

The Landlord Harassment during the Spanish Property Bubble

November 11, 2020

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Master's Thesis Social Work
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Autumn 2020

SUMMARY

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Supervisor: Satu Ranta-Tyrkkö
Autumn 2020
Pages: 76 pages + 2 appendix, 4 pages.

Abstract

The subject of this master thesis is *The Landlord Harassment*, one kind of harassment in the housing context, increased by the economic pressures of *Spanish Property Bubble or Real Estate Bubble* (from around 1996 to 2008). The landlord harassment is defined as the physical and psychological violence used to force residents out of their homes.

The Spanish property bubble was a period of time when the base of the Spanish economy was centred in the housing and in the building sector. This period of time is characterised by a big speculative economic bubble in housing, with fast growth of prices, mortgage credits and the development of big construction plans. The definition of this economic period as speculative bubble was considered during most of the time a political question, more than a real economic reality.

But bubbles are usually identified in retrospect, and as an abstract economic term, are difficult to delimit and study as it. In this thesis, the property bubble is going to be study through one of the problems increased in that time: the landlord harassment against tenants in gentrified areas of the historic centre of big cities in Spain.

An specific and detailed example of landlord harassment, and especially about the landlord harassment on the elderly, is reflected in the blog "Las Abuelas del 7 de Ventorrillo" (The Grandmothers of 7 Ventorrillo Street). In their pages, written by the tenants themselves, there is the history of the elderly tenants, "The Grandmothers", who suffered the harassment of the real estate company which bought their building with them inside. This case happened in the old neighbourhood of Lavapiés in 2007. Lavapiés is part of the historic centre of the capital of Spain, Madrid, a neighbourhood that traditionally have supported big gentrification pressures.

The direct experiences described in the blog of these elderly women, are a practical example of how the rights to an adequate housing clashed with the economic priorities of the bubble, and how elderly citizens experienced this situation in a time of big speculative bubble. In the blog they described how they tried to resist to the pressures imposed by these economics priorities and how many chances they had to stay in the houses where they have been living almost all their life.

The theoretical context of this thesis is based on the urban movements and in the political movement of the neighbourhood associations during the seventies in Spain. Today there is not the huge political activity associated to the old urban associations from the seventies, but the same motivation and the goals are shared in both periods of time: to reclaim the participation of the citizens in the urban renewal projects, and at the same time, to attack the speculative aspects of the current urban planning model, with the capital accumulation, as principal aim in the renovation of the neighbourhoods.

Keywords. Landlord harassment, forced evictions, gentrification, Lavapiés, neighbourhood associations, Spanish property bubble.

TIIVISTELMÄ

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The Landlord Harassment during the Spanish Property Bubble
Sosiaalityö
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Jyväskylän yliopisto
Ohjaaja: Satu Ranta-Tyrkkö
Syksy 2020
Sivumäärä: 76 sivua + 2 liitteet, 4 sivua

Abstract

Tämä Pro-gradu tutkielma tarkastelee yhtä kiinteistöalan ahdistelutyyppiä, asukkaiden ahdistelua, joka yleistyi Espanjan asuntojen hintakuplan aikana (vuosina 1996 – 2008). Asukkaiden ahdistelulla tarkoitetaan fyysistä tai psyykkistä väkivaltaa, jolla pyritään asukkaiden häätämiseen kodeistaan.

Espanjan asuntojen hintakupla oli ajanjakso, jolloin Espanjan talouden perusta keskityi kiinteistö- ja rakennusaloille. Ajanjaksolle oli tunnusomaista suuri talouden hintakupla, joka muodostui asuntoalalle hintojen ja kiinteistöluottojen nopean kasvun ja laajojen rakennushankkeiden kehittelyn myötä. Ajanjaksoa ei alkuun haluttu käsittää kuplaksi, vaan tätä näkemystä pidettiin poliittisena mielipiteenä, ei reaalitaloudellisena ilmiönä.

Hintakuplat havaitaan useimmiten jälkikäteen, ja koska kyseessä on abstrakti taloustieteen termi, ilmiötä on vaikea rajata ja tutkia. Tässä työssä tutkitaan asuntojen hintakuplaa siihen liittyvän ongelmallisen ilmiön kautta: vuokralaisten ahdistelu Espanjan suurkaupunkien gentrifikoituneilla historiallisten keskustojen alueilla.

Blogissa "Las Abuelas del 7 de Ventorrillo" (7 Ventorrillo kadun isoäidit) kerrotaan yksityiskohtaisesti erityisesti vanhuksiin kohdistuvasta asukkaiden ahdistelutapauksesta. Sivustoilla asukkaat, "isoäidit", kertovat kokemuksistaan kiinteistöyrityksen harjoittaman ahdistelun uhreina yrityksen ostettua heidän asuinrakennuksensa. Tapaus sijoittui Lavapiésin vanhaan kaupunginosaan vuonna 2007. Lavapiés on osa Espanjan pääkaupungin Madridin historiallista keskustaa, johon on jo pitkään kohdistunut voimakasta gentrifikaatiopainetta.

Blogissa kuvatut vanhusten ensikäden kokemukset ovat käytännön esimerkki tilanteesta, jossa oikeus asumiseen oli ristiriidassa hintakuplan taloudellisten prioriteettien kanssa, sekä siitä, millaisena vanhukset kokivat asemansa suuren hintakuplan aikaan. Blogissa vanhukset kuvaavat pyrkimyksiään vastustaa talouselämän painostusta ja sitä, millaiset mahdollisuudet heillä oli säilyttää kotinsa, joissa he olivat asuneet suurimman osan elämästään.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen tausta pohjautuu 1970-luvun Espanjan kaupunkien aktivismiin ja kaupunginosien yhdistysten poliittisiin liikkeisiin, jotka syntyivät diktatuurin aikana, jolloin vaikutusmahdollisuudet olivat muutoin vähäiset.

70-luvulla perustettujen, vanhojen kaupunkiyhdistysten poliittinen liikehdintä ei nykyisen demokratian vallitessa ole erityisen aktiivista, mutta ajanjaksoille on yhteistä toiminnan motiivit ja päämäärät; molemmissa on pyritty palauttamaan kaupunkilaisten osallistumismahdollisuuksia kaupunkien uudistamishankkeissa, sekä kyseenalaistamaan nykyiseen kaupunkisuunnitteluun liittyvän keinottelua, eli voitontavoittelun asettamista kaupunkien uudistamisen tärkeimmäksi tavoitteeksi.

Avainsanat. Asukkaiden ahdistelu, häätö, gentrifikaatio, Lavapiés, asukas-yhdistykset, Espanjan asuntojen hintakupla.

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1 Introduction

In Western Europe the urbanisation has become a central pillar of capital accumulation (Gray 2018, 56). This way of urban planning can have deep negative consequences in the physical and social configuration of the new neighbourhoods, even more, when the principal aim of urban planning is the capital accumulation and speculation in a short period.

A recent development of this kind of urban planning policies and its subsequent negative consequences, can be studied in Spain from the period of time called Spanish Property Bubble, from about 1996 to 2007. A closer look into the analysis of the period of Spanish housing bubble show us, how the right of an adequate house, and particularly the access to housing, became a problem and an unresolved conflict between the economic powers, governments priorities and the rights of the citizens.

The aim of this thesis is to show an example of the confrontation between the macroeconomic housing projects, and the particular life of individuals. To present this dichotomy between basic housing necessities as adequate housing, and the speculative interests of the capital accumulation, one specific subject of this study is *"the landlord harassment during the Spanish property bubble"*, that affected mostly tenants with old leasing agreements (by a law of 1964). This kind of harassment can be defined in Spain as the *"physical and psychological violence used to force people out of their homes for speculative purposes"* Kothari (2007, 4).

However, the landlord harassment can not be studied outside of the specific environment where it happened, that is to say without studying the *"Spanish property bubble"*. But the problem with the property bubble is that, as an abstract and controversial economic term, it can not be studied directly, as a real or as an independent existing entity. In order to be able to study an economic bubble, we have to find indirect ways to find this bubble, for example we can be centred in the problems that this economic development creates. One problem during the Spanish property bubble was the landlord harassment, that affected the elderly principally. While the bubble is an abstract economic term, the problems and side effects associated with this economic development are real and quantifiable.

To study this bubble will not let us to find a way to know or predict, what will happen with future similar economic bubbles, but it lets us to show in a practical way, that the protection of essential rights, like the access to housing, are not only ethical or moral advises, but a way protect and prevent in a basic part, the consequences of future economic abuses, period of crises and economic recessions.

As Social Work thesis, this study focuses on a particular case, that involves real people

that suffered the direct consequences due this speculative way to renovate the city. This case is described in the blog “El 7 de Ventorrillo”¹. In this blog, the last residents of the street Ventorrillo 7, “The Grandmothers of Ventorrillo 7”², in the historical centre neighbourhood of Lavapiés in Madrid, wrote about their problems of landlord harassment with the new owners of their houses, a real estate that bought their building with them inside with the project to renovate the building for new tenants. Ventorrillo case is the necessary subject, the real case, that it lets us be able to study the problems that the property bubble created in real people.

The slang name in the real estate world to describe an on sale building with tenants living was “*Casas con bicho dentro*” (houses with a *bug inside*). The popular slang name of landlord harassment is in Spanish, “*Asustaviejas*” (one who frighten old women, meaning like a kind of scarecrows for old women.). These two terms described the two opposite situations: 1) Real estate companies that took advantage buying old houses with tenants, cheaper than empty buildings, with the intention to evict the last tenants in order to have an empty building to renovate it with huge benefits. 2) Tenants harassed by the owners of the building in order to speed up the eviction to sell the building.

And now an important question arrives: *Why the owners of the buildings can not evict the tenants if these buildings are their own properties?* The answer is in the *old rental agreement* of these tenants. In Spain there is an old rental law that it lets the tenants to extend the time of the agreement as much as they need. So houses with these kind of tenants were sold with them inside, and these houses had the problem that the tenants could not be changed easily because they had legal rights to extend their rental agreement. Most tenants with this old rental agreement were elder, retired, and a very small proportion of the total tenants of a building. It was easy for real estate companies to isolate them expelling the others tenants with newer agreements. So in brief, this thesis is, from the point of view of the Social Work, an study of *the Spanish property bubble centred in the elderly*.

The tenants of Ventorrillo 7 described their case using their own blog in 2007. Today to have a blog or to be able to publish something in a social media, it is something almost completely irrelevant. But the case of Ventorrillo happened in a time before Facebook or other social media of today’s Internet. It was in the first years that Internet became an interactive way to express opinions and the blogs were one of the most popular ways to interact on the Internet. The blog lets us to read today, in 2020, many parts of this case without interviews

¹Blog, El 7 de Ventorrillo <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com>

²They described themselves in the blog as The Grandmothers of Ventorrillo 7.

with the people involved in it.

This thesis is organised in six parts. After this Introduction, Chapter 2 is devoted to the Spanish property bubble, the recurrent subject of this thesis. Here this economic bubble is described and this chapter works also as introduction to the Landlord harassment and as contextualisation for this work. This chapter is important because in general the Finnish audience is familiarised with the recent economic crisis period³, but not with the previous economic bubble. The topics discussed included in this section are namely the definition, the difficulty to identify this economic period as bubble, the term bubble as a political issue, how was the development of city planning in this period, the gentrification and how this affected different tenants, and in the last sections, the crash of the bubble and what came later.

Chapter 3 is centred in the Landlord harassment with the definition, the different common ways of harassment compared with the real case of Ventorrillo 7, the socioeconomic profile of the affected ones, and the previous studies of this subject.

Chapter 4 is the methodological one, discussing how this study is methodologically based, what are the objectives and the ethical implications to be cared for.

Chapter 5 is about the particular case of the Ventorrillo 7. First there is an introduction about the neighbourhood and their political activism in 2007 and also about the neighbourhood political activism during the seventies, with the Citizen Movement. After this introduction, the analysis focuses on different aspects of this case, with the aim of studying them as practical example of how the people lived through the gentrification pressures augmented by the property bubble. Here is also studied the point of view of how they organised themselves and which ways they found to use the different media available, to make visible their case, how many elements were used to put this case in the different principal mass media of Spain.

³For example, the front page of the Finnish magazine *Suomen Kuvalehti* from the date 19.4.2013 it has this principal subject: *Espanjan Häätä. Kansa on menettänyt työnsä, kotinsa ja säästönsä.* Suomen Kuvalehti 16/2013. Otavamedia.

2 The urban problem during the Spanish property bubble

Landlord harassment is one of the negative problems of housing related to gentrification. In this case, during the period of time of the property bubble, the cases of landlord harassment were intensified by the urgency of the economic bubble to find new places to reform and sell. In this study we are going to study different cases of this bubble period where most of tenants had a leasing agreement with an old tenant law of 1964, done before the new tenant law of 30 April 1985. The affected ones are not a very big part of the population, most of them were elderly and retired women. They suffered the economic pressures to leave their homes, in a period of their life, where by their age, to be evicted mean, to change the place where they have been living most of their life and where they wanted to die.

The property bubble, as an economic bubble, is responsible for the situation after the economic crisis and the posterior recession with the rise of unemployment in the last decade. The principal issues to being discussed here are related with housing in Spain, for example the property bubble, the gentrification, the political issues between the ones who believed in a big development of the economy and the others who argued that it was only a speculative bubble. In the end of the section, it will be described shortly the evolution of the housing after the crash of the bubble. In general during all the subsections the idea is to show how the housing was developed in that time. Many times, the example of the case of Ventorrillo 7 will be used to describe the issues that are being discussed in the different subsections. This will help us to put a concrete example of Spanish property bubble and its problems, and at the same time to contextualise the case of Ventorrillo 7 inside of the property bubble.

2.1 Basic rights of citizens to housing in Spain

The Right to Housing is included inside the Article 25.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as part of the rights to an adequate standard of living. In the Spanish legislation, Right of Housing is described in the article 47 of Spanish Constitution (1978)⁴, and the idea is *to promote adequate access to housing* and also *to prevent speculation* with housing. This constitutional article reflects the problems that historically housing has had in Spain. For example, during different periods of the recent Spanish history, speculation with housing has been a way of fast profit and capital accumulation.

But the presence of this article in the Spanish Constitution doesn't warranty the access to housing to Spanish citizens. With this article the state will have to promote adequate

⁴The translation of this 47 article of The Spanish Constitution is in the appendix A

access to housing, but promotion doesn't mean that the state will supply or it will guarantee the access to housing, only the different later laws developed from this constitutional article should promote or facilitate the access to housing. The other goal is to prevent speculation, and this goal has not been developed satisfactory in any way, seeing the results of the last property bubble.

So in Spain the Right to Housing is a constitutional right. But this constitutional right only recognise the right to housing to everybody, however it doesn't provide or warranty the universal access to housing to everybody, as for example with the rights to basic education, that the State recognise the right to education and provide basic education to all citizens.

2.2 The Spanish property bubble

The property bubble was the result of many factors gathered together in the same period of time. In Spain, urbanisation have been a traditional way of capital accumulation in history. But the factors that contributed to the development of this bubble are not only local, from the Spanish context, but they can not be understood without taking into account for example, the influence of the Europeanisation of Spain, after become member of European Union in 1986, and the entry in the Economic and Monetary Union in 1994 (García 2010, 2) with the arrival of Euro, that facilitated the entry of international investors.

The fuelling of the property bubble would be not possible, without the large investment of foreign capital part of the international globalisation of the markets. These investments were concentrated mainly in construction industry, and at the time of the property bubble, *"economic growth and urban growth became practically synonymous"* (García 2010, 3).

Home ownership in Spain is one of the highest in the world. During the time of the property bubble, buying a house was a way to invest, not only for professional investors but also an investment for particulars buyers. The prices of rental were also high, *"as owners opted for selling rather than renting to make quick profits, this generated a vicious circle, shrinking the rental housing stock"* (García 2010, 8). It was easy to obtain mortgage loans from banks and the mortgage loans interest rates were relatively low. It was widely published that to rent a house was like to lose the money, because mortgages were cheap and the monthly mortgage payment was almost the same as to pay a rent.

The growing prices were used as "investment warranty". The trend was: "The prices of houses are not going to fall". It was accepted that if your economic conditions changed, you could sell the house to recover the investment with profits, because prices were growing all the time.

The growth of Spanish population in this period, with a big influx of workers from East Europe and Latin America, and from pensioners and tourists from northern European countries, helped to fuel the property bubble by increasing the demand both of rental and ownership housing, but *“the housing boom cannot be explained by demographic development alone”* (Cano 2013, 13).

From the point of view of Social Work, is important to remark that housing converted in an big speculative investment, had a negative impact in the access to housing, in the essential right of adequate housing. The access to housing for majority of people during the bubble was difficult by the high prices, in both rental and ownership housing. Most of prices of all areas were inflated, not only the traditional places where houses have been more expensive, like the centre of big cities or tourist cities. Many houses were empty because the owners (locals and internationals) had them as investment, waiting for higher prices to sell them. A basic necessity, as to have a house for living, was a big risk for families finances, as later it was showed after the bubble crash, when many families lost their houses because they couldn't pay the mortgage loans, and to give the house to the banks were not enough to pay the loan⁵.

This kind of economic development, with a bubble centred in housing, is not something new in Spain. In the 1960s, the good economic period was translated into the development and building of new residential areas in the suburbs of the big cities. In that time, big cities like Madrid or Barcelona, needed to build more houses to cover the demand for the new workers that emigrated to work in the big cities. It was a way to increase the economy investing the savings of workers in houses. But *“Although housing in Madrid did provide jobs and homes for industrial workers, one of its most important functions was a major instrument of capital accumulation”* Castells (1983, 220). In that time in Madrid, Castells (1983) explains that these new neighbourhoods had plenty of new inhabitants, but they lacked of the most basic services such as new schools, health care, transportation and basic infrastructures. So this lack of the most basic services can be considered a clear proof which shows that the motivation for building was speculation, the capital accumulation.

Unlike in Finland at the time of functionalism, where many old part of cities with working class wooden houses were demolished and the neighbourhood rebuilt again, like the neighbourhoods of Amuri and Pispala in Tampere (Alcoverro & Dijkstra 2009) or Verkatehdas in Turku (Jauhiainen 1997), in Spain the centre of the big cities have been traditionally

⁵Many families lost their houses because they were not able to pay the mortgage, but because the prices fell it was not enough with the house as payment for the loan, so they lost the house and they still had debts with the bank

very dense built, it was not easy or cheap to expropriate the houses. The option was to build in the nearest areas of the cities, to build new suburbs. The population in this period moved from the centre to the periphery with the new residential complexes. The centre became obsolete and these new neighbourhoods in the suburbs were new and with affordable prices. The economic situation enabled the families to buy their own houses, so it was also an important time of social change: from living in rental houses, to being the new owners of their houses.

These changes made some parts of the centre of the cities less populated and with the pass of time, usually the parts where the working class lived, were forgotten areas without much changes. These areas have been under different plans of renovations that gentrified them during years. In time of property bubble, they were the last free spaces for speculation in the centre, like the last resources of free land to build in the inner centre of the cities, with very cheap houses in some cases. For example, some buildings were old and in bad conditions, or in the case of rental flats, they were cheap because they were sold with the tenants with the old leasing agreement living there⁶.

The urgency to find new houses to sell, and the lack of new places during the property bubble was the principal reason for the rise of landlord harassment cases. The case of Ventorrillo happened in the neighbourhood of Lavapiés, a traditional working class area in the centre of Madrid, that it has been during years under many government plans of rehabilitation and under big gentrification pressures. One of the places where speculation and gentrification worked together.

2.3 The economic bubble as political issue

Economic bubbles are really difficult to identify when they are happening. They are usually identified only in retrospect, when the prices fell and the bubble burst. First criticisms of this economic development began to be heard against the speculation and because the high prices of the houses, that made it very expensive to buy a simple house for living.

The term “*economic bubble*” or “*property bubble*” with the economic theories associated to them, were not widely used and accepted until the last years of the bubble, around 2006 when the warnings and the side effects were clearly visible, and it was enough proofs to justify its use. In the beginning, this term was mostly used on Internet discussions, but not much in the big traditional media, but soon became a trend, and a good way to support the

⁶The tenants with old leasing agreement has the right to renovate the leasing agreement as much as they need, so the owners with these tenants could not evict them easily. See subsection 3.2

debate about this speculative economic development in the last years of the bubble.

The neo-liberal conservative government prioritised the growth of the economy, namely the growth of the property bubble, more than for example, the conservation of the rights to adequate housing. The property bubble didn't remove in fact the rights to adequate housing, but *it made more difficult the access to housing*. In practical terms, access to adequate housing was reserved to the ones which were able to invest or buy houses with the prices of the bubble.

For the government, the growing prices were a signal of the growing economy, the result of right economic policies. Criticism of the trend was seen only as political criticism from opposition, not as a true warning concerning a dangerous economic development or a serious economic mistake. In other words, the bubble was not recognised as bubble, but as "a big economic success". It was supported by the economic policies of the Spanish Government. Nothing or very little was done to prevent its pernicious effects until it burst.

The Finance Minister (and vice president) during most of the time of the property bubble (from 1996 to 2004) was Rodrigo Rato, within the government of José María Aznar. Emilio Botín, the chairman of the Santander Bank, biggest bank in Spain, defined him in 2010 as the best Economy Minister of the Democracy⁷. Later, he got a work in the International Monetary Fund, as Managing Director from 2004 until 2007, which he obtained as "*architect of Spanish economy*". Later in 2010, Rodrigo Rato was chosen as the chairman of the new bank Bankia (a merge from Caja Madrid and six more saving banks). During his presidency in the bank, the new bank was near to the collapse and with the effects of the crash of the bubble forced Spain ask to the European Union for a rescue in 2012, in order to rescue the bank and the Spanish economy. These days he is in prison, by a case from his time in Bankia⁸, sentenced to four and a half years. Still he is awaiting trials by other cases of fraud, accounting irregularities, embezzlement and money laundering related with his time as chairman of Bankia. The "architect" of the property bubble suffered more or less the same evolution as the bubble itself, but he will not be judged as responsible for the mismatch during his work as finance minister.

⁷"Botín: Rato ha sido el mejor ministro de Economía de la democracia" ("Botín: Rato has been the best economy minister of the Spanish democracy")<https://www.lne.es/economia/2010/10/19/botin-rato-sido-mejor-ministro-economia-democracia/982387.html> Retrieved 16.10.2019

⁸The directives of Caja Madrid, later Bankia had a "black credit card" for their personal use that they didn't have any register of justification of their uses. They could buy with these credit cards without limits using the money of the bank.

2.4 UN Special rapporteur on adequate housing visited Spain in 2006

In April 2004, after the general elections, the conservative party lost the elections. From the conservative government of prime minister Jose María Aznar, in charge from May 1996, changed to a socialist government, with José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero as new prime minister. This government will live the crash of the bubble.

From 20 November to 1 December 2006, Miloon Kothari, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing of the United Nations, visited Spain invited by Zapatero government to made a study about the situation of housing in Spain. The conclusions of this report were presented in the General Assembly on June 5, 2007.

With this report from United Nations, the critics to speculation and to the property bubble in general were not any more a political issue from opposition, but a real concern about the precarious situation of housing and the difficulties of people to access adequate housing in Spain. So this marks the confirmation of the property bubble as something real, with negative consequences for that time and in the future.

In this report, there are many points related to landlord harassment. For example, in the section III “Areas of Concern” the point 11 says (the emphasise text with bold type are mine):

*Testimonies and information received by the Special Rapporteur indicate various discriminatory factors with regard to access to housing, including the gentrification of cities and the resulting segregation, evictions and “mobbing”⁹ (physical and psychological violence used to force people out of their home for speculative purposes). The Special Rapporteur is particularly troubled by information suggesting that **very few court cases led to decisions on alleged mobbing**. Many testimonies attest that **this practice particularly affects the elderly** (Kothari 2007, 4).*

This quote summarises the common problems that the inhabitants of the case of 7 de Ventorrillo suffered: Gentrification of their neighbourhood, segregation, evictions, “mobbing” (blockbuster, landlord harassment), few court cases for this harassment¹⁰, and the population affected is particularly the elderly.

⁹The term “mobbing” (“mobbing inmobiliario” in Spanish) was widely used by the mass media to refer to landlord harassment. It was somehow similar to the mobbing cases at work places. But in English language, the word mobbing is only used to speak about the harassment at work, (as the word “bullying” for harassment in the school context). For this particular case in housing, the term “blockbuster” is frequently used. More about the evolution of these terms, Villegas (2006) from the legal point perspective: “Del Blockbusting al Acoso Inmobiliario” (“Acoso Inmobiliario” is the Spanish term used for landlord harassment in the legal offence in courts).

¹⁰The landlord harassment was added to the criminal code in 2010 as is explain in subsection 3.

In the same document, there are different problems related to housing in Spain. For example, another problem related to the situation of Ventorrillo inhabitants is described in the point 9, about the percent of rental housing and public social housing:

“Regarding rental housing, while in 1950 total rental housing in Spain exceeded ownership housing, today the former only makes up 12 per cent of all dwellings, constituting one of the smallest shares in Europe. Virtually all of it is in the private sector with only 2 per cent of dwellings classified as public social housing compared to 10 to 30 per cent in other countries of the European Union”(Kothari 2007, 3).

Rental housing in Spain is very limited compared to other countries of Europe. The points 10 and 6 of the document, gives some answers about why these pressures happened suddenly in a short period of time:

“Speculation in housing has been a major source of extreme profits from which only some large developers have benefited”[...] “Speculation and the financial benefits generated by housing have reportedly led to large-scale corruption”(Kothari 2007, 4).

Ventorrillo inhabitants are an example of how these pressures from speculation were translated to the general population. In this particular case, the owner wanted the houses free of old tenants, even though some tenants had acquired rights to stay in their houses. Corruption is one natural evolution of big speculative movements, when the motivation is only to obtain the bigger profit, in a short period of time.

Next point is about the increasing of housing prices:

“Among developed countries, Spain has experienced one of the highest increases in housing prices in recent years. Even amongst homeowners in Spain, a sizeable population is experiencing difficulties. The Special Rapporteur notes that a significant proportion of this population is paying more than 40 per cent of salary (net of taxes) on mortgages. He is concerned that the allocation of such a large amount of personal income to housing may have a direct impact on the enjoyment of other human rights, including education, food or clothing”(Kothari 2007, 3).

This point is very important because here the population affected is not the small with old rental agreements, but “a significant proportion” who is paying more than their 40 per cent of the salary to pay the mortgages. This is the principal factor in the property bubble that affected later to people with mortgages, a problem that started from the property bubble but

it will be developed and visible during the time of the economic crisis and recession, when many families were not able to pay the mortgage because they lost their jobs, or their salary in time of crisis was not enough to pay these big mortgages.

2.5 Gentrification

The Gentrification processes can be studied and described by different points of view, with many different positive and negative aspects. Del Vas (2012, 135) summarises some different perspectives of gentrification inside the context of landlord harassment:

From an anthropological point of view, for Del Vas (2012), gentrification is a positive process that changes the socioeconomic status of the neighbourhoods. It is a displacement of the population linked with different consumer possibilities. But *this displacement can be many times abusive, discriminatory and deliberated*, for example, in order to displace small rent minorities.

From a sociological perspective, Del Vas (2012) considers gentrification mostly as a negative aspect, because *it implies the destruction of the social and community networks and their cohesion*, something necessary and basic in many particular minorities, as in our case with the elderly, that they had lived most of their lives in the same neighbourhood, forcing them to move and disperse in other parts of the city.

In the personal ambit, for Del Vas (2012) is where gentrification has more transcendence in the context of the elderly, because implies *“the criminalisation of the elder by their special vulnerability”* Del Vas (2012, 135). In the real estate ambit, for Del Vas (2012) the old age is *“a potential criteria that increase the susceptibility to manipulation”* and all this increased by *“two situations of extreme vulnerabilities, as the ageing of the population and the feminisation of the old age”* (Del Vas 2010, 135).

Houses with “bugs” inside. If we take a look of the case of this thesis, the example of Ventorrillo 7, we can describe this case with the real estate jargon of that time, as one example of *a building with “bugs” inside*. This was described explicitly in one of the pictures of



Figure 1: Reference of “bugs” in the poster: “We buy houses with old rent agreement, with bugs inside, to reform”.

their poster. Some real estate companies specialised in buying old buildings cheaper, within the expensive area of the historic centre of big cities, because they were not empty, but with tenants. Some of these tenants had acquired rights to stay in their houses by the old rental agreement law. The process was to try evict these last tenants in order to have the building empty to renovate it and to sell it as new renovated houses in the historic centre for a big profit. It is here where it starts the problems between interests of owners, tenants rights and profit, and all this in a context of a big property bubble, that it forced to resolve these problems in a short time, because without empty houses there is not much profit.

The particularity of these tenants with this old rental agreements¹¹, bring us to almost two very common situations: (1)the tenants have been living long in the same building¹², and (2)most of them are elderly, and the big majority, elder women, because biologically women's lives are usually longer than men.

From the point of view of Social Work, these cases of harassment can be classified as *cases of harassment on the elderly in the context of the real estate speculation, aggravated by the property bubble and by the gentrification* (Del Vas 2012), that their neighbourhood were suffering. In these cases, the elder tenants affected have an autonomous life, and these cases with permanent stress situations, because the uncertainty if they can be forced to leave, can have a big negative impact in their near future and for their basic quality of life.

Gentrification pressures. Real estate companies are interested in their business, in the physical buildings or the land where it is built, but not in the original or current residents of the building. But while the social welfare of the original residents of the building is not their competence, the rights of that residents has to be respected.

When one of these inhabited buildings was bought by a real estate company or a building company, the majority of the tenants were evicted when it was possible. The goal was to have the buildings reformed and empty for new residents with more purchasing power. During the property bubble, all the pressures of different economics actors were concentrated in these old tenants of gentrified areas with old rental agreement, which refused to be evicted or, which tried to stay in the house where they had been living almost the most part of their lives.

¹¹This old rental agreement will be studied in detail in subsection 3.2

¹²They did the agreement before the new laws in 1985, so the tenants in our case, with this old agreement, have been living in the same place almost the last 22 years (taking the year 2007 for calculation as the year that blog was started).

2.6 City planning in hands of speculators

These real estate companies are not part of the neighbourhoods, they arrive to do business in the area during a limited period of time. The “economic development” of the bubble time was not seen by the inhabitants of these areas, but they were part of these processes, used by economic powers in order to obtain profits, making profits from the forgotten and degraded neighbourhoods. The gentrification process is something that the neighbours have not caused, but gentrification affected them directly while they didn’t choose to be part of it. When the changes are fast, like in a time of property bubble, the time is against the tenants, because they are not aware of the legal process that came.

During the years of the property bubble, the capital accumulation was the principal motivation to the renovation of new city areas. The rationality of city planning in hands of people searching for big and fast profit.

In Spain, the development and the approval of the new building plans is the responsibility of the local administration, the city council principally. They approve the new projects and they collect the different taxes and permissions related to housing projects. The related housing laws are developed by the Spain’s Parliament and Autonomous Communities Parliaments, and the last ones have the function to control how is the development of these housing laws in practical terms.

Most of the amount of taxes for the permissions to develop a new building project, will be part of the next year local budget of cities and villages where plans are developed. In the time of the bubble, new building plans could triple the budget of the village (if the project was a big one). The bigger the project was, the bigger the total amounts of local taxes money.

With this system, for local politicians a big building project in their cities or villages was good news in two ways: 1) As a way to announce new big building project for the future of the city (new jobs, modernisation of the village, all this translated into big doses of populism), and 2) enabling to announce a big budget for the city for the next few years. In brief, the budget from big building projects was good for the personal political interests of local politicians: They could indirectly take advantage of these projects as way to promote their status and at the same time, to get more money for the next city budget for future projects¹³.

When a real estate company with the support of local government, develop an urban project, they will have in their hands the power to decide and to draw the future on a neigh-

¹³In Spain the city budget is not like in Finland. Most of the taxes are paid to the State by the “Agencia Estatal de Administración Tributaria”, the bureau which collect most of taxes, and many different services are competence and developed by the different autonomous administrations. For cities in the time of property bubble these big building projects was a way to obtain a big amount of money in a short term.

bourhood for the next years. But in a context of capital accumulation, they will be only interested in the investment of their capital and the return, but not in questions related to the future evolution of the area developed.

In general, the real estate companies do not stay in the neighbourhood so long. They will be the necessary time to build and sell the buildings, then they will move to the next projects in other places. They will have responsibility in the physical aspects of the building, but not in the posterior way of the social-economical development of the new neighbourhood. If the building has structural problems it will be their responsibility but not if the neighbourhood became an undesired place to live.

As social workers, we have to be aware, that the speculative movement using basic human necessities, as for example housing, is not going to bring anything good for the life in the different neighbourhoods of our cities in the near future.

As it happens with economic bubbles, if the area later becomes an undesired area to live, because of wrong urban planning, this can be only easily identified and explained in retrospect. The necessary modifications to recover the mistakes can not be easily done many times when building is ready. If a building has the double of flats than should be, it can not be removed after when these are built and sold. So the policies to avoid to converting the housing in a speculative movement should be more restrictive because they prevent serious damage not only for the present but for the future generations.

An urban planning based in capital accumulation can be, without any doubts, denounced as wrong urban planning. It is against the right of adequate housing, and it is unbalanced with the different means that urban planning should have as way to make different places for living for the present and for future generations, not only a way to generate fast profit. If housing is only converted in an speculative value, it will difficult more the access to a house to many, who are not able to be part of speculative housing markets, but as basic necessity they will need a house for living.

The Spanish property bubble is a clear example of the danger of this kind of development and his posterior consequences for the economy and for the basic rights of citizens. Citizens that are the ones that suffered and paid these building bubble abuses directly. For example, the case of the old grandmothers in Ventorrillo, that suffered the pressure of these companies, or the families that were forced to eviction and they lost their houses and saving, when they were not able to pay the mortgage after the crash, their big mortgage inflated by the prices of the bubble.

2.7 After the crash of the bubble

The period of time when Ventorrillo's blog was written, it was the time when the growth of the bubble started to fall, the beginning of the crash. Different critical voices against this way of economic growth began to be heard in different news, and the word *bubble* was used widely to describe this economic situation.

From the point of view of social work, during the property bubble, one of the principal problems was *the gentrification* in the historic centre of big cities that increased the cases of landlord harassment. Later, during the crisis and recession time, the principal problem changed to *evictions from foreclosures*, related with the non-payment of the mortgages. These evictions have their roots in the property bubble. The houses were purchased during the time of property bubble, with the inflated price of those days and with the low interests of the mortgages. Many non-payments of the mortgages were the result of the bubble crash, with their posterior crisis, recession and the fast rising of the unemployment rate.

During the property bubble, the most affected part of the population with problems to access housing were the young and the elder. The young because the high prices of houses obstructed the possibilities to be able to live an independent life. For the elder, because their state pension can not support fast economic changes. The high prices of houses affected to all social classes, but because it was easy to obtain a mortgage, and the unemployment rates were low, most people could afford temporarily the high prices with long mortgages.

Most affected part of population by the landlord harassment related to property bubble were the elder, a small part of total of rental houses¹⁴. But after the bubble crash, with the evictions, the population affected was from all social classes, because it was a consequence of a big economical world crisis, aggravated in Spain by the property bubble and the rise of unemployment rate, that it affected all the economical conditions.

Díaz Parra (2014) have studied the evolution of housing in Spain during the last decades, from the time of property bubble, with the gentrification as principal problem, and later, with the economic crisis and recession, with the problem of foreclosures and evictions. How the problem of housing has changed in these years.

In the case of the city of Seville (in the south of Spain), Díaz Parra (2014, 13) explain that after the crash of the bubble, the gentrification process in gentrified areas in the city were almost finished. The reason of this were two: 1) These areas were already integrated with other tourists and commercial parts of the city centre, and 2) the problem of housing changed, by the cases of eviction of families that couldn't pay the mortgage and lost their

¹⁴In Spain ownership have been the traditional way to have a house.

houses.

He defines these problems as the phenomenon of “urban violence”(sic). This “urban violence” is a way to define the direct negative consequences of the speculation with housing. In next paragraph, he summarises what have been the response to this “urban violence”:

Both urban violence associated with gentrification, and also the one, which we are recently contemplating related with the economic crisis and the foreclosures, it has created (as reaction) denounces from academic ambit, resistance from social movements and from those who were affected, and timid proposals for intervention from institutional authorities with progressist political inclinations. In both cases, the tendency to treat the consequences without considering the causes and, as a consequence, to carry out a fundamentally assistance work, has been the predominant one. (Díaz Parra 2014, 3)¹⁵¹⁶

In this quote, there is an important part concerning social work. Because the work of social workers will depend, to a large extent, of the support and resources that the different administrations have reserved for different kind of contingencies, how authorities and administrations has acted to mitigate the problems of the bubble and the later crisis, will determine the scope of social work intervention.

As said in the quote, the different administrations acted with only a “timid proposals for intervention”. The political authorities from different institutions didn’t react firmly to the exaggerated speculation in the bubble, and they neither did react when the bubble crashed and collapsed the Spanish economy, in a context of a world crisis. As a consequence, it put the families’ economies in big trouble with the final end of many losing their houses and savings. And even worst, the people affected were in their own hands in a crisis that it was in part, responsibility of the political economic policies, that it didn’t control the wild speculation.

For Díaz Parra (2014), the root of problems are: “the tendency to treat the consequences without considering the causes” and “to carry out a fundamentally assistance work”, that it to say, to act after the catastrophes forgetting the origin, how these forms of “urban violence” were originated.

The authorities have not considered or investigated the causes that originated from the

¹⁵This is my translation, original is in Spanish.

¹⁶The original paragraph in Spanish: “Tanto la violencia urbanística asociada a la gentrificación, como aquella que estamos contemplando de forma más reciente, vinculada a la crisis económica y a las ejecuciones hipotecarias, han provocado denuncias desde el ámbito académico, resistencias desde los movimientos sociales y los afectados, y tímidas propuestas de intervención desde la política institucional de corte progresista. En ambos casos, la tendencia a tratar las consecuencias sin plantearse las causas y, como consecuencia, a realizar una labor fundamentalmente asistencial, ha sido la predominante.” (Díaz Parra 2014, 3)

crisis, in order to, for example, prevent new similar future speculative bubbles. It is like the property bubble and the later crisis and recession happened by “natural causes”. This is also a treat for the future, new economic bubbles can happen again because the causes that originated this one have been forgotten, and the necessary changes that it could prevent new ones, it has not been done.

Most legislative work and political attention were done to rescue the bank system and to cut the state public expenses. The Constitution was changed to fulfil the conditions of the European Union before approving a rescue for Spain. But a similar work, it was not done to “rescue” the people, to react against a time where citizens were losing their jobs and houses by the crisis, after the crash of the property bubble and this affected thousands of people, not to a minority as with the landlord harassment.

During the property bubble the laws were not updated in order to control the big speculation with housing, and to protect and grant access to housing. The right to access to a house was forgotten and it was left in the hands of the housing markets.

3 The landlord harassment

3.1 Definition

The landlord harassment is a kind of harassment that have as goal to force tenants to move out of the building where they are currently living.

There are different definitions of landlord harassment, in Kothari (2007, 4) is the *“physical and psychological violence used to force people out of their homes for speculative purposes”*. In this definition there is three main points, the (i) *use of violence* with (ii) *the goal to evict the inhabitants* and the motivation is (iii) *speculation*.

For Tuset (2004, 27) landlord harassment is *“a clear power abuse from the owner-lessor from his dominant position that lead to a regular and meditated abused of the rights of the tenant, with an evident contempt to the fundamental rights, as for example, the rights to dignity and respect, by the use of psychological abuse, lack of responsibility and violent behaviour in order to bend the will of the tenant, to leave the house or building where they are legitimately living”*¹⁷.

This definition add (i) *the abuse of power from a dominant position*, this abuse is (ii) *regular and meditated*, and the (iii) *contempt of the fundamental rights* of the tenants.

In one of the first sentences against landlord harassment, the Case Tagora (Fernandez 2004), the judge used this definition: *“When a speculator uses illegal ways to seize a building property”* Tuset (2004,30)¹⁸. This definition is not clear outside of the context of the judge sentence, but it is a good one to emphasise that motivation is speculation and the most important point, *these actions are illegals*.

For Herrera (2007) the landlord harassment *is a regular and meditated affront against the rights of the holder of the rights to use a house. Different harassment dynamics can be identified* (Herrera 2007, 80). Herrera has tree subsections in her classification of landlord harassment: Existence of a planned plan, the systematic repetition of the harassment and a teleological element, where all the actions are done in order to obtain a goal: to exhaust the energies and moral of the victims in order to weaken the reaction capacity, or to obtain the unilateral abandon of the house. In this third group the actions are: *“not taking care of the conservation of the building”*, *“fraudulent simulated actions”* as being inspectors, town official doing an

¹⁷Original sentence in Spanish: “un claro abuso de poder del propietario-arrendador desde su posición dominante que desemboca en un atropello regular y meditado de los derechos del arrendatario, con evidente desprecio a sus derechos fundamentales, como puedan ser los de dignidad y respeto, por medio del uso del maltrato psicológico, falta de responsabilidad y comportamientos violentos con el fin de doblegar la voluntad del inquilino para que abandone, forzado por tales circunstancias, la vivienda que legítimamente ocupa” Tuset (2004, 27).

¹⁸The original sentence in Spanish: “un especulador se vale de medios ilegales para apropiarse de un inmueble”. Tuset (2004, 30)

inspection about the the building, “violence over the objects”, as doing intentional damages in the building, “psychic and moral violence over people” and “affectation of the health of the residents” (Herrera 2007, 80-82).

The landlord harassment is illegal and today it is recognised as an concrete offence that can be prosecuted and it is punishable by the Spanish laws. It was added to the Spanish Criminal Code in 2010 with a new paragraph inside the Article 173.1, part of TITLE VII “On torture and other felonies against moral integrity”, with the Organic Law 5/2010 of 22 of July 2010 ¹⁹.

The concrete paragraph is this:

The same punishment shall also be imposed on those who repeatedly perpetrate hostile or humiliating acts that, while not reaching the statement of degrading treatment, are aimed at preventing lawful enjoyment of a dwelling.²⁰

The cases of landlord harassment in Spain during the property bubble, shared usually many common characteristics related with the urgency of the real estate companies to have the buildings free of the old tenants, in order to reform the building for finding new tenants or sell the houses to new residents with more purchasing power. The affected population was not very big, usually the tenants with an agreement with an old rental law, done before May 1985.

3.2 The old rental law from 1964.

In general terms, there are many ways to have a house, but in practical terms, the most common ways are two: as owner or as tenant. As a tenant, owner and tenant made an agreement about the use of the house under the established conditions agreed by both parts in a rental agreement, and *this rental agreement is regulated by the current rental laws at the time of the agreement is made.*

In the old rental agreement laws of 1964, all the tenants have the right to prorogue the agreement as much as they needed under certain circumstances from the laws. The tenants are not owners and they have not rights to ownership of the houses, but they have the legal rights to use the houses during all their life long if they want to do it.

From the point of view of ownership is clear the difference between owners and tenants. From the point of view of the right to use the house, in the case of new rental agreement, the

¹⁹Ley Orgánica 5/2010, de 22 de junio, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 10/1995, de 23 de noviembre, del Código Penal. - <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2010-9953>

²⁰Spain - Criminal codes - Legislationonline https://www.legislationline.org/download/action/download/id/6443/file/Spain_CC_am2013_en.pdf Retrieved 09.08.2019.

right to use the house as tenants is temporal, and with the old rental agreement this use is temporal also, and it doesn't mean ownership, but in practical terms and in legal terms, it means that this temporal rental agreement can last a lifetime.

This old rental agreement is from the time of dictatorship but it was also in force during the time of democracy until May 1985. It was made the 24 of December of 1964 with the Spanish Law name: "*Decreto 4104/1964, de 24 de diciembre 1964 Texto Refundido de la Ley de Arrendamientos Urbanos*". In Spanish these rental agreements under this old law are called: "*Alquileres de renta antigua*" (Old rental agreement). All the rental agreements signed before the new law, had the rights to prorogue the agreement indefinitely, always that the conditions of the rental agreement were satisfied. This is the reason because most of the people affected by the landlord harassment were of elder ages, their rental agreement was signed before May 1985.

This law is a key to understand why was somehow difficult to evict tenants, and why some real estate companies and some particular owners used some illegal methods to force their tenants to move to another place, to have the building free for new tenants. Some of these tenants had the right to stay in their rental houses because their leasing agreement was done with the old law.

This law was done in the years of Francoist dictatorship. In this context, the owners didn't have any too many choices. Most of them tried to sell their property to the old inhabitants. With this law they virtually lose the property of the rental houses. It could be also a way to put more houses in the housing market in order to lower the price of the houses during the property bubble from the sixties.

This law can be responsible for the several changes in the traditional way of housing in Spain in that time. One of them is the social change of the way of living: While in 1950 the rental housing was proportionally bigger than the ownership, after this law, the rental housing decreased and today is one of the countries with lower levels of rental houses when it is compared with other countries of the same region.

3.3 Examples of different common ways of landlord harassment

While the old rental agreement have the possibility to prorogue the agreement as much as desired, the leasing agreement can be broken unilaterally if the agreement conditions are not met. For example, when *the tenant don't pay the rent* the agreement is broken and the leasing agreement finished and with them, the rights to prorogue it. Many landlords used this in order to complicate the way the rent is paid, and then to finish legally the leasing when

payment is not done.

In Tuset (2004, 28) there is the example of a couple who lived with an old rental agreement and the company owner of the house told them that the rent should be paid through a law firm. There, they told them that they don't need to pay at once, they can come another day or to pay once every 3 months. The next news the tenants received from the law firm was the eviction demand because they didn't pay the rent at time.

Another similar case, of eviction by not paying the rent, was the case of a 86 years old woman in 2004 in Seville. She had an old rental agreement from 1978. She had been living in that house the last 26 years. She didn't pay the rent for some months as a protest, because during a reform of the building, the painters broke her window glass and the owners of the building didn't repair it. When she went to pay the rent, by mistake she paid 39 euros less, when she misunderstood the conversion of the amount of the rent from pesetas to euros²¹.

The owners took advantage of this failure to evict her legally. The building was inhabited by 23 families in 2001. In that time, the owners tried to declare the ruin of the building. But the city planning authorities replied that

the building was not in ruin and they had the obligation by law to repair it. In the time of the eviction of this woman, 5 families were still living there.²²

Another common strategy to put away tenants was to start the reform of the building with them inside. Sometimes the site where the building was built was more expensive than the building itself. Also to made "reforms" that are not real but are against the habitability of the building, making holes in roof or breaking windows in order to deteriorating it and then obtaining the ruin declaration of the building.



Figure 2: Ventorrillo 7. Living between building materials in common places. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15169117@N05/>

²¹Desahucian a una señora de 86 años por el impago de 39 euros del alquiler https://sevilla.abc.es/sevilla/sevi-desahucian-senora-anos-impago-euros-alquiler-200403090300-962348044494_noticia.html

²²Desahuciada a los 86 años por 39 euros. https://elpais.com/diario/2004/03/10/ultima/1078873201_850215.html

These strategies in order to deteriorate the building can be easily proved with the examination and with the criteria of experts in building or architecture. It can also prove that the reforms have deteriorated the structure or habitability of the building.

For Del Vas (2012, 139-140) the criminal actions of the landlord harassment are summarised in these: lack of maintenance of the building, refusal to take the rent from tenants, personal harassment, deficiencies in the basic supplies (as water, electricity, telephony, heating) and hygienic problems in the building.

A list with the most common kind of harassment against the tenants in Tuset (2004, 32) are the following (I will put the Tuset's list in cursive and then the examples of the case in the blog of Ventorrillo if there is a coincidence with the list):

- *To increase abusively the amount of monthly rent without legal justification²³, or to return the rent or not accept the payment.* Many times the tenants have to put the money in an bank account for the owners in order to justify that the rent was paid during the right period of time and it is available, when the payment method was changed by the owners and it was not possible to pay in the fixed time.

- *To make holes in the roof that are not repaired later.* In the case of Ventorrillo, the reform of the building was done with the tenants living there. It was started but never finished.

- *Existence of noise, moisture, bad odours and dirty areas without any care from the owners of the property.* In the news of El País 2 July 2007,²⁴ one of the tenants said that they go to the street with fear, because the scaffold with nets that is covering all the facade of the building on the sidewalk, it makes difficult to see the traffic of the street²⁵. In

a comment of the post 4 July 2007²⁶, one old resident said that workers start at 8 or 9 a.m. breaking old partitions walls, in order to disturb the tenants. In the post 12 de



Figure 3: Ventorrillo 7. The scaffold in the principal and only door covering the sidewalk. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15169117@N05/>

²³With leasing contract under the old rental law, the increase of the amount in the rent is regulated and it can not be higher than the limits described in this law.

²⁴Las abuelas del Ventorrillo resisten - El País. 2 July 2007. https://elpais.com/diario/2007/07/02/madrid/1183375458_850215.html Retrieved 04.10.2019

²⁵Original sentence in the news in Spanish: "Salimos a la calle con miedo, ese armatoste no nos deja ver los coches"

²⁶Meneadas y en televisión. <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2007/07/04/meneadas-y-en-television/#comment-8> Retrieved 04.10.2019

October 2007²⁷, it said that the owners of the building don't take care of the obligation to repair and maintain the building. In the post 28 March 2008²⁸ it was discovered that there was not any licence of rehabilitation of the building with the name of the company owner, they didn't have the necessary municipal licence to make the rehabilitation of the building.

- *To cut the electricity or the light in the stairs.*

- *Let the common elements of the building deteriorate without any kind of reparation.* In the Flickr account of Ventorrillo blog <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15169117@N05/>, there are many pictures of how the building deteriorated after the start of the repairs of the real estate company. In the post 9 December 2008²⁹, they told that during a recent hailstorm the roof needed some repairs that have not been done. In the post 27 December 2008³⁰, they wrote about the risk of accidents, because the old tenants have to coexist and walk with the different planks, shoring and different construction materials that are in the building. In the post (9 January 2009) one of the tenants had an accident and she was in the hospital. In the post 20 July 2007³¹, there are some pictures of the door with the planks, the facade scaffold and others.

- *To break the intercoms.*

- *To close the doors of empty flats but without closing the windows, from there it came rain water and dirt.* In the post of 27 December 2008³², they described the accumulation of dirt under the street scaffold with the growth of risk of rats. They told that the building has now problem with drug addicts that go there because the abandoned state of the building and they have been forced to close the principal door.



Figure 4: Ventorrillo 7. The common spaces, like the principal door, without maintenance. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15169117@N05/>

- *Let the faucets from the empty houses open*

in order to cause floods and not taking care to close later. In the post 6 November 2007³³ it was

²⁷Un poco de luz II. <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2007/10/12/un-poco-de-luz-ii/> Retrieved 04.10.2019.

²⁸Luces y sombras. <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2008/03/> retrieved 04.10.2019

²⁹Frío, lluvia y vistas judiciales. <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2008/12/09/frio-y-lluvia/> Retrieved 04.10.2019

³⁰Reunión de vecinas. <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2008/12/27/reunion-de-vecinas/>

³¹Revista de Internet. <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2007/07/20/revista-de-internet/>

³²Reunión de vecinas. <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2008/12/27/reunion-de-vecinas/>

³³La "mafia" ha vuelto (1). <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2007/11/06/la-mafia-ha-vuelto-1/>

a water leak, it is not known if it was an accident or if it was deliberate. In the post of 20 March 2008³⁴ one pipeline without protection was broken and the floods went to a flat and it provoked floods and a short circuit in one lamp. All the building was without electricity in order to avoid new short circuits during the rest of Easter holidays.

3.4 General profile of the affected by the landlord harassment

In the news of El País (19.02.2008): *“Alerta en la ONU: el ‘mobbing’ se dispara.”* (Alert in UN: the landlord harassment (mobbing) out of control.³⁵ is described the problem with the landlord harassment in different cities of Spain. In this news, the case of Ventorrillo 7 street is cited, and the study of Miloon Kothari³⁶, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, about the vulnerability of different sectors of citizens with the housing speculation. These groups of population more vulnerable to speculation with housing citing Kothari(2007) were: the women, the youth, the handicapped, the elder and the gypsies.

In Del Vas (2012, 132) the people affected by landlord harassment, as “passive subjects” of these illegal strategies are the elder, the women, and the widows. These groups had in common a precarious economic situation and they were affected by many factors of discrimination, many helplessness and abandonment situations.

The profile of the residents of Ventorrillo 7 street agree with the description of Del Vas, but while they were in a precarious economic situation conditioned by the Spanish low income of widows and women pensioners rent from housewives in Franco time, in my opinion, they were not discriminated against or in abandonment situations. As we will see in the section 5.2, the building was entirely occupied by different tenants and they had many friends in the neighbourhood where they have been living all their lives. To live in a “Corrala”, an old traditional neighbourhood building, with communal parts, where the social interaction is common between all the tenants of the building, helped them to not be alone.

³⁴Semana Santa, la pasión de Luisa según...<https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2008/03/20/semana-santa-la-pasion-de-luisa-segun/>

³⁵Francesco Manetto.(19 February 2008) Alerta de la ONU: el ‘mobbing’ se dispara. https://elpais.com/diario/2008/02/19/sociedad/1203375601_850215.html Retrieved 30.11.2019

³⁶More about this study of Miloon Kothari in section 2.4

3.5 “Asustaviejas”

In the case of Ventorrillo 7, all the affected by the landlord harassment were women³⁷. This is also reflected in the popular term used to define people or real estate companies which used these kinds of harassment: “Asustaviejas”.

The word “Asustaviejas” is a composed word with words: a verb, “asustar” (to frighten) and a name, “viejas” (old women). The meaning is like a kind of scarecrow for old women. With the word “Asustaviejas” we have a clear description of the actions of these offenders: to frighten, to scare tenants, and at the same time, the word describes the group of people affected by these unlawful actions: old women, usually living alone.

The word “asustaviejas” was supposedly invented in Cádiz during the nineties. The city in the south of Spain, it is built in a narrow slice of land surrounded by the sea. This condition has caused that Cadiz is one of the most dense populated city in Europe and the possibilities to build new houses are very limited.

The specific term used in Spanish laws, to describe these specific offences of landlord harassment is “acoso inmobiliario” (landlord harassment, blockbusting). This term was added to the Spanish Criminal Code in the reform of 2010, in order to include landlord harassment or blockbusting as offence against human dignity³⁸.

The most common victims of these “asustaviejas” are the tenants with the agreement done with the old law, because the owners can not evict them as for example other tenants with newer contracts. The owners can use illegal ways to evict these last residents. Some real estate without scruples were specialised in these kind of building with old rental agreement, because they were cheaper than the empty ones, and many times the last residents of these building were the oldest and the last ones, so they were without the support of a big group or tenants in the same situation, they were very vulnerable targets in this context.

Officially nobody wanted to recognise that this was happening, that real estate companies were abusing of their tenants, in order to have the building free of residents, to renovate it and to sell with the high prices of the property bubble.

The term “Asustaviejas” was very popular between residents and in the neighbourhood associations of gentrified areas, when these cases started to be very common, years before, the term was used in the news. In the news, the name became popular in the beginning of 2004 in the city of Cadiz. For example, in the south of Spain in the summer of 2005 the City

³⁷In the first month of the blog it was also a man but he was ill and he died.

³⁸Spanish Criminal Code of 22 June 2010. Ley Orgánica 5/2010, de 22 de Junio 2010 Published in BOE núm. 152, de 23/06/2010. Referencia: BOE-A-2010-9953

Council made a special plenary session³⁹ to deal with the landlord harassment in the city. The subject of this session was to fight against property speculation and concretely against the companies and the subjects that were responsible for these actions, the *“asustaviejas”*.

³⁹ Cádiz aprueba medidas contra los *“asustaviejas”* en un Pleno tenso y polémico

3.6 What to do in case of a possible landlord harassment?

The cases of landlord harassment can be difficult to identify and to prove. The first and nearest place where the affected by the landlord harassment can have the first help, are the local neighbourhood associations.

Many neighbourhood associations usually work by the help of volunteers, they do not have permanent paid workers. In these places, the tenants can have the first orientation about the steps they should do, in order to avoid being evicted before the case being studied, and about the different professionals they must contact in these cases.

In the case of Ventorrillo 7, this local association was “La Cámara Oficial de Inquilinos de Madrid”(Official Tenants Chamber of Madrid). ⁴⁰ The Chamber, founded on 19 January 1919, is a private non-profit association. It was declared “Official” by R.O.(Royal Order by the king Alfonso XIII) of 19 July 1923 due to its eminently social character. This entity develops an important social activity, principally the legal defence of the tenants and other occupants against real estate speculation⁴¹. This Chamber is only economically maintained by the membership fees. In 2010 they asked to the minister of housing some kind of economic support in order to continue their work⁴².

The different professionals necessary to resolve these cases are usually:

- Professionals from the justice area like lawyers.
- Professionals related with town planning and architecture, to check for example the conditions of habitability of the building.
- And professionals of social areas, like social workers, because we function as mediators in these cases, and because of the social vulnerability of these tenants. Many of them were not aware of the rights they can have or being acquired by their old rental agreement. These tenants can be old age and without much economic resources against these real estate companies. Many times they don't have another place to live, or they can not live in the same part of the city because a new rental agreement is more expensive than their income, so the loss of their home can also mean the loss of their neighbourhood, friends and way of life.

The work of social workers can be in the beginning of the case, when the affected by these harassment need orientation, and in case if they have to leave the houses. They can be also following the evolution of the case and in the end if they are forced to leave, like working

⁴⁰El 7 de Ventorrillo. Post from 13 May 2008: Cámara Oficial de Inquilinos de Madrid mayo - <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2008/05/13/camara-oficial-de-inquilinos-de-madrid/>

⁴¹¿Qué es la Cámara? (What is the Chamber?) <http://www.idoneo.net/camarainquilinos/principal/navegasup1.html> retrieved 20.09.2019

⁴²Todo por los inquilinos (All for the tenants) - El Pais https://elpais.com/diario/2010/11/02/madrid/1288700659_850215.html retrieved 20.09.2019

after “the catastrophe” has happened, for example if the family evicted has not a new place, or if the tenants are elder, it is usually the work of the social worker to find a new adequate temporary place.

In the beginning of these cases, a lawyer is the most important professional. The professional work of a lawyer is very important because the rights that the residents of these buildings can have, as old tenants can be lost easily if they are not well advised. Most of the studies published related with these cases of landlord harassment are done by professionals of justice and laws.

Other important professionals are related to town planning and architecture. An architect can determinate the conditions of habitability of the buildings. Many times the owners wanted the building declared as a ruin. This can have two effects, the tenants are evicted and the building can be demolished. In many cases, the place where the building was built was more valuable than the old building itself. Many landlord harassment actions are done in order to accelerate the deterioration of the building, in order to difficult the life of the tenants. The local authorities of housing and city planning can stop the ruin of the building if it is not true and they can also force the reparation of the necessary part to guarantee the habitability of the building and to prevent its deterioration. In the case of Ventorrillo, the housing authorities in Madrid forced the owners to repair the building, but they didn't, so they did the reparation instead of the owners by default.

In the case of Ventorrillo street, they were not evicted yet and their defence is more centred with professionals of justice and with professional of media, in order to give visibility to their harassment.

First guides to act against landlord harassment. A book of Pedro Tuset del Pino (Tuset 2004) was one of the first guide against the landlord harassment practices, *Cómo y de qué manera actuar ante las prácticas de Mobbing Inmobiliario* (How and in which way act against the landlord harassment?). It is a practical guide of how to react and in which way, against the illegal practices of landlord harassment. Pedro Tuset del Pino is a professional of laws that work as a judge. In the book there is a lot of practical information and it was written during the time of the property bubble. A reference when somebody wants to study the landlord harassment at that time.

By the Ombudsman Office of the Malaga Region, with the name: “*El acoso inmobiliario. Una lucha desigual. El caso de Málaga.*” (The landlord harassment. An unequal fight. The case of Malaga.)[20] (Gutiérrez 2008). In the book are included 20 cases of harassment, selected

from 70 real cases recorded since the office was created in 2005 in Malaga, from the 2005 until 2007. The coordinator of the work was the Ombudsman Francisco Gutiérrez Rodríguez. All the cases are from the Malaga region in the south of Spain.

From the point of view of justice, the article of Jesús Manuel Villegas Fernández about the landlord harassment, *Del Blockbusting al Acoso Inmobiliario (I)*[31] (Villegas 2006) explaining the evolution of the terms used in different countries and about the terms to cite these cases that have been used in the Spanish courts. The author, was a magistrate in Bilbao at the time the article was written, and a member of the Basque Country Observatory of mobbing⁴³.

Landlord harassment added as criminal offence. The firsts cases of landlord harassment started to be more frequent in gentrified areas around the nineties. In that time it was not a criminal offence with a concrete name and definition of what is considered landlord harassment.

The landlord harassment as a criminal offence was not included in the new criminal code until June 23, 2010 and the law took effect in the end of 2010 (Jerónimo A.I. 2010).

The first case accepted in court of “mobbing inmobiliario” (housing mobbing), was presented in November 2003(De las Heras 2004) in Barcelona. A 75 years old woman had a contract from 1936 made by his father and under the old tenant agreement. She denounced the harassment of the landlord, that tried to evict her by force by different ways, as for example not maintaining the habitability and healthiness of the building, or by letting outside squatters live in the same building to disturb the life of the old woman.

The first favourable resolution was in august 2004, in Getxo (Fernández 2004), North of Spain. This is the known case of the “Casa Tagora” (Tagora house). In this case, the landlord was against the other landlords in a building with three houses. The case started when a businessman acquired one of the houses and tried to buy the others. But one of the owners didn’t want to sell it. The judge determined that the original inhabitant of the house were suffering a systematic harassment planned by the businessman to force the inhabitants to leave the houses and be free to buy it.

Visibility of the abuses as strategy against landlord harassment. It is difficult to make these actions of landlord harassment when the building is full of tenants. In the case of Ventorrillo street tenants, the real estate company negotiated with the tenants the termination of the contract. Some people had nothing to negotiate they only had to agree, but for the

⁴³Observatorio Vasco sobre Acoso. <http://www.observatoriovascosobreacoso.com/>

tenants with the old agreement, they had rights to stay, so this negotiation was most difficult. Anyway, in these situations, most of the tenants moved to another place, and the people who stayed *were the smaller part of the inhabitants*.

Being the only one in the building or being the building almost empty, is a good excuse to start with the reforms. These reforms can be a way to disturb the life of the last inhabitants, but this is also difficult to probe, because reforms are dirty, noisy and not nice if you are living there at the same time. If you decide to move, this can be used to show that you are not living anymore in the building and the rental agreement finished.

News as a way to give visibility to the cases. The news about these cases were not very frequent in the nineties, but in the last years of the bubble, around 2005, the news about the side effects of this economic growth were more frequent and clear. The coverage were more frequent when old tenants were evicted, for example one of the most covered news in March 10, 2004, when an 86 years old woman was evicted in the city of Seville⁴⁴, or in the summer of 2005, in Cadiz, the City Council organised a special town meeting to deal with the subject of landlord harassment in the city (as we saw in 3.5), or the news about our case, in Ventorrillo 7 Street from 2007.

⁴⁴Desahuciada a los 86 años por 39 euros. https://elpais.com/diario/2004/03/10/ultima/1078873201_850215.html

4 Methods. Design of the study

This study is a qualitative research with textual sources in the form of Case Study Research. The Case Study Research, following Robert K. Yin (2003) is usually used to *examine contemporary events*. It uses many of the same techniques as a historical research, *direct observation* and *interviews* of the persons involved in the case (Yin 2003, p. 8). However, in my case, the compilation of the information I am going to be through textual sources, specifically the information of a blog: the posts and the information from sources published in the blog, letters, videos, news and pictures.

Usually in the context of Case Study Research, the interview is one of the most used methods to compile information about the cases we are studying. In the particular context of my study case, it might be possible to have contacts with some of the real people behind the blog, in order to contrast the information and compile new sources. But most of the tenants were already elderly the time the blog was written, and I have not had any previous contact with them. So the sources from this case are the one that are available and can be retrieved from Internet where I live, in Finland.

More specifically inside of the group of case studies, this case fulfil with the objectives of a *Illustrative Case Study* (descriptive of events). Between the different characteristics of Illustrative Case Studies, following the classification of Hayes (2015, 8), these studies are “*helpful when the the study is addressing a target audience that is greatly uninformed about the topic,*” and one of the purposes is to “*inform an audience about a topic of which it was previously uninformed*”. In this case, the topic to present and introduce is the Spanish property bubble, and this topic is going to be studied and introduced studying one of the problems that the property bubble increased, the landlord harassment.

The objectives, from the point of view of Social Work are: to present what was the Spanish property bubble in a theoretical form, and to discuss it in practical terms, the case of Ventorrillo 7 as real example of the problems with housing, in this case with the landlord harassment in gentrified areas. With the information of the blog and the news about this case, we can compile the data of this case in order to have a real case as base, and so to present a concrete example of the landlord harassment from the years of property bubble.

Another part is the study of the different resources available that tenants, in this case elderly women, had for their defence in order to stay in their current homes. How many resources were available from different points of view, for example, from of the public social

services resources of the city, from the informal local organisations of the neighbourhood, from the different media to present their case and situation, and how the blog influenced the different big media and through the Internet with the different followers of this case.

Another secondary point is centred in the use of blogs and the Internet, to check how much information about a real case can be retrieved from a blog that it has not been maintained in years. To what extent the information can be retrieved and trusted without direct contact with the protagonists of this history. In other words, how informal sources are preserved in Internet, without the active maintenance of the owners and how the time has influenced in the conservation of these sources.

4.1 Theoretical Framework

My intention is to study this case of landlord harassment as a casework. The people affected are the group of last tenants of a building. They are families, organised and they are connected with the local associations in the neighbourhood which share the problems with gentrification and speculation. Most of these activities and interactions were described in their net-blog on WordPress blogging platform⁴⁵. In social work the case work has been a traditional way to study groups, communities, their environment and their social networks.

The Spanish housing bubble and the gentrification are examples of the basic expressions of modern capitalism and globalisation. The housing bubble accelerated the gentrification process and the forced eviction of tenants which used to live in these centre areas. This housing bubble was also part of government economic development plans of these neighbourhoods.

From the context of the *Urban Sociology*, one of the most cited authors is Manuel Castells. His theories have put emphasis on the role of social movements as active actors in the transformation of the cities. Castells has studied and he has been part of the *neighbourhood movement*, "*The Citizen Movement*" ("*movimiento vecinal*" in Spanish) in Spain in the seventies. For example in Madrid (Castells 1977, 1983). This political movement was composed by different associations and clandestine labour unions and political parties, during the last years of the dictatorship and in the transition period to democracy. The Citizen Movement had as principal points the demands of better living conditions in their neighbourhoods, and this movement was also a way to claim and exercise more political presence and democracy. Castells participate directly in this movement when he was student as part of Students' anti-Franco movement. In the case of Ventorrillo, the generation affected by the landlord ha-

⁴⁵<https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com>

rassment was the same generation who was part of the Citizen Movement, and their neighbourhood, Lavapiés, one of the most active.

Later in the nineties, Castells developed his works related with the arrive of Internet as new tool for the society, and for the social activism in the context of “the Post-Industrial era” and the “Network Society” in his trilogy: *The Information Age*, *The Age of Consumption*, and *The Network Society*. Some of the aspects identified by Castells in the “Network Society” can be seen in the case of Ventorrillo, with the use of a blog, as a tool for political activism. Tenants of Ventorrillo 7 used their blog as a way to made public the landlord harassment they were suffering, as their own personal publish media for the presentation and evolution of their case, and as a way to compile the case that it facilitates the previous documentation when newspapers and big media are interested in their case.

During the years of dictatorship any kind of machine to make publications was illegal by all means. The only newspapers and publications were the official ones, controlled by dictatorship authorities. The Citizen Movement had not publication media but they got indirectly the sympathy and interest of newspapers, because they were families from neighbourhoods with the claims of better communication and basic services (as schools, sport installations, parks and so) for their neighbourhoods, but they were not able to write any kind of legal publication media.

In 2007 when the case of Ventorrillo started, the free press situation has not only changed by the freedoms and rights of the democracy, as the article 21.1 of Spanish Constitution about the right to assembly without the need of asking permissions, but also by the arrival of Internet and the interactive Web 2.0. This let everyone to create their own media, for example, opening a personal blog, like in the case of Ventorrillo. So from the point of view of publishing, the Internet and blogs are an advantage that it didn't exist during the Citizen Movement.

Another way to study this case of Ventorrillo 7 and the Spanish property bubble is through *City Planning*, looking at the studies about the evolution of different suburbs in socio-economic terms. These studies tried to find some of the roots of the problems of some areas in the cities by the way that they were planned. How for example areas in a city became an undesired area to live, and what kind of process transformed or influenced that areas from the time when it was a new modern neighbourhood, until they became an undesired area to live.

Classical works in city planning as Jacobs (1961), *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, criticising 1950s urban planning policy as responsible of the decline of many neighbourhoods in the principal cities in the United States, give us a clear clue about how urban

planning policies conditioned the future of neighbourhoods.

Another classic author for city planning is from the architect Jan Gehl with his book *Life Between Buildings : Using Public Space*. His interest about city planning started when in 1962 a client asked him for a building project that was “good for people” and he started to investigate that question. Together with his wife, the psychologist Ingrid Gehl, they have arrived to the fact that “architects did not seem to be particularly interested in people” Gehl (2013, 60).

This point of view of city planning is in my opinion in the line with the Social Work principles, developing neighbourhoods “good for people”. In the regular work of a social worker, the city is divided in different areas. It is always interesting to ask why some areas need more social services than others, how is the different composition of these neighbourhoods, how have been the city planning histories of the neighbourhood, and how have they affected the life of the people who shared that living space. In other words, how much and to what extent the problematic of a neighbourhood can be explained in terms of its development history of city planning.

Gentrification can be seen as a modern actualisation of capitalism within the post-colonial globalisation, where you don't need to have colonies, only the concrete important profitable places. In the case of gentrification, the traditional working class have often been pushed to move away from the old centre of the big cities. Gentrification have been studied widely from different points of view, and in different parts of the planet. It is difficult to delimit an area of interest inside the field of gentrification. In the case of this work, this delimit area is the *resistance to gentrification* as for example, Annunziata,S and Lees, L. (2016) explain in their paper *Resisting 'Austerity Gentrification' and Displacement in Southern Europe*. In the case of this paper, the economic period is after the crash of the bubble, during the time of austerity and recession. In the case of Ventorrillo we can see this resistance to gentrification before the period of crisis and austerity, when the people affected were a small part of population, but with the same problem in both economic periods.

The landlord harassment affected by no doubt to women. this can be seen in the popular feminine nickname used to describe these abusive real state companies were “asustaviejas” (see subsection 3.5). Many studies in gentrification have been centred on social class, race or ethnicity, but not much in women and gender as DeSena (2018) in *Women and Gentrification: A Call for Further Research* denounces. In our case all the 8 tenants were women. In the beginning of the case, it was also one man, but he was ill and died during the first years of the publish of the blog.

4.2 Motivation

My main motivation is to explain to a Finnish audience, “the Spanish property bubble”, as economic period that in its time, was considered officially an “economic miracle”, and in the end, it was a speculative bubble with very negative effects in the Spanish economic crisis and later recession of the last decade. To show the problems that many people suffered by this “economic miracle” in the time of the bubble, many years before the crash of the bubble. An example that a good economic period can be only speculation not real growing of the economy.

When the blog in Ventorrillo was written in 2007, it was a time when the critics against the Spanish property bubble were gaining more visibility among the public and in the media in general. The general interest with this work is to study, from the point of view of Social Work, how the economic period of Spanish property bubble affected the life of a concrete group of citizens, tenants with an old leasing agreement. How were the options, resources and network connections that the tenants and their neighbourhood had to defend themselves against the gentrification of their neighbourhood, how they managed to publish and promote their case to the public, in a time, when the capital accumulation with an economic speculative bubble had all the priorities.

In particular, I will look at how these groups of people were affected by the negative effects of the property bubble, to show a practical example of the resistance to gentrification. This period of time is one key to understanding the roots of the current bank crisis and economic recession in Spain.

4.3 Research questions

In the case of Ventorrillo 7, we have two traditional visions of housing: housing as business and housing for living. Both positions in this particular case coexisted in a time of a big speculative bubble, where housing as business had more weight and it was promoted by the property bubble. Housing as business is also housing for living, but here the main purpose is the economic profit and many times these houses were not inhabited.

Lavapiés has been a working class neighbourhood, but because it is part of the centre, it has been lately always the target of different renovation and gentrification projects (Díaz 2007, 187-191). Gentrification means a reform and renovation of the neighbourhood, and this usually means a reform without taking into account the current inhabitants. So it is a renovation of the neighbourhood, and, indirectly but expected, the change of the residents

for others with higher purchase power. Both, real estate and local population fought for the same renovation of the neighbourhood, but with different aims and purposes, one as business and another to stay in the neighbourhood.

In the concrete case of Ventorrillo, the low rentals of the houses are because the building was old and not renovated. As we will see later in subsection 5.2, the houses were very small and many of them didn't have, for example, their own toilets. The real estate, the owners of the building had plans of renovation in order to sell or rent the houses with higher rents, and in times of the bubble, with a big economic profit.

So we have two different points of view: housing as a business, and housing as a right of access to housing and right to stay living in a concrete part of the city.

Which one have more weight, housing as business or housing as right to access housing? Is this process only an economic process where the owners of the houses control the future of the neighbourhoods? In this context, how are the rights of the current residents to participate in the renovation of their neighbourhood?

The owners, in this case the real estate, have rights over their material properties. They can decide what they are going to do with their houses and who is going to live there. The right of housing of the old residents is not their competence. They work with materials and not with people or their rights.

But in the particular case of Ventorrillo we have an intermediate case where the tenants with old rental agreements had rights to stay in their houses. So we have here a slightly different kind of gentrification, where the old residents had legal rights to stay in their old houses. So another question here is

How this old rental agreement affected the process of gentrification in this case, where these tenants had the rights to extend the rental agreement if the tenants need it, while the owners of the building has other plans?

In this case, we have a common process of gentrification but with the difference that the old residents with old rental agreements would have rights to stay in the houses. They can not be legally evicted if they meet the requirements of the old rental agreement. On the other hand, the tenants with these old rental agreements are not many, they can not exert much pressure in this process.

And with this puzzle, from the point of view of Social Work, we have the question of:

Which will be the position of social worker in these conditions, when the protection of the rights of living in these houses with old rental agreement are protected by a concrete law, but this can be against of, for example, the economic logic, the gentrification process, and the own city urban planning where we are working for and it is our employer?

4.4 Sources

The sources used for this work are mostly the digital archived sources from the blog *El 7 de Ventorrillo* <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com>. All this digital material is composed by the posts of the blog, the news linked in the posts, the pictures and letters, and the comments of the readers of the blog. The residents of Ventorrillo used two digital platforms to share their sources: one is the blog service *wordpress.com*⁴⁶, an on-line service to create and distribute blogs, and *flickr.com*⁴⁷, an on-line service for the publication and distribution of pictures. In flickr the content consists principally pictures, some official documentation (letters that were sent to different authorities), documents from different administrations, some pictures of scanned news from printed newspapers, pictures of some politicians that visited their houses, etc.

The sources can be classified as own sources, for example the blog and the flickr account, that they are their own media under their control and external sources, like the news in newspapers, videos for different televisions that they are not under their control but they covered their case. All the material published or linked in their own Wordpress or Flickr accounts, are the most important and they are like primary sources for this work.

Period of time covered in this case. The blog was written from June 2007 to November 2009. This period of time was the years of the start of the World Financial Crisis of 2007. In the Spanish context was the crash of the real estate bubble and the start of the current Spanish Crisis and economic recession. While these years were years of change, the transition from a economical period to another, the happenings of the blog correspond to the time of the property bubble. So here I am not going to cover the Financial crisis because it is a posterior period of time. Most of the time I will be centred in the time of the property bubble.

How I found this case. The first time I heard about this case, was in 2007 when it was published in the news aggregator Meneame.net⁴⁸. Meneame.net is a popular Spanish lan-

⁴⁶El 7 de Ventorrillo <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com>

⁴⁷El7deventorrillo's Photostream <https://secure.flickr.com/photos/15169117@N05/>

⁴⁸Meneame.net <https://www.meneame.net>

guage social news website⁴⁹. The web members submit content to the site such as news, comments, posts, which are then voted up or down by other members and the most voted are part of the web front page.

The case of the Grandmothers of Ventorrillo appeared in Meneame.net the 7 of July of 2007, with the title: Especulación Inmobiliaria (Real estate speculation)⁵¹. The link was a reportage from the newspaper El País, (in that time the biggest newspaper in number of readers in Spain). The reportage was titled with “Las abuelas del Ventorrillo resisten”(The Ventorrillo grandmothers resist)⁵². I have translated this article as reference and is part of the appendix B

Everything I know from this case is from the Internet, from their blog and the related news. I have not any direct contact with the protagonists of this history. I am now writing about this case from the same place where I read about them from first time, from Finland, and with the sources from the news and different materials from Internet.

4.5 The impermanence of the web.

“People tend to believe that anything they submit to the web will be kept safe by the various web operators. Vast amounts of data have been lost due to changes in ownership, attacks by hackers and abrupt shutdowns of services. GeoCities was closed down by Yahoo in 2009, resulting in the loss of 38 million homemade pages”(Ronan Hegarty.)⁵³.

In the blog of this case, one of the problems with links to outside media, is that the content can disappear soon, if it is no longer maintained or updated. Many links are broken, some webs are closed, or their Internet address domain is now part of another different owner, without the old content.

On the Internet, one of the virtues is that content can be published faster and easier than in a traditional media (like in paper support, books, magazines and newspapers). On the other hand, the content published online, can be modified in seconds and also destroyed forever.

The blog was started in 2007, and today, an important part of the published links are broken. The multimedia content are the most common archives to disappear⁵⁴. They are

⁴⁹Meneame.net was created by Dr. Ricardo Adolfo Galli Granada⁵⁰, a Doctor in Computer Science at the University of the Balearic Island, in December 2005.

⁵¹Especulación inmobiliaria. Published 04/07/2007 <https://www.meneame.net/story/especulacion-inmobiliaria>

⁵²Las abuelas del Ventorrillo resisten https://elpais.com/diario/2007/07/02/madrid/1183375458_850215.html retrieved 26 of January of 2018

⁵³Ronan Hegarty. May 28, 2012. What can be done about the impermanence of the web? *Libfocus.com* retrieved on 25.01.2013 from: <http://www.libfocus.com/2012/05/what-can-be-done-about-impermanence-of.html>

⁵⁴During the 2012 Autumn, when I started to collect the material for this study, I found two videos, two hours

much bigger files than texts. They occupy much space and to maintain a web structure that can share multimedia content is expensive.

The Internet Archive: “The Wayback Machine”

If we are going to study a blog that was written some years ago and that is no longer active or maintained, we have to be aware of the past of the time. As in real life, the pass of the time affects in the recovering of the information. From the point of view of the time on Internet, the degradation of the content is faster and it has more impermanent than traditional media. A simple way to recover the information that has been lost, for example, the dead links, is the online service from Internet Archive (<https://www.archive.org>), “The Wayback Machine” <https://archive.org/web/> to see if there are snapshots of the web that we are looking for. From their FAQ section: “*The Internet Archive (Archive.org) is a nonprofit library that preserves digital cultural artifacts, and provides online access to over a million users a day with the goal of universal access to all knowledge*”.⁵⁵ For texts and pictures, recovering it is usually possible, but Internet Archive doesn’t make copies of videos by default. Usually the videos are lost.

The Internet Archive is an essential tool when a blog or Internet sources are used, because you can use their backups in the case that your sources disappears or the sources are incomplete. An active blog can be modified every time, as for example an active wiki can be modified in minutes, so in this case it is difficult to demonstrate that the content of the information has not changed. But the snapshots taken by Internet Archive tools are static and it has the date when they were taken, so these snapshots are an essential tool when the sources are in digital form and they are on the Internet. The snapshots of Internet Archive are done by them, so this is an objective way to get sources from their snapshots, these sources are static copies available on-line for everybody.

4.6 Privacy and ethical concerns

The case described in the blog “El 7 de Ventorrillo” is a real case of a possible landlord harassment⁵⁶ with a lot of information published and available online, by the tenants themselves.

of a meeting, a public talk, about the speculation in their neighbourhood with other people affected. The videos are from 14 December 14, 2007 in a local of the work union CNT-Madrid and this meeting was announced in their blog. The videos were hosted in the Google Video service. Because in that time, Google bought YouTube company, Google closed the Google video service. A week later, when I tried to see the videos again, the link redirected me to a new place on YouTube where only this message was: “This video is unavailable. Sorry about that.”

⁵⁵Internet Archive Frequently Asked Questions <http://archive.org/about/faqs.php#296>

⁵⁶The justice didn’t condemn the owners by landlord harassment, while the tenants denounced publicly this harassment. The company owner of the building was condemned for not taking care of the building. The local administration forced them to repair the building but they didn’t take care. So the city administration authorised

Many details of their personal information, like their complete names, ages or their socioeconomic status, is not only available in their blog, but also, it can be found in the different public news that covered this case. For example, the name of their blog, is the real address of the building where they lived, 7 of Ventorrillo Street in Madrid.

A news about the case published some days after creation of the blog, in the most important newspaper of that time in Spain, *El País*, tell about the real socioeconomic situation of the different tenants of the building. Their names and ages are described, but also, for example, their retirement pension and the amount of rent of their flats or their personal life in that time. In the case of the news in newspapers, these texts are written by professionals, who have to care about the privacy of the interviewees and about the kind of permissions they got, in order to publish and use these interviews without creating new problems for the people in the case. It can not be argued in this case, that this personal information was published by mistake. These news are in a professional media and are revised before publishing them. So we could conclude that this was not a mistake, but their personal details of their life was published with their own consent, and with a meaning.

Why was this personal information published in the news and in the blog? I can not answer directly because I have not any contact with the authors of the blog. I can suppose that they published this information as a case of transparency. The tenants of the building accused the owners of damaging the building in order to make their life more complicated and difficult. The real estate company was only interested in the building, not in the tenants, of course. The grandmothers accused them of landlord harassment, and they presented different proofs of this to the public opinion. It would not be fair or credible to accuse the real estate company of these criminal actions as, for example, anonymous.

It is true that everyone has to care about the part of their life that is shared online. This published online information can be used later with different means and without much control. While many personal information are available in the news and in the blog, there are many reasons why I am not going to use this concrete information, as for example their names. The principal one is that I don't have their consent, and for this work, this personal information is not necessary. It is important to show that the information is real and the case really happened, but because all the information used here is on-line, everyone can check it and I don't need to put any of these information in this work. So in brief, for ethical and legal concerns, and to preserve the privacy of the people in this case, I am not going to write any names.

another company to do the urgent reparations instead of the owners itself.

Another reason to avoid their names is that all the documentation that I have about this case are from indirect sources: From their blog and from the news related to this case. With these indirect sources, there is a real danger to introduce mistakes in the information, or to reproduce mistakes from the news or from the blog, because I can not contrast the used information with the original tenants, in order to be sure of the fidelity of the information retrieved or to correct them in case of misunderstandings.

Anyway, the information of the one news in El País, published in their first post, is relevant because in it they told by themselves, how was their life conditions and how their life changed after this company bought the building. This information without using their concrete names, I think is important to know, their socioeconomic status, in order to have an example of the situation of these tenants with this old leasing agreement. This data is part of a newspaper archive and it is also freely available online.

I have thought about contacting the people in this case. They have a blog, an email address and the name of the blog is their postal address. But then, it would be another kind of study, and I should move some weeks to Madrid. The sources in this case would be different and also the ethical implications. For this kind of work, using the digital archives, it is not necessary to have a direct contact. I am not going to contact the authors of the blog for privacy reasons, but also because the ages of the women in this case, after ten years of the end of this blog, it would be difficult to contact with them. In the time of the blog, many of the grandmothers were already more than eighty years old.

The blog has not been updated after November 2009, so I understand more or less, that this case finished here *as being a public case*. Of course their case continued, but this is now part of the private life of the tenants of this building. Outside of the activity of the blog, after the blog was closed, I have found a video from a project called “100x100corralas”. 100x100corralas⁵⁷ was an research project about these historical buildings called “corralas”⁵⁸. One of these *corralas* that they visited the houses of the neighbourhood of the blog, in Ventorrillo 7. They made an investigation about the life in these houses, with different multimedia as for example a video⁵⁹. The video was dated from 2 November 2010.

The last source of information of this case that I have found is Another video⁶⁰ from April of 2011. It's a 5 minutes video from Spanish public TV and it is the last update about the case.

⁵⁷This project had his own web page until the beginning of the summer 2013. Now they have lost the web domain and a Chinese web can be seen instead of the original one. The information of the web it is not available in the Internet Archive because it was not written in HTML.

⁵⁸A “Corrala” is the traditional name of a tenement house with a central courtyard in Madrid.

⁵⁹100 x 100 CORRALAS VENTORRILLO 7 — <http://vimeo.com/18536317>

⁶⁰España Directo - Las resistentes del Ventorrillo — <http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/espana-directo/espana-directo-resistentes-del-ventorrillo/1065156/>

About the owners of the building, the real estate company, I have not found much information. There are some names of the people in charge, and links to the web pages of the company in the blog, but these links are now broken, and this real estate company doesn't exist today. In Internet Archive there is a snapshot, but without any information. It is not a good publicity for a real estate company to have had this kind of problems with harassment in the past. In one of the last video that I have found of this case, the public TV tried to contact with the real estate company to know their version, but they didn't want to speak about this case by phone.

In brief, this case now part of the history. The blog is accessible online, everyone can read it anytime, and also some of the linked news, but it is not a public case with presence in the news.

4.7 Who wrote the blog?

The administration of the blog is anonymous⁶¹ in the sense that someone wrote the history of the grandmothers of Ventorrillo, but the one who wrote it didn't put her name in the posts. It is not anonymous in the sense of being occult or not known. For example, if we read most of the content looking for the author, we can discover who wrote it. In the post from 27 October 2008, "Un grito"(A shout)⁶² a post written in first person, where she told that *"it have been almost 2 years when a real estate bought the property where I live and they are destroyed it with me inside in order to force me to leave"*⁶³. The case and the people are real, for example the name of the blog is the real postal address of the property, but who concretely wrote the content of this blog is not relevant or necessary for the credibility of the case.

In the blog it is clear that the grandmothers are not active writers of the posts, but they are totally aware of the content of the posts, the commentaries of the readers and the movement the blog generated. Today would not be strange to find a grandmother active on Internet or in social networks, but this is something relatively recent. In 2007 the Internet was something new for the general public. Most of today's popular social networks almost didn't exist at that time, Facebook was launched publicly in 2006 and Twitter service started in 2006. In that time, to be able to publish on the Internet you needed some experience, for example to activate a blog and to publish in it were not as easy to write as for example, in Facebook. But the social networks existed already in 2007 mostly in the form of blogs and wikis. The

⁶¹This section and this question is more about how the blog is organised, how is written and how this can be justified, not about who really wrote the blog.

⁶²Un grito <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2008/10/27/un-grito/>

⁶³Original in Spanish: "hace ya casi dos años una inmobiliaria compró el inmueble en el que vivo y lo ha destruido conmigo dentro para presionar y que me marche"

platform used to publish and manage the blog in Ventorrillo was Wordpress. Wordpress started in May of 2003 as an open source project.

In the time of this case, the blogs were in Spain the most popular kind of social media, before Facebook or Twitter that came later and it took their places. In that time, it was natural that most blogs were anonymous, under a pseudonym or a concrete blog topic, but the real name of the responsible was not important. Anonymous in the sense of common people, that their near friends knew who wrote the blog, but for newcomers, the real author was unknown.

One explanation, it can be that blogs were written by common people that are “anonymous” in their real life, so in their virtual life, they had the same status, *common anonymous people*. Another explanation is that *the content of the blog*, the messages and information, is more important than the one or ones, who create and maintain the content⁶⁴.

The blog is not anonymous in the sense of hiding identities, because all the information of their life, who they are, where they lived is available directly from the blog. It is anonymous in the sense that the content of the blog is important, not the real person who wrote the posts.

⁶⁴It is not like today, that many blogs are “ego-blogs”, the person and their life are the protagonist.

5 Analisis of the case of the Ventorrillo street

The 28th of June 2007 the last tenants of a neighbourhood in the street Ventorrillo 7 in Madrid, published their first post of their own blog, <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com>, to make public their problems with the new owners of the building, a real estate. There is still a lot of information available from this case on the Internet today, while it has been around 13 years since the beginning of the blog. This section is centred in the analysis of the content of this case. The final objective is to show the imbalance between the owners of the building and the tenants.

The grandmothers of Ventorrillo wanted *“to die in the houses where they spend all their lives”*, and they had rights to do it so. But the new owners of the building, as part of the side of the property bubble, the economic fashion of the moment, were against the wishes and legal rights of these tenants. So this picture is the imbalance between the rights anonymous individual citizens, and the economic priorities of the moment fighting for the same resource: housing. But this fight is from different perspectives: one from the right to housing, as right to adequate standard of living, and in this particular case with legal rights to live in their old rental houses, and the other, housing as a fast way of capital accumulation.

5.1 Grassroots in Lavapiés

Lavapiés is a part of the neighbourhood of “Embajadores” in Madrid. Lavapiés as known today began in the XIX century with the arrival of a massive immigration from all areas of Spain. Most of these immigrants were peasants or working class and this has left a profound mark of marginalisation, symbolised in that time by popular shops and simple housing (that today are considered as substandard housing). These buildings are called “Corralas”⁶⁵ (Gómez, 2006).

Lavapiés has traditionally *“been a very socially dynamic working class area, in contrast with other parts of the city centre, dominated by the service sector”* (Díaz 2007, 187). *“During the last years of Franco’s dictatorship and the first of the transition to democracy”*, the Spanish cities produced *“a significant cycle of social mobilisation”* (Díaz 2007, 187). This movement was composed principally *“by neighbourhood associations in working class areas, in outer suburbs and in the city of Madrid achieved a big intensity”* (Díaz 2007, 185-188).

This political movement was a response against the official plans of renovation of outer suburbs and other places of the city, that in the case of Lavapiés, would have involved the

⁶⁵A “Corrala” is the traditional name of a tenement house with a central courtyard in Madrid. The tenants of the case in Ventorrillo lived in an old Corrala built in 1900.

destruction of a large part of its architectural heritage. At the same time, it was a way to fight against the problems of the neighbourhood, as for example, the housing crisis, the lack of enough urban services and the inefficacy of the dictatorship administration to handle these problems⁶⁶ (Castells, 1977).

In the district of Lavapiés, the neighbourhood association “La Corrala” led the resistance and at the same time promoted a program of recovery of the cultural and popular identity of the district (Díaz, 2007). These associations were the only way to reclaim rights in a regime where any kind of political association was forbidden and punished.

These local neighbourhood associations were a fundamental part of the citizen political movement of the Spanish transition from dictatorship to democracy. But with the arrival of democracy, the neighbourhood movement started to decline. With the new democratic institutions, many leaders of the urban movement went to be part of the new political parties. It was thought, that with direct political representation the associative movement was not necessary any more, and so, little by little the urban movements ran out of steam.

The Lavapiés in the beginning of 2000 was composed by four well marked and differentiated social groups (Gómez, 2006):

1. National immigrants and their descendants. “Vecinos de toda la vida” (Lifelong residents). It is the eldest group in terms of age. They are known in the district as lifelong residents, they are called themselves with this name and they have a nostalgic vision of the past of the neighbourhood. In this group people were very politically active during the years of the *Citizen Movement* (Castells 1977, 1983). The process of gentrification has been one of the most serious problem for them, because it forces them to move from the neighbourhood where they spend most of their life.
2. International immigration. “Nuevos vecinos” (New residents). Around the year 1995 the neighbourhood started a process of immigration on a big scale, Lavapiés was “*one of the destinations of choice for immigrants arriving in Madrid. The existence of a bigger rental market*” and lower prices attracted these citizens⁶⁷ (Díaz 2007, 187). Their presence “*has been clearly reflected in municipal statistics in the second half of the nineteen nineties*” (Díaz 2007, 187).
3. Activist groups. “Red de Lavapiés” (Lavapiés network) A large community of activists

⁶⁶For the repressive dictatorship it was difficult to fight against a group of neighbours that were reclaiming better houses, street lighting, gardens or pavement for the roads.

⁶⁷Lessors without moral ethics have taken advantage of this situation to make fat profits, allowing a large number of inhabitants to stay in small flats, or very low quality ones, or even using the “hot bed” system, whereby rent is payable according the hours spent on each bed in the dwelling (Díaz 2007).

with heterogeneous ideology and different sociopolitical practices. The average of age is around 40 years and during the last decades they have been experimenting to transform the neighbourhood in a laboratory of participatory democracy. Most of them are professionally involved in investigation and a vast majority are professionals (Gómez, 2006).

4. New neighbours. “Novísimos vecinos”(Newest residents). They are a new population of relatively young middle class around 30 and 40. *“These people say they are attracted by the cultural diversity of the area, its central position in the city, its historical character, etc”*(Díaz 2007, 188).

Fernando Díaz Orueta (Díaz 2007) in his study *Madrid: Urban regeneration projects and social mobilisation*, describes the neighbourhood in the years of the case of Ventorrillo. In the section *“Lavapiés: A neighbourhood in transformation in the heart of the city”*(Díaz 2007, 187-189) we can see the urban and social characteristics of this district. A small draft with the principal points:

- *“Very socially dynamic working class areas that contrast with other parts of the city centre dominated by the service sector”*(Díaz 2007, 187).
- One of the choices of destination for the immigrant arriving in Madrid. *“Slowly at first, and then on a massive scale, Lavapiés became one of the destinations of choice for immigrants arriving in Madrid.”*(Díaz 2007,187)
- The “okupa” movement: Squatter. They perform social and cultural activities as a way to reclaim public spaces and at the same time attacking the speculative movement of the renovations plans. *“Evictions [of these groups] in Lavapiés have been followed by new okupaciones⁶⁸, maintaining a constant presence in the district.”*(Díaz 2007, 188)
- Some mass media *“have presented the district as a dangerous place, occupied by groups of delinquents”* (Díaz 2007, 188). The author affirms that *“Without a doubt, there is an effort being made to convince the population of Madrid that Lavapiés is a dangerous ghetto in urgent need of cleansing. A similar process has been observed in other cities.”*(Díaz 2007, 188)
- An urban renewal project without the citizen participation.
- Fragmentation of the population in the neighbourhood that it is being combated through social mobilisation, and new forms of urban social protest.

⁶⁸“Okupaciones” is the term used for these collectives to describe the action of occupying another building.

5.2 The neighbourhood Ventorrillo 7 in 2002, by the “Lavapiés network”

During a search on the Internet, I found a blog with a post about the case of Ventorrillo 7. The post was written as way to show solidarity and support to the grandmothers of Ventorrillo and to publicity their case. The post, from October 2007, is titled “Ventorrillo”⁶⁹. In the text, there is a link to a study of the building from 2002, the oldest information the blogger found about this case, where it is discussed about the conditions and possible rehabilitation of the building at that time. The original link is broken⁷⁰, but there are 11 captures in the Internet Archive Wayback Machine.

The study is titled as “Preliminary study for the rehabilitation of the building in the Ventorrillo 7 street”⁷¹. This study is also quoted in the blog of Ventorrillo 7, in the post of 14 of November 2007, *La “mafia” ha vuelto II*⁷² but because the link was broken I didn’t notice it until now.

The study is signed by the local association “Red de Lavapiés”(Lavapiés network) and it was published in their own web titled “Laboratorio urbano” (Urban laboratory). About the members of this association, there is not any names, but in the section “About us” it is the follow description about their motivations:

*“Urban Laboratory groups people involved in different experiences of building the city from social participation. We try to find a space in the academic environment that serves as a channel for interaction with an urban reality that is often unknown or denied: the invisible city.”*⁷³

About who made this study, in the first pages they said that it was done by professionals and students from different fields, with the participation of the tenants of the building. The motivation is to rehabilitate the building for the current tenants, not like happen with gentrification, that the rehabilitation means to change the inhabitants for new ones with more purchasing power.

In the web, this study is under the section “*Plan de edificios sensibles*” (*Sensible building plan*). In that section there is three links: 1) A critic about the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood without the participation of the inhabitants. 2) An open letter to the housing alderman

⁶⁹Blog: A mi manera. Ventorrillo <http://ammanera.blogspot.com/2007/10/ventorrillo.html> Retrieved 30.01.2020

⁷⁰The link to this document is from the web hosting service Geocities. Geocities was shutdown in October 2009.

⁷¹Estudio preliminar para la rehabilitación de edificio calle Ventorrillo 7 (copy from Internet Archive) https://web.archive.org/web/20030410071738/http://es.geocities.com/laboratorio_urbano/Informe_sinfotos.htm Retrieved 30.01.2020

⁷²La “mafia” ha vuelto <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2007/11/14/mafia-ii/>

⁷³Original in Spanish: “Laboratorio Urbano agrupa a personas involucradas en diferentes experiencias de construcción de la ciudad desde la participación social. tratamos de buscar un espacio en el ámbito universitario que sirva de canal de interacción con una realidad urbana que nos es muchas veces desconocida o negada: la ciudad invisible”

of the city of Madrid⁷⁴. 3) The last link is the study of the building in the Ventorrillo 7 street.

In the open letter⁷⁵, there is a description about what are the “*sensible buildings*”. They are buildings that they have been mostly abandoned and forgotten by their owners, and by the local administrations, but they are still inhabited. They also said, that not all the buildings in these conditions are included in this group, but only the ones, that “*their inhabitant are organised against this abandonment of the building*”. This is important for this thesis, because it shows that the tenants of Ventorrillo 7 have been organised years before 2007, when they opened the blog and they started a campaign against the speculation and landlord harassment of the real estate, reclaiming for their rights to live there and for the care of the building, as it is arranged in the rental laws. So “sensible buildings” are buildings with problems where the residents are *an active part of the process of denounce and resolution* of these problems.

In this study (Red de Lavapies 2002), there is much important information about this building in 2001, before a real estate company bought the building. This important information is the follow:

The number of houses in the building and their sizes. Ventorrillo 7 is a building with 42 houses or flats, with a size between 20 and 45 square meters. Only 12 have their own toilets, the rest 30 houses, shared community toilets.

Substandard housing (“Infravivienda” in Spanish). In Ventorrillo 7, there were houses that from the City Town view are considered *substandard housing*: houses with less than 25 m², without toilets and with problems of illumination and ventilation.

All the houses are inhabited. While the general tendency in these old buildings is, that the owner tried to empty the houses in order to accelerate the social and physical deterioration of the building⁷⁶, in the case of this building all the houses were inhabited and the owners tried to obtain the most benefits without maintaining the basic care of the building.

The average of rental prices. In general terms, the tenants with houses under 20 square meters paid between 120€ and 180€ and until 360€ for the biggest ones. The majority of tenants lack the resources to find an alternative house.

It has been problems with lack of maintenance of the building by the owners, and these problems have been documented almost from 1993. In 1993 the Department of Pro-

⁷⁴This alderman resigned in 2005 “by personal reasons” and a week later he was hired by a real estate company as vice-chairman. Source: El ex concejal de Vivienda dimite de su cargo en el PP, empujado por la presidenta. https://elpais.com/diario/2005/10/25/madrid/1130239465_850215.html Newspaper El Pais (2005) Retrieved 03.02.2020

⁷⁵Open letter to Sigfrido Herráez, alderman of housing and urban rehabilitation of Madrid city hall. RED de LAVAPIÉS https://web.archive.org/web/20080316080834/http://es.geocities.com/laboratorio_urbano/preguntas_sigfrido.htm Retrieved 03.02.2020.

⁷⁶This was the situation in 2007, when the real estate agency expelled most of tenants and it tried to evict the last tenants with the old rental agreement accelerating the deterioration of the building with the tenants inside.

tection of the Buildings of Madrid Urban Municipality⁷⁷ opened a expedient because of the bad conditions of the building. The different orders of the authorities of building protection were ignored and the required reparations were made by the city town. It was not know if the owners paid the costs back to the city town, but the department closed the case. After this, the tenants started actively to made denounces because the lack of conservation and maintenance of the building. After many denunciations, a new inspection was done in 2001 and in January 2002 the old expedient was reopened.

The owners of the building had to maintain the building by two main reasons, 1) because it is a rental building and the owners has the obligation to maintain the habitability of it, and 2) because it is a protected building with high historical value.

In the last pages of the study, there are four different proposals about the possible solutions for the repairs of the building. The idea was to repair it for the current tenants in mind, without changing the socioeconomic conditions for living in that building: 1. *to convince to the owner about the suitability of rehabilitate the building*. This option was considered difficult because the owner has not cared for the building for many years. 2. *The City Town will do the rehabilitation instead of the owners*. This was a second option and a also a second step if the first option wouldn't work. The problem was, that most of the tenants had modern rental agreement and this would involve the increase of the rents. 3. *Self rehabilitation of the building*. This would have many legal problems and in the end it would mean that the owners could take advantage of this collective work increasing the rents because the building would be in better conditions. 4. *Public purchase of the building and then rehabilitation*. They considered this option, the only one that it was not a danger for the continuity of the current residents and at the same time it would permit to eradicate the substandard housing. The possibility of expropriation is considered in laws for cases like the one in Ventorrillo 7 but it has not been used before⁷⁸.

In brief: All the houses were inhabited before the real estate bought the building. The building has a long record of not being cared to preserve the habitability of the building.

⁷⁷Departamento de Protección de la Edificación de la Gerencia Municipal de Urbanismo

⁷⁸During the time of the case of Ventorrillo described in the blog, the new owners, the real estate, didn't take care of the building because they didn't want the current residents with their low income. So the City Town did the substitute reparations.

5.3 Ventorrillo's case posters

In the first post of the blog⁷⁹, there is an image of a poster that they used to publicise their case in the streets of the neighbourhood. The poster is handmade, but the content and the organisation of the information, is in my opinion really good and like professional work.

In the poster there is many information, denounces and critics related with this case, for example: a) the speculation that affects to the most vulnerable parts of population, young and elders, b) a critic against the speculation, "Lavapiés is not Marbella"⁸⁰, c) the denounce of harassment and intimidation of the real estate company against the tenants, d) the name of the real estate company and the address of the building affected by the harassment, e) the denounce against real estate companies specialised in buying old building with old rent tenants f) the sentence of a person of the real estate who shout "I swear by my children that this rabble goes to the street" against the tenants, g) different jargon names used to defined these companies, for example "Asustaviejas" or "houses with bugs inside", h) they ask for help and support in order to share comments, i) and the presentation of their blog and email for direct contact.

The title, with the biggest letters are "El ladrillazo". That word mean, a big hit with a brick⁸¹. An after that big tittle "Shock treatment to the most vulnerable part of the society young and elders. Enjoy your mortgage all the life or die". This first sentence is like a definition of the situation of the time of the property bubble, a shock for the life of the young and elders. And then the options that they have: "for young, to have a big mortgage for the rest of their life, and for old, to die".



Figure 5: The poster they used in the streets.
Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15169117@N05/>

⁷⁹Hola Vecinos (28.06.2007) — <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2007/06/28/hola-vecinos/>

⁸⁰This is a reference to the "Operation Malaya", one big anti-corruption campaign, that began in 2006 and it was a big scandal because many local politician from the southern resort city of Marbella were arrested.

⁸¹Many Spanish names that end with the suffix "azo" mean "hit with" and the object name that it is used to hit.

Next paragraph is a criticism against speculation with housing. *"While is presented as the new economic boom or a kind of real estate progress, it is only other pure way of speculation", "a new coward form of terrorism"*.

After these general information, next is the denouncement of the particular case of the building in the street Ventorrillo 7. The name of the street is remarked in bigger fonts, and under the name is a remark with the sentence: *"-In the heart of the ghetto of Lavapiés-"*. For some reason, here the neighbourhood is called ghetto by the residents themselves. I think it is more to strengthen the problem of being a forgetting neighbourhood and also, because many in Madrid consider that neighbourhood as some kind of ghetto as it is said in Díaz (2007, 188): *"There is an effort being made to convince the population of Madrid that Lavapiés is a dangerous ghetto in urgent need of cleansing"*.

There is information about the requirement of eviction and the harassment they are suffering. It is also noticed that some of the tenants are women around 80 years old. There is also the name of the company responsible of the harassment, in bigger letters, *Sistema 23, Proyectos Inmobiliarios Integrados*.

After this, there is the answer of the last tenants of the building to requirements and the harassment of this real estate: *"DE NEN QUE S'A MUERTO PACHI"*. This sentence is in the old or traditional dialect of Madrid. For me as Spanish native is difficult to understand literally what this sentence means. I understand the meaning for the context. This answer of the tenants, with the old dialect of residents of Madrid, is like a remark that the people evicted are native residents, "lifelong residents" In the sentence, the tenants answered with a "castizo": *"De nen que s'a muerto pachi"*. The word "castizo" is a word used to speak about the traditional old residents of Madrid. In the answer is also the sentence that they are going to use all the legal ways available in their defence.

There are also some pictures with dialogues: 1) One picture is of the Euro symbol dressed as a construction worker speaking to two old women. It represents the real estate owner of the building. The Euro is swearing and insulting the two women (the same sentence that one of the workers of the company said one day to the tenants in the patio of the building). These women answered in the old dialect of Madrid.

2) Another picture is of a man dressed with the traditional dresses of Madrid. He has his own comment about this case using the words *"Inmobiliarias Asustaviejas"* (like scarecrows of old women) to refer to the real estate companies that are harassing neighbours in the area. This comment was read literally in one of the first TV reportage (from the local TV,

TeleMadrid), as presentation of the reportage to the audience of the program⁸².

In the end of the poster, there is the signature of the one who did the poster, “*El espermatozoide enmascarado*” (the masked spermatozoon). This name is also in the post of the 15 of May of 2008 *Oda a “el 7 de ventorrillo”* (Ode to Ventorrillo⁸³) The text is an Ode dedicated to the Corrala and their last tenants on the occasion of the day of San Isidro, patron saint of Madrid.

In a Internet search, I found a blog with a post of year 2009, titled “Mi amigo, el espermatozoide enmascarado”⁸⁴ (My friend, the masked spermatozoon). The post start describing his friend: “*he is octogenarian and a veteran anarchist of work and thought and despite of all, still active.*” The post said also that during the nights he used to draw and criticise many things with his drawings. “*He is calling himself like “el espermatozoide enmascarado”.* In the post, the author said that yesterday found one of his last drawings. “*He has been doing like this since he retired.*” The drawings are similar than the poster of Ventorrillo, so this helps to confirm that he is the same person. In this post, there is also the link to “the masked spermatozoon” own personal web⁸⁵, where there are more drawings about different problems with the same style than this poster of Ventorrillo. In his own web he said “*Hello, I am EP and I have grey hair (a lot of) and one of my hobbies*

(much as my grey hair) is to sit at the table of my small study and to draw these... well, I don't know how to call them... vignettes, comics or may be, they can be like the last resource when you only can protest, surely will be this last one...”⁸⁶

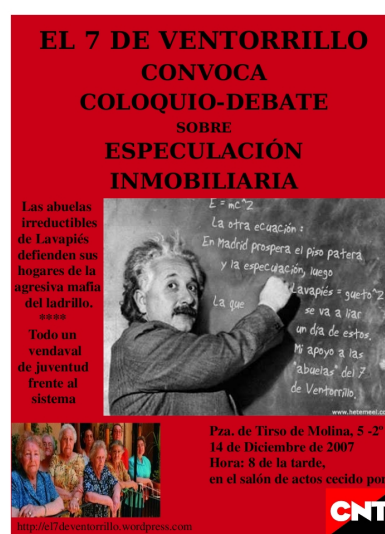


Figure 6: The debate colloquium convene. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15169117@N05/>

⁸²Video from TeleMadrid - el7deventorrillo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOMKUZcODb0>

⁸³Oda a “el 7 de ventorrillo”. <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2008/05/15/oda-a-el-7-de-ventorrillo/>

⁸⁴Mi amigo, el espermatozoide enmascarado <http://racanenado.blogspot.com/2009/01/mi-amigo-el-espermatozoide-enmascarado.html> Retrieved 23.03.2019

⁸⁵The link is broken, but there is a copy in Internet Archive: https://web.archive.org/web/20121027203927/http://www.telefonica.net/web2/mibarrionline/humo_01.htm Retrieved 31.03.2020)

⁸⁶Original in Spanish: Hola, soy EP peino canas (muchísimas) y una de mis muchas pasiones (tantas como canas) es sentarme a la mesa de mi reducido estudio y ponerme a dibujar estas....bueno, no se como llamarlas...viñetas, historietas o quizás puede que tan sólo representen el socorrido recurso del pataleo, seguramente será ésto último..https://web.archive.org/web/20121027203927/http://www.telefonica.net/web2/mibarrionline/humo_01.htm.

There is another poster in the blog, but this time to announce a meeting debate to discuss the problem of landlord harassment in the neighbourhood. The event was announced in the post of 21 of November 2007 but it was translated to the 14 of December and announced in another post. This poster was used to promote this event in the neighbourhood.

The event was in a local of the Spanish anarchist labour union CNT of Madrid⁸⁷ which they provided one of their rooms for the meeting. The poster color is in red with black letters like the color of anarchist with the flag of the CNT in the bottom of the poster.

The title of the event is *"The Ventorrillo 7 Street convene to a debate colloquium about the urban speculation"*. In smaller letters *"The irreducible grandmothers of Lavapiés defend their homes from the aggressive brick mafia."* *"A windstorm of youth against the system."* The image of Albert Einstein is used in the centre and the image of the grandmothers of Ventorrillo.

In brief: While they have a modern way to communicate: a blog, the way to spread and advertisement the case was also like in the old times, with handmade posters glued in the streets. The author of the poster is an old anarchist. This man was also retired and from the same generation than the grandmothers and he lived in the same neighbourhood.

5.4 Elements of the organisation of the case of Ventorrillo 7

I can not know truly, how have been the organisation or the leadership of this case, or what have been discussed in the previous meetings before this case became to public, or who did the different tasks and how many people were actively working for this case, because I have not had direct contact with the residents.

In general terms, the work done to resolve this case has two parts: one private, like for example, the work of the lawyers, (in the case of Ventorrillo, from the local association "La Cámara Oficial de Inquilinos de Madrid" (Official Tenants Chamber of Madrid)), and another public part, like the one that is described in the blog and in the related news about the case. In this study we are only centred in the only part we have access to, the one published and available today in Internet.

Inside of different groups and activists in the neighbourhood, the residents of Ventorrillo can be classified in the group of "life long residents". They can be considered also part of the *Citizen Movement* (Castells 1977, 1983) by their ages and because the Lavapiés neighbourhood

⁸⁷The Union labour CNT, National Confederation of Labour is an anarchist labour union founded in 1910 in Barcelona. It has been one of the most important labour unions in Spain with more than a million of affiliates during the time of Spanish Civil War. This time was described by the author George Orwell in his book about the happenings civil war in the area of Catalonia, "Homage to Catalonia" in 1946.

was an active area of Madrid of this social and political movement in that period of time.

In my opinion, the organisation of this case have been done, like remembering the way of organisation of the neighbourhood associations of the Citizen Movement and with people of the same age of the Grandmothers. It is also a way to remember that they were part of the people that fought against dictatorship, and now in the 21 century, in their elderly, they have to fight again against the abuses of the speculative movements of the property bubble, and they were as alone in their struggle as in times of dictatorship.

The grandmothers (and their supporters) organised many acts in order to find support and as a way to advertise their landlord harassment problems. One of this acts was a talk-debate in a room of the CNT trade union, as a way to present the case to the neighbourhood and to discuss it openly with other neighbours interested, or in a similar situation. This talk was announced in the post of 21 of November 2007, *Mobbing y especulación urbanística* (Mobbing and urban speculation)⁸⁸ but then postponed to 14 of December 2007.

The talk was recorded and it was available on the Internet in the Google Video Service, but it disappeared when Google closed this service. In that video, the spokesman was a man of the same generation as the grandmothers. This man also appear in some pictures published in the blog. I think, he is the same that it has elaborated the posters and wrote the handwriting letters⁸⁹ to the different authorities but I can not confirm today, because I don't have the videos of that meeting and I can not check his name. I can confirm that I saw that video and he was the spoken man in that debate in the CNT trade union, and his function was similar than in the letters to the authorities asking help for this case. In brief, a local activist that I will quote briefly in the subsection about the poster of the blog 5.3.

The important point is that the grandmothers were the most visible part of their activism for the defence of the right to stay in their houses, despite for example their ages. The real estate company, as many other cases, tried to isolate them and they evicted all the other residents that they didn't have old rental agreement, and they started the reform of the building in order to make the life of the last residents more difficult. This can be noticed in the different videos and news about the case compiled in their blog. Of course, they were not alone, they had the support of professionals, younger residents and the activism of the neighbourhood.

⁸⁸Mobbing y especulación urbanística <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2007/11/21/mobbing-y-especulacion-urbanistica/>

⁸⁹The pictures of these letters can be seen in the Ventorrillo Flickr account.

5.5 Letters and manifesto

In the post of 1 of August 2007⁹⁰ the residents of Ventorrillo presented different copies of letters and documents they were accepted in the different administrations. These copies are published in their Flickr account of Ventorrillo ⁹¹. In this photo blog, there are different pictures and letters. In these letters we can read how they described their problems and what kind of support they asked.

The letters are hand written and they are signed by one person. In companion of these letters, there is a manifesto signed by all the residents of the building, with their ages and their Spanish identity number.

All the letters and the manifesto are dated in Madrid from the 18 July 2007. The 18 of July date has a lot of political symbolism in Spain, because in the 18 of July of 1936 was the failed coup of Spanish fascists against the government of the Spanish Republic and the starting point of the Spanish Civil War.

At the end of every letter, after the signature, there is the web address of the blog and the email of Ventorrillo 7.

The letters are sent to different authorities in Madrid in that time:

- The manifesto.

All the letters included a *Manifesto* from the tenants of the building. This manifesto was composed by two pages and in the end with all the signatures, names and the identification number of the residents, which support the denounces manifesto.

The topics⁹² of the document starts with the problems of the property bubble generates to, in the end, their particular problem of landlord harassment. Concretely, they manifest *“their repulse to all the unfair system, that let or sustain the enrichment of speculators at the expense of the general public, with severity with the weakest”*. They denounced also the brutal growing of the price of housing in the last 10 years that *“nobody has tried to stop and it represents a fierce aggression by the economic power to all citizens in general”*.

All this made the right to access to housing impossible because everybody has *to destiny a big part of their salary to pay a mortgage of 40 or 50 years, that it lets them the right to a roof”*.

These big mortgages are a problem that impede the enjoyment of the right of housing because convert to the individuals in *“a person fettered and enslaved to the most repugnant*

⁹⁰“Seguimos en la lucha” <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2007/08/01/21/>

⁹¹el7deventorrillo - Flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15169117@N05/>

⁹²I have done a brief of the principal topics of the manifesto with an approximate translation but not always literal translation with the same words.

exploitation; a person that he will be never free, and his life will not be complete, because he will always afraid of loose his job and so, his home".

They describe that *"maybe the city halls has found another way more to obtain incomes"* but what the citizens need, *"are housing available for the most modest economies"*. Because speculators greed has not limits this affects also to the people that they have not been able to buy a house, *"who have been years or all their life in a rental house. The harassment to these people to evict them from their houses, is continuous and in the limit of mafia actions"*.

In the end of the manifesto, in the second page, there is an accusation and a demand for help:

"The affected of Ventorrillo 7, WE ACCUSE, to all by their passivity, allow cases to continue to occur cases like the starring by Sistema 23 S.L. We appeal in demand of help with the security that our petition will not be forgotten in the void. We send, with all our affection a fraternal greeting."

- *Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón*, member of the People's Party (PP), mayor of Madrid between 2003 and 2011.

This letter is sent to the mayor of Madrid. In the first paragraph they defined this letter as *"This request in demand of justice"*. They remark that this case is having an important media repercussion starting to be known as the case of the *"the irreducible grandmothers of Lavapiés"*. They explain that the grandmothers are victims of another case of speculation by real estate. This real estate is one of the so called *"Asustaviejas"*. They described the identification of the building and the name of the real estate owner of the building, *"which aspire to place the residents in the street and consummate a good real estate business"*.

In the end of the letter, they said that attached to the letter there is a written by the affected, *"included the grandmothers which ultimately are the ones which must say the words that they consider in their own defence"*. The last sentence is *"Mayor, your is the repulse or the esteem"*. In the end of the letter there is the web address of the blog and the email.

- *Ana Botella*, member of the People's Party (PP), chief of the Department of Environment in Madrid (2007-2011) and wife of the Prime minister Jose María Aznar (Prime minister from 1996-2004). This letter is a copy of the one sent to the Mayor.
- *Esperanza Aguirre*, member of the People's Party (PP), she served as President of the Community of Madrid between 2003 and 2012.

In this letter the housing speculation is defined as *“modern plague”*. Also like the ones which put *“into practice the most refined technique of harassment and intimidation, these real estate predators which harass who they consider an easy prey”*. They also said that the building was bought in the last June⁹³ and from that date they have been interfering the life of the residents with old rental agreement, some of them are elderly between 70 and 80 years old *“whose lives has passed between the four walls of 20 square meters of their humble houses”*.

In order to made small flats and apartments in the good situation of Madrid centre, and with prices of most expensive areas, the elderly are an obstacle *“who are mistreated from the first hours of the morning”* with the noise of the reforms. *“It have been placed absurd barriers”* with the different struts in the passages, and closing the visibility of the principal door when going to the street, without enabling an alternative protected pass, as it is said in the regulations. Also the real estate wanted to resolve this case fast with *“with the rescission of the rental agreement and the subsequent evictions”*.

The last part of the letter is a critic of the capital accumulation of these companies that they are part of *“the brick club”*. They ask if this accumulation of richness will not be related with the 50 years old mortgages of the young and with the evictions of the elderly. They also ask, if *“¿would it not be better to retrieve for the last one [the elderly] the final solution with Zyklon B and chimney?”*.

The letter continues that this situation should have a change and all politicians of all parties had the obligation to do it. They ask *“are you going to do something for the grandmothers or it will be the anonymous citizens, one time more, the ones who will try?”*

The letter ends remembering that *“nevertheless, because the grandmothers are fighters, they are going to resist and they are ready to fight: they resisted the sufferings and calamities of a civil war, of the post war, the fear, the hungry and the machismo. They trust that they will receive the support they ask.”*

- From the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) (Federación Socialista Madrileña): Jose Luís Rodríguez Zapatero, prime minister (from 2004-2012). Tomás Gómez Franco, Secretary-General of the PSOE Madrid branch (2007-2015). Pedro Zerolo Secretariat of Social Movements and Relations of PSOE.

The letter starts with *“This text is born from the necessity to receive help, the help that is asked to the F.S.M. (Federación Socialista Madrileña (Socialist federation of Madrid), to avoid a new*

⁹³I don't know if it is June of 2007 or 2006.

abuse of the real estate speculation against, as always, the poorest."

The exposition of the problem is similar to other letters. The real estate buy houses with tenants inside with old rental agreement, *"that the real estate speculators call as "with bug inside", has become a fashion and it produces a fast and big profits."* Also that the speculation with the ground for building has become a problem that nobody wants to attend.

They said that in the last 6 years (from 2001 to 2007) *"the biggest revenue is in the building sector and there, they are also the richest between the rich of this country. But these rich people don't create real wealth but business income. They are a social ballast stealing the freedom of the young. For the elderly, the pressure and the harassment, because they are an obstacle for their plans."*

After this they enumerate the problems of the neighbourhood and after these problems, it arrives a new one, the real estate.

- *Francisco Frutos*, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) (from 1998-2009). The same letter is sent to *Felipe Alcaraz* and to *Ángel Pérez*.

This letter is the only one where the writer has had a previous contact with the addressee of the letter. The letter start also with *"Friend Frutos"* which denotes nearness. In the other letters the language is more formal, like *"Ms President"* or they start with *"This request in demand of justice"*

In the beginning of it, he told that *"the 23 of June during a bus trip from Burgos to Madrid"* he had the opportunity to demand support personally to Francisco Frutos, *"in favour of the affected one in a case flagrant aggression against the working class by one of those real estate that grows fast speculating with housing"*. Here is another remark that he is not one of the residents but part of the people working closely in favour of this case.

"They are going to fight for their right to a roof in the place where they have lived most of their lives -in some case all- and where they brought up their families." There is also a postscript after the signature to say that with the letter there is the manifesto *"signed by the affected, who are which have to say the last word in defence of their interests."*

- *Enrique Múgica* Ombudsman (2000–2010).

This letter was sent before the others, maybe it was the first one to be sent, because the Ombudsman has competence to attend to these cases. In the post of 13 July 2007 they wrote that they received the answer from the Ombudsman. The others letters to

different political parties and authorities of the region were written on the 18 of July 2007.

5.6 The blog

We are going to use the blog to find and summarise some of the main points of this history. The idea is to show some examples of the information that we can find in the blog.

Introduction. The Internet has been an upgrade in the political activism environment, with the arrival of different communication tools that were not accessible at other times in history. Castells (2009, 61-71) explained these changes in "*The Rise of the Internet and Wireless Communication*" and this case of Ventorrillo is an practical example of this change.

The blog for Ventorrillo case was something essential. It described the case by the affected themselves. This facilitated greatly the previous work of documentation of journalists before to present the news in their newspapers. Almost in all the news, the blog of the grandmothers is cited. The blog described the evolution of this case as soon as it was an update or important change in the case. A record of the happenings that everybody could read freely, without any necessity to concrete a meeting with the tenants. It is also a way get updates about the case to check what's happened after some time without visiting the blog.

I think that without the blog, the number of news would be less and the case would be forgotten faster. But the blog was a way to obtain a complete picture of the case and in his time, how it has been the evolution of the case, if there are updates. Even today, the blog is a good way to know this case, as this thesis shows in these pages.

Most of the work of the popularisation of this case was done thanks to the coverage of the case from traditional newspapers and television. This popularity can be checked directly from the blog. Many comments said that they found the case after the news were in TV or in a big newspaper, and usually the most commented posts coincide after the appearance of the case on news in TV or in big newspapers.

The beginning. As we saw in subsection 5.2, all the houses of the building where occupied with tenants in 2002, but now in 2007 we have important changes, new owners, a real estate. They revoked all the tenants agreement and with the residents with the old tenant agreement they also tried to evict them with compensation but some of the old tenants preferred to stay in the same houses. Until now the situation is normal, nothing special, the owners should accept that some tenants will leave and others will stay. But it looks that this was not the

case, and the real estate company started the renovation with the last tenants living in the building as a way to difficult the life in Ventorrillo 7.

In the poster and in the first post of the blog, one from the real estate, angry, on the patio shouted: *"I swear by my children, that this rabble will go to the street"*. In this sentence, he insults, he called the tenants as rabble, and he swore that the tenants will end in the street. With this "declaration of intentions", it was clear for the residents that they were going to have problems with the new owners, problems to exercise their rights to stay in the houses, and it was clear that they have to do something to protect themselves.

So the beginning was the change of the owners by others with more interests in the building and the place where it is built, than in the situation of the current residents or their rights to live there. It is true that it is not the function of a real estate to care for the social welfare, but as leaseholder, they have to respect the rights of their tenants.

A brief socioeconomic status. In the first post, from the news of this case in the newspaper El País⁹⁴, there is brief information about the general socioeconomic situation of the residents of the building. The news was published in the paper edition on 1 of July 2007. The building is already with some months of reforms. It is full of construction materials, noises and tools. One of the grandmothers in the news, had received a letter asking her to leave the house before the 13 of June, but she has decided not to leave. This tenant was 82 years old and her flat had 20 square meters.

Amount of residents and their ages. In the news said that the tenants are 5 elder with ages between 62 and 85 years old and they are retired. One of the tenants live with two daughters in others flats on the same floor, and with one granddaughter, so there is also one minor living in the houses. So here we have a total of 8 people living. Later the article said that "the residents now are no more than fifteen".

Size of the houses, rental payment and retirement income. A tenant of 82 years old lives in a flat of 20 square meters. One who arrived at the building during the civil war in 1937, paid 75 euros for her house. Other tenant of 62 years old who has been in the building since 1969, she has a retirement income of 500 euros and 33 euros is for the rent. A 73 years old tenant with a retirement income of near 500 euros. The last tenant in news has 74 years old, she was born in the building. Her grandmother was working as a janitor of the building.

In the web page of the real estate owners of the building, the houses for renting are offered by a minimum of 600 euros. In the news said that they didn't specify what kind of project

⁹⁴Las abuelas del Ventorrillo resisten. El País. Madrid. https://elpais.com/diario/2007/07/02/madrid/1183375458_850215.html My own translation into English of this news is in Appendix B

they want with the reform of this building.

Different negotiations with the real estate to leave the houses. In the news is also one neighbour who decided to leave in next two weeks. He said that he had not received any compensation, only his rent has been condoned by the last two month of rent. One of the residents with 62 was given a compensation to leave of 12000 euros, but she don't want it and prefer to live in her own neighbourhood. Another had the possibility to move to another area of Madrid (Cuatro Caminos) where the company has another flat, but the company didn't accept the amount of rent that the tenant was able to pay.

Denounces in the blog.

- 2 of July 2007: From the news in El Pais⁹⁵. One resident with 82 years old denounces that the real estate *"asked her to leave the house empty before the 13 of June"*(while she had the old rental agreement, and she has rights to stay in the house). Another resident of 85 said that *"she is afraid to go to outside because the because the scaffold with nets that is covering all the facade of the building on the sidewalk, that it makes difficult to see the traffic of the street."*
- 4 of July 2007: *"Meneadas y en televisión"*. In the comments of this post, one old tenant told *"They start around 8 or 9 in the morning the work of destroying division walls, in order to disturb the normal life of the grandmothers."*
- 13 of July 2007: *"Las 'chicas' son guerreras"*. They told that *"The threats continue from Sistemas 23"*⁹⁶
- 20 of July 2007: *"Revista de Internet"*. They presented denunciations to the local authorities of Madrid and they will publish them later. One is for the occupation of the sidewalk that it makes it more difficult to see the traffic on the street. They requested for an urgent inspection from city planning authorities.
- 12 of October 2007: *"Un poco de luz II"*. During the visit of the architect of the offices of town planning of Madrid, the architect confirmed that the owners ignore the legal obligation to maintain the building. The urban authorities of town planning opened a new expedient asking for the start of the reparations in the next 5 days.

⁹⁵Las abuelas del Ventorrillo resisten - El Pais. 2 July 2007. https://elpais.com/diario/2007/07/02/madrid/1183375458_850215.html Retrieved 04.10.2019

⁹⁶Sistemas 23 is the name of the real estate owners of the building

- 6 of November 2007: ‘‘La ‘‘mafia’’ ha vuelto (I)’’. In this post they denounced that the threats have returned. They suffered a leak from a water pipe without protection. They were not sure if it was a sabotage or an accident, but they don’t have proofs. The firefighters came. They had also an unexpected visit from an architect of the real estate that screaming said *“this house is in ruins by your faults”*.
- 14 of November 2007: ‘‘La ‘‘mafia’’ ha vuelto (II)’’. They denounced that the reports of the architect of the real estate didn’t coincide with the conclusions of the reports of the municipal architects. The tenants affirm that the building was not in ruins and it had not ever been in that condition as the real estate said.
- 28 March 2008: ‘‘Luces y sombras’’. After the denounces to city planning, they got the answer and there is not any expedient with the license of the rehabilitation of the building that the owners were doing.
- 29 May 2008: ‘‘Comienzan las hostilidades’’. They wrote that after the recent death in the beginning of May of one of the residents who was ill, the only man of the residents, and he was one of the old janitors of the building, his widow has just receive an eviction order, so she has 10 days to present an appeal to avoid the eviction.
- 27 October 2008: ‘‘Un grito’’. In this post, it is the denounce of the bad conditions of the building after the incomplete reforms of the owners in order to deteriorate the habitability of the building. It is written in first person. It is also the denounce of that the life in that building is becoming too dangerous but she has the compromise to resist with other residents, but the problem is also for her eleven years old girl that is suffering the same than the other residents and she has not age for this.
- 9 December 2008: ‘‘Frío, lluvia and vistas judiciales’’. They denounced the cold and the rain of the winter in their broken houses and the judicial visit that it had to be postponed because the owner didn’t be present. They denounced that this is the owners strategy in order to make this process longer and as a way to avoid the responsibilities. All this is happening to a people between 60/70 years old, and in a building with incomplete reparations done in order to deteriorate the structure of the building.
- 27 December 2008: ‘‘Reunión de Vecinas’’. They had a meeting with the residents. They denounced that to live between reform materials and because the reduced mobility by the age of most of the residents, made the life in this building dangerous.

There had been problems with the accumulated dirt under the scaffold of the street is a hygienic risk because the rodents and the risk of fire. They were also worried because the building was used by drug addicts, so they were forced to close the communal door that traditionally have been open.

- 9 January 2009: ‘‘Crónica de un ‘‘accidente’’ anunciado’’. One of the residents felt over one of the reform structures on the floor of the principal door of the building the 5 of January at 12:56.
- 16 January 2009: ‘‘De juzgados’’. After two postponement, because the absence of the owners, it was the court hearing for the substituting reform by the city hall that the owners were not doing in order to preserve the habitability of the building.
- 18 January 2009: ‘‘Cabreadas, sin luz y sin calefacción’’. One of the resident put a denounce in the Police station.
- 21 April 2009: ‘‘¡Realojo ya’’. They denounced that their situation is the same or even worst. One of the residents is living in the house of a brother waiting the reparation of the floor of her home, because it is 10 or 15 centimetres below the normal. Another has problems with her ceiling affecting the installation of the warm water. Other tenant was still in the hospital after her fall and she is very depressed. They said that they were not going to renounce by many reasons but because they didn’t have another place to go.

Requests in the blog.

- 28 of June 2007: ‘‘Hola vecinos’’. In this post they asked “*support and solidarity with our elders*” they also demanded “*citizen support*”. In the news from the newspaper El Pais linked in this post, like the conclusion of the news they said: “*They fight [against the ones that don’t] let them to live in their houses, the place they chose to life and dead in peace.*”
- 9 April 2008: ‘‘Reunión-Asamblea’’. They remarked that hard times are coming: there are already orders of eviction so they ask for solidarity and help.

Support they received The “Grandmothers of Ventorrillo” received a lot of coverage from the different newspapers and media. In this part, I am going to summarise the support that they described in the blog, as different visits, collaborations and people which showed their

interest in this case and this was described specifically in the pages of the blog. I am not to describe the different news that it covered this case, but the most important support they told from their blog pages.

- 17 September 2007: ‘‘A las barricadas’’. In this writing they had an update from one of the residents of the building, one who has a close cite with the court. In this update she thanks for the support they have received from the blog and news.
- 5 October 2007: ‘‘Gracias a todos’’. They received the visit of the spokesman of the local socialist party, PSOE in Madrid, David Lucas. Accompanying him, there was many media to cover this visit and this case.
- 16 October 2007: ‘‘El schotis del 7 de Ventorrillo’’. Their case was presented in the plenary session of the town hall by the PSOE political group. They also expressed their gratitude by the many supporting signs that they were receiving these days.
- 21 November 2007: ‘‘Mobbing y especulación urbanística’’. In this post they announced that the trade union (CNT Madrid) gave them a room for a colloquium discussion to speak about their case.
- 12 April 2008: ‘‘La nueva ministra de vivienda’’. They talked about the possibility to have a meeting with the local architects and with the spokesman of Socialist party. They congratulated for the new Minister of Housing who always has attended them well.
- 8 May 2008: ‘‘En el ministerio de vivienda’’. They were invited to visit the Housing Ministry by the ministry. She, the ministry, visited their homes to care about this case. The socialist spokesman of Madrid group was also present in the visit.
- 13 May 2008: ‘‘Cámara Oficial de Inquilinos de Madrid’’. They devoted this post to write about the support and the work that the Official Tenants Chamber of Madrid have made in their case. This Chamber of Tenants was described and cited in subsection 3.6.
- 27 December 2008: ‘‘Visita sorpresa’’. They wrote about the surprise visit of the housing ministry, Beatriz Corredor with the spokesman of local PSOE party of Madrid. Like the previous year they came to wish good Christmas and to show interest for the case.

- 3 February 2009: ‘‘Se reanudan las obras’’. Technicians from the city hall of Madrid were in the building in order to resume the reforms and the owners were forced to let them to inspect the building.

5.7 Ventorrillo 7 in the news again in 2019

It was not my intention to write about what happened with this case after it was closed around 2010. But in March 2019 different news started to appear about the beginning of a procedure of expropriation of a building in the area of Lavapiés.

In the news of Eldiario.es⁹⁷ said that *“the City Hall has started a process for repairing and expropriating a building in Lavapiés. Different owners have broken the different orders from 2001, that it requires them to correct the serious deficiencies in this building located in the 7 Ventorrillo Street.”*

In this first paragraph of the news, we obtained two important data for this study: the building is in 7 Ventorrillo Street and the building has not been cared for all this time from 2001. So this process starts after 18 years of negligence of the different owners and by the initiative of the City Hall government of the left coalition with the mayor Manuela Carmena. The news continues that this process is based in the *Local Ordinance law of Conservation, Rehabilitation and Ruin Condition of the Buildings*, specifically, in the article 46 said that *“it can conclude in the expropriation of the building”*. The City Hall started this process after an inspection of the 6 of February 2019, that it verified that the ordered reparations by the town technicians were not done, and they also will put a sanction the current owners, *a bank*.

In the building there are two apartments occupied with *retirees with old rent agreements and the rest of apartments are closed*. The City Hall ordered the reparation of the building in 2001 and 2008 (this second one is described in the blog). But the news said that in 2008 the reparation was only done in the occupied apartments because the owners impeded the access to the rest of the apartments. The numbers of residents *have been being smaller by the deaths of some of their old inhabitants*.

In other news, from El País newspaper (Rodríguez-Pina 2019)⁹⁸ it adds the name of the bank, BBVA⁹⁹. In this news it said that the City Hall has also a pending litigation with the previous owners, probably the ones described in the blog. It adds another article of the law

⁹⁷Madrid abre un proceso para expropiar un edificio por falta de rehabilitación. (Madrid open a process to expropriate a building because of the lack of rehabilitation.) https://www.eldiario.es/politica/madrid-proceso-expropiar-edificio-rehabilitacion_1_1667439.html Retrieved 16.09.2019.

⁹⁸Carmena abre la vía para expropiar un edificio de viviendas en Lavapiés https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/03/05/madrid/1551808238_264982.html Retrieved 16.09.2019.

⁹⁹This bank is a multinational bank group and it is actually the second biggest bank in Spain.

to support this action, and in this case in the Building Code, the article 138. Also said that they have plans to find an alternative place for living for the last residents.

In other newspaper, La Razón, the headline is *"Juana y Juliana: 'we don't want to leave the corrala'"*¹⁰⁰ The city hall has not contacted them and the news said that it was their workers who told these news to them. The only contact with the City Hall of Manuela Carmena have been when the architects had visited their homes. One of the last residents said that she is not leaving her neighbourhood. The residents said that *"the new owners (the bank) only came to see the houses nothing more"* said Juana. One of the residents had in the time of the article 79 years old and a rent of 40 euros. The roof of the house has problems but because they lived in the first floor, the problem don't affect them directly, only the fears of the roof's collapse. The news finished saying if the building is expropriated, the current resident will be located in a new house, applying the program of residential emergency.

The 15 of June 2019, after the Spanish local elections of 26 May 2019, the local government of Madrid changed. While the party of the previous major, Mas Madrid with Manuela Carmena, was the most voted party, the Popular Party obtained council elections due to a coalition agreement between Popular Party, Citizens and Vox. The new major promised *"to end Carmena's inheritance"*¹⁰¹. It is clear that Carmena council didn't finished this expropriation process, they only had time to start it. Three months is not enough time to complete an expropriation.

The new conservative council has a different line than the previous one, more in favour that housing has to be regulated by markets and they are against large public housing. For example, the Popular Party sold many buildings of social rent housing to the Vulture business investing capital, Blackstone, when as published in the news ElPais: *"in 2012 and 2013 the city of Madrid sold off 6,844 municipally owned properties, making €261.8 million on the sales. These included the aforementioned 1,860 homes, which had been originally rented out as part of city programs to assist low-income families and the young"*¹⁰². Many families which were part of the municipal public rented houses were forced to leave their homes after the purchase of Blackstone. For the Popular Party was more important to sell these public buildings, in order to recover part of the debts of the municipal company, than the right to access adequate housing.

¹⁰⁰Juana y Juliana: "No nos vamos de la corrala" <https://www.larazon.es/local/madrid/juana-y-juliana-no-nos-vamos-de-la-corralla-FE22267929/> Retrieved: 11.09.2020

¹⁰¹El PP recupera Madrid y promete acabar con la herencia de Carmena (The PP recovers Madrid and promises to end Carmena's inheritance) https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/06/15/madrid/1560578298_100220.html Retrieved 24.10.2020

¹⁰²Madrid sale of public housing to vulture fund was illegal, report finds. https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2016/04/06/inenglish/1459935560_053995.html Retrieved 24.10.2020.

6 Conclusion

"All Spaniards are entitled to enjoy decent and adequate housing. The public authorities shall promote the necessary conditions and shall establish appropriate standards in order to make this right effective, regulating land use in accordance with the general interest in order to prevent speculation. The community shall participate in the benefits accruing from the urban policies of the public bodies." Article 47 of the *Spanish Constitution of 1978*, about the Right of an Adequate Housing in Spanish legislation¹⁰³.

All the posterior laws developed after the Spanish Constitution in 1978 related with housing, they should have the inspiration and motivation described in this article 47: (i) *"the right to enjoy decent and adequate housing"*, (ii) *"regulating land use in accordance with the general interest"* and (iii) *"to prevent speculation"*. It is also important that the (iv) *"community shall participate in the benefits accruing from the urban policies of the public bodies"*.

It is clear that the article 47 of the Spanish Constitution and the later related housing laws has not prevented the high speculation with housing in Spain. The different parts that redacted the constitution portrayed the problem with speculation and housing. This problem with economic bubbles relating with housing was not new, but the later development of the different housing related laws has not changed the problem with the speculation.

This failure in preventing the speculation is also a failure in the promotion and in the protection of the rights of adequate housing. Therefore, this is translated as vulnerability of the standards right of living, a door for future problems for families and family finance, a delay for the independence of young generations and as a consequence a delay in the development of the country.

Housing has been the Spanish traditional way of capital accumulation, and this has not changed with the laws developed during the democracy period. The authorities had not promoted the necessary basic protection against the inordinate speculation with prices of housing. The speculative benefits that housing has generated, has ended in private companies and particulars, the community has only participated partially in these benefits not as it was redacted in the Spanish Constitution of 1978. Private companies have been the most benefited with this speculation and the rights to an adequate housing the most injured, like during the sixties.

The example of the case in Ventorrillo 7 street, served us to present a practical example of how a group of tenants, in this case elders lived the property bubble from their own experience. The problems of gentrification of the neighbourhood became the problems of their

¹⁰³Spanish Constitution 1978 https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-1978-31229

daily life, and in the case of elderly, this economic model of the property bubble (with high prices of housing and long mortgages) was not available for their living situation. The property bubble pushed them away from different fronts, and these elder parts of the population were mostly depending only from their retirement pension, families and relatives and not by themselves.

It is not the business of real estate companies to care about the current residents. They work with the buildings and the place where the building is built. It is not their business to take care of the welfare of the tenants of a neighbourhood. It is not the problem of these companies, that the old residents will not have purchase power to live in the reformed houses. Social welfare is not competence of real estate business.

But housing businesses are regulated by different laws and they have also limitations. While they were like the motor of Spanish economy during that time, the rights had to be respected, in this case of the elderly, while the people with these problems were few. The rights to access to housing should be protected, and in this case the speculation and the bubble were against these rights. In the particular case of Ventorrillo 7, the real estate company knew which kind of property they were buying. So while it is not their business to care about old residents, they took advantage of them, for obtaining a cheaper building because the building was inhabited.

This case gives us a different gentrification environment. In this case, the gentrification doesn't mean necessarily the displacement of the old residents, because they can reclaim their right to live in the houses because of their old legal rental agreement. So we could have a situation where after the renovation of the building, the residents would have the same rights to stay in their old houses, and with more or less the same conditions. In this case the process of gentrification can be seen including the point of view of the old residents.

But to reclaim this right, they depended on themselves and many of them were not aware of their right to stay in these houses, they were only tenants. This ignorance of their rights was used sometimes as advantage by real estate companies, that evicted them easily while they could have rights to prorogue the agreement. There was not any special care for these vulnerable old residents with old agreements, because usually only the property had all rights over the building, and the tenants were only tenants, while tenants with right to indefinite renovation of the agreement, but tenants at the end.

As has been described in these pages, the property bubble didn't remove *the right to housing*, but it made more difficult and expensive *access to housing* for all social classes and the conditions, many times impossible. The worst part of the property bubble, like all the bub-

bles, was that everywhere the prices of houses were high. The government didn't put efforts to control the speculation, the bubble, and as it was shown later, this was a big economic mistake, when the bubble crashed and the affected by the bubble were most of the population.

Housing has a part for business, but all the houses can not be part of the speculative housing market. Here it is when the right to access housing works as a mechanism to control speculation. If the right to housing is protected against speculation, it could be a clear limitation for the property bubble, taking outside of the business many houses like the one of the Ventorrillo 7, where the old residents with special rental agreements should be outside of these speculative markets. This is not only a protection of basic rights, but also a protection against speculative bubbles.

The news from 2019 updated the case of Ventorrillo. After the crash of the bubble many companies went bankrupt and the bank took the houses of these companies as recovery for their loans. The owners of Ventorrillo 7 lost the building and the place got another new owner, in this case the Bank BBVA. The banks after the crash had many real estate properties from different bankrupts and in most of cases they don't care about the buildings. They usually don't pay the community fees and as in the case of Ventorrillo, they didn't care about the building, while they are forced to care for it because the building has still two families with rental agreements living there. This can be used as a proof, that they are not forced to care the building and in this case, it is not because the lack of money, but it is because there are not enough legal resources to control the owners to maintain the habitability of the building. The last intent of expropriation was a possibility that it could correct these situations, but it have never been used until now¹⁰⁴.

Because laws have not been made to prevent speculation with housing, or to warranty the access to an adequate housing, the problem of housing in Spain have been mutating in different new ones, based in the same business of speculative bubbles with basic necessities. This speculation has usually the same ending: big speculation with housing and more difficulties to access adequate housing for families, that they will need them for living, not as a way to earn big amount of money in a short time.

After the crash of the bubble and during the years of recession, a new bubble appeared, but in this case a housing rent bubble (Blanco-Romero 2018). This bubble has produced absurd situations in many cities where workers were unable to find a suitable home because of the expensive prices of all rent houses: *"The rental bubble continues to swell and excludes resi-*

¹⁰⁴In this case the expropriation process was only in the beginning, it was not complete

dents and workers from the market¹⁰⁵". <https://www.diariodemallorca.es/mallorca/2018/07/08/burbuja-alquiler-sigue-hinchandose-excluye-3162768.html>. As in the case of the property bubble, the term "bubble" was controversial and many didn't call this as a bubble, while the prices were higher than in times of the property bubble and still in the economic time of recession.

Social workers in this case. The social workers are not mentioned in this case. There were many different professionals but not any social workers. The Madrid's social services didn't sent any social workers by their own initiative, despite the media repercussion of the case, maybe because they considered this case an internal problem between owners and tenants, and because the tenants affected didn't ask for social workers interventions or support. The workers from the city in this case were mostly technicians to check and repair the building, but this was because the denounces and the initiatives of the tenants.

In the post of 21 of April 2009, *¡Realojo ya!*¹⁰⁶ they wrote about the possibility to find a temporal place for the time between the new reforms were made, and the different local housing companies and institutions of the city of Madrid were mentioned in the post. In this case, the social workers would have to study the situation and to find a temporal location for them, almost for the elderly ones if they didn't have other temporal places.

After the crash of the bubble, the Municipal Company of Public Land and Housing of Madrid: EMVS¹⁰⁷ had many debts, and the conservative government decided to sell many publicly owner buildings to different vulture funds, as Blackstone and Goldman Sachs¹⁰⁸. Many of these buildings were inhabited by different vulnerable and in difficult situation families. At that time, they were told that their rental conditions would remain the same, but when the contracts expired they were evicted or the rent was updated to a higher one¹⁰⁹. They organised themselves in a platform "*Yo no me voy*" (*I am not leaving*)¹¹⁰ to stop this economic operation.

In this case, the EMVS sent different social workers to facilitate the eviction process of the families. In a video of the platform, they expressed their disappointment with this action of the social workers, because the tenants wanted to stay in these houses almost until they legal

¹⁰⁵Original in Spanish: "La burbuja del alquiler sigue hinchándose y excluye del mercado a residentes y trabajadores".

¹⁰⁶¡Realojo ya! <https://el7deventorrillo.wordpress.com/2009/04/21/>

¹⁰⁷EMVS - Empresa municipal de Vivienda y Suelo. <https://www.emvs.es/>

¹⁰⁸This sale was consider later illegal by many reports: "*Madrid sale of public housing to vulture fund was illegal, report finds*" https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2016/04/06/inenglish/1459935560_053995.html

¹⁰⁹Special Report: Why Madrid's poor fear Goldman Sachs and Blackstone <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-housing-specialreport-idUSKCN0ID0GP20141024>

¹¹⁰Yo no me voy - Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/pg/YoNoMeVoy>

process was ended. The social workers come only with orders of the conservative politicians that sold the building, in order to ease the eviction of the tenants, without caring about the necessities or wishes of some of Madrid's most vulnerable people.

The tenants of the EMVS presented a complaint of landlord harassment, because by their opinion, it was done specially against the elders one, with telephonic calls by the social workers of the EMVS. The complain *"is based on the "pressures" that they neighbours say they have suffered, mainly the elderly, through telephone calls from social workers of the EMVS with they tried to "force them to leave their homes by renouncing their contracts"*¹¹¹.

This opens a moral debate about the position that a social worker should take, if they should be with the municipal housing company, with the politic decision that sold the building and with the municipal company where they are working, or with the tenants that they don't want to leave, but they should assist in avoiding the eviction process as they wish. In any case, a social worker should listen to both parts before to taking any actions. In this case the position of social workers is not easy.

In the case of Ventorrillo 7, the tenants wanted to stay in their homes as it was their legal rights, the owners must repair their homes as they are forced by the laws. Usually the social work here would be when the eviction process is accomplished, and if the old tenants would need to find a new place to live. This explains why the social workers were not asked to help them in this case at that time, when they were trying to stay in their old homes. I think the social work could be a help in this case, in order to give advice and legal support in the demands of the tenants against the real estate. But in this case, the old figure of the social workers as workers when the disasters are happened, in this case the evictions, didn't help much.

¹¹¹Los vecinos de "Yo no me voy" presentan la próxima semana su querella criminal contra Ana Botella por "acoso inmobiliario". <https://www.elboletin.com/nacional/72053/querella-criminal-acoso-contra-ana-botella.html>

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Appendices

A Rental laws in Spain

Spanish Constitution of 1978. The right of an adequate housing is in the Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution: *"All Spaniards are entitled to enjoy decent and adequate housing. The public authorities shall promote the necessary conditions and shall establish appropriate standards in order to make this right effective, regulating land use in accordance with the general interest in order to prevent speculation. The community shall participate in the benefits accruing from the urban policies of the public bodies."*¹¹²

The different Rental Laws in Spain in 2007. In the period of time of the Spanish property bubble, three different lease contracts were in force. They were done in different periods of time under the different rental law that was in the time of the agreement in force.

These three rental laws are (Blas 2004):

- 1964: Urban Tenancy Act. In Spanish: *Decreto 4104/1964, de 24 de diciembre, por el que se aprueba el texto refundido de la Ley de Arrendamientos Urbanos*.¹¹³ This law was published 29/12/1964 and was in force until 01/01/1995. The particularity of this law, was the infinite lease renewals of the lease contracts. They also had the possibility to be transferred to other familiars or residents in the building. This infinite renewal agreement is the most important issue to understand the cases of landlord harassment. While the law was in force until 1995, the infinite renewal agreement was repealed in 1985, so the tenants with lease agreements done before 30 April 1985, have today the right to renovate this lease indefinitely.
- 1985: Boyer¹¹⁴ Decree. In Spanish: *Real Decreto-ley 2/1985, de 30 de abril, sobre Medidas de Política Económica*.¹¹⁵ In the Article 9 of this law, the infinite renewal of the lease agreement was suppressed. All the lease agreements done after June 1985 are under the law of 1964 but without the infinite renewal agreement.
- 1994: Urban Tenancy Act. In Spanish: *Ley 29/1994, de 24 de noviembre, de Arrendamientos Urbanos*¹¹⁶. With this law, the old tenant agreement from 1964 was revoked.

¹¹²Spanish Constitution 1978 https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-1978-31229

¹¹³<https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1964-21865>

¹¹⁴Miguel Boyer Salvador, was the Minister of Economy, Treasury and Commerce, and this decree is known by his name.

¹¹⁵<https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/1985/04/30/2>

¹¹⁶<https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/1994/11/24/29>

B Reportage: The Grandmothers from Ventorrillo resist (7th July, 2007)

Translation of the article: *Las abuelas del Ventorrillo resisten* https://elpais.com/diario/2007/07/02/madrid/1183375458_850215.html By Pilar Álvarez published in the printed version of the newspaper El Pais on 2 of July 2007. Retrieved for this translation on 18 November 2013.

Neighbours with ages between 62 and 85 from the Embajadores neighbourhood join efforts against a real estate agency to avoid the eviction from the Corrala where they have been living for decades.

Pilar Álvarez. Madrid. 2 July 2007.

"If I go, it will be dead". Luisa Martín, 82 years old, sitting on a chair in her home of less than 20 square meters. In front of her, a television next to an old refrigerator. A thin wall separates the appliance from a dress up area where you have to come in by one side. Another partition wall and her room. Next to the bed, an electric WC that she installed after decades using the communal WC in the patio of the corrala. In a power failure on the electrical grid, the cistern doesn't work. And nothing more. Or nothing less.

Luisa Martín considers it as her only possible home. A mail merge from the real state agency that bought the corrala where she lives, asked her to leave. "We require you" said the letter, which invited her to leave the flat "completely empty, free of obstacles, and household free" before the 13 of June.

Quite the reverse. In her home it does not fit a pin. And her history would not be more than one more, in an old evicted neighbourhood for transforming the building in a new place. But it is not the same old history. It is not because Luisa Martín has said no. "From here I am not leaving", she repeats.

She is not alone. Others four neighbours, with ages between 62 and 85 years old, have rejected to leave the corrala, built in 1900 in the Ventorrillo's street (Embajadores). They argued that they were fighting. "We have resisted a war, a post war and now we will resist this" said the oldest one angrily, Ernestina Salcedo, 85 years old. "We are prepared to collect signatures, we will put up banners or whatever it takes, but we will stay" she continues .

The grandmothers of Ventorrillo have recruited lawyers, and they are prepared to appear on television, they have asked help from the ombudsman and they appeal to the support of the neighbourhood. "In the local market everyone here knows us, and they encouraged me every day", said Luisa Martín. She arrived in the corrala in the midst of civil war, in 1937.

Those were other times. "I have lived here with my parents, my uncles, my nephews, and my children, I am here by birth and I belong to this neighbourhood", she explained. She paid an old rent (75 "euros"), as did most of the families that are still living in the building, no more than fifteen.

She lives alone. She has six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, but she prefers that they visit her instead to settle and live with them. "I don't want to disturb. I prefer that they make their lives, to enjoy it, they are young".

Between the doors and the windows of the flats closed with bricks, shoring in the patio, the construction bags and the wooden planks, the women in Ventorrillo play normal life. The same life that they have been sharing for decades. Their clothes are still hangs in the ropes (in the patio) despite the dust. The corrala "is being rehabilitated", according to the City Council. The building belongs to the historic centre of the Village of Madrid and it has "structural" protection.

The walls cannot be touched. Also the facade, covered by a green net for months. "We are afraid to go out because that scaffold doesn't allow us to see the cars that come in the street", add Ernestina Salcedo. The responsible for the rehabilitation, the real estate agency Sistemas 23, declined to specify the project. In their web pages, they offer rental studios for a minimum of 600 euros per month. "It is clear that they have to do business, but it can be found a intermediate solution, and let the neighbours live there their remaining years". It is the thinking of José Antonio Fernández, the lawyer contracted by the family of Luisa Martín.

Fernández wants to take to court the case of her client. He thinks that they have possibilities to win. But he does everything to help his client to keep her feet on the ground. "For a lady of her age, to be aware of a demand is not an easy task, but she have to be ready if she have to leave, and I remember her every time that this could happen". She does not really need much reminding, Luisa does not forget it. "I eat bad and I sleep little, the only thing that I want is to stay here", she repeated.

The one who gives more encouragement is Ernestina, she is "again" in this matter. The veteran arrived in the corrala in 1982. Before she lived a few meters from now, in Mira el Sol street, a perpendicular street, where she lived in a similar situation.

An real estate agency bought the building and she had to leave. She resisted seven years. "They evict us because the house was in collapse danger, but it is still standing after 20 years. From my balcony I see my old house", she explained. In the background you can hear the noise of the workers, they tearing down walls and they close down the doors of the lower floor, already empty. They belonged to neighbours who found some kind of agreement with

the real estate agency.

José Antonio Martínez, 65 years old, is one of the neighbours who decided to leave. He had just retired and in less than a week he is moving to Àlava, with his family. "To me, they don't give me anything, they only forgive two months of rent", he tell me.

To Juanita Fernandez they offered 12.000 euros, like two millions of pesetas. She doesn't want it. She prefers her neighbourhood "of all her life", she said quietly while she adjusted her glasses. She has 62 years old, she is the youngest of the resistance group. She works as seamstress and now she lives with a pension of 500 euros, which 33 are for the rent of her home.

They are in the corrala from 1969. "This dust is going to kill me" add from the door of his dwelling, impregnated by the smell of cabbage that she boils in a pan. The "juggling" that she makes to end meet, justifies her diet. "Today and tomorrow, cabbage, another day will be eggs". It is the only one that sometimes gets emotional, near to drop tears. The others clench their teeth.

As Ángela Guallart, she is 73 and she has been for a month with bad feelings. "I am becoming ill", complains. They offered her to change her flat for a rental flat in Cuatro Caminos. Her home is in the last plant. "They told me that I could decide the amount I wanted to pay, when I said around 100 euros, there was not any answer", she added.

Her pension is less than 500 euros. She lives door by door with her two daughters. The minor and his granddaughter by one side, and the eldest by the other side. All the family in the same plant. The story is the same in the case of María Solís, she is 74 and she has a friendly face. It is almost lunch time. The women appears with a piece of bread for Ernestina who, with the confusion, she has forgotten to buy it. "That is why we are here", said directly.

She is the shyest of the group, she hides behind her neighbours in the pictures. She is also the oldest in the building. Her grandmother was the doorman of the building, where she was born and where she played when she was a child with her four brothers. The same place where now her granddaughter plays.

The five have shared their life in the corrala. The happiness of the old times when the building was full of visitors in the party of Saint Cayetano, with children and music.

The sorrows, the illnesses, the widowhood, the lunches, confidences. Now they share their struggle. Their struggle is for letting them to live in their homes, in the place that they have chosen to live and to die in peace.

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