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The revival of urban social and neighbourhood movements in Spain: a geographical characterization

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Abstract

The current economic and financial crisis manifests itself specifically in cities and metropolitan areas. As in other periods of recession throughout history, one of the characteristic features of this crisis was the bursting of a housing bubble. In Spain, the spectacular construction boom slowed down, and many families could not afford to pay the mortgages on their main or second homes. At the same time, welfare spending was slashed to meet the obligations of the banks and *cajas* (savings banks) ruined by the property slump. In addition, the unemployment rate rose to above 20%. As a result of this process, urban space reflects the resurgence of social and political movements of different kinds, ranging from more defensive movements focused on a particular place (against the closure of a company or an eviction order issued to a mortgage victim) to more general movements demanding direct democracy and an end to corruption. These movements fuelled the *indignados* protest with its camps on the streets of all major cities. This article primarily aims to classify urban social movements in contemporary Spain on the basis of their motives and demands. Secondly, it proposes a presentation of the movements assessing their impact on cities and their preferred demonstration spaces inside the city. Finally, it analyses their political-urban character in relation to local resistance, e.g. in Burgos, demands for urban communal ownership, the occupation of squares and houses, and the focus on creating new political expressions such as *mareas ciudadanas* (citizen tides) and the *Podemos* phenomenon.

Zusammenfassung

Die derzeitige ökonomische und wirtschaftliche Krise äußert sich vor allem in Städten und Metropolregionen. Wie schon in anderen Rezessionsphasen in der Geschichte war eines der charakteristischen Merkmale dieser Krise das Zerplatzen einer Immobilienblase. In Spanien verlangsamte sich der spektakuläre Bauboom, und viele Familien konnten die Hypotheken für ihre Erst- oder Zweitwohnsitze nicht mehr bedienen. Gleichzeitig wurden die Sozialausgaben in Spanien drastisch gekürzt, weil man die Zahlungsverpflichtungen der Banken und *cajas* (Sparkassen) übernahm, die durch den Preissturz bei den Immobilien in den Ruin geraten waren. Außerdem stieg die Arbeitslosenrate auf über 20%. Als Ergebnis dieses Prozesses spiegelt der städtische Raum das Erstarken unterschiedlichster sozialer und politischer Bewegungen wider; diese reichen von defensiven Bewegungen, die auf ganz bestimmte Orte ausgerichtet sind (etwa gegen die Schließung einer Firma oder die Zwangsräumung eines Pfändungsgopfers), bis hin zu Bewegungen mit allgemeineren Zielen, die direkte Demokratie und das Ende der Korruption fordern. Diese Bewegungen entfachten die Proteste der *Indignados* mit ihren Zeltlagern auf den Straßen aller größeren Städte. Der vorliegende Artikel zielt vor allem darauf ab, städtisch-soziale Bewegungen im heutigen Spanien auf der Grundlage ihrer Motive und Forderungen zu klassifizieren. Darüber hinaus stellt er die Bewegungen hinsichtlich ihrer Auswirkungen auf die Städte vor sowie hinsichtlich ihrer bevorzugten

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Demonstrationsplätze innerhalb der Stadt. Schließlich analysiert der Artikel den politischen Charakter dieser städtischen Bewegungen und deren Bedeutung für den lokalen Widerstand, zum Beispiel in Burgos, sowie ihre Forderungen nach städtisch-kommunalem Eigentum, die Platz- und Hausbesetzungen und die Schaffung neuer politischer Ausdrucksformen, wie zum Beispiel der *mareas ciudadanas* (Bürgerfluten) und des *Podemos*-Phänomens.

Keywords Urban social movements, property bubble, evictions, public space, *indignados*

1. Introduction: The economic-financial crisis and the urban movements in Spain

In recent years, Spain has become headline news around the world for the seriousness of its economic crisis and for the rise of urban social and political movements emerging in protest to the existing situation. The first point to be made is that both processes are directly related. The Spanish neo-liberal city, which previously experienced continuous building growth, became conspicuous for its spectacular flagship projects, enjoyed good transport links provided by modern infrastructure, and reflected the country's economic success in a European Union context, has now become the main stage on which the multiple financial problems of large private corporations, public authorities and citizens have been played out (Gaja i Díaz 2008; López Hernández and Rodríguez López 2010; Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2013). The main hypothesis of our work is that these difficulties have lit a fuse under urban social and neighbourhood movements dormant since the end of the 1970s which have expressed themselves with notable originality and have made various types of proposals in cities across the country (Díaz-Cortés and Ubasart-González 2012; Galde 2013). The Spanish urban movements express citizens' profound discontent, but unlike the riots in London or the Paris banlieues they are non-violent. Above all, they resemble the anti-globalization movement and the direct criticism of the system demonstrated in Greece, in Wall Street and at the G8 summits (Seattle and Genoa etc.) (Uitermark et al. 2012; Harvey 2012; Castells 2012; Davies 2014). All these movements question the model of a neo-liberal and apparently post-political city (Brenner 2004; BAVO 2007) which in the present economic and financial crisis has lost public support.

In fact, our main objective in this article is to apply the conceptualization that Geography has recently produced in relation to urban social movements (Routledge 2003; Nicholls 2007; Harvey 2012; Pedon 2013), and produce a typology of these in current Spain. Urban social movements form part of contemporary life. This is

because they have been described by leading thinkers over the last two centuries (Ruggiero and Montagna 2008) and because they reflect radical discontent with political and social organization in a specific time and place (Della Porta and Diani 1999; Nicholls 2007; Uitermark et al. 2012). Numerous theoretical contributions have focused on describing their general characteristics, in the most developed countries and through different experiences in various countries around the world. This paper aims to explore and typify the Spanish case, in accordance with the relevance of these interpretations, but also considering that in Spain some highly unique elements for expressing discontent have emerged as for example the importance of the anti-eviction movement, citizen indignation processes or the defence of public services.

In order to understand how the crisis exploded, readings of Piñeira-Mantiñán (2010) or Vives Miró (2013) are frequently invoked. Hence, the problems of Spanish cities correspond to the effects of a crisis of capital overaccumulation, as defined in the work of Marx and adapted for the purposes of Geography by Harvey (Marx 1867; Harvey 1985). Accordingly, the significant growth of the Spanish economy from 1990 to 2008 can be explained by the abundance of working capital flowing to the system in the context of the light-touch regulation of financial institutions. As the works of Marx and Harvey point out, available financial resources were not channelled towards the productive economy. Rather, they were widely used for artificial¹ land development. These classic readings of the issue have been nuanced, updated and enriched by recent authors, providing more specific views to understand the dynamics of growth at all costs which were recorded in Spain and other developed countries before the crisis. Among them, M. Aalbers, K.F. Gotham and J. Oßenbrügge (Gotham 2006; Aalbers 2009; Oßenbrügge 2011) are worth mentioning.

Hundreds of thousands of buildings were constructed, all kinds of communication infrastructure (motorways, high-speed railways, airports etc.) were improved and spectacular urban development was

Table 1 Main indicators of social and economic crisis in Spain

	2001-2006	2006-2008	2008-2010	2010-2012
Growth of GDP (%), annual average	7.69	5.06	- 1.96	- 0.80
Public debt (million €), annual, median	386 889.6	405 245.6	552 576.6	761 261.0
Housing construction, units (starts) , annual, median	574 393.0	478 333.0	127 093.0	49 875.3
Public tenders for roads, railways, airports and ports (thousand €), annual, median	35 560 531.0	48 422 049.0	38 732 070.0	14 835 671.3
Number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, median	3 519 333.3	10 748 500.0	11 682 500.0	12 495 500.0
Number of evictions, annual, median	*	*	42 324.5	66 189.0

Source: National Statistics Institute, Eurostat, Ministry of Development. (*) No data for the period

encouraged everywhere. Notable examples included the Cuatro Torres Business Area on the Paseo de la Castellana in Madrid, the City of Arts and Sciences in Valencia, and the City of Culture in Santiago. In short, we saw a property bubble leading to artificial land development, the whole coast being covered in concrete and the completion of barely profitable infrastructure projects such as Madrid’s radial motorways, several regional airports (Castellón, Ciudad Real etc.), and expensive stretches of little used railways (Toledo-Cuenca-Albacete being the most emblematic example). A model corresponding to the second circuit of capital accumulation ended abruptly in 2007/2008, giving rise to a serious crisis which is only now beginning to abate following serious sacrifices.

Table 1 summarizes the main indicators of the Spanish economic miracle, which led to a severe crisis. As in the USA and Ireland, Spain has seen a bursting of the property bubble with serious effects on the city and urban societies (Grupo de Geografía Urbana de la AGE 2014). In this crisis, the number of people and families who cannot pay their mortgages has multiplied and part of the financial sector (most Savings Banks took unreasonable risks in their involvement in the construction business) and the public sector have been dragged into bankruptcy. The public sector has been responsible for much of the private sector debt, especially given that in a period of recession its income reduces and the public deficit increases.

If we review those affected by the crisis, we can identify the protagonists of the rebirth of social and urban neighbourhood protest covered by this article. Firstly,

citizens who until 2008 or 2009 could have been classified as middle class have seen their living conditions worsen. These citizens have suffered a reduction of income and must meet their mortgage repayments under very difficult conditions. Secondly, many young people and adults have joined the army of the unemployed, a notable increase being recorded in the number of people living on very scarce resources. In an era defined by an unemployment rate which since 2009 has exceeded 20 % and which for those below 30 years of age is nearly 50 %, both family responsibilities and the size of households with falling incomes have increased exponentially. Thirdly, all citizens have been affected insofar as they are beneficiaries of the welfare state, as the welfare state has been trimmed substantially as a result of the decision to control ever-increasing public debt figures. Less is spent on healthcare, public education, social services and support for the unemployed, increasing the difficulties faced by many people everyday. Finally, thousands of households have lost much of their savings in investments in a financial system which has been forced to undergo complete restructuring. The volume of deposits in individual bank accounts has declined and a self-confident middle class with future prospects has turned into an impoverished group with unemployed or underemployed children and a state which responds badly to their welfare demands. Many of the members of this group have suffered a noticeable devaluation of their property and their accumulated capital. This highly-educated group, with its sense of having been dispossessed (Harvey 2012), is the one leading urban social protests throughout Spain (Castells 2012; Observatorio Metropolitano de Madrid 2013).

2. Urban movements: from the *indignados* to the fight against eviction

The crisis exploded in all its harshness in Spain in 2009, when the property bubble burst. Tens of thousands of jobs were destroyed and the state went into deficit, after several years of strong income growth and ill-considered spending practices. In 2010, the socialist government was obliged to significantly cut the salaries of public employees to improve competitiveness and avoid a financial bailout. Similar cuts were made in the private sector. Industrial production and GDP began to fall, and the whole economy went into recession. In a country which since the middle of the twentieth century had developed in an extraordinary way and suffered severe episodic crises (García Delgado and Myro 2011), the acute impact of the financial crash was accepted with resignation. General impoverishment occurred, which

was interpreted as a short period of restraint in the face of intensive growth accompanied, or so it was perceived, by a number of excesses. In fact, the recent debate on the intensity of social and political mobilization in Spain remains open. In the period of democratic transition (1975-78), there was an unexpected increase in demonstrations and all sorts of protests to vindicate political freedom, accompanied by others related to improving the quality of life in neighbourhoods, and the right to a decent home and universal public healthcare and education. This entire stage of historical acceleration gave rise to a long period of stability, which began in the early 1980s (Lois González 2009), characterized by significant economic growth rates, full entry into the European project, the political hegemony of social-democratic governments (which responded to demands for modernization and social welfare) and profound changes to Spanish social structure.

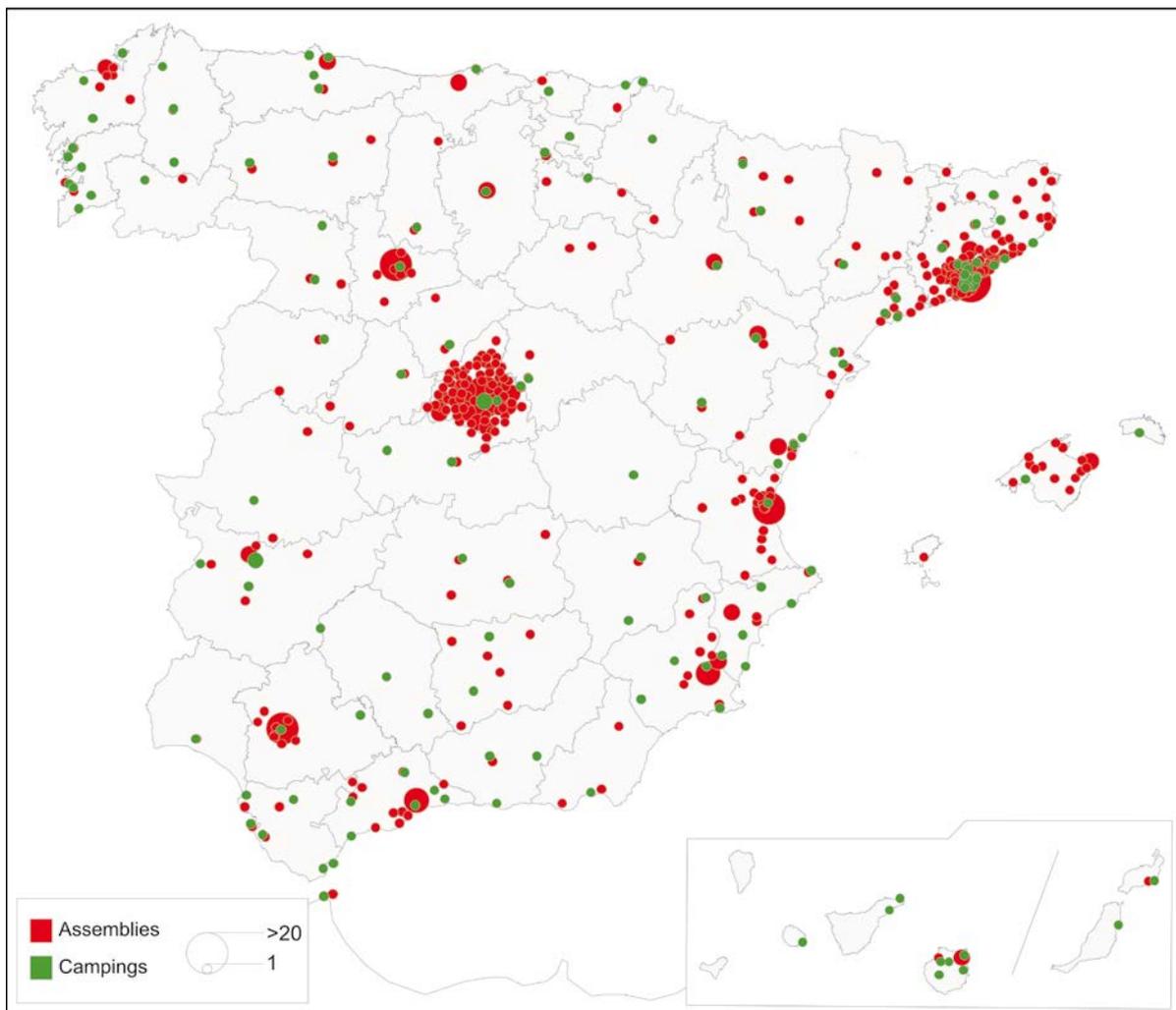


Fig. 1 Assemblies and campings organized during the 15-M movement in Spain

The turning point of this whole period occurred on 15 March 2011 when, in the context of a general deterioration of the condition of citizens' lives, it was realized that the crisis was going to last much longer than originally predicted, a set of calls to action issued in Madrid and distributed throughout Spain mobilized tens of thousands of people, who began to occupy the most central and emblematic squares of the cities. Without practically anyone expecting it, the *indignados*² movement emerged in imitation of events a little earlier in Tunisia and Egypt (although by very different reasons), bearing an even greater resemblance to similar protests in Greece and the *geraçao á rasca* movement in Portugal (Castells 2012; Harvey 2012). Figure 1 maps the spread of these protests, but perhaps it is more interesting to analyse their (spatial) content and their originality with regard to the socio-political urban movements which had developed up to that point.

In summary, one can say that the protest map reflects the distribution of cities and the most important urban centres in Spain nowadays. On the one hand, there is a concentration of the protests in large metropolitan areas, including not only Madrid and Barcelona, but also Valencia, Seville and Malaga. In this regard, the lower intensity of the movement in the Basque country is surprising, thus expressing their traditional difference from the Spanish sociopolitical dynamics. On the other hand, in the cartography of protest, outbreaks emerge in virtually all cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. The outrage against the crisis and political corruption generated protest camps and demonstrations in small towns, thrust for the first time onto the stage of discontent. This explains outbreaks such as Toro or Benavente in Zamora, Monforte and Vilalba in Lugo etc., where there were barely any precedents of political demonstrations, beyond concentrations of farmers for a specific problem. In fact, we are encountering the spreading of urban issues (lack of housing, evictions, poor governance etc.) in localities of a smaller size. Finally, there is some correlation between the demonstrations and areas to set up camp: It can be that the proliferation of protests settled in one or a few large camping sites through the decision of the assemblies (as in Madrid or Barcelona), or as a late addition to the movement, turn into large demonstrations in major cities, but they then choose to extend the movement through small camping sites in smaller towns (as was the case in Galicia, Asturias or the area of Alicante-Murcia).

To that end, we propose a theoretical framework to help us understand Spanish social movements in gen-

eral and the *indignados* movement in particular, based on the concepts and literature of Geography (Fig. 2). Our procedure was based on the consultation of two published participant studies of *indignados* activists, the first conducted by a graduate in communication sciences and militant environmentalist, and the second consisting of an analysis performed by an anthropologist (Pascual-Rodríguez 2013; Razquín 2014). Based on their evidence, our account of the movement's characteristics is contrasted with the theoretical approaches adopted over recent years in prestigious journals (Leitner et al. 2008; Uitermark et al. 2012) and the concepts of the right to the city (Lefebvre 1968, 1972) and the network society (Castells 2002).

In the content of the chart, both concepts of critical social thought (a right to the city) as to its reinterpretation by the social movements (a right to decide, participatory democracy) are used. In the middle, a series of concepts or words directly related to the geography are listed, from where a series of attributes or defining elements of the protests are located. In this regard, the explanatory logic of this issue made in various recent articles (Leitner et al. 2008; Uitermark et al. 2012) is followed.

The right to decide is the possibility of giving an opinion on very important matters (requesting a referendum and accepting the conclusions of an assembly), this opinion being binding. It is a right, which is expressed in a more general concept known as participatory democracy, associated with democratic radicalization and direct democracy. Finally, the different arrows used relate to many forms of interaction in the figure. Thus, the arrows on the left associate big words or terms with attributes that relate to them. On the right the arrows indicate a very generic linking of contemporary urban movements with expressions of protest in Spain. On the bottom, they seek to correlate the two central messages of the movement with its main attributes and geographic terms.

As can be seen, the right to the city is exercised in the public space, a collective space declared in opposition to established power. Action is taken locally and the proposal is disseminated through the networks on a global scale. In Spain, the central and more emblematic squares (the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, the Plaça de Catalunya in Barcelona, the Praza do Obradoiro in Santiago de Compostela etc.) were chosen by the *indignados* as the sites in which to express themselves. In this respect, the Spanish movement coincides with the ones studied in other Latin American countries (Arenas 2014). The movements

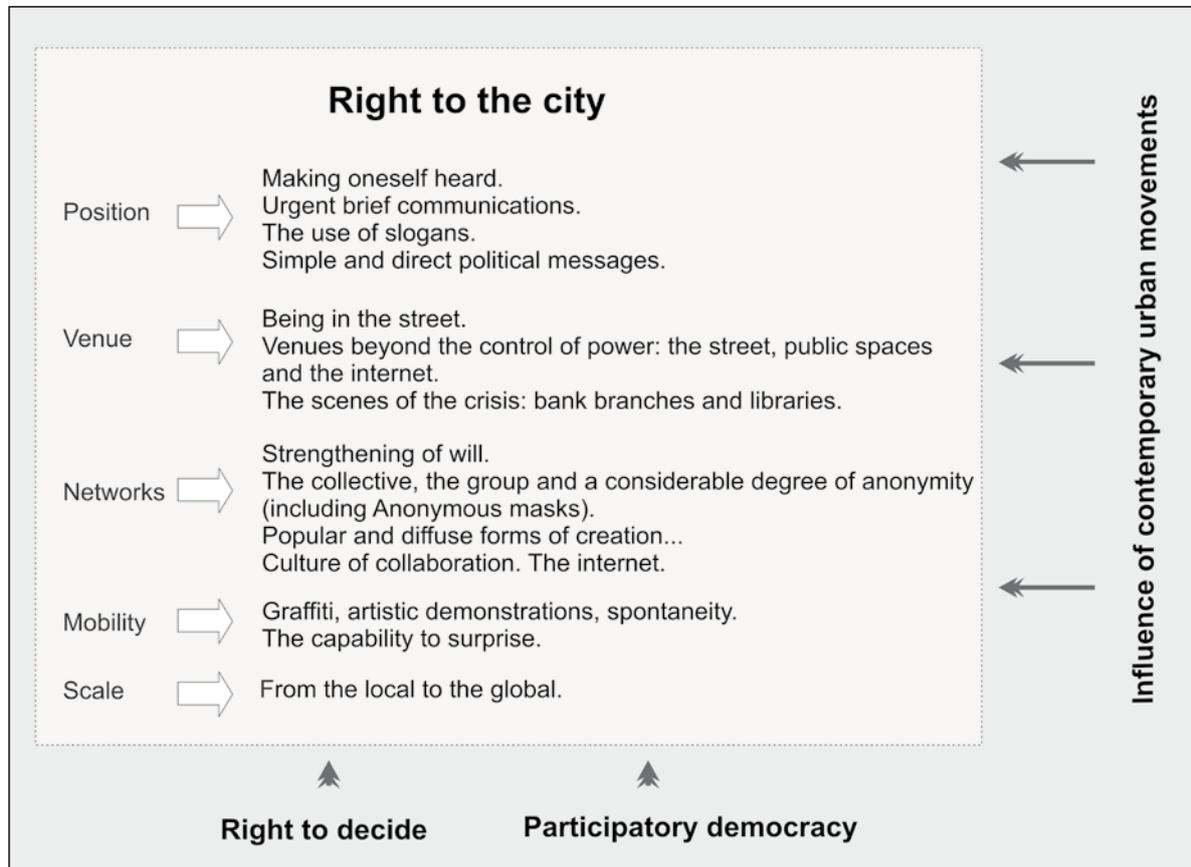


Fig. 2 Framework for the interpretation of urban social movements in Spain

occupy the squares, hold debates, engage in creative activity and stage protests, maintaining themselves there for a longer or shorter period of time (as in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, the encampment in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol over several weeks being a precedent for Occupy Wall Street). At the point when the protest ends or cannot last any longer, the process is repeated in the recognisable public spaces of the neighbourhoods, by means of symbolic occupations of bank branches or other places associated with the crisis and by means of the creation of works of art (murals, graffiti etc.) all over the city. Everything is collaborative, mobile and aims to create an alternative in opposition to the existing power. There are protests against political corruption, economic inequality, marginalization and mass unemployment. The network is used intensively (an inheritance of the old calls for assemblies from May 1968), and a concept of citizenship which demands citizens’ rights to the city, a new democracy and a new economic order becomes visible. The network, instant and horizontal communications, and the show of strength in public squares constitute the emblems of the movements’ renewed spatiality. The movements also aim to generate an impact, given that they are conscious of belonging to a society where protest must

be presented, to some extent, as a spectacle if it is to become effective (Debord 1967; Santos Solla 2002).

A second, highly significant setting for the movements, contested in parallel with the above, has been the fight against evictions and for the right to housing. In Spain the number of people evicted from their homes as a result of being unable to pay their mortgages is currently very high (27,251 in 2008, 65,182 in 2013). Faced with this process, and as a positive demand for the right to housing and the right to the city, anti-eviction platforms have risen up throughout the country and have had an undoubted political and social impact. Specifically, *Ada Colau* – the leader of Barcelona’s anti-eviction platform who last May became mayor of that city – has explained the keys to a movement which has become very popular and forced the introduction of reforms both to the laws and to legal practice on mortgage matters (Galde 2013). This testimony is again analysed based on the main concepts of Geography and critical social theory.

Firstly, *A. Colau* provides a brief historical summary of the anti-eviction movement, which began in 2006, without giving any further precedent. From that date,

different platforms for people affected by their mortgages (PAHs) began holding protest meetings outside homes whose occupants were going to be evicted. Protest meetings against evictions resulting from mortgage debt were announced through intensive internet activity and were held outside the specific place of eviction (Galde 2013). In order for the movement to be organized thus, its leader acknowledged the enormous influence of certain authors of contemporary critical social theory and specifically named *D. Harvey*, *M. Castells* and *H. Lefebvre*, who, in his opinion, were popularized in Spain through *J.M. Naredo* and *R. Fernández Durán* (Naredo and Montiel Márquez 2011; Fernández Durán 2011) and directly connected to the PAHs. Expressions like right to a home, right to the city and real-estate bubble were present in the activities of the movement, in its declarations and forms of written expression. In this regard, *A. Colau* clearly states the difference between the tactics and strategy of the movement. Its tactics were aimed at halting the process of numerous families being evicted from their homes and creating an impact in the media, while its strategy sought to vindicate the right to a home as a further human right and, in addition, highlight the speculative capitalist city to the public (Galde 2013).

At the same time, these tactics assisted self-organization and helped to empower those affected: a group of people who cannot pay their mortgage debt, whose first feeling, as a result of this, is embarrassment and a sense of isolation. This is why PAHs attempt to eliminate guilt and show them that anyone could find themselves in a situation of bankruptcy and that those in power are primarily responsible for the economic problems, rather than their victims. People affected are encouraged to appear publicly, without embarrassment and be an example to others. In short, attempts are made to expand the opposition movement (Galde 2013). Everything is expressed positively, based on the popular expression "Yes, we can", and it is highlighted that there are alternatives against the injustice taking place. Through this behaviour, the anti-eviction movement has won the backing of majority public opinion: those affected, the unfortunate ones, people who failed to pay their mortgage obligations, are presented as victims of the system. These victims are to be supported and public administration is to be pressurized to improve their situation (Galde 2013). A further key factor in the movement is self-organisation. PAHs are self-financing, horizontal groups, governed democratically through assemblies. The leader of the movement underlines the existence of 180 platforms in Spain, in a markedly decentralized movement, whose imple-

mentation is fairly uniform across different regions. Finally, there are three main scales of activity: local, where protest meetings take place in a specific location, where an eviction is planned, and attempt to halt it and raise public awareness in the city itself in favour of those being evicted from their home; national, where a proliferation of protests is aimed at changing the current state of affairs and, specifically, amending government policy so that it recognizes the effective right to a home of disadvantaged groups; and global, raising a voice against real-estate speculation and the concept of the city and the home as a business (Galde 2013).

The important anti-eviction movement in Spain resembles other movements emerging in Latin America over recent decades, in particular the "Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto" (MTST) in Brazil (Pedon 2013). Although in Spain the battle focuses on preventing citizens and families from being evicted from their homes for non-payment of debts while in Brazil the demand is access to decent housing for thousands of inhabitants of the favelas and other slums, for the first time we can see the direct influence of the new Latin American social movements on southern Europe.

Together with the emblematic *indignados* and anti-eviction activists, the urban social mass movements in Spain also take other less innovative, more traditional forms. This occurs in the case of neighbourhood improvement campaigns, which in some cities have turned into movements to obstruct the major public works city councils aim to construct. In the Gamonal in Burgos, the Plaça de Lesseps in Barcelona, Rekaldeberi in Bilbao etc., residents have been mobilized to demand a city for citizens (Lefebvre 1968). At a different level, cuts in public services have also generated another type of movement (based on traditional demonstrations, strikes etc.) unique in being mobilized on Sundays, such as the "white tide" (named after the colour of the gowns of healthcare staff) which led tens of thousands of residents of Madrid to take to the streets against attempts to privatize hospitals. This attempt at partial privatization of the public health service ground to a halt in the courts, becoming the most successful example of an urban fight against the dismantling of the welfare state.

3. A proposed classification of urban social movements in Spain

Based on the more emblematic social movements of contemporary Spain, fundamental oppositions have

been established between the world of protest and the world of power, which in its different forms and spatialities is presented as the other pole of reference (Allen 2003). The dialectic established opposes verticality and horizontality, the official communications media and unrestricted use of social networks, rules and creativity, spectacular urban planning and the right to the neighbourhood and common spaces, financial obligations and the right to decent housing, the city of late capitalism and the city of citizens, and so on. It is also worth stressing another fact. The social movements emerge and express themselves in the central and symbolic spaces of the city and manage to spread towards the suburbs. Yet they have been almost insignificant in the rural areas, which remain distant from the scenes of conflict generated by the crisis. In order to establish a typology of urban movements, we will start with the local, the specific, and the resistance to interventions perceived as aggression, and finish with the more general ideological demands and shows of strength which cities all over Spain have hosted.

The classification was inspired by previous work by Leitner et al. 2008 and Uitermark et al. 2012. The former produce a qualitative typology of contentious politics, an expression the authors prefer to refer to social movements. However, in Spain, mass popularization of the word movement (in protest, in neighbourhoods, against corruption, against evictions, in short, social movements), which was encouraged by movement protagonists and their chosen means of dissemination, obliges us to use this classic expression. A first methodological clarification relates to the use of the expression social movement rather than social protest. A movement seeks a profound change in a situation; it is lasting over time and different forms of fighting and vindication are adopted. It is different from a protest, which is a one-off activity with a specific purpose. The various authors who have dealt with this matter in Spain always advocate the expression social movement rather than social protest (Sampedro 1997; Aguilar Fernández and Fernández Gibaja 2010; Haro Barba and Sampedro Blanco 2011). In fact, the expressions social, union, student and neighbourhood movement are all derivations of the more classic labour movement, which was made into history by socialist, communist and anarchist parties throughout the 20th century, following the theories of K. Marx and other authors (Ruggiero and Montagna 2008). The notion of movement – in addition to its connection to the worker – has become generalized since the 1968 riots, starting with the affirmation of the student movement

(French, Spanish against Franco's dictatorship etc.) and the movement against war (in Spain, the conscientious objection movement achieved the highest levels of popularity in Europe in the 1980s and early 1990s, until mandatory military service was abolished).

Based on the meaning of movement, it is suggested that movements be classified according to their scale: infra-urban, urban and/or regional, and national. Even if the demands of the mobilization are of a general nature (for direct democracy, the right to a home, anti-corruption etc.), as far as Geography is concerned, they should be linked to a specific spatial location. The second criterion used is the actor, the movement that encourages the protests and vindications: neighbourhood, city, politicians and social actors, in defence of public services or employment. The third is the objective: to improve living conditions in the city and neighbourhood; to maintain the welfare state; to deepen the exercising of democracy and freedoms; or to strengthen public control of the economy. Finally, movements are also defined by the level of administration they are opposing: local councils involved in neo-liberal town planning; governments that apply social cuts and suppress rights; economic oligarchy; and corrupt political actors. In accordance with these four variables, a fairly precise classification of urban social movements is obtained, which coincides with the vast majority of images that the actual social mobilization has of itself (Castells 2012; Pascual-Rodríguez 2013; Razquín 2014).

a) The first type, based on their scale and the motivation behind them, consists of **movements affecting the residential neighbourhood itself**. Focused on the local, these are connected to the great tradition of neighbourhood movements in the country since the 1960s and aim to confront urban remodelling policies implemented by the local authorities. These neighbourhood movements have opposed the luxury redevelopment of plazas in Lesseps (Barcelona) and Rekaldeberri (Bilbao) as well as the construction of modern boulevards in the Gamonal (Burgos) (Asociación de Familias de Rekaldeberri 2010; Bernal 2014; Estévez Villarino 2014). From these three examples we can identify a deep-rooted intra-urban community which takes to the streets to defend itself, a rejection of beautification based on expensive construction works, an alternative agenda focused on demanding basic investment in local services, and the enhancement of communal leisure spaces which encourage socialization. The demands have always involved obstruction of construction or remodelling work in pro-

gress, demonstrations (with subsequent negotiations as in Barcelona or violent disturbances as in Burgos), and the persistent exercise of pressure on the local political authority which, given the magnitude of the protest, finally surrenders. The three examples of grassroots success discussed have encouraged the proliferation of other similar struggles in different cities with the slogan “the neighbourhood at the service of its inhabitants” as the common denominator.

b) The second group are **movements which demand basic rights such as housing, employment, education and universal health provision**. These movements are not limited to any specific neighbourhood. They have arisen at the national level and fairly frequently at the autonomous community or city level. Demands regarding housing or employment have spread throughout the whole country, although chains of protests do occur when several evictions are held in places close to each other or employees made redundant from certain companies result in a sudden increase in unemployment in a locality. In the face of these events, direct pressure is exercised on the regional authorities to intervene, since they are perceived as a level of government with decision-making ability which is not so distant from citizens and therefore can be influenced. Hence, *corralas* have achieved victories in Andalusia (Corrala de Vecinas la Utopía 2014; Informe Intercomisión Vivienda Sevilla 15M 2014; Mas que una Casa, Procesos Colectivos de Vivienda 2014), and regional governments have forced certain companies to sign generous redundancy agreements (*corralas* refer to forms of occupation of vacant residential blocks or public property led by women with dependent families and children and are named after the old arrangement of small dwellings with a shared patio characteristic of Spanish cities, see Zoido et al. 2013). Regarding the defence of public services, the movements adopt the more conventional stance of defending the welfare state through major strikes and demonstrations. This has been particularly intense in those autonomous communities most eager to cut public spending and/or privatize public services, with Madrid at the forefront (Martín 2013).

c) Thirdly, **movements demanding direct democracy and cities for citizens** are different. Here we can identify the distinguishing characteristics of the *indignados* and the *mareas ciudadanas* (citizen tides). While we identified collective defence of the neighbourhood itself and the ability of the community to participate in it as typical of the first type of move-

ment, in the case of this third type the slogans are more extensive and diffuse. These movements do not focus on a neighbourhood, city or territory. They are general and as we have pointed out they make intensive use of social networks (Tores 2013). Only on that basis are they grounded in specific situations such as expanding green zones, creating public spaces for debate and communal living, changing the municipal government etc.. The scale of these movements is fundamentally national, because they involve a number of converging protests which grab attention and succeed. Later, after the hypothetical victory, a different form of urban and regional government will be articulated. With this objective in mind, streets, public squares, vacant land and abandoned buildings or ground floors are occupied, the aim being to create dissident spaces connected by networks (Santos Solla 2002; Castells 2012). From these spaces citizens may exercise their true “right to the city”, to use the slogan coined by Lefebvre and championed by many Spanish theorists. In the opinion of the movement’s organisers, the mere fact of occupation and the proposal of alternatives involves the exercise of direct democracy (Manifiesto Democracia Real Ya 2011; Razquín 2014). A genuine and radical democracy (controlled by assemblies) is juxtaposed with the classic (and corrupt) forms of traditional politics. To comprehend this last proposition, it should be remembered that since 2012 distrust of political and government leaders in Spain has reached its highest level (CIS 2012-2014) as a result of the combination of the economic crisis and dozens of very public cases of convictions for corruption at various levels.

d) Deriving from the typology of the above movements, **the subject of urban communes** has been introduced into the protest agenda. This issue is not central, but it is persistent and it needs discussing due to its eminently geographical character which relates to the concept of the city itself. The importance of communal urban property is recalled by Harvey in his recent work (Harvey 2012), and in Spain it is asserted in diametric opposition to the excesses of capitalist and ultra-liberal planning. If a neighbourhood’s residents are capable of obstructing a large construction project or occupying an abandoned building, it is possible that they can manage it through a new form of communitarianism. Various examples have arisen, including El Campo de La Cebada in La Latina and “Esta es una Plaza” in Lavapiés, both working-class districts of Madrid, and others in Lleida, Zaragoza etc. (Bellet and Canosa 2014). The return to neighbourhood ownership or management is being realized in

specific places, but now it is based on a more political and general reading of the demand for the communal over the private, the right to decide, and the right to manage territories democratically, which all these social movements adopt as one of their main principles.

e) Finally, we can identify **urban movements in Spain that have an increasingly political character and focus on mass mobilization in order to take power**. These cases involve the condemnation of the illegitimacy of governments whose representatives have betrayed in principle the will of the people by not fulfilling the electoral programmes on which they were elected or by being forced to abandon their promises by the pressures generated by the economic-financial crisis (Manifiesto Democracia Real Ya 2011; Razquín 2014). This kind of mobilization includes the thousands of people who take to the streets around the Congress of Deputies in a direct challenge to the judiciary, who participate in *escraches* (noisy demonstrations outside the home of a government member), or who demand immediate elections. The sites of these protests are again urban centres (all the social movements analyzed reinforce the centrality of certain sectors of the city) and in particular the head offices of institutions. In the face of the established power, the opposition demonstrates, holds assemblies and constructs dissident spaces in front of symbolic monumental buildings. Often protesters seek to enter these buildings, which are always in a central urban location, as a tangible expression that they wish to win back the governance of the country.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this article has been to address the geography of counter-power in contemporary Spain symbolized by urban social movements. Following the precedents of 1968 and the various types of anti-globalization or alternative protests, these movements seek to create dissident spaces from which to protest against the normal order of things. In a context in which mobilization is nearly exclusively urban, their aim is to change the city as a step towards the general change of the economic and democratic order that they seek. The city is once again a compact built-up space with squares and emblematic central places which must be occupied. The network society enables demands to be immediately recorded, transmitted and disseminated to other places, creating new foci for dissent and the construction of alternatives to established power.

Many of the movements have maintained and continue to maintain a position of defence against what is perceived as aggression. Unwanted public works, cuts in medical services, or the rising cost of university studies end up generating protests which strengthen feelings in neighbourhoods or among citizens threatened by the crisis of the welfare state. Furthermore, as we approach the present, urban social mobilization has become increasingly more political. In order to reverse the state of crisis and to change an inadequate democracy, movements believe it is necessary to organize themselves into *mareas ciudadanas* or movement-parties, a belief explicitly asserted by Podemos, the party which has grown enormously in popularity after its success in the 2014 European elections. The construction of defensive spaces in the cities must be complemented by the mass exercise of the right to vote if political representativeness is to be transformed. In order to change the established rules of the game, a growing number of *indignados* have undoubtedly championed moving from dissident spaces to institutional spaces, from the social and urban to the political and governmental.

As we have aimed to demonstrate, the profound economic-financial crisis in Spain has changed the people, has reinforced the sense of citizenship, and has strengthened the demand for inextricably linked rights to the neighbourhood, to the city, to public services, to decision making, to real democracy etc.. What we are seeing, and this is very important from a geographical perspective, is a re-scaling of the country with new value attached to consensual planning, public spaces, central and compact cities, and institutional sites of power. The territory belongs to the people who nevertheless become more concentrated in specific spaces in order to defend their innovative critical positions. With regard to what we have been able to learn from this extensive social movement, firstly, it is urban or city-based in nature, as a consequence of accelerated urbanization of the country and development of the concept of active citizenship. Secondly, the value of Geography as an tool of analysis, due to its ability to establish a typology of social movements based primarily on their scale or the spatial networks that have been constructed (Routledge 2003; Nicholls 2007). Thirdly, important ideas are extracted as regards new ways of using space, in this case for vindication: connections based on intensive use of ICT, occupation of central places in the city, vindication of the public space as a place for public use, and a return to the old meaning of square, as a forum for debating ideas.

In Spain, perhaps alongside Greece, the intensity of the urban social movement to protest against the crisis has been surprising. The protests are not simply political, demanding the vindication of democracy, as is the case in Arab countries, nor do they involve outbreaks of episodic violence, as has occurred in the United Kingdom and France. They are movements with an extensive social foundation, which attempt to change the course of government of the economy and finances. They attempt to achieve more direct control of government proceedings and involve proposing urban solutions based on citizen pressure. In this regard, they are more similar to the anti-globalization movement, to Occupy Wall Street and to the contents of the citizen demonstrations in Brazil in 2014 and 2015, since they involve demands for fairer government, expressed from the centre of the city. This is why the Spanish example could be deemed to be both an exception and the norm, at the same time. It is unique, given that there are no equivalents as regards its magnitude, modes and slogans, but it is similar to other current socio-political movements in that it questions the democratic and representational deficit in the main governing, financial and economic institutions on their different scales, from local to supranational, the latter expressed by the EU and the IMF.

Notes

¹ 'Artificial' is a term adopted in the Basque Country to describe the action of consumption and land use for housing development, infrastructure and equipment. It is also directly related to the concept of artificial soil defined in the European project Corine Land Cover and refers to urban, commercial, industrial and transport areas; mining, landfills and construction areas; and non-agricultural artificial greenery.

² In Spain the word *indignado* refers to the person who vehemently expresses his/her displeasure or anger against a person, an event or a situation. Popularizing the name comes from the short book "*Indigne-vous*" written by the French diplomat *S. Hessel*. It was translated into Spanish by the critic and economist *J.L. Sampedro* as "*Indignaos*" in 2011 and was a spectacular sales success in Spain.

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