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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Knowledge production and learning in housing struggles

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of advocacy for non-housing issues and its spillover onto housing movements. Adopting the viewpoint that activism is a social practice that generates knowledge, this study analyses how activists in social movements produce, share, and disseminate knowledge through fieldwork research conducted in Dublin, Ireland. The findings reveal that knowledge transmission, critical thinking, and innovation are crucial for fostering productive dialogue among groups engaged in strategic housing action. Moreover, the research demonstrates that housing movements contribute to the development of novel cognitive and epistemic solutions through their practical and discursive interactions with other non-housing social movements. These results make a meaningful contribution to housing studies and social movement studies by shedding light on the political and social dynamics that give rise to new knowledge and innovative housing practices.

Keywords Social movements · Knowledge production · Housing activism · Cross-movement learning · Ireland · Financialization

Introduction

Research produced on emerging housing activism in recent decades has spawned a large and growing body of social movement studies. An important aspect of this literature has drawn attention to the different ways in which housing movements counteract the influence of neoliberal urban policies, housing inequality, dispossession, precarity and financialisation. Additionally, it focuses on the strategies, repertoires of action, and subjectivities of these movements. Research on activism in the current housing crisis context has made noteworthy contributions to housing policy and

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critical analysis of profit-driven housing policies. These works have enhanced our comprehension of movements advocating for housing justice and the recent surge of mobilisation, which has emerged as a result of heightened urban conflicts over the right to housing and the city.

According to Santos et al. (2007), all social practices involve the production of knowledge, including activism. Learning takes place in the course of organising and activism. Housing movements constantly produce and share knowledge throughout their existence. This learning comes from the movement participants' own experiences, subjectivities, and values, and they are a crucial domain for harbouring protest experiences and practices. The role of knowledge production has received considerable attention in the field of social movements (Casas-Cortés et al. 2008; Santos et al. 2007; Pavan and Felicetti 2019; Sartoretto and Custodio 2019; Choudry et al. 2020; Choudry and Kapoor 2010). This academic work becomes extremely important in times of crisis, where knowledge practices become a significant part of contemporary activism (Della Porta and Pavan 2017). The scholarly emphasis is often on the actions, strategies, and campaigns that can lead to movement 'success'. However, this focus tends to overlook the intellectual work within movements, as well as the policies, processes, spaces, and places involved. Additionally, knowledge production and learning in activist settings are often disregarded (Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Choudry 2020). These configurations transcend specific fields of struggle, such as feminist, Indigenous, or environmental movements, as they frequently intersect and encompass diverse forms of learning that defy clear boundaries.

Along these lines, in this paper I argue that, in addition to generating a space for the production of knowledge that challenges neoliberal social production models, social movements are spaces for learning, knowledge transfer, and innovation in the field of housing. More specifically, I argue that contemporary housing movements, through their practical and discursive action, promote new solutions that, besides being political, are also cognitive and epistemic, and that this social dynamic generates new knowledge and innovative housing practices. Using the distinctive case of cross-movement knowledge transmission among social movements in Ireland, I demonstrate how activists engage in a process of learning from participants of other social movements, as well as how they acquire the skills to effectively transmit and adapt knowledge from successful past experiences to tackle new protest challenges.

Therefore, I focus on the activism involved in the successful Movement Against Water Charges (2014, Right2Water www.right2water.ie) and the equally successful abortion rights campaign group (2016, Together4Yes www.togetherforyes.ie), from which some members converged into the emerging housing justice movements in the country. Drawing on the literature focusing on social movements, housing activism, and knowledge creation and sharing, I examine the distinctiveness of knowledge transfer within social movements in Ireland. Together, the movements mentioned above work(ed) to promote different aspects of social justice (access to water, access to abortion services, and access to decent housing) as part of a mobilisation process that produces and shares knowledge from previous experiences of struggles to contemporary ones.

More recently, studies on knowledge production and transmission have started to systematically examine the specificities of this field (e.g., Fields 2015; Fields and

Raymond 2021; Lira and March 2021; Pavan and Felicetti 2019; Casas-Cortes et al. 2008; Cox 2014; Della Porta and Pavan 2017). Therefore, this article contributes to the housing mobilisation scholarship by analysing how knowledge is created and shared from non-housing movements to housing movements, as a product of housing movement praxis. It examines how knowledge circulates, how it unfolds through social movement networks, and how knowledge production matters for housing research. For this study, I identify 'repertoires of knowledge practices' (Della Porta and Pavan 2017), which are the set of practices that guide initially disconnected, local, and personal experiences within a shared framework of action.

This article proceeds as follows: the next section lays out the theoretical dimensions of the research and discusses the literature review on activist knowledge production and the kind of knowledge that is hegemonic in housing research. Next, the research design is presented and, subsequently, the article analyses the results of the interviews and discussions carried out during the fieldwork. The results section presents the research findings, focusing on the key issues that encompass the production and transmission of knowledge. This article concludes with reflections on the ways in which social movement knowledge production is relevant to contemporary research on housing.

Literature review – knowledge production and learning in social movements

Learning and knowledge in housing movements

In the past decades, the process of financialisation of housing has made residential real estate attractive for investors. This trend has been supported by government policies that encourage the involvement of institutional investors in the housing market Gabor and Kolh 2022). The increasing commodification of housing poses significant challenges in terms of accessing affordable housing, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable populations, including migrants and low-income groups. Against this backdrop, the post-2008 financial crisis has witnessed the emergence of housing movements that resist the top-down, financialised, profit-driven approach to housing production (Fields 2015; Vilenica et al. 2019). Indeed, as exemplified by more recent tenant organising group in Ireland, Community Action Tenants Union (CATU) resistance involves reclaiming and utilizing forgotten knowledge of past struggles, as the movements draw on a deep historical well of successful resistance from rent strikes in the 1970's in Ireland (Kallin and Gray 2024).

Housing is not only a subject of struggle; it possesses a profound political dimension (Madden and Marcuse 2016). This is important because housing movements transcend the materiality of housing, encompassing both political ideologies and practical approaches (Lira and March 2021). These experiences have contributed to the (re)politisation of housing, so the pitfalls of failed housing policies can be contested at a scale appropriate to its significance for everyday life (Madden and Marcuse 2016, p. 137). Furthermore, Quijano's work on the coloniality of knowledge reminds us that this "(re)politisation" might involve challenging not only specific policies

but also the underlying epistemic frameworks that have historically shaped housing policy. Housing movements, in their resistance, may be generating knowledge that challenges the dominant, often financialised, ways of understanding housing needs and solutions (Quijano 1998, 2024).

Housing and urban scholars have paid attention to housing movements in various contexts. Polanska et al. (2019) have observed that structural perspectives have dominated, resulting in a lack of emphasis on understanding the role of agents and agency. This gap is particularly evident in bottom-up perspectives that encompass the voices of excluded groups and the knowledge production facilitated by housing movements. However, a growing body of research has explored innovative practices to resist financialisation (Lancione 2020; García-Lamarca 2017a, b; Lima 2019), housing justice (Vilenica et al. 2019; Lima 2021; Roy et al. 2019), and policy influence (Martinez 2019; Card 2022), to cite a few. However, less attention has been devoted to scrutinising how housing movements generate and disseminate knowledge. Recent contributions by Lira and March (2021) on how learning unfolds within housing groups, Fields (2015) on community organisations producing alternative forms of knowledge through data generation and critical skill acquisitionGarcía-Lamarca (2017b) on learned political practices from grassroots movements have added to the literature on knowledge production and sharing as domains of politics and practice. This study aims to address the gap in understanding how knowledge is created and shared from non-housing movements to housing movements. In the following section, I present the scholarly debates surrounding learning and social movements to throw light upon the scholarship focused on knowledge shared and production from activism.

Learning and knowledge sharing in social movements

Existing discussions of social movements' knowledge production have highlighted that social movements and social justice activism are important sites of learning and knowledge production (Choudry 2020). This literature has been cognisant of the diverse political implications arising from new knowledge generated, with a particular focus on the ideas and discussions presented by individuals who collaborate in the pursuit of social change. Most importantly, this literature has noted that social movements generate new knowledge, new theories, and new questions, as the most radical ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement with the problems of aggrieved populations confronting systems of oppression (Kelley 2002, p.9). With this assertion, Kelley is not just indicating that the 'context' where new knowledge is produced is important, but also that movements have a great potential to create change.

While an important part of the current literature has now established that learning and knowledge production is a significant part of social movements, how to interpret this knowledge is the new challenge (Cox 2014). This view is also echoed by Choudry (2020), who argued that the forms, significance, and value of learning and knowledge production should receive more attention from social movement scholars and activists. On this note, in this paper, I regard social movements as creators of knowledge, utilising North and South knowledge theories that analyse not only activism as a

social practice that produces knowledge, but also the way it is shared. Various works explore the connection between political and social struggles: Gramsci's (1991) studies distinguish between two types of knowledge: 'common sense', that aligns with dominant hegemonic thought and social norms, and 'good sense' that takes a more critical approach to knowledge and social norms (Crehan 2016). Freire's (1996) critical perspective on common sense sees learners as agents of social change (see also Choudry and Vally 2017; Gohn 2011). This aspect is not adequately addressed by the hegemonic 'common sense' and can be more effectively explored through struggles for transformation (Cox and Flesher Fominaya, 2009, p. 957).

In order to resist, challenge power structures, and push political changes, contemporary progressive social movements 'form collective spaces of knowledge production that are true laboratories for innovation' (della Porta and Pavan 2017, p. 297). From their personal way of experiencing the world, in addition to carrying out 'repertoires of protest', social movements also enact 'repertoires of knowledge practices'. In their insightful work, della Porta and Pavan uncover the core components of the set of repertoires of practices that encourage the coordination of disconnected, local, and highly personal experiences and rationalities within a shared cognitive system capable of providing movements and their supporters with a common guideline for making claims and acting collectively to achieve social, political, and cultural change.

della Porta and Pavan (2017, p.306-7) have identified three sets of practices of knowledge production within movements used to create knowledge alternatives, which I employ in this paper as one of my key conceptual frameworks for analysis. The first is the 'knowledge about the collective self', which involves movements reflecting about their own experiences and visions to identify the collective self, as movement participants focus on their own experiences to generate a type of knowledge that shapes the movements 'cosmology'. The second practice is 'knowledge about the action network', which includes the circulation of information about diverse agendas, competences, and resources, with practical implications for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and the construction of coordinated networks of action between movements. This also includes the identification of specific areas, domains, and subjects to be targeted by these networks. This practice is valuable for the amplification of movements' capacity to convert alternative frameworks into coordinated sets of protest events and campaigns. The third and final practice takes into account 'knowledge as production of (political) alternatives', in which movements produce knowledge oriented towards political changes, offering possible alternatives which are more specialised, combining local knowledge with expert knowledge. Connected to those three practices is also knowledge transmission, as social movements provide formal and informal opportunities for radical education that can be enacted in the form of public displays, circulation, and transmission of local knowledge. These knowledge transmission practices are distinguished by an unambiguous pedagogical education and learning, guided towards expanding the reach of movement knowledge outside the boundaries of their own movement group (Pavan and Felicetti 2019).

Taken together, this literature highlights that social movement practices include the creation of alternative knowledge that can serve as a basis for the formulation of policy proposals and development of new ways of thinking about housing activism practices. My challenge in this paper is to look into the multiple ways of knowl-

edge produced and transmitted (della Porta and Pavan 2017) from one movement to another, while also focusing on the knowledge embedded in the daily practices and struggles of marginalised communities. In the context of housing, this means recognising the profound knowledge held by those experiencing homelessness, precarious renting, and housing insecurity.

Drawing on a perspective that understands 'knowledge' as diverse and contextual, this paper then examines the knowledge production and transmission among social movements.

Methods

Housing groups in Ireland vary in size, profile, political orientation, and agendas. During the interviews conducted for this research, which took place a little before the Covid pandemic, it was discovered that the housing movement shared, among other elements, the presence of activists who had participated in the anti-water charges and activists advocating for the right to abortion. These individuals have now joined the housing mobilisation as their next focus. This profile represents a subset of activists who took part in interviews. The interviewees were selected through a purposive sample, based on their familiarity and participation in Dublin-based housing movements. A total of 31 semi-structured interviews were carried out in Dublin in 2019, as part of a project focused on emerging housing movements in Europe, with participants from a number of different housing groups. Of these, 15 participated in some capacity in the water movement and/or pro-abortion campaign group. At the time of the interviews, these activists were members of groups such as the Raise The Roof coalition, Take Back The City, Irish Housing Network, and Housing Action Now. The last three are groups with a strong focus on community organising, while Raise the Roof is more institutionally-oriented, involving political parties, unions, and local charities and community groups. Unions in particular had a strong role in coordinating actions between groups and acting as key organisers and brokers in the Raise the Roof campaign.[1]

The finding that nearly half of the participants in the research had some level of prior involvement in the other two movements was incidental. It was not originally intended by the researcher to identify this particular subgroup, and this finding emerged during the course of the research project. Due to the use of purposive sampling to select participants, it is challenging to determine the representativeness of these results in relation to the overall number of people involved in mobilisation. Upon identifying the presence of these participants with prior experience in the two other movements, the author made efforts to acknowledge and incorporate their perspectives in the data collection process.

[1] As of the time of the interviews in 2019, all four groups were still active in some form. Take Back The City was formally dissolved in 2019, IHN and Housing Action Now keep some of their social media active but have been largely less visible. This paper does not delve into the reasons the dissolution or changes in the movements mentioned in this research. CATU was not in existence yet in 2019.

The interview script addressed issues of activist participation, organising efforts and strategies, and their motivations and goals, as well as their learning experiences. The key questions revolved around activists' own experience in different social movements and the learning they experienced in their daily activism and collaboration with other groups. Through interview analysis, this study was able to identify the key elements on which learning and knowledge transfer are based, the motivations of the activists, and the challenges involved. All interviews were fully transcribed, anonymised, coded, and analysed with the support of NVivo.

In relation to the author's positionality in this research, the author held an academic position at a mid-size university in Ireland during the study. Drawing from the author's academic background and extensive experience in the public civil service, particularly housing policy, the author brings a unique personal perspective to this study. This positionality has the potential to shape various aspects of the research, including the selection of research questions, data analysis, and establishing rapport with participants. However, the author has taken active measures to mitigate their influence on this research by consistently engaging in self-reflection and critically examining their own privileges, not only academically but also politically and socially. This commitment to self-analysis and self-scrutiny supports the author's ability to reflect on her research within the context of her own positionality and associated privileges.

Brief overview of case studies: Right2Water, repeal the 8th and housing movements

This section presents a brief overview of the studied movements' main characteristics and achievements. These are multifaceted movements, involving various social actors like trade unions, local communities, professional bodies, students, and academics, all with complex histories. Consequently, a detailed analysis of their inner tensions, outcomes, internal structures, success factors, and comprehensive political campaign strategies falls beyond this article's scope. Additionally, the following serves as an extremely condensed account of these movements' histories; for more information, please refer to the specialist literature suggested in the text.

The Irish water charges movement – Right2Water

The Irish water protest movement resisted the implementation of water charges. The introduction of domestic water charges in Ireland in early 2010 led to an enormous backlash, including large-scale demonstrations locally and nationally, as well as physical obstruction of water meter installations and widespread boycott of water bills. In Ireland, financing for water services comes mainly from general taxation. But in 2009, as a condition of the IMF's €85 billion bailout of Ireland—which at the time was facing the extreme consequences of austerity caused by the 2007/8 economic crisis—the Fine Gael and Labour Party coalition government pledged to introduce water charges by 2013 and transfer responsibility for water infrastructure

from local authorities to a new water utility, Irish Water. For many, this was a certain path to water privatisation (Ogle 2016, p. 9; Murphy 2020; Kenny 2017) (Fig. 1).

The imposition of new taxes amid a global financial meltdown, austerity budgets, and high levels of unemployment ignited a wave of protests that challenged the myth of Ireland as a passive and stoic nation (O'Connor 2018) and created the 'perfect storm' by community resistance to austerity policies (Moore 2022; Cox 2017; Landy 2017). This resistance marked the beginning of a national anti-austerity campaign, Right2Water, created in 2014 to coordinate the Irish protest over water. This campaign had a strong working-class (Cox 2017), grassroots (Hearne 2015) component, with water charging as a unifying factor representing an issue that affected everyone and had clear effects (O'Malley and FitzGibbon 2015). The organisation of the movements encompassed an unprecedented alliance between unions, community groups, and left-wing parties in organised protests for the scrapping of the new charge. Trommer (2019) identified 235 local anti-water charges groups against the installation of water meters, with over 100,000 people marching across Ireland. The Right2Water campaign had clear results: only 62% of the planned 1.4 million meters were installed, and 50% of households boycotted their water bills. In addition, hundreds of thousands of people joined protests (Kenny 2017).

The 2016 general election signalled the end of water fees, as the original proponents of the water fees promised to abolish the tax once in government, pending review by a commission of independent experts. Following the recommendation in the 2017 reports, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were already trapped in a minority coalition and announced the suspension of the tax with some conditions such as 'excessive use' (see Kenny 2017 and Murphy 2019). The decision was, in fact, a substantial political victory and branded as a definite success, even if some business and excess use charges remained (Cox 2017; Trommer 2019). This victory motivated Right2Water participants to consider the housing crisis as the next big issue (Cox 2017). While some participants are likely to have chosen other paths, for some, the success of the water protests evolved into housing activism (Gaynor 2020; Lima 2021).

The abortion rights movement: repeal the 8th campaign and together for yes coalition

In May 2018, Ireland voted in a referendum to remove the Irish Constitution's Eighth Amendment, which placed a ban on access to abortion services. 66.4% of voters said Yes to overturn the strict anti-abortion law and reform the constitution. This win was

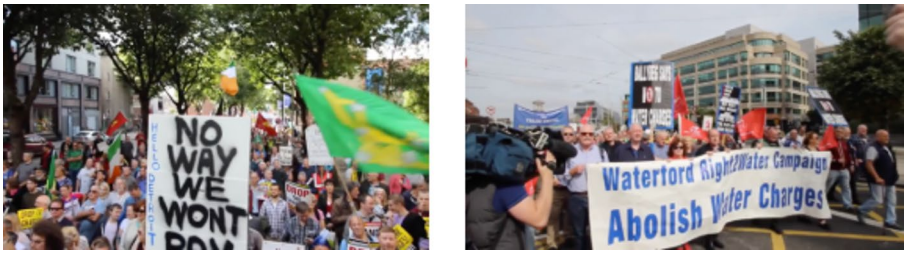

Fig. 1 Water Protests in Dublin. Alt text: Right2Water street rally, 17th September 2016 (link)

the result of a long history of feminist and reproductive rights debates, conversations, and campaigns, in addition to the recommendations of a national citizens' assembly on the Eighth Amendment [2] which were central to the referendum call (Mullally 2018; Browne and Calkin 2020; Elkink et al. 2019). The Repeal the 8th campaign included activists, students, medical doctors, lawyers, unionists, professionals, and several women's organisations (Fig. 2).

Campaigning with the motto 'Repeal the Eighth', the Together for Yes platform encompassed a highly structured campaign - with managers, strategic advisory panel and campaign directors, in combination with less hierarchical structures at the local level, with local committees and smaller groups (NWC 2019). The campaign strategy was focused on developing a support base to achieve a majority at the referendum, involving actions such as: 'inform and engage', 'persuade and motivate' and 'get out the vote', including the use of scientific evidence and the use of powerful personal stories (NWC 2019, p.40). The campaigners were also focused on including experienced people involved in the abortion campaign for years. The long but successful feminist campaign carried on for abortion law reform (Fischer 2019, p.32) contributed to the success of the vote, as it was passed by a relevant margin (66.4% of Yes votes).

At a time when the tide appears to be shifting towards more restrictive abortion regimes internationally (Kennedy 2022), the removal of the ban of abortion can be considered a definite win for the movement (Browne and Calkin 2020; Fischer 2019; NWC 2019; Mullally 2018). Nevertheless, the campaign has been criticised for not engaging adequately with reproductive justice thinking and, particularly, with meaningful and reflective praxis of intersectionality, such as racialised and migrant women (see Nyberg 2020; de Londras 2020).

While the liberation of Ireland's abortion laws has been achieved on some level, several challenges to full abortion policy implementation remain (see Mishtal et al. 2022; Stifanni et al. 2022). For many activists, women's reproductive health conflates not just with better maternity care and sexuality education, but also means better

Fig. 2 Repeal Protest in Dublin. Alt text: Repeal the protests in 2107 and 2018, respectively (link 1) (link 2)

[2] Final Report on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution: https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/The-Eighth-Amendment-of-the-Constitution/Final-Report-on-the-Eighth-Amendment-of-the-Constitution/.

housing (see Fitzsimons 2021). So, the campaign for appropriate access to abortion access continue[3], and some activists joined movements for housing justice.[4]

Irish housing movements

As a country heavily affected by the 2007/8 economic meltdown, Ireland saw its housing bubble burst in early 2010, leading to a deep housing crisis. Since them, affordable housing shortages, homelessness, high rents and evictions have triggered a multifaceted crisis, underpinned by the financialization of housing, the commodification of houses and apartments, and the withdrawn state from housing delivery have combined to create a serious housing and homelessness crisis (see Hearne 2020; Byrne and Norris 2018; Lima 2019). Various housing groups have emerged at the local and national levels, both to resist financialization and promote alternative policies to address housing issues. Some of the most visible groups over time have been Irish Housing Network (IHN), Take Back The City (TBTC) and Raise The Roof.[5]

There's a strong relationship between the trend of housing commodification and housing activism, particularly in the pre-financial crisis and post-financial crisis contexts. The mobilization around housing saw two distinct waves after the economic crash (Hearne et al. 2018). The first wave (2008–2014) involved grassroots mobilization against urban regeneration during the prosperous years of the Celtic Tiger. The second wave (2014-present) refers to movements that emerged as the initial crisis period transitioned into a new housing crisis, characterized by a dearth of affordable housing in the private sector and a rising homelessness problem. I identified over 45 housing grassroots groups active in Dublin alone in 2019, implementing a variety of tactics and strategies, from direct action to street rallies, building occupations, and institutional lobbying (Fig. 3).

These movements brought attention to the structural causes of the housing crisis and demanded policy changes to address housing affordability, homelessness, accessibility, dereliction, urban vacancy, and social justice. However, it was the issue of homelessness—stemming from evictions in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and consecutive governments' market-oriented housing policies (Hearne et al. 2018; Lima et al. 2022)—that became the focus of new movements. In this context of housing and homelessness, housing movements emerged as important agents of resistance, challenging neoliberal housing policies and advocating for the right to secure and affordable housing.

[3] Activists still fighting wider access to abortion service. In early June 2023 for example, a bill to amend Ireland's existing abortion laws was moved to the second stage to removing the three-day wait for a termination and further decriminalise abortion in the country (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018.

[4] See the announcement by *Together For Yes* for the May Day march, on 1st May 2017. The theme of the march that year was housing. Available at: https://www.togetherforyes.ie/event/may-day-march/.

[5] Groups are very different from each other in composition, structure and overall goals. For a more detailed scholarship, I suggest reading: Hearne 2020; Lima 2019, 2021; Mallon 2017; McArdle 2021; Sassi 2020; Reynolds 2024 (to mention some key publications).

Fig. 3 Housing protest organised by the Raise the Roof coalition. Alt text: Raise the Roof rallies, May 2019 (link)

Results and discussion

For many activists currently involved in housing activism, the relative success of the anti-water charges movements has developed into new forms of activism, including housing activism. In this section, I employ della Porta and Pavan's (2017, pp. 305-8) concept of 'knowledge repertoires' to analyse the knowledge production and learning of movements. These concepts include: *knowledge about the collective self* (the creation of the collective actor based on the group's vision and objective to transform ideas into practice); *knowledge about the network* (the construction of strategic actions and collaboration with the circulation of agendas and resources); *production of political alternatives* (developing a critique of the status quo and elaboration of alternatives via knowledge sharing and collaborations); but with a more specific focus on the practices of *knowledge transmission* (formal and informal opportunities for education and learning which are pedagogical in nature).

To illustrate how this typology might be used to analyse knowledge sharing and production for housing struggles, I reconstruct the path through which social movements in Ireland sustained day-to-day political action not just via support and solidarity, but also via the knowledge transmission of political strategies and collaborations that extrapolated the boundaries of the movements. This section is structured around the dialogue among those different movements, the translation of practices, and the communication of political alternatives and the formal and informal spaces for knowledge sharing.

The dialogue among visions, agendas and political alternatives

While the movements studied have different goals, visions, and intended targets, the knowledge and praxis they produced have been acknowledged by some contemporary housing activists and have informed some of their practice. To put it simply, the anti-water charges movement was a 'stop' movement, aimed at halting the implementation of a tax on water. The abortion rights movement was geared toward a referendum to change the constitution, a huge task that demanded winning that referendum. In comparison, the housing movement is about addressing the different expressions of the housing crisis, with most housing groups congregated around the centre spectrum of politics on one end, such as it was the case of the Raise The Roof coalition, and the

more left-leaning movement that proposes more radical alternatives for the housing issue, such as with the use of direct action and occupation of buildings.

As collective actors, all movements had a basic focus on human rights, that is, the right to water, the right to bodily autonomy, and the right to housing. Despite variations in implementation and level of attainment, this human rights-based approach remains relevant across all case studies. This was helpful for the legitimation of worldviews and ideas to generate new knowledge. The successful anti-water charges movement, as perceived by some interviewees, instilled a sense of victory and awakened potential to confront new challenges, despite certain activists expressing ambivalence towards the movement's outcomes (such as the continued existence of water charges and the establishment of Irish Water to manage water resources). Until this point, social movements and unions were fairly disorganized due to years of austerity and demobilization practices, in part due to the 'social partnership model', which encompassed the institutionalization of several movements, especially workers' movements represented by unions. But with the (re)involvement of unions in the austerity crisis reaction in the late 2000s, combined with local actions and nationally organized marches, there was a moment of reconnection among political groups, from unions to political parties and locally organized groups.

Acknowledging that learning occurs in both formal and informal spaces, an attempt to recreate the model of political protest implemented by the anti-water charges movements was observed. This initial dialogue among groups started when the water charge struggles were more or less resolved, in 2016, and also when the housing problem was already becoming more than just fodder for daily conversation. The housing challenges were different from the water challenge, but this did not impede the groups from communicating. As noted by this housing activist, the Water movement was about a vision for policy, while the housing movement focuses more on alternatives that can provide affordable housing for those who need it.

> I'm not saying it is easy to do, it's a very complicated thing, which is to build decent social housing communities. It is much harder to build public political pressure, but you know, what we did in there [water protests], we can do it again (Participant 12, male, age 50–60, charity worker).

Even though the goal and objectives were different, including the hope they could 'do it again', groups started to mobilise and initiated dialogues for the creation of a national housing movement, somewhat mirrored on the experience of the water charge movement. As noted by several interviewees, it was in particular the younger cohort of water activists that started the communication to later migrate to housing groups. This participant illustrates this point of view.

> So when we were in the Housing Action Now, the Irish Water movement was happening and then some young activists who had been politicised through the water thing, they got involved in Housing Action Now and they were very keen to recreate the Water movement, but for housing (Participant 22, female, age 30–40, school teacher).

In contrast, another participant observed that some people in her group were cautious about the new approaches suggested by the Water activists, which were closer with unions and institutional politics in their view. This concern is illustrated by this activist.

> (…) most of the people in Housing Action Now were maybe older, more cautious and didn't feel that that was feasible, realistic and wanted to do something that was a bit slower. And also some of those younger activists wanted to bring together other groups that were doing things about housing (Participant 27, female, 20–30, local councillor).

Interestingly, while I could not confirm the connection between the Abortion movement and the Water movement in terms of dialogues, alliances and knowledge sharing (specially due indications of the latter being leaned towards a patriarchal model of leadership), the Abortion movement involved a model of organising that included a great deal of door knocking and canvassing to create opportunities for people to be 'convinced', in combination with an strategy of building a broad platform of wide civil society representation. This point is illustrated by this activist:

> The very clear comparison that we are trying to develop here is: when we gathered to develop a campaign, the model we were very consciously trying to emulate was the repeal [the 8th amendment] model. So you build a huge broad civil society coalition who may or may not ever come together on a single issue again but they are focused on this one issue (Participant 14, male, 40–50, union representative).

In summary, the initial dialogue among these different groups started from a common understanding that even if not perfect, that modes of action from the Repeal and Water movement were successful and could be useful to the housing movements. Importantly, participants focus on the activist knowledge-practices that some activists were bringing from previous experiences. In this way, those knowledge-practices were seen as necessary as both a motivator fact ('we can do it again') and a successful model to be repeated to (remake) housing protest strategies.

Translation of knowledge and political alternatives

With a group that was not just heterogeneous but that also had different goals, the dialogue among activists from different movements started from a point of view where (a) activists felt confident their previous successes could be translated into success in the housing field; and (b) this new generation of mobilised young people were one of the most affected by the housing crisis, and they saw the housing crisis as their next big challenge. This is illustrated by the eagerness observed by some interviewees when interacting with campaigners from Repeal the 8th.

> After we had wrapped up our big win, we were like what is the next thing we are going to tackle? There is definitely an overhang of that where people are

> now seeing, 'oh well we got it with one then and now I have found my voice and now I am going to use that voice and I am going to get involved that way'. (Participant 13, female, 40–50 age, charity worker).

The timing for collaborations was also important because both the Repeal and the Water movement happened in the context of an increasingly problematic housing crisis. As noted by this activist from a union involved in the Water movement.

> Just as that was finishing, the housing crisis started to escalate. We had structural problems in our housing system that have been here for a very long time. The affordability crisis in the private rental sector, the under provision of public housing, etc. But from 2014, things started to become much more intense (Participant 14, male, 40–50, union representative).

Therefore, ties with possible collaborators formed based on participants' previous experiences of mobilization and the context of a severe housing crisis that needed fast action. On that front, both the Water charges movement and the housing movement fought against specific forms of commodification and financialisation. While for water this meant forcing people to pay for a basic right—one that, for particular reasons, had been provided without cost—decent housing has become a commodity unattainable by a substantial part of the population. Hence, the collaboration of some members of the Water movement with the housing movement was stronger in resisting neoliberal policies, with an exchange of knowledge and experiences, as there was a shared interest in building an amalgamation of knowledge on issues of common interest. This varied depending on the housing group. More radical groups, such as Take Back the City, were, for example, very critical of and against the presence of international investors in the rental housing sector. Other groups, such as Raise The Roof (RtR), were less critical of the financialisation of housing—even if they sometimes made comments in that regard—but generally, RtR focused on the right to housing and more public investment in the area.

Nevertheless, it's interesting to observe the construction of knowledge about political alternatives from different perspectives of knowledge, as housing movements attempted to coordinate various epistemological perspectives by adapting existing knowledge to the issue at hand.

Knowledge transmission and knowledge transfer practices

Considering that knowledge becomes even more important for movements in times of crisis (della Porta and Pavan 2017), housing movements started to organize around the housing issues that motivated them. Raise The Roof (RtR), for instance, focused on homelessness and on including the right to housing in the constitution, while Take Back the City and others focused on the better use of urban space, calling attention to the high number of vacant buildings and youth homelessness. In this way, housing movements were implementing a set of actions and strategies Eyerman and Jamison (1991, p. 55−7) named 'cognitive praxis', which encompasses a hybrid set of ideational and organizational practices in which movements' creativity is articulated

while being played out in a sort of 'product cycle' that, in fact, resembles the process that underlies technological innovation (della Porta and Pavan 2017). In other words, housing movements both applied the knowledge and took opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences from their networks (inside and outside housing).

Even if those tactics are not new, they are inventive ways of thinking and doing and configuring and reconfiguring relations between actors and provide that learning can be seen as a 'translocal political strategy and ways of working together' (McFarlane 2011, p. 67). This collective 'wisdom' from both movements was added to the already extensive 'urban knowledge' of housing activists who were not in any of the two other movements but had been mobilized via their own communities, political parties, or by suffering from the lack of affordable housing.

In the interviews, activists spoke of the spaces for learning provided by other housing activists and by activists originally from the other two movements. This amalgamation of knowledge went beyond having Right2Water and Repeal The 8th as the model or the goal. But since these links were partly organic, they nurtured the production and diffusion of alternative knowledge on housing, including new tactics and innovative solutions. This included action strategies to improve the groups' communication to become, in some cases, more horizontal, participatory, and dialogical, making use of the information, knowledge, and experience housing activists already had. This also includes the combination of action in local communities. For example, local groups offered legal advice on eviction cases and carried out localized action and protest for those who did not want to or could not be involved in the big actions of protest. This participant, a representative of a women's organization, explained the importance of housing actions and their connections with women and gender values supported by the Abortion campaign.

> Having the conversation was one of the most successful things in Repeal [campaign]. And for a lot of women who were involved in the campaign, they really liked that way of campaigning because there was a solidarity piece, with always four or five people participating. You weren't on your own. And some people find the big protests a bit intimidating (…). And I think it is about finding many ways in for people to get engaged in the campaign. There is no one size fits all here (Participant 13, female, 40–50 age, charity worker).

When asked about their learning experiences, some activists mentioned how much they learned from their previous housing experiences, such as highly visible building occupations involving direct action, specifically the Bolt Hostel in 2014 and Apollo House in 2016. In July 2015, activists from the IHN and anarchist groups occupied a vacant building on Bolton Street, owned by Dublin City Council (DCC). The building, previously used for emergency accommodation, was refurbished by the activists and renamed The Bolt Hostel, as it was repurposed as a homeless hostel. While addressing urgent accommodation needs, the occupation also diffused a political message through public events and protest rallies. Despite the activists' initial hope to stay in the building, legal proceedings were initiated by DCC against the activists for trespassing (see a more detailed analysis in McArdle 2021).

The other high-profile case was the occupation of Apollo House in 2016, when the IHN was joined by trade unions, artists, and activists. They staged a high-profile occupation, known as Home Sweet Home (HSH), by opening Apollo House, a vacant office building in Dublin, in December 2016. With strong visibility on national television and social media, the action gained mainstream attention and support from the public. At some point, Apollo House was accommodating 40 rough sleepers. The occupation, combined with public events and protests, emphasized the political nature of the housing crisis. An injunction was granted in late December 2016, and after negotiations and a promise from the government to improve homeless services, activists left the building (see a more detailed analysis in Mallon 2017 and Lima 2019).

The activists spoke of these experiences with affection, sadness, and awe, as they were occupations of high-profile buildings (especially Apollo House) that marked the recent history of direct action in housing activism in the country (Lima 2021). They brought their experience into workshops and training sessions for new and old members, where they could reflect about issues such as housing and gender, migration, and racism. As noted by this activist,

> (…) the Bolt [hostel] was a learning curve for a lot of people. I suppose people setback for a while, we reequipped ourselves. I think it affected people in a personal level. It was emotional. We have learned lessons, we learned what we can do about it and for me, the workshop on organising, on communication were one of the most useful and best things I learned (Participant 7, female, 30–40, health worker).

Activists, especially those focused on community organization, invested in pedagogical strategies to (re)create some of the energies gained in the water protests. As Crowther and Lucio-Villegas (2012) emphasize, there is a strong emancipatory potential of radical education for political action. These strategies are mainly observed in this research through workshops and training sessions on topics such as direct action, media training, anti-fascism, and anti-racism. The critical approach is innovative when compared to the water charges and abortion rights movements, which were largely composed of native Irish and white Irish middle-class feminists (see a more elaborate critique in Chakravarty et al. (2020), who analyze the failures of intersectionality in the abortion referendum campaign). MERJ (Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice), for example, was born out of the feelings of exclusion of migrant and ethnic minority in the Together For Yes campaign, even though the image and case of Savita Halappanavar, a migrant woman who died of sepsis after being denied an abortion procedure, has been widely used materials campaign illustrations (MERJ 2021). Speaking on this innovative aspect, one participant illustrates the training she received on how to fight racism within the housing movement itself,

> We got together, we organised a few hours' educational workshop on what racism is from our perspective and just to make sure that kind of racist views stay

> away from the Irish Housing Network because there are attempts (Participant 20, female, 20–30 age, teaching assistant).

As previous research has noted, this innovative choice is not just conceptual or unintentional; it's indeed supported by a rational and strategic practice to produce and expand identities while attempting to make the movement more inclusive. This also endeavors to turn it into a mass movement, as occurred with the other two movements. I find that learning is not only a complex and multi-layered phenomenon (Lira and March 2021), but it's also fundamental for a housing activism that is inclusive and considers the intricacy of housing problems and how they affect different groups (migrants, women, the poor) in multiple ways and at multiple levels. Innovation is an important element that contributes to pathways toward active housing justice.

Moreover, I try to be careful here not to romanticize translocal knowledge transmission, paying heed to McFarlane (2011). Despite the housing movements' notable translocal reach, there were sometimes heated debates within the movement and disagreements over political directions. For instance, not all interviewed participants agreed that the experience of the Water and Abortion movements was very important to the housing movement. One interviewee noted that some critical agents remained where they were and didn't try to reach out to the housing group she participates in,

> Some people from the Repeal the 8th went door-knocking but not that many … because if they had gone in the same numbers they have gone for the Repeal – and it was a lot of people – we'd be a little better off. I do not feel all those people moved to housing like that (Participant 2, female, age 20–30, postgraduate student).

While the housing movement, as it was observed at the time of this research, had yet to achieve success in transforming housing conditions and becoming a large-scale movement - something this author does not expect due to the very different nature and goals of the three movements being compared - they nonetheless have gathered critical knowledge and capacity to criticise the ways housing policy is designed and implemented, to 'make visible alternative values and visions that can animate people' (Crowther and Lucio-Villegas 2012, p. 66).

In this way, knowledge transfer, critical thinking, and innovation were indispensable for the viability of dialogue among groups carrying out strategic housing action. This is because decoding the status quo, through its exposition and critique, is fundamental for the innovation and systematization of collective action frameworks, whose constructive process takes place through the framing of the problem (Nyemeyer 2014).

Discussion and conclusion

This research examined knowledge production and transmission within social movements, building on the conceptual ideas of a social practice that produces knowledge and pathways to housing justice. Moreover, this research addresses the ways in which

knowledge is produced by movements, how it spreads, and its impact and content in the field of housing. Focusing on how this knowledge production matters for social movements, but especially for the housing movement, I mapped the production and transmission of knowledge brought about by activists that move from one movement to the other, bringing their worldviews, experiences, stories and knowledge with them. This new knowledge reflects the multifaceted ways neoliberal policies affect people and also the concerns of some housing groups with learning from previous experiences and reach among vulnerable groups.

I find that this knowledge is fundamentally context-dependent, developed in alignment with local needs and limitations, including social movements capacity, level of institutionalisation, political force and relevance. In this way, the paper makes a contribution to housing research by adding to the theoretical bases of innovation perspectives by focusing on the role of cross-movement relationship in housing mobilisation, from non-housing movements to housing movements. This knowledge that travel from one movement to another has the potential not only to make democratic spaces more inclusive but also the potential to generate housing activism learning that account for structural inequalities, one that disrupts housing financialisation and enriches housing justice (as seen in Lira and March 2021; Fields 2015 and Vilenica et al. 2019). The evidence here suggests that it is knowledge practices (della Porta and Pavan 2017) that has heightened the production and sharing of knowledge to incorporate once excluded forms of knowledge from a diversity of people and movements. These findings also highlight the greater heterogeneity and relationality of knowledge produced by social movements, recognising the cross-fertilisation and multi-dimensionality of social movement practices. If knowledge-based practices are relevant for the success of social movements, especially contemporary housing movements, then knowledge production is all the more essential for movements fighting for justice and inclusion.

Yet, the response of the Irish public has been far from what housing activists, advocates, and commentators seem to expect, considering the deepness and scope of the current housing crisis in the country. It demonstrates that despite being innovative by attempting to be inclusive (this, in fact, does not apply to all housing movements), the attempts to replicate a mass-movement comparable to the Right2Water and Repeal the 8th have been unsuccessful. This disparity in achieving a broad, unified mass movement requires further explanation. It is not because housing is an insignificant issue, but rather due to several interconnected factors that differentiate it from the more singular campaigns of Right2Water (focused primarily on abolishing water charges) and Repeal the 8th (focused on constitutional change regarding abortion access).

The inherent complexity of the housing issue itself makes a universally simple demand challenging. Unlike a clear ‘yes/no’ policy target, housing involves a vast array of interconnected challenges including supply shortages, affordability, rental costs, land speculation, homelessness, mortgage debt, and planning regulations. Addressing these requires a complex interplay of market interventions, legislative changes, and significant public investment, touching on diverse sectors like banking, construction, and social welfare. This multifaceted nature makes it difficult to distil into a single, mobilising demand.

What is more, the diversity of demands and experiences within the housing movement contributes to a less unified front. While the Right2Water movement coalesced around a common opposition to water charges impacting nearly all households, and Repeal the 8th united a broad coalition around a specific constitutional amendment, the housing crisis affects people in profoundly different ways. For instance, homeless individuals have immediate needs vastly different from struggling renters facing eviction or those unable to afford to buy a home. This leads to a range of distinct, sometimes competing, demands from different activist groups. This fragmentation might also reflect a divergence in how different groups produce and value knowledge.

Finally, the definition of success for the housing movement is much less clear-cut than for the other movements. For Right2Water, success was the abolition of charges. For Repeal the 8th, it was the successful referendum. For housing, 'success' could mean many things: a constitutional right to housing, a massive expansion of social housing, an end to 'no-fault' evictions, or comprehensive tenants' rights. While progress has been made on some specific aspects, the absence of a single, highly visible, and achievable legislative or policy target has meant that the housing movement, despite its critical importance and the widespread impact of the crisis, has struggled to achieve the same level of unified mass mobilisation and a definitive win comparable to the other social movements. But drawing on the insights from militant research, it becomes clear that 'success' for housing movements also lie in the very processes of knowledge production and political recomposition, rather than solely in immediate legislative victories. For instance, the Ireland's CATU focus on tenant organising, collective direct action, and grassroots democracy to fight the housing challenges 1970s rent strikes exemplifies how housing movements knowledge on rent control and tenant activism that might have been lost or marginalized from mainstream discourse can help to sharpen and clarifying the re-emergence of tenants challenging evictions, increasing rents and housing precarity (Kallin and Gray 2024). This type of conversation actively provides vital, context-dependent learning for present-day challenges.

Further research could apply a decolonial lens to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Irish housing movements in their quest for justice and inclusion, particularly in relation to knowledge production and mobilisation from below (see Lima 2021; for example). This perspective can encourage a more nuanced and inclusive approach to understanding the complexities of the housing crisis and the diverse forms of knowledge that can contribute to meaningful housing justice. Another venue is to investigate how the diverse knowledge within the housing movement can contribute to articulating more transformative goals rooted in principles of social justice and community well-being, potentially leading to more unified and resonant demands.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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