

Article

Evictions, Foreclosures, and Global Housing Speculation in Palma, Spain

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Abstract: Over the last two decades, the property bubble and the subsequent economic crisis and post-crisis policies have heightened urban inequalities, mainly in cities in southern Europe. The gaps between social classes have widened with the configuration of new urban spaces characterized by segregation and exclusion. Palma is the capital of one of the top tourist destinations in the Mediterranean (the Balearic Islands) and it is usually regarded as a successful tourism model and a land of opportunity for property investors. Nevertheless, serious problems of inequality exist in the city. The centre of this dual city is split between a process of spreading gentrification and the urban blight of its poor neighbourhoods. Son Gotleu is a particular case in point. The neighbourhood is home to a large number of social housing blocks (1960s) with residents from mostly migrant backgrounds. Within a global context of new redefined rent-seeking mechanisms, this article analysed impoverishment in Son Gotleu, based on three variables associated with housing: evictions, foreclosures and the property market. Our study shows that evictions were a determining feature of impoverishment, linked to the emergence of new speculative investment interests. Indeed, investment funds are very probably the most influential urban agents today.

Keywords: inequality; impoverishment; evictions; property market; squats; investment funds; Son Gotleu; Palma



Citation: González-Pérez, J.M. Evictions, Foreclosures, and Global Housing Speculation in Palma, Spain. *Land* **2022**, *11*, 293. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land11020293>

Received: 27 December 2021

Accepted: 11 February 2022

Published: 15 February 2022

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1. Introduction

Anyone who understands Spain's urban reality is aware that many scenarios might be defined as social emergencies, even in the context of a moderately optimistic economic outlook (e.g., the late 2010s) and emerging areas specialising in tourism and leisure (Majorca). This situation is not uncommon in other countries, and it grew in momentum during the world crisis and when the Spanish property bubble burst in 2007.

The makeup of the city that emerged from the 2007–2008 crisis and from post-crisis austerity policies is hinged upon inequality. The social gaps are widening and there has been a general increase in excluded sectors of the population living in precarious conditions. Studies of socio-urban inequalities are a traditional field of research in geography, particularly since the 1980s, with the onset of late capitalist globalization and the coining of concepts like the dual city [1]. In critical urban geography, various approaches to the subject have been developed, exploring it, for instance, from the perspective of gentrification [2], “urban entrepreneurialism” [3,4], urban and housing enclosures [5], the financialization of the real estate market [6–14] or “gated communities” [15]. When it is regarded in terms of the financialization of the real estate market, socio-urban inequality is linked to the conversion of housing into a financial asset [16–18] through the securitization of property mortgages (residential mortgage-backed securities). In a deregulated system, this means successive periods of accumulation by possession (property bubbles) and accumulation by dispossession (crises), leading to big inequalities in cities. When urban inequalities are analysed from the standpoint of the new enclosures that have emerged since the 1970s, they are attributable to the progressive destruction of the guarantees associated with social reproduction; that is, housing, education, and healthcare. From this perspective, widening

inequalities, growing dispossession, and rising evictions can be explained by a political model in which social guarantees are increasingly disregarded. Within the context of the above theoretical frameworks, this paper sets out to interpret the increase in socio-urban inequalities.

Three main dates are linked to growing inequality in cities over the last fifty years, all closely tied in with capitalist crises and changes in the economic cycle: 1973, 2007 and 2020. The cities that emerged from the 1973 crisis underwent extensive urban planning, with widespread social inequality. For Hammett [19], most urban inequality between rich and poor arose in the 1980s. Today, the urban and welfare state crises of the 1980s are being replicated even more intensely, if possible, because the welfare state has been weakened in many countries and there are worrying signs of a crisis in democracy. The 2007–2008 world financial crisis affected European countries and cities in many different ways [20], and the subsequent recession and austerity had a negative impact on most European cities [21]. Seen in this light, the economic crisis and ensuing neoliberal austerity policies have not only widened the gap between the social classes, but they have also led to the configuration of new urban spaces characterized by segregation and exclusion. The fragile, precarious recovery period was particularly imbalanced and socially polarized [22]. 2020 is the year of the third big crisis. Although, in this case, it is a health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it highlights the weak foundations and big social and urban inequalities on which the supposed economic recovery was based.

This distorted urban space has also been turned into a commodity subject to market criteria in terms of production and management [23]. Indeed, the logic of how financial institutions operate has been transposed to the city, making these bodies the main catalysts in the dispossession of those who are excluded from the benefits of the “commodity city” [23]. This article analyses these dynamics in Palma, one of the Mediterranean’s top tourist destinations and a city also afflicted by major social inequalities.

The city of Palma, with a population of 416,065 inhabitants in 2019, is the capital of the Balearic Islands (1,149,460 inhabitants). As has been analysed in the case of other European cities, including those with the highest economic growth rates, the combination of inequality, austerity and higher living costs has put larger numbers of people at risk of exclusion [24]. In 2019, the Balearic Islands hit a new record in tourist numbers (16,444,773), with the expansion of its available tourist accommodation (443,019 beds) and stock of holiday homes (some 20,000 regulated holiday lets), and the reactivation of its property market, mainly in the luxury home segment aimed at overseas buyers (30.54% of all homes in 2018, the highest ratio in Spain). Nevertheless, behind this image of a Mediterranean tourist “paradise” lies a region with severe problems of inequality and segregation [25–28].

In this context, this article aims to look at the process behind impoverishment in Palma through a case study of the neighbourhood with the worst urban vulnerability index [28], Son Gotleu, based on two housing-related variables: evictions (foreclosures and rent evictions) and problems with housing and living conditions. This neighbourhood emerged during the tourism developmentalism period in the 1960s and 1970s to accommodate immigrants from rural areas of mainland Spain¹ [29]. Since the mid-1990s, its population has largely been made up of foreign immigrants, mainly from Africa.

The hypothesis behind our study is that evictions and, in particular, mortgage foreclosures impact specifically on poor neighbourhoods and in times of crisis. Evictions and urban impoverishment have a knock-on effect on one another in two ways: on the one hand, through the higher vulnerability of the residents of these areas of the city (at an employment and social level etc.); and on the other, by encouraging speculative investors, including investment funds. As we will see, these funds first started to appear in Spain in the early years of the 2007 crisis, and they have now become important urban agents.

Thanks to the chosen methodology and type of neighbourhood under analysis, I believe that my work can contribute to an assessment and comparison of knowledge and to a better insight into impoverishment processes in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of dual tourist cities, especially in the Mediterranean. Although there is broad-ranging

literature on this type of city, it currently pays more attention to analyses of tourism and/or its consequences, such as gentrification.

2. Theoretical Framework: Inequality, Impoverishment and Evictions

One of the main problems of current urbanization processes is wider social inequality in cities, linked, amongst other factors, to situations of impoverishment and greater vulnerability, segregation and social polarization [30–34]. Ultimately, these factors are primarily responsible for new spatial configurations. On the one hand, the steady conversion of urbanized space into market commodities can be witnessed. This, among other factors, plays a decisive role in the population's unequal access to markets. On the other, financial bodies act as the suppliers of the capital that fuels urban growth and they have managed to extend the logic by which they function to the construction of cities. Thus, they have become the main agents of processes of dispossession by those plunged into debt and excluded from the benefits of the commodity city [23].

The last financial crisis was, above all, an urban crisis [20,35,36], where new urban agents—mainly from the world of finance—took on a more pivotal role. The devaluation of assets led to the reconfiguration of a property market that had spearheaded the economic boom in Spain in terms of new speculative investment opportunities.

Since the 1960s, the Spanish system of accumulation has been based on specialization in the construction, tourism, and real estate-financial sectors [37,38], with the dismantling of huge swathes of the industrial base. From 1995 to 2007, diversity in the financialization of home ownership in Spanish cities was mainly attributable to the creation of rent gaps, in addition to a property bubble propelled by a tsunami in urbanization [39], debt as a form of access to home ownership and the expansion of residential mortgage-backed securities. However, since this bubble burst in 2007, large property firms have given way to new players with speculative foreign capital: private foreign investment, banks with large, devalued portfolios and their agents, REITs (real estate investment trusts), and international investment funds [40]. In this scenario, home dispossession comes in different guises: mortgage foreclosures and tenant evictions.

Investment funds are the main purchasers of land and property in this new real estate cycle and urban system of globalization. For instance, according to data by BNP PARIBAS [41], 2018 was the year with the highest investment activity of the decade in Spain and investment funds played a major role, accounting for 61% of the total volume of transactions. These funds achieved a major foothold during the crisis, especially in countries like Spain, which suffered the most from the burst property bubble. These funds have a strong upper edge in the poorest neighbourhoods, particularly through their purchase of large housing portfolios owned by banks, which, in most instances, have come from foreclosures. The practices of these funds underlie certain urban dynamics, in particular the loss of homes in generally poor neighbourhoods.

Investment funds (known as hedge funds or private equity firms) use specialist investment strategies in the speculative debt business, whether this debt is corporate or sovereign. The said term is used to refer to both specialist distressed debt funds and to those that invest in sovereign debt in benchmark currencies on the secondary market, also known as vulture funds [42]. These funds, which are generally Anglo-American, make temporary investments and they seek high yields or very aggressive discounts. In other words, they take advantage of mark-downs to buy cheaply in times of crisis [42]. They appeared in Spain in 2012 and 2013, at the height of the crisis and after the property bubble had burst. Blackstone is the largest private property company in Spain at present, and it seeks to become the top firm in the hotel sector too² [43].

The eviction panorama should be conceptualized within the framework of processes of accumulation through dispossession [44], which, in turn, form part of rent-seeking production and harvesting strategies³ [45]. Although evictions are not a new urban problem, their wider use as a strategy reflects a change in accumulation models since the property markets crashed [46]. Drawing on the concept of “new urban enclosures”⁴, we argue

that evictions and foreclosures are a physical sign of the enclosure brought about by the financialization of built environments [6–8,11–14,17,47]. Links between financialization [48] and the urban environment can be found in the phenomenon of “land as a financial asset” [16–18] and in mortgage securitization⁵ [49]. Mortgage securitization has affected real estate mortgages (residential mortgage-backed securities) and, as a result, homes have become a key aspect of financialization [8]. Together with other factors like financial, fiscal, and land regulations, this phenomenon fosters the revaluation of property or, to put it bluntly, housing bubbles. In short, urban and property financialization is one of the underlying mechanisms behind the logic of accumulation in rent seeking through housing dispossession (due to gentrification and impoverishment).

As a result, in this post-crisis financial and real estate scenario, eviction data—alongside gauges of vulnerability and/or segregation—have become further indicators for researching urban inequality in Spain.

On the one hand, foreclosures facilitated the accumulation strategy during the bubble. Without the Spanish owner-occupier social model [38], the banking sector would not have operated under the same logic; there would not have been mass indebtedness in access to housing, and, without the latter, there would not have been the high numbers of foreclosures in Spain, as demonstrated from 2007 onwards. On the other, evictions can also impact on the use and intensity of urban spaces. Firstly, tenant evictions can lead to better, more intensive use of urban spaces. This is true, for example, with the regeneration of neighbourhoods and their transformation through gentrification. Secondly, tenant evictions can also bring about capital devaluation through the marginalization of certain urban areas. Indeed, evictions play a fundamental role in processes of neighbourhood gentrification, stigmatization and impoverishment [50]. In short, foreclosures and tenant evictions are an essential ingredient in the logic of accumulation, implemented through the financialization of the built environment.

Lost homes were one of the main effects of the 2007 property crash and the Great Recession. In Spain, the 2007–2008 crisis led to a new scenario, with the redefinition of rent-seeking accumulation mechanisms. One of its impacts was a growing percentage of excluded members of the population living in precarious situations, mainly in intentionally impoverished neighbourhoods. It is important to note that, with Spanish foreclosures, on the one hand, the evicted person is still liable to mortgage payments, which accentuates the process of dispossession even after their eviction; on the other, people who lose their homes must seek their own solution to the problem, as there is only minimal social assistance, focused on certain groups and situations (victims of domestic abuse, single-parent families etc.). That is, there is no state or regional policy directly designed to help people who have been evicted from their homes. The main change might be brought about by the future Right to a Home Act (whose approval is expected in 2022). This aims to transform the current temporary anti-eviction mechanism—which restricts eviction proceedings filed as a result of non-payment of rent—into a structural one, as well as extending protective safeguards for mortgage holders in mortgage proceedings. This protective instrument would enter play when the affected person was in a situation of financial vulnerability. If the social services were able to corroborate this fact, the self-governing region would be forced to seek decent accommodation for them (foreseeably, a home). Thirdly, during the last decade, given the growing rise in evictions, many town councils created anti-eviction offices. These officially supplemented the services of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform for Affected Mortgage Holders), a free collaborative association created in 2009 in Barcelona, present in over 226 different towns and cities in Spain in 2021. Palma’s Anti-Eviction Office, created in 2015 and attached to the City Council, is mainly aimed at preventing the eviction of citizens in Palma. It has other additional functions that are primarily informative or guidance related: prevention, intervention and mediation in social emergencies involving situations of housing vulnerability due to insolvency (an eviction or possible eviction); legal and social consultancy advice and guidance for all families encountering problems in the payment of rent or mortgages, whether there is an eviction

order or not; the monitoring of family situations at a legal and social level; and information on support and alternative types of housing etc.

Literature on the geography of evictions in Spain has proliferated over the last decade. Scientific studies of foreclosures and rent evictions in Spain have been made on two main scales—at a regional and an intra-urban level—in the first case, as an expression of the difference in incomes and inflation in the real estate sector during the economic boom that crash landed in 2007 and, in the second, as an expression of urban inequalities or trends seen in relation to impoverishment and gentrification, dependent on the neighbourhood in question [50].

We focus on the Palma neighbourhood with the highest negative social and urban indicators and number of evictions. Our analysis of foreclosures and evictions covers a period of 12 years from 2003 to 2014. These dates coincide with the economic boom associated with the property bubble (2003–2007) and the major economic crash that led to radical austerity policies and social welfare cuts (2008–2014)—both key factors in the sharp rise in inequality in Spain. The events of those years are fundamental in understanding the neighbourhood's current scenario in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Son Gotleu was the first city neighbourhood in Spain to be put into lockdown due to its high infection rate: a figure that can be explained by the high density of people, bad housing conditions, low income levels, and the social characteristics of its residents [28].

3. Materials and Methods

Two main approaches are taken in our analysis of urban poverty in connection with the housing market: on the one hand, a spatiotemporal analysis is made of evictions, differentiating between foreclosures and evictions due to non-payment of rent and, on the other, an analysis is conducted of the property market in this neighbourhood, classified in different studies [28,51,52] as having the highest vulnerability ratio in Palma. The analyses of these dynamics and behaviours were conducted at an intra-urban and housing block level for Son Gotleu, and so the internal dynamics had to be disentangled while also highlighting the processes that affect the 33 social housing blocks built in the 1960s. These blocks are located in the central, most characteristic area of Son Gotleu.

To conduct these analyses, we combined the use of quantitative techniques for analysing official statistics (property ages, evictions, per capita income, housing rentals) and other indirect sources (housing sale prices) with qualitative techniques based on intensive fieldwork. The latter comprised three main types of activities. First, technical visits were made to the neighbourhood, consisting of reconnaissance of its public and private spaces (communal areas, including the rooftops of the most neglected buildings). Second, meetings and interviews were held with the members of the Son Gotleu Platform. This is a civic organization made up of professionals working in the area (health centres, schools, social services, migrant services, etc.) and it is a rich source of knowledge about the neighbourhood. I attended two of their meetings and interviewed several members. In both instances, the information that I collected was useful as a first-hand source of data in the interpretation of the results. The members offered an insight into and the main clues to the neighbourhood's decline and its social and urban problems, including the complex situation of homes illegally occupied by families. There is no statistical data for these types of residents (which are essential in understanding the area's underlying trends), hence calling for fieldwork and a qualitative analysis to compensate for the lack of official data. Third, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with local residents and business owners as part of the fieldwork. These interviews were aimed at finding out the neighbourhood's problems, in the words of its own residents. On the one hand, the interviews complemented what the experts and technical professionals told us (Son Gotleu Platform). On the other, they were a key factor in analysing the statistical variables that we used and in drawing conclusions from them. The interviews revolved around four main themes: evictions; access to housing and housing conditions; the presence of speculative funds; and social conflicts.

The available official sources of data provide demographic information (mainly for analysing the immigrant nationalities), income levels, the price of housing rentals, and data for mapping the age of residential housing and the different blocks. The demographic and income-related data was sourced from the Spanish Statistics Office (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE), in the first case from its Continuous Register Statistics and, in the second, from a new experimental statistical tool. The data for housing rental prices was taken from a newly published statistical tool (the State System of Rental Housing Indexes), published by the Spanish Ministry for Transport, Mobility and Urban Affairs. The information on the age of housing was taken from the Land Registry (Cadastral Directorate General). The evictions map was also based on official statistics, but not from publicly released figures. In Spain, the only source of eviction statistics is the General Council of the Judiciary (CGPJ). Nonetheless, this is just broken-down data for the 431 Spanish judicial districts, and data for evictions due to non-payment of rent is only available from 2013 onwards. This means that the information is insufficient to conduct an analysis at a municipal, neighbourhood or street level. To break down the information at a municipal and intra-urban level and to differentiate between foreclosures and rent evictions, alternative sources had to be used. Hence, we compiled data from the ledgers of the Notices and Seizures Department (SCNE), which centralizes all eviction notices for non-payment of rent and surrenders of ownership due to foreclosures from the 17 courts of first instance in the Judicial District of Palma. The resulting database contains eviction orders from 2003 to 2014, differentiating between mortgage holders and tenants, on the one hand, and the full address (street and number) on the other. This information, processed through a geographical data system, is the basis for the provided global figures and maps.

Lastly, one interesting methodological aspect should be highlighted, which is largely a result of the availability of the used sources. Our database does not include all evictions but only those cases that ended in an eviction order after litigation. We were unable to include eviction orders that did not require the physical presence of a member of the authorities to carry out the eviction (even though they also went through the courts). We were also unable to include so-called “silent evictions”, with no lawsuit and thus no judicial ruling. The presented maps should therefore be interpreted as only reflecting part of the most visible facet of this problem.

In Spain, official data has recently begun to be published on housing rental prices by census sections. This information is taken from fiscal sources, using data on rentals of first homes (the State System of Housing Rental Indexes). However, there are no official statistics on housing sale prices at an intra-urban level. To make up for this lack of data, we used the databases from the two main property websites in Spain (Fotocasa and El Idealista). We understand that this is not an official source, but as an approximation for our comparative analysis, it provides useful information for garnering an idea of the available properties in Son Gotleu.

4. The Urbanization Process and Structure of Son Gotleu

Part of the current neighbourhood of Son Gotleu was developed after the General Alignment and Renovation Plan (1943) initiated by Gabriel Alomar came into force. This explains why part of it follows a geometric urban design. Nonetheless, this is not its predominant urban design as the area was radically transformed with the planning process that began in 1960. Today there are just a few examples of the area’s original properties (mainly single-family homes with a small rear courtyard), because the construction of social housing by the Ministry for Housing has transformed the geometric urban layout of this new area of the city. These later housing developments date back to the developmentalism period (1960s) and, today, they are the most easily identifiable with the neighbourhood. The first of these buildings, known as SesCoromines, was built in 1960, whilst the rest were constructed between 1964 and 1970 after the first Master Development Plan for Palma was passed (1963).

The neighbourhood is the outcome of the housing policies and swift urban development process of the developmentalism period, with a function similar to that of another twelve public housing developments built in Palma during the 1960s. Like another ten projects of this kind in the city, Son Gotleu was not based on a partial plan; a plan for the development of urban land previously defined in a master plan.

4.1. Urban Structure: Ageing, Low-Quality Housing Stock

Bearing in mind Son Gotleu's prevailing urban landscape, in the eyes of any Palma resident, the neighbourhood tends to be equated with big social housing estates from the developmentalism period (1960s). The rest of it also plays an indirect role in the dynamics of this large central space, but merely as peripheral areas. The north-eastern fringes contain newer developments, with a predominance of multi-occupancy housing built from the 1980s onwards. The west and south are home to more irregular plots dating back to the construction of Palma's new suburbs, with a clear mix of recent buildings and earlier single-family homes from before 1960. The area bordering the city ring road contains public offices or buildings (health clinics, social services, schools), small industrial estates and large undeveloped urban plots (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Age of housing stock in Son Gotleu. Source: Prepared by the author based on Land Registry website data (Cadastral Directorate General).

The big social housing developments from the developmentalism era date back to the 1960s and they were built by the Ministry for Housing under the Franco dictatorship. The oldest was built in 1960. The architectural style is reminiscent of developments sponsored by the Obra Sindical del Hogar (Trade Union Housing Organization), with ten open six-storey blocks, interspersed with green spaces. None of the ground floors contain commercial premises or tertiary businesses. The architectural style reflects the principles of 1920s and 1930s Modernist architecture, including concepts like housing cells. In just a small surface area, the right orientation and all the necessary ventilation and services have been achieved. Nevertheless, due to the low building standards, limited surface area (55 m² according to the Land Registry) and design as residential containers for low-income migrant populations, it has turned into a deprived urban area. The other big area of social housing is separated by Indalecio Prieto Street and it was built in two stages: 1964–1966 and 1967–1970. This development came under the auspices of the Low Income Housing Act of 15 July 1954 and Subsidized Housing Act of 13 November 1957, meaning that it was mainly built for rental purposes. It is made up of 19 multi-occupancy housing blocks along a street, Tomás

Rul·lan, which cuts across the middle of the neighbourhood from north to south. Although the buildings are larger than the previous development, most of the properties are in rows of six-floor blocks. Neglected communal areas are typical of both the 1960s housing and the blocks built from 1964 to 1970. What is more, only three blocks have a lift and, as of today, none are organized into residents' associations.

Although there have been attempts to draft urban regeneration plans, the response by the planning department has been clearly insufficient. How to tackle Son Gotleu's integration into the rest of the city, overcome its social stigmas and poor reputation, and boost the cohesion of its social fabric are questions still to be answered.

4.2. Social Structure: Segregation of Foreign Populations

Son Gotleu was classified as a vulnerable district of Palma in the latest (2001 and 2011) Urban Catalogue of Vulnerable Neighbourhoods in Spain (Observatory on Vulnerability, Ministry of Public Works). Piñeira, González-Pérez and Lois [51] classified Son Gotleu as the area of Palma with the highest rates of socioeconomic and residential vulnerability. A study by Palma City Council [52] rated the areas of La Soledat, Son Gotleu, Son Ximelis and Verge de Lluc as having the highest levels of vulnerability and the most cases of social exclusion. González-Pérez and Piñeira-Mantiñán [28] have mapped vulnerability in Palma, with Son Gotleu's five census sections achieving the worst indicators.

Son Gotleu is an outlying, albeit well-consolidated urban area on the outermost edge of the new town, bordering Palma's ring road. Its location on the outskirts is mainly due to cheap land and also to a desire to keep the working population in ghettos away from the rest of the city [27]. Nevertheless, its current lack of integration is not linked to its location on the outskirts of the city as such, but rather to the high presence of excluded groups and their subsequent social integration problems. Son Gotleu's makeup is a consequence of its social structure, more so than other neighbourhoods of the city. It is a space of social reproduction, originally developed to house rural migrants from mainland Spain, particularly Andalusia, who came in search of work to Majorca during the booming tourism and construction periods in the 1960s and 1970s. It continues to house migrant populations, although the first generation of migrants from the Spanish mainland (1960s) has been replaced by a second generation of foreign-born immigrants from the Global South (2000s), mainly from Africa. In both instances, the area was designed to act as mono-functional one, taking in the most disadvantaged groups who arrived in the city. Social conflicts—including high rates of juvenile delinquency—have been a constant factor since the 1980s, including sporadic episodes of latent social problems between generations of immigrants. There was major controversy in 1990 when local residents objected to a group of gypsies (originally from the Spanish mainland) moving into the area from the shanty town of Son Banya, believing that their presence would intensify the area's drug problems. Major altercations took place in 2009 between gypsy and African residents, with the intervention of the anti-riot squad. The most serious incident occurred in August 2011 with confrontations between the gypsy and Nigerian communities. It was sparked off by the death of a Nigerian citizen, who fell from the fourth floor of a building in Tomás Rul·lan Street. According to neighbours, the death occurred after a clash between Africans and gypsies over control of the illegal drug trade. Over and above disputes between specific groups for control of this trade, these confrontations are a further sign of "the war between the poor" [53].

At present, Son Gotleu has a population of 9553 people (2019), 32.17% of whom are foreign nationals. There is a clear predominance of foreign residents from the Global South. Most of them are Africans, accounting for 1984 people (20.77% of the neighbourhood's total population and 64.54% of all its foreigners), mainly made up of Moroccans (795), Nigerians (617) and Senegalese residents (202). The next largest group comprises immigrants from Asia (407 people, 4.26% of the total). This is one of the groups currently undergoing the highest growth, particularly in the case of Pakistanis (274). The third most important group is made up of Latin Americans (383 people, 4.01%), although it has seen a big drop in recent years (2018: 849 people). This can be explained by the fact that the 2007–2008 crisis led

many Latin Americans to either return to their home countries or to become naturalized Spanish citizens ⁶. This may also explain the relative decline in numbers of Africans in 2019 (2183 born in Africa and 1984 holding citizenship of an African nation) as there is no evidence of a large exodus of African nationals during the years of the Great Recession in Spain. Although there is still no data on the subject, intercultural mediators in the neighbourhood told us that some Africans emigrated to other European cities during the COVID-19 crisis.

Thus, the area has gone from being a “social container” for migrants from the Spanish mainland in 1960 to a social container for African migrants from the turn of the millennium. In terms of class (income and wealth), its social homogeneity makes it particularly sensitive to economic and financial crises. In short, the labour migration flows of two different generations are a key factor in understanding the neighbourhood’s social structure and urban geography. Figure 2 shows the percentage of foreigners living in Son Gotleu by nationality during the three years 2008, 2013 and 2019. This helps to offer an insight into the neighbourhood’s social structure and, although there has been a drop in the African share of the total number of foreigners living there, the ratio of Africans (6.5 out of every 10 foreigners) is still worthy of note.

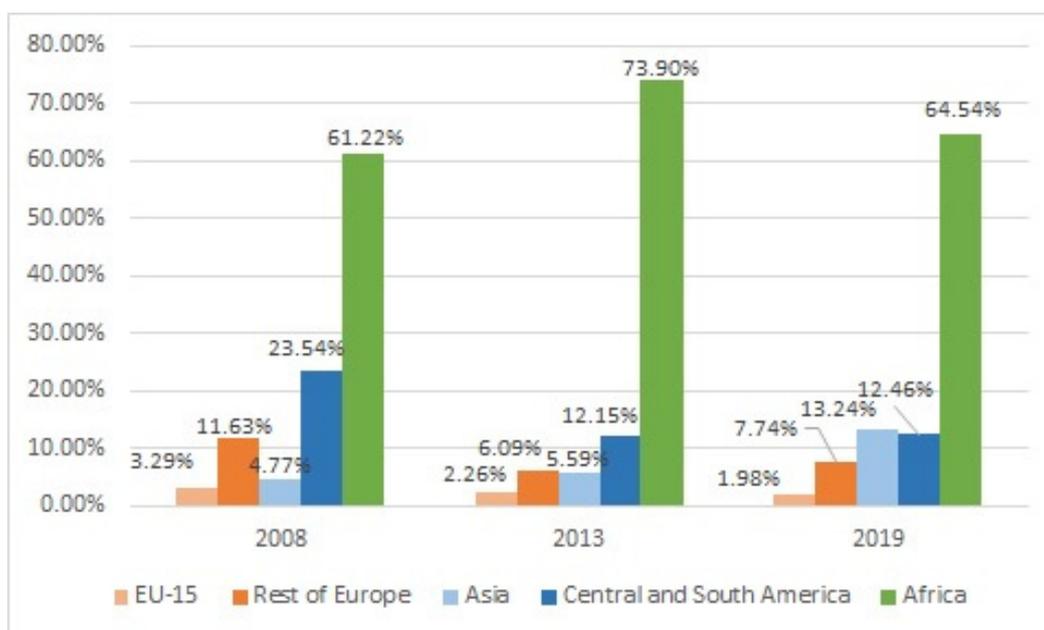


Figure 2. Son Gotleu’s foreign-born population by region of origin. Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE) and the municipal census of inhabitants.

This social background and situation lead to other types of economic and social factors inherent to poor neighbourhoods. The area has the highest unemployment rate in Palma, especially in long-term unemployed citizens [52]. It is important to note that many African residents came to Majorca at the height of the property boom, attracted by employment in the building trade, and they were therefore particularly affected when the property bubble burst in 2007. Son Gotleu has the highest illiteracy rate in Palma (48.20%); it is the area with the highest action by the social services; it has the highest number of people in financial difficulty and the highest amount of aid granted by social services; and it has received the most benefit payments for food [52]. In turn, it has the highest share of social income beneficiaries (723 in 2018, 17.06% of the total for the entire municipality). This figure for beneficiaries really encompasses a higher number of individuals, since most beneficiaries care for dependent family members who rely on this income. If we take an average of four people per beneficiary, this income covers nearly 2200 individuals. This

is an extraordinarily high figure for a neighbourhood housing a little over 9000 people. From an analysis of income levels, Son Gotleu has the lowest average gross income level in Palma (19,437 euros). This figure is far below the municipal average (26,841 euros) and less than half the highest income level found in the old quarter of Sant Jaume (46,990 euros).

If an analysis is made of Son Gotleu's internal contrasts, this grim social situation can be seen to be even more serious. The census sections occupied by blocks built as council housing in the 1960s and 70s are the ones with the worst economic and social indicators. The Ses Coromines area coincides with a large part of census section 0704004024. Buildings erected as council housing between 1964 and 1970 occupy most of the census sections 0704004022 and 0704004023. These sections hold some of the most alarming positions in the ranks of Palma's 258 census sections. sections 0704004022 and 0704004024 have the lowest per capita incomes in the municipality, and sections 0704004023 and 0704004019 hold the fourth and fifth lowest positions. As for average household income figures, sections 4024, 4022, 4019 and 4023 hold the third to sixth worst positions for the municipality respectively. These sections, with their low economic levels, are characterized by households with the highest numbers of foreigners, largely from Africa. sections 4022 and 4024—the poorest ones with the largest African populations— are particularly worrying (Figure 3).

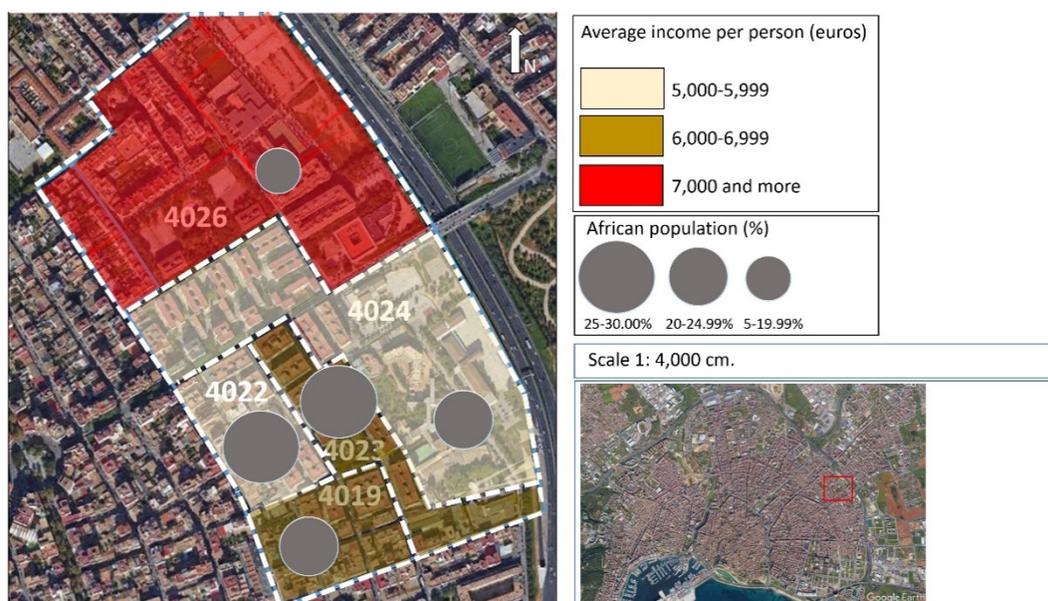


Figure 3. Average per capita income (2017) and percentage of African residents (2019) in Son Gotleu's census sections. Source: Prepared by the author based on the Municipal Census and Household Income Distribution Atlas (INE).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Impoverishment: Evictions and Losing One's Home

Evictions should be construed as a class analysis, reflecting the urban tensions of capitalism today. The bid to understand the logic behind the spatial and temporal distribution of evictions and foreclosures in Palma and Son Gotleu must be framed within the context of a scenario of increasing urban inequality, with these phenomena acting as key processes in the neighbourhood's impoverishment. We differentiated between foreclosures and evictions caused by non-payment of rent, as their spread and intensity do not always follow the same pattern. The 12-year cumulative analysis coincides with the most representative period of the property bubble and the early crisis years (2003–2014). Evictions in Son Gotleu were analysed from a dual perspective: on the one hand, within the context of a poor area of the city with the highest number of evictions in the entire municipality; and, on the other, in terms of their distribution at a housing-block level within a neighbourhood with a high ratio of social housing from the developmentalism period (1960s). In Son Gotleu,

gentrification was not the cause of the evictions. As demonstrated by the supplied data and maps, they were directly related to impoverishment and this, in turn, was the result of the neighbourhood's urban and social makeup (planned from the outset as a "container for the excluded population"), together with the residents' low level of income, and the high presence of foreign immigrants (mainly Africans). The 12 years were divided into two periods: 2003–2007 (the property bubble, economic growth, and higher numbers of foreign immigrants arriving in search of work) and 2008–2014 (the burst property bubble, economic crisis and welfare cutbacks).

Speculative financial phenomena linked to the real estate bubble (1996–2007), higher unemployment and the inroads made by neoliberal policies since 2008 have been some of the main causes put forward to explain the magnitude and negative trend in the number of mortgage foreclosures in Spain [54,55]. The Spanish economic crisis coincided with the bursting of the property bubble, leading to a soaring rise in both types of evictions. Palma is one of the Spanish cities with the highest number of evictions and mortgage foreclosures; hence, the interest in studying Son Gotleu, the neighbourhood where both phenomena have had the highest impact.

In Spain, between 2001 and 2007 (the years of the property bubble), a total of 113,265 mortgage foreclosures were calculated to have occurred (an average of 16,181 per year). During the same period, the number of new homes that were built grew year after year to reach a peak of 664,923 in 2006. This high rate of construction of real estate coincided with an equally high number of new mortgages. In 2006, 1,342,171 mortgages were taken out in Spain, in total accounting for the highest amount of the whole aforesaid cycle: 1,888,339 million euros. In short, during the years of the real estate boom, which were characterized by low default rates, the total number of mortgage foreclosures was modest in number, correlated with the increase in the number of mortgages [56]. The mortgages that were taken out and the apparent economic bonanza concealed a conflict that was, at the time, only visible for the classes in the most precarious situations, while the scenario still apparently seemed to be a favourable one for the middle classes and even for some sectors of the lower classes [44].

In contrast, between 2008 and 2014 (the period of the crisis and austerity policies), the number of mortgage foreclosures rose to 577,802 (an average of 82,543 per year). From 2007 to 2014, they underwent a 410% increase. In 2006, there was a drastic fall in the number of mortgages that were taken out and a progressive rise in the number of mortgage foreclosures. This home dispossession process was merely a reflection of the foundations on which Spanish economic policy is based and a reflection of Spain's uneven development, where the classes in the most precarious situations become increasingly poor and the middle classes become the new impoverished ones.

The increase in the number of mortgage foreclosures was clearly geographically influenced as it followed a series of spatial patterns, both at a regional and urban level. Its spatial and temporal coverage, from 2001, had affected all regions, although a certain spatial logic can be observed that is largely related to those areas that played the most active role in the formation of the real estate bubble. In accordance with [57] (p. 106), "the map of the crisis is almost exactly a negative image of the map of the real estate bubble". According to this spatial logic, the Mediterranean coast and Madrid were the places with the highest number of mortgage evictions.

During the period from 2001 to 2007, 15 judicial districts registered over 1000 mortgage foreclosures. In the following years, 160 judicial districts registered over 1000 foreclosures. Although Spain's leading cities headed the said ranks, with Madrid, Seville, Valencia and Barcelona at the top, Palma ranked high during the two analysed stages: in fifth place during the first stage and seventh during the second. Furthermore, other small and medium-sized cities were among the twenty top-ranking judicial districts: initially just those on the Mediterranean coast and, following that, others in big metropolitan areas. In relative terms, with Palma once again ranking among the top twenty cities, what stands out is the number of small Mediterranean cities specializing in a tourism monoculture. The

high concentration of cities along the Mediterranean coast is rounded off by certain heavily developed inland greater metropolitan areas, inhabited by social groups in particularly precarious situations. This is the case of the southern and eastern areas of Greater Madrid (Fuenlabrada, Getafe and Parla); Bages, Vallès Occidental and Oriental in Greater Barcelona; Aljarafe and Bajo Guadalquivir in Seville; and la Huerta and Ribera Baja in Valencia. (Table 1).

Table 1. The twenty judicial districts with the highest number of mortgage foreclosures (EH), the total number and rate per 1000 inhabitants in Spain (2001–2014).

| 2001–2007 | | | | 2008–2014 | | | |
|---------------|-------|---------------|------|---------------|--------|---------------|-------|
| Jud. District | Total | Jud. District | Rate | Jud. District | Total | Jud. District | Rate |
| Madrid | 4926 | Torreveija | 8.75 | Madrid | 25,684 | Roquetes | 45.44 |
| Seville | 2841 | SBTirajana | 8.14 | Seville | 10,868 | Vera | 40.44 |
| Valencia | 2429 | Elda | 6.42 | Barcelona | 10,690 | Torreveija | 39.42 |
| Barcelona | 2247 | Quart de P. | 5.62 | Valencia | 10,170 | Estepona | 38.86 |
| Palma | 1923 | Tortosa | 5.27 | Murcia | 9020 | SB Tirajana | 35.98 |
| Alicante | 1918 | El Vendrell | 5.18 | Orihuela | 8931 | Orihuela | 35.95 |
| Torreveija | 1486 | Novelda | 4.76 | Palma | 8245 | San Javier | 34.41 |
| Zaragoza | 1467 | Roquetas | 4.76 | Zaragoza | 8090 | El Ejido | 33.45 |
| Murcia | 1417 | Orihuela | 4.53 | Alicante | 7958 | Granadilla | 32.01 |
| Orihuela | 1343 | SV Raspeig | 4.47 | Málaga | 7743 | Illescas | 31.86 |
| Elche | 1223 | Illescas | 4.42 | Almería | 6410 | P. Rosario | 31.33 |
| Málaga | 1190 | Amposta | 4.36 | Granada | 6280 | Amposta | 30.99 |
| Las Palmas | 1141 | Reus | 4.34 | Torreveija | 6054 | El Vendrell | 29.33 |
| Granada | 1071 | Alicante | 4.32 | Castellón | 5570 | Torrijos | 28.63 |
| Lleida | 1017 | El Ejido | 4.32 | Sabadell | 5302 | Gandía | 28.43 |
| Castellón | 929 | Vila-real | 4.29 | Elche | 5273 | S. Feliu G. | 28.20 |
| Valladolid | 926 | Granadilla | 4.25 | Terrassa | 5241 | Berja | 26.60 |
| Reus | 896 | Torrent | 4.24 | Lleida | 5175 | Molina S. | 26.10 |
| Tarragona | 886 | S. Coloma Gr | 4.15 | Tarragona | 5058 | Marbella | 25.88 |
| Almería | 885 | Castro-Urd. | 4.10 | Gandía | 4924 | Tortosa | 25.49 |

Source: Own based on statistics by the General Council of the Judiciary.

This distribution has been accounted for in different ways. On the one hand, Ref. [54] related it to unemployment. On the other, in a more careful analysis, Ref. [55] distinguished two stages. In the initial one (2008–2010), in which Keynesian policies predominate, mortgage foreclosures were mainly concentrated in Mediterranean coastal areas and in Madrid. In the second phase (2011–2013), with an intensification of neoliberal policies, the evictions and mortgage foreclosures extended to medium-sized cities of urban networks. While, in the 1980s, the end of the Fordist production model led to a decline in industrial and mining areas, mainly located on the Atlantic coast (from the Basque Country to the Bay of Cadiz) rather than in Mediterranean areas, the dynamics of tourism and real estate specialization reversed this situation to a certain extent [58].

As for evictions due to non-payment of rent, between 2013 and 2015, a cumulative total of 109,857 evictions of this kind were calculated in Spain. Once again, the Mediterranean coast—where Palma sadly ranked high—and Madrid accounted for the highest number of cases and so the map of mortgage foreclosures was largely repeated. The most characteristic feature was the high representation of judicial districts on the peripheries of large metropolitan areas, in particular Barcelona. This was true in both absolute figures and in relative terms. Together with these cities on the peripheries, high eviction rates were also detected in Mediterranean and Canary Island tourist areas, for instance in San Bartolomé de Tirajana, Estepona, Arenys de Mar, Ibiza, Almuñécar and Arrecife, among others. These areas were usually socially segregated, and deluxe hotels and residential estates could be found in addition to low-quality housing and building estates with poor services, built to accommodate the working classes employed in the tourist sector. These latter areas were

often neglected and they were inhabited by people in precarious situations, many of whom were immigrants (Table 2).

Table 2. The twenty judicial districts with the highest number of rental evictions; the total number and rate per 1000 inhabitants in Spain (2013–2015).

| Jud. District | Total | Jud. District | Rate |
|-------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|
| Madrid | 9338 | San Bartolomé de Tirajana | 11.45 |
| Barcelona | 8058 | Puigcerdà | 8.5 |
| Valencia | 3125 | Santa Coloma de Gramanet | 6.41 |
| Palma | 2667 | Hospitalet de Llobregat | 6.24 |
| Zaragoza | 2222 | Terrassa | 5.57 |
| Hospitalet de Llobregat | 1586 | Estepona | 5.51 |
| Málaga | 1491 | El Vendrell | 5.30 |
| Terrassa | 1338 | Figueres | 5.20 |
| Badalona | 1287 | Tarragona | 5.05 |
| Seville | 1266 | Arenys de Mar | 5.04 |
| Alicante | 1254 | Blanes | 5.03 |
| Las Palmas de G.C. | 1224 | Barcelona | 5.00 |
| Granollers | 1208 | Ibiza | 4.94 |
| Tarragona | 1076 | Manresa | 4.93 |
| Murcia | 1046 | Almuñecar | 4.89 |
| Valladolid | 997 | Arrecife | 4.85 |
| Lleida | 957 | Badalona | 4.84 |
| Mataró | 955 | Vilanovai la Geltrú | 4.63 |
| Granada | 942 | Palma | 4.60 |
| Manresa | 915 | Melilla | 4.58 |

Source: Own based on statistics by the General Council of the Judiciary.

The map of evictions in Palma during the crisis and post-crisis period (2003–2014) reproduces patterns seen in the social map of Palma. This urban analysis is reflected by two maps produced with Arcgis (Kernel), with the interpolation of all evictions in 2003–2014. The neighbourhoods with the lowest incomes had the highest foreclosure rates [50], with impoverishment, destitution, and degradation being determining factors in the loss of home ownership. The highest concentration was seen in the neighbourhoods to the west of the new town. Some are neighbourhoods that were created when the city grew in the early 20th century (Pere Garau or Son Canals), but many others are located round the first peripheral loop (1960s–1970s), with a large public housing stock and, in many cases, high rates of immigration from Spain and abroad (Son Gotleu, NouLlevant etc.) (Figure 4).

In absolute terms, Son Gotleu had the highest number of foreclosures for the entire period under analysis: a total of 328; that is, 11.36% of the total for the entire municipality. In turn, it had the second highest rate of evictions for non-payment of rent (with a total of 208), representing 2.16% of all those in the city. In this instance, the distribution of evictions across the city was more balanced, spreading across a large part of the municipal area. Not only is this attributable to the logic of impoverishment but also to gentrification, including part of the old town, which is currently undergoing a process of tourism gentrification [59]. Son Gotleu had the highest density of foreclosures and evictions due to non-payment of rent in Palma. From a relative standpoint, the respective ratios of foreclosures and evictions for non-payment of rent were 10 and 23.53 per 1000 inhabitants. The street with the most foreclosures in the whole of the municipality was Tomás Rul·lan, which crosses the social housing estate of Son Gotleu built between 1964 and 1970 (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Location of the main public housing developments built by the Housing Ministry in Palma during the developmentalism period (1950s to 1970s). Source: Prepared by the author based on the MUIB (Balearic Urban Map) and Ajuntament de Palma.

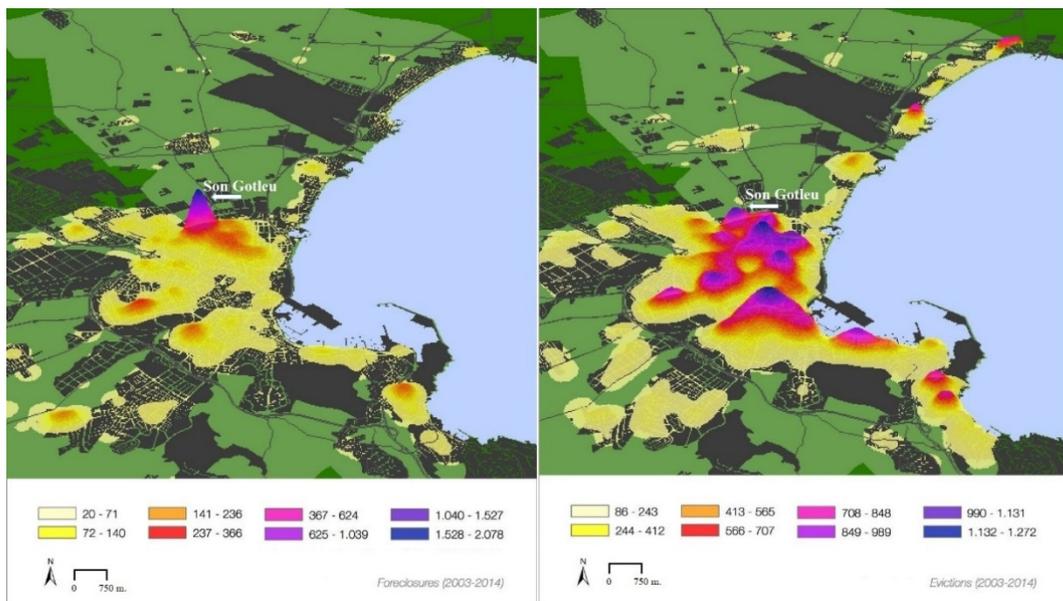


Figure 5. Spatial 3D representation of the number of foreclosures and rental evictions in the city of Palma (2003–2014). Source: Adapted from Vives-Miró, S., et al. (2018) [46], based on SCNE data.

During the property bubble, evictions for non-payment of rent clearly outnumbered foreclosures in Son Gotleu: 61 evictions compared to 46 foreclosures. When the crisis hit, the foreclosures increased considerably (282 foreclosures compared to 147 evictions for non-payment of rent), encompassing areas that were barely affected by them during the previous period. In all instances, as poor areas, the two large social housing estates were particularly hard hit by these expulsion processes. According to the 2011 Population and Housing Census, the three sections encompassing these social housing estates had immigration rates of between 50.18% and 61.49%.

During the period from 2003 to 2007, there were 15 cases in the oldest social housing development, Ses Coromines (1960), nine of which were for non-payment of rent. The

19 housing blocks farthest to the south saw 26 evictions for non-payment of rent and 38 for foreclosures. Outside these areas, evictions for non-payment of rent clearly predominated, with 26 cases as opposed to two foreclosures.

During the period from 2008 to 2014, the number of evictions rose throughout the neighbourhood. In comparison with the previous period, the increase in foreclosures stands out particularly, triggered by the burst property bubble and rising unemployment in a predominantly immigrant neighbourhood that was deeply affected by the crisis in the construction industry. The 147 evictions for non-payment of rent represented an increase of 141% in relation to the previous period, and the 282 foreclosures constituted a 513.04% rise compared to 2003–2007. This increase in foreclosures led to a growth in the number of properties held by banks and, later on, by investment funds. This process mainly affected the blocks in the most deprived areas, such as the council housing estates, due to their vulnerability and impoverishment. Over 62% of the evictions for non-payment of rent and almost 63% of the foreclosures were concentrated here. It is important to note that these 1950s and 60s council houses were “declassified” and liberalized 30 years after they were first made available. Consequently, there was no longer any limit on their price and they could be bought and sold. This housing had passed from having a use value to a real estate value. Under current Balearic legislation (the 2018 Housing Act and the 2017 Urban Planning Act), council housing is protected from being sold off. In Spain, the future Right to a Home Act follows the same lines (Figures 6 and 7).

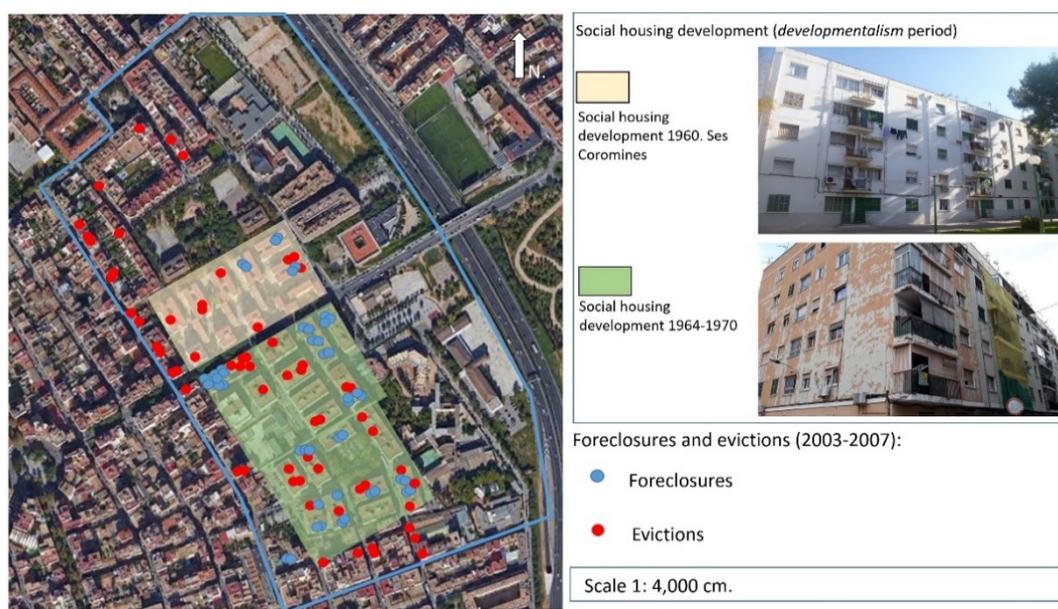


Figure 6. Typologies of social housing, evictions, and foreclosures in Son Gotleu (2003–2007). Source: Prepared by the author based on SCNE data.

As with many other Spanish cities, we are witnessing an unrelenting rise in impoverished debtors on the brink of vulnerability and social exclusion, given their incapacity to meet their housing rental payments or to pay the mortgage loan they took out to buy a first home. It is a problem that Spain’s national and regional governments failed to respond to until mid-2011, when four years had passed since the onset of the crisis. In 2011, the authorities began to react in response to the alarming situation in Spain, either due to the emergence of social movements or to the record number of evictions each year. Although some self-governing regions introduced measures through regional housing acts, it was tackled, above all, through national legislation. Examples are the Spanish Royal Decree 8/2011 and the Spanish Royal Decree Law 6/2012 on urgent measures for the protection of destitute mortgage debtors; the Spanish Decree Law 27/2012 on urgent measures to protect mortgage debtors; the Aziz case and Spanish Act 1/2013 on measures to reinforce

the protection for mortgage debtors, debt restructuring and social tenancies; the Spanish Royal Decree Law 1/2015 on the second opportunity mechanism, reduction of financial burdens and other social measures; and, more recently, other more ambitious legislation like the Spanish Royal Decree Law 11/2020 under which urgent complementary social and economic measures were adopted to deal with COVID-19; and the Spanish Royal Decree Law 16/2021 under which measures in the field of social protection were adopted to tackle situations of social and economic vulnerability. As commented on earlier, the forthcoming Right to a Home Act may introduce a major change by reinforcing protective anti-eviction measures and extending them to mortgage holders. The government's idea is that in proceedings filed because of non-payment of rent or defaults on mortgage payments, judges must request a report from the social services to analyse the situation of the affected person prior to their possible eviction. If the person is in a situation of vulnerability, while the authorities are seeking an alternative, the eviction process can be put off for two or four months, depending on whether the home belongs to a natural or legal person.

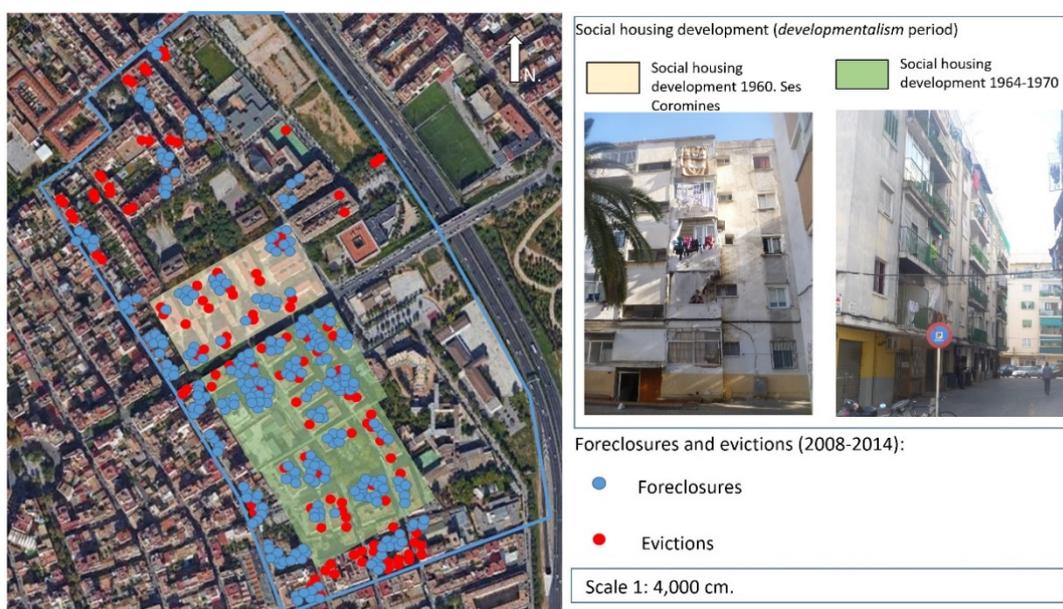


Figure 7. Typologies of social housing, evictions, and foreclosures in Son Gotleu (2008–2014). Source: Prepared by the author based on SCNE data.

In short, when the crisis hit, with ensuing unemployment, the extreme vulnerability of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants became obvious. A lost home is one indicator of the seriousness of the social situation. Foreclosures devalue the area, thus intensifying the poverty, contributing to stigmatization while also fostering rent-seeking property opportunities.

5.2. Impoverishment: Problems in a Devalued Property Market

Wealth is largely derived from investment in housing. The value of housing has exacerbated the disparity between incomes and wealth. A map of the value of housing confirms the process of impoverishment and the appropriation of urban land rents insofar as there is a clear link between the number of evictions and the low value of housing. Both phenomena have a knock-on effect on one another. Palma City Council has classified Son Gotleu as one of the neighbourhoods with the lowest average property prices [52]. The cadastral value of housing is a government value set for each property, and it comprises the value of the land and property built on it. The average cadastral value for homes in Palma is 63,930 euros. Son Gotleu has the second lowest value (30,977) after the neighbourhood of Mare de Déu de Lluc (28,730), the highest number and density of evictions in Palma, and a highly problematic property market characterized by several different processes⁷.

Firstly, the area's ongoing impoverishment, social exclusion and high level of evictions have led to a type of resident unlike conventional property owners or tenants. Secondly, the private rental market is practically non-existent, with an over-priced, unevenly balanced sales market. Thirdly, investment funds have been playing an increasingly active role in the property market and, subsequently, in building development in the area and in its social configuration. Sources from Palma City Council have confirmed that all the social housing blocks contain properties owned by vulture funds. These funds are complex financial and business frameworks with headquarters outside the Balearic Islands so that any supervision by the local authorities is extremely complicated.

The lack of relevant statistics leads to insufficient data. Nonetheless, two types of residents in Son Gotleu's complex property market are critical to gaining an understanding of the neighbourhood and its impoverishment. All the obtained information was gathered through fieldwork and interviews with neighbours and members of the Son Gotleu Platform. On the one hand, there are "okupas" or squatters. Although it was not possible to quantify them or to compare them in number with other Palma neighbourhoods or even other cities, due to a lack of relevant data, these were mostly low-income families who occupied empty properties, especially those owned by banks when they were left unoccupied after an eviction or a foreclosure. These squatters usually gained entry to the property by breaking down the front door, which they then cover with a metal sheet as a safety measure. At the start of the crisis, banks accepted the occupation of homes as a last resort, and the new residents were aware that an intermediary from the bank would come to negotiate payment of rent with them in the short to mid-term. This would lead to a change in their status: from illegal squatters to tenants with a legal contract. Nevertheless, in recent years, banks have refused to negotiate, and immediately apply for new eviction orders. According to members of the Son Gotleu Platform, 30 to 40% of all the homes in these 1964–1970 social housing blocks were illegally occupied. However, these statements should be taken with caution as there are no official data, although our interviews with the residents of these blocks confirmed this information. This explains why there were lots of broken or badly damaged front doors in the buildings (due to forced entry); barred doors (for various reasons such as squatters seeking protection, an owner or bank trying to avoid new squatters following an eviction, or neighbours who live in the building permanently and use iron bars as a security measure when they are not at home), and different types of doors of varying sizes and materials (for multiple reasons, including continuous evictions and squatters, and the lack of resident association guidelines etc.) (Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 8. 1960s social housing development: neglected communal areas and inner courtyards, home with shuttered windows to deter squatters. Source: Prepared by the author (22 January 2021).



Figure 9. 1964–1970 social housing development: Front doors to properties with squatters and homes protected against squatters. Source: Prepared by the author (22 January 2021).

In turn, the predominance of sub-tenants should be highlighted. The most common example was a tenant, usually a foreigner with a residence permit, who signed a leasehold agreement and then re-let out rooms to other individuals, even by the hour. This phenomenon is what is popularly termed “camas calientes” or “hot beds”. In other instances, when foreigners do not have a residence permit, they were forced to rent a home illegally from networks that act as the official leaseholder. These networks often stopped paying monthly rent to the owner soon after the agreement was signed. The ensuing situation is dramatic because an eviction was then set in motion, which affected the sub-tenant family who actually lived in the home, who had not stopped paying their rent to the intermediary network.

In Spain, no official data has been published on housing sale prices. According to information from the two main property websites in Spain—Idealista and Fotocasa—, on 22 April 2019, there were 74 homes on sale in Son Gotleu for an average price of 121,341.49 euros per home (1433.24 €/m²). The average figure for Palma was 2864.00 €/m². As we can see, this market value, based on the price of housing on sale at that date, was far higher than the average cadastral value of property in both Son Gotleu (30,977 euros) and Palma (63,930 euros).

There are two important points to be taken into account in order to understand the property market. Firstly, despite numerous foreclosures during the period from 2004 to 2014, neither of the two large property websites listed a single bank-owned property for sale or rent. Secondly, the land registry value was very low, as is to be expected in an impoverished neighbourhood, with a figure of under 31,000 euros. In contrast, however,

the average market price was highly overvalued: 121,341 euros, with an average of under 1500 euros/m². This price was half the average price for Palma for the same period (2854 euros/m²) and below that of other low-income neighbourhoods in the city, such as Nou Llevant-La Soledat (2201 euros/m²). This offers an insight into prevailing speculative dynamics and interests, the inflationary nature of housing, and subsequent difficult access to housing for a financially hard-up sector of the population.

The neighbourhood's lowest housing prices corresponded to two big stretches of former council housing: Ses Coromines (8 homes, 1269.54 €/m²) and council housing built between 1964 and 1970 (27 homes, 1201.41 €/m²). These areas were the most vulnerable. They had the highest rate of foreign immigrants, they were more socially stigmatized, they were most heavily affected by foreclosures and evictions, and they contained the most rundown public spaces and communal areas. Properties here had the lowest values. Moreover, these buildings also contained the most illegally occupied homes and, as we shall see below, this was where vulture funds held the most properties. Their market value was also negatively affected by a lack of lifts in blocks that mainly had five storeys and by the absence of a residents' association.

According to the most recent data for 2017, 292 of the homes were rented out. By census sections, average rental prices fluctuated between 510 euros in the more redeveloped, less neglected part of the neighbourhood (section 4026) and 354 euros in census section 4022. The latter was almost entirely made up of blocks built as council homes between 1964 and 1970. It was here that a square metre of land was cheaper, the income per inhabitant was lower, and (together with section 4023) there was a high ratio of foreign immigrants and Africans. Thus, home rental prices and economic and social situations are directly related. (Table 3)

Table 3. Rented housing (2018) and its link with other economic and social variables by census sections.

| | No. of Homes | Surface Area (m ²) | Rent (€) | €/m ² | Per Capita Income 2017 (€) | Percentage of Foreign Immigrants 2019 (%) | Ratio Evictions/No. Households (%) |
|-------|--------------|--------------------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 4019 | 38 | 67 | 450 | 6.3 | 6211 | 35.48 | 21.20 |
| 4022 | 42 | 67 | 354 | 5.0 | 5352 | 37.66 | 23.83 |
| 4023 | 67 | 69 | 400 | 5.4 | 6050 | 40.63 | 25.99 |
| 4024 | 70 | 54 | 400 | 7.1 | 5419 | 33.99 | 25.15 |
| 4026 | 75 | 89 | 510 | 6.7 | 9050 | 15.61 | 12.27 |
| Palma | 23,572 | 86 | 646 | 8.0 | 12,514 | 15.84 | 7.83 |

Source: Prepared by the author based on the State System of Housing Rental Indexes, Municipal Census, Household Income Distribution Atlas, SCNE data.

Evictions contribute to the neighbourhood's impoverishment, the degradation of apartment blocks, and the declining value of homes. The ratio of cumulative evictions to the number of households between 2003 and 2014 is disturbing. The three most impoverished census sections (4022, 4023 and 4024), where former council housing was to be found, had a ratio of over 23 evictions per 100 households. Inequality reinforces poverty (Figure 10).

Lastly, in this complex financial and real estate scenario, an analysis should be made of the practices of investment funds and their impact, as they have become the main urban agents in these poor neighbourhoods. They are the main beneficiaries of evictions and foreclosures and, indeed, of impoverishment in the neighbourhood.

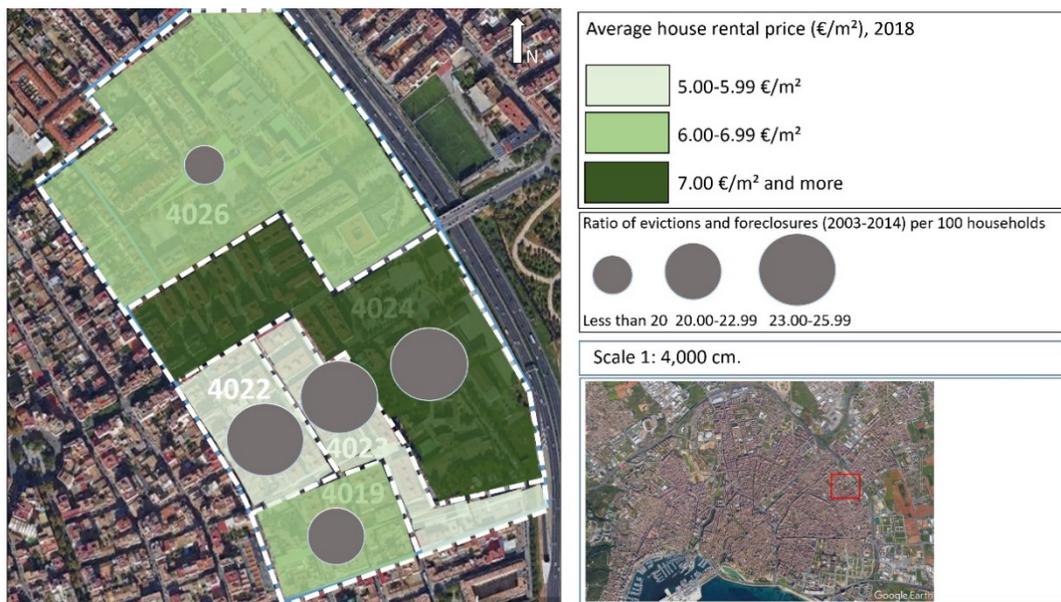


Figure 10. Average price of rental homes and evictions and foreclosures by census sections. Source: Prepared by the author based on the State System of Housing Rental Indexes and SCNE data.

A lack of access to official information and lack of transparency in the activities of these speculative funds hindered us from obtaining any relevant information. The only source of relevant statistics is the Land Registry, but this information is not public to citizens or researchers. Most of the properties owned by these funds were unoccupied (foreclosed) homes purchased from banks. This makes banks less interested in negotiating leases with the families who squat in them. A leasehold agreement would make the property's sale to these funds more difficult for banks or even prevent it altogether. The fund with the largest footprint in Son Gotleu was Divarian Propiedad [60], which took over the management of BBVA's property portfolio and Cerberus investment fund in October 2018. Divarian Propiedad was estimated to own 120 properties in Son Gotleu in December 2018, mostly empty flats, some of which were illegally occupied. According to different local sources of information and interviews with different social agents (the Son Gotleu Platform), its properties were mainly located in the streets of Tomàs Rul.lan, Santa Florentina and Pícs d'Europa, in the heart of this rundown neighbourhood. Divarian had not put any of the 120 properties up for sale, none of them are listed in the Balearic Government's Empty Property Register (although under Balearic Housing Act 5/2018 of 19 June, it is mandatory to do so) and the fund has ruled out the possibility of social rent. Everything points to them being intentionally kept for speculative purposes until their value goes up. In the meantime, the fund will probably continue to extend its property portfolio and to control the property market in the most rundown neighbourhood in Palma.

6. Conclusions

In the 1980s, the negative effects of touristification led to the emergence of a conservationist movement which called for the protection of natural areas of the Balearic Islands. In the 1990s and 2000s, social platforms and conservationists joined forces to stop non-developable land from being turned into housing. A third wave of objections and debate, starting in the mid 2010s, has embarked on a new battle: to combat the touristification and gentrification of the old town of Palma. In other words, in recent years, in political and civic debate and scientific literature on urban processes in Palma (Majorca) and in demonstrations by citizens, attention has been drawn to the city's progressive "elitization", with particular emphasis on the causes and impacts of tourist gentrification. Foreign investment in hotels, the influence of online holiday rental platforms on housing (Airbnb, Homeaway etc.) and the thematization of the city, home purchases by overseas buyers,

and the growing second home market for Germans, Swedes and Brits are some of the most widely analysed topics. In short, most analyses of the city focus on the social and urban transformation of areas suffering from the highest rise in property prices or on neighbourhoods in the city centre. Meanwhile, the more impoverished, poorer areas fall by the wayside in most studies.

Civic and media debate on these impoverished neighbourhoods is still monopolized by subjects like immigration, conflicts and urban violence. Son Gotleu is one of these areas—an instantly recognisable, socially stigmatized part of the city that has barely been explored from an urban planning standpoint. Although this was a local case study, the methodology and obtained results may be of interest in studies of other tourist cities (such as those in the Mediterranean), where many gentrified areas stand alongside rundown impoverished neighbourhoods whose residents are mainly immigrants and/or workers in the tourism and construction industries.

In the light of the increasing social divide and urban fragmentation of our cities, a critical, non-conformist approach must be taken in urban studies. A decade after the start of the last big capitalist crisis, inequality has grown in cities. The spatial distribution of different expressions of inequality and the characterization of their resulting urban manifestations are an even more interesting focus of study within the context of the last financial/property crisis.

This article diagnoses the underlying causes of impoverishment in Son Gotleu, finding these processes to be tied in with its origins: a space of social reproduction used for decades to “contain” excluded and/or low-income working and migrant populations, initially from rural Spain and then, more recently, from Africa. In terms of income and wealth, it is a socially homogenous area and yet it is also very diverse from the perspective of people’s race, origin, the language spoken at home, citizenship, access to Spanish citizenship etc. This social makeup makes it particularly vulnerable to negative economic cycles and to higher unemployment, as demonstrated by the 2007 and 2020 crises. One of the main consequences was the rise in evictions, with a spatial distribution (by blocks and buildings) dependent on the type of property and social makeup of local residents. The overpriced sales market, high number of homes with squatters, and emergence of new urban agents with speculative intentions are a few examples of the impacts associated with urban impoverishment, where evictions become a key rent-seeking strategy.

We have mapped and analysed specific statistical indicators to represent social inequalities, based on the evolution and distribution of foreclosures and evictions and on the complex situation of the property market in one of the neighbourhoods with the highest vulnerability levels in Palma (Majorca). We contextualized evictions and foreclosures in Palma and Son Gotleu within the framework of growing urban inequality, which we consider to be a key process in the impoverishment of neighbourhoods. Consequently, the neighbourhoods with the lowest incomes in Palma had the highest foreclosure rates, with impoverishment, destitution, and degradation being determining factors in lost ownership of homes. In Palma, as in many other Spanish cities, the typical neighbourhood with high rates of evictions and foreclosures tends to be located on the first peripheral loop (1960s–1970s), with large amounts of public housing stock and high rates of immigration. Son Gotleu, which heads Palma’s ranks in the density of foreclosures and evictions for non-payment of rent, is probably the best example of this kind of neighbourhood in the city. In absolute terms, Son Gotleu had the highest number of foreclosures and the second highest amount of evictions due to non-payment of all those in the city. From a relative standpoint, the ratio of foreclosures and evictions for non-payment of rent per 1000 inhabitants was 37.10 and 23.53 respectively. The two large social housing estates have been the most affected by these expulsion processes: over 62% of the evictions for non-payment of rent and almost 63% of the foreclosures were concentrated here.

One line of research that we are working on to complete this study and to investigate new dynamics in urban inequality in Palma is to find out the trajectories of people who have been evicted. In Spain, this is a complex task because there are no statistics on the

subject, and neither are data of this kind gathered by any public and/or statistical service. The approach that we will take is to conduct surveys of people who have been evicted from their homes. Our hypothesis is the existence of two possible scenarios: either displacement to neighbourhoods with cheaper housing, which reproduces and continues to fuel poverty, or else the possibility that these people are taken in by relatives, who let them stay in their homes on at least a temporary basis.

Phenomena such as evictions, squatting, stigmatization and forced impoverishment are exploited by the real estate sector to devalue areas, based on models of accumulation by dispossession and property rent-seeking. The neighbourhood's social heterogeneity, mainly due to the origins of its immigrant population, has led to changes in the housing market. In turn, this impacts in distinct ways on differing social groups. Different levels of access to the rental market or to a mortgage, depending on the person's nationality, the number of people per household and level of overcrowding are just some examples of the complicated process of integration for immigrants from the last wave, mainly Africans, who arrived in search of work. According to a 2020 survey [28], there were more Spaniards than foreigners living as tenants in Son Gotleu and there were more foreigners than Spaniards who owned a home or have a mortgage. This demonstrates the social change that the neighbourhood has undergone, mainly since the late 1990s when the first foreign immigrants from the Global South began to arrive. As a result, although low income levels are a key factor in gaining a social insight into the neighbourhood, it is housing that underlies many of the processes of social and urban change, including impoverishment. Hence, in its capacity as a poor neighbourhood, between 2003 and 2014, Son Gotleu experienced the highest number of foreclosures in Palma and the second highest number of evictions. Within the area, the 1960s social housing developments inhabited by immigrants (initially native Spaniards and now foreign residents mainly from Africa) were the most affected. They are blocks with serious structural problems, in a bad state of deterioration and neglect.

Using direct and indirect sources, we conclude that the housing market is predominantly based on rentals, a necessary system in a neighbourhood with high mobility and little borrowing capacity (mortgage loans). Within the neighbourhood, prices were in line with the level of income and presence of foreigners. The areas containing former council housing, with the highest number of foreign immigrants and the lowest incomes, were generally lower in price.

The properties had a market value (from real estate websites) that was much higher than their cadastral value (Cadastral Directorate General), with the cheapest prices being found in old social housing developments in impoverished areas inhabited by foreign immigrants, where the most foreclosures and rent evictions have taken place. Although the neighbourhood had a high rate of immigration and low income levels, there were practically no properties on the housing rental market. This factor can be tied in with the social exclusion of many of Son Gotleu's residents and with different types of illegal tenants (sub-lets or growing numbers of apartments with "hot beds"), as well as the illegal occupation of housing by families. Although there were no official figures in this regard, local residents and members of the Son Gotleu Platform explained to us that illegal occupancy accounts for around 30 to 40% of the homes in the social housing blocks. This is a close approximation to reality and these figures should make us reflect carefully on a neighbourhood that is often mentioned in terms of its public shortcomings, whilst it also suffers from serious deficiencies in terms of its private spaces.

Thus, housing underlies many of the processes of impoverishment seen in the neighbourhood and, far from diminishing, these problems were on the rise due to the growing relevance of what are now one of the neighbourhood's chief urban agents: investment funds. There is no easy solution. Although good use should be made of urban planning and housing policies, a holistic, multi-sectoral response to the problem is needed involving varying levels of the public authorities, depending on their scope of authority. Different urban plans are featured in Spanish and Balearic legislation, aimed at the global urban regeneration of neighbourhoods, in particular the Plan Especial de Reforma Interior (the

Inner Spatial Reform Plan or PERI). Furthermore, in the Balearic Islands, there is a good framework law for the regeneration of this kind of neighbourhood (Act 2/2009 of March 19th on the regeneration and improvement of neighbourhoods in Balearic municipalities). However, in Son Gotleu, responses tend to be partial, non-holistic ones. How to solve Son Gotleu's integration into the rest of the city, do away with its associated social stigmas and bad image, and foster the strengthening and cohesion of its social fabric are questions still to be answered.

Funding: Grant "Housing and international mobility in cities of the Balearic Islands: the emergence of new forms of urban inequality" (RTI2018-093296-B-C22) funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by "ERDF A way of making Europe"; and Grant "Crisis and social vulnerability in Spanish island cities. Changes in the social reproduction spaces" (CSO2015-68738-P. State Research Agency, Ministry of Science, Research and Universities, and ERDF).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ In the strictest sense of the word, developmentalism gives priority to economic development alone. When we refer to Spanish developmentalism, the concept is more complex. It corresponds to a stage in the Franco dictatorship that lasted for about two decades from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. With it, Spain's period as an autarky came to an end, and a new bid was made to open up to the outside world. The main driving forces behind this were the approval of the 1959 National Stabilization Plan and three economic and social development plans. With developmentalism, a period of inflated growth began (in the development of production activities, industry and, in particular, tourism; in building development and in the construction of private and public housing. This led to the beginning of big spatial imbalances and internal migratory flows, with a rural exodus. In terms of urban planning legislation, it was a period of friction between urban planning and development. Two urban planning laws were passed: the 1956 Land Use Act (hereinafter LUA 56) and the 1975 Land Use Act (LUA 75) [29]. In general, in municipal urban master plans, emphasis was placed on land rated appropriate for development, which was clearly much higher in ratio than it should have been, in many cases to facilitate speculative practices. Despite the weaknesses and inefficiencies of this legislation, it did introduce some principles consistent with holistic visions of urban planning. However, it could not compete with official developmentalist policies, pressures, private stakeholder interests and inefficient local administrations with little concern for urban development plans. Thus, cities grew with scanty attention to urban planning. Due to these factors and to the frustrating legislation, urban planning logically came to be discredited, with its subordination to other sectoral plans and its treatment as a separate field from other territorial policies, with which its decisions would have to compete).
- ² Blackstone is a United States investment bank founded in 1985 by two ex-executives from Lehman Brothers. It manages assets mainly comprising real estate investments in the US and Europe. In Spain, since the beginning of the 2008 crisis, it has built up real estate for a value of some 20,000 million euros and its investments total about 24,000 million euros. Since 2012, it has bought Socimi Hispania for 2000 million, Lar España's logistical portfolio, the head offices of a multitude of companies, some of the real estate portfolios of different banks (Catalunya Caixa, Sabadell, BBVA and Santander), etc. In 2017, it carried out the biggest real estate transaction of the year: the acquisition of Banco Popular's real estate assets for 10,000 million euros. This represents a total of 80,000 properties and 40,000 items of real estate collateral from Banco Popular's real estate exposure. It has also bought social housing from Madrid City Council, leading it to be described as a vulture fund. At present it is the biggest owner of rental housing in Spain, with over 50,000 rental units [43]. In addition, together with the management company HIP Partners, which Blackstone bought from Banco Sabadell, it is the biggest owner of hotel properties in Spain.
- ³ Accumulation by dispossession is a concept presented by the Marxist geographer David Harvey. It defines neoliberal capitalist policies that lead to the centralization of wealth and power in the hands of a few by dispossessing public and private entities of their wealth or land. Harvey argues that these policies are mainly guided by four practices: privatization, financialization, crisis management and manipulation, and state redistributions [45].
- ⁴ New Urban Enclosure is a term mainly developed by Hodkinson [5], consisting of three main acts: (a) privatization; (b) dispossession of those who are now on the other side of this new enclosure line, whether in the loss of land to grow food, of one's home, or access to affordable housing, or through the denial of certain services or even knowledge that people used to have access to; and (c) the process of capitalist subjectification. Enclosure in this sense means the encapturing of people, place, space and culture within the commodifying and alienating logic of capital accumulation and the competitive, marketing logic of neoliberal rationality [5] (p. 509).

- 5 According to [49], “a mortgage-backed security is a bond backed by a set of mortgages that entitles the bondholder to part of the monthly payments made by the mortgage borrowers [...] Borrowers purchasing homes would take loans from lenders, also known as originators. These originators could be local banks, commercial banks, or specialist mortgage brokers. The originators would sell the loans to issuers, or to wholesalers who would bundle loans together to then sell to issuers” [49] (pp. 13–14).
- 6 To apply for Spanish citizenship, under Spanish legislation, a person must generally have to reside in Spain for ten years. This period is reduced to two years for citizens of Latin America, Portugal, Andorra, the Philippines, Equatorial Guinea and for Sephardic Jews.
- 7 The cadastral value is established by the Cadastral Directorate General, attached to the Ministry of Finance.

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