Reassembling tourism labour and housing precarity: Barcelona during COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis severely disrupted the lives of hospitality and tourism workers worldwide. In Southern European cities, overly dependent on the visitor economy, a substantial part of the workforce plunged into uncertainty, adding to the rising challenge of housing affordability resulting from a rapid financialisation of real estate assets over the last decade. This paper examines how interactive service workers have coped with, resisted and negotiated such augmented and double-edged precarity during the COVID-19 crisis in Barcelona. From an intersectional perspective, the study deploys an assemblage-based analysis to trace the variety of ways through which capacities for sustaining labour and securing homes emerged during the pandemic. We foreground a typology of adaptation practices and different trajectories nested to critical events to reveal the spatialities and materialities of precarity beyond mere dialectical narrations. The research findings suggest that pre-pandemic labour and housing conditions were linked to the awkward welfare arrangements and the forms of labour and housing protections during COVID-19, which in most cases created new conditions for precarity. Different contingencies were coped at the margin of institutional support, nuancing emerging geographies of precarity and (re)produced through residential deprivation and embracing informality. The desire to work in the tourism and cultural sectors while imagining where and how to dwell surfaced as a controversial negotiation that affected workers unequally and foregrounded the possibility spaces of the precarious geography of tourism.

Keywords

Assemblage thinking, tourism labour, housing affordability, (im)mobilities, workers' agency, social precariousness, COVID-19.

Introduction

Tourism has come to represent an important dimension of economic activity in Southern European cities (Tulumello et al., 2020; Benítez-Aurioles, 2020), a region with similar labour and housing regimes (Arbaci, 2019). Especially after the 2008 financial crisis, neoliberal austerity measures and welfare roll-back set off new geographies of precarity. The rise of rentier capitalism could be indeed understood as a critical driver of tourist-led gentrification and the intensification of short-term residential environments for transnational dwellers in Southern European cities (López-Gay et al., 2020; Cocola-Gant et al., 2021). This context constitutes the pre-existing power relations framing the social vulnerability of tourism-dependent economies, further affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Barcelona, one of the most visited destinations in this area, is presented as an iconic case to analyse the enmeshment of labour and housing precarity.

In the wake of the pandemic, some countries have introduced different welfare measures to protect workers and tenants. One such measure is the job retention scheme (JRS) (Drahokoupil & Müller, 2022). Nevertheless, its impacts must also be regarded against the concurrent evolution of urban and population change in Southern European cities (cf. Cocola et al., 2021), primarily for the pivotal role of the home in the sanitary crisis. At the same time, some authors and institutions have manifested significant concerns about the effects of COVID-19 on tourism workers (Baum et al., 2020), particularly on interactive service workers and women (Eurofound, 2020).

Feminist and labour geography scholars have highlighted the challenges framing labour and housing market inequalities characterising neoliberal urban development. For instance, Castree et al. (2004) note that sub-local segmentation is both occupational and geographical, creating conditions where "*certain groups can become 'geographically entrapped' within certain districts*". This assumption is debated in the case of hospitality and tourism workers in London (Church & Frost, 2004) and Barcelona (Valente et al., 2021). Feminist scholars have further revealed the associated material conditions of gender inequality nested with migration in cities of the global north (Hanson & Pratts, 1995; Mitchell, 1996; McDowell, 2008), situating unequal power relations (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2011).

This study is situated within the geographical analyses of precarity (Jeronen & Rose, 2020). It considers the enmeshments of both domains of precarity – housing and labour –to understand how workers have navigated through the pandemic, engaging in a grounded inquiry into the intersectionalities of workers' experiences of precariousness.

Most studies of tourism labour and precariousness have focused on two strands of research. The regulation approach frames precarity as a structural problem of capitalism and neoliberal institutions (Jeronen & Rose, 2020), engendering active forms of flexible work (cf. McDowell et al., 2009; Cañada, 2018). The governance perspective (Jerone & Rose, 2020) focuses instead on the role of immigration and labour market policies, which facilitate migrant divisions (cf. McDowell et al., 2009) and contemporary forms of racialised, gendered and unfree labour (cf. Strauss, 2013, 2018; Terry, 2018). Our research feeds from both streams but then focuses on how people resist and cope against, upon and about political precarities (Jerone & Pose, 2020). It does so from a perspective that builds on relational ontologies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; McFarlane, 2011; Anderson et al., 2012) and notions of labour and housing as infrastructures (Power, 2019; Nelson & Bigger, 2022). This implies looking at the multiplicity of constituencies of urban life and the distributed agencies that offer resources and (dis-)able workers' capacities. We aim to contribute to theorising urban housing and labour assemblages by considering the materialities,

affects, and practices of adaptation and protection (during the pandemic), constituted not as fixed and structured but as fluid and transformative processes (McFarlane, 2011). Concerning the studies of the labour geography of precarity (Strauss, 2018; Ioannides & Zampoukos, 2018), this research reflects upon the politics of precarity associated with flexible labour relations and housing instability in tourism geographies during moments of crisis.

In the next section, we review the literature that advanced the understanding of workers' relational agency and the analysis of labour and dwelling as assemblages.

The relational agency of labour and housing

Diverse strands of relational thinking in geographical studies allow configuring various forms of knowledge production concerning socio-spatial theory.

The ontological tradition of structure and agency following the ideas of Anthony Giddens is very influential among some scholars (cf. Castree et al.,2004). Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2011) propose a social embeddedness framework to overcome structural theories' limitations in understanding how labour agency is articulated with other actors embedded at different scales. This approach suggests an understanding of how social relations constitute the power space of workers, from the articulations of agency and the ingrained inequality of power relations. Tourism geography scholars also influence this line of relational thinking (e.g. Zampoukos, 2018). While relationism in labour geography tries to situate the potential of workers' power, Strauss (2020) considers that the workers' agency and experiences are taken for granted, as the politics involving the workers' positionalities and identities. However, fixed structures still frame this relational perspective. Thus, Jessop et al. (2008) recognise the polyform and multidimensional socio-spatial relations and provide four analytical dimensions - territory, space, scale and network – to analyse such relations in a specific geographical context. Alternative relational approaches are offered by assemblage thinking (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1978), non-representational theories (Thrift, 2008) and actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), differing in some fundamental conceptions such as the notion of flat ontologies. Anderson et al. (2012:17-18) consider Jessop et al.' (2008) approach somehow limited to analysing new patterns, principles and forms of social-spatial relations while not providing a theoretical account for the articulations of agency.

On the other hand, the cause-effect relation based on the rent gap is a popular approach in urban studies of residential displacement (Slater, 2018). However, such linear causality needs to pay more attention to the diversity of affordances, materialities and urban displacement experiences beyond dislocation (Jayne & Hall, 2019) while considering housing (im)mobilities over life courses (Coe et al., 2016). Therefore, theorising housing affordability as a non-linear urban trajectory is critical for considering the unfavourable environment (Aalbers, 2019), where housing is increasingly seen as an asset to invest in instead of a home, a basic infrastructure of care (Power, 2019).

Taking stock of research looking further into relational ontologies (Thrift, 2008; McFarlane, 2010; Anderson et al., 2012) and engaging with the infrastructural turn in geography (Nelson & Bigger, 2022; Power, 2019), we propose to approach the labour-housing nexus as a relational endeavour concerning how precarity is enacted and experienced in the geography of tourism during the COVID-19 crisis. In the next section, we introduce the critical parameters of assemblage-based analysis.

Working and dwelling through urban assemblages

Assemblage thinking in contemporary socio-spatial theory is deployed to theorise the world of relations, examine the processes of composition, rethink agency as distributed, causality in non-linear, immanent terms, and the orientation of assembled orders in stable and changeable conditions (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 3). The *machinic assemblages* of Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) are a disposition of irreducible and immanent heterogeneities (Saldanha, 2006). This machinic functioning eludes mediations in favour of provisional holding-together and a continuous process of change and transformation, where entities can be detached from any assemblage to become part of another: new potentials are liberated by the appearance of a new actor or the removal of an existing actor (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 9-11). Machinic refers to capacities as an open-ended set of unpredictable possibilities that cannot be deduced from the entities (Anderson et al., 2012). This is a way to avoid holism, which sees entities as entirely determined by their relations (Anderson et al., 2012, p.27) but insists that autonomous capacities produce that difference. In this sense, the concept of *line of flight* (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988) helps explain the importance of the exteriority of relations when referring to adaptation and transformation practices, helping to approach the issue of stability of assemblages. In Saldanha's view (2006), the term *viscosity* expresses the spatiality in an open-ended set of possibilities of de- and re-territorialisation. This is a different perspective from other examinations of workers' spatial entrapment (Castree et al., 2004) and displacement (cf. Slate, 2018; Valente et al., 2023), expressing a spatial order structured on fixity and flux at different scales.

In this regard, agency and causality are conceived in distributed and non-linear terms. For Latour (2005), the agency is the "power to act", which is not held solely on humans but in relation to and through other (non)human entities. This power of action is a "*…function of complex material systems, a field of multiplicities and assemblages of heterogeneous (non-)human components, which creatively create conditions of becoming*" (Thrift, 2008, p. 36). In these terms, causality is not located in a specific capable agent but in the interactive assembly through which causality operates as a nonlinear process (Anderson et al., 2012).

Assembling dwelling as practice and as a gradual process, McFarlane's (2011) perspective of the city as an urban assemblage insists on situating the specific relational context of the practical engagement with place – or, as Saldanha (2006, p. 19) posits, paying attention to the interconnections that working bodies forge with things and places. The embodiment of precarity is assumed to be a process "*signalling the ongoing crafting*" (Lancione, 2019, p. 4): the body is the space where "the city" is enacted (emphasis added by the author). In this regard, the socio-materiality of the work-home relationship is critically analysed through notions of infrastructure, understood as social-material assemblage but also from their relational, social, and affective dimensions. Nelson & Bigger's (2022) taxonomy of infrastructure and labour considers care as the infrastructure, as it sustains reproductive labour. Others, like Simone (2004), introduce the notion of "people as infrastructures", where their activities, collaborations and relations are conceived as a platform leading to and reproducing life in the city (2004:408). Through these lenses, in considering housing as an infrastructure of care, Power (2019) reflects on the relational production of care capacities, which interrogates the nature and organisation of relations that make care possible beyond housing.

In the following sections, we employ these theoretical grounds to reconstruct an analytic account of securing labour and housing, tracing its connections, practices and processes of re-assembling, considering differential trajectories.

Setting the Barcelona context: Precarity through flexible protection and security

In 2019, the Barcelona City Council issued a report on hospitality and tourism workers in Barcelona (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2019), showing that their purchasing power had decreased in the last decade in the context of tourism growth. It was the worst-paid sector in the city, with a significant salary bias penalising women and mainly migrants from the "Global South". In this context, the COVID-19 crisis emerged as another critical event in the precarity of workers. The Spanish Job-Retention Scheme (JRS), covering up to 70% of salaries (first six months and after 50%), and the temporary moratorium on mortgage evictions and rental contracts were the critical pillars of the Spanish welfare policy during the pandemic. Moreover, the Spanish State increased the minimum wage to a thousand euros after 2019 and during the pandemic. Nevertheless, access to the protection schemes was highly contingent on labour conditions, health restrictions, and institutional capacities. These contingencies made many workers ineligible, leaving them unprotected and deepening pre-pandemic inequalities. Thus, housing and social policies are vital components of the working lives assemblages, as they condition the capacities to stay in or move out and care-with.

Contributing to the precarity of working lives, work rhythms in tourism synchronise with the temporal patterns of tourism mobilities, driving various forms of fragmentation and discontinuity (Jordhus-Lier, 2015). Access to the JRS required registration as (self-) employer before declaring the State of alarm in March 2020. This situation was the cause of exclusion from JRS and other kinds of subsidies, as they were temporarily unemployed at the time. Another form of straightforward exclusion detected in our field material was related to the decision of employers to keep workers under JRS or dismiss them.

On the other hand, the access to eviction moratoriums was designed only for mortgage holders. In any case, rental evictions were unprotected, affecting most of our research participants. Tenants found temporary protection through moratoriums on rentals and mortgage payments issued by the State. Additionally, the Catalan government introduced a rental cap policy, implemented during 2020-2021, preventing rentals from rising during the pandemic (Jofre-Montseny et al., 2023). However, such measures did not include tenants holding a short-term contract and other forms of informal tenancy.

Methods and data

This research follows a post-structuralist approach (Creswell, 2013) based on assemblage thinking to understand the COVID-19 crisis as an event. Hence, precarity is not a socially constructed category associated with labour or housing status but a process where differentiation, vulnerability and provisionality emerge, co-determine one another, stabilise, and change. Likewise, intersectionality is introduced here from an ecological perspective (Ingold, 2000) that allows escaping cultural binaries and focusing on how difference is experienced, produced through connections and practices, and linked to contingencies, materialities, corporealities, life courses and possibility spaces.

Our sample comprises interactive service workers in different tourism-related sectors in Barcelona, whose income depends primarily on tourism. The selection contains diverse traits, such as workers with (in-)formal and other employment relations, sex, age, education, nationality, and citizenship legal status. The recruitment of research participants (RP) was accessed through gateway informants (unions and charities), target-oriented search through the LinkedIn recruitment tool and random contacts in the public space with informal street workers. The ethics

board of our university previously validated recruitment methods, data protection and scripts. The final sample (Table 1) comprises 18 RP (half of whom are women) aged between 27 and 54. We managed to recruit RPs from different subsectors reflecting the composition of the tourism labour market of Barcelona (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2019). Many workers are not unionised or represented by works councils, and none are members of tenants' unions.

In-depth biographical interviews were conducted in May-July 2021. Participants received the project's information sheet before the interviews and submitted a verbal consent form, which was recorded. They were compensated for their time with a 15€ shopping voucher. Face-to-face interviews were recorded verbatim upon request and later transcribed and anonymised to avoid revealing the interviewees' identities. Transcriptions were copied manually and reviewed by three researchers. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview script addresses the broad dimensions of our object of study: reasons for immigration and residency in Barcelona, evolving labour and housing conditions in terms of contracts, environments, negotiations, affective states, work-life balance, and labour and housing practices related to ambitions for living and working in a tourist city. The principal topics for exploration are the critical events in life courses, the role that diverse agencies play in producing social precariousness and offering security to workers before and during COVID-19. Preliminary research framing the interview topics also included revising regulations/policies on housing, labour, and citizenship. The interviews were semi-structured to adapt to each participant's experience with the guidance of researchers. Through a recursive process, researchers asked participants to comment on a timeline of events and consequences over their trajectories to reduce bias in research interpretations (Hollstein, 2019).

To trace the process of change and adaptation with an intersectional approach, we identified some properties to be drafted with other conditions of difference. Following population geographers' concerns, we avoid using age cohorts, as the timing and ordering of life events and transitions vary from person to person (Bailey, 2009). After coding the data, divergent desires and difficulties emerged according to the length of labour trajectory, citizenship status, or care responsibilities. Therefore, the sample was organised into diverse groups of concern to explore these differences (Table 1). Thus, these *a priori* features do not assume fixed identities or agency power.

Table 1: Interviewed workers in different concern groups.

Group	Code	Sex	Nationality	Age	Education	Employment position 2019-21	Residential Arrangements 2019-21
Desires for Citizenship	W1	Woman	Colombia	34	University	Hostel receptionist	Work in exchange for residency / Cohabiting with friends
	W2	Man	Venezuela	43	University	Waiter/Unemployed	Cohabiting with friends
	W3	Man	Argentina	47	Professional Certificate	Chef	Cohabiting with partners and strangers
	W7	Man	Pakistan	30	University	Waiter/Rickshaw Guide	Cohabiting with family / cohabiting with strangers
Anticipatory Ass	W4	Man	Spain	30	University	Event Attendant / Unemployed	Cohabiting with family, owning a home

	W6	Man	Chile	30	University	Call centre agent	Cohabiting with partner
	W9	Man	France	33	University	Call centre supervisor	Cohabiting with a partner, own flat
	W14	Woman	Spain	31	University	Call centre agent	Cohabiting with workmates
	W16	Woman	Czech Rep.	28	University	Receptionist, Short-term rental agency	Cohabiting with strangers
	W18	Man	Spain	27	University	Customer service, Heritage Site	Cohabiting with workmates
(Not) Lost in transition	W8	Man	Italy	39	University	Events PR and back office; tour guide	Cohabiting with strangers / Alone / Partner
	W11	Woman	Ireland	44	University	Tour guide; Actress	Cohabiting with strangers
	W12	Woman	France	38	University	Operations Manager, Short-term rentals agency	Alone, own flat
	W17	Woman	Spain	35	University	Event supervisor; Administrative, Yacht Consulting	Cohabiting with a partner, a family-owned flat
Long-term precariousness	W5	Man	Spain	47	Professional Certificate	Rickshaw guide	Alone / Cohabiting with family, family-owned flat
	W10	Woman	Uruguay	48	Professional Certificate	Hotel maid	Cohabiting with child
	W13	Woman	Ecuador	48	Professional Certificate	Hotel maid	Cohabiting with partner
	W15	Woman	Peru	54	High School	Hotel maid	Cohabiting with adult children

Considering how to analyse urban assemblages, we follow McFarlane's suggestion to focus on the diversity of practices in rearranging everyday social spaces when connections and encounters with new actors are established (McFarlane, 2011). We also follow a process-oriented methodology (cf. Lancione, 2019) to trace change and adaptation. For such purposes, we use two techniques. First, data analysis follows a reconstructive and sequential narrative method (Hollstein, 2019). Narrative interviews offer a significant freedom to "*express individual meaning, goals, systems of relevance, and action orientations in the context of their biography*" (Hollstein, 2019, p. 5). Second, an event-state network method (Miles & Huberman, 1994) is deployed to organise data over time sequences corresponding with critical episodes during the pandemic, situating in time micro-events, adaptation practices, and changing states/conditions.

Results

Desires of citizenship of undocumented workers

Our four interviewees sharing this status were laid off during the first lockdown without compensation, leading them to find alternative sources of income to secure housing and food. Navigating through the pandemic city involved reassembling practices such as networking with friends, loved ones, compatriots, and charities to stay informed, re-code housing materialities, or deliver informal services. However, these new connections could break down anytime, while their dependency on them reflects their vulnerability.

The restrictions in Spanish migration policy for all undocumented migrants force them to wait for at least three years before they can seek out a full-time contract and, subsequently, access citizenship rights. This citizenship form appears as a complex assemblage of biopower, connecting with institutions like the police, and is reciprocally tied to forms of exploitation and unfreedom of urban labour geographies in the Global North (Lewis et al., 2015). W2, a 43-year-old Venezuelan man, spent three years before the pandemic working 50-60 hours per week as a head waiter in the hope of normalising his immigration status. The sanitary restrictions on the hospitality sector during the pandemic complicated his situation:

"*I had been preparing my papers. I had everything ready, but when I had to return the application, he (employer) did not make a labour contract for me.*".

In this exclusionary game, charity organisations were critical in sustaining housing and foregrounding employment possibilities. However, charity capacities are constrained by their limited resources, sometimes subsidised by governments. W2 found shelter through their rent subsidies, and they helped him find work in other sectors. However, other connections can sustain labour and housing through collaboration among flatmates, the recoding of housing and digital media as labour infrastructures.

> "*I took some informal work in a restaurant. We made sushi with the guys in the flat, and I gave English lessons to a girl. My flatmates helped me when I did not have enough to buy food. Caritas also helped me to pay the rent for five months*."

Social media platforms such as Facebook and peer-to-peer networks based on cohabitation played an essential role in reassembling livelihoods (W2 and W3). During the lockdowns, the door-to-door delivery was considered a basic need. W3 was a 47-year-old Argentinean cook who arrived in Barcelona in 2019 with his wife. During 2020, they survived by delivering homemade croissants through Facebook. They lived in a relative's flat, where they could cook at home and organise deliveries. Despite living in the suburbs, accessing public transportation and delivering food was easy. This case shows how reassembling labour involves a process of appropriation with digital technologies, body skills, kitchen home and mobile phone and affective networks of compatriots—a provisional assemblage of homemade food delivery to ensure housing affordability.

> "*I started to make butter croissants, to offer them on Facebook all over Barcelona, Cornella. People contacted me, and we arranged it, and we would take it to them, we would deliver it to their homes.".*

The properties of Facebook algorithms in connecting people permitted W3 to network with the Argentinean community of Barcelona. Several groups account for thousands of members, which created a material resource to rework his skills as a pastry chef. W3 found a full-time job as a pastry chef in an Argentinean food company: "*Actually, I got it through people advertising about me*.".

Housing (im)mobilities among this group of interviewees are characterised by intermittent home (de-)attachments, conditioned by the persistence of poor working, labour exploitation, or unfree labour (Strauss, 2014, p. 175). Material and more-than-representational constituents offer valuable insights into their experiences and situate the demarcations of (in-)formal housing (Jayne & Hall, 2019). W1, a 34-year-old Colombian woman, reported working in exchange for hostel residency. In this way, she stayed employed and kept a roof over her head. This arrangement

exposed her to an unsupportive living environment and unfree labour as she had nowhere else to go. During the pandemic, accommodations like hostels or short-term rentals reoriented their businesses to offer temporary housing. The pandemic hostel was captured by a new affective atmosphere (Anderson, 2009) and a different labour embodiment.

"*I was already exhausted. I did not sleep well. Moreover, the kind of guests that were there, even if you are not working as a social worker, or in a psychiatric centre, or if you are a psychologist, you can put up with this, but these kinds of guests, alcoholics, guests who took a night and went home, who left leftovers in the room, who woke you up late, or who was talking to you at the reception like that…, that you were carrying heavy things, difficult people.*".

She quit her full-time job/residency to work just two days per week, earning a tiny salary, thanks to the generosity of some friends who took her in.

Ensuring housing involves renting rooms without contracts, which presupposes limited bargaining power for those room tenants. Informal rental rooms are part of the housing assemblage of undocumented migrants. In this assemblage, charities are a solution for many migrants as they subsidise informal renting. While the Spanish Rental Law allows undocumented migrants to sign rental contracts, it only regulates rental agreements for over 12 months. Therefore, the civil code handles short-term rentals in Spain, which offers different types of security and is hard to inspect, so it presupposes an escape way to rent rooms without contracts. This allows many short-term housing practices and different material comfortabilities and securities. W7, a 30-year-old Pakistani, was laid off and unable to return with his wife to Pakistan. During the first lockdown, he rented a shared room with many other compatriots in a flat: "*It was like a hostel*" (W7). W3 and his wife could not stay at their relatives' flat because they could not afford it despite his new job. They found a room in a shared apartment with a short-term contract: "*The room was the best value for our salary"*. His unemployed wife spent most of her time in their bedroom, with limited access to the common spaces in the flat.

Anticipatory assemblages of young workers in the fluid life stage

Emancipation from home, stepping into the labour market, moving up the labour ladder, reworking over new jobs and professions, waiting for civil servant competitions, stopping living with the unknown, changing to a more comfortable neighbourhood, living with friends, in a couple, or buying a flat. All these desires and affective states emerge through the scripts of this diverse group of young workers. This diversity of early-career transitions is nested in intersections and fluid life stages (cf. Bailey, 2009). Tourism and hospitality jobs emerged as part of this anticipatory urban assemblage, the "what might be possible" (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988). The pandemic was a crucial event in this process of transition. Young workers in our sample, primarily Europeans, had access to JRS or unemployment benefits. Access to labour protection was highly significant for unionised workers (Airbnb call centre workers, for instance), abating the risk of housing deprivation and eviction, at least provisionally. Despite the low subsidies received (a reflection of the low salaries earned), their affordances were mainly negotiated through kindships (couples, friends, parents), critical in housing (im)mobilities (Coulter et al., 2016) and care-with (Power, 2019). Indeed, all such cases report housing arrangements with a lower risk than those experienced by other RPs, such as undocumented workers, singles, and single parents.

The following case exemplifies how young people with low-paid jobs in tourism needed to collaborate to reassemble housing and labour arrangements. Also, it shows the critical role of solidarity among unionised workers and how their desires for housing stability were embodied

through coping practices. W14, a 30-year-old Spanish woman, found her first full-time job after university in an Airbnb call centre. She decided to switch to the night shift to earn more money and afford herself better access to housing. She explained how the pandemic and in-company unionisation created an effective atmosphere of compassion and solidarity. Work council agreement with Airbnb headquarters and the outsourcing company offered her time for reworking and negotiating a severance pay after Airbnb closed the call centre in Barcelona. In this context of collective redundancy, sharing housing with friends emerged as a practice of commoning care and a way to face insecurity in labour.

"*If you do not want to live badly, I mean that you only have enough to pay the rent and to do the home shopping twice instead of three times a week, you must do these things... it is always an economical choice because everyone would like to live alone. Moreover, it indeed corresponds to the pandemic times.".*

(*Not) lost in transition*

(Not) being lost in transition was an emerging affective state experienced by some of our RP related to the risks of losing their jobs, homes and housing arrangements, hardly earned in previous years. This group includes four Europeans (three migrants) struggling to secure labour and residential stability. During the pandemic, the process of reassembling involved work and housing practices of informality and deprivation. In some cases, housing became an unpleasant labour infrastructure. Avoiding eviction was a constant struggle for those who lived alone.

The following case illustrates how labour and housing entangled materially in the context of making a career as a film festival producer in a tourist city. The pandemic greatly affected W8, a 39-year-old Italian man, cultural festival worker and tour guide. COVID-19 restrictions highly regulated both sectors, so making a livelihood implied temporary migration, poor working conditions, and housing deprivation. During the first lockdown, his flatmates left the flat, and he negotiated to pay 70% of the total price thanks to his parents' pension. His landlord evicted him after the first lockdown. Meanwhile, his film festival employers reduced his pay because of public health restrictions for public events. However, his workload increased as online festivals implied new customer service infrastructure delivered from home by him.

"*An infrastructure that I embodied through emails and Facebook and Instagram. It was a customer service worker job of about eighteen hours a day during access to the festival, which is more hours than I worked in person*.".

After weeks of living on a friend's couch, he returned to Italy for several months to live with his parents. When he saved some money working at a film festival in Venice, he returned to Barcelona to work at two other film festivals. Finding a new flat was difficult because he no longer met the landlord's (labour) criteria. Only through the goodwill of a real estate agent could he access a rental contract.

"*Until you find by chance a decent 30 m2 flat, which you think is decent and luck has it that the girl who works with the real estate agent has an Italian mother and says, 'if you show me the papers of your parents (Italian pensioners), although they are not valid in Spain, I trust that you will pay me the rent.".*

His new neighbourhood, *El Raval*, is a low-income migrant and touristified neighbourhood, stigmatised as insecure (Quaglieri & Scarnato, 2017). His experience reveals that the rental

housing market intermediaries constrained his residential choice, but this neighbourhood's materiality and rough atmosphere were uncomfortable.

"*It is a tough neighbourhood, rough, and more aggressive than it used to be… there was much fun here before COVID, …. I like the sparkle of El Raval. However, at the same time, it is Raval, where a neighbour beats his wife every other day, and I call the cops every six hours."*

Resisting long-term precariousness

Workers in this group are characterised by their permanent state as long-term precarious workers, which involves conditions of unfree labour (Strauss, 2014, p. 175), temporal contract and seasonal labour relations with relevant consequences for their residential arrangements, work-life balance and body health (cf. Cañada, 2018). In this group, building affordances for residential immobility and neighbourhood choice are essential in providing security and being close to their jobs, especially when children are involved. However, the pandemic badly impacted their economy, the recovery of which is uncertain. We now introduce a case where cumulative disadvantages related to care, housing insecurity and labour flexibility are critical to how she could adapt to the pandemic.

W10, a 49-year-old Uruguayan woman and single mother, has been jumping from one temporary job to another in hotels for the last 20 years. Before the pandemic, she was promoted to assistant manager of housekeeping and for the first time, she stopped cleaning. She has a recognised physical illness, and the doctor recommended she stop cleaning. At the first lockdown, she was fired with a low severance pay as she was chaining temporal contracts at the hotel – she had no seniority. Her unemployment benefits barely covered her rent, so she decided to look for another job to save some benefits for the future. Despite her low earnings, she took up a part-time cleaning job through an outsourced hospital subcontractor. She hoped to recover her previous managerial position because her physical condition was not ideal for cleaning anymore.

"*To get my job back, my salary, and afford a better quality of life, because the truth is that since a year ago, I do not think I have had a good quality of life.".*

Her access to tenants' support services facilitated avoiding eviction and securing childcare. She was at risk of eviction, and saving to pay the rent pushed her to cut down on food and leisure expenses. During the pandemic, the school cafeteria scholarships and food banks were part of the care-with assemblage (Power, 2019). Her landlord offered to charge the rent in instalments for lockdown and before her contract expired. Her landlord offered her a new contract, but a more expensive one, which she could not afford as a low-income part-time worker. Beyond the rent cap policy, the tenants' support service of the council turned out to be an essential connection in preventing the eviction of single mothers. They worked with the landlord to find a solution since the State pandemic decrees or regional housing policy had not secured an eviction moratorium for her as a renter.

"*I have always been informed through the Housing Office, as these lawyers negotiate prices. They spoke with the landlord, and I got the same price for two more years until 2023".*

Insecurity is embodied through her labour and housing practices of resistance. However, her capacity to gain security dramatically depends on others, the pandemic recovery, her ex-hotel employer's willingness, and the future landlord's decision about her contract. This showcases the COVID-19 as an anticipatory assemblage.

"*the pandemic, the lockdown, the curfews, working and earning almost half… it changes your perspective and even more so when you have a child, you know, who is at the age when he asks for everything, and I am trying to make him understand that there are priorities, that there is a flat, that there is electricity, water, that there are things that have to be paid for first"*.

Discussion

Throughout these life stories, we can gauge the COVID-19 crisis as a critical event for new co-articulations and compositions of urban assemblages, extending to the working and housing lives beyond the re-ordering of tourism and social life in cities. Results reveal how the prevalence of labour precarity and insecurity in tourism (Church & Frost, 2004; McDowell et al., 2009; Cañada, 2018) has opened new breeches to unequal social protection. Considering the different trajectories examined, an intersectional approach reveals how cumulative disadvantages imply differential practices and embodiments to sustain labour and housing affordances. This approach also helps situate precarity beyond dialectical positions as a highly differentiated experience dealing with contingency and the provisionality of security and protection arrangements.

For all research participants, the emergence and temporality of the pandemic alterations in the tourist city determined new contingencies on their capacities and desires to stay in tourism or shift to other employment sectors. The COVID-19 crisis can, therefore, be framed as an anticipatory assemblage (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988), informing logic of action and practices of protection, security, adaptation, and transformation. To this end, Zampoukos' (2018) assumption of labour (im)mobilities reminds us that careers in tourism are erratic and non-linear, co-determined by unequal conditions of social reproduction. This is confirmed in our case, where decisions to stay in tourism or change to other sectors are instrumental but erratically accidental. We insist on considering more-than-human actants more seriously (Latour, 2005) and the machinic power of urban assemblages. Indeed, McDowell et al. (2009) insist on the *hierarchy of acceptability* created through labour-migration assemblages. Similarly, housing (im)mobilities and material comfortabilities change along life courses as regulations/policies, housing technologies, or kinships (Jayne & Hall, 2019; Coe et al., 2016), configuring dwelling aspirations. However, this study shows how the labour-housing nexus offers a more critical outlook on urban precarities of working lives. For undocumented migrants and younger workers, tourism, hospitality jobs, and sharing apartments are part of an anticipatory urban assemblage. Nevertheless, this is not fixed, a convenient choice; it is exposed to continuous change and disruption. From an assemblage perspective, it involves thinking about the machinic processes of commodification and taking seriously the metaphor of the body without organs – "*matter occupying the space in a certain degree"* - (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988, p.153). In the changing housing environment in tourist cities like Barcelona (Cocola et al., 2021), where prices are rising, and housing access is an increasing field of contestation and stratification (Jofre-Montseny et al., 2023), this anticipatory assemblage is even more precarious, producing instability and insecurity in those less-valuable bodies. On the other hand, a different embodiment for those with long-term precarious trajectories implies permanent exposition to labour exploitation (cf. McDowell et al., 2009; Cañada, 2018). A body that carries wounds and scars of this trajectory and needs to take care to keep working while caring for others. The dependency of these urban labour assemblages aspiring to get something afterwards and protecting their positions makes many workers vulnerable and hopeful(less), especially when they are unprotected by institutions or care for others is involved.

Similarly, the pandemic event also emerges as an anticipatory assemblage. It was experienced as a succession of changing affective states related to the risk of contagion, losing the home,

downgrading labour positions, not having seasonal jobs, not receiving the subsidies in time, not being able to leave parents' homes, not being able to afford a flat by yourself, not supporting family, or not getting legal status. These affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009) have materiality printed in their decisions, practices, material comforts, etc. Precarity materialises through the provisional connections and the changing states of protection, security, and (im)mobility, which offer differential possibilities of urban life.

The notions of emergence and agency as being distributed help foreground emerging urban life topologies. Meanwhile, the concept of *line of light* (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988) allows interpreting change and instability as immanence processes. During COVID-19, adaptation and transformation practices constantly work on re-assembling, opening new connections where others were closed, re-ordering materialities, trying to stabilise, not getting lost, unprotected, or creating potentialities for income and *care*. "Difference" is a crucial material of expression and a machinic logic to be considered in urban displacement and capitalism: poor workers would hardly appropriate housing power; they permanently need to re-assemble labour and housing practices.

The relationality of labour-housing spaces, far from being static and bounded, should be framed by its immanency while considering the socio-material orderings and the constitutive geographies. In this way, the framework of labour embeddedness (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2010) have limited power to explain how capacities emerge and change beyond expressing the potentialities for action. Refusing the structural framework of embeddedness does not involve diluting the roles of institutions and corporations in enacting forms of workers' precarity and creating labour fragmentation processes. It involves understanding how workers' protection, securities, affordances, and comfortabilities are regenerated in relation to the activation of other capacities and how they are constitutive of the geographies of tourism. All cases show how labour and housing practices share certain synchronicity as expressions of adaptation. The flexible and fragmented protection of JRS creates a baseline situation where other agencies intervene to (de-)protect, where bodies are exposed to excess to avoid evictions, housing deprivations, malnutrition, or spending all unemployment benefits. Meanwhile, the opportunities for labour mobility depend on the multiplicity of actors forming the city's labour assemblages. These unionised workers of Airbnb (W6/9/14) could easily rework outside tourism thanks to the "potentiality" related to the labour market opportunities in technological companies with customer service during the pandemic. It illustrates how these urban actors are defined by the assemblage they enter (McFarlane, 2011, p. 653), which is also co-determined by body constraints, citizenship, or labour positionalities.

In most cases, securing affordable housing is a temporary condition in reconstituting labour security. Following McFarlane (2011:662), the possibilities of housing affordability "*are not just produced through dwelling practices but curtail the possibilities of dwelling, meaning they can be enabling or disruptive*". The affordance capacities (played out in economic, affective and material dimensions) constitute a precarious assemblage in most cases: choices emerge as relationally enacted through kinships, landlords, institutions, mortgage banks, charities, and social services, and the materiality of housing infrastructure, revealing unequal power relations and insecurity.

Moreover, adaptation and transformation are framed as an incremental process through socio-material assemblage (McFarlane, 2011). Unfavourable labour conditions and welfare fragmentation force workers to re-negotiate affordabilities, sometimes leading to using homes as an infrastructure of work. The role of platforms and social media has amplified the workers'

capacities, facilitating informal work such as home delivery (W2/3) and Airbnb room letting (W12), where housing materiality becomes a requisite for the ability to perform everyday work. Those who could telework during 2020-2021 used their flat as an infrastructure of work, which created a situation of inequality between those who had a comfortable workspace at home and those who did not, and the control over working conditions and the housing as a safe place during the health crisis. The separation of work and home space times become blurred and unequal.

Therefore, housing as a workspace contradicts housing as a care infrastructure (Power, 2019; Rogers & Power, 2020). This conception helps to situate our results on how capacities for caring and comfortability are built, which extend beyond the territory of the house (Jaynes & Hall, 2019, p.13), and how they relate to labour relations, care responsibilities and citizenship. In housing deprivation, the size of flats and possibilities for commoning care allowed many workers to maintain their residences provisionally. Public services and NGOs - for childcare, housing subsidies, housing liaison with landlords, and rental contract moratoriums - were critical in building capacities for securing housing for precarious workers, particularly for migrant single mothers and undocumented migrants.

Finally, the emerging precarious labour-housing interactions in the pandemic tourist city are contingent on the possibilities of the urban assemblages related to desires for labour fragmentation and housing assetisation, playing out at distance and proximity. In most cases, these dynamics reinforce the dependency on precarious jobs and housing deprivation, the difficulties in tracing alternatives, which further affects highly differentiated (im)mobilities (Adey, 2006) during the pandemic. All these relational processes constitute urban life trajectories under specific conditions of precarity.

Conclusions

Our research insights outline the process of change and adaptation to unfavourable conditions during the pandemic, focusing on the labour-housing nexus as a contested relational space in a tourist city. Following Anderson's (2009) conceptualisation of the spatiality of *collective affects*, material and emotional forms of unfreedom, housing deprivation, and labour precarity create an affective atmosphere of anxiety, hopelessness, and insecurity in the collective of hospitality and tourism workers. This portrait of the pandemic paradigm complements more optimistic academic reflections on post-COVID-19 tourism (cf. Lew et al., 2020) by offering perspectives on the precarious nature of workers' lives in the city, which could serve as starting points for improvement and critical studies.

Following the concerns of Ioannides and Zampoukos (2018) and the discipline of labour geography and housing (im)mobilities, this research advances the analysis of tourism worker precarity by incorporating the labour-housing nexus. Firstly, we have offered a narration of the *everyday geographies* of tourism workers and the social implications of their labour and residential mobilities, showing how they affect workers differently (cf. Adey, 2006). The study of the impact of COVID-19 on working lives in the tourism sector has evidenced how this nexus is in perpetual controversy with their future desires and affects them in ever more unpredictable ways, given the cumulative crisis ahead. Secondly, assemblage thinking has proven helpful in analysing the relational spaces of labour and housing and how social precarity is materially produced and differentially negotiated in a tourist city. We have also contributed to labour agency theorisation (Strauss, 2020) through the relational ontology of capacities.

Finally, integrating notions of care within tourism geography allows for a deeper understanding of the role of housing and labour as infrastructures and how the protection and security of workers are critical components of an expanded urban agenda that cares for people and strives for justice.

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The authors report no potential conflict of interest.

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