

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

Eva Álvarez de Andrés, Patrik Zapata and María José Zapata Campos

Eva Álvarez de Andrés
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos,
Madrid
eva.alvarez@urjc.es

Patrik Zapata
School of Public Administration,
University of Gothenburg,
Sweden
patrik.zapata@spa.gu.se

María José Zapata Campos
Department of Organization,
Copenhagen Business School,
Denmark,
mz.ioa@cbs.dk
&
Gothenburg Research Institute,
University of Gothenburg,
Sweden
mj.zapata@gri.gu.se

Keywords: Networked social movements, Travel of ideas, Evictions, Economic crisis, Hybrid space, Spain

Abstract

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

A revised version of this paper is published in *Habitat International*:

Álvarez de Andrés, Patrik Zapata and María José Zapata Campos, Stop the evictions! The diffusion of networked social movements and the emergence of a hybrid space: The case of the Spanish Mortgage Victims Group, *Habitat International* (2014),
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2014.10.002>

Introduction

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

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