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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 223 (2016) 160 – 166

Procedia  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

2nd International Symposium "NEW METROPOLITAN PERSPECTIVES" - Strategic planning, spatial planning, economic programs and decision support tools, through the implementation of Horizon/Europe2020. ISTH2020, Reggio Calabria (Italy), 18-20 May 2016

## The economic crisis and vulnerability in the Spanish cities: urban governance challenges

Jesus M. González Pérez<sup>a\*</sup>, Rubén C. Lois González<sup>b</sup>, María José Piñeira Mantiñán<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of the Balearic Islands. Cra. de Valldemossa, km 7.5. Palma (Mallorca), Spain  
<sup>b</sup>University of Santiago de Compostela. Pza. Universidade 1. Santiago de Compostela. Spain

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### Abstract

The consequences of the socio-urban economic crisis and so-called post-crisis policies (or austerity) are transforming daily life in Spanish cities. There are impoverishment processes, increased vulnerability and social segregation, which translates into a new spatial order. The first public responses to the crisis were dominated by the impulse of neoliberal policies, which aggravated the socio-urban inequalities. In response to this scenario, certain social movements were erected in influential political opposition media and have become the voice of the upset citizens in recent years. Some of these platforms ran in the municipal elections of 2015 under different political banners. The electoral turnaround has been remarkable. A significant number of large cities are governed by these new parties or movements, including Madrid and Barcelona. Although an analysis in perspective is necessary, drastic changes in models of urban governance are anticipated. In this context, the article has a double objective. On the one hand, to study the socio-urban consequences of the crisis and post-crisis urban policies in terms of vulnerability and social exclusion and on the other hand, to analyse the governance strategies driven by new political collectives in the context of the crisis. The territories of study are the cities of Madrid and Barcelona, headers of the Spanish urban system which are also governed by political parties from civic platforms.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of ISTH2020

**Keywords:** Crisis Economic crisis; Vulnerability; Citizen empowerment; New models of governance; Evictions; Madrid; Barcelona.

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34-971-172380; fax: +34-971-173184.  
E-mail address: [jesus.gonzalez@uib.es](mailto:jesus.gonzalez@uib.es)

## 1. Introduction

The crisis that has affected the countries of southern Europe had highlighted the consequences of neo-liberal growth, characterised by high risk investment, excessive economic specialisation, social polarisation and environmental unsustainability (Méndez, 2015). The appearance of negative macroeconomic indicators (high public deficit, an increase of unemployment, precarious working conditions, cuts in basic services, etc.) (Vale, 2014; Koutrolikou, 2015) increase the risk of downward social mobility, with the consequent worsening of the citizens living conditions (Ranci & Sabatinelli, 2014).

In Spain, the origin of the crisis is associated with the bursting of the housing bubble. Since 2007, many researchers have shown interest and concern for the planning deregulation (Rullan, 2012; Burriel, 2008) or the changes in land usage as a result of the increasing artificialisation (Rullan, 2012). Scholars of the urban phenomenon focused on explaining the physical construction of the city over the process of social construction. Measuring the social vulnerability and exclusion at an intra-urban scale has not been a priority until relatively recently (Alguacil, Camacho y Hernández, 2014; Ministerio de Fomento, 2011; Nel.lo, 2014). The bursting of the housing bubble in 2007 and the economic crisis awakened consciences and warned of the pessimistic outlook about to come. The Spanish city, urbanised under principles of social segregation since the 1960's, met all the criteria to suffer the severity of the crisis and deepen its inequality. After a period in which an uncritical attitude proliferated, the population demanded social guarantees and a change of management. As a result, there were new political parties born from the movement of the *indignados* (*indignant* in Spanish) and the 15M (Lois and Piñeira, 2015). They try to return hope to the population and alleviate the distrust in governments and politics (Della Porta y Vannucci, 2007; Jiménez y Villoria, 2012).

## 2. Vulnerability and social exclusion. The cases of Madrid and Barcelona

To measure urban vulnerability and social exclusion in Madrid and Barcelona, we have focused on two indicators: the rate of unemployment and foreclosures. The parallel evolution of both indicators is a symptom of one of the main effects of the crisis, the increase of unemployment, with a special emphasis on the more impoverished collectives and territories (Fig. 1). In Madrid, the highest rates of unemployment are concentrated in the peripheral districts of the South, Vallecas, and in Barcelona in the popular neighborhoods of the North (Sant Andreu or Nou Barris) (Fig. 2). As a result, the social structure where the city's weakest reside is being profoundly transformed.

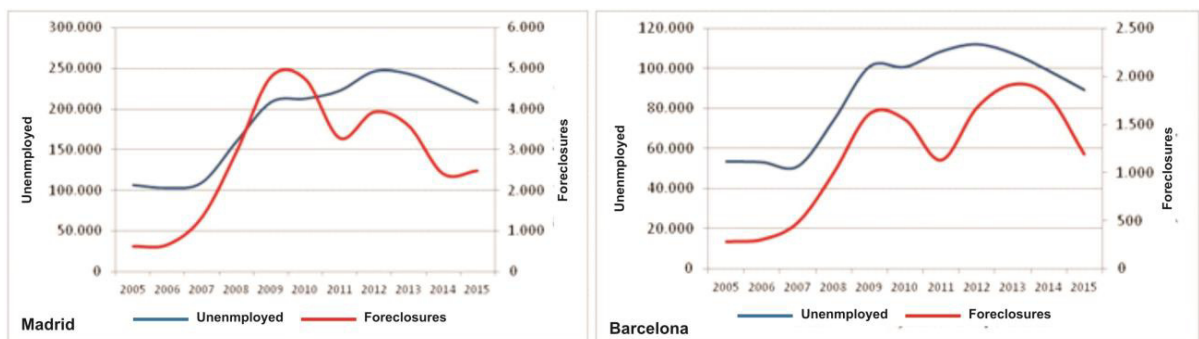


Fig 1. Evolution of the number of unemployed and foreclosures in Madrid and Barcelona. Source: Judicial Statistics and State Employment Public Service (SEPE).

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