From victims to activists:  
The role of communication for the empowerment and impact of the PAH anti-evictions movement in Spain

Source: PAH Barcelona (Twitter) #Dacionparajuang

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ABSTRACT

The anti-evictions movement Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) is one of the most effective and valued grassroots initiatives in Spain. It has convinced the majority of the population on the need to change the mortgage law, given solution to the immediate needs of its members via civic-disobedience actions and dignified the people who are not able to pay their mortgage debts. From being considered irresponsible victims, now they are seen as heroes fighting for a just cause and as the representation of the collective power of organized citizenship to produce social change.

To find out if –and how- communication has been key in this transformative process, this research uses observations and in-depth interviews to respond to the question: What role does communication play in the PAH for the empowerment of its members and for the overall impact of the movement?

The findings suggest that empowerment has been necessary to obtain impact, while impact has further promoted empowerment, in a virtuous cycle where internal and external communication practices, both interpersonal and mediated, have been central. The main communicative goal, as we will see, has been to transform people and society, and not to obtain visibility.

Decentralisation, open and horizontal collective knowledge-sharing and decision-making, diagnostic and motivational counter-frames, a focus on positive messages and results, graphic elements, the savvy use of different media (Twitter, Facebook, viral videos, mass media) and a very skilled spokes-person are some of the key aspects of a successful communication strategy that has been able to challenge neoliberal frames and representations related to poverty.

Several concrete activists have been very competent in designing and adapting the PAH’s use of communication, and in promoting contributions of many other participants throughout every part of the network. However, only a continuous effort in spreading knowledge and skills throughout the movement, in line with participatory communication approaches, will guarantee a sustainable and long-lasting impact.
“Many small people
in many small places
doing small things
can change the world”
Eduardo Galeano

“Tell stories of radical change, make it feel possible”
Martin Kirk
#Comunicambio
2015

Dedicated to my
helpful and generous family,
and to all the members of
the PAH, for giving me hope
in our collective power to
change reality.
# Table of contents

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 5
2. Literature review: The PAH in its context. Crisis and activism in Spain ...................... 7
   2.1 The Spanish housing crisis and its social consequences ............................................ 7
   2.2 XXI century activism and its influence in the PAH .................................................. 9
   2.3 The 15-M, a major turning-point for mobilization .................................................. 10
3. Theoretical framework ......................................................................................................... 13
   3.1 Communication and power ......................................................................................... 13
   3.2 Constructing meaning and frames .............................................................................. 15
   3.3 Analysing impact ......................................................................................................... 17
   3.4 Defining empowerment .............................................................................................. 18
4. Methodology .......................................................................................................................... 21
   4.1 A structure for the analysis of communication practices in social movements ........ 21
   4.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews ......................................................................... 22
   4.3 Participant observation ............................................................................................... 25
5. Analysis .................................................................................................................................. 27
   5.1 What is communicated? ............................................................................................... 27
       5.1.1 Horizontal and collective knowledge-sharing ...................................................... 27
       5.1.2 Frames, discourses and narrative ....................................................................... 31
       5.1.3 A collective identity reinforced by the use of graphic elements ....................... 35
   5.2 How does communication occur? .................................................................................. 38
       5.2.1 Internal communication: Physical and mediated knowledge sharing and decision-making .................................................................................................................................................. 38
       5.2.2 Protest actions: joyful civil-disobedience .............................................................. 40
       5.2.3 Social media: amplifying the message through online networks ....................... 42
       5.2.4 Press: human stories in exchange of political message ...................................... 46
       5.2.5 Videos: the PAH's TV .......................................................................................... 50
   5.3 How does communication affect empowerment and the overall impact of the movement? .................................................................................................................................................. 54
       5.3.1 Empowerment ....................................................................................................... 54
       5.3.2 Impact .................................................................................................................... 60
6. Conclusions ........................................................................................................................... 63
References ..................................................................................................................................... 68
Appendices .................................................................................................................................. 71
1. Introduction

The Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) is one of the most powerful and valued social movements currently active in Spain. Created in 2009, it has achieved to bring the drama of evictions to the public sphere. With more than 200 local platforms across the country, its demands have obtained the support of 90% of the population.

The multiple outcomes of the PAH’s work can be measured at three levels: practical, political and mental. First, it has articulated collective responses and solutions to the immediate needs of those involved. The PAH has stopped over 1,600 evictions and occupied several entire empty buildings owned by banks to reallocate families. On the political plane, it has stressed the responsibility of politicians and the banking system. This pressure has brought several cities and regional governments to initiate social measures to prevent the biggest consequences of this social drama. In addition, these advocacy efforts have brought housing rights to the political programmes of almost every political party in Spain. Regarding the mental change, evident in the media and among the Spanish society, the people affected by evictions are seen now as victims of an unjust system and as fighters for a just cause, while only five years ago the hegemonic opinion, in line with neo-liberal frames, was that people who could not pay they mortgages were responsible and guilty of their situation because they had ‘lived beyond their means’.

However, the PAH has also received severe critiques. The use of escraches as a protest method was harshly condemned by some politicians and motivated a heated debate in Spanish society.

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1 For the prestigious political think tank CIDOB, it is the “most valued grass-root organization of the country” http://www.cidob.org/publications/articulos/spain_in_focus/june_2013/profile_the_mortgage_affected_citizens_platform_a_grassroots_organization_at_the_forefront_of_the_social_protests
2 Survey by the daily El País: http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/02/16/actualidad/1361053281_008924.html
3 see counter in http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com (as of 12 May 2015)
4 An ‘escrache’, term and protest method imported form Argentina, is a demonstration in which a group of activists goes to the home or workplace of someone they want to denounce, in order to make his or her actions known to the public.
After a previous research on the keys to the success of the movement (Sanz, 2014), this analysis assumes that communication has had a relevant role in the multiple achievements of the PAH. Now, the goal is to analyse more in depth how internal and external communication has contributed to the victims’ empowerment and to the overall impact of this grass-roots movement.

The main research question of this analysis is:
- What role does communication play in the PAH for the empowerment of its members and for the overall impact of the movement?

Related sub-questions are:
- How does empowerment affect impact and how does impact contribute, in turn, to empowerment?
- Would the success of the PAH be similar without this approach to communication?

After a literature review to put the PAH in context with the political, economic and social context of the country, the theoretical part of this analysis will discuss the notions of impact and empowerment, and consider the power of communication to promote counter-discourses and challenge economic views.

Observations and semi-structured interviews are the methods used to find out if—and how—the PAH has empowered the people affected by evictions and further promoted the movement. The aim is to detail which aspects have been determinant and which could have played a greater role.

The final purpose of this research aims to be useful for the Communication for Social Change field of theory and practice, and for other grass-roots movements fighting for the rights of the socially excluded (poor people, homeless, migrants, etc.), that want to improve their approach to communication, their impact and get new voices heard in the public sphere.

5 The decision of using ‘escraches’ was taken after the presentation of 1.4 million signatures to change the Spanish mortgage law and the rejection of their proposal by the majority party in Congress, The Popular Party (PP)
2. Literature review: The PAH in its context. Crisis and activism in Spain

Social movements develop discourses and frames to bring about change. However, they are not isolated, and these discourses are built within particular contexts, with dominant and oppositional cultures. The external context affects not only the movement’s organization and shaping of identities, but also the interpretation of the movement’s frames and discourses (Meyer et al. 2002:205).

To analyse the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH), this research will build bridges between structural and cultural approaches. This section summarises the main traits of the economic, political and social moment in which the PAH has emerged and developed. It also offers a brief revision of recent social movements in Spain that have had an influence in its birth, organization and communication practices. In parallel, it summarizes the main findings of several researches on the PAH and highlights the ones that are relevant to communication.

2.1 The Spanish housing crisis and its social consequences

“Social movements are indicators of the malaise that exists in a society and its ability to provide answers to it” (Mir, 2014:88). In fact, the analysis of the PAH has to be related to the fact that in Spain a significant part of a population is unable to meet mortgage repayments due to one of the worst unemployment rates of Europe, affecting between 20 and 26% of the population from 2010 to 2015.6

After Spain joined the euro, the country experienced a long economic boom, underpinned by a housing bubble financed by loans to builders and homebuyers. House prices rose 44% from 2004 to 2008, but people were still encouraged to buy their homes by banks, who gave easy access to credit, and politicians and experts, who reassured the population by claiming that the value of their homes would

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6 Unemployment almost tripled in five years, rising from 9% in 2008 to 26% in 2013. Currently, in early 2015, even if the Government insists in that the country is overcoming the crisis, unemployment still affects 25% of the people available to work.
never decrease. Since the bubble burst, prizes have fallen by a third.

Another thing that the vast majority of homebuyers did not know was the content of the Spanish mortgage law, by which homeowners are liable for 40% of the valuation of the house, plus interests and judicial costs, even once their house has been foreclosed. While in many other countries, with the return of the house to the bank-entity the debt is settled, evicted families in Spain remain homeless and with huge life-long debts that lead them unequivocally to social exclusion.

The data concerning evictions are dramatic. According to the PAH, since 2008 there have been 500,000 foreclosures (which means around evictions per day), while the situation of hundreds of thousands of families in 2015 still is critical.

The PAH “has successfully scrutinised and denounced Spanish mortgage laws, the banking system and the lack of response by elected representatives” (Feenstra and Keane 2014:1276). Consequently, several authors have analysed the movement from the advocacy perspective.

For Romanos (2013), for example, mobilization around the problem of housing in Spain is not new, but it is attracting a great deal of attention today through a “savvy combination of direct actions and the cultivation of public relations with opposition politicians and the media”. For him, the PAH has managed to break with “the deep-rooted tendency toward a lack of interaction between protest movements and institutional actors” (Romanos 2013: 1).

For Anderica (2014), social movements are working increasingly as social lobbies to transform the way participation in democracy is understood. Institutional actors are loosing their power in favour of civil society, which is able to bring new perspectives to the public sphere. In her view, traditional media have also lost their exclusive role in the intermediation processes between the economic and political elites and the rest of the population. Civil society movements are, indeed, creating their own networks and media to modify the relation between society and institutional actors.

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7 http://affectadosporlahipoteca.com/2014/05/12/message-to-europe-stop-evictions/
Mangot (2014) has applied context and frame analysis to prove that the PAH’s success is related to the creation of an inclusive framework that avoids political or religious elements that could originate divergences. He also stresses that, as political opportunity theories indicate, mobilization does not happen necessarily when people are facing the greatest difficulties, but when people perceive that they can be successful (2014:66).

2.2 XXI century activism and its influence in the PAH

Even if the existence of the crisis is a necessary condition, is it sufficient to explain the development of this mobilization in Spain? Trying to respond to this question, in their research about the origins of the PAH, Mir et al. (2013) conclude that, along with structural factors, the previous activism experiences of the first promoters of the PAH has had an important influence in the shaping of the movement.

As Mir explains, while during the early 1990s the idea of a “right to housing” was related to the squatter movement, in the mid 90s, even if it still is an identity movement, it begins to be linked with the neighbourhood and the territory. This major “openness” can be linked to the alter-globalisation movement, a starting point for many new activists. The major demonstrations against the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2004 were some of the first activist experiences of the founders of the PAH (Mir et al., 2013 and Alemany and Colau, 2012). Specifically, after the massive protests against the Iraq war in 2003, some activists started working on “everyday wars” and housing problems such as the “real estate mobbing”8. This initial work lead to the movement V de Vivienda (V for Housing) in 2006, which denounced the impossibility for young people to buy a house due to rising prices. This movement was effective in stressing the existence of a housing bubble.

V de Vivienda, with a name related to the comic “V for Vendetta” was essentially

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formed by young people. It had a rapid ascending phase in 2006 and 2007, but ended with a great demobilization. As two of the founders of the PAH and promoters of V de Vivienda, Ada Colau and Adrià Alemany, recognise, this big demobilisation helped them to understand that a strategy was needed in order to keep a movement alive (Alemany and Colau, 2012).

One of the distinctive features of V de Vivienda was that it adopted a discourse and an aesthetic that broke with the correctness of previous political languages, to connect with the emerging youth cultures. One of its main actors was the superhero “Supervivienda” (Superhome) and its main slogan “You won’t have a house in your fucking life” became very famous. The recreation of icons of mass culture, the use of informal language and political marketing for the dissemination of calls, and the search for visibility and for the attraction of mass media, were some of the new features of the movement (Haro, 2010).

In 2008 the social centre Ateneu Candela of Terrassa (a city near Barcelona), which had an office dedicated to housing rights, started receiving people with foreclosures lawsuits. Not knowing how to deal with them, they contacted the activists of V de Vivienda in Barcelona to try to articulate a common response. As Mir (2003) highlights, they already knew each other from the alter-globalisation protests. The PAH is born in 2009, after an initial assembly promoted with posters in the street that gathered around 100 people with problems to pay their debts.

However, many activists joined the PAH during the 15-M protests (see point 2.3), two years after its creation. As numerous authors have stressed, the 15-M is key for the configuration of a new generation of activists who had not previously mobilized (Fuster Morell, 2012).

2.3 The 15-M, a major turning-point for mobilization

For Feenstra and Keane (2014:1262) “analysing the current political context in Spain is a major challenge”. Discredit of the major parties and political disaffection has been accompanied by citizen mobilisations that, especially since 15 May 2011
(15-M or Indignados movement⁹), are manifest in numerous channels and strategies. In fact, as we will see, the 15-M represents a turning point in the social mobilization of large parts of the Spanish society, and a major opportunity for the PAH to obtain the support of new activists.

Soon after the 'Arab Spring' protests, the 15-M in Spain was prompted by general complaints about incongruities within the political system: lack of transparency, economic lobbies manipulating politics and defective electoral laws (Feenstra and Keane 2014). For Castells (2012:20), “it was primarily the humiliation provoked by the cynicism and arrogance of those in power (...) that brought together those who turned fear into outrage, and outrage into hope for a better humanity”.

The 15-M engaged a multi-dimensional synergy: a new generation of citizens converged with movements and “freedom technologists”, a term used by Postill (2014) to name social agents who combine technological and political skills to pursue greater Internet and democratic freedoms. Equally, new activists connected their networks and skills with the ones from previous social movements and generations, “generating a virtuous cycle that obtained large social support and engagement (online and off-line) for the mobilizations” (Fuster Morell 2012).

Two of the founders of the PAH recognise that the 15-M represented a major turning point for the movement, which was already promoting a campaign against evictions (Alemany and Colau, 2012). Dozens of PAHs were created along the country and the #StopDesahucios (#StopEvictions) campaign spread in the country’s main cities.

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⁹ The 15-M originated after a multitudinous protest organized by the movement Democracia Real Ya (DRY or Real Democracy Now in English) on 15 May 2011, when a dozen protesters decided to set camp at Madrid’s main square, Plaza del Sol. They sent out calls for joining them via the Internet, mainly through Twitter, and during the following weeks around 30,000 people participated in encampments all over the country. The encampments were organized through popular assemblies and committees, where decisions were made through majority rules vote and consensus. Tens of thousands of citizens were thus experimenting with participatory, direct and inclusive forms of democracy at odds with the dominant logic of political representation (Postill, 2012).
Many researchers, such as Postill (2014), Castells (2012), Feenstra and Keane (2014) and Fuster-Morell (2012) have focused their attention on the 15-M by concentrating in the use of ICTs and new media for the promotion of social change.

The use of new media was crucial to the organization and diffusion of the protests. As Postill (2012:3) notes, protesters used Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and blogs "to great effect and in a range of different ways, including as a means of setting the tone and agenda of the 15 May marches, spreading slogans and organisational practices, and offering alternative accounts of the movement from those provided by the mainstream media". Creativity and culture jamming, to use Liewrouv’s (2011) expression, was very much developed during the protests in the form of slogans and memes.

It is interesting to note that both the Internet and the square were equally important to the movement, which was developed online and offline, using digital and analogical tools. New media, but also the physical presence, were key to organize, document and disseminate the protests. For two activists (@galapita and @hibai) quoted by Postill (2012:12): “The face-to-face assemblies are essential (...) [and] a massive, transparent exercise in direct democracy. Yet the direction is created mostly on Twitter. Hashtags serve not only to organise the debate but also to set the collective mood”. As we will see, the mix between physical and digital actions for communication will be one of the characteristics of the PAH.

By mid-June 2011 most encampments were dismantled with the aim to take the movement to the neighbourhoods, where local assemblies were created. Many critics quickly announced the disappearance of the 15-M. However, multiple protests continued, as for example the #StopDesahucios campaign, at the local level. As more recent events demonstrate, the 15-M spirit did not vanish. On the contrary, the citizens mobilized in 2011 have continued refusing austerity policies, and constitute the social force that permitted new techno-political practices to emerge strongly.\footnote{Even if most of the participants of the 15M movement distanced themselves from political parties and organizations, a few years after, there is a clear link between the 15M and the creation of new political parties (Podemos), or citizen platforms (Barcelona En Comú or Ahora Madrid) that, for the first time in Spain's post-}
3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Communication and power

Manuel Castells has been one of the authors interested in stressing the relation between communication and power. In his work, as more broadly in the field of communication studies, we can perceive a clear transition from studies focused on mass media to the analysis of new media and their capacity to alter power relations. Castells distinguishes between three types of communication (interpersonal, mass communication and mass self-communication) that coexist and contribute to challenging and changing power relations.

For Castells, communication networks are “the fundamental networks for power-making in society” (2009:426) and “power relations (...) and processes challenging institutionalized power relations are increasingly shaped and decided in the communication field” (2007:239).

Couldry also recognizes that “if contemporary societies are witnessing a change in the nature of power and legitimacy, media are surely crucial to that transformation”. However, the same author intends not to be “media-centric” and not to assume, as many other authors do, that media are the most important thing in peoples’ lives. As his work, this research is interested in seeing how meanings circulated through media have social consequences (Couldry 2012:8). Therefore, my approach is close to what he defines as a “socially oriented media theory” or to the study of “social processes that media constitute and enable”. However, I will also pay attention to interpersonal communication, as I believe that in the case of the PAH it has been as important as mediated processes.

Without intending to be neither overly cyber-optimistic nor cyber-sceptical, the use of social media will be thoroughly analysed in this research. For Castells,
“forms of mass self-communication” allow social movements “to intervene more decisively in the new communication space” (2007:238). However, he also reminds “social movements are not originated by technology, they use technology”. In the case of the PAH it will be interesting to know how its own members evaluate the importance of new media in the overall impact of the movement.

While new media practices are considered as very important, this study also focuses on the communication practices aimed to capture the mass media’s attention, as so-called traditional media are still tantamount to influence public opinion at large. In fact, “most socialized communication is still processed through the mass media” (Castells 2009:419). As Couldry (2012:15) reminds, “television continues to be watched and in large numbers”, and even the most popular news websites are the ones of the mainstream media. In addition, mass media can use gatekeeping (or capacity to decide which messages to block and which to diffuse) to focus the populations’ attention on particular themes while denying others. Even if with the emergence of social media this power in the selection of themes to bring to the public sphere has decreased, a social movement that wants to have impact has to have mass media very much into account.

Many Communication for Development theorists and practitioners have proved that the participation in communication practices can be empowering (Gumucio-Dragón 2001). Has the PAH been able to empower its members through communication-related practices? If so, which practices have been empowering and which have not? Can the use of social media be empowering, as some empirical studies on the uses of the Internet promoted by Castells argue? For him, the more an individual has a project of autonomy (personal, professional, socio-political, communicative), the more he/she uses the Internet, while the more this individual uses the Internet, the more autonomous he/she becomes versus institutions and rules (Castells, 2009).

In relation to empowerment, we must also acknowledge the impact that representations have and the still crucial role of mass media in this process. Representations created by mass media are “unquestionably a dominant force in
the representation of social life” (Couldry 2012:89). Moreover, they play an important role in providing recognition (2012:208). Citing Eva Illouz’s work, he notes that individuals and groups “need to be recognized as moral and social agents”, and as capable to contributing to social processes. How do the PAH members evaluate the ways in which mass media represent them? How do they try to condition or shape their representations?

3.2 Constructing meaning and frames

Communication, interpersonal or mediated, is the “sharing meanings through the exchange of information” (Castells 2009:23). The creation of “shared meanings” and “collective identities” is crucial for any social movement. These meanings, constructed collectively, can contribute to the success of the movements because of several reasons. First, meanings and construction of meanings generate cohesion and a shared knowledge between the members of the movement. Second, they can legitimate and generate sympathy among the general population. Third, they help to identify and visualize problems and point to possible solutions (Verger, 2008).

Framing theory is useful to understand how meanings are constructed. According to Erving Goffman (1974), framing is a process whereby communicators construct a point of view that encourages facts to be interpreted in a particular manner.

To influence their environment and build social imaginaries among the citizenship social movements need to invest time and resources in the construction of frames and in communicating them (Verger 2008). Therefore, based on Snow and Nebford (1988), he distinguishes between three main tasks of framing that will be useful for the analysis of the PAH’s messages.

- **Diagnostic framings** focus on identifying a problem and helping to its understanding. These explanations are intended to convince the public that adversity or certain problems are not arbitrary, but responsibility of specific agents or system specific rules. The aim is to identify the causes and those
responsible for a problem, attributing intentionality to their actions and demonstrate that their interests are contrary to the common good (Verger 2008)

- **Prognostic framings** identify and explain possible solutions to the identified problems

- **Motivational framings** motivate people to participate in campaigns and protest actions. With an optimistic rhetoric towards change, a movement must have the ability to convince that change is possible and to convince people that their participation is essential to achieve this change.

**Collective action repertoires**

Apart from the construction of meaning or frames, social movements use and communicate collective actions to reach their goals. There is a vast amount of possible collective actions that movements will choose according to their goals, capacities and resources.

Verger (2008) establishes three main forms of action repertoires: direct action, political pressure and information-awareness rising. According to him, they are perfectly compatible, and a campaign that combines them all is more likely to succeed.

a) **Direct action:** Collective and planned public action which aims to achieve an immediate goal. Carried out as in public spaces, it is often an effective way to visualize a specific problem and enter related concerns and demands in the political agenda. Direct actions have degrees of conventionality, whereby demonstrations, strikes and concentrations would be conventional, blocking evictions or occupying banks would be good examples of unconventional direct actions. Unconventional actions, being newer and stronger expressions, often do not need high levels of participation to obtain impact.

b) **Political pressure:** Directing towards the political class a series of complaints, positions and demands to a given problem. The strength of the social movement to do political pressure depends on the strength of the
arguments and / or the volume of population that supports its claims.

c) **Public information and awareness rising:** Social movements must invest resources in disseminating information, analysis and knowledge. This can be done through press releases, newsletters, web portals, seminars, etc.

While this distinction can be useful for the research, for the third category I prefer the term “communication”. Verger’s terminology still implies the “one way direction” approach of information, while communication (interpersonal and mediated) is a dialectical and two-way process, closer to the types of interactions occurring, especially after the rise of social media.

### 3.3 Analysing impact

The analysis of the impact of a social movement is challenging and multi-level. As Calle suggests, impact can be evaluated both internally and externally, while in turn these two types of impact greatly affect each other (2007:144).

Verger (2008) distinguishes three forms of impact of social movements:

a) **impact on public policy:** direct impact on policy content and policy making

b) **procedural impact:** does not refer to the final policy outcome, but to political decision-making processes

c) **symbolic/cultural impact:** changes in values and public opinion

Verger stresses that social movements that still have not succeeded at the policy level, such as the PAH, can have a major impact on the symbolic front. Even if some outcomes are not noticeable in the short term (like, for example, consciousness raising, favouring participation or generating solidarity relations), they may influence the success of the movement and the broader political context in the longer term.
Other authors, like Calle (2007) and Mangot (2013), have focused specifically on the internal impact, as it affects the movement itself and its capacity to mobilize and diffuse. In this regard, in line with the analysis of Mangot (2013), Charles Tilly’s (1999) four categories to analyse the success of social movements will be useful when evaluating the impact of communication practices for the growth and strength of the PAH as a social movement:

- **Worthiness**: capacity of the movement to be a deserving actor
- **Unity**: visible in form of slogans, symbols, uniforms, etc.
- **Number**: represented in the capacity to occupy public spaces or the massive signing of collective petitions
- **Compromise**: in form of actions that include a certain risk (legal, physical...) and in the intention to continue mobilization despite of threats.

### 3.4 Defining empowerment

To effectively analyse if communication has had a role in fostering empowerment, first we have to agree on the meaning of a term that has become a buzzword (Cornwall and Eade, 2010:111). In fact, the story and use of the term “empowerment” is a good example of a concept that has been mainstreamed, becoming depoliticized and losing its original meaning (Batliwala, in Cornwall and Eade 2010).

Feminist movements, particularly in Latin America and South Asia, influenced by the work of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire and by his ideas on popular education, as well as by the idea of Gramsci’s subaltern classes and the emergence of the social construction theory, adopted “empowerment” in the mid 1980s as a political and transformative approach for struggles challenging patriarchy as well as other mediating structures such as class, race, ethnicity or religion. Spaces were created to facilitate the collective reflection and to critically analyse the structures and ideologies that sustained women’s oppression. The aim
was to facilitate women to recognize their own agency and power for change and for moving their socio-political agendas forward.

However, according to Batliwala’s analysis, with the time, the term increasingly became a buzzword, and its sharp political perspective was diluting so much that in the 90s it was not only widely used among development organizations, but also in the business management and the corporate world. What initially was a collective socio-political process, after 20 years refers to an individualistic achievement. According to Batliwala, the term “degenerated into a set of largely apolitical, technocratic and narrow interventions” and was brought to serve neo-liberalism (in Cornwall and Eade 2010: 114).

Mick Moore shares this opinion and distinguishes between the material and the political understanding of the term. For him, while many aid agencies define empowerment as “improving the material status of poor people”, for him, the more literal definition understands empowerment as “visibly making more powerful”. This second notion has inevitably a major collective dimension, as un-coordinated individuals cannot do much in the political sphere. (Moore, 2001)

The United Nations Social Development Network promoted a conference on “empowerment” in 2012. After the event and after conducting a survey on the meaning of the term, it is defined as the “process of enabling people to increase control over their lives, to gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives, to increase their resources and qualities and to build capacities to gain access, partners, networks, a voice, in order to gain control”11. Interestingly, and in line with what scholars such as Batliwala, Cornwall or Moore stress, the UN does not include a reference to the political nature of the term, or to the concept of “power”. The collective element is also not very visible in this definition.

This research will analyse if the different communication practices have an empowering effect, by considering empowerment as a political and transformative process, and the results of a process, which aims “shifts in political, social, and

economic power between and across both individuals and social groups” (ibid. 2010:113).
4. Methodology

4.1 A structure for the analysis of communication practices in social movements

Rebecca Kolins Givan (2010) provides a useful and clear framework for the analysis of the diffusion of social movements, based on three analytical questions:

- What is being diffused?
- How does diffusion occur?
- What is the impact of diffusion?

This investigation will use these three questions (what, how and with what impact) to analyse and present the findings regarding the communication practices of the PAH. This approach permits us to reflect on the intentions of the communicator (the PAH) and on the different practices and media used to achieve its goals, while considering also the internal and external effects that these practices have had.

The first question will address the messages, frames and discourses that are communicated, as well as the use of graphical elements for making the movement’s collective identity visible. The second will be used to describe the multiple ways of communication and media used (interpersonal communication, protest actions, social media, mass media, videos, etc.). As we will see, all of them are used strategically and reinforce each other. Finally, the third question will serve to evaluate the impact of these communication practices for the diffusion of the movement itself, the external impact and the empowerment of its members.

The selected methodology for such a wide-ranging intention includes the realization of seven in-depth interviews to people from inside and outside the movement, as well as observations during assembles, protest actions and training courses.
Such a choice is successful in showing relations between online and offline, interpersonal and mediated communication practices, and in viewing that effective communication nowadays has to be multi-media. It addition, the many communication approaches identified, and its effects, are put in relation to the broader structural context of the country and to the previous and parallel experiences of the activists involved. Without a contextualization, the understanding of the communication practices elaborated by the PAH would be incomplete.

The scope of this project is very wide and each of the three analytical questions would need specific and thorough researches to be fully analysed. The number of respondents is also limited to be able to arrive to robust conclusions. However, this far-reaching analysis will surely include many findings that can be further examined by other researchers. It is a first attempt to look for initial findings and structure them in an analysis that puts the focus on the intentions of the communicator.

4.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

My previous research on the external communication strategy of the PAH (Sanz, 2014) included the realization of two semi-structured interviews, one to a Communication for Development specialist and another to a journalist of the daily El País. Both reflected critically on the PAH’s approach to communication and identified some thought-provoking insights.

As first-hand information from inside the movement was necessary to confirm the external perceptions, I decided to include five new interviews to members of the movement, who are able to give details of the PAH’s approach to communication. The selection wanted to include people who have worked specifically on communication from different perspectives, as well as people who joined the PAH when experiencing a foreclosure process. Therefore, the respondents include: one of the founders of the movements who still is involved in the everyday activities and in the communications commission; a person working inside the PAH who is
dedicated to communication-related and legal activities\textsuperscript{12}, one of the members of Commando Video, a team that does videos on the movement; and two people who joined the movement because of mortgage related problems: one who is not involved in mediated communication activities, and another one who is engaged in the communication area.

Their account on how communication is considered, organized and developed internally, and on how the PAH’s approach has evolved in the last six years will be a fundamental source of data for this second analysis, in addition to the two external interviews done for the first analysis, which give an external perspective. While interviews to such a small group of respondents is not sufficient to arrive at final conclusions, the idea behind the selection of this method is that the combination of opinions of interviewees from diverse positions can provide a far-reaching picture. For Brennen (2012:26) “many researchers agree that because people speak from a variety of different backgrounds and perspectives, interviewing is a valuable method that may be used to gather a large amount of useful, interesting, relevant and/or important information”.

The inclusion of people who joined the movement when experiencing an eviction process, even if some people inside the PAH do not want this distinction to be done, has been considered fundamental to find out if –and which- communication practices have had an empowering effect. Similarly, I have intentionally selected two “affected”, one engaged and one non-engaged with mediated communication practices, to have a wider, and not only media-centric idea on which elements can be empowering.

A specific questionnaire was prepared for each interviewee. However, having a journalistic background, my numerous follow-up questions to delve more deeply into the topics addressed converted these interviews in long, in-depth conversations.

\textsuperscript{12} At least two people are paid by the Observatory DESC to dedicate a part of their working journey to the PAH
The resulting open conversations, as well as the multiple connections and intersections included in each sentence, have made the posterior organisation of the data in different media practices very difficult. Similarly, the attribution of the different effects to particular processes, when everything is so interconnected, has been very challenging.

Similarly, the respondents have had more praises than critiques regarding the PAH. An interview to a communication expert without identifiable sympathies for social movements would be therefore a good addition to the analysis.

**Table 1 - Interviewees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role and Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clara Blanchar</td>
<td>Journalist of the daily El País</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montse Santolino</td>
<td>Communications director of the Catalan Federation of NGOs for Global Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucía Delgado</td>
<td>Co-founder and activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antoni Gálvez</td>
<td>Activist who joined the PAH because of mortgage-related problems. Not specifically involved in communication activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc Serra</td>
<td>Press officer and activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvia González Laá</td>
<td>Video-maker and activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta Salgot</td>
<td>Activist who joined the PAH because of mortgage-related problems. Involved in communication activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Participant observation

Researchers use participant observation to understand the language, practices and activities of a specific group, culture or institution (Brennen 2012:163). In this study, I have in some cases rather been a “descriptive observer as participant”. As Brennen defines it, (2012:165), the description observer as participant applies to researchers who are on-site but who distance themselves from those being observed. Such researchers may talk with and interview people but they do not always actively participate in activities, rituals or events. Their field notes and observations emphasize what they have seen rather than what they have experienced.

I have participated as an observer in some of the movement’s public assemblies, workshops and protest actions to detect how communication happens face-to-face among the participants of the movement, and the kind of content (frames, discourses, etc.) that is communicated.

Observation helps revealing some of the forms in which communication takes place and permits collecting findings on complex processes in which action, discourse, empowerment and the construction of identities are very much related to each other.

This ethnographic approach will help proving and refuting the subjective accounts of the respondents. However, as postmodern ethnographers recognise, it is impossible to discover a final, fixed or authoritative meaning of people’s actions and in this regard I am aware of the incompleteness of the observations, as well as of my own subjectivity as a researcher.

In fact, while I have included some critiques to the PAH, by focusing on the PAH’s use of communication, as a researcher I am already assuming that this study is worthwhile and that movement’s approach has been noteworthy.

As with the interviews, I have gathered an extraordinary amount of data during the many observations done. Identifying and including the most important findings of the observations without extending the text beyond the requested length has been
truly challenging. In addition, some of the findings gathered in observations, even if spread throughout the text, are probably not clearly identifiable for the reader, because I have excluded thorough descriptions. In contrast, my journalistic experience has brought me naturally to the inclusion of quotes in the text.

Table 2 – Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Associated communicative material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assembly of actions and coordination</td>
<td>13 January 2015 / 14 April 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop on “how to write press releases”</td>
<td>22 January 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome assembly</td>
<td>30 March 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Protest action against Blackstone vulture fund              | 11 February 2015          | Video: #blackstoneevicts \[
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPGGlpoiseI\]                                                                 |
|                                                            |                           | Press release (in Spanish and English) \[
http://affectadosporlahipoteca.com/2015/03/17/la-pah-intensifica-su-pulso-contra-el-fondo-buitre-blackstone-junto-a-colectivos-de-nueva-york-y-londres/\] |
| Celebration of the 6th birthday with the occupation of a building in Barcelona | 22 February 2012 | Associated press release: \[
http://pahbarcelona.org/2015/02/22/sis-anyss-de-pah-sis-practicant-el-si-es-pot/\] |
5. Analysis

5.1 What is communicated?

5.1.1 Horizontal and collective knowledge-sharing

The sharing of knowledge (data, practical resources) is one of the key features of the PAH. Horizontal and collective knowledge sharing in physical and virtual spaces has allowed the empowerment of the ‘victims’ of evictions and the diffusion of the PAH in more than 200 local nodes around Spain.

This approach is connected with what Lievrouw (2011) calls “the cultural logic of networking”, that has promoted “increasingly flexible, adaptable and flat social movement organizing”, a form that “succeeds by assimilating the contributions of participants throughout every part of the network, not by the formulation of agendas and strategies by a centralized leadership structure that are subsequently passed down” (2011:176).

People affected by foreclosure processes need a lot of trustful information. According to the members of the PAH, they do not only lack technical information on the different stages of the foreclosure process, but also are frequently fearing prison sentences or being separated from their children if they are not able to pay their mortgage debts.

This was evident since the beginning of the movement, when the first activists had to collect lots of technical and legal information to solve the queries of the affected. The help of the Observatory DESC\(^{13}\), was key in this process. The result of this continuous legal and practical research has converted the PAH in a source of

\(^{13}\) The Observatory focuses its efforts on overcoming the devalued perception of social rights, in relation to other rights considered more fundamental like civil and political rights. To this end, the Observatory combines advocacy with research and training, and gives its support to demands and civil society struggles. Read more at: http://observatoridesc.org/en/
knowledge and in a well-informed political actor, capable of promoting well-informed political and legal changes.14

However, the first promoters of the PAH did not want to follow a model in which experts solved the cases. Therefore they started organising weekly assemblies, physical communication spaces where the practical information and the strategy of the movement is shared, and shaped, in common.

“The others help you, but the work is yours” (Marta)

The so-called “welcome assemblies” (every Monday at 6pm) are the space where the technical information on the eviction process is shared. Six years after the creation of the PAH, they gather around 150 people every week. Their profile is varied; men and women of all ages (mostly between 35-70) and of different origins sit in chairs forming a big oval. Between 15 and 20 new people explain their situation and pose their questions. Everyone can answer to these queries, even if the group that has done the introduction takes the lead. Some people just listen, while others take notes.

Sharing experiences allows socializing tools and knowledge. “The affected is not a passive victim assisted by an expert, but becomes an active subject transmitter of knowledge that eventually has the skills and conditions to advise others” (Colau and Alemany, 100). In fact, the idea that the affected has to have an active role in solving his/her case is repeated frequently.

“No one will negotiate better for a solution than the affected person itself because your life depends on it” (Lucía)

“The person who enters the PAH will have a lot of work to do to solve his/her case, and this is key to its success” (Clara)

14 Between many other documents, they produced a report (http://observatoridesc.org/sites/default/files/2013-housing-emergency-spain-observatory-desc.pdf) that studies the regulation of foreclosures and evictions in terms of the legal commitments acquired by the State and the concrete impact this has on the families affected.
The distinction between expert and newcomer, affected and activist, is not unequivocally evident for the observer, and even after the participation in several assemblies, the researcher does not know the personal story behind many of the people who participate. The five respondents from inside the movement consider that no distinctions are done inside the movement and that the differentiation makes no sense. “I am also affected by the government policy related to housing” said one of the interviewees without mortgage-related problems.

During the assemblies, it is frequently repeated that the law permits little margin and that most lawyers know less than the movement itself, who has been collecting all possible information during the last years. All this information has been written down in a clear and understandable way. For example, the “Green Book” is a little booklet explaining the whole process and the possibilities of action of the affected in each stage. A box full of Green books is put in the middle of the circle, and at the end of the assembly, people are invited to take one. During the assembly the PAH members repeat frequently that all the information and models to present to banks/courts, etc. are also available online.

The PAH has created dozens of models of documents that the affected person can deliver to the bank and to judicial instances during the foreclosure process (http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/documentos-utiles/), and several protocols in order to create new PAHs, be able to conduct peaceful civil disobedience actions “so that people feel reassured” (L1), protocols on how to communicate these actions, and other useful material that any PAH and individual can use. This material is free and easy to access through the platform’s website: http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/documentos-utiles-para-pahs/.

Other types of documents, such as logos, slogans and other material is also accessible online, so that different PAHs can use it. More informal types of knowledge, such as for example the “songs of the PAH” (lyrics created by the PAH with the melodies of popular hits) are also available to share and use.
The fact that the movement can assimilate many different types of contributions (slogans, songs, legal advice, etc.), together with the openness of all documents and protocols, available free of charge in the website, are elements linked the 'commons knowledge" philosophy that many freedom technologists or digital activists promote (Lievrouw, 2011). All is valuable and available to be printed out, shared or remediated: images, logos and slogans for posters, stickers or t-shirts; videos and brochures, and also technical and legal documents to be used to negotiate with banks and other institutions. People are not just invited to share this material, but also to create it. The great amount of audio-visual material on local protests suggests that the PAH members not only feel proud of their actions, but also that they feel comfortable in inventing slogans or shooting videos to document their actions and make them available online.

Besides, the PAH has recently promoted the “School of the PAH” to organise workshops that follow the logic of “training the trainers”. The idea is to keep knowledge as horizontal as possible, and to share tools and knowledge between individuals and local PAHs. Trainings on how to lead a collective assembly or on how to write press releases were done in early 2015.

In the latter, where four affected people and the researcher participated (four women and one man), a journalist and an anthropologist who are involved in the communications commission explained how to write a press release, the necessity to keep a neutral tone, gave advise on how to collect and verify data, and gave also stylistic tips, like the inclusion of a motivational sentence and a hashtag at the end of the release. The participants, divided into two groups, finished the workshop by writing two releases on two different examples. One of these participants, who was interviewed a few months later, explained that she had already worked, together with other members of the Communications commission, in the collective writing of a communiqué.
5.1.2 Frames, discourses and narrative

The construction of collective counter-frames appears essential in the case of the PAH, where very clear diagnostic and motivational discourses are shared and shaped internally and communicated externally.

In addition, I have noted a very frequent use of the personal pronoun “us” in its feminine form, by both, men and women. The use of the first person in plural reflects the importance of the idea of a collective movement, while the use of the feminine form (when in Spanish the pronouns and verbs for speaking in plural about a group integrated by men and women is the masculine form) is a reminder of the patriarchal elements of the language and a conscious decision to break these codes.\[15\]

Diagnostic frames

The first thing that a person who cannot pay his/her debts has to overcome to be able to fight for his/her own case and be able to help others is his/her own sensations of fear, guilt and shame, according to the respondents who have experienced this situation and to numerous mentions to these feelings collected in my observations.

Apart from realising that they are not the only ones facing this problem, joining the PAH helps people changing their perception on their “responsibility” regarding the housing crisis and their dramatic situation, and thus, overcome emotions like guilt or shame that are paralysing for any action. Messages like “of course you are not guilty”, “they also have to pay for what they have done”, “these men [bank executives] are not better than us” are heard frequently in the welcome assemblies.

“I thought that I was the ugly duck in a lake of white swans, and that they were right. And no, they have brought us to this chaotic situation.... People

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15 The use of feminine and other gestures observed during the assemblies were equal to the language put in place during the 15-M assemblies
haven’t asked to remain without work. People want a worthy life, not a catastrophic one” (Antoni)

The discourse of the PAH insists in the fact that the right to housing is a human right, and that the government prioritises the interests of the economic powers to the problems of the ordinary people. It also stresses that the solutions to this widespread human drama exist (lieu in payment, social renting, stopping evictions) and that the solution to the housing drama depends on the political will.

Another idea that is frequently discussed is the proportionality of the protest actions. Whenever the negotiations with the bank fail, the use of civil disobedience (blocking of evictions, protests in banks and occupations of empty buildings owned by banks, escraches, etc.) is justified in order to palliate the dramatic situations of its members.

This diagnosis of the problem, stressing the lack of political will of the government and the responsibility of the banking system, and the fact that conducting peaceful, strong protests that escalate in intensity is the “last possible way of action after many other attempts” is spread in assemblies, documents, messages, press releases and videos. It justifies the intensity of the protest actions and further helps mobilizing the PAH members.

“You realise that the government’s economic policy has brought us to this situation, so it’s your fault in a percentage, but you are not 100% guilty as they tell you. Acknowledging this frees you and gives you strength to continue fighting. It’s a turn form your own fault to the fault of the system” (Antoni)

Motivational frames: “Yes, it’s possible”
Not feeling alone and powerless is key for the affected people, who in the PAH find a community of people with whom they can share openly their deep feelings and emotions during a very difficult personal process. This message was evident to the researcher, who heard many times, during observations and interviews, references
to the “family of the PAH”. Another message heard frequently is “You are not alone anymore once you cross the door of the PAH” or “The PAH leaves no-one homeless”. Leaving isolation and fear behind and joining a community that will help you is already described as therapeutic by some of the members interviewed.

“Here people speak your language and can understand that you cry one day. I’m one affected, a dramatic one, put here you see that there are 40,000 cases worse than mine, like families with three or four children” (Antoni)

In a movement where so many dramatic stories take place, what is interesting is that PAH tries to keep the mood of the affected in a good shape, also during protest actions. The discourses of the movement are focused on solutions and on the “little victories” achieved thanks to unity and power. The protest actions, even if denouncing dramatic cases, try to project images of optimism and victory.

In fact, the PAH focuses on results or what they call “little victories” (stopped evictions, occupied buildings...) and the positivity of the message and the joy during the protests (in form of songs, positive slogans...) is very visible.

The most repeated slogan inside the movement, “Sí, se puede” (“Yes, it’s possible”), reflects hope, positivity and the effectiveness of the collective struggle. Many of the slogans are claims from other famous struggles or popular songs that have been readjusted to speak about the PAH: “La PAH, unida, jamás será vencida” (The PAH, united, will never be defeated16) o “Yo soy de la PAH, de la PAH, de la PAH” (I am from the PAH, from the PAH, from the PAH) are examples of sayings shout in protest actions by anyone who wants to hold the loudspeaker.

“Even if you are fighting for something, we do not believe in sad passions... this is something of the PAH that I like very much” (Lucía)

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16 This slogan is a remix of the Chilean slogan and popular song “El pueblo, unido, jamás será vencido” (“The people united will never be defeated”), reflecting the spirit behind the mass mobilization of working-class people who in 1970 elected Salvador Allende.
“The fact that the PAH projects images of celebration, of achieved “lieus in payment” in front of the bank’s door with confetti and a smile, instead of the image of despair, cry or pain that media are looking for, permits the projection of “little victories”, of the “Yes, it’s possible” message. And this oil keeps the machinery of the PAH moving” (Marc)

This form of activism is seen as something different from the past, when activism was more linked to identity-movements.

“We have a very open and clear discourse... not activist at all... very close to people, very 99%, very open-minded, very 15M, and our demands come from the street (...) If you communicate in a certain way you are already conditioning the message” (Lucía)

The narrative: David vs. Goliath, heroes versus villains

When talking about what it is about the PAH than is powerful, many interviewees use the concept of “humanity” or “human stories” in their responses. Three of the seven interviewees mentioned the myth of “David versus Goliath”. The use of this myth was also heard in two of the assemblies observed.

“All stories that move people follow a sort of universal narrative or primeval myth. The force of the narrative of the PAH is that little people come together to fight an injustice, the power of many people united against the big powers (...) David versus Goliath” (Silvia)

“The PAH communicates a way of doing politics that does not renounce to being confrontational with a very bold discourse, of David versus Goliath” (Marc)

The possibility of collectively creating and communicating these frames and narratives, and to demonstrate that people together can achieve “little victories”
has converted the PAH in a reference for other movements and for Spanish society at large.

“The PAH represents many other struggles and the outcry against a system that is cutting rights and has to be stopped (...) and in a moment where we all are a bit disenchanted, and looking for stories that transmit hope and enthusiasm, the story of the PAH helps you to believe that things can be changed” (Silvia)

The training on writing press releases was very interesting for learning more about the PAH’s discourses and narrative. The two persons leading the session, a journalist and an anthropologist, explained how the ideal communiqué should include data on the practices of banks “to provoke outrage” and then explain the concrete demand/s of the PAH regarding the case, to finish with a more creative “power paragraph” referring for example to the “thousands of little victories achieved” or to the force of the movement. This structure helps presenting the PAH as heroes and the banks as the villains.

The effectiveness of this narrative is evident also for the journalist interviewed.

“The stories of the PAH are so human and so powerful, and deal about the good and the bad, and it’s so clear who is the good and who is the bad one, that these stories are very easy to sell” (Clara)

5.1.3  A collective identity reinforced by the use of graphic elements

Diani (1992) suggests that a movement is made up of a network of organizations and individuals with a collective identity. The PAH, for example has been successful in integrating migrant and Spanish individuals and networks, people belonging to different cultural and economic strata, and people from all ages to create one collective identity. The common identity of the movement has been reinforced with the use of graphic elements.
As a visual analysis on the PAH has shown (Sanz, 2014), the image of the movement during protest actions, and specifically the use of green t-shirts, not only helps to recognise the PAH, but also reflects optimism and positive mood, as well togetherness and solidarity. The green t-shirt has become gradually one of the distinctive features of the movement.

In some cases, the use of binary oppositions has reinforced the message. The use of green by the PAH (in t-shirts and vests) has been opposed to the colour red, associated with evictions, and therefore with banks and politicians. This binary opposition was especially evident during the escraches campaign, for which the collective Enmedio created two round signs inspired in the buttons that the deputies use to vote. The green sign said SÍ SE PUEDE (Yes, it’s possible) and the red PERO NO QUIEREN (But they don’t want to).

Some of the mental associations that can be inferred from the logos are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GREEN</th>
<th>RED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVE</td>
<td>NEGATIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAH / PEOPLE</td>
<td>POLITICIANS, BANKS, ESTABLISHMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>PARALYSIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLUTION</td>
<td>PROBLEM / LACK OF SOLUTIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOPE / RENEWAL</td>
<td>DANGER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD</td>
<td>BAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yes, it’s possible”</td>
<td>“But they don´t want to”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the videos also include the oppositional element (such as “From affected to MP\textsuperscript{17}, “From citizen to President\textsuperscript{18}” or “PAH versus Bankia\textsuperscript{19}”):

Figure 1: Fragments of the video “The PAH vs Bankia”

The positive image of the movement is also taken into account when the PAH decides avoiding showing harsh images, as for example in the case of occupations.

“The images of occupations are hard and tough. Especially during the first days when the apartments are empty, the images are bleak. To fight the stereotype and prejudice against occupation, we decided to use cartoons to explain that if there were empty buildings and people without homes, it was reasonable to occupy them” (Silvia)

Figure 2: Fragment of the video “La PAH presenta: de la burbuja a la Obra Social” (The PAH presents: form the bubble to the Social Work\textsuperscript{20})

\textsuperscript{17} https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4sequ8gw4s
\textsuperscript{18} https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrViE2mK0mo
\textsuperscript{19} https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjRV9kAWgFs
\textsuperscript{20} The Social Work is the PAH’s campaign dedicated to occupying empty buildings owned by banks.
In some cases, however, the PAH has documented live evictions and some of the videos reflect harshly the human drama. For example, the images of the eviction of the family of Irene, where we see her two children crying in front of the closed apartment door, have been also used, with permission of the affected family, to pressure the authorities to find a solution to her case. This kind of images, however, are always used together with other images of “little victories” or hope, as for example in the documentary “Yes, it’s possible. 7 days in PAH Barcelona”.

5.2 How does communication occur?

5.2.1 Internal communication: Physical and mediated knowledge sharing and decision-making

The area of the new social movements of the digital age is not a virtual space; it is a composite of the space of flows and of the space of places (Castells 2000, 2007). This is also the case of the PAH, which combines physical and virtual channels for internal organisation and communication.

Inter-personal communication is probably the main form of communication put in practice in the PAH. In PAH Barcelona, for example, the weekly agenda includes three big open assemblies and a self-help group session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6pm: Welcome and collective counselling assembly (100-150 participants)</td>
<td>6pm: Assembly of actions and coordination (around 70 participants)</td>
<td>6pm: Self-help group</td>
<td>6pm: Assembly of collective actions (to organize actions in banks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 Video “Desalojan a la familia de Irene” (The family of Irene is evicted): [http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/los-videos/](http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/los-videos/)
22 D[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elnjofVv_Os](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elnjofVv_Os)
Before the assemblies start and after they conclude, it is interesting to see people asking each other for advice. More experienced members counsel and give moral support and hope to the new ones: “Don’t worry, you are not alone anymore”, “Look, I was in the same situation as you and now I have solved my problem” are types of phrases that easily can be heard.

All are invited to speak during the discussions and all decisions, as for example on which protest actions to promote, are taken by consensus. Apart from these assemblies, PAH Barcelona has a dozen of commissions that meet periodically to work on particular issues and develop strategies that then are shared and voted in the Tuesday and Friday assemblies.

![Figure 3: The organisation of the PAH in different commissions](image)

In parallel, each PAH (and each commission inside each PAH) creates constantly communication networks through email groups and instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp or Telegram, that enable distant working and are very easy to use from mobile phones, for example in protest actions.
In only one hour, one of the PAH members that I was interviewing had received 80 WhatsApp messages, while another had received 72. Marta Salgot, who is active in five commissions, assured to receive around 40-50 emails per day during working days. The PAH members also use tools such as Titanpad to work together on documents such as press releases, articles or the preparation of tweets to orchestrate communication campaigns (as we will see in the chapter dedicated to social media).

5.2.2 Protest actions: joyful civil-disobedience

Civil disobedience and protest actions are frequently promoted by the PAH to exert pressure on banks and politicians, and to respond to the immediate needs of any member (in the case of stopping evictions or occupying empty buildings owned by banks). At the same time, these actions are useful to give visibility to the movement and its demands.

The use of nonviolent civil disobedience is one of the key features of the PAH. Unconventional actions (occupations of banks and other disruptive actions such as promoting different types of protests in bank offices where they end covered with slogans of the movement) are organised on a daily basis. These actions attract the interest of the media more than conventional actions such as demonstrations and concentrations, which in turn need a much higher level of participation to obtain impact.

“At the beginning we organized a demonstration and we were only 40. It was a disaster. That’s why we changed our strategy. The PAH is so, very alive. We try something and if it’s an error, there’s no problem, we try out something else” (Lucía)

The use of civil disobedience has been promoted gradually, and the types of actions have varied in relation to the maturity of the movement. The first blockade of an eviction was done in 2010, when the man who was going to be evicted
claimed during an assembly that he would not leave his home. The leading activists of the PAH took this opportunity to organise the first collective action where human shields were going to impede the entrance to the judicial team in the house and cancel the eviction. They rented a bus so that the PAH members could arrive in the early morning to La Bisbal del Penedès, a town between Barcelona and Tarragona. They also called the media and shot a video themselves to distribute to the media that could not attend the protest.

To make people feel protected during a protest action, the PAH has created protocols with key aspects to respect in order to prevent any violent episode.

“Having a protocol helps people to feel protected during actions that imply a certain degree of violence, like the blocking of an eviction. Some people will be giving support to the family, others will be speaking with the police, others with the press, and the rest will block the entrance to the apartment, but always peacefully” (Lucía)

Another specific feature of the action of the PAH is the joy. In many actions music is present, and for example the movement has collected a repertoire of songs that can also be found on the website http://affectadosporlahipoteca.com/2014/04/16/cancionero-pah/ The music of popular songs, with new lyrics put together by any local PAH, serve to keep the atmosphere cheerful. In the protest against the Blackstone Vulture found, for example, a member of the PAH who likes singing interpreted several hits while other members, mostly women, were dancing to and singing these remediated protest songs in the middle of the street.

This joyfulness, in contrast to other more traditional forms of activism (like shouting slogans in a demonstration), has been useful to attract many people that had not been involved in protest actions before.

“We are cheerful people and want to communicate in ways that attract everybody” (Lucia)
For the respondents from outside the movement, the multiple protest and social assistance actions of the PAH have been key to the success of the movement, as they follow the logic of media coverage, according to which conflict is newsworthy.

“It’s a bit like what Greenpeace did. Stopping evictions permits them to have permanent communicative actions (…) What do media want? Conflict and spectacle. With the PAH the conflict is assured, with the neighbours, with the police, with the judicial team. As informative material, the PAH is a candy for the media” (Montse)

“In reality, their actions are not communicative actions, but protest actions transmitted live” (Clara)

The participation in protest actions seems to be directly linked to the emotional element and to the building of a collective identity. As Diani stresses: “Participatory movement organisations – especially the most radical – are more dependent upon direct, face-to-face interactions (…). Engaging in what are potentially high-risk activities requires a high level of trust and collective identification that is unlikely to develop if not supported by face-to-face interaction (Diani, 2001:126).

5.2.3 Social media: amplifying the message through online networks

Almost all respondents have highlighted social media as crucial for the success of the movement. The PAH’s decentralized structure has created a network of hundreds of local Facebook and Twitter accounts. This can be inferred by looking at the contact details of the more than 200 local sections of the PAH, where we see that almost every local section has its own Facebook and/or Twitter account. The continuous sharing of content by so many local PAHs contributes to the perception that the movement is very active and widespread.
As Shirky (2011:2) explains, social media have become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world’s political movements. In the case of the PAH, however, this is only one of the many uses experimented. Social media have been useful for creating numerous networks inside and outside the PAH, for communicating protest actions live, for monitoring the discourse, for sharing frames, for launching videos, for dialoguing with politicians and decision-makers, and for attracting the interest of mass media.

Some of the members of the PAH, digital natives themselves, have not only been convinced on the need to use social media for communication, but also on the necessity to train people to use social media effectively.

“Social media have been very important. And when the PAH started 80% of the people were absolutely analogue. One of the things that the PAH has achieved is that 65 years old women start tweeting during actions, thanks to trainings. And all have WhatsApp now, and Telegram, and even people who almost don’t know to write are writing ‘Whatsapps’ and using social media” (Silvia)

Social media have been used for the creation of networks among the different PAHs, as well as among other social movements and external sympathisers. Many of the interviewees have highlighted the efforts of one person (@galapita), an activist known for her expertise in new media23, in training people on social media and creating an online community.

“Gala Pin has created an impressive network structure. She’s the great architect of the online community” (Silvia)

“If the PAH is trending topic on Twitter every week it’s because we have a big online community” (Marc)

23 Gala Pin was contacted to be interviewed for this research, but as she is now involved, together with other people of the PAH, in a citizen platform aiming to win the elections of the city of Barcelona in May 2015, she put the researcher in contact with other people involved in the everyday activities of the movement in 2015.
Social media permit transmitting actions live, which is very interesting in the case of evictions or protest actions, as anyone can follow what happens from a distance.

“The PAH has achieved that people connect to social media to find out what’s happening in an action” (Marc)

Social media have been very useful to capture the attention of traditional media. Journalists are very attentive to what happens on social media, particularly on Twitter.

“It’s easier to attract the press though social media than with a press conference” (Silvia)

A strong campaign on social media usually is taken into account by the press. More than if you try to do the inverse way” (Marc)

But Twitter does not only serve to spread the message and capture the media’s attention, but also to monitor the shaping of discourses.

“Twitter is a ring where journalists, communication leaders and other influential people battle around the control of the political agenda, where hegemonic discourses are constructed” (Marc)

Social media also allow monitoring the discourses that are built around actions. Every action of the PAH is connected to a hashtag. Whenever an eviction takes place, the PAH uses the formula “#(name of the affected)stays” ( #Mariasequeda ). The naming of the human being behind the drama and the focus on the positive outcome are reinforced by this formulation of hashtags.

Facebook is where the community of the PAH is more present, according to the interviewees. In fact, the Facebook account of PAH Barcelona is managed by three
people that joined the PAH when they were threatened by an eviction process. Facebook is also very useful to build a collective discourse.

“Facebook is where the message becomes viral and is constructed collectively with the comments of people (...). If one post has seven likes, and another 5,000, it’s clear that for the next one you will use the style of the latter” (Marc)

This collective discourse includes the appearance and sharing of so-called ‘memes’, a term used to define ideas that go from mind to mind, and that spread easily though different media.

“There are many ‘memes’ of the PAH. Through them, we have created a universe that you can find when you come to an assembly, but also on the Internet, in Twitter, Facebook or Youtube” (Marc)

Finally, social media are also used as effective means to orchestrate launchings of videos. The coordination for the launching of a video multiplies the viewers, according to some interviewees who have taken part in video-launching campaigns.

“The day before launching a video we collectively write examples of tweets on the video in a Titanpad and then we share it with all our community: all the PAHs, our friends, and people that are sympathetic to the PAH and that have a lot of followers. We let them know that at 11 o’clock we will launch the video, because we consider 11 o’clock a good hour to become viral. When the PAH sends its first tweet, lots of people are prepared to start tweeting. Then, if it is trending topic, people start asking themselves: What is this? And so we do the maximum noise possible without spending a cent” (Silvia)
5.2.4 Press: human stories in exchange of political message

Even if social media, and the existence of the platform’s websites, have been very important for the PAH, the interviewees have stressed the importance of mainstream media, and particularly of TV, to give visibility to the movement.

“If the PAH would only work through social media we would be in another place” (Marc)

“You can communicate with posters, from your web, through videos, a blog and now with Twitter or Facebook, but even if our blog has thousands of daily visits, let us not fool ourselves, the media, or what you can see on television or read on a newspaper is not the same” (Lucía)

In contrast to other activism experiences such as for example the squatter movement, in which mass media have been seen as an “enemy”, the PAH has had the media very much into account and has done a great effort in working with them, fundamentally to be known between people who may be having difficulties related to eviction processes, but also to increase its power.

“The PAH is very open to work with the media, or at least with some journalists” (Clara)

In opposition with more structural analyses present in social movements, the PAH believes that the media are complex and not only determined by the interests of its owners. In fact, even if now most of the Spanish press has banks in their governing bodies and financial structures, the PAH has been able to appear.

I remember the first evictions after the 15-M... a lot of people coming... and there was TV3 [the Catalan public television] and some people wanting them to leave. We had to stop them and explain them that we had called them. These are practices that perhaps come from other places, from younger and
more activist people. But from the PAH we say it clearly: we have always worked with the media” (Lucía)

The relation with journalists which are aligned with the PAHs positions or “gap journalists” working in mass media has been key in this relation. This fact is recognized from inside the movement and perceived also from the journalist interviewed.

“We have understood that media are built of people, and that these people also have their ideas (...) Working with journalists in a more personal and attentive way, with rigour, is also a way to get visibility in the media” (Marc)

“They always knew clearly that mass media had to be their allies, and probably some concrete journalists are the ones that assure a continued coverage” (Clara)

For all the interviewees, in the line of what Couldry (2012) says, the focus on television is very important, mainly because it is the most popular media among the people who are experiencing eviction processes.

According to Marc, the PAH has “profited the moments of television, even if we have had to put our conditions”. In this sense, while many television programs ask them for people who are facing eviction processes and are willing to commit suicide, the PAH wants to show people who represent stories of empowerment.

“There’s always a conflict of interest between what the PAH wants to project and what the media want. It’s a negotiation” (Marc)

The PAH is careful in the selection of people to appear in television programs. In the case of debates, they negotiate to send two people, one who is facing an eviction process and another who takes the role of a spokesperson and can give the structural and political point of view.
“It’s not easy. If the PAH would choose showing the human miseries behind eviction processes, because there’s a lot of misery, probably we would appear much more on media and TV, but the effect would be very different” (Marc)

The members of the PAH advice their members before appearing in the media, or accompany them, even if many do not even need this type of support.

“Once they are empowered, there’s no need to protect them from the sharks of the media because they already present themselves with another attitude, and the story is not about failure but about the struggle to solve a problem” (Montse)

“Usually we accompany people, but sometimes there’s no need. We have had here hyper-potent people, with a lot of discourse, who knew how to do it better than many of us. The truth is that here you find people who are very powerful when communicating. With others we do auto-trainings and we remind them that they don’t have to answer to questions on their personal story if they don’t want to” (Lucia)

One of the great assets regarding the PAH’s communication effectiveness in the media has been Ada Colau, as all the respondents have recognized. Ada Colau, who was one of the five first promoters of the PAH and its spokesperson for 5 years, has been elected in May 2015 to be the major of Barcelona representing a citizen platform, Barcelona En Comú (Barcelona in Common).

Her popularity and the visibility of the PAH had a peak after the presentation of the Popular legislative Initiative asking for a change in the Mortgage Law in early 2013. Ada Colau became very popular when she called “criminal” a representative of the banking system during her intervention in the Spanish Congress of Deputies24. Later on, when the campaign of escraches started, all media wanted to interview her. The PAH decided collectively to take this opportunity also to appear in popular prime-time shows.

24 the Spanish Parliament
“We were very conscious that the movement was benefitting from her communication skills, because she’s really good in communicating in a very clear and concise way, The movement has taken advantage of her and she made herself available. This combination was great” (Lucía)

Linked to this idea of professional activists that concentrate the communication, the strength of Ada Colau as a spokesperson was noted by the two external respondents. Regarding the critiques of the personalization of the PAH in her, both indicated that it was not the PAH which wanted to personalize the movement, but rather the media that always wanted her to appear.

“If you have a Messi25, what do you do? You don’t let him play? (...) We [the media] always wanted her because we knew that she does it well (...), she sticks to the time we give her, she has a great capacity to synthesize, speaks very fast, with a correct and efficient language” (Clara)

Her communicative skills and charisma have turned her in a kind of symbol for some people, and that is also the reason why she is leading a political citizen movement.

“For me Ada is a bit like the Antigona, the woman who defeats the most powerful power to defend the common sense” (Silvia)

After the success of Ada Colau and the campaign of escraches in the media, however, the PAH now is facing a challenging moment in which it is very difficult to get space in the media agenda for several reasons. First and foremost, 2015 is an election year at local, regional and country level. Therefore, the media are much more focused on political news and give less attention to social movements. Second, many evictions are stopped with previous negotiations with the banks. Third, the media also face structural problems and sometimes there are not sufficient journalists and/or cameras to cover the activities of the PAH, or at least

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25 very known football player of FC Barcelona
this is what some media outlets argue. In some cases however, as in the case of the regional Catalan and national Spanish public TV stations, the decision of not covering the PAH’s press conferences or protest actions could be rather politically motivated, according to some of the respondents.

Another thing that was highlighted during the interviews was the need to prepare content and to offer it, already cooked, to the media for its diffusion. Examples were given on how some news agencies and media outlets practically copy-pasted the press releases, including also the quotes offered by the own movement; on how the PAH did the script of a programme to appear on a public TV station, or on how the movement offered to certain TV stations and digital media its videos to be shown before they were put available for any other media outlet. In summary, the PAH sometimes offers content first in exclusivity, a practice that is done by many institutions and companies to assure coverage and capture the other media’s attention.

5.2.5 Videos: the PAH’s TV

The videos of the PAH merit that we dedicate an own chapter to their analysis, as almost all the interviewees have concluded that they have been key for the impact of the movement.

The PAH has been very active in recording actions and in editing strategic videos. The PAH’s website includes 111 videos (as of May 2015)\(^{26}\), a good example of the material that has been recorded and made available.

“The videos are fundamental. It’s the TV of the PAH. The written text is no longer the language of the XXI century, and with videos you can transmit a lot more than with a text. And I tell you this despite not even having a TV at home” (Marc)

\(^{26}\) [http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/los-videos/?tubepress_page=1](http://affectadosporlahipoteca.com/los-videos/?tubepress_page=1)
Smartphones have facilitated the recording of life-events and simple editing
programmes now permit that anyone with a bit of interest can put together a
video. Thank to these tools, the PAH is a movement that has documented its
actions frequently.

However, in the case of PAH Barcelona, the approach to video-making did a turn
when three people – a professional screen-writer and publicist (Silvia Gonzáles
Láa), a video-artist and architect (Pau Faus) and a sound-technician (Xavi
Andreu) – joined the PAH and decided to create Comando Video, a team to work on
videos to strategically spread and communicate the ideas of the movement.

“The PAH was already documenting actions and evictions, but what we did is
to introduce a strategic view and to use advertising techniques to turn the
video itself into an action, to generate a piece of news” (Silvia)

Among the more than 30 videos done by Comando Video, some of them have
become viral, such as for example the trilogy “From affected to deputy” (see page
36) done during the campaign of escraches. The three videos followed a formula
that they have called “collective voice”, in which members of the PAH, taken in
close-ups, say different parts of a common discourse by looking directly to the
camera, and the viewer. Among other things, these videos counteracted the focus
of the media on Ada Colau and helped showing the collective behind.

The scripts are written by Silvia and collectivised through Titanpad, even if she
recognises that for her, not used to team-working, it was strange to get comments
and suggestions of many people on her scripts: “There’s a moment where you have
to say ‘stop’ before the texts loses all its rhythm”. The PAH members who want to
participate in the shooting select the phrase they want to say27, sometimes even
modifying the content during the recording.

27 This was specially challenging when they decided to record one of such videos in English, because it was
dedicated to an international vulture fund, Blackstone (#Blackstoneevicts video:
https://vimeo.com/119345172). The phrases had to be written as they are pronounced in Spanish, in order
to get people who don’t speak English to pronounce them well.
These videos are not done for fun, but with a strategic intention. The first one, ‘From affected to deputy’28 wanted to explain the campaign of escraches.

“The message was: we have a drama that we want to explain to you. If you don’t come to listen to us we will come to explain it to you” (Silvia)

The second video, “Message to the voters of PP”29 wanted to touch the sensitivity of the right-wing party voters and appeal to their empathy with the families facing evictions because of unemployment. It got more than 1 million views, according to Silvia.

“I tried to imagine what could appeal to the emotions of by aunts from the Opus Dei, and the script follows a bit the rhythm of a prayer” (Silvia)

The third video of this trilogy, “From citizen to President”30 was addressed to the Spanish president, Mariano Rajoy. It got also hundreds of thousands of visits.

Apart from finding the formula for touching people's emotions so that the videos are shared through social media and become viral, the PAH has also organized orchestrated launchings that multiply the interest in the videos.

“What is more satisfactory for me is to turn the videos into communicative actions and to see that they become viral thanks to an orchestrated launching through social media. If after two hours of launching it the counter of Youtube gets blocked in +301 it means that it has become viral” (Silvia)

The last video belonging to this 'collective voice' series, aimed at promoting a Catalan Popular Legislative Initiative, includes the participation of famous people. According to Silvia, the intention was to arrive at a type of public still feeling far

28 De afetado a diputado https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4sequ8gw4s
29 Mensaje a los votantes del PP https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmuhiP-n-wZI
30 De ciudadano a presidente https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKzF5VRVQTM
away from the problems of the people affected by evictions. However, the use of celebrities also generates critiques.

“Showing celebrities in a video is not a success, it’s the easiest way. When a battle has been collectively assumed and has won the communicative space everyone want to be part of it. But how many celebrities defended the PAH during the campaign of escraches? Now it’s easy” (Montse)

“The drama of losing ones home is so brutal that you don’t need celebrities. Who will you believe more, someone who is experiencing it or a celebrity?” (Clara)

Other types of videos have been used to increase the pressure on certain actions. Paradigmatic are the examples of the video of Maria and Jorge, a couple of old people who were interviewed just before their eviction. The video was put on social media and helped to increase the pressure to stop their eviction. Something similar happened in the case of Irene. The eviction was done in early morning, but the PAH recorded some very hard images in which the little kids appeared crying in the staircase while they where receiving the support of other members of the PAH. The movement decided to occupy the neighbourhood’s public office to ask for an immediate solution for them, while the video was edited and released in social media, generating an immense outcry and demand for a solution.

Finally, Comando Video has also done a documentary ’7 days in PAH Barcelona’, which is not about evictions, but about the PAH itself, the internal work and the empowerment that takes place inside the movement.

“The aim is to explain in one hour the process of a person who joins the PAH, from the welcome assembly to the active participation in protest actions” (Silvia)

31 María y Jorge #CXVidasEnJuego https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUUwCP_x-j0
32 Desalojan a la familia de Irene https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pToHqClmXU
33 English version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caD17RKJbc
5.3 How does communication affect empowerment and the overall impact of the movement?

5.3.1 Empowerment

The existence of processes of empowerment, understood as collective socio-political processes that result in the affected people’s position in society, is one of the key features of the PAH, as seen in the observations and explained by the respondents in all the interviews held. The frequent use of the term ‘empowerment’ in assemblies and informal conversations by people of different sex, ages, origins and financial situations is symptomatic of the centrality of this concept in the movement. Central ideas are that anyone can be useful and that everything can be learnt in spaces that facilitate collective reflection on structures and ideologies sustaining the oppression of the weakest sectors in society.

“I have been freed of a complex of inferiority that now makes me capable of negotiating with the bank and fighting against injustice. I feel with the truth in my hand, and this pushes me to fight for me and for anyone” (Antoni)

“From being a frightened and criminalized victim to a super-activist that puts on the green t-shirt and is like Superman (...) All the organisational and communicational machinery of the PAH is planned to permit this process of politicization. And it is thanks to these processes that the PAH has so many activists and achieves so much, because anyone who arrives can become a super-activist and a referent for the newcomers” (Marc)

People who otherwise would be excluded from society are allowed and encouraged to participate (in open assemblies, open commissions, protest actions, etc.) and acquire knowledge on the banking system, consumer rights, protest methods, nonviolent civil disobedience, human rights or communication practices, which not only increases their self-esteem, but also their capacity to help others.
“Here you don’t need to be an expert in anything when you come. We will give you the tools so that you can help yourself and others” (Lucía)

Interpersonal and physical communication, the possibility of helping others, the participation in collective protest actions and, at a minor level, activities related to mediated communication, prove to have empowering effects, and not only for the ones experiencing an eviction process, but also for all the other activists.

The two people interviewed with mortgage-related problems have both stressed the personal transformation that joining the PAH had meant to them. Both have highlighted, first of all, the empowering effect of being able to support, comfort and help other people. Apart from this, for each of them the empowerment has come from different activities. While Antoni\textsuperscript{34} has found protest actions and negotiations in banks to be the most effective ways to challenge power-relations, for Marta\textsuperscript{35} the possibility of managing a Twitter account and expressing herself through articles and in the media is very important.

Both describe the therapeutic effect of joining a community of people who are facing similar problems, and how transformative it is to realise that you are not alone and isolated in your dramatic experience.

“I get the power from all my colleagues of the PAH who have made me feel free, not guilty, I have been able to express myself as I wanted” (Antoni)

\textsuperscript{34}Antoni Gálvez (68) was a businessman dedicated to the import and export of shoes and handbags, had to finish his activity when he was 58, as all the Spanish factories with whom he worked closed their doors. Now he gets a pension with which he is unable to cover his mortgage debts and the rest of necessities to live. In addition, he has had a stroke and a depression, the latter linked to his financial situation. In the past, he even tried to commit suicide.

\textsuperscript{35}Marta Salgot (53) works in a pharmaceutical company and did not lose her job during the crisis. However, when she broke her relationship with her ex-partner and he stooped to pay his part of the mortgage debt, she was not capable to pay her debt and cover the rest of expenses. The bank offered her some refinancing possibilities that later proved to be not convenient for her. After looking for advice in some public institutions and finding no help, she went to the PAH even she thought that this movement was only for people who had no jobs. In less than one year she managed to have her debt forgiven and to get a social rent.
The fact of sharing regularly physical spaces with other people increases the empathy and solidarity among the affected members, in line with Diani’s theory on the importance of building trust and collective identification through face-to-face interactions. This engagement happens after continuous meetings and, in some cases, after having been able to solve one’s problem.

“When I first arrived I wanted to solve my case. I don’t feel ashamed of it. But then you realize that this is not the way, and in the assemblies they always look for voluntaries to do this and that, and once you solve your case you start raising your hand and getting more engaged” (Marta)

“I am also a volunteer in the Food Bank and now I help everyone I can because life has taught me that we have to be much more solidary. I will never be again the one I was before, I was terribly detached” (Antoni)

The sharing of information, diagnostic and motivational frames and counter-discourses that make bankers and politicians co-responsible of the situation, together with the empathy of knowing personally people who are facing dramatic situations without getting solutions from public institutions increases the outrage and power to fight.

“You realise that the economic policy of the Government has brought us to this situation, and that you are responsible to a certain degree, but not 100% responsible as they say. You are not the principal guilty one here. This liberates you and gives you strength to continue fighting. From the own guilt to the guilt of the system” (Antoni)

In some cases the political element, even if present, is not specifically mentioned during the interview. The most important motor of action is feeling useful and being able to help other people. People like Marta mention also having found a “sense” to their lives.
“The PAH has given me life. I have lost an apartment but have won what I wanted to do all my life. Because before, in reality, my life was boring. Work, house, going out with my partner during the weekends, sport... but in reality empty. The PAH gives me so much more” (Marta)

The transformation process that occurs from the first welcome assembly to the active and constant involvement in the PAH’s activities can be observed constantly. For example, in one of the Assemblies of Actions and Coordination (with around 70-80 participants) a film-school student explained the script of his short-film to get actors from the PAH. The story was about a man who could not pay his mortgage debt and finally committed suicide. After his explanation, people started raising their hands and asking him why he had decided such an end. He argued that this was the best way to show the severity of the problem. In four posterior interventions, different people replied that, having faced or facing these circumstances, they considered much more beneficial to explain the story of empowerment that happened to someone when joining the PAH. A woman also stressed that the main character had to be a woman and the main message should be ‘Yes, it’s possible’. Finally, the collective decision was that anyone could participate in the shooting individually but not in the name of the PAH, as the movement could not contribute to a story that contradicts the message of hope, optimism and collective power promoted by the PAH.

For some members of the PAH, the participation in protest actions is the most empowering practice. The proud use of civil disobedience and the fact of feeling confortable during a protest action, taking into account that the majority had no previous activist experiences, already indicate that an individual transformation has occurred.

“The first time I was afraid. The third time the police dragged me, but I saw that I was still alive and nothing happened. Then you get used. Now I collect already three or four fines” (Antoni)
For Marta, participating in the communications commission, writing and managing Twitter, or participating in talks in high schools, has been very empowering and rewarding. After several trainings, she is one of the few people managing the Twitter account in PAH Barcelona. The three people that run the Facebook page of PAH Barcelona also joined the movement when facing mortgage-related problems.

“They give you the tools and encourage you to do new things. When I was proposed to learn more on Twitter I didn’t even know what is a hashtag. But if I do something, I do it well and we have to be the best in it. Now I am grateful because I knew Facebook, but Twitter is much more exciting, and every day I lean more from the others” (Marta)

While she started tweeting about news pieces and programming tweets that already where written in collective online documents prepared in advance, now Marta already feels confident enough to create her own tweets and add images that she searches on the Internet or creates herself. As Castells stresses, this use of the Internet perhaps increases in turn her autonomy versus societal rules and institutions.

“First I was reading news, financial news, till very late at night and preparing tweets. Now I invent them myself, and I still have to be careful with the tone, not to be too brutal. Sometimes I ask my colleagues about the content and they encourage me to go on. It’s a big responsibility” (Marta)

Marta has also started doing communicative practices, such as writing articles, and participating in public debates and media programs, where she is able to express herself as she had never done before. The rewarding feeling that Ilouz has highlighted, related to the need to be recognized as social and moral agents, could be related to this feeling of personal empowerment.

“I feel proud of being able to write this article [for a local magazine] because I never thought that I could be doing these things (...) I showed it to Mariana [a
The example of Marta shows that communication-related activities can be empowering, both individually and collectively. However, when trying to research if communication had been used on purpose as an empowering tool by the PAH, some of the activists interviewed saw other practices as more empowering.

“I think that the results of communication are the empowering ones. Regarding the process, we try to empower people, but many tasks related to communication are very grey, and I don’t think that working as a community manager is really empowering. Participating in a welcome assembly is much more empowering in my view, and seeing that after some weeks you are capable to comfort and give advice to a person who arrives. This is more empowering than doing a social media campaign” (Marc)

However, according to the expert in Communication for Development interviewed, the PAH could have considered communication practices as possibilities for empowerment.

“Everything has happened so fast that probably they have had no time to reflect on it, but in my view the communicative strategy could have been even more empowering, for example planning the videos in a more participatory way, or putting the whole collective to rethink communication” (Montse)
5.3.2 Impact

To promote the external impact of the movement, we can conclude that the PAH has used the three main forms of action repertoires distinguished by Verger: direct action, political pressure and communication.

In fact, communication has been absolutely essential for the impact of the movement, according to all the people interviewed. Interpersonal communication (both physical and mediated) has made the organisation, reproduction and diffusion of the movement possible, and thus further promoted its impact. The savvy use of social media and the strategic effort in mass media have been equally crucial, as they have challenged the representations of the affected, and affected the public image of government and financial powers. The PAH has been successful in challenging institutionalized powers. For example, in 2015 almost all political parties include the "lieu in payment" and the need to stop evictions in their electoral programs, while the majority of eviction processes are stopped in the negotiation process, before any action occurs.

"Communication is key, and has been well done. Even if you have a very good empowering machine, people have to know you and the PAH is known thanks to the media” (Marc)

"Communication has been very important, because you can be well organised, but if you don’t communicate what you are doing to the external world, how do you want that people come to your assemblies, how do you want to create a discourse?” (Lucía)

Using Charles Tillys categories to analyse the success of social movements, (worthiness, unity, number and compromise), we could conclude that communication has been crucial to increase them all. Besides, social and mass media have promoted the collective identity of the PAH and the public recognition of the victims as moral and social agents. This constant effort has increased the
negotiation capacity and influence of the movement. In turn, the “little victories” or positive results have increased the pride of the activists and their empowerment.

Interpersonal communication in physical spaces (several weekly meetings in the case of people belonging to the same PAH) and the daily use of virtual channels (mailings, Whatsapp, Titanpad, Twitter and Facebook), have facilitated organisation and cooperative working, as well as the joint promotion of communication campaigns and of the PAH’s counter-message. As Couldry and Castells argue, communication, and communication networks, have been crucial for the PAH to challenge power-relations, and to transform the nature of power and legitimacy.

Social media have been fundamental to create a community, to attract the attention of traditional media, and to increase the pressure on politicians and financial entities, among others. However, the effort in mass media has been equally important. And between mass media, TV has been fundamental, not only to spread their counter-discourse and to arrive to people with mortgage related problems, but also, as Eva Illouz stresses, to spread the collective identity of the PAH and the public recognition of the victims as moral and social agents.

The training in the use of social media of many people belonging to an analogue generation has been necessary for the internal and external impact of the movement. The most evident result of this external impact, according to some of the respondents, has been to promote mental changes among the Spanish society.

“When we first stopped evictions we were almost seen as criminals and now more than 80% say that we are right. This has been achieved with a very intelligent communicative strategy. We still haven’t gained the political battle, but we have won the communicative one. We have won the fight against the official narrative. Everyone is in favour of the PAH” (Silvia)

“For me the victory of the PAH is to be able to change the mentality of civil society. From ‘no-one forced you with a gun to sign anything’ to now, when
almost the whole society is in favour of our actions.... I think this is our biggest victory” (Lucía)

However, from the Communication for Social Change perspective, the PAH should continue its effort in spreading communicative skills among its members to avoid the centralisation of these roles in few hands and assure the continuity of the communicative efforts and successes.

“If you have been working on the communicative skills of the whole collective, you don’t depend on particular people who maybe are more professionalized. And this is a long-term logic that social movements should consider” (Montse)
6. Conclusions

The empirical data gathered in this research show that communication has been key to foster people's empowerment, the diffusion of the movement and the overall impact of the PAH. At the same time, each one of these processes has reinforced the other two, in a virtuous cycle where communication has been absolutely central (see Figure 4).

Interpersonal, mass communication and mass self-communication have been equally fundamental to create a collective identity, promote the PAH’s counter-discourses among Spanish society, give visibility to the movement, increase its political power and further promote the pride and empowerment of its members. Empowerment in turn, has further encouraged diffusion, the efforts in communication and the impact of the movement, which has succeeded in changing representations and cultural perceptions related to the victims of evictions.

Collective knowledge sharing and decision-making have turned the affected from powerless, ashamed and isolated victims into active agents of change. The horizontal structure of the movement, linked to Lievrouw's (2011) “cultural logic of networking” has helped to assimilate the contributions of its participants and to create a powerful and positive collective identity with feeds back upstream to the movement’s organization and communication efforts. The process of collective empowerment, understood as “visibly making more powerful” and as politicization, has been clearly described by the affected people interviewed for this research. In addition, the fact that all useful material (books, protocols, graphic elements, etc.) is available free of charge in the movement’s website, has permitted the movement's diffusion in more than 200 local PAHs in Spain. Their continuous activity and communicative efforts has also increased the impact of the PAH, which has taken benefit from its decentralized organizational structure. The multiplication of protest actions, positive messages, motivational frames and the frequent “little victories” achieved are the fuel of a movement whose major communication goal has been to change people and transform society, and not the movement's visibility.
Figure 4: The virtuous cycle initiated and strengthened by communication in the PAH (the arrows reflect the relation and the promotion capacity that the different elements have on each other)

Social media, as we have seen, have been fundamental to intervene more decisively in the communication space and to break the mass media's framing and agenda-setting capacities. However, the focus on mass media and popular TV programs has been equally important to reach more possible members and to promote a cultural change related to the problem of evictions.

One of the main findings of this research is that different media practices reinforce each other. Social media have given force to protest actions. Actions have reinforced media coverage. Media coverage has increased the views of the videos and the volume of the population supporting the PAH's claims. The support of large parts of the population has forced politicians and banks to negotiate with the movement, etc. These successes, in turn, have increased mobilization and hope.

Despite the fact that strategic decisions are taken collectively, and although the decentralised structure of the movement leaves a lot of room for communication practices to emerge spontaneously, we must recognize that several activists have
been very skilled in designing and adapting the PAH’s communication campaigns and messages to the different circumstances. These “catalysts of change” or “soft leaders”, even if effective in terms of impact, can easily become indispensable, which threatens the sustainability of the movement in the long term. It is true that the PAH has acknowledged the risks of these dependencies and is doing an effort in spreading knowledge through trainings in organisation and communication practices. However, these efforts have to be strengthened to avoid that the communication-related know-how depends on few people. The promotion of communication workshops, for example on managing relations with the press or on video making, is essential for a long-lasting communicative impact.

Regarding representations, the fact that the movement has been successful in integrating the skills of very different people to promote a voice that is usually not present in the media, has dignified the victims of evictions and, more broadly, the people who are suffering the consequences of neoliberal policies and long-term unemployment. Their fight, in fact, is going beyond the eviction-related sphere to represent the capacity of ordinary people to produce social change. The slogan, ‘Yes, it’s possible’ summarizes a new believe in the power of organized citizenship.

The final result of this research is a broad picture, a collage of observations, experiences and reflections on the use of communication by a social movement. As in the case of the PAH numerous communication-related practices have fostered empowerment and the impact of the movement, the movement’s key communication-related practices and their effects (summarized in Table 3) can be valuable for any social movement or organization wanting to improve or reconsider its approach to communication.

This research can be easily complemented with more in-depth studies on each one of the analytical questions. Discourse analysis would be key to understand better how the PAH has deconstructed and changed mental frames. Internal and external surveys on the effects of communication would also help to validate or discuss the findings gathered here.
In addition, the internal and external interviewees have expressed more praises than critiques concerning the PAH’s approach to communication. Even if some major challenges have been identified, the result of the observations provided by five internal members and two external respondents can appear as overly predisposed. Therefore, for a posterior analysis it would be interesting to interview people without identifiable sympathies for the movement, such as the communications directors of affected bank entities or communications scholars working for business schools, for example.

Finally, and acknowledging that no intellectual work is completely neutral, I would advise other researchers to focus on similar stories of radical transformation, to make it feel possible and inspire other movements fighting for human dignity and progressive social change.
### Table – The 10 key aspects of the PAH’s communication approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 10 keys of the PAH’s approach to communication</th>
<th>Effects on empowerment</th>
<th>Effects on Impact</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Horizontal knowledge sharing and collective decision-making in physical and virtual spaces</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Decentralisation of the communicational structure (every local PAH uses its own media)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Collective creation of discourses and counter-frames (focus on structural causes and political responsibilities)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Promotion of trainings on communication and media to spread communicative skills</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive message, focus on “little victories” and on emotional, human stories</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Use of confrontational unconventional civil disobedience actions and of graphic elements for the identification of the movement</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Savvy use of social media (to build networks, communicate actions live, organise and capture the attention of mass media)</td>
<td>In some cases (for people who have learned to use certain tools)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Intense and open collaboration with mass media, but establishment of conditions (human stories in exchange of political message), identification of “gap journalists”</td>
<td>In some cases (as certain representations and appearing in the media can promote social recognition)</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Use of the communicative skills of a charismatic spokesperson</td>
<td>Not particularly, even if messages are decided collectively</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Use of videos for strategic purposes</td>
<td>In some cases (when people feel proud of how they are represented)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Appendices

Questionnaire for the interview with Clara Blanchar
Journalist of El País

1. How do you think that the PAH have managed to put the issue of evictions in the media?

2. Do you think that the communication of PAH has been successful? Why?

3. What do you think are the differences between the PAH’s communication and the approaches of other local social movements? And with regard to the communication practices promoted by NGOs?

4. What has the PAH offered to the media? How do they approach journalists?

5. Do you think that new alternative media have had some role in putting evictions in the public agenda?

6. What is the role of those affected in the communication practices of movement?

7. What was the significance of the principal spokesperson, Ada Colau for the visibility the movement?

8. How would you evaluate the use of social networks by the PAH?

9. Do you think that visual elements have had some importance? If yes, which?

10. What do you think they could have done better communicatively speaking?
Questionnaire for the interview with Montse Santonlino
Communications coordinator at the Catalan Federation of Organizations for Global Justice (lafede.cat)

1. How do you think that the PAH have managed to put the issue of evictions in the public agenda?

2. Do you think that the communication of PAH has been successful? Why?

3. What do you think are the differences between the PAH’s communication and the approaches of other local social movements? And with regard to the communication practices promoted by NGOs?

4. How do you think they have worked with traditional media?

5. Do you think that new alternative media have had some role in putting evictions in the public agenda?

6. What is the role of those affected in the communication practices of movement?

7. What was the significance of the principal spokesperson, Ada Colau for the visibility the movement?

8. How would you evaluate the use of social networks by the PAH?

9. Do you think that visual elements have had some importance? If yes, which?

10. What do you think they could have done better communicatively speaking?

11. Do you think that communication promoted by PAH is an example of communication for social change? Why?
Questionnaire for the interview with Lucía Delgado  
Member of the Communication Commission and one of the founders of the PAH

1. What importance gives the PAH to communication?  
2. How is the communication team organized? Who does what?  
3. How was it in the beginning? How has the Communication Commission evolved?  
4. What professional and activist backgrounds do you have in the team?  
5. What are the lines of work of your own communication strategy?  
6. Which have been the biggest learnings regarding communication in your experience inside the PAH? What would you change?  
7. How do you coordinate the communication done by almost 200 local PAH? What can they do independently and what do you do together?  
8. Which is the role of those affected by evictions regarding communication?

MASS MEDIA  
8. How fundamental for the PAH is the appearance in mass media?  
9. Which has been most effective channel for the PAH? TV, radio, press, alternative media...  
10. What have you offered to the media to promote the organization and its ideas?  
11. Do you have allies in the media? Particular journalists or outlets....  
12. Even if you don't want to personalize the movement, how relevant has been Ada Colau as a spokesperson for the success of the PAH? Have you trained other people to do this role? If so, how?

HUMAN STORIES  
13. What is the role of the human stories for the communication of the PAH?  
14. How do you choose the people to appear in the media? How do you train them?

SOCIAL NETWORKS  
15. How important have social networks been for the PAH?  
16. Would the success of the PAH be possible without the existence of social networks?  
17. What channels are most useful and for what? Facebook, Twitter, Youtube....  
18. How do you organize to coordinate what is published by the different PAHs?

VISUAL ELEMENTS  
19. What is the importance of logos, slogans or green shirts for your communication strategy?  
20. Who decides logos, slogans and hashtags?  
21. Who makes the pictures? Who shares them?  
22. Why do you put so much effort in doing videos?

EFFECTS  
23. Has the communication strategy of the PAH achieved to contribute in the promotion of social change? How?
Questionnaires for the interviews with Antoni Gálvez and Marta Salgot
Members of the PAH who have joined the movement because of mortgage-related problems

For how long are you a member of the PAH?

Has it changed you somehow?

Have you learned something/any skills? What? Something related to communication? Have you been able to teach something too?

Do you consider that internal communication (among the own members) is important for the PAH? In what sense?

What role have had mass media regarding the PAH?

What do you think works better when trying to capture the media’s attention?

What do you think about how the media speak about the PAH and its members?

How do you perceive that the general population sees the PAH? And the affected?

How have you obtained these results?

Do you use social media? For something related to the PAH? And how do your friends/followers see the movement?

Has something changed in your mentality since you have joined the PAH? What?

Do you feel empowered thanks to the use of communication?
Questionnaire for the interview with Marc Serra  
Member of the PAH, working for the Observatori DESC dedicated to the PAH

1. Which is the approach of the PAH towards the media? Has it changed in these 6 years?

2. Why is it important to have a relation and appear in the media for the PAH?

3. How do you capture the media’s attention?

4. The figure of Ada Colau as a spokesperson influenced the interest of the media in the PAH?

5. Who forms the communications commission?

6. Who decides the actions to organise and when the media will be called?

7. Who writes the press releases?

8. How do you organise a campaign?

9. How do you achieve that the message is coherent between the 200 PAHs? Any control, any guidance?

10. How do you evaluate the treatment of the PAH by mass media?

11. Do you prefer working with specific journalists or with all in general?

12. Do you put any conditions?

13. Do you prepare “affected people” to speak with journalists?

14. Do you think affected people are happy with the representation that the media do form them?

15. Who uses social media inside the PAH? For what?

16. Which has been the impact of social media for the PAH? And for the affected?

17. Do you think that affected people learn about communication and the media work once they are in the PAH?

18. Do you think that communication can be empowering? Could you give any example?
Questionnaire for the interview to Silvia González Láa
Member of the PAH and of Comando Video

1) Why and when did you join the PAH?

2) Why do you decided to make videos on the movement?

3) Which do you think has been the impact of these videos? Inside and outside the movement.

4) Who decides the content? Do affected people participate somehow? With what effects?

5) The affected are the main characters? Why?

6) How do you work on the representations of the affected? What do you want to transmit?

7) Do you think that the work related to video-making has been empowering?

8) Have you been looking for becoming viral?

9) How have social media contributed to the visibility of the video?

10) What do you think about the overall communication approach of the PAH?

11) Has it had any impact in the success of the movement?

12) And for the empowerment of its members?