

# RE-THINKING TRANS-EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY IN THE FIELD OF HOUSING AND CITIES

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To:

*Activists, groups and networks engaged for the social Right to Housing, Land and the City  
Tenant and Neighborhood Organizations  
Right-to-the-City-Coalitions and Anti-Austerity-Networks  
in Europe and beyond*

Wednesday, May 08, 2013

## **From meetings in Germany: Short report about proposals for coordinated action and advocacy**

Dear comrades, dear friends,

late April some activists from tenant organizations, local urban movements, militant research and international housing rights networks met in Essen and Wuppertal (Germany) for internal and public meetings. There we discussed reasons and possible tasks of international solidarity cooperation in the field of housing and cities under the conditions of financialisation and crisis, austerity regimes and urban transformation. Coming from Barcelona, Berlin, Hamburg, Istanbul, London, Madrid, Padova, Paris, Pescara, the Ruhr-District, Rotterdam, Santiago, Vienna we used this occasion to exchange local experiences, map common questions and brainstorm some ideas for coordinated activities in future.

It was a main success of the meetings that activists from different cities and countries, generations, professions and political movements started to get into intensive communication within an open atmosphere. We started some rich debates on the necessary activist analysis of real estate in modern capitalism and crisis, about political orientations and instruments for the defense and the realization of the right to housing in the countries and at European levels, about the questions of organizing across the fragmentations at local and transnational levels, and about the need for international solidarity with concrete actions.

We are still working on the reports from the meetings and the resulting proposals for common action. You can find the results or join our collaboration on reporting at

[https://cross\\_urban.piratenpad.de/results](https://cross_urban.piratenpad.de/results)

*(registration with your Email may be necessary for full participation)*

In advance, see especially our ongoing mapping of possible / necessary projects on **ACTIVIST RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE**, which, hopefully, we together will soon elaborate a bit more: [https://cross\\_urban.piratenpad.de/research-projects](https://cross_urban.piratenpad.de/research-projects)

With this letter, in advance, we want to inform you about some “urgent” ideas towards **COORDINATED ACTION** and **JOINT ADVOCACY** within the coming 1-2 years.

Because of the scarce time these ideas have not really been discussed in depth. But we think it is important to spread the idea now, so that you and others may be able to relate and react to that in time. We hope that this impulse may lead to a real process of better organizing among activists and organizations for the right to housing and the city across Europe.

## **Ideas for coordinated trans-european action and advocacy 2013-2014**

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Through a process of open collaboration and coordinated action we hope to create powerful interventions and offensive demands in the political space, aiming to force the political class to react seriously. The period of the project should last until the European parliament elections in spring 2014.

This coordinated common advocacy and actions could have the following main elements:

### **A. ADVOCACY / DEMANDS**

We propose to focus on the elaboration of very few common demands towards the European levels, demands which are of central importance and of high urgency for housing conditions in European countries.

#### **1. PROPOSAL FOR AN URGENT DEMAND TO THE "TROIKA"**

As you know, people in Spain, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Greece are extremely threatened by the austerity mechanisms for the Euro-Zone, which had been decided in a non-democratic way by the so called TROIKA (IMF, ECB, EC ) and which had been pushed by some of the "strong" governments in the EU (not least Germany). These measures - mostly fixed in so- called "memorandums of understanding" - include demands to the national governments, which directly (through real-estate specific conditions) or indirectly (through general financial measures and budget cuts) deeply affect the housing situation in these countries.

Since these indebted countries (more or less) have lost their sovereignty to decide about their budget and, thus, their housing policies, the power of local and national movements to enforce satisfying housing policies is rather limited. International solidarity is needed in order to force the Troika to allow and support social housing solutions in the affected countries. Especially in Spain and Portugal the housing and mortgage systems have totally crashed, foreclosures led to mass evictions. Under these conditions it should be discussed, how to address our urgent demands directly to the responsible institutions (IMF, ECB, EC) and the countries which are backing them.

The evictions for "financial reasons" could be stopped by supporting the transformation of housing assets of bankrupt landlords and banks into democratically managed social rental housing and by calling for a stronger security of tenure in the affected countries. According to this demand the conditions in the "rescue" packages (memorandums of understanding) should be changed. Instead of transforming the bankrupt assets into sovereign debt, this process will free up real resources for social housing policies.

If we want to elaborate this idea, we first of all need a good understanding of the "European" responsibilities for the housing disaster in the affected countries, which means a good analysis on the factors within the Euro-austerity-measures, which lead to evictions AND of possible solutions / changes at this level. The resulting demands and arguments should be put into a common paper, petition or letter of demands, addressed to the responsible institutions.

#### **2. PROPOSALS FOR DEMANDS directed to European Commission and European Parliament:**

In addition some of us propose to focus discussions for mobilizations on political demands to the EU, like these:

- Save people's homes, not banks! Exclude national budget expenditure on housing policies from the "fiscal compact"!
- In order to stop evictions, introduce binding European standards of security of tenure!
- Stop homelessness and housing shortage through European standards and programs for the access to decent housing at affordable rents for all!

- Develop and implement European programs for the financial support of decentralized social housing solutions, which are decent, inclusive, affordable, democratic and ecologically sound! The programs must meet the real needs.
- Allow national and sub-national rent control!
- Cancel sovereign debt in order to get resources for social housing support!

For sure, these and other demands have to be discussed and elaborated.

## **B. COORDINATED ACTION**

Regarding a possible plan of action, some of us brainstormed ideas, which led to the following sketch, which we hope will inspire some further communication. These actions could relate to the above-mentioned demands, but they also could happen independently from them:

### **I. Asset Users Unite:**

We could agree on one day later this year when we organize parallel decentralized actions in front of EC, IMF, ECB, EP, strong governments, big banks and financial landlords for our common demands towards an immediate stop to forced evictions, European standards for secure tenure and towards a transformation of housing assets of bankrupt landlords and banks into social rental housing (see above).

### **II. "Take back land and houses"-day.**

At some other day people could organize parallel (real and/or "symbolic") squatting of vacant dwellings as well as of crisis-affected vacant social/cultural infrastructure and vacant land. Such direct action could express a European-wide reclaim of all the land, buildings and spaces which have been transformed into financial assets.

It was discussed that these action days could take place in October and be integrated in global campaigns.

*Such coordinated European action days of course cannot and should not substitute any local, sub-national, national or transnational activities you may be planning for the same period. It just should add some specific value related to the European level. If you like, you of course can understand this as a part of similar global demands and action days in the same period, like the "Right to Habitat" Action Days of Habitat International Coalition, the "Zero Evictions Days" of the International Alliance of Inhabitants or the "World Tenants Day" of the International Union of Tenants.*

*We are not proposing another global campaign or network. We are just proposing to improve an independent coordination and targeting of our action in Europe. By "Europe" we mean a sphere of necessary struggles with the political powers, a sphere which includes more than the EU. As "European housing rights activists" we also have to relate in solidarity to other regions. If we start to organize as European (plus neighbors and friends) inhabitants, we will increase the chance to change things seriously in other parts of the world. A debate how this may happen of course can be an issue in our process as well.*

### III. #anti\_mipim march 2014 :

CENTRAL ACTION AT THE OCCASION OF THE GLOBAL REAL-ESTATE-FAIR MIPIM ?

<http://www.mipim.com/>

Ideas that could be discussed for the MIPIM, March 2014 in Cannes

- Central protests against the party of all those real estate criminals in Cannes (supported by a trans-local communication and publicity network)
- Exhibitions on the consequences of bad real estate practices (in/near Cannes + virtual + later travel)
- "Tribunal" against real estate violence (in/near Cannes, virtually connected)

*Through and beyond these concrete proposals for advocacy and action some of us also hope that we can start **a new process of general cooperation** which is based on the following principles: Rooted in the structures of diverse initiatives and organizations we want to have multiple actions with similar demands at the same time, connect our local discussions and knowledge both through events with guests from other countries and through collaboration in the digital sphere, develop new social housing concepts that we can struggle for. To work together in these areas we can experiment with historical experiences of councils to bring forward a resonance between the local initiatives' struggles and this new transnational level.*

*At the same time others also emphasize the need for a common analysis of the situation and opportunities, which are based on trans-national organizing and/or the need to focus political mobilization on concrete, achievable demands at the level of transnational institutions.*

*We all think that we should develop common symbol(s) and main slogan(s) both translated into each language that we can refer to in our activities to create a frame of reference and to gain public visibility.*

#### **How to communicate / coordinate the next steps**

We hope that you can discuss these and other ideas soon. Please send your proposals comments to our provisional contact-email;

**coordinate2013@reclaiming-spaces.org**

We then will invite you to join an internal mailing list for general coordination.

As we have to discuss a lot of points at the same time with different people, we plan to open an internet forum as the very next step. Here we hope to be able to discuss in a structured way. A public blog and regular internet telephone (VOIP) conferences should follow soon. If a real process starts decentralized physical meetings will be necessary too.

**We agreed on this text as a first step. We will build a provisional committee for the consultation and further development of the ideas. Please join us.**

- Knut Unger, Wuppertal, Witten Tenants Association / Habitat Net,
- Annie Pourre, No Vox et Droit au logement (France) "L'important étant de commencer."
- Pascale Thys, Belgium, Habitat & Participation
- Grischa Dallmer, Berlin Tenants' Movement / Berliner MieterGemeinschaft
- Sylvia Brennemann, Duisburg, Bürgerinitiative Zinkhüttenplatz
- Agnes Verweij, Rotterdam, active in several housing right groups in the netherlands
- Ana Méndez de Andés, Madrid, Observatorio Metropolitano
- Michael Edward, London
- Anna, Berlin Tenants' Movement / Berliner MieterGemeinschaft

and some others, who do not want to publish their names.