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CASE STUDY

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Too many rights: too many people without rights—two opposite case studies of claiming spaces and rights in Turin and Geneva

Cristina Bianchetti* and Ianira Vassallo*

Abstract

Introduction: The multiple forms of living in the contemporary city clearly demonstrate how the relationship between living space and rights reveals itself in many ways, even to the point of being divergent and contradictory.

Case description: In order to analyze this point, we decided to observe two case studies that are emblematic for the divergence of issues that they are able to highlight. The neighbourhood of Les Grottes in Geneva can be described as a 'manifesto of living' based on sharing, solidarity, and freedom. On the other hand, the former Olympic Village in Turin expresses the "individual need to exist" of a population (of political refugees and migrants) not legitimatized to be in that place but one which, generally speaking, has nowhere to live.

Discussion and evaluation: These two situations are able to highlight how the right to housing today no longer has a universal meaning as in the struggles of the last century (70 s) but explodes in very different meanings.

Conclusions: For this reason the aim of this paper is try to rethink the concept of housing rights in order to emphasize how this term is still able to tell a lot about the urban and social transformations in contemporary cities.

Keywords: Housing rights, Claiming spaces, Social inequality, Urban transformation processes, Residential segregation

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to enrich the ongoing study on the multiple meanings of the concept of rights in relation to the city and contemporary living. In fact, the belief that the city is increasingly a place of pluralities without universal goals is the thin red line running between previous studies[1] and the one presented in this paper. In other words, the city is a place where different actors live together and create forms of cohabitation and control mechanisms; we need to review the plurality of actors, actions, and intentions in order to tackle the topic of rights associated with space.

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[1] The considerations presented in this text arise from an International Short Visit Project (2008) funded by Swiss National Science Foundtion—Decision IZK0Z1_144577. This project is related to Résistance et Projet. Destin des Grottes (1930–2039), promoted by Fondation Braillard, coordinated by E. Cogato Lanza e L. Pattaroni. Research outcome is De la difference urbaine, MêtisPress, Genève, 2013. This text also arise from Shared Territories (2009–2014), research project Politecnico di Torino-Politecnico di Milano-Università degli studi di Milano (coordinated by Cristina Bianchetti). The outcome is Territories Partagés, MetisPress, Genève 2015. (https://territoridellacondivisione.wordpress.com).

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In this sense, the multiple forms of living in the contemporary city clearly demonstrate how the relationship between living space and rights reveals itself in many ways, even to the point of being divergent and contradictory.

This is the general assumption on which we base our study. We believe that a plural background is needed in order to study the rights related to contemporary living. However, unlike the past, this does not currently include universal goals.[2] Bearing this in mind we have tried to not only rethink the concept of rights in the city and contemporary living, with specific reference to Italian legal literature,[3] but also emphasise the importance of the Simmel concept, recalled by Bagnasco 'un fatto sociale formato nello spazio'.[4]

Once the Shared territories project (note 1) was finished, a part of the research group continued to reflect independently on this issue: various case studies analysis were conducted, especially in Turin, to investigate in depth different situations of shared living. The main idea was to advance with the hypothesis that these forms of living built a useful and original point of view to talk about practices of living linked to the right to the city and housing right. There isn't a 'framework research' that holds these reflections together but, rather, they are the continuation of previous studies, possible through a habit and familiarity of doing research together and of using the case study analysis as an opportunity to reflect on broader issues. In the first case study, Les Grottes, the study began about ten years ago and benefited from a rich period of field research and an in-depth bibliographic analysis of local sources (note 1). It is a striking case study compared to the context in which it is defined. For this reason, several surveys, interviews and analysis have been carried out over time to understand the possible evolutions of this type of 'out-of-the-ordinary' settlement. The second case study, the former Moi neighbourhood,was carefully observed in its construction phase through the work of two Summer School (2004–2005).[5] Subsequently, the occupation of the complex by a group of migrants rekindled attention to the case study, which became one of the subject of three Urban Design Atelier (2016–2017–2018) at the Polytechnic of Turin,[6] in order to understand the spatial implications of the ongoing appropriation process. So, we can declare that we have extensively studied both situations and we chose them because they diverge in many ways.

The differences are revealed by the fact that the neighbourhood of Les Grottes in Geneva is, on the one hand, a 'manifesto of living' based on sharing, solidarity, and freedom. In Les Grottes you chose who you want to live with: in small groups, entre nous, entre voisin. On the other hand, the former Olympic Village in Turin, in the last 10 years (in particular from 2013 to 2019), has been the expression the "individual need to exist" of a population (of political refugees and migrants) not legitimatized to be in that place but one which, generally speaking, had nowhere to live. The occupation of one of the symbolic spaces of the urban transformation of the city in the early twenty-first century underscores the presence of a new urban population that often tends to be ignored and hidden by administrators, thereby generating a possible fracture in the social fabric of the city. While in Les Grottes subjective preferences are claimed as a right, in the former Moi the right to inhabit and the right to be acknowledged overlap.

In essence, we cannot accurately compare the former Olympic Village and Les Grottes neighbourhoods because their differences are too great. We believe that our effort to explore situations where the concept of human rights is clearly or implicitly affirmed within the multiple practices of contemporary living appears to be a good way to address the feeling of ambiguity which—now more than ever before—influences the keywords of our language, once again testifying to the need to recreate a vocabulary based on the observation of the multi-faceted situations of the contemporary.

[2] Plurality in the contemporary city is an extensively-examined issue above the field of contemporary planning theory and radical geography (especially studies on social inequality, gentrification, and so-called resistance studies). Although a list of publications would be reductive, the following were important for our studies: Castells (1984), Muffle (2000), Feinstein (2010), Mostafavi (2017). Marco et al. (2016), Kaminer et al. (2011). Lees and Phillips (2018). In the field of radical geography: Neil et al. (2012); Harvey and Herod (2009), Harvey (2014, 2017).

[3] Reference texts include: by Grossi (2005, 2012, 2017), Irti (2001), Rodotà (2011), Pietro (2009), Marzano (2014). Bobbio (1990). The double matrix we acknowledge as important (history of rights and renewed interest in social rights) is pertinent in the debate on philosophy and rights in both the version by Habermas (2013) and the one by Dworkin (2013).

[4] The sentence is the work title of Bagnasco's book that incorporates an expression of George Simmel polemic against abstract sociology with spatial connotations.

[5] The two Summer School (2004–2005) were organised by the 1° Faculty of Architecture of the Politecnico di Torino together with the Faculty of Civil Architecture of the Politecnico di Milano, the Faculty of Architecture of Roma 3 Università La Sapienza, the Faculty of Architecture of the Iuav and sponsored by the Comune di Torino, the Regione Piemontese, and the SiTi. The results were published in two book edited by Bianchetti Cristina: Torino. Il Villaggio Olimpico., 2005, Officina/Torino 2. Metabolizzare le olimpiadi, 2006, Officina).

[6] Atelier Urban Design 2016–2017–2018 (prof. Bianchetti Cristina, Ingaramo Roberta, Robiglio Matteo,) del corso di Laurea Triennale in Architettura del Politecnico di Torino. (For more informations: https://territoridellacondivisione.wordpress.com/category/ii-education/design-unit/).

Fig. 1 Public space, Les Grottes. (photo by Cristina Bianchetti)

Les Grottes: when rights explode[7]

As said above, Les Grottes is a good case study to observe changes in the concept of housing rights in the contemporary city (Bianchetti, 2019). Les Grottes is a neighbourhood of roughly 3300 inhabitants close to the Gare de Cornavin in Geneva. It earned its fame in the seventies and eighties when it withstood the pressure and urban regeneration projects to which it was constantly subjected. At the time it organised large-scale mobilisation by involving grassroots movements and solid associative networks; it also planned countless cultural initiatives and implemented occupation by squatters (Philippe 2012; Lanza et al. 2013).

Les Grottes is currently a highly contradictory enclave; its "different" status is visible in the space itself and in the behaviour of its inhabitants. It is a city district built on public land, but that has nothing to do with the forms and habits of what we call a "public city". Although it has a weak economy made up of small associations and artisanal activities, it is located in the centre of Geneva, the financial heart of Europe. All this makes it an "other place" within the city where diversity is essentially marked by a variety of signs, meanings and actions closely connected to the development of a set of rights linked to habitation: it is both an expression and an outcome (Fig. 1).

The former working class neighbourhood clearly illustrates the fact that the right to housing, forcefully demanded during the urban struggles of the eighties, has broken down into an ensemble of superimposed fragments. An in-depth survey of the protagonists of those struggles in the eighties—inhabitants, technicians, administrators, and researchers—allowed us to review a stratified concept of the law, a tangled mass of numerous threads woven with various materials: the right to pay a rent in proportion to one's income; the right to remain in illegally-occupied homes renovated by the Canton and the City; the right to a squatter lifestyle based on principles of solidarity, hospitality, and social participation. But also: the right to enjoy a different space to that of

[7] Several study periods in Les Grottes made it possible to identify the changes that took place, the character of the occupant population, and the way the land was used. This project was jointly performed by an interdisciplinary group. The project led to the publication curated by Lanza et al. (2013). (note 1). The studies focusing on rights were performed by Cristina Bianchetti; in the period 2007–2013, they included on-site visits, photographs, critical interviews (20). It's about "in-depth" interviews with the protagonists of the struggles of the 1980s, inhabitants, technicians, administrators and scholars, conducted by Mischa Pinaud, (sociologist) within the framework of the Résistance et Projet research activities. Destin des Grottes (1930–2039), referred to below as Dossier 2009. The focus of the interviews was: "what space is demanded (by which actors) in their dwelling mode". Preferences, desires, nostalgia, wishes become in fact materials to define the relationship between physical space and its meanings.

Fig. 2 Domestic use of public space in Les Grottes. (photo by Cristina Bianchetti)

one's neighbours; the right to intimité, privacy, intimacy, non-interference; the right to be left in peace; the right to extimité,[8] extimacy, i.e., to intimate relations within a public space; the right to slow mobility, to play in the street, to take care of public space with flowerbeds full of lavender and chamomile; the right to raise hens in the city centre; the right to craftsmanship. And more besides: the right to live in a neighbourhood not modelled by the market and renewal policies; the right to radical environmental awareness; the right to enjoy a suburban vernacular landscape in the heart of one of the richest cities in Europe where land is literally worth gold. A mess, or rather, a sort of bundle of rights (Hohfeld 2013; Marcuse 1994) that not only highlights its variety, but draws attention to the changing forms of appropriation of space. Enhancement, unavailability, and subtraction all involve relationships capable of building "things" (houses, space) as objects of right. There is no mention of private property in this superimposed set of elements (Fig. 2).

The way these rights are constantly enforced in Les Grottes is enacted every day on public soil.[9] Borders are constantly claimed and established throughout the neighbourhood: the henhouses, flowerbeds, and plots shared between neighbours create a complex set of differentiated divisions. The grammar of light elements emphasises the different use modes of public land: re-appropriated and rewritten in a way that is temporary, sophisticated, and capable of conveying clear meanings. The chicken coop is not merely a netting: it is a lightweight, fir wood fence. A precise, accurate, and ornately handcrafted product. Ready, however, to disappear quite quickly after being built. Inside there is no beaten earth, but an expanse of grass worthy of the finest English lawns. The inevitable small coloured garden figures, vases, and flowers hanging from lamp posts mark a domesticated space that is no lighter in declaring the "entre nous". What emerges is a different city, less smooth, less uniform, less continuous, yet very comfortable and reassuring.

In other words, diversity and the anthropological living conditions in Les Grottes are reflected in well-defined,

[8] The term should be considered as intended by Lacan (2006) and has been re-proposed in C. Bianchetti, Spazi che contano, Donzelli, Rome, 2016.

[9] Urban battles and urban planning policies to transform the neighbourhood are reported in the books curated by Cogato Lanza, Elena and Pattaroni, Luca. De la difference urbaine. Le quartier des Grottes, (Genève: MētisPresses, 2013) and the book edited by Gfeller Philippe. Place des Grottes, (Lausanne: Editions d'en bas, 2012).

almost maniacal artefacts that are absolutely temporary in appearance and yet yearn to look vague and casual. An extremely deliberate domestication. As mentioned earlier, all this results in a great variety of places, signs, levels of land, and practices. A disorderly variety that makes this part of Geneva no less recognisable than its history. One might object that Les Grottes is an enclave inhabited by a homogeneous population: middle classes with a good cultural background who feel part of a recognisable community whose foundations lie in the memory of its urban struggles. The inhabitants of Les Grottes use the pronoun "we" to refer to themselves. They are proud to live in the same "village" in the heart of Geneva. As we will see when we examine the former Olympic Village their counter-argument is that 'even if we share the same vision of the world, we do it our way, using our words, our way of rewriting space and defining how we choose to live', i.e., in keeping with a vision that is personal and therefore subjective. These considerations explain the absolute centrality of these small, temporary, disorderly and somewhat frivolous actions of rewriting space.[10]

The former Olympic Village: individuals without rights[11]

Obviously not all the manifestations of rights associated with living in the contemporary city fall into this category. The former Olympic Village is a completely different story compared to Geneva; it is a far cry from Lefebvre's perspective and the right-to-housing movements of the seventies, but is nevertheless emblematic not only of contemporary rights associated with the city and housing (even if they are often not acknowledged), but also the way they are considered by the people who live there or pass through.

The site in question is the former Moi in Turin (MOI was the acronym of "wholesale fruit and vegetable market"). It had been abandoned for a long time, but was restored and turned into the Olympic Village in view of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games. At the time it

Fig. 3 The transformation of the Olympic Village (photo by Ianira Vassallo)

Fig. 4 Urban Practice in the Olympic Village (photo by Ianira Vassallo)

represented a real opportunity for Turin which had been trying for quite some time to leave the Fordist era behind and give the city a new identity.

A little over a decade ago, in this place, an attempt was made to create a "manifesto" of a "different kind of lifestyle" compared to the homologated working-class city. However, in a relatively short space of time the area experienced accelerated impoverishment and social marginalisation processes. Until to get, in the last few years, it symbolises the territorialisation of poverty and hardship packed into urban areas where the demand for basic housing rights is closely linked to the social exclusion of those who demand that right (Tosi 2017).

The design of the district was a partial transposition of the city's ambitious plans for transformation. It was the result of an international competition launched in 2002 to build accommodation for the 2500 journalists and athletes attending the Olympic event. Subsequently, between 2003 and 2005, a working group coordinated by the studio

[10] Regarding the idea of personally rewriting space within daily practices, see in primis de Certeau (1990).

[11] The study of the former Moi was based on observation of the evolution of the neighbourhood between 2005 and 2019. As previously mentioned, initially, during the design and construction phase, the neighborhood was analyzed and described through the works of the Summer School. Subsequently, after the occupation process, in 2013, the authors carried out several survey in this place and interviewed the designers of "MOI—migrants an opportunity of inclusion "sponsored by the Compagnia di San Paolo, and a member of the Refugee and Migrant Solidarity Committee of the Ex-Moi and La Salette occupations of Turin. Finally, in 2016–18 given the relevance of this situation, the case study was one of the places investigated by the students of the Urban Design Atelier of the Politecnico di Torino, about the topic of forms and rights to live in the contemporary city. The work focused on a detailed survey on the informal practices of living, on the adaptation of some spaces to different needs and on the marginal dimension of living.

Camerana et al. was tasked with its construction; their brief involved very tight deadlines coupled with high expectations.

If, on the one hand, the story of its construction fits perfectly into the broader urban branding operation to define the city's new post-Fordist identity, on the other hand it paradoxically appears to echo the ambitions and illusions characterising the construction of the neighbourhoods of the factory-city exemplified by Falchera and Mirafiori.

The former Moi area, had been imagined as a place for a different kind of living: a more comfortable "inner" space suited to a society by a varied of young and dynamic population eager to live in a "different" environment reminiscent of contemporary Northern European city projects.

The silhouettes of the inhabitants, the chessboard setting of the buildings, their shapes and colours, everything was very different from the typical Turin life style.

This part of "another" Turin soon revealed how fragile it was. Despite the glitzy photographs taken when construction was completed, the idea of a "different life style" rapidly dissolved as people stayed only very briefly at the Olympic Village and then moved on: initially athletes, technicians, and journalists, then students, middle-class families, co-housers, shopkeepers, and technicians working for the Regional Environmental Protection Agency. This rapid succession of segments of the population left numerous 'footsteps' on the ground. The much celebrated continuity of the ground floors with shared spaces, as well as the layout of the ground itself—designed to unhinge the rigid and consolidated house system in Turin—were rewritten in a series of fences, some of which are very rigid. However, unlike Les Grottes, very different materials were used to build these fences in the former Moi district: hard materials to mark harsh borders. Iron barriers, concrete blocks, and leftover material were used to divide public space. These barriers not only segment the area, but also the idea of a smooth space, they also prematurely distort the design and rewrite its history. The plan to recover such a site failed, weighed down as it was by such a heavy legacy: railway infrastructures, the Lingotto complex, and the factory districts built in the seventies. The latter, together with the crumbling coloured plaster of the façades and empty ground floors are just the first signs of the failure of the "subversive" idea of living in "coloured houses".

Recent newsworthy events explicitly reveal the exacerbation of that parable. On 30 March 2013,[12] 150 refugees seeking political asylum occupied a building in the former MOI complex; the building had either been abandoned or was perhaps waiting for the population vaguely and confusedly identified by the housing project. In the 2019, after 5 years, the number of occupants has risen from 150 to over 1300 from twenty-eight different countries. When the first refugees illegally occupied the building seven years after the Olympics, the former Moi was suffering from lack of identity. The Regional Environmental Protection Agency, which in the meantime had fenced off its offices, only occupied part of the Moi; almost all the students had left, leaving big empty spaces inside. The gestures, experiences, and demands of individuals, very unlike the envisaged inhabitants, were visible in the buildings and open spaces (usually neglected and abandoned). In a few years, private, overcrowded, narrow worlds had been rebuilt; worlds that were capable of providing sanctuary and hiding their inhabitants. The people had been started to sleep under the stairs, revealing a notion of intimacy that gone beyond the walls of the apartment and marked the entire building, symbol of that community. The underground parking lot had been become a depot, a market, a place where more or less legal exchanges took place. It was a space that protects against the dangers of urban life even though it sometimes contained them (episodes of illegal acts and crimes have been reported by the local press, the police and, in some cases, the army). The concept of extimité, extimacy, in the former Moi was visible on the facades of the buildings covered in street art and words in different languages written by the inhabitants themselves. The ground floors used as bike cooperative, community kitchens, and dormitories, has been closed off from the outside words and has not been connected to the open space 'tamed' by the construction of a sports playground, flowerbeds, vegetable gardens, and rest areas. These spaces had been transformed in contradictory, violent, and unregulated ways into an authentic "village" inhabited by a population imprisoned inside the city and waiting for a verdict of acknowledgement. Only this 'waiting' had qualified them as a community (Fig. 3).

[12] "The occupation that occurred in Turin is intertwined with that of the so-called North Africa Emergency Programme, which started in 2011, triggered by the arrivals following the Arab Spring and the fall of Geddafi in Libya. The Programme mainly concerned people from central Africa living in Libya who were hosted, upon arrival in Italy, in accommodation centres managed by the Department of Civil Protection and the Ministry of the Interior. When the North Africa Emergency Programme ended, in February 2013, a large majority of the people expelled from the accommodation structures were homeless and unemployed. Between March and April 2013, around 400 of them, most of whom held humanitarian permits, occupied three buildings of the MOI" (Andrea and Irene 2020).

This too represent a village. But a village made of narrow, overcrowded spaces, cluttered with objects and voices demanding rights that are neither exchangeable nor negotiable: the right to inviolability, the right to the freedom to believe, to think, to be welcomed, to join with others in an association, to be respected without being discriminated. These are fundamental rights: their value does not depend on the number of people who demand them, yet they should not be confused with the right to housing (or the right to the city). Even if housing is crucial to obtain them.

The situation of former Moi was perhaps the most important form of claiming space and rights taking place in the city of Turin in the last 10 years. It reveals the complexity of the contemporary city, the fragmentation of its populations and the different meaning that the concept of housing rights revealed in the space (Fig. 4).

In November 2017 the city administration began a process that the Mayor of Turin called "sweet" evacuation, to design a new project of social housing settlement in that area. The eviction process was accompanied by a relocation project for the migrants involved.[13] This choice represents the climax point of what for years has been a fragmented and conflicting political and media management on the occupation of the former Olympic Village. (Andrea and Irene 2020). In July 2019 the last building (the orange and gray one where about 350 people lived) was cleared. In the following days, was defined a "safety operation" in order to avoid new, arbitrary intrusions. It was a question of preventing access to the area by placing jersey bumps along the perimeter and garrisoning the neighborhood with the army.

In December 2020, the renovation of the occupied buildings was started. They will become (in 2023) a new social housing hub with 400 beds dedicated to students and young workers (in temporary housing formulas with easy access yet to be defined in the modalities).

The redevelopment of the former Moi area is part of an important urban transformation that affects the Lingotto district: the inauguration of the skyscraper of the Piedmont Region, the Parco della Salute, the connection of the Lingotto railway station to line 1 of the underground. The acclaimed policy of social inclusion and integration—and poorly concealed through rhetorical slogans that not matched the eviction actions implemented—quickly revealed its true goal: a building redevelopment process without recipients (who are these students and young workers if the city knows an aging index among the most important in Italy and if the universities are located in areas very far from the neighborhood?!).

In conclusion, the challenge of legitimize a primordial right (to exist) that revealed the most complex and extreme side of the right to housing (in its forms of occupation and appropriation) has been transformed in an ordinary request for social security and urban transformation.

Too many rights

Fifty-four years ago, in the opening of his Les mots et le choses Michel Foucault wrote about the "profound distress of those whose language has been destroyed" (Foucault 1966). Between the eighties and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the language of the disciplines dealing with the territory also faded: the links between words, objects, processes, and the actors of those processes, have weakened. It is that failure, when the language of our disciplines changed radically, that allows us to say that "the twentieth century is really over". Words that played a key role in the construction of a shared public opinion are less forceful or incisive. Their meaning has changed, at least in part. Most certainly the meaning of the word "right" in relation to the city and to living has changed, even though we are still witnessing a renewed focus on that influential line of urban studies that interprets the "right to the city", starting with Lefebvre (1968), as if those remote definitions were univocal and untouchable. Les Grottes and the former Moi are an almost paradigmatic expression of this paradox: absence of rights for some and hypertrophy of rights for others. On the one hand, situations of exclusion and rights vehemently affirmed by those who are deprived of them; on the other, transformation of subjective preferences into rights.

The combination alone of these two cases can trigger disgust: together they are the paradigmatic expression of an unjust city, unequal in an increasingly radical way. Based on the ideas of Alain Supiot, we could say that the first case study is a good example of the neo-liberal explosion into fragments of the concept of the "right to". "Not a programme of deterioration, but of Deconstruction of the Law" (the capital letter is Supiot 2010). The "pulverization of Law into subjective rights" (ibid.). A city of individuals armed with the "soft rights" that are an expression of personal choices. The second case study is, in our opinion, an excellent illustration of the inescapability—both today and yesterday—of a welfare state (Supiot 2013) that embodies the concept of more extensive rights, where labour, security, and assistance (therefore also housing) merge into a more general idea

[13] MOI "Migrants an opportunity for inclusion". Project coordinated by an interinstitutional group formed by the City of Turin, the Prefecture of Turin, the Compagnia di San Paolo, the Piedmont Region, the Diocese of Turin. The project aims to resolve the housing occupation of four buildings in the former Olympic village of Turin through paths of work and housing autonomy of the migrant people living there.

of social right, capable of making individuals more supportive and kinder towards each other.

Although we are aware of the differing nature of these two cases, we have used them to corroborate our idea, which we will mention in our conclusions.

In both cases, the demand for housing rights is very clear, it's one the inhabitants of Les Grottes love to recall: ces annèes de luttes, so alive in their memory, were moments when they loudly shouted out their demands and physically lived them in their actions and words. Today they are small signs; it is, indeed, a silent demand. And even in the former Moi, the status of illegal immigrant forces these individuals to remain hidden, in silence; immigrants have to "barricade" themselves in a space, hoping it will become a sort of free zone where they can simply exist. This, in our opinion, is an initial sign, perhaps not even the most important, of how impossible it is to continue to use the concept of the right to housing as we did in the past: as if it were a round, well polished, and compact concept. Always equal to itself and ready to use.

If the right to housing reaches the extreme and opposite forms we have tried to describe, if it is demanded by minute hieroglyphic letters on the ground or by overcrowding spaces and filling them with lawful or unlawful practices, then the right to housing is something multifaceted that cannot be framed inside a single mythographic image.

In other words, housing rights in the contemporary city are positioned along a continuum with extremities similar to the ones we have discussed. It is useless, as well as an oversimplification, to refer to housing rights as we did in the seventies. Housing rights in the contemporary city are different. And no less dramatic in some cases. Very few concepts reveal the transformation of a city as well as housing rights. They also exemplify that "profound distress of those whose language has been destroyed" mentioned by Foucault many years ago.

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Authors' contributions
This text reflects further on an ongoing issue tackled by the authors, either individually or jointly. The topics in question were examined in different contexts including a doctoral thesis, several collective studies and several personal considerations. Reference is also made to texts by different authors provided in the bibliography. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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