
**APPENDIX 2: HISTORY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD MOVEMENT IN MADRID ACCORDING TO ITS FEDERATION, FRAVM**

The following is my translation of a text on the FRAVM website. The translation balances precariously, I am afraid, between two aims: that of fidelity to the original style and readability in English. I have preferred the former at the expense of the latter when necessary in order to transmit the emotional tone.

The text tells an important piece of movement history. Similar stories could be told about most or all of the federations that were created during the 1970s. Through this tale one also gets a glimpse of what was at stake at that time and how the movement and the general process of transition towards democracy interacted. And how very local practical problems continue to connect with large human rights issues.

For a fuller history of the movement in Madrid, see Pérez Quintana and Sánchez León 2008.

Text from web site, http://www.aavvmadrid.org, as read March 29, 2004

Behind the name of Regional Federation of Neighborhood Association of Madrid (Federación Regional de Asociaciones de Vecinos de Madrid, FRAVM) lie hidden over thirty years of history. A whole life. To find the origins of the federation we have to go back to a Madrilenian society that can hardly be recognized in the metropolis of today, 21st century Madrid. We are talking about the capital and the region in the 1950s, a period when the capital became the epicenter of the incipient industrial development and attracted thousands of Spaniards, protagonists of a rural exodus from Andalusia, Extremadura... Many of these immigrant newcomers occupied space on the outskirts and built a small house or shack, filling the peripheries of the city with precarious constructions and spilling over the urban contour with misery and needs that were systematically denied. In such circumstances, they had no choice but to make illicit connections to the electric mains, to get their water from public fountains and to make each coin stretch.

From the discomfort of those shacks, from the spontaneous mutual help, from increasing consciousness and neighborly conversations, sprang groups of neighbors who went out into the streets to struggle for the obvious: water, street lighting, schools or a little cement for the dusty and muddy streets. There was fear, evidently. The sinister repressive machinery of the Franco regime watched carefully and persecuted each minor movement. But that did not make the neighbors give up. The neighborhood meetings began to structure themselves more or less formally around the workers' movement and the illegal parties – mainly the Communist Party – and the lower rungs of the Church, until they could create the first neighborhood associations, using the narrow margin of freedom offered by the Law of Associations of 1964, which recognized for the first time the right of association.

Palomeras Bajas was the barrio that set off the struggle. It was now 1968 and those who came forward at that time as neighborhood leaders sowed the seed of what is today the FRAVM under the strict vigilance of the police, who made sure that nothing said in the meetings "would be political" and that each neighborhood representative would have a spotless biography. In this way the neighbors transformed their survival tricks and street wisdom into claims (*reivindicaciones*) anchored in those human rights that the regime trampled on. Between 1968 and 1970 twenty more neighborhood associations were created in popular barrios (Moratalaz, Orcasitas, San Blas, Puente de Vallecas...) and in towns like Alcalá de Henares, San Sebastián de los Reyes, Leganés and Getafe. The neighborhood organization spread like wildfire, but it was all it could do to keep up the activity within the extremely narrow margins of the Franco dictatorship. In this way the neighbors...
managed to obtain schools, street lighting and water, and years later they conquered the right to living quarters that dignified life in the peripheral areas; they declared "the bread war" against high prices, and they built the groundwork for what we today find obvious and necessary.

However, they did not just ask for solutions to alleviate the existing deficiencies – dwellings, freedom of expression, popular festivities – but also and above all they constructed meeting places and solidary action. They knitted an active movement of the barrios in which Madrilenians would be able to develop spaces free of the despotism and inertia of the regime, laboratories where the struggle for liberties could be forged.

The streets were boiling with struggle (reivindicaciones), and with time the associations began to constitute committees in which to integrate professionals – architects, lawyers, teachers – in order to work with sectors where there were even more deficits, and at the same time claim their legalization along the model of the Federation of Barcelona. The petition was rejected. Self-organization had no place, was unimaginable, within the authoritarian norms of "public order".

**Exercising citizenship**

Once Franco had died, the first steps of the later much celebrated transition did not satisfy the expectations of the neighbors of Madrid. The new legislation and the project for a Law of Bases for Local Government left citizens at the mercy of mayors appointed by the administration and not elected by universal suffrage. In this way the margins for developing a democratic transition stifled any initiatives born outside the political parties, which had been called in to legitimate the process.

In this context the idea came up to celebrate a neighborly picnic at Aranjuez, a festive outing that would reinforce and make visible the solidary network that had been created along the years of struggle and efforts (reivindicaciones). It was May 15, 1976, a day many will remember above all for the invasion of police (guardias civiles) who, with guns in their hands and without any excuse, indiscriminately beat up a lot of people who were on their way back home.

The response was not late in coming. The Regional Federation of Neighborhood Associations of Madrid – which had been functioning since 1975 but would have to wait until late 1977 to be legalized – organized a Citizens' Week, filled with meetings and cultural events under the slogan, "We want our rights and we want them now." The purpose was to show the strength and determination of the barrios and to pressure for the legalization of the "associations in the process of legalization." This mobilization was concentrated in a demonstration on Preciados Street on June 22. Approximately 50,000 persons were present and asked for the immediate legalization of neighborhood associations and other citizens' entities, as well as full human rights and democratic liberties.

After this event, the movement could not be stopped. In January 1977 the first meeting of neighborhood associations from all of Spain was held in Madrid, in order to work, among other issues, with the problems related to the legality and the constitutional recognition of the movement of neighbors and citizens. The FRAVM was legalized on November 2nd. In the 1980s, the first congress of the Madrilenian neighborhood movement was held and the first Norms of Citizens' Participation were negotiated with the Town Hall of Madrid.

Just like the journey to Ithaca, these more than thirty years of successes, failures and experiences have resulted in the neighborhood associations of the Madrid region now having over 115,000 members. This is a weighty reality, vertebrated and legitimated by its past and its present, a citizens' movement that faces new challenges and has managed more recent conquests, such as the plans of action and investment – 1998–2003 in Usera-Villaverde, 2000–2005 in Puente de Vallecas and Villa de Vallecas, 2003–2008 in Vicálvaro, San Blas, Carabanchel-Latina, Tetuán... and new norms and rules for citizens' participation.

New circumstances transform the forms of struggle. The neighbors' issues today have to do with resisting the privatization of public service and the lack of investment in them, air pollution and electromagnetic pollution, gender violence, the outrage of current urban policies and infrastructures, the exclusion of citizens from the management of public affairs...

Thirty some years can be a lifetime or almost a lifetime. Some of the Madrilenian leaders who participated in the first battles of the neighborhood movement are still around – the indispens-
able ones, as Brecht would say – others coming from other sectors of civil society, younger ones, have joined the exercise of citizenship, the participation in public affairs, the (re)construction of democracy, the democracy that aspires to be participatory in order to transform the reality of cities, barrios and surroundings. This reality is not promising, it is fragmented, consumer oriented, lacking in solidarity and collective values, it exalts the cult of the short-lived. It is a reality that needs us in order to construct a region of human dimensions. The dimensions of our dreams.