' associations and the authorities, and are updated every two years with the CPI and every four years a new study is conducted to assess the market situation".

ELGA MOLINA, an expert in European legislation on letting:

**"In Switzerland, tenants can go to court where they consider their dwelling's owner is making them pay abusive rent"**

Besides the Mietspiegel, a limit was approved in 2015 on updating rental incomes (Mietpreisbremse), which does not allow rent prices to be increased by more than 10% of the previous index. This system was approved in 2015, "despite having been criticised for having too many exceptions in its application", according to Molina.

**In Switzerland's case**, the lecturer in Civil Law pointed out that tenants can "turn to the courts where they consider their dwelling's owner is making them pay an abusive rent", for example, because of a disproportionately high rent increase compared to the previous year or because

the landlord's profit margin is excessive. In France, it is the other way around. There it is the owner who can turn to the courts where they consider the rental price of their dwelling was too low, to apply for the courts to set a suitable price, bearing in mind market prices.

Some countries establish limits on security deposits or systems to facilitate payment of such deposits and other expenses associated with entering a rented flat (insurance, first monthly instalment, property manager fees, taxes and so on). For example, for years now countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Italy have been limiting security deposits to an amount equivalent to three months' rent, a maximum that Spain ended up adopting too under the recent Decree 7/2019 on rents.



Molina highlighted periodic tenancies as a measure for bringing stability to tenants.

### **Both Germany and Switzerland establish mechanisms that enable a rented flat's entry costs to be paid in instalments.**

Furthermore, mechanisms have been established in both Germany and Switzerland to enable a rented flat's entry costs to be paid in instalments. In Germany's case, this is done by apportioning three monthly instalments, while in Switzerland's case, it is an insurer who pays everything at once from the beginning, with the tenant subsequently paying back this outlay in instalments. "Paying in instalments does no harm to the owner, because the purpose of deposits is to do repairs necessary for the dwelling, deal with possible rent default... and is therefore not an amount that is needed in the short term", in Molina's view.

Apart from rental costs, she insisted on the need for rent stability, which is why Spain could adopt the periodic tenancy model that already exists in many European countries, as mentioned previously. On the other hand, she is in favour of making tenants' terms and conditions, enabling them, for example, to sublet their dwelling, wholly or partially, without the need for authorisation, as already happens in Germany and Switzerland in justified cases, for personal or financial reasons. Molina believes this is a

mechanism that can help a tenant to meet their monthly payments without any detriment to the owner, because ultimately the tenant will have to answer to the landlord.

She also believes that tenants ought to be allowed to terminate their lease unilaterally in certain situations, for example, where they have to move owing to a change of job, or to carry out necessary work on their flat – should the owner wash their hands of the matter – at the owner's expense or by withholding their rent payments until the owner has the work done (for example, with a deposit in a court-controlled account).

## Improving guarantees for owners: the balance between affordability and profitability

In Molina's opinion creating an efficient and secure rental market also depends on guaranteeing owners' rights. Therefore she thinks a balance needs to be found between affordability of prices for tenants and profitability for owners. In that regard, she recalled how the European Court of Human Rights, just as it establishes the obligation for guaranteeing a housing alternative for families in situations of residential exclusion, stipulates that owners were entitled to sufficient profits too.

Molina believes this condition will be met if prices are adapted to the market context – as the supply would otherwise be too low – and if the owner receives sufficient income to compensate for the real expenses incurred by the dwelling or to assume the renovation costs whenever necessary. She qualified this by saying that these conditions are important when referring to periodic tenancies such as the ones found in many EU countries. Over long periods of time buildings might require considerable investment for maintenance not foreseen at the start of a tenant's lease. By contrast, she recognises that the situation is very different in Spain: "The problem does not arise under the short-term leases we have here".

## In Northern Ireland and England, mediation between owners and tenants is free and mandatory before going to court

Another area of concern for owners is being able to recover their dwelling quickly in the event of rent defaults. In that respect she warned that, in Spain's case, while eviction deadlines have gradually been getting shorter in the last few years and that they currently range from three to six months, in some cases they stretch out to a year in practice. She explained a few measures that could help to speed up this process, by freeing up the courts in charge of such cases. For example, creating more *ad hoc* courts specialising in the issue, creating a rent arbitration court such as the ones Austria has, or free mandatory mediation processes, such as the ones found in Northern Ireland and England, where the aim is to resolve disputes between owners and tenants without the need for going to court. Mediation in these countries is usually carried out by phone or remotely, with both parties receiving advice.

Molina also referred to other measures for providing owners with security, such as the possibility of terminating leases for extraordinary reasons – such as the landlord's financial difficulties, but never for speculative purposes – as stipulated in Germany, Switzerland and Austria; or the need to produce a mandatory inventory of all the dwelling's assets, something that is beneficial to owner and tenant alike, to know what the real situation is at any given time. On the other hand, she believes that owners also have to have the flexibility to be able to enter their dwelling

✓ **Alemania:** prorrateo tres cuotas mensuales.

✓ **Suiza:** seguro de depósito.



when necessary, to carry out essential work and repairs or demand more co-responsibility for the flat's maintenance from their tenants, in the case of periodic tenancies.

Finally, Molina referred to the importance of creating registers of leases, not just for statistical purposes but also to monitor the terms and conditions of the leases, prevent abusive practices and so on. She highlighted the fact that there already is one in Catalonia, through Incasòl, although many other regions lack one and a State-level one needs to be established. She also believes it would be useful to create a register of bad lease practices, to enable landlords responsible for illegal evictions or property mobbing or tenants responsible for rent defaults to be identified. Registers of owners such as the ones set up in Northern Ireland and Scotland as well. In those countries it is compulsory to register a flat for letting and, to be able to do that, no offences, discriminatory practices, regulatory infringements or anti-social acts must have been committed.

ELGA MOLINA:

**“Spain needs to have concise functional regulations, by analysing successful European models, to protect tenants with periodic tenancies, referenced rental systems [...]”**

To sum up, in order to establish a balanced rental system in Spain that would be a genuine alternative to ownership and bring us to up the average European renting levels, Elga Molina concluded: “Spain needs to have concise functional regulations, by analysing successful European models, to protect tenants with periodic tenancies, referenced rental systems and by being flexible over the termination of leases and the possibility of subletting. And to protect landlords at the same time too, so that they can include genuine housing expenses in the rent, quickly repossess their dwelling when they need it and enjoy sufficient guarantees”.

## 7.3.2

# Good practices in Europe in defence of affordable rent and housing

This section summarises the talks from speakers representing other countries who attended the Barcelona Housing and Renovation Forum to explain their experiences in the area of affordable rent and housing policies.

### A) TENANTS' UNIONS IN BERLIN

In contrast to Spain, where historically the prevailing culture has been one of ownership, Germany has a long tradition of letting and public housing policies developed especially after the end of the Second World War given the destruction of properties as a result of that conflict, although there have been highs and lows since then, under governments of different persuasions.

The first civil rent acts go back more than a century, while the first tenants' unions, through which civil society organised itself to defend tenants' rights, come from an even earlier period. The first tenants' associations were created between 1868 and 1905 – in Berlin's case, in 1888 – when the industrialisation process attracted people from the countryside and made the big cities grow.

REINER WILD, the Director of the Berlin Mieterverein tenants' union:

**“We need an effective rent ceiling, because this one doesn't work”**

**Reiner Wild, the Executive Director of the Mieterverein Berlin** (tenants' association), told the Housing Forum that the association he represented currently has 170,000 members, whose subscription fees guaranteed the organisation was self-sufficient and did not depend on public subsidies. In 2018, the association advised Berlin tenants on over 90,000 occasions.

It needs to be borne in mind that between 70% and 85% of the population live in rented housing in Germany's big cities. At 85%, Berlin is the European city with the highest percentage of tenants. The national average falls to 55%, because in rural areas more people are home owners.



PRESENTATION  
'The German system of rent control – odds and deficits'

INTERVIEW  
Reiner Wild

## At 85%, Berlin is the European city with the highest percentage of tenants

The Rent Act has been part of the German Civil Code since 2001. The country has also been a pioneer in limiting rent prices and in periodic tenancies, with a few exceptions, for example, when owners need their flat for themselves or a family member. In such cases they can terminate the lease, but under terms and conditions safeguarding the rights of the tenants.

Nevertheless, Reiner Wild warned that limiting prices is not mandatory throughout the country. "The government allowed federal states to restrict the Rent Act if they were not interested in this ceiling". In Berlin's case, mandatory rent price limits have been in force since 2015 and that means leases cannot be raised more than 10% of reference price established in the city.

However, there are exceptions to this general rule. Where owners invest in modernising their dwellings with measures for improving their energy efficiency, they can charge 8% of the investment costs to tenants annually, with certain restrictions applying as of January 2019. He also

warned of various loopholes in the regulations, which in his opinion need correcting, such as the fact that price limits have not been introduced to halt the letting of new flats or flats subject to major renovations. Nor can the rent limit apply if the previous tenant was paying a price above the 10% limit.

Mieterverein Berlin's executive director warned that limiting rents "has not yet had the expected effects": "Rents have risen by an average of 100% in 10 years". He attributes the limit's lack of effectiveness above all to the fact that most owners ignore the ceiling and do not face prosecution. Hence: "We need an effective rent ceiling, because this one doesn't work. We are aiming to close loopholes, so penalties need to be applied to owners who exceed the limits and compensation needs to be given to tenants who have paid more".

Besides improving the effectiveness of price limits, Wild emphasised other housing-related challenges in the German capital. He warned that the number of city residents has grown rapidly recently, by nearly 40,000

people a year, well above the pace of housing construction. Hence he believes the city needs more affordable housing.

There is an ambitious measure currently on the table. On the initiative of residents' association, Berlin City Council has announced that it is prepared to hold a referendum where city residents would have to decide on whether to ban big property owners and place compulsory purchase orders on as many as 200,000 dwellings to allocate them to social rental housing. A process is presently under way to collect at least the 20,000 signatures necessary for applying to hold a referendum. Wild is convinced there is widespread popular support for the measure, but expressed doubts over whether the political authorities would allow it to see the light of day.

## B) LISBON'S EXPERIENCE IN THE FACE OF GENTRIFICATION: REGULATING TOURIST FLATS



SESSION  
Fight against  
gentrification

The situation in Lisbon today contrasts strongly with that of four decades ago. In 1974, following Portugal's Carnation Revolution, the city took in hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees and its population rose to a million. Four decades later, the population has dropped to half a million, though in a metropolitan area of three million, but the city has been facing growing pressure from tourism, especially over the last ten years. So much so that in 2018 it played host to some 20 million visitors.

RUI NEVES BOCHMANN FRANCO,  
Lisbon City Councillor for Housing:

**"20% of Lisbon's  
housing is municipal,  
but even that is 'not  
enough' to halt the  
phenomenon of  
gentrification"**

The policies implemented in the 1990s in the city to put an end to shanty towns, where people from the former colonies were still living, established good foundations for housing policies in the city. At present, 20% of the city's housing stock is in the hands of the City Council, which awards dwellings to people who need them the most, based on income criteria. Most of the costs of these dwellings are borne by the City Council, which allocates a total of 100 million euros to them every month. **Rui Neves Bochmann Franco, the Lisbon City Councillor for Local Housing and Development**, explained that the

average salary in Portugal is very low, half that of Spain's, and that the social protection system is meagre. Faced with that situation, the Portuguese capital has opted to maximise its investment in housing policies. So much so that the city's economic development also depends to a large extent on the housing sector.

Even so, the Lisbon city councillor explained that this is still "not enough" to halt the phenomenon of gentrification and rise in prices flat prices: "During the last 3 years, the property sector's annual inflation has been 30%". That means more and more people are having problems paying for their housing with their income. He added that the city's touristification is causing "a loss of intangible culture", in other words, of the social fabric and physiognomy traditionally characterising its neighbourhoods. So he considers it a paradox that this is happening both in Lisbon and in Barcelona as well as many other cities with a rise in investment in material culture (historical heritage, cultural facilities, etc.) which in turn is a tourist attraction.

Like many other places, Lisbon had seen an exponential growth of tourist accommodation over the last few years and the presence of international platforms such as Airbnb, which is putting upward pressure on rent prices.



Rui Neves Bochmann, the Lisbon city councillor, during his talk at FHAR.



### Lisbon's proposal for tackling the crux of the problem: the higher profitability that owners receive for renting their properties to tourists rather than residents

For the Lisbon city councillor, the crux of the problem lies in the higher profitability that tourist apartments give owners compared to residential letting. This difference can range from 500 euros a month for letting a flat long-term to residents, to 3,000 euros a month for renting a flat out to tourists, with 90% occupancy throughout the year.

Given that, Lisbon City Council has come forward with a pioneering proposal to regulate the activity of these platforms. In their mediation work between owners and tenants, they will have to operate with 50% long-term accommodation for residents and 50% short-term accommodation for tourist uses. Subsequently, the earnings obtained with the two types of accommodation will be weighted and owners using the platform will receive the income corresponding to that weighting for renting out their dwellings. "So it is irrelevant whether you opt for one type of renting or the other", the councillor explained.

He rounded off his talk by adding that thanks to the taxes the platforms will pay Lisbon, they will also have more resources for expanding the public housing stock, which remains a priority goal. 🏡

### Lisbon City Council sets rules for platforms such as Airbnb on how to operate in the city

Consequently, in the middle of 2018, Lisbon City Council took the first step towards fighting this phenomenon, just after the central government had given local councils responsibility for regulating tourist accommodation. Lisbon established a moratorium on this kind of accommodation in the city centre, as Barcelona has done too, which has led to a higher number of tourist apartments moving to the city outskirts.

This was later supplemented with rules for international platforms such as Airbnb for operating in the Portuguese capital. The platforms will have to pay taxes in Lisbon and short-term rents for tourist uses will have to follow the same rules as long-term leases for residents.

# 08

## Renovating the housing stock



# Renovation policies in Barcelona: towards a sustainable renovation model



SESSION  Collaboration and monitoring to ensure the proper use of housing

PRESENTATION  Núria Pedrals' presentation on renovation policies in Barcelona

Renovation has to be a basic pillar of housing policies, in the opinion of **the architect Núria Pedrals**, Chair of AuS (**Architecture and Sustainability Group of the Catalan Architects' Association**). Besides recovering the heritage value of some buildings and improving the existent housing stock, she said today it would have to be used for improving building sustainability and energy efficiency, emphasising their "multiplying effects": "When a euro is allocated to the renovation sinking fund, it can be turned into three or four. It creates more heritage value, more urban planning permits, more IBI... even if indirectly".

She therefore bemoaned the fact that renovation policies have historically been neglected, mainly due to two obstacles: the complexity of managing renovation processes, because they can affect many people with different interests living in the same space; and because of funding difficulties, for enabling communities to opt for the

necessary credits without having to mortgage their homes.

Pedrals reminded her audience that renovations can be on three levels: flat interiors, buildings or neighbourhood, and that their complexity grows "the bigger the extension and the more people involved". She is convinced that public authority leadership is crucial for renovations to prosper, especially in renovations involving entire neighbourhoods or extensive areas of a neighbourhood. For example, she explained that Barcelona City Council had developed several pilot experiences over the last four years in neighbourhoods such as Can Peguera and Canyelles to include efficiency criteria in buildings and improve their insulation.

She believes Barcelona City Council has stepped up its efforts in renovation policies during this last municipal term of office. So, for example, she explained that subsidies for housing renovations



## NÚRIA PEDRALS

BARCELONA  
Architect and Chair of AuS (Architecture and Sustainability Group of the Catalan Architects' Association).

have increased by 27.16% from 2016 to 2018 and reached 32.3 million euros. At the same time, the number of dwellings benefiting from renovations has also grown, by 15.24% from 12,337 to 14,217.

She remarked that not only had expenditure on renovation increased but “the target of the grants has been focused” too. While several years ago they started “from a more generalist conception”, targeting grants at renovation in any community that met the requirements, now there are specific calls for the most vulnerable areas and groups. This is because: “For many years, these grants went mostly to communities that had someone with the capacity to follow the procedures for it, which is complex, and that did not mean they were the ones who needed them most, because precisely such people don’t usually have that profile and stay on the sidelines”.

To focus renovation grants on these groups, the City Council first commissioned a study from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, through which the city’s most vulnerable properties were detected. Thanks to this information, the Council has been able to design a plan for promoting the renovation of these buildings. That led to a call for grants specifically for renovating highly complex properties, which was published for the first time towards the end of 2017, with a budget of 12,184,500 euros. That same year (2017) also saw the launch, for the first time, of a call for flat interior renovations aimed at the most vulnerable groups, budgeted at 5 million euros.

## Renovation grants in exchange for providing dwellings with social and non-speculative uses

Besides these two types of subsidies aimed at the most vulnerable groups, the application of social and anti-speculative criteria has recently been added to other calls for subsidies, such as the one for communal parts of buildings. For

example, the latter call also links the receipt of aid to two conditions: extending lease terms to at least five years (the Spanish government's recent Executive Decree 7/2019 has now set the

minimum period at five years but, until its approval, it had been three) and maintaining rent prices within the bracket established by the rent price index. Another example of a call with a social purpose is the one aimed at renovating vacant dwellings so they can be added to Barcelona's Rental Housing Pool.

In 2019, Pedrals explained, Barcelona City Council has kept its commitment to renovation policies and diversifying subsidies with that aim, to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable groups, as well as applying social and anti-speculative measures linked to the receipt of those subsidies.

NÚRIA PEDRALS, architect:

**“Barcelona City Council has concentrated the allocation of renovation grants on the most vulnerable groups and areas”**



## A revived Barcelona Observatory for Architectural Renovation, a space for debating, agreeing on and innovating policies in the field

She also added that an observatory had recently been revived to promote renovation in Barcelona, in which various city political, social and economic players were taking part, to discuss and seek consensual solutions in this matter. This is the Barcelona Observatory for Architectural Renovations (OBRA) which, besides Barcelona City Council, comprises various professional organisations, associations and guilds from the property sector, the world of architecture, engineering and property management, as well as public and private land and housing developers, representatives of the residents movement and the universities. More recently they have been joined by players from the financial world, the third sector and the energy-saving sector.

Besides working to improve several aspects linked to renovation policies (calls for grant applications, funding for renovation work, tax systems for subsidies and so on), Pedrals explained the observatory will also be working on strategies to revitalise and innovate renovation in several areas.

She believes that one of the top priorities for the future has to be strengthening sustainability and energy-efficiency criteria in renovation processes. She sees that as a natural development, as a stage beyond “Barcelona, posa’t guapa” (make yourself beautiful) the famous slogan under which the city had promoted the improvement and renovation of various buildings and architectural features, from the 1990s to the start of the 21st century. In the opinion of Núria Pedrals, now it is necessary to take another step and promote the city’s “energy renovation”. 📌



Above, renovation of the Canyelles neighbourhood. Below, Núria Pedrals during her talk at the FHAR.

# 8

## Santa Coloma de Gramenet's experience in creating a conservation and renovation area



PRESENTATION  The "Santa Coloma Renovem els Barris" Municipal Renovation Plan



**JOAN MANEL GONZÁLEZ**

SANTA COLOMA DE GRAMENET

Santa Coloma de Gramenet municipal architect.

The Catalan Act of 2007 on the Right to Housing gives local authorities the capacity to declare and delimit conservation and renovation areas (ACRs) within their municipal boundaries. The aim is to promote building renovation in especially run-down areas to prevent situations of risk for social cohesion. Few local authorities have made use of this faculty since then. Santa Coloma de Gramenet, together with Barcelona, is one of them, as the **municipal architect, Joan Manel González** explained.

JOAN MANEL GONZÁLEZ, Santa Coloma municipal architect:

**"We need to promote renovation, because Santa Coloma's buildings are very old and we don't have any more space in the city to grow in"**

Gonzalez gave the reasons that led Santa Coloma de Gramenet City Council to take this step forward. On the one hand, the city's housing stock, consisting of 6,069 residential buildings with 51,710 dwellings, is "very old". According to municipal data, 81.51% of the buildings were built before 1980, and 60.95% of the blocks with more than three floors have no lift, added to which are insulation problems in many cases. Furthermore, Santa Coloma, with 120,000 residents, is reaching the limit of its possibilities for growth. Renovation is therefore the only way to modernise the housing stock.

With such a high number of buildings to be renovated, Santa Coloma City Council has decided to start the renovation processes in the most vulnerable areas, until now the ones requesting fewer subsidies for that purpose in many cases, owing to a lack of knowledge or resources for processing them. The City Council has delimited several neighbourhoods in the south of the city – Fondo, Santa Rosa,

Raval and Can Mariner – as priority renovation sectors for the next 20 years. With this aim in mind, it has delimited several conservation and renovation areas (ACRs) that each group together between 350 and 400 dwellings.

Having done that, the City Council can start its renovation work in the area and the first step is to establish a system for collaborating with the corresponding communities of owners, by signing an agreement with each of them. Under that agreement, the owners authorise the City Council to apply for subsidies or sign contracts on their behalf for technical plans, work plans and technical assistance for the renovations. The City Council subsequently takes charge of these procedures, initially bearing the costs but later passing those onto the owners. Each of them has to pay the City Council an interest-free portion of the costs of the work proportional to their ownership coefficient. To make payment conditions easier for owners, the City Council offers them different alternatives: payments in 60 monthly instalments over 5 years, which most owners opt for, or paying 50% of the corresponding amount at the start of the work and 50% at the end. Those experiencing greater financial difficulties can also register to apply for help in paying their renovation expenses.

The City Council has so far carried out renovation work in one of the delimited ACRs, on Carrer de Pirineus in the Santa Rosa neighbourhood of Santa Coloma de Gramenet, with 32 properties and 386 dwellings. The municipal architect pointed out that during this process preliminary work and meetings with the communities served to identify intermediaries to help get the renovations off the ground and to diagnose the situation of buildings and their tenants. Hence

JOAN MANEL GONZÁLEZ believes  
**“community mediation”  
 is crucial for carrying out  
 property renovations in  
 collaboration with property  
 owners.**

his emphasis of the importance of “community mediation”.

This preliminary work with the communities allowed the Council to find out the social, economic and cultural situation of each household and any problems between neighbours, as well as detect situations of energy poverty or the need for improved technical comfort. The Council also identified the dwellings involved in eviction processes or subject to other conveyances through sale or inheritance and with incidences over their ownership.

All that enabled the renovation process priorities to be established and determine what could or not be done in agreement with the communities. The result of all that was a renovation process “combining the features of public procurement with property management work and everyday life in the community”.

González warned that these processes are long and that implementing each ACR requires a period of six years, from the start of the initial studies to completion of the work, and between eight and twelve years if we consider the final payment instalments. He also warned of the current difficulties and limitations, such as the lack of financial resources for improving the energy efficiency of buildings that need renovating in several areas of the city, when communities cannot afford them, and the fact that the accessibility code does not reflect the reality of numerous

existing buildings, because it does not allow lifts to be installed in some properties with little available space.

## **Santa Coloma City Council calls for more renovation funding from the supra-municipal authorities**

He is in favour of simplifying various administrative procedures because they are long and bureaucratic, making the most of the advantages of the technological means, while warning of the digital gap in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods. Furthermore, he believes specific applications would have to be created for the administrative and financial management behind receiving instalments, requiring a big effort on the part of the local authority, and that technical profiles would have to be broadened to include community management capacities, which have to be distinguished from those of property managers.

He also called for funding renovation work to be made easier. First, he pointed out that most renovation subsidies do not provide for the authorities acting on behalf of the owners and aggregating the demand. Second, he warned that VAT regulations do not provide for such initiatives among those with the lower VAT rate, thereby penalising the most vulnerable groups.

Finally, he called for the promotion of subsidies and plans that provide for comprehensive urban regeneration initiatives, and appealed to the supra-municipal authorities to make a bigger financial effort in renovation processes which, in his opinion, exceed the economic capacities of local authorities. 🏡



Joan Manel González and Núria Pedrals, at the FHAR.



The FHAR audience in the MACBA auditorium.



Architect Josep Casas moderated the FHAR session on collaboration and monitoring for ensuring the proper use of housing.

# 09

## Public-private collaboration in promoting affordable housing



# Collaboration between the public authorities, the private sector and the third sector to expand affordable housing



SESSION ▶ Co-production with non-profit or limited-profit enterprises

PRESENTATION 📄 'Co-production with non-profit or limited-profit enterprises'

According to various experts, making the private sector co-responsible is essential for ensuring the expansion of the affordable housing stock in Catalonia and approaching European levels. **Ricard Fernández, the Social Rights manager at Barcelona City Council**, also stressed this idea in his talk on the co-production of housing by the Council and non-profit or limited-profit enterprises. He gave several reasons for co-production: to acquire the necessary land and funding, all the more so in a context of restricting public budgets and public borrowing capacity; to reach certain social sectors outside the authorities' reach; to promote innovation or greater efficiency, and even as a constitutional requirement, given that the Carta Magna establishes the social function of private property.

For Ricard Fernández, collaboration with the private sector reflects the same aim to network and reach agreements that the City Council maintains with many other social

players. In that regard, he pointed out that the City Council has promoted the Citizen Agreement for an Inclusive Barcelona, made up of 167 organisations and organisation networks dedicated to promoting social inclusion and reducing inequalities. Under this agreement, a city strategy has been approved which considers it a priority to reduce the burden that the cost of housing represents for families. More specifically, it provides for reducing by one third the number of households that have to allocate more than 40% of their annual income to housing expenses. In 2016, 19.3% of Barcelona's families (127,959 in total) allocated close to half of their income to housing.

One of the mechanisms for achieving this goal is the co-production of housing policy. This was established under Barcelona City Council's Right to Housing Plan for 2016-2025, which considers collaboration between public, private and third-sector players to be crucial.



**RICARD FERNÁNDEZ**

BARCELONA

Manager for Social Rights at Barcelona City Council.



Since the start of the current municipal term of office, the municipal manager of Social Rights has believed that affordable-housing co-production “is modest in number, but important in concept”, to get the idea across that enterprises and the third sector have to take a share of the responsibility. Among the actions carried out, he mentioned competitions for land and building leases for cooperative and foundation cohousing, agreements with Hàbitat 3 (from the Catalan Third Social Sector Institutions Committee), API and property managers for mobilising vacant housing for social and affordable rent, the 30% measure, agreements with big property owners and housing projects for groups at risk of social exclusion, among others.

RICARD FERNÁNDEZ,  
the municipal manager  
for Social Rights:

**“The Barcelona Metropolis Housing project stems from the need to co-produce housing with the private sector and with a metropolitan vision”**

This is crucial, in his opinion, for tackling the challenge of housing co-production from a metropolitan perspective: “The real city is the metropolitan city. There are limits within Barcelona proper which make it impossible to solve the housing problem”. In addition, he thinks Barcelona has “to show solidarity with the new centres” being created in other municipalities, and that the various metropolitan cities have to tackle the problems they have in this area, as in others, together, by overcoming the resistance to cooperation that exists today.

Out of this double perspective – in defence of co-production with a metropolitan view – came the **Habitatge Metròpolis Barcelona** project. This project aims to deal with the scarcity of affordable housing in Barcelona and bring us closer to the 15% affordable housing set by European standards. More specifically, there is a target of building 4,500 dwellings allocated to affordable rental housing in several stages up to 2028, each with a floor area of 70 m<sup>2</sup>. These will be under the general officially protected system (7.28 euros/m<sup>2</sup>) or the state-assisted system (8.89 euros/m<sup>2</sup>) and below the market price, which is currently around 12 euros/m<sup>2</sup>.

The tool for achieving this would be an affordable housing metropolitan operator, made up of Barcelona City Council and the Barcelona Metropolitan Authority (BMA), with the aim of promoting and managing affordable rental flats in the metropolitan area. That way it would become the main public-private operator for this type of housing.

At the same time, the operator would convey the production of these flats through the joint venture company Habitatge Metròpolis Barcelona, SA. This company was incorporated at the start of 2019 by Barcelona City Council and the BMA, pending the incorporation of a private partner with considerable knowledge of the sector. That partner, besides being a shareholder, will manage the housing stock and have an initial five-year commitment to the venture. Fernández believes that will not undermine public control, as the authorities will be able to intervene in the company's corporate bodies, where necessary. He also asserted that the company will maintain a balance between the public and private presence. In addition, the profits will be limited to dividends of around 4%.

So far, the project has still not got off the ground. The deadline for submitting offers for incorporating a private housing partner has been postponed until 31 July. But Fernández remains hopeful and highlighted the importance of starting affordable housing co-production between public and private players as soon as possible. 📌

# Housing alternatives from the social and cooperative economy: public support for cohousing

## 9.2.1

### The cohousing model in Barcelona



SESSION:  
Community  
co-production:  
assigned-use  
cooperatives and  
Community Land  
Trusts

Faced with the increase in property market prices, the social, solidarity and cooperative economy is also promoting affordable housing alternatives, something which needs increasing attention. **Vanesa Valiño, the chief of staff at the Councillor's Office for Housing and Renovation at Barcelona City Council**, explained how the local authority is promoting these cohousing alternatives in the city, as part of a more comprehensive strategy to revitalise the cooperative movement. Since 2015, the City Council has given its support to over 800 cooperative projects in Barcelona, promoted by the city's social network and the community.

As an example of public sector collaboration with the community, Valiño cites the case of Can Batlló, the former factory complex in the Sants neighbourhood of La Bordeta, which now combines spaces for local community activities with public facilities and affordable housing. At the beginning of March 2019, Barcelona City Council's Economy Committee approved the assigned use of Can Batlló to neighbourhood associations so that they



Interior of La Borda, the cooperative housing building in Can Batlló.

could manage the activities they do there for a period of 30 years, extendible to a further twenty.

And it is precisely the Can Batlló complex that houses the first cooperative housing block to have been built on municipal land in Barcelona. That was the aim behind which Barcelona City Council handed over the building lease of a plot of land in this complex to the **La Borda** cooperative. The building, consisting of 28 dwellings, has been a reality since the end of last year and its tenants, besides having their own home, share a communal laundry, kitchen and dining-room, among other things.

To boost these types of experiences even more, Valiño explained that the first step at the start of this municipal term involved setting up a cohousing board comprising a number of stakeholders who help to promote this model in the city: cooperatives, ethical banks offering loans for this purpose and other social players in the city. According to Ms Valiño, “the aim behind the board was to be capable of co-producing assigned-use cooperative housing in the city”. Under this model, a cooperative is the owner of a block of flats and its members, by paying an affordable monthly sum – in the case of La Borda, ranging from 400 to 680 euros – can live in their flat indefinitely. In other words, they have an exclusive right to it even though they are not its owners.

Following the establishment of this board, the City Council made its first invitation to tender for a plot of land for cooperative housing in 2016 and is currently working on a second invitation to tender for three plots of land, according to the chief of staff at the Councillor’s Office for Housing and Renovation.

This process, warned Valiño, has given rise to scenarios that had not been envisaged, for instance, “the introduction of the logic of competition in a sector that did not compete” in the face of a call for public competitions for awarding land, something that was making the City Council rethink several aspects of the invitation-to-tender process. She also explained that they were compelled to make a change to the General Metropolitan Plan: “We

had to amend it so that the cooperatives were not obliged to make parking spaces. When we came to power, you could build sustainable housing but urban-planning regulations forced you to build parking spaces”. This amendment exempts protected dwellings as well as those with an accredited environmental-efficiency rating from having to meet this obligation. Such is the case with La Borda, a building constructed mainly out of wood, where special account has been taken of energy-efficiency criteria and the aim has been to do away with the need for parking spaces.

To give continuity to the cohousing model, Valiño underscored above all the need to achieve political consensus around this issue, and warned: “It’s not clear among the Left. There are groups that say all public housing has to be rental. Our plan says that public renting has to represent 80%, but that we need to combine it with other methods. But there is no political agreement here”. On the other hand, she explained that there were several views on opting for cohousing in the world of the social and solidarity economy.

Another very important obstacle was “institutional machinery”, because “anything new to the authority is very difficult”, she pointed out.

She believes the City Council has a long history of promoting public housing and that it is hard to vary this model, although a way has to be found to make the institution “believe in the model and adopt it”.

As with any change of paradigm, it is not an easy challenge, but the municipal manager called for every effort to be made in this direction: “Faced with the commercialisation

of housing, land and our lives, this model builds more individualised ties with the neighbourhoods and cities”. She concluded by quoting Ivan Miró, recalling that, for this leading figure in the cooperative movement, “what is at stake in this model is the idea of modernity, so, if we manage to establish the notion that this is modern, this housing alternative will grow”. 🏡

VANESSA VALIÑO, the Chief of Staff of the Councillor’s Office for Housing at Barcelona City Council:

**“A political consensus is required for cohousing to be promoted and for the model to be believed in and adopted by the institutional machinery”**

## 9.2.2

### Assigned-use housing: the experience of the Balearic Islands



**MARIA ANTÒNIA  
GARCÍAS ROIG**

PALMA DE MALLORCA

Managing Director of the Balearic  
Institute of Housing.

 PRESENTATION  
Cohabita

 INTERVIEW

The government of the Balearic Islands has also been committed to the alternative of cohousing since 2015, with a model that has some particular features. Thus explained **Maria Antònia Garcías Roig, the Managing Director of the Balearic Institute of Housing.**

The Balearic government has held a competition for assigning five plots of public land to assigned-use housing cooperatives, granting them building leases for a term of 75 years, extendible to 99 years. The Director of the Housing Institute explained that they had opted for submitting already defined cohousing projects to public competition, so that several cooperatives could opt to implement them: “This does not allow cooperative members to start work on their own project from the beginning, although it does represent a financial saving for them, as they no longer have to allocate resources to designing it”.

The public competition awarded extra points to aspects such as the project's contribution to communal life and building ties with the neighbourhood, sustainability and energy impact (reducing water expenses, opting for solar energy, etc.), use of local products in construction, quality control and ethical funding.

MARIA ANTÒNIA GARCÍAS ROIG,  
Balearic Institute of Housing:

**“Assigned-use  
cooperative  
housing ‘creates  
a neighbourhood’,  
thereby promoting  
relations among local  
residents”**



Garcías Roig defined assigned-use housing as a model “straddling the line between buying and renting”, allowing members to access housing at an affordable price, with monthly payments below market rent prices. She also pointed out that cohousing helps to “create a neighbourhood”, thereby promoting relations between the tenants in common spaces and with the community. Finally, she highlighted its flexibility, as any member can leave the cooperative and others can join it. Social and economic criteria are taken into account in the requirements for becoming a cooperative member, thereby encouraging families on low incomes to join.



The Director of the Balearic Institute of Housing highlighted the implementation of this innovative model, in an autonomous region where the culture of ownership as a form of access to housing remains deeply ingrained and was even prevalent until very recently in officially protected housing developments. “We did not start making officially protected rental housing until this term of office; we believe that public investment has to be maintained”, she concluded.

In short, promoting public rental housing combined with assigned-use dwellings are two of the main commitments pledged by the Balearic Islands’ government. 🇮🇵



From top to bottom: Maria Antònia Garcías Roig, Vanesa Valiño and the session moderator, Mara Ferreri, a post-doctorate researcher at the IGOP (UAB).

## 9.2.3

# The Austrian benchmark: combining public action and limited-profit housing associations

In Austria, there has been a very strong public commitment to social and affordable housing on several levels (political, legal, etc.). Cooperation between public and private players has also been crucial. One out of every four people around the country lives in public flats (17%), or in housing promoted by the limited profit housing associations (LPHAs) (7%). These are private organisations, mostly cooperatives but public companies as well that build and, to a lesser extent, renovate housing.

**Gerald Koessler, a representative of the Austrian Federation of LPHAs,** explained the features of this model during the Housing and Renovation Forum, to put the framework in which these associations work into context.

He emphasised that by combining this double system (public housing and housing associations), Austria has the second highest proportion of social and affordable housing in the European Union, just behind the Netherlands, adding that, while it might seem paradoxical, this has been achieved by allocating 0.3% of its GNP to housing, four decimal points below the EU average. An apparent contradiction explained by the particular system for funding the country's housing policies. Austrian institutions focus most of their



SESSION  Co-production with non-profit or limited-profit enterprises



**GERALD KOESSL**

AUSTRIA

Representative of the Federation of Limited-Profit Housing Associations in Austria.



PRESENTATION OF  
'The Austrian Model of Limited Profit Housing Associations'



INTERVIEW

GERALD KOESSL, of the Federation of Limited-Profit Housing Associations in Austria:

**“In Austria, loans are provided for building housing and, in exchange, we ask that its price be affordable”**

spending on housing (90%) in the form of returnable loans so they “are entries that do not represent any increase in public debt under the criteria set out by the EU”, he explained. In addition, there is also another difference between the Austrian system and the general trend in Europe: most of the loans are for building and not for housing subsidies.

In his opinion, one of the most important features in this loans system lies in including restrictions on house prices among its award criteria. That way the loans system helps to guarantee prices people can afford.

These building subsidies are open not just to LPHAs but also to other private providers. Building is funded mainly with long-term loans awarded by regional governments – with systems that are different in each region – at a reduced interest of around 1%. LPHAs combine this system of funding with others (non-refundable subsidies, bank mortgages, etc.) to go ahead with their housing developments.

## More than a quarter of dwellings in Austria are built by limited-profit housing associations

Within the framework of the Austrian housing system, Koessler explained the features and running of these associations in more detail. He started off by recalling their origins, which date back to the end of the 19th century and start of the 20th, coinciding with the industrialisation of the large cities, which many people moved to in search of work and, consequently, housing too. Promoted by the cooperative movement, the first housing associations created at that time to meet these new needs, although their growth did not accelerate until after the Second World War.

Today, there are 185 LPHAs throughout Austria (98 cooperatives and 77 public companies of various types), all grouped under the Austrian Federation of Housing Associations. They have a stock of 923,000 dwellings, 71% of which are for renting, and on average each LPHA manages 5,000, although there are associations of various sizes, from small ones managing 8 flats to the largest, in charge of 40,000.

Overall, they have considerable weight when it comes to housing construction. They are building between 12,000 and 15,000 dwellings, between 25% and 30% of the total number of flats being constructed around the country. The extent of their housing stock enables them to provide housing solutions not just for families on low incomes but also to the middle class. There is a strong social mix among these dwellings' tenants. The high quality of the flats built and the application of technological innovation to building more sustainable houses, better adapted to people's needs, should also be noted.

GERALD KOESSL:

**“The associations’ main goal is to provide affordable dwellings, not financial gain”**



Koessler remarked that, even though the housing associations are private organisations, their profits are limited under the legislation regulating them, which dates back to the start of the 20th century. Shareholders' dividends are limited and that most of their profits are reinvested in building or renovating affordable housing (mostly building), the only activity they are allowed to do. It also needs to be pointed out that they are subject to special audit and monitoring rules.

Their main goal is to provide long-term continuity in the provision of affordable housing and the rent prices of their flats are strongly regulated: "They may not receive anything more or less than what it costs to build and maintain the homes".

The average price of the flats is 6.8 euros per m<sup>2</sup> (23% below the market price). Given their social contribution, they are exempt from paying the equivalent to corporation tax in Austria. It needs to be borne in mind that they are currently facing rising land prices and building costs.

In addition, Koessler pointed out that the LPHAs help to stabilise the housing market and the labour market – by creating jobs – as they act as a countercyclical force. In other words, they building more housing when the private sector makes less.

Proof of the social contribution housing associations make is their high rate of acceptance among the population: 92% believe they are important and 70% think they will be even more so in the future. In that regard, Koessler said one of their future challenges would be to meet the high demand for affordable housing in urban areas.



Gerald Koessler and Ricard Fernández during their talks at the FHAR, moderated by Anna Gener, the Chair of Aguirre Newman.



## Vienna's experience: a city housing model with political consensus



SESSION  
Generating  
affordable  
rental housing



**BOJAN  
SCHNABL**

VIENNA  
Vienna City  
Council's  
Housing  
Research  
Unit



PRESENTATION  
'Social resp.  
Subsidized  
Housing in  
Vienna'



INTERVIEW

In a later talk **Bojan Schnabl, a member of Vienna City Council's Housing Research Unit**, explained the model specifically followed by Austria's capital in this area. The total number of public flats and flats promoted by limited profit housing associations in Vienna represents 45% of the total stock of dwellings (25% public and a further 20% from LPHAs), 21 points above the national average. The capital currently has 220,000 public dwellings and a further 182,000 from LPHAs.

Within the framework of a well-structured system of housing policies around the country, Vienna City Council wanted to take a further step. So it has established a city model for housing policies and urban planning based on a wide political consensus between public and private players.

Schnabl remarked that this political consensus is not strictly confined to housing policies but reflects the development of a more sustainable city model from a social, economic and environmental perspective, in line with the United Nations' goals against climate change. He explained that Vienna's housing policies and urban planning promote sustainable development, for example, by taking

into account energy efficiency criteria in constructing and renovating buildings, another priority area

of action in the city. Likewise, they are being implemented under urban-mix criteria, to keep gentrification processes at a minimum, and they are also regarded as a source of jobs.

Public land management is another pillar of this model. Schnabl considers it a very positive development that a new category of land use, for subsidised housing, has recently been incorporated into the Vienna Building Code. Finally, he highlighted the need for a sustainable funding system in housing policies. The Austrian capital allocates close to 600 million euros a year to housing policies, combining the loans system for building or renovating dwellings applied all around the country with subsidies to a sinking fund or help with housing payments for groups with more difficulties.

Nearly half (45%) of the municipal housing stock is for letting. "In Vienna it is just as profitable to let out a flat than to sell it", Schnabl explained. He also highlighted the strict protection of tenants' rights and pointed out that leases are periodic with prices set at 5.58 euros per m<sup>2</sup> in the case of municipal flats. He believes this also puts pressure on the free market to drop its housing prices.

If this model is to function, the involvement public and private players is crucial. Schnabl explained public players such as municipal enterprises, private companies competing in public tenders and limited profit housing associations are involved in managing, building and renovating land and dwellings. Integrating all of these into a single model promoted by the public authorities is essential for guaranteeing the right to housing, according to Bojan Schnabl, who concluded by saying: "If the private market in the current circumstances is incapable of meeting the housing needs of 75% of the population, it's obvious that public intervention is necessary". 📌

BOJAN SCHNABL:

**"Vienna's housing policies are enshrined in more comprehensive sustainable development goals"**

## 9.2.4

# The experience of community land trusts in Brussels



**JOAQUÍN DE SANTOS**

BELGIUM

Head of the Brussels Community Land Trust's Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities (SHICC) European project.

 PRESENTATION  
'The Community Land Trust model'

 INTERVIEW

Brussels' social and community fabric has embarked on another affordable housing alternative, promoted from the bottom up. This is the community land trust (CLT), a model that Brussels has exported for the first time to continental Europe from the United States and which is based, to a certain extent, on inverse criteria to those of assigned-use housing. Whereas under the latter it is the authorities that own the land and the cooperative that owns the block of dwellings built on that assigned-use land, in the CLTs, it is the collective that owns the land, and the flats themselves belong to different individuals (or entities).

According to the international organisation Word Habitat, a community land trust is a non-profit organisation, controlled by a community that possesses, deploys and manages local assets at the service of the common good. Its goal is to acquire land and assets in perpetuity for the benefit of a specific locality or community.

Community land trusts are currently found in several countries throughout the world (the United States, Canada, the UK, France, Kenya and so on) and present considerable diversity. Apart from developing the social, commercial or community fabric, the collective ownership of the land may only be used to enable access to housing. CLTs may be adapted to

both urban and rural environments as well as to various sizes, from a block of houses to an entire province. It is estimated that in all there are more than 500 CLTs worldwide.

In the case of the Brussels Community Land Trust (BCLT), **Joaquín de Santos, the head of the BCLT's Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities (SHICC) European project**, explained the main goal is to "guarantee that city residents, especially those in more vulnerable situations, can have a suitable dwelling", and thereby help them to enjoy full social integration.

JOAQUÍN DE SANTOS  
(Brussels Community Land Trust):

**"The land belongs to the community and the dwellings to each of the owners, who buy them at an affordable price with the undertaking they will respect profit restrictions if they sell them"**



De Santos during his intervention at the FHAR.

Despite their considerable diversity, both in Brussels and in the various parts of the world where they have been introduced, CLTs share certain features. First, their model of ownership is hybrid, that is, the land is collectively owned while the dwellings belong to individual owners, in some cases cooperatives or associations. Second, the affordability of the dwellings is guaranteed, given that a condition for owners to be able to acquire them at an affordable price is precisely that, if they to sell them later on, they have to respect certain profit restrictions.

It should also be added that all CLTs are open to citizen participation and have a community management model. Normally a third of their administrators represent the residents, a third residents and civil society in the area and a third the public sector. In that regard Joaquín de Santos pointed out that the BCLT also aims to promote the “integration in the neighbourhood” of the community’s residents, as well as their “empowerment”. They work with future residents, organising workshops on architecture, energy management, positive community life, non-violent communication and so on. The future residents are also involved in the process of the project’s design and construction.

Finally, he pointed out the responsibility of the CLT’s board of directors in ensuring the project’s continuity and permanence over time. For that, permanent contact with the community’s residents is essential, as is having a good knowledge of their situation and needs, to prevent possible socio-economic problems or problems in the community.

## Brussels has imported the United States' CLT experience to continental Europe

Joaquín de Santos says that the idea of export this model to Brussels came about as a result of the severe housing crisis that affected the city during the first decade of the 21st century. In that context, a group of people from Brussels attending an international conference on housing cooperatives in France in 2008 discovered the experience of the CLTs in the United States, where these communities have been in existence for over 50 years. The same year, the world's biggest CLT, the Champlain Housing Trust in Burlington, set up in 1983 and promoted by Bernie Sanders, the city's then mayor, received the UN's World Habitat Award. A small delegation from Brussels subsequently took the opportunity to travel to Burlington to study its model and, just one year later, the Brussels Community Land Trust was established.

After intense awareness-raising work with the city's various political and social players, at the end of 2012 the platform managed to get the Brussels regional government to officially recognise the CLT and start providing public funding to get it off the ground. The BCLT is currently implementing ten projects of this type in the city, including L'Arc-en-Ciel, a community of 32 dwellings that is in the process of being completed and where the first residents will arrive in September 2019. It will also house a local branch of a feminist association.

The BCLT had received various recognitions and awards since its inception, though its representative warned of the difficulties that they have encountered and of the many challenges they still face in the future. Those challenges included finding an appropriate legal model, given that it was the first time this model had been

used in continental Europe. He also believes it is necessary to strengthen the political support for these initiative, to continue improving participation and internal life of the communities and to diversify the funding sources to avoid exclusive dependence on public aid.

In his view, there has to be a commitment to extending CLTs in Europe and he explained that a research group at the University of Cordoba was investigating how to implement CLTs in the Spanish State. According to Joaquín de Santos, there are many reasons for doing that, because community land trusts are "a flexible tool for providing access to housing and urban renovation", which creates communities to the benefit of the common good "in perpetuity" and which, moreover, help to coordinate collective and individual interests and citizen empowerment. ▶

# 10

## Housing for new models of living together



# The Netherlands, a model country in social and intergenerational cohousing



SESSION ● Intergenerational housing. Approaches to the various living needs

With over 30 years' experience behind her as an architect, **Ana Fernández** has spent most of her career in the Netherlands, promoting housing projects with social purposes, including many intergenerational or social cohousing projects. She is currently a partner at **Cohousing\_LAB**, a services firm working to pass on this experience to Catalonia.

She highlighted that the essential thing about cohousing projects is the central role of the people who will be living in them and that her firm is dedicated to revitalising the design process for each of these housing blocks and to contributing their expertise. This process had to be participatory and to involve the community members.

Intergenerational cohousing is a type of cooperative housing conceived for groups with different ages and needs living together. This is still a new experience in Catalonia, as are the cooperative housing initiatives as a whole. However, it is not the case in the Netherlands, where housing

cooperatives promoting cohousing alternatives have strong roots. This has been particularly true since the mid-twentieth century.

Fernández explained that the Dutch government supports these associations to promote affordable dwellings for people, for example, by providing them with land at low prices or cutting their work-permit costs.

Housing associations currently enjoy special importance in the country's property market, given that 60% of the social rental housing stock is in the hands of these cooperatives.

Cooperative housing also include several intergenerational housing experiences. Ana Fernández outlined some of those she has been professionally involved in during her stay in the Netherlands.



**ANA FERNÁNDEZ**  
BARCELONA  
Architect.

## A project initially for young people which is turning into an intergenerational one by decision of the community itself

She began by talking of an experience dating back to 1976 in the city of Groningen, in the north of the country, which involved alterations to a building listed as a monument. It was initially promoted by a group of young people, most of whom still live in the building and are now approaching their 70s. As time passed, the project “became an intergenerational one by decision of the community itself”. As young people have joined, they have seen the benefits that intergenerational communal life brings the community: diversity, learning, exchanges, mutual support, etc. Fernández also emphasises the high adaptability of the project in response to residents’ concerns. For example, there are people in this community who wanted to do the work of a luthier and a model maker, so some old stables were turned into a workshop for doing those types of work.



Ana Fernández explained several intergenerational housing experiences.

## Young people and dependent old people with reduced mobility living together in a cohousing project

Later, in 1990, an intergenerational cohousing project was launched in Bedum, in the north-east of the Netherlands. In this case the project was conceived for a community of elderly people, with reduced mobility and a high level of dependency, living with young people (in-family or not, and whether students or working). As the young people have no mobility problems, they occupy the top flats, although the ground floors have common spaces for the building’s residents to socialise with one another and with local area residents, as there is a courtyard open to the community.

## A building for a community of young people with functional diversity and independent elderly people

Fernández highlighted how each example “shows that the typological diversity in intergenerational projects is very high” and then outlined a third case, with very different profiles to those of the experience above. In the city of Hengelo, in the east of the country, some young people with physical and learning disabilities live with elderly people who still enjoy a certain independence. For the architect,



the key thing in this project has been to guarantee accessibility, seek flexible solutions – for example, it has been predicted that the number of elderly people could grow and that of young people could drop in the future, and the buildings could be adapted to this new scenario – and look for “connection points” through initiatives that could be of mutual benefit to the various members of the community. The main connection point that they had found is a restaurant, which is being run by young people with a disability and provides a catering service for elderly people, who can go there when they do not feel up to cooking. In addition, the restaurant provides a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere that encourages mutual relations between members of the community and local residents, because it is a service open to the everyone.

ANA FERNÁNDEZ, architect:

**“In intergenerational and social housing experiences it is essential ‘to create collaboration spaces’ with communities in order to understand ‘how they want to live’”**

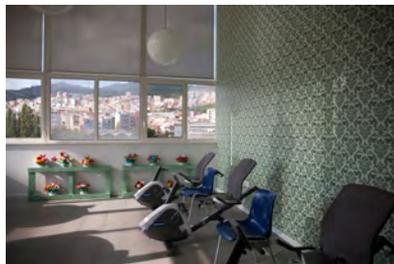
## A cohousing model for encouraging informal care

The Cohousing\_LAB member also highlighted a more recent cohousing experience to encourage “informal caring”, in other words, that care a dependent person receives from someone in their family or social circle without having to turn to an external professional service. She made it clear that informal care “is institutionalised in the Netherlands, because the State has realised this model is more advantageous to it than spending money on a professional for this purpose”.

One way of encouraging this care model is to design cohousing that takes into account the needs of both the dependent persons and their carers, as the one up and running in the Dutch city of Groningen since 2016. When it came to designing this building, they took into account the fact that dependent persons would need continuous care, while carers also had to be able to keep their own sphere of personal life and enjoy their own breathing space. The key to achieving that was the two interconnected-dwellings model, where each of these people

live in a separate flat and is independent, but are close to one another at the same time and the carer can quickly attend to any need the dependent person might have. Each flat has an independent access point and a door that connects them internally, which can be closed or opened, depending on the time of the day.

In that same building, besides 22 flats for informal care such as these (11 pairs of 2 independent flats), there are 24 flats for families and 10 for young people who have just become independent. This also allows carers and dependent residents to have other, more plural and enriching spaces for interaction and community life.



## A pilot experience in Badalona adapted to the needs of people with multiple sclerosis: the aforEM cooperative

After outlining some of the many experiences there are the Netherlands, Ana Fernández explained that her firm, Cohousing-LAB, is taking part in the implementation of a social cohousing project in Catalonia. It is being promoted by the aforEM cooperative, made up of ten people who have multiple sclerosis and have suggested creating a block of flats that meet their specific needs in Badalona, the city that the various members of the community had ties with. It should be noted that they have chosen a completely flat plot of land and that the building will have a gym with a physiotherapy service and a heated swimming pool for exercising in.

There are numerous social needs this cohousing model could meet, according to Ana Fernández, who underscored the importance of architecture being capable of anticipating new trends and emerging challenges. She believes that it will be important to create adaptable spaces in the future, spaces flexible enough to be adapted to people of different ages and circumstances and, above all, “train more and more in participatory processes”. To bring about intergenerational and social housing experiences, it is essential “to create collaboration spaces” with communities to detect what their concerns are and “how they want to live”. 📌

## A time bank between elderly people who devoted their lives to farming, and young people with a slight disability: the former teach the latter how to cultivate the land and the latter offer the former their support and accompaniment

Ana Fernández rounded off her talk with an example from the town of Opende, in the north-east of the Netherlands, which is currently being developed. The aim is to bring together young people with a slight disability and elderly people who have dedicated their lives to farming, but can no longer live in the house where they had their land because they can no longer work that land and need a more accessible home. It has been the families of the young

people who have opted for this project, as there is no residence in the town that could attend to their needs, and they believe that the elderly people can teach the young people how to work the land. It will operate on the basis of a “time-bank system”, where the elderly people will teach the young people how to cultivate the land and, in exchange, the latter will offer them support or accompaniment (to go shopping, go to the doctor, clean the house and so on).

# A successful case in the Spanish State: intergenerational housing in Alicante



PRESENTATION 'Intergenerational housing'

In contrast to the Netherlands, intergenerational housing experiences in Spain are only just beginning. One of the most notable of these is the one promoted by the Alicante Municipal Housing Trust, a block of dwellings where elderly people and young people live together in Alicante's Plaça d'Àmerica. **The trust's manager, Gaspar Mayor**, told the forum about the process that led them to promote this new housing model in the city.

Given their long history in public rental management, the trust detected that elderly people presented specific needs. They are a "low-visibility" group, though they frequently suffer "a high level of vulnerability" affecting their access to decent housing, explained Gaspar Mayor.

The trust's manager explained that they initially intended to address such discrimination by establishing specific conditions for elderly people in public assigned-use housing criteria. For example, they established additional

points in the system of scales and mandatory quotas for elderly people in access to public rental housing. They also considered creating exclusive residential resources.

But they soon realised that this did not ultimately meet the specific needs of elderly people, who often "suffer defective housing conditions, for example, as regards accessibility; who suffer from unwanted loneliness and a sense of defencelessness, or can find themselves pressurised by the people round them to abandon their house against their will", Mayor explained.



**GASPAR MAYOR**

ALICANTE

Manager of the Alicante Municipal Housing Trust

GASPAR MAYOR, the Manager of the Alicante Municipal Housing Trust:

**"Housing for the elderly has to be able to adapt to the speed of changes that occur at this stage of life"**



Gaspar Mayor's talk at the FHAR, moderated by the architect Carles Baiges.

Once these needs had been diagnosed, the Alicante Municipal Housing Trust came to the following conclusions: first, housing-solution waiting times had to be cut; second, community housing programmes had to be promoted where the elderly gave one another mutual support, and third, dwellings had to be designed that were capable of being quickly adapted to the changes that occur at this stage of life. Referring to that, Gaspar Mayor argued: "From the age of 65, everything happens much faster and changes occur at a giddy pace (retirement, widowhood, illness, temporary incapacity and so on), so it is necessary to take account of this factor when designing housing policies for this group".

The Alicante Municipal Trust's first step down this road was to develop an initial block of 18 dwellings for elderly people in the old city centre, in the "Lonja de Caballeros". Despite this initial experience not working at all, it did represent an important lesson. "Two residents died a few months after the building – where only elderly people were living – had gone into service. That forced us to do something, to raise people's moral, and we decided a few young people should come to the building to try it out, without any further commitment. By chance, a young man and an elderly woman established a very close relationship and the results of their mutual support showed us the path we had to follow". Thus Gaspar Mayor explained how they decided to embark on the initiative, ten years ago now, of an intergenerational block of flats.

It is a block of 72 rental flats with some communal services, where 56 elderly people and 16 young people are currently living. It has mostly been financed with public funding and a mortgage loan that was paid back in instalments by its tenants. These are affordable instalments of 150 euros a month, added to which are another 50 euros for current expenses. So far no one has defaulted.

The building has a health centre and a day centre, plus parking spaces on a concessionary basis and a porter's service. Gaspar Mayor explained that it is located on municipal land in a working-class Alicante neighbourhood, for which block of flats has become an "icon".

The Housing Trust's manager detailed the requirements that the tenants have to satisfy. Elderly people had to be over the age of 65 and can live there indefinitely provided they continue to meet the conditions for living there independently, whereas young people have to be under the age of 35 and cannot live there longer than 7 years or after they have turned 35. Young people are also asked to make a commitment to the community and show solidarity with the elderly people they live with, something that was especially valued in the award system for the flats. Family members of elderly people residing in the block are also required to show a commitment to their care.

To be eligible for one of these dwellings, potential occupants cannot be the owner of a flat and, where elderly people had a flat in poor conditions or which was inaccessible, they would have to assign it to the municipal affordable rental housing programme. Rent criteria are also set: tenants' income may not exceed 2.5 times the IPREM (currently 7,519 euros a year). In addition to income, other vulnerability factors are taken in account in the case of elderly people in the award process (loneliness, accessibility or habitability of the flat where they were before) as well as the suitability of this resource for the personal situation of each one.

Gaspar Mayor stressed the advantages of this model, which has become an intergenerational housing benchmark in Spain and other countries and has received several awards. In his opinion it helps to "solve housing problems with affordable rent prices" for elderly people and young people, to "promote the exchange of experiences and values and improve mutual respect and appreciation". To encourage community life, the block has common spaces (for reading, computers, television, music, workshops and festive or social

GASPAR MAYOR:

**"Intergenerational housing enables elderly people to feel less lonely and to make their independent lives last longer, and it helps young people to improve their self-esteem and feel useful"**

activities, allotments, gym equipment and so on) and each floor has separate uses, so that all the tenants who wish to do the same activity have to coincide.

In the case of elderly people, Mayor believes that intergenerational housing helps to "protect against isolation, loneliness and fear, to improve their quality of life and state of mind and to make their independence last longer". As for young people, it also improves "their self-esteem and sense of being useful".

Although the young people help to liven up the community, Mayor pointed out that they have found the elderly people have a greater capacity for self-organisation than they expected: "We created the project thinking that it would be the young people who would get the work committees going. But we find that many elderly people are active in the groups. They've organised themselves. For example, they have organised a committee for cases of illness: they receive the person, look after the neighbour who needs help for a period...".

For the Alicante Housing Trust's manager, the success of this project lies in having managed "to transform a building of flats into an active and participatory community, which practically doesn't need municipal supervision and where people can live together almost like a family". 🏡

# How can dwellings be adapted to the development of social changes from a gender perspective?



PRESENTATION  'Dwellings for long and diverse lives: intergenerationality and equality'



**ZAIDA  
MUXÍ**  
BARCELONA  
Architect.

 INTERVIEW

Lifestyles change over time and designing housing has to take that into account to adapt buildings to the needs of the people in each era and historical context. We must not lose sight of “why and for who we build houses for”, insisted **the architect Zaida Muxí**.

Reflections on this issue come from way back and there were many authors who had theorise about that. Around the Industrial Revolution, between the beginning of the 19th and 20th centuries, many thinkers who championed improved living conditions for the working class also reflected on how to ensure decent housing for the population. From Flora Tristán, who fought in particular against the exploitation of women in industry, to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, not to mention Octavia Hill.

In addition, during the first half of the 20th century, several theories were advanced on how to organise urban centres, ranging from Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Theory, which

supported moderate growth for cities and a balance between the developed part and the green spaces to maintain a healthy model for life and work, to the Athens Charter, an urban-planning manifesto championing the functional separation of residential, leisure and working spaces and a reasonable urban centre density (published in 1942 by Le Sert and Le Corbusier). Added to these models were the contributions of feminist theory on how to better adapt housing to the needs of domestic and care work.

ZAIDA MUXÍ, architect:

**“The right to housing cannot be disconnected from the right to the city”**

Muxí bemoaned the fact that, from the second half of the 20th century on, a large variety of theoretical contributions on how to adapt housing to people's needs were left on the sidelines. She pointed out that, following the Second World War and the decrease in the housing stock it caused in several countries, "the notion of quantity over quality" began to prevail. This explains the subsequent spread of highly densified outlying neighbourhoods in different European and Latin American cities, with numerous small-sized, low-quality dwellings and without services, facilities, infrastructures and so on. A process began "which disconnected the right to housing from the right to the city, two concepts that ought to be closely linked", according to Muxí.

She believed there is an urgent need to reflect once more on what social housing means today. While theories on housing solutions for the working classes had been developing from the end of the 19th century to the start of the 20th century, today we needed to reflect on how to ensure the right to housing in the light of "job insecurity". Muxí identified this group with the individuals who, despite having jobs, had difficulties in paying or were unable to pay for a flat and who found no effective answer in public policies or aid for access to housing. "Housing is no longer a problem for the classes with less access to resources, but it is a widespread problem. We therefore need to think up housing solutions for all social classes", she emphasised and for whom the commercialisation of housing and lack of regulation on the part of States had made the problem even worse over the last few decades.

Muxí pointed out several present and future challenges for planning public housing policies and providing architectural solutions adapted to social needs. First, she warned, in contrast to the start of the 20th century, many cities no longer had any space left to grow in, so housing solutions would have to be

ZAIDA MUXÍ:

**"Dwellings have to be thought of for longer life cycles, taking into account the ageing of the population and diversity of household models"**

found by renovating and reforming the existing urban fabric. Second, she pointed out that, given the increase in life expectancies, dwellings will have to be conceived for longer life cycles and be capable of being adapted to the changing needs of people as they age. Population ageing, caused by the inversion of the population pyramid, also requires housing to be increasingly adapted to the needs of the elderly, while taking into account improved quality of life and independence to increasingly older ages.

Other challenges have to do with the diversification of family and household models. Muxí highlighted the paradox that even today most of the housing being built are four- or five-room flats for families with two adults and two children, when the traditional family model is losing out to other household models (people living alone, single-parent families and so on.)

## The gender perspective in urban planning and architecture

Muxí, the author of the book *Mujeres, casas y ciudades*, also insisted that the gender perspective has to be taken into account when designing dwellings and their changes over time. In that regard she referred to the comparison made by the architect and reference figure of feminist urban planning, Franziska Ullmann, on women's and men's lifestyles in the 1950s and today. During the 1950s, the life model was much more linear and presented pronounced differences between the sexes: men's studies lasted longer than women's, with men subsequently dedicating themselves to gainful employment; women studied less and later dedicated less time to gainful employment, because they practically exclusively took on all the child-rearing and carer responsibilities. Today's life model is not so linear and the various functions (training, paid and unpaid work etc.) are gradually being superimposed to a greater extent throughout life, although women continued to bear the brunt of most of the child-rearing and carer responsibilities. In the specific case of Catalonia, even today 70% of these responsibilities are being borne by women.

## A neighbourhood of women workers in Vienna, a pioneering experience

Just like **Col·lectiu Punt 6**, which works on architecture from a feminist perspective, Muxí called for rethinking dwellings by taking more account of women's point of view and the needs of child-rearing and carer responsibilities. In that regard, she mentioned Vienna's first housing project "Frauen-Werk-Stadt", the first neighbourhood for the city's women workers, launched in 1996.

Designed exclusively by women architects and urban planners, the project took mixed uses into account in particular, in other words, for the neighbourhood to incorporate buildings with various functions (dwellings, shops, facilities, health centres, schools, nursery schools, neighbourhood meeting spaces and so on). This reflects the perspective of people carrying out domestic and care work, looking after children and elderly people or people with reduced mobility, for whom having various services and centres in the same neighbourhood can make a big difference to their daily lives. This perspective is contrary to the functional segregation of neighbourhoods, which still prevails in many cities today. A good example of how gender views had been disparaged in architecture and urban planning until recent times is that legislation had to be changed before this first project could be launched. Until then, the regulations did not

allow mixed uses in projects such as this social housing one.

In Muxí's opinion it is essential for housing designs to take account of the gender perspective and, in general, the diversity of needs that people might present throughout their lives. She believes that dwellings have to be versatile and adaptable to several functions and needs: "We cannot think of dwellings merely as a domestic and private place of rest... but also as a space for sharing, for carrying out productive and reproductive work in too... which is adapted to life's various stages".

In a society where people's living circumstances are more flexible than decades ago, Muxí also supports "flexible types of housing tenure" that help with people's mobility and do not oblige them to stay put in the same place, "without that having a negative connotation while responding to people's aims".

She concluded by saying: "We need to rethink the purpose and people our housing is for and think of it as a social infrastructure – not as a market commodity – which we can change according to our living needs". 🏡



Muxí highlighted the importance of thinking of housing from a feminist point of view.

# 11

New-build and renovation  
projects promoted by  
Barcelona City Council



# New-build projects



## Gràcia district

### FLATS FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD FACILITIES ON THE SITE OF THE OLD QUIRÓN CLINIC

DISTRICT  
Gràcia

ARCHITECTS  
TJV set up by  
Espinet Ubach  
and Bajet  
Giramé

SURFACE AREA  
12,000 m<sup>2</sup>

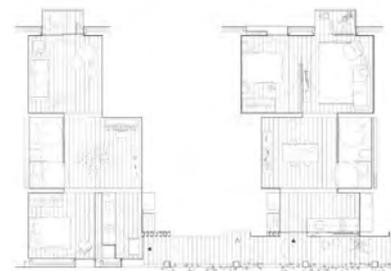
PROGRAMME  
86 dwellings  
with special  
services for  
elderly people,  
facilities and a  
Household Unit.



PRESENTATION  
by Pau Bajet  
of the old  
Quirón project

For years the residents' movement in the La Salut neighbourhood of Barcelona's Gràcia district, had been calling for the site of the old Quirón clinic, covering an area of over 12,000 m<sup>2</sup>, to be used for facilities and, pending a definitive solution, it had already appropriated the site for use as an urban allotment or outdoor film activities.

The municipal project for this site had already been announced during the 2011-2015 municipal term of office, but during this latest term of office has been redefined, also on the basis of a participatory process for local residents, and its design and construction awarded to a group of architects under a Temporary Joint Venture (TJV) formed by Espinet Ubach and Bajet Giramé. The project ultimately provides for a block of facilities, incorporating 86 dwellings with services for elderly people, as well as a youth centre, an old people's centre and a neighbourhood centre, facilities that will occupy close to 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> of the ground floor. It also provides for a pilot test of the

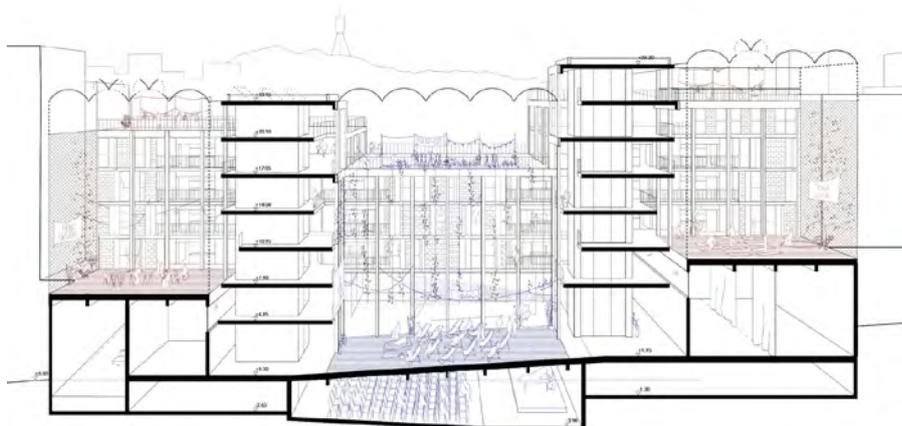




Cohabitation Unit, a space similar to a dependent old people's home with 10 bedrooms, community spaces and 24-hour-a-day continuous support.

Besides affordable rented flats for elderly people, with an average floor area of 45 m<sup>2</sup>, there will also be community areas and services (kitchen, dining room, etc.) The

current urban allotments will be moved to the terrace area and a space for film screenings relaxation will be located there. There will be a street-level bar and a 1,500 m<sup>2</sup> auditorium in the basement, plus a car park with 39 places. The building is also designed with efficiency criteria. 🏡



Plans and summary images of the old Quirón.

Sant Martí district

## SOCIAL RENTAL DWELLINGS, ELDERLY PEOPLE AND GROUP SHELTERS IN CARRER DE VENEÇUELA

### DISTRICT

Sant Martí

### ARCHITECTS

Marta Peris and  
José Toral

### PROGRAMME

80 social  
rental flats

60 shelters for  
senior citizens

The team of architects in charge of the project have called it "Fòrum Veïnal". Construction work is expected to start in 2019 and last for two years.

The Marta Peris and José Toral team of architects have won the public competition to carry out a new-build project on Carrer de Veneçuela in Barcelona's Sant Martí district. This project, now in progress, includes 80 social rental dwellings with services, 60 dwellings for elderly people with services and group accommodation to temporarily meet special accommodation needs. So, a large diversity of profiles will live together in the future housing complex: elderly people, nuclear or single-parent families, people who are single, couples without children and so on.

A particular feature of the project is that it is located on a plot of land in a passage way for which the team of architects has sought a solution to maintain it. The various parts of the housing complex will remain in line with the passage's surroundings.

The architectural project takes into account social and intergenerational criteria – hence the creation of common spaces promoting community life among the site's future residents – as well as energy efficiency criteria. A system has been designed that enables the opening and closing of the building's central atrium, depending on the time of year, so that in winter it is more watertight and maintains the temperature better, while in summer it is open more for better ventilation. It is planned to install fans that circulate air to regulate the building's temperature. 🌬️



Nou Barris district

## AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING IN TORRE BARÓ

DISTRICT  
Nou Barris

ARCHITECTS  
Jesús Arcos  
and Francisco  
Burgos

PROGRAMME  
32 affordable  
rental  
dwellings

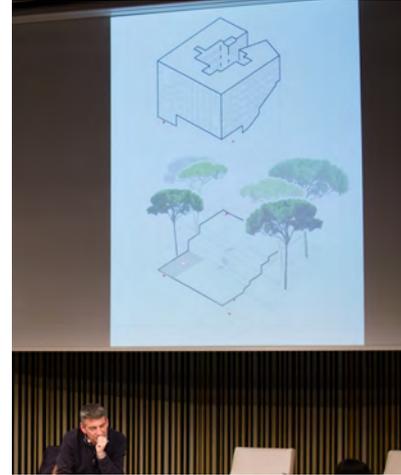


PRESENTATION  
by Jesús Arcos  
and Francisco  
Burgos, of the  
Escolapi Càncer  
project

As part of a series of Barcelona City Council actions to promote affordable rental housing in the Torre Baró neighbourhood (Nou Barris district), a new-build housing block is being built between Carrer Castelldefels and Avinguda de l'Escolapi Càncer. The architectural project has been awarded to the architects Jesús Arcos (from Aldayjover Arquitectura y Paisaje) and Francisco Burgos (from Burgos & Garrido Arquitectos). It is the block called Torre Baró E Block.

One of the project's main features is that the structure of the buildings is adapted to the area's terrain. The housing complex stands on a steep slope so the height of the building is reduced as you go up the slope. At its maximum height, on the lowest point of the slope, it has five storeys, plus a terrace and a ground floor. "This is about turning a slope into an opportunity", explain the architects. Each of the dwellings will have between two and three bedrooms as well as a courtyard in the central part of the building that is not only intended to allow in light and natural ventilation but also to offer a communal area for local residents.

The block also straddles the line between two unequal environments: a suburban development of small dwellings, many in poor condition, and a more modern and completely urban area. The architects also highlight the social mix that the project represents, as well as the urban regeneration that new-build projects such as this bring to the Torre Baró neighbourhood. 🏡



## Sants-Montjuïc district

**"PLEN SOLEIL" NEW-BUILD PROJECT  
IN MARINA DEL PRAT VERMELL**

## DISTRICT

Sants  
- Montjuïc

## ARCHITECTS

Jaume Coll

## PROGRAMME

83 dwellings

In the middle of La Marina del Prat Vermell, a new neighbourhood under development between La Marina de Port and the Zona Franca industrial area, various blocks of flats are being built. The neighbourhood owes its name to the lower part of La Marina de Sants, where a printed-calico textile factory operated for many years. Once the clothes had been dyed, they were put out to dry in the fields, which took on a reddish colour. Hence the name of the new neighbourhood, which could accommodate close to 30,000 residents in the future.

One of the housing blocks being built there is designed by the architect Jaume Coll. It will have a total of 83 flats and be located in the Carrer d'Uldecona vicinity. The building is noted for the originality of its shape, as the housing block will be triangular, with sides parallel to Gran Via and the Ronda del Litoral. Another essential feature will be the strong exposure to sunlight, in other words, natural light, that all the flats will enjoy. So much so that the project is called "Plein soleil".

Bearing in mind its proximity to the sea, the architectural project is also designed to exploit the sea breeze as natural ventilation for the building. Natural ventilation and light would be two of the features helping to ensure the sustainability, comfort and interior health of the flats. 🏡



## TOTALS

TIPUS	#	DORMITORS	USUARIS
TIPUS A - 45m <sup>2</sup>	15	1	2
TIPUS B - 47m <sup>2</sup>	20	2	3
TIPUS C - 49m <sup>2</sup>	47	2	4
TOTAL	83		287

## RELACIÓ HABITATGES USUARIS



PLANTA BAIXA (4 habitatges adaptats)

1:800 0 3 6 9

# 11.2 Renovation projects

Sants-Montjuïc district

## RENOVATION OF CASA CONSEGAL

DISTRICT  
Sants-Montjuïc

ARCHITECT  
Domènec Boada  
i Piera (1903)

RENOVATION  
Santiago  
Herrero (2013)

BUDGET  
€117,602.67

YEAR  
2013

A renovation process begun in 2013 and now completed has been carried out in the Modernista Casa Consegal, a house on Carrer de Galileu in the Barcelona's Sants-Montjuïc district. This was a listed property designed and built by the architect Domènec Boada i Piera in 1903, where numerous architectural features bearing masonic symbols have been detected.

Initially, the renovation project, promoted by the same family that own the building and designed by the architect Santiago Herrero, provided for the installation of a lift in the courtyard next to the stairs and the removal of the existing architectural barriers.

However, following a technical assessment, the scope of the reforms was extended to the building's entire staircase and lobby, to reclaim ornamental features with a heritage value (sgraffiti, ceiling frescos, railings, chequered floor surface, gas lamps etc.) That represented an increase in the initial budget, from roughly 80,000 euros to 117,602.67 euros. So the owners applied for an extra subsidy that would defray up to 50% of the cost of the work, which was granted. The subsidised amount was, therefore, 58,801.34 euros. 📌



## Ciutat Vella District

### RENOVATION OF THE DWELLINGS AT CARRER DE LANCASTER 7, 9 AND 11

DISTRICT  
Ciutat Vella

ARCHITECTS  
TJV made up of Batllori & Trepal Arquitectes SLP; Crespiera Simó Diagonal Arquitectura SLP; Marta Urbiola Domènech and Pau Vendrell Sarroca

PROGRAMME  
Renovation of 42 dwellings

YEAR OF CONTRACT AWARD  
2019



PRESENTATION  
by Eduard Simó and Marta Urbiola about the renovation of three properties with 42 dwellings at numbers 7, 9 and 11 Carrer Lancaster

The residents of numbers 7, 9 and 11 Carrer de Lancaster struggled for months against the prospect of losing their home as well as the deterioration of the buildings for want of maintenance. As in the buildings next door, some property companies and investment funds had already been interested in purchasing these blocks without providing any guarantees to their tenants that they could stay by paying an affordable rent, as they had been doing up to then. In view of their situation, Barcelona City Council decided to buy around 40 of the flats in these blocks in the middle of 2017 for a total amount of 5.6 million euros.

Because of the poor state of these dwellings, the next step was to promote their renovation, awarded under an invitation to tender at the start of 2019 to a group of four teams of architects belonging to the same TJV: Batllori & Trepal Arquitectes SLP; Crespiera Simó Diagonal Arquitectura SLP; Marta Urbiola Domènech and Pau Vendrell Sarroca

On behalf of this team, Eduard Simó explained that it is a project for renovating a total of 42 very old and very dilapidated flats. The renovation project is designed to be compatible with the residents living in the block, so they will not have to abandon their home while the renovation work goes ahead. A minimal intervention is planned in the building's structure to ensure suitable living conditions. 🏡



# 12

## Innovation, ICTs and housing: finalist proposals in the BCN-NYC Housing Challenge





SESSION  Presentation of the BCN-NYC Challenge projects

PRESENTATION  Presentation of the BCN-NYC Affordable Housing Challenge

Find technological advances and innovative solutions that might help to reduce the time and cost of building and renovating housing in dense urban areas, to make housing more affordable for everyone. This is the goal of the BCN-NYC Housing Challenge, an international competition where innovative housing proposals can be submitted for their possible implementation in Barcelona or New York.

The two cities planned this competition together, as they currently shared many challenges in this field, such as a scarcity of land for building on and a lack of suitable and affordable housing, which has a negative impact on social inclusion, equality, health, people's well-being and sustainability. It should be remembered that both cities led the drafting of the "Declaration of Local Governments for the Right to Housing and the Right to the City".

The winner of this year's BCN-NYC Housing Challenge, announced on 14 May 2019 at the Smart Cities New York Conference, was the CAH and ATRI project, and the other two finalists were Elastic Living and Everyday Life Housing Networks. Chosen by a multidisciplinary committee of experts from among the 54 bids submitted from as many as 16 countries, the three finalist projects were presented at the Barcelona Housing and Renovation Forum.

The challenge is organised by the i.lab programme of Barcelona City Council's Commissioner for Technology and Digital Innovation and Councillor for Housing and Renovation in conjunction with New York City Council. The winning project and the other two finalists are described below.

The winning proposal received a cash prize of \$40,000 to carry out two pilot projects, one in Barcelona and the other in New York City.

### a) CAH + ATRI: the densification of the city

This proposal is the result of the sum of two similar projects launched by two different teams: Straddle3 Barcelona's "Innovation for Excitement" and the National University of Colombia's "Building System for Affordable Housing".

In view of the scarcity of land for building on both in Barcelona and New York, the idea is to increase city densification, not just by making the most of empty spaces still available by giving them new uses, but also by growing vertically. In other words, it is proposed to put more storeys on existing buildings or annexe new buildings in infrastructure spaces (roads, main roads, railway tracks etc.).

This is a renovation and new-build model based on light, adaptable, quick-to-install housing modules which use recycled materials and require little support on the ground. Because these new constructions meet social needs, the project argues for them to be accompanied by participatory processes involving the communities concerned, which could be speeded up with technological applications such as apps.



CAH + ATRI

## b) Elastic Living: flexible and multi-purpose spaces in dwellings

This is a system that enables both the size and uses of household spaces to be adapted. The same space can be turned into an office, kitchen, bedroom, living room and so on, depending on the needs of the people living there at any time of the day. This is possible thanks to a system of mobile modules that can be separated from or attached to one another by means of a variety of combinations, providing several functions for the same space.

It a system for making space more flexible with numerous advantages. These include saving time and money on construction as it is based on prefabricated modules, spatial efficiency – every kind of household use could fit into a 40 m<sup>2</sup> space – flexibility and the possibility of tenants customising the space according to their tastes and needs.

In addition, the system could have multiple applications in several fields, from public housing to tourist accommodation. It also offers accessible solutions to elderly people and people with mobility problems and, in general, it can be adapted to the situation of people with different profiles and in different stages of life.

It is a system invented and patented by the Austrian architect Angelo Roventa. ArqEstructura also collaborated in the project.





### c) Everyday Life Housing Networks: dwellings with a gender perspective

This is a proposal from Col·lectiu Punt 6, a Barcelona architects' cooperative with a feminist perspective. The collective housing project submitted to the competition aims for the people involved, despite living in different dwellings, to share common spaces as a means for collectivising domestic and care work (laundry, kitchen, meeting spaces etc.) on the understanding that this has to be a joint responsibility for all the members of the community and not fall mainly on the shoulders of the women. Sharing certain spaces also means fewer expenses and therefore helps to make housing more affordable.

So, the aim is to organise an accessible and affordable housing network with people's everyday life at its heart, also including sustainability criteria and making the most of the advantages of digital media for sharing out child-rearing and care tasks. The idea is to extend this task-sharing to the neighbourhood level, beyond the community directly involved in the project.

Participation also takes on a special importance in designing the project. Hence the suggested creation of work groups with residents from the neighbourhood involved, to reflect the diversity

of profiles of the people concerned. Each community will have to decide which aspects of their life they want to share or keep private, on which basis the common spaces will be decided.

The main contributions of the project are to highlight child-rearing and care tasks, putting them on the same level as paid work; break down the barriers between public and private in everyday life; promote an urban design that contributes to health and well-being, and make women more visible. 🏡



Col·lectiu Punt 6 SCCL

# Conclusions

**Thanks to the forum's various speakers, we can confirm, on the one hand, the great complexity of the housing challenge in cities and, on the other, the numerous measures and possibilities for tackling it.**

The roots of the problem can be found in the dynamics of the global capitalist system, which sees housing as an investment and financial-speculation commodity, as explained by the lecturer in architecture and urban planning, Raquel Rolnik, who highlighted the following paradox: capital without ties to the region is what is restructuring cities, changing our lives and unleashing the gentrification chain.

We are currently witnessing the second wave of dispossession that has led to the entry of housing into the financial markets. The first began in 2007, with the mortgage crises, with effects on an international scale, although especially severe in the case of the Spanish State. The second, which has brought about a hike in rent prices, making rental housing increasingly inaccessible to many people, has worsened, especially since 2013. In Spain's case, this is due to a series of factors: the financial hardships of families and difficulties accessing mortgage credit following the outbreak of the crisis, causing a rise in demand for rental housing, with scarce supply; changes to the Urban Leases Act of 2013, which, according to social movements, have contributed to the price hikes, and the proliferation of tourist accommodation.



## Spain, a far cry from Europe's most advanced housing policies

The housing crisis in cities is not an exclusively Catalan or Spanish phenomenon, although we are seeing the worst of it here. Why? The reason is none other than the Spanish State's historical backwardness in housing policies in the European context.

This backwardness has a historical context to it. While many countries had already begun implementing policies at the start of the 20th century, and especially after the Second World War, to ensure affordable housing for their citizens, this never happened in Spain. Some of the housing problems we continue to face today stem from Franco's dictatorship. These include encouraging mass access to flat ownership through borrowing and the considering the property sector as the country's economic powerhouse.

This historical legacy, and our incapacity to reverse it, explains to a large extent many of the differences that separate us from the rest of Europe, countless examples of which we can find today. The EU states are currently allocating 1% of their respective GDPs to housing, whereas Spain only allocates around 0.1% to it. While 16.9% of the population in Spain live in rented property, 48.3% do in Germany. Whereas over 30% of the housing stock in the Netherlands is social and affordable, in Spain it is under 2%.



## The authorities are overwhelmed by the housing emergency

Owing to the lack of social and public housing, many authorities have been overwhelmed by the housing emergency in Spain. City councils experiencing this problem on the front line are demanding greater involvement in and funding for housing from the supra-municipal authorities, the Catalan regional government and the Spanish State.



## **Social movements are combining acts of civil disobedience and emergency initiatives with demands for structural policies**

In view of this situation, social movements championing the right to housing have taken on a crucial role. First, it was the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH), which was set up in 2009 to support and empower people affected by eviction processes. More recently the Tenants' Union, created in 2017 and inspired by the tenants' unions that have been in existence in countries such as Germany and Austria for over a hundred years.

Both the PAH and the Tenants' Union combine acts of civil disobedience (halting an eviction, occupying a vacant flat to provide shelter for families in a situation of exclusion, refusing to accept an abusive rent price hike, remaining in the same flat paying the same rent and so on) with demands for changing the policies and legislation they consider unjust on local, Catalan regional and State levels. In addition to the social movements, we should note the support being lent by third-sector organisations to people in situations of residential exclusion.

As confirmed by the social movements and officials of various authorities, we are facing the twofold challenge of meeting a housing emergency without abandoning the implementation of structural measures. Without those, we shall never emerge from the chronic crisis we are immersed in.

Structural measures can either be implemented on the existing housing stock or by promoting new affordable housing, as explained below. If they are to be implemented, it is crucial for there to be better collaboration between the public and private sectors and between the authorities themselves.



## **Changes in the existing housing stock**

### **A) RENOVATING DWELLINGS**

This is one of the priority policies, especially in cities such as Barcelona, which have little land available for growing and where solutions will therefore have to be sought in already existing buildings to take on the housing challenge. Hence the need to link public renovation grants to social and anti-speculation clauses, for example, by making owners who receive them to rent out their flats at an affordable price. In addition, it is a priority for renovation processes to be increasingly geared towards improving building energy efficiency and accessibility.

### **B) GUARANTEEING THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF PROPERTY**

It is essential for vacant dwellings to be detected so they can be mobilised for social renting, with grants being provided as well for their renovation. With this goal in mind, during this last term of office Barcelona City Council has drawn up its first exhaustive census of vacant flats in the city, detecting a total of 10,052, which represents 1.2% of the total housing stock.

In the case of big property owners, we need to take account the recently recovered articles of Act 24/2015 compel them to assign the use of dwellings that are vacant to social renting. The Act likewise establishes that such owners have to offer a social rent to families with financial difficulties before proceeding to evict them. Of course, we need to bear in mind that the ownership of dwellings in Spain is extremely fragmented and mainly in the hands of

individuals. So mobilising vacant flats belonging to big property owners is a necessary measure but it is not sufficient.

The public authorities may also acquire housing to ensure its social function through preemptive rights, that is, their preferential right to buy dwellings for sale, although that is subject to their budgetary availability.

In the case of the Basque Country the regional government, in a pioneering measure throughout the Spanish State, implemented another measure to ensure continuity of the social function of dwellings: the permanent classification of protected housing.

### C) MEASURES TO HALT RENTAL PRICE RISES

During the forum, various positions were expressed regarding this issue. First, spokespersons of the Spanish and Catalan governments expressed their support for reference price indexes, which provide guidance on what the average cost of a dwelling is, without this being binding. In their opinion, indexes have to be accompanied with tax incentives for owners who rent out their dwellings for rents below the reference prices. In fact, the Catalan government has already had a reference index since 2017, while the Spanish State's Rent Decree provides for the creation of such an index.

Second, there are some who are in favour of mandatory rent price restrictions, supported by Jaime Palomera, from the Tenants' Union, and Javier Burón, the Manager for Housing and Renovation at Barcelona City Council. This is a measure already adopted in countries such as Germany, where price restrictions have been

mandatory since 2015, although the Berlin Tenants' Union believes that so far it has not worked as effectively as it was intended to. In addition, there are different criteria on how the scales for these price restrictions ought to be defined, whether they should be based on socio-economic and income criteria, as the social movements maintain, or on market prices.

If affordable rental housing is to be guaranteed, tourist accommodation will have to be regulated. Barcelona City Council has adopted several measures since 2015 with this goal in mind (identifying, fining and closing tourist flats, limiting such accommodation in areas with more tourist pressure, etc.) but, despite all that, the problem is very hard to reverse. Many owners are attracted to the higher profitability that tourist apartments can yield.

Lisbon has come up with a pioneering measure for fighting against the root problem: compelling platforms such as Airbnb to ensure half of the leases they act in as intermediaries are long term (for residents) and that only the other half can be short term (for tourists). Subsequently, a weighted average would be worked out with the income obtained from both types of lease, as the amount that the owner would receive, thereby ending incentives for owners to dedicate themselves solely to tourist renting.

In addition to affordable prices, the lecturer in civil law, Elga Molina, a specialist in rent legislation in Europe, also recommends applying the periodic-lease model in Spain, a model that already exists in over a dozen European countries.



## **Promoting a new stock of affordable dwellings**

### **A) PUBLIC HOUSING CONSTRUCTION IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

Provided there is land available – it is scarce in Barcelona but a higher proportion can be found in other metropolitan municipalities – and budgetary availability, the construction of affordable public housing can be promoted directly. The social movements insist that these properties be exclusively for renting out, so they cannot be deregulated after a few years.

The authorities warn of a lack of resources for building public housing, so promoting private sector collaboration and co-responsibility in this area is regarded as increasingly important. This is the perspective behind the Barcelona Metropolis Housing project to build 4,500 affordable rented dwellings through an operator set up by Barcelona City Council and the Barcelona Metropolitan Area that will organise the construction of flats through a joint venture company that would have to incorporate a private partner.

Barcelona City Council has also called for co-responsibility from the private sector in guaranteeing the right to housing, under a pioneering measure in the Spanish State driven by the social movements: that 30% of new private housing developments and large-scale renovations have to be allocated to affordable housing.

For its part, the Catalan government is focusing one of its credit lines for officially protected rental housing developments on public and private developers.

As for the property sector players, among other things they are demanding more public-private collaboration in housing and greater speed in granting building permits, which would also help to produce HPOs more quickly.

### **B) PROMOTING COHOUSING AND COOPERATIVE HOUSING**

The social, solidarity and cooperative economy has started to promote alternatives for guaranteeing access to affordable housing, especially the assigned-use housing model in the case of Catalonia. City councils such as Barcelona's are assigning the use of more and more public plots of land to cooperatives for this purpose. These types of dwellings have also been promoted in other autonomous regions such as the Basque Country and the Balearic Islands, but this is still a very new experience in the rest of Spain. We are still a long way off countries such as the Netherlands, where 60% of the housing stock is in the hands of cooperatives.

Cohousing may not just be a formula for making house prices affordable but also for giving a boost to other models of living together. This can be clearly seen from the intergenerational experiences (or experiences of different collectives living together in the same building) promoted by cooperatives. There are numerous such experiences throughout the Netherlands and a few cases in Spain, driven by cooperatives or the public sector. For example, the Alicante Municipal Housing Trust has promoted intergenerational housing between young and elderly people, a benchmark in Spain and other countries.



## Planning housing policies: where are we heading?

If measures such as the above are to be effectively implemented, strategic planning with a long-term approach will be crucial, as explained by Mario Yoldi, the Director of Planning and Operational Processes for the Basque government, which is a pioneer in this area. That unit plans housing policies based on an analysis of the data it gets from the other departments involved, with which it networks in a coordinated fashion. They also make use of the potential of digital media for planning and assessing housing policies and adapting them to the needs of the public.

Planning also requires keeping sight of “why and who” we are building for, as pointed out by the architect Zaida Muxí, for whom attending to demographic and social changes is essential when thinking about the dwellings of the future. Both Zaida Muxí and the Director of the Metropolitan Housing Observatory, Carme Trilla, warned of population ageing and stressed the importance of adapting housing to the needs of the elderly. In addition, Muxí believes that we need to rethink the structure of dwellings by attending to changes in household models, for example, the growth in the number of people living alone or in childless couples, and the gender perspective. As with Col·lectiu Punt 6, which works on architecture from a gender perspective, she believes that the composition of blocks of flats and neighbourhoods in general have to help with distributing domestic and care work.

There are therefore many aspects that have to be taken into account when it comes to planning housing policies, deciding which ones will be implemented and how that will be done. As Raquel Rolnik explained, the root of the problem is the conversion of housing into a commodity of financial speculation. The difficulties in accessing housing will continue so long as we find ourselves stuck in these capitalist dynamics. But this cannot be an excuse for doing nothing. There is margin for action and there are numerous possibilities for that, as highlighted by the Barcelona Housing and Renovation Forum.

Rolnik is sceptical about the capacity of states to act in the context of global capitalism and pins her hopes on the local world, on the alternatives that may come from citizen initiatives and the social, solidarity and cooperative economy, which may help to give an impetus to local authorities.

In short, citizens and municipalities have and will continue to have a key role in promoting solutions to the challenge of guaranteeing the right to housing. 🏡

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