

Stop the evictions!

The diffusion of networked social movements and the emergence of a new hybrid space: The case of the Spanish Mortgage Victims Group

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Abstract

Over 350,000 families have been evicted from their homes since Spain's property market crashed in 2008. The response of Spanish civil society has been the emergence of a networked social movement, Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH; the Spanish Mortgage Victims Group), to stop the evictions and change applicable legislation. This paper uses social movement theory and the travel of ideas metaphor from organization theory to understand how the PAH movement and its practices and tactics, originally born in Barcelona in 2009, have successfully spread to over 160 cities and stopped over 1135 evictions throughout the country. We argue that the ability of networked social movements to quickly replicate has fuelled their power to resist, protest, and induce change. We contend that the fast growth of networked social movements in Global North and South cities, is fuelled by its ability to create a hybrid space between communication networks and occupied urban space in which face-to-face assemblies and protests take place.

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Introduction

In the last few years, networked social movements, such as the Occupy Wall Street (OWS), Indignados, and Taksim Park protests, have emerged based on mobile or wireless communication networks. Most of these movements share political non-affiliation, distrust of mass media, horizontal organizational structures, and reliance on the Internet and local assemblies for collective debate and decision-making (Castells, 2012). Based on the case of one such networked movement, the Spanish Mortgage Victims Group (PAH), and informed by social movement theory (e.g., Castells, 2012) and the travel of ideas metaphor from organization theory (e.g., Czarniawska-Joerges & Joerges, 1996), we argue that the ability of these movements to spread and grow rapidly is what has fuelled their power to resist, protest, and induce change (Schneiberg, 2013). We also argue that the fast growth of the PAH is underpinned by its ability to create a hybrid space (Castells, 2012) between communication networks and occupied urban space in which face-to-face assemblies and protests occur.

Over 350,000 families have been evicted from their homes in Spain since the property market crashed in 2008. In the event of inability to make mortgage payments, Spanish law forces homeowners not only to return the property to the bank in partial repayment of the mortgage but also to continue repaying the part of the loan estimated to remain after the property has been liquidated. The response of Spanish civil society has been the emergence of a networked social movement, the Spanish Mortgage Victims Group – Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) – to protest and stop the evictions and to lobby for change to existing legislation.

The PAH, originating in Barcelona in 2009, has spread to over 160 cities and has stopped more than 1135 (May 2014) evictions through Spain. With the help of social networks and alliances with neighbourhood associations and *Indignados*, PAH “flashmobs” block the evictions of people who have failed to make their mortgage payments. The anti-eviction movement also supports householders in negotiations with banks to prevent evictions and has succeeded in negotiating hundreds of “payment by account”. Moreover, it provides help and shelter for evicted families, arranging for over 1180 people to rent some of the vacated houses for an affordable price. The PAH has also led protests and campaigns to change the eviction laws and has succeeded in presenting a popular legislative initiative with over 1.5 million signatures. In only four years, the PAH has gained the trust of Spanish citizens, as 80% of Spanish citizens claim to share the demands made by this movement (Metroscopia/El Pais, 2013).

Next we briefly review the literature on urban social movements and present the theoretical framework based on the hybrid space concept and the travel of ideas metaphor. The methodology used to gather and analyse the data is then introduced. The history and practice of the PAH are then presented. The paper concludes by discussing the case through the lens of our theoretical framework.

Networked social movements and socio–spatial change

Social movements such as the PAH are social actors making claims for and against certain practices in order to resist and transform oppressive institutional arrangements (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008) and, ultimately, to change values (Castells, 2009). Organizations and groups embedded within institutions attempt, and eventually succeed, in changing these institutional arrangements, drawing on contradictions to introduce new practices, assert new visions, and contest existing arrangements, evoking legitimacy crises and making sense of new practices. Social movements emerge from and exploit contradictions, or multiple logics, to forge new paths or produce change.

Contexts (at the national, regional, and global levels) shape contestation and collective action, creating openings for challengers and shaping their capacities and resources to produce change. Social movements often emerge via a sequence of shocks, disruptions, and deinstitutionalization and reinstitutionalization processes (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008). Shocks such as economic crises or new laws evoke uncertainty, so sense-making and new groups emerge to define the situation and establish their solutions as new bases of order (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008: 653). Regardless of whether or not social movements succeed in establishing their new practices, their legacy remains in the collective memory of the community, producing meaning either through history or a changed built environment. This also shapes the emergence of new social movements, since paths may emerge in multiple waves (Castells, 2004).

The capacity of social movements to bring about cultural, political, and social change relies on an array of events, arrangements, infrastructures, contingencies, and practices. One of these factors is the capacity of movements to

recruit members and organizations, connect to networks, mobilize resources, and gain political support to pressure states and other powerful actors to adopt new practices, laws, and policies. Their strength is often based on the use of protests, boycotts, and even direct action to dramatize problems (in what are called event-mediated social movements; Castells, 2004, 2009) and disrupt daily operations and routines (e.g., Hoffman, 1999). More specifically, in the context of the network society, mobile and wireless networks facilitate the creation of networks of trust and resistance: messages spread virally through these networks and always rely on a nearby source (Castells, 2009). Communication is therefore central to social movements and lies at the heart of the fast growth of many of them (see, e.g., the Zapatistas movement and its use of media, the Tahir protests in Egypt, or the OWS movement). It is important to understand that the emergence of these networked social movements relies on the diffusion of their messages online through info-actions from home. Movement supporters and sympathizers who are not activists in physical protests or actions can still help virally spread the movement's message through their social networks. An informational ecosystem for conversational flows is created by connecting mutually interacting applications and spaces (Fuster Morell, 2012).

Movements need to negotiate a balance between the openness of their claims and the connections needed in order to spread and gain access to additional militants and supporters (Uitermark & Nicholls, 2012). For example, movements such as OWS spread globally because their claims and messages were "global in ... [their] causes, implementation and planning" (Castañeda, 2012: 318). While the use of similar symbols and narratives to magnify resonance in the public sphere remains crucial, these movements also largely depend on how they are connected to local social and political networks (Uitermark & Nicholls, 2012).

Furthermore, social movements rely on their ability to frame and reframe issues and to theorize, transpose, translate, and recombine institutional logics (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008) to increase acceptance of their claims and foster a favourable public opinion climate for diffusing alternative practices. As a result, social movements become agents of theorization, classification, and diffusion. In practice, social movements devote considerable energy and time to theorizing their claims and framing them as ranging from thematic-specific to meta-political in a broader context (Fuster Morell, 2012). For example, community-based recycling movements in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s framed their recycling efforts as part of a broader project to restructure capitalism and reframe the social order of the consume-and-discard society (Lounsbury, 2005; Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003). Their success often relies on combining new elements with prevailing models, myths, and concerns (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008) by weaving a coherent and credible narrative (Chu, 2008). They also devote considerable energy to disseminating their approaches via conferences, manifestos, mass media, and social networks. Certainly, a favourable public opinion climate enhances the prospects of social movements, for example, during economic crises when citizens are more sensitive to issues such as

home evictions or during general protests against a socio-economic system that has led to high inequality and unemployment.

Of the many possible factors explaining the success of a movement, this paper focuses on the emergence of hybrid space (Castells, 2012) in contemporary networked social movements, informed by social movement theory and the ability of new movements to grow rapidly, based on organization theory.

The emergence of hybrid space in networked social movements

Contemporary social movements have been described as networked (Juris, 2004, 2008) since they are organized as autonomous and decentralized networked local cells, each movement constituting “an amorphous nebula of indistinct shape and with variable density” (Melucci, 1996: 113). These new movements are less hierarchical, more participatory, and based on more interactive and self-configurable communication networks (Castells, 2012). Even so, they are characterized by the ability to be strongly embedded in other networks (Juris, 2004) as well as in territory and place (Halvorsen, 2012). In other words, despite the indisputable relevance of networks (Juris, 2004), place and territory continue to play a significant role in the emergence and development of networked social movements (Halvorsen, 2012).

Castells (2012) has referred to this dynamic and relentless interaction between digital and urban space as hybrid space. He claims that social movements spread and live in public space, defined as “the space of societal, meaningful interaction where ideas and values are formed, conveyed, supported, and resisted; space that ultimately becomes a training ground for action and reaction” (Castells, 2009: 301). However, the latest networked social movements are symptomatic of the emergence of a hybrid space between the Internet, mobile social networks, and occupied space. This new hybrid public space is a space of autonomous communication, essential to allow social movements to form and to relate to society at large beyond power centres (Castells, 2012).

The ability of networked social movements to mobilize simultaneously at multiple levels, both global and local, has proven to be significant in their ability to induce change (Castañeda, 2012). Their ability to expand relies on their ability to theorize and assert models, rules, and laws at the global, multi-national, and national levels, while effecting change at the local and micro levels.

The power of movements to spread rests on their capacity not only to place and keep alternatives on the political agenda but also to defend new practices against counter-attacks led by dominant power centres such as authorities and corporations. Such counter-attack tactics range from undermining the legitimacy of social movements (though delegitimation campaigns, e.g., alleging health risks in camps; e.g., Liboiron, 2012) to using force or even changing the institutional legal arrangements to reduce the ability of movements to protest (see recent reforms of Spanish law governing protest). The capacity of social movements to embed themselves in societal and local networks and to gain the support of citizens and of internal adopters, such as professional communities that

adopt the new practices, rules, and claims, are crucial to increasing the legitimacy of the advocated practices.

The travel of ideas metaphor and the fast growth of networked social movements

Together with the concept of hybrid space (Castells, 2012), in seeking to better understand the ability of new networked movements to grow rapidly, the present paper is also informed by the travel of ideas metaphor from organization theory. In the first stage of an organizational field, for example, after the introduction of new institutional arrangements or a new societal context or after shocks such as the economic crisis, diverse organizational forms emerge (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). These new organizations grow slowly, however, because their form is unfamiliar, making them less likely to survive due to the “liability of newness” (Freeman, Carroll, & Hannan, 1983). The proliferation of adopters of an organizational form, such as the PAH, contributes to the institutionalization (i.e., adoption by imitation) of this organizational model as the taken-for-granted organizational solution (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983), in the present case, to the problem of mortgage victims in Spain. New organizational forms gain weight, visibility, and legitimacy “as they become more common, crystallizing new communities of practice and prompting others to embrace innovations” (Schneiberg, 2013: 656).

Accordingly, in new institutionalism theory, imitation is conceptualized as a basic mechanism for circulating ideas that become rational myths (Czarniawska-Joerges & Sevón, 1996), for example, the spread of PAH as an organizational model for articulating the interests of mortgage victims in cities other than Barcelona. Ideas, practices, institutions, and organizational models such as the PAH cannot spread until they have been simplified, abstracted, embodied, and inscribed, as only bodies or things can move in time and space (Czarniawska, 2002: 7). In the translation process, as elaborated by Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges (1996: 46), an idea is disembedded from its institutional surroundings, packaged as an object, unpacked and translated to fit the new context, translated locally into a new practice, and finally re-embedded. What is finally re-embedded is not the idea or the organizational model as such, but rather accounts and materializations of it (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008) in different local versions in different local milieux.

The travel of ideas does not imply the reproduction of exact copies of original ideas; instead, the adoption of new ideas can eventually bring about change and innovation. The travel of ideas metaphor has developed from a “diffusion” to a “translation” model, in which institutional pressure, or rather, external ideas, are translated, changed, and localized in the new organizational context (Czarniawska-Joerges & Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). Accordingly, the travel of social movement organizational models cannot be reduced, for example, to the simple reproduction of the PAH transferred from Barcelona to other cities. Instead, local actors can create new spaces in which to interpret, adapt, and bend the PAH model to fit local net-

works' needs, meanings, and interests – though under the organizational label and aesthetics of a unified organizational model.

Methodology

This is a single-case study (Yin, 1994) of the PAH movement in Spain. The study is designed to refine the theory (Ridder et al., 2012) that social movements' power to induce change is fuelled by their ability to grow rapidly and is mediated by the creation of a hybrid space. The study is based on data generated in various ways (Yin, 1994). In our data collection, we were inspired by Burke's "what", "where", "who", "how", and "why" pentad (Burke, 1969) in reconstructing the story of the PAH and its expansion.

First, the data consist of texts, photos, and films produced by the Spanish and international mass media, social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, and websites), and PAH websites. Second, the data also come from informal conversations (Kvale, 1996) with participants in the PAH movement from Barcelona and Madrid conducted during three conferences in June, July, and October 2013. In these conversations, we concentrated on learning and discussing our ideas about how the PAH organization travelled – expressed in terms of the translation metaphor as explained above – i.e., how the concept was packaged and formulated and by whom.

Our research strategy was pragmatic in that we combined methods (Silverman, 1993) in order to understand the genesis, dissemination, and stabilization of the PAH. It is also pragmatic in that it is neither purely inductive nor purely deductive, but follows patterns of creative abduction (Schurz, 2008). Inspired by Strauss and Corbin (1990), our data collection, coding, and categorizing involved iterative moves between data sorting, coding, probing, and collecting until we could reconstruct the story of PAH.

The spanish mortgage victims group social movement

The birth and expansion of the pah

The PAH was born in Barcelona on 22 February 2009 as a result of the work of activists who had participated in a previous social movement, V de Vivienda ("H for housing"), since 2006. V de Vivienda gathered together a group of young people affected by precarious employment and difficulties accessing housing. The group organized protests and campaigns to raise awareness of the right to housing. However, despite its achievements, in the context of economic growth in which most people owned their own housing and saw its value increase quickly, the claims of organizations such as V de Vivienda were supported by only a minority.

Since Spain's property market crashed in 2008, other organized movements have emerged to articulate the interests of citizens affected by evictions. However, Barcelona's PAH has been the organizational model that succeeded in expanding throughout the country.

The PAH was created, according to its founders, with the explicit strategy of reproducing itself throughout Spain (Colau & Alemany, 2012): the resources, practices, knowledge, experiences, and structures of the various PAH chapters have been “disposed and designed to facilitate the reproduction of the PAH” (p. 103). From the city of Barcelona, the PAH expanded throughout Barcelona’s metropolitan area, where the highest density of local PAH groups can now be found. By the end of 2010, the organization had travelled from Cataluña via Murcia to the rest of Spain (see Fig. 1 and Table 1). Murcia is one of the regions where the construction sector has been hardest hit by the financial crisis, and the resulting high unemployment has rendered thousands of citizens unable to pay their mortgages, possibly explaining why the PAH model initially travelled to places such as Murcia before others.

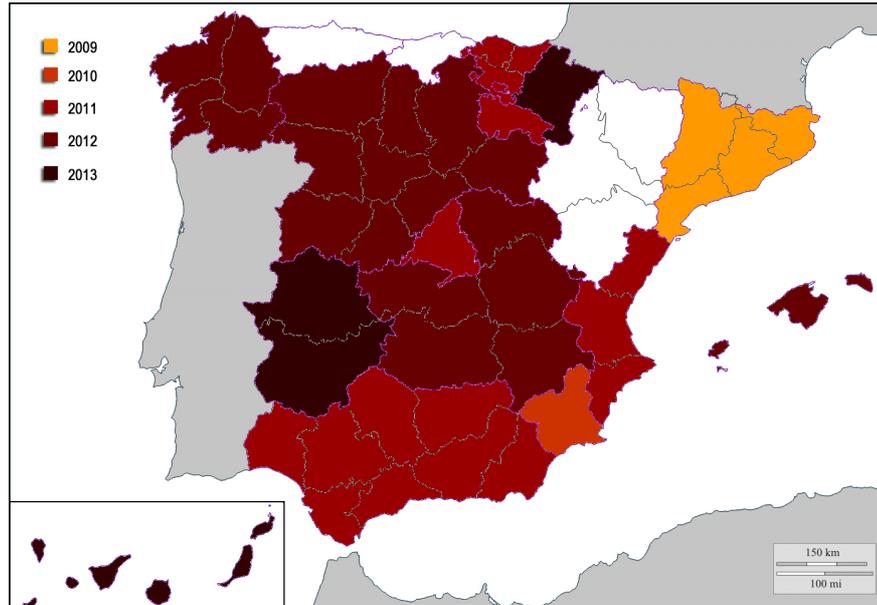


Fig. 1. Map showing the spread of local PAH groups.

It was not until 3 November 2010 that the first eviction was suspended due to an anti-eviction protest in the Barcelona metropolitan area. According to the PAH, it took a long time for mortgage victims to decide to enact a collective protest entailing civil disobedience. This first campaign served as a template for the ensuing thousands of protests the PAH held throughout the country (PAH, 2010). It also served to strengthen the PAH as a legitimate movement to defend the rights of mortgage victims, accelerating its spread throughout the country. Later, mostly since 2011, the PAH spread to Valencia, Madrid, Andalucía, La Rioja, Canarias, Basque Country, and, more recently, to the Balearic Islands, Galicia, Castilla y León, and Castilla-La Mancha.

The expansion of local PAH groups has also been boosted by the Indignados (15M) movement since 2011. The PAH participated in the national protests organized by Democracia Real Ya (DRY; “Real democracy now”) in November 2011, which was the origin of the Indignados Movement. PAH demands become more visible alongside the demands of the 15M movement (a citizen movement formed after the 15 May 2011 demonstrations). The 15M movement’s aim is to strengthen the democratic system by making it more participatory and less dependent on banks, large corporations, and a few political parties (Fuster Morell, 2012). After the first protests, some neighbourhood associations and the Indignados movement created new local PAH groups (e.g., in Madrid) to continue their efforts to promote the right to housing. In many other cities, the already existing anti-eviction campaigns were supported by Indignados and neighbourhood associations.

The expansion of local PAH groups resulted in a constant stream of small public actions and news stories that kept the home eviction issue constantly on the media, social, and political agendas. Each PAH group creates or joins the campaigns and actions it chooses. For example, the PAH Barcelona led the popular legislative initiative and the *escraches* campaign (“exposure” protests at banks and politicians’ houses), while the Madrid group communicates via Twitter for the PAH at a national level and has also engaged lawyers who offer advice pro bono.

Small victories, such as when an eviction is blocked (e.g., when over 200 people successfully blocked an eviction in Madrid, 15 June 2011; *El Pais* 15/06/2011), or even defeats (e.g., when police have violently attacked the passively resisting activists) have been broadcast via the social media and helped promote the PAH movement.

Since 2011, the PAH has continued growing and promoting its local, regional, and national campaigns. The first national PAH meeting, involving almost 40 local groups and 100 participants, took place in September 2011; since then, local groups have met at the national level twice a year. The PAH national movement has a website, and virtual forums serve as horizontal communication channels for this decentralized network.

The pah: goals, actions, membership, and organization

In January 2014, the PAH comprised 160 local and autonomous groups dispersed in cities throughout Spain interconnected via the PAH national platform. Local PAH groups share similar goals: payment by account of mortgages in arrears via the reform of the national eviction law, suspending home evictions, and the transformation of vacated properties into social rental units (see Table 1 for a chronology of the spread of the PAH).

PAH has launched several campaigns to achieve these goals: the anti-eviction campaign, the popular legislative initiative to reform the eviction law, and the social housing project. In the anti-eviction campaign, by using social communication networks and alliances with neighbourhood associations and Indignados, “flashmobs” have blocked over 900 evictions of people who failed

to make their mortgage payments. The PAH also supports householders in negotiating with banks to prevent evictions and has succeeded in negotiating hundreds of payment by account arrangements. In the social housing campaign, the PAH provided help and shelter for evicted families, promoting the rental of vacated houses to the evicted for an affordable price. The PAH has also organized protests and campaigns to change the eviction laws and succeeded in presenting a popular legislative initiative with over 1.5 million signatures.

PAH groups are organized according to these principles: independence and non-partisanship, nonviolence, free resources and advice, collective advice, decision-making via open assemblies, and freedom to develop local strategies.

Although there are variations between local PAHs, membership turnover is usually high with few members who regularly attend all meetings. Many new members initially attend meetings sporadically to learn what PAH is. Regular meeting attendance is difficult for those who lack sufficient economic resources to meet basic needs such as food and transportation. The membership composition is heterogeneous and has evolved since the creation of the PAH Barcelona. The PAH groups unite housing activists, Indignados, and volunteering professionals (e.g., lawyers and psychologists) with mortgage victims. At the beginning of the crisis many mortgage victims were immigrants, but nowadays up to 70% of PAH members affected by mortgage difficulties are Spanish born (Colau & Alemany, 2012).

Internal and external communication is crucial to PAH strategy. PAH activism practice relies on Internet and mobile communication networks (e.g., web platforms, forums, Twitter, and Facebook), regular meetings in local offices, and protests. The documents, forms, and protocols for action (from legal forms for negotiating with banks and government offices, to protocols for exercising non-violent resistance at an anti-eviction protest) have been standardized and uploaded to national and local PAH websites for everyone's use.

The PAH has created media "trending topics" to inform, explain, and convince the public of the validity of their claims (interview with Esther Vivas, elideario.com/dentrodelpah). They have also devoted considerable energy to communicating understandably with the public, explaining new concepts such as "*dación en pago*" (i.e., non-recourse debt). They brand their public presence using the colours orange and green, skilfully use catchphrases and slogans, and dramatize their public actions and events. The PAH has communicated their claims and actions to international media and been covered by the BBC, *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and Al Jazeera.

When people join the PAH they feel hopeless and depressed more than outraged (Colau & Alemany, 2012: 94). At PAH offices, the movement has created "a space of trust and community via face-to-face meetings where people have the opportunity to express and share their experiences. The creation of this space ... is vital for the victims to understand the collective dimension of the issue as well as the structural factors behind individual decisions" (Colau & Alemany, 2012: 94). When mortgage victims join the PAH they change from being objects of injustice to becoming active subjects who act to resist and to create change.

Since 2009, the PAH has gained the support of 80% of the Spanish population (Metroscopia/El País 8/04/2013), including the support of, for example, associations of firemen or locksmiths, who refuse to unlock the doors of houses to facilitate eviction. Over 200 municipalities have declared open support for the PAH and its principles, magistrates have supported payment by account and stopped some evictions, and even bank officers have individually helped renegotiate mortgages and stop evictions.

Since the first evictions were stopped in 2011, both the state and banks have reacted: police responses to actions have grown in intensity, and dozens of riot police sometimes violently attack peaceful protesters and citizens (Asamblea Drets Socials, 2011; El País 23/04/2012); activists and protesters have been asked without cause for identification and been imprisoned; open dates for evictions have been used to hinder anti-eviction campaigns; and anti-protest laws have recently been passed, constituting a serious attack on Spanish democracy.

2006 (May): V de Vivienda is born as a social movement to defend the right to decent housing
2008: International financial crisis and Spain's property market crash
2008 (October): V de Vivienda organizes protests of the first evictions under the slogan "We will not allow banks to throw us out of our homes"
2009 (February): PAH Barcelona is established
2010: PAH Murcia is established as the first PAH group outside Cataluña
2010 (June): PAH demands "payment by account" at the Spanish parliament
2010 (November): First eviction suspended by an anti-eviction protest
2010 (November): PAH starts a campaign to shelter evicted families and promotes the use of vacated houses as social housing with affordable rents
2010 (December): PAH starts a campaign to gain the support of municipalities to prevent evictions
2011: PAH presents parliament with a popular legislative initiative with more than 1.5 million signatures
2011 (November): PAH participates in the 15M protests and "seeds" the Indignados movement
2011: New PAH groups are established in Valencia, Madrid, Andalucía, La Rioja, the Canary Islands, and Basque Country
2012: New PAHs are established in the Balearic Islands, Galicia, Castilla y León, and Castilla-La Mancha
2013: New PAHs are established in Extremadura and Navarra
2013 (March): The European Court of Human Rights declares Spanish legislation in breach of EU consumer-protection laws because it does not allow judges to halt evictions, even when mortgage contracts contain unfair terms
2013 (May): A new mortgage bill approved by the Spanish government (1/2013) does not guarantee protection for most families facing eviction: it does not consider retroactivity, it legitimizes unfair terms in contracts, and maintains evictions by force

Table 1. *Milestones of the development of the PAH networked social movement.*

Discussion

To understand the fast growth of the PAH as a networked social movement, we discuss the data presented in the previous section, informed by the concept of hybrid space from social movement theory, combined with the travel of ideas metaphor from organization theory.

The birth and spread of the PAH is a response of Spanish civil society to the socio-economic crisis, a protest against the injustice of evictions, and an attempt to change oppressive institutional arrangements. As a social movement it mirrors its context, sparked by shocking episodes of families being evicted and mortgage victims committing suicide. Despite similar legal and political arrangements before the economic crisis, in the pre-crisis context the eviction law affected only vulnerable citizens, and difficulties upholding the right to housing were denounced by only a minority of organizations, such as V de Vivienda (Aguilar & Fernández, 2010). The crisis, high unemployment, and loss of houses were the sparks that ignited a collective civil society response. However, although movements such as V de Vivienda did not succeed in disseminating their message before the crisis, their message remained in the collective memory (Castells, 2004), preparing the ground in organizational and discursive terms for the claims that became structural issues for the PAH and social movements such as Indignados (Abellán, Sequera, & Janoschka, 2012).

If the crisis was the spark, the rapid growth and spread of the PAH fueled the many events, actions, and arrangements that ensued. The first of PAH's achievements was its ability to create a hybrid space (Castells, 2009) between communication networks and urban space where face-to-face assemblies and protests take place. The PAH, like other new movements, is both a networked (Juris, 2004) and a place-based urban social movement (Halvorsen, 2012). The PAH succeeded, in every city where it became established, in creating spaces of trust behind the scenes of the movement, providing open assemblies where mortgage victims met, discussed their situations, and found common solutions. These face-to-face meetings became spaces of transformation where victims (as objects of an unjust law) became activists and political subjects. Depressed, silent, and hopeless citizens were transformed into outraged, powerful protesters who struggled to defend their rights in front of their neighbours, judicial institutions, and even the police if necessary. The first anti-eviction campaign one year after the PAH Barcelona was established embodies this transformative process, where for the first time one mortgage victim dared to publicly defend his house by civil disobedience during the eviction action.

PAH's members describe anti-eviction campaigns as "magic moments" when the sense of community is strengthened when confronting the police via civil disobedience. In their own words:

... those who have taken part in an anti-eviction protest know that it becomes a magic moment: the nerves on edge, the uncertainty of not knowing until the last minute if we will succeed, the family's distress, feelings of solidarity and determination among the people, ru-

mours that the judicial commission is coming ... And as the prosecutor and the court secretary are approaching, the instinctive reaction of the whole group is to gather together, linking hands and arms, in front of the door that we will defend as if it were our own, until it is confirmed that there will no be eviction today, that they will leave, that we have succeeded once again. It's magic to see that when we come together, it seems inevitable that things can change, and things that seem impossible become reality. (Colau & Alemany, 2012: 128)

The live video feeds of anti-eviction protests shown on social media and TV channels nationally and internationally, as in the case of other movements such as Tahrir and OWS, helped viewers to imagine these actions as radiant and magical experiences (Kerton, 2012), contributing to their replication in other cities throughout the country via what has been called “imitative magic” (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011).

As in the Indignados or OWS movements, face-to-face meetings became spaces of trust and community (Castells, 2009, 2012) where collective identity emerged (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). The importance of place and neighbourhood, or, in other words, the agency of the territory (as in Occupy London or the Indignados movement; see Halvorsen, 2012), is fundamental to understanding how flash-mobs and local activists supported local PAHs and could therefore participate in both local assemblies and anti-eviction protests.

In these public spaces at the assemblies, members could theorize, categorize, and frame their claims (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008), producing new meanings (Castells, 2004) that not only made sense of the crisis but also imagined its alternatives. For example, new concepts previously unknown to the public, such as payment by account – a radical proposal that would not have gained widespread support before the PAH – were popularized and are nowadays not only acknowledged but supported by common citizens. The PAH also contributed to the sense-making of the individual dramas of the evictions, framing them in the context of a socio-economic system based on housing speculation that perpetuated unequal access to the right to housing. The multiscalarity (Castañeda, 2012) of the PAH, that is, its ability to link micro-events with national eviction laws and global issues of social injustice, also explains its rapid growth.

The PAH inherited a profound critique of the capitalist system from *V de Vivienda* and has succeeded in linking the individual dramas of the evicted families in thousands of villages and cities across Spain with an incisive narrative of the structural crisis of the economic system (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2005). Through anti-eviction protests and assemblies, the PAH movement, like other movements such as Indignados or OWS (Abellán, Sequera, & Janoschka, 2012), has created spaces of citizenship that challenge the taken-for-granted principles of capitalism, such as the powerful discourse about the primacy of property rights over the right to housing (Harvey, 2012).

The PAH, like OWS, has travelled well throughout Spain because it addresses similar problems across the country, and its goals, tactics, and repertoire of practices can be used anywhere (Castañeda, 2012). Another key factor to understanding the rapid growth of the PAH was its deliberate strategy of reproducing and diffusing itself in order to fuel change (Schneiberg, 2013). The PAH Barcelona was one of many civil society responses to deal with a new context. However, the PAH succeeded in becoming the legitimate organizational form for mobilizing mortgage victims and articulating their voices throughout the country. The idea spread initially via people from the metropolitan region who attended face-to-face meetings in Barcelona. These members progressively reproduced the PAH around the Barcelona metropolitan area and farther into Cataluña. Again, the agency of the territory played a fundamental role (Halvorsen, 2012). The density and cohesion characteristic of urban areas such as Barcelona provided opportunities to spread the PAH, quickly stabilizing and normalizing this organizational form.

The key to this success was not only in the message but also in how it was packaged, formulated, and timed (Czarniawska-Joerges & Joerges, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). V de Vivienda or PAH “did not say anything new, but differently”, as some members affirm (Adau & Colá, 2012): the message was packaged according to communication strategies, including slogans, directly targeted videos, and the creation of “trending topics”. The message was also kept before the public eye by events (Hoffman, 1999) such as evictions, police violence, and even mortgage victim suicides. The PAH movement was deliberately designed to be reproduced and diffused, inspired by how contemporary movements are organized as autonomous and decentralized networked local cells (Melucci, 1996). Practices, procedures, forms, and documents were standardized and uploaded as files that can be downloaded freely from PAH websites. The organization’s design was simple in its principles and aims (e.g., the PAH’s three simple and clear claims): it was transparent and easy to understand, decode, and translate into new local contexts (Theodore, 2013).

The message was also connected to the public’s rationales and experiences, providing wide social support for its claims. Like other new urban social movements, the PAH’s openness and inclusivity (Novy & Colomb, 2013; Uitermark & Nicholls, 2012) served to transcend its particular claims and attract people with various ideologies and interests. As agents of communication (Castells, 2009) or social movement infrastructure (Haug, 2013), the PAH created internal and external communication networks to facilitate its replication in other cities. Local PAHs all used similar symbols and narratives but were locally sustained, as are many new social movements, by different networks in different cities (Uitermark & Nicholls, 2012). For example, the PAH Madrid emerged from the 15M-Indignados movement and was embedded in the organizational soil of the neighbourhood associations when the Indignados movement was decentralized to the barrios. In Barcelona, the origin of PAH was the V de Vivienda, while in Murcia the local PAH was created from scratch, in the context of a region seri-

ously damaged by high unemployment caused by economic dependence on the construction sector.

As the number of local PAH adopters increased, the more visible and legitimate its organizational label became. It was only when the PAH had amassed a considerable number of adopters in Cataluña and succeeded in attracting national media attention via its anti-eviction campaign that the PAH movement overcame the “liability of newness” (Freeman, Carroll, & Hannan, 1983). It then succeeded in spreading outside the Cataluña region, first to Murcia, and later to the whole of Spain, now via social and mass media networks as well. Thereafter, alliances and interconnections with other social movements driven by similar ideologies, such as the Indignados and urban neighbourhood associations, served to create new PAHs. It was not until the 15M movement exploded in 2011 that the PAH’s struggle gained major national visibility (Abellán, Sequera, & Janoschka, 2012). The Indignados movement not only helped create other PAH groups throughout the country (e.g., one of the largest in Spain, the PAH Madrid) but also magnified the resonance of its message and actions.

PAH also managed to amass political support, both from political parties and from a majority of citizens who support its claims, to put alternatives on the political agenda and keep them there, to assemble political resources, defend new practices against counterattacks, and create favourable political contexts for the spread of alternatives. Achieving legitimacy was important for the PAH, as it is for other movements that occupy the public space, because certain tactics such as the *escrache* or anti-eviction protests are at the limits of civil disobedience and what is considered legitimate. Consequently, the PAH has been subject to intense moral scrutiny from its opponents, mostly the state, parts of the mass media, the state police, and the banks.

Despite that, the PAH, like social movements such as OWS or Indignados, has succeeded in maintaining a delicate balance between the radicalism of some of its claims and tactics (e.g., civil disobedience in anti-eviction protests, personal *escraches* at politicians’ houses, and squatting in apartments that have become vacant through eviction to claim them as social housing) and its legitimacy, taking care, for example, to develop protest tactics that allow nonviolent resistance to arrest at protests. Similarly, the movement has increasingly gained internal adopters in state and corporate institutions (e.g., firemen and locksmiths who refuse to unlock the doors of homes of potential evictees, judges who have given favourable sentences to citizens to be evicted, and bank officers who have individually helped renegotiate some mortgages), signifying its well-established legitimacy.

These emerging forms of broad-based mobilization have been criticized for preserving the status quo of a small privileged minority (Novy & Colomb, 2013), constituting, in the words of Harvey (2001), a form of “militant particularism”. In fact, it was only when a considerable portion of the Spanish middle class was threatened with eviction that the movement gained major mainstream support, beyond housing activists from the pre-crisis context. Nevertheless, as the PAH originated in previous housing movements, its claims go beyond a

defence of the status quo and instead question the subordination of the right to decent housing to the right to private property (Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 1968). Furthermore, movements such as the PAH in the privileged cities of the global North have the ability to unite austerity victims with middle-class-based activists, allowing them to acknowledge both their differences and common cause (Meyer, 2013).

Conclusion

This paper explored the infrastructure that has facilitated the rapid growth of networked social movements and fuelled their power to protest and induce change, informed by the case of the PAH in Spain. Unlike many housing and anti-eviction protests (Chu, 2008; Magigi & Drescher, 2010; Magueli, 2004; Mahbubur Rahman, 2001; Yau, 2011), the PAH has succeeded in replicating itself, boosted by a rapid change of the national economic context that threatens hundreds of thousands of families with losing their housing tenure.

We contend that the ability of these movements to spread and grow rapidly has fuelled their power to protest and induce change (Schneiberg, 2013). We also argue that the rapid growth of the PAH has been mediated by the emergence of a hybrid space (Castells, 2012) between communication networks and urban space. In new networked social movements, such as the PAH, we claim that communication technologies are as important as are issues of place and territory (Halvorsen, 2012). By engaging in a politics that is simultaneously place-based and globally networked in scope, these movements challenge traditional conceptions of scale (Fahmi, 2009) and bridge the divide between the victims of austerity policies and middle-class protesters.

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