

## THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AS A CLASS FRONT. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND URBAN TOURISM IN POBLENOU, BARCELONA

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## EL BARRIO COMO FRENTE DE CLASES. MOVIMIENTOS SOCIALES Y TURISMO URBANO EN EL POBLENOU, BARCELONA

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### ABSTRACT

The current concept of city contributes substantially to the productive sphere in capitalist societies and the conformation of social classes. Using as an example an opposition movement to touristification in Barcelona, this article pursues to illustrate the effects and mechanisms of capital on the reconfiguration of neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood of Poblenou has witnessed how the platform *#EnsPlantem: Veïns in Perill d'Extinció* deals with an increase in housing prices, changes in the traditional character of the area and the privatization of urban spaces, as a manifestation of capital reorganization. This research has been conducted through an ethnographic approach consisting in two-year long fieldwork.

### KEYWORDS

Classes; Poblenou; Social movements; Tourism; Urban space.

### RESUMEN

A través de una aproximación etnográfica a un movimiento de oposición a la turistificación en Barcelona, este artículo enmarca las acciones de los movimientos sociales en contextos urbanos dentro de la consideración de la ciudad como parte fundamental de la esfera productiva en las sociedades capitalistas y de la conformación de clases sociales. El barrio del Poblenou ha visto como la plataforma *#EnsPlantem: Veïns en Perill d'Extinció* enfrenta un incremento de los precios en la vivienda, cambios en la fisonomía tradicional del área y la privatización de sus espacios urbanos como una manifestación del proceso de reestructuración del capital. El resultado de la investigación ha sido posible gracias a un trabajo de campo de casi dos años.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Clases; Espacio urbano; Movimientos sociales; Poblenou; Turismo.

“What we have to do is to manage our success correctly. The issue is that, in recent years, we have not managed this success well. This creates strange situations. When I walk around Ciutat Vella, the people stop me and tell me: ‘when are you going to get rid of them?’ Meaning the tourists. This is surprising because tourism in this city is a main sector for economic growth and job creation. We have to do one thing that has not been done for a long time: the citizens have to perceive the benefits of this activity”.

Former Major Xavier Trias introducing his electoral program (2011)

## INTRODUCTION

On the evening of May 20, 2016, an improvised assembly, a significant group of people sitting on the ground, in the Rambla of Poblenou in Barcelona got the attention of the passers-by. A group of three women, activists with considerable experience in social movements in the neighbourhood, had decided to organise an informal meeting just a few days earlier, through email lists, WhatsApp groups, flyers and word of mouth among different and varied collectives and people making up the social fabric of Poblenou. *#EnsPlantem, Veïns in Perill d’Extinció* was born.

Nowadays, cities make an important contribution to the continuity of the process of capital accumulation (Harvey, 2001 y 2013; Lefebvre, 1969; Brenner, Peck and Theodore, 2015). Aspects which previously were not linked to the market, like intellectual property rights, certain cultural expressions, the urban space itself or the environment, stand as new protagonists that help perpetuating aggressive processes of commodification and dispossession (Harvey, 2007). This *intensification* capital action is accompanied by an *extensification* thereof; that is, its expansion towards geographical areas – countries, regions, cities, neighbourhoods- that, until that point, had stayed away from it (Robinson, 2004; Mansilla, 2018).

As one might expect, this dynamic is not free from controversies and contradictions. Thus, the way in which sociability in cities has been affected by the capital in the urban space has frequently been the object of intense struggle (Hesketh, 2013). As Lefebvre pointed out (1976: 85), “if space as a whole has become the place where the reproduction of the relations of production is located, it has also become the terrain for a vast confrontation [...]”. As a result, space as an essential object shapes and confronts those classes that fight for having a say, basically, on who has the right to participate in its production (Lefebvre, 2013; Hesketh, *op. cit.*).

In this way, *#EnsPlantem* emerges as an important tool that sheds light on the class struggle that Poblenou is currently living, showing how conflicts in the social system are observable in the urban spatial order (Castells, 1983; Harvey, 1973; Canan and

Hennessy, 1989). Taking the opportunity provided by these kind of emergent organised initiatives aiming to reduce the effects of tourism in this neighbourhood, this article will highlight the relation between social movements and the consideration of cities as important elements in the contemporary capitalist productive sphere (Kling and Posner, 1990).

## METHODOLOGY

In order to demonstrate the aforementioned working hypothesis, the methodology used in this article is mainly qualitative (Berg, 2007). Nevertheless, a quantitative (Bernard, 2006) approach has also been conducted as a way of *triangulation* (Posthill, 2015) in order to empirically determine the propositions. The first step to the ethnography (Velasco and Díaz de Rada, 1997) was a review, not only of extensive relevant bibliography (books and articles in relevant scientific magazines, news, statements, websites and social networks) about social movements and their role in touristic cities as important protagonists of social responses to neoliberal urban policies, but also the revision of statistical sources, public and private published data, as well as diverse company reports on housing and the state of the real estate sector.

This was followed by field work of fifteen months over different periods of time between May 2016 and March 2018. The main tools used were participant observation (assemblies, claims and squatting actions, demonstrations, social networks, etc.), in-depth, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and dialogues with some of the protagonists. Ten interviews were carried out in the neighbourhoods of Poblenou and La Ribera (Barcelona), information that was accompanied by participation in six assemblies -two demonstrations and squatting in empty plots in Poblenou- as well as a WhatsApp group membership in *#EnsPlantem* for the duration of the ethnography. Social networks such as Twitter (@EnsPlantemP9) were also checked.

The sample of the interviewees was decided ex-ante using the extensive knowledge of Poblenou’s social movements gained in previous researches (Mansilla, 2015a and Mansilla, 2015b). Activists were chosen according to their participation in related and former collectives and entities. For the interviews, a semi-structured guideline was used. Interview guidelines were constructed through literature studies on social movements and tourism. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using an inductive coding strategy. This ethnologic methodology is well-suited to this sort of research because it allows an approach to the object of study from within and endeavours to describe and interpret the social process putting the focus on the participants. The results presented in the research do not differentiate on the basis of age or gender. They were deemed as non-relevant variables for the issue

at hand. Finally, in order to avoid repetition, only the most representative extracts from some of the interviews and events have been selected.

## TOURISM, URBAN SPACE CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Since the 2000s, urban studies have been breaking down the notion that tourist and residential use are separate in cities (Judd, 2003). As Russo and Richards pointed out “tourists are now being brought into much closer contact with locals and have new opportunities to experience the community at their destinations” (2016: 1). Local political institutions have also changed their traditional role as social services and collective consumer goods suppliers to another one centred on entrepreneurialism, where tourism would work as a fundamental element in urban economies in crisis (Harvey, 1989). This is the path taken by American cities such as San Francisco and Valparaíso (Opillard, 2016), Santa Monica (Peters, 2016) or, in Europe, Bilbao (Vicario and Martínez, 2003), Berlin, (Fuller and Michel, 2014), Barcelona (Cocola, 2016; Cocola and Pardo, 2017) and Paris (Chapuis, Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot, 2015). Nevertheless, as Judd and Parkinson (1990) have commented, these kinds of policies usually generate segmented cities with an abundance of middle classes who displace the poor<sup>1</sup>.

Besides, cities compete in order to attract not only capital, but also the aforementioned middle classes, reinforcing the process. Proposals like these elaborated by Richard Florida (2009a and 2009b) and its famous *creative classes* could be considered as such<sup>2</sup>. The objective would be to create particular and specific environments dedicated to cultural production and consumption that would work as driving forces for urban redevelopment (Lloyd, 2002). “Be creative – or die” was the title of an interview with Florida in the Salon Magazine, where the author emphasised that “cities must attract the new ‘creative classes with hip neighbourhoods, an arts scene and a gay-friendly atmosphere -- or they’ll go the way of Detroit” (Dreher, 2002). However, the presence of social groups with higher incomes and new demands of consumption has triggered wider processes of gentrification and exclusion which were not foreseen decades ago. This change has been pointed out by authors like Smith ([1996] 2012) and Slater (2011) when they wrote about the reconfiguration of the urban landscape of the cities and the importance of the class factor.

In this way, the new middle class neighbours would match the demands for urban experiences to those requested by tourists, making the effects of both presences indistinguishable within the frame of the latest urban changes (Fuller and Michel, 2014). In fact, as García Herrera, Smith and Mejías Vera (2013: 277)

pointed out for the case of Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Spain), when a gentrified neighbourhood becomes a touristic destination “the separate logics and motives of tourism and gentrification begin to blur: the one begins to feed the other, and the dilution of geographical distinctiveness is further exacerbated”.

The displaced groups see their capacity of participation depleted –of *inhabiting* as Lefebvre (1969) considered- in a model of a city destined for consumption by the middle classes. These middle classes –or tourists- would find in the urban space “a mirror of their reality, sedative representations [and] the image of a social world where they find their place, precise, labelled and assured” (Lefebvre, 2013: 345). At the same time, they would leave behind all of those who cannot, or do not want, to be part of this kind of city. These would be displaced, marginalised –in the sense of being situated in the physical and symbolic margin of the contemporary city- from their *right to the city* (Lefebvre, 1969) to the extent that they are not important as consumers both, *of* and *in* this space. Nevertheless, this phenomenon of exclusion is not only due to economic factors, but also to ideological – even social – ideas following the traditional distinction made by Weber (2002: 682) of class, states and parties. In this way, certain people or social groups would not accept participating in the hegemonic urban culture, being excluded structurally and spatially through a “centrifugation effect” (Anta, 1998: 61-64).

In the same vein, David Harvey pointed out (2013: 188) that “the dynamic of the class exploitation does not happen only in our workplace”. In fact, the practices of dispossession related to, for example, the housing market or the privatisation of the urban space could be considered as secondary ways of exploitation that, nowadays, would constitute an important part of the capital accumulation and the sustenance of the class power (*Ibid.*). In the context of Post-Fordist societies, the *emptying* of the factories does not mean the disappearance of the production relations, but rather their elevation to a spatial level (Herin, 1982; López, 1990; Gaudemar, 1991), that is, to cities that work as commodities (Lefebvre, 1969). Thus, neoliberalism, as a process of reorganisation of capitalist production, creates new and essential historical agents, different constellations of interests, the threats to these interests and the principle conditions for the transfer of power and its dispute (Tilly, 1977).

In these situations, the inherent unrest of the cities could be seen as a competition for the resources and services offered (Fuller and Michel, *op. cit.*) and/or a manifestation of power relationships, spatiality and social control (Harvey, 2013; Aricó and Fernández, 2013). Nevertheless, it can also be presented as a class struggle between “those who seek to transform space such that it is ever more functional for capital accumulation (abstract space), and those who seek to construct another way of life through the creation

of genuinely ‘differential space’” (Lefebvre, 1976; Hesketh, 2013: 216)<sup>3</sup>. In this situation, an *urban front within a class struggle* (Garnier, 1976 and 2017) would be conformed, on the one hand, by the urban social movements and, on the other hand, by the

“financial, businessmen, constructors, promoters, etc., i.e., the bourgeoisie, [...] the elected politician [councilmen], their councillors, their planners, their specialists in ‘urban troubles’, i.e., a local elite that belongs to the high and middle classes, the intellectual petty bourgeoisie” (*Ibid.* 190).

Thus, as Baker (2013) also pointed out, we are facing a process that involves two sides at least. One that involves resistance to exploitation and oppression, and another that includes ruling groups that work to maintain *status quo* positions, power and contain the resistance.

Finally, and as authors like Gabriel Hetland and Jeff Goodwin (2013: 85) remind us, the capitalist system does not only show its face in the cities in a direct way; it also works indirectly, i.e., re-shaping collective identities and solidarities, distributing power and resources among the different classes and fractions of classes, facilitating the divisions of those, as well as the apparition of new ideologies and culture forms.

## THE URBAN TOURISM’S UNREST

Barcelona, just like other Western capitalist cities, has confronted a strong process of transformation in recent decades. Not without difficulties, it has moved in a fully satisfactory way, from a past as a key and traditional industrial area to a Post-Fordist or neo-liberal present, characterised by a strong economy inextricably linked to the service sector and tourism. As many other European capitals, its conversion to a *liar city* (Delgado, 2007) went hand in hand with the public momentum. In fact, the municipal institutions brought to the end public-private policies of collaboration that gave birth to a known and exported model of urban regeneration – the Barcelona experience (García-Ramón and Albet, 2000), where the neighbourhood of Poblenou played a central role.

Paraphrasing the film maker Luis Buñuel, the Poblenou neighbourhood has been *that obscure object of desire* of businesspeople, technicians and politicians for more than fifty years. In addition, what happened in this district is a good example of the change in the social and economic orientation from a traditionally industrial area to another, focused on services and consumption (Capel, 2005 and 2016). Some of the projects were attempts to transform its sea front into a *Copacabana Barcelonesa* in the 60’s (Arroyo, 1999; Tatjer, 1973; Navas, 2016); the construction of the Olympic Village in 1992 (Makhlouf, 2014; Aricó, Mansilla and Stanchieri, 2016) and, finally, the tentative conversion of this previous *Catalonian Man-*

*chester* into a new SoHo through the Plan 22@ at the end of the last century (Marrero, 2003).

Precisely this last project, the Modification of the General Metropolitan Plan (MMGP) for the renovation of the last industrial area of Poblenou had as a fundamental objective the creation of the Districte d’Activitats 22@BCN, an area dedicated to those industries linked to the new economy of information and communication (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2000). At that time, it was the biggest urban transformation carried out in Barcelona, more than 198 hectares, but also the one that generated a wider social response (Marrero, *op. cit.*; Mansilla, 2014 and 2015a). The 22@ Project pursued the regularisation of 4,614 pre-existent houses and the creation of 4,000 new ones using social housing criteria; an increase of the green areas by 145,000 m<sup>2</sup>; new public facilities; the preservation of 144 elements of industrial heritage in the area and an investment of more than 180 million euros. However, after 15 years, only 1,600 social houses have been built; there are only 40,000 m<sup>2</sup> of green areas; less than 10% of the promised public facilities have been created and 50.6% of the land has not yet been transformed (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016a)<sup>4</sup>.

The paradigm of an expected new economy never emerged in Poblenou, or even in the city of Barcelona. As the data show, in 2015 just 30% of the companies installed in the 22@ area were covered by the umbrella of new technologies. Even more, 52.7% of the companies already existed before the creation of the district and just moved to a new emplacement. Finally, 70% of the total enterprises were hotels and companies related to insurance, financial services and marketing (Ajuntament de Barcelona, *ibid.*). Thus, the process of de-industrialisation in Barcelona continued through plans like 22@ and this was accompanied not only by an urban and financial speculation dynamic, but also by a strong increase in the number of hotels and other tourist facilities that compensated for the relative failure in the arrival of new economy companies (Clarós, 2013; Charnock, Purcell and Ribera-Fumaz, 2014).

The drift towards services and tourism experienced in the 22@ area is in line with the conversion of Barcelona into a tourist city comparable to other widely consolidated destinations such as Paris, Rome or London. In fact, nowadays Barcelona is the third most visited city in Europe and the twelfth on a global level (Mastercard, 2017). This has meant, as the 2020 Strategic Tourism Plan of Barcelona points out, that tourism is “an inherent and constitutive part of the contemporary urban phenomenon” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016b). In this way tourism, as a socioeconomic activity, shapes the city and, at the same time, dialectically, the city shapes tourism (*Ibid.*).

## #ENSPLANTEM, VEINS EN PERILL D'EXTINCIÓ

As already mentioned, the local platform #EnsPlantem, *Veins en Perill d'Extinció* was created in May 2016. Among its first decisions was that to carry out actions in the urban space of Poblenou with the aim of making its claims visible. In this sense, they launched a call for the celebration of a *Route of Speculation* on June 5. This action consisted in a parade that toured several places in Poblenou considered as especially relevant for the members of the platforms (Picture 1.-). Among the sites were some that, in a short time, would take in new hotels and tourism facilities. They also visited old plots now used as urban allotments and in which the Assembla Social del Poblenou (ASP9), a social movement created in Poblenou in 2011 after the 15M explosion in Barcelona (Mansilla, 2015a) squatted<sup>5</sup> years ago. Some of the plots were then property of the Sociedad de Gestión de Activos Procedentes de la Reestructuración Bancaria (SAREB), also known as the *Bad Bank*, an organism created by the Government of the Nation in order to buy and sell real estate assets formerly belonging to financial entities affected by the economic crisis.

The final objective of the parade was “the recovery of a green space for the neighbourhood” and “popular flower planting”. Thus, the participants in the *Route* finally squatted, in a symbolic way<sup>6</sup>, on a plot of 10.000 m<sup>2</sup> located in the intersection of Llacuna, Llull, Roc Boronat and Ramon Turró streets. On the City Council plans, this area would take in a green area and two new hotels. According to the squatters, these new hotels would mean more than 1,000 new beds in a neighbourhood where “housing prices have gone up, new shops that are not related to residents’ every day requirements are opening and the presence of foreigners and visitors is becoming increasingly evident in bars and restaurants” (La Vanguardia, 2016).

Thereby, initially the idea following this social movement would revolve around a) a fight against the price increases in the housing market, b) the transformation of the urban landscape, and c) certain perceptions in the way the space is used that is a long way from the most traditional ones carried out by the residents. As Rosa, one of the founders of the platform, pointed out to me: this was started because “nobody was doing anything, a movement that fights for the right to housing and public space was necessary. Somebody had to make a stand, both literally and metaphorically”<sup>7</sup>.

**Picture 1.**

*The Route of the Speculation visited a recently opened youth hostel in the neighbourhood (June 5, 2016)*



Source: @EnsPlantemP9

The first preparatory meetings of *#EnsPlantem* were carried out in one of the spaces that had been denounced and indicated in the *Route of the Speculation*. In fact, the participants in these meetings were activists from Poblenou with a wide experience in the organisation of this kind of movement. Getting back again to Rosa,

“the idea of creating *#EnsPlantem* emerged at one of the squatted allotments, the one called ‘Huerta No 1’. We called people from the Flor de Maig<sup>8</sup>, Octubre<sup>9</sup>, nearby people who we thought would be particularly interested and we held meetings for two months. We always said that it was necessary to do something in Poblenou, start whatever...”

Thus, Rosa’s commentary presents the squatted allotments as one of James Scott’s (2000: 149, 151) “hidden transcript sites” in reference to those places where “the control, surveillance, and repression of the dominant are least able to reach” making “free intellectual life and democratic experiments” possible.

In relation to this, Roser, another person interviewed, underlined the possibilities offered by the urban space for the birth of new movements – “urban insurgent network” as authors like Nicholls (2008: 848) point out, as well as for the development of actions, when she highlights that

“The neighbourhood has experienced cycles of mobilizations. It has been quiet for a time, well, doing things, but more internally, and now this peak of movement is due to tourism, but this would not have been possible without previous mobilizations and the people who had participated in these mobilizations”.

### **Fighting against the price increases in the housing market**

The main claim made by *#EnsPlantem* is about the increasing price of housing, both for rent and purchase. The statistics from the *Institut Català de Sol* (INCASOL) indicate that, from 2013 -first data available - to 2017, the purchase-sale price of houses per m<sup>2</sup> in Poblenou<sup>10</sup> rose from 3117.3 euros to 4.347.3 euros, that is almost a 40% increase in five years. The housing rental prices increased by 32.13%, from €10.57/m<sup>2</sup> in 2014 to €13.97/m<sup>2</sup> in 2017. If we imagine an average area of 70 m<sup>2</sup>, 62.6% of the houses range from 60 to 120 m<sup>2</sup> <sup>11</sup>-, this would have meant an increase from €739.90/month to €977.61/month of rental income<sup>12</sup>. These price levels prevent the area’s inhabitants from being able to afford rent. Roser told us about her own experience:

“I had to leave the neighbourhood, to el Clot. It is not so far, I am fine, but I was looking over here and I could not find anything... the only things you could afford were *holes* of 40 m<sup>2</sup> or less and, of course, if you were interested in sharing the flat with somebody, you couldn’t...and, also, very expensive...so you had the option to move to Besós or up, the prices in el Clot<sup>13</sup> are also rising significantly”.

To tackle this problem, in February 2018, *#EnsPlantem* together with the *Associació de Veïns i Veïnes del Poblenou* (AVVP9) and other entities from Poblenou launched the *Comissió d’Habitatge del Poblenou* ( Picture 2.-) The objective of this commission is, in words of Roger, one of his members,

“to hear about the expulsion of neighbours on account of rental prices, and also, to help people get organised to bargain collectively, the only way to put pressure on land-owners and institutions to stop abusive rental contracts”.

This offers the possibility to provide a jointed response to a threat that, although experienced individually, still has a direct influence on the social fabric of the neighbourhood. Among the decisions taken by the commission was opening a permanent point of contact for information exchange in Poblenou, in the *Casal del Barri* located in the Rambla del Poblenou, and getting organised in much more advanced levels, at a city level, with other collectives with similar objectives. Thus, in March of this year, *#EnsPlantem* and the *Comissió* participated in the event *Coordinem-nos! Trobada de col·lectius en lluita per l’habitatge*. In *Coordinem-nos* informative workshops took place on topics like eviction, accompaniment, squatting or current legislation on the subject of rented accommodation. Therefore, in the context of an extensive enlargement of capital, social movements “jump scales” and connect to other groups that are suffering the same experience in an attempt to fight against practices of dispossession (González, 2005: Hesketh, 2013)

#### **Picture 2.**

*Assembly of the Comissió d’Habitatge del Poblenou (5th April, 2016)*



Source: @HabitatgeP9

### **Transformation of the urban landscape**

The changes produced in the urban physiognomy and the productive structure of the neighbourhood are justified by the Statistic Department of the *Ajuntament de Barcelona* who agree with those who think that its urban landscape is changing because of touristification. Thus, according to the report made by the Barcelona's *Gabinet Tècnic de Programació*, between 2010 and 2016, activity linked to tourism and hospitality went from 5.6% to 9.9%, i.e., an increase of almost 100%. At the same time, traditional commerce and industry went from 28.7% to 25.4% and from 50.3% to 37.7% respectively during the same period.

This transformation of the urban landscape is evident for the activists of *#EnsPlantem*. For them, the image of Poblenou as a traditional, lower-middle class and *neighbour-friendly* area have changed clearly to another focused on the visitors and upper-middle classes (Picture 3.-). Getting back to Rosa, she insisted to me that:

“we either respond strongly strongly [sic] or the situation will become worse. Sometimes, when I visit the streets over at Pere IV, where I don't normally go, but when I go there and I see the place full of brunch, brunching, muffins, and the rest, I think, but... what's that?”

**Picture 3.**

*Some of the traditional shops and buildings in Poblenou now closed (15th June, 2017)*



Source: Author

At the end of 2017, there were 37 tourist facilities (hotel, tourist apartments and hostels) with more than 11,500 beds in the District of Sant Martí. Five years earlier, there were just 29 with 9,679 beds. However, we have to add to this regular offer the apartments on websites such as Airbnb that, in the same period, increased its offer by 25%, reaching 2,324 beds (*Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016a*).

The activities of *#EnsPlantem* related to this situation were focused not only on the symbolic and real squatting of plots located near hotels under construction, as has been indicated before, but also on different direct actions denouncing the transformation of the neighbourhood into a holiday destination and its effects on the living condition of local residents. Thus, a demonstration on 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 was described, from different sectors and mass media, as “tourismophobia” for having fired paint-filled balloons and smoke canisters against the hotel building (Picture 4.-)

*#EnsPlantem* does not the same view of what happened on the day. Thus, as Robert told me:

“...nothing happened. Just 300 neighbours in a demonstration. We carried out symbolic actions. We threw some eggs full of black paint and one smoke canister. The idea was to show our anger and signal some of those guilty of gentrification and social displacement suffered in Poblenou...real estate companies, hotels, investments funds, etc.”

The labelling of *#EnsPlantem* as a class movement is made possible by these actions, as well as by the perception of being one on the part of its protagonists. The objective is, then, to stop the “growth machine” (Molotch, 1976) with the help of social organisation and by confronting those held as directly responsible: speculators, owners, investors and others.

### **Perceptions of the way urban space is used**

In 2016, the activities of *#EnsPlantem* continued. On June 14<sup>th</sup> another assembly was organized, followed by an improvised supper (Picture 5.) in the middle of the Rambla and, after that, on July 26<sup>th</sup> a demonstration with a *cacerolada* (a group of people making noise by banging pots or pans). The objective of both actions was, on the one hand, to realize a popular re-appropriation of a disputed space –taken by bars and restaurants, according to *#EnsPlantem* and, on the other, to attract more people to the social movement. Along with this, they also tried to inform walkers about the allegations presented to the *Pla Especial Urbanístic d'Alotjaments Turístics* (PEUAT)<sup>14</sup>, under progress by the City Council at this moment.

The importance given by the activists of *#EnsPlantem* to the privatization of the urban space that represents the terraces in emblematic places like the Rambla is reflected in comments and opinions like the one made by Pierre, a French guy who used to live in the neighbourhood, when he says that:

**Picture 4.**  
Some of the graffiti painted during the demonstration of 15th of May



Source: @EnsPlantemP9

“the fact that walking around the Rambla and listening to people speak in English or other languages..., so you see that the public space is not occupied by people from here, but by people passing through who come to consume the city and the neighbourhood”.

The substantial increase of the number of tourist accommodation establishments has been accompanied by an important increase in the privatization of the urban space in the neighbourhood (Graphic 1.). The streets and squares in Poblenou have been filled, during the last years, with tables and chairs at the bars and restaurants' terraces, especially so the neighbourhood's artery, the Rambla of Poblenou.

As shown in Graphic 1., between 2010 and 2018, the space occupied by terraces on the pedestrian zone has been multiplied by 10, reaching 852 m<sup>2</sup>, and peaking at 947 m<sup>2</sup> in 2016, while the number of licenses ascended from 12 to 56 for the same period<sup>15</sup>.

In November 2016, the City Council finally promulgated a Singular Terrace Planning Regulation<sup>16</sup> for the Rambla of the neighbourhood<sup>17</sup>, as foreseen in the *Ordenança de Terrasses* in 2013 in certain locations, in consideration of “the structure of the space and any other special circumstances”<sup>18</sup>. The regulation allows a maximum occupancy of 40% of the width of the pedestrian zone and a maximum of 42

tables every 100 linear metres. Moreover, the regulation establishes a maximum of 445 in the whole of the Rambla. The approval of the regulation shows a temporary decline, going from 421 in 2016 to 361 the following year. Nevertheless, in 2018 the number of terraces start to grow again, reaching 379. According to a member of the technical team of the political party *Barcelona en comú*, at the district of Sant Martí:

“the reduction over the last two years, pursuant to the regulation is massive (sic) on the central stage, but it is ‘disguised’ by the increase in licenses on the upper stretches of Pere IV, that is to say, the Rambla Nova”.

Thus, as a consequence of the entry into force of the directive, the central space at the Rambla, located between the streets of Pere IV and Taulat, has experienced a decrease in the concentration of tables and chairs, but this has been compensated with an increase in the upper part of the Rambla, That is, between Pere IV and Diagonal. This is the reason why there is an apparent decrease in the number of chairs and tables and surface, while the amount of licenses has remained the same. This expected result of the entry into force of the singular directive has led the members of *#EnsPlantem* to demand a more stringent reform of the directive itself, and participation, along with other groups, in collective exigencies for “stricter and more rigorous inspections and sanctions”<sup>19</sup>.

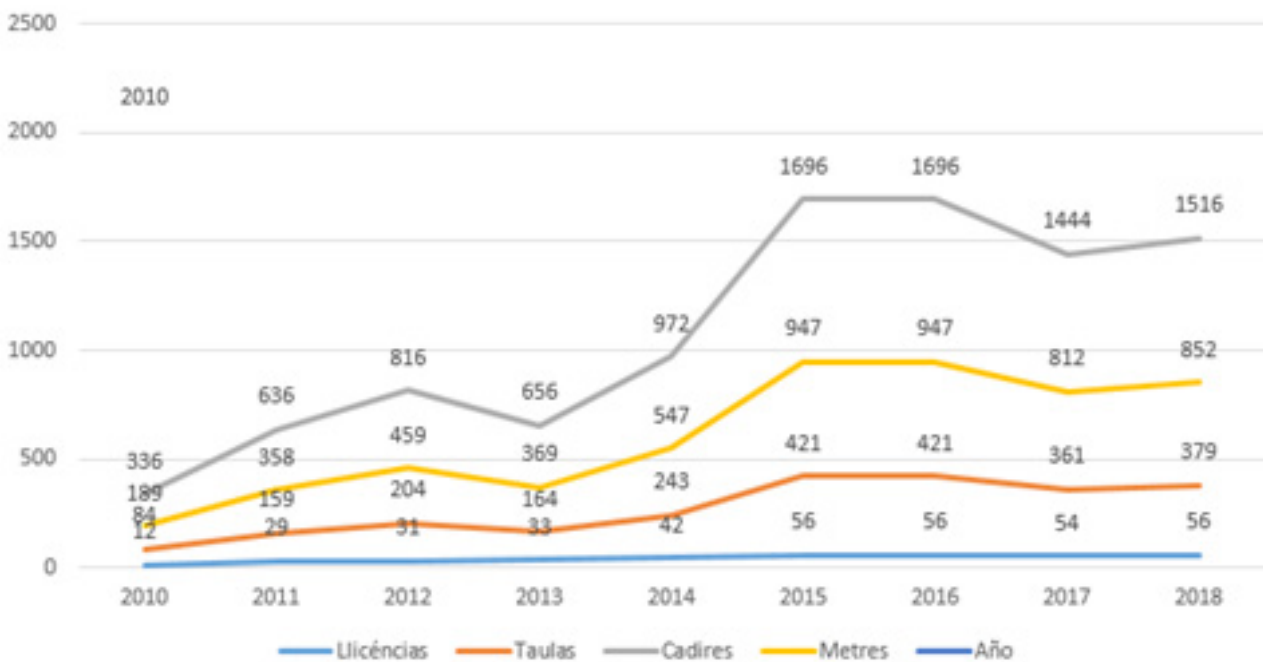


**Picture 5.**  
*Assembly-supper of #EnsPlantem at the Rambla (June, 14)*



Fuente: @EnsPlantemP9

**Graphic 1**  
*Number of annual licenses, number of tables and area occupied by the terraces at the Rambla of Poblenou (2010-2018)*



Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2018

As we can see, this strategy of defending space is an important aspect of class struggle, “since it represents the refusal of the extension of commodification” (Hesketh, 2013: 224) to the urban space. Even more, these kind of struggles become a “class project” because they are a direct confrontation to the circulation and accumulation of capital (Harvey, 1996) that the privatization of Poblenou’s streets and squares means.

## CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen in this article, urban social movements are not far from the capital accumulation dynamics that, under neoliberalism, have taken the city as one of their main fields of action. Under the consideration of class confrontation, following the classical Marxist conception by authors such as Jean Pierre Garnier (2017), or Henri Lefebvre (1976), movements such as #EnsPlantem would not ignore at any moment the consideration of the cities as one of the new main spheres of production. Moreover, they have to be seen as an answer, a reaction to new ways of oppression and exploitation. In this sense, as David Harvey pointed out, cities present “various secondary forms of exploitation

(landlords, retails merchants, saving institutions)” (1999: 47), and organizations as #EnsPlantem develop a role similar to the trade unions in the traditional commodities production sphere.

In accordance with this, the response by #EnsPlantem against the tourism phenomenon and its consequences, i.e., an increase in the house prices, changes in the traditional physiognomy of the neighbourhood and the privatization of urban spaces, as a manifestation of the restructuring of the capital, is a deeply significant contestation in several and diverse ways, as Neil Brenner (1998) pointed out. With their actions and discourses they claim for a neighbourhood and a city where use-value overcome exchange-value.

Finally, we could highlight the importance of this kind of movements, and their actions, for obtaining changes in the current urban power and confronting a local class front. As Clara and Robert, both of them members of the platform, stated at one of the assemblies:

“We have not reached 100% of our expectations. Perhaps, around 60-70%. Therefore, we cannot see everything through rose tinted spectacles. We need to continue working with actions in the street, we need to do things, and do them together”.

## NOTES

1. As the geographer Rosa Tello points out regarding Barcelona’s Metropolitan General Plan (MGP) of 1976, this document strives “to keep middle and upper class people in the region” (1993: 513).
2. In a recent article published by the magazine Jacobin, Richard Florida recognizes that he was wrong. For further information: <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/08/new-urban-crisis-review-richard-florida>
3. In recent times, different author, mainly from Europe and the United States, endeavour to address integrally research on issues such as constraints arising from neoliberal urban policies, and resistances thereof by looking at three key elements: the rich range and heterogeneity of the target groups, the variety of responses that social movements offer, and lastly, the proposals to rebuild a town from below. In doing so, they express their dissatisfaction “with the rationalist and empiricist social movement research paradigm” (Thörn, Mayer y Thörn, 2016: 22) on the analysis based, for example, on Structure of Political Opportunities (EOP), calling for a return to Castells in an attempt to overthrow their long reign. It is worth recalling that Manuel Castells in *The Urban Question* (1977) gave a potential transformative function to urban social movements and equated them with the traditional unions of the production sphere. In later works, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (1983) adapted the approach to the phenomenon. Much more generic are the approaches made by authors like Mario Diani (1992, 2010), Donatella della Porta (2009) and jointly Diani y Della Porta ([1999] 2006). They shine a light in defining social movements, in their specificity in the coordination of collective actions and the constitution of stakeholder networks with a wide and heterogeneous profile.
4. Since 2006, Barcelona has a territorial distribution based on 10 Districts and 73 neighbourhoods. The District of Sant Martí, where Poblenou is located, also has these neighbourhoods: El Parc i la Llacuna del Poblenou, la Vila Olímpica del Poblenou, Provençals del Poblenou, Diagonal Mar i el Front Marítim del Poblenou, el Besòs i el Maresme, el Camp de l’Arpa del Clot, el Clot, Sant Martí de Provençals and la Verreda i la Pau. The first four, beside Poblenou, form the traditional area formerly known as Poblenou, the old industrial district.
5. In March 2017, Allotment nº1 was evicted.
6. As of April 2018, this allotment is still functioning. For further information, *El País*, 15<sup>th</sup> of March of 2017
7. #EnsPlantem in English could be translated as *we stand firm*. In Spanish and Catalan has a double sense, *plantar* is also to plant or seed.
8. Ateneu la Flor de Maig. Former cooperative, now public facilities for social and political use. For further information: <https://lafordemaig.cat/>
9. Poblenou’s Independentist Association. For further information: <https://www.facebook.com/octubrepoplenou/>
10. The data presented on the price of the m2 includes new and second-hand housing. The source that INCASOL uses comes from the Association of Land and Mercantile Registrars of Spain.
11. Data from the Technical Cabinet for Programming. For further information (only in Spanish): <http://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/catala/dades/guies/a2016/guaidt10/index.htm>

12. Some mass media have pointed out that prices have risen above pre-crisis growth levels. For further information, *El Confidencial*, 29 September 2017.
13. Both, the neighbourhood of el Clot and Besòs belong to the District of Sant Martí.
14. The *Pla Especial Urbanístic d'Allotjaments Turístics* (PEUAT) regulates the introduction of tourist accommodation establishments, as well as youth hostels, collective residences with temporary accommodation and tourist apartments. For further information: <<http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/pla-allotjaments-turistics/en/>>
15. The stronger period of growth, between 2013 and 2015, coincides with the ruling of Convergència i Unió (CiU) in charge of the administration of Barcelona City Council, that, in fact, passed a new regulation on Terraces. Much more permissive than the previous one, and that provoked a significant increase on the number of licenses.
16. Few months earlier, in April 2016, local restaurateurs contested with a *block out* to the implementation of the municipal normative affecting the terraces (restaurants and bars' tables and chairs in the urban space) in the Rambla of Poblenou. For further information, *El Periódico*, 24 April 2016.
17. At the same time, the *Federació d'Associació de Veïns i Veïnes de Barcelona* presented the City Council's action as part of the recovery of "public space and against its privatization for lucrative purposes". A manifesto elaborated by this Barcelona neighbourhood association in 2016 said that "the municipal management of the terraces has to be led by general interest, not dictated by the lobbies". For further information: <http://www.favb.cat/comunicats/en-resposta-al-libre-blanc-de-les-terrasses-de-barcelona>
18. Boletín Oficial de la Provincia de Barcelona (BOPB)). For further information: <https://bop.diba.cat/scripts/ftpisa.aspx?fnew?bop2013&12%2F022013032523.pdf&1>
19. For further information: <https://twitter.com/AssBarrisTS/status/975275840798937089>

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