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BACHELOR THESIS

Resistance Spreading through Spaces:
The Transnational Diffusion
Dynamics of Place-based Housing
Movements

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Abstract

This study aims to explore transnational diffusion between place-based housing movements while relating it to neoliberalism's effect on housing crises and the concept of space of flows and space of places. This qualitative study employs various data sources and its primary method is a manifest content analysis of interviews with activists from the housing movements Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignen and Movimento Referendo pela Habitação based in Berlin and Lisbon respectively. The findings of this study include proof for the occurrence of diffusion between the aforementioned movements, an account of the similar nature of neoliberalism's effect on affordable housing in Berlin and Lisbon, and how the idea of a referendum initiative and the internal organisational structure were diffused through three diffusion pathways. Additionally, the study presents new insight into the potential role of the characteristics of individual activists and social media in transnational diffusion processes. This study is relevant because it is the first to investigate the effect of Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignen's referendum success in other places. Furthermore, the application of the space of flows and the space of places provides a spatial dimension to diffusion studies by adding geography to a typically sociological field of study.

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1 Introduction.

In his 2019 book *Rebel Cities*, David Harvey mentions that the global urban network is replete with political possibilities that remain untapped by progressive movements. This paper explores how these possibilities are starting to be tapped by examining the Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignen movement (DWE). The Berlin-based Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignen movement, launched in 2017, is protesting against the housing crisis in the city, and it does so by proposing a straightforward solution: Berlin should expropriate more than 250.000 dwellings owned by the city's large-scale corporate landlords through the leverage given by Article 15 in the German constitution to de-privatise this significant part of the housing stock to make the city more affordable again for lower- and middle-income people (Kusiak, 2021). To achieve their goal of expropriation for better housing justice, DWE ran a successful referendum campaign by collecting more than 350.000 valid signatures from the citizens of Berlin in a relatively short amount of time. According to the Berlin State Constitution, a referendum could be held. And it was. 59.1% of the Berlin voters expressed that they want to expropriate the biggest corporate landlords that manage housing stock in the city (dweenteignen, n.d). News of the successful referendum echoed across global cities. Leilani Farha, a former U.N special rapporteur on housing and human rights activist, has expressed the global importance of DWE and that she brings DWE to the table when interacting with advocates and governments in other cities, leaving them flabbergasted and slightly anxious that a similarly driven movement will be mobilising in their city, using the constitution to go after their landlords (Süer & Kintscher, 2022). Perhaps they have a good reason to be worried. Upsurges of radical mobilisation tend to occur in great protest waves, in cycles of contention (Hsiao & Pfaff, 2022).

The number of initiatives focusing on housing justice and using the referendum as their primary democratic tool has grown considerably in the last few years. Given the recent success of DWE, it is reasonable to speculate that these new initiatives and their mobilisations may be influenced by DWE's strategy and achievements. Nevertheless, so far, it seems that no academic work has been conducted that can definitively conclude that diffusion, the spread of information, identities, structure, and tactics, has occurred with DWE to the extent that similar movements develop in other countries in Europe as a result of the success of DWE. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate this potential link and provide evidence of diffusion from DWE to other movements. Before addressing this recent referendum and housing justice phenomenon as the beginning of a cycle of contention with DWE as the originator, we must properly assess the relationship between DWE and one of the other recent referendum and place-based housing movements.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The primary question of this study is: how and to what extent does a social movement's political and organisational success in one location spread its characteristics, ideas, tactics, strategies, and identities to other place-based social movements abroad?

The secondary research questions are:

1. What conditions in different locations warrant similar forms of resistance?
2. Does transnational diffusion occur in the selected cases?
3. What specific elements are being diffused?
4. How exactly does this diffusion process occur?
5. What is the role of a spatial dimension in the diffusion process?

STRUCTURE OF THESIS

First, this thesis delves into theoretical explorations, focusing on the notions of space of flows and space of places. Then, it investigates the role of neoliberalism in inducing urban housing crises and highlights the dynamics of diffusion among social movements. Following this theoretical framework, a methodology section discusses the chosen research method, data collection, selection of respondents, limitations, and ethical considerations. The thesis then applies this theory and data to investigate the transnational diffusion of social movements, using two cases: Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignung (DWE) in Berlin and Movimento Referendo pela Habitação (MRH) in Lisbon.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 THE SPACE OF FLOWS & THE SPACE OF PLACES

Castells' (1999) concepts of space of flows and space of places in the Information Age can illustrate the spatial dimension of the forces involved in globally connected European cities' housing crisis and the transnational diffusion between the transmitter and adopter movements. The space of flows is the material arrangements that allow for the simultaneity of social practices without geographical proximity and consists of a technological infrastructure of information systems, telecommunications, and transportation lines. The capacity, characteristics and location of the elements of the technological infrastructure determine its functions and relationship to other spatial forms and processes (Castells, 1999).

In the space of places, place refers to the form, function and meaning of social phenomena within the boundaries of a locality, such as a city, neighborhood or street, to which people tend to construct their everyday life. Beyond personal life experience in relation to a specific place, social organisation and political representation are also place-based, as well as shared cultural identities, often built on shared historical experiences in a specific territory. Because the space of flows is interconnected and versatile, it can transcend the restrictions of local, territorial control, allowing the space of flows to dominate the fragmented and localised space of places. According to Castells (1999), the only way the space of places can resist the dominating influences of the space of flows is by refusing the land rights for overwhelming flows meaning, for example, that local communities and entities reject certain globalised practices or external influences from happening in their city.

2.2 NEOLIBERALISM AND THE HOUSING CRISES

Neoliberalism emphasises entrepreneurial liberties underscored by principles like private property rights, personal freedom, open markets, and unrestricted trade (Harvey, 2005). Financialisation, marked by a growing dominance of financial actors and practices leading to structural changes in economies, companies, states, and households, is an essential part of the neoliberal economic model (Byrne & Norris, 2019). The government's role within this framework is to ensure these freedoms by establishing crucial functions. These include law enforcement and legal systems to secure private property rights and promote markets' logic. In terms of housing, the government shapes the provision of social and affordable housing to facilitate the process of housing financialisation (Byrne & Norris, 2019; Harvey, 2005).

However, the implications of this neoliberal economic model are significant across several sectors, especially housing. Harvey (2005) posits 'accumulation by dispossession', a process where the wealthy and influential gather assets and resources by depriving the less advantaged of theirs, resulting in a shift of the power dynamics between the dispossessed and the wealth-accumulating capitalist class at a central place in this economic model. This phenomenon manifests via land acquisition and debt enslavement, often leading to forced removals and coercion, further exacerbating social inequality (Harvey, 2005; Routledge, 2009). These socioeconomic dynamics have instigated a global spread of protests and transnational initiatives against neoliberal institutions, governments, and corporations (Miller,

2008). New social movements born from these dynamics present opportunities to propose, embody, and envision alternative conceptions for the future of democracy through their participatory and inclusive mechanisms and demands (Porta et al., 2017).

The effects of neoliberalism and financialisation are particularly evident in larger urban areas. Neoliberal governance turns urban areas into battlegrounds for these socioeconomic conflicts and civil resistance. When expressed in urban governance, neoliberalism results in the business-oriented transformation of local government, the privatisation of public services, and the commodification of urban spaces, especially affordable housing (Mendes, 2018). Cities are managed like businesses, with the government's goal to attract investments and reduce expenditures, leading to spending cuts, decreased public services, and limited investment in infrastructure and affordable housing (Peck, 2012).

This austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012) has sparked extensive protests and resistance movements, with activist movements fighting for their right to the city and demanding transformative shifts in housing policies (Madden & Marcuse, 2016).

At the same time, neoliberal globalisation has widened the gap between the global and local, unbalancing the power dynamic between global networks in the spaces of flows and local institutions in the spaces of places (Nicholls, 2007).

The ongoing housing crisis in Europe and the social movements opposing it exemplify the complex interplay between global financial systems, local governmental policies, and citizen-led activism. The effect of neoliberalism on housing, seen in the privatisation and financialisation of the housing sector and the ensuing protests, shows how the dominance of the spaces of flows over the spaces of places is contributing to the current housing crisis in Europe.

In conclusion, the neoliberal economic model and the process of financialisation have had thorough impacts on various aspects of society, most notably on housing. As demonstrated by the current housing crisis in Europe, these models have not only led to the privatisation and financialisation of housing sectors but also instigated widespread social movements and protests.

2.3 DYNAMICS OF DIFFUSION

Diffusion can be defined as the spread of social innovation from a transmitter movement to an adopter movement and the acceptance of a specific item over time by the adopting movement. The transmitter and adopter movements are linked to external channels of communication and to each other by both a structure of social relations and a system of values or culture. It involves processes in which the ideational, tactical, and organisational lessons from the originating movement are made available to subsequent adopters (Hsiao & Pfaff, 2022; Rucht & McAdam, 1993; McAdam, 1996).

Social movement diffusion involves more than merely spreading information. It includes the transfer of contentious claims and forms across varied contexts, and how social movement organisations respond to and adopt new ideas and forms originating from abroad (Shawki, 2013).

The items of transnational social movement diffusion can involve elements such as the content of mobilisation (e.g., goals or themes), the form of organisation (e.g., internal structures), the form of action (e.g., effective strategies), the model of action (e.g., other movement's mobilisation serving as a template), collective identities, and the likely effects of collective action (e.g., information about probable outcomes influencing group mobilisation) (Haydu, 2019; Kriesi et al., 1995).

Studying transnational diffusion necessitates a nuanced understanding of communication and exchange processes. These processes encompass the adaptations of ideas in diverse local settings, the shared elements and differences among social movements (Pleyers, 2023). In the context of transnational diffusion, Rucht and McAdam (1993) propose that for diffusion to occur, adopters must identify at a minimal level with transmitters. In the case of place-based movements, this identification of the adopter with the transmitter entails that there must be similarities between the places in which the movements are based.

To argue that the diffusion of collective action items has occurred between movements, one must prove that the similarities between cases arise not from independent responses to similar conditions in different locations but from the influence of one movement on another (Haydu, 2019; Shawski, 2013). Hence, to establish the occurrence of diffusion, three premises must be empirically supported: first, a demonstrable temporal lag between the actions of the transmitter and the adopter; second, identification of shared elements between the two movements; and third, empirical evidence that shows these shared elements have been transferred from one movement to another via both relational and non-relational links (Rucht & McAdam, 1993). Therefore, occurrence of diffusion can be concluded by examining the mechanisms of diffusion, which include exposure to new information and social contact between the adopters and transmitters (Hsiao & Pfaff, 2022).

These mechanisms operate through three diffusion pathways, acting as different channels for information exchange. The first, **relational diffusion**, relies on interpersonal contact and communication between transmitters and adopters as the medium for diffusing contention. While relational diffusion facilitates trust-based communication and emulation of practices, its reach is typically restricted to personal networks. The second, **non-relational diffusion**, utilises impersonal and indirect means such as media that do not rely on personal contact for spreading information. Although non-relational diffusion facilitates rapid message transmission, it may oversimplify messages, potentially leading to many interpretations. The third pathway, **mediated diffusion**, involves third parties who maintain relationships of trust with both the transmitter and adopter, facilitating communication and information sharing between them. Mediated diffusion can allow these brokers to reshape the message to fit their agenda. Notably, most diffusion processes leverage a combination of relational and non-relational channels.

In the technologically connected Information Age, the internet can spread resistance information almost universally through all diffusion pathways (Shawski, 2013; Tarrow, 2010; Rucht & McAdam, 1993).

2.4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Below sits the conceptual model that connects the identified dynamics of diffusion from the literature. It demonstrates the spatial dimension and how these processes relate to the distinction between the occasionally intersecting space of flows and the space of places.

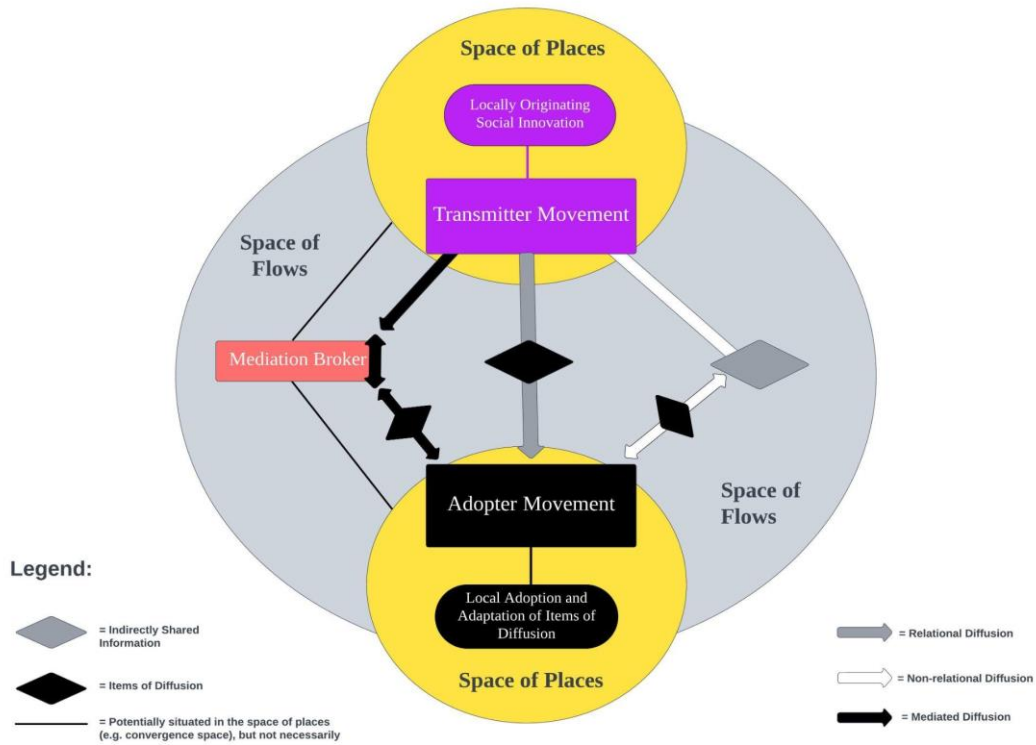


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model. (Author). Made with lucid.app.

2.5 HYPOTHESES

After having explored the literature, the expectations, or hypotheses, for this study are:

H1: Diffusion occurs with DWE as the transmitter and MRH as the adopter.

H2: The dynamics of diffusion in this case align with those identified in the literature.

H3: Castells' notion of 'space of flows' and 'space of places' provides valuable insight into the spatial dimensions of transnational diffusion.

3 Methodology.

3.1 DATA ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with movement participants from DWE and MRH in Berlin and Lisbon in April and May 2023, respectively. A manifest content analysis was applied to the primary text data from these interviews. This approach is selected because it focuses on interpreting the explicit content of the data rather than searching for implicit meanings. The analysis consisted of three stages. The first stage, de-contextualisation, involved breaking the text data into smaller meaning units. Each meaning unit was then labeled with a code meant to be understood in context. These codes facilitated the identification of concepts around which the data could be assembled into patterns more easily. A coding list with explanations of the codes was kept and expanded to ensure reliability and minimise cognitive change during the analysis process. The interview codes were generated deductively from the literature and inductively from the raw data. The second stage, re-contextualisation, entailed comparing the labeled meaning units against the original text to check that all relevant information was broken down into meaning units, facilitated by color-coding the units in the original transcribed text in ATLAS.TI. The third stage, categorisation, involved identifying themes and categories (Bengtsson, 2016).

Data triangulation was used in this study to secure a more holistic and valid comprehension of the subject matter. A variety of data sources, including social media posts, websites, a general movement assembly with MRH, a panel discussion featuring DWE, the Housing Action Day 2023 demonstration in Berlin (initiated by the European Action Coalition), an interview with an academic expert on Berlin housing, and two documentaries were part of the research process. One of the documentaries focuses on DWE, and the other explores the housing crisis in Lisbon, including the precursors to MRH. The incorporation of these diverse data sources aids in ensuring the robustness of the research findings.

3.2 TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION OF INTERVIEWS

All interviews were initially converted from MP4 files to text format via cost-free speech-to-text Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). The Berlin-based interviews, conducted in English with occasional German and Spanish names, were transcribed using Otter.ai. This tool allows for the transcription of three 30-minute recordings at no cost. Post-transcription, the text was manually corrected for mistakes made by the API, particularly with non-English names.

The Portuguese interview required a different transcription tool, as Otter.ai lacks Portuguese language support. The acclaimed sonix.ai, capable of transcribing and translating multiple languages, including Portuguese, was utilised. The output from Sonix.ai was compared with that from Whisper.ai, another transcription tool, to validate the transcription accuracy. Whisper.ai demonstrated superior accuracy, transcribing the entire interview into Portuguese. Subsequently, the Portuguese transcript was translated into English using DeepL Translate, a machine-learning tool considered more accurate than Google Translate. Then, the English transcript was reviewed while listening to the audio recording to detect inaccuracies.

3.3 LIMITATIONS

Due to time and financial constraints, the gathered empirical data were insufficient to provide a holistic account of all the relevant actors in the transnational diffusion dynamics. The study was primarily concerned with the Portuguese movement, the adopter in the diffusion process under investigation. However, the language barrier constrained the flexibility of the semi-structured interview and limited the depth of probe and adaptation based on the respondent's answers. Furthermore, the language barrier could have led to a loss in the nuances and implicit meanings regarding the interview and the attended general assembly in Lisbon.

While the transcription tools' accuracy is well-documented, some errors were noted. Corrections were made based on the contextual information in the conversation and existing literature on the social housing movement in Lisbon. However, as the tools make mistakes, relying on them compromises data reliability through inaccuracies.

Upon comparing the recording to the transcription, it was noted that the tools (presumably Whisper.ai) had modified the English grammar and phrasing, seemingly to aim for formal correctness. However, the semantic integrity remained, satisfying the study's objective of understanding the transmission of ideas, not the emotional states or idiosyncratic communication styles.

Besides the movement interviews, the data sources were not subject to manifest content analysis in ATLAS.TI. Instead, descriptive and interpretive notes based on observations were intuitively selected and written down in a notebook by the researcher and then infused into the analysis section of the paper.

3.4 RESPONDENTS

Housing movement Movimento Referando pela Habitação (MRH) in Lisbon, which has similarities to DWE, has mentioned in a statement that it is inspired by DWE (European Action Coalition, 2022). MRH “*intends to use (...) the local referendum by popular initiative (...) to change the municipal law on holiday rentals (RMAL) in order to prevent commercial activity, such as holiday rentals, to take place in buildings with housing licenses.*” (European Action Coalition, 2022). Therefore, these two movements are chosen for this study on transnational diffusion between place-based housing movements.

The respondents for the interviews and the attended events were identified through direct email contact with the movements and by following their social media activity in real-time. The respondents have been active in the movements since their inception and are well-versed in the topic. Therefore, their responses are deemed valid and trustworthy. However, the study would have benefited from additional interviews with movement participants directly involved with transnational exchanges.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The identities of all respondents and movement participants mentioned during the interviews have been anonymised to ensure their privacy. Right before the interviews, the study was explained to the respondents, either in written or verbal form, mentioning why they were valuable to the study. It explicitly stated that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent anytime. Additionally, the researcher's contact information was shared with the respondents to ensure the accessibility of communication in case of questions or consent withdrawal. Following data privacy regulations, the interview recordings and transcripts will be deleted in the tools and databases used for this study.

4 Results

4.1 NEOLIBERALISM AND HOUSING IN BERLIN AND LISBON

In this part of the analysis, we will explore how neoliberal economic models and financialisation, underpinned by principles such as private property rights, personal freedom, open markets, and unrestricted trade, have contributed to the housing crises in Berlin and Lisbon. We aim to establish similarities and differences in the developments leading to their current housing situations, against which the movements of our focus resist and aspire to change.

4.1.1 BERLIN

Starting with Berlin, the city was financially close to bankruptcy after re-unification in 1989, and the local government was in need of capital.

"And so in the end, this whole system ended up with the Berlin municipal housing companies selling 50% of the housing stock to private investors." - Berlin Housing Expert Interview

This is a clear example of the local government shaping the provision of affordable and social housing in a manner that fueled the financialisation of housing. The process involved accumulation by dispossession, where the less advantaged individuals residing in these social housing units, as well as eligible tenants currently unable to access affordable housing due to diminished housing stock, experienced the removal of essential material possessions from their lives. This housing stock, previously deemed vital for the well-being of these residents, was then seen as an investment opportunity by foreign investors and developers.

"Basically, for me, the most important thing is what you would say as a deregulation, liberalisation, financialisation of housing. So it started in the 90s. Everything started a little bit earlier. But that started in the 1990s." - Berlin Housing Expert Interview

This statement shows the critical aspects behind Berlin's current affordable housing crisis, namely the deregulation, liberalisation, and financialisation of housing. These principles suggest a turn towards the neoliberal ideology favouring private property rights, personal freedom, and open markets. Additionally, they imply a growing influence and presence of financial institutions and practices in the housing sector.

The liberalisation of the housing market in Berlin, along with the wider effects of globalisation and advancements in financial technologies, attracted international actors.

"And who bought this housing, this was like, not all but a lot of them were like US American and British stock companies that consider housing not as a social good, but as a commodity." - Berlin Housing Expert Interview

This quote illustrates the widening gap brought about by neoliberal globalisation between the global and the local, and the power dynamics between dominating global networks, 'spaces of flows', and local institutions and people, 'spaces of places'. These powerful investors dictate the structure and accessibility of a substantial portion of Berlin's affordable housing stock through financial networks enabled by neoliberal policies. Their decisions, made from afar, have significant local implications, further emphasising how the space of flows can dominate development in the space of places.

4.1.2 LISBON

Turning our attention to Lisbon, the transformation of urban space and housing accessibility, as a result of shifts in urban governance, has become more pronounced in Lisbon due to the economic aftermath of the 2008-9 financial crisis. This intensification is partly a result of the responses to the financial crisis. Specifically, the Troika, a body of key representatives from international financial capital such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Commission (EC), called for certain measures to be implemented (Left Hand Rotation, 2019). These measures were primarily designed to strengthen the real estate market, making it the backbone of economic recovery. Operating within the space of flows, the Troika mandated a further liberalisation of the market, reducing Lisbon's resilience to the dominating influence of international flows (Mendes, 2018; Left Hand Rotation, 2019).

"The adoption of new models of management and development of the territory as imposed in order to safeguard the success of the underlying commitments to the program on International Financial Assistance which conditioned the performance of the state and other public and private sectors while obeying a transnational norm (...) One of the new structural reforms was the New Urban Rental Regime which has resulted in unaffordable rent for many tenants while failing to establish adequate social support, which has negatively affected families of lower socio-economic status. The new law of urban rental allows for the facilitation of eviction if the landlord and/or owner wants to claim the dwelling for themselves or their descendants (...) which led to gentrification and displacement happening in central areas of Lisbon." - Mendes (2018)

Similar to Berlin, but through a slightly different mechanism and distinct policy, accumulation by dispossession in Lisbon is facilitated by neoliberal policies, in this case, the New Urban Rental Regime. This law paves the legal path for the eviction of economically disadvantaged tenants, thereby leaving them worse off. This law has played a role in housing speculation in Lisbon, where buildings housing poorer tenants are being purchased by foreign investors. This purchase leads to the eviction of tenants due to the New Urban Rental Law, and buildings are subsequently rebranded to accommodate higher-value touristic functions before being sold at a higher price. As a result, housing availability is diverted from rental and residential use towards touristic rentals, thereby decreasing the supply. With a reduced supply of housing, prices increase. In a liberalised economy, where prices fluctuate according to market rules in a sector with inherent speculative tendencies, such as housing, tourism only strengthens this process and contributes to real estate financial revaluation processes. The city centre was for a long time characterised by a low-cost rental market, resulting in relatively

low rents compared to markets in other countries. Moreover, the state is encouraging foreign investment by creating programs to attract it, for instance, the Golden Visa and the Non-Regular Resident schemes. These initiatives have redirected many financial and migrational flows towards Lisbon, altering the local characteristics of central city areas and the everyday lives of its inhabitants (Mendes, 2018; Left Hand Rotation, 2019).

To conclude this part of the analysis and answer one of the subquestions, we see that similar changes have happened in the two cities due to the imposing dominance of financial networks in the space of flows on the places where people base their everyday life, facilitated by the urban entrepreneurialism and austerity urbanism policies that have affected the housing situation gravely in both Berlin and Lisbon.

4.2 DIFFUSIONS BETWEEN DWE AND MRH

Before proceeding further to the dynamics of diffusion between DWE and MRH, we must establish whether diffusion between the movements has occurred.

Fig. 2 .
Demonstrating Diffusion as a Fact. (Author).Made with Canva. (Rucht & McAdam, 1993; MRH Participant Interview; DWE Participant Interview; dweenteignen, n.d.; European Action Coalition, 2022)

<p>1) A temporal lag between the actions of the transmitter and the adopter.</p> <p>2) An identification of shared elements between the two struggle.</p> <p>3) Empirical evidence that shows these shared elements have been transferred from one movement to another via both relational and non-relational links (Rucht and McAdam, 1993).</p>	
DWE	MRH
<p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DWE was founded in 2017. • The successful DWE referendum was held in September 2021. 	<p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MRH was founded in June 2022, almost a year after the referendum in Berlin. • MRH is currently in the signature collection phase
<p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DWE uses anti-neoliberal rhetoric • Used local referendum by popular initiative • Aims to legally de-privatise housing by expropriating the biggest corporate landlords to create more affordable housing stock for locals • The internal structure of DWE consists of neighbourhood teams that organise events to gather signatures and working groups that are responsible for logistical tasks. • DWE operates in Germany with a democratic political system with referendums by popular initiative written in the Constitution. • DWE is non-partisan and horizontally organised 	<p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MRH uses anti-neoliberal rhetoric. • MRH uses local referendum by popular initiative. • Aims to change the municipal law on holiday rentals (RMAL) to prevent commercial activity, such as holiday rentals, from taking place in buildings with housing licenses to create more affordable housing stock for locals. • The internal structure of MRH consists of neighbourhood teams that organise events to gather signatures and working groups responsible for logistical tasks. • MRH operates in Portugal with a democratic political system with referendums by popular initiative written in the Constitution. • MRH is non-partisan and horizontally organised
<p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "when we met up (DWE and MRH), we just had like a two hour just chat about our experiences building (...) the structures that we used, because they didn't when we did it, they didn't start with the Signature Collection yet. (...) we kind of talked about our system of having local groups, (...) how we try to transfer information and knowledge and everything. So we kind of talked about strategic, like structures that we built." - DWE Participant Interview 	<p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "the referendum in Lisbon is very much inspired by the referendum in Berlin, the referendum of Berlin (...) we came up with the idea of, ok, maybe we want this here in Lisbon as well" - MRH Participant Interview • "We are discussing about the local groups, the neighborhood groups, because it was a copy of what happens in Berlin, because in the city, what I know is that they organise neighbourhoods. And we try to do the same here" - MRH Participant Interview

By comparing both sides of Figure 2, especially the quotes from the movement participants, we can answer subquestion 2 by concluding that Rucht & McAdam's three premises necessary for establishing the occurrence of diffusion are satisfied in the case of DWE as the transmitter and MRH as the adopter in a diffusion process. Now, we can proceed to explore the dynamics of this diffusion more in detail to answer subquestions 3 and 4.

4.2.1 DIFFUSIONS PATHWAYS

“we started out mainly as observers of what was happening in Berlin on an individual level, that is, several people who were here in the city, some already involved in the housing movement, others not, we began to understand what was happening in Berlin, and wondering how we could bring it here as well, and so began a kind of one-to-one conversation between all these people. (...) I think it was very much this synergy of being infected with what was happening elsewhere and bring it here.” - MRH Participant Interview

Above is a clear cut example of the beginning of the diffusion process, starting with non-relational and then relational diffusion. Although the exact source of information is not specified, the quote suggests that the activists that would go on to constitute MRH, learned about the progress and success of DWE as observers, presumably through the consumption of media which then was spread within activist circles in Lisbon before those activists, either through individual activists' social ties to DWE participants or by directly contacting DWE through communication channels situated in the space of flows such as email or direct messages on social media platforms, as the DWE participant mentioned in the interview. Therefore, it seems that the idea and motivation to start the MRH initiative was diffused through the non-relational pathway, which then led to direct contact in place facilitated by international travel in the space of flows allowing the diffusion items to be of more depth, constructive and detailed, as seen in the quote below.

“there was someone here who was (DWE participant; name omitted) (...) who was telling us about some of the experiences of the Berlin referendum, namely in terms of how to get started” - MRH Participant Interview.

In the two quotes above we see non-relational and relational diffusion of the content of mobilisation (the theme and direction) and in the two quotes below we see relational diffusion of the form of organisation (internal structures) which aligns with the theory (Haydu, 2019; Kriesi et al., 1995).

“then there are the neighbourhood groups, which are the local groups, the set of local organisation I had talked about, which are very much inspired by the Berlin movement” -

MRH Participant Interview

“when we met up, we just had like a two hour just chat about our experiences building like, especially the structures that we used, because they didn't when we did it, they didn't start with the Signature Collection yet. So we kind of talked about our system of having local groups, but still like a Berlin wide group and how we try to transfer information and knowledge and everything. So we kind of talked about strategic, like structures that we built.” - DWE Participant Interview.

4.2.2 MEDIATED DIFFUSION AND MEDIATION BROKERS

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, mediated diffusion involves third parties who maintain relationships of trust with both the transmitter and adopter, facilitating communication and information sharing between them. Mediated diffusion can allow these brokers to reshape the message to fit their agenda (Tarrow, 2010).

“That was actually the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. So like, a foundation here that helped to establish the contact between us and the movement in Lisbon. So I think it's kind of both sometimes it's like people getting contacted, sometimes it's third parties helping or like connecting (...) that (conference in Berlin) was arranged by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. Okay. Yeah. So they paid for it also” - DWE Participant Interview

In the quote above, we see how the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS) has acted as a mediation broker connecting DWE and MRH by inviting them, and other movements, to a conference held in Berlin in 2022, paid for by RLS, where the goal was to facilitate Information sharing between the movements focussing on achieving housing justice with referendums as the primary political tool.

Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, founded in 1990, is a major German political foundation that *“stands for democratic socialism with an internationalist focus”*. The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung *“aims to serve as a forum in Germany and abroad fostering dialogue between socialist forces, movements, and organizations, left-minded intellectuals, and non-governmental organizations”*. The foundation does so by *“bringing together various left-wing organizations and individuals and providing a forum for political dialogue”*. Its *“international work strives to incorporate the perspectives and experiences of our partners abroad into political dialogue in Germany, and to ensure a genuinely equal and reciprocal exchange of knowledge”* (rosalux.de, n.d.).

Based on its self-description, RLS's agenda seems to align with the goals of the housing movements: to radically transform governance to resist the dominating forces of the neoliberal economic model. Therefore, it seems unlikely that RLS will distort the diffusion process to serve a hidden agenda that differs from that of the movements. Although, RLS seems to have had the deciding power in choosing which movements could attend the conference. Furthermore, RLS was in charge of the schedule meaning that their role consisted of more than introducing the movements in a formal setting. Nevertheless, RLS seems aware of its general role as mediation broker, but it might also have acted as a transmitter by wielding decisive power over the structure and content of the conference. While RLS's goals align with the housing movements, their control over the conference's structure and attendees raises questions about potential bias and power dynamics.

Moreover, RLS operates in the space of flows while its goal is to impact the space of places by facilitating diffusion across and between the restrictive borders of place. This is in contrast to DWE and MRH that operate in the space of places and seek to restrict the space of flows by eliminating the dominance that certain network flows wield on the space of places.

4.2.3 LOCAL ADAPTATION OF THE ITEM OF DIFFUSION

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, understanding diffusion also entails how the adopter movement adapts the item of diffusion. The item of diffusion is often transformed when filtered through the space of flows to remove the place-based contextualities, or simply not given much attention, as seen in the quote below.

it's hard to compare sometimes in different countries? Because it really depends on the political system, kind of what the rights of referendum are, how, what kind of all of those things. So it's still interesting to compare and share. But that's, I think, not maybe that useful in most cases, because it's hard to apply - DWE Participant Interview

However, MRH applied the neighbourhood team structure 1-to-1 to Lisbon, where each team is autonomous and constricted by the neighbourhood borders. While efficient in Berlin, this structure encountered some issues in Lisbon due to the lack of civic culture and the displacement of locals to the periphery because of gentrification-causing dominant financial flows and post-financial crisis neoliberal policies. Most neighbourhood teams in MRH are structured around inner-city areas, but the displacement of potentially supportive locals to the periphery means that MRH is working on adapting the internal structure to fit this local context. For example, with multiple inner-city neighbourhood teams collaborating by doing signature collections and activities in peripheral neighbourhoods currently lacking an MRH team. Therefore, the success of the adoption of items that are transformed and transported through the space of flows, can be challenged by the specificities in the space of places, forcing the place-based movements to reevaluate their adaptation of the items.

4.2.4 THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISTS

The theoretical framework does not identify the role of individual activists and the importance of their characteristics and relations to one or more places in the diffusion process. However, in the case of transnational exchanges between DWE and MRH, those individuals and their characteristics play a crucial role in the diffusion process.

“And then I think when (omitted name) went to Lisbon, I think she also like the signature collection started or something. And then she went there for like a meeting (...) because she speaks Portuguese, so it was nice for her, I think to go there as well.” - DWE
Participant Interview.

The activist from DWE volunteered to go on exchange to Lisbon to share the experiences of DWE with MRH regarding the signature collection phase of the referendum process, thereby engaging in relational diffusion with DWE, represented by this woman, as the transmitter and MRH as the adopter. This activist can converse in Portuguese, which removes the hindrance of a language barrier, reflecting the autonomous and place-based nature of MRH and its preference for Portuguese, which is also the only language in which they publish information. Here, the international background of the DWE participants plays a crucial role in transnational diffusion, showcasing that activists can embody and navigate certain specificities of different places, for example, by being multi-lingual, going back and forth between the places through the space of flows, which then can facilitate a more efficient diffusion process and solidarity building.

4.2.5 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms operate in the digital space of flows and can connect people and organisations based in the space of places. These platforms play a role in the diffusion process, as seen below.

“We shared some messages on Instagram, but in an informal way. But maybe in the future we will talk to them more seriously (...) but I think the social network can be a space to start a conversation with these movements, because you see their stories on Instagram and share their stories in the referendum here. It is a type of international virtual coexistence and can be a space to start a conversation in a more formal way.” - MRH
Participant Interview

As a result of previous direct contact, DWE and MRH remain socially connected in the space of flows by following each other’s main Instagram accounts. When DWE reposted the announcement of the successful end of the signature collection phase for the equivalent housing moment in Hamburg, it started a non-relational diffusion process with MRH. The MRH activist operating their Instagram account shared the repost with other movement participants, transforming it into a diffusion item that enhanced MRH’s belief in their ability to finish their signature collections successfully. Furthermore, MRH discovering the Hamburg

movement with the repost by DWE led MRH and Hamburg to have direct contact through Instagram. These direct Instagram messages may lead to more in-depth relational diffusion. Utilising the internet and social media's capacity to spread resistance information across the boundaries of place, DWE acted in the role of a mediation broker by connecting MRH and the Hamburg movement. In this instance, the mediated diffusion differs from the RLS conference by facilitating non-relational, instead of relational, diffusion.



Fig. 4. DWE at Housing Action Days demonstration in Berlin on April 1st 2023. (Author, 2023).



Fig. 5. MRH at Housing Action Days demonstration in Lisbon on April 1st 2023. (MRH Facebook page, 2023).

5 Conclusions.

This study has explored transnational diffusion between social movements, through a spatially aware lens. By having investigated the place-based housing movements DWE and MRH, we can state conclusions.

The first conclusion is that the neoliberalisation of urban governance and the growing dominance of financial networks in the space of flows over the people in the space of places has negatively affected the security and affordability of housing in both Berlin and Lisbon, meaning that the occurrence of similar forms of resistance against the same framed injustice in the cities seems plausible.

The second conclusion is that transmitter-adopter diffusion has occurred between DWE and MRH.

The third conclusion is that the diffused items from the transmitter to the adopted include the idea of using referendums for achieving housing justice and the internal organisational structure of the movement. On the other hand, the specific political and legal aspects were not diffused due to being too place-specific.

The fourth conclusion is that diffusion occurred through three pathways (relational, non-relational and mediated diffusion).

The fifth and final conclusion is that the dichotomous but intersecting notion of the space of flows and the space of places proves valuable in spatially situating part of the European housing crises and the dynamics of diffusion. Based on these five conclusions, we can accept all three hypotheses presented in this paper.

Further research should delve deeper into the extent to which diffusion with DWE as the transmitter has occurred in other cities around Europe. Additionally, if Hegel is correct in saying that the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the coming of the dusk, then these movements and the diffusion that has occurred, and perhaps has yet to occur, should be revisited in more depth once this cycle of contention has long passed.

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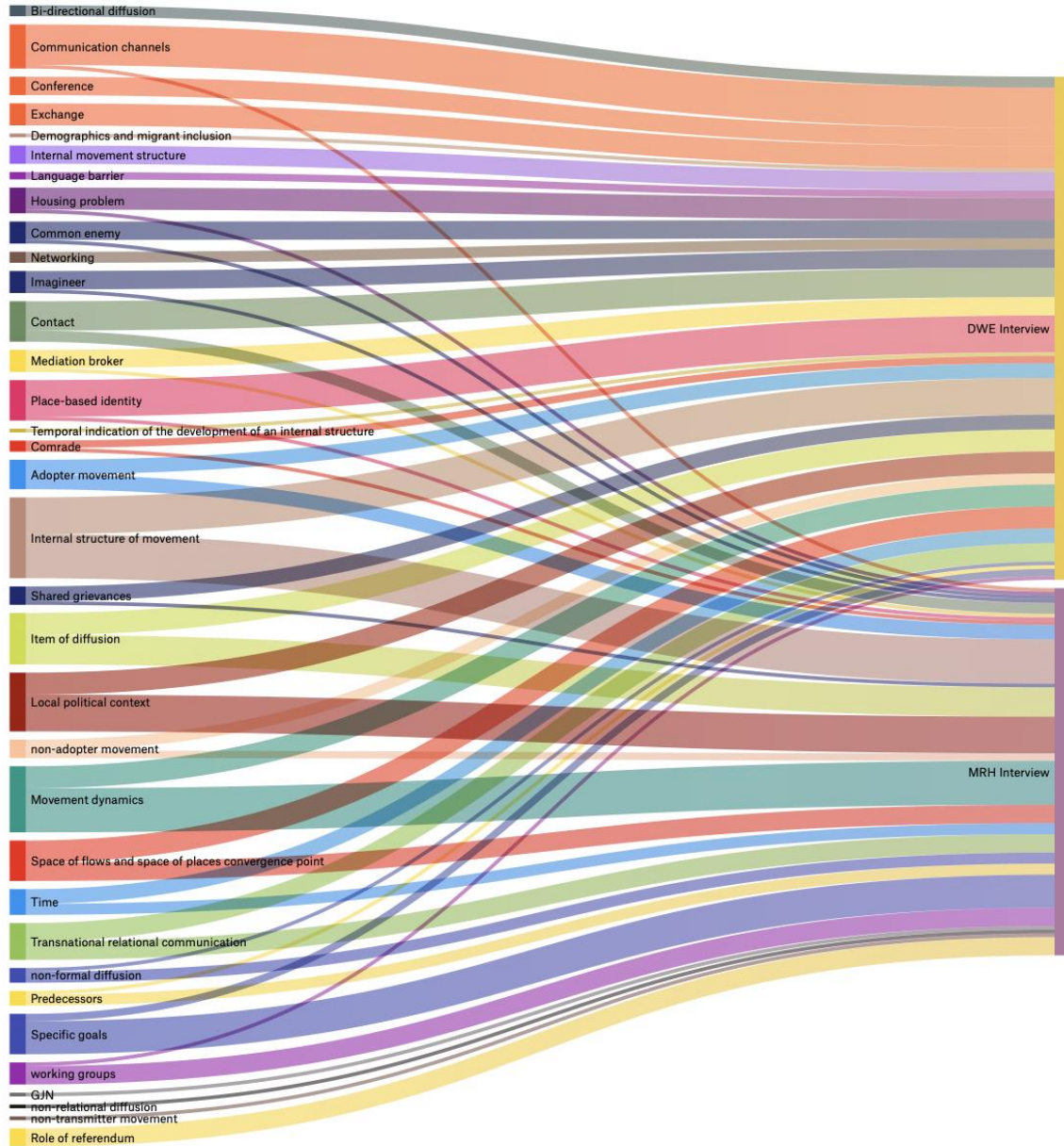
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7 Appendices.

Sankey diagram:



Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project on the diffusion of social movements. This study investigates the diffusion of ideas, tactics and identities from one social movement to another. You will remain anonymous in the study.

I value your participation and assure you that all information you provide will be confidential. Your name and identifying information will not be shared with anyone besides me and my supervisor Chris Dideriks.

By signing this document, you permit me to use the information you provide in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw your consent at any time or ask for your data to be deleted.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be happy to provide more information and address any issues you may have.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Elias Harald Nielsen (researcher) email: e.h.nielsen@student.rug.nl

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided, and you give your consent to participate in the study. You also understand that your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your consent at any time or ask for your data to be deleted.

Date: _____ Signature of participant: _____

Interview DWE participant English transcription:

E = interviewer

A = interviewee

E:

So my first question is, how long have you been part of or affiliated with Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignen? And what is your role within the, the initiative right now?

A:

Okay, so I started almost three years ago now. So June 2020. And I started, so I think my roles have shifted a bit over the years. So at first I was involved in a kiez team as it's called, so it's the local structures that we have. And that was the time when the Kiez teams they were still being built. So we didn't have them yet. So I was one of the people building a kiez team here in Wedding. So where I used to live at the time, that was very exciting. And a bit later, in like the end of 2020, I started also joining the right to the city Working Group, which is the English speaking Working Group, which especially focused at that time on the topic of people without German citizenship, not being able to vote for referendum, which is obviously like a democratic, like a big democratic deficit. And like a problem because 20% of the population in Berlin are not, or don't have German citizenship, and so can't vote for referendum, even though they're often very much affected by the housing crisis, even more, sometimes, even then, people with German passports. So I was involved in that. And then, because I didn't have time, and whatever, work, I came through, I now am only active in like, it's a working group that tries to connect kind of the local structures to the general initiative. So kind of we support the kiez teams, we supported them already during the signature phase, and then the election phase, we tried to coordinate a Berlin wide actions and help those who maybe need something or I don't know, built spaces where they could meet and exchange. And I do that still.

E:

Yeah. Okay. So like, kind of the Central Administration, overseeing or guiding?

A:

I mean, yeah, kind of like that. So we still have coordination circle that coordinates the whole structure. So I'm not in that I was there briefly, but very briefly. Yeah, so this only really concerning, like, local structures. And it shifts a lot. I mean, like the work because now like, the whole situation is different than it was two years ago. So kind of the, the, what I do there changes, but I'm still in the same working group.

E:

Okay. So a very fluid dynamic according to what happens politically and stuff like that?

A:

Yeah. And also where we are at, of course, because we had this very fixed. Yeah, goal when we had to collect the signatures, very fixed goal when we had to win the referendum. And then after that, kind of our goals, they are not as fixed anymore. So that's why also word changes, I think that's natural.

E:

Yeah. It might be difficult, because there are a lot of people involved. But if you have some thoughts on this, do you think there are some shared experiences, values hopes for the participants in DWE, kind of like a shared identity that people see themselves in and DWE as an organisation as an entity? If you would give that an identity? How would you define?

A:

That's an interesting question. So I think one of the first major points where we all come together as being affected by the housing crisis ourselves, so it's like, really from a position of having experienced, of course, in different degrees, but everyone has experienced or has people that experienced electrify their personal life really like what it means to not find an apartment pay way too much. I don't know, like live in precarious situations without a contract and so on. So I think kind of this is the first thing and then I would still say, of course, there is to some extent also like an idea of that this is not just like any one's fault, but this is because of like, the practice of big companies exploiting us for money. So I think there is I wouldn't maybe call it class consciousness because that wouldn't say that this in all of the best sort of maybe common understanding but there is like understanding of it's a political problem that certain people profit from or certain companies profit from and the rest suffers. So there is like yeah, that I think shared understanding and then otherwise Yeah, I don't know maybe like this democracy thing like to say, Okay, it's all right. We have this referendum, we won this referendum. We have the majority of the majority of Berliners they support this so kind of this identity of being someone from the city, maybe I would say, so. Yeah. yeah. So there is some shared injustice directly affected by the situation, housing situation, but also some some kind of fight for ideas of democracy and... inequality, I would say still and like rights. So like, we see what we fight for is our rights, because it's the right to live somewhere decently. And so I think there is this, of course share, like when you have.. housing shouldn't be, like something on the market, it should be something. Yeah. And I would say that most people would agree otherwise they wouldn't be acting like actors. Yeah.

E:

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. And this next question kind of feeds into it. How does Berlin and the current situation with the housing market feed into this identity and this experience of the participants, if you can tell a bit about how the situation is? Who is affected? How people are affected by it?

A:

good question. So I think what's maybe special here is that it used to, so like the housing crisis in Berlin, really rapidly got worse the last 10-15 years. So and that's why maybe there still is this understanding of, it could still be different, because it was different not that long ago, kind of idea, because it used to be very, like still more or less affordable to live in Berlin for a long time, and then it drastically changed. Also, the moment where the kind of investment saw that they could make a lot of money from it at the time in the 90s where like, the politicians or like the the Senate at that time, they sold a lot of the social housing to big companies like Deutsche Wohnen and so on. So I think there's kind of this hope still. And this, like seeing that it's possible, not like maybe other cities in Europe or capitals, where it's all kind of, you know, where it's even long, more long gone, kind of the good times I would say. So I think that's kind of one thing, and then like seeing it so rapidly, get worse every time. Yeah. Yeah, and I think that kind of shapes this identity of, we can do us to do something against it. And we are affected by it. Of course, all in a bit different ways. Because

still, there's differences in kind of income, where you come from, whatever solution you have, all these things also, of course, influence your situation on the housing market, but still, like a lot of people also suffer from it, generally.

E:

So because people have tried to live in a city with affordable housing, where it wasn't such a pressure, there is more, a bigger hope, or a bigger idea that you can achieve that.. is not out of the it's possible.

A:

I will say so. Absolutely. Yeah. And also like seeing maybe local fights being won as well. So our initiative is also like built, of course on like, like, a history a very rich history of housing struggles in Berlin. So like, I think without these struggles, we wouldn't have been that successful without like, local fights. For example, Otto-Suhr-Siedlung, it's very known one where they fought against Deutsche Wohnen and like, very bad conditions there. And, like, a lot of part of our initiative grew out of that initiative as well. And like, there's like different kinds of local sites in parts of Berlin, and like the long or Kotti-&-Co., or something like that, a very known one. No, no, I think without them, and without also already showing that politics, city politics are important, or housing politics, then we wouldn't have been this successful.

E:

Yeah. So there's a long history of initiatives building up, creating momentum.

A:

Yeah, I would say so. And like, also offering knowledge and like, expertise in experience and everything. So yeah. I think without that, you know, that helped a lot. Definitely. Some kind of shared ideas and experiences. What went right, what went wrong?

You know? Okay. Yeah, I would say

E:

Do you know if there has been any contact with Deutsche Wohnen & Co Enteignen and then movements outside of Germany?

A:

Yeah, so I, well, that I know of, I think there's been a lot that maybe I don't know, but what I know of is definitely so we at the very beginning, when I was in the Right to the City Working Group we had, like calls with where we didn't know that we would win. Right. So that was very much at the beginning. We had calls from people in Spain from like, I don't know, like the one like, left party. I forgot what their name is, but the most I think maybe was podemos. Yeah, I think we had like, and we talked about that with them. Then there were people, for example, from a Dutch initiative. Also, I forgot their name, where one of my comrade colleagues comrades, was she was in the Netherlands at one of the housing protests. And then one woman, she came to us for our conference. And then we also had an exchange with the people from Lisbon. So the same comrade that went to the Netherlands and me, we met them here in Berlin. And we talked to them about our experience building up referendum. And I think she also went to Lisbon to kind of have an exchange there. There's people because we have this international working group, I think there's a lot of things that I don't know about, because it's all like going parallel, you know, that there's people from all over the world and all over Europe that of course, they bring their experiences, they talk to other people from

where they're from, and from movements. So it's all like, definitely, I would say, Yeah, both kind of we get inspired. And we talk to people from other countries. And the other way around, I would say.

E:

So in the international team, the members of that year, through previous contacts with people in other countries, are talking?

A:

Well, I think like it's both so I think just because people know, like, have contacts there informally, of course, you just talk and know about each other. But and then there's people coming to us directly who want to have interviews or whatever, who want to know something about it. And that doesn't only go to the international group. So that's just in general. Yeah, people asking us and then depends who answers let's say, Who has time to talk to them now, so it is not only that group, but

E:

do you know how this contact was established with other movements and groups? They contact you. Did you reach out?

A:

I think mostly, that I know of they contacted us. So for example, the Spanish because we have some people that have were active in podemos. I think, I'm not sure if it's put in with like, see, but I do think so. So they were active there. So they just knew people that were interested in call and then we just set up a call. And the same in Lisbon. That was actually the was the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. So like, a foundation here that helped to establish the contact between us and the movement in Lisbon. So I think it's kind of both sometimes it's like people getting contacted, sometimes it's third parties helping or like connecting.

E:

Yeah. And you also mentioned like going on exchange, kind of, like one of the represents. Yeah, yeah. One of your people went to Lisbon and some went here in Berlin. Yeah. Do you know how that was arranged?

A:

Yeah, that was arranged by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. Okay. Yeah. So they paid for also, I paid for it? Actually. Yeah.

E:

Yeah, yeah. And then you had a talk. So how, what happens in the cities.

A:

So in Berlin, we just met up for like, they had a long list of activities, they met up with other people first when people as well. But when we met up, we just had like a two hour just chat about our experiences building like, especially the structures that we used, because they didn't when we did it, they didn't start with the Signature Collection yet. So we kind of talked about our system of having local groups, but still like a Berlin wide group and how we try to transfer information and knowledge and everything. So we kind of talked about strategic, like structures that we built. And then I think when ... went to, to Lisbon, I think she also like the signature collection started or something. And then she went there for like a meeting. And just

saw it. I don't know exactly what she did. But now because she speaks Portuguese, so it was nice for her, I think to go there as well.

E:

Yeah, yeah. Kind of leads to my next question. How do you choose who goes?

A:

So basically, we have like groups where if there's someone who wants to talk to someone who just gets in a group, and then if someone wants to answer Yeah, I'm free to just take it. So it's not really like it's a more, there's no like, official. Yeah. It's not like an official process. I'm just like, whoever comes first or has time or resources or whatever speaks the language or something. They can do it. And then because there was already the exchange, also, then she got invited to go to Lisbon. I think so it's like, more. Yeah, that's how it kind of works. I think.

E:

It was like this woman volunteering?

A:

Yeah. Because everything we do is volunteering anyway, because we don't get paid for it. So it's more like an extension of what we do anyway in other (unintelligible due to noise).

E:

So you don't have like delegated ambassadors or?

A:

No, no, no, no. Because we're not that I mean, our focus isn't international communication or anything. So it's a bit like it's a byproduct. And I think it's an important one. And it's not like the main focus of our work. So it's more like, what Yeah. Yeah.

E:

And yeah, you mentioned a bit earlier, like, sharing strategies and this internal structure of the organisation. Are there any other types of information that that will that are? That is shared between?

A:

Yeah, so I would say I mean, the legal kind of, especially because like referendum, is a very specific tool, I would say that have different. Yeah, well, you like it's hard to compare sometimes in different countries? Because it really depends on the political system, kind of what the rights of referendum are, how, what kind of all of those things. So it's still interesting to compare and share. But that's, I think, not maybe that useful in most cases, because it's hard to apply. What, what you use it for concern different in other countries. So I think more it's really like on the kind of like, how we are organised, how we communicate, like external communication Because I think that is maybe, let's say, similar in, or I don't know, that's more adaptable, I think, you know, for example, that we choose, yeah, like the communication, but also the demands, you know, like the demand of expropriation. And like using that word and like, trying to kind of challenge or like change the perception of expropriation, I think that's more of discussion you can have in other contexts as well. Yeah. So I think it's more of those things that are kind of that apply more to general left struggles, other than like the really specific specificities of your struggle, and like the political surrounding, I think, yeah. And then I think the third thing that we talked about is like our role as social movements in regard

to political parties, because that is a question that arises a lot as well. So how close are you to political parties? Or how far away or where do you position yourself? Yeah, that was something that's always interesting.

E:

Yeah. So you're talking about just, instead of talking about the strict specifics, that are very contextual, you focus more on the main ideas, the main methods? Yeah. And then you share your experiences in that way?

A:

I would say, I think that's often how it is, I mean, I think it depends also a bit of talk and whatever. But I think mostly, that's kind of what in my experience are more helpful? Or more interesting, also, exchange with them. Because that's, it's very easy to them say, oh, yeah, sure. Maybe we could frame our demands in another way. And that's more, or when it's clear who the enemy is, or something, you know, that's more like a general thing that maybe it's helpful. Other than say, oh, you should also demand the expropriation of all these houses, you know, if it's not something that's possible in that country, then makes no sense. I think, ya know.

E:

So I can imagine they can get a lot out of DWE. Yeah. Do you think there is something going your way as well, from these interactions with these connections?

A:

Definitely. So much. So for just one example, that always strikes me so much is that we had, we had a conference, I don't know. And we, like, people from Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca in Spain is that, you know, like, they were built, they were they were founded after or, like, during the financial crisis. And they, their goal was to support each other for people who were affected by getting kicked out because they couldn't pay their hypotek (mortgage) in English, like their from houses, you know, what you get, if you, if you like loan kind of you get for your house, and they like a lot of people couldn't pay them back in the financial crisis. So they were almost kicked out of their houses. And so it was a platform that tried to support and give each other legal advice on how to work and we invited them and they told us a lot about how they work, how they're organised, because they've been going on for 15 years, almost. And that was like such a, I always think about that because they, how they set how they structure their meetings, how they see each other, like how they kind of build relationships in the group, how they try to maybe also not only see that activist group but really more a part of their everyday life and like supporting each other and I don't know, like built relationships out of this activist like thing. I think that really had a very big impact on me and how I saw my group kind of in a way, so I think that's it Probably yeah. And there's like countless. So I think like in Lisbon just to even get the idea that of course, like, the whole topic of, I don't know, tourism and Airbnb, you know, maybe also like, maybe we could also in Berlin somehow do something about that, because Berlin also gets more and more affected by it. So like, also to get the idea of new demands that you could have, or new alliances that you could build, like other political, maybe, like more alliances with the unions or something. So I think it's, yeah, oftentimes, I got very inspired by other movements. yeah, definitely. I would say like, in so many ways, also, like my, I just talked for, I didn't have the talk with them directly, but my old roommate she is writing on, he's making a project on like, housing movement in Brazil. And he told me a lot about what he learned and how they, for example,

cook for each other as well. And it's like an integral part of their whatever, like, group, you know, to also have these care responsibilities. And I don't know, I, we don't really have this practice in Berlin. We are very social group. But still, we don't have the practice of really like caring for each other in that way, that much. And I really thought, oh, that's also like, interesting to have that, to hear that.

E:

So not just political strategies, but also how do you relate to each other. Yeah.

A:

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I think that's a very important part of exchange.

E:

Yeah. When did you do remember when this group from Spain, yeah, when you interacted with them?

A:

Yeah. So I think that was actually like, almost one year ago. So it was in May 2022, we had a conference in Berlin, and they got invited.

E:

Do you think there is a specific point in time where the contacts with other movements and groups intensified or started ?

A:

Well, I mean, started, I would say, when we kind of got more when it was clear, like half a year before the collection of signatures, the second one began, I would say, because then our structures really grew. But intensified, I couldn't really say I think it's more like really, different stages have different. Yeah. So I think in the very stressful group, at times, where we had no time to think of anything else than collecting signatures, we, of course, had less time for maybe also like exchanges like that. But I think in other times, it just kind of ebbs and flows.

E:

Do you know if there has been more contact coming your way after the referendum? After you sorted? You got a majority vote?

A:

Well, I would say yes, a bit more. And I don't have numbers, so it's more like a feeling

E:

Yeah. Is there like a strategy regarding language for your movement?

A:

I think it's like a big, actually problem still, um, because we do, are all of our meetings are in German. And there are like, when we do big conferences, we try to offer some parts in English and German. And I think maybe we also have no, but I think that like, mostly it's, and we also, at some point, try to offer translation, this German for our big plenary meeting, say we have every two weeks. But I think now that's not offered anymore. So kind of that makes it I think, very hard. To be honest, if you don't speak German to participate, you can of

course, participate if you speak English, in the English working group. But because there is no Yeah, I think that makes it sometimes hard a bit because the the working group isn't like, it's a bit harder to integrate into the whole movement, because of the language barrier. And because we don't, we didn't succeed in really like having a structure that makes it normal to have everything in German, English, or even other languages. Because of course we, like also other languages in Berlin that are spoken a lot as second language other than English or as first language. So I think that's a very big still problem, that we don't really have that.

E:

So internally, and the city is very German. What about with media? Has there been any international media?

A:

I am not in the media group So but so I don't know. But I know that normally. So I think if there's some media from or like some requests coming from An international media, which kind of goes the same way as German media, it just gets put in a group. And then if someone speaks, the language they asked for, they can say, Yeah, I can talk to them. So we don't really have a strategy either. It's more like if we have the capacity to do it or not. So that's not a strategy to do it. Like we like to plan. You know what I mean?

E:

so it's more if someone has a request, you figure it out?

A:

Yeah, we're like that. Yeah.

E:

You mentioned, to go back to the way communication is done, sharing of information you mentioned. Yeah. Going to places. You mentioned telephone calls. And then you said something about conference. Can you please tell me a bit more about the conference?

A:

Yeah. So we have like, we had one big conference last May. So so it was like, we invited. So it was all about Deutsche Wohnen Enteignung. But it was open so not so much an internal conference, but like, also external conference, and which there were like, a lot of there was a very big program, about all kinds of different topics. Yeah, so it was exchanged from within, like the movements of like the housing movement in Berlin, but then also like inviting guests like the platform in Spain, but also like strategic things. I don't even remember, they are very, very different formats, and like discussions, big discussions, everything was also open for media also.

E:

So who facilitated this conference? was it solely you, you or other parties involved?

A:

I think there were other parties involved also, like with paying, like they helped with the payments, but I think like the organisation really was mostly people from inside, like from the initiative, as far as I remember. Yeah. (Not entirely sure from here on) From their makeup pay. They got some money back. Yeah.

E:

Okay, yeah. And then yeah, you've mentioned telephone calls? And are there any other types of communications, channels of communication that you can think of?

A:

Well, I guess they are, like some of this, like, in for, like, personal connections, you know. So it's, I mean, that's like an important part, because it's not only just through like the official channels, but it's more like someone knows someone, and then they go, Oh, can you give them? Can I give them your number, they want to talk to something because because, of course, people that maybe either lived abroad at some time are from not from Germany, and are already or have already been connected to social movements or housing movements in their country or in the country they lived in. They of course, have contacts and know people. And then it's sometimes kind of an informal route that it takes. Or like getting to know someone at a conference, and then you pass, you give numbers, and then kind of that's sometimes how it goes as well. Yeah, yeah.

E:

So you have a lot of people involved and then things ripple out.

A:

Yeah kinda. Like it's chaotic, but it's somehow always. So this. Yeah, that's structures, but they're not that many structures for a lot of things, either. And then that's kind of how it works out.

E:

Yeah. Yeah. I guess it can be hard to track every single time ideas are shared. So there is formal sharing then there was also this informal aspect.

A:

Yeah.

E:

So you have answered all my questions perfectly. Do you have anything to add?

A:

Maybe just like, I think I actually I forgot one very important exchange. One comrade of ours, she was invited to Argentina for some kind of thing. I don't know. And I, and it was she also loved it so much. And remember, when she came back, she was like, so like, first of all, she then she told something that she was in the taxi, just getting from the airport to the convention center or something. And then she talked to the taxi driver, what she was doing and talked about, oh, yeah, referendum in Germany, and like the taxi driver randomly knew about it. And maybe that was her first like And then but also like learning from, like, local experience in Argentina and like, yeah, and I think that's the last thing I want to say that it's so even though we don't have so much time for it, because of course, you always feel like, oh, it's more important to do something here. Then I think whenever people tell or like experience exchange or talk about it, they always love it so much. And they love what they learn and then the people learn from us. So I think it's very valuable.

Interview MRH participant English transcription:

E = interviewer

A = interviewee

E:

So, that's recording now.

So first, can you tell me how long you have been part of the movement and what is your role in the movement?

A:

Do you want me to introduce myself first? Ah, okay.

So, I'm Raquel, I've been part of the movement since the beginning,

So I showed up at the very first meetings at the invitation of a friend of mine who had been one of the people, who had initiated talks with other people also to appear at that meeting. So I've been involved from the beginning, which was in June 2022, and I have had a role in the referendum, mainly connected to the communication part and the creation of materials and graphic identity, I participate in the creation of physical materials, in the creation of digital materials, I am also involved in the Western Area Signature Group, which is a regional group in which we see more localised signatures, like the two, This part is part of the Western Zone of the city, and therefore I participate in the life, not daily but weekly, of the organisation and of our movement.

E:

Ok, something about graphic design and talking to the news?

A:

Excuse me, could you repeat that?

E:

Something about graphic design or talking to the news?

A:

Not speaking to the news, that is the responsibility of the public action group, But, for example, I run Instagram, I create designs for Instagram as well, I am not a designer, but I help when necessary, I also do the materials part, i.e. painting banners, creating flags, thinking about t-shirts, all these things more of giving a visual image to the movement in the street, ready, I'm involved in that.

I am also in a group that we are starting, which is the care group, which is the It's Like a Care Group, is very early days, but we are trying to understand what a care group is within a referendum, not an experiential one. Do you understand something I am saying?

E:

I'll translate, that's fine, don't worry.

A:

Okay, sorry, but I can try...

E:

No, no, no, sorry, it's okay, it's okay.

I'm going to learn some Portuguese.

A:

I will converse between English and Portuguese, so you can understand me in English, and if I start like Lola, I turn into Portuguese.

E:

Whatever feels right for you.

A:

Okay.

E:

So the next thing is a bit about movement. So you can tell me, you know who founded the movement, who started the movement, and why did they start it?

A:

So, as I've already told you, we are very inspired...the referendum in Lisbon is very much inspired by the referendum in Berlin, the referendum of Berlin. So it started as...In other words, we started out mainly as observers of what was happening in Berlin on an individual level, that is, several people who were here in the city, some already involved in the housing movement, others not, we began to understand what was happening in Berlin, and wondering how we could bring it here as well, and so began a kind of one-to-one conversation between all these people. Until, we come up with the idea of, ok, maybe we want this here in Lisbon as well. And so, yes, I think it was very much this synergy of being infected with what was happening elsewhere and bringing it here.

The first people to talk were, in other words, many individuals, but some were already organized, others not, in movements like the habita, like Stop-Despejos, which are organisations that already existed here in Portugal in the area of housing movement.

And, voila, these people all started talking to each other, They spoke to other people, others who were not organised, and then emerged the platform of the different. Okay. So, first of all, the referendum has two objectives. The first goal is to collect 5,000 signatures, minimum 5,000, maximum 7,500 signatures we need to bring our proposal regarding the Municipal Assembly and to vote. And the second objective is to create movements in the streets, i.e. occupying the streets, getting people talking about the housing issue, etc. So our strategies, In other words, we have a strategy more related to the first objective, that goes through the form a little bit of how we organise ourselves and how we manage to gather all these necessary signatures.

And right now what we've been doing is dividing up into neighborhood groups, i.e., to achieve the goal of signatures has been join together in neighborhood groups, organised locally, each group is autonomous, and this after a horizontal organisation and neighborhood groups organise concrete actions in their neighborhood to collect signatures. For the second objective, which is to create movement, What we have done is to think not so much at the local or regional level of the city, but to think as an organisation and set up public inventions, to be able to run narrative campaigns on the internet, show, for example, creating designs for Instagram, where we try to deconstruct a little bit of the housing problem in Lisbon, explain, for example, why there was a problem there, etc. and bring the people out onto the streets, and that's it. I think that's it. Okay.

You don't understand anything, I'm sorry.

E:

No, I have to learn, it's a good way to learn Portuguese.

A:

Okay, okay.

E:

So what do you think the participants in the housing referendum movement share in terms of experiences, injustices, hopes, but also fears, like an identity?

What do people share?

A:

Okay, from this platform. Because, that is, when we walk to the referendum platform, what we see is people from many different organisations and organizations that have, as the name says, different types of organization and that they all come together in a space of political belief that is common to think of something bigger. So, this is to say that first of all there are many things that separate us, i.e. political beliefs, forms of political action, etc. But then we also find a space that unites us. And I think the initial space that brought us together is, one, we don't tolerate and we can no longer endure the housing crisis in Lisbon, and secondly, we have the referendum as an instrument of political action that can be effective, right?

And that leads, of course there are people with a greater or lesser degree of belief in political institutions, but it does require us to have some confidence in that, okay, that's it, that an institutional process might, or not, we don't know, lead to political change. What experiences do we share? I don't know, that's it. We all find them very different people. I think we are mostly creating new memories together of the experiences we have had in the referendum. I think that at the moment we are and at the point where we are I think there is a great deal of expectation with how we will be able to collect the signatures and when we will be able to deliver the signatures, and I feel that that is the main party objective at the moment between us. Okay, and then I think there are beliefs related to the content specific to the referendum, right?

I don't think any of us think that the local referendum is a problem in Lisbon, I think we all share the idea that it's a problem that has to be tackled, etc. Ok, so first of all the referendum is organised horizontally, so there is no hierarchical organisation, there is no group that is hierarchically superior and has decision-making power over others, so all the structures that exist, exist in a horizontal way. We meet every fortnight in a General Assembly, that assembly is where most collective decisions are taken, because it is a meeting place for everyone independently, possible for everyone regardless of how one chooses to act within the movement. In addition to these assemblies, we then have working groups, these working groups have to do with logistical tasks, for example we have the argumentative working group, the working group on social networks, the materials working group, the care working group, are groups that logistically organise the movement, And then there are the neighborhood groups, which are the local groups, the set of local organisation I had talked about, which are very much inspired by the Berlin movement, because in Berlin they were organised by neighborhoods and we tried to imitate that logic, we have to see how it works or not here in Lisbon, because there is not much civic culture here in Lisbon, It is not very common for people to involve such spontaneity in the social movement, and so we are looking at how these neighborhood groups may or may not also work and can transform the neighborhoods themselves and the culture in the neighborhoods, but rather, these neighborhood groups have this objective of local organisation, community dynamism, collection of signatures, and that's it, and those are the two structures that exist.

E:

Now let's talk a little more about the neighborhood in Berlin. A little more specific. Is there any direct contact between you?

A:

I haven't been, personally, because I don't know, but there was someone here who was DWE participant 1...., I can't remember who was telling us about some of the experiences of the Berlin referendum, namely in terms of how to get started, because I think that's what we were looking for at the beginning, was how you start this process. Meanwhile, we also had a

conversation about two months ago, We had a chat with DWE participant 2, who is part of Right to the City, which is the English group in the Berlin referendum, and who also came here and explained, especially already at this stage was more disconfirmation of doubts as to things that we here were not managing to resolve or that they were not working. And it was a bit around understanding how they had reacted to those problems. And I forgot, in the summer, two people from the referendum here in Lisbon it was for me to talk so much with the... I can't say the name, no. They were there and spoke to them, And they also spoke with some comrades from the airport referendum.

E:

So you have spoken in two different ways.

A:

Yes, yes, yes. The two were related to the Berlin referendum, But it was at the beginning, so it was a lot about getting started. How to start the process of a Berlin referendum.

Because...It is important, perhaps, to mention that in Portugal it is not so common to use the referendum as a political instrument. For example, the referendum was only used 9 times in Portugal's democratic history. That means 9 referendums in almost 50 years of democracy. It is, you know...So it's a new one. The referendum used is critical to...In Lisbon, it's like...Yes. The first time Berlin's referendum was used, was the first time that Berlin's referendum was used. And it's also scary, because we don't know what to expect. And I think... I think, you know...Because it is different, for example, in Switzerland...Switzerland? Yes, I think it's Switzerland. Switzerland, it's like this. It is the other country. Okay, Switzerland...Switzerland is a country...Yes, I think it's Switzerland. Switzerland, it's like this. It is the other country. Okay, Switzerland...In Switzerland, for example, you have a great political culture related to the referendum, Because they had referendums all the time. But here it is not common, it is not used, so I don't think people know how it works, do you?

E:

I don't know. It's a bit scary too. I am excited about this referendum, but I am a bit scared, because there is no critical culture about it. And I don't know how we can convince people to vote, for example, and say, yes, you need to vote, this is a local referendum, you know. (Joking voice) They have never tried that before. Yes, but...But this is what you talked about when two people went to Berlin? Yes, when they went to Berlin in the summer, it was to listen to their experiences and try to, you know, gain some knowledge on how to start or how to construct a referendum here. I have already said this in Portuguese, but I will repeat it in English. I think at the beginning, a part of our structure, our organisation, it was just a copy of Berlin, you know, Because it was like, okay, how are we going to do this? Okay, but just, you know, make a copy of their organisation. And, of course, we are now adapting some structures, because some of them don't work in Portugal, others are ok, but...

E:

So you had, like, most of the forms that they made?

A:

Excuse me?

E:

Most of the ways they did it in Berlin, you applied exactly the same here, but now you're trying to adapt for a more local context.

A:

Yes, yes, yes. We started...At the beginning, we were trying to understand whether it works or not, and now we are adapting some things. Yes.

E:

Can you tell me a bit about these small adaptations?

A:

Yes, for example, currently we have...We are discussing about the local groups, the neighborhood groups, because it was a copy of what happens in Berlin, because in the city, what I know is that they organise neighborhoods And we try to do the same here, but it is difficult because, as I said, there is no civic culture in Portugal, so it's very difficult to convince people, to try join a local group So we are discussing now whether local groups work or not, and what we can do. For example, whether it is better for us to organise big signature actions, For example, everyone in the referendum goes to one place, or whether it is better for the neighborhood groups to organise themselves. So, we are discussing this now, and perhaps result in some adaptations of the first group.

E:

Are there other examples of how you are changing that to do differently from what you learned in Berlin?

A:

Yeah, it wasn't exactly a copy, okay? And it's not a copy, it's like gaining knowledge from other experiences and trying to...When we started, for example, discussing about the care group, we also adapt...The idea for the care group was given by a member of the Berlin referendum, because they had a care group, I think. I don't know, it's an awareness group. I don't know the specific name they had, but they had a care group. And we started talking that we need a care group, because, you know, situations, for example, of gender violence or others, if it happens in the social movement, has to be addressed within the social movement. And I think what happened in Berlin, at some point they had a situation of gender violence, and spent a couple of months trying to deal with this situation. And they said, yes, we lost a lot of time, because it is a difficult process. So, I'm going to speak in Portuguese, okay? Not only does the group spend a lot of time and energy solving these problems, that are important to resolve and that are super necessary, but also that it wears out the grouping at the time, because people go to access veinless, already this to solve. All in all, it ends up being very time consuming, etc. And the idea they gave us in the background was to create this care group from the beginning, so that we know how to deal with this situation without wearing out the movement as a whole, if it happens. So far nothing has happened. That's it, we brought the idea from Berlin, from the care group, but we adapted it a little to what was also our understanding of what should be a care group, which was a little different from what was happening in Berlin. I think in Berlin, for example, it was one group that had decision-making power above the others, i.e. whatever the group decided, whatever the group decides, whatever the group decides, i.e. whatever the group decided, was binding on the rest of the movement, of what to explain to us, and we, for example, were more or less discussed in assembly that, precisely because we must have a horizontal structure principle, it didn't make sense for us to be a group, the care group eventually have province, that's it. These are the types of adaptations. Can I say hello to a friend? It took a few seconds. Do you think it will be more than 10 minutes? Yeah, the best. It probably is.

E:

A maximum of 10 minutes.

A:

Sorry

E:

No worries.

A:

It's a friend and I'm saying, okay, 10 more minutes, because she wants to have a coffee.

E:

It's cool. Is she also part of the movement?

A:

No, but she is also part of other social movements,

E:

then she is a supporter.

A:

Yes, but she is not organising in the movement. She has supported and is organising in other social movements. She's busy with that.

E:

Would you say that this is common for participants, that they are already involved in some social networks?

A:

Yes, because as I said, there is no civic culture, then people involved in social movements, they know...There's a joke here in Lisbon that there are more movements than people participating in movements, because one person is always in 5 different social movements, so it is very common when you enter a process a person is already involved with another organisation. But the referendum...I'm going to switch to Portuguese..So I 'm saying that the fact that the referendum is a tool.. a political tool that is not very used, causes a lot of people that don't use to cause them to the organisation, a lot of people that don't used to participate in political environments. Because... and because housing it's like a topic that was, you know. because the referendum is a big thing and there's a new act being presented.

E:

You mentioned it too, just to go back a bit to Berlin, you also spoke to the airport movement, the airport park.

A:

But I wasn't in this conversation, so I don't know what they talk to them about.

E:

But do you know if there are other movements outside, not in Portugal, that you have been in contact with or contacted? ½: We have had some contacts with the Sindicato de Inquilinos in Spain. Not formal contacts, but... We know some people who are organizing unions and we change ideas. We are talking to them about the organisation and housing movement. We also had people from the referendum who participated in the European Action Coalition. For example, the demonstration on 1 April, was part of the European Action, organized by the European Action Coalition. It is not a referéndum, I think the official organisation from Portugal in the European Action Coalition is Habita, but the people presenting Habita have links to the referéndum, so somehow we also have contacts with this network. We have Sindicato de Inquilinos, European Action Coalition, we are also talking now with the referéndum in Firenze, in Florence. I don't know what, but I think it's to block student hostels, because they have autos for the students and they want to talk about it. I don't know, but we are talking to them too. It is not a formal relation, but perhaps it could be in the future, with the referendum in Hamburg. It is also a moment inspired by the Berlin referendum, but in

Hamburg. I don't know the name in English. Hamburg. Yes, Hamburg. I was speaking in Portuguese, but I was speaking in Portuguese. Hamburg is in Portuguese.

E:

It is very different from English.

A:

So, Hamburg. We shared some messages on Instagram, but in an informal way. But maybe in the future we will talk to them more seriously, because I think they are now campaigning, because they already have, I don't know, the referendum, the signatures. So now they are preparing the campaign to convince people. I don't know. We had some contacts in Europe.

E:

So you mentioned Instagram, which is very informal.

A:

Yes, with Hamburg it's on Instagram, but I think the social network can be a space to start a conversation with these movements, because you see their stories on Instagram and share their stories in the referendum here. It is a type of international virtual coexistence and can be a space to start a conversation in a more formal way. Then you follow the others. Yes, and we comment on the posts With fires (emoji). It is very informal and not a serious contact, but it creates a link, a kind of solidarity, when we, for example, share. It is also important, for example, here in Lisbon, to show us that it is possible to win a referendum. For example, I remember Hamburg, when they delivered the signatures I shared, because I am the person who manages the Instagram here, and I thought, I'll share this, because I think it is important for people who are supporting us, to know that it is possible. In Hamburg they got rid, I don't know how many signatures, but it was a lot. And I think it's important to renew hope. Yes. I said, well, yeah.

E:

So maybe seeing some successful examples.

A:

Yes, yes, exactly.

E:

You know, how you guys come across these movements, just by accident, or how do you find them? On Instagram, for example.

A:

No, there are some that I already know in existence, And I see them on Instagram. For example, Berlin referendum, and the Tenants' Union, I only see them. But others, for example, Hamburg, I found out that there is a referendum in Hamburg, because Berlin referendums share the delivery of the signatures, and say, what's happening in Hamburg? And it's nice to share experiences about what is happening. For example, two days ago, I saw that they were making t-shirts, and I thought, that's cool. And I got a print to share with my comrades from the material staff, and said, oh, you see the t-shirts, they are doing in Hamburg. I think the virtual space can be cool to share experiences about the organisation in an informal way.

E:

That's everything from me. Is there anything final that you would like to...If there's something I haven't asked, that you find relevant?

A:

Sorry. I don't think so. You can see the signatures we have.

E:

May I?

A:

Yes. Because we have two types of signatures. Signatures, that's the name, isn't it? One, it's the people who vote in Lisbon and can vote in the referendum. And a yellow sheet for people who can not vote in Lisbon, but they want to support the referendum. And, I say, all together, they...I say, they have a...Importantly...Significant...Sorry.Now, please, for a minute. I would like to... Okay. Okay. Sorry. Sometimes...Don't you understand?

Interview housing expert Berlin

E = interviewer

A = interviewee

E:

So first, can you please tell me a bit about what you do?

A:

Okay, I've been here for more than 10 years already, I've been here since 2012, as a research assistant in the Department of Geography this lab is called economic geography. However, I do not see myself too much as an economic geographer, more as an urban geographer, and I'm, particularly since 10 years, dealing with like, housing in various remarks like housing owners, housing policy, the connection of housing and neighborhood management, Housing and Urban Development. Actually, I'm looking at a particular instrument, which is like home swapping, like how to distribute the existing housing stock more efficiently. So that's it. And I mean, my, and that is why you are here, certainly my main focus is like Berlin. And just lately, stop I mean, I observe more, of course, the German housing market, but like with, with terms, to empirical research, I did it here in Berlin, because like Berlin is so rich, and is so transformative right now, there's so much to study that I was focusing, focusing about. Berlin. Yeah, and currently, I'm working. And so my habilitation or postdoc projects about is home swapping, and thinking about, okay, good home, swapping be like, de-growth strategy for housing post-growth or could home swapping, be a measure of like a more environmental friendly and kind of sufficient housing provision where you downsize our, for example, that like old people that don't need their big apartments, they spoke with families, they downsize and make space for like other households that need much more space. So to keep a long story short, since like, more than 10 years, I'm dealing quite actively with housing in Berlin, and with housing policy as well. And I think that's what we're going to talk about like, as well, depending because housing policy is a very important policy in the city of Berlin.

E:

Yeah. Okay. Thank you. I would love to talk about that a bit more after the interview and then I'll go to the first question I have. Yeah. So it's a bit broad. You can choose whatever you deem is relevant. But what is the current state of the housing market in Berlin? And what are the key trends and policies that affect the current state as it is right now?

A:

woah than that, that's, I mean, the question, okay, it's a little bit broad, but it makes it very broad, because you have to understand the current situation, you have to go far back in history to understand what's what's going on here. Okay, let me start with the current.

E:

Can I rephrase it a bit, then we can start with when SPD sold off the social housing back when the city was close to going bankrupt?

A:

Okay, so actually, I want to start just up to the unification which is just like some years prior to what you mentioned. So first, the current state, I mean, it's still a very tense housing market. Prior to Corona, we had like for I don't know, I mean, you can check the data. I think since 2011, and 2019. We had each year, at least 40,000 new people coming in. So that means each year, basically, a midsize city was added to the city of Berlin, which gives you an idea that the demand for housing was tremendous. And we have now the refugee situations of 2015 16. We have another current refugee situation with Ukraine and still Syria and Afghanistan. So we have a lot of pressure in terms of demand in new households. So that's the first thing and second thing we are quite. We are quite slow in providing new house housing. First, of course. A house is not a cell phone, which you can produce in like, I don't know some weeks but takes like four to five years depending on certain circumstances. So it takes a lot of time. In Berlin or in Germany In Germany, we have very high bureaucracy, which makes it quite slow the housing production. We have a very left wing government for a lot of years, which is putting a lot of like restriction to housing owners in Berlin and a lot of new policies, which of course, especially for private investors might not be as appealing as in other cities, for example. So some of them like they are relocating from Berlin. And last but not least, but it's due to Corona, everything is so expensive. If you want it to build and you have the permission, it's hard to find craftsmen. It's hard to get the material or then it's very, like expensive. And I mean, of course, we we are in the city where the available land is getting more and more scarce. We still have plots. Yeah. And maybe the last thing, so I talked about supply by the housing, it's slow, we have a high demand. And the third thing is what you might have heard in the US is like, NIMBYism not in my backyard. That's a thing here in Berlin. Berlin is quite left wing city in general. Yeah. And so wherever a new development is announced some kind of protest movement, like neighborhood movement is established and try to protect their free land from this new construction. So that's the current state, and how we got here. Basically, for me, the most important thing is what you would say as a deregulation, liberalization, financialization of housing. So it started in the 90s. Everything started a little bit earlier. But that started in the 1990s. East Berlin, West Berlin, or East Germany, West Germany, and the wes- East German housing system, which was a state controlled housing system should be adopted to a market oriented housing system. Yeah. And so since the East German housing benefit, a lot of depth, yeah, the West German government said, Okay, we release you some of the debt if you privatize your housing stock, sell it to private owners, investors, originally, they wanted to sell it to tenants, but here in East Berlin, they were not affluent, they couldn't afford it. The stock was in a poor condition. And so in the end, this whole system ended up with the Berlin municipal housing companies selling 50% 15% of the housing stock to private investors. And that was a rule for East for the East Berlin housing stock. The Senate did the same for the West Berlin housing stock selling 50% of the city owned housing stock. Because the city was in heavy debt because of massive deindustrialization and poor economy in the 1990s. And they did they, they did a lot of, or not a lot, they did some more ehm decisions on to privatize municipal housing stock. And so from 1990 to 2012, that was the lowest point of city-owned housing. We were going from 480,000 units in the end of the city of Berlin to 275. A massive decrease. And who bought this housing, this was like, not all but a lot of them were like US American and British stock companies that considers housing not as a social good, but as a commodity. And of course, they had other things in mind than just having like a proper maintenance and keeping rents

low. They want to make a profit for their stakeholders obviously. And that went for a while. And since it was such a big run on on the on the housing market, what we had then was speculation Yeah, like some stock companies, they bought housing, kept it for three years try to increase its value, sell it further and so on and so forth. Then even we have some single owners so one I don't know grandma which lives in the third generation, she has her home. And there's a big demand from affluent people from I don't know, Russia, South Europe is host Germany that wanted to just invest in housing. And since housing in Berlin is very cheap compared to Munich, Frankfurt, and so on and so forth, there's was a high demand, not only from institutional investors, but also from like single persons that wanted to invest here. And of course, they wanted to exploit the value. And so that's privatization and financialization and globalization of housing. The second thing that's just a piece of it is like, tourism, of course, Airbnb, and so on, and so forth. That's not the major problem. But it adds to the problem of, of like scarcity of housing. Of course, when a housing unit is sold for Airbnb or rented, then it's not available for the households here in Berlin, there was a nice study in 2000, or not, this was not a recent study, it was done by a newspaper, they did a little research and compared offers on Airbnb and on our most famous called Immoscout, you have like rental offers, and they did it for three neighborhoods in Kreuzberg. And in some for a single day, you couldn't find a no 100 200 offers on Airbnb, but not a single one, a single rental offer which gives you an idea of okay, if you would be a tourist, you have a perfect offer of housing or like accommodation, when you are a renter here, there is no offer at all. So that's another problem. And of course, it's slow building activities since years. We build a lot in the early 1990s, when housing when we expected Berlin to grow quite rapidly and be as famous as important in the 1920s. So with a overproduction of housing, and then through the 1990s, there was just limited housing, activity, building activity. And until 2014, Berlin didn't invest a single Euro in social housing. I don't know from 94 to as for 20 years, and not a single euro invested in social housing. And some of the social housing units available, they are dropping from the system getting on the free market. And so they are not this rent controlled anymore. So, I mean, it's a lot of information I know, but you will hear it on your, on the audio, and then you can sort it out a lot of problems. A lot has to do with development in the 1990s. Yeah, and we're still here, I could talk with you what my personal experience on the housing market, but that would be another problem. But maybe to the state of the housing. Meanwhile, we are in such a situation that even like a mid income household, for example, me is not easily able to find proper affordable housing, since a lot of housing is social housing for like 6 euro 50 or something. Yeah, but since housing, land prices, building prices when so high, the other share of the housing unit has to be sold for 13,14,15,16 euro per square meter. Yeah, and what is missing is a segment in between now for like mid income people that are not eligible for social housing, but cannot afford this kind of very expensive household. So that's like, one of the additional issues at this house.

E:

So you will say that the middle class is one of the groups suffering the most?

A:

Yeah. Because because there are now I mean, there are some measures, for example, there's the city owned housing companies, they should build like 650, some housing units for nine to 11 euros. So they have a very stratified model. Yeah. But for a private investor, for example. He has to build like I don't, I think 30% He has to build social housing, and the rest, he builds

what he wants, and of course, he built an expensive. So the middle class falls somehow behind.

E:

So you mentioned for example, this huge influx of people from the refugee crisis, slow building because of the planning regulations and nimbyism and also this, let's say pushing out of the middle class because social housing is not open and tolerant for people with slightly higher incomes. Are those things unique to Berlin, or do you think they can be seen in other large cities around Europe?

This kind of problem?

A:

Yeah. I mean, I wouldn't say like, I wouldn't go too far to be like capable of talking about Europe. But in Germany, we have similar problems, because what we experienced in Germany is a reurbanisation, but a very selective, so who is benefiting are like the top seventh. They're called the top seven cities, like Berlin, Munich, Cologne, Hamburg, Frankfurt am Main, Stuttgart and Düsseldorf. Yeah, and they experience people coming in adding to rising rents. And we have a lot of like smaller mid sized cities, they still shrink. In these top seven cities, we have like similar, similar problems. I am not too familiar with the precise politics in other cities. But I know, for example, that in Hamburg, in Hamburg, they managed somehow to build a lot faster. So they cope a little bit better with the influx of people, but in general, and the whole thing of privatization, and so on, and so forth. And that was a trend that was executed Germany wide, so that similar influx of like financial capital to the cities, and similar, and so on, and so forth, why the interest in Berlin was so extra ordinary because the city was so cheap, so investors could buy, like entire 60,000 housing units. One, at one time, for example, 2004, there was the selling of the biggest municipal housing companies 64,000 housing units, and an investor bought it average for one housing unit for 4000 euros. So very cheap. Yeah, it could get very cheap in, in Berlin, while in Frankfurt, Hamburg and Munich, the prices were much higher, it was not so not so interesting. And furthermore, we have a very low ownership rate. And so the investors were speculating on Okay, let's turn the rental units into condominiums and so and sell them very expensively and to get more money. So now there was a little bit of exception in Berlin, but the German situation is this general situation here, with the interest of people financialization It's the same in the big German cities.

E:

Okay. So what made the city cheap originally is also what ended up making it exploding in prices and rent.?

A:

Yeah, right,

E:

So a lot of things have happened or are happening, and you say, you mentioned the middle class suffering from it. So do you have any examples or any general trends of how local people are resisting against some of these developments, for example, by forming organizations of social movements and pushing for

A:

I mean, to be fair to the Senate of Berlin itself, is doing a lot since 2012, they are issuing not every year, but every sometimes every year, but every like two, three years, some new ordinances, some new cooperation agreements with their state owned companies to say, okay, you can only rate raise the rent for like 2%. Now, during the energy crisis, a rent allowed to not raise the rent at all, there's so much going on. But still, it's not working, because building is so slow, and people are still coming in. So what people are doing is, first thing that could really be observed is that people are really try to stay as long as possible in their housing unit. If you have an old regular contract, you're not moving. If there is not a very severe trigger, then you try to stay there as long as possible because you have a very cheap rent, when you let's say you have a rental contract from 20 years ago, and then you would move to a similar housing unit, you might end up paying the double. So that's a problem. You have very little fluctuation on the housing market. That's one thing on the political side, what is happening on a political side on like, let's say civil engagement. I mean, there is a lot of like movements. This nimbyism, for example. You have this kind of right to the city movements here in Berlin. You might have heard of the movement Deutsche Wohnen und Co. Enteignen which is like very strong. And you see that the things that the city programs/policies(?) is doing since 10 years, they are not working. And now people try to really push for some kind of like, extreme solutions like expropriation of housing owners. It's a very extreme solution in a social market democracy. Yeah, but the people, they had a referendum, 2021, and more than 50% of the voters said, Yes, please, expropriate. And now the Senate have to come up with a solution how to manage this whole this whole situation, what could be observed as well. And this is very interesting. In Berlin, at the same time, the push for reurbanisation or urbanization from outside Berlin, but at the same time, you could experience that people are moving to the suburbs. Yeah, so Berlin is gaining people in comparison with each municipality in Germany, but it's losing people in comparison to the surrounding municipalities. Yeah, so people, people from elsewhere coming to Berlin. And because the pressure is too high, people from Berlin, going to the suburbs to Brandenburg to the surrounding municipalities. And even there, we have the problem now, low vacancy rates, rising rents, because the whole process of these pressures, housing markets, like really expanding to Brandenburg already.

E:

Okay. So if I understand correctly, people that have a higher buying or power purchase ability, they move into the central districts, and then the people that lived in the central district are going out to the periphery,

A:

they're in this place, yeah. So getting to the large housing estates, the property, especially the people on social welfare, they are only allowed of their rent, can, it's not allowed to exceed a certain threshold. Yeah. And of course, when rents rising in the inner city, the only chance where they could meet this threshold is at the periphery. And you could see a really like, of course everybody wants to go to the inner city, Prenzlauerberg, Friedrichshain and so on, in the people that cannot afford go further. And, or even like auto run, then then then they decrease the vacant space in the periphery, and then it also becomes more scarce and more expensive.

Yeah. Okay, so you see the same trend happening, just of course, not as strong. But yes. Okay.

E:

Yeah, as you mentioned, Deutsche Wohnen & Co. Enteignen, has there been anything similar before at this level of extremity and radicalness? Which such success with, for example, the majority voting for it?

A:

Yeah, I mean, not this radical, but something similar was the so called Mietendeckel, which is rent cap. 2020 where the Senate said Okay for now, I think five years, we are now freezing the rents at a level of 2019. That was a level and from this on, rents are not allowed to rise anymore. That was something that the left wing Senate invented, I think, one year or two years, and one and a half years later, our Constitutional Court says no, and Berlin is not allowed to take these measures, because these measures have to be done on federal level, states are not allowed to introduce these kind of measures. So that was just a legal legal thing and why this instrument is not in place anymore. But that was until that point before DWE was the most extreme to say, Okay, we are freezing rents for like, I would say five years on a certain level. Now, usually, you are allowed to increase your rent. That's a federal regulation 20% In three years, and then we have the, what is called the rent break. Interesting Berlin as well. They say, Okay, you are allowed, if you have a new lease to just raise rent 10% With regard to the local rent level. Yeah, but even that was not enough. And so the Senate said, Okay, let's include this very strict rent cap. And but then our Constitutional Court said no Berlin is not allowed to introduce such a measure and so it's not in place anymore, which of course, then fueled certainly a lot of people to engage in this kind of Deutsche Wohnen movement.

E:

So you think that has had a positive effect on the Deutsche Wohnen turnout?

A:

Yeah. institutional which I'm not completely sure when the Court turned the rent cap down, there might be like a, like an overlap. But certainly that increased the.. contributed to the atmosphere of okay, we had to do something, maybe taking it off hands or whatever.

E:

So trends that have accumulate accumulate.

A:

Yes.

E:

To my knowledge, there hasn't been something like DWE in any other city in Europe, or anything around the world.

A:

So that refers to be Berlin, originally being a very left wing city, like, even during the Nazi times, and during the monarchy, Berlin was kind of like left wing, we have a very, very strong fight between communists and social democrats, and so on and so forth. So that Berlin had a history in there. And just on a side note, during the division of the city, you- young people did not have to serve the military, when they live in West Berlin, they were exempt, which, of course, motivated along that a lot of young, West, left wing people students, sociology, psychology, whatsoever philosophy to move to Berlin, to not have to serve in the army, again, like contributing to this very left wing atmosphere here in the city.

E:

Yeah. So if I say it correctly, like the demographics of the city, due to very specific circumstances, historically led to a more open atmosphere for radical ideas, or was

A:

I mean, I would not over exaggerate this argument, but it's definitely a piece of it, he wouldn't. I mean, the atmosphere in Munich , where the prices are very high as well, in Munich, such a movement would never be possible at all. So that's something very Berlin specific. And I mean, Berlin, left wing in the West, and of course, left wing in the East because of socialist GDR and so on. Yeah, we have a private capital and where you might be very skeptical toward private capital, and this idea of financial investment and so on. So coming together and then you have this kind of movement.

E:

where do you see it going from here?

A:

Where do I see, I mean, we had a little room where the city was able to breathe throughout Corona, I think in 2020, the first year since 15 years, that the city was even shrinking in population, certainly, because due to Corona, less people were coming to the city. And certainly due to Corona, people who could afford it, maybe went to the countryside. And you know, in Germany, it's not very strong, but we have some kind of movements, and I know that in other countries, you have it as well to back to the countryside, and in the green area with this COVID-19 thing getting out of the city, and so on and so forth, going from Berlin, like to Brandenburg, not to the vicinity, but even further out. And with all these home office and stuff, if you have like a proper digital infrastructure, there is not a dire need to be in the city. So that gave us some time to breathe so that the rent prices during the last two years yet were not increasing too much. They were like stable or just a little increase. But to be honest, I see and I whenever I told you about housing that some of my last words and I would like to give it to you as well. You cannot see housing and put it as a black box that's embedded in the national policy and our national policy for a lot of decades. We have a neglect of smaller cities and and neglect of the countryside, which in turn lead to the situation that people were leaving these areas going to the big cities. So if you want to relieve the big cities from the constant pressure of new immigration, you have to strengthen the countryside you have to strengthen mid size smaller sized cities and the health system and public transportation, schools and kindergartens which are not in place there. And so of course, for a lot of people not finding a job, not finding adequate infrastructure for the children and so on and so forth.

And as long as the federal government does not find proper solution on large scale for these problems, you will have pressure for like years and maybe decades to the bigger cities. So, but you see, I mean, we started like talking about housing in Berlin and pressure and so on, and we ended up with like, kind of bigger stories, bigger story that you have to solve in the end. Because only when you have, we have a situation where the.. your entire spatial system is attractive for people in so many like housing, and job opportunities, and social infrastructure, then they have not the feeling, okay, I have to go to Berlin need to go to Hamburg, to find everything that I need for a proper life.

E:

So it is also tendencies of centralisation and migration patterns, and policy that leads to this over accumulation of people.

A:

yeah definitely, I wouldn't say like centralisation, but I mean officially the government, the public government has a policy of decentralisation, but in fact what you see is really a centralisation cause you know capital is going where people are and when people are going there, then companies are going there that means that companies are leaving from somewhere to where more people are going(?) so you have this strong polarisation tendency and here I would say that federal government is not enough to counteract this thing.

E:

so you can't just look at it from a city perspective?

A:

I mean of course there are things for example one argument is always that we have too much bureaucracy we have to cut down on our building regulations you have to hand in so much it is taking years and years and years. I mean to give you a specific example where a company wanted to buy and there was a certain kind of protected lizard which is of course fine as environmental protection and then it is taking longer and longer and then birds on the building. It is good from an environmental perspective but it is taking very long and making things very unefficient and it is not solving our problems in the short term. and that could be a city specific thing but I think the problem is bigger than just looking at Berlin.