

# UABDIVULGA

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## The Urban Social Movement in Barcelonès Nord (1954-1987)



With the arrival of people from other parts of the Spanish state, the towns of Badalona, Santa Coloma de Gramenet and Sant Adrià de Besòs underwent a large population growth starting in the 1940s. The fight against substandard housing and lack of basic services, along with the action of grassroots Catholic organisations and anti-Franco activists, favoured the formation of a strong sense of collective identification, as well as a powerful urban social movement which developed during the last years of the Franco regime and the transition.

Trafalgar Square in the neighbourhood of Llefià (Badalona), occupied by National and Municipal Police Forces (February-April 1986). Source: Arxiu Històric de Llefià.

This research examines the powerful urban social movement originated during the last years of francoist dictatorship and time known as ‘the transition’, in the *Barcelonès Nord* area. At the North of the city of Barcelona this area is formed by the towns of Badalona, Santa Coloma de Gramenet and Sant Adrià de Besòs. The *Barcelonès Nord* experienced a large population growth in the early 40s and 50s of the twentieth century, when the arrival of people from other parts of the Spanish state resumed after the end of the Spanish Civil War.

The daily struggle to improve life in the neighbourhoods, where substandard housing predominated, ushered in an early organisation. Francoist authorities tried to control these

neighbourhoods by encouraging particular models of association. However, these attempts at control did not succeed thanks to other factors favouring the formation of a strong sense of collective identity and class which led to the subsequent outbreak of local movements.

The actions of catholic worker's organisations as well as a group of young priests promoting a different apostolate in these towns' working-class neighbourhoods and the performance of the anti-Franco activists were crucial. The leftist Marxist political parties and other organisations traditionally prioritized work in factories, but gradually gave more importance to the neighbourhoods until the seventies, when they considered it comparable to their union battlefield.

It was in the seventies when a series of struggles in different neighbourhoods of the towns of *Barcelonès Nord* erupted in full force, driven either by social centres, neighbourhood committees or even neighbourhood associations. The initial reason was the poor construction and lack of any kind of service. But soon more politicized claims against dictatorship were made, demanding democratic councils with a speech highly critical of the capitalist system. Francoist local authorities were overwhelmed.

In order to establish democratic councils, the neighbourhood movement experienced a moment of crisis among other reasons for the departure of neighbourhood leaders to take responsibility for the new councils, the debate on what the role of the movement in the new context political should be, crisis of the different leftist groups and, also, because of the concern of the economic crisis itself. However, this did not lead to the disappearance of the local movement since, in the eighties, there were still conflicts with an intensity comparable to of the previous decade, although more responsive to defensive reactions and a clear will assumed by large sectors of the population to change the political system as had happened in the neighbourhood struggle against the dictatorship.

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### **References**

*El moviment veïnal al Barcelonès Nord (1954-1987)*, José Miguel Gómez Cuesta doctoral thesis, read at the *Department of Modern and Early Modern History* and supervised by Dr. Martin Marin Corbera.

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