



Turning Tactics into Strategy: The Right to Stay Put and the Decommodification of Housing in Barcelona

Luisa Rossini*

ICS University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

luisa.rossini@ics.ulisboa.pt

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6162-4894>

Gabriele D'Adda*

Politecnico di Torino, Torino, Italy

gabriele.dadda@polito.it

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2739-4437>

Abstract: *The 2007/2008 global financial crisis severely affected EU semi-peripheral countries like Spain, where recovery policies facilitated the entry of international financial actors into the real estate market. In Spain, measures by the state and central bank supported the expansion of equity funds and REITs, accelerating the financialisation of housing and turning it into a speculative asset. This significantly contributed to widespread mortgage repossessions, evictions, and increasing housing precarity. In response, grassroots movements mobilised to defend housing rights and developed tactics that offered meaningful alternatives to eviction and displacement – conditions further exacerbated by the chronic lack of affordable housing, which remains among the lowest in Europe. This article examines the ‘tactics’ enacted by groups actively engaged in housing struggles in Barcelona, some of which were eventually incorporated into public administration strategies. Among these, the use of the right of ‘first refusal and pre-emption’ (tanteo y retracto) – pioneered by movements and some housing cooperatives – has proven effective in countering evictions and contributing to the expansion of affordable and social housing stock. By combining radical actions – such as actual or alleged occupations – with engagement in institutional channels, including demonstrations, policy negotiations, and legislative advocacy, these actors have (re)politicised urban planning and challenged dominant narratives of housing as a financial commodity. This study explores how such contentious urban practices resist financialisation and open space for alternative socio-economic governance in times of housing financialisation, austerity, and shrinking public resources, as well as their effectiveness in transforming grassroots tactics into decommodified and definancialised alternative housing strategies.*

Keywords: housing financialisation; urban social movements; housing alternatives; Barcelona.

* The authors contributed equally to this work and share first authorship.



Urban social movements resisting housing financialisation

The global rise in housing precarity and crises stems not only from economic shocks – such as the 2008–2009 financial crash, austerity, and the COVID-19 pandemic – but also from long-term trends of commodification, financialisation, and deregulation (Farha 2017; Madden and Marcuse 2016; Rolnik 2019). Southern European countries, such as Spain, have been at the forefront of these processes (Tulumello and Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou 2024), with cities experiencing intensified gentrification, touristification, and displacement during both crisis and recovery phases (Knieling and Othengrafen 2016; Gil and Palomera 2024; D’Adda and Kusiak 2025; Wijburg et al. 2018; 2021).

Housing rights movements are increasingly foregrounding social justice in institutional debates, challenging frameworks dominated by austerity and growth imperatives (Liu, 2020). In Spain, urban movements have advanced counter-narratives and policy strategies that oppose housing speculation, reframing housing as a right and emphasising the state’s duty to ensure access, particularly for the most vulnerable (D’Adda 2021; Gil and Palomera 2024; D’Adda and Kusiak 2025; Martínez and Gil 2024).

This study explores the use of the right of first refusal and pre-emption (*tanteo y retracto*),¹ introduced by Catalan law 18/2007, as a radical alternative to eviction and a potential solution for expanding affordable and social housing assets in the city. Housing movements in Barcelona have increasingly advocated for the application of this legal tool to support tenants threatened by eviction or displacement (‘mobbing’) by speculative investors who acquire entire buildings to replace existing residents with wealthier tenants. As part of their strategy, movements organise residents into collective campaigns – often referred to as ‘blocks in struggle’ – to exert public and political pressure on both property owners and local administrations. Through these actions, they aim to compel institutional actors to activate the *tanteo y retracto* mechanism and facilitate the acquisition of buildings for social housing purposes, particularly in a context of limited public resources and housing supply.

In this framework, Barcelona serves as a pertinent case study because of the intense pressures on its housing market, which are driven by a combination of factors including the increasing involvement of financial actors. Designated as a ‘zona de mercado residencial tensionado’ (an area with a stressed residential market) by Spain’s Ministry of Housing, the city saw housing prices rise sharply between 2014 and 2020 – by 38.7% for purchases and 39.6% for new rentals – surpassing pre-2008 levels (CTESC, 2021). A core issue is the limited supply of affordable housing: Spain’s social rental sector accounts for only 1.6% of total housing, well below the EU average of 9.3% (OECD, 2024) and France’s 14% (Brookings Institution, 2021). In Barcelona, this drops to just 1.5% (Buron, 2023). The situation is further strained by the spread of short-term rental platforms like Airbnb, which increase market speculation (García-López et al., 2020), while restricted credit access and falling homeownership push more people into a saturated rental market (Martínez and Gil 2024). The increasing presence of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs, or SOCIMIs in Spain), attracted by favourable tax policies, has drawn significant capital, reshaping rental markets and fuelling gentrification, which has impacted lower- and middle-class residents (Blanco-Romero et al., 2018; Cocola-Gant, 2018; Rossini et al., 2023; D’Adda and Kusiak 2025). Consequently, many households in Barcelona face severe housing precarity, including forced displacement, evictions, and the difficulties in accessing the rental market.

¹ On 5 December 2018, the Barcelona City Council approved a modification of the General Metropolitan Plan, declaring the entire city as an area subject to *tanteo y retracto* rights. This measure, published in the *Diari Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya* on 20 December 2018, gives the municipality priority in acquiring certain properties when they are put up for sale (ajuntament.barcelona.cat).



The configuration of a multifaceted housing movement in Barcelona (Rossini et al., 2023), which emerged in the aftermath of the global economic crisis and its severe impact on the Spanish housing system, has been widely studied for its resistance strategies in numerous academic publications (García-Lamarca, 2017; Colau and Alemany, 2012; Martínez, 2019; D’Adda 2021., D’Adda et al., 2022; Gil and Palomera, 2024). These movements and groups support households and individuals facing eviction, identifying legislative tools and alternative tactics that can be used to negotiate or develop eviction alternatives, particularly in contexts where institutional responses are absent or insufficient. Many of these legal instruments originated in grassroots proposals aimed at strengthening the defence of the right to housing and the ‘right to stay put’ (Kranz and Mayer 1985; Newman and Wyly 2006; Gustafsson et al. 2019; López-Gay et al., 2023).

This paper investigates the potentialities and limitations of the alternative strategies developed and promoted by grassroots groups to resist evictions and expand access to affordable housing. We will discuss several paradigmatic cases, such as the recent resistance at ‘Casa Orsola’, promoted since 2021 by the Tenants’ Union (Sindicat de Llogateres – SLL) in Barcelona. In this case, the attempted eviction of the ‘bloque en lucha’ (‘block in struggle’) – a real estate asset targeted by speculative plans from international investors – was successfully opposed through tactics enacted by groups actively involved in housing struggles, which were eventually incorporated into public administration strategies.

This analysis enables an exploration of: (a) how the repertoires of action and strategies employed by housing movements to resist housing financialisation can raise awareness and bring political centrality to a growing problem; (b) how this visibility serves as a necessary condition for advancing the inclusion of prefigurative forms of politics that propose alternatives to existing housing models; and (c) what are the limitations and potentialities of the identified alternatives, particularly in the light of broader shifts in urban governance, the retreat of the welfare state, and the redefinition of citizenship through grassroots action. Moreover, these identified alternatives could offer opportunities for the design of more inclusive and democratic housing policies. Through this analysis, the article will contribute to both broader activist debates and the academic literature on possible strategies not only to resist housing financialisation but also to envision alternative housing models.

The study combines desk and literature analysis with an examination of movement websites and interviews with activists from Barcelona’s housing movements. As activist-researchers, we have monitored the development of these campaigns over recent years, though we were not directly involved in promoting or developing them.

The agency of grassroots constructing alternative modes of governance

Building on Michel de Certeau’s (1984) influential distinction between ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’, this article adopts his framework to analyse how grassroots practices not only resist dominant spatial orders but can, under certain conditions, evolve into strategic interventions that shape policy and institutional dynamics. While De Certeau originally theorised tactics as everyday practices employed by those lacking power – operating within spaces defined by others – several scholars have explored how such practices may transition into more durable, institutionalised forms of action.



This dynamic is particularly relevant in urban studies, social movement theory, and critical geography, where the agency of grassroots actors is increasingly understood not merely as reactive, but as capable of constructing alternative modes of governance. James Holston (2008), in his concept of insurgent citizenship, shows how marginalised urban populations in Brazil move from informal and tactical practices such as land occupations or self-built housing towards influencing planning processes and claiming legal rights, thereby reconfiguring state-citizen relations. Faranak Miraftab (2009) provides a complementary theoretical lens through her notion of insurgent planning practices, where grassroots initiatives in the Global South transcend mere resistance to engage directly with policy and urban transformation and aspire to structural change. The ‘invented spaces’ of citizenship, autonomously created by marginalised actors, emerge from tactical practices that, over time, may become strategic by aiming at structural change. The notion of agonistic pluralism by Chantal Mouffe (2013) offers a valuable perspective on how conflict is a necessary element to drive social and political change. For these, grassroots struggles allow identities and power dynamics to be negotiated and can enter institutional arenas to contest hegemonic narratives. This transition from dissent at the margins to structured political contestation aligns conceptually with the transformation from tactics to strategies in the Barcelona context (Colau and Alemany, 2012; Martínez, 2019; D’Adda 2021., D’Adda et al., 2022; Gil and Palomera, 2024; Rossini et al., 2023). In the European context, Margit Mayer (2009) has examined how urban movements shift from contentious, tactical actions – such as occupations or protests – towards engaging with urban governance and co-producing policy initiatives and institutional reforms. Patsy Healey’s work (2013) adds critical theoretical depth to the idea that grassroots actors not only resist dominant planning frameworks but can also shape planning cultures and institutional practices through participation, relational agency, and the circulation of ideas. In this way, grassroots strategies can enter and influence formal planning discourses by linking situated practices to broader epistemic communities and policy networks. Together, they frame institutional engagement not as co-optation but as a terrain of constructive contention, where grassroots actors assert their place in shaping public values and urban futures.

Financialisation unveiled: housing injustice and collective struggles

After the 2008–2009 financial crisis in Spain, a surge in mortgage foreclosures as a result of rising unemployment led to widespread protests and social unrest that fuelled the growth of housing movements, which reorganised to combat the increasing influence of corporate landlords (Martínez and Gil, 2022). Notably, the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) emerged, initially resisting housing foreclosures and highlighting the state’s inadequate response compared to the gains of financial entities (D’Adda et al., 2022).

The emergence of Blackstone and other global funds as new owners of houses, previously owned by individuals grappling with the aftermath of the mortgage crisis,² presented a novel challenge for the platform.³ These included rent increases and tenant rights violations that sparked demands for rent control and new housing legislation, prompting grassroots initiatives to address rent extraction and state policies favouring housing financialisation (Gil and Palomera 2024; D’Adda and Kusiak 2025). In Barcelona, in addition to PAH and the Tenants’ Union (SLL), several neighbours’ unions emerged, forming a network of

² Many people affected obtained *dación en pago*, cancelling their debt by handing their mortgaged property back to the bank. *Alquiler social* is a ‘social rent’ contract that allows people to stay in a repossessed house and pay an affordable rent.

³ Among the initiatives against the financialisation of housing, in March 2015 PAH organised a campaign targeting Blackstone with coordinated protests across Spain, London, New York, and San Francisco.



neighbourhood-based groups. In November 2019, over 50 organisations participated in Catalonia's first housing congress with the aim of sharing practices, establishing objectives, and organising joint mobilisations to resist housing speculation and advocate for socially just, community-based housing solutions.⁴ One joint tactic that emerged from the housing congress was the 'Guerra a Cerberus' campaign, launched in Barcelona in 2020, which targeted the equity fund Cerberus and its real estate arm Divarian for conducting mass evictions and disregarding housing laws. Expanding to 11 Spanish cities, it used occupations and protests to expose the harms of financialised landlords, sparking public debate on housing rights.

The organisation of large-scale protests has been crucial to exert pressure on both corporate landlords and social services and they signal a growing public awareness. These mobilisations aim to enforce the right to social rents for vulnerable tenants and prevent their evictions. This demand is grounded in Catalan laws 24/2015 and 1/2022,⁵ both of which were developed with strong input from grassroots organisations and social movements⁶ (D'Adda and Kusiak 2025). These laws oblige major property owners to offer a social rent before initiating eviction proceedings against economically vulnerable households. However, this obligation is frequently ignored, delayed, or only partially fulfilled. As a result, non-compliance with this article is often used in court to suspend evictions or, at the very least, as a basis for negotiation between housing activists, social services, and landlords (D'Adda and Kusiak 2025). In some cases, these negotiations succeed. For example, landlords such as Cerberus have been required to offer seven-year social rent contracts instead of evicting tenants, allowing many families to avoid displacement and secure affordable housing – at least temporarily.

When negotiations for a social rent fail, and eviction cannot be suspended, housing groups shift their focus to preventing homelessness. They pressure authorities and social services to provide temporary accommodation, often in *pensiones* – basic lodgings somewhere between a budget hotel and an aparthotel. These accommodations, while offering a roof, rarely provide adequate living conditions: families are placed in small rooms without kitchens or spaces to study or work, making it a minimal and precarious form of shelter.

Occupying entire housing blocks has emerged as a protest tactic by housing and neighbourhood unions in Barcelona, particularly in cases of 'residential mobbing' – when investors purchase entire buildings to displace existing tenants in favour of wealthier residents. In response, activists occupy these buildings and pressure public authorities to intervene, often demanding that the properties be acquired and converted into public housing. This tactic aims to halt speculation and preserve affordable housing by organising resistance across entire buildings owned by corporate landlords, thereby preventing evictions and, in some cases, rehousing evicted families. Frequently, this tactic also involves invoking the right of first refusal and pre-emption (*tanteo y retracto*), a legal tool that enables public administrations to acquire properties under preferential conditions to expand the public housing stock and ensure access to affordable housing.

In 2017, PAH Barcelona decided to occupy six empty apartments in a building at Aragó 477, in the Eixample district, owned by the international company Norvet, which had acquired the entire property to renovate and resell its 24 flats. As explained by a former PAH spokesperson:

⁴ The concluding report of the first Catalan housing congress are available at: <https://congreshabitatge.cat/>.

⁵ These laws define *grans tenidors* (major landlords) as entities owning more than 10 properties.

⁶ The ILP - Iniciativa Legislativa Popular (Popular legislative initiative) Committee that developed these laws if formed by several organizations, namely the 'Catalan PAHs', the 'DESC Observatory' -now 'DESCA'-, and the 'Alliance Against Energy Poverty' (APE).



‘Aragó 477 allowed us to reframe the public debate, speaking about the role of vulture funds and describing them as responsible for the expulsion of people from their neighbourhoods.’

The occupation aimed to temporarily rehouse families facing housing precarity while awaiting access to social housing. Although PAH, in collaboration with the municipality, negotiated a commitment from Norvet to offer social rents in line with Catalan housing laws, this agreement was never fulfilled. In 2020, despite resistance, the families were evicted, though they were eventually assisted by municipal social services.

In a similar case, the Sindicat d’Habitatge de Gràcia occupied a Cerberus-owned building in 2021, renaming it ‘Bloc Ruth’, and called on the municipality to acquire it through the right of first refusal (*tanteo y retracto*). The building sheltered over twenty people for two years. Although final evictions took place in July 2023, Bloc Ruth became a symbol of resistance to vulture fund Cerberus and speculative real estate.

The most recent and emblematic case of an entire building resisting the pressures of financialization is Casa Orsola, where, since 2021, several tenants have organized with the Tenants’ Union (*Sindicat de Llogateres – SLL*) to struggle for the right to stay put and remain in their homes. After the entire building, which includes 27 flats and 4 commercial premises, had been acquired by the Lioness Inversiones SLU fund in 2021, all but the 8 tenants with an indefinite contract were told that their leases would not be renewed once expired. SLL started a public denunciation campaign once several tenants approached the Union’s assemblies. Their tactics aimed at both Lioness Inversiones SLU and the public administration to lobby for negotiations to prevent the eviction and expulsion of these tenants. Their tactics included the occupation of the offices of the Lioness company in Barcelona enacted together with the Xarxa d’Habitatge de l’Eixample Esquerra (Housing Network of the Left Eixample Neighbourhood) to protest against the investment firm’s replacement of long-term rental contracts with short-term leases after acquiring Casa Orsola. Furthermore, the housing movements developed a campaign, named ‘Ens Quedem’ (‘We Are Staying Put’), to defend tenants’ right to remain in their homes.

Meanwhile, tenants faced eviction and soaring rents – up to EUR 2,000 per month – while the company cited renovations as justification. The new rental contracts allowed only short-term occupancy – between a minimum of 32 days and a maximum of 11 months – effectively preventing long-term tenancy. According to the Tenants’ Union, this model enables landlords to frequently rotate tenants and raise rental prices with each new lease. At the time, such short-term rentals were an emerging model increasingly used to convert housing into tourist apartments, allowing landlords to charge significantly higher rates. Activists argue that this highly speculative objective accelerates the conversion of homes into tourist and luxury apartments, worsening the housing crisis by promoting tenant turnover and unaffordable pricing.

In January 2023, the Barcelona City Council adopted a motion advanced by residents of Casa Orsola, in coordination with local housing organisations, urging the property owner, Lioness Inversiones S.L., to engage in negotiations for lease renewals and to fulfil the legal obligation to provide social rent contracts to tenants in situations of vulnerability, as stipulated by Catalan law 1/2022. Despite this institutional initiative, the property owner declined to implement the mandated social rent measures. While some eviction proceedings were suspended by judicial intervention, the case of at least one tenant who resisted vacating the premises remained unresolved, with eviction proceedings scheduled to resume in early 2025. The campaign in defence of Casa Orsola, amplified by a mass demonstration organised by the SLL in late November 2024, became a symbol of the rent crisis in Barcelona. The resistance to the eviction scheduled for 31 January 2025 evolved into both a



political flashpoint and a mainstream media event, covered live by all major Catalan TV and radio networks. As a result of these mobilisations, the Barcelona City Council, in collaboration with Habitat 3 – a social housing foundation – purchased the entire building for EUR 9.2 million. The acquisition ensured the provision of social rental contracts to the tenants and prevented their eviction.

As outlined by the analysis of these three paradigmatic cases (Aragó 477, Block Ruth and Casa Orsola), the use of this tactic has had important precedents and shown the permeability between housing rights groups as a valuable tool for promoting alternative solutions to evictions. According to members of the PAH, interviewed collectively during an assembly on the use of the *tanteo y retracto* (right of first refusal and pre-emption), this legal tool has been employed on numerous occasions as a strategy to prevent evictions and secure housing solutions for vulnerable households. As the interviewees highlighted, purchasing a home already occupied and at risk of eviction is often more cost-effective and efficient than constructing new public housing from scratch and allows for rapid intervention in urgent cases of housing loss. One of the main problems they pointed out is that the municipality cannot purchase the property at a favourable price (e.g. the original acquisition price) but must instead pay the full market value (like the contested case of Casa Orsola).

Housing cooperatives in Catalunya have also used the *tanteo y retracto* mechanism to purchase buildings at a lower price, after organising the affected tenants into a residents' cooperative. As Albert Valencia from La Dinamo Housing Cooperative (based in Barcelona) explained during the 'Novas Formas de Viver' conference – held in March 2025 in Évora – the right of first refusal and pre-emption is held also by non-profit housing developers, and it has been used often by housing cooperatives in Catalonia.

He also argued that cooperative housing projects established through the *tanteo y retracto* mechanism tend to be more affordable but face challenges in community-building due to shorter implementation timelines and the presence of pre-existing tenancies. Another interesting outcome of these new strategies is the collaboration between the Tenants' Unions and the Housing Cooperatives by working on the 'cooperativisation' of the tenants under threat of displacement.

One strategy supported by the Catalan Tenants' Unions involves helping residents of buildings in conflict with landlords to form housing cooperatives, purchase the building, and stay under a *regimen de cesión de uso* (use-rights model).⁷ This approach is already being tested in several cases, supported by public funding, and is seen as a necessary alternative to construction-led housing solutions.

In many cases, the right of first refusal and pre-emption has been identified by grassroots groups as a potential alternative and is currently regarded as a key institutional strategy capable of serving as a leverage tool with stakeholders, preventing evictions, securing social rents for precarious tenants, and increasing the public housing stock.

⁷ <https://www.barcelona.cat/metropolis/es/contenidos/vivienda-cooperativa-en-cesion-de-uso-una-nueva-forma-de-acceso-y-de-relacion>



The right of *tanteo and retracto* and the impact and limits of grassroots' proposed alternatives to evictions and housing precarity in Barcelona

In Barcelona, grassroots movements have played a central role in resisting housing financialisation and responding to housing precarity. Their tactics – ranging from building occupations and eviction blockades to legal mobilisation and media campaigns – have not only brought public attention to the practices of corporate landlords but also advanced concrete alternatives. These include demands for the public acquisition of buildings, the use of *tanteo y retracto* (right of first refusal), and the promotion of cooperative housing models. The same housing movements, advocating for the use of pre-emptive rights as an institutional instrument enabling public administrations to acquire properties at affordable prices—particularly in transactions involving investment funds, banks, or large landlords—contribute to make it a central institutional tool.

The case of Casa Orsola exemplifies the strategic application of this legal mechanism. Through the 'Ens Quedem' ('We're Staying Put') campaign and the mobilisation of tenant networks, activists successfully pressured the municipality of Barcelona to acquire the building in collaboration with the non-profit foundation Hàbitat 3, ensuring social rental contracts for its residents. While this outcome marked a significant victory, it also revealed several limitations inherent to the mechanism.

A primary constraint lies in the fact that municipalities are required to purchase properties at the full market price agreed upon by private parties. Contrary to common assumptions, *tanteo y retracto* does not allow public entities to acquire housing at a discounted rate. On the contrary, prices often reflect speculative valuations, rendering many acquisitions financially unfeasible. Furthermore, before approving a purchase, municipal technical offices must assess the physical condition of the building. If a property is found to be in poor condition or requires extensive rehabilitation, it is typically excluded from acquisition. As a result, the mechanism cannot be used for distressed properties and tends to be limited to buildings with high market value – ironically, those least accessible for affordable housing strategies.

These limitations undermine the transformative potential of *tanteo y retracto*. While the mechanism remains valuable, it is often underutilised due to high acquisition costs, bureaucratic constraints, and limited municipal resources. Many local governments opt not to exercise these rights, especially in contexts of austerity or political ambiguity. Thus, despite its promise, the broader systemic impact of *tanteo y retracto* is curtailed by the very forces of financialisation it seeks to counter.

Nonetheless, sustained grassroots mobilisation has been vital not only in promoting the use of this tool but also in pressing for further regulatory reforms such as Catalan laws 24/2015 and 1/2022 to guarantee housing rights (D'Adda and Kusiak 2025; Rossini et al., 2023). Their tactics – ranging from building occupations and eviction blockades to legal mobilisation and media campaigns – have reshaped public discourse and pressured institutions to act. Campaigns such as '*Guerra a Cerberus*' and the resistance at Casa Orsola not only prevented evictions but also catalysed public intervention, transforming temporary resistance into institutional recognition by generating substantial public visibility and trans-local resonance.



Ultimately, the capacity of housing movements to influence policy lies in their dual approach: combining disruptive protest with institutional engagement and advancing grassroots proposals for legislative changes and tactics that can be used to define alternative ways to expand public housing stocks. The cooperation between more institutionalised actors, such as housing cooperatives, and more radical groups, such as housing rights movements in Catalonia, is also particularly noteworthy in the process of ‘cooperativising’ blocks in struggle using the *tanteo y retracto* mechanism. This legal tool not only enables the preservation of affordable housing but also contributes to expanding the public housing stock without the need to construct new units or further consume land, making it a sustainable strategy in multiple respects.

This ability to transform tactics into strategies has opened up – though not without resistance – space for partial decommodification and more socially just urban governance. However, the success of such initiatives remains contingent on political will, sustained funding, and integration into comprehensive housing strategies that go beyond isolated interventions.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how grassroots housing movements in Barcelona have developed and deployed a range of tactics to resist housing financialisation and promote alternative, more just urban futures. Drawing from Holston’s idea of insurgent citizenship and Miraftab’s concept of insurgent planning, these movements not only contest dominant narratives but also create autonomous, ‘invented’ spaces to propose structural alternatives. Mouffe’s notion of agonistic struggle reinforces the democratic value of integrating contentious voices into institutional arenas, while Mayer’s work highlights the shift from resistance to policy co-production. Finally, Healey’s theory (2013) of relational complexity underscores that meaningful institutional change emerges through shared language, mutual learning, and the co-production of planning knowledge. Altogether, these insights suggest that grassroots strategies do not simply scale up but instead reconfigure planning cultures from within, marking a critical pathway for decommodified and socially just urban futures.

Scholars widely acknowledge that transforming grassroots tactics into enduring strategies often requires engagement with formal institutions, such as legal, policy, and planning frameworks. By asserting the right to stay put – a concept rooted in resisting displacement and prioritising housing as a social right rather than a financial asset – urban housing movements have mobilised both direct action and legal tools to contest speculative urbanism. This right encompasses not only protection from eviction but also the preservation of community ties, cultural continuity, and long-term housing security. By the acquisition of blocks in high-density areas of the city, where new construction is nearly impossible due to spatial constraints and the land has prohibitively high costs, the acquisition of entire blocks by the city administration ensures the provision of social rental contracts and prevents their eviction while expanding the city’s stock of affordable housing.

Tactics such as building occupations, eviction blockades, and the strategic use of the *tanteo y retracto* mechanism – which in some cases have evolved into institutional strategies – demonstrate how grassroots resistance can assert the right to stay put against speculative and financialised housing dynamics that displace local populations. By generating political pressure, reshaping public discourse, and influencing housing policy, these actions envision meaningful alternatives. Although significant challenges remain – particularly the persistent dominance of global corporate landlords – the cases discussed illustrate how locally grounded, bottom-up approaches can create space for decommodified and definancialised housing solutions. Moreover, they contribute to constructing counter-narratives, such as the



‘Ens Quedem’ (‘We Stay Put’) slogan, which assert collective local interests in social sustainability and set boundaries against speculative incursions. Ultimately, the Barcelona experience contributes to broader academic and activist debates on housing justice, offering both a critique of financialised urban governance and a vision of alternative models that foreground housing as a right, not a commodity, while demonstrating how grassroots movements can transition from reactive dissent to strategic, insurgent, and transformative governance.



References

- Blanco-Romero, A., M. Blázquez-Salom and G. Cànoves 2018. "Barcelona, Housing Rent Bubble in a Tourist City. Social Responses and Local Policies" *Sustainability* 10 (6): 2043. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10062043>
- Buron, J. 2023. *Barcelona's social and affordable housing policy*. Housing Ireland. Retrieved 26 June, 2025 from https://housingireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Javier_Buron_2023_small_3.pdf
- Brickell, K., M. Fernandez-Arrigoitia, and A. Vasudevan (eds.) 2017. *Geographies of forced eviction. Dispossession, violence, resistance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brookings Institution 2021. *Spain's once-substantial rental market is now one of the smallest in Europe*. Retrieved 26 June, 2025 from https://www.brookings.edu/articles/spain-rental-housing-markets/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Cocola-Gant, A. 2018. Tourism Gentrification Pp. 281-293 in L. Lees, M. Phillips (eds.) *Handbook of Gentrification Studies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publisher, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781785361746.00028>
- Colau, A., and A. Alemany 2014. *Mortgaged lives: From the housing bubble to the right to housing*. Los Angeles, CA: Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press. Retrieved 26 June, 2025 from <https://www.joaap.org/press/pah/mortgagedlives.pdf>
- CTESC 2021. *El dret a l'Habitatge*. Consell de treball, econòmic i social de Catalunya, Col·lecció Estudis i Informes número 58. Barcelona. Retrieved 26 June, 2025 from https://ctesc.gencat.cat/doc/doc_13636361_1.pdf
- D'Adda, G. 2021. Urban mobilizations and municipal policies to un-make housing precarity: The Barcelona experiments. *City* 25 (5-6): 740-763 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2021.1981696>
- D'Adda, G. et al. (eds.) 2021. *La Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca. Una década de lucha por la vivienda digna 2009-2019*. Barcelona: Bellaterra.
- D'Adda, G. Emperador Badimon, M. G., Ramón, E. Sala, E. Sanmartin Cava, L. M. and F. G. Santos (eds.) 2022. *La PAH, 10 años de Lucha por el Derecho a la Vivienda*. Barcelona: Bellaterra.
- D'Adda, G., J. Kusiak 2025. Striking back with the law: Legal struggles against corporate landlords in Barcelona and Berlin. *Urban Studies* Online First. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980241300417>
- De Certeau, M. 1984. *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.
- Farha L. 2017. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living, and on the Right to Non-discrimination in this Context. Financialization of Housing*. Retrieved 26 June, 2025 from https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/34/51



FEANTSA 2021. *Sixth overview of housing exclusion in Europe 2021: European Index of Housing Exclusion 2021*. Fondation Abbé Pierre and FEANTSA. Retrieved 26 June, 2025 from <https://www.feantsa.org>

García-Lamarca, M. 2017. From occupying plazas to recuperating housing: Insurgent practices in Spain. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41 (1): 37–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12386>

García-Lamarca, M. 2021. Real estate crisis resolution regimes and residential REITs: emerging socio-spatial impacts in Barcelona. *Housing Studies* 36 (9): 1407–1426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2020.1769034>

García-López, M. A., J. Jofre-Monseny, R. Martínez-Mazza, M. Segú 2020. Do short-term rental platforms affect housing markets? Evidence from Airbnb in Barcelona. *Journal of Urban Economics* 119: 103278. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2020.103278>

Gil, J., J. Palomera 2024. Can Tenants' Unions Challenge Neoliberal Housing Governance? The Emergence of a New Movement in Spain and Its Impact on Post-neoliberal Housing Policy. *Housing, Theory and Society* 41 (5): 628–656. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2024.2353818>

Knieling, J., F. Othengrafen (eds.) 2016. *Cities in Crisis. Socio-spatial Impacts of the Economic Crisis in Southern European Cities*. Routledge.

Gustafsson, J., P. Hagbert, and T. Malmqvist 2019. The Right to Stay Put: Resistance and Organizing in the Context of Displacement in Sweden. *Radical Housing Journal* 1 (2): 191–200. <https://doi.org/10.54825/MKVM1056>

Healey, P. 2013. Circuits of Knowledge and Techniques: the Transnational Flow of Planning Ideas and Practices. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (5): 1510–1526 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12044>

Holston, J. 2008. *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*. Princeton University Press.

Kranz, S., M. Mayer 1985. Gimme shelter: self-help housing struggles within and against the state in New York City and West Berlin. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 9 (1): 15–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.1985.tb00419.x>

López-Gay, A., M. Solana-Solana, J. Sales-Favà, H. V. S Cole, A. Ortiz-Guitart 2023. Housing Insecurity, Lived Reality, and the Right to Stay Put in a Gentrified Southern European Neighborhood: The Case of Sant Antoni in Barcelona. Pp. 151–172 in W. Curran, L. Kern (eds.) *A Research Agenda for Gentrification*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800883208.00016>

Liu, R. 2020. Strategies for sustainability in shrinking cities: frames, rationales and goals for a development path change. *Nordia Geographical Publications* 49 (5): 49–74 <https://doi.org/10.30671/nordia.97970>

Madden, D. J., P. Marcuse, P. 2016. *In defence of housing*. London: Verso.



Martínez, M. A. 2019. Bitter wins or a long-distance race? Social and political outcomes of the Spanish housing movement. *Housing Studies* 34 (10): 1588-1611. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1447094>

Martínez, M. A., J. Gil, 2024. Grassroots struggles challenging housing financialization in Spain. *Housing Studies* 39 (6): 1516–1536. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2022.2036328>

Mayer, M. 2009. The ‘Right to the City’ in the context of shifting mottos of urban social movements. *City* 13 (2–3): 362–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810902982755>

Mirafteb, F. 2009. Insurgent Planning: Situating Radical Planning in the Global South. *Planning Theory* 8 (1): 32-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095208099297>

Mouffe, Chantal 2013. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. Verso Books.

Newman, K., E. K. Wyly 2006. The Right to Stay Put, Revisited: Gentrification and Resistance to Displacement in New York City. *Urban Studies* 43 (1): 23–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980500388710>

OECD 2024. *OECD Affordable Housing Database - indicator PH4.2. Social rental housing stock*. Retrieved 26 June, 2025 from <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/data/datasets/affordable-housing-database/ph4-2-social-rental-housing-stock.pdf>

Rodríguez A., R. M. Espinoza Pino 2018. *De la especulación al derecho a la vivienda. Más allá de las contradicciones del modelo inmobiliario español*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños.

Rolnik, R. 2019. *Urban Warfare: Housing under the Empire of Finance*. Verso.

Rossini, L., M. A. Martínez, A. García Bernardos 2023. The configuration of a multi-pronged housing movement in Barcelona. *PACO, Partecipazione e Conflitto* 16 (1): 63-86 <https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v16i1p63>

Tulumello S., M. Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou 2024. Housing financialization and the state, in and beyond Southern Europe: a conceptual and operational framework. *Housing, Theory and Society* 41 (2): 192-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14036096.2023.2279529>

Wijburg, G., M. B. Aalbers, S. Heeg 2018. The financialization of rental housing 2.0: Releasing housing into the privatized mainstream of capital accumulation. *Antipode* 50 (4): 1098–1119. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12382>

Wijburg, G. 2021. The de-financialization of housing: towards a research agenda. *Housing Studies* 36 (8): 1276-1293 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2020.1762847>