
Social Innovation in the Times of a European Twofold Refugee-Housing Crisis. Evidence from the Homelessness Sector

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- › **Abstract_** *This paper examines the socio-political role and potential of homelessness NGOs in triggering socially innovative transition pathways towards housing for all during the early years of the post-2015 twofold housing-migration crisis in Europe. Informed by theories of social innovation, governance and housing, and with empirical evidence from Vienna and Madrid, the paper deliberates on the opportunities and limitations of homelessness NGOs in moulding neo-welfare states and setting forward pro-equity housing policy and bottom-linked governance transformations for the benefit of the sector and the populations they serve (e.g., homeless people, low/no-income, refugees). The paper concludes that homelessness NGOs emerged as the core protagonists in finding housing solutions for asylum seekers and refugees in restrictive social housing and expensive housing markets. They also used the momentum to build up strategic partnerships to provoke public debate about the persisting affordable housing problem and the new and alarming integration crisis. The political and societal polarisation over the migration issue, nonetheless, did not prove to be the political moment for a resurgence of collective housing activism and the awakening call for revising over-commodified housing systems and promoting more substantial welfare. As a result of this polarisation, homelessness NGOs and their allies remained subtly political.*
- › **Keywords_** *“refugee crisis”, affordable housing, bottom-linked governance, neo-welfare state, Vienna, Madrid.*

Introduction

The lack of affordable housing is a critical matter in the European Union. Housing prices are growing faster than incomes in most EU cities, making housing costs the most significant item of household expenditure for at least one third of EU households (Eurostat, 2017; European Commission, 2018). Access to affordable land for construction and development of social, public and affordable housing has become a serious challenge as real estate speculation and the high-end luxury housing market heavily affects land prices (European Commission, 2018). At the same time, other speculation-driven developments such as the exponential growth of short-time apartment rentals have claimed a sizeable share of the affordable housing stock in many EU cities (Housing Europe, 2019; Joint Research Center European Commission, 2019). Rising construction costs and public budget cuts on housing programmes have further exacerbated the shortage of affordable housing (FEANTSA, 2016a; European Commission, 2018). Poor households and people who are new entrants to the housing market have suffered the most from this prevalent shortage of affordable housing throughout EU Member States. Non-EU nationals (asylum seekers, refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary or humanitarian protection, undocumented migrants) are the most vulnerable to housing exclusion and the most overburdened by housing costs in all EU countries (FEANTSA, 2018a; FEANTSA, 2020). This housing problem has been increasingly evident in many EU cities since the peak of the 2015 “refugee crisis” when the number of asylum seekers reached staggering levels in Europe¹. The unprecedented peak of asylum seekers and the subsequent reception challenge for EU cities has pressured the housing shortage problem and tested the pre-existing cultural and institutional frames of housing systems in different EU Member States. This twofold refugee-housing crisis has been particularly poignant during the transition phase from urgent temporary housing solutions for asylum seekers to more permanent accommodation arrangements for recognised refugees. As a result of this twofold crisis, access to sufficient, affordable and dignified (semi-)permanent housing by all vulnerable populations (EU and non-EU citizens) has emerged as a key challenge and a major political question for EU institutions, Member States, cities and non-governmental and grassroots organisations.

The EU responded to the refugee crisis with a temporary, emergency-driven policy that included short-term and immediate measures that prioritised security and military concerns over other policy concerns, such as housing, integration and employment (Carrera *et al.*, 2015). This lack of a multi-policy sector approach to the

¹ In 2015, the number of first-time asylum seekers seeking international protection in the EU reached an unprecedented peak of 1.2 million people, double the number from 2014. The three main citizenships of first-time asylum applicants were Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis (Eurostat, 2016).

migration problem has affected the effectual social integration and sustainable housing of recognised refugees, making them vulnerable to homelessness. To fill this policy lacuna, the homelessness sector emerged as one of the main providers of accommodation during and after the asylum process (FEANTSA, 2016b). In light of this reality, this paper sets off with the hypothesis that homelessness service providers (in short: homelessness NGOs)—in their integrative and politico-institutional role—hold great potential in recalibrating injustices in housing systems and designing and materialising socially innovative transition pathways towards housing for all. Thus, this paper aims to answer the following questions: What types of solidarity-inspired and inclusive alternative housing solutions were taken by different homelessness NGOs during the early years of the twofold refugee-housing crisis? What were the homelessness sector's coalition-building strategies in their aim to successfully house and socially integrate both refugees and vulnerable indigenous populations? To what extent and in what ways have they interacted with multi-level public authorities and elected officials for the promotion of pro-equity housing policies and the counteraction of the spiral of speculation trajectories and exclusionary patterns in housing systems? In what manner have these interactions formulated novel bottom-linked governance configurations that hold better potential in accommodating urban transition trajectories in the direction of housing for all?

To answer these questions and gain a deeper understanding of the socio-political nature of homelessness NGOs and their capacity to trigger policy and governance transformations in housing systems during the early post-2015 crisis years, the paper counts on theories of housing (Garcia and Haddock, 2016; Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Paidakaki and Parra, 2018), governance and social innovation (Moulaert *et al.*, 2010; Martinelli, 2013; Moulaert *et al.*, 2013; Swngedouw and Jessop, 2016; Parés *et al.*, 2017; Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Moulaert *et al.*, 2019; Paidakaki *et al.*, 2020) as well as on empirical evidence from the two EU cities of Vienna and Madrid. The selection of the two case studies is premised on the following three criteria: (1) high housing cost burden (total housing costs representing more than 40 per cent of disposable income); (2) refugee population looking for accommodation; and (3) pre-existence and/or emergence of socially innovative housing actors, with a socio-political transformative potential. The research methods mobilised for the purposes of empirical research consisted of document analysis (newspaper online articles, policy and advocacy papers, case-study literature), two one-month pilot visits in Vienna and Madrid in May and June 2018 that included site visits of refugee housing and 32 semi-structured interviews with key interlocutors² (homelessness NGOs, local researchers and scholars, housing activists, non-profit housing advocates, journalists, city authorities, elected officials). In this research, special attention is given to the socially innovative (semi-)

² The vast majority of interlocutors wished to keep their identity anonymous.

permanent housing solutions promoted by homelessness NGOs for beneficiaries of international protection (persons who have been granted refugee status or subsidiary or humanitarian protection status; in short, refugees). The research also focuses on the ways in which the sector has increased its influencing role in housing systems and its capacity to trigger transition pathways towards housing for all.

The first section of this paper brings theories of social innovation, governance and housing in dialogue with each other to conceptualise the dual potential of socially innovative housing actors in accommodating housing needs and transforming the institutional and governance setting that governs their actions and influences their societal impact. The following section empirically investigates the nature of social innovative actions by homelessness NGOs in Vienna and Madrid in the post-2015 era against the background of the cities' unique housing markets and local and national political climate. The last section reflects on the findings and draws conclusions on the opportunities and limitations of the homelessness NGOs in setting forward pro-equity housing policy and governance transformations in the aftermath of the 2015 crisis; it also makes note of the potential catalytic role of the Covid-19 pandemic in accelerating previously pro-equity paved ways leading to housing for all.

Social Innovation and Bottom-Linked Governance

Social innovation is a powerful idea referring to the collective capacity of societal groups to look for alternative futures and meet human needs in the face of societal challenges and crises, which have often been provoked, accelerated and intensified by market-driven development paradigms and technocratic institutional and governance arrangements (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019). In most of the literature on social innovation and community development, generators and leaders of social innovation are third sector organisations (non-governmental/non-profit organisations and social enterprises) who utilise resources in novel ways to address inequalities, deprivation, marginalisation and other crisis mechanisms and offer alternative “recipes” for improving the conditions of excluded individuals and communities (Martinelli, 2013; Paidakaki and Moulaert, 2018; Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019). The primary concerns and enduring questions of social innovation practitioners and scholars are the design of alternatives for the improvement of the human condition as well as the identification and confrontation of exclusionary mechanisms of contemporary policy arrangements and development paradigms (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019). Social innovation, hence, is not only *outcome-oriented* in that it offers solutions to social problems, but also *process-oriented* in that it leads a development trajectory toward more democratic, egalitarian and solidarity-inspired cities (Parés *et al.*, 2017; Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Paidakaki *et al.*, 2020). As such, social innovation is premised on three main

pillars: (1) the satisfaction of material and immaterial human needs (housing, health, food but also visibility, recognition, citizenship); (2) the development of new forms of social and institutional relations and collaborations between individuals and social groups; and (3) the institutional leverage of social innovative practices and the formation of open and democratic bottom-linked governance reconfigurations (Moulaert *et al.*, 2013).

Within this three-pillar interpretation, social innovation and governance are inextricably intertwined and “bottom-linked governance” emerges as a key concept in social innovation scholarship. Bottom-linked governance not only breaks the dualism between “top-down” and “bottom-up” forms of action but also becomes a cornerstone for social change/transitions (Moulaert and MacCallum, 2019; Moulaert *et al.*, 2019). It is understood as a novel governance hybridity between social innovation actors and institutional enablers of social innovation (e.g., including executive/administrative and legislative public authorities, elected officials, foundations, financial institutions) who place more value on heterarchy of self-organisation in networks and unconditional solidarity-inspired action (Swyngedouw and Jessop, 2006; Manganeli and Moulaert, 2018; Paidakaki *et al.*, 2020).

Socially innovative actors build up and are nurtured by democratic bottom-linked governance that is structured by intra-level and inter-level organisational interactions. *Intra-level governance* is built up by the horizontal interactions between and across socially innovative groups and the (co)construction of endogenous institutional capital (alliances, advocacy/pressure groups, policy communities, coalitions, federations) aiming at influencing decision- and policy-makers (Paidakaki *et al.*, 2020). *Inter-level governance* is constructed through the adversarial and non-adversarial interactions between socially innovative actors (individually and/or with their allies) and public and private institutions. This form of governance aims to challenge dysfunctional/pro-market governance arrangements, advocating for solidarity-inspired governance forms and leveraging additional support and entitlements (e.g., through policy improvements, tax incentives, programme experimentation and alternative forms of social funding) for the benefit of the socially innovative actors and their target communities (Paidakaki *et al.*, 2020). In these bottom-linked, governance-forming processes, when institutional structures are open to engage with a heterogeneity of socially innovative actors and their networks, they produce exogenous institutional capital (such as the development of open/transparent/inclusive public participation forums and human-centered public-private partnerships) and create new opportunities for governance hybridities that favour heterarchy and solidarity forms of governance (Paidakaki *et al.*, 2020). The (collective) building of (new) institutional capital emerges, thus, as a fundamental element in transition strategies for universal human needs satisfaction.

Social innovation and bottom-linked governance in housing systems

Social innovation in housing systems commonly emerges in response to social, economic and political (spatial) processes that put universal accessibility to affordable housing in jeopardy. Some of the most important processes, according to Garcia and Haddock (2016), are: (1) globalisation, which prioritises city competition over social welfare; (2) financialisation/(hyper-)commodification, which triggers speculation, capital accumulation and transformation of underinvested areas into super-prime/luxurious real-estate development; and (3) state restructuring and privatised welfare, which leads to more expensive social services, social exclusion and needs deprivation. Byproducts of these large processes are a series of urban injustices and pathologies such as public housing shortages, shrinking social housing programmes, cuts to social services, homelessness, gentrification, discrimination and the potential exclusion of migrants from (publicly-supported) housing, as well as other “othering urban practices” that dichotomise social welfare beneficiaries between the native population (“us”) and the migration community (“them”). National citizens are especially polarised along this dichotomy: some citizens support othering practices often informed by fear, xenophobia or racism, and others struggle against them driven by compassion, charity and philanthropy (Kaika, 2017).

Especially in times of crises, socially innovative housing actors (e.g., non-profit housing developers, homelessness NGOs, self-organised housing movements) activate themselves to build up intra- and inter-level governance structures to advance the (housing) conditions of the poorest and most disadvantaged; to gain better access to and improve the usability of economic capital; and to inform the modus operandi of affordable housing provision (Paidakaki *et al.*, 2020, p.7). To accomplish their objectives, housing social innovators act in different ways in terms of what and how to demand and whom to target. Some fight against displacement, gentrification and exclusion while others fight for housing and tenants’ rights, fair rent, rent regulation, housing accessibility/affordability, new public housing construction and deeper public subsidies for social housing. Their tactics and strategies cover a wide range of actions, from eviction blocking, street demonstrations, political mobilisation and electoral participation, to legislative/programming/policy lobbying, campaigns and urban plan proposals targeting powerful groups/opponents (e.g., pro-growth housing developers), public authorities and elected officials (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Acting either offensively or defensively in their bottom-linked interactions with influential actors, housing activists have aimed at marking turning points for hegemonic housing systems and constructing a *neo-welfare state* whose primary purpose is to incentivise and finance with deep subsidies a diverse terrain of housing actors in the most socially just way, while at the same time securing equal access to housing for all (Paidakaki and Parra, 2018). The neo-welfare state enables long-term systemic change and the building of a

different world that actually provides housing for all through the promotion of diverse economic forms (cooperative, non-profit, for-profit, private, public) and by introducing and consolidating new complementary value systems (mutuality, reciprocity, and social solidarity) (ibid). Some of the actions that the neo-welfare state is expected to lead are: (1) the decommodification and definancialisation of the housing system through rent control, secure tenancies, public ownership of land, public financing, limits on speculation, “Housing First” approach to homelessness; (2) the expansion, defense and improvement of the publicly-owned housing stock available to all needy; (3) the increase of housing production by the non-profit housing sector, and (4) the democratisation of housing policy by opening up the housing system to broader democratic scrutiny and input (Madden and Marcuse, 2016).

To understand and dig into the transformative potential of housing activists in response to the twofold housing-refugee crisis in Europe, the next two sections empirically investigate social innovative practices of homelessness NGOs in the cities of Vienna and Madrid. This investigation is embedded within the housing market context and political climate that these practices played out between 2015 and 2018. In turn, the last section scrutinises the potential of these practices in triggering transitions towards novel governance formations that would better lead to housing for all, and makes some initial reflections on the prospects of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic in accelerating the observed social innovation manifestations and bolstering their transformative capacities.

Refugee-Housing Crisis and Social Innovation in Vienna

At the outset of the European refugee crisis in 2015, Austria was confronted with a severe crisis in refugee accommodation (FEANTSA, 2017). The country recorded 88 430 asylum requests with 14 413 people being granted asylum and 2 478 subsidiary protection (UIA-Urban Innovative Actions, n.d.). Asylum seekers originated mainly from Afghanistan and Syria, but also from Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Kosovo and Somalia (STATISTIK AUSTRIA, 2016). During the asylum procedure and the four months following the asylum status being granted, migrants in Austria are entitled to basic care (board and lodging, medical care, counselling and monthly “pocket money”) (Aigner, 2019, p.782). Once people are granted the asylum or soon after, they are entitled to the minimum income for food and accommodation expenses and are free to move and live in any Austrian province. More than half of the refugees move to Vienna because of its diversified labour market and large ethnic communities. They have, nonetheless, been confronted with pressing housing shortages. Unentitled to apply for public housing during the early years of their refugee status (see “Wiener Wohn-Ticket” below), refugees are either forced to live in the private rental sector—often in overcrowded flats rented out by migrants to the newcomers

for an unreasonably expensive price—or, if they display some sort of vulnerability (e.g., addiction, illness, analphabetism) and are in need of social worker support, they are allowed to stay in shelters and flats run by homelessness NGOs. In Austria in 2018, non-EU nationals were on average 6 times more likely to systematically live in overcrowded conditions (FEANTSA, 2020).

The housing system and political climate of Vienna

Vienna has predominantly been a rental city that, in the last decade, has witnessed a rapidly growing population and an urgent need for new housing production. Two thirds of the population lives in an apartment that is regulated. This includes both social housing built and managed by housing associations (the main vehicles for state-led housing provision), which mostly cater to the middle classes, and council housing owned by the city of Vienna which is the largest flat owner in Europe and accommodates mostly the lower-middle classes. The other one third of the population lives in housing provided by the free market sector. Within the private rental segment, there is a sub-segment of housing units designated for migrants. This sub-segment, according to local researchers, is mainly owned by previous generations of migrants that rent out often substandard housing to newcomers at high prices.

Since 2000, private investment in the Viennese housing market has been lucrative, thanks to the drastically reduced public subsidies for housing and a clear preference for financial market-led privatisation in national housing policy (Lang and Novy, 2014). Public expenditure for housing decreased by 33 per cent between 2007 and 2017 (FEANTSA, 2020). As a result, most of the new construction activity has been led by private development companies who make high-end apartment complexes in the central districts of Vienna (1st, 2nd, 7th, 9th, 15th) to sell to well-off foreigners and investment funds. Private companies have also progressively accumulated small property owned by natural persons and radically changed the business model traditionally operated by small landlords. This new up-market housing construction in central Vienna combined with the liberalised rent regulation in the private rental market that has been effective since the early 1990s (i.e., possibility for fixed-term contracts, rent liberalisation, urban renewal program, “location bonus”), have resulted in skyrocketing rents (Kadi, 2015). Between 2008 and 2014, rents in Vienna increased by 22 per cent (and 28 per cent in the private sector); this represented a particularly alarming increase for the 36 per cent of the low-income population renting in the private rental market (BAWO, 2018; FEANTSA, 2018b). Between 2008 and 2016, homelessness also increased by 32 per cent (FEANTSA, 2018b).

In 2015, the city of Vienna did not have an organised refugee housing and integration policy in place. In contrast, the city government (and its coalition between Social Democrats and Greens) had a bonus system for long-term residents through the *Wiener Wohn-Ticket* [Vienna housing-ticket]. This system included a council

housing allocation policy that put newly recognised refugees at a structural disadvantage (Aigner, 2019); according to two interviewees (local researchers), it reflected Vienna's shift in policy from integration to diversity, whereby no specific measures were expected to be made for different groups. Besides little access to council housing, recognised refugees with little means also struggled to access social housing offered by housing associations. These non-profit housing providers did not include social criteria or urgency in the allocation of their housing stock and only occasionally and exceptionally dedicated a few of their flats to specific vulnerable people in cooperation with homelessness NGOs.

Given the current political climate and housing policy framework in Austria and Vienna, how have homelessness NGOs reacted to the twofold crisis? How have they responded to the housing needs of destitute people and rearticulated the (power) relations of actors orchestrating the local housing system? Magnifying lenses are put on the actions of socially innovative homelessness NGOs in Vienna in finding housing for newly recognised refugees; in particular, the manner in which they have used the twofold crisis to challenge pre-existing social policy voids, institutional fallacies and for-profit housing market dynamics that have generated and reinforced housing exclusion.

Social innovation evidences in the homelessness sector

A prominent socially innovative homelessness NGO in the city of Vienna is Neunerhaus. A pioneer in the Viennese homelessness sector, Neunerhaus has long been promoting long-term de-institutionalisation solutions for homelessness with the introduction of the Housing First pilot programme of 2012 (Wukovitsch *et al.*, 2015; Garcia and Haddock, 2016). In 2017, after witnessing the rising housing costs and shortage of affordable housing for low-income people and recognised refugees in Vienna, it further drove de-institutionalisation of homelessness by founding the Neunerhaus Social Housing and Real Estate non-profit GmbH (in short: neuner Immo). Neuner Immo is a subsidiary of Neunerhaus and a hundred per cent non-profit limited company (GmbH) established with a dual purpose: (1) to act in the housing market and provide people in need with immediate access to housing and (2) to promote its social aims (e.g., improvement of access to affordable housing by people in poverty and refugees and the cessation of competition between those two destitute groups for welfare resources) (neuner Immo, n.d.). In 2018, the main target group of neuner Immo's mobile service programme was recognised refugees.

To accomplish its aim for housing needs satisfaction, neuner Immo has mainly cooperated with housing associations to secure flats for its target groups and partnered with Neunerhaus for social support services. The novelty of neuner Immo is the mediating role between two "policy worlds"—the housing system and the social system—previously unmet in Vienna. Neuner Immo provided socially innova-

tive solutions not only in accommodating housing needs, but also in its cooperation with housing associations and other (social) construction companies. In doing so, it has established a new institutional capital in the housing system of Vienna, informed by novel interrelations between the Viennese housing/building sector and the social/homelessness sector. This mediating role has allowed *neuner Immo* to be treated as an equal housing partner in the Viennese housing market: one that facilitates the acquisition of houses for the homelessness sector clients and that offers specialised services to the housing sector, such as eviction prevention.

Neunerhaus, in their role as a leading organisation of the Austrian umbrella organisation of homelessness service providers *Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe (BAWO)*, further enhanced/bolstered the social relations between the social and housing sectors. In 2017, *BAWO* started to lead a participatory process together with experts from the public administration, private and social real estate, and planning and homelessness to build networks and trust as well as draft and publish a position paper on affordable housing (“Housing For All: Affordable. Permanent. Inclusive.”). During a series of workshops and at the Congress of *BAWO*, contacts were made across experts and links were intensified between homelessness and housing policies. During these interactions, *BAWO* had a dual goal/expectation: (1) to manifest and prove to the building sector their expertise in housing policy seen from their unique homelessness perspective and (2) to show both within its members and across the various sectors involved that homelessness can be solved not by focusing on a small group sleeping rough but by collectively designing strategies to guarantee decent and affordable housing for a broader target group. In fact, the Austrian Federation of Limited-Profit Housing Associations (*GBV*), following the *BAWO*-led workshops and interactions, took a series of actions including: conducting a survey of social projects and initiatives taken by their members; disseminating good practices across its members; consolidating homelessness prevention methods and promoting the Housing First approach model. The position paper was also used as an instrument capable to transform the homelessness sector itself. The paper was destined to be offered across *BAWO* members and other homelessness NGOs and raise awareness/educate homelessness practitioners about the importance of housing (housing market, tenancy law...) in solving homelessness and widen the understanding of the issue beyond alcohol/drug abuse³.

³ The most important claims in the policy paper include: strengthening of the rental market; preservation and expansion of limited-profit housing; improvement of access to limited-profit housing; expansion of municipal housing and certainty of its accessibility; encouragement of the usage of vacant apartments; stimulation of needs-based housing development; more financial benefits towards housing (*BAWO*, 2018).

Through neuner Immo and BAWO, Neunerhaus further triggered embryonic transformations in the Viennese housing system, at least at the discursive level. The non-profit organisation neuner Immo focused its work on making its voice heard (on a political and policy level) on the need to innovate the housing system. It did this in a unique way, interacting with CEOs, property managers and developers of construction companies, in a communication campaign that underscored the affordable housing problem in Vienna for homeless people and refugees and the need for the (social) housing sector to work closer with homelessness NGOs to tackle this social problem. Companies who saw the validity of the points made became open to new forms of collaboration. Neunerhaus also lobbied for a “housing for all” objective through BAWO and used the alliance as a platform for wider and deeper cooperation between construction companies and homelessness NGOs. In doing so, it has opened a wider range of housing market options to homeless/low-income people and refugees and increases the affordable housing stock, both from the income and the housing cost perspective. As Elisabeth Hammer, BAWO chairperson, eloquently explains:

“Our aim in the beginning of this project was to point out that homelessness services—regardless of their important role in supporting homeless people—cannot solve the housing crisis in a structural and sustainable way for homeless people and for other groups suffering from a housing shortage. The end of this project is marked by understanding that BAWO is part of a broader alliance of parties/players, which can, due to a particular position, promote “housing for all” with a specific focus on people with low income. Successfully building a bridge between players in housing and social politics was one contribution to positively promote “housing for all” as a crucial social challenge for the future” (BAWO, 2018, p.3).

BAWO’s lobbying activities in the city government promoting affordable housing was complex and challenging because of the Social Democratic party’s different views on housing policy. In particular, BAWO challenged the narrative that separated indigenous homelessness with refugee homelessness; it built up an influential counter-narrative—one that highlighted the need for housing for people without housing, regardless of their income and/or nationality. BAWO found the position paper useful in lobbying all political parties in putting housing affordability high on their agendas and in catalysing a connection between the allocation system of council housing and the homelessness sector (which had not previously existed in Vienna).

Refugee-Housing Crisis and Social Innovation in Madrid

Complying with the distribution quotas proposed by the European Commission in 2015 to relocate asylum seekers from Greece and Italy to other members states, Spain pledged to offer asylum to 17 337 asylum seekers (Bris and Bandito, 2017). For a country accustomed to influxes of predominantly economic undocumented migrants and with a weak asylum tradition in place, this pledge put the “so far invisible” asylum issue higher on the Spanish national and municipal agendas. According to one interviewee (local researcher), the conservative party governing Spain in 2015 was mindful of the potential reactions in electoral terms of their constituencies over the migration issue and claimed for a European solution to the “refugee crisis”. The two largest Spanish cities, Madrid and Barcelona, contrariwise, were openly favourable to welcoming refugees. On August 29th, the mayor of Barcelona initiated the development of a network of Spanish cities willing to host international protection seekers, while the mayor of Madrid pledged €10 million to host asylum seekers in the city and hung a white banner outside the city hall reading “Refugees Welcome” (The Local Spain, 2015).

To be able to receive this number of international protection seekers, the government launched two special programmes in 2015 and 2016 respectively, which channelled subsidies to a wide network of NGOs mandated to increase the volume of available spaces for the first phase of the reception system (i.e., accommodation in reception centres or facilities) (Bris and Bandito, 2017). In 2016, 900 spaces were finally available across Spain and only 744 refugees arrived from Italian and Greek camps (Bris and Bandito, 2017). The real “refugee crisis” for Spain started in early 2018, with influxes of asylum seekers fleeing Ukraine, Colombia and Venezuela, but also El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. The total number of people affected were 42 025, a record figure in historical terms, mainly from Venezuela (14 995), Ukraine, (4 645), Colombia, (3 375), and Syria (2 680) (CEAR, 2018). In 2018, Spain was one of the five EU countries that registered the most asylum applications, putting pressure on the inadequate and undercapitalised reception systems (FEANTSA, 2020).

In Spain, there is no differentiation between housing solutions for asylum seekers and refugees across the different phases of the asylum process, which lasts 18 months (or 24 months for extremely vulnerable). Both groups are housed in reception centres during the first phase, in Refugee Reception Centers or in NGO-run centres in the second phase, and in independent accommodation with financial and social support by NGOs in the third phase (FEANTSA, 2020). Once refugees are registered as city residents in Spain, they are supported by social emergency and integration resources and services of local governments (temporary housing/shelters, education, public health centres etc.). However, these services

are designed mainly for the typical profile of homeless populations (long-term rough sleepers, male, 50 years old with substance/alcohol abuse history) and not for refugee families who represented the new reality. In Spain, non-EU nationals are 5.8 times more likely to be overburdened by housing costs and 5.7 times more likely to systematically live in overcrowded housing (FEANTSA, 2020). Between January and June 2018, Madrid hosted over 900 asylum seekers in their emergency shelters.

The housing system and political climate of Madrid

As opposed to the housing system of Austria, Spain has been traditionally a homeownership-oriented country. Since the Franco era, housing policy in Spain has put emphasis on homeownership and, hence, incentivised housing construction to sell under a complex set of subsidy schemes (Gonick, 2016). During the 2000s, the Spanish housing policy promoted the liberalisation of property and land markets, speculative real estate development and construction booms (Janoschka, 2015). This speculative bubble burst in 2008 and resulted in almost 320 000 evicted people by 2013 (Barbero, 2015). In 2009, the massive evictions gave birth to Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (in short PAH), a platform for people affected by mortgage arrears (Romanos, 2014; Barbero, 2015; Díaz-Parra and Mena, 2015; Janoschka, 2015; De Weerd and Garcia, 2016; Garcia and Haddock, 2016; Lopez, 2017). PAH's most successful action was to stop evictions. However, a lot of their attention was to put pressure on private and public institutions to increase the rental social housing stock that was less than 2 per cent of the total housing stock (García-Lamarca, 2017). Despite this effort, several municipal and regional authorities sold their stock of public housing to private funds in order to deal with the municipal debt. For instance, in 2013, the regional government of Madrid sold about 5 000 rental apartments (with rents under the market rate) to equity/international finance investors, including Goldman Sachs and Blackstone (Gonick, 2016; Pareja-Eastaway and Sanchez-Martinez, 2017).

In the shadow of the foreclosure crisis, Spanish housing policy has shifted its focus on the private rental market—a section of the housing system that represented 12 per cent of the housing stock in 2017 (Pareja-Eastaway and Sanchez-Martinez, 2017). Under the new housing policy, private landlords are incentivised to make their empty apartments available in the housing market and often encouraged to add social criteria in the rental price. This new focus on rental units was largely based on the assumption that more units available in the market would lead to lower rental prices. However, as housing bubbles do not follow the market law of demand and supply but rather build upon expectations, prices for rentals in Spain have dramatically increased due to the exponential growth of short-term apartment rentals, new strategies of real estate investment, and the golden visa programme that allowed foreigners (e.g. Chinese, Russians) to purchase properties of more than half a

million euro in exchange for a residence permit in Spain. Rents of public housing rental units also skyrocketed (up to 900 per cent) when leases expired (Pareja-Eastaway and Sanchez-Martinez, 2017). The housing market in Spain has thus been immersed in a new bubble. The unaffordability of rental houses, especially in city centre areas, has become the contemporary conflict in large cities of Spain and the root cause behind evictions for rent arrears.

In response to the rental-housing crisis, new movements have emerged in Spain (e.g., the tenants' union "Sindicato de Inquilinas e Inquilinos de Madrid") with the purpose to stop evictions from rental units through campaigning and provocation actions. The city government of Manuela Carmena (2015-2019) also started to build new social housing units. Nonetheless, the city administration's housing policy was moderately ambitious due to the high debts of the local housing company that have to be urgently cleared. Out of the 4 000 houses envisioned to be constructed, only 1 500 units were finally completed by 2018, which has led the city administration to focus more on buying from private owners for renting. Access to social housing can be gained by residents legally residing in Spain at least for five years without interruption—a restriction that largely excludes all newly recognised refugees.

Social innovation evidence in the homelessness sector

Provivienda is a homelessness NGO that socially innovated during the early years of the post-2015 refugee crisis; a non-profit association established in 1989 in Madrid, it aims to respond to residential needs, especially of people in situations of great difficulty. Provivienda was one of the partnered NGOs managing the first phase of the asylum process as a response to the government's needs for hosting centres and places for the high number of asylum seekers in Spain. As opposed to other NGOs involved in the management of this phase whose accommodation model focused on large centres (e.g., CEAR, Red Cross), Provivienda treated refugee reception through the "Housing First" lenses, offering individual houses that would better accommodate, empower and integrate asylum seekers and refugees. Their accommodation model was based on rental agreements; either between the NGO and the landlord, or between the refugee and the landlord, in which case Provivienda functioned as the guarantor. During the first year of the refugee crisis, solidarity-led landlords offered housing abundantly, making the establishment of rental agreements an easy task for Provivienda. At the aftermath of the attack in Nice in 2016, however, Provivienda was enormously challenged with increasing its network of apartments because refugees were seen as a risky population by landlords. As a result, it resorted to expensive private housing market to continue implementing its housing model.

Provivienda's expertise and leadership in finding houses was acknowledged by the HOGAR SÍ Fundación (here on Foundation), a social initiative entity created in 1998 to eradicate homelessness. Valuing the importance of complementarities between NGOs, the Foundation partnered with Provivienda for their Hábitat programme. In 2018, Provivienda also partnered with other NGOs (CEAR, ACCEM, Red Cross) building up new endogenous institutional capital taking the form of a new informal group working on social intervention and improved housing accessibility conditions for people in need. The monthly informal meetings of the group served as platforms with a dual purpose: 1) to map out the problem of accommodation for refugees in Spain during the second asylum phase and find solutions to address it and 2) to make the housing problem more prominent in the social politics agenda and harvest deeper government support. Provivienda also collaborated with housing activists beyond the NGO-complex, such as the PAH. However, this type of interaction between grassroots movements and NGOs was rather limited. This was due to their competing views on how housing activists should engage with public authorities, and also because PAH's main interest was not refugee housing, but rather rent speculation, massive social housing buying outs, Airbnb proliferation and urban touristification. As a result, PAH has been closer to new tenant unions and other traditional social movements and prioritised the real estate/housing model in Madrid as their focal conflict.

More evidence of inter-institutional interactions around the urgency of the two-fold crisis was a workshop called "De sin Refugio a Sin Hogar [From refugee to Homeless]" organised on June 13, 2018 by FACIAM, a network of nine homelessness NGOs. The main themes discussed during the workshop were: the new reality of migration in Spain with the arrival of forcefully displaced populations; the changing profile of people occupying the homelessness sector; the inaccessibility of the rental housing market and the new housing bubble in Spanish cities; the ethical imperatives and division of responsibility in receiving and integrating refugees; the (economic) inefficiencies of the present asylum system and the perspectives of rights and responses from public administrations. Present in this workshop was the First Deputy Mayor of Madrid who interacted with various homelessness NGOs (e.g., FACIAM, CEAR, Caritas Spain) expressing her openness to develop a policy tool that would adopt a holistic approach to refugee integration. Homelessness NGOs challenged the city administration on the affordable housing shortages in the city—especially public housing shortages and their constraining allocation criteria—and the limited public funds supporting NGOs (FACIAM, 2018).

Conclusions

Scrutinising social innovation in the homelessness sector during the early years of the twofold housing-refugee crisis in Europe, important lessons emerge with respect to the potential politico-institutional role of homelessness NGOs in paving new governance and policy trajectories for housing for all/ housing-led models (e.g. Housing First). The influx of refugees in 2015 shed light on the existence of weak welfare states that focus more on quick and temporary emergency accommodation for asylum seekers and pay insufficient or little attention in the development of long-term social housing policies and programmes for the housing needs of the most destitute. This long-lived disinvestment in social housing and the absence of political vision revealed an *integration crisis* that has become a significant concern for homelessness NGOs in the years following the 2015 refugee crisis. In response to this new crisis, homelessness NGOs became the core protagonists in finding housing solutions in difficult housing markets for asylum seekers and refugees, mediating between the refugee and the housing builder/owner. They also used the momentum to intensify the promotion of housing-led solutions to homelessness and the integration of social/homelessness policies with housing policies. Opportunities for fighting housing exclusion patterns—at least at the discourse level—have especially arisen with the development of new institutional capital both in Vienna and Madrid. These opportunities have taken the form of formal or informal coalitions between and across homelessness NGOs and inter-institutional, bottom-linked, partnerships between homelessness NGOs, housing associations (in Vienna), private landlords and public authorities. The new claims for “housing for all” in Vienna, and the pursuit of sustainable housing solutions for Spanish and non-Spanish citizens in Madrid, have given prominence to the issue of (social) housing and rendered the homelessness sector a fundamental catalyst and precursor for changes in public social/housing policy and governance. This catalytic effect was especially stronger in Vienna as compared to Madrid because of its differently structured homelessness and housing sectors. The pre-existence of a well-established national umbrella organisation of homelessness NGOs working closely with its members and promoting their interests in different state and institutional arenas as well as the long-standing existence of regulated social housing providers in Austria offered a more productive framework for novelties to emerge (see the pioneering establishment of a non-profit limited housing company under the auspices of a homelessness NGO) and for building and maintaining bridges between the homelessness and housing “worlds”.

Alas, powerful speculative real estate activities in cities as well as the political cloud over the migration issue that divided/polarised Europeans (including Spaniards and Austrians) between pro-refugee and anti-refugee citizens, landlords and decision/policy-makers, have hindered a contextual provision of “real affordable houses for

all” to gain ground. These “Janus-faced” reactions to the refugee crisis have played an instrumental role in blocking transition potentialities in the direction to housing for all. The 2015 refugee crisis, with its divisive and politically sensitive character, did not prove to be the political moment for a resurgence of collective housing activism and the awakening call for revising over-commodified, market-driven, housing systems and promoting more substantial neo-welfare states that invest in the social housing sector, including housing for the recognised refugees. What we witness, instead, is a bi-directionality in the management of the reception crisis: one direction fuelled by an anti-refugee sentiment and another driven by pro-refugee solidarity. As a result of this polarisation and bi-directionality, homelessness NGOs and their allies have remained subtly political and have not built large social movements to mould new post-refugee-crisis imaginaries. Instead, they have engaged more with allied NGOs, public authorities and elected officials to provoke public debate about the timely issue of the integration crisis and the persisting shortage of accessible affordable housing. Through their narrative premised along the lines of “housing for all” and not “housing for refugees”, a slow process has been initiated toward a cultural change within welfare arrangements that treat native and foreign populations as competitors of limited public benefits and within housing systems that have been predominantly informed by pro-growth and market-mediated logics.

It remains yet to be seen whether this homelessness NGOs-led process towards building up a neo-welfare state continues and bares fruit, and whether the initial societal polarisation around the refugee issue will be tamed; it also is to be seen whether the state-society contract around issues of social housing will change during the years of the post-2015 refugee crisis when integration processes will be in full swing. In this examination, the potential of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic in becoming a turning point in how homelessness NGOs politically activate themselves to advocate for deeper subsidies for the Housing First approach will be of catalytic importance. The momentum is seemingly a historic opportunity for homelessness NGOs across the EU to advocate for, level up the ambition of, and implement “housing for all”, as the crisis put housing back at the core of the debate, making it an issue of life or death, irrespective of the administrative status of the housing excluded. Future research on the politico-institutional actions of homelessness NGOs in the aftermath of the pandemic (advocacy, lobbying, overcoming possible conflicts and formulating larger movements with organisations inside and outside the homelessness sector, e.g. housing providers, property managers, construction developers, activists, service providers for asylum seekers/refugees) will reveal the political potential of the sector in becoming more visible and influential in further moulding neo-welfare states and catalysing significant transitions in how housing is valued, priced, regulated and governed, for whom and by whom.



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