

VÍTOR PEITEADO FERNÁNDEZ

PRODUCING ALTERNATIVE URBAN SPACES

Social Mobilisation and New
Forms of Agency in the Spanish Housing Crisis

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Roskilde University



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and

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To Maia, *Mamá*, Martina and Milena

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the social mobilisation in Spain provoked by the financial crisis which started in 2008. Specifically, the thesis analyses the intersections of the housing movement with some political coalitions that won many municipalities in 2015. It does so to explain the dynamics that lead to the creation of a “space of activism” capable of opposing the capitalist organisation of space.

Since the beginning of the crisis thousands of Spanish people have lost their homes because they were unable to pay their mortgages. The debt that these people have contracted for covering their housing needs has become such an unbearable burden that many see protest as the only way to avoid being thrown onto the streets. The consequent mobilisation has been canalised mainly through the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH). Created in Barcelona, this organisation has expanded all over the country, not due to a centralised strategy directed from Barcelona, but to a “contagious” shooting up of chapters that provokes a strong independence among the chapters and a focus on local mobilisation. Despite being able to stop evictions and to force the renegotiation of individual mortgages, PAH has failed to force legal or systemic changes. These difficulties animated many activists to promote the creation of multiple coalitions with diverse political organisations to run for the 2015 local elections.

In interrogating what the dynamics that shape this mobilisation are and examining the transition between the movements, this thesis focuses on two definitory characteristics of these organisations. The first one is

their high degrees of heterogeneity. This heterogeneity became evident in PAH due to the coexistence of different social classes, nationalities, perceptions or values. Whereas in the municipal platforms, the heterogeneity was mainly linked to the coalition of multiple political groups with diverse ideologies. The thesis explores the role and the influence of this heterogeneity, and the way the different groups handle it.

The second definitory characteristic is the high levels of decentralisation and localism that mark the activism of these organisations. That said, the groups are not totally disconnected from each other and their localism is accompanied by certain forms of integration that raise questions about how these connections take place and articulate the different local struggles. In reflecting about these definitory characteristics, the thesis investigates the relation between heterogeneity and the production of space, as well as its relation to the development of certain forms of agency.

The fieldwork was based on ethnocartographic research in two local chapters of PAH (PAH Barcelona and Stop Desahucios Coruña) and two municipal coalitions (Barcelona en Comú and Marea Atlántica) in order to research groups of different sizes, visibility and in different contexts. Ethnocartographic methods aim to map the affective relations between the activists that shape certain dynamics that influence the way the activism develops.

To advance in this direction, the thesis excavates the possibility of combining Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of politics with that of Lefebvre's theory concerning the production of space. Grounded in their common interest in relationality, everyday life and heterogeneity, the theoretical framework explores the potential of this combination to analyse the connections between the general dynamics that shape activism and the redefinition of agency so as to contest neoliberal urbanism. The analysis excavates how the contention developed by these local groups produces specific forms of space and the potential of these to become spaces of everyday life that confront capitalist representations which organise space. By focusing on this production of space, the thesis addresses the role of heterogeneity in those dynamics and the changes in the agency of the activists.

The research reveals the importance of space as the product of the confrontation between the capitalist attempts to organise space and its resistances by the users. The activism, especially that of PAH, has implemented a change in the affective relationships of those subjected to debt. These people transform their passive subjection to the constraints imposed by a spatial organisation around debt into an active agency that mobilises an affective capability to challenge that indebtedness. The coming together of heterogeneous groups of people and their perceptions proved to be the key for this mobilisation, this is especially so concerning the central role of certain activists that incorporate their antagonist perceptions in those affective relations. Nevertheless, the cases demonstrated how, to challenge indebtedness and capitalist imposition, the heterogeneity has not only to be exposed and articulated, but also assembled. When the different perceptions are assembled new representations emerge. These favour the development of new perceptions that confront individual subjectification. The thesis argues that these new representations of everyday life do not develop a full confrontation of capitalist representations. They need the creation of other spaces to avoid jeopardising the cohesion of heterogeneity. It is in these terms that the coalitions must be understood. These coalitions fully develop the abstraction of demands hinted by the representations developed by PAH, by completing a transition from the performative politics that were predominant in PAH to the representational politics that become dominant in the coalitions. The thesis argues that the way in which this transition is made, by avoiding dynamics of rescaling, has favoured the cohesion of the groups, reduced the tensions linked to dynamics of abstraction and generated a “space of activism” based on horizontality that poses a considerable challenge for capitalism to reimpose subjection.

RESUMÉ

I denne afhandling behandles den sociale mobilisering i Spanien, som krisen i 2008 var startskud til. Afhandlingen analyser specifikt boligbevægelsens skæringspunkter med nogle politiske koalitioner, som vandt mange kommuner i 2015, for at udfolde den dynamik, som førte til oprettelsen af en “spatial aktivisme”, der kunne modstå den kapitalistiske “spatiale” organisering.

Siden starten på krisen har tusinder af spaniere mistet deres hjem, fordi de ikke kunne betale deres terminer. Den gæld, som disse mennesker optog for at dække deres boligbehov, er blevet så ubærlig en byrde, at mange ser protest som den eneste måde at undgå at blive sat på gaden. Denne mobilisering er primært blevet kanaliseret gennem platformen for gældsplagede borgere (PAH). Denne organisation, der blev dannet i Barcelona, er vokset, så den i dag dækker hele landet, ikke som et produkt af en centraliseret strategi styret fra Barcelona, men som en “smit-som” opståen af afdelinger, der fremkalder en stærk selvstændighed mellem afdelingerne og et fokus på lokal mobilisering. På trods af at man har været i stand til at standse udsættelser og gennemtvunge genforhandling af individuelle prioritetslån, er det ikke lykkedes PAH at få gennemført lovmæssige eller systemiske ændringer. Disse vanskeligheder ansporede mange aktivister til at fremme oprettelsen af flere koalitioner med forskellige politiske organisationer for at stille op til lokalvalgene i 2015.

Ved at spørge, hvilke dynamikker det er, som former denne mobilisering og overgang mellem bevægelserne, fokuserer denne afhandling på

to definitoriske karakteristikker af disse organisationer. Den første er deres høje grad af forskellighed. Mens denne forskellighed blev tydelig i PAH som følge af sameksistensen af forskellige sociale klasser, nationaliteter, opfattelser eller værdier, skyldtes forskelligheden i de kommunale platforme primært koalitionen mellem mange politiske grupper med forskellige ideologier. Målet for afhandlingen er at udforske denne forskelligheds rolle og indflydelse samt den måde, hvorpå de forskellige grupper håndterer den.

Den anden definitoriske karakteristikk er den høje grad af decentralisering og lokale interesser, som kendetegner disse organisationers aktivisme. Når dette er sagt, er grupperne ikke fuldstændig løsrevet fra hinanden, og det lokale aspekt ledsages af visse former for integration, som stiller spørgsmålstejn ved, hvordan disse sammenhænge skabes samt sætter ord på de forskellige lokale kampe. Som et produkt af refleksionen over disse definitoriske karakteristika undersøger afhandlingen relationen mellem forskellighed og produktion af rum samt rummets relation til udviklingen af visse former for handling.

Feltstudiet er baseret på etnografisk forskning i to lokalafdelinger af PAH (PAH Barcelona og Stop Desahucios Coruña) og to kommunale koalitioner (Barcelona en Comú og Marea Atlántica) for at undersøge grupper af forskellig størrelse, synlighed og i forskellige sammenhænge. Formålet med anvendelsen af etnografiske metoder er at kortlægge de følelsesmæssige relationer mellem aktivisterne, som former visse dynamikker, der igen påvirker den måde, aktivismen udvikler sig på.

For at komme videre i denne retning undersøger afhandlingen muligheden for at kombinere Deleuzes og Guattaris konceptualisering af politik med Lefebvres teoretisering af produktion af rum. På baggrund af deres fælles interesse for det relationelle, hverdagsliv og forskellighed udforsker den teoretiske ramme denne kombinations potentialer for at analysere forbindelserne mellem generelle dynamikker, som former aktivisme, og redefineringen af handling for at anfægte en nyliberal urbanisme. Analysen udforsker, hvordan den påstand, der er udviklet af disse lokale grupper, fremkalder specifikke former for rum og disses potentiale for at blive dagligdagens rum, der konfronterer kapitalistiske repræsentationer,

som organiserer rum. Ved at fokusere på denne produktion af rum behandler afhandlingen den rolle, forskelligheden spiller i dynamikkerne og ændringerne i aktivisternes handling.

Forskningen påviser vigtigheden af rum som produkt af konfrontationen mellem de kapitalistiske forsøg på at organisere rum og den modstand, brugerne udviser. Aktivismen, specielt hos PAH, har medført en ændring i de følelsesmæssige relationer hos de gældsplagede borgere. Disse mennesker omdanner deres passive underkastelse i forhold til de restriktioner, de pålægges af en "spatial" organisation med hensyn til gæld, til en aktiv handling, som mobiliserer en følelsesmæssig evne til at udfordre denne gældsætning. Det viste sig, at nøglen til denne mobilisering var at samle forskelligartede grupper af personer og disses opfattelser, og i særdeleshed den centrale rolle for visse aktivister, der inkorporerer deres modstridende opfattelser i disse følelsesmæssige relationer. Ikke desto mindre påviste disse cases, hvordan det var nødvendigt ikke alene at udstille og fremhæve forskelligheden, men også at samle den for at kunne udfordre gældsætningen. Når de forskellige opfattelser samles, opstår der nye repræsentationer, som fremmer udviklingen af nye opfattelser, der konfronterer den individuelle underkastelse. Afhandlingen argumenterer for, at disse nye repræsentationer af dagliglivet ikke udvikler en fuld konfrontation med kapitalistiske repræsentationer. De har behov for, at der skabes andre rum for at undgå at bringe forskellighedens sammenhængskraft i fare. Det er i denne sammenhæng, at koalitionerne skal forstås. Disse koalitioner udvikler fuldtud abstraktionen af krav antydnet af de repræsentationer, der er udviklet af PAH, ved at gennemføre en overgang fra de performative politikker, som var fremherskende i PAH, til de fremstillende politikker, som blev dominerende i koalitionerne. Afhandlingen argumenterer for, at den måde, hvorpå denne overgang har fundet sted ved at undgå omlægningsdynamikker, har fremmet gruppernes sammenhold, mindsket de spændinger, der er forbundet med abstraktionsdynamikkerne og genereret en "spatial aktivisme" baseret på det horisontale, der udgør en væsentlig udfordring for kapitalismens genindførelse af underkastelsen.

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Completing a PhD dissertation is a long and, at moments, painful process, full of many steps forward and setbacks. My experience as a PhD candidate is not an exception. For the last five years, since I started my PhD in February 2015, I struggled, laughed and even cried a little. Looking back, not only did I expand my knowledge greatly, but I also grew as a person. And although the cover of the book has my name on it, this dissertation is the product of the collective work and interaction with many people that guided, encouraged and supported me. This dissertation is partly theirs, so I would like to acknowledge some of those that had a bigger role in the completion of this thesis. This is my little tribute to them.

I would like to start by acknowledging the importance of the activists that form the four groups which are the focus of this thesis: PAH Barcelona, Stop Desahucios Coruña, Barcelona en Comú and Marea Atlántica. Without their enthusiastic activism, this thesis would have never happened. Having the opportunity of being part of these groups has enriched me greatly and reinforced the admiration I had for them before starting my research. Therefore, I would like them to see this research not as a criticism of their activism, but just as a critical analysis aimed at increasing the possibilities of advancing their agendas to create a better world. In particular, I would like to thank the members of Marea Atlántica—especially the members of the discourse group—and of PAH Barcelona for always making me feel warmly welcomed and for reinvigorating my faith in the power of collective action to change the world. I would also like to thank Felix San Segundo for his openness and valua-

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANT	Actor-Network Theory.
AT	Assemblage Theory.
BBVA	Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria.
BeC	Barcelona en Comú.
BNG	Bloque Nacionalista Galego.
CGPJ	General Council of the Judiciary (<i>Consejo General del Poder Judicial</i>).
CUT	Critical Urban Theory.
DG	Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya.
EU	European Union.
FROB	Fund for Orderly Bank Restructuring (<i>Fondo de Reestructuración Ordenada Bancaria</i>).
ICV	Iniciativa Per Catalunya-Les Verts.
ILP	Popular Legislative Initiative (<i>Iniciativa Legislativa Popular</i>).
INE	National Statistics Institute (<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística</i>).

IRPH	Mortgage Loan Reference Index (<i>Índice de Referencia de Préstamos Hipotecarios</i>).
MaT	Marea Atlántica.
PAH	Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (<i>Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca</i>).
PP	Partido Popular.
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español.
RMBS	Residential Mortgage Backed Securities.
SAREB	Management Company for Assets Arising from Bank Reorganisation (<i>Sociedad de Gestión de Activos Procedentes de la Reestructuración Bancaria</i>).
SIPHO	Mediation and intervention service in situations of lost and/or occupation of housing (<i>Servei d'intervenció i mediació en situacions de pèrdua i/o ocupació d'habitatge</i>).
SMT	Social Movements Theory.
TPSN	Territory-Place-Scale-Network approach.
VPO	Officially Protected Housing (Vivienda de Protección Oficial).

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GLOSSARY

15-M movement	Also known as <i>Indignados</i> movement. It refers to the protest that followed dozens of demonstrations that took place 15 of May 2011 in throughout Spain. The protests were characterised by the occupation of main squares of the cities, where campingsites were set. The occupations lasted for around a month, when the squares turned into big assemblies where activists discuss about political, economic and social issues around the main claim of Real Democracy Now! (Democracia Real Ya!). The movements are considered a continuation of the protests linked to the Arab Spring and to be the precursor of the Occupy movements.
Acompañamiento	One of the most common protest actions within PAH's repertoire of collective action. Directly translated as accompanying, in the action a couple of activists accompany a person in risk of eviction to a meeting with the counterpart (e.g. bank, social services, etc).
Autogestion	Self-management in French. This is the word used by Lefebvre in his writings.
Comisión/Comisiones	Translated as commissions, its use in Spanish is less formal than in English. It is the name

	used in PAH and in Barcelona en Comú to refer to their working groups.
ComPAH	Name used in PAH Barcelona to refer to its members. It is a combination of the words <i>compañero</i> (comrade) and PAH.
Dación en Pago	Non-recourse debt. The Spanish law does not acknowledge non-recourse debt, so this became one of the main demands by PAH.
Dinamización	Word used in PAH Barcelona to refer to the way to manage the assemblies. Directly translated as “dynamisation,” it is carried on by a <i>comisión of dinamización</i> , whose members are responsible for making the assemblies dynamic by engaging in the discussions as many people as possible.
Eje	Translated as “axis,” it is the label used in Barcelona en Comú to refer to main themes around which the discussions and activities of each working group “revolve” (e.g. feminism, education, culture, urbanism, etc.).
Escrache	Protest action popularised in Argentina in the end of the 20 th Century and beginning of the 21 st Century, it has been used in Spain by various social movements. The protest consists on people gathering in the street to make noise with pots and other tools, usually around the homes, working places or public places where those who want to be denounced are. It was fully incorporated in the repertoire of PAH in 2013 and it is used as a form of protest usually in connection to national campaigns.
Facilitación	Directly translated as facilitation, it is the word used in Marea Atlántica and Barcelona

	<p>en Comú to refer to the managing of the assemblies. Unlike the <i>dinamización</i> of PAH, <i>facilitación</i> does not aim to engage the activists, but to keep the order of the assembly and to provide equal opportunities for all participants to talk.</p>
Guanyemer	<p>Activist of Barcelona en Comú identified as part of the initial group of promoters. As the initial name of the coalition was Guanyem Barcelona, Guanyemer has been used to refer to all those that share the visions of that initial group. The term is used to distinguish these members from activists that joined as part of the political parties that entered the coalition.</p>
Marea	<p>In English “tide,” it is the label used to refer to the working groups within Marea Atlántica.</p>
Mareante	<p>Activists of Marea Atlántica. Although, like in the case of Guanyemer, was initially used to refer to activists linked to the initial group emerged from the social movements, it has become more common its use to refer to any activist that actively works in Marea Atlántica.</p>
Obra Social	<p>Roughly translated as “Social Work,” it is the <i>comisión</i> of PAH in charge of preparing and handling the occupation of empty apartments belonging to banks, where to accommodate people who have been evicted. There is also a campaign Obra Social that promotes these occupations.</p>
PAHmilia	<p>Label used in PAH Barcelona to refer to the group. It is the result of combining PAH and <i>familia</i> (family).</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Spain has witnessed the emergence of new social movements that have reinvigorated, renovated and redefined previous forms of activism. This reformulation and expansion of social mobilisation emerged as a reaction to an extremely precarious situation provoked by the biggest economic crisis in recent Spanish history, which was accompanied by a political crisis that led to the end of the bipartisan political system of the previous 40 years. The characteristics of that crisis and the subsequent mobilisation are the product of an economic model that based growth on the construction sector and the exponential increase of debt. This generated the conditions for one of the deepest housing crises in Europe. As it will be shown, this turned housing issues into the main catalysts of social discontent in the years that followed the start of the crisis. This crisis led to the engagement of a segment of the Spanish population which had previously not been involved in protest. It also helped to redefine what housing is.

In 2014, as the protest evolved some sectors of the social movements launched an innovative strategy to gain institutional power. The strategy had never been tried since the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975. When this strategy proved its potential, as coalitions emanating from these social movements won many municipalities, including the biggest cities in the country, the strong foundations of the political system derived from an "exemplary" transition process started to shake. This thesis excavates that mobilisation, its connections and the ways in which new forms of activism advanced to pose a challenge to the regime never seen in the country since the end of that transition process of the 1970s.

Before analysing such mobilisation and in order to understand it, it is necessary to briefly explain the background that led to that situation. This is undertaken in the following two sections together with a discussion of the specificities of the Spanish economic model that generated such great levels of discontent.

The Spanish economic model: the economic boom and the housing bubble (1996-2007)

“We want a country of owners not of proletarians,” Jose Luís Arrese, November 1957. (López and Rodríguez, 2010, p. 239, my translation)

This sentence, pronounced by the first Spanish Housing Minister during Franco’s dictatorship, marks the symbolic beginning of the development of a housing structure characterised by high levels of ownership still dominant in 2019. What started as a way of increasing social control and de-proletarianisation soon became the development of a whole economic sector, the collapse of which became the main trigger of the Spanish economic crisis of 2008. Thus, although this crisis is a direct consequence of the economic model that led to the Spanish “economic miracle” of the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, its roots are deeply buried in the Spanish economic and political systems. The political interest in promoting house ownership generated a whole discourse that favoured this form of tenancy as the only proper way of inhabiting a home (López and Rodríguez, 2010, p. 254). From the 1960s until today (2019), house ownership became so embedded in the Spanish ethos that it turned out to be the necessary condition for any Spanish to enter adult life (Palomera, 2014). This collective imaginary created a first precondition for the generation of periodic housing bubbles, although none of them as deep as the one that burst in 2008, as that imaginary intersected with economic and political contexts that created the perfect storm for the drama to come.

The processes of the liberalisation of land, housing and mortgage markets that followed the end of the dictatorship initiated a tendency of deregulation and privatisation that, in combination with that high demand

for purchasing property, created the conditions for the generation of the biggest housing bubble in Spanish history. Thus, the Mortgage Market Regulation Act passed in 1981 set the first stone for the deregulation of the mortgage financing systems, as it facilitated the access to credit for low income classes, which became more deeply indebted (García Lamarca, 2016, p. 90). This was followed by the 1992 Securitisation Vehicles Act, which created the legal basis for Spanish residential mortgage backed securities (RMBS). The latter is “an instrument that moves [assets] off balance sheet and thus diffuses risk globally” for the financial entities, therefore increasing their incentives to participate in the housing market (García Lamarca, 2016, p. 90).

Years	Owned	Private Rent	Public Rent	Leaseback	Other Forms
1950	49	-	-	-	-
1960	51.9	41	2	-	-
1970	63.4	28.1	2	4.6	1.9
1981	73.1	18.8	2	3.1	3
1991	78.3	13.2	2	4.5	2
2001	80.7	9.3	2	6	1
2007	87	7.6	1.5	3.9	-

Table 1 Housing forms of tenancy in %. (Palomera, 2014, p. 4).

The creation of the Eurozone accentuated this tendency. The expansive policies implemented by the European Central Bank relaxed, to an even greater extent, the requirements of access to credit and brought interest rates to historic lows (García Bernardos, 2018, p. 90). The new conjuncture expanded the demand for property from outside the Spanish borders as it turned the country into an attractive market for Northern European investors¹ (López and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 13). The adoption of the Land Act in 1998 was the milestone that marked the beginning of exponential increase of housing speculation and the transformation of the construction sector into the engine of economic growth, peaking at a 12.2% of Spanish GDP in 2007 (López and Rodríguez, 2010, p. 338). This act,

¹ The average of yearly foreign investment in property assets reached €7 billion between 2001 and 2006 (López and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 13).

passed by the government of the right wing Partido Popular (PP), made *de facto* almost all land open for development, since only those areas that had some sort of special protection—e.g. national parks—were exempted. The goal of the act was to control housing prices through the reduction of land prices by increasing its supply. Nonetheless, not only did it not stop inflation, it also facilitated the development of areas which were disconnected from the fabric of the cities and towns, and which became empty developments. This demonstrated the authorities lack of knowledge of the functioning about the market, as they considered land an easily reproducible asset (Leal Maldonado and Martínez del Olmo, 2017, p. 28).² Thousands of houses were constructed every year as a consequence of the high demand and the increase in the available land, expanding the stock by 30% or seven million units from 1997 to 2007 (López and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 5).³ This huge stock would turn into an impossible burden for banks and developers once the crisis struck and the demand sunk after 2008.

This liberalisation of land development accelerated the formation of the bubble, as it intertwined with measures limiting the tax revenue for the local governments imposed by the central government. These restrictions transformed land into the fastest and easiest way for municipalities to cover those income cuts, which started a race of uncontrolled development of land in order to increase their income to finance services and activities (García Lamarca, 2016, p. 88). This led corruption around construction permits and the development of land to become common (Puig Gómez, 2011). The country then entered a spiral of land speculation, growing housing prices and increasing number of risky mortgages that fuelled the economy as long as the housing market was booming. This had consequences for the economy and families. On the one hand, the economy's dependence of the construction sector increased, as exemplified by the fact that around a 70% of the total bank credit in 2007 was construction loans and mortgages, which increased the bank's exposure to a collapse of the housing market. On the other hand, the fami-

² After passing the act, the housing prices even escalated more rapidly, rising almost 200% between 1997 and 2007, when the square meter peaked to €2.086 (Puig Gómez, 2011, p. 67).

³ As an example, only in 2006, the year before the burst of the bubble, almost 900,000 units were started, more than France, Germany and Italy combined (López and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 20).

lies, due to the growing prices, must allocate a larger percentage of their income to cover their housing needs, which increased their precarity in case of unexpected economic contingencies or interest rates rises (Naredo, Carpintero and Marcos, 2007). The context of high prices intersected with the narrative of the need to buy a house to generate a perception of a house as a secure investment that could be sold in the future to generate rents. In a context in which the salaries did not grow at the same rate as housing prices, the favourable conditions to access credit covered this divergence to allow access to a housing market that generated a fictional sense of wealth (Naredo, Carpintero and Marcos, 2007).

This economic and political context was accompanied by an almost total lack of construction of social or public rental housing, which accounted during that period for around 1% of the total stock (Eastway and Varo, p. 284). This lack of state subsidised housing was compensated for by promoting the purchase of housing through tax regimes and by easing the access to mortgage finance (García Lamarca, 2016, p. 92). The most common way of state intervention was through VPO (Vivienda de Promoción Oficial),⁴ by which the state subsidises private developers for encouraging the construction of housing units whose price is legally set by the authorities.⁵ The access to these houses is in the form of ownership, with certain limitations for eligibility in terms of maximum income and the possibility of selling property (García Bernardos, 2018, p. 145). This system reveals how, even in cases of state intervention, in consonance with the previously related imaginary, ownership is the preferred tenancy. This expanded the housing bubble even further, as it encouraged the construction of new housing through the transfer of rents from the public sector to the private developers.

⁴ Translated as Officially Protected Housing.

⁵ In fewer cases the promoter is a public enterprise, mainly for dwellings constructed for lower income families, therefore with lower prices and less attractive for private developers

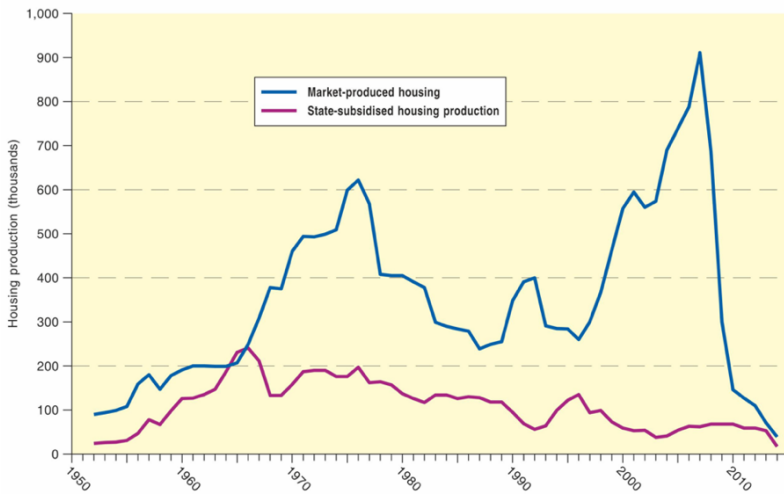


Figure 1 Number of market-produced housing vs. State-subsidised housing. (Trilla i Bellart, 2014, taken from García Lamarca, 2016).

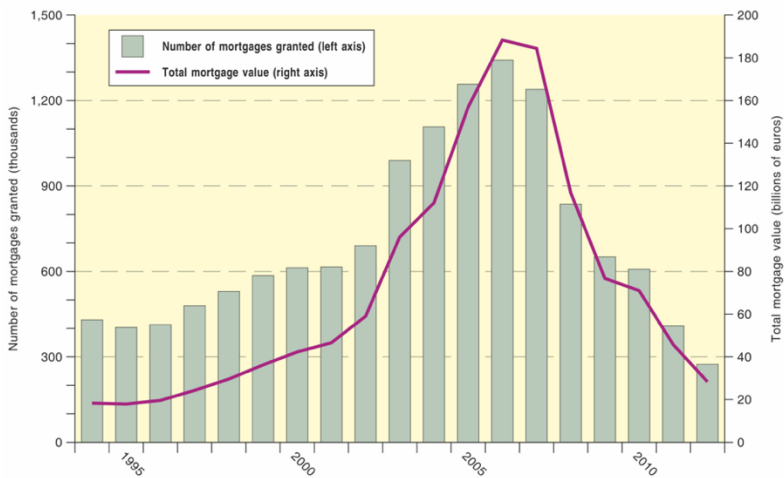


Figure 2 Number and value of Mortgages signed in Spain between 1994 and 2012. (García Lamarca, 2016).

This economic boom, however, did not last forever. In 2007, the housing prices started a decrease that converged with the financial crisis in 2008 to spark the recession that has caused thousands to lose their houses as they were unable to pay the debts they were pushed to contract

during the boom. Once the financialisation and the securitisation that had facilitated this access to credit and had fuelled the increasing speculative spiral started to collapse, firstly in the United States and later in Europe (Aalbers, 2008; Rolnik, 2013; Fernández and Aalbers, 2016), the Spanish economic miracle started to fall apart (Coq-Huelva, 2013).

Economic crisis and the end of the dream of constant growth: the housing emergency

The financial crisis burst in the United States in 2007 seemed not to affect the Spanish economy greatly in the first months. Even though the unemployment rates started to grow slowly, the GDP grew still a 3.8% that year and 1.1% in 2008 (INE, 2018b). Using these macroeconomic numbers, in the first months of 2008 the government still argued that thanks to the public surplus and the economic strength of the “Spanish miracle,” the country could avoid a major crisis.

“We are not in an economic crisis [...] The Spanish economy has excellent foundations. We have some difficulties coming from abroad [...] It will be an adjustment in the construction sector, we have capability because the economy is in all other sectors absolutely strong, in order to absorb the loss of jobs and keep creating jobs,” Jose Luís Rodríguez Zapatero, Spanish Prime Minister, February 7, 2008 (Reuters, 2008, my translation).

This quote of an interview with the then Spanish Prime Minister reflects greatly that atmosphere and political discourse of the first months after the sparking of the international financial crisis. The Prime Minister expressed the confidence shared by a considerable part of the political and economic elite on the resilience of an economy that had continuously grown for 10 years to reach one of the lowest unemployment rates—8.6%—in Spanish history (INE, 2018a).

Nevertheless, the future proved that hope terribly wrong and those excellent foundations to be extremely weak, as they crumbled as soon as the construction sector collapsed. As 2008 advanced, the unemployment

rates escalated,⁶ the GDP started to deflate—it would do it every year until 2013 (INE, 2018b)—and banks started to struggle due to their high levels of dependence of the construction market (López and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 22). As the credit stopped flowing, the construction sector came to a halt and the developers began to have problems selling their developments. When the construction sector started to collapse, the economic contraction spread to the rest of the economy and the increasing unemployment brutally impacted the families that found themselves unable to pay their mortgages, which turned a drama into an authentic housing emergency. Consequently, the final months of the year 2008 and the year 2009 showed a constant increase in the number of foreclosures that reached around 90,000 per year until 2010⁷ (El País, 2015b). Between the years 2008 and 2018, 750,000 foreclosures took place, of which 500,000 were evictions of people unable to pay their mortgages or rents (García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016, p. 10; Portillo, 2018).⁸

In this context, most of the Cajas de Ahorros⁹ were facing bankruptcy, and in June 2009 the government announced the implementation of a rescue fund, FROB (Fund for Orderly Bank Restructuring), of €9.7bn that would be accompanied by a restructuration of the sector, which reduced its number of entities from 45 to 17 as product of multiple merges (López and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 22). This was followed by two more capital injections in 2011 and 2012,¹⁰ which created also the SAREB (Management Company for Assets Arising from Bank Reorganisation)—popularly known as “*banco malo*” (bad bank) (Berglund, 2018, p. 5). This private entity was created by the banks and the government, which owns 45% of it, in order to absorb all those “toxic assets” of which the banks could not get rid. These toxic assets mainly refer to

⁶ From 11.23% in the third trimester of 2008 to 17.24% in the first trimester of 2009. The rate continued to grow until it peaked in the first trimester of 2013 when 26.94% of the active population was unemployed (INE, 2018a).

⁷ The number of foreclosures was probably higher because this is data collected by the CGPJ: Consejo General del Poder Judicial (General Council of the Judiciary), so it includes only those foreclosures that were ruled in court.

⁸ These figures are estimations, as there is no official institution that offers a consistent collection of data. Therefore, these numbers are the result of triangulating the data offered by three institutions that use different sources and methodologies: The CGPJ; the Bank of Spain; and the National Statistics Institute (INE).

⁹ Semi-public savings-and-loans banks administered by depositors, employees and local political representatives.

¹⁰ The first one of €5.7bn and the second of €33.8bn.

units repossessed by the banks, as well as land and dwellings formerly belonging to developers that went bankrupt and ended up in the hands of the banks for covering the outstanding debt (Leal Maldonado and Martínez del Olmo, 2017, p. 28). In a context of decreasing demand and oversupply, many of these assets were almost impossible to sell, so they were taken out of the balances of the banks to be managed by the SAREB, which held €51bn in real estate assets (García Lamarca, 2016, p. 35). Concurrently, the pressure of the banks to increase the cash flow increased. All the good words to encourage people to sign a mortgage of the previous years turned now into threatening and rough tactics to force the debtors to pay or relinquish the houses.

The bailing-out of the banks was accompanied by the implementation of measures of austerity imposed by the European Union to reduce the public deficit to 3% of the GDP (López and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 6). As consequence of these policies, from mid 2010 budgets were cut, wages lowered, labour-market restructured and various investment projects cancelled to meet the EU's requirements (López and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 23). This worsened the situation of many, who lost their jobs and found impossible to find stable alternatives, therefore becoming dependent of shrinking state subsidies.

In these first years of the crisis, the TV news and the newspapers often led with dramatic images of people being dragged from their houses by the police, of families with all their belongings in the middle of the street after being kicked out from their homes or even cases of people committing suicide while the police were coming up the stairs (Elorduy, 2018). The drama of the evicted people was even aggravated by the Spanish legislation: the law does not recognise non-recourse debt, so in cases of repossession, if the value of the house does not cover the full amount of the debt plus the interests, the difference is still pending and must be paid by the debtor. The overpriced houses bought during the boom years decreased their value dramatically, leaving the debtors in an even more precarious situation, as they found themselves without their homes but still responsible for paying debts that they could not cover (Naredo, Carpintero and Marcos, 2007, p. 83). This dramatic situation and the generalisation of the housing emergency turned the topic into

one of the biggest concerns in connection to the crisis, in many cases erupting into outrage. By 2009, housing had become a central issue in the public agenda (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2016) and one of the central topics for mobilisation and protest in the following years. As a reaction to this dramatic situation the first chapter of the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages), PAH, was created in Barcelona in 2009 as a way to help people in danger of eviction and to canalise that discontent.

Reacting to the crisis

10 years later, the organisation has around 240 chapters across the country and has become one of the most visible organisations within the mobilisation triggered by the crisis. This expansion was not one of PAH Barcelona's objectives, but all the chapters were created by the initiative of local activists that saw a model for canalising their discontent in the struggle for the right to housing and the methodology implemented by PAH. For example, the second group of PAH was created in Terrassa, a city within Barcelona's metropolitan area, after activists from PAH Barcelona ran a workshop on PAH's model with local activists. This direct contact is impossible to implement in cities located further away, so the expansion was just based on imitation and the acceptance of few foundational principles (PAH, 2009) as being the only condition for being acknowledged as a chapter. Although the creation of one chapter per city is common, this is not fixed¹¹ and it is not rare that a node¹² crosses the municipal border if an affected person needs help and there is no chapter in their municipality. Once the chapter is accepted, it is self-organised, without supervision by chapters in other cities. As a consequence of this form of expansion almost all activism happens locally. This is despite the fact that PAH's organisation roughly replicates the state structure: state, regional and local. There are two main levels of activism:

¹¹ E.g. in Madrid, the process resulted in the creation of various nodes attending to neighbourhood divisions.

¹² This is the name used in PAH when talking about the chapters: "*nodo*" (node), as point in the network of independent but interconnected groups of PAH across the country.

1. State and regional meetings¹³ which take place approximately every three months. It is not mandatory for the nodes to send representatives, so the big ones and the ones near the place of the meeting tend to be overrepresented.¹⁴ There is no permanent decision-making body and complementarily there are thematic working groups that work in a decentralised way, mainly communicating through social media between the meetings. The main outcome is the launching of campaigns to coordinate the chapters for a specific goal and time.
2. Local nodes: the main place of activism, based on independent chapters where the weekly assembly is the main meeting where decisions are debated and taken. PAH Barcelona, has two different assemblies: the welcome assembly, where affected people explain their cases, and the coordination assembly, where actions and internal topics are discussed. This division may be rare in small chapters that commonly include all matters in one assembly. Besides, every PAH decides whether to organise through thematic working groups—called *comisión*—which also gather periodically and must inform the assembly of most of their decisions.

The state and regional meetings do not have the formal power to decide what to do, as this has to be validated by the local assemblies. When the node does not send any representative, the information is transmitted via the internet. Thus, the organisation is not hierarchically structured and concentrates its activism on local mobilisation, while those national and regional meetings function mainly to share knowledge and launch campaigns (Casellas and Sala, 2017).

PAH has become not only the vanguard of social mobilisation, but also the origin of new political subjects that have shaken the foundations of the Spanish political regime that emerged after the death of Franco in 1975. PAH's sustained activism that was important for the 2011 spark of what would be called the *Indignados* or *15-M* movement, became key for maintaining the mobilisation as the squares were cleared. Thus, many activists used PAH to canalise their discontent, which led three

¹³ Not every region has regional assemblies, which are more common in the ones with big and more PAHs.

¹⁴ The city for the meetings changes and it is decided at each meeting where the next one will take place.

years later to one of the most innovative strategies implemented by the social movements in 40 years of democracy: the attempt in 2014 to co-opt the regime institutions by the creation of municipal coalitions of diverse social movements' organisations and political parties. These coalitions, directly promoted by the social movements, surprisingly won the elections in many cities—including Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, A Coruña or Cádiz—with anti-austerity and progressive programs. Although the connections vary from city to city, these could not be possible without the activist work of PAH, as exemplified by Barcelona, where many promoters of the first of these municipal coalitions, Barcelona en Comú (BeC), are former members of PAH.

The expansion of these initiatives resembles greatly that of PAH. The second of these coalitions, Marea Atlántica (MaT), appeared also in the summer of 2014, but its high visibility would be impossible to understand without the public exposure that BeC got in the mass media. Moreover, the close relationships between some promoters of both coalitions resembles the way PAH Terrassa was created. Repeating the expansion of PAH, many local municipal platforms¹⁵ started to appear all over the country replicating the model established by BeC. As in PAH, every platform works independently without superior supervision, although a network was created to share information and experiences. To provide this network with greater coherence, they created labels like “Rebel Cities,” “Cities of Change” or “Fearless Cities,”¹⁶ at the same time that they organise sporadic meetings to share experiences.

All these coalitions have similar organisational arrangements, which reproduce to a certain extent that of PAH. The main decision body is their assembly,¹⁷ called at least once every three months in BeC and monthly in the case of MaT. At the same time thematic working exist, similar to PAH's *comisiones*, where activists participate according to their interests such as mobility, urbanism or culture. Moreover, there are neigh-

¹⁵ Term used to distinguish it from a simple electoral coalition, since the goal was to achieve a bigger integration than in a coalition.

¹⁶ The fearless city summit organised in Barcelona in 2017 gathered representatives of these kinds of movements from all over the world in an attempt to launch a sustained network of these groups. A new summit took place in New York in the summer of 2018, although the creation of the network is still limited.

¹⁷ Called Plenario (Plenary) in Barcelona en Comú and Rede (Network) in the case of Marea Atlántica.

bourhood groups and working groups that deal with internal aspects like discourse, logistics or organisation.

The articulation of both PAH and the municipal coalitions at state level could vaguely resonate with the umbrella organisations created by some movements to encompass local groups' activism to influence or confront opponents in superior scales. Nevertheless, a superficial look at their configuration questions that label. In contrast to those umbrella organisations, no hierarchically superior centralised organisation is created in any of these cases (Willems and Jegers, 2012), nor do they represent an indivisible position or mobilise to achieve a specific reward at stake (Zald and Ash, 1966). Even though "Cities of Change" or "Fearless Cities" could be assimilated into umbrella organisations, the fact that these just materialise on a website and a couple of meetings organised by initiative of one or two platforms differentiate them from that model. PAH falls even further: the integration is stronger than in umbrella organisations as the chapters belong to the same organisation defined by specific organisational forms. Nevertheless, there is no formal national or regional structure, but just periodic coming together of local activists that discuss and, at the most, coordinate to launch campaigns with limited control over them.

When I started to analyse these forms of contestation, the first question was to decide on which groups I would focus. I decided to research four different groups: the first and, probably, most visible chapter of PAH, PAH Barcelona; Stop Desahucios Coruña, a smaller node of PAH with much less visibility; the first municipal platform—Barcelona en Comú—and the second one, namely Marea Atlántica. This decision responded to a growing interest in the impact on activism of two aspects that called my attention when I started my research: internal heterogeneity and organisational decentralisation. This influenced the election of groups of different sizes, visibility and in different contexts, but also affected the aim of the thesis, which evolved as I was getting more familiar with their activism.

Aim of the thesis

The initial main aim of this thesis was to investigate how activism around housing has managed to be at the forefront of contestation and to influence the generation of organisations capable of winning mayoral-ties. This initial interest came from a personal sympathy towards the goals of these social movements and the curiosity to know the reasons behind their success—at least in terms of mobilisation and stopping evictions (in the case of PAH), and of winning elections (in the case of the municipal platforms).

As I became in contact with the groups, the general aim was concretised and redefined in response to certain specificities that called my attention. As I increased my knowledge about the groups, I became surprised by the high levels of heterogeneity existing within the different organisations. The more I participated within the groups, the more I realised about the richness of intersecting diversities that shape the activism, collectively and individually. Whereas this heterogeneity became evident in PAH due to the coexistence of different social classes, nationalities, perceptions or values, in the municipal platforms the heterogeneity was mainly linked to the coalition of multiple political groups with diverse ideologies. Exploring the role and the influence of this heterogeneity, and the way the different groups handle it became two of the main interests for me and a major thread throughout the thesis. Product of the development of the research, the coming chapters will problematise and enrich that mere vision of heterogeneity as the co-existence of elements with differential characteristics that called my initial attention.

Alongside realising this heterogeneity, as I started researching the movements, I became even more aware of the particularities of the way they expand and relate to each other. The expansion of the housing movement, which responded to a “contagious” spread of activism more than to a centralised strategy, was mimicked by the expansion of the municipal platforms that mushroomed in many municipalities throughout the country. As a consequence of this expansion, the different groups interact with each other but maintain their independence, with contingent and discontinuous connections that provoked my curiosity. This spatial configuration marked by the strong decentralisation posed

new questions concerning how this intersects with the heterogeneity previously mentioned and its influence on the activism.

Theoretical transitions: from structure to agency and back

As this research agenda was developing, I found that heterogeneity and its articulation was not problematised in depth within the literature I was using at that point, Social Movements Theory and Critical Urban Theory (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996; Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Tarrow, 2011). These approaches offered valuable tools to analyse the main dynamics and mechanisms that trigger, influence and expand collective social mobilisation. Nevertheless, they only tangentially address issues about the personal motivations of people to join the movements, as well as how the interaction of the perceptions and imaginaries of the activists influence collective and individual activism. This pushed me to try to complement that initial focus on the main dynamics of contention with perspectives that locate agency in the centre of the research agenda, so the perceptions and actions of individual activists became important points of reference for analysing how contention forms.

In this transition, I became familiar with a body of research labelled Assemblage Theory (AT). As I became more acquainted with this approach, questions arose about how to combine its interest in agency with those structural analyses that focus on the main dynamics of contention previously mentioned. These issues are not new and have generated continuous debates in relation to different attempts of combining Critical Urban Theory and Assemblage Theory (Brenner *et al.*, 2011; McFarlane, 2011; Storper and Scott, 2016). These debates became the starting point of exploring potential paths to develop a theoretical framework able to grasp how heterogeneity and space influence contention. Thus, I started excavating the potential of expanding the limited use of Deleuzoguattarian philosophy made by Assemblage theorists by incorporating their critical analysis of the imposition of capitalism.¹⁸ With this move, I aimed to begin the analysis on the process of subjectification through which the indebted people internalise the imaginaries generated by the Spanish model of housing as a property.

¹⁸ Mainly in the two volumes that form their work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

The rising awareness of that subjectification becomes the entry point to research into how the activists develop their agency, their capacity to perform their activism (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 1987; Deleuze and Parnet, 1987). As heterogeneity is one of Deleuze and Guattari's (henceforth DG) main interests, the discussion of agency from this perspective allowed me to directly engage with those concerns regarding the impact of heterogeneity in activism. In this process, a key aspect within DG's analysis of capitalism emerged that called my attention, that is, a strong spatial component by which capitalism and its resistances generate different spatialities that determine the relations between the elements. This spatial focus resonated with the questions about the effects of an activism articulated through local decentralised nodes, and it allowed me to explore the intersections of this with heterogeneity.

Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari do not concretely discuss how those spaces are produced, so I found it necessary to deepen this spatial aspect to concretise how that production takes place. To advance into that direction, I explore the potential of combining their analysis with the work of one of the authors that has more deeply analysed space, namely Henri Lefebvre (1991). His theorisation on the production of space offered a perspective which could enrich DG's analysis of the spatiality of capitalist domination and its resistances. At the same time, it opens possible paths for bridging the gap of that agential perspective with structural analysis, since, as I attempt to show below, Lefebvre's triad for the production of space provides a dynamic diagram to problematise and concretise the intersection between those two perspectives.

Research questions

By scrutinising how agency is formed within these four groups, I aim to understand how their decentralisation relates to their internal heterogeneity, and their impact in the ways resistance to neoliberal urbanism expands, contracts and advances. This influences the formulation of specific research questions that revolve around three main topics that will traverse the analysis: heterogeneity, space and imaginaries. Starting with imaginaries, I refer to those hegemonic visions generated by the Spanish economic model of the urban space and housing as an asset. As these

imaginaries become internalised through processes of subjectification, they materialise in certain perceptions of housing and the urban space that come in contact in the activism. The analysis of heterogeneity will focus especially on how the co-existence of diverse perceptions of housing influences activism and is handled within the groups. Finally, as that subjectification process is linked to the creation of specific spaces, I question to what extent the social movements generate spaces that can challenge the spatiality imposed by capitalism and what is the relation of those alternative spaces to the heterogeneity. These three main topics concretise in three research questions:

1. How does the formation of agency, individual and collective, relate to the production of space by the different social movements' groups?
2. How does heterogeneity relate and influence that interaction between agency formation and the production of these spaces?
 - a. How does the production of space intertwine with the diverse activists' imaginaries and perceptions?
3. How do the spaces produced by the different groups intersect to develop their activism?

Concurrently with the empirical aim expressed by these research questions, the thesis also has a theoretical one. In line with the problematic discussed in the previous section, I attempt to develop a theoretical framework that can open new paths to explore the possibility of conjoining agential and structural analyses. Grounded on the empirical findings of this thesis, I aim to show the potentialities of exploring the connection of DG's critical analysis of capitalism with the theorisation about the production of space by Lefebvre. I consider that through this combination, space and the production of space becomes a potential common ground for analysing the relation between agency and the main dynamics of contention.

Chapter outline

Beginning with the chapter the reader has just read, I divided the thesis into seven chapters and one intermission. This chapter has introduced the aim and the research questions in connection to a brief account of the Spanish economic model based on the expansion of debt that led to the crisis of 2008. Contestation has not been directly discussed, but only sketched in relation to that crisis. The second chapter focuses on that mobilisation to describe how the movements reacted to the crisis of that economic model. The chapter starts by briefly discussing the local context where the groups mobilise, in order to connect the economic model with specific urban environments—Barcelona and A Coruña—that reproduce and deepen the effects of the crisis. This contextualisation provides the ground for describing rather chronologically,¹⁹ how the social mobilisation evolved from contestation around housing to the emergence of political initiatives that advance the movements' goals. Finally, the chapter ends with a review of the existent investigations concerning the groups to locate the thesis within that corpus of research.

The third chapter aims to locate the thesis within the debates within urban studies around the possibilities of conjoining agential and political economic aspects. It starts by briefly discussing the main lines of research within Social Movements Theory, which may in general be divided into structural or cultural approaches. The incorporation of geographical dimensions in the analysis maintained that division by translating structural perspectives into scale-focused analyses and cultural ones into network-focused analyses. These became integrated within the field of urban studies, the first mainly through Critical Urban Theory and its focus on political economy and the second through Assemblage Theory and its focus on networks. After discussing the tensions between these lines of research, the chapter continues by framing them concretely around the challenges of militant particularism to articulate place-based struggles. The debate about how to confront those challenges reproduces the two different perspectives previously discussed, which materialise in the confrontation of representational and performative poli-

¹⁹ Social mobilisation rarely follows a linear coherent direction, with constant steps forth and back and continuous overlapping. Nonetheless, in the chapter this has been simplified, for the sake of clarity to condense in 10 pages 10 years of social mobilisation.

tics. At the same time that brings the two main interests of the thesis to the centre of the discussion: heterogeneity and the creation of a space that handles that heterogeneity. Departing from that debate about militant particularism, I analyse the formation of a common positionality product of the subjection of big portions of the population to housing debt. I base this enquiry on Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of subjectification as the product of processes of homogenisation, which provides the ground for discussing the role of heterogeneity in processes of contention. Subsequently, I excavate the potential of intersecting the spatial aspects within Deleuze and Guattari's critical analysis of capitalism with Lefebvre's analysis of the production of space to explore new paths to deal with those challenges launched in the theoretical discussion. The differentiation between striation and smoothing of space pivotal in DG's conceptualisation intersects with Lefebvre's triad on the production of space.

The theoretical discussion is followed by the explanation of the methodology used in the thesis, which is the focus of chapter four, although in between these chapters I inserted an intermission to clarify potential issues emerging from combining Deleuze and Guattari with Lefebvre. This is arranged as an intermission to bridge the theoretical and methodological discussion.

The methodology chapter that follows discusses the use of cartographic methods, and more specifically of diagrams, their implications and the ways in which they can be implemented. The diagram strongly influences the activities undertaken in the field, guided by the use of engaged ethnocartography, as a spatial redefinition of ethnographic methods. This is followed by chapter five, which is divided into four main sections describing a regular week of activism of each group. In line with the diagrammatic logic, the description focuses on the environments and relations generated in the encounters I attended.

Chapter six analyses the spaces created by those encounters through the lenses of the theoretical framework. The chapter focuses on the main processes that characterise the activism, especially how the different groups coordinate the relations between heterogeneous members. The

chapter departs from the discussion of some of those encounters that more clearly reveal the dynamics that affect the activism, occupations and assemblies. The analysis of these encounters directly engages with the theoretical framework to excavate how the intersections between the different ways of handling heterogeneity and the formation of “spaces of activism” affect the activists’ agency.

Finally, chapter seven directly engages with the research questions to examine the role of heterogeneity and space in social contention and the possibilities of articulation to contest capitalism.

2. EMERGENT FORMS OF CONTESTATION: REACTING TO THE CRISIS OF THE NEOLIBERAL MODEL

The consequences of the Spanish economic model and its crisis sparked in 2008 generated a wave of discontent that boosted social mobilisation all over the country. This generalised contestation, however, has been unequal and has responded to specificities provoked by the intersection of the model with the local characteristics of different urban environments. To get a greater insight into some of these particularities that can influence the social mobilisation, the first section of this chapter offers an account of the urban development model of the two cities where the groups researched here perform their activism, namely Barcelona and A Coruña. These models and their connection to the Spanish economic model that led to the crisis are the point of departure for discussions about how they introduced large numbers of the population in the circuit of debt, whose consequences pushed many to join the movements. The subsequent section offers a more detailed historical description of the evolution of this social mobilisation in the decade 2009/2019, while the last section discusses previous research into the organisations investigated here and the location of the thesis within that body of research.

One model, two cities: Barcelona, A Coruña

The convergence of the factors that led to the economic crisis described in the previous chapter created a common economic context that was reproduced all over the country and impacted every single city and re-

gion. The two cities where the groups researched in this thesis mobilise—A Coruña and Barcelona—are no exception. That said, the interaction of these national economic dynamics with diverse urban contexts produce local characteristics, in these cases connected to two models of urban development with many commonalities but also with some specificities. These specificities derive, to a great extent, from the different position of the two cities in the Spanish and the international context. Whereas Barcelona is the second largest city in the country and may be considered a global city, A Coruña is a mid-size city of around 250,000 inhabitants and its impact globally is considerably more limited. Therefore, whereas Barcelona is able to attract millions of tourists and investment, A Coruña's capabilities in these directions are much more limited, basing its economy on its central position in the region to which it belongs, Galiza. Moreover, in opposition to the economic dynamism of Catalonia, the region to which Barcelona belongs, Galiza has a much smaller economy.

Furthermore, the “history of success” of Barcelona as a global city is a consequence of the development and implementation of a consistent plan of urban development, whereas in the case of A Coruña its urban development is just the product of the implementation of policies that follow a certain coherence, but that do not respond to a preconceived comprehensive plan. Consequently, whereas the so-called “Barcelona Model” (Blanco, 2009) has become a trademark analysed by urbanists, planners and academics, A Coruña lacked any plan of this sort, but followed to a great extent the “Barcelona model” and attracted much less attention.

In spite of these different positions and different urbanisation models, the cities share a continuity in the institutional political environment, since after the transition of the late 1970s and for around 25 years the mayoralties were occupied by the same party—the social democratic PSOE—and most of the time by the same mayors.²⁰ This continuity al-

²⁰ Partido Socialista Obrero Español. Pasquall Maragall was mayor of Barcelona between 1982 and 1997. It was substituted by Joan Clos and Jordi Hereu until 2011, also from PSOE. In the case of A Coruña, Francisco Vázquez was mayor from 1986 to 2003 and his substitute was Javier Losada, who was mayor also for PSOE until 2011.

lowed the fixation of a certain urban model that followed the trends marked by neoliberal urbanism, although with certain specificities, especially in the case of Barcelona, which would compose that famous “Barcelona Model” (Blanco, 2009).

The “Barcelona Model”

Barcelona is considered in Spain a synonym of success for being able to transform the city into a brand recognisable all over the world for its cosmopolitanism and openness. In short, for putting the city on the map and positioning it as a popular destination for tourists and ex-pats.²¹ This position is the result of a policy of branding defined by the use of major events as catalyst of great urban regeneration processes, which was launched in 1986 when Barcelona was chosen to organise the Summer Olympic Games of 1992. Although the Games became the milestone for launching that branding strategy to position the city globally as a modern city, the “Barcelona model” is not merely defined by the organisation of these events, but by their use to deploy many dynamics that scholars have identified as characteristic of neoliberal urbanism (Harvey, 1989; Jessop, 2002; Swyngedouw, Moulaert and Rodríguez, 2002). Among the defining features of this model, some of the most relevant are: a relational form of management based on private-public partnerships; the creation of autonomous managerial public agencies; the design and regeneration of certain areas of the city, like the degraded historic centre; territorial decentralisation and citizens’ involvement—as any other stakeholders—in public policy making (Blanco, 2009, p. 356).

Furthermore, in line with the social democratic ideology of the party to which the mayors that occupy the mayoralty for the following 25 years belong, the model combines these neoliberal dynamics with a certain concern and rhetoric about social issues and the provision of public services. Consequently, in the first years of the development of the project to prepare the city for the Games, the municipality argued for the importance of regeneration projects for redistributing and increasing the

²¹ The number of tourists grew a 165% between 1990 and 2004 (Casellas, 2006, p. 67). In 2017 was the 17th most visited city in the world and it has being consistently in the top 20 since 2010 (Mastercard, 2019). Moreover, it was considered in 2017 as the sixth best city for expats by the organisation Internations (2017) and it ranks also high as a destination for investment (Casellas, 2006, p. 67).

citizens' quality of life, as well as their involvement in the policy making process. These claims, which had been in the centre of the political agenda since the first mayor of PSOE was elected in 1979—Narcís Serra—were, in 1986, a continuation of such agenda (Díaz-Orueta, Lourés and Pradel-Miquel, 2018, p. 182). As the municipality considered that this social agenda assured the support from the citizens, it saw in the event a good opportunity to involve the private sector too, whose support the City Hall considered necessary for the success of the urban development model. As the preparations for the Games advanced, the reality proved that balance of interests impossible, as the influence of the representatives of the inhabitants became rather insignificant against the private economic actors, who emerged as the ones really determining the development (Casellas, 2006, p. 73). As the prevalent private interests focused on those areas that could generate higher rates of return in terms of extracted rents, the redistribution agenda resulted in a failure. Despite this deficit, the euphoria and visibility generated by the Games expelled the redistribution debate out of the political agenda and imposed a hegemonic imaginary of the success of the regeneration projects to brand the city as an attractive destination for tourism and investment.

After the Games, the social polarisation increased, as the differences between the regenerated areas and the ones to which these projects did not reach became more evident. This unevenness was accompanied by a higher segregation from the urban fabric, excluding the peripheric neighbourhoods from that modern and cosmopolitan image of Barcelona (Palomera, 2014, p. 9). These dynamics, aggravated by the economic crisis of 1993, reactivated a dense network of neighbourhood activism that had been important in the early 1980s, but had lost much of their prominence due to the consensus generated by the Games. These movements started to mobilise to push for measures to tackle that segregation and the poor conditions in those neighbourhoods. As a response, the municipality adapted the projects to launch new neighbourhood regeneration initiatives, with the intention of increasing decentralisation and the engagement of citizens in the decision making process (Blanco, 2009, p. 363). Nevertheless, the implementation of these new regeneration projects also resulted in criticism from certain neighbours movements that feared that they would lead to the speculation that followed

previous regeneration projects linked to the Games (Casellas, 2006, p. 69). In reality, despite the claims made by the municipality, the main initiatives for regeneration came from independent agencies and were the product of the public-private partnership, in which the private actors became dominant as this model consolidates and becomes more dependent of the private investment. Consequently, the redistribution perspective prominent at the beginning of the 1980s and that progressively was losing importance during the pre-Olympic developments, finally left room in the late 1990s to projects that, instead of aiming to directly improve the citizen's quality of life, focused on economic growth based on the attraction of new investment (Casellas, 2006, p. 76).

As a consequence, although they initially responded to these neighbourhoods' deficits, the regeneration projects pursued a strategy to increase their attractiveness for investment, which subjected the areas to housing speculation. It is in these years of the Spanish economic boom when the "Barcelona Model" was consolidated in its more neoliberal form, to transition from a model that spun around the redistribution and the improvements in citizens' quality of life in the beginning of the 1980s towards a model based on economic growth and big transformation projects (Casellas, 2006, p. 71). As the housing prices in these districts escalated in similar proportions to the rest of the city, this forced the working-class inhabitants of these areas—in many cases migrants—to contract considerable debts to cover their housing needs, which fuelled the debt expansion described above (Palomera, 2014).

The "Coruña Model"?

In contrast to Barcelona, in A Coruña there was no explicit model designed and implemented, although the continuity in the mayoralty created a more or less consistent urban development plan. As a consequence of this lack of plan and of the much lower positionality of the city globally and nationally, the city has received much less attention, both from practitioners and academics, which translates into the almost total lack of academic research about the city. In general, the urban development in the city followed the same patterns of those in Barcelona, although in response to the absence of mega-events, the municipality concentrated its efforts in the development of spectacular architecture and landmarks

to brand the city as an attractive tourist destination. Thus, those 20 years saw the construction of a congress and opera palace with a neoclassical design and an artificial waterfall in 1989; a new sports arena, The Coliseum, built in 1991; a new museum about humanity—the Domus—designed by a star architect—Arata Isozaki—in 1995; an aquarium in 1999; an obelisk, erected in 2001, opposite the most important historic landmark in the city: The Tower of Hercules, the only Roman lighthouse still in use in the world. The biggest development, however, was the construction of a seaside promenade bordering the city, which at the time of completion in 2004 stretched more than 13 kilometres and was publicised as the longest in Europe. The clear goal of these developments was to follow the example set by Barcelona to brand the city and position it within the national and international markets (Fernández Ignacio, 2017, p. 509).

With the exception of the sports arena, the rest of the developments are concentrated in the centre and in the wealthy areas of the city, which left, in general, the peripheric working class neighbourhoods without any of these regeneration projects. A special case was the seaside promenade. Although started in the wealthy centre of the city by the beach, it expanded towards the port and working-class neighbourhoods, which started to suffer from a greater pressure for housing development and speculation. Although the effect of these dynamics was way more limited than in Barcelona, the city also became segregated and unequally developed, with a clear segmentation between wealthy areas and working-class neighbourhoods. A quote taken from a public speech by Xan Xove²² to celebrate the first anniversary of the victory of Marea Atlántica perfectly exemplifies the impact of this model of urbanisation:

I am from Agra do Orzán [a working-class neighbourhood, that in the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s marked the western limit of the city] and coming to the meeting on the [bus number] 7 I ran into Bego and asked her: ‘So Bego, are you going down to Coruña?’ This pictures in two words my childhood and of many others in the 1980s and 1990s in Agra do Orzán: not recognising the city as part of us,

²² A well-known musician, member of Marea Atlántica and since 2019 member of the Galizian Parliament.

identifying ourselves as inhabitants of a place isolated from the projected image of the city. When we said we are going down to Coruña it was... Please, do you allow us to go to Coruña? . . . Us playing in As Conchiñas square did not identify ourselves with the image sold of Coruña: The Coliseum, Paco Vázquez [Francisco Vázquez] tiling the promenade and us playing on a dusty plot of land. . . We were the majority, nevertheless from my point of view until this year, we couldn't prove that we were that majority. We needed those low voices from Coruña's neighbourhoods to break that lie of the posh and central Coruña.

This quote summarises in few sentences the urbanisation model implemented in the city in the 1980s and 1990s, based on those landmarks as a form of city branding and concentrated in central wealthy neighbourhoods or used as an engine to incorporate other neighbourhoods within the speculative market—specially through the promenade and the Coliseum sports arena. By the same token, it reflects the urban segregation promoted by those policies, by which a working-class neighbourhood of narrow streets, without green areas and 10-storeys high buildings²³ remained abandoned by those policies. Similarly to the trends in Barcelona, the urbanism in the city in these years is characterised by the constant intertwining between land speculation, increasing construction and the predominance of private interests, as exemplified by the promotion of the opening of shopping centres (Monge, 2003, p. 67). Between 1987 and 2011 six shopping centres were built, including the biggest in Spain and the third biggest in Europe at that time in 2011. The fact that two of those closed less than five years after opening reflects the short-term speculative strategy of the municipality and the private developers.

As happened in Barcelona, during this period the municipal government constantly stated during this period its commitment towards the inhabitants of the city and the provision of services to all the neighbourhoods. Thus, in these years different municipal social centres opened around

²³ This neighbourhood was rapidly developed in the 1960s and 1970s without any kind of control or plan along existent rural paths to provide housing to the migrants arriving from rural areas. It is commonly accepted among the population that Agra do Orzán is the most densely populated neighbourhood in Europe. Even if not true, this gives an idea of the acknowledgement of such density and the lack of green areas and services.

the city in order to decentralise the urban management and bring the administration closer to the inhabitants. In spite of this effort, these were insufficient and some even denounced that these were used by the municipality to establish a network of patronage and control over the already weak neighbourhood movements in order to legitimise the urban policies promoted from the City Hall (Monge, 2003).

In summary, although Barcelona had a more developed comprehensive plan, both cities implemented similar mechanisms, despite the divergences provoked by the different relevance of the cities, which forced A Coruña to promote projects that did not require such big events due to its limited capability to attract investment. These developments facilitated the insertion of both cities within the economic dynamics of the Spanish economic boom and of the crisis once the economy collapsed. As the cities followed models of regeneration of the public space that increased housing speculation, inhabitants of both cities fully entered the circuit of indebtedness, as the signing of mortgages was the only way to assure the access to adequate housing. The incorporation into the financialised economy also made them potential protesters, as they become affected by the burst of the housing bubble. The reaction to this situation of despair and precariousness due to the total dependence on debt becomes a first main motivation for mobilisation. The way the debt expanded and became central within people's lives during the economic boom becomes central to understanding their motivations and how agency is formed.

Housing indebtedness

The urbanisation models of Barcelona and A Coruña found the perfect environment for their development in the Spanish economic model of the 1990s and 2000s discussed in chapter one. An economic model that sustained the "Spanish economic miracle" of the first years of the 21st century and set the bases for the crisis of 2008 that still shakes the country nowadays with an unemployment rate of 15% at the end of 2018 (INE, 2018a). An economic miracle based on construction and housing speculation that collapsed as the credit stopped flowing and the construction sector paralysed. The legal and economic promotion, combined with an imaginary that presented homeownership as the only "rea-

sonable” form of tenancy, escalated the signing of mortgages even for people in precarious conditions. These people, mainly from the working and middle-classes, who had been outside the main circuits of debt, suddenly found themselves pushed to become indebted as the only way to access stable adequate housing (Palomera, 2014; Sabaté, 2016). The retraction of the state from the provision of affordable housing was then covered by easing the access to credit that facilitated the incorporation of all this new contingent of people in the circuit of capital subjected to debts contracted for overpriced houses. Mortgages and loans became the mechanism for fulfilling the encouraged demand for homeownership in times of skyrocketing prices but low salaries and state retraction from its constitutional mandate of guaranteeing adequate housing for all. This situation exemplifies the transition from a model of welfare to a model of debtfare (Soederberg, 2014), in which the debt becomes basic to cover social needs.

The expansion of this precariousness guaranteed their subjection to capitalism, whereas the securitisation incorporated them within the flows of global financial capitalism, at the same time that seemed to reduce the risk of those bankers that signed mortgages in obvious risk of default (García Lamarca, 2016, p. 109). This national model found its perfect counterpart in municipal urban strategies that prioritised economic growth and deepened the dynamics of speculation that led to the disaster that erupted in the year 2008 when the financial firms started to default. Nevertheless, when some became aware of the precarious situation in which this indebtedness puts them, they decided to fight back and start questioning what really pushed them to accept such a heavy burden. These became the first affected people to join PAH to defend their right to housing through the use of collective action. The history of how this contestation has evolved will be the focus of the next section.

Social mobilisation around the Spanish housing crisis

When the economic crisis fully hit Spain in 2009, the foreclosures numbered hundreds a day. As a reaction to this critical situation, a group of activists with a long trajectory in housing activism, mainly in the group V de Vivienda, formed PAH (Huerga, 2015). V de Vivienda had criti-

cised the difficulties youngsters faced to access affordable housing in the years of the economic boom, but, despite a certain visibility, V de Vivienda had failed to set the topic on the public agenda. In 2009 the problematic changed from the unaffordability of housing to the drama of thousands losing their homes for not being able to pay their mortgages, so housing activism changed to react to a housing emergency of families being thrown out onto the streets. What followed is the story of a social movement organisation that put housing at the centre of the agenda and that became the forefront of social contestation to neoliberal policies (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2016). Furthermore, without the existence of PAH it would be impossible to understand the emergence of new initiatives that have entered and transformed institutional politics. The best example is the creation of municipal coalitions directly emerging from these years of activism that were able to win multiple municipalities in 2015. This section tells that story of how for a period of 10 years, with varying results, this activism challenged housing commodification and indebtedness so deeply embedded in the Spanish economic system (López and Rodríguez, 2010; Sabaté, 2016), at the same time that spurred the development of new organisations that have shaken the foundations of the Spanish regime created in the second half of the 1970s.

The first years: the reaction to the housing emergency

In February 2009 a group of activists in Barcelona created PAH. That the movement started there is not a coincidence: the city was suffering an enormous housing crisis which was a product of the “Barcelona model” (Casellas, 2006) that increased housing speculation and reduced the supply of affordable housing. Concurrently, the city had an active housing movement that had created a network of activists who directly confronted the speculative model of the economic boom years (Huerga, 2015). The new organisation aimed to offer those facing eviction tools for fighting for their homes. In these first months they established the foundations that would regulate the movement’s expansion (Colau and Alemany, 2012):

1. Non-assistentialism: refusal to work as an advisory body for affected people, stressing the importance of their empowerment.

The claim “the affected person is the first person responsible for their case” frames the organisation as a source of information, knowledge and collective support to the individual fight of each affected person;

2. Free: PAH will never charge for the help provided to affected people;
3. PAH will be managed democratically, through an assembly, which is the only body that can take important decisions in order to promote horizontality.

In these first months, the strategy was based on the creation of collective knowledge and mutual support, which conferred some visibility that caught the attention of activists in other parts of the country, who, mainly through personal networks, started expanding the organisation, especially in the cities around Barcelona (Colau and Alemany, 2012). These nodes developed independently of PAH Barcelona, but were an attempt by local activists to translate PAH Barcelona’s model to their local environment.

Defensive activism: Stop Desahucios (Stop Evictions)

During its first year, the movement was relatively peaceful and the repertoire of collective action less confrontational, thereafter resistance to evictions became physical. The turning point was the eviction of a family for which PAH Barcelona managed to gather many activists to effectively prevent it from happening (García Lamarca, 2016, p. 179). This victory worked as an example for launching the first campaign in November 2010 namely *Stop Desahucios* (Stop Evictions) (PAH, 2012). It was a campaign of direct measures implemented by the local PAHs to stop evictions. When a node learns about an eviction, it mobilises by peacefully blocking the entrance of the court representative to the house. These actions helped to turn the problem from the individual shame of losing the home into a collective problem, while developing solidarity bonds among the affected people (García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016). These actions that were mainly confrontational in these first years, became peaceful, as the experience created a sort of protocol by which

both parts—PAH and authorities—know how the other will act, resulting in an extremely high ratio of stopped evictions. Simultaneously, in these first years, PAH also used legal actions of suing banks for signing unfair terms and involving European courts to overrule the Spanish legal framework in a strategy of amalgamating a disruptive and institutional repertoire (Weerdts and Garcia, 2016). The images of peaceful activists being violently dragged by the police provided PAH with great visibility and legitimacy (Álvarez de Andrés, Zapata and Zapata Campos, 2014), although in these first two years, the expansion of PAH was still limited to Catalonia and some big cities around Spain, often without direct linkage to PAH Barcelona. This growing visibility increased the capability of the PAHs to force the banks to negotiate: in some cases, a relief of part of the debt; in others, a social rent; and yet others, a non-recourse debt (“*dación en pago*”).

Legislative measures: ILP (Legislative Popular Initiative) campaign

Non-recourse debt started to gain prominence among PAH’s demands, becoming the centre of the second campaign: the *campaign for an ILP* (Legislative Popular Initiative) for changing the law that PAH—together with other organisations—launched in 2011 (PAH, 2013d). ILP is one of the few popular initiative mechanisms recognised by the Spanish constitution. Once presented by the proponents, the proposal requires the acceptance by the Bureau of the Parliament to initiate the collection of at least 500,000 signatures to force the plenary to discuss it. The proposal registered by PAH in March 2011 spun around three demands: retroactive non-recourse debt, stopping all evictions and the relinquishing of empty apartments of bailed-out banks for social housing (PAH, 2011a).

Hundreds of evictions were still taking place and there were chapters of PAH in a few big cities (Álvarez de Andrés, Zapata and Zapata Campos, 2014), which worked mainly independently and on a local basis. This configuration affected how PAH interacted with other actors like authorities or mass media, such interaction being key in PAH’s strategy to increase visibility (Romanos, 2014). Due to the lack of a central representative body, these interactions have fallen on the shoulders of individual spokespeople, producing a complex situation that some have seen

as the promotion of prominent leadership (Martínez, 2018). Nevertheless, considering the total independence between chapters, their visibility seems more a consequence of the need for communicating than a consequence of an effective leadership: they detent that position just as spokespeople of some big node,²⁴ without control over the activism of the local nodes; likewise, most of the chapters only sporadically engage with each other, limiting the interaction with the spokespeople. A hint of this complex territorial configuration can be found on the press release about a speech in the Parliament defending the ILP by Ada Colau, the main spokesperson of PAH Barcelona. The press release started by saying “Today, [...] the PAH travelled to Madrid...,” this is when a PAH had just been created in Madrid (PAH, 2011b). This exemplifies the lack of self-recognition as a national organisation, the central position of PAH Barcelona and the complex spatial configurations already emerging in 2011.

The 15-M

In May 2011, while PAH was trying to push their ILP, a totally unexpected event that shook the Spanish regime born in the transition process after Franco’s death sparked, namely the *15-M* or *Indignados* movement. In a context of rampant unemployment, austerity and hundreds of foreclosures a day, municipal elections were scheduled for May 22nd. A week before, dozens of demonstrations took place to show the disaffection with the regime. The demonstrators took to the streets shouting “*Democracia Real Ya!*” (Real Democracy Now!) (Castañeda, 2012). The demands were diffuse and vague, as were the organisers which were mainly small organisations—including PAH—without connections to any institutional political actor (Fominaya, 2015). What started as an expression of disaffection towards the bipartisan political system and the austerity policies surprisingly evolved into the occupation of central squares in many cities (Abellán Bordallo, 2015). More than 40 camps were set up and for around a month the squares became public agoras where assemblies debated how to change society (Taibo,

²⁴ Therefore, the three main spokespersons of PAH since its creation until 2018 have been members of PAH Barcelona. The same happens with the general PAH communications at state level and the general website, which are mainly handled by members of the biggest and more influential chapters like Barcelona and Madrid.

Vivas and Antentas, 2011; Viejo, 2011). The movement had a great impact on public opinion, with mass media struggling to untangle what was happening, especially due to the difficulties of identifying an organiser. The camping sites promoted not only political debates and regained the use of public space, they also densified activist networks and gave the chance for people outside those to enter in contact with them (Charnock, Purcell and Ribera-Fumaz, 2012).

Nonetheless, after a month of intense debates, tiredness and increasing repression caused the squares to be cleared and the protesters to look for other ways to canalise their activism, which led them to integrate existing organisations or to create new ones (García-Lamarca, 2017b). PAH attracted many protesters, who reinvigorated local chapters or created new ones in their towns²⁵ (Abellán, 2014), carrying with them the 15-M discourse about democracy and citizen's rights (Gerbaudo, 2017), which intertwined with PAH's framing of housing. This intersection also influenced the repertoire of contention, as new forms of civil disobedience were incorporated and started to coexist with more institutional forms of mobilisation (Martínez López, 2016).

The hot years: increasing mobilisation after 15-M

During the 15-M, PAH kept fighting for the ILP, which was finally admitted for discussion in the Parliament in July 2011 (PAH, 2011c). During the discussion for the acceptance of the proposal, PAH was called to the Parliament to defend the proposal. In a final tirade, Ada Colau, in a confrontational tone warned that time was running out as was civil peace, so politicians should join the right side (Alemany and Colau, 2011). Even the title of the speech, "*Menos comisión y más democracia real!*" (Less commission and more real democracy!), links the struggle to the 15-M and frames the confrontation between a delegitimised Parliament and the citizens. The politicisation that followed the 15-M had influenced PAH's discourse (Díaz-Cortés and Sequera, 2015), inserting the housing crisis within a frame of regime and democratic crises (Flesher Fominaya, 2017). The Bureau finally accepted the proposal in

²⁵ PAH Madrid is a good example of this connection (El País, 2011).

September 2011 and the collection of signatures started in April 2012,²⁶ with a high degree of mobilisation by some PAHs—especially the big ones—which collected 1.4 million signatures in nine months (PAH, 2013f). In February 2013, Colau visited Parliament again, where she accused the banks of creating the housing emergency and the politicians of being accomplices. Once again, in the final tirade, she threatened that this would force the population to increase the pressure to defend their rights if the ILP was not passed (PAH, 2013c).

Civil Disobedience: Escraches campaign

After this speech and as a result of the mobilisation, the Parliamentary groups that had blocked the proposal changed their position and the ILP was accepted for discussion. At this point, PAH expanded its repertoire of contention to openly support civil disobedience through the *campaign of escraches* started in February 2013 (PAH, 2013g). *Escrache* is a protest action which people gathered to make noise with pots and other tools, in this case in front of places where MPs were, such as their homes, to pressure them to vote in favour of the ILP (Romanos, 2013). Nevertheless, the campaign did not have the desired effect and PAH ended up withdrawing its proposal because it had been reformulated during the Parliamentary process to the point of emptying it of most of its substantial content (PAH, 2013d). After the failure, the campaign intensified, especially against members of the ruling party, the main responsible for the failure (PP). Nevertheless, the campaign stopped after a while, as it started to divert the focus of the public debate from the right to housing to the democratic legitimacy of the actions (Flesher Fominaya, 2015).

This campaign exemplifies an evolution towards a more disruptive repertoire, as a legitimate tool both for saving families from losing their homes and to achieve the right to housing. The failure of the ILP reinforced the framing of the linkage between politicians and financial sector that impoverishes democracy (PAH, 2013a, 2013b), while the framing pointed to indebtedness as a product of the elite's interests. At the end of 2013, dozens of evictions were taking place on a daily basis, but

²⁶ Although the proposal was officially accepted in February, PAH did not get the official material for collecting the signatures until that month.

PAH increased its ability to stop them, although the mobilisation varied greatly from node to node. In some cases, the involvement of the node in the *escraches* was significant, in others, the chapters just worried about local issues.

Antagonist actions: Obra Social campaign

No campaign exemplifies better the differences in levels of involvement better than the *campaign Obra Social* (Social Work). This campaign re-locates evicted people in empty houses belonging to banks to pressure them to relinquish the houses for a social rent to those occupying (PAH, 2011). Although the campaign was launched in September 2011, it was first after the failure of the ILP (the end of 2013) that the campaign expanded across Spain. Until then, it had been concentrated in a few nodes in Catalonia, especially those with linkages to the libertarian and anarchist movements (PAH, 2013e). This campaign saw PAH engaged in more confrontational actions. Up to this campaign, the mobilisation had been based on criticising the housing indebtedness promoted by the economic model, *Obra Social* directly challenged the concept of private property and squatting was redefined as a legitimate way to guarantee the right to housing (Di Felicianantonio, 2017; Díaz-Parra and Candón Mena, 2015).

By the beginning of 2014, PAH had chapters throughout the country, joining activists with people suffering from the housing crisis. However, there were large variations from node to node due to the highly decentralised nature of PAH and the lack of hierarchical control (Álvarez de Andrés, Zapata and Zapata Campos, 2014). The four main campaigns organised until then—*Stop Desahucios*, *ILP*, *Escraches* and *Obra Social*—revealed an increased politicisation of the housing issue and a radicalisation in the tactics and demands (Peiteado Fernández, 2018a). Nevertheless, this evolution varied considerably through the country, with each local node focusing on certain campaigns or issues but ignoring others in response to the needs of the local context. Despite the years of mobilisation and some victories stopping individual evictions and acquiring small legal changes in Catalonia and some municipalities, the situation was still dramatic (Martínez, 2018). Many evictions were still taking place and the pressure started to expand to the rental sector. The

limitations to producing legal or systemic changes led some activists to consider new strategies to actually force effective change.

The institutional strategies: Barcelona en Comú and Marea Atlántica

These new strategies revolved around the possibility of co-opting the institutions of the Spanish political regime in order to overcome the barriers that prevented change. They materialised in February 2014 with the creation of the left-wing party Podemos which was formed to compete in the European elections of June that year. Claiming to be a tool for canalising the discontent expressed during the 15-M, its unexpectedly good results—1.4 million votes and five seats—convinced many activists of the potential of the institutional strategy (Errejón and Mouffe, 2015; Hassan, 2016; Chironi and Fittipaldi, 2017). In June 2014, as an expansion of the path opened by Podemos (Calle Collado, 2015), a group of activists, including many from PAH Barcelona, launched a municipal platform, Guanyem Barcelona, to win the city in the municipal elections of May 2015. This was followed by the launch of Marea Atlántica in the city of A Coruña, in a process that would be later reproduced in many cities across Spain and that would mimic PAH's model of expansion. BeC and MaT were the first two of these municipal platforms and, in contrast to Podemos, they came directly from PAH and other autonomous movements (Calle Collado, 2015).

Barcelona en Comú

Guanyem Barcelona was presented to the public on 26th June 2014 at a press conference. The main figure was Ada Colau who had quit her representative role within PAH a couple of months before to launch, together other members of PAH Barcelona, a political platform for winning the mayoralty of the city. Some days before, 15th June, Guanyem had launched an online manifesto signed by 387 prominent activists, academics and politicians in which they argued for the need to create a new political subject to enter the institutions and overcome the elites' permanent blockade of the proposals made by the social movements. Moreover, the manifesto argues for the need to construct a real democratic city to reverse urban commodification and called for the creation of a political platform (Barcelona en Comú, 2014).

The promoters quickly gained the minimum of 30,000 signatures they thought necessary to support the legitimacy of the manifesto and validate the project (Guanyem Barcelona 2014). The manifesto was followed by the press conference and the presentation of the project in the neighbourhoods in order to promote the co-creation of the electoral platform. At the same time, the promoters started a dialogue with diverse social and political organisations to negotiate their incorporation into the project.²⁷ The platform changed its name to Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common) and the process culminated in primary elections in March 2015. These were held to elect the representatives running for the municipal elections of May that year. They were carried out through a system of closed lists that included representatives from every organisation recognised within BeC. The Colau's list was the only one running for the primary elections and received more than 3,000 votes of support (Barcelona en Comú, 2015b). In May 2015, BeC won the elections having gained 25% of the votes (El País, 2015). Colau became the new mayoress supported by the PSOE and the Catalanian nationalist party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC).

Marea Atlántica

Marea Atlántica followed a similar process a month later. An online manifesto signed by 99 activists and academics launched the platform, with a formal presentation on 22nd July 2014 asking for 2,500 signatures to validate the project. The manifesto followed the same argumentative lines as the one of Guanyem Barcelona, except for the lack of a reference to how the formation of the electoral platform would be implemented (Marea Atlántica, 2015). In this case, the promoters of the organisation were not former members of the local chapter of PAH, but mainly linked to autonomous social centres. The launch of the organisation and its presentation in the neighbourhoods was accompanied by a negotiation with other organisations and political parties.²⁸ The platform also organised a process of co-creation of the electoral platform between February and April, and primary elections in March 2015, in which

²⁷ Podemos having five seats in the European Parliament and Iniciativa per Catalunya-Les Verts having ten in the Catalanian Parliament were the biggest at that time.

²⁸ Again, Podemos and Anova, this one with four seats in the regional Parliament, were the most relevant.

Xulio Ferrreiro was elected as the candidate to become mayor—again the only contender. Unlike BeC the rest of the list was voted for in an independent election by using a system of open lists (Rodríguez, 2015). In the elections of May 2015 MaT gained ten mandates, the same as PP. Xulio Ferrreiro became mayor thanks to the support of PSOE (El País, 2015).

The new scenario: the PAH Five and the PAH's Housing Law campaigns

At the same time that the municipal platforms and Podemos turned institutional politics upside down, PAH maintained its activism (PAH, 2015a). Although some core activists had left to join these initiatives, other refused to enter institutional politics. The platforms opened the political structure, but also created tensions about how to relate to organisations from which PAH claim to be independent (Weerdt and Garcia, 2016). Nonetheless, because of the high degree of decentralisation, the new political structure impacted each chapter differently depending on their relation to the new local governments and the mobilisation developed by the node. The organisation continued its expansion across Spain and in November 2015, it recovered its more institutional repertoire and launched a new campaign: *Las 5 de la PAH* (The PAH Five), to force the parties running for the parliamentary elections of December 2015 to accept five points to guarantee the right to housing (PAH, 2015b). (see table 2).

Old demands are redefined in a wider way and two new appear: an active policy to increase the stock of social and public housing, which in 2011 was exclusively framed as the transformation of empty houses belonging to banks into rental social houses for those facing evictions (Alemany and Colau, 2011; PAH, 2015b); demands not directly connected to the defence of housing, but to adequate housing. This campaign evolved after the elections in the campaign *Ley Vivienda PAH* (PAH's housing law) to force the discussion in the Parliament of a more comprehensive law to guarantee the right to housing (PAH, 2017). This time PAH agreed with some parties that they could present the proposal

in its name, demonstrating the use of the more open political structure.²⁹ The proposal was finally rejected in March 2018 due to PP's and the liberal party Ciudadanos' opposition.

At the same time that the two campaigns were taking place, the institutional political context changed in both Barcelona and A Coruña, when the new governments of Barcelona en Comú and Marea Atlántica took office in June 2015. The housing crisis was among their main worries, confronting the commodification of housing and, at least theoretically, showing a more open attitude towards the social movements. This generated certain synergies that did not prevent the local PAHs from criticising the new governments or from keeping their repertoire of civil disobedience, but created a new scenario to which they had to adapt.³⁰

²⁹ In a quite fragmented Parliament, Podemos was the third largest party, close to the social democratic PSOE.

³⁰ PAH Barcelona sent a letter to Ada Colau in December 2015 accusing her of "not doing enough" (PAH, 2015a)

The PAH 5				
Retroactive Non-recourse debt	Affordable rent	Stop evictions	Social Housing	Guaranteed electricity, water and gas supply
<p>1) Mechanisms for granting non-recourse debt and write off of the debt</p> <p>2) Inability to seize guarantor's home</p> <p>3) Elimination of unfair terms and economic compensation for them</p>	<p>1) Reform of the Housing Law to provide security and stability</p> <p>2) Extension to 5 years and/or formulas by which the contract can be terminated only in specific urgent cases</p> <p>3) Create a regulatory framework for prices in accordance to population's average income</p>	<p>1) Moratorium of evictions from the main and only home</p> <p>2) Mandate for the banks and big real estate companies to offer a social rent to affected families prior to execute eviction</p> <p>3) Financial help for paying the rent in cases when the landlord does not have many houses</p> <p>4) Mandate to the public administrations to offer resettling even in cases of squatting</p> <p>5) Mandate for the companies to offer settlement in the same municipality and neighbourhood in cases of resettling</p>	<p>1) Use of empty houses through mandatory cessions</p> <p>2) Increasing the offer of public housing</p> <p>3) A maximum of 30% of the family total income for stabilising social rents</p>	<p>1) Caution principle: guarantee for not cutting off the basic supply of water, electricity and gas without gathering information about the situation of the affected people</p> <p>2) Social subsidy: payment according to the purchase power</p> <p>3) Refusal to cover the debts with public funds, forcing the suppliers to assume the costs of families who cannot pay</p>

Table 2 Las 5 de la PAH (The PAH 5).

Ley Vivienda PAH was PAH's last national campaign of its first 10 years of existence, which, despite little victories, have been full of setbacks, divergences and imbalances (Martínez, 2018), as the five campaigns¹ were followed diversely by the nodes (Peiteado Fernández, 2018a). Moreover, the campaigns overlapped providing the room for the coexistence of divergent discourses, repertoires and political cultures. The *Obra Social* is the best example, with some nodes quite active—specially in Catalonia—whereas the majority do not even consider it. *Stop Desahucios* was the only campaign that was generalised, as an emergency reaction to dramatic cases applicable by each node. These divergences are allowed by the strongly decentralised articulation, replicated by the municipal platforms, which work independently and only come together sporadically. This independence becomes influenced by specific local contexts where local governments of the platforms took power, which generate tensions and opportunities both in the institutional and the non-institutional arena.

These above sections have offered an overview of the mobilisation triggered by the economic crisis sparked in 2008 around the right to housing and the development of new strategies for co-opting institutional power. This mobilisation responded to the housing drama of considerable portions of the population that became incorporated as the weakest links into the global flows of debt by an economic model based on speculation and exponential growth of debt around the housing sector. The precarity provoked by the subjection to debt intrinsic to such a model became evident as the economy collapsed and many ended trapped in a dramatic situation not only economically but also in their social lives. This situation caused the appearance of the first PAH in Barcelona, one of the cities where the housing emergency hit more deeply as this economic model interacted with a neoliberal urban model that segregated and made the city more exposed to the financial crisis. The deepening of the crisis and of the housing emergency that lasted for a few years has facilitated the expansion of the mobilisation model of PAH throughout the country. This territorial expansion was accompanied by an expan-

¹ Six, if The PAH 5 and PAH's housing Law campaigns are considered independently.

sion in the repertoire of contention and in a discourse that redefine right to housing in more antagonistic terms as PAH implemented its five campaigns. Nevertheless, the limited capability to achieve effective legal change and to improve living material conditions convinced some activists to try a different strategy, this time by participating in the institutions of the representative liberal regime. Reproducing PAH's model of expansion, the municipal platforms success in the local elections of 2015 opened new opportunities, but brought new challenges about how to maintain their horizontality within the representative regime.

The visibility and relative success achieved by these organisations in recent years have called the attention of many academics who have tried to untangle this social mobilisation from multiple perspectives and focusing in diverse aspects of contention. The next section briefly reviews some of the most relevant work to locate this thesis within that body of research.

Research on PAH and the municipal platforms

The prominent position of PAH among the movements within the waves of mobilisation triggered by the economic crisis has called the attention of many scholars. In contrast, the municipal platforms, as they are more recent, have not done so, although this will no doubt change sooner rather than later as I met many researchers while I was doing my fieldwork in BeC. The academic accounts produced so far have been multiple and varied, from different perspectives and in different locations, especially in the case of PAH, although there has been an overrepresentation of the chapters of PAH found in Barcelona and Madrid metropolitan areas.

Starting with PAH, the research has been extensive and covered multiple aspects: the evolution in the organisation of mobilisation and its outcomes and impacts in the neoliberal urbanism (Abellán, 2014; Álvarez de Andrés, Zapata and Zapata Campos, 2014; Huerga, 2015; Martínez López, 2016; Martínez, 2018); the creation of new forms of governance (Weerdts and García, 2016); the development of a new discourse (Fletcher Fominaya, 2015; Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2016); the em-

powerment of evicted people (Mir García *et al.*, 2013; Barbero, 2015; García Lamarca, 2016; Casellas and Sala, 2017; García-Lamarca, 2017a; Santos, 2019); the reformulation of identities (Gonick, 2016; Ortega Fernández, 2017); the repertoire of collective action (Romanos, 2014; Flesher Fominaya, 2015); the potential for building resistance and alternatives to capitalism (Di Felicianantonio, 2017; Kaika, 2017; Berglund, 2018); or even comparative studies with other housing movements abroad (Ordóñez, Feenstra and Tormey, 2015). In general, without discussing them in detail, most of these accounts are located within the fields of Social Movements Theory or Critical Urban Theory, paying attention to more structural aspects and describing PAH as a quite antagonistic organisation that opposes housing commodification. These analyses discuss the organisation as a more or less unified whole and focuses on the general dynamics influencing or promoted by the organisation to advance towards its goals. In a few cases (e.g. García Lamarca, 2016; Gonick, 2016; Ortega Fernández, 2017) the research zooms in and focuses on the internal dynamics that articulate the organisation, therefore not limiting the attention to those general dynamics that can determine mobilisation, but expanding the research into how the agency of the affected people is constructed. These last studies advance some interesting starting points and directions on the individual motivations for joining the PAH and the development of alternative imaginaries—especially in the works of García Lamarca (García Lamarca, 2016; García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016; García-Lamarca, 2017a), who conducted fieldwork in PAH Barcelona—which will be expanded upon in this thesis by excavating the connections of that agency formation with the spatial articulation of the movements to contest neoliberal urbanism.

Faced with the obvious impossibility of analysing every single node, most of the researches usually base their fieldwork in one or two of the most prominent ones. To complement these researches and to problematise potential generalisations of the contention in the most prominent nodes as the standard for the whole organisation, I included in my research a smaller and less visible node. The inclusion of Stop Desahucios

Coruña may add some nuances to the analysis of the complex ways in which the agency is formed and reworked not only in relation to the contexts, but also about the spatial articulations between the nodes and with the municipal platforms. This increases the possibility of problematising in greater depth the activism of an organisation that has 240 independent nodes. My research is then seen as a step towards covering a certain lacuna within this research, as other researchers do not directly question the ways heterogeneity affects the mobilisation of an organisation where the demands and strategies created nationally can have an unbalanced echo in chapters where the demands are locally based. Thus, I intend to excavate to what extent the national framing of the activism, which is dominated by those prominent chapters that manage the official communication channels,¹ determines the local activism of the different nodes, or if this has limited influence at local level and its function is mainly to generate a more unifying vision towards the exterior of PAH: mass media, political parties, banks, public in general, etc. To capture those potential variations, the fieldwork was carried out in chapters that are geographically distant (around 1000km) and considerably different in size (e.g. PAH Barcelona has around hundred active members, whereas the node in A Coruña has around 15) to analyse how they react to the neoliberal urbanism, the influence of their contexts and the role of the activists' agency. Of course, the research does not intend to be an account of PAH as a whole, but to understand how the differences are managed and their effects at the local level.

As mentioned, Barcelona en Comú and Marea Atlántica, have a shorter history and therefore the number of academic accounts is much smaller. Nevertheless, their success in winning the mayoralties and their visibility has attracted increasing attention that starts crystallising in some academic accounts. There will, no doubt, be many more to follow. The perspectives are also varied, but focusing mainly on what has been called "New Municipalism" to refer to these and other alternative movements that have won mayoralties not only in Spain but also in other countries in Europe. These movements have progressive programs

¹ Each chapter has its own Facebook page and in many cases a website too. Nevertheless, the official website and social networks are managed by a few people mainly within PAH Barcelona.

that focus their political action on local politics (Blanco and Gomà, 2016; Subirats, 2016; Blanco, Gomà Carmona and Subirats, 2018). The emergence of the new institutionalisation strategy has also called the attention of few scholars interested in the transition from movement politics to institutional politics (Eizaguirre, Pradel-Miquel and García, 2017; Ordóñez, Feenstra and Franks, 2018; Blanco, Salazar and Bianchi, 2019), as well as their linkages to the emergence of Podemos (Calle Collado, 2015). Nevertheless, there is still a vacuum of exhaustive analysis of how these groups create their agency and their activism, which this thesis aims to start filling. This is especially needed in the case of Marea Atlántica, because of paucity of research, it has yet to be investigated. In this thesis, in line with the research on PAH, I intend to expand this body of research by focusing on the relations between the different platforms and with other movements, in order to produce specific spatial arrangements that can challenge capitalism.

Unfolding this complex, diverse and rapidly changing situation poses some theoretical challenges that will be discussed in the next chapter which will start with a brief account of potential theoretical perspectives for analysing social mobilisation. Building on these perspectives and their main challenges in relation to the connection between structural perspectives agential ones, the chapter will propose an alternative approach based on the problematisation of the spatiality of capitalism and its contentions as potential ground for conjoining both approaches.

3. THEORETICAL CHALLENGES TO ANALYSE CONTESTATIONS TO NEOLIBERAL URBANISM

As seen, the 2008 economic crisis in Spain was followed by a reconfiguration and increase in contestation, as new social movements appeared and old ones redefined their strategies, organisation and discourse. This, as happens in all cases of social mobilisation, is a multifaceted phenomenon that has been researched from diverse standpoints and perspectives, which has led to a certain compartmentalisation. After briefly discussing the different perspectives that form the heterogeneous corpus of Social Movements Theory, the second section of this chapter focuses on how the body of research has been expanded by an increasing interest about the geographical aspects of protest. This perspective, which gained momentum as a reaction to the specificities of mobilisation relating to capitalist globalisation processes, can be divided into two main approaches, namely scale-focused analysis and network-focused analysis (Nicholls, Miller and Beaumont, 2013, p. 3). Whereas the first one has been linked to political economic analyses and Critical Urban Theory, the second perspective has been developed by Assemblage Theory and focuses on agential aspects. The possibilities of combining both perspectives have generated animated debates that I use as a background for developing a theoretical framework that will directly relate to the challenges posed by the possibility of articulating militant particularism (Harvey, 1995). This discussion revolves around the relations between place and space and the different solutions that reproduce the division

between scale-focused and network-focused perspectives in relation to the challenges of combining different place-based struggles.

This background helps to locate this thesis within the field and to launch the theoretical challenges with which I engage. Thus, the reference to militant particularism departs from the emergence of a common positionality in relation to housing indebtedness. The indebtedness implies the control of everyday life, but indebtedness also helps to connect the different local struggles. From this common ground, I aim to develop a theoretical framework for analysing how the articulation of such heterogeneous place-based struggles has taken place in Spain. In order to do so, the framework excavates the potential of combining Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of space and politics with the work on the production of space by Lefebvre. As I shall discuss, their shared interest in bodies, everyday life, relationality and heterogeneity offer the possibility for this combination to open new paths concerning the dialogue between the two perspectives. This provides a fuller understanding of the challenges of militant particularism and the contestation of neoliberal urbanism.

Social Movements Theory

The disciplines of sociology and political science have produced extensive research into social movements resulting in a vast and varied corpus of literature which has been grouped under the label Social Movements Theory (SMT) (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). This body of research, which initially emerged as a reaction to previous descriptions of social mobilisation as irrational, understands contestation as the product of rational decisions taken by actors reacting to the opportunities and constraints offered by the political economic context (Gould, 2009). Since its founding, the field has been under constant development and expansion though, generally speaking, one can make a division between structural and cultural approaches (Klandermans and Roggeband, 2007).

Structural approaches

Political Process Theory and *Resource Mobilisation* are two of the most relevant approaches when focussing on the identification of general dynamics and mechanisms that influence contention (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). Whereas the first of these focuses on aspects within the political environment—political opportunities structure—that favour or prevent social mobilisation¹ (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996), resource mobilisation theory focuses on how the social movements compensate for lack of power within the institutional arena by deploying a series of resources to advance towards their goals (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996; Tilly and Wood, 2010). Although there is no exhaustive list of resources, usually organisation and repertoire of contention appear as two of the most important. Repertoire of contention refers to those actions that a movement has for achieving its goals. The repertoire is under constant renovation, since it is culturally embedded (Tilly, 1986). One example of a classification is that based on levels of confrontation in violent, contained behaviour—e.g. petitions—and disruptive—e.g. civil disobedience (Tarrow, 2011).

Expanding the focus of those structural analyses, a different line of research stresses the important role of discourse creation for social mobilisation. Among these, *Frame Analysis* (Benford and Snow, 2000; Motta, 2015) has been one of the most influential and most developed. This approach defines frames as the schemata used by social movements to interpret the world out there and boost mobilisation by fulfilling three main tasks: diagnosis to establish the undesirable situation; prognosis to describe the desirable future and the means for advancing towards it; motivational to offer the motives that work as prods for action (Snow and Benford, 1988). Concurrently, other approaches have developed alternative or complementary perspectives of discourse analysis, for example from a Foucauldian perspective (Sandberg, 2006; Baumgarten and Ullrich, 2016).

¹ For example, the possibility of finding allies among the elites; the possibility of finding international allies or the division between the elites.

Cultural approaches

This concern with discourse incorporates certain cultural aspects, although without abandoning that focus on the identification of general dynamics and mechanisms that shape contention. This transition is expanded by other approaches that turn cultural aspects into their main focus of research such as the *New Social Movements approach*. The label “new” refers to a reality of “non-class specific contemporary social movements, issue-oriented citizen protest, and varied collectivities demanding social recognition” (Lee, 2007, p.v). It stresses that the origin of mobilisation changed from one revolving around labour-capital conflicts about working and living conditions to aspects which are more related to the development of alternative identities (Laraña and Gusfield, 1994). Consequently, the research agendas switch the focus to investigating identity creation (Melucci, 1988) or activists networks (Diani and McAdam, 2003), in order to understand a contention characterised by a radical pluralism different to previous centralised organisations that encompassed a universalistic vision of socio-political change (Lee, 2007). These perspectives aim to capture the fragmentation within the movements to unfold the mechanisms implemented to mobilise activists (Klandermans, Kriesi and Tarrow, 1988) and the symbolic challenge to prevailing orders. Nevertheless, they still pay little attention to the complexities of lived experiences or alternative emerging subjectivities (Juris and Khasnabish, 2013, p. 6).

Deepening this cultural perspective and its micro-sociological analysis, another corpus of research focuses on how *affective intensities* influence the relationships between activists and contention (Ryan, 2015) to assert the complementarity of affectivity to that rationality stressed by other approaches (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2000). These analyses have made *affect* the object of constant redefinitions and diverse theoretical developments with multiple intersections with concepts like emotions, feelings or power (Jasper, 1998; Aminzade and McAdam, 2001; Gould, 2010; Seigworth and Gregg, 2010; Lara, 2015).

Although these diverse approaches gained momentum at different moments, one did not displace another. Rather, they coexist generating constant debates about their pertinence. This is an indicator of their limits that has led prominent scholars to make constant calls for integration (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 1997). These claims materialised in formulations such as *cycles of collective action* (Tarrow, 1993) or *dynamics of contention* (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001), which focus on the temporality of mobilisation. Nonetheless, their influence has been limited and the field is still characterised by compartmentalisation and the emergence of new perspectives. Specially relevant for this thesis is the intersection with the works of Foucault (Ullrich, 2010; Künkel and Mayer, 2012), especially in relation to the study of neoliberal governmentality.

From these dominant lines of research two main challenges emerge in relation to this thesis: firstly, problematising the effect of heterogeneity in the formation of agency. Despite recognising the diversity within every mobilisation, these perspectives generally discuss it in relation to the social movements and not within individual organisations.¹ Thus, the empirical analyses mainly focus on general mechanisms and dynamics of mobilisation, but do not systematically discuss the influence of the diversity within the organisations, except to investigate their failure (Hamel, Lustiger-Thaler and Mayer, 2000, p. 158).

Secondly, institutionalisation is usually analysed as part of the repertoire or as an outcome of mobilisation, moment when the analysis stops for considering it out of the research object (Mayer, 2000, p. 149; Pruijt and Roggeband, 2014). Consequently, this literature does not pay much attention to organisations that, despite being originated within non-institutional arenas, aim to co-opt institutional power. This strategy, that was rare before, became more common in the mobilisation after the cri-

¹ It must be reminded that social movement—e.g. environmentalist movement—, should not be confused with organisations within that social movement—e.g. Greenpeace.

sis of 2008,¹ which have generated new questions about institutionalisation and the movement/party forms (Della Porta *et al.*, 2017).

Moreover, to add a new layer to these challenges and divisions between approaches, the globalisation process of the last decades of the 20th century provoked the development of a whole new set of questions that have derived into an increasing attention to the importance of the geographical dimensions of contention. In relation to protests in connection with the summits of organisations like the IMF, scholars started to pay attention to how movements from around the world develop a more or less common agency (Kriesi, Rucht and Della Porta, 1999; Hamel, Lustiger-Thaler and Mayer, 2000; Smith and Johnston, 2002). As a consequence of these new research agendas, variables like space, place or scale started to be problematised to unfold not only how these variable interlink with the different approaches within SMT, but also how those became the field of contestation (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto, 2008). The development of this research led to new questions about the spatiality of contention, at the same time the research transforms our understanding of the urban space from a mere container of mobilisation to the object of contention in itself. It is within this line of inquiry about the spatiality of mobilisation that this thesis is more specifically located. Hence, the next section discusses these attempts and the challenges that arise when one wishes to incorporate geographical variables.

Social mobilisation research and geography

As a reaction to the new forms of mobilisation characterised by their decentralisation, the academics started to pay attention to variables like space, place, scale or territory. As this line of research expanded, it became one-sided, which led some scholars to advocate for a more holistic perspective to integrate all the potentially influencing variables (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto, 2008; Nicholls, 2009). Thus, relationality emerged as a key epistemological concept for these proposed combina-

¹ E.g. the municipal platforms previously discussed, since their origins, discourse and normal functioning approximate them more to social movements than to political parties (Blanco, Salazar and Bianchi, 2019).

tions, which, following Nicholls, Miller and Beaumont (2013, p. 3), I group in two main perspectives:

1. Scale-focused, which concentrates on questions of relational state structures and political economy. These studies relate to a critical realist position, perform in general structural analysis and, despite recognising other variables like space, place or even networks, scale plays a central role in the research;
2. Network-focused analyses, which tend to concentrate on actors and the relations they build. These researches are linked to postmodern and poststructuralist positions, in which agency plays a key role in social mobilisation.

Scale-focused Analysis

The interest for the spatiality of the new forms of activism, launched a line of research that sees the activism's articulation in terms of rescaling. Although these analyses problematise how variables like territory, space or place (Nicholls, 2009) influence mobilisation, scale emerges as the feature that traverses all those aspects enabling us to answer the main question of how local movements mobilise together. A good example of this kind of approach is that of Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008) who sketch a framework for an integrated analysis of spatial dimensions. Departing from a relational perspective (Strategic-Relational Approach) and emphasising the path-dependency of the historical development of these spatial attributes, they develop TPSN (Territory-Place-Scale-Network) as a multidimensional polymorphic model of socio-spatial analysis for conjoining all dimensions without a priori superiority of any of them (Jessop, Brenner and Jones, 2008, p. 395). They argue for the potential of TPSN to specifically analyse contention in three ways (Jessop, Brenner and Jones, 2008, p. 398):

1. To classify different socio-scientific accounts of contentious politics, in order to identify the limitations of one-dimensional accounts;

2. To decipher the strategies and tactics of individual and collective agents engaged in contentious politics;
3. To pose new questions regarding the interplay between the spaces of contentious and the geohistorical periodisation of capital accumulation and state power.

Although proposals like this advance the potentialities of an overarching framework that overcomes partiality, some academics have raised reservations. One line of criticism claims that the framework offers a purely theoretical diagram that “may fix the conceptual meanings of the various dimensions of spatiality and the relations between them” (Paasi, 2008, p. 407) in a sort of static template to be filled by the researcher.

I find, however, more relevant here a second line of criticism derived from locating all dimensions at the same analytical level. This formulation may generate internal contradictions when synthesising the divergent and contradictory socio-theoretical assumptions linked to such socio-spatial perspectives (Mayer, 2008). In other words, although territory, place and scale could coexist, the incorporation of networks is more complicated, since, as Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008) admit, network analysis tends to look at the relational aspect as a rhizome, consequently implying a flat ontology. This stresses what I consider the main challenge faced by these attempts, as they hinder the conjoining of networks with variables that imply an ontologically hierarchical vision—specially scales. This would constantly limit the role of networks and their relationality, since they will be invariably subordinated to the other dimensions. This hindrances resonate with the challenges to conjoin structure and agency, as this structural perspective mutes the importance to define those dimensions of basic attributes of networks like actors, interests (Paasi, 2008; Mayer, 2008) and power.

In summary, the main interest of scale-focused approaches like this TPSN lies on problematising the implications and ways in which decentralised activism can be rescaled to overcome the limitations of their lo-

calism to effectively challenge capitalism. The development of this body of research and its limitations has launched diverse lines of inquiry that expanded the field and generated intense debates on the definition of geographical dimensions (Marston, 2000; Brenner, 2001; Moore, 2008; Legg, 2009). Within urban studies, Critical Urban Theory directly incorporated these attempts and enriched this perspective by revealing the central role of urbanisation and its resistances in those spatial arrangements.

Critical Urban Theory

Critical Urban Theory (CUT) is the label used to group diverse studies that have critically researched the neoliberal development of the city from diverse Marxist perspectives (just to mention some examples Harvey, 1989; Swyngedouw, Moulaert and Rodríguez, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2006; Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer, 2012; Brenner, 2013; Fernández and Aalbers, 2016). Inspired by the epistemological and ontological formulations of the Frankfurt School, Brenner (2009) talks of four intertwined and mutually constitutive propositions that guide these critical urban studies:

1. It is theoretical, in the sense that Critical Theory is abstract and characterised by epistemological and philosophical reflections.
2. It is reflexive because Critical Theory is enabled by historical conditions and contexts, that implies that all knowledge is contextual and focuses “on how specific antagonistic forms of knowledge, subjectivity and consciousness may emerge within an historical social formation” (Brenner, 2009, p. 202).
3. It entails a critique to instrumental reason, which demands an interrogation of the ends of knowledge.
4. It emphasises the disjuncture between the actual and the possible by researching the emancipatory possibilities embedded and suppressed by capitalism.

In line with the scale-focused perspectives, these are mainly political economic accounts, in which relationality becomes progressively incorporated to develop more dynamic analyses. As in the case of scale-focussed perspectives, this relationality is mainly used to investigate variations within those political economic dynamics (Brenner *et al.*, 2011), which maintain an a priori determining position over other aspects—i.e. processes of subjection.¹ From this perspective, urban social movements have been studied mainly as expression of resistance to those dynamics and forces that shape urban neoliberalism (Hamel, Lustiger-Thaler and Mayer, 2000; Miller, 2000; Ngai Ming, Martínez and Xiaoyi, 2019). These researches enriched social movements literature,² but have treated activists' agency mainly as determined by those political economic dynamics. This approach pays less attention to internal configurations that can explain, for example, why contention takes in some cases the form of organised resistance and in others, violent riots. Aware of these challenges, scholars like Dikeç and Swyngedouw (2017) claim for the need of understanding urban politics as an immanent process that creates alternative spaces which go beyond the constraints of those political economic dynamics, which opened the field to incorporate post-structuralist perspectives like Foucault's theorisations on governmentality (Stenson, 2005; McKee, 2009; Sum and Jessop, 2013). This launches a line of inquiry in which agency emerges as a key feature to understand urban contestation. This perspective opens new paths for conjoining political economic and agential accounts to be expanded here by the study of the resistance to subjectification.

¹ This resonates with the classical discussion within Marxist circles about the relationship between base and superstructure. Thus, against the economic determinism dominant during part of the 20th century, many authors have denounced this partial reading of Marx and argued for the attention to be given to extra-economic aspects. Gramsci's (1971) "hegemony," Williams's (2006) social "totality" or Althusser's (Althusser and Balibar, 2009) "overdetermination" are conceptual frameworks to describe how a multitude of processes come together to construct capitalism as a societal totality (Resnick and Wolff, 1987, p. 28). These have influenced CUT, although some of that economic determinism remains, as economic processes are still systematically chosen as entry points, while extra-economic ones remain often underdiscussed (Resnick and Wolff, 1987).

² For example questioning the different nature between organised social movements and riots usually generalised within SMT (Mayer, Thörn and Thörn, 2016).

As a product of these developments, CUT appears especially powerful at describing the dynamics that trigger mobilisation and the interaction of the movements with their context, but as the interest of the social movements internal dynamics becomes collateral, they treat agency formation mainly as consequence of those structural forces—with a few exceptions of intersections with the micro-sociological perspectives within SMT and the study of governmentality. In line with this political economic perspective, CUT develops scale-focused analyses starting from an epistemological focus on urban processes, but facing the same challenges concerning the incorporation of networks as discussed earlier. This raises difficulties in problematising agency formation in relation to processes of subjectification, so questions about how agency emerges and interacts with specific spatial arrangements of contestation remain unasked. To tackle those challenges, the other main possibility explored by academics to understand the articulation of local struggles revolves around the full incorporation of relationality in what Nicholls, Miller and Beaumont (2013) called network-focused analyses. These approaches based on Deleuze and Guattari's (1983; 1987) or Latour's (2005) works attempt to fully incorporate relationality by explicitly putting agency at the centre of the research.

Network-focused analyses

In line with the increasing interest for relationality, various approaches stress the potential of network as main ontological entity to excavate the configuration of contestation. This switches the focus from the structural dynamics that interested scale-focus analyses to agency and the role of these networks. Among these approaches, two theoretical frameworks have had a major impact: Actor-Network Theory (ANT), based on the works of Latour (2005); and Assemblage Theory, based on the writings of Deleuze and Guattari and their reinterpretation by DeLanda (2006). In spite of being often used interchangeably, there are some differences among the two approaches, which Müller (2015) summarises in three shortcomings of ANT that are covered by AT: its difficulties to accommodate the unexpected; its lack of a notion of event; and its neglect of the corporeal capacities of humans. Considering these shortcomings,

this thesis will focus on Assemblage Theory and the attempts to reformulate CUT from this perspective, which has generated intense debates.

Assemblage Theory and Urban Studies

Firstly incorporated in the discussion of geographical variables like scale (Anderson and McFarlane 2011), it was a question of time before the DG's approach made its way into urban studies, initially for researching specificities of processes like regeneration projects (MGuirk, Mee and Ruming, 2016), privatisation (Cupples, 2011), gentrification (Lagendijk *et al.*, 2014) or contestation (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein, 2018). The progressive incorporation of their theorisation led to the development of an approach labelled as Assemblage Theory, due to the central role that assemblage has as main ontological entity.

Although Deleuze and Guattari do not offer a univocal definition of assemblage, this may be understood as “complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning” (Livesey, 2010, p. 18). In other words, different elements come together to form a whole that, instead properties, has emergent capacities on its own further than the simple collection of its parts, as it is the interaction that generates them. Consequently, the definition of the objects is contingent and does not depend on an essence defined by certain properties, but on their relationship with other objects (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 408). Consequently, assemblages materialise in the form of an event, never as a state (DeLanda, 2006), which makes necessary to increase stability mainly through:

1. *Coding*: it refers to those codes of conduct that confer certain stability for the elements within an assemblage to “understand” each other by increasing the foreseeability of the relations. Coding reinforces the formation of an identity, in opposition to what is outside the assemblage (DeLanda, 2006, p. 15), and it is under constant tensions of decoding by elements that contest it,

which makes necessary to recode with new rules to acquire stability again.

2. *Territorialisation*: it sets the boundaries of the assemblage, so it establishes which relations are part of the assemblage and which ones are outside to reduce their capability of interference (DeLanda, 2006, p. 12). These external relations held by the terms provoke processes of deterritorialisation, which can enter in contradiction with their relations within the assemblage (DeLanda, 2006, p. 13). The deterritorialisation usually leads to a process of reterritorialisation, producing new assemblages subject to new processes of deterritorialisation.

This formulation called the attention of authors that started exploring its potential to analyse forms of contention that evince high levels of heterogeneity, flexibility and spatial dispersion. Confronted with this difficulty, as Marcus and Saka (2006, p. 102) argue, assemblage emerged as a potential tool to address “the modernist problem of the heterogeneous within the ephemeral, while preserving some concept of the structural so embedded in the enterprise of social science research. [...] The time-space in which assemblage is imagined is inherently unstable and infused with movement and change. Assemblage thus seems structural, an object with the materiality and stability of the classic metaphors of structure, but the intent in its aesthetic uses is precisely to undermine such ideas of structure.”

Thus, the works of various geographers launched a line of research that have influenced many scholars who started investigating the potentialities of assemblage thinking for researching contestation (McFarlane, 2009; Davies, 2011; Chatterton, Featherstone and Routledge, 2013; Levkoe and Wakefield, 2014; Karakaş, 2018; Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein, 2018). From this perspective, urban social movements are seen as assemblages of heterogeneous terms that enter into relations in diverse spatio-temporal locations to shape contestation. Consequently, the movements cannot be reduced to their elements, but to the relations they forge at certain moments.

The incorporation of AT into urban studies and for the study of social movements mainly followed three trends: assemblage as a research object within political economy, researches that use AT in a methodological sense as an extension of political economy, and assemblage as an alternative ontology to political economy and CUT (Brenner *et al.*, 2011). It is the last one of these that has generated the most animated debates (Storper and Scott, 2016), as assemblage theorists argue that switching the analysis to the relations between different actors that actualise potentialities through processes of assembling, reassembling and constitution (McFarlane, 2011 p. 210) can enrich critical urbanism in three main aspects:

1. A descriptive orientation towards urban inequalities as produced through relations of history and potential.
2. A concept that disrupts how we conceive agency. By “approaching agency as an emergent process that is distributed across the social and the material,” the unexpected agency of different materialities, human and non-human become acknowledge (McFarlane, 2011 p. 215).
3. As a critical imaginary of the city as a collage, gathering and composition, it allows to work towards a progressive cosmopolitan urbanism (McFarlane, 2011 p. 219).

On the other side of the debate some Critical Urban Theorists show a hesitation mainly around three issues (Brenner *et al.*, 2011): firstly, assemblage theory does not allow to use the potential of the concepts developed within political economy that are basic for CUT and that help to analyse the normal functioning of capitalism; secondly, assemblage theory falls into “naïve” objectivism by offering thick descriptions without further theorisation; and, thirdly, it does not allow to produce alternatives or possible futures, which is one of the main aspects of Critical Theory.

In general, one could say that this debate reproduces the challenges and the discussion between the two lines of research described by Nicholls, Miller and Beaumont (2013) when dealing with spatialities of social mobilisation: scale-focused and network-focused. The former political economic analyses provide valuable tools for understanding the way movements organise and activate as a whole, as well as the insertion of activism in its context. Nonetheless, these approaches do not pay much attention to the role of internal agency formation in the production of activist spaces and how this influences the internal dynamics that shape the movements as actors. On the other hand, the network-focused accounts that stress the importance of agential aspects, only collaterally engage with those political economic factors, which, as Nicholls (2009, p. 82) argues, translates into limited interest about theorising collective action. These debates around the potential combination of both approaches advance some of the challenges for unfolding how local urban contestations can articulate to pose alternatives to capitalism. Reformulating these through the lenses of the challenges of the incorporation of geographical variables, this articulation may be analysed from the perspective of the spatiality of contention, and more concretely the connection between diverse place-based struggles to generate a space of resistance. This has been framed within the research in the tensions between place and space, which have been further developed by the discussion around the challenges and opportunities of militant particularism. I develop on this debate in the next section, to launch a discussion about how to research the spatiality of contention and of potential paths to overcome the limitations of the different positions.

Spaces of activism: the challenges of Militant Particularism

The debates discussed in the previous section reflect some of the main challenges for the analysis of urban social movements and the potential responses from different standpoints. Here, to concretise those debates about the spatiality of mobilisation and the conjoining of structural and agential perspectives, I use the discussion about militant particularism and the tensions between the fixation of local struggles to place and the need for creating a space of activism that transcends that place. This

clearly resonates with the cases I research here, as the four social movements' groups mobilise locally, but also interact to form a space of common activism. Using the debates about the challenges of militant particularism helps to frame the research on the formation of that space, the influence of heterogeneity and the dynamics that influence their intersection.

This discussion about militant particularism starts from the works of Raymond Williams, who used the term to “describe the kind of militant politics that had grown up around quite stable working-class communities, often united by a dominant industry and rooted very strongly in particular localities” (Featherstone, 1998, p. 19). At the same time that the different authors acknowledge the importance of local struggles as the origin of antagonism, they argue for the necessity of expanding the resistance further than those local struggles to effectively challenge capitalism. Nevertheless, this is not a simple mission and in the present, I find relevant to concretise the challenges of the potential solutions for conjoining heterogeneous place-based struggles. These potential solutions have sprung from different standpoints, which in general reproduce the two previously discussed approaches to analyse the spatiality of contestation: the scale-focused, represented mainly by Harvey; the network-focused, here represented mainly by Featherstone. Each perspective focuses on different aspects of contention, which lead them to different answers to how to articulate the different place-based resistances. This debate helps, on the one hand, to frame my research about the production and potentialities of a resistance characterised by their strong local focus and decentralisation. On the other hand, it helps to excavate the intersections between those scale-focused and network-focused approaches, as I do not see them as necessarily opposing each other, but focusing on different aspects, which makes interesting to try to combine them.

Scale-focused analysis of militant particularism: the possibilities of representational politics

Starting with the scale-focused perspective, its main representative has been David Harvey, who aims to problematise how “ideals forged out of the affirmative experience of solidarities in one place get generalized and universalized as a working model of a new form of society that will benefit all of humanity” (Harvey, 1995, p. 83). In other words, his main concern is how to encompass the different concrete demands of each place-based struggle. For launching his investigation, he takes the case of a research project in which he participated, the project followed the struggle of the workers of the Rover car plant in Cowley (Oxford) against the closure of the factory between 1988 and 1993 (Harvey, 1995).¹ Harvey uses the disputes between diverse visions of resistance—not only between the concrete demands of the workers and the more abstract perspectives of the academics, but also among the researchers—as a starting point to problematise the limitations and challenges for translating place-based local activism into long-term strategies of change (Harvey, 1995, p. 72).

For him the transition would imply the move from a level of abstraction linked to place to another one reaching across space. Nevertheless, this is a mission full of tensions, as the increase in the abstraction implies conceptual changes and different structures of feeling that can challenge the sense of common purpose due to the loyalties contracted at one scale (Harvey, 1995, p. 90). These identities and loyalties pose the main challenges for assembling the struggles, as they are forged under a certain regime of oppression, which complicates the possibility of thinking an outside to it—the Rover factory would be a good example of these contradictions, as the workers fought for keeping their jobs, which have a negative impact in the global environment.

¹ He develops the discussion further in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Harvey, 1996) and *Spaces of Hope* (Harvey, 2000), where he engages with debates about idealism/realism and structuralism/poststructuralism, to find a middle ground for articulating socialist alternatives in the globalised world. As a product of this theorisation, he develops a dialectical method that remarks the relationality of socioeconomic and political processes to unfold the spatialities of social mobilisation (Harvey, 1996).

To face this challenge to common purpose, Harvey takes a step back and argues for the necessity of theorising everyday resistance practices across diverse hierarchically structured scales. From this theorisation, he proposes to analyse the rescaling and conjoining of such struggles as emanating from the awareness of a common positionality that the working classes, no matter their place and job, share within the global dynamics of capitalism (Harvey, 1996). The capitalist accumulation process has colonised every part of social life, which not only expands the positionality as working class outside the factory, but also expands the demands further than those merely linked to production. Consequently, the resistance to capitalism is everywhere and among everyone, so the struggle must take place in everyday life and the body becomes the initial site of resistance that materialises that common positionality (Harvey, 2000). Every struggle has a class component that the common positionality helps to reveal (Harvey, 1996) and this common positionality becomes the common ground to connect the place-based struggles linked to local issues—like the closing of a factory.

With this move, Harvey incorporates the embodiment of capitalist dynamics from which the demands can emerge. That said, although the common positionality is the condition for combining the place-based struggles, it is not enough for constructing alternatives, which can only be done through a rescaling of the demands. This rescaling process would involve the abstraction of demands to connect the diverse local struggles to the global dynamics of capitalism to avoid compartmentalisation and to rethink contention further than the local concrete struggle—e.g. the negative environmental impact of keeping the car factory open. Consequently, departing from that common positionality of the body within the global capitalism, the struggles must be rescaled to allow processes of abstraction that frame them within universal demands (Nicholls, 2009, p. 80). Harvey is aware that this is still a complicated process full of many challenges and contradictions, which leads him to propose the defence of universal human rights as a potential demand that can canalise such abstractions (Harvey, 2000).

Harvey's formulation reveals a tension between performative and representational politics that traverses the different solutions to confront the challenges of expanding place-based struggles. It is out of the scope of this thesis to discuss in depth the definition of representational and performative politics. I use the terms rather as entry points to explore the possibilities and interconnections between the two main perspectives to analyse the articulation of militant particularism: scale-focused and their political economic perspective; and network-focused analyses and their attention to agency. Thus, I approach representational politics here as those perspectives that focus on the demands and their aggregation for the articulation of activism. I call performative those proposals that focus on the capabilities of the body, on what the body can do to articulate the activism (Dewsbury, 2000). In line with the discussion in previous sections, I do not see these as opposites, but as intertwined approaches. I think that analysing those intersection from the perspective of representational and performative politics can facilitate to untangle how the two approaches for analysing militant particularism relate.

Harvey resolves the challenges of militant particularism in favour of the representational realm, as this is for him the main way of encompassing resistances. Nevertheless, the way he builds his theorisation implies certain moves that open questions and paths that he does not develop. His initial concern is formulated in terms of the rescaling of demands, on the aggregation of different representations that can be conjoined through processes of abstraction. Nevertheless, Harvey is aware of the challenges and difficulties posed by the need of identifying a certain commonality of those demands to argue for their encompassing. It is at this point when he makes a move towards a more performative perspective, in which the capitalist dynamics—and by the same token, its resistances—are embodied by every individual subjected to capitalism.¹ The capabilities of the bodies to perform a resistance emerging from this common positionality shared by everybody is what leads Harvey to claim the need for everyday resistance. Nevertheless, this resistance performed by the bodies in the everyday life is not enough, so from this performa-

¹ This move allows him to reformulate the definition of the working class further than its relation to the means of production, in order to include other struggles, like for example environmentalist or feminist.

tive move that allows Harvey to ground the articulation, he returns again to representational politics and the need for encompassing demands through abstraction. Thus, even though Harvey jumps from representational politics to performative to ground the possibility of combining struggles, he abandons this path to return to the need of representations able to abstract those demands so they become included within universal ones. This transition may pose certain challenges that will be examined in this thesis.

Network-focused analysis of militant particularism: the importance of performative politics

It is in reaction to this last move towards representational politics that I see the responses from network-focused perspectives. For example, Routledge (2003) proposes the use of the concept convergence space to offer a more dynamic vision of the ways militant particularism can articulate. Thus, still problematising the universalisation of demands, he stresses the importance of analysing how the networks form and develop, since potential power relations can impose certain imaginaries linked to those universalisations over heterogeneous local-based struggles (Routledge, 2003, p. 346).

Nevertheless, it is Featherstone (1998; 2005; 2008) who deepens this network-focused perspective by questioning how Harvey conceptualises the linkage between local struggles and wider political imaginaries. In his case, despite the acceptance of the existence of common positionality, from a perspective of the performative capability of the bodies included within the networks Featherstone problematises how this actually emerges and develops. The key for articulating militant particularism is not to encompass the demands—through processes of abstraction or not—but how the different bodies connect in response to such common positionality. This makes it necessary to rethink how that common positionality forms, which he understands is mainly static in Harvey's account due to a rigid class/place axis that identify the class component of all place-based struggles. For Featherstone, this limits the potential to connect diverse bodies and their identities, and to question them

(Featherstone, 1998, p. 23). This criticism, which emerges from Harvey's initial writings on the topic, is tackled later when he uses an expansive definition of "workers" to refer to all those bodies incorporated within the flows of global capitalism through the colonisation of all spheres of life by the system (Harvey, 2000).

It is, however, a second line of criticism from Featherstone that I find more relevant here, as it directly refers to the relation between place and space. Unlike Harvey's demand for the need of rescaling, Featherstone focuses on the performative capability of these bodies that share the positionality, as the relationality is already present in the place-based struggles. This creates a common space of activism already in the generation of the place-based resistances, which do not need to be abstracted to be connected. In research about the subaltern struggles in London during the 18th Century Featherstone (2005) argues that the repertoires and the demands between the different place-based struggles are already interconnected when they emerge, therefore, preceding any rescaling that encompasses them. Consequently, Featherstone questions Harvey's analysis for being based on a static conceptualisation of the place-based struggles as a kind of fix blocks that become superposed to each other to rescale those struggles. The local struggles would then become monolithic and subject to change only in response to internal local dynamics or to the hierarchical relations imposed by the nested scale order. Moreover, the rescaling raises some issues in terms of relationality as it reproduces a certain mechanistic division of hierarchical scales, in which local is associated to concrete, while global is paired to abstraction in a kind of cumulative hierarchical movement in the ladder of abstraction. On the contrary, Featherstone, as Routledge did before, focuses on the role of the networks to articulate the different place-based struggles, challenging a more hierarchical vision of aggregation of struggles through those processes of rescaling. This relational perspective would reject the binary opposition global/local, which appear permanently intertwined, at the same time that helps us to understand the transformation of identities to "oppose exclusionary nationalist or localist oppositions to globalisation" (Featherstone, 2005, p. 268).

The debate between both positions reveals the challenges posed by militant particularism and directly relate to the social movements discussed in this thesis, as they are characterised by their strong decentralisation and heterogeneity. While both trends admit the need for militant place-based particularism as initial site of resistance, their solutions to the challenge of conjoining those particularisms are different. Thus, starting by the common positionality and the body as initial site of resistance, Harvey interprets it from a perspective of representational politics and sees in the dynamics of rescaling of demands the only possible way to encompass those place-based struggles. Routledge and, especially, Featherstone see in Harvey's attempt a certain mechanistic account of abstraction, which parallels the rescaling. To tackle this discontinuity, they increase the role of relationality by turning the focus to the formation of the place-based struggles as a product of the connection of diverse bodies through networks. With this move, Featherstone (2008) stays in the realm of performative politics to avoid breaking the continuity in nested hierarchical scales, since the relationality between the struggles is present in their own genesis. Nevertheless, his account exemplifies those challenges for conjoining the local struggles that troubled Harvey, as the question about how local place-based struggles can be encompassed to effectively challenge capitalism further than local small victories remains unanswered. The local struggles appear horizontally connected and more interrelated than assumed by Harvey, but their articulation to build alternatives that overcome the localism is not sufficiently problematised.

The challenges of these solutions to the problem of overcoming militant particularism offer the ground for analysing the dynamics through which the movements researched here expand and interconnect. Excavating these dynamics through the lens of this discussion of militant particularism not only would contribute to a better understanding of how these movements construct a space of activism, but also may help to cast some light on the challenges faced by each of the perspectives. Moreover, this problematic about militant particularism directly resonates with the previous discussions regarding the incorporation of geographical

variables for the study of contestation. The potential answers lie between a standpoint that stresses the need of rescaling the demands to oppose structural dynamics of capitalism and another one that questions that possibility by focusing instead on the performative agency of bodies interrelated in networks of activism. The development and potential intersection of both perspectives poses some questions that may help to understand how place-based mobilisation around indebtedness assembles, and that would guide the analysis later in the thesis. To advance in this discussion of militant particularism in relation to the cases researched in this thesis, I start by questioning in the next section how that common positionality necessary to connect place-based struggles can be generated and mobilised specifically in relation to housing indebtedness.

Housing indebtedness and common positionality

Looking at mobilisation through the lenses of militant particularism, the common positionality mentioned by Harvey becomes the starting point for the construction of contestation. That said, this common positionality is not static and has to be accompanied by an awareness of it in order to conjoin different actors and struggles. In classic Marxist analyses, positionality was defined in relation to the means of production, but when precarity and immaterial labour started to expand,¹ awareness about common positionality in relation to the ownership of the means of production became more difficult to mobilise. It is to overcome this challenge that Harvey's proposal of the common positionality derived from the insertion in the global dynamics of capitalism must be understood (Harvey, 2000). The mobilisation of this common positionality, however, requires high levels of abstraction, which, following his argument, it may not be useful to mobilise place-based militant particularism, which he associates to more concrete struggles.

To overcome these difficulties, I consider that housing indebtedness offers a concretisation of common positionality from which contestation can be developed. As the financial crisis extended, it became obvious

¹ I am not implying by any mean that the working class linked to the factory has disappeared, but that its relevance, especially in the global north, has been decreasing in the last decades.

the housing vulnerability of many who depended on risky mortgages for assuring their housing needs (López and Rodríguez, 2010; Palomera, 2014; Sabaté, 2016). As more and more people became at risk of losing their house for not being able to pay their debts, they became aware of their common precarious situation, despite other differences like class or nationality. Consequently, housing indebtedness becomes a very concrete issue for protest—families risking to lose their homes—with a strong connection to place-based mobilisation, as eviction due to mortgage default is a long process that takes a few years.¹ In a sense, housing fulfils the same central role that the factory had in the past and in Harvey's case, the possibility to articulate the place-based activism.

Similarly to the inter-relational dynamics that Featherstone (2005) identified in the origin of the London port strikes of 1768, as the housing crisis expanded, this common positionality traversed different places, where people became aware of their shared vulnerable position. This increasing awareness of common positionality across places is reinforced by the fact that the housing crisis is connected to indebtedness, which hints towards the connection to the global dynamics of capitalism that Harvey mentioned. Thus, the linkage between the different individual cases within and between places becomes densified by the increasing awareness of that shared position in relation to indebtedness. The sharing of similar stories and the identification of common enemies reinforce this sense of common positionality.

The awareness of a common positionality does not necessarily imply the emergence of contestation, but, as I shall discuss below, it is the specific characteristics of debt and housing indebtedness of the Spanish model, which made it more susceptible to sparking mobilisation. The fact that indebtedness expands across many places and that it is based on the control over the bodies become main factors to understand how this awareness of common positionality becomes mobilised. The controlling mechanisms associated to the payment of debts became a trigger to gen-

¹ The increasing pressure on the rental sector in Spain in the last years sets a different context for mobilisation, as the eviction process is much shorter

erate a sense of outrage that could evolve into contestation, as the affected people faced the trauma of the real possibility of becoming homeless. Those mechanisms of control and the subjectification from which an awareness of common positionality can emerge are the focus of the next section.

Indebtedness: subjectification and the control of everyday life through debt

The direct connection between housing and indebtedness made the housing emergency the symptom of a crisis provoked by the default of an economic model based on debt expansion (Palomera, 2014). The role of debt in the capitalist economy was already analysed by Marx in relation to financialisation, which, as extensively shown in political economic research, has become central during neoliberalism (Boyer, 2000; Harvey, 2007; Foster, 2007; Jessop, 2013). This centrality of debt, however, is not limited to these political economic aspects of financialisation that assure the flexibility of capital to move wherever bigger rents may be extracted. The expansion of debt is accompanied by the implementation of certain mechanisms of subjectification that guarantee the control over the indebted people (Lazzarato, 2012). This subjectification assures the reproduction of the system, by increasing the foreseeability of people's behaviour as they become subjected. Debt emerges then as a mechanism to fixate the common positionality of these debtors within the system. To excavate the potential effect of that subjectification on the subsequent formation of a common positionality, I shall use Deleuze and Guattari's theorisation of subjectification as the product of processes of homogenisation. This offers the ground for the materialisation of a common positionality of heterogeneous elements.

Subjectification and capitalism

For Deleuze and Guattari, subjectification is a key mechanism for the imposition of capitalism, so to understand it, I shall briefly discuss their analysis of this system. As just one of the three main historical social

formations produced by the interaction of multiple dynamics,¹ capitalism cannot be taken as a pre-given category. Therefore, DG start their analysis from the perspective of desire, considered the main productive force, which those social formations try to appropriate. This desire is not a fully-constructed individual raw innate wishing, but a collective productive force that emanates from the creation of connective flows between different parts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). The difference between the elements becomes then a key aspect that traverses a reality formed by two separated but interconnected fields:

1. *The virtual* field of pure difference, where capacities form an infinite list implying the inexistence of any initial essence to which difference refers, but absolute difference between the parts;
2. *The actual*, where, through repetition, some of those differences that populate the virtual form entities whose properties can be listed.

As consequence of this differentiation, when a capacity becomes actual always does so in the form of an event, never a state, since that capacity is always subject to variations provoked by new repetitions within the virtual (DeLanda, 2006). This event is always double: active as terms affect other terms that participate in the event, but also passive because the capacity requires another object with the capacity to be affected.² This makes capacities relational, as they do not form the essence of the object, but emerge from the interaction between them. Consequently, the definition of the objects is contingent and does not depend on an es-

¹ Archaic or Primitive; Despotism and Capitalism. Each system is subject to tensions of deterritorialisation and decoding, that, when cannot be absorbed, eventually provoke their collapse and the transition to the next one. Nonetheless, this transition is not inevitable and it is produced when absolute dynamics of deterritorialisation and decoding come together at a certain spatio-temporal context (Buchanan, 2008, p. 27).

² The discussion about affect has generated an extensive corpus of literature that problematises the conceptualisation of affect, as well as its connection to other concepts like, moods, feelings or emotions (see Masumi, 2002; McCormack, 2008; Pile, 2010; Anderson, 2014). This discussion is out of the scope of this thesis and the use of affect in the thesis is rather restrictive to refer to the capabilities of the different bodies (human and non-human) to affect and being affect, and how the distribution of these affective capabilities shapes the dynamics that influence activism.

sence, but on their position and relation with other objects (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 408).

Therefore, their formulation revolves around two crucial aspects for understanding the potential emergence of common positionality discussed here: heterogeneity and relationality. The networks formed by the connection between these heterogeneous elements form the desiring-machines that mediate the different flows of desiring-production (Bonta and Protevi, 2006, p. 107) and that capitalism attempts to appropriate. Among the intersecting machines that populate the world, three are central to determining the way reality emerges:

1. *Abstract machine* links virtual singularities to form multiplicities in the plane of consistency. In other words, defines the patterns and the thresholds of a complex system (Bonta and Protevi 2006, p. 48);
2. *War machine* actualises the abstract machine of creativity in the world through a smooth space that maintains social formations in a far-from-equilibrium or “intensive crisis” condition (Bonta and Protevi 2006, p. 165). This abstract machine would play a central role in the resistance to capitalism;
3. *Social machine* operates in the registers of desiring-production and social production (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, pp. 139-145). That is associated to a specific form of socius, as the apparatus responsible for striating space and organising desire by “coding the flows of desire, inscribing them, recording them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly dammed up, channelled, regulated” (Harris, 2016, p. 25).

This formulation implies that the abstract machine organises the virtual absolute difference, while some of these virtual potentialities are actualised in certain ways by the war machine through processes of repetition that generate assemblages with the potentiality of fulfilling desire. Finally, this confronts the social machine or socius that tries to constrain it to

absorb the productive force of desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 33) through the control of the connections between the heterogeneous parts. Thus, the interaction between the machines would constrain or expand the way capitalism is imposed and the possibilities of resistance. It is now when the subjectification unfolds through the representation of a unified homogeneity of essences that the capitalist social machine tries to impose over the absolute virtual difference in order to appropriate the productive force of desire.

Subjectification: between molar homogeneity and molecular heterogeneity

This homogenisation functions by mechanisms of statistical aggregation of large groupings and mainly uses binary segmentations that codify the flows of desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 209). This is what DG denominate a molar representation, and it is one of the two modes of segmentation through which organisation proceeds. The molar lines of segmentation are determined by the dependence of the segments of complex binary machines that fix the code and the territory of the corresponding segment (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p. 147). In other words, capitalism generates subjectification by creating essentialist identities that are usually organised in opposing binarities with well-defined territories and codes. Applying this perspective of subjectification to indebtedness, it becomes a form of segmentation that functions by the imposition of binary differentiation debtor/creditor, who are separated in territories and defined by essential characteristics that homogenise the heterogeneous members within each segment.

For this subjectification to be effective it is necessary the involvement of the state, as the main actor that imposes those binary segmentations. Thus, together with its active role to generate certain political economic environments previously mentioned, the state becomes the enforcer of those mechanisms of control that assure the acceptance of the system. This does not imply that capital loses its pivotal function of subjectification, but that it needs of the state for its actualisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 457). In the previous chapter, I showed how the Span-

ish state fulfilled this mission by generating a hegemonic imaginary of housing ownership as the only rational way of inhabiting, which pushed the population to become indebted (López and Rodríguez, 2010).

Together with this mode of molar segmentation there exists a mode of molecular segmentation that distinguishes from the former by its nature. Unlike molar, molecular segmentation operates through interaction and contiguity in self-organised systems that interact and act relatively by constantly shifting assemblages to produce desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). While the molar reterritorialises around unity and identity based on universalised distinctions and categorical boundaries, molecular is subject only in relation to productive processes lying alongside them (Fuglsang and Meier Sørensen 2006, p. 47). The molecular is therefore characterised by heterogeneity and the constant assemblage of elements and their relations.

It is important to remark here that the difference between molar and molecular should not be confused with that of the collective versus the individual, since there is not duality between these two (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p. 143). The differentiation responds to the nature of the system of reference envisioned, between the molar domain of representation—both collective and individual—and the molecular domain of desires (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 219). The molecular flows imply something that escapes the codes through deterritorialisation, while the hard-molar line of segmentation implies an overcoding, with the segments functioning as the reterritorialisations. Consequently, I analyse the modes of segmentation as intertwined, since at the same time that the individual is subject to molar representations, the social is formed also by molecular relations of desire. Moreover, the fact that capitalist subjectification functions through processes of homogenisation does not mean that heterogeneity is totally eliminated. In fact, capitalism thrives in difference, in the promotion of limited heterogeneity that widens its limits to generate a productive desire that can be subsequently appropriated through the homogenisation. In the case of debt, the constant expansion to sectors with increasing risk of default or the colonisation by debt of all parcels of everyday life and sociality—from housing to vaca-

tion or microcredits for the smallest purchases—promotes a difference that will be subsumed by a subsequent homogenising representation as debtors.

This formulation implies that the way to fight capitalism is to generate processes of singularisation resistant to those homogenising procedures of subjectification, re-appropriation and co-optation¹ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 366). In other words, to take those processes of differentiation further than the limits within which capitalism can still homogenise them. Before analysing whether and how that singularisation takes place in the case of the Spanish social movements, I shall deepen on how that subjectification is developed—specifically around debt. As indebtedness concretises a common positionality, the next section discusses those representations and how indebtedness tries to subsume the heterogeneity.

Subjectification and the control of everyday life

The subjectification previously discussed organises and mediates sociality by subjecting it to a set of practices that guarantee the control and the insertion of the individuals within the capitalist system of values and beliefs (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007). Within the works of Deleuze and Guattari, I focus on the central role debt has played to assure the individual subjection in all three historical social formations. Whereas archaic or primitive societies were characterised by a reciprocal debt immanent to the kinship system of territorial-lineages (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 197), during the despotic era this “[turned] into an infinite debt owed to the transcendent figure of the despot” (Holland, 1999, p. 66). In capitalism, the debt becomes infinite and immanent as it is fully embedded in the functioning of the system. Moreover, in its neoliberal phase, the dependence from debt aggravated with the progressive reduction of service provision by the welfare state and its substitution by a “debtfare” (Soederberg, 2014), in which the citizens become

¹ They talk of *molecular revolution* to stress that contention and resistance should not be directed exclusively to the molar field, but should be instead constructed and articulated from the molecular one (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007).

private welfare investors depending of their capability to “sign off significant parts of their current and future labour to private debt contracts” (Kaika, 2017, p. 1279). With this constant expansion, debt seizes everyday life, as it becomes the condition for developing social functions, which materialises that colonisation of which Harvey talked about. Consequently, debt implements a biopolitical control as it imposes a permanent evaluation of the individual and of the work they must undertake to function in the society by structuring the process of individuation with the promise of payment and of future value (Lazzarato, 2012, p. 135).

As consequence of this biopolitical component, debt becomes a key influence on the identity formation of those indebted, who internalise the dependence from debt to carry on their everyday life. In line with Harvey, this control turns the body and everyday life into the first places of resistance, as they are the first sites of subjectification shared by those subjected to debt. The homogenising subjectification of these bodies is based on a clear-cut separation creditor/debtor whose relationship creates a specific “economy of time and subjectivation,” since the debt relation objectifies the future as the debtor must honour his or her debts (Di Felicianantonio, 2016, p. 1210). Thus, debt generates guilt and responsibility that reinforces that control over the present and the future, which would be shared by all these debtors.

Furthermore, this does not only enrol the individual person’s everyday life, but also his/her community and relations, which expands the capability of debt as a mechanism of biopolitical control in the name of capital accumulation. As the indebtedness determines someone’s entire life and social performance, the transformation of everyone into a debtor raises the segmentation debtor/creditor over other binarities (Di Felicianantonio, 2016, p. 1210). Debtor emerges then as the main concretisation of that common positionality within the capitalist system, in this case through processes of subjectification, by which certain essential characteristics and constraints are imposed. The creation of this “indebted person” (Lazzarato, 2012) becomes a fundamental operation for the maintenance of capitalism, as a mechanism to assure their subjection to capitalist dynamics. At the same time that the homogenisation produces

subjection, it also equates diverse life stories and bodies in multiple places. This makes indebtedness the starting point for the potential development of an awareness of common positionality.

In summary, this section has discussed how the political and economic aspects of indebtedness are paralleled by its development as a main mechanism of subjection of the bodies to capitalism. Through the hard-molar binary segmentation debtor/creditor that imposes certain essences and behaviours on the individuals, everyday life and sociality become totally controlled. As the debtors become private welfare investors, they become permanently indebted, as contracting and paying debts become the only possible future for fulfilling their social needs. Moreover, indebtedness not only subjects bodies in certain places, but also connects them to bodies in other places creating a sort of space of indebtedness. It is through these connections across places that common positionality can emerge more clearly and subsequently be mobilised. The next section analyses how that indebtedness generates this form of space defined by its strict control over the everyday life of the debtors.

Space of indebtedness: debt as generator of space

This generation of a common positionality of debtors is reinforced and expanded by the incorporation of the indebted person within the space of global flows of capital. Thus, the explicit individual control of everyday life through debt is accompanied by an unconscious bound as dividuals within the system of debt and financialisation. Information about the indebted person becomes separated from his/her body to be attached and permanently recombined in the structure generated by the global flows of debt. The individual is not indivisible anymore, but a dividual who is divided into multiple chunks of information—in this case about their mortgage debt—that bound him/her to the system to assure its survival. In Lazzarato's (2012, p. 148-149) words, "as "humans" operators, agents, elements, or pieces of the sociotechnical machine of the debt economy [...], the dividual is adjacent to the credit-machine [...] he functions according to the programs that use him as one of its component parts." Housing debt becomes then an efficient tool for forging em-

bodied practices of financialisation and subjecting the individual to the global capitalist machine, since paying the permanent debt becomes the only future (García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016, p. 2). In other words, as the bodies of the debtors themselves became controlled in their everyday life, they also became inserted within the global financial circuit through practices like securitisation that incorporate them within what DG call the capitalist axiomatic.

This capitalist axiomatic is, according to DG, the way capitalism organises the flows of desire—in this case through debt—to generate a surplus that can be appropriated. As Holland (1999, p. 64) argues, “there are two ways such organization can be accomplished: qualitatively or quantitatively, symbolically or economically. [Primitive societies]... and despotism are organized symbolically, via codes and overcodes, while capitalism is organized economically, via axioms.” Capitalism does not try to overcode the deterritorialised flows that it promotes, but to axiomatise them via the axiomatic of the market that joins together heterogeneous flows of matter that have been quantified (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 461). This quantification is done by the *socius*, which in capitalism is the capital which homogenises all the flows to allow that quantification. Capitalism produces value by conjoining heterogeneous objects solely on the estimation of the surplus generated by “the quantitative differential between the flow of money invested in factors of production [...] and the flow of money returning at the end of the production–consumption cycle” (Holland, 1999, p. 67). As the *socius* is integrated in the system, capitalism is immanent, since there is no transcendent entity controlling and assuring its reproduction. Therefore, the mechanisms, forces or processes constrain the actions of the different terms, but they are not imposed from outside, but deployed by those actors that are embedded in their development. In the case of housing debt, the debtors become objectified as bodies living “mortgaged lives” (Colau and Alemany, 2012), as the value of the mortgage homogenises the different embodied debts to incorporate them within the axiomatic through quantification.

The axiomatic needs to organise the multiple bodies and flows in a certain way to generate surplus, which produces a specific form of space that structures the positions and relations of each body. In such spatial arrangements, debtors occupy a fixed common position, characterised by that permanent control of their bodies and everyday life to guarantee that homogenisation that allows quantification. The strong interdependence between them¹ became evident when the default of certain elements affected many others that formed that space. This strong relationality produces a spatial assemblage of bodies across places characterised by its ephemerality, as different elements from different places are constantly entering and leaving an “space of indebtedness” that permanently reshuffles the relations. This ephemerality relates to the fact that the formation of such networks connecting the different bodies is not a straight forward operation, but rather a process marked by ruptures and gaps that challenge their continuity.

For assuring this expansion, indebtedness initially deterritorialises to promote that productive heterogeneity so that it is subsequently appropriated by homogenisation processes. It is in these processes when ruptures and gaps generate tensions that need to be solved, so the network needs constant repair and maintenance to subsist and expand (Graham and Thrift's, 2007). As the network of indebtedness is immanently created by the actions of the indebted bodies as individuals, the performance of reparation requires of their flexibility, so they can adapt to those ruptures and the subsequent reworks (Malabou, 2008, p. 13). As the debtfare becomes dominant, the subjectification imposes the flexibility of the indebted to remain within a circuit of debt that has become the only way for developing their everyday life. Changes to fix those ruptures such as the increase in interest rates or the tightening on the debt conditions require the flexibility of indebted people to adapt the everyday life to those changing circumstances. The crisis showed the precarious and dependent position of these individuals within such spatial organisation, as honouring the constantly changing conditions and sub-

¹ Not only the indebted people, but also creditors, banks, authorities, rating agencies, etc.

suming themselves to the control of the everyday life may not be even enough to keep their homes.

From this configuration, it can be extracted that the generalisation of indebtedness involves two complementary dynamics. On the one hand it fixes, constrains and controls the bodies and their everyday life, mainly through processes of subjectification. On the other, it expands and connects heterogeneous bodies and everyday lives by incorporating them within the global flows of capital as individuals within the capitalist axiomatic (Lazzarato, 2012). This expansion generates a similar fixed positionality within the space of capital for an increasing number of debtors, which provides a ground for the interconnection of local struggles. Indebtedness emerges again as a potential concretisation of that common positionality claimed by Harvey, in this case “forging an intimate connection between everyday life, global practices of financial speculation and the creation of urban futures” (García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016, p. 11).

The reverse of that constraining position as individuals is that, as the indebted bodies become the necessary elements for the immanent condition of this axiomatic, they are also the potential sources for short-circuiting that network. As mentioned before, the networks are not characterised by their continuity, but rather by their ruptures linked to the expansion of that network through difference (Graham and Thrift, 2007). It is the existence of these ruptures that opens the room to the emergence of resistance to the subjectification to debt. In line with Malabou’s (2008, p. 36) work on the connections between neuroscience and social organisation, the possibilities of resistance virtually exist within those bodies that form the networks, so the ruptures become pivotal moments through which such resistance potential can actualise. It is in those cases in which the flexibility that allowed adaptation to those ruptures fails or is insufficient, when the potentiality of resistance of the bodies may emerge. In these cases, the rupture becomes a trauma for being incapable of coping with the changes, which may function as a liberating trigger to start questioning one’s position. In this transition, the affective capability of the bodies become liberated, as, thanks to the

trauma of losing the home, they transit from a passive position of flexibility to adapt to changes determined by the system, to an active position of pursuing the changes themselves (Malabou, 2008, p. 71). In other words, as the risk of becoming homeless—being responsible also for their families—generates a deep trauma, it can function as a strong point of rupture from the previous indebted position to start questioning such positionality and to empower oneself.

For most people an eviction is a traumatic experience. This can help to raise awareness of the subjectification, which can be subsequently mobilised in relation to the shared common positionality. This centrality of the bodies makes—as Harvey claimed—they and everyday life the main sites of resistance to that biopolitical control of the debtor that fixes their position within the global capitalist system. As the body becomes indebted, it emerges as the site that mediates the conjoining of the everyday life and the global space organised through indebtedness. This prevents the fracture between those realms. Consequently, the resistance to capitalism linked to the processes of indebtedness would not spring from the everyday life as an initial stage of a bottom-up construction of global alternatives, but it would be permanently grounded in that everyday life, which becomes the site to which this resistance should always return.

This focus on everyday life has important implications for analysing the place/space relation linked to the discussion around militant particularism. The formation of activist spaces based on local place-based struggles then pivots around the articulation of common embodied experiences to generate alternative spaces emerging from this common positionality. The local positionality from which local struggles can emerge already appear fully integrated into a space organised around debt to which these local struggles must construct alternatives. The emergence of this common positionality blurs the place/space dichotomy as they become encompassed through constant interactions between different elements, without any priority between them, but as an intertwined phenomenon (Hellström, 2006, p. 214). It is the acknowledgement of shar-

ing this similar position within a global space arranged around indebtedness that the awareness of common positionality can more easily mobilise. The raising of such awareness, however, is not an inevitable outcome, but needs a burst of certain traumatic experiences and the activation of certain forms of agency to question the biopolitical control of the everyday life from which alternative spatial arrangements can emerge. To analyse how this everyday life resistance can produce such alternative arrangements, I turn in the next section to three authors that problematised and considered everyday life key for the construction of alternatives to capitalism. On the one side Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and on the other Henri Lefebvre.

Space and the control of everyday life: Deleuze, Guattari and Lefebvre

Departing from the constraints imposed by the control of the everyday life by debt, this section explores the connections between Deleuze and Guattari's and Lefebvre's work as a potential path for researching resistance to capitalism. The commonalities between these authors start already from a shared demand for Marxist analyses to look not only at economic aspects, but to pay the same attention to socio-spatial ones, which translates into a shared interest in unfolding the structures that determine everyday life (Wallestein, 2016). Among those, individual subjectification emerges as a pivotal feature to constrain and organise the relations among individuals in their everyday lives. As hinted in previous sections, this control of everyday life is accompanied by the generation of specific spatial arrangements around debt, which provides the ground for analysing how contestation emanating from indebtedness has been performed in relation to the discussion about militant particularism.

Considering their common interest in untangling the dynamics that determine everyday life, in the first section I focus on the spatial aspects in the works of Deleuze and Guattari. Although they do not discuss space in itself, I follow Dikeç's (2012) argument for the value of analysing the role space has in diverse conceptualisations of politics. As he does with Arendt, Laclau and Mouffe and Rancière, I shall discuss the central role

that spatiality has in DG's understanding of the functioning of capitalism and its resistances. Nevertheless, the lack of a systematic analysis of the production of space in their works calls for the need to expand and concretise the analysis of those spatial aspects. It is at this moment when the work of other author that pays great attention to everyday life may be of help: Henri Lefebvre, whose work on the production of space I subsequently discuss.

In spite of certain lack of comprehension between them, they coincide in their interest for untangling capitalism and its resistances although from different perspectives: whereas DG paid attention to the way capitalism functions, Lefebvre explicitly focused on the spatial dynamics and the importance of the urbanisation process in capitalism. Despite these differences, their theorisations have many commonalities that offer the ground for intersections that are investigated by authors like Mark Purcell (2016), who has suggested that engaging with the three authors in a dialogue about the city and democracy is beneficial. In the last two sections of the chapter, I explore the potential of the intersection between the two perspectives to substantiate the transition from "conceiving politics as spatial [...] to gain a sense of space as political" (Dikeç, 2012, p. 671). I believe that this move can help us to develop paths to bridge the agential and political economic approaches, by conceiving the production of differential spaces as the main field of social struggle.

Deleuze and Guattari: between striated and smooth spaces

Starting by Deleuze and Guattari, as mentioned, spatiality traverses all their theorisation to the point that for Buchanan and Lambert (2005, p. 5) the "mapping of the different kinds of space that mix in each assemblage (social, political, but also geological, biological, economic, aesthetic or musical, and so on) becomes the major task set out by the project they define as pragmatics or micro-politics." I understand their discussion about spatiality revolving mainly around two concepts: striated and smooth space. Although these spaces have opposite natures, they are intertwined and coexist in reality (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 474), so I do not see them as two separated spaces in confrontation, but

as processes of becoming striated or smoothed. Their characteristics should be considered then as dynamics that would lead towards a striation or a smoothing that will never be fully reached, as the constant subjection to these dynamics keeps the spaces in a far-from-equilibrium condition.

Striating the space of the everyday life

In spatial terms, their analysis of capitalism revolves around the need of the system to striate space, as the main mechanism through which it implements the subjectification that controls everyday life. This striated space is a structured space that orders the different elements attending to an arrangement in which each of them has certain positions, although with different levels of flexibility. Thus, whereas certain elements can enjoy a certain flexibility to move within the space, the ones in the lower position within the hierarchy find their movements constrained by codings and territorialisations to merely go from one point to the other (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 363). In the case of debt, financial practices like securitisation provide those in higher hierarchical positions the flexibility to move within the space, while they deny that mobility to those in the lower positions, who become fixated to certain sites through the biopolitical mechanisms of debt. The striation functions then by identifying individuals, both for enabling and for constraining them through hard lines of segmentation (Genosko and Bryx, 2005, p. 114).

This striation accompanies the processes of subjectification and organisations¹ space according to that: mainly through homogenisation and binary segmentation as the main mechanisms which reterritorialise the deterritorialised flows created by capitalism itself to widen its boundaries (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 370). The striated space is characterised

¹ They talk of organisation to refer to those systems in which each forming element is necessary and have a fixed function within a closed structure. To this organisation, Deleuze and Guattari oppose the concept of the Body without Organs (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 8) to refer to the formation of the body not as an organism in which each organ occupies a certain fixed position, but as a destratified body in which the organs do not respond to that centralised hierarchically patterned structure (Bonta and Protevi, 2006, p. 62-64). Despite being a central concept within their theoretical apparatus, since I focus specially on the spatial aspect, I decided to use other concepts like rhizome that have similar implications, but with a more explicit spatial dimension. Definitely the body is present and the reformulation of the body subsumes the discussion in this thesis, but I focus on those spatial aspects that influence the distribution of embodied affect and its intersections with the production of activist spaces.

by division and structuration in which the different elements that form the space become fixated through essentialist identities in specific places with a specific organic function. The striation delineates space and compartmentalise it through a molar segmentation that establishes the position of the elements, always defined in relation to their positionality to a centre from which these parts depends (Bonta and Protevi, 2006, p. 154). In the everyday life of those bodies subject to debt, this striation is not only translated into a fixed position in relation to the global flows of capital, but also in their social relations that become totally delimited, controlled and structured to assure that they honour their debts. Translated into machinic terms, this spatiality directly relates to the social machine, as main responsible for imposing and reinforcing that striation, specially through the state. Thus, the state emerges as a central actor to organise the space and fixate those divisions through the imposition of certain spatial practices, regularities and imaginaries that fixate those hard-molar segmenting lines (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 385).

As capitalism aims to proclaim that there is not exterior to it, it attempts to show that there is no spatial alternative to the hierarchical striated space. Nonetheless, as the system reproduces by reterritorialising and recoding flows previously deterritorialised and decoded by the system itself, it hints to the virtual existence of a space with differential characteristics, which capitalism prevents it from becoming actualised. Consequently, striation appears as not inevitable, but just as an actualisation of the multiple virtual possibilities, emerging the spatial arrangements from the constant tension between striation and smoothing of space.

Smoothing capitalist space

In opposition to that striation of space that organises in specific segments, the smooth space is characterised by the free combination between heterogeneous elements. While the striated space is the space of the molar, of the representative homogenisations, the smooth space is the space of the molecular, of the productive heterogeneity. Whereas through the striation “space is counted in order to be occupied,” through the smoothing “space is occupied without being counted” (Deleuze and

Guattari, 1987, p. 361). In other words, while the striation delimits space and cuts it with segmenting lines to locate through homogenising identities, the different elements within each segment, the smoothing does not operate through a preconception of limited space, so quantification makes no sense.

The smooth space expands horizontally and has neither beginning nor end, as any element can enter into new relationships to expand the smoothing in multiple directions. Consequently, in opposition to the centralisation of the striated space, the smooth one is characterised for being acentered and rhizomatic, since from any part new ones can develop (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 371). Consequently, the movements of the debtors and activists in a smooth space would not be constrained to move between points, but they would be part of a nomadic space of wandering—in opposition to the sedentary striated space that distributes the bodies in closed spaces (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 381). This implies that, against the fixation of striation, the smoothing is characterised by its flexibility for the activists to occupy new places out of those fixated by the debt. The elements can then recombine freely to form the smooth space, therefore, not following a linear causality and recognising the contingency as there are no necessary relations. Rather, these are product of historical spatio-temporal configurations that come together at a certain moment and place (McFarlane, 2011), which makes impossible to talk of “an essence because [the assemblage] has not eternally necessary defining features, only contingent and singular features” (Nail, 2017, p. 24).

These two spaces should not be seen as separated or as binary opposition, as they are permanently intertwined and always subject to tensions towards the opposite form (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 474). Every spatial arrangement suffers tensions of de/re-territorialisation and de/recoding, subjected to constant change as product of permanent processes of becoming striated or smoothed—although “the smooth space always possesses a greater power of deterritorialization than the striated” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 480). In the case of the space around housing indebtedness, although it tends towards the striation, it evinces

these tensions between the two formations. As mentioned before, although indebtedness homogenises the different bodies, this operation is preceded by processes of differentiation that allow the generation of productive desire. Although the indebtedness initially smooths to establish horizontal connections between multiple indebted people in multiple places, these are subsequently homogenised, organised and packed by financial companies. The expansion of financialisation and of securitisation connect in a subsequently hierarchically striated space bodies fixed to multiple places through housing debt (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 487). As the securitisation repacks the debts and sold to enterprises that repack them again, the space formed by quantification, segmentation and conjoining is constantly redefined, but with little capability of influence by the initial debtor, who is not even aware of those changes. Therefore, although space becomes produced through the interaction of these multiple elements, not all of them have the same capability to affect it, as it becomes centralised in certain elements that shuffle the relations around (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 494). The striation guarantees the recoding and reterritorialisation of those deterritorialising and decoding flows produced by the horizontal expansion of debt to the working classes and the subsequent risk of default (Palomera, 2014). Of the capability of the movements to reshuffle the relations to resist that organisation of space through the crossing of such boundaries will depend the possibility to challenge subjection to debt and capitalism in general.

DG do not develop an analysis of how these spaces are effectively formed and they discuss them in rather abstract terms as emergent products of the relations between heterogeneous elements. In other words, although they discuss the conditions and how these two forms of space interact, they pay much less attention to how these processes take place practically. It is now when Lefebvre's analysis on the production of space can enrich the investigation of how activist spaces form and interact with capitalist spatial arrangements to bridge structural and agential perspectives. Lefebvre himself has been part of that debate, which has derived in divergent reinterpretations of his work, mainly from two

standpoints: political economic; and culturalist linked to postmodern positions. I situate my reading of his work within what Kipfer *et al.* (2008, p. 13) have called a third wave, in which a bridging of the two positions tries to be constructed by a rereading of Lefebvre's work in an undogmatic way.

Lefebvre and the production of space

I use Lefebvre's work on the production of space to concretise the spatial dimension of politics within DG's analysis of capitalism. I do not imply that Lefebvre's theorisation is the only possibility or that he attempted to materialise DG's philosophy, but that, in base to key commonalities, Lefebvre can enrich DG's formulation to excavate how striation and smoothing relate in the organisation of urban spaces. Among those commonalities, the shared interest on everyday life as place of domination and resistance functions as a main link and starting point for this intersection. With this combination I hope to expand the discussion about the interaction of geography with the study of contention, and concretely of the challenges related to the expansion of militant particularism.

Lefebvre's triad

Similar to the entire Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, Lefebvre's conceptualisation of the production of space is strongly relational (Lefebvre, 1991). For him, space is produced by the interaction of three moments (figure 3), which, despite their labels, should not be considered static forms of space, but constant processes of becoming, although never forming a synthesis (Schmid, Stanek and Moravánszky, 2014, p. 16). When Lefebvre defines moment as "the attempt to achieve the total realisation of a possibility" (Elden, 2004, p. 172), it resonates with those events in DG in which some forms of the virtual possibilities of smooth or striated spaces become actualised. Furthermore, this triad should not be seen as a mechanical framework, but as a fluid simplification of three moments that blur into each other (Merrifield, 2006, p. 109). In DG's terms, this triad would be a sort of diagram for mapping the constant tensions between the different moments from which space emerges. The triad is formed by:

1. Spatial Practice: “the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.” These spatial practices are the moments of the physical space, of what have become “commonsensical society’s space” (Stanek, 2011, p. 129). Specifically, spatial practice under capitalism “embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, “private” life and leisure)” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). It is the moment that can be more directly apprehended by the senses: sounds, smells, visions, touches, tastes, etc. Thus, although it does not have any priority over the others, it appears as the one in which the relations between the emerging dynamics converge to generate that common perception of the social space.
2. Spaces of representation: “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). This is the space imagined by the inhabitants and all those artists, philosophers or writers that seek to change and appropriate it. These spaces of representation are the moments of the everyday life, of how the space is experienced and transformed by the “users” (Stanek, 2011, p. 82). Consequently, this becomes the key moment for the emergence of alternatives to capitalist imposition. In Deleuzoguattarian terms it is in these moments that the molecular lines can interact freely to form desiring-machines in which the productive flows of desire colonise the spatial practices of the everyday life. In other words, it is in these spaces of representation when the social movements can generate alternative spaces.
3. Representations of space: those conceptions of space of scientists, planners, urbanists, etc, “all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). These are moments of spatial abstraction, of pure representation through

which capitalism and the state as its main agent create and impose homogenising spatial organisation. What in DG is performed through the creation of molar representations of binary fixed identities and homogenisation (Lorraine, 2005, p. 169), in Lefebvre materialises in the imposition of routines that fix that binarity to maintain certain conditions of existence (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 94). Abstract space generates symbols and relationships to impose a homogeneity that makes a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in its way, that is, difference (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 285). Lefebvre's abstract space would be the materialisation of the striated space of DG, which assimilates the qualitative differences between spaces through quantification to make space measurable (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 352). Abstract representations of space replicate then the functioning of capitalist axiomatic, as quantity substitutes quality to make the different spaces interchangeable and tradeable.

The state not only striates but decodes as a first step to generating that unification of spatial practice, which realises the transition from the spaces of representation to those striating representations of space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 163). This unity of the spatial practice is translated into those top-down representations of space in which state agents present space as an empty homogeneous container awaiting to be filled with static entities with definitory essences (Lorraine, 2005, p. 170).

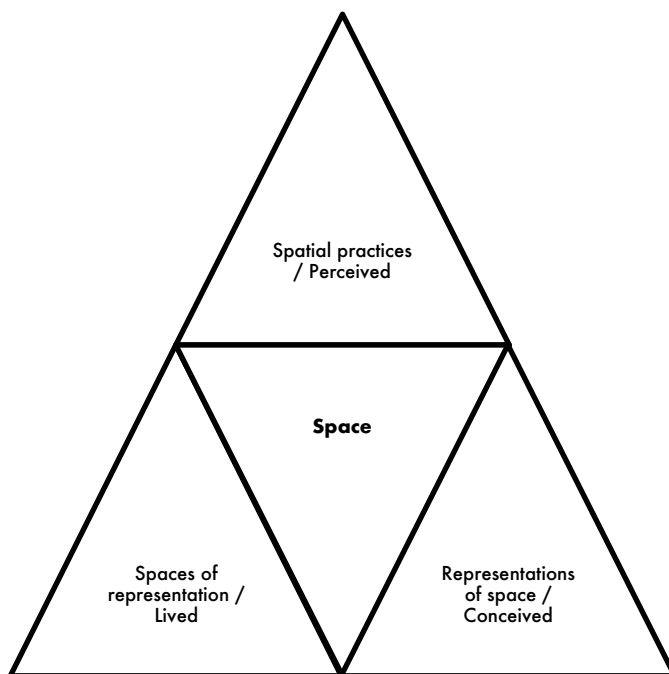


Figure 3 Lefebvre's triad of the Production of Space. (Fonseca Alfaro, 2018, p. 48).

Concurrently to this spatial characterisation, Lefebvre considers space from what Schmid (2008, p. 39) identifies as a phenomenological perspective that pairs Spaces of Representation, Spatial Practices and Representations of Space respectively with Lived, Perceived and Conceived space. Without entering into a discussion as to whether or not this is effectively an incorporation of phenomenology within the conceptualisation, I consider this move from a different perspective, as a key operation to definitely prevent any abstraction of the moments. Thus, the moments become directly produced by the embodied practices of the individuals, who also determine how they relate to each other. This adds nuances to the previous formulation, as these moments become embodied to canalise the flows of desire understood as the productive force. As it happened with DG, for Lefebvre the body emerges as the main producer of space through the assemblage of these flows and, consequently,

becomes the initial site of resistance to the imposition of spatial arrangements (Elden, 2004, p. 189).

The body becomes central to the actualisation of certain affect for producing social space understood not as filling of an empty container, but as an emergent product of the relationship between bodies, objects, etc. Therefore, as an alternative to that phenomenological read, I interpret this reconceptualisation of the three moments as a movement towards the acknowledgement of the performative capacities of the body, in a tension between representational and performative politics that I think traverses Lefebvre's work.¹ In Lefebvre's (1991, p. 199) own words, "for the spatial body, becoming social does not mean being inserted in some pre-existing 'world': this body produces and reproduces-and it perceives what it reproduces or produces." Translated into Deleuzoguattarian terms, the body affects the creation of space and is affected by this space created through the encounter of the body with its surroundings, human or not (Lorraine, 2005, p. 161). Thus, mine is an expansive reading of these three moments of perceived, conceived and lived space, in which any interpretation of each of them is the product of the actual interaction of the bodies that create spaces in such interaction. Here, the relationality again becomes a strong linkage between DG and Lefebvre, as the space may be seen as another assemblage created from the conjoining of the bodily experiences of terms that mutually affect each other (Anderson, 2014, p. 9).

Consequently, both Lefebvre and DG, oppose the idea of space as an abstract construct, because this would be the reproduction of the representations of space imposed by the state, which overrun qualitative difference in favour of a quantitative homogenisation (Merrifield, 2006, p. 112). Instead, one should talk of spaces in plural, as contingent and ephemeral emergent products of the assemblages of multiple embodied flows articulated through the three intertwined moments. The three moments are not pre-existent moments within which bodies interconnect, but they are immanently generated by the reciprocal affective relation-

¹ Tension that, as discussed above, is also present in Harvey's problematisation of militant particularism.

ship between all bodies to act and undergo. This offers the possibility of breaking that deadlock of representations of space imposed over the other moments, in which certain possibilities of change are already included within the system. To generate spaces exterior to that imposed striated representations around debt, the focus must be set on the rearticulation of embodied flows within the lived spaces of representations, and specially on the heterogeneity that populate that moment. It is through the generation of alternative lived moments with the capability of being imposed over the representations of space that capitalism can be resisted. The body subsists then in between the two realms of its lived difference and of its analytical thought of the conceived space of representation, so space is created through the energies that flow between bodies (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 179).

In summary, the three authors share a similar vision of the space as a reality that is produced by these connections and flows that traverse the bodies, which they oppose to the realm of pure abstraction, the realm of representations. Consequently, the moments emerge from the everyday life, from the flows that come together at certain times as product of those interactions between bodies of activists that cut and expand the flows. That said, all three moments are necessary and make their contribution to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, although their connections are neither stable nor simple (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 46). In capitalism, the representations of space, the conceived structure, have subsumed the rest, so the relations that produce everyday life are constantly constrained and organised to produce certain space. In the case of the subjection to debt, although the bodies (human and non-human) are the main agents of those flows of debt, their everyday life is constrained by a striated controlled space that locates them in fixed places through the imposition of certain representations and identities. Consequently, the possibilities of antagonism derive from an everyday life that triggers the constant recombination of bodies to shape the collective agency of the “users,” so the alternative lived spaces emerge from multiple non-established connections. For Lefebvre this can be mainly done by appropriating space (Stanek, 2011, p. 87) to generate

spaces of representation where multiple bodies interact and become included. It is now when one of those practical tactics for smoothing appears: appropriation or occupation of space.

Occupation

Concurrently with their strong relationality, these lived spaces of representation are characterised by their immanence as they are produced through the actual “occupation” of space by bodies. As Lefebvre puts it, “the law of space resides within space itself, and cannot be resolved into a deceptively clear inside-versus-outside relationship, which is merely a representation of space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 171). The representation of space attempts to transcendently fix the positions of the bodies according to the homogenising segmentation debtor/creditor, while restricting the access of the first to multiple spaces. This representation controls, routinises and limits the spatial practices, as the streets become privatised places of consumption or just passing-by places between two points in defined paths of flows. The occupation of these spaces for their use to create an oeuvre emerges as a key mechanism for enhancing difference (Elden, 2004, p. 226-231) to challenge those homogenisations and control. This occupation would open spaces to multiple encounters to recombine heterogeneous lived spaces and to generate new ones that confront the constraining conceived spaces of capitalism.

This formulation resembles greatly the emergent aspects of the assemblages in Deleuze and Guattari, since the formation of specific spaces is embedded in the creation of assemblages of multiple terms. The formation of space through the assemblage of multiple elements makes central the promotion of encounters, understood as simultaneity and assembly both of human actors and everything that is produced either by nature or by society (things, objects, works, signs and symbols) (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 101). In these encounters, the embodied heterogeneous flows enter reciprocal affective relationships within and between the three different moments to produce the everyday life as an oeuvre, a work of art based on use value over exchange value. For Lefebvre this oeuvre is the expression of a desire liberated from the constraints of capitalism (Goonewardena, 2008, p. 122). As it happens in DG, desire ap-

pears here as a productive force to take control of the things that affect everyday life (Elden, 2004, p. 229). In both cases, desire is collectively formed mainly by coming together and sharing certain spaces in encounters based on direct interaction.

Street festivals are one of Lefebvre's recurrent examples of how that occupation would free desire and enhance the richness of an everyday life that overflows over the urban space to increase the acceptance of difference (Merrifield, 2006, p. 14). This acceptance of difference directly confronts unified representations of space that expulse or subsume the experiences and perceptions that do not align with them. The encounters facilitated by the occupation challenge the conceived space, as they break the organisation and fixation of the relations within. Instead, they combine heterogeneous everyday lives that come together to form a space where heterogeneity is not only recognised but promoted. In Deleuzoguattarian terms, the expansion of encounters of heterogeneous lived spaces would increase the possibility of those to develop singularities that resonate with each other to form alternative spaces (Lorraine, 2005, p. 173). The encounters of heterogeneous ways of experiencing everyday life provide the ground to raise awareness of the common positionality around debt and to question those segmentations that assign fixed essences according to the division debtor/creditor. In other words, the relations forged within the encounters of activists build space, but also build the subject for living differently, more communally (Dewsbury and Thrift, 2005, p. 102). Consequently, for Lefebvre, the resistance starts with the acceptance of heterogeneous forms of everyday life, which translates into the importance of acknowledging different place-based struggles (Wilson, 2014, p. 115) so important in the discussion about militant particularism.

As result, the encounters facilitated by the occupation would generate alternative lived spaces through the recovery of its immanent nature. These lived spaces would be produced by the free interaction between heterogeneous bodies in their everyday life, therefore, liberating these from the homogenising representations of space. Nevertheless, the con-

stant tension between this diversity in the lived space and the aim of control by the conceived space never disappears. Such tension responds then to the conflict between the immanence of the lived space emerged from conjoining heterogeneous everyday lives and the transcendence of the representations of conceived space that try to impose certain organisation. Consequently, maintaining the immanence becomes central for keeping these spaces open to heterogeneity, and for Lefebvre this can only be done through self-management—*autogestion* in French which is the language of Lefebvre's original writings.

Autogestion

Autogestion (self-management) emerges then as the second main practical tactic to resist spatial organisation. Once the moment of the lived space manages to generate recombinations of bodies, these bodies must keep their immanent capability to generate new spaces. As it is necessary to articulate difference for posing a real challenge to capitalism, *autogestion* emerges as the only way of guaranteeing that immanence (Wilson, 2014, p. 122).

That said, as there is no univocal definition of *autogestion* and this must be perpetually negotiated and practiced (Merrifield, 2006, p. 140), I understand that its form must be context based and respond to the relations that take place in each moment. Returning to DG, this resistance based on *autogestion* is what the smoothing linked to the war machine implies: expanding and articulating heterogeneous perceptions of space through the generation of moments of wandering (Watt, 2016, p. 301), without being subsumed to a superior centralised body, so lived spaces under constant redefinition can emerge from these relations. Furthermore, in line with the demand for the acceptance of difference, the *autogestion* implies also the acknowledgement of the same a priori capability of every single element to affect the production of space.

This argument for *autogestion* directly confronts state domination and its attempts at homogenisation, which adds a nuance to the discussion about militant particularism. Like Harvey, Lefebvre considers it indispensable to connect and coordinate the place-based struggles, because, if

they remain isolated, they would contribute to the homogeneity through fragmentation (Wilson, 2014, p. 116). Nevertheless, unlike Harvey's solution of rescaling, *autogestion* is, for Lefebvre, the way this linkage can enhance the recognition of difference, therefore generating a differential space that challenges the homogenisation of the conceived spaces. The *autogestion* appears then as a potential solution to the interaction between different emergent alternative lived spaces, without any of them becoming dominant, in order to avoid constraining their immanent capability to generate new spaces. The final goal of the implementation of *autogestion* is to guarantee the acceptance of difference as the only way of building alternatives to capitalism (Elden, 2004, p. 226; Kipfer, 2008, p. 203). This is what Lefebvre called, the acceptance of the right to difference.

From the Right to difference to the acceptance of absolute heterogeneity

The construction of alternative spaces discussed in previous sections revolves around the resistance to the homogenisation that capitalism tries to impose over the everyday life. This resistance is formulated in Lefebvre by the recognition of the "right to difference" (Elden, 2004, p. 226) and in DG as micropolitics, or what Guattari called the acceptance of "subjective pluralism" (Guattari, 1996, p. 216). Both proposals stress the importance of the affective relations between the bodies for the production of spaces characterised by the acceptance of difference, otherness and dissension. This would not only challenge spatial homogenisation, but, as DG claim, it would produce also singularities to challenge the capitalist subjectification that imposes fixed identities (Bertelsen and Murphie, 2010, p. 152).

Although they use different terminology on many occasions—Lefebvre talks mainly of difference and DG often of heterogeneity—difference and heterogeneity may be equated here, since they are used in relation to their opposition to the homogenisation of the capitalist representations (Merrifield, 2006, p. 114). In fact, the concern of Deleuze and Guattari for constructing a non-negative conceptualisation of difference can en-

rich Lefebvre's theorisation. As discussed, for DG reality emerges from a virtual field populated by absolute difference where essences do not exist and difference emerges from the repetition of the same idea that becomes different in each repetition (Welchman, 2009. p. 44). This formulation defines difference not in relation to a specific essence, but to accept the existence of pure heterogeneity without any referential object or idea. The potential of this conceptualisation when discussing the production of space is that it allows us to totally separate this from any representation, as there will not exist "normal" and "deviant" lived spaces. This conception of difference deepens Lefebvre's concept of right to difference as the acknowledgment of absolute difference would increase the acceptance of difference due to the lack of any a priori to which the activists should be different. Moreover, this could help the social movements to prevent the creation of new dominant representations that could restrict that difference in the new spaces.

This centrality of heterogeneity for challenging capitalism in both DG and Lefebvre evinces the potentialities of the intersection to mutually enrich their theorisations. Thus, whereas the positive conceptualisation of difference of DG enriches Lefebvre's formulation, his triad concretises the dynamics of how enhancing heterogeneity can effectively challenge capitalism. As mentioned, in their analysis of striating and smoothing of space Deleuze and Guattari do not discuss concrete mechanisms for how those spaces for enhancing that heterogeneity can be produced and expanded. Lefebvre's triad, in contrast, offers a diagram to empirically analyse how such tensions between homogenisation and heterogeneity relate. Departing from the shared importance they give to the body and the everyday life, the triad helps us to understand and concretise how the interactions between the different spaces take place and how they materialise in the urban environment. Moreover, the previous section has discussed two concrete tactics for enhancing the difference necessary to smoothing space: occupation and *autogestion*. These can relate directly to contention, as possible strategies with the potential of challenging the homogenisations of space. Analysing how these tactics are implemented and affect contention will reconnect the discussion

with the debate about militant particularism and the possibilities of expansion and production of activist spaces.

That said, although Lefebvre helps to concretise how alternative spaces can be produced, he does not discuss, in depth, the formation of the agency that can produce such spaces. In general, he talks of the working class as the agent of change, but he focuses mainly on the formation of working class consciousness (Elden, 2004, p. 115) and little on its material organisation. It is now when DG's concept of machine can enrich Lefebvre's theorisation with a dynamic relational perspective to understand the articulation of that difference. As discussed, the desiring-machines emerge from the connection of heterogeneous flows of desire articulated without an a priori structure in which each element has a fixed position¹ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 8). This desiring-machine is not static, but in constant tension of becoming between two machines with opposing natures: the war machine and the social machine. It is in the relation between the three different embodied moments that the desiring-machines are formed and evolving towards one or other in constant tension.

The form of the machine that becomes dominant influences how the flows between the moments relate. Thus, the social machine—with the state in a central role—regulates flows of desire through representations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 262) that organise the movements of the bodies within the lived space. In contrast, the war machine emerges from the spaces of representation to confront the organisation that the moments of representations of space try to impose. Therefore, the possibility of overcoming the system virtually exists, but it needs the emergence of a war machine to actualise those possibilities—one must remember that the war machine effectuates the abstract machine that articulates virtual singularities (Bonta and Protevi, 2006, p. 165). This war machine would emerge from the activism of social movements that create new lived spaces that effectively challenge capitalist striation

¹ That is the reason why the use of the term organisation is avoided, as this imply the articulation as an organism, with organs with a clear function and fixed position.

through the enhancing of the right to difference. Since for Lefebvre such alternative moments of lived space can only be created by the working class, the conceptualisation of the war machine will enable us to problematise the common positionality that articulates such resistance. This reconnects once again with the debate about militant particularism, as it directly refers to how the different actors produce certain space from which new agency emerge. The characteristics of this war machine will be the focus of the next section.

Nomadic war machine: heterogeneity becomes mobilised

The emergence of a war machine actualises the articulation of heterogeneity created by the abstract machine in ways that generate lived spaces able to challenge the homogenising representations of space. In opposition to the striation of space associated to the social machine, the war machine is characterised by the smoothing of space that maintains social formations in a far-from-equilibrium or “intensive crisis” condition (Bonta and Protevi 2006, p. 165) through the promotion of heterogeneity. Thus, the primary concern of the war machine is to distribute pure differences against the state’s organisation. The war machine is pure exteriority, while the state delineates an interiority. Whereas “the state binds and organises, the war machine disaggregates and disperses” (Harris, 2016, p. 47).

A popular characterisation of the war machine describes it as a form of commoning, as an emergent formation produced through the cooperation of different singularities (Tampio, 2009, p. 387). This perspective has been extensively explored by Hardt and Negri (2004), who analyse the possibility of contesting capitalism through the emergence of the Multitude, as the construction that can overcome the limitations of formulas like class, people or mass. Discussing the different conceptualisations of commons and commoning is out of the scope of this thesis. Commoning is used here just as a formulation to launch the analysis of the characteristics of a potential war machine emerging from the articulation of difference in the movements. When Hardt and Negri (2004, p. 129) describe Multitude as an “open network of singularities that links

together on the basis of the common they share and the common they produce,” the common positionality becomes the ground from which to articulate heterogeneity. They talk of a heterogeneous group of bodies that act as an assemblage in a rhizomatic way, characterised by its flexibility and openness, in which difference is not only accepted but also the biggest strength to effectively resist capitalism. Consequently, unity in the social movements must be rejected in favour of multiplicity and the denial of the existence of an organic whole that subordinates the parts to fulfil any specific function. This rejection of unity has important repercussions in this thesis, as it will help to guide the analysis of the ways the different groups develop their activism and to deepen on the tension between unification and singularisation. This problematisation will enable to question the influence of the different levels of unity and organisation within the groups as potential constraints to the possibilities of emancipation by the recombination of their parts (Nail, 2017, p. 23).

To understand the implications of this formulation of the war machine or Multitude, it is necessary to return to DG’s positive conceptualisation of difference, which requires the development of an agency that is not defined by certain essences. In opposition to concepts like class or people, this war machine lacks any definitory characteristics, since that would mean falling again into hard-segmentations and fixed identities. Once accepted the existence of a common positionality around debt—as bodies constrained in a striated everyday life space—the key is then to generate forms of agency without essential identities that would reduce heterogeneity and prevent the entering of new bodies. Formulas like Multitude—or the 99% of the Occupy movements—recognise that common positionality without referring to defining properties, at the same time would imply a more active agency than Harvey did in his account of militant particularism. That is the function of commoning for the analysis here: a point of departure to analyse how the heterogeneity can be effectively articulated without any essential identarian definition to favour the acceptance of absolute difference. These commoning constitutes becomings and conjoinings of flows that, in opposition to the binary organisation of the striated space (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 352), create a smooth space in which the flows are constantly changing

connections of heterogeneous terms. The binary forms have no real power over these ones, because the flows traverse the segments, not by adding a new line but by drawing a line between the segments (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p. 147). Analysing to what extent and how the social movements researched here enhance a right to difference based on this non-essential heterogeneity can offer some insights to enable us to understand how the war machine can emerge and expand.

In spatial terms, the smooth space intrinsic to this machine has the form of a rhizomatic assemblage characterised for being horizontal and non-hierarchical, but also for being acentered and lacking any linearity, so no essentialist representation of that positionality can emerge (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 382). Like a rhizome, the war machine has neither beginning nor end and it can expand in any direction, even without any physical connection between the oldest and the newest parts. The smoothing of space of this war machine is based then on the constant recombination of the diverse bodies and their everyday life experiences, so the flows of desire can be constantly expanded and transformed. It is at this moment when the claim for *autogestion* intersects with the war machine to prevent re-striation and to transform everyday life (Elden, 2004, p. 229). As the *autogestion* prevents the control from a centralising body, it would allow the parts to permanently recombine and expand in multiple directions, so the different elements retain a high capability for taking decisions. The *autogestion* becomes then a condition of the rhizomatic character of the war machine to assure multi-polar affective compositions that develop that right to difference—or subjective pluralism—capable of changing everyday life. The analysis in this thesis will excavate to what extent the dynamics that affect the activism of the four groups actualise this war machine and the potential limitations to that process.

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In Lefebvre's triad, the war machine would initially actualise only in the moment of lived space, as the moment in which the everyday life can recombine outside the conceived representations of space. Through this recombination of heterogeneous perceptions, the representations that striate space would be questioned. Nevertheless, staying at the moment of lived space would not be enough to effectively challenge capitalism. It has to be in the direct interaction and confrontation between moments through the expansion of the war machine that the new representations generated in the lived space can challenge the conceived representations of spaces.

As debt striates space to constrain the bodies to certain spaces and places (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 380), the occupation of these spaces could attack those moments of representations of space. Occupying places that are supposed to be out of reach for the activists becomes a potential way of actualising the war machine, as these imply potential attempts to redefine the space (Watt, 2016) and break segmenting divisions. Through the promotion of those encounters that cut the segmenta-

tions of the conceived space, the war machine can start liberating heterogeneity to produce singularities that free oneself from capitalist subjectification (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 216). Although this liberation may have an individual starting point, as desire is collectively formed and the social and the individual are embedded, it is necessary to connect these various singularities (Lorraine, 2005). The social movements researched here can provide insights into how smoothing space can be performed and how the tensions of smoothing and striation interact to affect the emergence of a war machine within which new singularities can emerge. Some specific questions in relation to this smoothing of space by the war machine relevant for the thesis would be: how do activists try to smooth space? Is heterogeneity effectively enhanced? How is this heterogeneity spatially articulated and the relation to dynamics of smoothing?

Summary

Departing from the challenges of conjoining structural and agential aspects of the study of urban contestation and their influence in the incorporation of geographical dimensions within the field, this chapter excavated potential paths to advance in the conjoining for a better comprehension of a social mobilisation characterised by spatial decentralisation and heterogeneity. To launch that exploration, I used the discussion about militant particularism as a framework for investigating the challenges for the interconnection of four different place-based struggles, so within their difference, they avoid falling into localism. The two main positions within this debate reproduce the division between structural and agential analyses, which, following Nicholls, Miller and Beaumont (2013), I called scale-focused and network-focused approaches. Departing from this discussion, I started by analysing how housing indebtedness became the source for the generation of a common positionality as the condition for connecting heterogeneous place-based struggles. Following DG's analysis of subjectification, I discussed how a common positionality can emerge as a reaction to a process of homogenisation by which the everyday life of every single debtor becomes fixed, constrained and controlled. Debt emerges then as a key mechanism for achieving a two-sided process of domination: the debt expansion that

incorporates new contingents of population into the financial flows of capital; and through the biopolitical subjectification to that axiomatic. It is from this double process of subjectification and production of a space of indebtedness across places that an awareness of common positionality within capitalism can be mobilised for resistance in multiple places. This space of indebtedness is in constant change, product of permanent gaps and ruptures. Housing indebtedness, and, specifically, the risk of eviction produced by the incapability to adapt to those ruptures, generates a deep trauma from which the individual awareness of a common positionality in relation to debt can be mobilised.

The formation of that space of indebtedness and subjectification has another spatial component concurrent to that assemblage of global flows, and that is to control, constrain and fix within certain segments, within certain spaces, the bodies of the debtors in their everyday lives. Space becomes a key element of resistance, a key struggle for the debtor to liberate him or herself from that control imposed through debt. To analyse the emergence of the resistance to this space of indebtedness, I propose a theoretical framework based on the intersection between two conceptualisations of politics that, despite their differences, also share many commonalities: Deleuze and Guattari and Lefebvre. By focusing on the spatial aspects that traverse both perspectives, the framework developed here seeks to explore potential paths where those structural and agential aspects can converge. Starting by discussing the spatial aspects of DG's conceptualisation of politics, the subjectification imposed by the space of indebtedness turns the body and the everyday life into the main sites of resistance, a commonality that directly connects this conceptualisation to Lefebvre's formulation.

The space in DG moves in a tension between striation and smoothing, and Lefebvre offers a concretisation of how those processes take place. The use of his triad of conceived, perceived and lived space¹ as moments from where the space emerges enables us to better grasp the dynamics of striation and smoothing. The connection between the mo-

¹ Or Representations of Space, Spatial Practice and Spaces of Representation.

ments is unstable, in constant change and tension between striation and smoothing. The striation actualises in representations of moments of conceived space that homogenise space to subsequently divide it. Whereas, smoothing depends on the immanent capability of the users to produce moments of lived spaces of representation. These two moments of conceived space and of lived space interact with the third moment—perception of space or spatial practices—in different ways. Whereas the conceived representations of space act as a transcendental force that constrains these perceptions through processes of subjectification, the lived spaces of representation bring different perceptions together to challenge subjectification and generate alternative spaces through the liberation of flows. The body then becomes the main actor producing space through the flows that traverse the bodies involved in the production of those lived spaces. It is in relation to this interaction between moments that occupation and *autogestion* emerge as potential tactics to advance in the smoothing. For Lefebvre these tactics could enhance the immanent creation of lived spaces of representation able to challenge the transcendental imposition of representations of space based on homogenisation. This enhancing of difference is what Lefebvre called the *right to difference* and DG *subjective pluralism*.

To understand how the debtors and activists can produce such lived space, it is useful to return to DG and their conceptualisation of desiring-machines to describe the way the different flows connect and move between the moments. Two machines emerge as basic to understanding how these three moments connect: the social machine and the war machine. Whereas the first one homogenises, organises and imposes representations over the everyday life, the second one enhances heterogeneity, expands horizontally and promotes the constant recombination between bodies in the lived space. Whereas the first one is the machine of capitalism and state, the second one is the machine of its resistances. This war machine that articulates bodies in a non-essentialist identity would redefine agency through the enhancing of the right to difference, at the same time that challenges capitalism by attacking its spatiality. This conceptualisation of war machine opens potential paths to frame the research of the articulation of heterogeneity and the production of

space focus of this thesis. This war machine provides alternative perspectives to investigate the challenges of connecting local struggles posed by militant particularism, in this case by problematising how enhancing heterogeneity would affect the emergence of an activist space. Furthermore, as the social movements would be subject to the same pressures for homogenisation and the creation of static essentialist identities, this thesis will analyse the challenges and tensions within the movements that prevent or advance the emergence of such smoothing war machine.

Based on the common ground of their relationality, the centrality of the body and everyday life, and the importance of heterogeneity, this chapter has launched a dialogue between DG and Lefebvre as a potential path for enriching our understanding of how social mobilisation and space interrelate. The consequence of this perspective is that the mere formation of specific forms of space becomes the battleground that frames the struggles. Understanding space as a relational social product, as an open-ended emergent territorialisation, provides the ground for analysing how capitalism tries to organise that heterogeneous reality, the bodies and the everyday lives in specific constraining homogenising spaces. Therefore, heterogeneity and the production of space appear intertwined as key features to challenge capitalist imposition and organisation by redefining those spaces and creating new ones through encounters that can generate new singularities against the capitalist subjectification. Researching how social movements deal with this heterogeneity in the production of space, its potentiality and its limitations can open new paths to investigate alternative ways to reformulate the interrelation of geographical variables and how they influence resistance.

INTERMISSION

Before continuing the thesis with the discussion of the methods used for the research, I would like to make some clarifications about three potential issues emerging from the conjoining of the two perspectives discussed in the previous chapter.

Until now I have focused on the strong commonalities that provide the ground for combining the works of Deleuze and Guattari and Lefebvre. Nevertheless, I consider it beneficial to briefly address some issues that may be raised in relation to this combination and how I think they can be solved. My intention is not to offer a final solution for these tensions, but to acknowledge them and to discuss how I confronted them, so they do not become a hindrance to the combination. Although I shall focus in three main issues, I do not imply that these are the only ones, but that are the main ones challenging the attempt of conjoining proposed here:

The first one is an epistemological issue related to Lefebvre's use of a dialectical method: in his works, Lefebvre develops his own reinterpretation of the dialectical method. Without discussing this in depth here, he constructs dialectics formed by three interrelated moments, but without any possible solution. In contrast to dialectic methods constructed around three moments of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, he focuses on open-ended processes in which a synthesis is impossible as the three moments are in constant tension and contradiction (Merrifield, 2006, p. 109; Schmid, 2008). The best example of this dialectics would be the triad of space previously discussed. In spite of Deleuze and Guattari's opposi-

tion to the dialectical method, I consider that Lefebvre's reinterpretation brings him closer to them than to the classical dialectical method. The definitory importance that they give to moments of rupture for the construction of networks stresses the importance of those tensions and contradictions that are pivotal on Lefebvre's dialectics. The focus on strong relationality, interdependence and the contingency that Lefebvre's dialectics imply as an ever-changing process of becoming resonate greatly with Deleuze and Guattari's own perspective. In other words, I wonder to what extent one can call Lefebvre's method dialectical or whether Deleuze and Guattari's epistemology is not in a certain way dialectical as defined by Lefebvre. Therefore, I consider that the shared focus on relationality, difference, open-ended processes and contingency provide a more solid ground for the intersection than the separation implied by the use of the term dialectics by Lefebvre.

A second issue I would like to discuss here is ontological: when discussing space, Lefebvre talks of scales, whereas DG base their theorisation on a flat ontology against any hierarchical scalar order. That said, their conceptualisations are flexible, which provides the ground for interpretations that can encompass both perspectives. Starting with Lefebvre, his vision of scales stresses the importance of relationality when he talks about three main levels: global, urban and everyday. The use of the term level hints towards a certain concern for avoiding hierarchical mechanistic orders of nested scales (Elden, 2004, p. 233). Thus, he claims that the abstract space 'is' whole and broken, global and fractured, but it should not be seen as a hierarchical scale stretching between the poles of the global and the local equating to political power the first and dispersion the second. Instead these are inextricable intertwined, constantly influencing each other. Thus, "the places of social space [...] are not simply juxtaposed: they may be intercalated, combined, superimposed-they may even sometimes collide. Consequently the local (or 'punctual', in the sense of 'determined by a particular "point"') does not disappear, for it is never absorbed by the regional, national or even worldwide level" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 88). In spite of the differences with DG's flat ontology, this definition of the scales as permanently intertwined provides in

fact an interesting starting point to problematise the creation of scale ordering¹ and its role in capitalist striation of space. In line with this, I understand Deleuze and Guattari's flat ontology not as the negation that scales exist, but as the problematisation of those as the result of striation of space. In other words, their flat ontology would question the *a priori* necessity of scales as a main strategy for smoothing the striated space that constantly tries to fix certain scalar order, whose concrete functioning Lefebvre's perspective could help to untangle.

Finally, there is a final issue that relates directly to the interpretation of the triad of space in Lefebvre. As discussed before, the incorporation of the body for the articulation of the three moments—perceived, conceived and lived—has been understood in phenomenological terms, as the interpretation of the body of the different moments (Schmid, 2008; Stanek, 2011, p. 128). Without discussing the pertinence of such an interpretation, I aim to take that use of the body further. As Lefebvre discusses the production of space as the product of the conjoining of flows that traverse the bodies, the role of the body seems to be more complex and important than the simple interpretation of those moments (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 194-218). Further than representation, I consider here that Lefebvre's formulation acknowledges the performative capability of the body to create its own social space (Lefebvre, 1991). In all three moments the bodies, besides their phenomenological component, have a central role in the actual creation of the space. Thus, for example, the conceived space that directly resonates with a mental operation, it is also performative. As Lefebvre claims, the agents of the state, like urban planners, implement those conceived representations of space, which change and try to order space to their convenience. By the same token, he mentions the lived space as the space of the artists, of the users, which implies the embodiment of those moments through the actions of these actors, who mutually affect each other. I see in Lefebvre an attempt of freeing the body and his formulation from representation, but without reaching that objective fully, as he in certain ways returns often to the representations. The intersection with Deleuze and Guattari and

¹ The discussion about scales is not new within geography. For more on this, see (Agnew, 1997; Swyngedouw, 1997; Brenner, 2001; Moore, 2008; Sheppard and McMaster, 2008; Mackinnon, 2010).

the non-representational conceptualisation of space (Thrift, 2008) can help Lefebvre to finally cast off that “trap of representation,” to acknowledge the full performative capability of the bodies to shape an everyday life capable to fight against the representations imposed by capitalism and the state.

4. METHODOLOGY: DIAGRAMMING ACTIVISM

The use of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of difference and the virtual/actual distinction imply an understanding of reality, called transcendental empiricism, that has epistemological implications for how that reality can be grasped. This chapter starts by discussing those implications for the methods used in this thesis, which will be explained in the forthcoming sections in relation to the use of a diagram to map the relations that shape activism.

Starting with transcendental empiricism, as Žižek (2004, p. 4) states, "the paradoxal coupling of opposites (transcendental + empirical) points towards a field of experience beyond (or, rather beneath) the experience of constituted or perceived reality." The virtual field gives rise to a certain empirical world of stable objects as effect of contingent connections between proto-elements. The empiricism becomes transcendental, as the virtual becomes the condition for reality to emerge, but the way this virtual becomes actualised is immanent by the internal differentiation of the various ideas that come together at a certain space and time (Welchman, 2009, p. 44). As this non-negative differentiation within the virtual functions without a conceptual mediation that defines an essence (Rölli, 2016, p. 178), difference is only possible through repetition, which produces specific actualisations. For Žižek (2004, p. 11), repetition repeats "the virtuality inherent to the past and betrayed by its past actualisation. In this sense, the emergence of the New changes the past itself, that is, retroactively changes not the actual past—we are not in

science fiction—but the balance between actuality and virtuality in the past.” Repetition is then a repetition of the same, generating through its actualisation a difference between two instances of the same concept.

Thus, although the virtual appears impossible to capture through the senses, as the actualisations reconnect with their virtual genesis, the conditions of actual givens can be established regressively (Rölli, 2016, p. 54) in a speculative reconstruction that takes the object as a kind of illusion constituted by a representation. Affect becomes pivotal for connecting the two fields, since, as affect is virtual and based on relationality, it cannot be conceived as an effect of an event, but taking “place before and after the distinctions of subject-world or inside-outside” (Anderson, 2006, p. 736).

Thus, DG’s transcendental empiricism understands reality as formed by three intertwined and coexistent moments that come together in encounters at a certain time and space: the virtual field of pure difference, where the relations of exteriority of the ideas prevent the existence of fixed essences; the actual, which materialises certain combinations within the virtual and is the key to capturing reality, since the virtual is impossible to grasp in itself and it has to be done regressively through the sensible characteristics that are actualised; finally, those sensible characteristics are just expressions of an intermediate moment in which affect appears as the necessary mediating process by which that virtual becomes actualised. The research must resist the temptation of homogenisation and unification of actualised representations that obstruct the understanding of a world of pure difference (Gregory *et al.*, 2009, p. 207).

This formulation implies a realist ontology that understands that reality exists separately from the mind, which inclines DG to empiricism (Rölli, 2016, p. 161). Nevertheless, transcendental empiricism differs from observation-based empiricism, since their realist standpoint is more complex than the simple assumption that what we capture through our senses is the reflection of reality (Thrift, 2008, p. 5; Anderson and Harrison, 2010). The empiricist epistemology linked to this position sees

reality as socially mediated by the intersection of certain dynamics constructed, developed and shaped by social actors. The initial goal of social research becomes that of identifying the mechanisms and dynamics that determine social life as specific actualisations of the infinite difference of virtual reality. The first consequence of this formulation is the rejection of positivist research paradigms and the strategies associated with them—mainly inductive and deductive—and the need for complex models to incorporate social mediation. This locates the research close to what Blaikie (2010, p. 155) calls a retroductive strategy by which, through the guidance of certain theoretical apparatuses, the research is led to find those dynamics and mechanisms that determine social life.

Although this focus on dynamics and mechanisms approximates transcendental empiricism to political economic analyses (Blaikie, 2010, p. 84), the central role conceded to the agency of social actors for the development of those dynamics separates it from them. By the same token, it approximates the approach to social constructionism, although without reaching that fully, but located in between both paradigms. Transcendental empiricism is not the only philosophy that tries to conjoin both positions but, unlike approaches such as critical realism, the agency of social actors and the political economic dynamics are seen as embedded, without any priority but as concomitant phenomena that mutually constitute and shape each other. The constant combinations and re-combinations within the virtual make the dynamics that determine social life contingent and in constant change. Consequently, as reality is formed by open and unpredictable systems, knowledge cannot be universal but contextual and without linear causal relationships between those virtual elements from which the actual emerges (Blaikie, 2010, p. 104). This locates DG within the epistemology of complexity theory, which focuses on the relations between the elements that form the systems and the mechanisms in a specific context producing diverse actualisations.

Moreover, the research in this thesis, that has commonalities with that retroductive strategy, is also abductive in certain respects. Despite the inclusion of agency in the former, the latter expands it by incorporating

interpretations and meanings of social actors—in this case activists—in their everyday life to untangle imaginaries and identities to be triangulated with their effects on the mechanism and dynamics (Blaikie, 2010, p. 88). The abductive strategy reinforces the analysis of the agency in the formation of those dynamics and its resistance, although I consciously limited it to activists' perceptions and imaginaries to avoid the interpretivist research paradigms that could impose representations over reality (Blaikie, 2010, p. 89).

In line with these research strategies, the collection of information is based on qualitative methods. Although quantitative methods could be useful to disclose those mechanisms and dynamics, their use is problematic in relation to a perspective that considers them contingent, context based and products of the interactions of multiple elements. To understand how these relations happen and how they shape dynamics, a situated knowledge is more suitable than the attempt to develop general trends, for which quantitative methods are valuable.

Together with this alignment with the theoretical framework, the kind of research questions asked is the second main factor that determines the research strategies and methods (Silverman, 2014, p. 9). That theoretical alignment with qualitative research is reinforced by research questions that are interested on untangling people's meanings and imaginaries of their everyday lives (Silverman, 2014, p. 9) to analyse how they develop an agency that interacts with the dynamics and mechanisms.

In summary, to grasp this complex reality, the methods must allow one to investigate the interactions within the actual field of the dynamics and the agency of the social actors that actualise all the differences that characterise the virtual field. This forms a complex setting of encounters that overlap and interconnect, but without any hierarchical order or linear causal relationship as the virtual is constantly actualising as a product of contingent combinations. To apprehend this complex reality, mapping in general, and diagramming in particular, emerge as an overarching framework to develop the qualitative methods in line with those retro-

ductive and abductive research strategies. These research activities are guided by qualitative ethnographic methodology to grasp subjectivities, imaginaries and everyday activism (Juris and Khasnabish, 2013, p. 6). Among the qualitative methods, I mainly used oral ones, as the goal was to identify different imaginaries and experiences of the research subjects, and to investigate the interactions that shape the general dynamics of their activism (Winchester and Rofo, 2016, p. 9). That said, although the methods would be close to those utilised in ethnographic research, I treat them in a different manner to the common ethnographic use. The etymology of the word ethnography—from the Greek *étnos*- (people) and *-grafía* (writing)—raises some issues in order to avoid the representational trap of words to which this etymology points. In contrast, the diagram as cartography focuses not on writing ethnic patterns of certain subjects defined by a more or less stable essence, but rather on the emergence of spaces around contingent combination of events and encounters. This makes the use of the etymon cartography more accurate, speaking here of ethnocartography.

Diagram: an entangled cartography

This section discusses the potential of the diagram, what its use implies and what specific activities have been carried on for implementing such cartography. The use of diagrams was proposed by DG as an alternative to linear methodologies that function by methods of tracing, which constantly fall into the trap of representation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). By contrast, cartographic practices provide a better understanding of the heterogeneity that exists in the origin of reality and of the relation between the virtual and the actual. Mapping and diagramming have no beginning or end, are horizontal and allow entry at any point without needing a linearity that would reproduce an arborescent representation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Nevertheless, they do not have the same status, as the map is a changing detailed plan of the diagram, which remains the same (Dovey and Ristic, 2017, p. 17). Of the multiple definitions, the most complete defines diagram as:

“A display of the relations between forces which constitute power as microphysical, strategic, multipunctual and dif-

fuse...The diagram is the map of relations between forces, a map of destiny, or intensity, which proceeds by primary non-localizable relations and at every moment passes through every point “or rather in every relation from one point to another” (Deleuze, 1998, p. 36).

This definition stresses the importance of the interrelation between heterogeneous elements. The focus is not set on the forms but on “particular *points* which on each occasion mark the application of a force, the action or reaction of a force in relation to others, that is to say an affect like “a state of power that is always local and unstable.” This leads to a fourth definition of the diagram: it is a transmission or distribution of particular features” (Deleuze, 1998, p. 73). The importance of transmission and distribution connects the diagram to the three moments that form reality, as “the immanent cause that enacts the power of repetition as a machinic force” (Vellodi, 2014, p. 90). Every diagram acts as an informal abstract machine (Teyssot, 2012) that articulates the differences without a fixed linear order, therefore constituting a rhizome, in opposition to the striating machine that creates the binarities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 91). Hence, as the diagram maps the distribution of affect within the movements, it becomes an informal oppositional assemblage of forces to stratified historical formations such as capitalism. While the diagram is unstable and shuffles around to become a sort of non-place of relations and mutation, the stratified formation stabilises the diagram through the substantialising of diagrammatic matters separating a plane of content from a plane of expression (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 144).

A diagram implies that any figure drawn is accompanied by an expectancy that it will be redrawn (Knoespel, 2001, p. 147), as a creative map to produce a new reality “yet to come,” rather than a re-productive enterprise of an existing reality (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 142). This quality makes the diagram a valuable tool for investigating the possibilities of change by the different social movements by mapping the embodied affects and flows that conform the reality, in this case, the emer-

gence of agency and the production of spaces through activism. For doing that, this diagram makes use of rich descriptions to unfold the various aspects that converge in different encounters to actualise that affect through which different elements relate.

In summary, the diagram, by offering a horizontal non-linear cartography, enables us to situate the different elements in the space, so it is possible to sketch how affect distributes within that space. As in video games based on the discovering of new spaces and on the development of a cartography at the same time, the researcher moves in this virtual field unfolding the relations within the space. Those games usually start by setting the player in a random spot, which is the only visible part of a bigger space, whereas the rest of the game's universe will be unfolded as the virtual character(s) opens trails that cast light on the dark space and show what forms it. In this way, the player encounters different resources, geographical formations or actors with which to interact and that form those spaces. Similarly, I implemented the diagram by confronting an unknown space that I can enter and start mapping from any point. Once I started the trip, the dynamics and materialities that produce the space started to unfold as I crossed encounters, but still many of other aspects within the space remained unknown. I am the one mapping the space by engaging in different encounters to unfold the aspects that produce the space. Therefore, my positionality is not only part of the diagram, but it is key as the common thread that develops that cartography by connecting the different encounters in a rhizomatic way.

My positionality in the diagram

To unfold the actualisations of affect, the diagram uses research activities that allow us to develop rich descriptions. To develop these descriptions, qualitative methods are the more suitable, which requires a direct relation with the research subjects. This dilutes the distance between researcher/researched subject (Juris and Khasnabish, 2013) and implies the acceptance of affecting and being affected. Consequently, my position as a researcher must be part of the diagramming and becomes a key element that determines the perspective from which the research activities are carried on. As Thrift (2008, p. 7) argues, since in non-

representational methodologies social awareness precedes sensory awareness, it is impossible to treat the researcher as a blank sheet of paper to be filled, but instead as an assemblage of many relations with the potential of influencing other elements, as it carries certain preconceived ideas and shares cultural and social codes.

Acknowledging this affective relation and denying the fiction of the apolitical neutral researcher (Clarke, 2012, p. 141) pushed me to implementing an engaged ethnocartography (Clair, 2012) that, in line with critical theory, conceptualises research as a mechanism of engagement, in my case with grass-roots initiatives designed to resist neoliberal urbanism. Apart from helping the groups to advance towards their goals, this engagement partially allows one to respond to ethical issues about the responsibility towards the activists. In line with the transcendental empiricism, this responsibility is product of a relational social construct (Gunder and Hillier, 2007, p. 64) arising from each encounter, therefore not depending of any sort of universal categorical imperative, but understood as an emergent inherent product of the immanence of the assemblages (Bazzul, 2018, p. 477; Gunder and Hillier, 2007, p. 86). The conceptualisation of responsibility and its implications depend on each encounter, and with the engaged perspective I aim to avoid purely extractive fieldwork and to build a reciprocal relationship (Dowling, 2016, p. 36).¹ I became involved in as many actions as my working hours allowed, not only those that were interesting for my research, but also those necessary for the normal functioning of the groups. The goal was to fully engage as a regular activist that takes the responsibilities offered and gets involved as much as possible to, within the limited time of fieldwork, provide already something on-site to the groups.

As I see this as an unconditional responsibility towards the members of the groups (Gunder and Hillier, 2007, p. 80), the responsibility extends further than the fieldwork to include the outcomes of my acts or deci-

¹ This made me think initially on possible methods that actively involve the researched subjects in the fieldwork, like action research or participatory action research (Burgess, 2006; Levin, 2012). Nonetheless, the fact that I am interested in researching everyday dynamics and that I do not permanently live in the cities where I conducted fieldwork limited the time frame for developing activities related to these methodologies.

sions on others. To fulfil such responsibility, I intend to share every essay I produce with activists, as they can provide insights to reinforce and extend the activism (Juris and Khasnabish, 2013, p. 4), as well as the possibility of exercising the accountability connected with the responsibility (Gunder and Hillier, 2007).

Moreover, when analysing my positionality and the ethical responsibility in relation to the outcomes of research, Deleuze's critique of representation re-emerges as the molar homogeneity that obstructs the understanding of a world full of processes of pure difference (Gregory *et al.*, 2009, p. 207). From this perspective, I become the mediator that creates that representation, located in the mentioned middle point between positivism and interpretivism (Blaikie, 2010, p. 81). One of the main goals is to try to resist the temptation of representational homogenisation and unification of such heterogenous reality captured through the interaction with the activists.

In summary, the researcher's positionality is a complex place where I can never be considered as detached from the object of study but influencing it. The awareness of this positionality must be complemented by the resistance to the temptation of prescribing homogenising representations of the researched phenomena. As the positionality intersects with the importance of the assemblage as main ontological entity, entering in contact with certain elements not only makes me part of the assemblage, but forms new assemblages with the potential power to affect and be affected. At this point, the nuances of the original French concept of *agencement* used by DG become central. That means not only the coming together of heterogenous terms to form a new entity, but stresses the agency that is created both collectively and individually. Once I became in contact with the activists, new capabilities to affect emerge, which also generate ethical responsibilities towards those participating in the encounters. By the same token, as I can influence the assemblage by becoming part of it, I embody the affect distributed within it, so I become part of the research object to be included in the diagram. In line with this centrality of the researcher and the engaged ethnocartography, autoethnocartography becomes a valuable method for starting mapping, since,

like in those video games, I become the common thread that traces the spaces through different encounters, while becoming in the process fully embodied within the assemblage.

Autoethnocartography: embodying activism

My positionality as part of the research object, subject to affect as any other member of the groups, makes the use of methods of autoethnography valuable (Fisher, 2015)—in this case autoethnocartography. As the virtual is actualised mainly through the embodiment of capabilities to affect and be affected, this will become embodied in myself. As I become the common thread of that cartography, this autoethnocartography becomes the starting point, traversing the rest of the activities that emerge as the cartography is being developed. This diagram could have a shape like this:

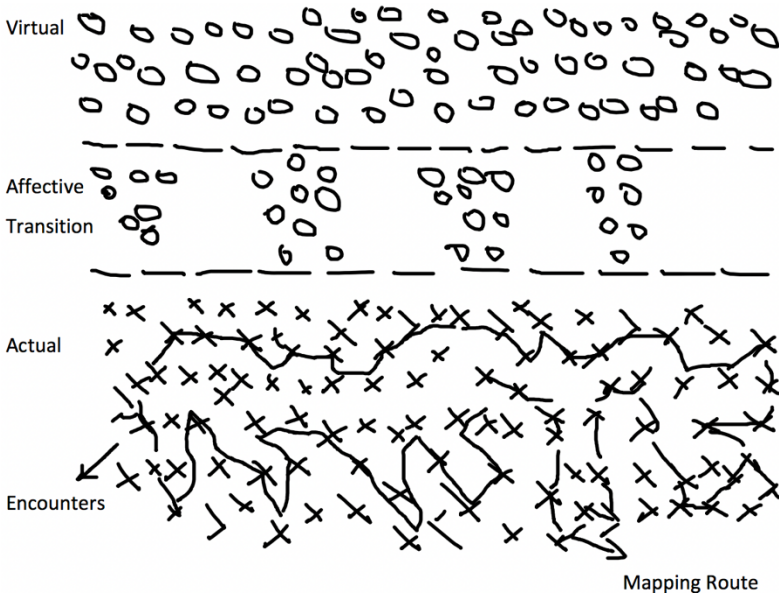


Diagram 1 Example of a diagrammatic research. Source: Author.

The drawing is an example of how the diagramming would look like for this thesis: of the multiple differences that populate the virtual, only few

repeat and come together through an affective transition that leads to actualisations. These actualisations emerge in this case as encounters that I, as a researcher, traverse to open a mapping route that extends as a rhizome, but that does not cover all actualised encounters. The autoethnocartography as the activity that launches the diagramming, mainly provides information about two aspects:

1. The situations experienced when joining the groups, as I embody myself as a newcomer the mechanisms of territorialisation that delimit them. The difficulties or eases to join intersected in some cases with the existence of gatekeepers that generated more complex interactions than the unidirectional relationship usually assumed (Campbell et al., 2006). Furthermore, accessing the groups raises ethical responsibilities regarding the awareness of the activists as research subjects. In line with the unconditional responsibility towards the other members, it was indispensable that all knew that I was investigating their activism to give them the opportunity to modulate what they wanted to share. To offer full information about my position, I introduced myself before each group to explain the aim of my research and the goal of my fieldwork. This introduction worked as a sort of collective informed consent (Silverman, 2014, p. 149), which was made explicit and written in the case of Barcelona en Comú. Moreover, I was aware that not everyone was at the assemblies or the meetings when I introduced myself, so I looked for oral informed consent every time I was holding a personal conversation with any individual.
2. To identify internal dynamics within the different groups once I entered them. Participating and interacting in the everyday activities provided information on how the spaces are produced and coded, as well as the distribution of affect, which I embodied myself as I became part of the groups.

This autoethnocartography provides information derived from being myself inserted in the flows of affect within the different groups through

the participation and generation of encounters where these flows actualise. Therefore, as mentioned, this autoethnocartography crosses all these encounters and the different research activities carried on, since I, in different degrees, always would embody some affect as consequence of being part of the encounter.

Unfolding activist spaces through encounters

Departing from that initial standing point, I interacted with the members of the different groups, both in encounters generated by me and in encounters of the groups in which I participated as another activist. As the diagram expanded, new encounters emerged to confirm or redefine perceptions developed in previous ones. More than implementing certain techniques for collecting data, I followed a process by which I advanced in the cartography by participating and generating multiple encounters of different kinds where I performed diverse activities to grasp how the affect actualised in those spaces. The cartography started being developed by participating in collective encounters of the different groups to start grasping how the space and the group's interrelations were produced. The research activities performed within them were based on active participation and observation.

Collective encounters

As a starting point for untangling how these relations articulate to shape activism, I implemented what is traditionally labelled as *participant observation* in encounters of the groups (Kearns, 2016). This activity allows one to “gain an insider perspective of a group too often represented in simple, abstract stereotyped terms” (Cloke *et al.*, 2004, p. 178) through first-hand information on their everyday functioning. That said, although the research role when I started fieldwork could be described as of an observer-as-participant, as a newcomer joining the groups (Kearns, 2016, p. 319), this perspective showed certain limitations to fully understanding the affect that traverses the encounters. Therefore, in contrast to many ethnographic accounts that focus on observation and in line with the engaged ethnocartographic perspective, with the advance of the fieldwork the participant side of the formula participant observa-

tion became predominant and implemented through high levels of engagement (Clarke, 2012). The goal was to become a regular participant (Laurier, Whyte and Buckner, 2001, p. 203) to embody the affective relations that traverse those groups and to grasp how they actualise the virtual. This engagement inserted me within the groups, as the participation in these encounters is the research activity that more clearly dilutes that separation researcher/researched created by other ones like interviews (Lury and Wakeford, 2012).

In line with ethnocartography, I paid attention not only to what is said, but also to how the space is produced and the relations that populate it. Focusing on the materialities of the encounters—from the setting to how the interactions happen—allowed me to grasp the atmosphere of those encounters and the groups' dynamics to understand how the material conditions influence the actualisation of affect. Therefore, I collected information not only about the discussions, but also about the body languages, the settings and my on-site interpretations of the atmosphere. In this way, I could trace dynamics of interaction and how affect is actualised, embodied and distributed to create a more complete cartography of how individual experiences are embedded within the dense network of relations and vice versa. For increasing the effectivity of this engaged ethnocartography, I participated in diverse kinds of encounters to identify potential differences and to construct an account of the movements story and developments (Clair, 2012, p. 141). Consequently, during the fieldwork, I participated in encounters involving the four groups or small sections of them, both organised by them or by other groups.

The fieldwork was divided into four rounds: two months in the summer of 2016 and four months in the Winter/Spring of 2017 in A Coruña with Stop Desahucios Coruña and MaT; four months in the Autumn/Winter of 2017 and a week in March 2018 in Barcelona to conduct fieldwork at the local chapter of PAH and BeC.

In line with the path drawn in diagram 1, I participated in multiple related encounters that complemented and led to each other, but always producing new differences in their repetition. The diagrams below depict

those collective encounters, while stressing the relationality between them, as they are interconnected. The lines show the way I transited between them, as certain encounters opened new ones for advancing in the cartography. Regarding the colours: green is used for encounters that are scheduled and happen periodically within the groups; blue for sporadic unscheduled encounters that involve mainly members of the groups; orange for encounters conceived as direct interaction with actors outside the groups;¹ and purple for those encounters in which the groups participated but organised by external groups. This should not be seen as a clear-cut division, but just for the sake of clarity.

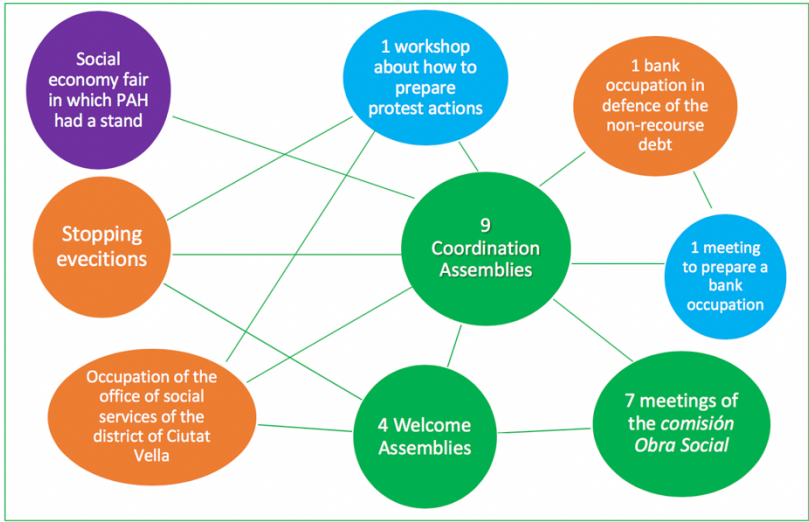


Diagram 2 Collective encounters attended during the fieldwork with PAH Barcelona.

¹ In some cases, such as a meeting of Stop Desahucios with the municipal government of Marea Atlántica, implying the direct interaction between two of the groups researched in this thesis.

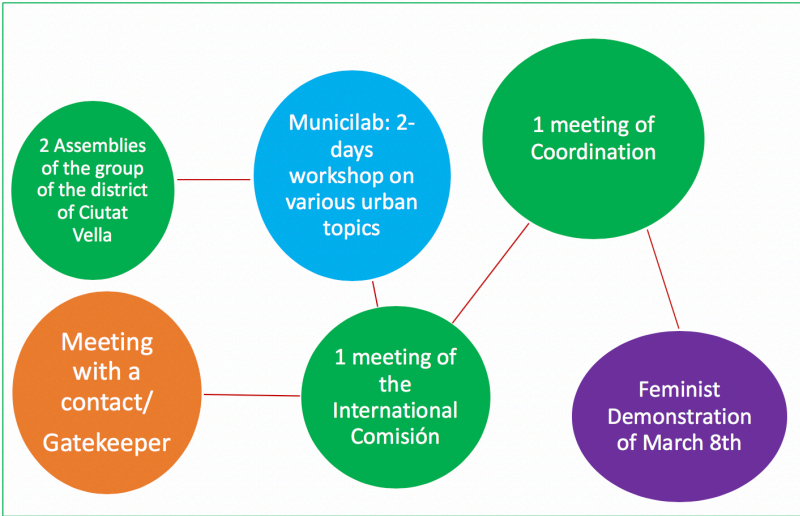


Diagram 3 Collective encounters attended during the fieldwork with Barcelona en Comú.

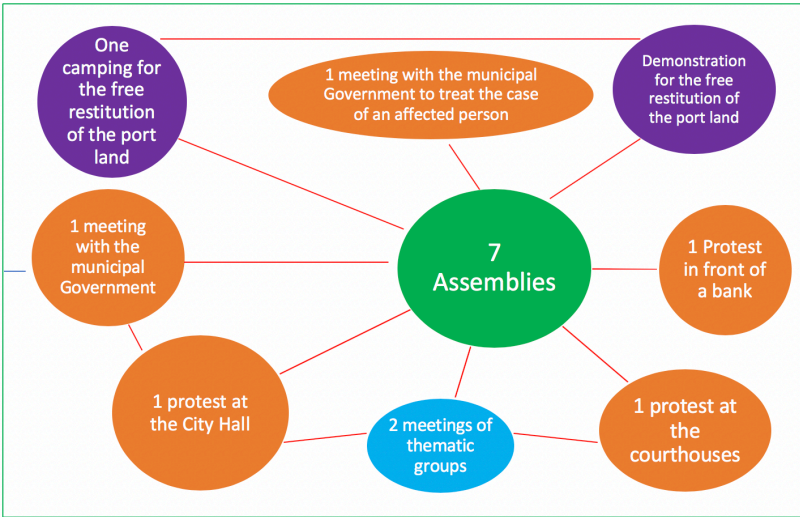


Diagram 4 Collective encounters attended during the fieldwork with Stop Desahucios Coruña.

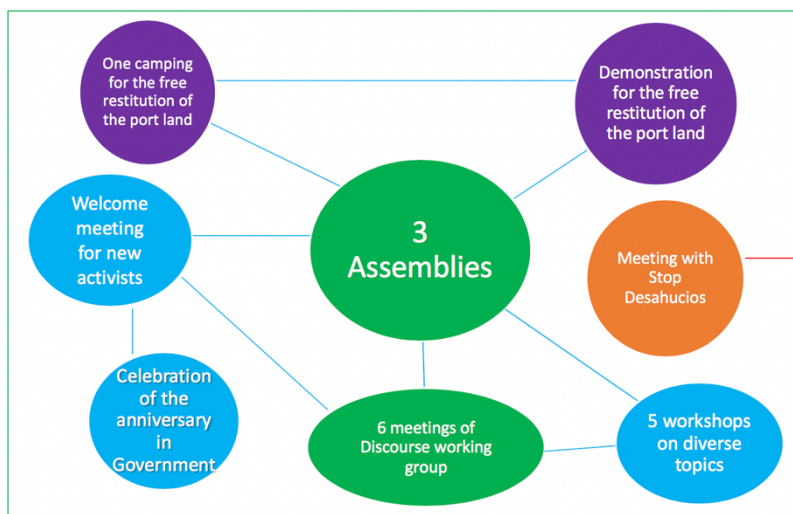


Diagram 5 Collective encounters attended during the fieldwork with Marea Atlántica.

I actively participated in these encounters as a regular member, not with the aim of influencing them (although that happens only by my presence there), but to capture the textures of that actualisation of affect in different relations and emotions, both collective and individual. I tried to adapt to their materialities, as they imply different environments where affect actualised in diverse ways. Therefore, although I mainly took a passive attitude at the beginning to untangle how they develop, I increasingly adopted a more active role as they advanced. For example, in assemblies I posed questions or gave my opinion when asked or I considered relevant, and in protests (e.g. occupations) I acted as a regular activist chanting the slogans, giving flyers or helping with logistics. This allowed adaptation to the different types of encounters, since the way emotions were deployed was different in more settled encounters like assemblies to “stressful” ones like protests, where emotions loosen themselves from the representation of words. These encounters required certain interpretations of what I was witnessing, especially by trying to identify the emotions that were embodied, as in many cases these were not articulated in words.

The fieldnotes were complemented with pictures and videos, collected not only as an archive of details to be revised during the analysis, but also as material to support and reinforce the richness of the descriptions (Garrett, 2011). This audio-visual material provides direct information about non verbalised embodied emotions, at the same time that helps to capture the atmosphere surrounding the encounters. That said, I collected these exclusively in public encounters as their use in private ones could raise ethical issues in relation to the privacy of the participants, their discussions and opinions (Dowling, 2016, p. 31). This is a complicated matter, because analysing what is said, the attitudes and the emotions displayed in those encounters is the core of my fieldwork, but at the same time these are private interactions (Silverman, 2014, p. 145) that in some cases even border illegality. Therefore, to reduce undesirable outcomes I maintained the anonymity of the interacting people (Dowling, 2016), although, in line with the relational origin of these ethics, these restrictions were modulated depending on the encounter. For example, I shall not refer to specific discussions within online encounters, whereas I transcribe slogans chanted in demonstrations as the activists are fully aware that those may become public. Although as general rule I did not transcribe everything the activists said but small quotes, the personal interviews discussed below were fully transcribed, but maintaining the anonymity, which is even more necessary when dealing with online encounters, in which the members may be less aware of who is part of the conversation.

To avoid following a straight linear logic and to expand the cartography in divergent directions, these encounters led to different ones, complementing each other to cast light on those spaces that were still in the dark. While I kept participating on these collective encounters that allowed me to get closer to the activists, I undertook other research activities by generating myself separated encounters. I started performing walks & talks with activists to widen and enlarge those trails I was creating, in this case to capture individual perceptions, meanings and embodiment of activism.

Individual encounters: walks & talks

I held multiple individual *short encounters* with many activists of all four groups. These personal informal talks lasted between five and ten minutes. These encounters were based on short conversations aimed to grasp how the personal agency field was developed and shaped, to capture the motivations and the personal trajectories of the individual activists. They took place within the context of other encounters—e.g. assemblies or protests—in a sort of oral life stories (Dunn, 2016, p. 150) and I allowed the activists to decide the main topic they wanted to talk about. I only used the necessary questions for engaging them into conversation or for clarifying what it has been said, with the intention of creating a relaxed atmosphere for the activists to tell about their personal stories. I found in this a valuable way for collecting stories on the background of the activists, since this was the main topic discussed by them: most of them talked about the personal drama of losing their houses or their personal trajectory as activists that motivated them to join the municipal platforms. In contrast to more strictly coded encounters, like interviews, these unstructured and open-ended chats allowed me to capture individual perceptions and reactions that otherwise might be modulated and rationalised. To keep the informality and the relaxed atmosphere necessary for the activists to discuss their intimate emotions and life stories, I did not record or take notes on the spot, but right after the encounter to reflect on what was discussed and my interpretation of it (Lury and Wakeford, 2012). These encounters helped to understand their personal trajectory towards becoming part of the movements, their imaginaries and how the activism affected them. In other words, how their lives have been affected by joining the group and how they think the movement has been affected by them.

As weeks and the trails within the space expanded, new forms of encounters unfolded and new research activities became at hand to expand the cartography. Thus, I started generating new individual encounters, with different materialities to those walks & talks, which also generated a different sort of research activity: individual interviews.

Individual encounters: interviews

Similarly, expanding the cartography further than the trails built by the collective encounters and the walks & talks, I conducted *individual interviews* with members of Marea Atlántica and Barcelona en Comú. The initial idea was to conduct interviews with members of the chapters of PAH too, but I detected a defensive reaction after the first contacts with members of Stop Desahucios, so I decided not to conduct the interviews within PAH's nodes to not jeopardise the building of trust so important for participating in other encounters. The only exception was two interviews with former members of PAH Barcelona expelled in the Spring 2017.

The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and, unlike the walks & talks, they did not take place in the context of other encounters, but by appointment. They generated a different setting to those informal chats, since they made the activist more aware of the research and the answers more meditated. The fact that I recorded the interviews reinforced this atmosphere, where the performative character of the recorder created a certain distance between the interviewee and me (Back, 2012). As this recording does not capture the body language and gestures of the interviewees, I took some notes as the interview was taking place to put those words into a context of bodily expressed emotions.

Even though the interviews focus also on the individual perspective, the goal of these was slightly different to the walks & talks, as they focus not only in the interviewees' life stories but mainly on their reflections about the evolution and functioning of the groups. I used primary and secondary questions, which included most of the types identified by Dunn (2016, p. 155): descriptions of the group; storytelling about the creation of the group and their trajectory as activists; opinions about the group, the activism and the proposals; devil's advocate, in which I took details from other encounters to touch upon controversial issues. The information collected was not treated as report of events or facts, but to grasp how the interviewees construct meaning (Silverman, 2014, p. 199), their understanding of the groups and to find dynamics that appear repeatedly in the interviews. In total, I conducted seven interviews with

members of Marea Atlántica and eight with members of Barcelona en Comú.

There were some differences in how I chose the interviewees. Whereas in MaT I decided whom to interview on the basis of the contacts and the information I gathered in other encounters, in BeC I could choose only one interviewee, since the rest were suggested by the organisation's secretary. This limited my control over the kind of informants and the new trails opened to cartograph the activist space, because, as confirmed in the interviews, they mainly chose activists that would give a positive vision of the group.

The activities carried on in the walks & talks and interviews cover the most individual imaginaries, motivations and visions of activism. They help to expand the cartography in spaces with different materialities to the collective encounters, to complement each other and conjoin different perspectives and layers of research. The participation in all these facilitated the possibility of entering other encounters that are even more separated from the initial paths: online encounters. In addition to all these face to face activities, I also participated in online encounters that traverse all other encounters as they provide the spaces for expanding those encounters before and after they took place physically. Moreover, as the spatial arrangements are different, they allow the incorporation of dark spots of the cartography that were far from the trails opened by those off-line activities.

Online encounters

As the research activities concentrate on a specific period, they may be subject to certain specificities due to, for example, external factors.¹ Consequently, the information collected may fall into a certain compartmentalisation and a distorted perception. Although this partiality of

¹ The best example is the situation in Catalonia when I was doing fieldwork in Barcelona. In the Autumn 2017 the confrontation between the Catalanian Government and the Spanish Government around the topic of the Catalanian independence reached its highest point, with direct confrontations in the street and in the Parliaments and the suspension of the Catalanian autonomy. This had a great impact in Barcelona en Comú, whose debates spun around that problematic, marking almost its entire agenda.

social research is unavoidable because social phenomena stretch in space and time further than those of the fieldwork (Clair, 2012, p. 141), I intended to extend this period to acquire a more complete understanding of the movements. Thus, together with the face to face encounters, I collected information from *online* platforms used by the different groups as places of *encounters*. The Internet has become not only a fundamental tool for activism, but also an important source of information for social research, as places that rework social dynamics and relations (Winders, 2016, p. 345). That said, not all online platforms have the same status. It is important to distinguish between the internet 1.0 based on a read only environment and the 2.0 based on a read and write environment (van Dijck and Poell, 2015, p. 2). Whereas the former does not require a direct interaction between the sender and the receiver, the latter, and its best example the social networks, requires the acknowledgement of the receiver by the transmitter, which implies the need for a certain trust and provides more personal information about interactions, emotions, desires, etc. The social networks are constantly created and reworked as places of encounters with their mechanisms of territorialisation and coding, in which specific combinations are created. Obviously, as any other encounter, this separation between online sources is not clear cut, but they develop different contexts that determine how the agency emerges.

Consequence of this constant reworking, and as I experienced during my research, not all social networks have the same status. Although Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp offer in theory the space for interaction between the activists, they are used by the groups more to communicate and interact with the exterior than for internal communications, which are mainly done via Telegram.¹ Each group created multiple Telegram channels, so I became a member of the general channel of each group and of the ones of the working groups I was a member. These are mainly used to share information about encounters and, in some cases, to debate, while enabling the almost immediate transmission of information in a sort of permanent encounters. In spite of some sporadic activity, I

¹ Activists mentioned that they prefer Telegram over WhatsApp for being more secure. The use of WhatsApp is very residual, being only present in some communications of Stop Desahucios.

am usually quite passive in these debates and focus my research activity mainly on the observation of the dynamics and the ways the members relate to each other. I avoid transcribing quotes and I pay attention only to the general sense of a conversation to avoid ethical issues.¹ These Telegram groups help me to be up to date with the activities and to map the distribution of affect by identifying which members are more active and handle most of the information.

All the activities carried on in the diverse encounters explained here, from walks & talks and interviews to participant observation are used complementarily, providing information on diverse aspects to develop rich descriptions to map the activism. The activities in the personal encounters with individual members, which are specially valuable to untangle imaginaries, use also their perceptions to test the information acquired through the participant observation in collective encounters (Dunn, 2016, p. 150), which provide a context for the activists' individual stories. All these encounters relate mainly to the dynamics of production of space within the groups, but offer limited information about the political, social and economic environment that surrounds the groups. To grasp that context and the relations of the groups with it, other kinds of encounters and sources must be included.

Researching the environment of the movements and their representations

Official online platforms

For acquiring a more complete view of the relation of the groups with their environments, I collected information from online platforms within the read only environment of the internet 1.0 (van Dijck and Poell, 2015), which are mainly used as channels for spreading information. I monitored these online sources extensively before, during and after fieldwork to collect information about general representations the groups as a whole generate to frame their activism. These sources refer mainly to the groups' official channels, specially their websites:

¹ As mentioned before, the participants will be always anonymous.

afectadosporlahipoteca.com; mareatalantica.org and barcelonaenco-mu.cat. These sources provided access to official documents (e.g. press releases), as well as information about different initiatives and their discourse, which are valuable to understanding how those actualisations of affect witnessed in the fieldwork are translated into the groups' political activism as a whole.

Together with these online sources, I have also followed the official social networks of the groups, mainly on Facebook and Twitter. As mentioned, these platforms are not used for internal communication but, as Schwartz (2015) showed in the case of the Danish political parties, to connect with supportive citizens and to publicise the activities and proposals of the groups, as well as to expand their visibility through the social networks of the activists that repost or retweet the official messages (Langlois and Elmer, 2013. p. 10). These social networks became, in my thesis, more sources for keeping up to date with the activities and for untangling how the groups represent themselves than for interacting with the members.

Mass media and academic accounts

Finally, to complete the cartography I looked into *news from the mass media*¹ and *academic works and reports*, both about the social movements and their urban context. "The mass media" mainly refers to newspapers that more or less continuously follow the activities of the groups and their contexts: La Voz de Galicia which is the biggest regional newspaper in Galiza and the most read newspaper in A Coruña, and La Opinión de A Coruña which is the second most read regional newspaper in A Coruña; La Vanguardia which is the most read newspaper in Catalonia and El Periódico de Catalunya which is the second most read newspaper in Catalonia; El País which is the most read newspaper in Spain and Plaza which is the most read online newspaper in Galizan language. The sources were monitored daily between February 2015 and July 2019 to follow the situation in both cities remotely and to grasp the representations of the movements created by different actors (e.g. media

¹ In their online version.

and authorities). The research activity in these cases consisted in extracting main general representations of the groups and their contexts, which the mass media used to frame their activities.

Regarding *academic works and reports*, as described in chapter two, there is extensive research on PAH, while MaT and BeC still remain under-researched. Many of these works offer valuable comprehensive descriptions that provide diverse information to complement the cartography of this thesis by including data on certain spaces that I could not cover during my fieldwork. These academic accounts are valuable to complete the diagram, as most of these sources treat the movements as a unified whole, which provides the ground for identifying possible dislocations with that heterogeneity acknowledged by the use of the diagram.

Cartographing all these interrelated encounters through the use of the diverse research activities described in this chapter aims to unfold the complex field of relations that shape social mobilisation without falling into a unified homogenising representation. Starting by an initial point within a blank map, my participation in those collective encounters expanded rhizomatically, to generate new encounters and unfold the activist spaces as I transited and crossed them. In contrast to linear descriptions of causal relations that mask the heterogeneity and reduce the possibilities of change, this rhizomatic expansion in multiple encounters traces how contingent processes of conjoin within the virtual produce certain actualisations. The use of diverse complementary activities that traverse and even generate different material encounters allows one to trace the density of relations through which the spaces emerge, while acknowledging the heterogeneity and contingency to avoid deterministic analyses. In line with the theoretical framework and the transcendental empiricism, the development of this diagram intends on the one hand to grasp the actualisations that produce and shape these groups, and on the other to expand that to excavate the ways in which these actualisations are linked to the virtual possibilities. Diagramming these encounters provides a description of relations and phenomena that overlap, at the same time that the possibility of entering or leaving the diagram through

multiple points recognise not only the relations within the borders, but also potential lines expanding such diagram. The next chapter starts this diagramming by describing those encounters that have been introduced in this chapter.

5. EVERYDAY SOCIAL CONTESTATION

The activities of the four social movement groups which are the focus of this thesis—PAH Barcelona, Stop Desahucios Coruña, Marea Atlántica and Barcelona en Comú—have many commonalities. All have a general assembly where the most important decisions must be taken. As sketched in the previous chapter, the assemblies are connected, in varying degrees, to a plethora of more or less stable groups and periodic encounters. Therefore, the assemblies centralise and canalise the routine functioning of the movements. This is especially the case of Stop Desahucios where the assembly is the only regular weekly meeting. The other groups, which are organised in working groups, compartmentalise their activism by dividing the activists into these groups.¹ In all cases, the working groups relate to different themes or tasks (e.g. coordination, discourse or logistics) and they have a permanent status. BeC and MaT also have neighbourhood groups that reflect territorial division. These working groups are open to any member of the organisation though to varying degrees. The rotation of members in these groups is low and usually happens in connection with new participants joining as they know a current member. This is especially the case with the thematic groups. In all cases, these smaller groups are quite independent in terms of deciding how to work and when to meet. For example, I joined the

¹ Named “*comisión*” (commission in English) in PAH Barcelona and Barcelona en Comú and “*mareas*” (tides in English) in Marea Atlántica. It is the name given to the different thematic working groups the members can join for canalising their activism

urbanism group in Marea Atlántica, which turned out to be inactive during the time of my fieldwork, while the *marea* in charge of generating a discourse for MaT (discourse group), to which I also belonged, met every second week.

This chapter recounts a regular week of activism in the four groups by describing some of the most common aspects of these encounters. As it would be tedious to describe every single encounter in which I participated, I have chosen examples of those most relevant to the aim of the thesis and which were repeated most often during the fieldwork. Therefore, the meetings discussed here did not necessarily happen in the same week, but as some meetings always happen on the same day each week they are put together to give a sense of how a normal week is experienced by an activist and how the activities connect to each other.¹ Thus, I follow the sequence of the encounters and the days of the week in which these took place to provide a more accurate picture of how the activities relate to each other during a normal week. Furthermore, in encounters such as the assemblies, which happen more regularly and have a more or less defined structure, the account is not of a specific meeting but a mix of different topics and discussions that took place during many of these assemblies which occurred during the fieldwork. Describing all the discussions within all the assemblies would take too much space and would include many irrelevant discussions, so here I put them into one for the sake of simplicity. I start each of the following sections by describing how I joined the different groups, as this use of autoethnography provides information about the barriers newcomers face when joining the groups.

A week in PAH Barcelona

Entering PAH Barcelona

Entering PAH Barcelona as a researcher is slightly different to the way in which an affected person or supporter would join. The node has a standard procedure for any person interested in doing any research with-

¹ This is especially relevant in the two chapters of PAH, where the assemblies, which greatly influence the rest of the encounters, always take place on the same days.

in the group: a meeting at 5 pm on Tuesdays—before the coordination assembly starting at 6 pm—is organised for all those interested in undertaking research at PAH. After the meeting, each researcher introduces themselves and their research during the assembly. This procedure was justified by the large number of researchers approaching the organisation and the disappointment of many activists who have complained about the purely “extractive” nature of the research. I did not experience any researchers being rejected during the period of my fieldwork. This is despite the fact that new researchers were being introduced almost every week. In contrast, an affected person or a supporter only has to go to the assembly and sit without having to say anything to anyone to justify their presence there, although it is advisable. Once in the assembly, members can ask for the floor and express their opinion freely. In fact, despite being a researcher, I tested this possibility unintentionally during the first assembly I attended: before the assembly I introduced myself to one of the persons organising the assembly, but this person did not discuss this with anyone and he just told me to sit down.¹ I sat and I could speak freely without any problem or any inquisitorial looks, despite the fact that nobody knew me.

Welcome assembly

Every Monday, in a working-class neighbourhood on the edge of Barcelona’s city centre around 60 people gather to share their dramatic personal stories about how they are in real risk of losing their homes. A cold Autumn Monday evening is no exception. As has been happening for almost 10 years, new people affected by the housing crisis that has devastated Spain since 2008 attend the meeting to tell their stories and look for collective support to ensure that they do not lose their homes. Together, those affected and supporters, form the *Welcome Assembly* of PAH Barcelona. It is 6 pm and around 30 people chat animatedly in small groups about their personal situations, their problems concerning work or to complain about the assistance they receive, or do not receive,

¹ For some reason they did not introduce me in the assembly, as it is common practice with the researchers, so I had to introduce myself afterwards.

from social services. A few of them sit alone in a clearly nervous state and with their eyes riveted to the floor.

The place is a 200m² room filled with around 70 empty chairs waiting to be occupied by the activists and affected people who are yet to arrive. The colour green, which has become the “corporate” dress of the movement, predominates in a room whose walls are covered by multitude of pamphlets and posters announcing and, especially, commemorating those actions that are considered victories due to their visibility and impact on the public agenda. Among the posters are some papers with slogans like “*confianza cero en el banquero*” (zero trust in bankers) or a t-shirt with the claim Right to the City. These help to build a narrative around the need to defend the right to housing. Mixed with these claims directly related to the movement protests, lots of information about the internal functioning of the group is also posted on the walls: a list of the *comisiones* and their roles; the calendar to be filled with the group’s activities for the whole month; materials concerning actions (demonstrations, bank occupations, etc) related to the last general campaign of the organisation, *Ley Vivienda PAH*; or the minutes from the previous assembly. At the end of the room, there is a blackboard waiting to be filled with the information provided by the affected people who will speak during the assembly.

At this point, ten minutes after the beginning of the assembly, around 45 people are already sitting in six rows of chairs distributed three on three creating a central corridor in the middle of the room. Within 10 minutes, there will be around 60 activists and affected people, a large presence of migrants (around 65% of the attendees) and a 50-50 split of men and women. Although there are people of all ages, most are between 25 and 50 years old, and mainly low-income working class (in many cases their only income comes from small subsidies from the state). They are in a precarious situation not only due to the lack of employment, but also as a result of difficult personal circumstances such as gender violence or even being victims of scams.¹ There are also few members of the middle

¹ For example, people who paid the rent to someone who was not the owner of the apartment and now face an eviction initiated by the real owner.

class, who have faced the impoverishment of the middle classes, who risk to lose their houses or who just support the struggle. These class and ethnic heterogeneities are representative of the groups that have been most affected from the housing crisis. Most of the affected people have families, and in many cases, it is women who take the initiative, not only to join the organisation, but also to speak during the assembly about their cases. This is a pattern found in all the assemblies and in the actions that are undertaken: many women take the initiative to fight to avoid eviction, are more outspoken and in many cases, they come alone to the assembly, or when they come with their partner, they are the ones speaking. Finally, some kids come with their mothers (I have never seen a kid coming with just a father). The kids are taken to a small “kindergarten” in another small room and looked after by some adults in order to avoid disturbing the assembly.

The assembly is started by two people from the *comisión de dinamización*—“dynamisation commission”—the working group in charge of organising and managing the assemblies to make sure that the rules are respected and to provide everyone with equal opportunities to express their opinions.¹ In their introduction, they explain that the goal of this assembly is to give the space to people who suffer “some kind of housing violence” to explain their cases and ask for support. Furthermore, the people in charge of *dinamización* remind the newcomers about the coordination assembly taking place on Tuesdays:

Please, come to the Tuesday assemblies to get involved in the organisation, because if you only come on Monday, we stop your eviction, and then you disappear until the next eviction, people may be not so keen to help you then. You are the main person responsible for your case and you must engage and take responsibility.

This will be repeated a few times during the assembly in order to get the newcomers involved and to prevent them from leaving once their evic-

¹ The use of the word *dinamización* suggests the desire to have a dynamic assembly by engaging as many people as possible.

tion is stopped. The assembly today will last for approximately two hours, depending of the number of cases—usually an average of eight.

People start asking for the floor, so that the list to speak is quickly filled. The first person starts explaining that person's case. Even though, in some cases, the people joining the assembly knew some members who introduced them into the group, most of the people introducing their cases come without knowing anyone and come because they heard about PAH from other people or through other sources. The affected person must explain their case in this assembly, which means “undressing” themselves and explain their problems in front of a large group of unknown people. The person speaking shows fear and despair about losing their home, even leading them to cry in a few cases. This immediately mobilises the people in the assembly, who reply to the crying and despair with encouraging shouts and at least one activist running to comfort them with hugs or talk to them personally. If the person gets really upset, the person in charge of *dinamización* moves the assembly on to the next case, leaving the previous affected person speaking in private with one or two experienced activists to discuss their case in more detail. Mixed with this fear, in some cases, the affected person shows some shame, not only for being unable to pay their debts, but also for the need of speaking about such a dramatic situation in front of a bunch of strangers. Less often, these emotions are substituted or accompanied by rage—mainly towards the bankers and the banks with which they contracted the debt—but this is not common and, even in cases in which the affected person has been cheated, the rage is more usual among the activists than among the newcomers.

Situations vary enormously: people that for different reasons cannot pay their mortgages and face eviction by the bank; people who cannot pay their rents and face eviction by an individual landlord or a company; people who occupy a house after being evicted who face a new eviction; people who have been paying the rent to a person who turned out not to be the real owner of the house, who now threatens the tenants with eviction; people subject to great pressure from a vulture fund that has bought their building and now wants to increase their rent by up to a 50% or

kick them out. Despite the commonalities, every situation is different, as is the possible solution. The first problem mentioned above was by far the most common in the first years of PAH's existence, but in the last couple of years, the rental evictions in their different forms have become more common.

In this assembly, the first case is introduced by a migrant man facing an immediate eviction. He, his wife and his little girl live in a rented apartment, but cannot pay the whole rent because he has lost his job and the small subsidy he receives from the state is not enough for paying the rent and buying food. He has been talking with municipal social services about getting an emergency flat with a lower rent, but the only solution they provide is to pay for a hotel for a couple of weeks. He has tried to get a better solution because a hotel room is not adequate and, in the end, they could not cook, so they would spend more eating out than on rent. He seems quite collected, although his voice shows a certain despair because the eviction is scheduled to take place at the end of the week. The person in charge of *dinamización* starts addressing the other attendees to ask for advice for the affected family. He moves around the room handing the microphone to all those who want to contribute. People start suggesting that he keep pressuring social services to stop the eviction. The problem is that this is an open eviction. In this model, the eviction does not have a set date and it can be carried out any day during a period of two weeks. These evictions are more difficult to stop, as they require the presence of the activists at the front door from very early in the morning (around 7 am) to the afternoon (around 5 pm) for 15 days in a row, as the eviction can be carried out any time within this time frame. In the last months of 2017 and the start of 2018 this new form of eviction became more common. Pressuring social services seems the only option, and it is proposed that on Wednesday, the local office of social services will be occupied until they offer a better solution to the family. This should be confirmed in the coordination assembly the day after. The man seems satisfied with the solution, he thanks everyone for the support, although he still speaks of his fear of being thrown onto the street.

Once the decision is taken, the person in charge of “dynamising” the assembly moves to the next case. Other cases are as dramatic as this, but maybe less urgent. In this second case another migrant, a woman, with her little kid on her lap and clearly upset, explains how she is facing an eviction for not being able to pay the rent. She appears to be really worried. Her eviction is planned for the coming week and she bursts into tears while telling her story. Immediately, there are shouts of support across the room and a couple of activists sit next to her and comfort her with hugs and speaking to her in greater privacy. The people in charge of *dinamización* note the date and time of the eviction to be stopped and move to the next case while the two activists still comfort her.

The next person speaking is another migrant, as were the previous two cases, who has been a bit late with the payment of the rent and started getting threatening letters of eviction from the company managing his apartment. He brought all the documents, as well as an eviction notice from the court. The papers are a bit confusing and an activist who is a lawyer starts asking questions and has a look at the papers. The affected person fears that he will lose his home as he is an immigrant and his situation is more precarious, but immediately people start saying that we always stop the evictions and that he has the same rights as anyone else. The assembly decides that the eviction will be stopped and that the lawyer will have a quick look at the papers to recommend possible courses of action.

The people in charge of *dinamización* move to the next case, the only Spanish person whose case is discussed today. A pregnant woman in her 20s asks for help before an eviction for not being able to pay the mortgage. She is alone, the father of her child does not take any responsibility for anything and she has to face the payments on her own, which is impossible for her.¹ She is nervous and evinces rage more than fear and claims that she is ready to fight. She wants to keep her house at any cost, as she bought it. This perspective raises some hesitation from some of

¹ Although this type of case is relatively unusual, cases of single mothers who have suffered gender violence from their partners are not uncommon.

the participants, who warn her that maybe she will have to give up the house and that buying is not the only housing option. She insists that this is her house because she bought it and that, like everyone else, she has the right to keep it. Despite a couple of replies, the activists opposing her argument decide to drop the discussion and the assembly shows its support, agreeing to stop the eviction suggesting her to ask for an *acompañamiento*¹ to pressure the bank in the coordination assembly, which would take place the following day. She seems satisfied with the outcome and declares her hope that the case will be solved.

Finally, the last case discussed today is of another migrant man who is facing eviction for not being able to pay his mortgage. He tells the assembly that the problem is not only his, but of relatives who back his mortgage and risk to lose their house as collateral. He asks for help to keep his house to try to “resist until the prices raise again, so they can sell it to make some profit.” This immediately led to the response of many of the participants who argued that they could help him, but that his approach is wrong, as housing is not something to be traded, but to live in. They insist that perhaps the best solution is to give up the house and to cancel the debt. The affected person seems not to understand why his arguments are rejected, but the discussion did not last long. It was suggested that, since his eviction is not imminent, he should pressure the bank, so he should ask for an *acompañamiento* the day after. Anyway, they remind him that there is more than one solution to his problem, that he has to be realistic and that, maybe, keeping his house is impossible.

It is now 8 pm and the blackboard is full of information about the upcoming evictions and the forms that the affected people can download from PAH’s website to pressure the counterpart to reach certain agreements. At this moment, there are around 40 people left and the assembly

¹ Literally translated as accompaniment: gathering some activists to accompany the affected person when they go to negotiate or put pressure to their counterpart, usually a bank or the public administration (i.e. municipal social services or Habitatge, the official body in charge of dealing with housing emergency issues in the region of Catalonia). Nonetheless, lately these actions have been expanded to some investment and vulture funds that have bought entire blocks of flats in the centre of the city and that practice some sorts of mobbing on the neighbours. These actions are discussed and requested by the affected person in the Tuesday assemblies.

is officially closed by the *dinamización* people. The attendees pile the chairs and leave, some of them in small groups of two or three.

Coordination assembly

It is 6 pm Tuesday and the evening is a bit warmer than the previous day. The coordination assembly of PAH Barcelona is scheduled to start as usual. The room is as it was the previous day with only one difference: the empty blackboard at the end of the room is packed with information, mainly the agenda of the assembly. Every Tuesday, the order is the same and structured chronologically by: welcome; role sharing; *Com estem?* (How are we?); information and topics for debate and the estimated time necessary to discuss each topic; evictions and *acompañamientos*. Together with the agenda there is a section for “parking”, a small square at the bottom-right corner where the topics that could not have been discussed will be “parked” to be debated at the next assembly.¹ Finally, the top-right corner of the blackboard is reserved for written information concerning evictions scheduled for the upcoming seven days. This information is provided by those affected people that have come to the assembly to ask for help.

One of the two people from the *comisión de dinamización* managing the meeting officially starts the assembly by saying “Welcome to the Coordination Assembly of PAH Barcelona.” They briefly explain how the PAH works and what is the role of the Tuesdays’ assembly. Afterwards, they start distributing the roles for handling the assembly: who is taking the minutes; who reads the minutes from the last assembly; who is in charge of the weekly cleaning of the premises; who is in charge of keeping the assembly quiet when someone is talking; who is filling in the calendar showing the activities that are introduced and decided upon during the assembly; and who is giving the floor. All roles get quickly filled, except taking the minutes, which, as usual, takes a few more seconds until someone finally steps up, after the dynamising people threaten to appoint someone at random, and emphasise the importance of col-

¹ Usually because: the debates took longer than expected and not every topic could be discussed by 8 pm, when the *acompañamientos* start; because a unanimous decision could have not been reached; or because the topic pops up from the discussion about other topics.

lective responsibility for the success of PAH. In spite of the fact that the people in charge of the *dinamización* are Catalans, the introduction and the assembly is held in Spanish, as a response to the large number of migrants who will be present (this was also confirmed in conversations with different activists). The vocabulary used is simple and uses the feminine form,¹ although its use is not the choice of the majority, as most of the affected people speaking during the assembly will use the standard masculine.

Com Estem?

After distributing the roles, one of the people in charge of dynamising continues the assembly by asking the attendees *Como Estem?* (How are we?). A couple of people speak up and explain their individual victories. One of them is a confident migrant in his 30s, who takes the microphone and proudly announces that after four years of struggle, he forced the bank to cancel 210,000€ of his standing mortgage debt, while reducing the monthly payments to match his current level of income. A round of applause storms the room accompanied by some shouts of “*bravo*” and “*si se puede*.”² A second person takes the microphone to explain how he reached an agreement with his bank for renegotiating his mortgage and to personally thank one of the activists for his expert help and support. This again is replied by a round of applause and by a reaction by that activist who claims that he did not do anything special and that this was possible thanks to the help and support of the whole collective. This is not all rare, as from time to time I witnessed how affected people showed this kind of admiration and thankfulness for their knowledge and support towards this and other few members. The good spirit dominates the atmosphere and the *dinamización* people take the assembly to the next part.

¹ In official Spanish when referring to a collective the masculine form is the correct one. This has been opposed by the Spanish feminist movement as a necessary step for tackling gender inequality narratives.

² Translated as “It can be done.” One of the most common chants of PAH, usually shouted after stopping an eviction. It has become so popular that it has transcended the group to become a chant of hope in difficult situations, to be even chanted in football stadiums.

Information and Discussion Points

Once the roles are distributed and the updates shared, the meeting turns to the information and discussion points listed on the blackboard. Each point is made in a few words, next to the name of the *comisión* raising the topic and the time available for each topic. In this case, the topics are: *Ley Vivienda* PAH (PAH's housing law); housing motion to Barcelona's municipality; small owner evictions; IRPH *comisión*; coordination *comisión*.

The *dinamización* people start by introducing the person from the *comisión Ley Vivienda* PAH to discuss the first issue about the last campaign launched by PAH at state level, ***Ley Vivienda* PAH**.¹ The topic is introduced by one of the members of the working group, who has been also in the state assemblies and who explains the specific issue. He is one of the most active members, who gained visibility during the time I was doing fieldwork and became one of the spokespersons to the mass media. The topic is not totally new, since different aspects have been debated in many assemblies, but today the presenter puts forward two new topics for debate: the proposals to take to the state assembly and the outcome of the previous ones for the local PAH to decide if they should join the campaign and how; when to present the law proposal in the Spanish Parliament. The person introducing the topic not only gives the updates, but also expresses the proposals to be taken to the next assembly and that have been previously discussed in the *comisión*. Very few people speak up to clarify some doubts and to support the decisions taken by the *comisión*. The differences are not big, so a unanimous decision is implicitly reached without any need to vote.

However, the discussion about when to present the Law proposal generated a livelier debate. The person introducing the topic explains how the proposal must be presented by one or various of the Parliamentary groups at the registration office of the Spanish Parliament to start the process of discussion. According to the initial schedule, the presentation would have taken place in October 2017. Nonetheless, due to the con-

¹ PAH's Housing Law proposal

flict surrounding Catalanian independence, PAH decided to postpone it. Therefore, a new date had to be decided upon and three options were introduced by the member of the *comisión* (December 2017, January 2018 and February 2018) with their pros and cons. The member explains how presenting it in December would probably reduce visibility, since the Catalanian conflict would hog most of public attention. This risk would probably exist in January, besides being right after the holidays, while in February, it could mean waiting too long. Furthermore, the political party Podemos, who showed its willingness to support the proposal, is considering to present theirs if PAH waits too long. Although the presenter does not openly defend any option, he seems to lean more towards February. It starts a debate, so people who want to give their opinion raise their hands and ask for their turn to speak to the person in charge of giving the floor. The speeches are short and concise and most of the around 10 people who participate support the February option, arguing that PAH wants visibility for its proposals and that its agenda cannot be subordinated to external actors like Podemos. It is decided that February would be the best option and the proposal will be taken to the next state assembly.



Figure 4 Assembly of PAH Barcelona.

Immediately one of the two people in charge of *dinamización* takes the lead again by summarising the decision taken and moving to the next topic, the presentation of a **motion to Barcelona's municipality** protecting the right to housing in the city, which will be discussed in a meeting with the municipal government of BeC. The introduction is made by a member of the *comisión* working on the proposal, the same to whom the affected person thanked so much during the *Com Estem?* This activist is one of the most recognised spokespersons of PAH Barcelona and tries to engage the attendees by launching questions about previous debates on the topic, although without much success. People remain mainly silent and he has to encourage some people to start talking and explaining what has been discussed in previous assemblies.

He launches then the debate concerning today's topic, namely one of the demands to be included within the motion: the obligation to build 30% of social housing for any new development or large rehabilitation project. The activist introducing the topic does not discuss the demand it-

self, but how it should be framed. Basically, he talked of two possibilities: requiring that 30% within the development; or giving the chance of carrying it out in any part of the city the developer wants, which opens the possibility of doing it in the outskirts of the city. The presenter of the case took a quite neutral position, avoiding to defend any of the options explicitly, although hinting support for requiring the development of social housing on-site. Everyone supports the measure, but where it should be carried out produces a lively debate, with 12 participants giving their opinions. The positions are quite split. Those supporting the option of allowing the developer to build the social housing anywhere argue that this will increase the possibilities of the motion being accepted, whereas the defenders of the other position argue that allowing the developer to build where they want will empty this demand of its essence, that is to assure affordable housing in areas of the city subject to speculative pressure. The debate extends for longer than planned, so it is “parked” for upcoming assemblies.¹

The persons in charge of *dinamización* close and “park” the topic to introduce the next point: **what to do in the case of rent evictions in which the owner of the dwelling is not a company or a person that owns many apartments**. The same activist that introduced the previous topic also introduces this one. He does not introduce it as part of any *comisión*, since this topic is not raised product of the work of a *comisión*, but as a reaction to an unfortunate situation happening the previous week. As this activist explains, an affected person had come to PAH asking for help to stop an imminent eviction for not paying his rent. As usual, PAH gathered a bunch of activists to stop it, but when the court representative, the police and the representative of social services appeared, they showed their surprise at PAH being there, as the person had some ongoing court cases for drug dealing and paedophilia. Moreover, the flat belonged to a particular person, what they refer to as a small

¹ After few assemblies it was decided to include the demand of 30% within the new construction. The proposal, presented together with other organisations like the Observatory DESC, neighbourhood associations and the tenant’s union, was finally approved by the plenary of the City Hall September 28, 2018.

owner to distinguish from a bank, a company or an individual with many rental apartments.

The activist launches the discussion to avoid those cases in which some people not only conduct illegal activities, but also take advantage of small owners. The normal way of proceeding when an affected person joins PAH is to stop the eviction by activating Stop Desahucios. This was unproblematic when most of the affected people were facing a mortgage eviction by a bank, but the diversity of rental cases has generated some debate about what to do. After his introduction, the presenter framed the topic as the need to decide between three options when facing new rental cases: (1) if it is necessary to establish a sort of protocol to investigate the affected person; (2) if it should be taken case by case; or (3) if things should continue as previously, therefore stopping any eviction. The presenter took an explicit position for the second option, starting an animated debate about whether the eviction should be stopped or not. The new options could be grouped into three possibilities: (1) stopping every eviction; (2) not to stop the eviction and try to pressure social services to provide a solution to the tenant(s); (3) to stop the first eviction and analyse situations case by case. The positions defended by the speakers are quite even, although with small majority for the last one. The most repeated argument by the defenders of this position, most of them affected people, is that “when the owner has only one or two houses that is not speculation.” Most of the speakers develop this idea and most of the assembly seem to agree. At this point, I argue that, although I agree that each case should be taken individually, every eviction should be stopped because speculation is not a question of the number of houses owned, but the purchase of housing for extracting a rent. This creates immediate strong resistance, mainly among the affected people, who start shaking their heads in sign of disapproval, while three of them raise their hands. These three speakers oppose this argument saying, for example, “that a poor person who depends on the income from a house may suffer from not getting the rent.” The debate has lasted longer than planned and, although I want to reply to the last speakers, I am stopped by the activist introducing the topic who in a friendly and yet condescending way suggests “let it go.” This ends the discussion,

which is wrapped up by *dinamización* as no protocol would be formally established and that the decision would be taken on a case by case basis, as the presenter of the topic defended.

The same person that was in charge of *dinamización* introduces the next topic, namely a proposal made by the *comisión* against the **IRPH**. Two people from this *comisión* explain the proposal of selling their t-shirts in the premises of PAH to fund their trips to “educate” other chapters on how to tackle the IRPH issue.¹ The first thing that strikes me is not only that I have never heard of that *comisión* (and the same for most of the participants in the assembly), but especially that it is the first time I see these two people. Even, at the beginning of their presentation, I doubted if they are part of PAH, because it seemed odd to sell specific t-shirts being part of PAH (in yellow and not in the green “corporate” colour). One of the persons in charge of *dinamización* asks what the assembly thinks of the proposal, which, as no one spoke against it, is unanimously accepted. Nonetheless, right afterwards, the same activist that introduced the previous two topics, raises his hand and in a serious tone shows his doubts about the decision. He argues that he does not see the need of having a different t-shirt being a working *comisión* of PAH, and that if they sell their t-shirts a percentage of the money should be used to pay part of the rent for the premises where PAH has its meetings. The two representatives of the *comisión* remain silent and one of the persons in charge of *dinamización* takes the lead and decides to reopen the voting to decide again between the two options. Strikingly, the vote swings dramatically: the previous unanimity of the assembly to accept the *comisión*’s proposal turns into nobody backing up that option and unanimously supporting the last proposal. The two representatives seem disappointed, but sit down again without saying anything against it. They leave the assembly minutes later and I never see them again.

Again, the person in charge of *dinamización* makes the transition to the last discussion point. Today, it has not been necessary to park any of the

¹ IRPH is a mortgage reference rate that is considered abusive by many social organisations, since it is way higher than the most common reference rate used in Spain, Euribor.

points in the agenda for not having enough time to debate them before 8 pm, when the “evictions and *acompañamientos* part starts, and only one topic was parked as an agreement could not be reached. This last issue involves the *comisión* of **coordination**. The topic was introduced by two members of the *comisión*, both of them Spanish and one of them the activist that has introduced the second and third debates. This discussion was the only time during the fieldwork that the *comisión* was mentioned or raised any point to be discussed, although all its members are well known by the activists and belong to other *comisiones*. They start by introducing the mission of this *comisión* as coordinator between *comisiones*—although this is confusing and does not really clarify its role—and that they want to openly discuss how people can join it to avoid any controversy or accusation of lack of transparency. The first striking aspect is that, although the *comisión* is on the list of *comisiones* on the poster hanging on the wall, most of the people seem not to know about it, which has been confirmed by the tone of the introduction. After the presentation, the debate revolves around how to access the *comisión*. The presenters of the topic and some other members of the *comisión*, including one of the persons in charge of *dinamización*, monopolise the debate and repeat that anyone could join as they please once this person has been involved and showed certain commitment to PAH. Nonetheless, they do not offer any criteria to define when a person is committed or involved enough to be eligible for becoming a member of the *comisión*.

I see immediately that most of those speaking on behalf of the *comisión* of coordination are not directly affected people or their cases have been solved. Besides, all of them are middle-class Spanish nationals and are some of the most engaged activists, being present in most of the encounters, in which they play a central role. Besides, in the walks & talks I identified that many of those representing the *comisión* of coordination today have an activist trajectory within and outside PAH. The topic does not generate much debate until I, as the only speaker not part of the *comisión* or strongly connected to its members, make a proposal to centre the debate on the creation of a clearer access mechanism. The proposal was that one or two representatives from the different *comisiones*

should be part of coordination as representatives of their *comisiones* and in a rotating manner, so everyone in the working *comisiones* would have the chance to hold this position and to avoid the concentration of information in certain members. As I was speaking, three members of the *comisión* of coordination automatically raised their hands to oppose to it, arguing that this is not necessary, as anyone could become part of the group if they wish. After this reply, the debate is wrapped up by one of the persons in charge of *dinamización* (part of the *comisión* of coordination too), without giving me a chance to reply, in order to jump to the part of the assembly for “evictions and *acompañamientos*.” No formal decision was taken and basically the *comisión* and how to access it stayed in a blurry informal condition.

To contextualise this strange discussion, it is necessary to describe an event happening earlier in 2017 that casts some light on this *comisión* and why the issue was brought to the assembly. In the first months of 2017 there was a direct confrontation between two factions within PAH Barcelona that ended up with the expulsion of 22 people. As this happened before my fieldwork, I learnt of this first through the Stop Desahucios e-mail list,¹ where official information about the expulsion was shared, and social media, where a press release by the expelled group was published. Nevertheless, as a consequence of the decentralisation and the total lack of connection between the chapters, the information was limited. Later, when I conducted fieldwork in Barcelona, I interviewed two of the expelled activists, who told me their side of the story. As they told me, the issue started around a different vision concerning when to activate the occupation of empty apartments to re-house people:²

- a. For the people within the *comisión* of coordination, occupation must be considered the last solution, when all the mechanisms for pressuring authorities or banks have failed and the affected people would find themselves literally

¹ I was not in Barcelona at the time this expulsion happened, but conducting fieldwork in A Coruña.

² The campaign known as Obra Social.

thrown onto the street. This was the group that won the debate and stayed in PAH.

- b. For the second group—mainly members of the *comisión Obra Social*, the group handling the occupations—the occupation also has a political meaning as a direct confrontation to housing commodification by putting the right to housing over private property. They defended the idea that the occupation should be activated much earlier in the eviction process, not only to send a political message, but also to reduce the anxiety produced by the uncertainty of the long eviction process.

The debate started within *Obra Social* and expanded to the whole node in the Spring of 2017, when the topic was discussed in a coordination assembly. With this expansion, the confrontation went beyond the purely political debate about occupation to interlink with a debate about organisation and the *comisión* of coordination. The group that was later expelled claimed that the *comisión* did not limit its activities to coordinating the different *comisiones*, but took important decisions and representative functions. Furthermore, they accused the *comisión* of not being transparent, of lacking any control by the assembly and of making it only possible to join through an informal “invitation” by the current members. The confrontation ended with the expulsion of the group demanding more transparency. One of them, informed me about how the expulsion happened in a coordination assembly in which the topic was not part of the agenda and as a consequence of the alignment of members of the *comisión* of coordination that showed a clear strategy. Although this happened months before the discussion in the assembly today, this could influence the members of the *comisión* to bring the topic periodically to prevent that kind of confrontation from starting again.

Evictions and Acompañamientos

It is now 8 pm and, in contrast to other assemblies in which topics that have not been discussed by this time must be postponed for the upcoming weeks, we managed to debate all points within the agenda. At this

point, the dynamics and the atmosphere change. People seem more active and affected people who need support for their cases make signs to the person in charge of giving the floor to get in the queue to ask for help for the action they want. The people in charge of *dinamización* change the dynamics to start the part of the assembly for the “evictions and *acompañamientos*” (from now on *acompañamientos* as these are the most common actions). The *dinamización* people, who until now were mainly at the end of the room next to the blackboard move more to the central corridor created by the chairs. While moving like this, they make a brief explanation of what it is supposed to happen now and say that it is the time for affected people to ask for help from the group. The assembly is still full of people and the initiative is left to people affected by their precarious situation with respect to housing. They start explaining their needs for help in relation to their case. Although the name of the organisation directly refers to people with mortgages, as a reaction to the situation when PAH was created in 2009, the situation has changed and the majority of the cases people ask help for now are related to rental evictions. There are still cases linked to mortgages, but these are mostly old cases starting as far back as three years ago. The increasing number of rental evictions makes it necessary to adapt to a new situation in which the evictions happen much faster and there is weaker legal protection. Moreover, there are also cases related to occupations or people already living in the street, however they are a minority. People start explaining their cases and, although it is not the goal of this part of the assembly to introduce them, as this is done in the Monday assemblies, people who have not been in PAH long talk for a little longer to explain their case. This is controlled by the *dinamización* people, who try to keep the turns as concise as possible, and focus on the demands for collective support to organise actions towards resolving the case. There are many types of actions, the most common being the *acompañamiento*.

One after another, individual affected people start asking for actions in front of the whole assembly. At this point, migrants and other affected people, who have been mainly silent until now start being more active

and speak up. There are around seven cases in the queue, and in their turn each person briefly explains the current status of their case to justify why they need the *acompañamiento* and when. These *acompañamientos* consist in 2 or 3 activists “accompanying” an affected person to go to their bank to pressure for renegotiating the conditions of their mortgages or to deal with social services to get a housing solution. In a few cases, although increasing over the last months, the affected person asks for some help to put pressure on a vulture fund that wants to raise their rent dramatically or simply expel them from their house. Some cases are of people who have the mortgage in the same bank, so they “pack” their cases together and support each other. In this case and when the date of the eviction is approaching, they ask for a larger action, which range from giving away flyers and shouting about their situation in front of the bank branch to sticking posters in the bank branch or even occupying a bank. No matter the kind of action, it is common that the people in charge of *dinamización* address veteran affected people to help the newcomers and explain the possible solutions to their problems in a sort of snowball strategy in which the proposals accumulate and enrich each other, creating a feeling of commitment towards the collective. Furthermore, they insistently encourage the newcomers to go to an *acompañamiento* with an experienced activist as a great way of learning how to carry out these actions.

Although all these kinds of actions are requested by individual affected people, they are treated differently in the assemblies. Thus, while *acompañamientos* or giving away flyers do not raise much concern among the people in the assembly, sticking posters and, especially, occupying banks are more carefully considered and need the approval by the assembly. The affected person who was suggested to ask for an *acompañamiento* in the welcome assembly, asks for an occupation of a bank, because she had tried to pressure the bank and nothing seemed to work. As happened on other occasions, the assembly tries to talk this person out of that idea. Furthermore, the persons in charge of *dinamización* take a leading role, without directly replying to the demands of the affected person, but by asking activists until they found the answer or the proposal they are looking for, that is to talk her out of the large-

scale action. As a consequence of this outcome, and as I had seen many other times, the person making the initial proposal is disappointed and frustrated by the decision taken by the assembly, although she accepts it due to the lack of support.

After the explanation of each case and of the action requested, participants start raising their hands or their voice to offer themselves to help the affected person. Most commonly at least two people volunteer to go with the person, although sometimes more people are willing to go as they have created stronger friendship bonds with the affected person. In very rare cases, a person does not find anyone willing to go with them immediately, but after a few seconds hesitation there is always someone willing to help. When there is some hesitation, one of the most repeated mottos—not only in the assemblies but also through the general Telegram group for internal communication, *PAHmilia*¹—is shouted to encourage people to commit and get engaged in the group: “*hoy por ti, mañana por mí*” (today for you and tomorrow for me), which encourages the *ComPAHs*² to cooperate and signifies the importance of individual engagement not only in favour of the collective, but as a support to each one individual to create a collective emotion of empathic support and dependence.

Once the group has decided for the *acompañamiento*, the members agree on the exact time and place for meeting. Usually, these are peaceful actions and are just conceived as a way of showing that the affected person is supported by PAH to increase their leverage.

This part of the assembly takes around one hour and fifteen minutes. It is now 9:15 pm and the room is quite cold at this time. The assembly is almost finished and the people in charge of *dinamización* point towards the blackboard to remind people of the pending evictions. The information about these evictions was written before the assembly and com-

¹ Conjoining of the words PAH and “*familia*” (family).

² Conjoining of the words “*compañero*” (comrade) and PAH.

pleted by those that popped up during the discussions.¹ The evictions taking place within a week's time are written on the blackboard, whereas for those scheduled for later, the affected person is invited to come to the Monday assembly, which is allocated to explain individual cases and evictions. The people in charge remind everyone that it will be evictions every day of the rest of the week and some days more than one, so people should distribute themselves to cover them all. Furthermore, they remind everyone that the day after it will be an occupation of the office of social services in Ciutat Vella to demand a solution for a family of three that is about to be evicted—this was the first case introduced on Monday. Finally, they remind everyone to pay attention to the Telegram channel because on Friday morning “we’ll go party” and further information will be shared the previous day via the Telegram. The action was announced in previous assemblies, but the information is now kept secret for the moment, hence the use of the label “going party.” The *PAHmilia* Telegram group then becomes the space for the transmission of information about the actions in between the assemblies. Furthermore, the Telegram enables those members who could not attend the meeting to be up to date, as well as providing the possibility of a quick reaction to the different environments, such as distributing themselves to cover all evictions happening at the same time. On some occasions, some newcomers or not very active members misuse the Telegram channel to explain their cases or ask for help. This generates the almost immediate reaction of the most engaged and old members that remind them that all these must be explained in the assemblies, since the Telegram is only for the transmission of information. This generates some tensions between a few individual members and the rest of the collective, which usually does not go beyond the Telegram chat.

The assembly is finally over, the attendees (that at that point may be around 40) stack the chairs. Usually some people chat a bit longer in small groups, on some occasions around some snacks and drinks brought by some affected person who has seen their case solved and wants to thank all members of PAH for their support. The coldness en-

¹ Although there is formally not room for discussing evictions in this assembly, it is common that newcomers do not know the normal functioning and introduce their eviction case during the assembly.

gulfing the room is dissipated by the warmth of the 25 people gathered around the table to eat and know each other better in an atmosphere of celebration.

Social services occupation

It is early morning Wednesday, the day of the occupation of the office of the municipal social services in the district of Ciutat Vella (Old Town) to force a solution for the case of the family of three who are facing an open eviction. The action starts in the morning and it will last until they offer a suitable solution for the case, which required the whole day, as this solution was only found in the evening. Before that, the affected man who attended the Monday assembly occupied the office together with a bunch of members of PAH. The occupation is peaceful, with the clear instruction that they will not harass physically or verbally the workers. They will just disturb the normal functioning of the office until they get a solution. After the initial occupation, the situation enters in stand-by, hours pass, but the activists remain there entering and exiting the office. In front of the office some activists dance to some loud music played through a loudspeaker in a quite joyful atmosphere.

At the beginning of the evening, some negotiations with some high ranked civil servants start, handled by two or three members, but the situation does not change. The protesters stay there, making a noise in the street and threatening that we will come back every day until a solution is provided. The around 15 remaining activists chat animatedly, as do I with one of the most engaged activists, who tells me how he joined PAH a couple of years ago, after losing his job and risking losing his family house for not paying their mortgage:

We even had two houses, but when I lost my job, we lost the second one and almost had to leave our family house when we had to close my wife's shop. But thanks to PAH we managed to keep our house and did not end up being thrown onto the streets, so, although we are in an OK situation now, I will help others as others helped me.

In the dark of the evening, the situation seems to change. We are now around 10 people and a civil servant connected to Barcelona en Comú comes down from the office across the street to speak with the activists. She leaves again and comes back with the same proposal they had offered the affected family before, which is not accepted by the activists. She said that this does not depend on her, but on another high ranked civil servant. She leaves again with the promise of trying to get a better solution. After a while she comes back, accompanied by one of the advisers of the district councillor from Barcelona en Comú. They come with a new proposal that they were able to negotiate with the high ranked civil servant. They offer the family to pick up all their furniture and store it for free in a storage room, to provide a hotel room for 10 days, after which they will provide an emergency flat. The activists discuss among themselves. The affected person is the one who must take the final decision, although the more experienced activists offer their opinion. He decides to accept the offer, which is communicated to the member of BeC. The agreement is signed while some thoughts are exchanged between the civil servant and a couple of activists. Although the exchange is mainly friendly, they threaten that if the agreement is not fulfilled PAH will come back to the office. The civil servant understood that, but also claimed that this was the best possible agreement. This friendly atmosphere is product of a personal relation between the activists and the civil servant, since she turned out to be a former member of PAH Barcelona, like many other members of Barcelona en Comú. The agreement is finally signed and kept by the affected person, who is moved and in great gratitude to the PAH and all the activists that have helped him. After an intense day of protest, all activist leave while discussing which of the evictions they will attend the day after.

Stopping an eviction

It is Thursday morning and, as usual, there are few evictions scheduled around the city. The information about the place and time for meeting explained during the assembly is distributed in the Telegram groups (both the official of PAH Barcelona and the general internal one, *PAHmilia*) to distribute ourselves, so all evictions are covered with as many people as possible at the front door of the house where people are

about to be evicted. It is 8:30 am and I attend one taking place in the municipality of L'Hospitalet, on the border of Barcelona. It is not common that PAH Barcelona mobilises for cases outside the municipality, which must be handled by the local chapters, but the one in L'Hospitalet has not been very active in the past months.

We are around 15 people, included the person to be evicted, a migrant woman and mother of two. We gather at the front door in an expecting atmosphere, quietly and chatting about the possible course of the action. Most of the people are confident except the person who is facing the eviction, who is nervous and fearful. The activists try to calm her by insisting that the eviction will be stopped and by sharing their experiences. After an hour of waiting, around 9:45 am, the court representative appears accompanied by two policemen to carry on the eviction. If this eviction would have taken place in Barcelona municipality, a civil servant, SIPHO,¹ would have showed up first, followed lately by the court representative.

As the court representative arrives, one of the activists recognises her and mentions to me that she is a tough one, but that the eviction will be stopped for sure. It starts an exchange of opinions between the court representative and two of the most experienced activists in the presence of the woman facing eviction. The activists state that they will block the entry to the house, to which the court representative replies that the eviction is dated for today and it must be conducted. The flat belongs to an old lady who needs the rent. The activists reply that they understand the situation but that they cannot throw a family onto the street without a housing solution. The attitude of the activists is peaceful but determined, whereas the tone of the court representative is more aggressive. Nonetheless, after a couple of minutes, she informs the affected person that the eviction has been postponed and that they will receive a letter setting

¹ *Servei d'intervenció i mediació en situacions de pèrdua i/o ocupació d'habitatge* (Mediation and intervention service in situations of lost and/or occupation of housing), is a service created by the municipal government of BeC to deal with the evictions, as an interlocutor between the debtor and the creditor or landlord. One representative of the service must be present in any eviction taking place within of Barcelona.

a new date for the eviction.¹ The court representative and the policemen leave the place and the activists stay there for a while just to comfort the family who have avoided the eviction and to encourage her to come to the assemblies, because she cannot wait until the next eviction and she must engage with the group to start mobilising to find a solution. The atmosphere is joyful, but more than anything it is of a mere formality, another day in the office, as the activists were sure that the eviction would be stopped. In fact, in all the time I have been doing fieldwork in Barcelona every eviction was stopped. As the other evictions happening that morning have been already stopped, it is not necessary for us to move to help in any of them. Consequently, some activists leave for work or home, while others sit down together in a cafe to share their experiences and worries. Before going their own ways, they remind each other about “the party” happening the day after and to pay attention to the Telegram that evening to get the instructions for it.

Later that evening the Telegram group starts boiling with information for the “party.” The meeting point is at the exit of the metro station Plaça de Catalunya, in the heart of the city, at 8:30 am. The instruction is to come with the PAH t-shirts hidden under jackets and sweaters.

Bank occupation

It is finally Friday 8:20 am and around 30 activists wait in Plaça de Catalunya. The atmosphere is still relaxed, the activists chat animatedly and there is no sign that these people are part of PAH Barcelona. Moreover, the meeting has also certain atmosphere of excitement for implementing an action with an uncertain outcome. At 8:30 am we are around 55 activists and the action is explained more in depth. We will occupy one of BBVA’s main branches² in Barcelona and the t-shirts must be hidden until reaching the branch, so the group can move freely without calling much attention. Furthermore, an activist will come with his van

¹ Activists in PAH Barcelona always talk of how they will be able to stop up to four attempts of eviction. The fourth is the final one for the court to carry on the eviction, and but that time the case will be solved, if not by reaching an agreement with the bank or the authorities, by rehousing the evicted people in occupied empty houses belonging to banks (*Obra Social*).

² Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria, the second largest bank in the country.

once the bank is entered with diverse materials: banners, speakers, leaflets, posters, etc.

After the explanation, we leave to go towards the office, with a short detour to avoid main streets. Once at the office, a couple of activists enter while two others hold the sliding doors allowing the whole group to enter the office. The roles were perfectly defined and divided beforehand, to prevent the workers from closing the office down. The activists enter the branch and start chanting, throwing flyers about the organisation and gluing posters to the walls and the cash machines. The workers are not directly addressed, and when this is necessary it is done in a friendly way, explaining that this is not an action against them, that they will not be attacked or harassed. The manager comes out of her office and speaks with two activists who explain that this is not against the workers, but that we want a solution for the cases of the people facing eviction by BBVA and that we will not leave until they get that. Otherwise, the branch will be occupied, facing the risk of being unable to carry on its normal work. Although the action is framed as mobilisation to demand non-recourse debt as one of the five main measures demanded by PAH's Law Proposal explained in chapter two, the action also intends to pressure the bank to find a solution for five affected people facing eviction because of that bank. The discussion with the manager is not friendly but nor is it aggressive. Meanwhile, the rest of the activists divide between the branch and the pavement chanting slogans, gluing more posters and handing leaflets to by-passers.

A few minutes later the police arrive, which adds some tension to the conversation with the manager. The rest of the activists keep chanting and giving flyers away, some in the pavement at the entrance of the office, although the majority enter the office again once they see the police arriving. The interaction, which was mainly calm before the police arrived, becomes increasingly tense. One of the police officers demands the promoter or the leaders of the protest¹ to identify themselves. He ad-

¹ This is usually done as a way to scare the protesters, since this person would be the responsible for any violence erupted, therefore, subject to be fined or prosecuted.

dresses one of the activists, who not knowing what to do, nervously hands him her ID. At that point, three experienced activists reach the place and tell everyone not to show their IDs when the police request again for the promoters to identify themselves. One of these experienced activists, who was involved in the organisation and coordination of the actions—and also one of the persons in charge of “dynamising” the assemblies—replies to the police officer that there is no leader and that they would have to identify all the people carrying out the action. Furthermore, he said that we would need to decide in the assembly if we would be willing to be identified because the decisions that involve the organisation must be decided by an assembly. After a few minutes discussion, the reaction of the police was to give up and to follow the action from the two police vans parked 300 meters from the bank. In this particular case, the tension did not turn to aggression, so it was unnecessary to implement a strategy that became common in these situations: the male representatives step back and leave the women to take the forefront of the action when police or private security become more aggressive, as, the activists argue, women are usually less confrontational than men and manage negotiation better.



Figure 5 Occupation of the branch of BBVA by PAH Barcelona.

One hour has passed since the action started and the 55 activists keep addressing people in the street, giving away flyers and occupying the bank's branch. Some tv stations, radios and newspapers have also sent reporters who interview an activist, the one that introduced the topic about the *Ley Vivienda* PAH in the assembly, as the representative of PAH. At this point the situation is on stand-by, without much movement by any side, so the activists turn the entry of the office into a sort of improvised theatre stage. People disguised as caricaturised bankers or vulture funds fight against an activist disguised as SuperPah (see figure 6), who is able to defeat them. Afterwards, some music is played from a big loudspeaker carried by the protesters with many activists singing and dancing in the street. The excitement shared before the action, which transformed into certain tension when the police appeared, has become now transformed into manifestations of joy and happiness. As happened in the occupation of the office of social services, the use of music, the dancing and the disguise create a sort of improvised theatre that reduces the tension provoked by the action. The atmosphere is of protest, but of happiness too. At this point, chatting with SuperPAH, she tells me in a state of excitement and joy:

Vítor, you should have seen me a year ago when I arrived at PAH, all shy and fearful... I even wore the veil!! Look at me now!!

It is now around noon and some activists have started to leave, around 30 remain, who after a while start sharing their stories in a sort of "open mike." Now, the joyful tone is substituted for a more serious one in which people share their personal dramas with anyone who wants to hear them. The atmosphere is of anger, but also hope, of how the PAH and the mutual support have helped them to keep their houses or at least to have some hope in doing so. Claims against the bankers and the politicians are repeated, although only few of the speakers refer directly to the need of passing PAH's law proposal and the need of defending non-recourse debt. The number of activists keeps decreasing until the end of the action when the branch closes at 2:15 pm. The action disturbed the normal functioning of the branch and after sitting down with the affect-

ed people, a compromise was negotiated ensuring that the cases would be reviewed and solutions for each one would be found. At this point the action is called off and the activists abandon the branch with the satisfaction of conducting the action without any confrontation and of achieving a compromise for negotiation from the bank.

It has been an intense week and now the activists go home to start their weekends and rest to get ready for another week of activism. Except for some celebrations, such as a Christmas party or participating at events such as social economy fairs, the activity of the chapter is reduced to that on the Telegram channels at the weekends. This is because no evictions are carried out and offices are closed, so no protest actions are organised and the activists have some “spare” time from their activism.



Figure 6 SuperPah “fighting” bankers and politicians.

A week in Stop Desahucios Coruña

We jump now more than thousand kilometres from Barcelona to the smaller city of A Coruña, in the region of Galiza in the northwest corner

of Spain. In 2011, Stop Desahucios Coruña was established as the local chapter of the PAH. At the time, dozens of chapters were springing up in cities all over the country.

Entering Stop Desahucios Coruña

In this node, the welcome assemblies for affected people (Monday's assemblies) and the coordination assemblies (Tuesday's assemblies) of PAH Barcelona are merged into one, taking place on Wednesdays.¹ To enter the group, I simply had to introduce myself at the assembly and, although nobody stated any concern regarding me undertaking research there, I did not feel very welcome, failing to create high levels of trust, which I perceived later as an effect of the complex dynamics within the group. Thus, although the activists seem to respect each other, strong differences emerged periodically. These were often in the form of direct personal confrontations that ended up with people leaving the group. The activists usually did not spend time together outside the activities of Stop Desahucios—with a couple of exceptions—and I sensed some atmosphere of distrust, not only towards me but in general between the members. One example of this is a constant concern about eliminating from the mailing list people who “are not active” within the group anymore,² something that I did not face in any of the other groups, which have a much higher number of inactive activists on their mailing lists.

Assembly

Wednesday 8:10 pm. In a working-class neighbourhood, around 20 people are arguing in a quite aggressive tone at the entrance of the premises where Stop Desahucios gather every week. The people are divided into two groups: one formed by current members of Stop Desahucios and the other, formed by former members. Aggressiveness escalates with shouts of mutual accusations of theft and of not being real activists. At some point, some people start threatening to punch members of the other

¹ At least during the time of fieldwork in the Spring of 2017. At the end of the year it was decided to move the meeting to Fridays to try to accommodate the schedule of as many members as possible.

² Since I am not living in A Coruña, I was eliminated from the mailing list two times: the first just before I came back for the second round of fieldwork, so I could be included again; the second three months after ending my fieldwork.

group, although in the end no physical violence erupts. A group of seven people leave after five minutes, shouting and threatening a group of around 15 people that still remain in the premises. The group that is leaving was formed by former activists that left Stop Desahucios around two years ago, whereas the group that is staying is formed by current activists, who, in most cases, have joined in the last two years. The atmosphere among the people who stay in the premises is one of rage and incomprehension.

This event has created certain nervousness and altered the normal beginning of the weekly assembly. Now, 20 people chat around a table in the centre of a 50m² room. There is also a sofa next to the entrance and a few tables and shelves display multiple leaflets and books about libertarian or anarchist themes: references to political prisoners; claims against the state; or the defence of occupied autonomous social centres. The room has a predominantly green colour, although this is not because of PAH, but a decision of the collective running the venue, a libertarian athenaeum, in which PAH is only one of the organisations that uses the premises for its meetings. Consequently, the walls do not have any reference to past or future actions organised by Stop Desahucios. There are people of different ages, but the most predominant are people between their late 30s and their 50s, with only two or three people in their 20s or early 30s. Although there are some migrants, the majority of the people in the assembly are from Galiza, with a 65/35 presence of men over women. Most of them would be classified as working class, although some of them are impoverished middle-class people.

Informative points and debate

After some discussion about what has just happened, the assembly starts by distributing the roles of who is taking the minutes and who is giving the floor during the assembly. Nobody is chosen to lead the assembly beforehand, and the assembly does not have a clear structure after distributing the roles. Thus, who is in charge of starting the assembly varies from day to day and the decision is made on the spot, as well as who is responsible for taking the minutes. The person who will be responsible for managing the meeting starts the assembly by reading the agenda

previously distributed through the mailing list, to which any participants can propose amendments. No amendment has been made today, but it has been decided to include a point to talk about the situation that just happened before the assembly, which is related to the funds of the node and the payment of some old fines.

The assembly starts debating the first point, **the convenience of having only one or two assemblies**. This has been a recurrent topic in many assemblies and discussions within the group's mailing list for the last couple of months in the winter of 2016 and spring of 2017. The person in charge of handling the assembly launches the debate by introducing the two possibilities: to keep the assemblies together or separating them. He explains that the main reason for rethinking the possibility of having separated assemblies is that the assemblies have become hard to manage because they have too many topics, so it is impossible to finish before 10 pm without leaving many topics undiscussed. The attendees start participating and almost all of them give their opinion, usually in a relaxed tone. The positions are quite divided, so no position is majoritarian. The ones that defend the idea of keeping the assemblies together argue that if the assemblies are to be separated, there would be a risk that the affected people would attend only the assemblies for affected people without engaging in the general activities of the group. This would fail to attract new activists. On the contrary, the ones that support the idea of separating them argue that this would help to differentiate the affected cases from the more political work and to make the assemblies more manageable. Moreover, they argue that in the past the chapter had two assemblies, so this was not at all a completely new issue. At that time, there was still an assembly per week, but they were alternating between assembly of affected people one week and coordination assembly the next one.

Collaterally, it is also debated if the cases should be discussed first or they should be left for the end of the assembly. The attendees engage for a while in a fairly respectful exchange of opinions, which is closed after around 20 minutes. Finally, after many discussions in various assem-

blies, it was decided to keep both assemblies together and the cases at the end of the assembly, as it has been done in the past months. Moreover, people are reminded that affected people should only speak if they have any update about their cases, since one of the main reasons assemblies end too late is that affected people continue too long or ask for the floor without having any news in order to find some comfort for their personal situation. The attempts of the rest of activists to limit their time to allow others to explain their cases often creates frustration among these affected people, who consider that they have been ignored.

The person in charge of managing the assembly introduces the second topic on the agenda, another issue that has generated higher levels of confrontation during various assemblies. That is, whether **Stop Desahucios Coruña should have thematic working groups**, as it happens in PAH Barcelona. Until now when a topic needs to be worked outside the assembly, it is first discussed within the assembly and the people interested in the subject state their willingness to continue with the issue outside the assembly. Nevertheless, in some assemblies and meetings in the Spring of 2017, some members started proposing that it would be beneficial to have the work organised through thematic working groups. This was opposed by some members, so the topic was debated in the assembly, mainly among the most experienced activists. Whereas the ones supporting the creation of working groups argued that this would provide continuity to the different topics, the ones opposing it argued that considering the size of the chapter, it would make no sense to have working groups of two or three people. It would be better to introduce the topics to everyone from the beginning. The discussion continues for a while, and, as has happened before, most of the people attending the meeting gave their opinion. Again, there is a roughly equal division in opinions, but in contrast to the previous issue, I observe an atmosphere of aggressiveness and some implicit personal references. The debate lasted for longer than expected and no final decision was taken, postponing it for the next assemblies. Finally, the chapter decided to create the *comisiones* in the Autumn of 2017 when my fieldwork was done, so I only learnt about it through the mailing list. As a reaction to this decision, one of the most engaged activists, who is not an affected person

but activist in other autonomous movements, announced via the mailing list that he was leaving the group because he was dissatisfied with the direction it was taking and the tone of the discussions.

The next topic is another issue debated in many assemblies: the **proposal for a motion to be presented in the plenary of the City Hall** for the protection of the right to housing. The proposal is introduced by a working group created *ad hoc* by people who showed their interest during previous assemblies when the discussion began. This group gathered a few times outside the assembly to create a draft to be revised and approved by the assembly. The motion was finalised, one of the most important measures being the prevention of every eviction and the passing of laws to force owners of empty apartments to make them available for renting. The motion had to be proposed by at least one of the parties within the City Hall and Stop Desahucios had entered the proposal through the City Hall's registry without informing, or negotiating with, any of the parties. Immediately afterwards, five members of the group visited the four parties within the City Hall to inform them and test their willingness to support the proposal. While the visit to the offices of the right wing Partido Popular (PP) and the social democratic Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) lasted less than two minutes in the first case and five in the second, the visit to the left wing Galician nationalist Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) lasted for about 10 minutes and with the municipal Government of Marea Atlántica evolved into a 30 minutes meeting with the City Councillor for Equality. All groups said that they would contact the organisation after the meeting but only BNG and Marea Atlántica did, in order to try to make amendments to the proposal. This started negotiations back and forth about the content of the motion to get the parties to support it. Even though the agreement in the assembly was that no substantial amendment would be accepted, some people understood that this should be flexible, which started a discussion with these parties and generated a heated debate within the assembly concerning how to react to the feedback and the proposed amendments.

After some months working on the motion and almost reaching an agreement with this two parties, at today's assembly a member proposes contacting the PSOE again since there is a new person in charge of their municipal section and this member of Stop Desahucios has been contacted by her to have better and more regular communication. This proposal starts a debate between the oldest members of the group. Even though the majority of the assembly shows its willingness to accept the invitation to negotiate, some voices are opposed to this. We consider that the issue has been already discussed, that this would delay the presentation of the motion even more, it would give the PSOE a preferential treatment and it would be a reopening of a case that had been already decided by the assembly. This opened a quite bitter debate in which the different members defended their positions with some personal attacks on the political views and closeness of the different members to each party. Personal reproach was used to debate against the proposals by the opponents. There were implicit mutual accusations of lack of neutrality and of supporting a position in relation to their sympathy for MaT, the BNG or the PSOE. The tone of the argument even expanded to the mailing list where the personal attacks became more explicit (in fact, some members decided to leave the organisation as consequence of these disputes). The final decision in the assembly was to have a meeting again with the different parties to discuss the possible amendments and it was decided that the representatives of the group at that meeting should not accept any substantial changes to the text of the proposal. The motion was finally approved in the City Hall's plenary of April 2018, with the support of Marea Atlántica, the PSOE and the BNG and the abstention of the PP.

This topic confirmed my initial perception that the members of the node covered almost the whole political spectrum, from the extreme left-wing Stalinists¹ to the right-wing, from members that would fall within the social democratic ideology to the centre right, from Galician Nationalism to anarchists. These political positions are more or less openly displayed or well known by the members, as exemplified by the acknowledgement

¹ One of the activists defined himself in these terms to ironically confront accusations from other activists.

in one of the walks & talks with one of the most extreme left-wing activists who talks of another member as “right foot cripple,” to refer to his sympathies for the PP.

Another relevant topic which was discussed was also linked to the organisation of the group and related to the **funds and conflict with former activists**. As the node does not have the visibility or as many members as PAH Barcelona, it usually struggles to gather money to fund its activities. Thus, the money must be carefully handled. In the assembly there is a recurrent conversation about the payment of some fines made by the police to some former members as consequence of some occupations and blockades. A couple of members explain how these fines are more than two years old and they relate to previous actions, when most of the active members of the group were different. These members still hold money that the current members claim as belonging to the Stop Desahucios and that the former members refuse and say they have used for paying those fines. This issue has generated recurrent, angry, confrontations with former members in the social networks, although never to the level experienced earlier today.

The problem goes back to the year 2014, when most of the people active within the organisation were different and had a different profile to the ones active when I undertook my fieldwork in 2017. Those active in 2014 were mainly people with a more or less long trajectories of activism and with high degrees of politicisation. In that period there was a peak of mobilisation around Elviña Non Se Vende (Elviña is not for sale), an initiative to avoid the eviction of five families and the demolition of their houses located in a small neighbourhood. The excuse was that space was needed for a road connecting to the city’s biggest housing development, located on the opposite side of the main avenue entering the city. It is out of the scope of this thesis to describe the situation in depth here, but it is necessary to know that Stop Desahucios was deeply involved with the people forming Elviña Non Se Vende. After that peak of mobilisation, some people left the organisation, which started to change by attracting new people, both activists and affected, with a

different profile. This created tensions mainly because the new members accused the former members of not protecting affected people, of rejecting new cases and of spending the meetings discussing “*el sexo de los ángeles*.”¹ This provoked strong arguments within the mailing list to the level that one of the current affected people referred to the discussion with the former members as “*mariconadas*.”² This homophobic remark deserved reprobation from some members, mainly among the former activists, but also mobilised the support of the current activists, who join in the defence of this affected person, even by a gay member who claimed not to be offended and supported the current activist. The strong tensions between the two factions ended up with most of the initial members leaving the group—as a consequence, the chapter needed to find a new place to meet, because they used to meet in *A Comuna* (an autonomous social centre), to which many of the members of the group that left belong.

After the events at the beginning of the assembly, the question was what to do with the money: if to give it up or fight for it. There is a conversation between around ten members who have been in the group the longest and some claim to be exhausted with this fight and that maybe it is better to just to give the money up and cut any relationship with the former members. Nevertheless, a final decision is not taken and the issue will be still pending and generating conflicts at the time I end my fieldwork. Concurrently, there is a discussion of how to get some funding. If it is impossible to access the money held by the former activists, it is necessary to do something else and people start suggesting selling t-shirts again and even an affected woman offers to make bags saying “Stop Desahucios” by recycling old jeans. The assembly think that it is a good idea and someone suggests the possibility of selling them in some street markets, to which the woman replied that she has no problem with that as long as we do not have to “work with gypsies.”³ This immediately raised some criticism from some older activists censuring the com-

¹ Equivalent to the English “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?”

² This could be translated as things that a “maricón” (in English “faggot”) does, to refer to stupid, embarrassing or pointless actions or visions.

³ Romani people have a big presence among the vendors in the Spanish street markets.

ment. However, the criticisms were made in a mainly paternalistic tone avoiding any confrontation.

Cases

The rest of the assembly is used to discuss the cases and the possible course of action. A couple of people who have been mainly quiet until now start speaking. They introduce their cases and ask for advice on what to do, the majority suggest possible solutions.

The only new case is the one of an old couple that live on a small pension and cannot pay their rent because they owe some municipal taxes, so when they receive the money at the beginning of the month, part of it is automatically taken by the municipality. They fear that they will be evicted. The man explaining the case is quite calm, but shows great fear of being kicked out and of finding himself and his sick partner thrown onto the street. In contrast to PAH Barcelona, this fear was not replied with much physical contact, but just with certain comforting words to give him some hope. People in the assembly start putting forward suggestions, the most common being to put pressure on the municipality, since by law that money cannot be seized. Some other activists criticise social services, specifically certain civil servants that instead of helping the affected people seem to drag them down. A couple of activists will go with the affected person and notify the municipality as the first step.

The rest of the cases are old cases of people facing eviction for being unable to pay their mortgages. One of them has been in process for a couple of years and after small victories, the family are still in their home but the threat of eviction remains. The father of the family provides an update on the case, supported by many papers used to pressure the bank, in many cases sentences delivered by Spanish and European courts. He does not ask for any specific advice and he just confirms that there will be an action at the bank that same Friday. He has been an activist for almost two years and he limits his speech to the news about their case, as decided before.

The next case is of a woman who has a disability, so she depends of a small pension from the state. She has had problems with the neighbours and the municipality—she lives in a municipality next to A Coruña—and she pops up at the assembly from time to time when new problems appear. This time, she does not have a water supply at home and the assembly agree to undertake an *acompañamiento* to the municipality two days later, although she asks not to be present in the meeting, so only three activists will be at the meeting.

Finally, there is another mortgage case. Again, the majority of the assembly advise the person to try and negotiate with the bank, which is the most common advice, trying to put pressure on the bank by letting it know that the person is a member of Stop Desahucios. The person is offered an *acompañamiento*, which is common practice, and the suggestions focus more on the exhaustion of the legal measures than on more disruptive actions. As a consequence of this more legalist approach, when affected people give updates on their cases, they usually focus on how the case is evolving in legal terms. Today, another affected person complains about the service he is getting from his duty solicitor, as he is not doing the necessary paperwork on time, so he asks for the help of the lawyers supporting Stop Desahucios. Although these lawyers are rarely at the assemblies or the protests, they are extensively used to prepare paperwork or legal advice.¹ In fact, one of the oldest activists shows his hesitation about this, because he fears that we could “burn out” the lawyers just by passing all the cases on to them, so we should educate ourselves more, so that the lawyers are drawn upon only when strictly necessary.

In connection with this problem, the assembly is reminded that there is a protest action set to take place on Thursday in front of the courthouses as a continuation of the sending of letters to the chief judge. The protest will consist of presenting a written complaint in the courthouses to force the duty solicitors to effectively fulfil their responsibilities, and to de-

¹ There were three lawyers helping Stop Desahucios at the time of fieldwork, but only one of them was more or less involved in the activities of the group, although I did not see him in any of the encounters I participated.

mand the observance of sentences delivered by European Courts that are constantly ignored by the judges.

The assembly finishes around 10 pm by reminding the meeting time and place for the two actions taking place this week. This is a busy week, since it is normal to have no more than one action per week. The people leave individually or in couples, still talking about their cases, sharing opinions or discussing the situation happening at the beginning of the assembly.

Courthouses protest

It is Thursday at 10:30 am. Nine people gather in front of the court houses in the city of A Coruña. Most of them were in the assembly the previous day. Some of the activists wear a Stop Desahucios t-shirt and talk animatedly. We wait for around 15 minutes to see if more people show up, meanwhile one of the activists arrives with the banner to be used once the complaint is entered at the register of the courthouse. It is now 10:45 am and we decide to start the action. Two people enter the courthouse to give the complaint, while the rest of us wait in the square in front of the building. After 10 minutes the two activists come back and we decide to wait a bit longer, because a couple of local newspapers said that they would send a journalist to cover the action. Finally, two journalists arrive and the activists roll out the banner (see figure 7) with the Stop Desahucios Coruña logo and the slogan “*Nin casas sen xente, nin xente sen casa*” (Neither houses without people, nor people without houses). The journalists undertake a short interview of no longer than five minutes with one of the activists and take a few pictures of the activists holding the banner. The action is carried on in a quiet atmosphere, without any chanting or shouting of slogans while holding the banner. It is now around 11:30 am and the action is ended, with the activists leaving individually and reminding about the protest against the bank which is to take place the next day.



Figure 7 Protest of Stop Desahucios at the Courthouses in A Coruña.

Bank protest

It is Friday at 11:30 am and people start gathering in front of a bank Abanca branch. The action is planned to start around noon and at this point around 15 people stand in the square in front of the branch. At 12 the same banner used the previous day is rolled out, becoming the centre of the action of around 25 people, some of them wearing Stop Desahucios t-shirts, others with flags. While some activists hold the banner, another activist holds a megaphone and chants slogans that are repeated by the rest of the protesters. Another woman gives away flyers with information about the particular case of the affected people and about how the bank wants to evict them.



Figure 8 Protest of Stop Desahucios in front of Abanca.

The action takes place outside the bank and none of the activists attempts to enter the branch at any time. We limit our participation to staying behind the banner and to chant slogans producing a more serious atmosphere than in PAH Barcelona. As the action's main goal is to gain visibility among the mass media, it lasts for a couple of hours until the media come to interview some activists and record the action. The action seems restrained. The only hint of that as a protest action is the rage expressed by some of the most chanted slogans. This chanting of slogans continues for the two hours that the protest lasts. The most repeated slogans are: “*nin casas sen xente, nin xente sen casa*” (neither houses without people, nor people without houses); “*a loita é o único camiño*” (the struggle is the only way); “*temos solución, banqueiros a prisión*” (we have the solution, bankers in prison); “*nada máis violento ca un desafiuzamento*” ([there is] nothing more violent than an eviction); “*este desahucio ímolo parar*” (we will stop this eviction); “*é a nosa crise, é o seu botín*” (it is our crisis, it is their loot). Furthermore, the protest is constantly watched by a few police officers that make sure

that the protesters do not totally block the entrance to the branch or the access to the cash machine. The protesters do not confront the police commands, and even ensure that we do not block the entrance.

Around 1 pm some journalists appear and take some pictures, record the action and make a short interview of the affected people and an activist. There are more media than the previous day, four journalists, who, as on the previous day, have been contacted beforehand by the group. They ask some questions regarding the specific situation of the affected people and the reason for the protest. The same activist as the previous day is interviewed. At 2 pm the action is called off and the people leave the square quietly without any disturbance or interaction with the bank workers or the police.

A week in Marea Atlántica

Since June 2015, A Coruña, the city where Stop Desahucios develops its activism, is ruled by Marea Atlántica, a coalition originated in the city's autonomous social movements. In spite of holding institutional power, MaT claims to be another social movement that just happens to hold the mayoralty. Their activities and the way they organise remind to certain extent of PAH and its claim that it is not subsumed by institutional politics. This is an example of a week of activities, which include activities not only organised by this platform, but also its participation in protest organised by other movements.

Entering Marea Atlántica

To enter Marea Atlántica, I decided to send an e-mail, as I assumed that attending an assembly would be restricted. I received a reply two days later—despite it being July, when many are on holiday—to set a date for a meeting with a person from the welcome group.¹ He asked me about my interests, research needs and even offered to speed up the normal process for introducing new activists—something that I refused. Afterwards, a meeting was set up with two people from the same group, to-

¹ Called *Grupo de Apertura* (Opening Group). This group not only deal with new activists, but also is the one in charge of negotiations with other groups interested in joining Marea Atlántica.

gether with other two more people interested in joining. The tone was relaxed, it took place on a terrace of a bar and included some drinks. They introduced the way MaT organises its work and the requirements for new activists—i.e. joining working groups—if they are to be considered for being part of the platform. Meanwhile, the new activists expressed our intentions, visions and reasons for joining.¹ I found this helpful to have a clearer vision of the group and to be comfortable when participating in bigger encounters, as I found some familiar faces willing to talk to me and introduce me to other activists.

After that meeting, those who welcomed me put me in contact with people from the working groups I wished to join to become a full member. In order to attend the assembly, I had to be active within the thematic or neighbourhood working group I joined (“active” means to participate in at least two meetings) and, although I could speak from the first assembly I attend, I could only vote from the second onwards. The assembly is again the main meeting around which the activities of the group gravitate. This assembly sometimes displays some of the dynamics seen in the cases of PAH Barcelona and Stop Desahucios, but there are also many differences. These are the product of many years of activism and self-learning about how to manage these kinds of gatherings, which are the main decision meetings and happen once a month.

The Marea Atlántica assembly

It is Wednesday 8 pm in the headquarters of Marea Atlántica at the heart of A Coruña’s downtown. On the second floor of the premises, around 60 people sit and chat in groups before the beginning of the assembly. The room is big (around 200m²) with big windows facing a little square and one of the streets that lead to it. The walls are naked, without any of the posters that welcome everyone entering the premises in the first floor: the defence of the public ownership of the port land; a black poster about a municipal program to fight gender violence; information

¹ What are the main motivations for joining? What are our main interests? How do we think they can help the organisation? Which working groups do we wish to join? These were common questions posed during this meeting.

about roundtables organised by MaT, etc. On this second floor only a big blue dot (the logo of the organisation) breaks the monotony of the windows. The chairs are set up in a U-shape with a big whiteboard in the open side of that U. This allows, not only adaptation to the long narrow shape of the room, but for the people addressing the assembly to move from the whiteboard towards and between the audience.

Most of the participants are men (60-40%). Furthermore, although there are some youngsters in their 20s, most people are older than 30, equally distributed between 30 and approximately 60 years old. They are all Galician or from other Spanish regions and most of them seem to be part of the middle class and with a higher education (this is a perception that was confirmed by data gathered about the activist's profile by the organisation and in the interviews). The assembly was called by the coordination group, the only group that can call it, and it is the monthly general assembly, although there have been cases of extraordinary assemblies being called to discuss a specific issue. The agenda, which cannot not be amended by any individual, but only by a formal group or a group of people, has been previously distributed via e-mail.

At 8:10 pm a person in charge of *facilitación*¹ from the group of *mediación* (arbitration) officially starts the *Rede*.² Two people from this group are in charge of facilitating and start by reading the agenda written on the whiteboard. The agenda reflects the points to be discussed, the expected time for each topic and type (debate, information or decision). Any topic must be proposed beforehand by one of the groups or the municipal government to the coordination and arbitration groups, the ones in charge of setting the agenda and the topics.

The assembly starts by deciding who will take the minutes. Afterwards, the person in charge of the *facilitación* introduces the first presenter, who will explain the topic and launch the debate. The majority of the

¹ Literally translated as "facilitation," the equivalent to PAH's *dinamización* and in charge of managing the assembly. That said, the use of word *facilitación* has different implications as instead of stressing a focus on dynamic inclusive meetings, hints more to the simple provision of the space for discussion.

² Literally translated as network, it is the name they use for the general assemblies in Marea Atlántica.

topics are proposed by the municipal government and are mainly informative to explain decisions or policies implemented. Thus, the majority of the topics revolve around the government action, which becomes the main driver of activism. This perception is confirmed by the interviewees, who stress the main goal of the activism which is winning elections and of working for assuring the implementation of government policies. Therefore, the assembly starts with an update on the creation of a **shelter for homeless people** that generated a strong controversy due to their being some opposition to the project. The topic was introduced by one of the city councillors involved in the development of the shelter. The initiative of the shelter was actually private and the municipality just offered some public land for the construction of small individual houses where the homeless could stay for short periods of time. The topic became complicated due to the mobilisation of some neighbours who attacked the municipal government for offering a plot of land in their neighbourhood. The city councillor explained the case and how the municipality tried to find a solution to accommodate all demands. The government held two meetings with neighbours, who were very aggressive to force the cancellation of the final construction of the shelter in that location. Moreover, the councillor fears that this discourse will expand to another project of a low demand homeless shelter¹ about to be opened by the municipality in the centre of the city. Therefore, to reduce the risk of “infection,” the municipality decided to speak with the private promoter of the shelter so that they could choose an alternative location. After the introduction of the topic by the councillor, the person in charge of *facilitación* opens the floor for a debate in which all speakers support the municipal government in their attempts and blame other parties (specifically the right-wing PP) for mobilising their supporters just for the sake of attacking the government.

After this debate, the person in charge of facilitating the assembly gives the floor to a new speaker to introduce the second informative point

¹ This is a shelter where the homeless can sleep, eat a meal and take a shower without needing to fulfil any specific requirement. They can also ask for advisory on diverse issues to help them abandoning homelessness or to improve their conditions. It was finally opened in the summer of 2017.

about **the case of the city's inner harbour**. This is a complicated case that would take much space to explain here, but very briefly, it refers to the privatisation of the land of the inner harbour. This waterfront land is about to be relinquished due to the construction of an outer harbour, and the port authority wants to enforce the agreements signed in 2004 in which the municipal government at that time planned to develop the land for residential and commercial purposes. The new government opposes this development and intends to keep the land public. This has started a conflict that involves multitude of actors from the port authority to the Spanish state, the Galizan regional Government, a social movement or a private company interested in purchasing part of the land. This case has been picked as example here as the biggest struggle within the municipal government and MaT since it won the elections of 2015.

Again, the councillor responsible for the negotiation makes the presentation of the current situation. The issue was discussed in more than one assembly, so the presentations provide updates on the negotiation between the different actors. The councillor speaks of the need of mobilisation in the street for the municipality to have a bigger leverage when negotiating. Some participants speak during the debate, but mainly to raise doubts about the case and to confirm their support to the municipal government. Moreover, the topic is discussed by three activists, who are not part of the municipal government, but involved in the *Comisión Aberta en Defensa do Común*¹ (henceforth *Comisión Aberta*), the social movement organisation that canalises the mobilisation for the defence of the public tenancy of the land. They provide updates on the upcoming actions and decisions of that organisation, with a whole calendar of actions and activities that will take place in the spring of 2017: a camping site in front of the Port Authority and a demonstration organised by *Comisión Aberta*; a symbolic action, also organised by *Comisión Aberta*, of covering part of the harbour land with sand in the area that used to

¹ The Open Commission in Defence of the Commons is a social movement organisation formed by the conjoining of almost 70 organisations. Among them some political parties, like *Marea Atlántica*, the social democratic PSOE and the left wing Galizan nationalist BNG. Nevertheless, only *Marea Atlántica* and BNG are really involved in the movement and were present in the protest actions implemented by the commission.

be a public beach and that now is harbour premises. MaT organised also a walk in the harbour with an explanation of the situation and the problematic.

Together with these majoritarian informative points there are also some points of debate on which a decision is expected. In these cases, the members of the municipal government lose their prominence and are substituted by other activists. A good example is the debate for redefining the organisation of MaT, introduced by one of the most active members, who represents a group of activists that set out the need for starting **a new process for redefining the organisation**. The topic has been the focus of debate for many months and shows the way the members perceive the group. As a consequence of the many problems and some complaints about the daily functioning of the organisation, the proposal is to start a process, called *Marea Viva* (High tide), mimicking the “tide” that led to the creation of MaT. The debate is framed as the need for rethinking an organisation that was created for an electoral campaign, but not for day to day management of institutional power, so it depends too much of the initiative of the municipal government. This has provoked some complaints about the lack of communication between the different working groups, the inactivity of some of them and the need for more horizontality in the normal functioning of the platform. This problematic was actually confirmed by most of my interviewees, who remarked that this is one of MaT’s main problems. As stated by one of them,

A solution is to reformulate the structure of MaT, so it becomes effectively articulated around the Rede, which would guarantee that the structure of the organisation, which right now is vertical, becomes horizontal. [The aim is] to limit the intervention capability of the members of the municipal government or those persons that are the extension of the municipal government within the organisational structure of Marea Atlántica.

This is discussed by various attendees, all of them agreeing on the need of the *Marea Viva*, implicitly approving the proposal without the need

of a vote and allowing the starting of the process. The process took a few months and finally culminated in February 2018.

The topic that generated the liveliest debate in the assembly was the formation of a coalition at Galizan regional level. After intense negotiations it was formed **En Marea**, a coalition result of the conjoining of many local platforms similar to MaT (commonly labelled as *Mareas*) and other political parties. Although political parties that joined the coalition like Anova or Podemos are part of Marea Atlántica, the negotiations were difficult and left many activists disappointed with the outcome, as they understand that the conjoining was not as democratic and transparent as it should be. Furthermore, they show disappointment with the form of the relationship as a standard coalition of parties, instead a more integrated one like MaT. These problems worsen after disputes between different factions within the coalition after the failure in the elections,¹ when those factions accused each other of trying to appropriate the party. In the most serious and bellicose atmosphere I experienced during my fieldwork in MaT, many activists complain about the way the coalition was made and especially about the way a minority group of the executive board manoeuvred to control it. Some activists talk of a coup d'état, since they took decisions which only the assembly of En Marea is legitimated to take, whereas others refer to this as “old politics” or “plumbing politics,” in reference to an opaque way of making politics typical of the traditional parties within the representative system. Very few voices defend what happened, but these are people who I have not seen active within Marea Atlántica and that most of the activists identify as part of other groups, not as *mareantes*.² In the interviews and walks & talks, I identified how the label *mareantes* was initially used to refer to the initial promoter group from the autonomous social movements, but has become dominant to overcome the differences between those members that are more engaged with MaT. As one of my interviewees from Podemos puts it,

¹ En Marea became the second party in the Galizan Parliament, but did not manage to gain enough seats to lead a coalition to beat Partido Popular, which held the power.

² This is the name people refer to the members of the organisation, especially those who are part of the more autonomous sectors, therefore, not belonging to any of the parties.

I think that within the Marea [the groups] function very well as a team, that they forget that to work together [...] Nobody ever inquired about my affiliation to any party because I was part of Podemos [...] Marea is a place where various political spaces coexist, each having its own interests and that can generate certain tensions, but it exists a *supra*.

Another interviewee from the autonomist group, therefore a *mareante*, although acknowledging that capability for generating a common identity, reflected how still

Differences exist between the more *mareante* people and people from the parties. There are differences in how they understand MaT, in how it should be and internally there exists that autonomous group [...] who has a certain hegemony, in number and form. It is labelled as citizenish,¹ although this is not openly discussed. In the end, the good thing is that we did not enter that logic, but there are people from the different parties and people that are from MaT and this in the end is hegemonic because it [the citizenish] managed to control the common sense of what MaT is, how MaT should be, with the issue of democratic participation, inherited from the movement, more present than from other actors. [These differences] become more obvious when we jumped scales, the process of En Marea.

Despite the tension that traverses the debate in the assembly and that responds in general to this cleavage, the tone is respectful, fair and handled in a quite balanced way by the person in charge of *facilitación*, who, in opposition to PAH Barcelona, does not get involved in any of the conversations. In general, most of the activists show their disappointment with the direction of En Marea, although no decision is taken regarding that. The debates will expand to the Telegram groups, in

¹ The interviewee used the word “*ciudadanista*.” This word is not included in the official Spanish dictionary and has no direct translation in English, so it is my own translation. It relates to citizen and the interviewee used it to refer to a group of people that focus their political action on the local level.

which activists expressed themselves more freely, always depending on who is in each of the groups. In general, the discussions in Telegram and five of my interviewees expand on the disappointment with En Marea by questioning if “it is still useful” or a new coalition should be created.

The assembly finishes around 9:45 pm, when all the members fold the chairs and leave the building, in many cases to keep chatting in smaller groups in the bars around the headquarters.

Meeting of the discourse working group

On Thursday, a meeting of the discourse group takes place in the headquarters of Marea Atlántica. It is 8 pm and six people, four of them men, sit around a small table in a corner of the second floor of the headquarters. Most of the participants are in their late 20s or early 30s, although there are a couple of older men in around their 40s who are very outspoken and whose opinion seem to be extremely valued. The meeting is also attended by one councillor, who is part of the group, although she is unable to come to many of the meetings as she is usually busy with activities linked to her position as councillor. At other table in the same big room, a dozen members of the *marea* of feminism¹ have one of their periodic meetings. This is one of the most active and numerous groups within MaT.

The agenda is formally decided at the beginning of the meeting, although the topics have been extensively discussed via the group’s Telegram. The Telegram is also used to agree on the time and day of the meeting, because, although the group tries to meet every second week, the day changes depending of the availability of the members. Besides, it is first at the meeting that it is decided who is in charge of the meeting.

The agenda includes diverse topics, but most of them focus on practical work that must be done by the group. Moreover, as these working groups are responsive to some situations that affect the platform,² the

¹ Name given to the thematic and neighbourhood working groups.

² For example, to create discourse to respond to accusations launched by opponents.

political debates or opinions about political, economic or social issues are mainly done via the Telegram, to prepare the response that will be agreed during the meeting. The today's agenda focuses on a **workshop** to be organised by the group. The idea of holding workshops to debate about different political issues has been discussed at many meetings, but until now it has been impossible to organise them. Finally, a workshop about civil disobedience will be organised to take place on a Wednesday evening in a couple of weeks in the headquarters. It will be open to everyone. It is decided that one of the members of the group would facilitate the conversation and that an expert on the topic would give a short introduction to launch the discussion about what civil disobedience means, how to implement it, and how it can be intersected with institutional politics. The workshop finally took place as scheduled, with around 25 participants, most of them *mareantes*, who discussed about the meaning and the possibilities of civil disobedience. Although the intention was to make these workshops a monthly activity, this could not be fulfilled, and so they are organised more sporadically. The workshop about the problematic of the privatisation of the port land gathered the most people. It is decided that the main outcomes of the workshops will be placed in a short report, which will be presented in the assembly, to give more visibility to the workshops and for the sake of accountability.

As group in charge of the creation of discourse, we became involved in the **production of short texts for a small online local newspaper**. A person in charge of the newspaper contacted one of the members and asked if MaT would like to contribute short texts (of about 400 words) about any topic we decide on a periodic basis. This idea did not come from coordination or the assembly, but directly from the group. It was decided to write the texts, since, although the newspaper is small and has a limited impact, the other parties write periodically there too, so it is necessary to be visible. The topics will be discussed individually for every text according to what is relevant at each time. One person will be responsible for writing the text, which will be revised by the rest of the group. The aim of the article would be to generate discourse about topics that call the attention of the public opinion, such as the problematic

with the shelter for homeless people or the privatisation of the port land. In all cases, although the articles have these specific topics as starting points, these are framed within a more general and abstract perspective, in these two examples about inequality and segregation the first one, and about land speculation and urban commodification the second.

The person leading the meeting introduces the last point, which will be the internal dynamics and concretely the **need of increasing the visibility of the MaT separated from the municipal government**. All participants consider that MaT needs to be more separated from the municipal government, which in the end is the one establishing the agenda and the political direction of activism. All agree that this is a normal consequence of participating in institutional politics, but that is necessary to try to resist this tendency. Nevertheless, all participants admit that this is just an incipient debate and the possibilities would depend from the outcome of the *Marea Viva*, which all of them find necessary. In the end, no formal decision is taken, and this worked mainly as a point for starting to rethink the functioning of the platform and its role. This becomes a main challenge mentioned not only in this group and in the assembly, but also by all my interviewees, as exemplified by the following quote:

Challenges for MaT, [...] to have its own voice. I think that MaT lacks a clear voice, I mean spokespeople [...] independent from the municipal government. It would generate conflicts, but it would solve the question of what the function of MaT is, because suddenly we need to create discourse, suddenly the mareas would have something to work on and for someone.

It is now 9:30 pm and after leaving the headquarters almost all of us go to one of the bars close by for a couple of drinks and keep chatting about these and other issues. The bonds within the group are generally strong, especially among the youngsters, who are the ones that more often keep discussing in the bar. Usually the tone of the debate has been respectful and in a relaxed atmosphere.

Camping in front of the port authority

As a consequence of participation in institutional politics, the repertoire of collective action (Tilly, 2005) used by MaT does not include disruptive actions that can escalate tension. Thus, although MaT keep mobilisation outside the institutional field, this is canalised by participating in other movements in which to dilute their activism. The camping to demand the free restitution of the port land organised by Comisión Aberta is a good example.



Figure 9 Camping site for the free restitution of the harbour land in A Coruña.

It is a sunny warm Friday evening of late April 2017. The square in front of the port authority of the city of A Coruña is occupied by around 25 camping tents and around 100 people. The atmosphere is calm and festive (see figures 9 and 10). The activists have been there since 7 pm and will stay until 2 pm the next day. The people sit in their tents, chat around them, some are sitting down in foldable chairs or simply standing up. The action, which has been organised by the Comisión Aberta, demands the free restitution of the land taken up by the inner harbour of the city. During the action different events will take place: a speech by members of the Comisión Aberta; concerts of Galician folk music; a poetry reading; or an informative walk led by a university professor from the camping site to the land to be relinquish.

The camp reflects the diversity of Comisión Aberta and during the almost 24 hours that the camping site will be there, hundreds of people stop by to support and chat with those setting up the tents. Among these, many members of Marea Atlántica, not only activists, but also members of the municipal government show their support for the activists' demands. Furthermore, the municipality of MaT has provided a connection for electricity for lighting and for speakers. Nevertheless, there is no sign of MaT or any of the groups that support the claims by the Comisión Aberta. The camping site is dominated by a big banner demanding free restitution, whereas some of the tents have bits of paper or cardboard hanging on them. Written on these are demands aimed against speculation and for the free restitution not only of the harbour land but also of the old prison and other public land. Furthermore, between the tents there is also a pavilion under which supporters can sign a manifesto in favour of the free restitution.



Figure 10 Camping site for the free restitution of the harbour land in A Coruña.

The atmosphere is relaxed and of certain joy, which is reinforced during the concert and the poetry reading. There is no presence of police and the action is carried out without any kind of tension or aggressiveness. Finally, they broke camp as planned, on Saturday at 2 pm, after a short speech by one of the representatives of the Comisión Aberta demanding the free restitution of the port land.

Demonstration in defence of the free restitution of the port land to the municipality

A demonstration was organised as the culmination of the campaign launched by the Comisión Aberta. In a sunny warm Sunday of May around 4000 people gather at noon in a square in the city of A Coruña. We are getting ready to start a two-kilometres walk that will take us to the building of the port authority in the heart of the city. After a couple of months of protest actions that included camping sites and rallies, the group calls for a big demonstration to show their support for the free restitution of the land to the municipality. Thus, the around 70 groups

that form and support the Comisión Aberta are called to participate in the demonstration. One of them is Marea Atlántica, who have actively participated in the meetings for preparing the actions, which were attended by activists without any institutional responsibility.

In the square, many social movement organisations (including also Stop Desahucios Coruña) that want to show their support for the demand meet. The square is full of colour, provided by different flags of the different groups, as well as nationalist Galician flags and some banners. The atmosphere is optimistic, of joy and happiness, as many people say they are pleased to see so many people. Of all the groups, one calls particular attention: seen from above a big blue stain walks close to the front of the demonstration. A big cardboard blue boat carried by four people with the slogan “*Gañemos o Porto*” (let’s win the harbour) is surrounded by dozens of white and blue paper hats in the shape of a boat. These are the Marea Atlántica activists (including members of the municipal government) who have worked the whole night recycling old posters and campaign material to create the boat and to make hats that protect people from the sun. They become the more visible part of the demonstration, to which they provide the sense of a festivity by singing and making a lot of noise. By contrast, Stop Desahucios, for example, just gathered around 10 people walking silently behind its banner at the end of the demonstration.

After covering the two-kilometres distance singing, chanting slogans and dancing, the demonstration ends two hours later at the port authority, where a manifesto in defence of the free restitution was read by members of the Comisión Aberta, while some of the groups supporting the demand hold their banners (see figure 11). Finally, the demonstration is called off, without any confrontation and in a quite festive atmosphere.



Figure 11 End of the demonstration demanding the free restitution of the port land to the Municipality of A Coruña. Members of MaT on the left side of the picture with the blue paper boat.

A week in Barcelona en Comú

We move back now to Barcelona, where another municipal platform, Barcelona en Comú, similar to Marea Atlántica, rules the municipal government (also since 2105).

Entering Barcelona en Comú

I arrived in Barcelona to research this organisation and PAH Barcelona in September 2017, after doing fieldwork in A Coruña. Thanks to my participation within MaT, the councillor who was part of the discourse group got me in contact with a member of Barcelona en Comú, who turned out to be employed full-time by the platform. I contacted him a couple of days before I arrived in Barcelona and he called me for a meeting in the BeC headquarters in the centre of the city ten days later. He was extremely busy, so we met during his lunch break. I arrived

there and asked after him at the reception. The premises are divided into two spacious floors, without much decoration apart from certain leaflets and brochures, including one about the plan “Barcelona, refuge city,” an initiative to make up for the inactivity of the state government to receive refugees that were scaping the civil war in Syria¹ (Barcelona en Comú, 2015a). The person at the reception told me to go upstairs and wait for him as he was still in a meeting. When I went upstairs, I saw a big room with a few working stations and some people working at them. This was nothing like what I experienced in MaT, as everything seemed more professionalised, which was confirmed when I later found out that up to a total of 10 activists were working full or part-time in different managerial positions such as logistics, organisation’s secretariat or international relations. Nevertheless, nobody ever explained nor I could ever find anywhere a clear definition of the duties and positions within the platform of each of these workers.

When my contact arrived, I explained my research and my plans, and that I would like to join as any other activist, as I had done in MaT. He explained briefly how BeC is organised and showed me a diagram of the groups within the platform (diagram 6). This diagram was being discussed around the time I was doing fieldwork in a process called Phase D, the last of the consecutive phases for developing the organisation implemented until then, which aimed to strength and provide stability to the organisation. As shown in the diagram, the platform is organised in successive concentric circles that go from El Comú, which includes all those registered as members, to the coordination group formed by 40 members elected to represent different groups and which includes an executive board. This executive board was mainly in charge of operative duties and of implementing the decisions taken by the coordination group. The diagram was a bit confusing for me, with many intersections and constant overlaps, but I quickly got the idea that the coordination group was the main decision-making body on a daily basis, as they usually meet every second week. It includes the eight members of the executive, 10 members from the municipal government, three representatives

¹ In 2016 the initiative was expanded by the creation together with Athens, Amsterdam or Berlin of a network for the transferring of refugees between cities independently from the states’ policies.

of technical *comisiones*, six from thematic *ejes*¹ and two from each of the districts (Barcelona en Comú, 2018).

At the meeting I ask my contact about the possibility of joining a *comisión*, specifically the international *comisión*, since he belongs to it and I am a researcher from abroad. He says it should be fine and that he would let me know when the next meeting takes place.

He contacts me again one week later to inform me about the next meeting. I arrive at 7 pm at the headquarters to attend the meeting. This takes place in a small room, where eight people, including my gatekeeper, sit around a table. As he does not introduce me and I feel some curiosity about who I am, I introduce myself and I explain what is the aim of my fieldwork. Immediately one individual directly says “I don’t think this is the best place for you to do research.” I explain why I think that would benefit my research and my intention of working as another activist, while my contact remains silent checking his phone. As nobody else speaks or openly says that I should leave, I stay. Five minutes later, the person who questioned my being there packs her stuff and leaves, while I stay for the rest of the meeting, although I am mainly passive. At the end of the meeting I leave the room with my contact who addresses me with a shocking “so, it was ok, right?”

The day after the meeting I receive an e-mail from a corporative e-mail address but written by my contact informing me that I cannot attend more of the group’s meetings and that I need to fill and sign a “protocol” for researchers that they are preparing.² He justifies this by saying they have had bad experiences with previous researchers and, although this “protocol” is not totally ready yet, I should fill it out for them to validate and decide where is the best place for me to do research. This document included questions about my research and what I think I can provide to the platform. All the questions are framed to avoid sensitive in-

¹ Translated as axes, it is used to refer to the main theme around which the discussions and activities of each working group rotate (e.g. feminism, education, culture, urbanism, etc.).

² At the meeting with my contact he did not mention any protocol or any other requirement of the sort, so it is clear that, in the case they were working on this protocol, they rushed it to use it.

formation getting outside the organisation. I fill in, sign and return the document that same day and, although I asked about it up to three times, it took one month and a half before I finally got feedback. Two of the times, I got a reply from the same person that had left the International *comisión* meeting, who said that the turmoil about Catalanian independence was making it difficult to pay attention to something else and that, anyway, I could not come back to the International *comisión* as this was not the best place for doing research.

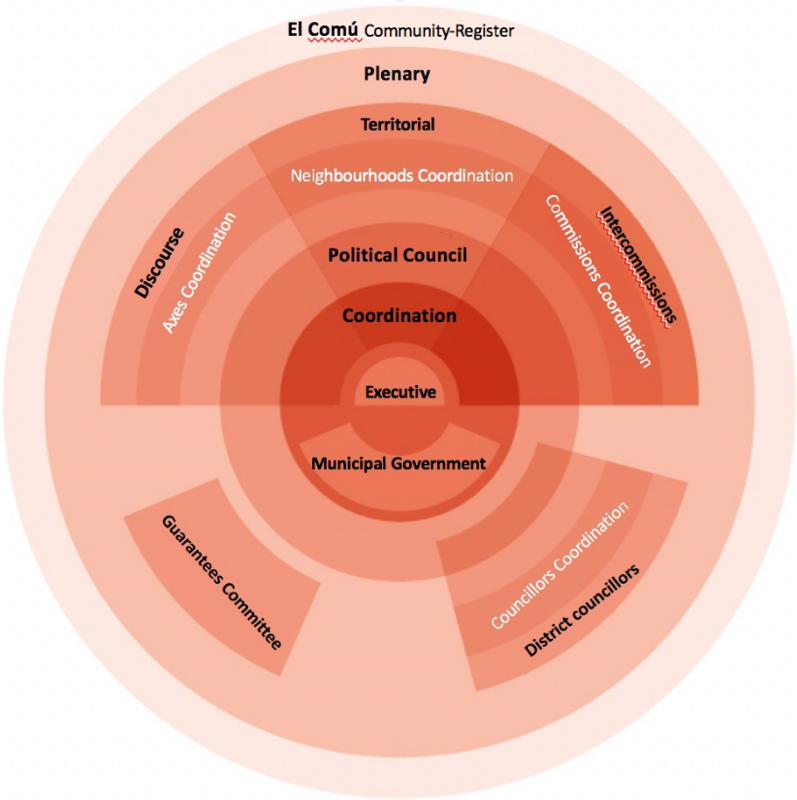


Diagram 6 Organisation of Barcelona en Comú. Source: Barcelona en Comú (2018), my translation.

This meant that I could not attend almost any official internal meetings or any general assembly, since only one took place in almost four months. Similar to MaT, the low frequency of the assemblies is due to

the fact that, despite the official requirement of a meeting every three months as laid down in the BeC's regulations, the exact dates are not set. The dates are decided by coordination (or 20% of the registered activists), which also decides the agenda after considering the inputs from other *comisiones*¹ and, especially, inputs from the municipal government. The only assembly took place in November and I was unable to attend because I was not registered as an active member, since I could not join any working group. This in turn was because I was still waiting approval in relation to the protocol.

Finally, a different person, the organisation's secretary, contacted me to have a meeting to advance my fieldwork. The secretary asked me about my interests and gave me a list of persons to interview and meetings to attend, as she thought they would be relevant. Two weeks after the meeting she provided me with a list of contacts to interview and meetings to attend, including a coordination meeting. Nevertheless, this was almost when my planned time for fieldwork in Barcelona was over, so I had to come back again in the spring of 2018 to conduct the last interviews and attend the coordination meeting.

This scrutiny was far different from my experiences with other groups, making it almost impossible to establish some levels of trust, despite being the only organisation in which I had a contact to gain access (Silverman, 2014, p. 248). Thus, while when I approached the organisations without any gatekeeper I did not face big barriers, I found the biggest resistance in the one that had one, proving Campbell et al. (2006) argument that the relationship with the gatekeepers is not unidirectional and more complex than usually assumed. Whereas in MaT and PAH Barcelona, I found myself warmly welcomed and did not experience much suspicion, I found more difficulties in Stop Desahucios Coruña, where, despite being accepted, I sensed constant scrutiny, although nothing close to BeC.

¹ Label used as in PAH to refer to thematic working groups of activists.

Nevertheless, while I was waiting for this process to finish, I worked other channels in order to continue my fieldwork. The organisation is divided into working and neighbourhood groups, based on a thematic logic the former and on a territorial one the latter. Since I found the way to the *comisiones* blocked from above, I focused on the neighbourhood groups and, through a personal contact with a member of BeC, I was able to attend other meetings and two assemblies in one of the neighbourhoods, namely Ciutat Vella (the Old Town). This assembly can be used to exemplify the standard functioning of an assembly within the organisation. I am aware that this assembly is different to a *Plenary*,¹ but I also believe that it replicates many of the dynamics within the general plenaries, as, on paper, the latter is the main body within the organisation, so the one that sets the example for the rest of the groups.

Assembly of the district of Ciutat Vella

These meetings are set to take place every second week, although due to the turmoil connected to the Catalanian independence process in the Autumn of 2017, this varied as a reaction to the turbulences in the political environment. In an autonomous social centre in the old town of the city, a group of around 15 people of different ages—but mainly older than 45—and of Spanish origin, chat in small groups. All of them are part of the middle class and in most cases have some sort of higher education. In fact, the difficulties of attracting people within the working class was mentioned by many interviewees as one of the weaknesses of the platform. It is 7 pm and in the room there is no reference to Barcelona en Comú or the municipality. The attendees distribute themselves in chairs around a long table, with a slight majority of women. The assembly starts by one person offering to lead it and another one for taking the minutes. The language is Catalanian and the agenda has been previously distributed via Telegram, so everyone is aware of the topics to be discussed.

After the distribution of roles, the different topics are introduced. This is mainly done by people who hold some kind of responsibility at the dis-

¹ Label used for the general assembly of Barcelona en Comú.

trict level (from elected representatives to advisers).¹ As is the case with MaT, the agenda is strongly determined by government action, which, as some interviewees stated, often determines the discussions and the activities of the organisation. As one interviewee mentioned,

As a municipal government they have to take their decisions, but as an organisation there are many decisions that they take, with which we would disagree [...] We should have more independence between the municipal government and the organisation

The centrality of the government action seems to be a continuation of the urgency to win the municipal government, which requires joining multiple ideologies. One of the interviewees explained that,

In July 2014 and in May 2015 we wanted to win Barcelona's mayoralty. A goal, and this is like, the whole citizenry has to row, because that first call was to political parties, movements, associations, people that are on their couches. Let's become united, because if we get together, we can win.

In relation to the topic within the agenda I found most relevant, the representatives of the district were seated at one end of the table and read point by point the whole **agenda of the upcoming district plenary** to explain the position of the party and its arguments. Furthermore, they also refer to the position of other groups within the district as well as to possible negotiations to reach an agreement. The explanation of each point is followed by a discussion in which the attendees can state their position, propose any amendments or pose possible alternatives. The debate is animated and most of the people give their opinion on almost any point, aligning in all of them with the decisions taken by the district representatives. As this is a debate about how to vote regarding different topics, there are only three possible options: yes, no, abstention, and despite small discrepancies, they support the proposals made by the repre-

¹ Actually, one of them was one of the civil servants personally negotiating with PAH Barcelona during the occupation of the social services office.

sentatives in every point. The inputs are mainly used to solve the doubts the activists may have about each point and for the activists to offer arguments to reinforce the party's positions in the district plenary.

Another topic that provoked considerable debate was the **position of BeC regarding the independence process and the repression that occurred on 1st October 2018**. This was by far the biggest topic of debate during the time I was doing fieldwork and, in fact, it was one of the points previously discussed on the agenda, in which the district government would vote yes to a motion against the suspension of the Catalan autonomy approved by the Spanish central government. The debate about this topic generated also great tensions between BeC and PSOE, due to the support of PSOE for the suspension of the autonomy. PSOE had entered the minority municipal government of BeC in the previous year to provide it with more stability, but their position after the events of October generated a heated debate within BeC about the convenience of keeping or dissolving the government pact. There were extensive discussions within the assemblies about the possibility of breaking, or not, the government pact with PSOE. The debate was animated, with all 15 attendees giving their opinions and stating their positions regarding the topic in a rather respectful manner. The majority position was for breaking the government pact, although the participants showed their doubts and many defended the need to keeping the agreement. Nevertheless, no decision was formally taken, as this could not be done at district level, so this functioned more as a space for debate than as a space to take a decision. Moreover, the final decision of breaking the pact was taken in the plenary I could not attend and through a voting process, so the discussions at district level had no impact. This was also one of the complaints from one of my interviewees. A former member of the coordination, who was a representative of a territorial group, claimed that the information and decisions travel up-down and hardly down-up.

In addition to these debates, the general debates in the assembly spun around the main problematics within the neighbourhood (e.g. the increase in the drug consumption in the streets is one of the most repeated), in which the attendees exchange opinions and information about

specific situations. The problem of the **evictions and the problematic of empty apartments that are occupied for drug dealing** is extensively discussed. Many participants express the fact that the general atmosphere is one of disappointment and that there is a majority in the neighbourhood that demand solutions to the municipal government. The district representative acknowledges the problem, but admits that they are overwhelmed, since the municipality has not enough police officers and depends on the regional police, who are not doing much. The district representative frames this as a need to stop evictions and of reducing the number of empty apartments (a consequence of the housing speculation and the housing crisis). In fact, she is a former member of PAH Barcelona, and participates in stopping some of the evictions. The attendees understand the problematic, but admit that this may have electoral costs in the neighbourhood if measures are not taken. Concurrently, a couple of attendees notify the assembly that some evictions will take place, which they will attend to try to stop them. Furthermore, the assembly is informed of some protest actions against the occupation of flats by some drug dealers. Although there are some differences between the participants on the causes and possible solutions to the issue, the topic is generally framed as a consequence of the housing problem. The debate is lively and in general in a respectful tone.

The assembly lasts until 9 pm and when it is officially finished most of the participants stay in the room exchanging opinions about the negotiations for the creation of a new coalition, Catalunya en Comú-Podem, to compete in the regional elections to take place in December 2017. BeC is in negotiations with other groups and political parties (Podemos, ICV and Esquerra Unida) to replicate the municipal platform for these elections. Although the process was not officially discussed in any of the encounters I participated, it was informally debated at every gathering since the moment the elections were called. The main reason is that, despite those groups being part of BeC, the negotiations have been difficult and most of the people in the room show their disappointment with the way the negotiations are being handled, for not being transparent and for giving up the horizontality. Most of the people complaining de-

clare their intention of not cooperating in the campaign and their disappointment, and in fact the assembly decided not to cooperate as a collective, but to allow any individual to do whatever they decide. Weeks later, I witness this disappointment in the lack of involvement by the majority of members of BeC, especially the ones that identify themselves as part of what the interviewees refer as Guanyemers,¹ who used the bad electoral results as support for their argument for focusing on local politics.² In fact, one of my interviewees, who joined Podemos and BeC at the same time, mentioned,

Podemos is strongly involved in the campaign, like their lives depend on it. They decided to converge, so they give it all. And I noticed that the people of Guanyem are the ones more demotivated to participate, because the coalition process did not replicate the one that created BeC but it was done more old school, from above, with closed lists, without a participation process.

This distinction between Guanyemers and activists from other groups was mentioned by all my interviewees and even one of the members from the Esquerra Unida expressed how at the beginning of the convergence that created BeC

At least in my case, I sensed that for a period of time we are on probation. The ones that were part of political spaces were still perceived as part of those spaces.

The one discussed here is an example of one district assembly, although, as mentioned by many interviewees, the way the assembly works varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. The one in Ciutat Vella is considered an average assembly, not very active, but more than many others that have little activity.

¹ Activists part of the initial nucleus of Barcelona en Comú originated in the social movements—specially PAH Barcelona—or who have been accepted in this groups thanks to their valuable work for the platform. This is used to distinguish them from those that come from political parties, which they associate to less horizontal and more institutionalised political cultures.

² The coalition had unexpectedly bad results, gaining only 8 mandates out of 135.

Municilab

On a bright Friday morning of October, the campus of the University Pompeu Fabra located in the centre of Barcelona opens its doors for a two-day workshop about municipalism organised by Barcelona en Comú: Municilab. The workshop is made up of many individual workshops, panels, debates and seminars about different issues related to municipalism grouped in main blocks: municipalism; democratic radicalism; commons; right to housing. In addition to these main activities, organised by BeC, there are parallel activities organised by other social movements on different topics such as water as a common good or the creation of a legal framework for the commons. In general, most of the topics are discussed in abstract terms, without explicitly referring to specific issues, but about how the different topics can be formulated, re-defined and pushed forward. The common thread of most of the workshops and talks is commons as an alternative way to produce everyday life and the urban environment. These helped to expand the participants further than the members of BeC, who were the majority of the speakers and attendees. Furthermore, there is participation of representatives from other municipal platforms, among them Marea Atlántica. In general, attendees have a profile of activists belonging or close to BeC, and academics who are interested not only in the topics, but also in the platform. Most of the workshops are organised as seminars with experts, who provide the ground for a final debate. In most cases, it reproduces an academic environment, mainly taking the form of lectures.

The aim of the workshop is not only to deepen the debates and discuss the implications of municipalism, but also to create and expand the networks with other alternative political initiatives at the local level. There have been attempts to implement this such as initiatives like Fearless Cities and the creation of a network of Rebel Cities or Cities of Change,¹ although, as they admitted during the Municilab, the network is still weak and needs more development.

¹ See chapter 2.

Each of the days ends with an open keynote, in which well know activists converse about issues like commons and the intersection between the defence and the expansion of the commons with a strengthen municipalism. On the Friday night, one of the keynote speakers is the Mayor-ess of Barcelona, Ada Colau, and the colloquium gathers around 300 people in the main patio of the university building. On Saturday, the number of attendees is smaller, around 150, and the workshop closes with a concert.

Coordination meeting

In March 2018 I finally could attend a meeting of the coordination which was part of the agreement I reached with the secretary. On a Monday at 6:45 pm, on the second floor of the headquarters of BeC, around 25 people sit facing a wall over which some images are being projected. There is a 50-50 split of men and women, and a majority of people in their 30s and 40s. All participants are in the meeting as representatives of a specific group, of the municipal government or as employed by BeC for specific tasks. The meeting reproduces the homogeneity of the platform in class and education, even including some academics. Furthermore, although coordination includes representatives from the neighbourhood groups, the majority of the attendees are representatives from the municipal government, the executive board and those employed by the platform. The majority of the participants were *Guanyemers*. The meeting is handled by the organisation secretary and another person, who describe the agenda and give the floor. I see some people that I know, a few that I interviewed and four people I have seen at the meeting of the *comisión* International I attended.

The agenda is organised around different points that on this occasion are only debates. The first one is about the **dynamics of the relations with other government levels** and the possibility of combining positions in more than in one level. This generates some conflicts and tensions that the different people speaking in the meeting relate to diverse issues. The debate is quite vague and difficult to follow if you are not into the discussions and dynamics of the groups, as confirmed by one of the interviewees who was part of the coordination for a while as representative

of neighbourhood groups. No decision was taken, as this seemed to be a mere exchange of opinion about possible issues regarding moving between scales.

The second point focused on the **introduction of a new person who will be responsible for cultural activities within the municipality**. The person introduces his views on the direction that the promotion of culture should take in the remaining time of the present government until the next elections of May 2019. He talks of the importance of finding the balance between the production of cultural activities by the municipality and accompanying the cultural initiatives launched by non-institutional groups, while avoiding to give priority to big events like music festivals, which would get from now conditional support. After the presentation starts a round of questions and comments in which the participants launch some proposals like some cinema run by the municipality or the possibility of rebuilding alliances with groups from the cultural sector that have been lost. All these are replied to by the presenter and accepted as inputs to be considered. The tone is serious and respectful, without much debate. After 30 minutes, the secretary closes the debate and moves to the next point.

One of the councillors in the municipal government takes the floor and starts explaining the **plans of the government for the upcoming month**. She talks of three main battles: the expansion of the tram line; the creation of a public funeral parlour; and the re-municipalisation of water. She explains the possibilities of passing the different proposals and the position of the different groups within the City Hall towards them. Concretely she speaks of the difficulties of gathering support from certain groups that are more worried about the national scale and vote according to the perception they have of what would benefit them the most at that scale. There are some questions, but these are more clarifications of some of the issues than a real discussion. The topic is closed by the secretary and we move to the last point.

Two people in charge of international coordination, one of them, my contact, introduces **the project for creating a municipal network**. As a preparation for the 2019 election campaign, they would like to intensify and reinforce the contacts between the different municipal alternatives developed across the country. They think that other cities take advantage of what is done in Barcelona, while the problems in other cities are used by the media, other parties, etc, to attack BeC. This must be tackled and they think that the creation of more municipal alternatives and the reinforcement of the existent ones is the key. The idea is not the creation of an umbrella organisation, but of a network that launches specific projects that generate confidence, creating, for example, working groups that conjoin different platforms to discuss possible projects and to share knowledge. The goal is to create a brand of a “municipal candidacy” that gives a sense of more unity of the different platforms and also to put in common and generalise topics like commons, re-municipalisations or to fight housing commodification. This has been already sketched with the label of “Cities of Change” used for those cities already governed by these kinds of candidacies, but the idea is to expand it now for the campaign. He asks for ideas and people start making suggestions, such as creating a “municipal bus” that goes to smaller cities and towns spreading the idea. Nevertheless, some people see this as a risky idea, as it may be perceived as patronising and arrogant. Most of the speakers talk of the need of spreading the experiences and victories achieved by BeC. Few people claim that the rest of the cities “look at BeC as an example, demanding them to be leaders and the vanguard of the municipal movement,” so they have to offer them examples on what to do.

It is now 8:30 pm, and the secretary closes the topic, as this was a first presentation and the project must be developed in upcoming meetings. The meeting is finished and some people stay still at the headquarters, while the most leave in groups.

This chapter has described how the four social movement’s groups researched in this thesis develop their everyday activism. The common thread has been the encounters and the spaces that these different encounters create, as well as the intersections between these and between

the groups. Although all these encounters are qualitatively different, in all of them certain dynamics and mechanisms influence the formation of the agency and the shape of the activism. These descriptions offer the ground for analysing how those dynamics affect the production of spaces with the potentiality to resist capitalism. Such analysis will be focus of the next chapter.

6. PRODUCING SPACES OF ACTIVISM: HETEROGENEITY, SMOOTHING AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE WAR MACHINE

The previous chapter described the everyday activism of four social movement groups—PAH Barcelona, Stop Desahucios Coruña, Marea Atlántica and Barcelona en Comú. Taking that description as the starting point, this chapter excavates how they produce different spaces and how they deal with heterogeneity to resist homogenising representations of space. To achieve this, I shall discuss some of the episodes described above through the lens of the theoretical framework developed in chapter three. One must remember that, in line with that theoretical framework, I consider the different episodes as encounters, as events produced by the intersection of multiple actors and dynamics. The relations established between those actors and dynamics within the encounters generate different spatial arrangements from which individual and collective agency emerge. Furthermore, I analyse all these encounters as being interrelated, having their similarities but also differences in relation to past encounters (Anderson, 2014, p. 82). This produces a limited continuity.

Among the episodes that shape the various weeks of activism described above, I shall focus specifically on two kinds of encounters: occupations of space performed by the groups and assemblies open to all the members of the groups. As each of these encounters responds to diverse con-

texts and configurations, a deep analysis enables us to research the dynamics that influence the activism under different conditions. By comparing these dynamics and their outcomes, I aim to understand how the different spaces are produced and their capability to produce resistance and alternatives to capitalist representations of the urban space. In the final section of the chapter, I shall use this analysis to return to the theoretical discussions developed in chapter three about the production of spaces and the articulation of the heterogeneity in relation to the challenges of militant particularism.

I start the analysis of these episodes by examining the example of occupations performed by the groups in their activism. As discussed in chapter three, I see occupation as a possible tactic for resistance and the production of alternative forms of space, so these encounters help to investigate the potentiality of such a tactic.

Occupations

The previous chapter has shown the relevance of occupation as one of the main tactics used by the social movements, specially the nodes of PAH, as most of their protests implied the occupation of certain places. Despite their different capabilities, both nodes constantly try to perform some sort of occupation of sites that are usually restricted within the activists' everyday lives. Concretely, in this section, I focus on the occupations of bank branches by the two nodes of PAH, the occupation of the social services office by PAH Barcelona and the stopping of an eviction in Barcelona as occupation of public space.¹ These sites are all directly related to the condition of the activists as debtors and the control that tries to assure that they honour their debts. All these places impose certain limitations on the affected people which provides good examples to analyse how the production of space can be disputed through occupations.

¹ One must remember that stopping the eviction takes usually place in the street, to prevent the entry of the court representative to the front door of the house or building.

Those restrictions do not mean a total prohibition of entering those sites, but the imposition of certain constraints for accessing and staying. In most cases, although individual access is allowed, this is done under certain conditions and usually forbidden for groups of more than two or three bodies. The best examples are the bank or social services, where the debtor can gain access usually by appointment and to discuss a specific issue under the conditions established solely by the institutions that manage those sites. Initially, the occupations perform a redefinition of these spaces, in which certain codes and rules regarding who, how and when these spaces can be entered and used become subverted.

This subversion of codes and rules entails an attempt to challenge the capitalist spatial striation. The occupied sites are examples of that striation that delimit a closed space, to subsequently divide it through codes that situate the bodies in different segments according to specific essential identities (Genosko and Bryx, 2005, p. 114). All the occupied sites have clear rules that determine not only how the bodies can enter but, what is even more important here, how they relate to each other within them. For example, the banks or social services are divided into waiting areas, receptions and offices that are clearly delimited and through which all the debtors have to go to have an encounter. While the waiting areas are the spaces of the debtors, of the affected people who are in the weakest position, the offices are the ones of the creditors, of the civil servants, of those with power over the lives of the debtors. This striation is the product of an abstract representation of space—one of the moments within Lefebvre's (1991) triad—that has segmented the space assigning certain essences to each of them, as the dividing line between the debtor and the creditor or civil servants is strictly drawn. The occupation challenges that segmentation by forcing access to the offices when the debtor wants, but also by rebalancing the affective capability of the bodies within the relationship. In the striated space of the bank or social services are the bank clerks or the civil servants who perform a strong capability to affect and the debtor exclusively adapts to them. The bank clerks and the civil servants emerge as the main agents of striation by calling the debtor when they want, make them wait—increasing their anxiety—and receive them in their offices under their conditions.

Through the occupations the debtor attempts to balance that capability by subverting those codes as the debtor moves freely within the site.

The challenge to the striation starts already with accessing the bank when the activists decide and without being expected. The instructions shared among the activists of PAH Barcelona before the occupation of the bank to approach the branch through side streets and with their t-shirts hidden to avoid being noticed is a good example of the challenges that this produces. The activists are aware that if this is not performed as planned, it will be impossible to access the bank. Once access is acquired, the smoothing is performed by challenging those divisions that fix the different bodies in each location. The recombination of bodies, not only of activists, but specially of those of the debtor and the creditor—or the civil servants—changes the affective relationship and generates new flows that traverse those bodies. That said, the segmentation is maintained—in the end the debtor is still the debtor—but now the definitory essence associated with each of them becomes questioned. The threat that the activists will not leave the bank, the street or the social services offices without a solution or a written compromise of dialogue totally challenge the striation. In other words, the affected people take control of the production of the space. Against the representation of these as passing-by places, the occupations transform them into places where to stay and permanently return until their cases become solved by those who created them in the first place.

Occupations and the challenge of the social machine

As these challenges emerge, the attempts at re-striating those spaces directly involve the social machine. The state becomes the main enforcer to sustain the striations that fix the bodies within the different segments (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 385). The bank occupations are the best examples, as the police intervene to try to restore the division through coercive measures with two different outcomes. In the case of Stop Desahucios, this is achieved by totally closing the space thus denying the activists access, who then submit to the police. In the case of PAH Barcelona this is done by trying to identify the organisers of the protest.

PAH Barcelona manages to avoid that striation by opposing the groups' diversity to the attempts of unification by the police when they claim that there are no leaders and that they will have to identify all 55 activists. This approach reinforces the awareness of the heterogeneity of a group of 55 different individuals against the unification the police needed in order to repress it. This resistance to the police is possible thanks to the legitimacy PAH has acquired after many years of struggle. Stop Desahucios, as part of PAH, could enjoy similar levels of legitimacy, but this is not mobilised at any time. Furthermore, the total freedom of the activists to move around the bank's branch and to come into contact with anybody challenges the location of the bodies in fix places.¹ The confrontation shows the problems of the social machine to deal with a heterogenous fluid movement, so it tries to establish a certain unity by finding a responsible individual, which would facilitate the imposition of a unifying representation to fix the bodies again in their segment. The reaction by the activists, who refused to identify themselves and claimed that they would need to hold an assembly to decide what to do, prevented that tactic from succeeding.

Nevertheless, the way the group faced the challenge by the police adds a nuance to the simple contraposition between homogenisation and heterogeneity. By homogenisation, I refer here to the imposition by the social machine of an abstract unifying representation, in which the qualitative differences not only of space but especially of the bodies are erased in order to divide it in closed segments where to fix those bodies (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p. 147; Lefebvre, 1991, p. 285). In contrast, the acknowledgement of heterogeneity raises those qualitative differences (Merrifield, 2006, p. 14) and opposes that segmentation by questioning the essential definitions that equate all those bodies that are part of each segment. The episode of the identifications in the bank occupation by PAH Barcelona and how two prominent members canalise the negotiation and instruct the activists evinces a certain centralisation, filtering and enforcing by these members. The self-management of each activist in their difference that was majoritarian until the police intervention, be-

¹ The only explicit limitation is the instruction of not harassing or confronting any worker, but just calmly reply to them if they address the activists that this is a peaceful action against the bank and not against them.

comes reduced and concentrated to confront the challenge posed by the police. At this point, a couple of experienced activists intermediate the two spaces by cutting the flows that were created between the police and the activists that started being identified—the same logic functioned when the mass media appeared and interviewed another core activist. Homogenisation and heterogeneity appear then intertwined in a much more complex form than simple opposition. Instead, it seems more productive to understand these tensions from the perspective of the production of space and the strains between immanence and transcendental. This case shows the confrontation between a PAH that tries to immanently redefine a certain space by using it, compared with a transcendental force that tries to segment it.

Moreover, the police are not the only body used by the state to guarantee the striation. For example, during the prevention of the eviction or the occupation of social services, the actors responsible for keeping the segmentation are civil servants or court representatives. In fact, the difference with these cases show how the state uses a more coactive power for the protection of private space than it uses in the occupation of public ones i.e. the office of social services or the street at the front door of the house of a family about to be evicted. In these cases of the occupation of public spaces, the police are either not present or play a secondary role. The protection of the private space is accentuated in the cases of house occupations, which activists mentioned as the most dangerous and confrontational actions. These occupations pose the biggest challenge to the spatial striation, as access is permanently forbidden and is not allowed under any circumstance. Occupying these houses requires a more detailed preparation and more caution—the plans are not discussed in the coordination assembly, but in the *Obra Social* group—as they can mobilise a more coactive response by the state. These occupations, which have become widely accepted among the effected people (Barranco Font, González García and Llobet Estany, 2016), pose a considerable challenge to the segmentations imposed by capitalism. They redefine a private space to be transformed into a public one, as PAH oc-

cupies only empty apartments belonging to bailed-out banks to pressure these to relinquish the units for social housing.

Occupations as redefinition of spaces of everyday life

As the occupations challenge the use of the different spaces imposed by the social machine, they imply also the expansion of the lived spaces. Sites that were not included within everyday life now become part of it. With this transition, the segmentation of space becomes challenged as the protesters abandon the segments where they were constrained to cross their borders while developing their everyday lives. For example, the bank branch or social services change from being sites where the affected people only go when they are called or when they are in urgent need, now to be places where the activists spend large portions of their everyday lives to pressure those responsible for their situation to solve it.¹ Moreover, the expansion of the lived spaces is not reduced to these, but to any site that now appears as likely to be occupied. The expansion of occupations of banks that can happen at any time² produces increasing uncertainty for the social machine, which constantly needs to restore the challenged segmentations (Watt, 2016).

An important consequence of such inclusion is the redefinition of those sites within the lived spaces of the affected people. Nevertheless, this redefinition has different outcomes depending on the way the groups perform the occupations. How the different groups try to carry on the occupations differs greatly, which provokes also differences in the capability of redefinition. In the case of the occupation of banks or social services, these represent dark places where to stay the shortest time possible as they are permanently associated with bad news and the critical situation of those facing evictions. Whereas in PAH Barcelona, the singing and dancing turns these from sites of despair into places of joy, in Stop Desahucios that redefinition of the lived space becomes less developed, not only as consequence of the fail to access, but product of a

¹ One must remember that the occupations are always complemented by other actions like *acompañamientos* or constant protest at the entrance of the branch by the affected people.

² In this thesis I included only some of these occupations, but following the groups for some months show the dimensions of such expansion in the attempts of occupation, especially in the case of PAH Barcelona: multiple bank branches, vulture funds headquarters, courthouses etc.

much more serious atmosphere that does not redefine the representation of the space. In Stop Desahucios, the debtor is still in the weakest position and the fear that controls their everyday lives is not counteracted by a redefinition of the nature of that relation. In PAH Barcelona, I witnessed, instead, a transition from the fear, shame and despair expressed during the evictions, when the atmosphere is more serious, compared with other protests, to show respect for the critical situation of those at risk, to emotions of hope, resistance and distrust towards the banks and politicians. Most of the activists with whom I held personal chats reflected on how this transition was a consequence of feeling the collective support when undertaking the actions and the joy of small victories, not only theirs, but of other affected people. Here, the quotes from the walks & talks with members of PAH Barcelona are good examples. The expansion and display of joy help to create this optimism by combining different bodies and redefining the bank branch or social services. Whereas in the case of PAH Barcelona, the bank or social services become redefined as places of hope from where a solution to their problems can be extracted, in the case of Stop Desahucios, the incapability to access them maintains a more confrontational perspective that in the end reinforces the division between debtor and creditor.

Moreover, as PAH Barcelona manages to occupy the bank branch or social services, most of the singing, dancing and protesting happens in the pavement next to the bank, these occupations also blur the boundaries between private and public space. Whereas the house occupations directly redefine a private property that is forcibly turned into public, bank occupations perform a continuity between the two spaces. The bank becomes a public space where the affected people gained the right to stay. As the activists enter and exit the branch freely, they traverse that segmentation private/public. This provokes a deep redefinition of the bank, which becomes fully integrated within the lived space of the activists, but in a totally different way to that based on fear and dependence.

In Stop Desahucios, this integration and redefinition is way more limited, especially provoked by the lack of access. Stop Desahucios be-

comes subordinated to the influence of external actors, exemplified by the total submission to the police instructions during the protest at the bank. This limited redefinition is reinforced by a development of the protest that does not challenge the positions of each group in the segmentation. The serious and confrontational tone does not help the affected people to reinterpret the essences that divide debtors and creditors, who remain in a power position in their secluded place. This incapability to redefine the space provokes a limited development of new emotions. Despair and rage are still prevalent as manifested by the slogans chanted during the attempt of bank occupation. Furthermore, the lower number of cases, and consequently of victories, provides fewer reasons for joy and hope.

In summary, the occupations emerge as a frontal confrontation to one of the three moments of the triad from which social space emerges, the representations of space. These representations become directly challenged by the creation of new lived spaces that overrun the regulations that organised those spaces. Through the recombination of bodies, new flows appear and expand to reformulate the codes that organise those spaces. In this way the debtors develop the opportunity to challenge their subordinate position to the creditor, to the point of demanding the solution of their cases. With this redefinition of the everyday life, the control associated with debt starts being contested or at least questioned. The debtor takes greater control of their life by confronting the creditor and threatening them with not honouring their debts, as their personal situation makes impossible. It is now when the debtors make use of that common position as individuals within the space of indebtedness (Lazzarato, 2012), exposing in this process the heterogeneity that subsists under the homogenisation performed by the indebtedness. In fact, in most cases, the debtors achieve certain arrangements that enable them to free themselves from the debt, and even in many cases to keep the house paying a social rent according to their current income. That said, the cases show that the differences in the way the occupations are performed have a great influence on the possibility of challenging indebtedness and segmentation. The capability of actually forcing access to the sites and the use of music, dancing, etc help to the further development of smoothing

as the segmentations and their essences become questioned through flows that travers them.

To deepen the investigation of the production of activism, the next section focuses on other encounters that are key in the protest carried on by the movements, but that do not imply a direct confrontation, but the effective creation of alternative spaces: the assemblies.

Assemblies

Among the encounters around which these groups perform their activism, the assemblies occupy a central position. In all cases, these are, at least formally, the main encounters to take important decisions that affect the whole group. As all members can participate, the assemblies are valuable when analysing the heterogeneity within the groups and how that is handled. As the representations of space function by an abstraction that organises space through a homogenisation that erases the qualitative difference of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991), the assemblies become key encounters for analysing how that difference can re-emerge. In opposition to the striation linked to those representations, the smoothing of space would enhance that difference and enable the free connection and recombination between the elements (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 371).

In the first subsection, I shall analyse how the different assemblies handle heterogeneity and its impact in the striation and smoothing towards a space that allows to expose heterogeneity. Concurrently, as the main space of decision, excavating the dynamics that shape the assemblies and their discussions allows one to analyse the implementation of *autogestion*. In chapter three, together with occupations, I considered *autogestion* a potential tactic for social movements to advance in the challenge to representations of space. Therefore, the second subsection analyses how the *autogestion* discussed by Lefebvre relates to the recovery of the immanence in the production of space in opposition to the transcendental imposition by the state (Merrifield, 2006, p. 140). That is, however, a coin with two sides. At the same time that *autogestion*

emerges as potential tactic for articulating heterogeneity, it can challenge that articulation, as it needs of certain cohesion to keep the conjoining and to avoid falling into particularism (Wilson, 2014). This leads to a subsection where I excavate how different strategies of cohesion affect and shape the *autogestion* and the enhancing of a right to difference, specifically in relation to that commoning demanded by Hardt and Negri (2004).

Nevertheless, these strategies do not totally eliminate conflict, which sporadically emerge in relation to the handling of heterogeneity. The last subsection will look at those conflicts, in order to explore the origin of such conflicts and its relation to the tensions between unifying representations¹ of activism and heterogeneity.

For this analysis, in this section I present an in-depth examination of the Stop Desahucios assembly, the coordination and welcome assemblies of PAH Barcelona, the assembly of MaT—Rede—and the assembly of the group of Ciutat Vella from Barcelona en Comú discussed in the previous chapter. At the same time, as these encounters are affected by other encounters within the groups, I complement the analysis by including the coordination meeting of BeC and the meeting of the discourse group of MaT in the discussion.

Assemblies and heterogeneity

Starting with the role and the management of heterogeneity in the assemblies, the mere way of arranging these encounters exhibits many differences with the potential to affect the expression of heterogeneity. This subsection analyses how those differences influence the smoothing necessary to enhance heterogeneity. This smoothing becomes the condition for the generation of alternative spaces of representation, those moments in Lefebvre's triad from which everyday life can produce a resistance to the moment of representations of space (Stanek, 2011, p. 82). Looking at those encounters, one can identify three models of how to manage the assembly defined by the existence or not of a group of activ-

¹ I equate these representations of the space of activism to the capitalist representation of space as imposition of a certain abstraction generated within a group over the rest of the activists.

ists in charge of handling the encounters: no group in Stop Desahucios; *dinamización* in PAH Barcelona; *facilitación* in the municipal platforms.

Stop Desahucios assembly

Beginning with Stop Desahucios, the assembly is fully open to anyone who wants to attend. This openness, however, is partially constrained by a material disposition in a circle, which subjects the newcomer to the inquisitorial looks of the members. Being part of the circle requires active acceptance, which poses certain limitations, since participating requires some courage to introduce oneself before a bunch of strangers. Once the assembly starts, there is almost total freedom to carry on the assembly, as there are no rules to direct the discussions and interaction between the bodies. As the encounter evolves, this lack of rules does not produce a space without limitations on how bodies interact, but one constrained by that distrust evinced towards the newcomers, which dominates most of the encounter. The cases described above showed how these dynamics lead to constant confrontation that complicates the taking of final decisions, which are often subject to revision depending of the balances within each assembly. The best example is the debate about the motion, which became periodically reopened to introduce changes in the text or to renegotiate with PSOE, which months before had shown no interest in the proposal.

Discussions like this show how these confrontations are a product of a considerable heterogeneity of perceptions that emerge in the assembly, but that usually conflict with limited intersection between them. These perceptions of space, one of the moments in the Lefebvre's triad (Lefebvre, 1991; Schmid, 2008), are relevant as products of the incorporation of the capitalist representations of space in the everyday lives of the affected people as debtors. Although the heterogeneous perceptions become explicit in the Stop Desahucios assemblies, they are not openly discussed. Moreover, the fact that on many occasions the suggested course of action focused on legal measures limited the development of a certain cooperation based on the transmission of a certain knowledge among the participants, since this knowledge is embodied by lawyers

who rarely attend the encounters. This leads to certain “assistentialism,” best exemplified by the case of the woman without water supply, who was absent from the meeting with the municipality, something which is inconceivable to happen in PAH Barcelona.

Those confrontations and lack of acknowledgement towards the others increase that distrust that resonates with the serious atmosphere described in the occupation of the bank. As happened in that occupation, this environment does not help to reduce the anxiety of the affected people and the fear of losing their houses, which erupts in the periodic arguments and personal attacks described in the previous chapter. Examples like the discussion around the negotiation of the motion with the political parties produced frontal confrontation between the participants, who accused each other of holding their positions according to their sympathies towards the parties instead of defending the interest of the group. This confrontation never gets solved and results in the reinforcement of each one’s positions without any redefinition of the different perceptions of space. Even in cases like the one of the racist or homophobic comments that attacked core aspects of some activists’ perceptions, the confrontation did not lead to a discussion about them, but to a reaffirmation in each one’s perceptions. Instead the source of resistance to capitalist homogenisation, heterogeneity becomes a constant challenge to the emergence and strengthen of activism. Differences between the activists and their perceptions remain separated and relate in a purely confrontational way.

PAH Barcelona Assemblies

In spite of belonging to the same social movement group, PAH Barcelona performs its assemblies differently. Even though they are also characterised by their initial openness, unlike Stop Desahucios, the material display of the room enables newcomers to join without interrupting the encounter. This facilitation does not mean that a totally new body would be unnoticed, but the arrangement in rows of chairs allows the newcomers to sit in the back and to participate when they are ready to do so. Nevertheless, the main difference to the assembly of Stop Desahucios is

the use of *dinamización*, as the legitimate body to enforce a set of rules known by all activists i.e. the timeline and the structure of the meeting.

The use of the word *dinamización* and how this is exercised reflects the aim of having dynamic assemblies through the involvement in the debates of as many people as possible. The material disposition of the place allows the “dynamisers” to move around to pass the microphone, so they become the physical connectors between the different bodies to encourage participation. Their constant movement and encouragement of the attendees to participate facilitate to expose heterogeneous perceptions. The welcome assembly is a good example of this exposure of heterogeneous experiences linked to indebtedness, which now becomes questioned to transform the fear and embarrassment associated to the trauma of losing one’s home into hope or even rage. This hope is reinforced by the display of comforting, happiness or joy, and expanded by the use of music, singing and dancing in the occupations. In the coordination assembly, those different perceptions become explicitly challenged and discussed, as exemplified by the discussion about what to do in the case of small owners. This debate, which started in a discussion about how to act in concrete cases of eviction, became an animated exchange of perceptions about what speculation is, involving around 15 participants directly and most of the assembly indirectly.¹ The participants discussed their perceptions, especially due to the intervention of *dinamización* that encouraged participation and questioned dominant representations.

Besides encouraging participation, *dinamización* also partially transfers the responsibility for handling the assembly to all participants. This co-responsibility becomes more obvious and less controlled on the part of *acompañamientos*. In this part, favoured by the encouragement of the “dynamisers” to the attendees to advise each other, the social space is created through a collective knowledge, although *dinamización* still remains the main enforcer of rules. The continuous display of comfort-

¹ Mainly by showing their approval or disapproval to the different positions by shaking their heads or using their hands.

ing—e.g. by hugging the affected person—helps to counteract possible initial distrust and to generate a sense of collective understanding of the individual situation, which contrasts with the lack of comprehension when dealing with the creditor or the state. This trust is the base of the *acompañamientos*, since, as some explained in the walks & talks, the common support helped them to realise that their problem can be solved and that they are “collateral damages” of others’ greediness. Quickly the newcomers find themselves part of a group that understands their suffering, which is common to all the affected people as the weakest links within that space of indebtedness. This awareness of that common position was initially developed during the welcome assemblies where the participants openly discuss their cases before 50 people. The awareness becomes the base from which to develop the co-creation of knowledge. That sharing creates a bond that can be mobilised later in the occupations and the coordination assemblies, where the different bodies not only advise each other, but also commit themselves to providing support to carry out actions such as *acompañamientos*. In the first *acompañamiento* of a new case, the affected person relies on the knowledge of the most experienced ones. That knowledge becomes transmitted to the newcomer, who can put it into practice in future *acompañamientos*. In this part of the assemblies the recombination of the bodies frees itself from the control by *dinamización* or any other body exterior to the relation established between those participating in the *acompañamiento*. People team up for the different actions, this generates and redistributes the flows through new combinations of the bodies.

The importance of *dinamización* to direct the flows and their distribution does not disappear entirely in this part of *acompañamientos*, but actualises it in a different way. The “dynamisers” are still the main bodies canalising the flows, but now they do not directly intervene in how the bodies connect. They limit their participation to encouraging the activists to support each other and to advise on the most suitable actions for each case. A good example is when the “dynamiser” asks the attendees “what do we tell him/her about the action?” especially when the affected person demands an action larger than an *acompañamiento*. I noted how in most cases they keep addressing people until they find the answer

they are looking for, usually to convince the activist of a smaller action. This formula enables a certain control while maintaining the perception of co-creation of knowledge and reducing the risk of being perceived as an imposition. Nonetheless, I identified how sometimes these turned into disappointment, since the affected person was not convinced, but the person did not find the necessary support for an action that was disapproved by some activists who used the collective pressure to stop it. In other cases, this canalisation of flows that limits the recombination of bodies becomes even more explicit. A good example is the case of the t-shirts of the IRPH, when a closed discussion was reopened by the “dynamisers.” That said, the existence of clear rules about the participation known by all activists and the fact that the “dynamisers” are not in charge of giving the floor limits this capability for controlling the assembly.

Key to understanding how this *dinamización* affects the assembly is the existence of the *comisión* of coordination to which many “dynamisers” belong. This *comisión* is formed mainly by activists who are not directly affected by eviction but have been engaged for quite a long time. Unlike the majority of affected people, they are Spanish and have some kind of higher education. In contrast to the heterogeneity that populates the assembly, this group is characterised by a bigger homogeneity and strong cohesion. Although in the debate about this *comisión* described above, the current members claim that anyone can join, two of the 22 expelled people denounced in an interview that joining depends on an invitation from the current members. The fact that during the discussion in the assembly they refused to establish any system for guaranteeing that every activist could eventually join the group and that they prefer to maintain an informal mechanism seems to confirm that claim. The most outspoken participants tend to be part of this group and, despite the existence of debates, it is often the position defended by them the one accepted. A good example is the discussion about the t-shirts of the IRPH and how a member of the *comisión* of coordination was able to reopen a closed discussion, which the “dynamisers” did without any hesitation. When someone new joins the assembly quickly identify them for being

the most active and the ones to whom people listen more carefully. This position is not the product of some formal process, but of their valuable knowledge and their great engagement in PAH's activities. This capability to influence the assembly became even more obvious in certain situations in which they sensed their position being threatened, as in the conflict in which 22 activists were expelled. In cases like this, a strategy previously decided in encounters of this *comisión* is put into practice in the assembly to constrain and control its outcome. This *comisión* will be key in the analysis of dynamics of *autogestión* discussed in the coming sections.

Unlike Stop Desahucios, in PAH Barcelona heterogeneity is not the source of constant conflicts, but a main tool for developing activism. By the imposition of certain codes and a group of enforcers, heterogeneity becomes canalised in certain ways, which prove to be more productive to reduce potential conflicts and to favour the coexistence of multiple different bodies and perceptions of space than in Stop Desahucios.

Municipal Platforms Assemblies

Finally, the third way of handling the assemblies is the *facilitación* used by the platforms. In spite of the different name, this *facilitación* resonates greatly with the *dinamización* of PAH Barcelona. It implies the existence of a specific group of bodies explicitly formed to manage the assembly. Nevertheless, the way they implement the *facilitación* is different to that of *dinamización*. The cases showed how they do not take a leading role in the discussions and limit their participation to the management of the encounter. The “facilitators” do not intervene in the discussions neither they “dynamise” to engage the attendees or to transfer them any responsibility for handling the assembly. They simply facilitate the discussion by giving the floor and keeping the order.

The codes and rules for the assembly are set by a coordination group that resonates with the *comisión* of coordination of PAH Barcelona with the main difference being that in the platforms the coordination group's existence is known by all activists and their members are elected. Furthermore, in contrast to PAH Barcelona, *facilitación* does not enforce

rules widely known by all participants, but codes that are more arbitrarily set by the coordination group. This implies a bigger control of the assemblies, which take place when the coordination decides and discusses the topics that coordination decides¹ investing this group with a filtering capability. The assemblies meet less often, so many topics never make it to the discussions and are handled by the working groups without much accountability.

Together with the coordination group, a second group of activists seem to have a great deal of influence within the assemblies: the municipal governments. The governments become the main actors setting the agenda, which the coordination groups filter to the rest of the platform. Consequently, the debates are limited and, although occasionally decisions must be taken, often the points raised are mainly used to counteract the sometimes negative information from mass media. The debates about the policies are quite limited and the assemblies become places for exercising transparency and accountability more than for real discussion and interaction between different perceptions of space. This is especially so in BeC, whereas in MaT, it is more common the call for assemblies to discuss and decide about key policies. In this constrained environment, the heterogeneity that definitely exists is not really enhanced or exposed. Most of the debates are conceived as informative points in which participation is not really encouraged and the position of the coordination/municipal government is most of the times implicitly accepted.

Moreover, the fact that only those explicitly acknowledged as part of the platform can participate in the assemblies shows a strong desire to control the information that can be extracted from the assemblies and the people that can enter the group. With the exception of the Ciutat Vella assembly, where activists can join without any limitation, the attendees of the general assemblies must have participated in other encounters,

¹ One must remember that the only condition is that one assembly should take place at least every three months in BeC and every month in MaT. During the time I spent doing fieldwork, the plenary of BeC was called only once. In MaT, assemblies were called more often than in BeC, some months even twice or three times.

which can be joined only through an explicit acknowledgment. The protocol implemented by BeC exemplifies the use of powerful mechanisms to control the access to the group whenever the coordination group considers it necessary. This control seems to be more limited in MaT, where the existence of a standard procedure to access the platform¹ provides explicit rules that facilitate the initial contact. Although that procedure could be seen as a barrier, in fact it facilitates membership, as it reduces the suspicion towards the newcomer. Thanks to the face-to-face meeting with two activists, I always found familiar faces that introduced me to other members. This resembles, to certain extent, the process to allow researchers to join PAH Barcelona which facilitates the introduction in the assembly of someone who is not an affected person.

The fact that, in contrast, I found no resistance to entering the Ciutat Vella group reveals differences in the control of the access depending on the position of the encounters within the structure of the platform. These differences hint towards the creation of a hierarchy of groups, where certain encounters have more prominent positions and must be protected. Notwithstanding, the existence of multiple personal relations that traverse the different encounters, for example telegram channels that mix members from different groups, and encounters where the coordination group is absent creates an informal mixing of bodies that pushes towards the smoothing of the striated space, especially in MaT.

In contrast to the chapters of PAH, the expression of heterogeneity is much more controlled and limited in the platforms. The use of limiting codes that were beneficial in PAH Barcelona is expanded here to ensure greater control. Moreover, the enforcers ensure that the coexistence of the heterogeneity does not become so evident, but it is maybe transferred to other encounters with less control, although also with less impact in the collective activism.

¹ The situation was different in the first months of existence of BeC, when the project was introduced around the city. In those public encounters, the activists asked the attendees to provide their contact information if they were interested in participating in BeC in the future. When I was undertaking fieldwork there was no standardised procedure.

Exposing heterogeneity: between smoothing and striation

The three models for managing the assemblies produce different dynamics in terms of exposure of heterogeneity, these directly relate to the production of a space that becomes striated or smoothed. The first we should consider is the openness of the assemblies. In contrast to the delimitation of the striation, an open encounter would favour the smoothing of space by facilitating the access of heterogeneous bodies and their perceptions. Unlike striation that sets clear borders to the space to subsequently divide it, smoothing follows a different logic due to which those limits are in constant change and never fixed (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 361). In this sense, the nodes of PAH offer more open spaces, as any body can join the assembly without any constraint, although the physical arrangement of the Stop Desahucios assembly set certain limitations to such openness. In contrast, the municipal platforms set specific conditions for participating, mainly to be active in some working group, condition that impose more constraints for joining the groups. This measure, which aims to avoid the influence of activists that are not part of the daily work of the groups, has the effect of erecting barriers to joining the encounter.

These conditions set a first striation. They limit the bodies that can come into contact and produce the space, although the standard procedure to enter MaT reduces the arbitrariness that I found in BeC, where few members showed great discretionary capability to set the limits for newcomers. For a newcomer without any contact within the group it is easier to enter MaT, since one just has to choose which group to join¹ and those in charge of welcoming put them in contact with its members. Instead, in BeC, the possibility of joining is more limited as it depends greatly of the relations of the newcomer to members of the group. In my case, while attending the assembly of Ciutat Vella was simple, the access to other groups took a few months and it was full of setbacks, for example the opposition to attending the International *comisión*. This limitation makes the already established networks the main channel for

¹ With the only restriction of the coordination and other *comisiones* in charge of handling the relations between the groups that form the platform.

joining BeC, which sets a hard border for the heterogeneity of the bodies that take part in these encounters. As most newcomers are already part of the activists' network of relations, the potential coexistence of divergent perceptions becomes limited. For instance, in the BeC coordination group, despite being formed by 40 members, the heterogeneity was limited, since almost all participants could be identified as *Guanyemers*. In contrast, this control was almost non-existent for entering the Ciutat Vella group, where any member can bring a newcomer without much problem, although they still depended on already established networks. This lower level of control enables a higher exposure of heterogeneity, as shown by the discussion about the Catalanian independence, when many perceptions were confronted.

The initial tendency towards smoothing or striation hinted by the openness or closeness is nuanced by the way the encounters are handled. This relates to the second step of striation, which is the division of the space or the lack of it in cases of smoothing. While in Stop Desahucios, the smoothing seems *a priori* to be reinforced by the lack of specific codes and enforcers, the existence of these in PAH Barcelona could be associated with dynamics of striation. Nonetheless, the cases question that intuition. PAH Barcelona seems to evolve towards a bigger smoothing than Stop Desahucios, as different perceptions are more explicitly accepted thanks to the encouragement for participation by the “dynamisers.” As the “dynamisers” directly address the attendees to reply to each other and to give advice, they promote the exposure of heterogeneity. This interaction between divergent perceptions becomes fully developed in the *acompañamientos* section, when the generation of flows frees from the control of the “dynamisers” or any body external to the relation established between those teaming up. Although this coming together might end in confrontation as in Stop Desahucios, in most cases I witnessed how the participants accept the different perceptions to work together thanks to the bonds developed in the welcome assemblies and other encounters. The main role of *dinamización* here is to assure the acceptance by enforcing the codes and, in some cases, by partially striating the upcoming encounters by reducing the demands for large scale actions. This is not done in an authoritarian way, but addressing the au-

dience until they find the desired answer, which reinforces the sense of co-creation.

The exposure and acceptance of difference in PAH Barcelona become possible thanks to an intersection of the legitimacy of the *dinamización* to enforce well-known rules, the transmission of knowledge between the affected people and the way the *dinamización* is exercised, so it is not perceived as imposition. In contrast, the absence of a body enforcing commonly known rules in Stop Desahucios, despite resonating with dynamics of smoothing, makes their assemblies chaotic and without a clear goal. This seems to produce more striation than smoothing. The different perceptions emerge but they relate in a confrontational way that limits the acceptance of difference. Although the lack of rules could lead to smoothing, the lack of control over the flows or the recombination of bodies proved to reduce the acceptance of difference. In both chapters, the heterogeneity becomes exposed, but whereas in PAH Barcelona this is canalised by the *dinamización* to promote its acceptance, in Stop Desahucios it provokes striation, since every perception remains reaffirmed in a segment. This shows the complexity of the relation between the dynamics of smoothing and striation, as conditions that should favour a certain direction lead to the opposite.

The *acompañamientos* section clearly reveals the differences between *dinamización* and the third model of handling the assemblies, *facilitación*. Reinforcing that limited openness, *facilitación* deepens the dynamics of striation. The timeline and the arrangement of the assembly are totally controlled by these enforcers, as their role is different to that of the “dynamisers.” They do not occupy a central position to redirect the flows. As the assemblies are strongly coded from the beginning, they do not favour the free recombination of bodies and flows. The “facilitators” become enforcers of codes that, unlike PAH Barcelona, are not commonly known by all participants, since those vary from assembly to assembly and are decided beforehand in the coordination group.

Moreover, the existence of *dinamización* reveals the tensions between the dynamics of smoothing and striation. At the same time that “dynamisers” increase participation, they showed a great capability to control those dynamics of participation. Consequently, while *dinamización* favours smoothing by boosting participation and heterogeneity through the incorporation of new bodies into the flows, it also striates by centralising those flows in some bodies that direct them in certain directions. This exemplifies how the tension between smoothing and striation can be handled, in this case mainly through the existence of the coordination *comisión* and its use of *dinamización*. It is from this centrality that the main challenge to smoothing emerges, since in almost all discussions those in charge of *dinamización* are the main people responsible for directing the debate and determining when the decision is taken. As most “dynamisers” are part of that coordination *comisión*, in many cases the members of this group use *dinamización* to control the recombination of bodies and flows, despite not having any formal legitimacy to determine the assembly. From this perspective, *dinamización* is similar to the striation of *facilitación*, as these bodies become the transmitters of the representations generated within the coordination group. The main difference is that while most of the “dynamisers” belong to the coordination, most of the “facilitators” do not.

Nonetheless, there exists a major difference in how the capability to control the flows and combinations that form the space are developed by these coordination groups. While in the municipal platforms this is more collectively imposed, in PAH Barcelona this is mainly individually embodied. In the last case, their legitimacy derives from their great engagement and knowledge, which they translate into a great power to affect the assembly. This resonates with Deleuze’s remarks (1998, p. 73) about how, despite their different nature, power and knowledge articulate, being the latter an agent of stratification of the non-stratified matter mobilised by the former. In PAH Barcelona, this knowledge becomes a main tool for actualising affect as consolidated power (Buchanan, 2008), being used by this coordination group to partially striate the spaces to control the activism. This considerable capability to striate is present in all debates described above, but in none of them is it as clear as in the

discussion around IRPH, when a member of the coordination *comisión* managed to totally switch the outcome of the voting with a three minutes speech.

In contrast, in the municipal platforms, the legitimacy of the enforcers and of the generators of codes is not based on their knowledge or engagement, but on punctual election processes—or employment, as with the 10 members of BeC—which produce a collective legitimacy in connection to their organisational position. This source of legitimacy results in higher control and striation, as they are invested with a discretionary capability to rework the rules and the conditions for participating. As a result, in contrast to the *dinamización* of PAH Barcelona, the platforms do not need to use *facilitación* to direct the flows in the assemblies, as these are extremely controlled from the start.

That said, despite the more individually based legitimacy of the coordination members in PAH Barcelona, it can also be collectively coordinated on exceptional occasions when they sense a challenge to their position, for which they use the *dinamización* to control the debate. This was obvious in the case of the conflict in which 22 activists were expelled. The coordination members, despite not holding any formal power, organised themselves to face the challenge from other group. Nonetheless, this control is limited by the fact that the “dynamisers” are not in charge of giving the floor and that the rules for participating are known by all activists.

All in all, unlike PAH, the coordination group exhibits high levels of discretion in the platforms, as they can increase or decrease the striation whenever they perceive a threat. While PAH Barcelona implements a hybrid model that balances certain striation through *dinamización* and coordination with strong smoothing practices in the assembly, in the platforms the assembly has been strongly striated since its inception. Unlike the exposure of difference favoured by the first model, the one of the platforms limits the emergence of heterogeneity, as *facilitación* does not have any function as a connector, but just to keep the encounter or-

ganised. Previous perceptions that challenge capitalist representations of space¹ are not really exposed, as the heterogeneity remains under the surface and transferred to other encounters. This interaction with other encounters raises some issues regarding the *autogestion* of the assemblies as main decision meetings within the groups. If, as argued, *autogestion* is a key tactic for smoothing, the *autogestion* of the assemblies is key to performing that self-management that would allow the acceptance of heterogeneity (Wilson, 2014, p. 120). Starting from the analysis of these dynamics that shape the assembly and their impact in the exposure and acceptance of heterogeneity, the next subsection analyses how those dynamics interact with the different forms of *autogestion* to enhance the right to difference.

Articulating heterogeneity: assemblies and autogestion

The expression of different perceptions that the assemblies enable, especially in the two chapters of PAH, makes the heterogeneity evident. Whereas the occupations challenge space striation, they do not directly deal with difference, which is done in the assemblies. The previously discussed dynamics that shape these assemblies not only favour or prevent the exposure of heterogeneous perceptions, but also influence how this heterogeneity is handled. The cases have revealed the challenges provoked by this exposure of difference. In the case of Stop Desahucios, for example, the lack of rules favours a smoothing that leads to the exposure of heterogeneity, but that becomes striation, as the heterogeneous perceptions do not get articulated but simply confronted. This outcome nuances the possibilities for enhancing a right to difference from which alternative lived spaces of representation can emerge. To guarantee the right to difference formulated by Lefebvre (Elden, 2004, p. 226; Kipfer *et al.*, 2008, p. 203), the exposure of heterogeneity appears insufficient and the cases showed the need of a subsequent collective acceptance and articulation of that heterogeneity. The dynamics that influence such articulation directly relate to the *autogestion* or self-management. Against the pressure of transcendental forces—i.e. the state, as part of the social machine—to impose abstract representations (Brenner, 2008), the *auto-*

¹ One must remember that these platforms are formed by the conjoining of diverse groups within the left that in different degrees articulate counter-hegemonic discourses.

gestion would guarantee the immanent production of space through the articulation of difference. Consequently, analysing the ways the different groups implement *autogestion* can help to understand how the transition from the exposure to the articulation of heterogeneity for developing the right to difference can be performed and its influence on the production of space.

As discussed in chapter three, I see *autogestion* defined by two features or moments in its development: (1) the levels of independence from the influence of external groups; (2) the *a priori* capability of each member to affect the production of space within the groups. In this section, I shall analyse how the ways the *autogestion* is implemented according to these two criteria affect the capability to maintain immanence in the production of space.

Enhancing immanence through local independence

Regarding the first aspect, the previous descriptions reveal how the assemblies are, in general, carried on without the strong interference of external groups. Nonetheless, this independence from the transcendental determination from other groups does not mean a total elimination of the relations, which still affect them.

Starting with the nodes of PAH, despite belonging to the same social movement group, their activism is independently developed. During all the time of my fieldwork there was no direct communication between them and in the case of Stop Desahucios, the relation with any other chapter of PAH was almost non-existent.¹ The case of PAH Barcelona is slightly different. It is one of the most prominent nodes within the country, so its members are active in the state meetings and encounters with other PAHs in Catalonia. Nevertheless, the assemblies showed how the different nodes maintain a total independence and how it is the local group which decides what to do.² In the municipal platforms the inde-

¹ During the time I participated in their meetings they had only very sporadic contacts with a few nodes in Galiza and they never got involved with the state assemblies.

² I have the intuition that actually PAH Barcelona can have strong influence over other smaller PAHs in Catalonia, but since they are out of the scope of my thesis I cannot confirm or deny so.

pendence is even more obvious, since, despite the aim of establishing networks for sharing experiences, they are different organisations.

As the groups share urban locations and have certain linkages, it is relevant to analyse the relations between the nodes of PAH and the platforms. As PAH declares itself a non-partisan movement, there are no formal relations between PAH and any party, including the platforms. Nevertheless, as a consequence of this shared location, the relationship of both nodes with the municipalities is constant and characterised by cooperation or the posing of demands in a non-disruptive way. The more regular relationship takes place in Barcelona, mainly canalised through Observatory Desc (Weerd and Garcia, 2016), a research centre specialised on housing issues. This intermediation has more of an individual character than a formal one. The brokerage is mainly done through members of the Observatory who are members of PAH Barcelona or have linkages to it. At the same time, there is also a more sporadic but still fluid direct relationship between PAH and the municipal government of BeC, as exemplified by the meetings to negotiate the motion or the negotiation with social services, in which a former member of PAH now working for the municipality helped to find a solution for the family of three. These relations are not institutionalised and mainly canalised through certain bodies, are usually product of shared trajectories of activism. For example, members of smaller groups, like Ciutat Vella assembly, connect the issues raised by PAH and the responses implemented by the government. In spite of these personal connections, the way the PAH Barcelona assembly discussed the motion displayed considerable levels of independence from BeC.

This autonomy is even stronger in the relationship between Stop Desahucios and MaT, where a regular relationship with the municipality of A Coruña is inexistent. Their contacts respond to specific demands from Stop Desahucios in connection to individual cases, and mainly through individual acquaintance. More than a previous personal relation, the connection is based on the willingness of MaT to acknowledge Stop Desahucios and through personal connections—sometimes product of shar-

ing activism, like in the Comision Aberta.¹ The transferring of activists that was so common between PAH Barcelona and BeC was inexistent here. Although some members of MaT act as brokers between the platform and certain movements, Stop Desahucios was never one of them. The acknowledgement of the social movements by MaT facilitates certain negotiations—e.g. the unscheduled meeting to discuss the motion proposal. However, the lack of strong personal bonds reduces the capability of Stop Desahucios to influence MaT. Whereas PAH Barcelona managed to maintain a unidirectional relation to try to advance its agenda, in Stop Desahucios this is more bidirectional, and if something, leaning more towards the capability of the municipality and other parties to affect Stop Desahucios, as exemplified by the discussion about the motion.

Therefore, the relations between the two chapters and the municipalities are mainly canalised through personal bonds and acknowledgement. This informal relationship hints to some challenges to the hierarchical striation of space linked to the institutional transmission of demands, reinforcing instead a personal relation between the groups.

Forms of autogestion and the immanent production of space

Once the high levels of *autogestion* of each group among themselves are established, I shall analyse *autogestion* in relation to how the strategies and directions of activism are decided. In other words, as the assemblies are encounters open to all activists, the independence from other encounters and the capability of every participant to intervene in the production of new spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). As the assemblies function differently, especially in relation to the existence of enforcers of rules and of a coordination group, they offer good examples of exploring how the different levels and forms of *autogestion* influence the articulation of heterogeneity.

¹ This created also tensions, as the proximity to the municipality by one member received the suspicion of other members.

In Stop Desahucios, the lack of enforcers or any other group intersects with the initial smoothing to provide high levels of *autogestion*. A priori all activists have the same position to participate in the production of space. This assures the immanent capability of the participants of the assembly to create the space and to decide the activism. In contrast, in the platforms that immanence appears more limited by the coordination groups. The cases showed that, although the assembly is the encounter that should guarantee the articulation of heterogeneity, decisions are taken in the coordination meetings, especially in the case of BeC. Through the filtering of the topics and the reworking of the codes of the assemblies, this striated coordination group creates a coherent representation that unifies and homogenises the activism, which is imposed over the assembly. The independence and immanence of the assembly to conjoin different perceptions is overrun by the imposition of decisions taken in another encounter. Consequently, the acceptance and articulation of difference and the direct interaction between all activists is more limited, with a segmentation in various hierarchically organised encounters that filter certain representations and funnel potential disagreements by reducing the possibility to affect those representations. This obscures the heterogeneity by producing an aggregate that eliminates many discordant voices and autonomy (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007) in favour of those abstract representations of activism, so the striation is translated into a quite systematic unity.

Although BeC reveals, in general, bigger limitations to *autogestion* than Marea Atlántica, both cases share similar variations on the level and configuration of such limitations depending of the encounter. In the case of BeC, whereas in the Ciutat Vella assembly these limitations are implemented through the agenda—which often revolves around the topics posed by the district councillor—in the coordination group this same constraint through the agenda—which is set by the municipal government and the executive—was reinforced by the fact that the encounter was handled by those employed by the platform. The representatives of the government set an agenda, in cooperation with the executive and those employed, which mainly follows an informative approach, as the government tries to explain the policy proposals and justify them. The

main difference is that while in Ciutat Vella the participants cannot influence these proposals and they are arranged as mere encounters of information, in the coordination meetings they must take decisions that will be filtered to the rest of encounters. Although the coordination included representatives from the neighbourhood groups, they were minority and they remained mainly quiet, so their capability to affect the production of the space was very limited. One of my interviewees confirmed my perception of the secondary role of these representatives. They seem to fulfil more a function of transmitters of those decisions to the rest of the encounters than to really engage in the production of the space. In both encounters the dynamics lead to striation by separating the different bodies, mainly according to their belonging to the municipal government—and the executive within the coordination—creating bidirectional flows, that start or end in the government members. Consequently, the enhance of heterogeneity through the articulation of bodies and their different perceptions is limited. The space appears strongly segmented and the flows tend to converge in the members of the government, who centralise them. The immanence is extremely limited and the potential different perceptions do not evolve into articulations that enhance the right to difference. Instead, heterogeneity becomes subsumed to those representations of the government representatives.

In contrast, these connections between encounters within MaT were more informal and channelled through members who participated in multiple meetings, so they fulfilled a function of brokerage. This provokes that while the control by the coordination and the municipal government striate the assemblies greatly, the working groups demonstrate a higher level of *autogestion*. The topics discussed in encounters like the discourse group meetings emerge from the needs the activists perceive in their daily activism without external imposition and through informal interconnections due to the participation of the activists in multiple groups—e.g. two of the members of the discourse group were also part of the coordination group. In the discourse group, neither the member of the government that participated in the meetings nor the members of the coordination imposed any control or limitation on the *autogestion* of the

group, further than sharing possible concerns mentioned in other encounters.

PAH Barcelona assemblies could be located in an intermediate position between Stop Desahucios and the platforms. As in the latter, a coordination group exists, but its capability to determine the assemblies is limited by a set of rules known by all activists. As they have limited capacity to decide the topics discussed in the assemblies and the format, their capability to impose certain representations is restricted. The best examples are the *acompañamientos* or the welcome assembly, where their position is secondary and it focuses on engaging the activists. That said, their capability to reduce the immanence in the creation of space never disappears completely and activates on certain occasions, for example to defend their position in the conflict that ended with the expulsion of 22 activists. In these situations, the lack of that filtering capacity of the coordination groups within the municipal platforms is compensated by the use of *dinamización*, as most “dynamisers” are part of that *comisión* of coordination. In cases like this, the use of *dinamización* facilitates the control and imposition of certain consistent representations previously discussed by them, despite not having any formal legitimacy to determine the assembly.

In summary, as discussed above, I consider *autogestion* a potential tactic which can be used to produce alternative spaces to capitalist representations. Its importance derives from the possibility to enhance the acceptance and articulation of heterogeneous perceptions of everyday life (Wilson, 2014). Looking at the way the assemblies function, one can say that the *autogestion* in the nodes of PAH encourages the immanence greater than in the municipal platforms. This immanence has enabled, in principle, higher levels of acceptance and articulation of heterogeneity than in the platforms, where the coordination groups—which are themselves striated by the municipal governments, and also by the executive and the employees in BeC—emerge as a transcendental power that sets the limits of the space and segments it to limit the articulation of different bodies and perceptions.

Nevertheless, the analysis has shown how certain limitations of *autogestion*—as happened with smoothing—of PAH Barcelona favours the articulation of difference more than in the case of Stop Desahucios, where the immanence is greatly enhanced. Although there is a coordination group in PAH Barcelona, its capability for imposing transcendental control over the encounters is counterbalanced by a clear set of codes known by every member—not only of how the assemblies take place, but also their weekly periodicity and place—although without totally eliminating their capability to reduce that immanence in certain moments. These enforcers become pivotal for the articulation. They do not emerge as bodies where the flows stop, but bodies that centralise diverse flows to subsequently redistribute them in multiple directions. By contrast, the organisation of the platforms in well-defined structures fixes each encounter in certain points of such structure, which determines their importance and the limitations to their immanence. When these groups occupy a central position within the structures—i.e. the coordination groups—the limitations are higher. These limitations generate a quite stable and homogeneous group that sets the conditions for the creation of space and produces certain representations that are funnelled to the rest of the organisation. On the other hand, when the groups occupy a less central position, like the assembly of Ciutat Vella—one must remember the organisation chart of BeC as the best graphic example—the control is relaxed, so more heterogeneity is expressed, although with a reduced impact in the activism of the whole platform. Although MaT had similar levels of control over the assembly, its vaguer organisation enabled higher levels of immanence and *autogestion* in the smaller groups, which also showed a bigger influence on the activism.

That said, even though the *autogestion* intersects with the smoothing to encourage or limit the acceptance and articulation of heterogeneity, the examples show that this articulation does not guarantee the emergence of new spaces of representation. The cases revealed how a third move must follow to that expression and articulation, and that is assembling the heterogeneous perceptions. In other words, the right to difference (Elden, 2004, p. 226) seems to depend on the conjoining of that differ-

ence from which new representations can emerge, while assuring constant expression of new differences. In addition to the mechanisms of *autogestion* implemented by the groups that facilitate or hinder the articulation prior to the assembling, a second mechanism affecting that process to ensure that the activists work together despite their differences is the dynamics of cohesion. These dynamics ensure the maintenance of the groups, so from the assembling new differences emerge and become accepted to form new assemblages. The next subsection excavates how the groups attempt to maintain the group and how their different strategies affect the possibility of permanently articulating difference in open-ended processes.

Assembling heterogeneity: cohesion and the right to difference

The impact of the different dynamics of *autogestion* on the enhancing of the immanence in the production of spaces hints at the importance of a third movement in connection to the right to difference. Difference can be exposed/acknowledged and articulated, but the cases show that this can be insufficient to develop this right fully, as the differences relate mainly in a confrontational way. While the striation in the platforms limits the development of the right due to the restrictions to the exposure of difference, the smoothing in Stop Desahucios facilitates the exposure but limits its articulation. The outcome in both cases is the lack of intersection between heterogeneous perceptions and flows. This lack does not overcome the segmentations, which only seem to be openly challenged in the case of PAH Barcelona, where the heterogeneous perceptions become more commonly assembled. Therefore, assembling the perceptions appears as a necessary move to advance towards the production of alternative lived spaces.

To perform this assemblage of heterogeneous perceptions the movements face a main challenge: the need of maintaining the groups together while combining the different perceptions without the imposition of unifying representations. The need for cohesion poses new challenges to enhance the right to difference. As discussed in chapter three, it may be problematic to use identities based on certain essences that would repro-

duce segmentations that divide the bodies according to such identities. It becomes pertinent here to return to the discussion about commoning (Hardt and Negri, 2004; Tampio, 2009), as a form of cohesion that attempts to avoid essentialist identities to allow the incorporation of heterogeneity to produce space. Analysing how the groups try to acquire that commoning to keep the cohesion enable to investigate how the intersection between this commoning and the different modes of *autogestion* facilitate the assemblage of different perceptions to fully develop the right to difference. The dynamics of the groups reveal the existence of two main ways for achieving this commoning:

1. In the nodes of PAH—especially PAH Barcelona—the commoning is based on the mutual individual support and dependence to solve each individual's cases. Starting from the sympathy and acknowledgement towards the newcomers in the welcome assemblies, an awareness of the position shared by all affected people in relation to their debts becomes mobilised. As the activists become engaged with other affected people, this awareness pushes the bodies to participate in encounters like *acompañamientos*, where that sympathy evolves into care and dependence as they rely on each other to solve their cases (Santos, 2019). This dependence emerges as the main feature that helps to keep the cohesion of the heterogeneous group, not only in the base of the common positionality but on the promise of support for future actions. The previously mentioned motto “*hoy por ti, mañana por mi*” reflects this dependence and expectancy of commitment clearly, while the labels *ComPAHs* and *PAHmilia* stress the comradeship without reference to any kind of essential property. For this way of commoning to be effective, it is supported by the focus on finding a solution to individual concrete cases, that are more feasible to achieve than legal or political economic changes. Reaching small victories not only provides examples that generate hope for the affected people, but also provoke an emotion of gratitude that pushes the affected people to remain engaged at least for some months. As

consequence, an emotion of thankfulness is prevalent within the assemblies of PAH Barcelona, which, as shown, can take the form of individual gratitude, but usually works as a collective emotion constantly expressed in these encounters and the Telegram groups.¹

The small victories of stopping evictions or forcing institutions to provide solutions for affected people emerge then as the main mechanism to articulate this heterogeneous contingent of people without the imposition of a strict essential identity. When those small victories are rarer, as in the case of Stop Desahucios, the cohesion appears more challenged, as it is harder for the activists to perceive a benefit for their activism. The fieldwork shows that, despite following a similar form of commoning, as this node deals with fewer cases, the lack of daily encounters and victories makes this tactic much less effective. In fact, the differences translate into more confrontations between the members, which, as shown, often leads to personal attacks. Unlike PAH Barcelona, where the perceptions of space may be discussed and often mixed thanks to the cohesion sustained by the construction of a community of mutual support, the debates in A Coruña demonstrate how the expression of divergent perceptions do not translate into high levels of caring or personal support, but more of respect and an approach more as a helper. This fails to create the personal bonds and sense of mutual dependence that so effectively prevent the eruption of aggressive personal confrontations when heterogeneity becomes evident in PAH Barcelona. This culminates in disappointment when the affected people think that they do not get enough help, which leads to aggressive personal confrontations that provoke members to leave the node.

¹ In the Telegram group sometimes the thankfulness becomes disappointment, as some people feel that they have not received the deserved support from the rest of the members, although those are minoritarian and usually replied by an invitation to openly discuss that in the assembly.

2. The municipal platforms share the strategy of focusing on short-term goals, although framed as the defence of a common good and not as the fight for solving individual problematics dominant in PAH. As these coalitions conjoin groups that *a priori* share similar perceptions of the urban, most of the activists join as members of those groups and not because of a situation of personal need. Even in the cases of activists without previous affiliation, they join in order to produce structural change, usually in connection to previous politicisation within the 15-M movement or other groups like PAH. This makes difficult a commoning based on interpersonal dependence and reciprocity, so the cohesion tries to be built around formulas like *Mareantes* or *Guanyemers*. In contrast to the labels used by PAH Barcelona, these are associated to certain representations of the activism, usually linked to the initial promoters from social movements, which tries to be imposed over the whole groups. This is specially accentuated in BeC, as I identified in the interviews how the term *Guanyemer* was used to distinguish a certain group from the rest by assigning certain properties to each of them. In contrast, in MaT, it seems that *Mareantes* has become more inclusive, as a sort of overarching label for all the activists despite their group of origin. Even so, these representations seem quite vague, since those properties are blurry and not really defined. This vagueness enables a majority of the activists to identify themselves with that identity at certain moments.

Thus, in order to achieve cohesion, they mobilise that strategy of focusing in concrete victories around the collective work for a greater common good. This strategy transforms here into a short-term goal strategy around winning elections, which showed to be effective for the first election when in the space of 10 months the platforms were able to win the elections. Winning the elections facilitated the conjoining of the heterogeneous political positions of the groups due to the need of the individual's work for the sake of the common good. The mutual

support that traversed PAH is translated here into a more abstract responsibility towards the survival and the goals of the platform—which are in most cases not set in the assemblies, but decided by the municipal government and the coordination group. My interviewees reflected how they were able to put aside strong differences—without even discussing them—and work hand in hand to achieve the common good of winning the elections. As the individual support for a concrete issue is not mobilised, having this clear objective has helped to recombine the bodies and get together various perceptions in a consistent political project, without the imposition of a closed essentialist identity. Nevertheless, with this strategy the heterogeneity is not really combined and the different perceptions are only exposed in strongly problematic cases, like for example the regional coalitions. In these cases, the lack of mechanisms for assembling difference known by all the members generates great tensions and confrontation without traversing the segmentations.

The strategy of the nodes of PAH—especially PAH Barcelona—based on the personal interdependence among the affected people in order to achieve small victories seems to favour that multiple perceptions assemble in base to their common positionality within that space of indebtedness (Gonick, 2016). Participating in this activism has the effect of constantly crossing those perceptions of everyday lives, since in most cases the activism requires a great deal of involvement, as it implies the participation in many encounters during the week—especially in PAH Barcelona. The spaces formed while performing their everyday lives for many activists start to slide. The activism occupies much of their time and the groups become the centre around which social life gravitates. The constant engagement and dependence generate bonds and sharing from which this commoning based on mutual support can be developed (Mir Garcia *et al.*, 2013, p. 58).

PAH Barcelona, through this form of commoning, and its intersection with a limited *autogestion* that partially striates the spaces, seems to enhance the right to difference more than Stop Desahucios. The activism

becomes central and the contact between different perceptions sustained by strong dependence reinforce the combination performed by an *auto-gestion* model based on the pivotal role of a group of “dynamisers” that canalise that heterogeneity to promote that assembling. I am not implying that every participant ends up being fully committed to the mission of PAH,¹ but that, since the eviction process is long, many people remain active, which totally transforms their everyday lived spaces. In contrast, in Stop Desahucios, the much-limited engagement and the partial failure in generating collective mutual dependence reduce the possibility of promoting the right to difference. Heterogeneity is exposed thanks to a great smoothing, but the different perceptions are not assembled to produce new spaces of representations. In the municipal platforms, which try to articulate diversity around the need of working together for an abstract common good, the transition is even more limited. The differences are only partially expressed and not really problematised, as the main aim is to guarantee that everyone works for that common goal.

The implementation of these strategies of commoning did not eliminate the tensions completely. As evinced by the assemblies, tensions emerge periodically in connection to certain limitations in the capability to expose, articulate or assemble this heterogeneity by the different models of *autogestion* and commoning. The next subsection analyses these challenges, mainly around the contradictions between the attempts to impose representations that tend to unification and the expression of heterogeneity.

The challenges of combining difference: abstraction and rescaling

The previous chapter described a few examples of conflicts that have challenged the cohesion of the groups and the capability of expanding and connecting the different local struggles. Behind these disputes one can identify the tensions of exposing, articulating and assembling differ-

¹ The constant demands of the “dynamisers” for the affected people to stay engaged or the discussions within Stop Desahucios about having one or two assemblies evince that the activists acknowledge that problem.

ent perceptions with the formation of unifying representations. In other words, these conflicts relate to the tensions between the two moments within the triad of representations of space and spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1991). The first moment as abstractions generated by certain bodies to be transcendently imposed. The second one as the immanent representation emerged from articulating and assembling different bodies and perceptions. The examples in the two nodes of PAH are quite explicit in this regard. The biggest quarrels derived from clashes between different representations of daily activism, mainly around different levels of abstraction. These challenges reconnect with the discussion about militant particularism and Harvey's (1995; 1996) argument for the need of rescaling to perform the necessary abstraction to connect heterogeneous place-based struggles. As he argues for the need of abstraction, he parallels it with a process of rescaling, in a formulation that has two main implications: on the one hand, Harvey's claim implies that abstraction is limited at local levels; on the other, that rescaling is a condition for increasing the abstraction necessary for connecting place-based struggles. Analysing those conflicts may cast some light on how the dynamics of *autogestion* and commoning previously discussed influence abstraction and its relation to processes of rescaling to produce a space of activism guided by the right to difference.

Starting by the limitation of abstraction at local level, a quick look at these conflicts in PAH seems to initially confirm Harvey's assertion. The main confrontations derived from the collision between representations that reflect different levels of abstraction. In both nodes, it was the more abstract position demanding more explicitly the need for challenging political economic structures the one that was defeated. This defeat resulted in their advocates leaving the groups forcibly or voluntarily. In Stop Desahucios, this confrontation took place between former members, who tried to politicise the issue further than the simple renegotiation of individual mortgages, and current ones, who considered that the most important was to support the people in need, with little attention to the right to housing or housing speculation.¹ In PAH Barcelona, the best

¹ This was a common accusation launched by former members of Stop Desahucios in the mailing list before abandoning or being deleted from it.

example is the conflict that led to the expulsion of 22 activists which originated in divergent visions of housing occupations.

The outcome of these confrontations reveals how the levels of *autogestion* affected the capability of abstraction. In the case of Stop Desahucios, the high levels of *autogestion* enabled them to resist the imposition of a unifying representation of the activism, whereas in PAH Barcelona, the hybrid system of *autogestion* was used by a group to articulate a limited representation backed by the majority of the bodies. Consequently, PAH Barcelona reveals higher levels of abstraction and involvement in rescaling, while Stop Desahucios has never been directly involved in a national campaign and the abstraction is very limited. This limitation evinces how the *autogestion* that favours the adaptation to local interests can prevent the nodes from getting involved in the rescaling: whereas bigger chapters like Barcelona engage in the rescaling, smaller ones focus almost exclusively on their everyday activism around individual cases. This limitation of abstraction is reinforced by the commoning strategy of focusing on concrete short-term goals, which leaves abstract long-term objectives to be discussed in the national assemblies by certain activists—mainly linked to the coordination group. This lack of abstraction initially confirms Harvey's claim for the need of rescaling demands to generate alternative representations.

The consequence of the implementation of these forms of *autogestion* and commoning is that the attempts for generating and imposing a coherent unifying representation of activism, both from other scales or from within the groups, are weak. The representations are not translated to the nodes, and even when the connection with other scales exists, as in PAH Barcelona, the impact of these representations is limited. The decisions taken in the national encounters are not simply accepted but openly discussed in the assemblies, where the activists who attended the national meetings launch the debates. The discussion about when to register the proposal for the new housing law is a good example of how the strong *autogestion* guarantees that the assembly generates its representations independently. This kind of discussion was absent in Stop De-

sahucios, as none of the activists attended any national encounters and the only concern was to try to guarantee that the affected people could keep their houses.

That said, although this articulation seems to confirm the need for rescaling, PAH Barcelona offers examples that partially challenge Harvey's claim about the limited abstraction enabled by mobilisation in the lower scales. Some discussions exhibit a more complex reality than the simple separation between scales. The debates about the motion to the City Hall or what to do in cases of small owners are examples of how perceptions with different levels of abstraction come together without direct reference to other scales. The mere inclusion of a proposal, such as the 30% one, reveals higher levels of abstraction than the simple struggle for individual cases. The multiple positions in the debate reveal differences in the levels of abstraction of the different perceptions intersecting. Whereas some activists support that this could be done in any part of the city, others argued for the need of having them in the place of the new development—in order to tackle the brutal speculation of housing in the city centre, the goal of the proposal—which in the end became the majoritarian option. A similar intersection between different levels of abstraction was also shown in the debate about what to do in evictions from houses belonging to a small owner, where the discussion about how housing speculation is defined is questioned from multiple angles. These cases exemplify how, within an exclusively local perspective, the discussions departed from quite concrete topics to conjoin diverse levels of abstraction that led to the emergence of a representation that demands political economic measures to increase affordable housing. Perhaps this abstraction does not evolve to the level of explicitly challenging capitalism, but enables the development of abstraction without fully formed representations of space.

Both dynamics of abstractions, the one debated exclusively within the groups and the one that follows the rescaling, intertwine and are traversed by a commonality that nuances the relation between scales and abstraction: the bodies that canalise them. In both cases, the persons in charge of launching and transmitting the discussions are members of a

core group of activists, who are usually not affected people, and mainly members of the *comisión* of coordination. The abstraction depends then from the presence of certain activists, who carry the representations to the different spaces and are also in charge of encouraging the combination of different perceptions to create new representations. Since PAH Barcelona is one of the main nodes involved in the creation of a minimum representation of PAH nationally,¹ these activists filter those representations to the local chapter, where they are confronted with multiple perceptions. This movement results in the explicit acknowledgement of a heterogeneity of perceptions that is translated into varied visions about housing and socioeconomic issues (Gonick, 2016). Moreover, the centralisation in certain bodies of the relationship between different spaces and scales resonates with that centralisation used in the occupations to deal with the social machine to increase the stability of the local spaces and protect their immanence.

The cases of the municipal platforms pose a bigger challenge to Harvey's questioning of the impossibility of abstraction at the local level. In their assemblies, the debates revealed higher levels of abstraction, linked for instance to the defence of feminism, ecologism or against commodification. Departing from specific initiatives for the two cities, these debates are often framed within an abstract perspective that refers to the right to the city or the commons as alternatives to neoliberal urbanism (Peiteado Fernández, 2018b). The discussions within Municilab, the workshops organised by MaT and the claims for creating a refuge city for asylum seekers or against gender violence show an abstraction that connects local issues to global dynamics. The questioning of Harvey's argument for the need of rescaling for abstraction hinted at by the debates within PAH Barcelona is deepened here. High levels of abstraction are present in the place-based struggles, where they constantly intersect with more concrete demands.

¹ It must be remembered that PAH Barcelona was the first node of PAH created in 2009 and one of the most active and visible.

That said, these higher levels of abstraction are not the product of an assemblage of heterogeneous perceptions, but a consequence of the low levels of *autogestion*. The abstractions are mainly the product of the unified representations of the activism generated by smaller groups within the platforms. Nevertheless, the high attendance at activities like Municilab or the workshops of MaT hints towards the alignment of these abstractions with the perceptions of the activists. Therefore, more than the reduction of abstraction, the lack of *autogestion* seems to limit the possibility of those abstractions being constantly reworked product of the interaction of diverse perceptions.

Moreover, the biggest tensions within the platforms did not derive from the confrontation of abstract representations locally, but in relation to rescaling attempts at replicating the coalition for regional elections.¹ The negotiation to generate a coherent representation at the regional scale provoked confrontation and disappointment. Many activists denounced the process for being hierarchical and opaque, bringing the limited *autogestion* for combining different perceptions to the surface. This disappointment led to the process alienating the support of many who ended up focusing on their local activism, and hence refused to cooperate in the regional elections.

The subsequent failure in the elections proved how the short-term goals strategy of commoning becomes more difficult to implement regionally, as those goals are less attainable. The conjoining of diverse representations of the groups that form the platforms did not generate confrontation when the short-term objectives were reached, but they erupted in conflict when those were not achieved. These processes brought heterogeneity and the distinctions between Mareantes/Guanyemers that were unproblematic until then back to the surface. The formulation of short-term goals through the vision of a common good turned the internal functioning to a main source of conflict when the representations of activism are disputed and not based on the conjoining of diverse perceptions.

¹ En Marea in Galiza and Catalunya en Comú in Catalonia.

In contrast, PAH's commoning based on mutual individual support turned debates about internal configuration into an add-on, as they do not directly tackle personal cases or housing precariousness. For instance, the discussion about the coordination group was treated with disdain by the affected people, who showed no interest in joining. The only example of a challenge in terms of activism and internal configuration is the case of the expulsion, but this was exceptional and the outcome possible because the expelled activists had a lower degree of power to affect the assembly and the representation was minoritarian. The conflict was a direct challenge to a representation—in this case from a more abstract perspective. This resulted in lack of support by the majority of affected people.

The cases do not totally discard the influence of the processes of rescaling, but hint to a complex articulation of abstraction and scaling in relation to the dynamics of differentiation and integration. This may make it useful to analyse these intersections between abstraction and rescaling from a different perspective, namely the tensions between performative and representational politics. The cases showed how the different groups move between these poles, since, although the abstraction is present within the place-based struggles, the connections among local groups are articulated through the networks and not through the encompassing of demands. It is at this stage that the differences between groups are made obvious. Whereas PAH leans towards a performative perspective, as the bodies and their connections are the ones that transmit the abstraction across scales, the platforms lean towards representational politics. In PAH Barcelona, the bodies of certain activists carry certain representations, which seem not to respond to scalar redefinitions, but to the movement of these activists. Moreover, as this movement of bodies is inexistent in Stop Desahucios, these debates are rare in its assemblies, this translated into a limited challenge to representations linked to indebtedness. The differences in the motion proposals presented by the two chapters exemplify these differences. Stop Desahucios focuses on

an individualistic perspective around the protection of affected people, without measures to reduce housing commodification.¹

Unlike PAH, the attempts at rescaling by the platforms to create a structure independent from the municipal platforms seemed way more problematic. The goal was to replicate the same process that led to the platforms, with the same groups but with activists that were in a secondary position within the platforms. In contrast to PAH, the ones permanently involved in the regional coalitions were different from those core members of the municipal platforms, which resulted in a certain discontinuity and strong confrontation that led to the mentioned disappointment. This form of rescaling implicitly implement Harvey's (1996) proposal. It attempted to translate the demands and representations to a different scale through the creation of another space that, despite the connections, would be independent. This generated more tensions than the ephemeral conjoining implemented by PAH—and the platforms themselves when they share experiences and cooperate in workshops, Municilab, etc. These tensions provoked a bigger discontinuity in the engagement of the activists that broke the connections between groups and jeopardised the local platforms, as a consequence of those tensions among the same groups intersecting in two different spaces. Many interviewees mentioned how they found themselves disconnected from the regional coalitions, in some cases leading to the abandonment of the municipal platform. These visions were openly debated in the assemblies of MaT, which generated the most confrontational discussions I experienced during the time of fieldwork and the only time at which that heterogeneity of perceptions explicitly emerged in an assembly.

Summary

When looking at the assemblies, one must start by acknowledging the high levels of *autogestion* of all the groups, a product of their capability

¹ Two great examples of how the profile of the activists influences the local chapters in the opposite side of antagonist continuum are the PAHs of Sabadell and Manresa, two cities in the province of Barcelona, whose official denomination is PAHC (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages and Capitalism). Already the name of the nodes shows the importance within these groups of members linked to the squatting and libertarian movements (García Lamarca, 2016), reaching levels of antagonism that would be impossible in many nodes.

to resist control by any external actor. In the implementation of this *autogestion*, the assemblies emerge as the key encounters where the immanent capability of the groups to produce their everyday life space becomes explicitly implemented (Merrifield, 2006, p. 141). Nonetheless, the existence or not of a body of enforcers has important implications for the way this *autogestion* is implemented to enhance the right to difference. Although the presence of enforcers signs the existence of a certain striation that can limit the exposure of difference, this interacts with other mechanisms to favour or prevent the smoothing that would enable the subsequent acceptance, articulation and assemblage of that difference. One of these mechanisms that favour the smoothing is the existence of specific rules shared by all the members of the groups. These codes set some limitations to the control by those enforcers and appear as a key factor to smooth space. In the cases in which the codes are not commonly known and subject to constant revision and change the striation hinted at by the existence of enforcers becomes reinforced.

A second factor that needs considering is how that enforcement is implemented, therefore, if the goal is to include as many bodies as possible in the creation of the space or to set certain limits that striate it. In cases like PAH Barcelona, in which the enforcement is developed as a tool to encourage participation of multiple bodies and the enforcers function as bodies that canalise and redistribute the flows, the smoothing and the *autogestion* become reinforced. In contrast, in those cases in which the enforcement is limited to keeping the assembly ordered, the *autogestion* becomes limited in line with a striation that sets certain bodies as initial transmitters and final receptors of the flows. It is at this point when the form of commoning interacts with the *autogestion* to keep together such heterogeneity, which influences the potentiality of assembling different perceptions from which new lived spaces can emerge (Tampio, 2009).

The cases revealed two main ways of pursuing such cohesion: in the chapters of PAH—especially PAH Barcelona—based on the interpersonal dependence to achieve small victories that generates a cohesion without any essential identities; in the municipal platforms, on the other

hand, the cohesion is also based on the pursuit of concrete victories, but in connection to a common good that pushes the members to work together for a clear goal. Whereas the first option seems quite effective to keeping the cohesion and to assemble difference thanks to the small victories and the personal bonds forged in the activism, the second option seems more fragile when the small victories are not acquired, and especially in relation to attempts at rescaling activism. This rescaling poses strong challenges to the recognition and assemblage of difference. In most cases, the rescaling directly relates to processes of abstraction that produce tensions in the dynamics of the commoning of heterogenous perceptions within the groups.

That said, these tensions are mainly a product of different dynamics of abstraction and rescaling, which produce different outcomes. In PAH, the performative logic in which the bodies maintain their central role of translating the abstract representations between scales does not create tensions. Whereas, the more representational logic of the municipal platforms, in which the bodies lose their importance as connectors of flows, generates important hindrances. As these strategies intersect with the different forms of commoning, the first evinces a bigger capability to enhance the right to difference. The abstraction is limited, the representations are weaker and the conflicts between competing representations are rarer. Whereas, the second option has shown to be problematic, as the new representations collide with the previous ones and with the perceptions that the bodies had of the activism.

Up to this point this chapter has analysed how different spaces are created by these four groups. Focusing on different kinds of encounters—i.e. occupations, assemblies and small group meetings—I analysed the dynamics that form these spaces, their interaction and how they influence the exposure, articulation and assemblage of difference in order to fully enhance a right to difference from which new spaces of representation of everyday life can emerge (Schmid, 2008). In the next section, I recapitulate and take this analysis further to discuss to what extent the right to difference is enhanced and actualises war machines able to confront capitalism.

Producing spaces of resistance: right to difference and war machine

The activism analysed in the previous sections has one aim: to resist, in different ways and degrees, capitalism. In line with the theoretical framework developed in this thesis, this resistance is analysed here from the perspective of the contestation to the spatial arrangements imposed by the system. Consequently, the next question is whether the spaces generated by these groups advance towards that resistance, mainly through the emergence of new singularities against the capitalist spatial striation and its subjectification (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 363). In this section, I recapitulate the dynamics analysed above and excavate the potential emergence of war machines in relation to the Lefebvrian right to difference (Elden, 2004, p. 226), to advance in the opposition to homogenising representations.

As a starting point, this chapter has analysed the ways in which occupations and *autogestion* can confront the capitalist organisation of space. The first section showed how occupations implement a direct resistance to spatial striation by challenging the imposed use and division of space created around indebtedness that represents housing as a property, as an asset to be traded. Through the occupation of certain sites that were restricted to those affected by indebtedness, these sites enter into a process of redefinition (Watt, 2016). In some cases, this redefinition transforms them from places of despair—where to go to receive bad news only—into places of hope and where to stay to claim for a solution to the problem. In other cases, the occupation of houses directly challenges private property and the segmentation between private and public spaces. These occupations change the perception of housing as an asset to be traded. Housing stops being a private property to be a mixed place in which the private and the public intertwine. With these occupations, the lived spaces become expanded as new places appear incorporated in everyday lives, in some cases to become the central places around which people's lives gravitate.

The cases showed how these occupations smooth space and attack the segmentation by trespassing the borders that divide them to redefine what these spaces mean. This redefinition, however, proved to be insufficient. The occupation only sketches a challenge to that subjectification that fixes the bodies in specific spaces according to essentialist definitions. To complement this move, the groups implement specific forms of *autogestion* that contribute to different degrees to developing alternatives to those striations. Therefore, the occupation that questioned these spaces is followed by a redefinition of them through the recovery of the immanent capability of the users to produce spaces—not only debtors but urban inhabitants in general. This is mainly performed through encounters like the assemblies, where this *autogestion* is more explicitly activated. The way the movements expanded by simple imitation and the extreme decentralisation by which each chapter works independently (Álvarez de Andrés, Zapata and Zapata Campos, 2014) translate into a lack of external control that facilitates the *autogestion* of each node. Despite the commonalities and the existence of some vague rules about the organisation—specifically in the case of PAH—all four groups were able to decide how they function and the direction of their activism free of the interference of other groups. Nonetheless, this immanent capability is insufficient and only a first step to guaranteeing *autogestion* by avoiding that any external forces transcendently impose certain forms of space. This first feature must be expanded by the capability of each body within the groups to affect such production of space, in order to avoid the imposition of transcendental representations of space from within the groups.

This chapter has shown how the differences in this second feature of *autogestion* affect the redefinition of the space in the different groups. Although in general all groups allow, to different degrees, the expression of difference, its articulation seems to depend of the way they exercise this second step of involving the different bodies and perceptions. This move of *autogestion* appears central to fully enhancing a right to difference (Elden, 2004, p. 226; Kipfer *et al.*, 2008, p. 203) from which a war machine can actualise as a space where new singularities emerge from the interaction of heterogeneous perceptions to generate new spaces of rep-

resentation. Thus, to guarantee the Lefebvrian right to difference emerged as a condition that the initial acknowledgement and articulation of difference evolve into an assemblage that should not prevent the emergence of future differences to be assembled again. This assemblage was only achieved in those cases in which a permanent open-ended process of *autogestion* had certain constraints that implemented a limited striation of the space through the use of enforcers of commonly known codes. This limited *autogestion* favoured the assembling in connection with the development of certain dynamics to keep such heterogeneity together. The need of keeping the heterogeneity together raises the question of how to reach a balance between enhancing heterogeneity and the necessity of achieving certain cohesion for developing collective action. It is now when the problematic of commoning mentioned by Hardt and Negri (2004) becomes central to analyse potential solutions to that challenge from which a war machine can emerge.

Maintaining the heterogeneity together: between individual dependence and the common good

The cases showed how the groups faced this challenge for commoning in two ways: PAH through the use of mutual personal dependence and focusing on the solution of concrete issues; the municipal platforms referring to a common good, also with a focus on concrete victories but framing them in a more abstract way. The model based on personal dependence and concrete demands has shown to be weaker in the case of Stop Desahucios, where the solution to those demands are rare in a space that tends towards smoothing. Although the intersection of these aspects favours a form of *autogestion* that allows the expression of heterogeneity, the right to difference is not fully enhanced, as the smoothing does not lead to a subsequent assembling that would favour the development of new lived spaces (Stanek, 2011, p. 82). Instead, the intersection of smoothing, high levels of *autogestion* and a lack of victories and personal dependence led to direct confrontation in which most members maintain their previous perceptions without much question-

ing.¹ In this case, the limited development of new singularities only partially questions those divisions that fix the bodies to certain segments and places.² In other words, the affected person rethinks her or his position within the system, but with little questioning of their subjectification as indebted bodies.

The solution implemented by PAH Barcelona to the challenge of a commoning based on individual support was to generate strong bonds of dependence between the different activists, reinforced by the use of explicit forms of care (Santos, 2019) and the co-creation of knowledge. This form of commoning was strengthened by the capability to achieve periodic, small, victories and by the intense engagement of the activists within the activities of the group. This form of commoning intertwined with a model of *autogestion* based on the imposition of a clear set of codes implicitly known by all activists and the creation of a group that guarantee their observance. The role of this group becomes pivotal because, at the same time that it guarantees the smoothing by encouraging the intersection of diverse perceptions, it poses certain striations through a centralisation of flows. This form of limited smoothing, limited *autogestion* and personal dependence promotes spaces that evolve towards smoothing, where bodies and flows recombine in different ways to those set by indebtedness (Lazzarato, 2012). This recombination allows the expression of different—sometimes even divergent—perceptions and the enhancement of the right to difference through certain assemblage of perceptions that often generate singularities that challenge subjectification. Thus, the initial shame and fear of being unable to pay their debts transforms, in most cases, into a rage that questions their responsibility and their position in the circuit of debt as the source of their precarity. This is translated into new perceptions that question housing commodification, expanding in some cases to other aspects like the use of public space and the submission of private property to citizens' needs.

¹ One must remember the pejorative comments about Romani people and the use of homophobic language, which would not be tolerated by the PAH Barcelona's *dinamización* and were not directly confronted or questioned.

² What Deleuze and Guattari would call more precisely relative lines of deterritorialisation, understood as the movement of the bodies out of that segmentation (Bonta and Protevi, 2006, p. 116).

That said, the position of certain bodies as centralisers of flows sets some striation that can limit the emergence of spaces that can really challenge the unifying representations. As these bodies incorporate their more antagonist representations within the flows, they promote the generation of new lived spaces where to develop new singularities. Nevertheless, their central and prominent position invest them with a great power to prevent these from becoming a frontal challenge to capitalist representations.¹ As Guattari (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007) put it, some “vectors of molecular revolution” can be identified, but they are still incipient, without generating molecular lines that lead to lines of flight.²

This makes it pertinent to question whether alternative lived spaces of representation need to be promoted, how and what are the limits of this promotion. In the cases analysed, the emergence of these spaces seems to be favoured by those “dynamisers” and their more antagonist perceptions, which get incorporated into the flows as they redistribute them. The use of the word *affected* becomes a metaphor of the importance of this influence and of the transition in the affective power that determines the relations between the bodies. By entering into the production of these spaces, the people at risk of losing their houses incorporate other affective relations that not only compete with the one they embody from debt, but also counteract it through a process of substitution. The production and permanent reconstruction of these spaces in each encounter provide the affected with new spaces of sociality liberated from that bi-political control. The position within the global flows of debt is challenged, as the affected person gains control over their everyday life. It is then, in the relation between the simultaneous smoothing that promotes the new lived spaces and certain striation that limits them, that new singularities are created and expanded within PAH Barcelona.

¹ As exemplified by the expulsion of activists that wanted to take the challenge further.

² Even though DG stress the importance of molecular lines as those processes of deterritorialisation that challenge molar representations that unify and subjectify, I decided not to use this concept to focus on the spatial aspects of smoothing/striation and the emergence of new singularities as the product of the generation of certain spaces. Talking of molecular lines would require to research more in depth the personal stories of affected people, which would require a more microsociological perspective than the one I use here.

Emergent singularities and the challenge to capitalist representations

The hegemonic representation of housing as an asset becomes questioned and challenged thanks to the confrontation of different perceptions, as exemplified by the case of the affected person in the welcome assembly that wanted to keep the house until he could sell it to make some profit. This vision, which is quite common when new affected people enter PAH, becomes questioned and challenged by these same affected people in a period of few weeks as they enter the dynamics of the group.

Although this questioning of the representations of housing and subjectification is generalised within PAH Barcelona, in two specific cases the expansion of singularities that confront subjectification is more evident: women and migrants.¹ Since the moment I joined PAH Barcelona I identified how women take a central role in the activism and the defence of their rights. Within few weeks, this transforms into full processes of empowerment in which they start challenging the spatial segmentation that fix them in certain places and redefining, for example, gender violence in terms of male domination and not as an individual problem. This is a good example of the emergence of alternative singularities in relation to the central function within capitalism of the binary segmentation man/woman that fixes properties and places for each gender (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987). Regarding migrants, I witnessed also how migrants, who thought they had no rights, in the lapse of few weeks argue for their human rights and challenge the definition of rights linked to citizenship (Barbero, 2015)—in line with Harvey's claims for the importance of human rights (Harvey, 2000). Again, their fear and shame turn into hope and courage to demand a solution as any other Spanish national would, while challenging strong segmentations based on ethnicity and nationality. The assemblies or the occupations of PAH Barcelona emerge as spaces of where to assemble a heterogeneity of perceptions that otherwise would not come into contact with each other in the segre-

¹ For more detailed accounts on the important role and the impact of these two groups in PAH see Gonick (2016) or Suarez (2017).

gated spatial practices of the neoliberal city. By contrast, these encounters not only produce new lived spaces of representation through the direct redefinition of spaces with restricted access for these bodies, but also by enhancing the right to difference through their assemblage (Lefebvre, 1996).

MaT and BeC solved the challenging of commoning also around concrete goals, but linking them to an abstract common good. The cases have shown how this interacts with an *autogestion* that constrains the expression of difference. This intersection of striated space, limited *autogestion* and commoning based on a common good reduced the right to difference to generate lived spaces, therefore limiting the development of a war machine. Although in theory most members share perceptions that question capitalist representations, those limitations reduce the production of lived spaces where new singularities can be developed. The considerable levels of striation lead to a participation conceptualised mainly as accountability and to legitimise the positions and decisions already taken. The discussions around divergent perceptions are limited within the assemblies and seem to be moved to other encounters, although, in most cases, the striation limits the *autogestion* and the impact of potential combinations.

While in MaT, the vaguer organisation allows some limited combinations thanks to the overlapping and interaction between multiple encounters, in BeC, this is almost impossible and these encounters remain as simple debate groups without any impact on the production of spaces of representation (Stanek, 2011, p. 82). The only place where these discussions take place is in the coordination group, where the heterogeneity is reduced by its restricted openness to new activists, and from where a coherent representation of the activism is transmitted to the other encounters. It is from this representation that a vague definition of a common good emerges in abstract terms, which is translated into discussions around abstract oppositions to neoliberalism, usually in terms of the development of the commons. The strong striation makes it difficult to challenge or redefine those representations by members outside those

groups, which in the end limits the right to difference and the potential of generating new lived spaces.

Ironically, those initial antagonist perceptions seem to be limited in their evolution, as the members outside the coordination groups have a limited capability to enter into an affective relation to discuss them—the only exception would be the discourse group, favoured by the blurry structure of MaT. While the platforms create potential spaces to contest the striation of the representations imposed by state and capitalism—mainly framed as the right to the city or the commons (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008)—their *autogestion* does not seem to promote the emergence of singularities. These perceptions appear to be subordinated to representations generated in small encounters with limited heterogeneity. In other words, new singularities are not created, but rather the platforms are a tool to canalise antagonist subjectivities previously developed in the form of political identities. Nonetheless, I identified two cases in which I perceived certain promotion of singularities:

1. People for whom the platforms are their first collective permanent activist experience, in many cases in connection to the 15-M movement. This first experience deepens in the questioning of their positionality that pushed them to join the platforms in the first place. I observed this in some cases in MaT, but I found it more common in BeC, although I also perceived how this transition was limited by an unquestioned acceptance of the groups' dominant representations, mainly by the submission to that perspective of working together for short-term objectives for a common good.
2. Activists that join the platforms as members of groups that formed the coalition. Doing so challenged their previous perceptions of politics and traditional parties and stimulated their transition to more autonomist¹ positions that are majoritarian within the original promoters. This was more common in Marea

¹ By autonomist I refer here to positions that share a certain distrust towards state institutions and that defend horizontal and non-hierarchical organisation.

Atlántica where many activists mentioned how they abandoned their former groups—i.e. Podemos—as they got more engaged in MaT.

The differences between the two main ways to ensure commoning and *autogestion* resonate with the differences between performative and representational politics. These difference connects to the two main lines of research to face the challenges of articulating the heterogeneity of militant particularism to pose a challenge to capitalism (Harvey, 1996; Featherstone, 2005). Whereas in PAH the politics are mainly performative, based on the bodies, the platforms tend to focus on representational politics. Whereas in PAH the articulation is based on what the bodies can do to ensure their lived spaces, in the platforms the bodies are partly subsumed to an abstract common good to explicitly resist political economic dynamics. The first one demonstrates the emergence of certain frictions, discontinuities and dependence on the profile of the activists at each specific time, although corrective tactics like the centralisation of flows reduce the impact of those tensions. The case of expulsions is a great example of this performative politics. The confrontation that started around certain representations of activism led to a struggle for maintaining certain positions by specific bodies. This reveals how the different representations become embodied and how representational and performative politics intertwine in the debates around activism. The more representational option implemented by the platforms provides, on the other hand, a greater coherence, but seems to be quite weak in case of defeats and specially for conjoining those place-based struggles through processes of rescaling, which seemed to fall apart once the short-term goal was not achieved. This failure to reach the goals provoked tensions in the networks of activists that connected the municipal and the regional spheres, to the point of breaking them and impeding such articulation of place-based struggles.

Finally, the coexistence of the two strategies points to those tensions between political economic analyses and those that focus on agency. While representational politics revolves around the aim of directly at-

tacking the global dynamics that compose capitalism, the performative one focuses on the capability of every individual as immanent creator of those dynamics. The cases revealed that this last strategy seems to be more effective for that commoning linked to a smoothing war machine where alternative singularities can be developed. At the same time, the case of PAH Barcelona shows how this does not necessarily imply the lack of abstraction. Whereas the use of an abstract common good opens the door to diverse interpretations, the individual approach is sustained by the different individuals' perceptions, without the need for looking for legitimacy in an abstract common good that may be reinterpreted. The use of an abstract common good turns the internal dynamics of *autogestion* and heterogeneity into the main source of tension. When the small victories are not achieved, the interpretation of that common good becomes challenged. This is reinforced by more striated spaces, where the common good is filtered and fixed as the representation of activism, which limits the assembling of heterogeneity linked to the emergence of a war machine.

Summary

This chapter has analysed how the diverse dynamics that produce the different spaces of activism influence the emergence of a war machine based on a right to difference that assembles difference to challenge capitalist organisation of space and its accompanying subjectification (Bonta and Protevi, 2006, p. 165). Departing from an acknowledgement of a common positionality as individuals within the space of indebtedness, the indebted persons start developing their agency by exposing the heterogeneity that the indebtedness had subsumed. The suffering of similar forms of subjection to debt that controls their lives brought together heterogeneous groups of people, whose interaction exposed the different life stories and perceptions that traverse that common positionality. The key aspect for the development of a resistance appeared to be the assembling of such heterogeneity, as that subjectification is based on abstractions that homogenise and compartmentalise everyday life in representations of space. The cases showed how the groups challenge compartmentalisation through the occupation of space and how they enabled the expression of heterogeneity, but they also showed how this exposure

is not enough to guarantee that right to difference. For this right to be fully developed, the heterogeneity of bodies and perceptions—in many cases the product of the subjectification linked to those capitalist representations of space—must be assembled, so a confrontation of that homogenisation can expand to the levels implied by a war machine.

The cases have shown how this assembling depends, initially, on the diverse forms of groups' *autogestion*, so *a priori* all the users of the space have the same possibilities of producing the spaces, without external imposition. From this interaction new individual perceptions can emerge that challenge the representations of what every body is and where they should stay and move. This *autogestion* intertwines with dynamics of smoothing but, surprisingly also with dynamics of limited striation to favour the combination of different bodies and their perceptions. Maintaining this heterogeneity once the assembling is performed, while enabling the articulation with new heterogeneities, becomes then the main challenge for the emergence of war machines that can be sustained and challenge capitalism. The way of confronting this challenge makes it necessary to rethink how to keep this war machine together. The cases have shown that appealing to the individual mutual benefit may be more effective than the reference to a common good. Rescaling appears as the key dynamic revealing those limitations, which are less present when using the first strategy. When appealing to the individual mutual benefit, the rescaling is not done in base to representational politics but through the reconnection and performance of specific bodies. In contrast, appealing to a common good enabled the conjoining at the local level, despite the implementation of limited *autogestion*—especially if the short-term goals are achieved. However, it crumbled when that common good attempted to be rescaled.

In terms of connecting the heterogeneity of multiple place-based struggles, this movement from the performative to representational problematises the potential and the form of rescaling. The bodies and their representations become the connectors between the place-based struggles, which guarantees the *autogestion* and blurs the scale order. If some-

thing, what we witnessed is a rescaling of bodies and not of the representations in themselves, which seemed to fail and to create biggest hindrances when implemented by the platforms for conjoining diverse representations of space. The analysis performed in this chapter reconnects with the aims of the thesis of advancing the understanding of how heterogeneous social movements can develop a resistance to capitalism. The next chapter will discuss these reconnections further by providing some conclusions extracted from this analysis in relation to the research questions.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Social contention is a multifaced phenomenon that may be researched from multiple perspectives. This thesis has focused on its spatial facets to analyse social movements that have been in the forefront of the protest provoked by the deepest economic and political crisis in recent Spanish history. This crisis, a product of an economic model based on housing speculation and the expansion of debt, has impoverished large numbers of the middle and working classes, which in many cases perceived protest as the only way to keep their homes (García Lamarca, 2016; Ortega Fernández, 2017). This thesis has explored that mobilisation and its connections to new political projects that have transformed Spanish institutional politics.

My interest in the spatiality of this contestation started from a curiosity about how the decentralised articulation in local nodes influences activism. As I approached the nodes, I detected strong differences and imbalances between their activism. These imbalances raised new questions about how heterogeneity shapes the movement and influences its coherence or existence. It is around these two aspects of space and heterogeneity that I attempted to construct a theoretical framework which is able to decipher how space and heterogeneity influence contestation. In this framework I combine the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1983; 1987) and Lefebvre (1991), the first two of these authors have theorised heterogeneity extensively, and the third is one of the leading theoreticians concerning the production of space.

Starting from the shared stress on the importance of relationality, I aimed to develop a framework to research the potential of the spaces generated by these groups which contest the spatial arrangements of capitalism. According to this framework, the imposition of the Spanish model was accompanied by the creation of a representation that homogenised space, and the bodies within it, to subsequently divide it into segments in which to fix those bodies (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p. 147). This fixation is produced through the generation of essentialist identities that homogenise all the bodies within each segment—in this case debtor/creditor—so every single body is located in a certain segment that sets the limits within which the bodies can carry on their everyday lives (Lazzarato, 2012; Di Felicianantonio, 2016). The social movements groups emerged as potential producers of spaces where heterogeneity can come together to resist and, in some cases, develop alternatives to this homogenising control. To link these approaches, especially with the research concerning social mobilisation, I recovered the debate around militant particularism (Harvey, 1995). This discussion has its main line of research in the challenges of the articulation of heterogeneous place-based struggles, therefore it provides the ground for framing that discussion about space and heterogeneity within the study of social contestation. In theoretical terms, this framework pursues new ways of analysing urban development and its resistances as the product of the interrelation of individual actions with global dynamics and mechanisms. In other words, the potential of combining the works of the three authors to advance our understanding of how agency and political economy intertwine, which has been one of the main debates within the field of urban studies (Brenner *et al.*, 2011; McFarlane, 2011). This chapter recapitulates the main findings that directly refer to the research questions posed in the introduction.

The first section of this conclusion directly engages with the first two questions. It restates the findings about the redefinition of agency in relation to the production of space and the role of heterogeneity in such a configuration in order to challenge neoliberal imaginaries. Starting from how the agency of the activists has been constructed around the awareness of a common positionality as debtors (García-Lamarca and Kaika,

2016), the thesis has shown how, through activism, the affected people question their subjectification of certain imaginaries that position them within the capitalist system. The cases showed that the emergence of singularities is not straight forward and it depends on the implementation of certain dynamics of control and centralisation of the production of certain spaces that promote those singularities. At the same time, it requires certain codes and total openness to limit that control through the reinforcement of the immanence of the spaces. The analysis revealed how the acknowledgement of the common positionality evolves into the exposure of the heterogeneity that had been subsumed by that homogenisation. Nevertheless, the cases also showed how that transition challenges capitalism when that difference is assembled, which only happens in PAH Barcelona thanks to certain dynamics of centralisation that limit *autogestion*. To maintain this transition, the form of commoning based on short-term goals and individual personal support appeared to be key to generating that assemblage from where alternative spaces of representation can emerge.

Zooming out the findings and reconnecting with the problematic of militant particularism, the second section directly engages with the third research question about how the different spaces of activism created by the groups intersect. I recapitulate how the common positionality became mobilised to emerge as a potential basis to create a space of activism that connects place-based militant particularisms. The proposals to mobilise that common positionality revolve around two trends of performative or representational politics. Whereas the first focuses on the capabilities of interconnected bodies (Featherstone, 2005), on what the bodies can perform, the second looks at the potentiality of embedding demands through processes of abstraction (Harvey, 1996). The cases showed that rather than contrast, both perspectives intersect to form overlapping intertwining spaces, in which the transitions respond to different dynamics depending on the strategy followed, with bigger limitations for strategies dominated by the representational perspective.

As a consequence of the constraints and opportunities posed by this intersection, a subsection discusses the findings concerning the generation of alternative spatial arrangements, and specifically the potentiality of a contestation reluctant to follow the scalar order. The cases have demonstrated how attempts at rescaling following a representational logic failed to build an alternative, while the refusal to rescale and the simple coordination of bodies emerged as stronger alternatives which were more difficult for the system to control. This combination of the place-based struggles hints at the emergence of a war machine (Bonta and Protevi 2006, p. 165) that attempts to resist the capitalist spatial organisation through the enhancing of difference, which in this case depends on a commoning based on individual dependence and the horizontal intersection of struggles.

The final section of this conclusion returns to the theoretical challenges around the research of contention and urban studies. The section reflects on three specific paths opened in the thesis as specific contributions to advancing and guiding research into urban contention. The first contribution relates to the challenges of combining political economic and agential perspectives that were represented in this thesis by the debates between Critical Urban Theory and Assemblage Theory. To start giving answers to those challenges, the thesis explored the potential of using the struggles to define and organise space as the ground where those capitalist political economic dynamics intertwine with the agency of actors that develop or resist them.

The thesis' second contribution revolves around the potential of the use of *encounter* as a key concept for overcoming the compartmentalisation of contention dominant in Social Movements Theory. The analysis of all social movements activities as *emergent encounters* which are the products of the interconnection of multiple actors and dynamics can enrich our understanding of how the actions intertwine and their role in the development of activism.

Finally, the thesis' third main contribution is that it excavates potential ways of redefining the relation between the geographical variables that

influence contention. Departing from the challenges to combine the analysis of the influence of place, territory, scale or networks in social contention, this thesis has explored the potential impact of a relational vision of space to better grasp the definition of those variables and their interactions.

Emergent agency: from heterogeneous perceptions to alternative singularities

This section engages with the first two research questions:

1. How does the formation of agency, individual and collective, relate to the production of space by the different social movements' groups?
2. How does heterogeneity relate and influence that interaction between agency formation and the production of these spaces?

To answer how agency is (trans)formed through activism, I started the analysis in the debt expansion that preceded the crisis which caused many to protest. This debt expansion became a key form of control of everyday lives and sociality (Lazzarato, 2012) through the debtor/creditor distinction (Di Felicianantonio, 2016). As debt homogenised the position of the debtors, the thesis has shown how the trauma of people losing their homes triggered a questioning of this subjection to debt. This questioning brought together heterogeneous people who found that, despite their differences, they share a common positionality as indebted subjects (García Lamarca, 2016). As housing precarity generalised, the ruptures linked to the circuit of debt transformed housing into a topic that traversed the many segmentations generated by the capitalist axiomatic denounced by DG (1987): the housing crisis hit the working classes hard, but it also affected the impoverished middle classes (Palomera, 2014; Sabaté, 2016); although it mainly affected migrants, it also significantly struck Spanish citizens (Suarez, 2017); in terms of gender, it hit entire families, and in many cases single mothers, who fought to save their homes (Gonick, 2016). The desperate situation pushed the affected people to cross these and other segmentations, raising awareness of a

subjection to a system that totally controls their everyday lives. This process, product of the embedment of housing in debt, demonstrates the great capability of housing to expose capitalist control and to mobilise the common positionality for the redefinition of agency. The ruptures linked to the loss of one's home appeared to be such traumatic experiences that they offer strong motivations for those affected to cross the segmentations and mobilise against that subjectification of debt. The transversality of the perception of housing as a basic need that crossed all segments of the population demonstrates the potential of housing to generate dynamics of resistance capable to mobilise large portions of a previously demobilised population.

As affected people and activists came into contact with one another, the thesis showed how the initial redefinition of their agency provoked by the trauma started to be developed and mobilised. The individual despair, linked to a passive flexibility to adapt to the constraints set by the indebtedness (Malabou, 2008, p. 46), changes into emotions of hope. With this transition the affected people become active agents to confront debt control. The analysis has revealed how this transformation of agency was the product of an initial substitution in the affective power and relations. The everyday life of the people in risk of losing their homes transformed from being fully affected and controlled by the capitalist indebtedness, to entering more bidirectional affective relationships. This produces new forms of relations that creates innovative forms of agency (Featherstone, 2008, p. 33) that challenge the former and partially substitute it. This new affect is the product of the interaction between diverse, affected people and activists, who produce new spaces of sociality for escaping that control, while new forms and visions of their agency emerge (Ortega Fernández, 2017). This agency emerges from the common positionality that the affected people share as indebted subjects to regain their capability to produce and define their own spaces. In other words, departing from a "space of indebtedness" that connects heterogeneous bodies and everyday lives to subsequently homogenise them, a "space of activism" emerges. In this "space of activism" the intersection of affected people and activists enables them to recover control over their everyday lives and to challenge the capitalist organisation of space,

especially through occupations in which the spatial arrangements imposed by debt are directly confronted by a regained capability to affect. The occupations redefine what those sites mean and cross the borders that the indebtedness sets to delimit where the indebted can continue their sociality. The occupations blur the segmentations, open the door to the unexpected and explicitly perform that questioning of the positionality by getting together diverse perceptions and life experiences.

However, the occupations, which challenge the segmentation of spaces, did not lead to a full redefinition of the agency and space. It has been during the coming together in other encounters that this redefinition has been produced through the development of different forms of *autogestion*. The cases have shown how the occupations and the *autogestion* complement each other in advancing the development of agency and the production of spaces. This discussion directly engages with the second question regarding how the heterogeneity relates to the formation of agency and the production of space. As the transition in the questioning progresses, the intersection between heterogeneous perceptions exposes the subjectifications and evolves into questioning one's own perceptions. This thesis, however, has shown how this questioning does not necessarily evolve into a contestation of those perceptions and the production of alternative spaces. Although the exposure and articulation of heterogeneity enabled people to question and challenge the imaginaries internalised through processes of subjectification expressed in people's own perceptions, in many occasions the questioning fell short of developing alternative spaces and agencies. The analysis showed that it is in those cases in which the articulation evolves into an assemblage of heterogeneous perceptions that individual and collective agency openly attack the capitalist representations. The concept of assemblage re-emerges (DeLanda, 2006), as the product of spatial processes that combine heterogeneity to generate collective representations under constant change.

The cases of Stop Desahucios and PAH Barcelona showed the importance of *autogestion* in that transition from exposure to articulation

and finally assemblage. While the exposure of heterogeneity was obvious in both chapters, the articulation proved to be limited in Stop Desahucios, but more common in PAH Barcelona. In the latter, the limited *autogestion* based on the centrality of certain bodies favours the development of the articulation into an assemblage that promoted the emergence of singularities. This hybrid form of *autogestion* maintained high levels of immanence in the production of such spaces, while inserting the antagonist perceptions of those centralising bodies within the flows as the bodies canalise the flows. The key to keeping the critical balance between this immanence that exposes the heterogeneity and the centralisation that facilitates the assembling was the acceptance of clear codes for the production of space and the lower territorialisation that lead to totally open encounters. As the codes are clear and shared by all members, the centralisation that gives coherence to the new representations is accepted, but also subject to limitation. The centralisation of flows appears to favour an assemblage that generates new representations in permanent interaction with the activists' perceptions, mutually affecting each other in the process. In other words, the clear rules and the centrality of certain bodies that incorporate antagonist perceptions in the flows as they distribute them, enable the emergence of spaces where the heterogeneous perceptions assemble to articulate agency.

In contrast, the implementation of the highest levels of *autogestion* or the most reduced ones offer little articulation, although outcomes differ. In the case of the almost total lack of striation of Stop Desahucios, the immanence helped to mobilise the agency of demobilised people who had accepted their positionality within capitalism (Ortega Fernández, 2017), but this led to a limited questioning of the subjectification. In the case of the most reduced *autogestion* of MaT and BeC, the hierarchical organisation in different levels limits the immanent capability to produce space. The exposure of heterogeneity and the creation of singularities were both limited, as was the capability to attract previously demobilised people. Consequently, the spaces respond to representations generated in closed small encounters that obscure the heterogeneity.

Therefore, a space product of an *autogestion* that balances little degree of striation and strong smoothing seems to facilitate the assemblage of heterogeneous perceptions that become questioned and rearticulated in the process of producing such space. Heterogeneity then becomes enhanced and a key element in the reformulation of agency and the production of alternative everyday spaces. Moreover, the centralisation in certain bodies has shown to be effective in protecting the immanence in the production of space also in moments of direct confrontation with the social machine, like the occupations, when certain activists occupy an intermediate position between spaces. That said, the production of space where the heterogeneity becomes assembled depended on a second aspect that intertwines with the *autogestion*: the form of commoning to keep the heterogeneity together.

All four groups focus on short-term concrete goals that require the activists to work together, despite their differences. Nevertheless, this similar mechanism is not mobilised in the same way, which, as the thesis showed, produced different outcomes in how the agency and the spaces form. Whereas in PAH, the commoning mainly takes a performative perspective—as these goals are based on the mutual support and individual dependence—in the platforms the strategy transits towards a representational perspective, as it relates to a vague common good that would benefit not only all activists but also the society in general. Unlike previous mobilisation around housing which used an abstract framing that failed to generalise mobilisation (Aguilar Fernández, 2010), the attention of PAH to individual cases within a local perspective has proven to be more effective at problematising the housing issue and to increase mobilisation. The focus on the individual's situation and mutual dependence seem to offer a greater potential to mobilise agency around such topics by connecting them to small struggles and the sharing of concrete diverse experiences to generate alternative discourses and models (Di Felicianantonio, 2017). This form of commoning has favoured the attraction and combination of heterogeneity, while redefining the activist's agency. Whereas the appeal to a common good implemented by the platforms not only limited the exposure of heterogeneous percep-

tions, it also revealed great weakness when the short-term goals were not achieved, as will be expanded upon below in connection to the dynamics of rescaling.

Thus, regarding the intersection between agency, space and heterogeneity, the thesis has shown the centrality of the forms of commoning and *autogestion* in affecting the formation of agency and the production of space. These intertwined phenomena shape activism. Whereas the interaction of a commoning based on individual dependence with a hybrid mechanism of *autogestion* helped the reformulation of agency and the production of alternative spaces, commoning around an abstract common good that intertwines with a restricted *autogestion* greatly reduces the possibility of redefining agency and of producing alternative spaces. I do not imply that these are the only processes influencing the possibilities for the emergence of alternative agencies and spaces, but in light of the research here, they emerge as central dynamics in the development of collective action.

Rethinking the expansion of activism

The divergent results in the emergence of the assemblage of heterogeneity open new ways to understanding how agency can be effectively mobilised to resonate with larger numbers of the population. Having this in mind, the thesis has provided two main insights, which are only sketched in this conclusion, but that I think open paths for exploring new ways in which activism could be expanded:

Firstly, the potentiality of topics, like housing, for generating new forms of active agency to challenge capitalism. As housing problems and dependence on debt becomes relevant to large parts of the population, housing becomes a major impetus for mobilisation due to housing's status as a basic need. This formulation makes housing a less politically charged topic, as it appeals to a "common sense" of the need of having a home and liberating oneself from the control of indebtedness, which allows multiple perceptions of housing to converge.

Secondly, as capitalism has colonised every aspect of everyday life, the resistance cannot emerge from outside the system but from inside the system, as there is no outside. As neoliberalism is characterised by the imposition of extreme individualism, the mobilisation of agency around individual motivations seems to make the struggle more resonant to mobilise those who were subjectified and demobilised before. The call for mobilisation based on the collective common good seems to be less resonant than a call to the defence of an individual interest. The two chapters of PAH exemplify the potentials and risks of this form of building activism. While in PAH Barcelona, this proved to be a fruitful tactic, as the node counteracts the individualism with mechanisms of care and personal dependence, in Stop Desahucios, as the node failed to implement such mechanisms, it reinforced individualisation and was unable to generate a sense of mutual help. In contrast, the appeal to the common good of the platforms attracted mainly activists with perceptions that already challenged the system, but had more problems resonating with perceptions more aligned with the capitalist representations.

In terms of the challenge to capitalism, although the appeal to individual motivations can have a difficult transition to confront the system as a whole, it poses a first challenge to its functioning through the questioning of the subjections. Although local individual resistance will not contest the functioning of capitalism as a whole, multiple local struggles like the ones carried on by the 240 nodes of PAH have helped to attack the general imaginary and the Spanish economic model based on debt and housing speculation (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2016). In the case of PAH Barcelona, the majoritarian questioning of personal perceptions transited, to different degrees, to questioning imposed imaginaries of housing as a property and other segmentations linked to binary identities of gender, nationality or class. These transitions hint at an interconnection between agency and structural aspects, as the questioning of the subjectification as debtors is accompanied in many cases by the questioning of political economic dynamics that legitimise, for example, the occupation of empty apartments to fight and expose commodification and speculation (Díaz-Parra and Candón Mena, 2015). From the

practical experiences and situations of activists and affected people, the activism evolves into certain abstractions about housing in a transition from a personal to an abstract perspective, which, despite its discontinuities and dislocations, challenges the imposed hegemonic representations and imaginaries.

As mentioned, although the risk of individualism linked to the appealing to the individual benefit was overcome by dynamics of mutual support and dependence, the case of Stop Desahucios demonstrates that the risks of this strategy should not be underestimated. In this node, the individualism was dominant, as the possibility to connect the local struggle with global dynamics was limited. As the awareness and the mobilisation of the common positionality enables a first step towards the conjoining of heterogeneous bodies and perceptions, the main challenge of militant particularism emerges. Articulating that local heterogeneity in places further afield to create a space of activism where those local spaces intersect to challenge the system. It is in relation to these dynamics that the municipal platforms cast some light on how the transition can be articulated and how the spaces of activism develop. The next section discusses these dynamics, which directly deal with the third research question, namely: how do the spaces produced by the different groups to develop their activism intersect?

Assembling militant particularism: intersecting performative and representational politics

The problematic concerning militant particularism departs from the acknowledgement of the challenges of combining diverse demands and perceptions without alienating the support of those local groups. Therefore, answering the third research question about how the different spaces relate to each other can help us untangle the possibilities to overcome the challenges posed by militant particularism. The question of how to create a space of activism that intersects multiple place-based resistances is mainly answered from two perspectives: one that focuses on representational politics to perform the necessary abstraction of local demands through processes of rescaling (Harvey, 2000); and a second one that is based on performative politics and that stresses the importance of

the networks of activists, where the pivotal role is exercised by the bodies (Featherstone, 2005). The research in this thesis concerning movements characterised by their strong localism and their attempts to connect multiple local struggles offers some hints as to how we should rethink the possibilities of articulating these spaces of activism.

The cases have shown how the two forms are not exclusive and totally disconnected, but constantly intertwined to construct specific models with different outcomes. The differentiation between performative and representational strategies starts being forged and derives from the form of commoning implemented by the different groups. PAH, based on the individual dependence, implements a performative strategy in which the capacities of the interconnected bodies of the activists are the key for that commoning. In contrast, in the municipal platforms, appealing to a common good already hints at the importance of an abstract demand that must guide the activism.

This transition between strategies responded to movements by certain activists to overcome the limitations of social contestation. While the housing movement has been relatively effective at challenging subjectification, it has found it more problematic when actually confronting the general neoliberal dynamics and forcing improvements of material living conditions (Martínez, 2018). It is against this background that one must understand the attempt of various activists to try an institutional strategy leaning towards a representational perspective. The platforms attempt to widen the limits of a “space of activism” that many considered had exhausted its capability of resistance, but without totally breaking the linkages with it. Now, in contrast to most of the previous initiatives that generally attempted to articulate nationally, the new projects followed the lessons of PAH and focused on the local as the main site of resistance. As this transition is based on a movement of activists from PAH to the platforms,¹ the articulation between the groups maintained a

¹ More evident in the case of BeC. The involvement of former members of Stop Desahucios in the creation of MaT was more residual.

performative strategy, as the bodies of the activists connect to create the new spaces of activism.

Nonetheless, as the platforms consolidated, the movement of bodies and networks involved a transition from performative to representational strategies. The continuity of the platforms with the housing movement is marked by a process of increasing abstraction of that particularism, which culminates in a move into representational politics. In line with commoning on the base of a common good, the platforms frame their mobilisation as direct antagonism to neoliberal urbanism, especially within the abstract claims for the right to the city or the urban commons. The interaction between the groups, which is still based in personal connections, combines the performative and representational politics to produce intertwined spaces of activism: on the one side, PAH's contestation that clearer articulates activism based on the capabilities of the bodies to perform resistance; on the other side, the creation of a different space that directly challenges those dynamics from a political economic perspective in the same local environment. More than an opposition or mutual exclusion between the two strategies, the cases showed how these become complementary to avoid dislocations with the dominant form of communing. To do so, they must be implemented by the different groups in interconnected but separated spaces. In other words, attending to the connections and the transitions between the groups, the platforms appear as an expansion of that "space of activism" linked to indebtedness. Departing from that mobilisation of common positionality around housing debt, the challenge is expanded and interconnected to other demands, in many cases in more abstract terms. This articulation of the activism advances some issues and implications regarding the strategies for conjoining struggles across places, especially in relation to the importance and pertinence of rescaling strategies and processes of abstraction.

Challenging scale order through local activism

The thesis showed how the abstraction in these cases does not exclusively follow the logic of rescaling demanded by Harvey (1996), but a rearticulation of local spaces, which develops abstraction in connection

to place-based struggles. The abstraction, which is not central to the everyday activism of PAH—although neither non-existent—becomes more explicitly developed by the platforms. In this process, the representational perspective constantly intersects with the performative and the activists become the main channels for the interaction between spaces. The platforms implement a transition from performative to representational politics for abstracting the struggles, which culminates with the formation of regional platforms that attempt to reproduce the model. Nevertheless, while MaT and BeC were the product of the networks of activists that connect to each other and with other groups, at the regional level the abstraction of demands becomes the main source of combination. In these attempts, the representational perspective became dominant and it failed to produce a consistent form of commoning for the new space, at the same time that jeopardised the cohesion within the municipal platforms, which resulted in the total disconnection with those spaces.

Besides showing the challenges of Harvey's proposal to connect place-based struggles, the cases hinted towards possible alternatives, more in line with the network-focused perspective of Featherstone (1998). The thesis confirms Harvey's (2000) emphasis on the importance of common positionality and the body as initial sites of resistance for combining struggles on the base of their performative capability. Also, as Harvey claimed, one can identify a transition between performative politics and representational politics, but in different terms to those argued by him. While his theorisation jumps from the performative potential of the local struggles to an activism based on representations linked to the rescaling of demands, the cases revealed the limits of such a strategy. Whereas a partial transition to representational politics without jumping scales produced quite stable spaces that united diverse bodies—with the limitations discussed above regarding the striation of those spaces—when this strategy attempted to be rescaled, the conjoin of the heterogeneity resulted in a strong confrontation and failed to produce new spaces. The cases show that, as the body's performative capability be-

comes subsumed to abstract demands to jump scales, the articulation of struggles collapses.

The most evident consequence of this outcome has been to question scale orders. The articulation of resistance locally and the reluctance to rescale poses a direct challenge to the spatial striation generated by capitalism and state with its scale hierarchy. With this move, everyday life becomes the key of the resistance and the ground where the bodies can interconnect to share different perceptions that can attack capitalist representations. This spatial arrangement encompasses the 'whole' without a separation between the macro and the micro, which appear interrelated and emanating from the local space (Lefebvre, 1991). Unlike the traditional strategy of scalar integration, these movements attempt to substitute that compartmentalisation with an expansion that tries to recover the centrality of the local. The local becomes the main site of activism and the articulation of local struggles is not performed through a rescaling, but by connecting diverse struggles and activists without integration. This configuration should not be understood as the total denial of the power to affect that other spheres such as the regional, state or European have on the local space, but the refusal to occupy them and reproduce that order, looking at the most for cooperation with other political spaces in those spheres.¹

This configuration of the activism resonates with that acentered non-hierarchical rhizomatic war machine, which expands horizontally without a linear expansion that connects consecutive points (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 21). In both the cases of PAH and of the platforms, the chapters were created by repetition of experiences, in some cases even without connections with already existent nodes, but never as a response to a central direction understood as the original source of activism. As happens with rhizomatic plants, the expansion did not respond to a linear logic and new nodes appeared as repetitions of any of the parts that form the rhizome to react to a common situation, but generating difference through this repetition (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.

¹ Podemos has been generally that ally in the national level, for example.

382). The strong independence encouraged by the *autogestion* and the limitation of dynamics of rescaling prevents the generation of homogenising representations, as no structure is created to organise the local struggles within a superior space. This articulation resonates with Featherstone's (2008, p. 4) criticism of the dichotomic separation between place/space, since, as happened in the case of indebtedness, both appear as immanently produced by the connection of the embodied flows, happening simultaneously without any *a priori* between them. The movements produce them not as positive representations, but as events performed by the interaction between the different bodies that form them (Hellström, 2006, p. 214). This challenges hierarchically organised spaces of capitalism, as there is not a centre that enables to reterritorialise the flows and to re-incorporate the movements within the system.

The attempts to densify a “municipalist network” to connect place-based struggles based on personal connections has generated fewer challenges to the cohesion of the different place-based struggles than the attempts of regional integration. This more performative strategy, which resonates with the strategy of PAH, appears as a more consistent but much slower strategy which only the future will show its real success. The strategy focuses on the interrelation between activists, which, as Featherstone argues (2005), is already present in the genesis of the place-based struggles,¹ while reducing the challenges of transitioning between performative and representational politics. When this transition was made from within a representational perspective, it entered into a contradiction with the predominant performative approach of local mobilisation and provoked challenges that pushed the activists to return to the local sphere. This thesis has revealed a dominance of performative strategies of conjoining, although without the elimination of representational ones. The emerging war machine is mainly a product of a commoning based on the mutual individual support and connections that coexist and transit in certain spaces towards more representational spaces, but al-

¹ As I mentioned in previous chapters, many interviewees, especially in MaT, mentioned how members in the platforms were in permanent contact and that BeC was the first one to be publicised because of the visibility of Barcelona and Ada Colau.

ways reminding the impossibility of dissociating it from the bodies that carry them. Again, this transition demonstrates the reconfiguration of new political spaces linked to certain places where that abstraction of demands can be developed. It is still too soon to know how the initiatives will evolve and if the rescaling strategy will be reactivated, but the lessons learnt until now have encouraged the activists to try to densify their networks horizontally instead of attempting to replicate the hierarchical spatial arrangements of the state.

Nonetheless, the cases have also shown certain limitations of the performative strategy. While on the one hand, the strategy favoured the expression of heterogeneity, on the other hand, the challenge to the capitalist system has been varied, since in some cases the resistance is more antagonistic than in others. The preponderance of performative politics meant that these resistances depend greatly of the bodies and their perceptions. This raises an important obstacle for these alternative movements, as the abstraction depends on the participation of certain bodies, whose absence can limit the antagonism. The complementarity between the different activist spaces hints then towards the indispensable connection between them to answer to the different needs in the different moments and to avoid the reassurance of individualism mentioned above. The cases have shown how in the greater densification of the connection between the spaces in Barcelona have generated better connections and dynamics of abstraction than in A Coruña, where the isolation of Stop Desahucios has limited the processes of abstraction. This poses questions regarding how integrated the struggles can be and how a less structured but more fluid connection reduces the hindrances of conjoining, while still enabling the synergies between the groups. Moreover, this densification should not only connect similar struggles but pursue the transversality between diverse resistances without creating a totalising global resistance (Featherstone, 2008, p. 188).

All in all, this thesis has not aimed at declaring the superiority of the performative strategy over the representational, rather it has aimed to excavate how they interact and affect the activism and the articulation of heterogeneous bodies, perceptions and demands across multiple local

struggles. These cases demonstrate that abstraction is necessary to articulate alternatives to capitalism, but they suggest some refinements to the theoretical considerations about how the two perspectives actually intertwine. The analysis showed that abstraction does not require of processes of rescaling, as multiple examples showed how in the local sphere abstraction is possible and articulated through the generation of overlapping spaces, with a strong presence of performative politics. The conflicts discussed in previous chapters are perhaps the best examples of this intersection and of the need to remember the impossibility of dissociating representational politics from the bodies that perform them and that determine their articulation. The conflict that ended with the 22 expulsions in PAH Barcelona or the confrontation in Stop Desahucios between former and current activists, and the conflicts around the rescaling in regional coalitions, are all conflicts that started in representational terms but ended up in the expulsion or exit of the bodies defending those positions. Examples like these showed how representational politics linked to processes of abstraction become subjected to the bodies that carry them and how when these are disconnected the contradictions become more evident. The emergence of these contradictions questions the capability of an abstraction understood as separation between representations and the bodies, and affirm the need of seeing these as intertwined phenomena, while acknowledging the importance of the performative perspective to maintain the necessary continuity between spaces.

I do not intend to offer a final answer to the question of how the performative and the representational perspectives relate, but to enrich the discussion with the necessity of finding an effective way of combining those political economic demands with agential aspects. Performative and representational perspectives appear as intertwined and necessary, but the sources of constant challenges and tensions, especially when the groups attempted processes of integration, mainly through rescaling. In contrast, when the movements related to each other through the generation of overlapping and independent, but at the same time intersecting spaces, the tensions were reduced and the synergies between the movements were more effective. The use of a performative strategy based on

the constant transitions of the activists helped to generate stable connections between spaces without jeopardising the cohesion of the groups, which can help to understand the dynamics from which a war machine can actualise (Watt, 2016).

The focus on the production of differential activist spaces can facilitate the dialogue between the agential and the political economic positions, as they appear intimately intertwined in the production of these spaces. The next section will discuss how space and its production can contribute to this dialogue mainly from three perspectives: the production of space as a battleground for the imposition of capitalism and its resistances, the potentiality of space to overcome the compartmentalisation of the study of contention, and to redefine the relation between the geographical variables that influence contention.

Contributions and further research

In the analysis that traversed the entire thesis, space became central to reconceptualising the way mobilisation develops, as it turns into a main field of struggle between capitalism and its resistances. This centrality of space derives from a relational vision as an emergent product of conjoining multiple actors and dynamics. Returning to the theoretical challenges of combining political economic and agential analyses, this thesis makes its first contribution to the research by using this relational vision of space to open new ways to explore that intersection without establishing an *a priori* superiority of any of them. Whereas the political economic dynamics become more obvious in the imposition of certain organisation of space by capitalism, the cases have shown how they depend of the more or less coordinated action of multiple actors—i.e. indebted people. Resistance can emerge to articulate different forms of agency in which those actors become free from those structured relations to short-circuit the dynamics. This happens through the creation of singularities and connection of militant particularism that springs from that common positionality within the political economic dynamics. In this sense, Lefebvre's (1991) triad provides a graphic starting point for investigating those intersections, as the moments of representations can only be imposed by capitalism through the subjectification in percep-

tions of everyday life, therefore intertwining both aspects that need each other to develop. On the contrary, the resistance will go in the opposite direction via the creation of spaces of representation through the everyday life activism to attack the abstract political economic dynamics.

In connection with that conjoining, this thesis makes its second contribution by illustrating how the focus on relational space can enrich the study of contestation. Unlike approaches within SMT that focus on classifying the different activities implemented by the social movements, looking at all these activities as *encounters* that produce different spaces allows us to excavate the continuities among these encounters. The various encounters are understood as *a priori* equally important in forming parts of the activism as a whole. In other words, instead of compartmentalising the activities of the social movements in repertoire of collective action, organisation and so on (Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Tarrow, 2011), the same status is given to all, which allows a more dynamic analysis of their interactions and how they influence each other. Talking of *encounters* provides the ground for considering all activities as part of the activism, without distinguishing between protest and organisational meetings. As the analysis has shown, all of them are interconnected and the resistance is not only developed in direct protest actions, but also in other encounters where the conjoin of multiple heterogeneous elements can articulate agency to challenge subjectification.

Analysing the activities as encounters has shown two key aspects of this perspective that can contribute to the research of social mobilisation. Firstly, all the activities of the movements—protest actions, organisational meetings or other gatherings—are the result of the conjoining of multiple dynamics and actors (mainly activists, but also newcomers, affected people, opponents, etc.) that produce and shape the space. Secondly, the product of this interaction, even if these encounters are repeated in time, they are unique in a specific space and time, with their specificities and their uncertain outcomes, as their repetition generates their differences (Žižek, 2004; Welchman, 2009). As the fieldwork showed, all the activities carried out by the movements are interconnect-

ed and play their role in the resistance and the maintenance of the mobilisation. Thus, although encounters like assemblies are central for the normal functioning of the movements, they are also the spaces in which imaginaries, discourses and subjectification are put into question and alternatives created through the interaction and debate between the participants. By the same token, the protest actions have an additional role to that of trying to influence the authorities, that is to create bonds and dependence from mobilising together, which increases the cohesion and survival of the group. This perspective opens new possibilities for expanding the analysis of social mobilisation to cases, like the ones here, where co-opting institutional power is the main goal of mobilisation, and the transitions between the different activist fields. The acceptance that the spaces are a dynamic result of the connection between multiple objects blurry the barriers between the groups and their environments, specifically between institutional and non-institutional politics.

Finally, the thesis provides a third contribution by sketching how a relational vision of space can enable us integrate the different geographical variables that influence contestation (i.e. network, place, territory and scale). To advance potential solutions to solving the constant challenges linked to conjoining geographical variables that can imply contradictory socio-theoretical assumptions (Mayer, 2008), the thesis has excavated the potentiality of analysing them as constantly intertwined and not as given, but socially created through the converge of different dynamics that produce space. For example, the cases analysed here have offered some insights on the formation of scales, as the compartmentalisation of the space in scales does not emerge as an *a priori* feature (Mackinnon, 2010), but as product of capitalist striation and its actualisation in the scalar hierarchy generated by the state. This scale formation impregnates the entire social life, again imposing a representation that creates the idea that there is nothing outside this striation. Nevertheless, the smoothing of space created through the interaction of the social movements researched in this thesis confronts that by generating a radical horizontality and decentralisation to avoid the submission of heterogeneity to the homogenising statistical aggregates that consecutively compose the hierarchical scale order. The organisation in municipalities,

provinces, regions, state and even the EU have usually pushed the Spanish movements to reproduce this order and rescale their activism without much success, as the rescaling was translated into the imposition of certain hegemonic representations that ended up weakening the local activism. In the cases studied here, some “pulsions” for reproducing the scale order still remain, but the continuous disappointments and failures seem to limit them to explore alternative ways of articulating space instead.

Another variable explicitly discussed here has been place, as the cases show the complex relation between place and space. More than separated, they seem to form a unity where the borders between them become blurred and their definition becomes context-based and dependent on the relations set between different dynamics and actors. The cases showed how the relation to place of the different struggles is strongly mediated by divergent and contingent relationships of activists within certain spaces, which shape the ever-changing limits of the place of activism. In opposition to top-down visions of space as an empty vessel, the movements produce spaces in which relationality and the constant reworking of the spatial boundaries of the ephemeral relations—especially in the chapters of PAH—confront that striation of space as an empty container to be filled with relations (Lorraine, 2005, p. 170). By contrast, the production of space as relation emerges as the main feature from which variables like place, territory or scale are defined—as representations generated by capitalism and imposed by the state or as the result of the relations between those people that produce these spatialities in their everyday lives. As a consequence of this importance of space, those variables, as it happens with space, become the product of the permanent tension between the striation attempts of capitalism and its contestations. Place, territory or any other geographical dimension are not conceptualised as given, but must be problematised, conceptualised as the product of the attempts of capitalism and state to striate a space that affects and becomes affected by the production of these spatialities. Moreover, with this conceptualisation of space networks stop being that uncomfortable travelling companion to become just the mechanism by which these features are immanently produced.

I would like to end the long journey that led to the completion of this thesis with a final hope in these difficult times, in which the reactionary forces are realigning and neoliberalism has shown a great capability to reinvent itself after its biggest crisis to date. I believe that the battle can be won only if we rethink our forms of resistance and, especially, of construction of alternatives. The old formulas of taking state power have shown little effect and, in the best of the cases, they only managed to implement a momentary “humanisation” of capitalism. I believe that the Spanish social movements discussed in this thesis—and others—have taken some steps into that alternative direction by developing new forms of activism based on horizontality, decentralisation and democratic radicalism. Nevertheless, these are just first steps. Neoliberalism is not going to be overcome in one day, but through a combination of multiple forces and dynamics that come together in an open-ended process full of many challenges that would make the possibilities of change difficult. It is within this process where this thesis is located, as an attempt to increase our understanding on how resistance can be articulated and strengthened. Having a better knowledge of how to challenge hegemonic imaginaries to build alternative ones that resonate to a majority of the population to confront the global dynamics of capitalism is the best way for us to build not only the barricades, but also to go on the offensive. This thesis is just a modest contribution on possible ways for looking at this struggle to enrich that dialogue to generate a brighter future.

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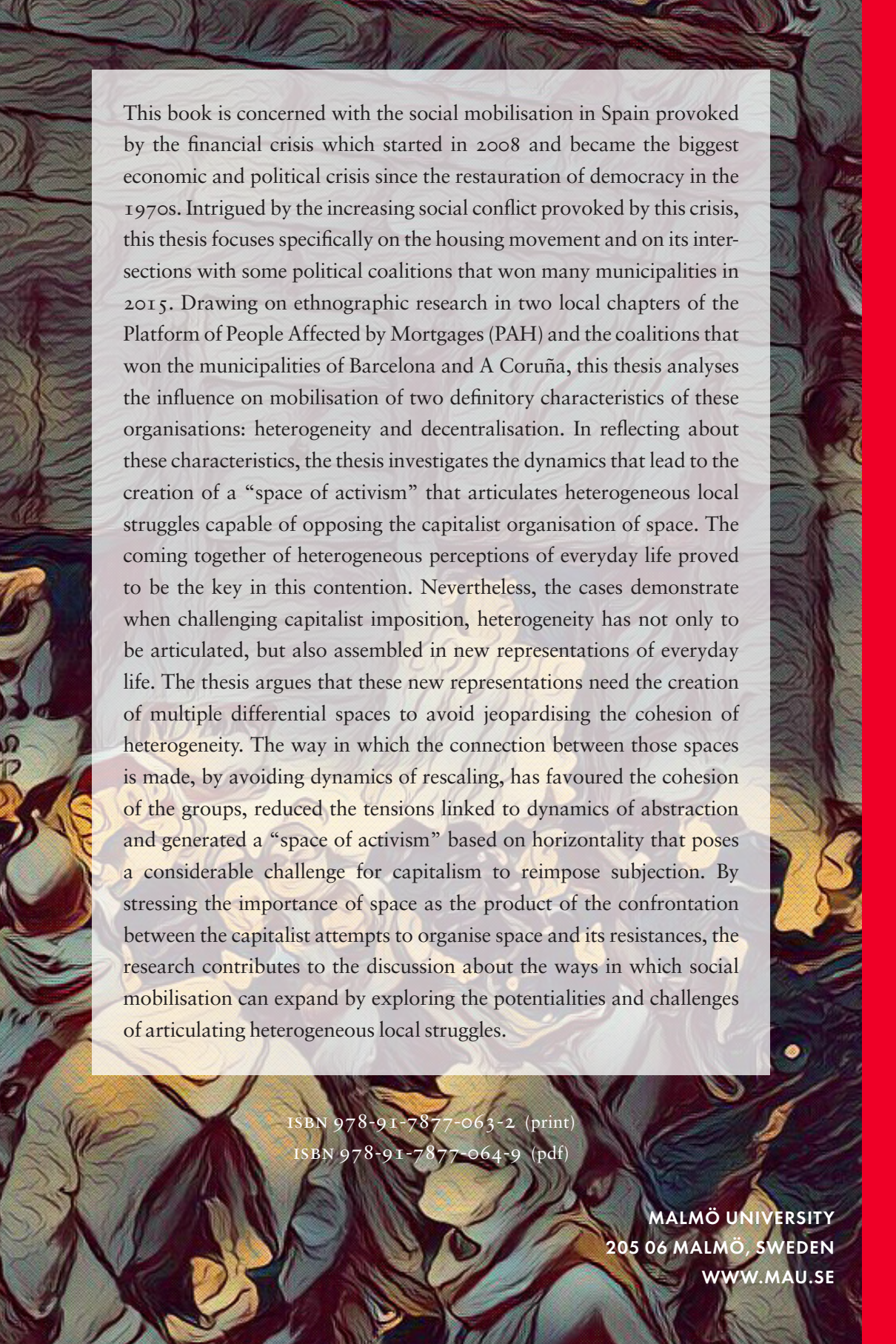
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This book is concerned with the social mobilisation in Spain provoked by the financial crisis which started in 2008 and became the biggest economic and political crisis since the restoration of democracy in the 1970s. Intrigued by the increasing social conflict provoked by this crisis, this thesis focuses specifically on the housing movement and on its intersections with some political coalitions that won many municipalities in 2015. Drawing on ethnographic research in two local chapters of the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) and the coalitions that won the municipalities of Barcelona and A Coruña, this thesis analyses the influence on mobilisation of two definitory characteristics of these organisations: heterogeneity and decentralisation. In reflecting about these characteristics, the thesis investigates the dynamics that lead to the creation of a “space of activism” that articulates heterogeneous local struggles capable of opposing the capitalist organisation of space. The coming together of heterogeneous perceptions of everyday life proved to be the key in this contention. Nevertheless, the cases demonstrate when challenging capitalist imposition, heterogeneity has not only to be articulated, but also assembled in new representations of everyday life. The thesis argues that these new representations need the creation of multiple differential spaces to avoid jeopardising the cohesion of heterogeneity. The way in which the connection between those spaces is made, by avoiding dynamics of rescaling, has favoured the cohesion of the groups, reduced the tensions linked to dynamics of abstraction and generated a “space of activism” based on horizontality that poses a considerable challenge for capitalism to reimpose subjection. By stressing the importance of space as the product of the confrontation between the capitalist attempts to organise space and its resistances, the research contributes to the discussion about the ways in which social mobilisation can expand by exploring the potentialities and challenges of articulating heterogeneous local struggles.

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205 06 MALMÖ, SWEDEN
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