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June 2017

# EUROPEAN COALITION BULLETIN





## WHO WE ARE?

The European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City is a platform for the convergence of movements struggling across Europe. After having campaigned for years, we (groups and social movements made up of tenants, slum/self-built neighborhoods dwellers, squatters, inhabitants of inadequate housing, victims of eviction, those affected by indebtedness, professionals and researchers) felt the need to gather in order to strengthen this fight, so that we can take common positions and common action on housing issues.

In 2013 groups had meetings in Essen, Athens and Paris to analyse the European context, and agreed on the need for a platform for the defence of the right to housing and to the city, opposing the advance of neoliberal capitalism in all aspects of our lives, the destruction and commodification of public and social housing, the deregulation of the market, the privatization of space and services, the lack of public investment, the financialization of the systems of provision, and the real estate speculation going on in all the cities of Europe. Based on a view of housing as a commodity and reinforced by austerity, these policies impoverish populations, making access to decent housing more difficult and increasing house prices, rents, evictions, and homelessness. In this way the social segregation of our cities is sustained and deepened.

Our values demand the political, economic and social changes that could enable the realisation of decent housing for all. We also require the right to participate in effective decision-making on the spaces and resources of our cities, the commons that belong to all of us. We want environmental sustainability and the possibility for inhabitants' connection with the countryside. We oppose all forms of oppression, and we see housing as an intersectional issue that affects people differently, according for example to their migration status or gender. We are fighting for real political, economic, social, environmental and urban democracy. The Coalition brings together all movements and people that identify with its principles and objectives and agree to its structures.

For the  
right to  
housing  
and to  
the city!

The coalition is an anti-hierarchical, democratic and pluralistic platform, independent of any political party or religious belief.

Through this convergence we intend to strengthen our local struggles, collectivising different resources and tools across the continent. In sharing knowledge, analysis and strategies, we are building the relations between grassroots organisations, and so creating the conditions for international solidarity. We are also building our capacity for common action to raise the visibility of the current housing disaster and to target its causes. Finally, we want to support the development of alternative proposals, in the knowledge that this goes hand in hand with building the power to realise them.

## WHAT IS THIS?

This is the second of our 6-monthly bulletins. Through them we want to spread information about the housing struggles happening across the continent, reflect on how we are fighting them, and create space for analysis and discussion between housing groups.

We hope this can increase the visibility of housing struggles, so please pass or send it around! If you have anything to contribute, or other thoughts, send to [housing@riseup.net](mailto:housing@riseup.net). It took a while to produce this, so let us know if you'd like to help! We are mostly not writing in our native language, so bear with us.

## ROUND UP

### OCTOBER ACTIONS 2016

#### #EUROPENOT4SALE

**In Serbia** – Don't Let Belgrade Drown wanted to celebrate liberation day in Belgrade and make the struggle visible. They planned a massive concert and announced it before official celebrations, which were thrown out of the public square so Don't let Belgrade Drown was only celebration of liberation day!

**In Spain** – the PAH did an action on Twitter with prepared tweets in advance using #Europenot4sale, which was successful in getting media interest. People sent pictures of many different PAHs.

**In France** – the DAL had planned to protest against illegal evictions outside the ministry, but heavy policing forced them to stop nearby. There is a new campaign to hunt for empty buildings instead of Pokemon, Requisition Go!

**In Hungary** – A Varos Mindenkie organised a demonstration of 800 people for the right to housing, with financial support from the European coalition.

**In Czech Republic** – Wake Up Houses organised a demonstration and street parade, leading to an occupation of the Blackstone offices (the world's largest private equity fund). They were dressed up as cleaners to clean up

the speculators :)

**In the UK** – Radical Housing Network targeted the London MIPIM real estate conference focusing on student housing. They did a video of a stunt collecting money from people going to MIPIM for the charity 'Give us back our fucking rent'. Rent Strike also did an occupation of student housing company's office on the same day.

**In Italy** – Comitato Abitanti San Siro participated in student rally to highlight empty buildings in the city centre and graffitied the messaging.

**In Portugal** – Habita! organised a symbolic action at a central tourist monument with 25m banner in English and Portuguese (a coalition banner)!

**In Cyprus** – the Movement against Foreclosures built alliances, including recognising a common approach with main left party. The action got people moving and went to the central bank and government.

**In Poland** – Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów organised an action at end of October. They had a major victory with municipality to get debt relief for people who had to pay very high rent because they had nowhere to go when they were being evicted.



Don't Let Belgrade Drown - Massive Concert in Belgrade, October 2016

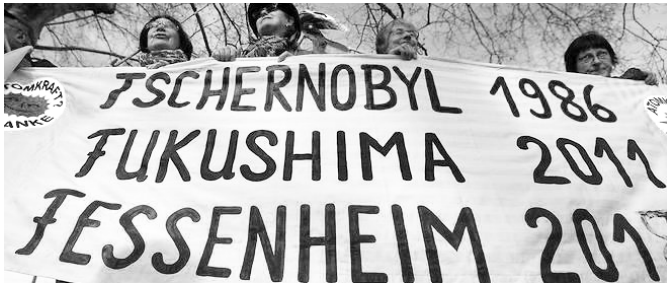
### OCTOBER ACTIONS 2017

Every year in October, movements across the world take action for the right to housing. As the cold begins to hit the northern hemisphere, homelessness becomes even more difficult, and there is Zero Evictions day to mark and UN Habitat Day to hack. Over the last 3 years the coalition has organised weeks of action called 'No People Without Homes, No Homes Without People', and 'Europe Not 4 Sale', bringing together our movements and acting in solidarity with each other, in order to learn and grow.

This year we are aiming for even more coherence, with 2 days of action on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th of October 2017. If you are wondering how to begin to get involved in housing struggles, organising an action might be the way to go.



**If you are wondering how to begin to get involved in housing struggles, organising an action might be the way to go. If you get in contact with [housing@riseup.net](mailto:housing@riseup.net) we can support you to organise an action, however small, and get linked up with other organisers. If you are an existing group and are interested in getting involved let us know. We'll release more information on our website in the future.**



A demonstration in solidarity with Fukushima

## **FUKUSHIMA SOLIDARITY**

We met some organisers from Japan at the World Social Forum in Montreal last August. We've since joined their campaign, and call for international solidarity to support their struggle.

Following the earthquake that struck the Japanese coast in March 2011 and the destruction that followed the Fukushima Daiichi disaster, those living nearby had to be relocated because of radiation danger in those locations. To do this, the Japanese government paid them a housing allowance that allowed them to stay out of the irradiated area, affordably, despite the loss of many homes due to the disaster.

Since then, the radiation level has barely fluctuated in the region, remaining well above the internationally recognized safety standards.

However, on March 31, 2017, the Japanese government wants to not only drastically lower the threshold of radiation deemed acceptable now, but also wants to force the return of Fukushima refugees to their original places of residence by removing any rent assistance. In both scenarios, we consider that this is a risk of severe health hazard and even of life for those affected and it is a flagrant denial of their right to housing. This is unacceptable!

Our organization therefore joins its voice to those of the Citizens' Network for the Evacuation from Radiation, No-Vox Japan and the entire international No-Vox network, and asks for this demands:

### **To the government of Japan:**

- Apply the precautionary principle and to establish in its legislation that 1 millisievert (mSv) per year is the

maximum acceptable dose of radiation;

- Allow Fukushima refugees to live outside of the irradiated area and for this reason, fully maintain their housing allowance;

### **To the UN:**

- In order to respect the right to life and to adequate housing in all circumstances, to adopt an international agreement requiring all governments to adopt similar legislation setting at 1 millisievert (mSv) the maximum acceptable annual radiation dose;

- Call on the International Criminal Court so that those responsible for the Fukushima Daiichi plant, who knowingly lied to neighbouring populations, are prosecuted for crimes against humanity.

**For more information see here**

**<http://fukushima-evacuation-e.blogspot.pt/>**

## **COALITION STRUCTURE**

The European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City is a grassroots network of about 27 groups in 20 countries across Europe. We share skills, run campaigns, and build knowledge. We have a full meeting every 6 months with delegates from all groups, and we are organised in working groups. These are currently Mobilisation, Research, Skills and Communications.

### **Communications**

We have a new communications team for the coalition. We're on a whatsapp group to share each other's struggles internationally, so we can publicise on our social media. If you want to publicise your action internationally, get in contact with [housing@riseup.net](mailto:housing@riseup.net) or tweet to us @4housingandcity. We also produce this bulletin! Get in contact if there's something you want to include or put on the website.

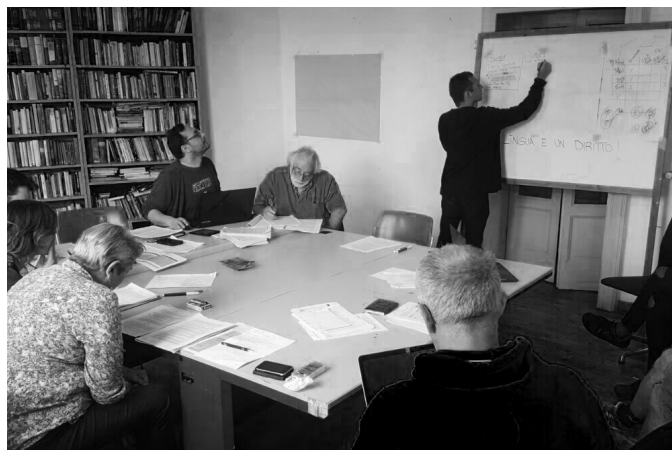
We are producing a general brochure that presents the coalition. It includes our history, our members, and also our politics. This means we are going through a process of agreeing our shared politics and vision at the moment! We'll have it finished by the end of the summer 2017.

### **Financialisation campaign**

We met in April in Milan to build up our campaign against the power of finance in housing and in cities. We decided to have a broad-based campaign that talks about the many forms of financialisation, and gave a lot of scope for member groups to push on their own issues. Though this might make our action more diffuse, there was general agreement to have an awareness-raising campaign that included local struggles, rather than setting ourselves a transnational EU-related target immediately. We will still be doing lots of work on demands, including at our meeting in Belgrade in June, but we won't start out focusing on one single change.

There was a lot of energy around the MIPIM property fair being a central focus for this. The research working group created the working definition below, and is creating a short brochure explaining the different forms of financialisation and how they occur across the continent. Our launch of the campaign will be our actions on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th of October. We'll be meeting at the G20 in Hamburg to keep working together.

**FINANCIALISATION:** a working definition. The complete transformation of housing into a commodity, not only on the real estate markets, but also on the financial



Meeting of the two working groups of Financialisation and Research, Milan, April 2017

ones. This transformation involves the opening up of housing for speculation along with the retrenchment of the social function of housing both as an essential social need and a basic human right.

The financialisation of housing results from the expansion of neoliberal capitalism and its urge for commodification of all spheres of life. Neoliberal deregulation furthers the private sector into appropriating housing and transforming it into a commodity. Moreover, deregulation facilitates the private sector financialising housing, enabling speculation over housing.

There are three fundamental forms that the financialisation of housing takes. The first one is through mortgages for accessing private property, which create indebted families. The second is through the direct and speculative investments of hedge funds, subsequently pushing prices up and making access to housing more difficult. Public-private partnership that supposedly provide social/'affordable' housing to cover for the existing need are in fact the third means of financialisation as the access to it are limited to certain segments of society and those in need. Thus, these housing units also end up under the speculative regime of the private sector.

The main actors financialising housing operate simultaneously on three different levels: trans-/international actors (the EU and its institutions; financial institutions; the IMF, the WB, the ECB), national states and institutions, as well as city and/or local councils. The research working group is undertaking to analyse these differing levels. Even though the financialisation of housing takes different forms in different contexts the consequences are similarly identifiable everywhere: almost

complete privatisation of public housing stocks, hiking rents on the market, multiplication of empty/vacant buildings, land leases for private developments, further gentrification of neighbourhoods, and the touristification of our city centres. These processes have huge social consequences (evictions, homelessness, exclusion, social segregation, unemployment, the infringement of children's rights, degradation of health, general quality of life, and the loss of control over one's own life) for the lives of people.

We need to address all these consequences as they can be traced in different ways by all groups in the housing justice movement of the Coalition.

We've been engaging in plenty of international initiatives in the last months, from activist-scholar conferences, to the AlterSummit in Brussels, to meetings about alternative funding paradigms for activists.

## **ACTION IN GRENOBLE**

**March 2017**

**We have been supporting a series of events and actions in Grenoble from March 7-12th on the occasion of the biennial "Cities in Transition".**

**Alternative debates, workshops and actions are occurring on a wide range of themes, including plenty on the right to housing.**

**These have been co-organised by the DAL, the Atelier Populaire d'Urbanisme and the Forum Géopolitique. By the time this is printed it will have already taken place - we're sure it was a great success!**

## **NEW MEMBERS**

### **A City For All, Frankfurt**

In Frankfurt and the entire Rheine-Main area, we are experiencing a severe housing shortage. For people with low income in Frankfurt the "right to housing" has been de facto abolished. Even with an average income, it has become more and more difficult to find affordable housing in a central location. At the same time people with or without permits have to live on the streets of the self-proclaimed "financial capital". Urban politics fuel these developments instead of guaranteeing social equality: ABG-Holding, the city-owned housing association, owns one fifth of all rented apartments in Frankfurt. However, the association operates like a profit-oriented property investor. In this sense, city politics and the ABG bear responsibility for the housing situation in Frankfurt and the region. We demand an immediate rent freeze for all apartments controlled by the ABG (which we achieved this year), an increase of public housing and the democratization of the city-owned housing company. In the long term, at least half of the existing housing stock must be put under public autho-

rity and should eventually be controlled by the tenants. We have organized a few demonstrations, blocked the headquarters of the ABG Holding, disturbed public events held by city authorities, published many press releases, collected signatures and tried to organize ABG tenants.



A City for All - "Who owns Frankfurt?"

## Urban Reactor, Tbilisi, Georgia

Urban Reactor was established in 2007, and was involved in number of projects and activities concerning education, research, publishing, etc. The main project for Urban Reactor became a platform called Library for the Built Environment Studies which started in 2010. The idea was to establish a space for promoting critical knowledge about urban issues at its broader understanding. Through the library number of key texts were translated, lectures and discussions were organized. At the moment we are working on the research project Housing Supply Policy: Challenges and Perspectives. The aim of the project is to clarify what is the housing policy of Georgian government on central and local levels, acquire knowledge about international experience and to make an initial draft for possible housing policy in Tbilisi capital of Georgia. Beyond the research we are working in partnership with online analytical platform European.ge for promoting knowledge about the issue and publish translations of key texts and our own articles about the subject. In addition we are working with labor unions to start the campaign about affordable housing for the workers.

# URBAN REACTOR

## THE FUTURE

### Welcome to Belgrade (21-25 June meeting)

"City of the future wishes you a warm Welcome" says the Belgrade Investor Guide, one of the many tools with which local government executes its development strategy, one aimed at attracting as much foreign investment as possible, at any cost. Benefits offered include a whole range of financial and fiscal incentives such as significantly lower wage con-

tribution costs, state subsidies for new jobs, exemption from social security contributions, income tax, as well as taxes on profits, free land and cheap provision of infrastructure. In a race to the bottom, the Serbian prime minister even guarantees an offer 5% better than what you would get in any other country in the region.

City officials have proudly proclaimed that Belgrade became "the city of cranes" with 500 construction sites and millions of square meters to be built. Although the productive economy is continuously shrinking, shopping malls, high-end hotels, and luxury housing blocks are booming - setting the stage for an all too familiar economic bubble. And while city officials hope that by creating an image of a city worth investing in, it might become so, citizens don't have much to hope for.

New housing is far from affordable to the average household. In fact, even existing housing is out of reach for the majority. According to the information provided by Eurostat, some 70.8% of the population of Serbia has severe problems with keeping up with housing expenses. The ratio between annual household income and the cost of an apartment is 13 to 1, far beyond what is considered a threshold for state intervention into the market. All the while the only alternative to acquiring an apartment is the unregulated private rental sector (social housing being so marginal that it is hard to claim it even exists).

Most of the existing housing stock in Belgrade was built during the socialist era, when housing was considered a right, and its development was an important pillar of societal modernist aims. Now, housing is a private problem, and an increasingly unsolvable one. The unaffordability of buying or renting an apartment, energy poverty leading to utility debts, foreclosure due to job insecurity and currency fluctuations, and all sort of other evictions are spreading much faster than an articulation of the problem and an accompanying mobilisation of people.

So when you come for the Summer meeting of the Coalition, you can also invest in Belgrade - but in the most important of ways - in its people demanding a more just society. Together we need to interrogate this power of finance, and learn how people are fighting it across the continent. We will be looking at speculation and how people campaign against financialised investment from June 21st to 25th with a series of public events and an internal meeting of the coalition. Welcome to Belgrade!



One slogan of the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City



**WE ARE MANY! WE ARE LOUD!**

**THE WORLD WILL HEAR US**

July 2017, the G20 summit in Hamburg. With the world's 20 most powerful leaders, in a world in deep crisis and turmoil, the world's media will be present. However, not only the powerful and mighty will be there. We will make sure that the voices of the many different struggles around the globe will be "on air" as well: the voices against social inequality, austerity and exploitation; the voices against war and man-made eco-disaster; our voices for solidarity, other choices and visions. We know that we can make our voices heard, if we are loud and clear. Seattle 1999, the global marches against the Gulf War, the squares of Madrid, Istanbul, New York and Lagos, Blockupy 2015 in Frankfurt and the Global Women's Marches proved it.

The G20 will try to square the circle and protect the globalized system of domination from its own self-destructiveness. And they will try to rearrange the whole world in order to serve the interests of the rich and powerful. This is why we, the lively resistance in our many shapes and forms, will be in Hamburg.

Let them set their global issues; we'll set ours. Let them discuss their capitalist development; we will be loud against the exploitation of labour and the destruction of nature in the name of profit and loud for equal rights and gender equality. Let them talk about their "migration crisis"; we will speak up for open borders and against racism; we will address the systematic production of poverty and war that forces millions of people to move. Let them talk about free trade agreements; we will be vocal about transparency, for political, cultural and food sovereignty and against their (post-) imperialist practices toward the Global South. Let them talk about the "war on terror" and the "clash of cultures"; we will shout out for peace and against their war-mongering and torture, against their production of fear and Islamophobia. We will meet their efforts to divide us and rule forever with our creative protest and fierce resistance.

None of us thinks that the world is easy to explain. Yet we are determined to oppose all those politicians who allegedly know best what is good for their countries and the world. These new political figures seem to address the social question, the social effects of a decades-long neoliberal world order. However, we know that in their efforts to keep us divided, they push us into rivalry and hate against our brothers and sisters on the other side of their borders and eventually into their dirty wars. We know their plans and we will not let this happen. We don't buy into scapegoating the weakest of our world in the false hope that this will change the misery of our everyday lives.

Against their rivalry, we stand in solidarity; against their exploitation and expropriation even of the air that we breathe, we put the cooperation of free individuals and the free use of the commons; against their wars, we opt for sister- and brotherhood, for freedom and equality.

We see the protests against the G20 as a chance to send

a strong signal to the world that we are the many who believe in global alternatives. We believe in alternatives outside and against neoliberal globalization, nationalism and autocratic rule. We believe in the globalization of justice and Rights4All and we reject all nationalist and xenophobic "solutions", which are their solutions against our vision for a just world, a world united in solidarity.

The counter summit, the camp, the transnational rally with tens of thousands of people in the city of Hamburg and the mass civil disobedience actions will give us the opportunity to meet, to discuss and to share our visions, ideas and practices of resistance, of a world of freedom, equality, solidarity.

**Allons enfants! In 2017, the Bastille stands in Hamburg!**

The "compact week" of global solidarity against the G20 will give us many opportunities to express the other world and our conviction that it is possible.

At the "Summit of Global Solidarity" (July 5 and 6) or at the open camp (from July 2 to 8), in actions of mass civil disobedience on the day of the official summit (July 7) or at the broad, lively and colorful demonstration in the heart of the city (July 8) we will organize and celebrate, fill the squares and streets of Hamburg, debate and shout out!

Let's make the G20 summit a real counter summit of the many, the disobedient of the world.

Come and join us at the international preparatory meeting in Hamburg on April 7, get in touch with us via email.

See you all in Hamburg! The coalition will be running a workshop on our new financialisation campaign, email us at [housing@riseup.net](mailto:housing@riseup.net) to find out more.

**The International NO-g20 work group**

**<http://g20-protest.info/>**

**[international@g20-2017.org](mailto:international@g20-2017.org)**

**The Coalition's next coordinated actions will be on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th October, with the launch of our new campaign on the financialisation of housing and the city.**

**Keep in contact through our website at [www.housingnotprofit.org](http://www.housingnotprofit.org),**

**@4HousingandCity,  
or [facebook.com/europeancoalition](https://www.facebook.com/europeancoalition)**

## Apollo House

In the weeks on either side of 2016 and 2017, a public intervention was undertaken in Dublin's city-centre to enter and occupy a vacant building, to fix it up to a liveable standard, and to turn it into a safe and welcoming home for rough-sleeping homeless people of Dublin. Under the campaign banner "Home Sweet Home," a loose and at times uneasy coalition of housing activists, trade unionists, and famous artists staged the biggest, and most popular mass occupation of a building Ireland in decades.

The building in question is held by the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), a bad bank created by the Irish government in late 2009 to take property development loans off the books of Irish banks, and was targeted for specifically this reason. Insolvent Irish banks were allowed to swap €74.3 billion in bad property related loans for €32 billion in secure government backed bonds, and NAMA is the state vehicle holding these loans, selling the buildings to international speculators and vulture funds at a massive loss to the taxpayer, and building office blocks instead of public housing. This vacant building, owned in effect by the state which rescued the banks while imposing austerity, was occupied to highlight the contradiction between vacant buildings and homeless people, and to disprove the idea that nothing can be done.

After some clandestine entering and maintenance work, Apollo House was opened on Friday the 16th of December, and as word spread and the story entered the news cycle; there was an explosive outburst of support from the public. After a few days, unsolicited donations had to be turned away for lack of space, and the substantial material supplies were contributed entirely through callouts on social media. Rules quickly had to be fastened for the double signing of receipts to make sure cash donations could be accounted for, and a kickstarter that began life as a way of potentially funding the printing of banners and leaflets accumulated to the point that it ended up constituting a fund that will end up supporting community resources for the next few years.

It was generally assumed that BNP Paribas, the receivers appointed by NAMA, would wait for the public support bolstered by the holidays to die down before initiating legal proceedings, and that the real struggle would begin when Christmas trees started coming down in early January. However, they miscalculated, thinking that the campaign was haphazard and disorganised, and filed an injunction before the Irish High Court the following Wednesday. Not knowing anything about who was in the building or why, they themselves were unprepared and depended on misleading and ultimately false affidavits from Dublin City Council (DCC) stating that there was no need for such an intervention, and that there was an urgent need to evict all trespassers from a building scheduled for demolition six months later. Home Sweet Home brought affidavits testifying to the level of professional experience of builders, security guards, medical, and social care profes-

sionals working voluntarily in teams inside Apollo, and crucially, an affidavit from the respected advocate for the homeless Fr. Peter McVerry that the living standard in Apollo House was very high, and that in reality there are not enough beds for all the rough sleepers. In the end the judge granted a stay of execution on the injunction sought by the receivers, which meant that legally; nobody in Apollo House would be trespassing until the 11th of January. This came with the stipulation that Home Sweet Home would have to work with the receivers, including paying for round the clock security, in addition to the volunteer security team, in order to retain the public liability insurance for the building. That constituted by far the biggest cost, and the rest of the money will go into a radical grassroots community grant scheme, to fund the activities of radical groups and community resources.

The day to day administration of Apollo House was overseen by the Irish Housing Network (IHN), in collaboration with volunteer homeless support groups, taking the IHN's structure of interworking teams focusing on support, outreach, and media to the running of a building, as well as its ethos of being affected-led. This allowed new volunteers to quickly be absorbed into teams depending on their skills and interest, and facilitated over 700 people doing at least one shift. The most notable thing about the volunteers was their diversity, in both class and in politics. Centrist liberals working



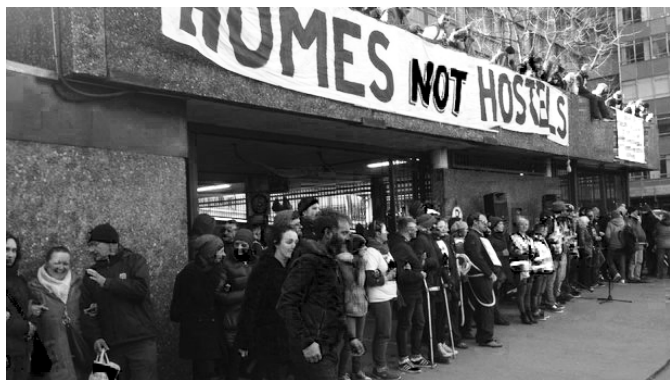
alongside dissident republicans provided for a theretofore unimaginable opportunity for radical politicisation from a first principles perspective.

The positive nature of how Apollo House was portrayed and perceived came down to several fortuitous factors. The first is that having celebrity spokespeople who stood out of the way but gave headline interviews to establishment media organisations gave the project a humanitarian credibility that seemed at first apolitical, and this made the project harder to criticise from the right. Secondly, the media discipline from the first day prevented political opportunists from hijacking the project in the media and also made it easier to control the message, this included daily press releases, press briefings, and press tours highlighting homeless figures and the political nature of the housing crisis in Ireland as well as improvements made each day within Apollo House. Thirdly, by being able to make distinct statements about the politics of NAMA, the political failure of the government parties to address the housing crisis or build public housing, and the inspirational environment of the building and the public support; it was easier to handle the barrage of media attention. Also by making separate criticisms of the city council and the department of housing, city council representatives were for-



ced to publicly respond by criticising the government despite their attempts to present a united front.

The decision to leave on the 11th of January rather than fight the eviction stemmed from the fact that there was an extremely high level of support for residents in Apollo House (only homeless people had beds in Apollo House), some of whom were just coming out of extremely vulnerable situations. This would no longer be possible following a court order that would potentially give occupiers a criminal record, as the social care workers volunteering would lose their jobs. Instead, the groups that make up the Irish Housing Network went back to their communities to regroup, impart the lessons learned, and prepare for the next fight.



Irish Housing Network - Occupation of Apollo House

## AVM - A VÁROS MINDENKIE

How do homeless people, people living in dire housing poverty and their “allies” work together in The City is for All (AVM)? How do we try to reach equality of participation in our group? How do we empower our “affected” members?

From its foundation, The City is for All (AVM) is a joint effort of people affected by housing poverty and their allies to struggle for the right to housing and against the criminalisation of poverty and homelessness itself. Ally is a term referring to the middle class members of the group, typically coming from a social science background with organisational skills gathered from experience in left-wing social justice activism. The underlying idea is that allies use their knowledge in critical social theory and experience in community organising

to help affected members of the group in their development of political consciousness and tactical and organisational skills.

The group’s purpose is first and foremost to be a platform for the political organisation of affected people. For this it is vital that affected members take a huge role in setting the political agenda of our group, present the group to the public etc. However, a certain tension emerges from the inequalities in cultural capital and commonly recognised skills between affected and ally members. However critical the group is towards existing systems of recognition, we can not free ourselves from their implications and effects on group hierarchies.

Problems come from

- allies being perceived as speaking nicely, eloquently
- allies having good communication infrastructures, they have valuable
- they have valuable relationship, they speak foreign languages”
- the public easily identifying the group with one or two ally members, which reinforces unequal recognition and strengthens inner power inequalities

To avoid the reproduction of unequal power structures, we set some procedural rules. The direct purpose of these is to enhance the initiatives of affected members, facilitating equal participation and to counter spontaneous reinforcement of inequalities, or the tyranny of structurelessness.

We try to make power inequalities explicit, concerning not only class, but also education, gender, or inequalities existing between new and old members. We developed a structure, and we are continuously developing a culture that tries to reflect on privileges and lessen their consequences.

The ratio of affected and ally members is around 3-4 to 1, so ally members are always in a minority. This means that for middle class activists, it is very hard to become a member, in the last 4 years 4 ally members got invitations. AVM is of course open towards all people living in housing poverty or homelessness.

We use a special facilitating method in our meetings: we give priority to affected speakers, and also to women, new members, and in general, those who speak less. We don’t use this rule mechanically, it is rather a guideline for facilitators of meetings, and we emphasise the rule



A Város Mindenkié - Photo of an action

more while discussing things of strategical importance. We also encourage our members to take on tasks, especially tasks that go together with more responsibility and power. For more serious tasks, or those that go together with representation, we nominate each other.

We try to lessen the role of internet communication in the group because it excludes from participation those who don't have internet access. We make almost all decisions in our live meetings, so no one gets excluded for not having internet access. But we also try to help our members to get access, through maintaining some computers for usage by members. We also regularly ask our supporters to donate used notebooks, so members who need it for their activist work can use them. Concerning the budget, it is a priority that we can pay for communication fees, travelling to meetings, etc. We regularly organise internal workshops and trainings in various subjects (these are practically internal popular education sessions) such as the basics of internet usage, english speaking, group facilitating, recruiting, meeting with the authorities, or on political, theoretical subjects. We have a very strict rule concerning representation. In the media, or in meetings with other groups only affected members can represent the group, or affected and ally members collectively. In the past, we had to turn down a lot of media invitations because of this rule. It took a while for the media to get used to this.



A Város Mindenkié - Photo of a demonstration

Of course, these procedures have their drawbacks. All these procedures make the group less accessible to newcomers, because it is not easy to comprehend every rule concerning facilitation, representation etc. (which sometimes make internal procedures bureaucratic) and thus to really become a member. Although we have a mentoring system for newcomers, some difficulties of socialisation are inevitable and this makes base-building harder. Because it is very hard for middle class people to become members, those who do get in are usually very experienced organisers with huge cultural capital. This can give way to the false impression that understanding critical social theory or good organisational skills goes together with not being homeless or being a middle class citizen. So this can have disempowering effects. Probably the solution for this is to work on recognising skills that are not well-recognised but can be very important, such as being a good cook or having good mechanical skills.

Two numbers - 2.8 million and 145,000. The first number corresponds to the number of empty homes in France according to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, the second to the number of homeless people according to the Abbé Pierre Foundation

This paradox demonstrates that there are clearly enough houses to provide shelter to all the people who live in the street in France; there is, therefore, clearly also a political lack of will on this question. This is why DAL decided to launch the campaign Requisition GO, modelled of course on Pokemon GO. Don't search for Pokemon, search for empty buildings! The initiative began in Toulouse and spread to Paris; by the time of printing Grenoble, Bordeaux and other committees will have taken it on as well. The eventual objective is simple, of course - to requisition empty buildings belonging to the public or major financial players, but also to denounce and make visible the empty buildings that for practical reasons (security guards, videos surveillance etc) it is impossible to occupy without the intervention of the State.

In every city activists are organising marches to denounce this absurdity. We also set up secure email addresses where people can leave us the addresses of empty buildings. Thanks to this, two requisitions were opened by the DAL in Paris and Toulouse. Both were in empty wings of hospitals, accommodating nearly 200 people. Besides, one of the buildings targeted in Toulouse was also discreetly/by a twist of fate/quietly used by the municipality to make a homeless shelter, a requisition in all but name. Though in Paris the Préfecture, during freezing conditions, quickly accepted the occupation, and in Toulouse the court rejected the demand of the hospital to evacuate the occupied building, the fight is not over.

The growing number of empties poses a question. In 15 years the number has doubled in France, many of them in small cities which have lost part of their population to the major urban areas. It is in particular the number of empty offices which is remarkable in these cities: they are often sold and resold between property deve-

## RÉQUISITION GO!!



Droit au Logement - Photo of an action of the campaign "RequisitionGO", inspired by the PokemonGO game, Toulouse, 2017



lopers, with even social housing providers sometimes taking part in this market. This creates a speculative bubble, which is detrimental not only to homeless people but all working class people by creating a scarcity of housing, and so pushing up rents and land values.

This is why we invite all people in Europe who have similar issues to join the campaign and to use it as they see fit.

## Organisation

In terms of organising the campaign, DAL begins to gather the homeless people on their files and introduces them to each other. The group elects delegates and finds translators for those who need it, when it is possible. They look for buildings to occupy. For one or two months, they will check the addresses in their database and then they ask for it to be requisitioned. They bring the group and occupy it, while also looking for allies to occupy the building in solidarity. These utilities are put in place if not there already. DAL asks occupiers to sign a charter stating that they will participate in collective activities, food, laundry, etc, and a rota of chores is established. They don't take the buildings just in order to stay in them, but to demand that the city buy the buildings and turn them into housing. The occupiers must be housed first for this to happen.

DAL camps are prepared in the same way. Sometimes police disperse people in the tents violently, but participants are prepared for this. When tents are cleared, people stay on the pavements. The participants clear within the 6 hours given by the police notification, but then they move somewhere else and the legal process must be started again. The camps can last for months!

DAL is based on the fact that everyone has a right to housing. It is a federation of groups across France. In each town, there is an info point for DAL. Anyone with a housing issue can go to the info point and a file is created for them. After, a collective group is created from those individuals who are experiencing similar issues. When the group is established they self-organise to choose a delegate from among them. DAL does not interfere in this decision, but it does ask that there is an equal number of men and women in the collective. The delegates are responsible for keeping the collective active.

In the Paris committee for instance, there is a weekly meeting of delegates from all groups in the city where they talk about their group's situations. There they decide the priorities that should be addressed by the collectives. Every month there is basic training for the delegates, for example on how to create a file for a person, or the information to convey when people come for advice. On the first Saturday of the month there is a general assembly where we decide on the three priority actions that will take place that month. Then we take action collectively - we win when we are strong together!

## MUTUAL AID AS AN INSTRUMENT OF EMPOWERMENT AND REAPPROPRIATION OF RIGHTS AND NEEDS

*Comitato Abitanti San Siro, Milan*

The crisis of the imagination is a serious stumbling block to collective struggle. The economic crisis in which we live spreads suffering, fear and powerlessness: losing your salary, not managing to pay rent and bills, not having the money to pay for medical treatment or study, not having a future. This way of life is shown as the only one possible.

It spreads a sense of guilt for a debt for which we are not responsible, a sense of guilt which increases fear and resignation. Without an alternative, it will lead to a war between the poorest who knife each other for a piece of bread while the richest divide up an enormous cake. We need an antidote.

In the streets of Milan or the districts of Athens, experiments of active solidarity and autonomous territories are appearing. The defense of homes from eviction becomes a network of language schools or after-school clubs, a market of essentials, a legal desk, blockparties in the squares; solidarity is contagious when it serves to fight.



Comitato Abitanti di San Siro - First european meeting on housing rights hosted in the Space of Mutual Aid, Milan, 2013

As they say: "to every moment its needs. For every moment its possibilities". Mutual Aid can be a weapon to reconstruct the social fabric of our territory, to help a community regain the power to act, having once resigned itself to unemployment and precarity. In this space we can recreate the welfare that is being cut.

In Milan in 2013 we occupied a space, the Space of Mutual Aid, with the intention of developing a laboratory inside the city that could merge the need to building mobilisations to claim our rights, with the fact of having a physical space to share knowledge, time and energy to build a new community welfare.



We see Mutual Aid as a useful tool for the construction of collective emancipation for the people. Many are resigned to the dominant model and feel powerless - we must reassert the possibility of acting within a community and an area, and through our skillsets build a new welfare.

When you are an unemployed person and still feel useful by teaching Italian to migrants, you can teach any area you used to work in - this gives rise to semi-professional classes and home-made laboratories.

Anybody can give and receive from a community, share knowledge and her or his time: the migrants, who have learnt Italian, can themselves teach their language to others.

Inside the space, in addition to living there, about one hundred people have given life to a Popular Gym, a clothes swap, a popular university with language and music classes, a consumer cooperative that buys food directly from the farmers, an art workshop and a kindergarten.

Whoever participates in the space has access to the free sport courses or self-training in the gym, healthy food, a clothes exchange and other things, as well as taking part in debates and classes, and fighting together to have a house. They can in this way have access to an alternative and collective welfare, by taking back their rights and their needs so often denied.

In the end, Mutual Aid is also the bridge towards a shifting political consciousness, starting off by people frequenting the space because of one particular need, for sports, learning a language or getting their housing needs met. This process can on the one hand stimulate people to make their own contribution, valuing their own skills, and on the other make them become aware of the necessity of getting organized to claim and take back their rights.

Poznań's city council has been forced to stop enforcement proceedings against social housing tenants after the intervention of Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów (Greater Poland Tenants Association). After months of struggle Poznań's city council stopped allowing bailiffs execute warrants on the unfair debts of people living in social housing. From spring 2016 the council stopped referring such cases to the court, which was also the result of WSL struggle. All cases that were in process have been suspended. At least 430 families were threatened by this procedures, but the real number is likely to be much higher. We consider this decision a huge success for the tenants movement in Poznań. In Poznań, debts were incurred by families with a right to social housing, but who were still in private rented accommodation because the city council hadn't provided enough social units. When a family was being evicted from their private rented accommodation, if the family won the legal right to social housing, but there was no vacant one available, the council paid a 'refund' to the landlord of the house the family was living in. After years the council decided to try to charge tenants, because of the money it was paying to private landlords. They started to apply a "penalty rent" to the tenants that were still living in private accommodation, despite having the court decision for the right to live in social housing. This "penalty" rent was 4-5 times higher than average rent in a social house. At the same time the city council was not providing enough social housing, as is its constitutional duty.

WSL strongly opposed these practices and demanded full debt relief. The Ombudsman became interested in this process, and shared the opinion of WSL. The city council is responsible for the housing crisis because of the disastrous policies it undertook for years. At the moment we are waiting for the relevant city council resolution (to entirely cancel the debt) to be submitted for discussion in the chamber - though it was due to be announced a few months ago, there is still no sight of it. Still the council is no longer referring cases to the courts and bailiffs. We will keep up the pressure, and let you know about our ongoing actions!



WSL - Poznań

## A CARAVAN FOR HOUSING!

The reality of housing in Portugal is a multi-faceted one. Before the financial crisis of 2008, most vulnerable groups, including the poor, most migrants and Roma communities were excluded from access to credit and the rental market. As a result, many such households were obliged to live in informal settlements (in many cases out-and-out slums), precarious housing and overcrowded dwellings. A national rehousing program launched in the 1990s funded the massive construction of social housing, but social housing constitutes around 2% of the total housing stock, and is inaccessible to many people. In the existing slums, populations are often faced with violent forced evictions with no



Logo of the campaign "A Caravan for Housing" that will be launched in July 2017, Portugal

alternative. Many people still live in precarious housing; and those who are able to rent end up paying the majority of their income - as a result, often almost nothing is left to pay for food, transport and other essential services.

In the aftermath of the crisis, many lost their jobs (especially in the construction sector, because of the burst of the real-estate bubble) and, at the same time lost welfare protections due to austerity 'reforms'. The so-called middle class, which in Portugal includes households earning around 800 euros a month[1], was deeply affected as well. With stagnating or falling incomes, or unemployment, middle class households cannot afford market rent and, due to the credit crunch, are virtually excluded from access to mortgages.

At the same time, the intersection of many factors - the reduction of credit so more people are renting in a small market, the touristification of cities, the use of housing as a financial asset, the lack of substantive social housing policy, and the promotion of the luxury market for wealthy foreigners - boosted the explosion of housing prices in the main cities. Housing prices rose by 30-40% in large cities and 20% in some medium-size ones in only four years. The total liberalization of the rental market, requested by external borrowers (the 'troika'), stripped tenants of most of their rights, making rental contracts extremely precarious. As a result, most landlords in Lisbon and Porto prefer offering one year contracts, making repeated rent increases the norm, and facilitating the eviction process. Associação Habita! has been fighting for the right to housing since 2005.

We started to support the struggles of the most vulnerable - populations suffering forced evictions from the slums; and in time we came to work with households forced to squat to have a home, with tenants threatened by evictions, and with families unable to pay mortgages. Habita! has been able to promote the self organization of residents in poor neighbourhoods, as well as creating networks among neighbourhoods with shared problems; and is now working to connect the struggles of poor neighbourhoods with middle class movements. Early in 2016, Habita! had a number of meetings with the national government, whose representatives stated there was no plan to develop more social housing policy. Only some public private partnerships were envisaged to include small amounts of affordable housing units to middle-class (hence excluding the most vulnerable) and no such plans have been developed. Habita! has organised many actions in different neighbourhoods during 2016, from juridical complaints, to direct actions, including occupations of the ministry with evicted families. Habita! was able to stimulate media attention, and mobilise some sectors of the civil society. It was also responsible for the organisation of the visit of the special rapporteur of UN for the right to adequate housing. It has also pushed the parliament and political parties for a different agenda. In the ensuing months, the renewed media attention increased the pressure on the government and it was forced to announce it was going to analyse housing needs, and reconsider the need to implement new social housing policies. As of now, however, no concrete actions have been put in place: no timeline or sets of criteria have been released, and dialogue with the civil society is absent. Many groups therefore concluded that this year of 2017 will be crucial for direct action to push for the implementation of new and effective policies.

Habita! proposed to an assembly of groups and neighbourhoods, open letter subscribers, tenants associations and some academic groups to promote a joint action during 2017 with four aims: Keep a sustained pressure on the government, pushing the development of housing policy designed to meet real social need; Maintain and increase the visibility of housing problems; Create solidarity and networks among different neighbourhoods and social groups affected by housing issues, ultimately working for the creation of a common front; State clearly that all these groups and partners



Habita! - Photo of a popular neighborhood of Portugal

have the responsibility and the right to be part of the design of a different housing policy. With such goals, we are planning a project made up of two steps:

1. Launch, during July, a Caravan of Housing, which will travel through different neighbourhoods and places in Portugal over one week with representatives of the promoting groups and neighborhoods, a videographer, artists and journalists. The Caravan will visit those places where housing problems are most pressing, including old and deprived public neighbourhoods, to informal and self-built settlements, to city centres that have become

completely unaffordable. The caravan will give visibility to the reality of housing in Portugal, collecting both problems and proposals from the bottom-up.

2. Organize, during the month of October a national Conference featuring representatives of neighbourhoods and, associations, plus scholars, elected councillors. During the conference, the presentation of the problems and proposals collected by the Caravan will launch the discussion about the housing policy Portugal needs. The main goal is preparing a dossier to be delivered to the government.

# ***NO HOMES WITHOUT PEOPLE NO PEOPLE WITHOUT HOMES***





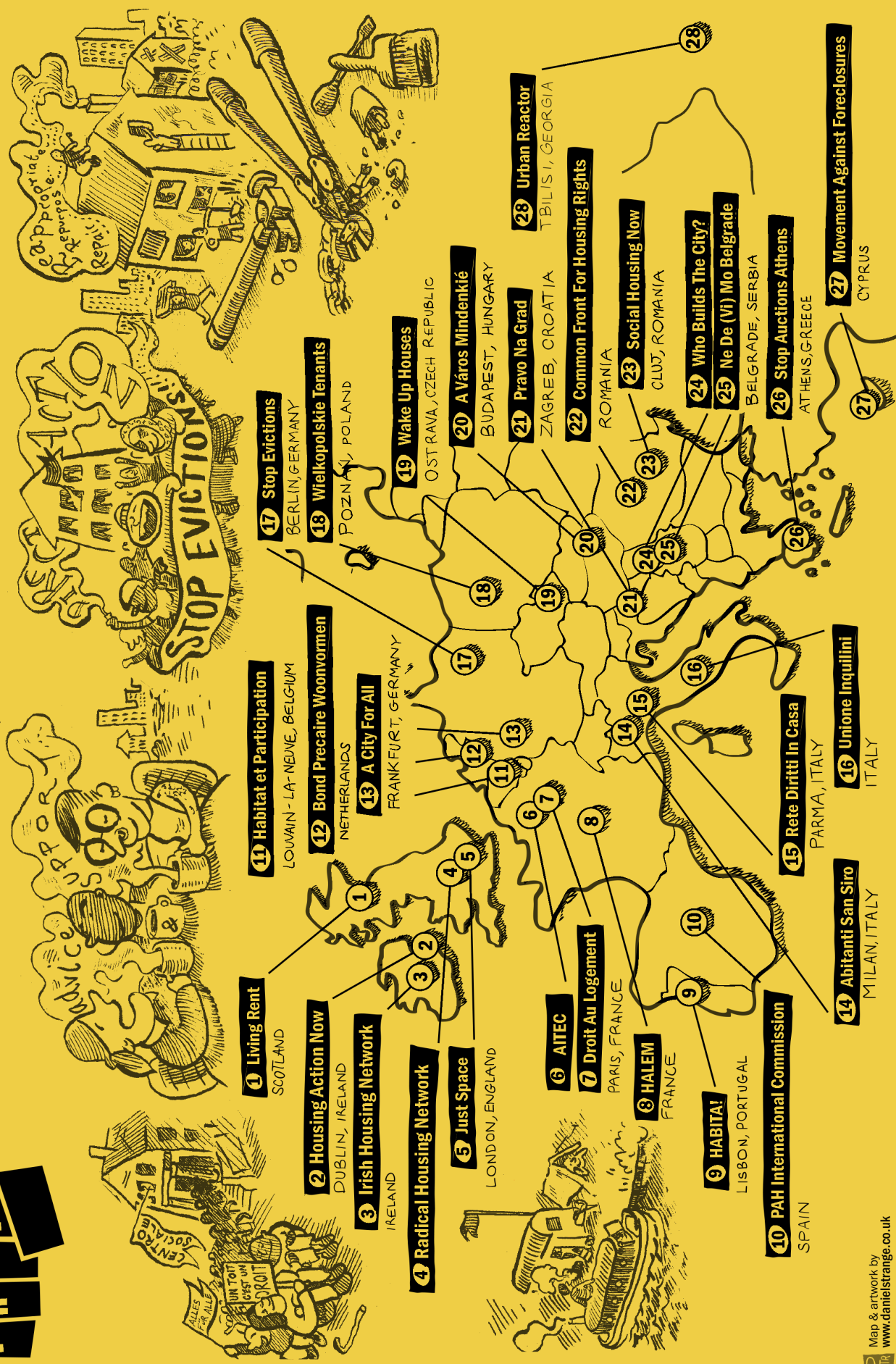


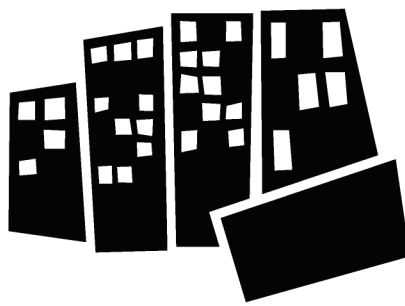
# EUROPEAN ACTION COALITION

FOR THE RIGHT TO HOUSING AND TO THE CITY

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