



## Partecipazione e Conflitto

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### Housing activism and urban space during the Covid19 pandemic. Research notes on the *bairro* of Arroios, Lisbon

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#### ABSTRACT:

This paper presents some research notes from an on-going project on housing activism in Lisbon in the last decade, describing its ascendant trajectory (2012-2019) and the impact that the Covid epidemic had on the local activist community (2020-2022). In particular, the paper focuses on two of the main protagonists of local housing activism, the association Habita and the collective Stop Despejos, and on the relation that they have developed in time with an ecosystem (of sites, groups, projects) that have developed in the last ten years in the neighbourhood of Arroios, which have found a characteristic spatial infrastructure in the *coletividades* (a Portuguese expression that identifies spaces managed by no-profit associations or collectives). The paper examines this relation against the background of two bodies of literature, namely contributions that have examined (i) the nexus between collective action and space and (ii) the different forms of political agency represented by the conceptual pole of "contentious" and "everyday politics". This research is based on extensive data collection (through ethnographic notes, documental analysis, and in-depth interviews, 2020-2022) and on the authors' status of insiders in the process observed.

#### KEYWORDS:

Covid-19, Housing policy, Lisbon, Social movements,

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## 1. Introduction

On of September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019, some 500 people occupied Avenida Liberdade, one of the Lisbon's main traffic arteries, for a demonstration for housing rights. For the whole afternoon, the loudspeakers boomed with speeches and testimonies from the participants – housing activists, resident committees, artists, surrounded by pieces of furniture that they had brought on the streets to symbolize the lack of housing opportunities in the city. At sunset, the people walked down the Avenida towards the *baixa* (Lisbon's downtown), to reach the nearby square of Martim Moniz; during the short route, a sofa was left blocking the entrance of a building that showed the blue sign “AL” (“Alojamento Local”, which in Lisbon appears on all buildings licensed to host short term rentals such as AirBnb). At the southern end of the square, a small stage hosted a musical event, featuring the performance of Jhon Douglas, a local Brazilian musician who had authored a tune that was rather popular among the participants to the demonstration, “*Orientas-me uma renda?*” (“Can you take care of my rent?”).<sup>1</sup>

*Eu quero um casa pra morar, amor!  
Eu tó bem pertinho, eu chego lá,  
já sento o cheirinho de morar com o meu amor.  
Mas quanto que é o salário pra ganhar?  
(chorus) É 600€!  
E uma casa pra alugar???  
(chorus) 1,200€!!<sup>2</sup>*

The demonstration held on September 29<sup>th</sup> was the closing event of the *Festival da Habitação* (Lisbon, September 7-29, 2019). Based on a manifesto signed by over 40 local organizations and groups (Habita 2019), the *Festival da Habitação* (a crasis between “habitação/housing” and “acção/action”) had been scheduled to take place a month before national elections. Among the main organizers of the event, housing activists had planned the festival to mobilize a wider, visible support to housing struggles; the resulting program listed some 40 events in 23 days (concerts, art workshops and performances, debates, dinners, movies, etc.) taking place in various locations of the city (see Fig. 1).

The final day of the festival is an appropriate starting point for this paper, in many different ways. First, both authors were present on the day of the demonstration, and had participated to its organization: one as a member of the collective Stop Despejos (“Stop Evictions”, <https://stopdespejos.wordpress.com/>), one of the main promoters of the festival together with the association Habita (<https://habita.info/>); the other as part of the collective of Sirigaita (<https://www.facebook.com/sirigaitalisboa/>), a *coletividade* (Portuguese term indicating a space run by a no-profit association or a collective) that had joined the organization of the festival and hosted different events of the program. Stop Despejos, Habita, and Sirigaita will represent the main empirical objects of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper have been discussed in HOPE's project seminars; in a session of the UTH reading group, and in the pre-conference organized by the CES' Social Movements Research Network (June 2022). Another session has been held at Sirigaita (October 2022) in order to discuss the first draft of the text with our respondents, which produced many interesting insights; apart from that, we have a huge debt of gratitude with all the people that have helped our research – right up to the last minute, answering our email right before the final submission. We hope that this paper can be a way of giving something back to that community.

<sup>2</sup> “I want a house to live in, my love. I'm real close, I'm getting there, living with my love already smells good. But how much my salary pays? (chorus) 600€! And how much is the rent? (chorus) 1200€!”. Jhon Douglas and JungleBoys, *Orientas-me uma Renda?*, *Jhon Douglas and JungleBoys - Festival HabitAcção*, *Lisboa*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j09Fvfw2NqU>

Second, it was in the following days and weeks that we started to reflect on what the festival could tell us about the genealogy and the perspectives of the housing movement in Lisbon. In particular, we wondered whether the festival had been a success, and observed the key role played in the organization by the network of *coletividades* that had emerged in Arroios in the previous decade. This reflection eventually took a more structured and academic form as a work package of the project HOPES<sup>3</sup>.

Third, and retrospectively, the festival was the last housing protest before the Covid pandemic started. We had originally planned our investigation a short, intensive ethnographic investigation on covering the period between winter 2019 and summer 2020; inevitably, however, the impact of the pandemic became a key factor both for our own logistics, and in the dynamics of the mobilization that we were observing.

This paper focuses on the trajectory of housing mobilization in Lisbon in the last ten years (2010-2022). In particular, we chose to focus on the relations existing between the dynamic of housing activism strictly speaking, and the existence of a local “ecosystem” of sites, groups, projects – an ecosystem that has found a characteristic spatial infrastructure in the *coletividades* of the neighbourhood of Arroios.<sup>4</sup>

The base upon which this project is founded is the authors’ role as insiders and participants in relation to the phenomenon observed. This paper is based on 18 in-depth interviews (from 90 to 150 minutes) for a total of 26 respondents (see Tab. 1); on many more informal conversations held with activists and members of four *coletividades* of Arroios (Sirigaita, Disgraça, Zona Franca, RdA, see Fig. 1); on the abundant material available on Habita and Stop Despejos’ websites and social media, among the others; and on our participation (sometime in an organizing role) to tens meetings, public events, and actions, including all the key steps of housing mobilization in the last three years. Section 2 of the paper discusses the theoretical background of the argument; section 3 provides an account of the trajectory of housing mobilization (2012-2022); section 4 presents some conclusive notes.

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<sup>3</sup> HOPES: HOusing PErspectives and Struggles. Futures of housing movements, policies and dynamics in Lisbon and beyond (FCT, PTDC/GES-URB/28826/2017; PI: Guya Accornero; partners: CIES-ISCTE, ICS-ULisboa).

<sup>4</sup> Administratively speaking, the term “Arroios” identifies one of Lisbon’s 24 parishes; for the purposes of this paper, however, “Arroios” would indicate the so-called “eixo Almirante Reis” (“Almirante Reis axis”, CML 2017). i.e. the area stretching north-east of city’s *baixa* (downtown) – from the square of Martim Moniz to the square of Alameda, on both sides of Avenida Almirante Reis (including areas of the parishes of Santa Maria Maior, São Vicente, and Penha da França).

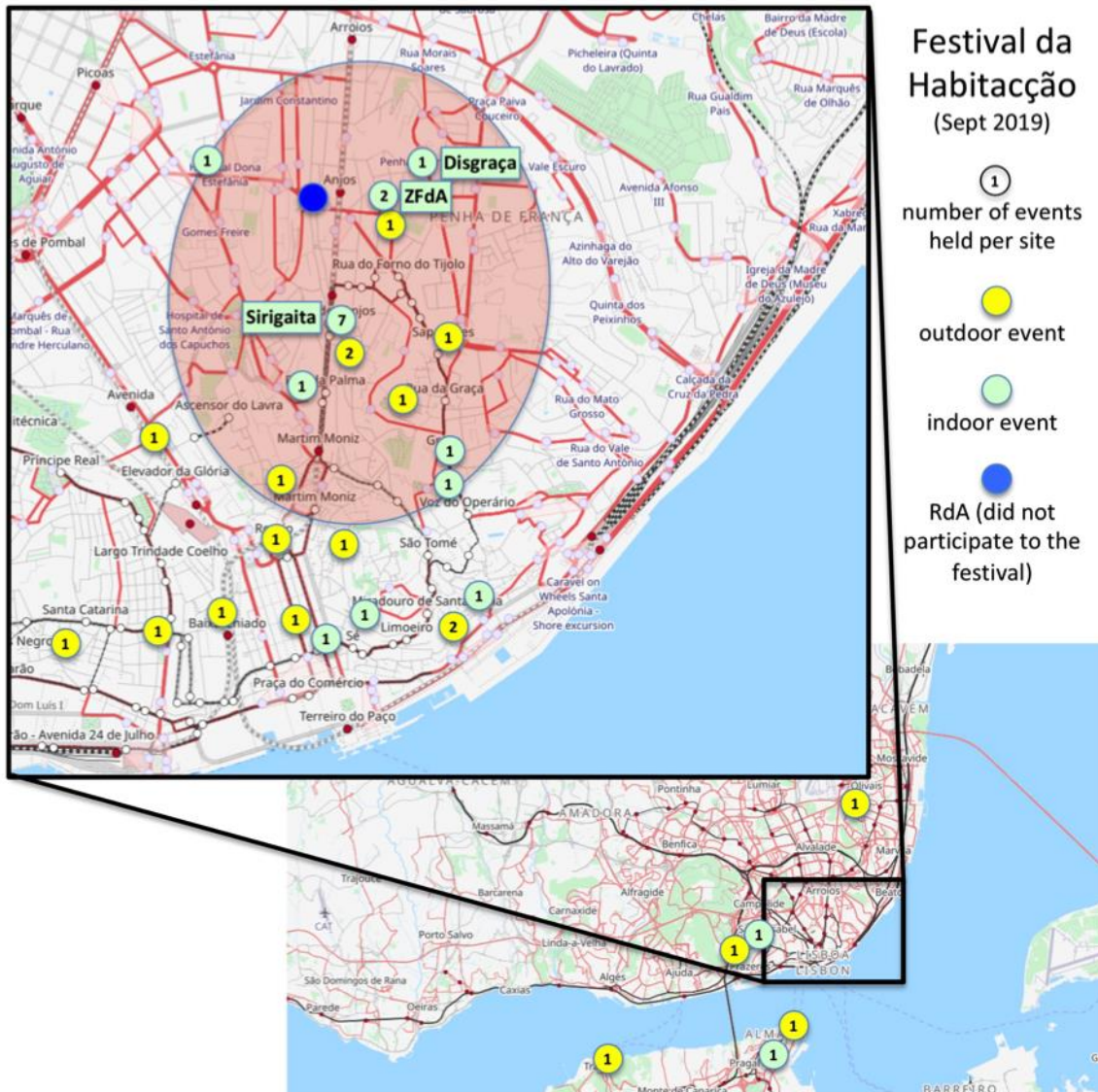


Figure 1 – The Festival da Habitação (September 2019) consisted in some 40 events over a period of 23 days; the red oval indicates the area of Arroios (see footnote 3) (Source: authors’ elaboration on data from Habita 2019, OpenStreet maps)

## 2. (URBAN) SPACE AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Considering the relation between housing mobilization and the “urban ecosystem” of Arroios touches upon two theoretical elements, namely (i) the relation between space and collective action, and (ii) and the reflection on what constitutes political agency in our societies.

### 2.1. Collective action and (urban) space

Decades of scholarship have pointed to the role of space as a key dimension of collective action. Thus, notions such as “urban social movements” (Castells 1983) and “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1991) have been central to academic debates (and beyond) as influential conceptualizations of collective agency in an urban environment. In a similar vein, observing the social and political “effervescence” of cities from a

historical point of view, James Holston and Arjun Appadurai (1996, see also Holston 2008) have suggested that urbanization is a key vehicle for producing new forms of citizenship. Following this line of thought, many scholars have looked at cities as crucial sites for social and political struggles: urban qualities such as density, size, and diversity, would make cities an especially fertile ground for social movements. First, as *catalysts* of mobilization, i.e. as “relational incubators”, “facilitating complex relational exchanges that generate a diversity of useful resources for campaigns operating at a variety of spatial scales” (Nicholls 2008: 842). Second, because urban life presents urban dwellers with specific challenges (typically, planning conflicts or housing issues), which represents as many potential *triggers* for political mobilization (Briata, Colomb, and Mayer 2020).

As far as the relation between urban space and collective action is concerned, the trajectory of housing activism in Lisbon in the last ten years has developed against the background of a rapidly changing city. After suffering a severe financial and economic crisis between 2010 and 2014, the Portuguese economy has experienced a swift recovery, which was largely based on the boom of tourism and of the real estate market. This dynamic has changed the urban reality of Lisbon in dramatic ways: whereas in the 1990s Lisbon’s key problem had been one of urban decay (i.e. of intense sub-urbanization leaving behind an impoverished city centre), the post-austerity urban change has been widely described through the now-familiar categories of “gentrification” (Barata-Salgueiro et al 2017; Mendes 2017, 2018a, 2018b) and “touristification” (Cocola-Gant and Gago 2021; Sequera and Nofre 2018, 2020). This paper takes a diagonal approach to these categories, in that we are interested in how the same urban trends observed by gentrification or tourism scholars interact with activist practices and new forms of living the city; in other words, we are especially interested in “exploring the range of strategies, conflicts, interests and alliances adopted by different actors and social groups of local touristified communities” (Sequera and Nofre 2018: 2). Empirically, we want to chart emergence of new cultural and political subjectivities in Lisbon, which have brought “new cultures of enjoyment of the city and citizenship itself... [and] a surge in civic initiatives and the consolidation of urban movements... in areas ranging from urban ecology to the social economy, from transport to housing” (Seixas and Guterres 2019: 4).

From this point of view, the “touristified city” of Lisbon is interesting for us in two respects – as a *catalyst* and a *trigger* of collective action (Briata, Colomb, and Mayer 2020). First, because the emergence of the ecosystem of Arroios (of which the *coletividades* are a characteristic infrastructure) is linked to the dynamic of urban change described above. Arroios is to some extent paradigmatic of key urban trends in the city’s recent past, such as the development of a new economic paradigm of urban development, which hinged on tourism, urban renewal and rehabilitation, and on cultural and creative economy; the sustained growth of real estate prices, spurred by the new status of Lisbon as cosmopolitan, “cool” European capital, by the impact of new private economic players such as Airbnb, as well as by the strategies of public authorities; the demographic and cultural transformation of the city population. The “new” *coletividades* of Arroios have emerged from these dynamics. For example, much of the membership of the *coletividades* and of their audience (for concerts, cultural events, etc.) comes from that new wave of young, educated Portuguese and foreigners (Italians, Spaniards, Brazilians, etc.; see Tab 1) that in the last ten years have moved to Arroios, looking for big apartments to share in what was a relatively less expensive area in the city. And on the other side, the *coletividades* themselves have contributed to the transformation of Arroios, as “new cultural stakeholders” of a growing pole of cultural production (CML 2017: 198; see also Seixas and Guterres 2019; Stevens et al 2019; Rego and Borges 2021).

Second, the dynamic of urban change has created a severe housing crisis, in which traditional housing and planning problems mixed and overlapped with the unsustainable growth of the real estate market – a crisis that has invested not only relatively marginal communities, but rather a far larger and diverse section of the society, including much of the lower middle class. Habita and Stop Despejos (which have by and large worked together in the last few years) have responded to this crisis by establishing themselves among

the main players in the field of housing politics during this period. Habita (founded in 2012) has been the main radical voice in the Portuguese housing debate, performing a variety of roles; Stop Despejos was founded in 2017 as a more action-oriented group, which would be able to mobilize on short notice a small but significant number of activists in order to oppose evictions. Both Habita and Stop Despejos have remained small organizations (in relation, for example, to their far larger counterparts in some Italian and Spanish cities), but they have been part and parcel of the growth of the new wave of urban activism that have marked the post-austerity context of Lisbon (Seixas and Guterres 2018; Seixas, Tulumello, and Allegretti 2019).

## 2.2. Collective action between “contentious” and “everyday” politics

The second key theoretical theme in this paper revolves around issues of collective agency – when and how do people join forces for a common goal? What makes this collective action “political”? How social change is achieved through collective action? Theoretically speaking, this paper sits in between two different (and, in our view, complementary) conceptual poles. On the one side, the field of social movement studies has traditionally focused on the idea of “contentious politics” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), and its focus on “understanding the ways organized citizens engage publicly with political change” (Mitlin 2018: 559), by making demands to public authorities through a public display of unity and strength and a “repertoire of contention” (i.e. collective actions designed to put some pressure on public authorities and disrupt the flow of daily life: strikes, demonstrations, pickets, etc.). On the other side, some have suggested that an “everyday politics” (Boyte 2004, see also Scott 1990, Bayat 2013, Holston 2008). This model of collective action (i) is deployed through ordinary, routinary, and less visible practices, rather than through “extraordinary” deeds designed to have an impact on the public opinion (such as protesting, signing petitions, and so forth); (ii) does not engage explicitly with “political change”, as an activist group or a political party would do, but rather originate from the immediate need to preserve individual and collective autonomy in the face of the society at large, and to appropriate the resources that people need to go on with their daily lives; (iii) relies on the existence of shared notions of justice and appropriateness (a “moral economy”, Thompson, 1963) rather than on a consistent ideological outlook, (iv) and proceed through informal channels of coordination (in the extreme, on semi-spontaneous organizing logics similar to Bourdieu’s *habitus*, Bourdieu 1977) rather than on statutes, hierarchies, or membership cards.

By outlining these two modes of collective action we are not arguing that housing activists and the *coletividades* belong to separate species; indeed, we are describing a small world of close personal relations and overlapping memberships. Said that, and as far as abstract concepts can fit the actual reality of things, Habita and Stop Despejos can be described as activist groups working primarily in the field of “contentious politics”, meaning that these organizations programmatically focus on a specific issue, and do so through a repertoire of activist practices directed at “engaging publicly with political change”. While *coletividades* such as Sirigaita share some traits with activist groups, they also differ from the latter in many ways. Generally speaking, the Portuguese term “*coletividade*” (and the more theme-specific “*clube desportivo*”, or “sports club”) indicates a space run by a no-profit association, which offers a range of services to its members (e.g., a bar, meeting place, debates, concerts, a canteen, etc.).<sup>5</sup> As such, the formula keeps together non-profit cooperatives that operate as indie clubs or bars, as well as those in which we are more specifically interested in this paper, i.e., those that have a more pronounced left-wing political and social outlook, and mostly rely on voluntary work (e.g. Sirigaita, Zona Franca, RdA, Disgraça). Similar to activist organizations, these *coletividades* are founded on a small core of volunteers, who take care of the key

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<sup>5</sup> Access to the space of a *coletividade* is theoretically limited to members; however, membership cards can be purchased on the spot for a small fee (between 3-5 €/year), so that in fact these most of these spaces are open to a broader public.

functions and needs of the space through periodic assemblies and constant informal exchanges. However, contrary to Habita and Stop Despejos, *coletividades* do not have a specific political agenda, and their activities are directed to the community gravitating around the space rather than to the general public, media and policy-makers; most of their activities are social, cultural, and recreational in nature; instead than focusing on organizing campaigns or demonstrations, their members spend most of the time and energies to keep the *coletividade* running.

Thus, housing activists and the *coletividades* sit at opposite poles of the conceptual continuum that stretches from the idea of “contentious politics” to that of “everyday politics”. This paper, however, focuses precisely on the relation between the two, and how this relation has shaped the trajectory of housing mobilization in Lisbon. Before moving on, it is therefore necessary to outline the main axis of this relation. First, the *coletividades* are part of an urban ecosystem of sites, groups, and projects, which constitutes an immediate and receptive audience for housing activists, and have regularly participated to activist campaigns providing a showcase for housing struggles in the city. Second, the *coletividades* possess resources that are precious for the activists (and, chiefly, spaces adapted to their organizational needs); while *coletividades* usually refrain from promoting political initiatives themselves, they do systematically offer their resources to groups that wish to do so.<sup>6</sup> Third, this ecosystem gives a specific (if implicit) territorial frame of reference for housing activists, in the form of a localized critical mass that support their mobilization. Fourth, housing activists have built in time strong relations with some of the *coletividades* (for example, Sirigaita is the traditional headquarter of Habita, which has been a sort of “institutional partner” of that *coletividade* since its founding). Fifth, the existence of a shared worldview and of longstanding personal relations between housing activists and the *coletividades*, create as overlaps in the membership of specific groups.

### **3. The action: housing politics in a (rapidly-changing) changing city, 2012-2022**

The following sections present a chronological account of the trajectory of housing mobilizations in the last decade: our account starts with the foundation of Habita (2012) and describes the ascending trajectory of the housing movement (2012-2019) before the Covid pandemic (2020-2022).

#### **3.1. The ascending trajectory of housing mobilization (2012-2019)**

Habita has its roots in the organization *Solidariedade Imigrante* (Immigrant Solidarity), where in 2005 formed the working group *Direito à Habitação* (D.a.H., “Right to Housing”); this group later (2006) expanded in the Plataforma *Artigo 65* (Article 65), which ultimately gave birth to the collective Habita in 2012 (Di Giovanni 2018; R4, interview). In this phase, activists focused especially on housing issues affecting the immigrants (e.g., situation of overcrowding), as well as on the evictions and demolitions of the last so-called *bairros clandestinos* (“informal” or “illegal” neighbourhoods) in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon. Indeed, even later on, some of the most important campaigns of Habita continued to focus on neighbourhoods such as Santa Filomena and Bairro 6 de Maio (Amadora), and the Bairro Torre (Loures), where a significant part of residents was under constant threat of eviction. Thus, in this phase housing activism still primarily focused on the legacy or urban renewal and rehousing policies of the 1990s in the

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<sup>6</sup> As an ethnographic vignette, we could note how in early 2022, the weekly schedule of Sirigaita included, beyond the opening nights of Thursday and Friday: Habita’s help desk for tenants and the meeting of Stop Despejos (Monday); the meeting of the climate activists of Climáximo (Tuesday); the delivery of agricultural products to the consumer’s association Bela Rama and the rehearsal of a band (Wednesday); a cineforum, (Saturday); and the meeting of Lisbon’s Marxist-Leninist collective (Sunday) – all recurrent events organized by different groups rather than by Sirigaita as such.

metropolitan area of Lisbon – and contributed to make clear that, for example, rehousing operations conducted under the *Programa Especial de Realojamento* (PER, “Special Rehousing Program”) had proceeded on a snail’s pace, left out a significant part of the residents, and often failed to address social problems that plagued the periphery of Lisbon (poverty, spatial segregation, institutional racism, etc.; see for example Alves 2021).

Participation in these struggles remained a constant for housing until the end of the 2010s. However, when Habita was founded as a collective, in 2012, the situation was already rapidly changing. Starting from the mid-2000s key legislation had been introduced,<sup>7</sup> whose effects would be felt in the following years on the rental market, on real estate prices, and in the dynamics of urban renewal (see Allegra, Tulumello, and Allegretti 2022). The economic crisis brought about harsh austerity measures, which in turn triggered a cycle of mass protests between 2010 and 2013 (Baumgarten 2013, Accornero and Pinto 2015, Carvalho 2022). Anti-austerity mobilizations reached a mass scale unseen in Portugal since the end of the political turmoil that followed the end of the dictatorship in 1974, and featured influent actors other than parties and unions – yet another trait of novelty in Portugal, where “civil society” and “social movements” had been relatively weak compared to other European countries (see Baumgarten 2013, 2016). This wave of protest energized the activist community and marked the personal trajectory of many individuals; indeed, the idea of anti-austerity protests as a turning point for social movements in Lisbon is consistently voiced by our respondents (see also Seixas and Guterres 2019). Anecdotal evidence from our chronology (see Also Rego and Borges 2021: 9-10) seems to confirm that this energy also was reflected in the *coletividades*, many of which were founded in this period: RdA (2010), MOB (2012; moved from the Bairro Alto to Intendente in 2014; Sirigaita since 2018), Zona Franca (2012), Crew Hassan (2012). As one of the founding members remembers, after the start of the *Geração à Rasca*, the RdA (hitherto home to a “small affinity group of 5-10 individuals”) became one of the informal headquarters of the protests, with “hundreds of people” participating to the various activities (R14, interview).

After the peak of anti-austerity protest, the mobilization for housing rights and the right to the city started to scale up. When Habita became an association, in 2014, the consciousness about a new, looming housing crisis was getting stronger (R4, interview); indeed, around the same date, civil society organizations and the academia began to focus more intensely on the dynamics of urban change. Urban scholars and geographers had already introduced the idea of gentrification in the Portuguese context some years earlier (Mendes 2006, 2008, and Rodrigues 2010 on Lisbon; Fernandes 2011 on Porto); in the early 2010s, however, Malheiros et al (2013: 119) could still conclude that “evidence on the existence of gentrification” in the neighbourhood of Mouraria (their case study), and in Lisbon in general, was “fairly scarce”.

In the second half of the 2010s a new consciousness started to develop regarding the acceleration of the process of urban change, as well as of some of its specific traits. Luís Mendes (geographer at IGOT; see also R6, interview) indicates 2016 as a turning point in this respect. That year, the Architecture Triennale and the campaign *Quem Vai Poder Morar em Lisboa?* (“Who will be able to live in Lisbon?”) introduced in the public debate key topics that would mark activists’ discourse in the following years, such as the

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<sup>7</sup> This has included the liberalization of the rental market (2012); the introduction of the Golden Visa regime (2007), as well as of that for “non-habitual residents” (*residentes não habituais*, 2009); the concession of fiscal benefits for rehabilitation to real estate funds (2008). Recent governmental and parliamentary initiatives such as (respectively) the Nova Geração de Políticas de Habitação (NGPH, “New Generation of Housing Policy”, 2017) and the Lei de Base de Habitação (LBH, “Framework Law on Housing”, 2019) have so far proved unable to reverse the “housing drought” (Allegra et al 2021) inaugurated in the early 2000s by bringing substantial new investments or substantially improving the governance of the housing sector (Mendes 2020; Allegra, Tulumello, and Allegretti 2022). In the meantime, public authorities have fully embraced the new paradigm of growth based on tourism, urban renewal, and creative and cultural economy (Seixas and Guterres 2019), thereby directly and indirectly contributing (e.g., through investment in urban regeneration and the de-regulation of rental market) to the soaring of real estate prices. To this we should add, as another significant factor, the arrival of AirBnb to Lisbon (Cocola-Gant and Gago 2021).



impact of the Golden Visa regime, the proliferation of short-term rentals, the benefits for foreign investments in the real estate sector, etc. (see e.g., Morar em Lisboa, 2017). Also in 2016, the collective Left Hand Rotation (whose member would later join Stop Despejos) produced the documentary *Terramotourism*, which, by comparing the tourists flows to the disastrous Lisbon's earthquake of 1755, throw a more sinister light on the dynamic of Portuguese economic recovery.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in the mid-2010s, housing mobilization started to reflect a broader consciousness about the multi-dimensional, multi-scale nature of urban change, and found in the concept of the "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1968) both a conceptual umbrella and a popular slogan.

Habita participated in this growing debate, while at the same time continuing its work in the peripheral, self-built neighbourhoods – the struggle against the demolition of the Bairro 6 de Maio represented probably the organization's most important effort in this respect (R4, personal communication; see Bogado 2019, Bogado e Saaristo 2021).<sup>9</sup> In 2017, Habita's work with these communities further progressed with the launch of the manifesto/open letter of the *Caravana Pelo Direito à Habitação* ("Caravan for the Right to Housing", <https://caravanapelahabitacao.wordpress.com/>), which had the goal of "scaling up" housing mobilization by connecting different local communities and activists' networks at the national level, and culminated in September with a ten-stops national tour that brought the *caravana* in Lumiar, Beja, Porto, Coimbra and the Azores (Falanga et al 2019, Kühne 2019).

Besides working at grassroots level, Habita had been active in networking at international level. In 2014 it contributed to the founding of the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City (EAC, <https://housingnotprofit.org/>), which held its first meeting in Portugal in 2018 (Habita 2022). Perhaps the most significant sign of Habita's ability to act across state boundaries and governance levels, however, was its role in the organization of the visit of Leilani Fahra (UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing) to Lisbon, which preceded the publication, in March 2017, of a very critical UN report on the state of housing in Portugal (Fahra 2017; see also Morais et al 2017). Fahra's report received ample coverage by the national media, and constituted a significant push for subsequent policy initiatives, such as the re-establishment of the State Secretariat on Housing and the launch of the *Nova Geração de Políticas de Habitação* ("New Generation of Housing Policies", 2017); and the formation in the Portuguese parliament of a working group on housing policy that would eventually lead to the approval of the *Lei de Base da Habitação* ("Framework Law on Housing" 2019).

Thus, between 2016 and 2017, housing mobilization started to intensify. At the same time, Habita experienced an influx of new members, to which it should be added the birth of Stop Despejos (founded on December 2017, during a meeting held at Sirigaita). These activists (many of which foreigners, and especially Spaniards and Italians, see Tab 1) brought not only new energies, but also new ideas, skills, and political cultures (R1, R4, R25, interviews). Stop Despejos, for example, added a further dimension to the dynamic of local housing struggles in the form of a small anti-eviction group, and of a communication-savvy collective able to produce high-quality audio-visual material.<sup>10</sup>

In the next two years, Habita and Stop Despejos obtained a significant degree of visibility by organizing tens of initiatives (debates, open letters, anti-eviction pickets, symbolic actions, marches, etc.) in partnership with many other organizations (associations, collectives, tenants' association, etc.). They

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.lefthandrotation.com/terramotourism/](http://www.lefthandrotation.com/terramotourism/).

<sup>9</sup> The Bairro 6 de Maio was eventually demolished between 2018 and 2019; also thanks to Habita's work, however, most of the residents ended up being rehoused in social housing projects.

<sup>10</sup> See for example the 2019 full-length film *O que vai acontecer aqui* ("What's going to happen here", [www.lefthandrotation.com/museodelosdesplazados/colaboraciones/left-hand-rotation-o-que-vai-acontecer-aqui/](http://www.lefthandrotation.com/museodelosdesplazados/colaboraciones/left-hand-rotation-o-que-vai-acontecer-aqui/)), edited by the collective Left Hand Rotation based on the short documentaries published by Stop Despejos on their website (see <https://stopdespejos.wordpress.com/portfolio>). The film was presented at DocLisboa 2019 (the country's main documentary festival) and received several awards at international festivals.

occupied the premises of the IHRU (the main governmental agency for housing policy) and of the ministries of Environment and Housing, and made uninvited appearances (twice) at the office of Lisbon's housing alderman to discuss pressing issues; and continued to support residents under threat of eviction both in the periphery of the metropolitan area of Lisbon, and in the city centre – for example supporting squatters in Lumiar, Chelas and Graça (Saaristo 2022). During this period, the two organizations also promoted two mass demonstrations. The first, in September 2018, was organized in the context of the “Hand off Action Camp” (Lisbon, September 21-25, 2018), the first EAC's meeting held in the country, which brought together more than 40 local groups (including *coletividades* such as Disgraça, Gaia, RdA, Zona Franca) and a few thousand protesters in the streets of Lisbon and Porto. A year later, Habita promoted the *Festival da Habitação* (Lisbon, September 7-29<sup>th</sup>, 2019). Once again, although Habita and Stop Despejos figured as the main organizers of the event, a larger participation was reflected in the dynamics of the mobilization, as well as in the list of the over 40 local groups that signed its manifesto (see Habita 2019). A rather late call for proposals, published on August, mobilized significant additional energies, especially on the part of artists and performers (R1, R2, interviews). All this was therefore able to result in a program that listed some 40 events in 23 days (concerts, art workshops and performances, debates, dinners, movies – and the final demonstration on September 29<sup>th</sup>) taking place in various locations of the city, including 15 *coletividades* (see Fig. 1).

The *Festival da Habitação* marked the culmination of Habita and Stop Despejos' activities before the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, it shows the standing of Habita and Stop Despejos as activist organizations – in terms of their reputation and visibility, and in their ability to reach different audiences and create broad and diverse coalitions in support of housing struggles. It also shows key elements of the practice and political goals of the housing movement, namely the “urban nature” of contemporary housing struggles and the emphasis on the need of building wide coalitions of different actors.

### **3.2. Enters The Virus, 2020-2022**

After September 2019, Lisbon's housing activists looked at the EAC's Housing Action Day planned for March 2020, as the next step in the process of “articulation among housing, feminist, climate and migrant activists” (Habita 2019: 5). A demonstration was planned for March 28 in the city, and few meetings took place at Zona Franca between January and February. Parallel to that, housing activists also participated to the mobilization for Women's Day through the campaign *Minha Casa, Minha Luta. Rumo ao 8 Março* (“My Home, My Struggle. Towards March 8<sup>th</sup>”). The demonstration for Women's Day, however, would be the last to be held in Lisbon for some time, since the planned mobilization of March 28 was postponed as the first lockdown hit the city.

The fluctuations of the Covid-19 pandemic and of lockdown measures have dictated the pace of everyone's life in Lisbon in the next two years. Our project has developed almost entirely in this period: on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020, we held our first meeting; on the 25<sup>th</sup> we did our first interview, while on March 9<sup>th</sup> Covid-19 was mentioned for the first time by one of our respondents, who still referred to it as an “Italian” health issue (R2, interview). The first Portuguese Covid cases, however, had been diagnosed a few days earlier, and on March 18<sup>th</sup> the government declared the state of emergency in the country. It is unnecessary (and beyond the purposes of this paper) to describe in details the impact of Covid in Lisbon, as what followed in the next two years would be immediately familiar at least to all readers in Western Europe: Portugal went through several pandemic cycles of rapid growth in Covid cases; imposition of draconian lockdowns and other sanitary measures; decline in the number of cases; relaxation of emergency measures; new growth in the number of cases; etc. At the time of writing (October 2022), the country has gone through six “waves”, whose impact, however, has been progressively mitigated by mass vaccination campaigns, which became a main factor in fighting the pandemic and easing the harsh sanitary measures. Indeed, since the first months of 2022, urban life seems to have gone back to its usual rhythm.

The trajectory of housing mobilization during the two years of pandemic can be divided into two main periods: a first bout of activism, from the first weeks of the pandemic until the summer of 2020, followed a decline in the mobilizations that has persisted until recently.

In the early days of March 2020, Habita and Stop Despejos were working on the case of the evictions in the Bairro Bensaúde, which continued even after the pandemic was officially declared. Soon, however, the pandemic became a main factor in the dynamic of housing mobilization. Most obviously, demonstrations were de facto banned for a couple of months – Stop Despejos would organize its next public gathering only on May 29<sup>th</sup>. Housing activists (and activists *tout court*) thus started to come to terms with the new situation – epitomized by the recurrent question: *como se faz o ativismo sem ruas?* (“how do you engage in activism without going in the streets?”), which was especially felt from those activists, like Stop Despejos, whose activities focused on direct action (R5, interview). And indeed, certain activities became simply impossible: even before officially cancelling the demonstration of March, Habita had suspended its weekly meetings and open desk at Sirigaita. Exerting pressure on institutions became more difficult: as a Habita member recalls, “we cannot even organize our protests, because people simply had no rights of political participation, like for example... attending a session of the municipal council, which were not taking place because of Covid” (R4, interview).

Despite the logistical challenges, in the first few months of the pandemic social movements seemed to have found new energy and sense of purpose (see Mendes 2020 for an early contribution on the subject). Certainly, Habita and Stop Despejos did not lose time: as a Stop Despejos member noted, the imperative was “do whatever we could, but never stop” (R11, interview) precisely because of the new situation; indeed, fighting evictions appeared to be even more urgent as the lockdown was imposed on the city (R6, interview). On March 13<sup>th</sup>, together with Sirigaita, Habita and Stop Despejos launched the campaign *Como Se Faz Quarantena Sem Casas?* (“How Can You Quarantine Without a Home?”, Habita 2020), and were soon joined by more than 50 other groups and associations – from climate (Climáximo) and anti-racist (SOSO Racismo) and labour (Precários Inflexíveis) activists, to civil society networks (Morar em Lisboa) to, of course, many of the *coletividades* of Arroios (Sirigaita, Zona Franca, RdA, Disgraça, ). This was followed by several campaigns launched over the next few months; as per Habita and Stop Despejos’ modus operandi, these campaigns were supported by a number of other groups, including climate, labour and anti-racist activists.<sup>11</sup> In parallel, the two organizations continued campaigning against evictions of several families in the Bairro Bensaude and in Quinta do Ferro; in June, Stop Despejos was able for the first time to mobilize, in a matter of a few hours, some 50 people to stop the eviction of a single tenant in Lisbon.

The same energy was visible in the *coletividades* of Arroios. Zona Franca, RdA, and Disgraça opened up *cantinas solidárias* (“solidarity canteens”) and *brigadas de bairro* (“neighbourhood brigades”), which provided assistance to people in need, serving free meals and home-delivering groceries, medicines, or food (see Mendes 2020, Rádio Gabriela 2020). Sirigaita promoted the birth of an online radio/website, Rádio Gabriela, whose live broadcasts, podcasts, and blog posts tried to connect (and give visibility to) all these activities. In the same period, two short-lived experiments of inter-group action developed. Between April and June, several collectives from Lisbon, Coimbra, and Porto held five online meetings to discuss possible forms of joint actions (in what was informally called Assembleia Inter-Coletivos or “Inter-Collectives Assembly”), while on May 9<sup>th</sup> a miscellaneous group of some 50 people (most of them coming from the RdA, but with participants from other groups, including the Stop Despejos and the Rede de Apoio

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<sup>11</sup> Among the main initiatives in this respect: the campaigns *Ninguém Fica Para Trás* (“No One Must Be Left Behind”, March/April) and *Escolher casa ou pão? Não! - Nem rendas, nem dívidas!* (“Choosing between bread and a house? No! - No rent, no debts”, May); a request to reopen public bathhouses that were closed during the pandemic, leaving the homeless without access to basic services (April); the launch of FAQ webpage with instruction on how to fight evictions during the pandemic (April), and of a survey on housing conditions (May); several public meetings and assemblies (June and July); the conference *Habitação é Saude* (co-organized with the project HOPEs, November); the birth of the group *Mulheres P’lo Direito à Habitação* (MuDHa, “Women For The Right to Housing”, March 2021).

Mútuo/Mutual Support Network) occupied an abandoned building in Arroios, with the goal of opening a new space (which they named *Seara*, a Portuguese word meaning “cultivated field” but also indicating a group of people working together for a worthy goal) that would provide assistance and basic services to the homeless.

And indeed, at least to some extent, it seemed that policymaking was willing to respond to the challenges brought on by Habita and others. Luís Mendes (R6, interview; see also Mendes 2020) argues that Habita’s efforts (and AIL’s) were a crucial in determining the government’s response to the crisis, which took the form, on March 19<sup>th</sup>, of a law introducing a number of “exceptional and temporary measures” responding to the threat posed by the pandemics; this included a moratorium on evictions and on the possibility for the landlords to cancel rental contracts – something that Habita was quick to celebrate with its traditional hashtag #ValeAPenaLutar (“#FightingIsWorthIt”). On April 1<sup>st</sup> the government further approved a suspension of rent payments for tenants (including commercial activities) that had seen their income reduced in the previous months. To a certain extent, governmental response surprised activists, and even exceeded their expectations in regard to what was possible to claim or achieve. As a Habita’s member recalls,

We were discussing the pandemic, we were talking about various things, and we said immediately that evictions should simply stop, right there. And some... I remember that there were people saying that that it was a ridiculous idea (R4, interview).

All in all, in the first months of the pandemic the general impression was that the activist community was flexing its muscle. Most people thought that the emergency would not last long (R24, R26, interviews), and that a harsh socioeconomic crisis was looming on the horizon: a member of the Zona Franca illustrated this attitude when he noted, in July 2020, how “now the tide is rising, preparing a future tsunami” (R8, interview), while a labour activist noted that “going back to normal is going to be explosive” (R3, interview). In this context, the pandemic crisis was considered by some with a sort of cautious optimism: the crisis could further emphasize the importance of universal access to housing (R17, interview), and possibly give social movements the chance of stepping up and playing a more central role in the Portuguese society (R6, interview); it could even bring, in the words of a member of Habita, a “hot autumn” of mass protest, and the articulation of different political claims (R4, interview).<sup>12</sup> Last but not least, while the experiences of *Seara* and of the *Assembleia Inter-Coletivos* did not survive for long, these episodes represent a further testimony on how inter-groups cooperation and solidarity increased during the first months of the pandemic, and came to be seen as a positive turn of events unexpectedly brought on by the pandemic (R6, R9, interviews).

The atmosphere began to change after the summer of 2020. Starting from April, most restrictions had been gradually eased or lifted, and on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, for the first time since March, no Covid-related deaths were registered for 24 hours. In September, however, the number of cases started to grow again; October registered a record growth; on November 21<sup>st</sup> the state of emergency was reintroduced; and on January 15<sup>th</sup> the government declared a new, nationwide lockdown. While the perspective of an immediate end of the pandemic was slipping away, and the “hot autumn” failed to materialize, the activist started to feel a sense of fatigue. The fluctuation of Covid-related regulations did not only limit the ability of the organizations to take the streets and to maintain direct contact with residents, but also challenge their ability to plan ahead: after the cancellation of the demonstration of March 2020, Habita had to cancel the one planned for November 14<sup>th</sup>. As a member of Habita recalled,

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<sup>12</sup> The reference here is to the Italian political lexicon, where the expression *autunno caldo* (“hot autumn”) originated from a series of strikes that took place between the end of 1969 and the beginning of 1970.

I think that... nobody [in Habita] had figured out exactly how we could go back to action, or even how we could do anything without being together. The basis of what we do is being together, right? Creating a community. How do you do that without being together... In June 2020 we presented an application for a project on housing and health – and every stage in our project required organizing meetings with people. And then, suddenly, in September, once again you cannot hold meetings, and we delayed it until January – and again, comes January and you cannot do it either (R26, interview)

Constrained in their ability to carry on a significant part of their activities, the activists began to experience a growing sense of individual and collective fatigue. As many housing activists noted, after the initial bout of energy they found themselves in the same predicament that affected everyone else, and had less and less energy to act, which eventually also had an impact on the internal dynamics of the organizations (R19, R25, interview; R4, R27, personal communications)<sup>13</sup>.

The *coletividades* experienced in many ways the same dynamics – compounded by the fact that the core business of these groups is to keep their spaces open to other groups and the general public. On September 2020, after the easing of restrictions during the summer, Sirigaita reopened for two nights, just to quickly backpedal because of the difficulties of (self)determining how the space should function (e.g. of imposing the use of masks or not; managing the flows of people in relation to the maximum capacity of the space); and of the risk of huge pecuniary sanctions on the part of public authorities, which at the time were very strict about Covid-related rules (the same situation applied to Zona Franca, R9, interview). Similar to the activists, the *coletividades* struggled to come to terms with the situation: “going back to normal” was not simply a matter of regulations imposed by public authorities, but meant overcoming the general sense of uncertainty inherent to the situation – which also reflected a variety of opinions in relation to the appropriate anti-Covid measures to be adopted by the members of the *coletividades* (R16, R20, interviews).

The *coletividades* were hit as hard as the activists; however, the overall impression is that the former had been able to deploy more resources in addressing this situation. At Sirigaita, for example, the impossibility of keeping on with the previous routine opened up spaces for a different use of the space (R24, interview). Before the pandemic, for example, the bar of Sirigaita used to be open five nights a week for events and concerts; now the number has been reduced permanently to two, because during the pandemic pre-existing groups (Climáximo, Stop Despejos) started to use the space for their meetings, while new projects (Manas, Livraria das Insurgentes, and the already-mentioned Rádio Gabriela) also found there a home;<sup>14</sup> as a matter of fact, it is fair to conclude that Sirigaita got out of the pandemic as a larger and stronger collective than it was before. Our conversations with people at Zona Franca (R7, R8, R9, R10, R16, interviews) and Disgraça (R20, R21, R22, R23, interviews) suggest that the pandemic also represented a stimulus to re-think their collective identity and the use of their spaces, and to prioritize the collective care for fellow members of the *coletividade* vis-à-vis the pressure to perform by trying to maintain the pre-Covid routine – several of our respondents noted that the pre-pandemic pace of activities had been wearing them off for some time (R20, interviews). In many ways, housing activists were not afforded the same luxury.

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<sup>13</sup> The same sense of fatigue and declining optimism emerges clearly, if indirectly, from the observation of the topics discussed in the cycle of *Assembleias Inter-Coletividades* in the second half of the same year, which focused on issues such as care, survival strategies, and mutual solidarity between *coletividades* – while the *Assembleias Inter-Coletivos*, a year before, had primarily discussed matters of political identity and the possible strategies to bring the voice of political radicalism in the dynamics of future mobilizations.

<sup>14</sup> Climáximo ([www.climaximo.pt/](http://www.climaximo.pt/)) is one of the main climate activist groups in Portugal; the Livraria das Insurgentes ([www.instagram.com/livrariadasinsurgentes/](https://www.instagram.com/livrariadasinsurgentes/)) is a feminist bookshop/library; the Manas ([www.instagram.com/manasaferspace/](https://www.instagram.com/manasaferspace/)) is a mutual help collective formed by female drug users.

#### 4. Concluding notes

How can we characterize the trajectory of housing mobilisation in Lisbon in the last ten years? How did the pandemic impact on this trajectory? Our concluding remarks will present some impressionistic observations in this respect, which will necessarily remain provisional and subject to reassessment: as recent history fades into current news, we are implicitly venturing into the uncharted territory of the next future.

Before proceeding, however, we would like to outline a possible research agenda that emerges from the work for this paper. First of all, a history of housing movements in Lisbon for the last decade still needs to be written; while many authors have published on the subject in the last few years, no comprehensive account exists, and especially on the “pre-history” of Habita (2005-2012) and on the role of anti-austerity protest in this trajectory. Second, the idea of the “ecosystem” of Arroios should be further explored through a systematic mapping of that territory, of the *coletividades*, and of the community that gravitates around them. Third, it is interesting to note that much of the existing literature on Lisbon’s housing movement, as well as on related urban issues (see, respectively: Falanga et al 2019, Bogado 2019, Bogado and Saaristo 2019, Seixas, Tulumello, and Allegretti 2019, Kühne 2019, Mendes 2020, Alves 2021, Saaristo 2022; and Mendes 2017, 2018a, 2018b, Cocola-Gant and Gago 2021), has been produced by scholars that have directly participated in the activities of Habita, Stop Despejos, or other organizations active in the field; this permeability between the academic and the activist environment is also worth exploring.

Said that, we have two main conclusive remarks. First, our account describes the ascendant trajectory of housing mobilization in Lisbon (2010-2019), from the development of a new housing movement in the early 2010s, to the peak of Habita and Stop Despejos’ activities before the start of the pandemic. Throughout this period, the two organizations established themselves as key players in the city’s housing politics and beyond. Measuring the impact of this mobilization on housing policy, or on the city’s population, is outside the purpose of this paper; but our account shows how the two organizations have animated a wide range of initiatives – gradually broadening the range of their area of intervention and their repertoire of action; assisting and organizing local communities under threat of demolition; fighting evictions and providing assistance to individual tenants; creating large, pluralistic coalitions in support of their campaigns; putting pressure on decision-makers; moving between the local, national and international scale. All in all, Habita and Stop Despejos have contributed to re-brand Lisbon as a space of social struggles, thus creating an alternative image of the city vis-à-vis the rhetoric of urban entrepreneurialism promoted by local public authorities and market players.

The relation between Habita and Stop Despejos and the *coletividades* of Arroios has been important element in this trajectory. As for the basis of this relation, both housing activists and the *coletividades* have by and large shared a common criticism of the commercialization of public space, and the idea that politics is about creating networks and coalitions; women and foreigners constitute a significant proportion of the participants to these groups, which have an overlapping membership (see Tab. 1), and whose members have often developed close personal relationships. As we have noted, the *coletividades* of Arroios, have represented part of a local, supportive ecosystem for housing struggles (the *Festival da Habitação* in 2019 being a good example of what this collaboration can achieve); at the same time, one could hardly imagine the *coletividades* of Arroios without the myriad of projects and groups that gravitate around them – of which activist groups constitute such a crucial part.

A first tentative theoretical note: our account highlights how the transformation of urban space in Lisbon has provided both the *trigger* and the *catalyst* for establishing coalitions of different actors (Briata, Colomb, and Mayer 2020). In Lisbon, a severe housing crisis has put considerable pressure on a significant portion of the local population (from the historically marginalized residents communities in the periphery of the

city, to the growing portion of downtown residents that struggle to pay rent), which in turn have propelled the growth of housing activism. On the other side, our account also shows how broader coalitions have formed from specific sites of housing struggles (such as those conducted in the neighbourhoods of Santa Filomena, Bairro 6 de Maio, and Bairro Torre, which later resulted in the *Caravana da Habitação*). The *coletividades*, and the broad and diverse range of groups and projects that they host, have represented yet another channel for establishing these coalitions; in this respect, the *coletividades* of Arroios have certainly worked as many “contact points”, “where diverse activists come into contingent interactions with multiple others” (Nicholls 2009: 82).

Second, the evidence collected suggests that when the pandemic started, at the end of 2019, the housing movement was in many ways at its historical peak – a peak that was reflected also in the intense pace of mobilization that marked the first months of the pandemic. It further suggests that, toward the end of 2020, housing struggle entered in a phase of relative decline, visible in the lower intensity of the mobilization. How much this has been due to Covid, of course, is difficult to ascertain precisely; however, qualitative data collected through interviews and ethnographic research shows how, rather unsurprisingly, the pandemic have had a detectable impact on the community that we have observed: our respondents clearly linked the impossibility of going on with one’s (activist) life and the growing level of stress and fatigue vis-à-vis the uncertainty of the next future, to the declining energy of the mobilizations and to the disruption of the internal dynamics of the collectives.

Throughout the pandemic period the relation between housing activism and the *coletividades* that we have sketched above was maintained. The *coletividades* of Arroios were central to local mobilization in the early months of the pandemic, offering a wide range of services to their immediate audience and the local population at large. Furthermore, they seem to also have offered a significant venue for participation to activists themselves, when other channels were closed by the pandemic; this is for example the case of the collective of Rádio Gabriela, born at Sirigaita, to which several members of Habita and Stop Despejos participated. Somehow, one could advance the hypothesis that during the pandemic the *coletividades* have been especially important for what they could offer to the ecosystem of Arroios (including housing activists) as spaces of care, sociality, leisure, and so forth – as opposed to the more straightforward frustration that activist groups started to experience toward the end of 2020.

This introduces the second theoretical note in relation to the conceptual pole of political agency (Section 2). If we assume that housing groups and the *coletividades* represent reasonably well the ideal types of “contentious” and “everyday” politics respectively, then our account provides an illustration of how these two modes of political agency can coexist and reinforce one another. Implicitly, this provides a sympathetic critique to the literature on urban movements, which seems to have privileged the “contentious side” of the equation of political agency. Our observation of housing struggles in Lisbon shows how the dynamic of “everyday politics” embodied by the *coletividades* of Arroios has provided precious resources for the “contentious politics” of housing activists (material resources, spaces, networks, a loyal audience); more broadly, the strong link between the realm of “everyday politics” and issues such as primary needs, mutual care, and sociality alludes to a whole realm of politics that often invisible through the lens of “contentious politics”; on the contrary, the observations made during the pandemic represent anecdotal evidence that this dimension can represent an important element of the dynamic of political mobilization. Finally, our account shows the relation between the two modes is mutual: on the one side, housing activists have always been conscious of the importance of the *coletividades* – a fact epitomized by Habita’s longstanding relations with Sirigaita and Zona Franca; on the other side, our chronology suggests the proliferation of the new *coletividades* of Arroios in the last ten years might have its roots, at least in part, in a previous cycle of contentious politics, namely the anti-austerity mobilizations of early 2010s.

Finally, we would like to offer few impressionistic remarks on the present situation of housing struggles in Lisbon. To begin with, and as far as real estate market is concerned, key pre-Covid trends have shown considerable resilience in the face of the pandemic; at the moment of writing, the flow of tourists in the city has resumed its pre-Covid intensity, and nobody expects that market dynamics will change in the next future. Absent a comprehensive set of housing polities designed to counter or compensate this dynamic (Allegra, Tulumello, and Allegretti 2022), it seems fair to conclude that the housing crisis in Lisbon is not over yet.

Against this background, how can we evaluate the future perspective of housing struggles? For sure, the pandemic has offered a vivid example of the fragility of small organizations. Despite an impressive ability to constantly punch above their numerical weight, Habita and Stop Despejos remain small groups of volunteers operating on tiny budgets, which carry a significant load of political and social work without being able to count on resources other than the time and energy of the people involved. The same fragility marks the life of *coletividades*; and even conceding that their “everyday politics” has perhaps made them relatively more resilient than activist groups in relation to the pandemic, they face a more structural, long-term threat to their existence due to the rising costs of rents in that area. Absent a systematic mapping, it is difficult to say whether this trend has reversed the growth in the number of local associations registered between 2008 and 2016 (see CML 2017), but ethnographic evidence shows that most of the *coletividades* struggle to pay their rising rents, or fear to be unable to do so following the next renovation of the contract.

It is perhaps too early to say if the last two years have represented a moment of pause, from which housing activism is recovering, or if the last two years have opened a new phase in the dynamics of collective action in the city, including in the relation between the activists and the *coletividades*. While the pandemic has had a considerable impact on the activities of social movements, the last decade has created a significant political capital for “horizontal, nonpartisan, self-financed, and autonomous” politics in the city, which Covid has certainly not obliterated.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This characterization comes from the self-description of Stop Despejos, which defines itself as: “a collective that is horizontal (there are no hierarchies, and all decisions are taken during the collective meeting), nonpartisan (does not belong or support any political party), self-financed (does not accept subsidies from the state) and autonomous (does not depend from any other organization), <https://stopdespejos.wordpress.com/sobre/>.”



**Table 1 – Respondents’ list**

CODE	AFFILIATION	NATIONALITY	INTERVIEW DATE
R1	Habita/Stop Despejos/Sirigaita	Italian	25-Feb-20
R2	[artist]	Portuguese	09-Mar-20
R3	Rede de Apoio Mútuo (RAM)	Brazilian	02-Jun-20
R4	Habita/Sirigaita	Portuguese	16-Jun-20; 18-Oct-22 (personal communication)
R5	Stop Despejos	Italian	03-Jul-20
R6	Luís Mendes - University researcher/Associação Inquilinos Lisbonenses	Portuguese	03-Jul-20, 7-Jul 2022
R7	Zona Franca do Anjos	Brazilian	06-Jul-20
R8	Zona Franca do Anjos	Portuguese	06-Jul-20
R9	Zona Franca do Anjos/Habita	Portuguese	06-Jul-20
R10	Zona Franca do Anjos	Italian	06-Jul-20
R11	Stop Despejos	Italian	28-Oct-20
R12	Stop Despejos	Spanish	28-Oct-20
R13	Stop Despejos	Spanish	28-Oct-20
R14	RdA	Portuguese	30-Oct-20, 11-Apr-2022
R15	RdA	Portuguese	14-Apr-21
R16	Zona Franca do Anjos	Italian	02-Jan-22
R17	Stop Despejos	Portuguese	18-Mar-22
R18	Stop Despejos	French	18-Mar-22
R19	Stop Despejos	French/Port.	18-Mar-22
R20	Disgraça	Portuguese	22-Apr-22
R21	Disgraça	Australian	22-Apr-22
R22	Disgraça	English	22-Apr-22
R23	Disgraça	English	22-Apr-22
R24	Sirigaita	Portuguese	5-Jun-22
R25	Habita/Stop Despejos	Portuguese	10-May-22
R26	Habita	Portuguese	10-Jun-22
R27	Habita/Sirigaita	Portuguese	22-Oct-22 (personal communication)

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