

## THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AS A TOOL FOR URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THE CASE OF BARCELONETA

*R.W.J. Boer\* & J. de Vries\*\**

\*University of Amsterdam, Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies,  
Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130, 1018 VZ, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Email: r.w.j.boer@uva.nl

\*\*University of Amsterdam, Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies,  
Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130, 1018 VZ, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Email: j.devries1@uva.nl

**ABSTRACT:** In the governance context of neoliberal urbanization in which certain interests are in danger, Lefebvre's concept of 'the Right to the City' gained new relevance. Originally a rather revolutionary concept, and a plea for a new and radical kind of urban politics, it is now widely spread and used as well in more reformist ways. This paper explores present theories and applications of the right to the city and presents an analytical model based on the concept in order to conduct a case study on the urban transformation of Barceloneta, a neighborhood in the Spanish city of Barcelona. Furthermore this paper explores how the right to the city could be applied as a tool for urban social movements in Barceloneta. Among others the right to the city as a method to unite social movements, the right to the city as a method to unite different stakeholders in one issue or the right to the city as 'frame', were identified.

**KEYWORDS:** right to the city, Barcelona, Barceloneta, gentrification, bottom-up planning, urban social movements, governance

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decades an urban renaissance occurred simultaneously with the rise of neoliberalism, which led to the comprehensive transformation of urban governance in European cities. The public and private sector are exploring new forms of cooperation, in which the private sector plays an increasingly dominant role. The public sector is limiting its activities, and its urban and economic policies are besides deregulation characterized by a more aggressive restructuring of urban space in favor of private interests (Jacobson 2007, Peck and Tickell 2002). This new governance context of neoliberal urbanization led to massive gentrification processes, which Sassen described as the "physical displacement of low-income households, non-profit uses and low-profit firms, expressed directly in evictions or indirectly through the market" (2006, p.18).

In this context the concept of 'the Right to the City', coined by Henry Lefebvre in the late sixties, gained new relevance. Originally a rather revolutionary plea for a new and radical kind of urban politics, it is now widely spread and used as well in more reformist ways (Dikec 2001, Harvey 2003, Lefebvre 1967, Purcell 2002, UNESCO & UNHABITAT 2009). This paper explores the original concept of the right to the city and its different interpretations in the course of history. Furthermore, the concept is operationalized and transformed into a research model in order to be able to analyze the present state of this right in a certain area. This model is used as a starting point for a case study on Barceloneta, a small but centrally located neighborhood in the Spanish city of Barcelona. Barceloneta is a classic example of a working-class area in the city center of a European city that has been discovered by development companies and real estate investors and is presently undergoing some major transformations. Urban social movements consisting of concerned inhabitants are contesting these developments and are acting against the policies of the local government.

Elaborating on this case study the paper explores the value of the right to the city for urban social movements and discusses three possible new applications of the concept. This lays the foundations for recommendations for the movements in Barceloneta and the answer on the main research question: How can the right to the city be applied in the work of urban social movements in Barceloneta?

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## 1 THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

### 1.1 The original concept

In 1967 the French philosopher and sociologist Henry Lefebvre wrote 'La Droit à la Ville', or 'the Right to the City', a passionate plea for a new and radical kind of urban politics. Lefebvre states that the right to the city can only be conceived as a "transformed and renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre 1967, p. 132) and explains the concept by discussing different aspects of this right. A central theme in his work is the perception of the city as an 'oeuvre', a collective artwork of all the inhabitants and users of a city. They can contribute to the 'oeuvre' by collectively shaping the future of urban space and by inhabiting their urban environment actively, for example by participating in the public life of their community, but especially by the *appropriation* of both time and space of their city (Lefebvre 1967, 1973, 1974). The emphasis on appropriation is based on Lefebvre's opinion that everybody has the inalienable right to use all space of the city in order to provide themselves with the necessities of daily life. According to him, the appropriation of space is more important than the domination of those who own space. Therefore, in the city-as-an-oeuvre the *use value* of space has the priority above the *economic value*, which means that the social function of space is always more important than the profit that can be made by its exploitation or selling (Lefebvre 1967). Another important theme in his work is the 'centrality' of space. Inner cities are epicenters of social interaction and human creativity and everybody has the right to access the center and appropriate space of centrally located areas.

Lefebvre's right to the city is not a closed system of set procedures, but should be seen as a mentality, which implies the right to the 'oeuvre', the right to appropriation and the right to have a final vote in decision making processes. These rights need to be fought for permanently in the urban environment or as Lefebvre states: "the right to the city does not abolish confrontations and struggles. On the contrary!" (Lefebvre 1973, p. 195)

### 1.2 The right to the city as a radically different urban society

In recent years the right to the city has gained new attention and has been interpreted in many different ways. A group of predominantly social scientist stay close to the original meaning of the concept and contributed extensively on the elaboration of the concept. Others, especially human right activists, development workers and more reformist social movements work on the incorporation of different aspects of the right in official treaties and other legal structures, in order to make them enforceable at local and national governments. Most of the social scientists, however, expanded Lefebvre's concept and interpreted the right to the city as a call "to radically rethink the social relations of capitalism, the spatial structure of the city and the assumptions of liberal democracy" (Purcell 2008, p. 92). Purcell states that the right to the city could be a tool in the resistance against neoliberal globalization that in his view has led to decreasing levels of democracy, greater inequality and more social problems. Their right to the city is not a blueprint or a full scale alternative but 'a new kind of urban politics', that completely alters the methods of decision making in the city and when realized will mark the beginning of an urban revolution (Purcell 2002, 2008).

According to Purcell two concepts are central in the right to the city: participation and appropriation. Participation is much more than just taking part in the decision making processes within the structures of liberal democracy. It's the fundamental right for *all inhabitants* (as opposed to 'all citizens') to exercise full influence on all decisions made in respect to the production of space and the city. The right to appropriation subsequently challenges directly the structures of capitalism and therefore both the use of space as a lucrative factor of production and the prioritization of the economic value of space above the use value of its inhabitants as well (Purcell 2002). Harvey adds that it is a fundamental human right to take control of urbanization and urban transformations and "to change the city after our heart's desire" (Harvey 2003, p. 393). Both Harvey and Dikec emphasize that the right to the city doesn't belong to a single individual, but should be perceived as a certain relationship between an individual and the rest of the society. It's an 'enabling right', that offers all inhabitants of a city the possibility to participate in public life, which is much more than the well-known participatory planning. It leads to a city as a political collectivity, where the public interest is permanently redefined and realized through political struggle (Harvey 2008, Dikec 2001, 2002).

### 1.3 The right to the city as an individually enforceable right

These authors were vital to the development of the concept of the right to the city and influenced many

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other scientists who refined the ideas and worked on the elaboration of different aspects of the concept. In this literature the right to the city is used in its original, radical conception, and linked to various revolutionary ideals. Many moderates who were inspired by the idea of the right to the city used the concept as a strategy to achieve change within the present structures of society. There have been groups that tried to incorporate the right to the city in various treaties en declarations from and between governments and between government and citizens that are supposed to guarantee different aspects of this right.

UNESCO and UN-HABITAT for example started a joint project called 'Urban Policies and the Right to the City' that focuses on "contributing to meeting the Millennium Development Goals and reducing poverty by identifying good practices and initiatives in law and urban planning" (UNESCO & UN-HABITAT 2009, p.3). Their analysis of the right to the city is based on the work of Lefebvre, Purcell and Dikec, to which they refer extensively. They don't find however a solution to deal with the radical aspects and state that "Lefebvre's work was disconcertingly vague as to how it could be implemented" and that "there is little practical guidance on what the right to the city entails, or how it can influence relations between urban dweller and state" (UNESCO & UN-HABITAT 2009, p.15). Subsequently they limit themselves to an interpretation of the right to the city that is made to create consensus between local authorities, other policy makers and economic partners.

Besides the combined UNESCO – UNHABITAT project there are many local, national and international initiatives that use the right to the city for a reformist agenda, for example the 'World Charter for the Right to the City'-project and 'La Chartre Montréalaise' from the Canadian city of Montreal. A very special example in which the right to the city is put to practice is the 'Estatuto da Cidade Brasil'. This Brazilian City Charter contains three elements that come all very close to the original concept, namely the regulation of informal settlements and democratization of urban governance, but most innovative is the new law which states that the right to property comes always second to the social function land or real estate can fulfill. Even the surplus value generated on property can be employed for the benefit of society.

There are clear indications that the radical ideas of Lefebvre, Purcell, Harvey, Dikec and others are used for reformist agenda's, something most of these authors predicted and were negative about. According to them, the right to the city should not be incorporated as an *individual* right in the present structures of liberal democracy, but should be perceived as a permanent *collective* political struggle. Clearly the two approaches to the right of the city promote different roads to establish full participation of inhabitants and users of the city. While many contributors to the academic debate seem to assume that both approaches are mutually exclusive, or at least conflicting, not much is known on how the radical and reformist approach interact in practice.

#### **1.4 The right to the city as an analytical model**

For this paper an analytical model was developed, that makes a clear distinction between the two different main interpretations of the right to the city. The present state of the right to the city as a *radically different urban society* is identified to the extent by which a radical political struggle is collectively organized in a neighborhood. The quality of the right to the city as an *individually enforceable right* on the other hand is identified to the extent by which aspects of the right to the city, for example participation options or the quality of housing, are offered to citizens and to the extent by which people both know about and use these possibilities and actively lobby for its conservation and expansion.

Both the more radical and more reformist interpretation of the right to the city can be very broad with respect to the scope of their analysis or proposed solutions. A radical different urban society is automatically very comprehensive and also most of the reformist practices usually contain extensive lists of rights that should be included in the right to the city, such as access to education and the job-market. However, considering the character of the case study, it focused on physical transformations and their relationships with issues of the right to the city.

This case study was carried out by conducting interviews with representatives of most of the important stakeholders in the area, all of them cooperating voluntarily and providing information on their connection with the case, their opinions about the situation and their strategies for the future. The reflection on the case, the discussion of the different developed applications of the right to the city is based on a workshop with the participants of the KRAX-Jornadas, a conference on urban social creativity focusing on Barceloneta, and on interviews with experts on both the right to the city and neighborhood struggles.

## 2 BARCELONETA

### 2.1 Introduction

In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Barcelona was in a period of economic and demographic growth and was in strong need of expansion. Around that time Barceloneta was built on a peninsula outside the city walls and was on the other sides surrounded by sea. The new neighborhood filled up quickly and soon the original one or two story buildings were raised to 5 stories. The old apartments were split twice over time and soon Barceloneta became one of the most dense areas of the Catalan capital. These houses, called 'quarts de casa', were inhabited by large families and were lacked any decent sanitary amenities (Permanyer 2003, Vilanova 2003). In 1830's the first neighborhood associations were founded and started fighting for better living conditions in the houses and working conditions in the nearby factories. During the dictatorship of Franco all neighborhood associations were prohibited, although in 1950 the first business communities were allowed to assemble and in 1964 the establishment of the 'Associació de Veïns de Barceloneta' was ratified. This neighborhood association gained popularity quickly and effectively contested the 'Ribera plan', which proposed a comprehensive modernistic restructuring of the inner city. After Franco's death in 1975 a rapid process of transition towards democracy started, in which both social movements and neighborhood associations played an important role. The first democratic elections in Barcelona took place in 1979 and were won by a coalition of socialists and communists, who remained in power in the 80s and in the 90s.



**Figure 1:** a map of Barceloneta and on the left its location in the city

Despite the power of the social movements and neighborhood organizations during the transition, they were excluded by the city council in the years that followed and were marginalized to the extent that nothing remained of the old structures. Furthermore, the 'model Barcelona' was developed, a term used to describe the various aspects and context of urban governance in Barcelona in the years after the transition, during which the city experienced a comprehensive transformation. In the first phase the Barcelona model contained

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mostly improvement programs for run down neighborhoods and upgrades of public space in and around the city center. In 1986 it was announced that Barcelona would host the 1992 Olympics, which resulted in the development of large urban transformation plans. From the preparations of the Olympics onwards the city council started promoting the city with various marketing campaigns focusing on both tourists and the international business community. A fierce competition started with other large European cities and gradually the Barcelona model changed and was increasingly characterized by neoliberal urban politics (Capel 2007, Citymined 2006, Jacobson 2007). Despite the leftwing character of the city council processes of deregulation were introduced and urban space was restructured in favor of private interests. Recently the city council repeated that “there is a need to attract investors on a large scale, because of the exceptional necessity to win the game of globalization” (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2004). With the new urban transformation programs and the arrival of many tourists, multinationals and high-income expats, extensive gentrification processes sprouted around the city. These processes played an important role in the development of Barcelona in the last 15 years and implied for many neighborhoods a top-down transformation, from which especially the original inhabitants and the social structure suffered (Paz Balibrea 2001).

Although Barceloneta is located next to the medieval city center, it always felt slightly isolated because of the obstacles – initially the city walls, later industrial areas and recently a highway - that separated the neighborhood from the center. However, during the Olympics of the early 90s ‘the city turned towards the sea’ and the edges of Barceloneta were transformed. The Parc and the Passeig de Joan de Borbo were upgraded, the highway (Ronda del Litoral) was tunneled. On top of the tunnel an attractive public space was realized, which made the neighborhood intuitively much more accessible. As a result of the fact that Barceloneta now ‘joined’ the city center and because of the strongly rising number of tourists, the neighborhood became a target for real estate investors and development companies. In just a very short time, it became one of the most popular development areas of the city (Tatjer 2007, Jacobson 2007).

Recently, different consequences of these processes were researched and the following were identified: the privatization of facilities and the public domain, increasing housing costs, decreasing tolerance with respect to non-traditional dwelling forms, such as those of Roma, homeless and squatters, a strong commercialization of the neighborhood and especially the boulevards, and a very high influx of tourists and expats (Jacobson 2007). In addition, because of the former relative isolation, the neighborhood had developed a very strong identity, with social networks, cultural associations and neighborhood associations playing a very important role in local life. Many inhabitants however feel that the policies of the city council don’t offer any protection against the consequences of these processes, and that these processes are destroying their traditions and ways of life.

Most inhabitants of Barceloneta are members of the ‘Associació de Veïns de Barceloneta’, originally a grassroots neighborhood association defending the neighborhood’s interest during the tough years of the dictatorship, but in recent years dominated by the Socialist Party, who also occupies the majority of the seats in the city council. The former president of the association, Julian Garcia, is an influential person in the neighborhood and associated with the socialists as well. He previously had a prominent position in the nearby harbor, where many inhabitants of Barceloneta work, and was also president of the local sporting club CNAB. He is seen by many as the ‘cacique’ (godfather) of the neighborhood and is married to Paca Quilloreni, the representative for Barceloneta of the Socialist Party. They are good friends of Carles Martí, the former ‘regidor’ of Ciutat Vella (head of the city district). This trio obtained a firm position in the neighborhood and was supported at the political level by the district and the city council, at the neighborhood by the Associació and the sporting club CNAB and from the business community by the harbor and the ACIB (association of companies and shops of the neighborhood). These persons, organizations, governments and companies together form a power block, based on clientelist traditions.

In 2004 the new Pla General Metropolità (PGM) was ratified by the city council, in which the general spatial policies for the city were laid out. The details for Barceloneta were worked out in the Pla Especial de Reforma Interior, in which the neighborhood association participated. Many inhabitants of Barceloneta did not agree with the persistent speculation and gentrification in the neighborhood and believed that neither of the plans indicated a change in this respect. At the same time they noted that the neighborhood association formed part of the dominant power block, did nothing to stop these processes and that various persons linked to the association benefited from these developments.

Various groups of independent inhabitants started to organize and in 2005 an alternative neighborhood association was founded, called ‘L’Ostia’. They demanded plans made by inhabitants, the protection of

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historical heritage, preservation of the identity of the neighborhood and an end to speculation. At the same time other organizations were founded with similar demands, that started cooperating and soon formed a new group of local social movements. Among them were 'la plataforma per la defensa de la Barceloneta', the squat 'Miles de Viviendas' and 'Bomba Hotel Vela'. These social movements are the only form of political self-organisation in the neighborhood and created various possibilities for collective decision making, like a weekly open meeting and the grassroots participation platform 'Barceloneta habla e decide' ('Barceloneta speaks and decides'). Furthermore, they organize actions around the neighborhood both to inform other inhabitants and to protest the policies of the district and the city council.

Just after the ratification of the PGM the Associació Barceloneta Alerta, the elderly association, announced the results of a research on the living conditions in Barceloneta, which stated that especially the accessibility of buildings for elderly was inadequate. The city council arranged the partial financing of the construction of elevators and the Foment Ciutat Vella, the public private partnership created by the district 'Ciutat Vella' (old city), announced a revision of the PGM with the proposal to build elevators in every building in la Barceloneta. Since there is no space left for elevators in the packed buildings of the neighborhood, in many of the buildings a full vertical row of dwellings will make place for an elevator, with the remaining space divided over the remaining apartments. A system was worked out in which the majority of owners of every building was assigned the power to decide if an elevator would be built or not. Since this inevitably would lead to a decreasing number of dwellings, also the construction of 200 new dwellings just outside the neighborhood was proposed.

Only later the plan, that had the endorsement of the traditional neighborhood association, became known with the new social movements. Although they agreed that solutions needed to be found for the problems of accessibility, they started immediately a campaign to stop the plans of the Foment Ciutat Vella. According to the social movements, tenants would have no voice in the decision and therefore could be forced to leave the neighborhood. Even regular property owners would be no match for large property owners, who could decide by themselves about the situation thanks to their larger amount of shares. Besides, many tenants have 'indefinite contracts', that would be opened in case of the alteration of the property relations in the apartment blocks, which could lead to a wave of speculation. According to the social movements, this plan could lead to disputes among neighbors, the elimination of neighborhood cohesion and the expulsion of 1500 to 2000 inhabitants.

Despite the intense reactions from the neighborhood the revision was ratified in the spring of 2007. Since the so-called 'elevator plan' didn't contain concrete interventions but just procedures in which the decision making was arranged, nothing was certain about the outcomes of the plan. Very soon different opinions and interests led to a conflict between neighborhood groups. The traditional neighborhood association still advocates the plan and states that the social movements are creating unnecessary unrest, that the improvements are inevitable and that in theory nobody has to leave the neighborhood. According to them just a small group would be accommodated in the nearby newly built houses. The social movements on the other hand state that these dwelling are located outside the urban fabric of Barceloneta, where there is lack of social relations like in the neighborhood itself and that are so important for especially the elderly. Furthermore they presented an alternative plan, in which no elevators would be constructed and the elderly with accessibility problems could be relocated in converted dwellings in former shops on the ground floor.

During the new elections, just after the ratification of the revision of the PGM, the social movements called to give in a blank vote, to which 40% of the neighborhood responded. The socialists won again, but lost so much on the previous elections that they had to present a new, more neutral regidor, called Itziar Gonzales. She realized that large groups of inhabitants did not agree with the present plans and after persistent pressure of the social movements decided to put the plans on hold. Furthermore she expanded the possibilities for participation and facilitated the 'Llei de Baris' (neighborhood act) for Barceloneta. The Llei de Baris was a form of participatory budgeting, in which inhabitants could work together on working out and requesting funding for improvements of the neighborhood. Despite the scope of the Llei de Baris is limited to interventions in public space and socio-economic programs, the inhabitants of the neighborhood seem to be very satisfied and even the opposing neighborhood associations participate.

The last important change that was received with less joy in the neighborhood was the construction of the five star Hotel Vela on the outer tip of the peninsula. This 120 meter high Hotel is located on a piece of land owned by the port authority that has a special form of political autonomy and can construct without the permission of the local government and without presenting the plans. Groups of inhabitants of this

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predominantly working class area described the sudden appearance of the hotel as ‘an insult’, are campaigning against its opening and stated that ‘after everything, they even privatized the horizon’.

## **2.2 Discussion: The right to the city in Barceloneta**

Although the academic debate is characterized by tensions between the two interpretations of the right to the city, both types of the right to the city are put into practice simultaneously and stakeholders can use both types at the same time to pursue their goals. They apply various practices that can be placed on a continuum of which both types of the right to the city are the extremes. There are no indications that ‘mixing’ approaches leads to a lower effectiveness. On the contrary, it could be hypothesized that the complement each other. Social movements in Barceloneta for example take part in the Llei de Baris processes offered by the district and organize grassroots participation platforms like ‘Barceloneta habla e decide’ at the same time.

On the one hand, it can be concluded that the right to the city as an individually enforceable right, has been established in Barcelona to a certain extent. First of all, Barcelona signed the ‘European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights to the City’ which opens with ‘The right to the city for everybody’. Clearly not all the promises of this charter are yet fulfilled, but for sure more and more possibilities for participation and even a participatory budgeting system, called “Llei de Baris”, are installed. Large parts of the civil society in Barceloneta participate extensively in this program, the more traditional business and neighborhood associations as well as the newer social movements. The provision of information was adequate during the ‘Llei de Baris’, but varied during other projects and was non-existent concerning the Hotel Vela. Other aspects of this interpretation of the right to the city, for example decent and accessible social housing for the people of the neighborhood, are crucial but sometimes largely ignored, which is protested by all the existing neighborhood associations.

On the other hand there are clear obstacles in current Barcelona’s governance practices towards establishing a ‘full’ right to the city. From the radical perspective current practices systematically ignore minority interests. In this context it is important to for *who the right to the city exists*. In Barceloneta, large groups of inhabitants have a sleeping membership of the main neighborhood association and therefore in fact automatically agree with the present politics. The social movements, consisting of mostly more precarious inhabitants, are smaller in number. The right to the city seems realized when – in a liberal democracy – a majority of the people agree with the present policies, plans and changes regarding their urban environment. However, in this type of the right to the city the concept implies another, more radical type of democracy. It’s not a game of majorities versus minorities, but a collective process with an inclusive character is implied (Dikec 2001). Viewed in this way the right to the city is definitely not realized, because most decisions seem to be made behind closed doors by the government, a clientelist neighborhood association and the business community together. This type of the right to the city is not something offered by some external entity, for example a government, but on which an active political claim should be made by collectively organized inhabitants. Even with respect to this point there is still a long way to go, but since the new social movements came into existence the first steps have been made. They conduct a permanent struggle against the plans of the local government and the present power block of the neighborhood. In recent times this led to a clear new political voice in the neighborhood which resulted in some concrete achievements and the establishing of the first, small but collective and inclusive decision making processes. Besides, in many ways the city and the public domain have been collectively appropriated, which is very essential in this type of the right to the city, for example by various actions around the neighborhood and by squatting dwellings by younger inhabitants of Barceloneta.

## **3 LESSONS: THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AS A TOOL FOR URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

### **3.1 Traditional applications of the right to the city**

The present social movements of Barceloneta achieved some good results so far. It is important however that they keep expanding their present work and seek to develop new strategies. The right to the city could in many ways be a very useful and broadly applicable concept. Two traditional interpretations of the right to the city have been discussed so far and both are applied widely – without using the name of the concept – in the context of Barceloneta. Although it was concluded that the political activities of social movements are often not perfect examples of one of the two traditional types of the right to the city but can be placed on a continuum between the two extremes, both types also imply different actions, when used by

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social movements.

The first type implies conducting a permanent political struggle, based on organized but voluntarily cooperating inhabitants. These people make a continuous political claim to their 'right to the city', which implies different actions. Firstly structures should be made in which the collective can take decisions on the city and its transformation, and secondly an effort should be made to collectively appropriate urban space. This can be done by using public space for political statements or organizing cultural activities or converting empty buildings into dwellings, offices or a social center. The other right to the city implies a campaign for the incorporation of this right into local declarations or treaties in order to make this right for all citizens legally enforceable. Furthermore they can secure aspects of the right to the city in these legal structures, like possibilities for participation in decision making processes, full provision of information on urban transformations, decent and sufficient social housing, and much more.

Based on interviews with representatives of different social movements and experts on the right to the city and neighborhood struggles three new applications of the right to the city for urban social movements have been developed. All three applications can be used in both more radical and more reformist practices at the same time, even when social movements frequently change their tactics or practice them simultaneously.

### **3.2 The right to the city as a link between different social movements**

The right to the city has been criticized for its broadness and with that a lack of content and focus. However, this broadness can be an advantage if for this reason various individuals and different groups and organizations can agree on the presented terms. The right to the city offers the possibility for social movements to create links between different entities.

Two applications of the right to the city are based on this finding, although they might lead to very different outcomes. First of all, the right to the city offers the possibility to build bridges between social movements with different backgrounds, themes and agendas. The struggle for affordable and decent housing seems to be very different from for example the struggle for the education of migrant's children, but if they adopt the right to the city as a central framework, there actions can be linked. Both immigrant groups and tenants associations then fight for their right to claim the possibilities a city offers in fulfilling their basic necessities.

This application of the right to the city is already been practiced in the United States since a few years. In 2007 many different groups that are in one way or another 'material deprived or culturally oppressed' united themselves in the 'Right to the City Alliance' (Marcuse 2008). Among others migrant groups from Los Angeles, grass root unions from Miami and homeless organizations from New York came together not just to form a broader and stronger movement, but especially because of the critical need to jointly shape the city and decide collectively about its future. The right to the city appeared to be the useful concept and functions as a framework in which all connected groups can cooperate and pursue their goals (Perera 2007, 2008).

### **3.3 The right to the city as a link between stakeholders**

Besides linking movements with different themes and backgrounds, the right to the city also offers the possibility to bring together different groups within a social issue. Social movements are never operating in isolation but find themselves always in an arena where besides themselves and the government many other actors operate. These other actors and stakeholders can have very different socio-economic, ideological or ethnic backgrounds and therefore cooperation or contact with social movements is not obvious and even unwanted. In for example the imaginary case of a random Spanish city a part of the historic urban fabric will be demolished in order to make place for hotels and new apartments. Spanish low-income households on the upper floors are connected to various social movements and used to the common methods of protest, but the Pakistani shopkeepers on the ground floor are less embedded in the local culture and not familiar with the existing social movements. If the Pakistani shopkeepers become convinced of the fact that it is as well their – and also their workers without papers' – right to use the space of the city to make a living without being put under pressure by the economic interests of the government or the hotel chains, the right to the city could be a very powerful tool to create cooperation concerning this issue between the different stakeholders, both the Spanish tenants and the foreign entrepreneurs.

### **3.4 The right to the city as a frame**

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A third application of the right to the city is a consequent ‘framing’ of the issues with the discourse of the concept. There are multiple reasons why especially the right to the city can be such a useful frame for social movements. First of all, the right to the city is a very clear message and can simplify very complex processes. In case the policies of the city council indirectly and in close cooperation with private partners lead to the construction of apartments for high-income households, increasing rent prices and the destruction of the naturally grown social relations of the neighborhood, the right to the city states that it’s the right of all inhabitants to shape the future of their city and the right to stay in the neighborhood where they live. Secondly, the right to the city as a frame is flexible and broadly applicable. Its discourse is extensive, it is characterized by a broad conceptual framework and can be interpreted in many ways for different agenda’s. The right to the city can be applied in different cases with different problems, whether it concerns the lack of democratic decision making or increasing rent prices. Thirdly, social movements often frame their issues according to a classic activist discourse originating from the left of the political spectrum, which is often perceived as radical and utopian. The right to the city offers a new vocabulary which can be used to communicate a clear but reasonable message without compromising on a radical political line. The right to the city as a frame can be used for common targets as the media and politicians, but also for inactive neighbors or for internal purposes.

### **3.5 Recommendations for the urban social movements in Barceloneta**

Based on interviews with representatives of social movements and with experts on neighborhood struggle and ‘the right to the city’, recommendations for these social movements are formulated. Regarding the two traditional, more fundamental applications of the right to the city, extensively discussed before, the experts are rather clear. Firstly, they discern a paradox in the fact that although the right to the city as *an individually enforceable right* was to a larger extent realized than the right to the city as *a radically different urban society*, the application of rather radical politics led to better results on the ground compared to the more reformist tactics. Therefore - although they acknowledge that in practice both types of the right to the city can be used simultaneously - for building effective strategies they have a preference for tactics originating from the radical type of the concept. The more reformist right to the city has not proven very successful in the past, because no concrete achievements were obtained on the main issues using this type. Also in the future not much is expected from the application of this type, because of the clientelist character of local politics and the fact that the district handed many responsibilities over to an enterprise, whose shareholders have important business interests in Barceloneta. Furthermore, according to the experts this strategy will lead to ‘social peace’, in which the action readiness and the autonomy of social movements will decrease. The application of more radical politics led to a new political voice in the neighborhood and reduced the power differences in such a way that the ‘elevator plan’ is temporarily frozen. The experts expect concrete achievements when this type of the right to the city is increasingly put to practice and encourage the present social movements to keep building social relations and networks, in order to expand their scope.

Regarding the three new applications of the concept, they think that connecting to other social movements should not be a priority at the moment. It might be very relevant for global social movements as a whole, but considering the present state of affairs in Barceloneta there is first of all a critical need to expand their practices in the neighborhood before looking abroad. Besides, they warn for simply copying the American Right to the City Alliance, since the issues and the political context in Spain as well as the history of social movements are very different. The application ‘connecting different stakeholders’ is expected to be more useful, since broadening its base is crucial for the development of social movements in Barceloneta. Working together with other organizations and convincing them of the need to struggle is very important, but for many groups their deeply rooted clientelist traditions will remain an obstacle. Using the right to the city as a frame is regarded as the most successful option, since it could be a good method to make clear to both the media and key politicians what the social movements regard as the problems in the neighborhood. Furthermore, inactive inhabitants could be convinced of the fact that urban transformations aren’t something that just happens, but important issues that are vital to one’s living conditions and something everybody can (co-)decide about.

## **4 CONCLUSION**

The Frenchman Henry Lefebvre was the first to write about the right to the city, that over time has been

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used in various ways and especially in recent years gained popularity. Especially in academic fields the radical line is continued, but in practice the right to the city is increasingly used for more reformist agenda's. In this paper the right to the city is used in two innovative ways. Firstly, it is transformed into an analytical model in order to make the right to the city researchable in certain area. Secondly, the right to the city is used as a starting point for the development of three new applications of the concept as tools for urban social movements. In Barceloneta, researched with an analytical model in a case study, there is a limited right to the city 'as an individually enforceable right', although many aspects of this interpretation are still largely ignored. Also the right to the city as a radically different urban society is certainly not realized. However, radical politics appeared to have led to better results than more reformist practices and for this reason experts on the right to the city and neighborhood struggle advise social movements to build future strategies around the radical interpretation of the right to the city. Furthermore, they noted that not so much 'connecting to different social movements', but rather 'connecting to different stakeholders' and 'framing the issue' are useful applications of the right to the city for the urban social movements in Barceloneta in order to bring their work to a higher level.

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