Chapter 10

The Relational Articulation of Housing Crisis and Activism in Post-Crash Dublin, Ireland

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In this chapter, we look at the evolving relationships between the commodification of housing and the role of activism in the Irish context. We draw on the periodizations of Manuel Aalbers (2015), with respect to the changing role of housing, and Margit Mayer (2013), with respect to social movements as shaped by neoliberalism, to unpack the ways in which the particular character of housing systems both creates specific crises and necessitates specific contingent and conjunctural responses from activist movements. In line with her long-standing interest in urban social movements and politics, urban scholar Mayer (2013, 5) has suggested the need to consider how contemporary activism responds to, and is shaped by, the impact of the different waves of the neoliberalization of cities because 'urban protests and the claims made on urban development address—and correspond with—specifically neoliberal designs and enclosures'. In her periodization, she highlights four phases: Fordist/Keynesian norms (up to the early 1980s); roll-back neoliberalization in the 1980s; roll-out neoliberalization in the 1990s; and the current phase marked by the triumph of austerity and the financialization of the economy. Building on Mayer's argument, we analyse the strategies developed by housing activists in Ireland as a response to different waves (and crises) in the neoliberalization of housing. To account for the evolution of the housing sector, we also draw upon the periodization of housing developments proposed by Aalbers (2015) who distinguishes between (a) the pre-modern period; (b) the modern/Fordist period; (c) the flexible neoliberal period; and (d) the late neoliberal/postcrisis one.

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The importance of processes of capital accumulation in shaping urban space has, of course, been a long-standing interest of critical geographers (Harvey 1982). The built environment has provided a 'safety valve' for the overaccumulation of capital (Harvey 1982), whereas the 'abstraction' of space from the social conditions of its production is a core component in the material-ideological work of capitalism (Lefebvre 1991). As such, the production of urban space is intrinsically tied in with political economic processes happening across spatial scales (Brenner and Theodore 2002). However, urban space is also, as Lefebvre (1991) argues, an *oeuvre* produced out of the everyday life of the city's inhabitants. The politics of urban space is shaped, in part, out of this intersection of the city as a site for capital accumulation and what Wood (2017) calls 'the city as inhabited'. Moreover, from the late 1970s with the advent of neoliberalism, the urbanization of capital has become a more central component of the global economy. Housing has been key to these political economic shifts and to the activist struggles that emerge as a response to the material changes wrought by these transformations (Aalbers and Christophers 2014; Di Feliciantonio 2016).

The choice to focus on housing is based on a double set of considerations. The first one concerns the main role of housing (and real estate) in the contemporary economic history of Ireland and the profound neoliberalization and financialization of housing. During the 'Celtic Tiger' period, construction and real estate registered a massive well-documented boom (e.g., Kitchin et al. 2012; Memery, 2001), followed by the collapse of the sector after 2008, marked by the proliferation of what Kitchin et al. (2014) have defined as 'the new ruins of Ireland' (i.e., unfinished estates). However, since 2013 real estate has registered a spectacular recovery (combined with further financialization of the urban environment), especially in Dublin (see Byrne 2016). The second concern relates to the interscalar character of housing (Aalbers 2015); although typically considered as local because of its fixity, housing is deeply influenced by national laws, regulations and investments (especially in a small country like Ireland), and in recent years, it has registered the massive entrance of 'global players' as investors and landlords (Byrne 2016). So, housing highlights the multiscalar working of 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner and Theodore 2002).

Our argument is that housing activism has been shaped by, and has acted as a response to, the main characteristics of each period and the different crises generated by them. We do not consider the 'pre-modern' and 'modern/Fordist' periods, our analysis beginning with the 'Celtic Tiger' years (corresponding to the third phase in Aalbers's conceptualization) and focusing mainly on the current postcrash period, characterized by austerity politics and rapidly deepening financialization. Our aim here is to use the periodizations offered by Aalbers and Mayer as a heuristic device to better frame the changes in

the Irish housing sector and the responses provided by different social actors (e.g., new anti-austerity and community housing activism, nongovernmental organizations, unions, older 'social housing' community groups, lone parents and Left political parties) to different types of housing crises. Methodologically the chapter draws from a number of different research projects carried out since 2010, including academic, policy and activist, using several research methods (participant observation, interviews, policy analysis and activist praxis).

NEOLIBERALIZATION AND IRELAND'S HOUSING CRISIS

As Kitchin et al. (2012) have argued, Ireland's encounter with neoliberalism does not easily map onto paradigmatic cases of roll-back and roll-out neoliberalization. They attribute this to a range of factors, including Ireland's status as a postcolonial nation (which meant that the Fordist welfare state had not developed to a similar level to that of, for example, the United Kingdom), that major neoliberal reforms were first introduced during a period of economic growth (the first phase of the Celtic Tiger), and that these were rolled out in combination with an expansive programme of 'social partnership' (in which trade unions traded pay increments for commitments not to engage in industrial action). In combination, these conditions meant that neoliberal reforms were introduced initially in a 'commonsense' and noncontentious manner. However, the weak state apparatus and Ireland's embrace of globalization, combined with the importance of property developers as a component of the local elite, made Ireland a perfect testbed of neoliberal housing policies. In this regard, Kitchin et al. (2012) argue that Irish neoliberalization was characterized by a form of 'path amplification', particularly with regard to housing. This led eventually to the housing crisis and a particularly extreme version of neoliberalism emerging in and through its wake.

During the so-called Celtic Tiger era (1993–2007), export-led growth throughout the 1990s was followed in the 2000s by growth predicated on a debt-fuelled property bubble. Between 1991 and 2006, 762,541 housing units were built nationally, while house prices rose by 429 percent in Dublin and 382 percent in the country as a whole (Kitchin et al. 2012). From 2007 onwards, Ireland's economic boom collapsed along with the global financial system, resulting in a dramatic and severe housing and financial crisis and recession. House prices fell by 57.4 percent in Dublin and 48.7 percent in the rest of the country (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2015). Unemployment soared from a low of 4 percent in 2004 to a peak of more than 15 percent by 2011 (Kitchin et al. 2012). In late 2010, the Fianna Fáil government agreed

to an €85 billion IMF-EU-ECB bailout programme, and successive govern-
ments responded with a series of harsh austerity budgets in the ensuing years
(Hearne 2014). As noted previously, one outcome of the property crash was a
landscape of unfinished and vacant residential and commercial developments.
The National Survey of Housing Developments in 2010 documented 2,846
unfinished estates in Ireland, present in every local authority, of which only
429 still had active construction happening on them (Housing Agency 2010).
The extent of oversupply was clarified in the 2011 census, which reported
that 230,086 units were vacant (excluding holiday homes), 168,457 houses
and 61,629 apartments out of a total housing stock of 1,994,845 (CSO 2012).
This was combined with growing levels of mortgage arrears, which peaked
in Q3 of 2013 at 12.9 percent of all principal residence mortgages (99,189)
in arrears of more than ninety days (Central Bank 2016).

Notwithstanding the particular trajectory of neoliberalism in the Irish con-
text, the transformation of Ireland's housing system over the course of the
property bubble conforms to many aspects of Aalbers (2015) periodization of
the flexible neoliberal/Post-Fordist period. These include the shift to promot-
ing mortgaged homeownership, the withdrawal of state-provided affordable
ownership and social rental housing provision and the promotion of hous-
ing as a financialized asset. The collapse of this model of housing provision
resulted in a wrecked national banking system and dysfunctional housing
market, which has left many thousands of households struggling with debt
(Waldron and Redmond 2016).

THE NEW HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

From 2013, Ireland's property market has substantially recovered in specific
parts of the country. In Dublin in particular, the 'contradiction' between a
robust urban economy and the proliferation of 'distressed assets' has created
a favourable climate for international capital investors (Byrne 2016). This
influx of international capital, in combination with the policy response of
successive governments to the crisis, has created a new housing and home-
lessness crisis, which stems from the structural problems of the system as
it has evolved over the boom-and-bust years (Kitchin et al. 2016; Hearne
2017). In line with Aalbers' (2015) periodization, during the Celtic Tiger
years, Irish housing policy moved away from the state provision of social
housing and outsourced it to the private sector, making it dependent on pro-
cyclical forces (Byrne and Norris 2017). The Celtic Tiger years also saw the
creation of public-private partnerships (PPPs) to regenerate existing older
social housing estates, which would also include new private housing units.
However, the majority of these schemes collapsed when developers were hit

by the property crash (Hearne 2011). The state, moreover, initiated a policy of housing tens of thousands of social housing tenants in the private-rental sector (PRS) through the payment of a state-subsidy (Rent Supplement, recently renamed the Housing Assistance Payment [HAP] to landlords). Between 1994 and 2004, Rent Supplement claimant numbers increased by 101 percent, in comparison to a 15.2 percent increase in mainstream social housing tenants (Byrne and Norris 2017, 8).

Although the overwhelming policy drive during the Celtic Tiger was towards homeownership, homeownership rates actually fell from 81 percent in 1991 to 76 percent in 2006, whereas the proportion of households in the PRS increased from 9.9 percent in 2006 (145,317) to 18.5 percent in 2011 (305,377) (Hearne 2017). This was the outcome of a number of factors, including the growth of buy-to-let investors and increased immigrant populations, who were often limited in their accommodation choices because of the need to be close to work in city centre areas (see Gilmartin 2014). Moreover, the PRS remains underregulated in the Irish context (Sirr 2014), resulting in various problems for tenants in terms of affordability, security of tenure and living conditions (see Byrne, this collection).

Furthermore, following the crash, as part of a series of severe national austerity budgets from 2008 to 2013, exchequer capital funding for newly built social housing was cut by 90 percent, resulting in an almost complete cessation of new supply by the principal state provider, local authorities. Hearne (2017) has calculated that, had existing levels of capital funding been sustained, an additional 31,136 social-housing units would have been delivered over the period 2010 to 2016. Meanwhile, the PRS is under increased pressure. The lack of new private-sector supply, coupled with more stringent regulations on mortgage lending, has led to higher-income households renting for longer periods, whereas households who previously would have accessed social-housing units are instead being pushed into the PRS (through the HAP payment). Rents have increased at a rate of 13.5 percent on an annual basis nationally, and rents in Dublin have risen by 15 percent per year (a 65 percent increase from their lowest point in 2010) (Daft 2016).

The introduction of 'global players', such as vulture funds and private equity funds, to Dublin's housing market has also served to increase both property prices and rents. Facilitated by the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)—the 'bad bank' established by the Irish state in 2009 as a mechanism to resolve the country's financial crisis by taking on €74 billion of distressed property loans associated with the five main Irish banks (Byrne 2016)—these funds have bought up ninety thousand properties and hold at least €10.3 billion worth of assets in Ireland (RTE 2017). Sales of properties to investors have increased from 22 percent of all purchases in 2010 (5,194 properties) to 36 percent of all purchases in 2016 (16,999 properties) (Hearne

2017). These factors have combined to create a new housing and homelessness crisis. Homelessness has increased dramatically in Ireland in recent years as a result of evictions from the PRS. Family homelessness emerged as a major issue from 2014 onwards. A majority of these families are lone parents (e.g., this group comprises 70 percent of families in 'emergency accommodation' including commercial hotels). This is reflective of the challenges faced by low-income households as a result of rising rents and inadequate social housing supports. The number of people homeless in Ireland more than doubled from 3,226 to 7,421 between July 2014 and December 2016. In Dublin, the epicentre of this new crisis, 5,480 adults accessed homeless accommodation in 2015, increasing to 6,314 for 2016 (Dublin Region Homeless Executive 2016). The number of homeless families has likewise grown from 598 in March 2016 to 1,091 (comprising 1,465 adults and 2,262 children) in April 2017 (Dublin Region Homeless Executive 2017).

NEW HOUSING MOVEMENTS

These specific material changes to the Irish housing system have influenced the form that movements have taken following the crash. In contrast to countries such as Spain, which followed a similar trajectory in terms of the property bubble (García-Lamarca and Kaika 2016), the issue of mortgage debt was not politicized to the same degree in postcrash Ireland. The dominant, if contested, narrative of the crisis framed the property bubble as the responsibility of homeowners (O'Callaghan et al. 2014). Moreover, Ireland's mortgage arrears crisis only reached its peak in 2013, five years after the initial 'crisis'. Despite having one of the highest mortgage default rates in Europe—with almost a quarter of all Principal Dwelling House (PDH) mortgages in arrears, and a fifth (21.7 percent) of all Buy-to-Let (BTL) mortgages in arrears—Ireland has had a comparatively low repossession rate. There were 600 PDH repossessions in 2012 and 5,568 repossessions in the period 2012–2016, although, repossessions did show an increase in 2016 (Hearne 2017). This contrasts with 570,000 foreclosures in Spain between 2008 and 2014 (García-Lamarca and Kaika 2016). In line with the new postcrisis transformations outlined, the principal source of evictions in Ireland has been of tenants in the PRS. In the first instance, this occurred when rent receivers were appointed by financial institutions recovering BTL properties in arrears. During the first quarter of 2015, rent receivers were appointed to 886 BTL properties, bringing the stock of accounts with rent receivers appointed to 5,965, up from just 566 in 2012. As the property market in the major cities began to recover, a new wave of economic evictions because of escalating rents followed.

The upshot of these factors was that new housing movements did not emerge immediately following the crisis. And indeed, rather than indebtedness forming the main political antagonism (e.g., see Di Feliciantonio 2016), the issue of family homelessness, stemming from evictions in the PRS, became the focus of new movements. As such, postcrisis housing movements in Ireland follow a different trajectory to that of paradigmatic cases like Spain. Here, we periodise the emergence of postcrisis Irish housing movements in two phases.

During the first phase (2008–2014), housing movements emerged out of preexisting struggles of disadvantaged communities during the period of the boom (corresponding to the phase of 'roll-out neoliberalization' in Mayer's conceptualization). Although the Celtic Tiger brought increased levels of wealth for a broad section of the population, there were also communities and sections of society that saw little benefit from the economic boom. Communities in social-housing estates, in particular, found themselves caught in the crosshairs between the state and the Local Authority's policy retrenchments on social housing, and 'regeneration' plans based on inflating land values of the estates. Such urban regeneration schemes, implemented through Integrated Area Plans (IAPs) and PPPs, resulted in conflict when communities felt their concerns were not being taken into account (Attuyer 2015; Hearne 2011). During the boom, social-housing communities in the south inner-city of Dublin—such as St. Michael's Estate, Fatima Mansions and Dolphin House—mobilized anti-displacement campaigns in response to state 'regeneration' plans, engaging in public advocacy, and linking together to form a cross-city tenants' alliance, Tenants First, in 2003 (Bissett 2008). The collapse of PPP schemes following the crash coalesced action in these communities at an individual estate level and at a city scale with public protest marches to the City Council offices organized by Tenants First (Hearne 2014). The austerity budgets also had an immediate and devastating effect on these communities with large cuts to regeneration, community development, the Drugs Task Force and Traveller programmes prominent.

The communities participated in a national alliance, with some support from the trade unions SIPTU and Unite, to hold one of the first national anti-austerity protests in September 2009, with twelve thousand attending. Weekly vociferous protests were held by community activists at the local offices of government ministers until January 2010 when the government removed the majority of funding and autonomy of local community organizations. Some of the community groups regrouped and created a new movement with artists, the Spectacle of Defiance and Hope, against the community cuts. These linked with other small-scale anti-austerity protests (Hearne 2014). Although some victories were achieved (see Hearne and Kenna 2014), the cuts to

community development and youth supports resulted in an effective dismantling and silencing of much of the community infrastructure.

As such, these community-led campaigns were at the forefront of early anti-austerity protests, which also formed the first wave of housing movement response. Thus, the first phase of postcrisis housing movements was born out of preexisting community-based movements contesting the course of regeneration during the boom. These campaigns were taken to another level in response to both the immediate collapse of PPPs and the emerging politics of austerity. However, they remained relatively isolated, in part, because of the subdued nature of the initial anti-austerity response in Ireland before 2014, and were (partially) defeated. In this sense, the first phase of movements was a reaction to austerity from communities already suffering from housing disadvantage during the boom. If we connect to Mayer's periodization discussed in the introduction, this phase can be seen as marking the shift from the third (roll-out neoliberalization) to the fourth phase (characterized by austerity and financialization).

A second phase of housing movements (2014–present) began to emerge as the initial period of the crisis gave way to the new housing crisis. These movements explicitly emerged in response to crises in the PRS and in particular the burgeoning homelessness emergency. The character of these new groups was diverse. Groups like Housing Action Now attempted to bring together the older social-housing community and newer housing and anti-austerity activists, while the Dublin Tenants Organization aimed to create a tenants' union to mobilize and advocate for those in the PRS, seeking to create a broader political platform for housing struggles (see Byrne, this collection). But many new groups were more circumscribed in their focus: they emerged at the grassroots level as a direct response to the threat of homelessness.

However, a wider, more politicized, housing movement would coalesce around these groups. A number of conjunctural factors contributed to this. Firstly, activists became inspired by a range of new tactics and strategies emerging both in Ireland and internationally. Internationally, the notoriety of the main housing movement in Spain, the *Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH), was spreading in activist circles. Promoting contentious direct actions including the picketing of banks and politicians in their personal homes, along with occupying empty buildings, the PAH has been able to challenge the cultural and political hegemony of homeownership, making squatting a widespread practice (Di Feliciantonio 2017). Members of the PAH were invited by local activists to give a talk and workshop in Dublin in December 2014, which was highly influential in subsequent housing movements in the city. At the national level, the Right2Water movement (an alliance of local independent community groups, left-wing political parties and anti-austerity trade unions such as Unite and Mandate) had mobilized massive

sections of the population (Hearne 2015). At the local level, the Right2Water movement was instrumental in politicizing people, some of whom later transitioned into housing activism. Direct actions by some grassroots groups such as the North Dublin Bay Housing Crisis Committee (who were a group of parents and families affected by the housing crisis who occupied the offices of the Local Authority until demands for housing were listened to) were influential in paving the way for more radical tactics. The latter also underscores the importance of women to recent housing movements in the Irish context. Women, and lone parents in particular, have been disproportionately affected by the new forms of family homelessness, but they have also been at the forefront of new housing movements in response. As such, the particular material conditions of the new housing crisis resulted in new movements forming in the communities and sections of society hit hardest. The specificities of those affected, in combination with the influence of new movements internationally, also began to shape the types of discourses, strategies and tactics of this new set of actors.

Pivotal to the coalescing of these new housing movement politics was the formation of the Irish Housing Network (IHN), an umbrella network for a number of grassroots housing action groups, in 2015. The IHN have been heavily influenced by models developed by the PAH in Spain, which emphasize the importance of those affected by the housing crisis leading struggles (Di Feliciantonio 2017). Their activist strategy has consisted of building a horizontal activist-led network structure of organization (excluding formal representation of political parties, trade unions, etc.), direct actions that target particular issues, capacity building among communities affected by housing inequality and building a counternarrative on the housing crisis. This has included exposing the paradox between high levels of housing vacancy and growing homelessness, conducting walking tours of the city showing the location of vacant buildings and in a number of cases, engaging in direct actions including the occupation of vacant buildings. In the case of walking tours, activists explain to the audience the history of vacant sites, including the details on property and how long they have been vacant, thus spreading awareness about their speculative nature. A similar goal is pursued in the case of the occupation of vacant buildings, when activists show the public how vacant buildings could be used to respond to the primary needs of an increasing number of people. The practice of occupation also challenges the increasing institutional response based on providing homeless emergency accommodation in hotels and bed and breakfasts, an extremely expensive solution that does not offer any stability to people in need.

In this sense, the second phase of movements was more explicitly an activist response largely shaped around homelessness but which encompassed a wider vision for housing. In the absence of other movements

emerging in response to the wider housing and property crash, and with the homelessness crisis growing steadily worse from 2014 onwards, homelessness became a unifying signifier enabling a broad unity. In particular, campaigners and activist groups made visible new forms of family homelessness which placed the issue firmly on the political radar and in public discourse.

THE CHALLENGE OF BUILDING AN
IRISH HOUSING MOVEMENT

Here we offer some factors to help explain the apparent contradiction of a prolonged and escalating crisis and increased housing activism but an absence of a major social movement in housing. We do this by exploring some of the recent actions that attempted to build cross-group alliance campaigns and in particular drawing out factors such as the approach taken by different actors, how they positioned themselves in relation to claims and the particular context of the Irish civil society landscape. We focus briefly on three recent actions/campaigns: (a) 'The rent crisis must be stopped' campaign to improve tenants' rights and introduce rent regulation, (b) the occupation of Apollo House and (c) the campaign to stop the sale of public land for 'strategic development and regeneration' under PPP schemes.

During 2016, trade unions (SIPTU, IMPACT, Mandate, Unite) involved in the National Homeless and Housing Coalition (NHHC) organized 'The Rent Crisis Must Be Stopped' campaign. The NHHC was set up in 2015 as an attempt to bring the various housing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), left political parties, trade unions and housing groups together to form a united campaign. The IHN participated at certain points in this campaign, but there was some tension over how it would be represented given its network nature. Organized as a traditional political alliance-type campaign, it called for the government to declare a housing emergency, build social housing, introduce rent control and secure tenancies. Despite considerable resources and effort, their organized marches had no more than five hundred to two thousand in attendance. Nevertheless, the campaign is seen as having some influence on the implementation of a limited form of rent control by the government in late 2016.

The campaign suffered, in part, from the depoliticizing effects of social partnership during the Celtic Tiger, which had resulted in a demobilized and passive trade union sector. Furthermore, NGOs and charities have played a central role in delivering Irish housing and welfare services and are heavily reliant on state funding. The state has used this as leverage to silence

potential dissent through 'service level agreements' with NGOs that forbid public advocacy or protest as a condition of service delivery. Thus, housing NGOs dominate the 'homelessness' space (particularly public debate), but their public critique of government policy is tempered. As such, there was a tension in terms of organizational approach between trade unions and the NGO sector on the one hand, who pursued a public advocacy campaign, and newer housing movements on the other hand, who sought to align themselves with more radical, rather than reformist, demands. Although the campaign constituted a re-politicization of the trade union and NGO sector, for some sections of new housing movements, there was a perception that the approach was not radical enough to address the crisis.

Between December 2016 and January 2017, the direct action taken to occupy Apollo House, a NAMA-controlled office building in Dublin city centre, brought together a wide coalition of actors. Operating under the name 'Home Sweet Home', the coalition included activists from the IHN, trade unionists from Unite and high-profile artists including Glen Hansard and Jim Sheridan. Within two days of occupying the building, Home Sweet Home opened Apollo House as a dry hostel for the homeless. The campaign captured the public imagination and through its 'Go Fund Me' page, received €160,000 in donations, along with widespread public support, volunteer work and donations from thousands of people across the country. Through fighting an injunction served by receivers appointed by NAMA in the courts, and through a media campaign in support of the occupation, Home Sweet Home was successful in making visible and politicizing the homelessness crisis. During this period of the occupation, the group put pressure on the Housing Minister, Simon Coveney, to deliver new emergency provisions and address the crisis. After commitments to improving basic standards were made by the Minister, the group left the occupation on January 12, 2017, in compliance with a court injunction.

Although the action opened up the possibilities for the formation of new political subjectivities, the restricted focus on homelessness failed to connect up with the wider impacts of the housing crisis. The positioning of homelessness and particularly the centring of the most vulnerable subjects of society (e.g., rough sleepers, people with addictions) in campaigns, seemed to prevent the average 'indebted wo/men' (Di Feliciantonio 2016) from actively identifying with them, albeit being generally sympathetic. The focus on homeless families and individuals also placed pressure on vulnerable individuals to become key actors in movements. However, these groups are often reluctant to engage in public action because of the stigma attached to homelessness and the reality of their traumatic and chaotic circumstances. As such, despite the emphasis on affected-led struggles, the sensitive and difficult nature of the action meant that Home Sweet Home activists were often obligated to speak

on behalf of homeless individuals. In terms of the overarching aim of new movements to transform the hegemonic narrative around housing, the focus on homelessness runs the risk of limiting the narrative to that particular issue. The case of the Apollo House has shown this: hundreds of people supported the occupation of the vacant building for homeless people in central Dublin through volunteer work or donations, but then no broader mobilization followed the direct action.

In April 2017, an announcement was made by then Housing Minister Simon Coveney to sell four parcels of public land in Dublin earmarked for 'strategic development and regeneration', with advertisements placed in national newspapers. This constituted the revival of failed Celtic Tiger policies to deliver new social and private housing through PPP schemes (Hearne 2011). Community organizations in the old social-housing estates, such as St. Michael's Estate, had already begun to organize against this partial privatization through holding local public meetings in the first half of 2017. Newer groups such as the North Dublin Bay Crisis Committee organized against similar plans in their area, whereas Dublin Central Housing Action (a group within the IHN) campaigned at a local level on the issue. The issue also attracted support from left political parties, such as the Workers Party, which proposed a costed plan to deliver mixed-income social housing on the sites. Sinn Féin, which has positioned itself as the main anti-austerity left party in the postcrisis period, was initially supportive of the Workers Party proposals but later consented to the government plans on the basis that 30 percent of units on the regenerated estates would be designated for social housing.

These campaigns marked a point of intersection between first- and second-phase housing movements. In their respective campaigns, these groups have tried to connect the privatization of the public land to the wider housing crisis by mobilizing locally for affordable housing. Yet despite the parity of their agenda, there were some tensions between the different groups involved. For first-phase groups, the campaign constituted a continuation of years of struggle around an issue that they had built up considerable social movement capacity in addressing. For second-phase groups, the land being sold constituted one of the last available resources to build social housing on a large scale in Dublin city centre and to stem what they viewed as the 'social cleansing' of the urban core. However, these different campaigns failed to link up into a wider platform. Newer groups have at times ended up reproducing some of the strategies of older movements but without also reflecting on the successes or failures that these movements experienced. Although the haste at which campaigns are launched is understandable, given the severity of the current crisis, it nevertheless speaks to the absence of social movement infrastructure and history in the Irish context.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have built upon the periodizations of Aalbers, with respect to the changing role of housing, and Mayer, with respect to social movements as shaped by neoliberalism, to account for the changing forms of housing activism in Ireland after the collapse of the economy. We have identified two phases: the first one (2008–2014) strictly connected to the struggles carried by the disadvantaged groups during the years of the Celtic Tiger and the initial phase of austerity (corresponding to the phase of 'roll-out neoliberalization' in Mayer's periodization); the second one, started in 2014, characterized by new grassroots groups and national alliances, partially shaped by transnational solidarity, aiming to respond to the increasing polarization of Irish society and the housing market.

As Aalbers, Mayer and others have demonstrated, in late capitalism housing has become a more pivotal component of the global economy, and therefore more central to the analysis of political economy (Aalbers and Christophers 2014). The deep infiltration of finance capital in housing has profoundly affected the nature of urban space and transformed everyday life at a biopolitical level (García-Lamarca and Kaika 2016). Although these transformations are characterized by a level of convergence internationally (Aalbers 2015), we argue that it is also necessary to consider the relational ways that local material conditions mediate and shape these processes. We conclude that viewing the neoliberalization of housing conjuncturally requires us to examine how housing crises make specific types of activism both possible and necessary and how activism creates possibilities for addressing the structural problems of housing systems in contextually specific ways.

Overall, our analysis demonstrates a contradictory moment in Irish housing movements. On the one hand, new movements and campaigns appear to be speaking to a residual section of society through a core focus on homelessness, much like older movements centred on social housing. Alongside this, the general population has been incorporated into the hegemonic narrative of economic recovery whereby a sizeable proportion of the middle classes 'gain' from rising property prices. Thus far, the housing movement has failed to transform the hegemonic narrative that this broad group identifies with. On the other hand, the postcrisis period has witnessed a series of radical transformations in housing movement politics that, though in their infancy, suggest the emergence of a new base in the social movement infrastructure. The emergence of a range of new groups, the reigniting of older community-based campaigns, and the shift in the political position of NGOs and trade unions all testify to this. In this sense, housing could become a key signifier of the deeply unequal 'recovery' and a rallying point around which civil society unites for social justice.

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