

The self-build housing in Madrid (Spain): 40 years of struggle

Eva Álvarez de Andrés¹

¹ *DUyOT-ETSAM, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (Spain), eva.alvarez@upm.es*

Abstract: In a context of increasing commoditization and financialization of housing and the city as a whole, the self-construction of "informal" housing has constituted an alternative in many countries both in the North and in the Global South, however precarious it may be, for those who have been excluded from the "formal" system. Although these forms of production tend to be considered residual in the Global North, they keep creating dissident spaces that interrupt the process of accumulation of capital and challenge the private property, which is one of the fundamental pillars of capitalism.

This article analyzes the policies and actions carried out in Madrid (Spain), from 1978 to 2018, in relation to self-built settlements. This analysis shows how the policies and actions carried out have been determined by the place occupied by the affected community, both physical and social, as well as by the way that community is linked to the rest of the power structures.

Information regarding historical cases has been collected from existing official documentation, as well as through interviews with the actors involved in them. An analysis of current policies has also been carried out through action-research carried out in a self-built settlement for three years. The information collected has been processed through an analytical framework based on the Giddens' approach, with a focus on the role of two key actors: the state and the community (allocative structures and authoritative structures).

It is considered that this work contributes to assess the achievements of innovative community-based practices, such as the "*Plan de Remodelación de Barrios*" as well as the results of such practices in terms of satisfaction of community needs and of deeper structural changes.

Keywords: Social innovation, conflict, space of autonomy, bottom-up processes.

Introduction

UN-Habitat estimated that, by the year 2020, 1.392 million people will live in "*informal*" settlements, double what was estimated in 1990 (UN-Habitat, 2007, Table B3). Housing is an asset that is increasingly inaccessible to the lowest income groups. This has contributed to the development of "alternative" forms of access to land, housing, or basic services such as water or energy, constituting a significant way of building the city (Davis, 2001; Pastrana et al., 2012; Vaccotti, 2017). This model of self-production of space has become, for many people, the only way to access housing or basic services in the city, even in very precarious conditions (Secchi, 2013).

These forms of self-production of space, commonly called "*informal*", have been occurring to a greater or lesser extent throughout history, and highlight how, despite the efforts invested in formalizing urban life and its development, the formal system seems to represent only the tip of the iceberg of a deregulated subsystem, partially regulated or not regulated (Herrle & Fokdal, 2011).

The concept of "*informality*" has been defined and redefined since the 70s. At first it was considered only as an appropriate concept to define the "survival" mode of the urban poor. In the 80s and 90s the term "*informal*" was adopted by experts in housing and planning, and applied to self-produced settlements by low-income communities. Although, studies such as those of Durand-Lasserve & Royston (2002), have highlighted how "*illegality*" has been used as a pretext to carry out massive eviction processes of the most deprived sectors.

From this perspective, more and more authors question the usefulness of the term and put the focus on the need to analyse the phenomenon from its complexity, that is, from a more holistic perspective that allows to link the economic, social and governance factors that make it up (Álvarez et al., 2015; Alfaro et al., 2018). In this sense, Álvarez et al. (2019) affirm that "*informality*" is first and foremost a political question, which has to do with the place it occupies, a certain community, within the social space and the way in which it is linked to the rest of the power structures.

The objective of this article is to analyse the policies carried out in the Community of Madrid (Spain), in relation to self-managed settlements, in the last 40 years (1979-2019). This work has been based on the case study method (Yin 1994) and focuses on the analysis of the patterns of relationship between actors and the way in which this determine access to housing and basic services in the city (Herrle & Fokdal, 2011, Alfaro et al., 2018). To this end, the policies carried out in Madrid against self-induced settlements from 1979 to 2015 have been analysed, as well as the current process of "*dismantling*" one of the last settlements self-managed of the Community of Madrid, Las Sabinas (Móstoles) (2013-2019). It is considered that the comparison of the results obtained, in both cases, helps to show the extent to which the implemented policies have been determined, as Álvarez et al. (2019) affirm, by the social place occupied by a certain community and the way in which is linked to the rest of the power structures.

The article is organized as follows, after this first section of introduction, the results obtained in both cases are presented to finally draw conclusions.

Policies in relation to self-managed settlements in Madrid (1979-2015).

This section briefly presents the context, that gave rise from 1979, to two processes that occurred in parallel: on the one hand, the "Plan de Remodelación de Barrios" (PRB) (1979-1998), as response to the demand of the working class of a decent house, at the beginning of the democratic period, and, on the other, policies aimed to serving of the population considered "marginal" that were planned in parallel to the PRB and that were developed until the closure of the "Instituto de Realojamiento e Integración Social" (IRIS) in 2015.

Context (1936-1979)

At the end of the 50s, as a result of the migratory field-city processes, self-produced settlements accounted for 16.6% of residential land in Madrid (Carmona and Rodríguez, 2007; Lago, 2014). During the Franco period, the administration pursued self-produced settlements and neglected the demand of these families for access to decent housing and basic services, claiming that these were neighbourhoods built "*illegally*" on rustic land. Facing the institutional abandonment, around 300,000 people continued self-building their homes and self-managing their access to basic services. Over the years, these lands were gaining centrality and in 1963, were declared urban land and plans proposals began that, under the pretext of improving hygiene conditions and the urban environment, assumed the eviction of families to new peripheries. In this context the neighbourhood associations and those who supported them, mobilized by rejecting official plans and demanding "*decent*

housing, here and now!". Their struggles were gaining legitimacy and managed to transfer the idea that they should be allowed to remain in the periphery that they had been colonizing.

The "Plan de Remodelación de Barrios" (PRB) (1979-1998)

In 1979, in the context of a recently inaugurated democracy, the PRB, led by the neighbourhood associations, was implemented. The PRB was a process of more than 15 years of negotiations between the actors involved, affected, institutions, technicians, etc. Once finished, had been achieved (Castro & Molina, 1996) the rehoused in-situ 150,000 people in 39,000 houses and, thus, the opportunity for these families to consolidated the efforts invested in their neighbourhoods for decades. The houses were granted under ownership, which allowed families to remain in them over time, since the financing conditions were very favourable (less than 10% of family income).

Although around 3% of the families affected by this process were excluded of the PRB, of these 93% were gypsy families. A community historically, socially and economically discriminated (Montes, 1994). From that moment, the self-managed settlements in Madrid stopped being a generalized problem that affected broad sectors of society and became a problem of "marginal" sectors. In 1984, the Housing Institute of Madrid (IVIMA) aimed at promoting housing ownership for the middle class is created, while a plan to "*control the phenomenon of shantytowns*" was developed.

Housing plans for the "marginal" population (1986-2015)

In 1986, the Consortium for the Relocation of Marginal Population (CRPM) was created with the aim of "*eradicating*" the slums of the city of Madrid (located 87% in the districts of the South-East) and take advantage of the land freed for *the new* urban developments in the city. In the 12 years since the creation of the CRPM, only 35% of those initially involved have been relocated, of which 55% are in neighbourhoods known as "*special types*", that ended up turning into ghettos, or provisional camps that ended up lasting decades. The failure of this experience, as well as conflicts between different levels of administration for the management and development of these processes led in 1998 will close the CRPM and the Institute for Re-housing and Social Integration (IRIS) was created. The IRIS started with the recognition that all families had a right to decent housing and conducted a new census of families who were living in self-managed settlements. According to Nogués (2010), between 1998 and 2006, 43 "*slums*" were "*dismantled*" and 1,223 homes were adjudicated, located 90.5% in the South and South-East of the CAM (in the lower income municipalities). It is estimated that the investment in flats by family relocated was about € 110,000, which was equivalent to a floor in property regime, although the families were relocated on a rental basis. There is no information on whether all the displaced families were relocated or not, although it is known, for example, that between 2005 and 2006, 421 "*slums*" were demolished and 232 families were re-housed, which indicates that at least 55% of them were in those years of the families affected by these "*relocation*" processes were seen on the street without a housing alternative, and forced to "*start from scratch*" in others self-managed settlements such as La Cañada Real or Las Sabinas (Móstoles) that were never included in the censuses of the IRIS. In addition, there is no official information available about how many of the families who were relocated under social rent have been able to stay in the flats, since the payment of housing, community and services entailed 50% and sometimes even 95% of the income of these families. With the outbreak of the crisis in 2007 the situation is only getting worse, the precariousness of the families increases while the administrations are without liquidity, which led to CAM selling, in 2013, around 2,000 social housing to "vulture" funds. According to unofficial sources (El Plural, 20/07/2013), it is considered that the last house delivered to a "*slum*" by IRIS was carried out in 2011. In 2015, it was estimated that around 4,000 families were still living in self-managed settlements in the CAM and the public administration decides to close the IRIS and start up the Social Housing Agency (AVS), integrating in the same agency the IVIMA and the IRIS, two institutions that had been created to respond to the demand of housing, a demand that since the crisis of 2007 had only increased.

In almost three decades, since the creation of the CRPM to the closure of the IRIS (1986-2015), it was observed that, unlike the PRB, these processes were led by public administrations, without participation in the decision-making process of the affected by them. In 30 years, barely relocated to 4,000 families, 10% of those who were rehoused in half the time in the PRB, these rehousing not only were not in-situ but in 90% the homes granted were located in the South-East periphery of the CAM (in the municipalities with the lowest incomes). In addition, the houses were granted on a rental basis, with no public information on how many of the families affected by these processes were left out of the rehousing and how many remain today in the flats in which they were rehoused. The analysis of the current relocation process of the Sabinas (Móstoles), which is presented below, is carried out, among other things, in order to clarify what happens with these issues in a relocation process.

Policies in relation to self-managed settlements in Madrid (2015-2019): The case of Sabinas (Móstoles).

In 2015, the AVS inherits from the IRIS the relocation agreement, signed between CAM and the municipality of Móstoles, from the settlement of the Sabinas. A neighbourhood located in the path of the Guadarrama River, along 4 cores (2 in Móstoles and 2 in Arroyo Molinos), which have been self-managed for decades and which is estimated to comprise some 375 families.

After decades of institutional abandonment in which families have to self-manage their access to water, energy, and live without waste collection service, without access to public transport, etc. Finally, in 2013 the relocated agreement was signed. This agreement establishes the obligations of the two administrations involved (financial contributions, actions to be developed, etc.), as well as the requirements that families must meet to be rehoused, among which is set: a minimum registration of 5 years in the town and not having been awarded public housing in the last 20 years. According to the information provided by the social services of Móstoles, at the time of signing the agreement 45% of those affected by it does not meet the requirements, so the alleged "*relocation*" process implies the "eviction" without any housing alternative for these families, something that goes against Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution.

Although the agreement is signed in 2013, the "*relocation*" process does not begin until 2018. This delay is due, among other things, to the fact that the municipality does not provide the corresponding funds until 2015, and although the families suffer the consequences of 5 more years living in precariousness and uncertainty, there is no consequence for breach of it for the respective administrations. In addition, when the AVS starts the relocation, it maintains the requirements established in 2013, so in practice a 10-year census is required and not 5 as established by the Decree approved in 2018 by the AVS. On the other hand, so far the agreement has been carried out exclusively, in only one of the four nuclei, which is inhabited by 90% by gypsy families from other self-managed settlements from which they were evicted without any alternative housing. In this neighbourhood of 100 families, 50% do not meet the requirements established in the agreement (the majority does not comply with the registration requirement, despite the fact that almost all of them have been in the neighbourhood for more than 5 years), while, no any alternative being foreseen for this families. From the information available it is known that 40 homes have been granted under social rent, 84% located in the South-East of Madrid, about 50 km from the centre. Of these, at least 20% have been rejected or are in the process of doing so due to a break with their social fabric, distance or the impossibility of facing the payments that sometimes involve up to 100% of family income.

In the case of Las Sabinas (Móstoles) the results obtained show how once again the plans for the population considered "*marginal*" have been carried out without the participation of the people affected in the decision-making processes. This has led to the fact that despite the fact that more than 5 million euros have been invested, they have been used inefficiently and inefficiently. The administration continues to blame the "*victims*" without questioning their mismanagement and their inability to sit down and negotiate the process with the people affected by it.

At present, there is still no precise census of how many families live in self-managed settlements in the CAM or in occupied dwellings. Given the lack of effective response from administrations and the context of housing emergency in Spain (Gutiérrez, 2018), it is expected that "*informality*" will continue to increase.

Conclusions

The objective of this article is to analyse the policies carried out in the Community of Madrid (Spain), in relation to self-managed settlements, in the last 40 years (1979-2019). This work has been based on the case study method (Yin 1994) and focuses on the analysis of the patterns of relationship between actors and the way in which this determine access to housing and basic services in the city (Herrle & Fokdal, 2011, Alfaro et al., 2018). To this end, the policies carried out in Madrid against self- induced settlements from 1979 to 2015 have been analysed, as well as the current process of "*dismantling*" one of the last settlements self-managed of the Community of Madrid, Las Sabinas (Móstoles) (2013-2019).

- The analysis of the PRB, has shown how a process led by those affected achieved the relocation in-situ of 150,000 people in 39,000 homes granted under ownership and under very advantageous financing conditions (close to 10% of family income). that has allowed these families to consolidate the efforts invested over the years.
- However, this process leaves out just 3% of the population, in a 93% gipsy population, a historically discriminated community (Montes, 1994). Since then, the self-managed settlements in Madrid have become a problem of "*marginal*" sectors.
- Since then, all of them, the CRPM (1986-1998) and the IRIS (1998-2015), as well as the AVS (2015-current), have excluded those affected from the decision-making process. This has meant that in more than three decades the 10% of the population that relocated to the PRB has barely been relocated in just 15 years. Of the current process in the Sabinas is also observed that the "*relocated*" process, is foreseen without housing alternative for the 40% of those affected, something that goes against Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution itself. In all cases in which housing has been granted, this has been on a social rental sistem, representing between 50% and 100% of the income for some families. In addition, the houses have been granted each time in peripheries furthest from the centre.

In short, the comparison of the results obtained helps to show the extent to which the implemented policies have been determined, as Álvarez et al. (2019) affirm, because of the place a community occupies within the social space and the way of linking that they achieve to generate.

Finally, note that although the results obtained in this research are context-dependent, it is considered that similar results could be obtained in other cases in similar conditions of violation of rights and unequal power relations.

References

Alfaro d'Alencon, P., Smith, H., Álvarez de Andres, E., Cabrera, C., Lombard, M., Mazzolini, A., Michelutti, E., Moretto, L., Amandine, S., (2018). Interrogating informality : Conceptualisations , practices and policies in the light of the New Urban Agenda. *Habitat International*, 75, 59-66,

Álvarez de Andrés, E., Fernandez Güell, J. M., & Smith, H. (2015). Instruments for analysing urban conflicts in the Global South: The case of urban transformation processes in Dakar. *Habitat International*, 49, 187–196.



Álvarez de Andrés, E., Cabrera, C., & Smith, H. (2019). Resistance as resilience: A comparative analysis of state-community conflicts around self-built housing in Spain, Senegal and Argentina. *Habitat International*, 86, 116–125.

Carmona y Rodríguez, (2007) “Barrios: planificación, inmigración y movimiento vecinal (1939-1986)” en Observatorio Metropolitano (Eds.) *Madrid ¿la suma de todos?: globalización, territorio, desigualdad*, pp 333-390, Traficantes de sueños.

Castro, P., Molina, J. (1996). Un ejemplo de participación y renovación urbana: la remodelación de barrios en Madrid (España). *Ciudades para un Futuro más Sostenible*. <http://habitat.aq.upm.es/dubai/96/bp258.html>.

Davis, M. (2001). *Magical Urbanism: Latinos reinvent the US City*. New York: Verso.

Durand-Lasserve, A. and Royston, L. (2002): *Hold ing Their Ground: Secure Land Tenure for the Urban Poor in Developing Countries*. London.

El Plural (20/07/2013). *La Comunidad ha reducido programas contra la exclusión y de realojamiento y ha cerrado centros de inserción laboral*. Disponible en línea: https://www.elplural.com/politica/la-comunidad-ha-reducido-programas-contra-la-exclusion-y-de-realojamiento-y-ha-cerrado-centros-de-insercion-laboral_61355102

Healey, P. Herrle, P., & Fokdal, J. (2011). Beyond the urban informality discourse: Negotiating power, legitimacy and resources. *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 99(1), 3–15. <http://doi.org/0016-7479>

Lago Ávila, M.J. (2014). El otro Madrid: el chabolismo que no cesa. Actuación autonómica en políticas de realojamiento e integración social 1997-2010. *Estudios Geográficos*, 2014, vol. 75, nº 276. p.225.

Max-Neef, M., Elizalde, A., & Hopenhayn, M. (2010). *Desarrollo a escala humana: Una opción para el futuro*. Madrid: Biblioteca CF+S

Montes, J., (1994) Sobre el realojamiento de los gitanos. En San Roman, T. *Entre la marginación y el racismo. Reflexiones sobre la vida de lo gitanos*. 155-170. Alianza: Madrid.

Nogués Sáez, L. (2010) *Exclusión residencial y políticas públicas: el caso de la minoría gitana en Madrid (1986-2006)*. Editorial de la Universidad de Granada. Granada, 2010

Pastrana, et al. (2012). *Treinta años de hábitat popular en la Aglomeración Buenos Aires (1983-2010) en Estructuración Urbana, Institucionalidad y Sustentabilidad de Ciudades Metropolitanas y Regiones Difusas*, (Ainstein, L. coord.). Buenos Aires: EUDEBA.

Secchi, B. (2013). *La città dei ricchi e la città dei poveri*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

UN-Habitat (2007) *Global Report on Human Settlements: Enhancing Urban Safety and Security*. Earthscan: London & Sterling VA.

Vaccotti, L. (2017). Migraciones e informalidad urbana. Dinámicas contemporáneas de la exclusión y la inclusión en Buenos Aires. *EURE*, 43(129), 49–70.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage.

