

4. Struggling Against Entrenched Austerity

From the housing crisis toward social movements for housing in post-crisis Lisbon and Portugal

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Abstract¹

This chapter provides an overview of the field of housing politics in contemporary Lisbon: the transition from the end of a period of economic crisis and deep austerity to a fast economic growth based on exportation, tourism and real estate; the intersection of historical housing problems with new trends of financialisation, touristification and gentrification; and the growth of social movements concerned with the right to housing and to the city. By reflecting on housing crisis and struggles, the chapter takes two conceptual steps. On the one hand, by building on an understanding of austerity as the downloading of vulnerability to risk from the economic to the social sphere, it explores the entrenchment of austerity in the field of housing. On the other hand, by questioning the capacity of emerging social movements to fight the social vulnerability brought by austerity, it questions social movements' potential to establish themselves as a 'resilient' alternative to the dominant models of economic development.

¹ This chapter is largely based on the lecture I gave at The Athens Summer School on Resilient European Cities (Athens, June 2018), and it stems from my involvement in some of the activist groups mentioned in the text and in two research projects: 'exPERts – Making sense of planning expertise: Housing policy and the role of experts in the Programa Especial de Realojamento (PER)' (Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia; PTDC/ATP-EUR/4309/2014FCT; 2016-2019); 'HOPES: HOusing PErspectives and Struggles. Futures of housing movements, policies and dynamics in Lisbon and beyond' (FCT; PTDC/GES-URB/28826/2017; 2018-2021).

Introduction After years of deep austerity, imposed from the national (2010-2011) and European (2011-2015) level, narratives have radically changed in Lisbon. The economy is growing, the national government – brought to power in 2015 by a coalition between the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Left Block – has reverted some of the harsher austerity measures, and Lisbon has suddenly become a hub of global flows, attracting tourists, creative classes and European pensioners, but also increasing flows of real estate investment. The narratives surrounding Lisbon tell a story of resilience and coping in the face of deep austerity, and then post-austerity rebirth and hype (e.g. JONES 2017, KHAN 2017). At the same time, however, the new economic trends are fostering a fast restructuring of the housing market, which is increasingly burdening households, and especially young adults, in the access to housing. It was growth, more than the economic crisis, to trigger a deep housing crisis in Lisbon. At the same time, key reforms passed during the years of austerity – including those that have had a deep impact on the housing market by favouring accumulation over the right to housing – are not being reverted by government and parliament. This context has provided a fertile ground for the birth of a new generation of activist groups and platforms concerned with the right to the city and the right to housing (see, for instance, SEIXAS & GUTERRES 2018). Despite the big complexity and diversity of grassroots actors at play, emergent struggles have had in common the capacity to play on different arenas – seeking media visibility, negotiating with institutional actors, acting in confrontational way, producing alternative data – with the explicit goal of fighting back the commodification of housing in ‘post-austerity’ Lisbon.

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of this complex field; and take two steps toward a conceptualisation thereof. On the one hand, by building on an understanding of austerity as the downloading of vulnerability to risk from the top-down, and from the economic to the social sphere (see SAPOUNTZAKI & CHALKIAS 2014), I will discuss the extent to which the page of austerity actually has turned to the field of housing and housing policy. This, in line with previous reflections based on a very different context, that of the South of the USA (TULUMELLO 2018), suggests that austerity needs to be conceptualised as a long-

term multi-scalar governmental strategy – in contrast to a mainstream conception of austerity as a set of responses to any number of crises. On the other hand, by reflecting on emerging social movements for their capacity to fight on a number of different levels the social vulnerability brought by entrenched austerity, I will question social movements' potential to establish themselves as a 'resilient' alternative to the dominant models of economic development.

What follows is a reflection based on the work I have been carrying out as a member of two research projects on housing in Lisbon and Portugal; and, at the same time, of my involvement in some of the very activist groups and actions I will discuss – and should hence be considered as a research-informed, politically-positioned discussion.

Portugal has been one of the countries most harshly impacted by the European economic crisis and the austerity politics deployed as an answer to it. However, Portugal has always constituted an exception, albeit in different ways at different moments in time, to dominant narratives about the crisis – a 'rare beast in the eurozone', a commentator argued (KHAN 2017). The economic crisis started to hit Portugal in 2009. The then socialist government started to enforce austerity measures, while the combination of recession and bailout of banks was putting pressure over the nation's financial stability. In 2011, the socialist government failed to approve the fourth austerity package in just one year, and was forced to request external aid. After the fall of the government, in the same year, it was a new centre-right government to negotiate the bailout with the 'Troika' made up of the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund. The new government embraced European austerity *con gusto*, cutting jobs and wages in the public sector, raising taxes, reducing social transfers (PEDROSO 2014). Not only was the government keen to implement structural reforms requested by the memorandum of understanding, but it exploited the situation to gain power over other political actors (MOURY & STANDRING 2017), going 'beyond the Troika' as proudly announced by Paulo Macedo, then Minister of Health, toward the end of his tenure in late

From the 'good student' to the 'alternative to austerity'

2015. No wonder that Portugal was, at the time, considered European austerity's 'good student' (EVANS-PRITCHARD 2012, AFONSO 2013, JORDAN 2015) – the difference with the Greek case was often remarked by Pedro Passos Coelho, then Prime Minister, who wanted to build an image of a country conforming to European mainstreams (see, e.g., FALCÃO 2015).

Despite the return to economic growth in 2015, the deep social impacts brought by austerity measures eroded in time the support to the centre-right government, and, after the elections in November of the same year, an unprecedented coalition made up of the centre-left Socialist Party, and left-wing Communist Party and Left Block was formed to support a socialist government. The majority and government's discourse was straightforward: austerity needs to be reverted. The external aid programme having been concluded in 2015, the new government started to revert some of the extraordinary measures approved during the previous years (FERNANDES et al. 2018), namely the cuts in wages of public employees, special taxes over wages and pensions, other tax increases (like VAT for restaurants), and cuts to allowances. Moreover, the minimum-wage – still the lowest in Western Europe – was repeatedly increased. At the same time, the economic trends reverted abruptly, driven by the growth of exports, and especially tourism, which had been ongoing since the years of austerity – and also thanks to a favourable external environment, including unconventional quantitative easing by the European Central Bank (TELES 2018). The reversal of some austerity measures supported the growth by providing a stimulus to domestic consumption (idem). This also proved positive for national finances, with deficit and debt plummeting. Soon, the discourse about Portugal changed, as progressive commentators worldwide saw in the new government the proof that an 'alternative to austerity' could exist (JONES 2017, ALDERMAN 2018). Portuguese Minister of Finance Mario Centeno was credited with the capacity of keeping a balanced budget at the same time as fostering economic growth, and was elected President of the Eurogroup – quite a success for a country that was, just a few years before, considered to be on the brink of bankruptcy. Portugal had found its financial 'Cristiano Ronaldo' – as Wolfgang Schäuble, austerity hawk and then German Minister of Finance, called Centeno in

2017. At the same time, a global hype was building around Lisbon, which soon became the new 'coolest capital in Europe', with newspapers and magazines describing it as a gem that had too long been hidden from the spotlight; and as tourists, students and startups started to flock in.

Besides the hype, however, there are good reasons to be sceptical of the turn of the page of austerity. Commentators from quite different backgrounds, in left-wing magazines (e.g. PRÍNCIPE 2018, TELES 2018) and political science journals alike (FERNANDES et al. 2018), suggested that in fields such as health, education, university, public transport, not much had changed.

So let me focus on the field of housing, which is particularly apt to question the contradictions of post-crisis/'post-austerity' Portugal because of its multifaceted nature. Being at the same time a basic right – as the Portuguese Constitution acknowledges (art. 65) – and a tradeable commodity, housing has always been oscillating in between the welfare state and the market, revealing itself to be a field of contradictions and deep tensions. It is not by chance that, in the aftermaths of the global economic crisis and in an age of late capitalism, housing crises are on the rise globally (MADDEN & MARCUSE 2016), bringing the housing question – in ways that remind of Engels' descriptions from the 19th century – back to the spotlight of political struggle. In Lisbon, the pressures stemming from the cycle of austerity and 'post-austerity' have impacted over an already complex field, articulating old and new crises.

The housing question in Lisbon

Lisbon is the central municipality of a metropolitan area that hosts around 3 million inhabitants. In order to understand its current dynamics, a brief reference to its recent history is in order. Since the 1980s, Lisbon metropolitan area has undergone a quite typical, if late and extremely fast, process of post-industrial transition, characterised by chaotic suburbanisation. In the process, Lisbon city has lost more than 40% of its population, dropping from around 900,000 to slightly more than 500,000 inhabitants in a few decades. In time, the fast growth of the metropolitan area, pushed by waves of immigration, before and af-

ter the 1974 democratic revolution, has not been accompanied by the establishment of a fully-fledged housing policy capable of meeting housing demands (TULUMELLO et al. 2018). Successive stages of informal settlements have been addressed by a number of specific programmes – of which, the Special Programme for Rehousing (Programa Especial de Realojamento, PER) launched in 1993 has been the most important – resulting in a complex patchwork of persistence of informal and semi-informal settlements, large public housing estates, and several forms of sub-standard housing.

If housing has been described as the ‘wobbly pillar’ of the welfare state (TORGERSEN 1987), this is particularly true for working classes in Portugal and Lisbon (see SANTOS et al. 2014). However, this is not true in general, as public policy has in time privileged favouring some classes and interests: by stimulating above all homeownership for the middle-classes, housing policy has, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, constituted a key component in the financialisation of the Portuguese economy, and one of the key triggers (via building private debt and the bank sector’s main liabilities) of the economic and financial crisis (idem).

One of the main drivers of the crisis, housing and real estate are also among the main drivers of economic recovery. Since 2015, the real estate market has exploded, with prices growing yearly double digits almost everywhere in the Lisbon metropolitan area. The real estate boom needs to be understood because of the intersection of phenomena on the demand and supply side. On the supply side, the key triggers are a number of reforms, approved before and during the external bailout, with the aim of liberalising the housing and real estate sector – as explicitly requested by the memorandum of understanding signed with the Troika (EC 2011) – and making housing a space for (foreign) investment. Already before the financial crisis, the socialist government approved a package of fiscal benefits for real estate investment funds investing in urban refurbishment, as well as a Golden Visa scheme (which grants access to the Schengen area when investing in real estate) and a number of statuses which aimed to attract wealthy Europeans to Portugal (the Non-permanent Resident Status and bilateral agree-

ments on tax exemptions for pensioners). During the bailout, the centre-right government approved a number of reforms: the reform of spatial planning, which has made real estate operations easier; the New Urban Lease Regime, which liberalised the rental market; and the fiscal regime for short-term rental, which completely liberalised the transformation from residential to touristic use.

From the demand side, the most evident trend has been the boom of tourism. As international arrivals in the country doubled between 2009 and 2017² – also because of turmoil in Northern African and Middle East countries, which pushed tourist away from many traditional Mediterranean destinations –, pressures mounted for flipping housing into hotels, hostels and short-term rentals. To make an expressive example, at the time of writing (October 2018; data AIRDNA) short-term platform AirBnb manages in the city of Lisbon around 16 thousand rentals, of which three-quarters entire homes – a market that virtually did not exist as early as 2012 (see Fig. 1). But the hype surrounding Lisbon has been bringing other groups – all of them with purchasing power significantly higher than that of local residents – in town: European pensioners attracted by the good weather and fiscal benefits, international students,³ and increasingly so ‘digital nomads’ and startupper – a field in which the municipality has recently invested quite heavily.⁴

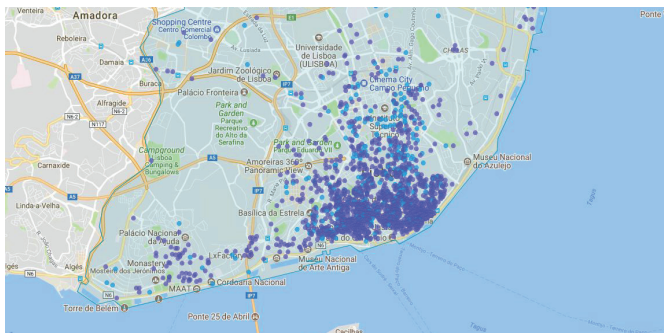


Fig. 1. AirBnB listings in Lisbon, as of October 2018. Source and copyright: AirDNA; see www.airdna.co. Reproduced by courtesy of AIRDNA.

2 World Bank data, URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL>.

3 Student housing may well be ‘the next big thing’ for real estate investment, as suggested by the study commissioned to local start-up Uniplaces by Jones Lang LaSalle, one of the most important global firms of real estate services (see JLL and UNIPLACES, 2017)

4 See, for instance, the site Startup Lisboa (www.startuplisboa.com/). Lisbon has also successfully bid to attract, since 2016, the Web Summit, one of the

Real estate and housing have thus become a privileged place for investment and speculation for foreign actors, both individual households moving their residency to Portugal and investment funds. Prices are skyrocketing, and even the Portuguese National Bank has alerted for the risk of a new housing bubble, and its burst to come (BANCO DE PORTUGAL 2018). The social impacts are there to see: the housing crisis, which in the crisis period tended to be limited to specific social groups, is now cutting across the social body, as more and more groups are pushed away from central areas by gentrification, tourisification and financialisation (SALGUEIRO et al. 2017, COCOLA-GANT 2018).

***Housing policy
and politics:
'post-austerity'?***

As pressures over urban residents mounted, and as mainstream media started to cover stories of expulsions and evictions, housing became a crucial political topic in 2017 throughout the country, and especially in Lisbon, where the campaign for the municipal elections of that year was framed around the housing crisis. The national government was therefore forced to acknowledge an issue that had at that point being absent from its political agenda; and created a new Secretary of State for Housing. Since then, a panoply of policies – some announced, some approved – was discussed: First Right (Primeiro Direito), a new programme for the rehousing of households living in precarious conditions; schemes for subsidised rental; and a provision that allows municipalities to regulate short-term rentals.⁵ The policy field was suddenly characterised by a range of openings, but at the same time by deep omissions and contradictions (ALLEGRETTI et al. 2018). Indeed, at the same time as he was picking housing as a new policy priority, Prime Minister António Costa denied he had any intention of regulating the market (LUSA 2017), a claim that has been repeated multiple times by the newly appointed Secretary of State for Housing, Ana Pinho. This is exemplified by two pieces of legislation recently approved. First, a new piece of national legislation allowed municipalities to fix limits in a short-term rental, and the local government of Lisbon decided to suspend new licenses in

biggest global fairs for digital technologies – which has in 2018 announced that it will remain in Lisbon for more five years.

⁵ See the provisions under the label of the New Generation of Housing Policies (Nova Geração de Políticas de Habitação), at www.portaldahabitacao.pt/pt/portal/habitacao/npg.html.

the historical centre. A local politician claimed that ‘this is like removing a dead patient from life support’ (LOURENÇO 2018, my translation). Indeed, there are reasons to believe that one such measure will do nothing more than shifting the pressure over different areas of the city. Second, the provision for fiscal incentives for long-term rental contracts has been criticised for not applying to existing contracts, creating incentives for terminating them (FRANCISCO 2018) – and hence possibly reducing, rather than increasing, tenure security. More generally, key pieces of ‘structural reform’ approved before and during the external bailout and at the core of the current housing crisis – including the spatial planning reform, the Golden Visa scheme and other fiscal benefits for speculative actors, and the regulations easing evictions – are not being subject to governmental scrutiny or action.

If, on the one hand, the reluctance of the government in regulating fields at the core of economic recovery can be understood as the fear of killing the goose that laid the golden eggs; on the other, by questioning the very nature of such recovery, deeply based on volatile financial investments and external inflows, the field of housing calls into question the very ‘post-austerity’ nature of the current Portuguese government. In this respect, the way austerity tends to be conceptualised in the European context may not help us understand the nature of recent transformations. Austerity has been, in Europe, a field of fierce political conflict, among, on the one hand, neoclassical economics, which support austerity as a necessary tool to rebuild confidence in times of crisis, and, on the other, neo-Keynesian perspectives that have put into discussion the capacity of austerity to rebalance public finances and promote economic growth (see BLYTH 2013, for a recap). However, there’s something in common to both fields, that is, an understanding of austerity as a ‘response’ to economic crises. The experiences of different contexts – for instance, US cities – suggest that, by reducing its intensity, austerity can become a permanent political technology well beyond periods of crisis (TULUMELLO 2018). Permanent austerity works, rather than through sudden and abrupt ‘cuts’ to welfare, through a variety of mechanisms that restructure state action away from ‘public policy’ and toward capital accumulation (idem). A perspective of vulnerability/resilience,

as theorised by SAPOUNTZAKI and CHALKIAS (2014), helps us understand a core dimension of the entrenchment of austerity. In these authors' view, austerity should be seen as a multi-scalar process of transformation of the multi-scalar balance of resilience and vulnerability to risk. In particular, SAPOUNTZAKI and CHALKIAS argue, austerity 'downloads' (see also PECK 2012) vulnerability, that is, it increases the *financial* resilience of the state to external shocks, but at the cost of reducing *social* resilience, impacting local territories and vulnerable groups.

Seen in this light, the case of 'post-austerity' housing policy in Portugal and Lisbon exemplifies the way austerity can, at the same time as it is alleviated, become normalised, ultimately entrenched in the system of public welfare, in three steps. First, amid a financial crisis, shock austerity measures are implemented in the name of saving the state, while 'structural reforms' are implemented in the name of creating the pre-conditions for future growth. Second, in times of rebound, amid a favourable economic environment, the financialisation of housing and real estate cum foreign investment, by supporting the recovery of financial stability, is among the core dynamics that make the reversal of the most visible pieces of austerity legislation possible. However, third, while structural reforms are not reverted amid fears that rebound could be halted, growth itself, via housing crisis, further transfers vulnerability toward the social fabric. Austerity survives the reversal of austerity, becoming entrenched in the housing system – and beyond that. Against this background, what is of civil society and bottom-up politics? Enter the new housing struggles.

Fighting entrenched austerity: toward a new generation of housing movements?

The historical connotation of Portugal as a *país de brandos costumes* (a country of mild manners) has been put into crisis by the waves of anti-austerity mobilisations during the external bailout (see BAUMGARTEN 2013). However, differently to what had happened in countries like Spain, the USA or the UK, the field of housing had been outside of the limelight of Portuguese social movements in those years. Things changed in 'post-austerity' times, and 2017 has also been the year of appearance and consolidation of a number of activist groups and platforms concerned with the right to housing and the city. Amid the great diversity and variety of actors at play, a pivotal role has been

played by Habita – Association for the Right to Housing and to the City (see www.habita.info), founded in 2005 and engaged since then in the struggles of self-built settlements in peripheral areas of Lisbon metropolitan area (DI GIOVANNI 2017). Habita has been the original promoter of the Caravan for the Right to Housing; Habita organised the open assembly from which the platform Stop Evictions was born (see below). In what follows, by focusing briefly on the multiplicity of strategies adopted by activist groups, we can start questioning their capacity to offer an alternative to permanent austerity politics.

First, the acknowledgement of the variety of struggles, both those with a longer history and those pushed by recent trends (see above), has inspired attempts at creating *networks of solidarity and struggle* among different actors. The Caravan for the Right to Housing (Caravana pelo Direito à Habitação; <https://caravanapelahabitacao.wordpress.com/>) is the most important example (see FALANGA et al. forthcoming). The Caravan, which travelled throughout Portugal in September 2017, was launched with the goal of giving visibility to housing struggles around the country, and shaping housing as a common field of struggle for populations as different as Afro-descendants living in self-built settlements and middle classes being pushed away from urban centres (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The Caravan for the Right to Housing, September 2018. Source: <https://caravanapelahabitacao.wordpress.com/>.

Second, the field of housing activism has seen, possibly for the first time in Portugal since the revolutionary period of 1974–1975, the development of *confrontational actions*. This is exemplified by the work of platform Stop Evictions (Stop Despejos; <https://stopdespejos.wordpress.com>), an informal group born with the specific objective, as its name says, of stopping evictions, more often by physically disrupting their operations.

Third, another dimension of confrontational housing politics has been *squatting*. While households – and especially single mothers – had long been squatting abandoned flats in public housing estates, it was since the revolutionary period that housing squatting had not been framed as a political action. During the last few years, Habita and Stop Evictions have supported the organising of several dozens of households squatting in public estates (see <https://stopdespejos.wordpress.com/portfolio/queremos-dialogo-julho-2018/>). Squatters had been claiming that, on the one hand, no eviction should be carried out in absence of a decent solution for the households; and, second, that it is unacceptable that, in the face of thousands of households on waiting lists for accessing public housing, hundreds of publicly owned flats have been abandoned for years. The municipality has recently decided to assign some of the squatted flats to households in the waiting list, claiming that squatting unjustly disrupt priority of access to public housing (DN/LUSA 2018). This action, while evidently being an attempt at disrupting the squatting movement by putting households into conflict (see HABITA 2018), can, at the same time, be considered a partial victory of the squatting movement, which has forced the municipality to speed up its assignment practices and put more flats into use.

Another area of action, fourth, has been the construction of *bridges with academia*, of which the two project exPERTs and HOPES are two examples, and where HOPES also includes a formal action research partnership with Habita. These bridges are considered by Habita as an important component in the political construction of a new generation of social movements, as exemplified, for instance, by its long-lasting cycle of debates.⁶

This is linked, fifth, with preliminary attempts at *building (alternative) data* about the housing market and the housing crisis. This is a quite problematic field in Portugal, as the availability of micro-data over demographics, housing and real estate is limited to censuses, which take place every ten years. Both in the activist and academic community, there is a generalised perception that good data would be useful to counter main-

⁶ See the 'Events' section of Habita's Facebook page www.facebook.com/habita.colectivo/.

stream narratives about economic growth, by showing, for instance, the role of touristic deregulation in the expulsion of residents from urban centres. Recently, the website ‘I’ve lost my home’ (‘Perdi a casa’; <http://lisboa.perdiacasa.com/>) has been launched to map the processes of eviction and expulsion, with the double aim of generating bottom-up data and of creating awareness about ongoing struggles.

All of the previous strategies, sixth, have been linked with attempts at creating *media visibility* to ongoing struggles and contributing to shaping the *political discourse*, including through artistic interventions – see, for instance, the work by the collective Left Hand Rotation (see Fig. 3). In particular, activists have been concerned with the fact that media attention has been almost uniquely concerned with the impacts of gentrification and touristification over urban middle classes, thence keeping groups – including racialised ones – that have long been suffering from housing crises at the margins of the political discourse (see FALANGA et al. forthcoming).

Seventh, particularly Habita has been active in building *international networks* of struggle and solidarity, more evidently throughout its participation in the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City (<https://housingnotprofit.org/en>), of which the 2018 meeting has been organised in Lisbon.

Finally, eight, it is important to stress how the previous strategies – and particularly confrontational actions – have been going hand in hand with the building of *dialogue with institutional actors*. A case in point concerns the aftermath of an action of disruption of an eviction in the self-built neighbourhood Bairro 6 de Maio in the city of Amadora, in Lisbon’s suburban ring (see <https://stopdespejos.wordpress.com/portfolio/bairro-6-de-maio-amadora-18-janeiro-2018/>). Bairro 6 de Maio has been fighting for its own survival for decades, since the municipality has worked for the clearance of the settlement without providing housing alternatives to many of its residents. In January 2018, Stop Evictions successfully stopped the eviction of two households. Right after, the collective, also thanks to the participation of two national MPs and two local councillors from

TERRAMOTOURISM

EMERGENCY INSTRUCTIONS IN CASE OF **URBAN TRANSFORMATION** PRODUCED BY **TOURISM EARTHQUAKE**

01



GET TOGETHER AND MAINTAIN THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

02



ATTACH FURNITURE, OBJECTS AND STRUCTURE THAT MAY FALL. ONCE THE IDENTITY AND PATRIMONY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY ARE LOST IT'S RECONSTRUCTION WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE.

03



AVOID ABANDONMENT . REVIEW THE STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF YOUR HOME

04



RELAX. DON'T LET PANIC TAKE OVER YOU.

05



IF YOU ARE INSIDE THE BUILDING, STAY INSIDE

06



DON'T USE ELEVATORS

07



DON'T RUSH TO THE SUBURBS

08



RESIST COLLECTIVELY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WHERE YOU LIVE

09



IN "BRAND CITIES": TOURISM TSUNAMI AND GENTRIFICATION ALERT



Fig. 3. Project Terramotourism, by Left Hand Rotation. See: www.lefthandrotation.com/terramotourism/.

the Left Block, was able to negotiate with the municipality that no further evictions without solution would be carried out, an informal agreement that seems to be, although precariously, holding, while the national government is providing support for rehousing. But maybe the most important example in this field has been the visit to Portugal, in late 2016, of Leilani Fahra, UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Adequate Housing. Habita played a crucial role in getting the Special Rapporteur to visit Portugal. Fahra's report (2017), released after a few months, has had a massive media impact, constituting a crucial moment in the politicisation of housing in Portugal. More generally, Habita, the Caravan for the Right to Housing and academic activists have been quite active in dialogues with the Secretary of State Ana Pinho, who has shown, particularly during the first months of her tenure, interest in building bridges with grassroots groups. Whether, and to what extent, will this dialogue really impact the policy field, becoming a component of a more participatory approach to the field of housing, is an open issue.

The field of housing activism in Portugal is ongoing fast growth and change. One crucial goal of many activists and collectives is pushing toward the convergence of different, new and old struggles. While the prevalence of homeownership had long contributed to social pacification in this field, housing crises and the progressive entrenchment of austerity seem to be opening up to the possibility that different groups start realising what they have in common, the political-economic dimension of housing in times of late capitalism (cf. AALBERS & CRISTOPHERS 2014). In particular, young, urban middle classes, who are not being supported in the path to homeownership in the same way older generations had been, may start realising the structural nature of their housing problems, and possibly join racialised and poor groups in their longstanding struggles. Against this backdrop, then, a political space seems to be open. 'We are living a new moment in the struggles in the housing field in Portugal: movements are overcoming their divisions and converging' (activist, in FALANGA et al. forthcoming). Whether this process will consolidate is still an open question.

Lessons learned: fighting permanent austerity?

At any rate, this overview of patterns of normalisation of austerity in 'post-austerity' Portugal and the new waves of housing mobilisations opens up to some conceptual arguments that – while needing deeper empirical exploration and theoretical development – help us better understand the housing field in contemporary Portugal, but indeed well beyond it as housing financialisation and its crises increasingly characterise the contemporary version of (European) capitalism. The fight against the commodification of housing – which, overall, constitutes the hallmark of housing movements in Lisbon and Portugal – can be understood as a fight against low-intensity austerity as the transference of economic vulnerability to the social fabric. In this sense, housing is revealed as a field where multi-scalar and multilevel connections are particularly relevant, both to understand policy change (take, for instance, the effects of reforms pushed by European institutions over the housing market in central neighbourhoods in Lisbon) and socioeconomic transformations. From the perspective of the promotion of urban resilience, the case of Lisbon confirms the suggestion by SAPOUNTZAKI and CHALKIAS (2014) that austerity increases *financial* resilience at the costs of *social* resilience: the boom of the Portuguese real estate market (favoured by austerity measures) is apparently easing the financial burden over the Portuguese state, at the same time as it is making households, especially in Lisbon, more vulnerable with regard to the right to housing. But more than that, a perspective of resilience/vulnerability applied to the field of housing exposes the problematic nature of the current economic growth in Portugal and Lisbon: the fact that the fast growth is based on external inflows (of tourists and other groups, of financial and speculative investments) makes the very economic recovery extremely dependent on trends that are not under the control of the Portuguese state and of its cities.

Against this backdrop, what is the role of housing politics? If austerity is devolution of vulnerability, then housing movements are actively offering alternative understandings of resilience based on the right to housing and to the city. This, however, may be at odds with the very concept of resilience, which designates the capacity of a system to recover and adapt in the face of 'external' shocks. On the one hand, the multi-scalar na-

ture of housing problematizes the idea of an 'external' origin of economic crisis – in line with accelerationist or world-ecology perspectives (CUNNINGHAM 2015, MOORE 2015) that have been advocating for the need to understand our global presence as an all-encompassing bundle of (capitalist) relations. At the same time, if austerity, from a shock doctrine (KLEIN 2008), is increasingly becoming a permanent, entrenched feature of state action, the idea of 'shock' seems to be less and less useful to understand it. Against the progressive normalisation of austerity politics, then, the ultimate challenge for social movements – and the civil society at large – is that of thinking new systems of economic and social relations where vulnerability is more equally shared, and the provision of basic rights, such housing is, becomes the core goal of state (or whatever institution may replace it in the future) action.

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