



REDUCING
HOUSING
INEQUALITIES



Case study report: Olot

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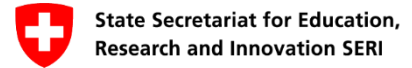


Table of Contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	Town profile, challenges around just (housing and ecological) transition	5
1.2	Green Transition and Housing Interventions in the Nucli Antic of Olot: Precedents	10
2	Methods	14
3	Civic Perceptions of Green Initiatives in Case Study Areas: Olot	15
3.1	Precedents and implementation.....	15
3.2	Participation and governance (procedural).....	16
3.3	(In)equity (distributional).....	17
3.4	Political mobilization.....	19
3.5	Socio-ecological impacts/benefits (positive).....	20
3.6	(Civic perceptions of) socio-ecological impacts/harms (negative).....	21
3.7	Tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors	22
3.8	(Civic perceptions of) innovative governance mechanisms	22
3.9	(Civic perceptions of) tourism and market pressures.....	23
3.10	Gaps in Perceptions Between Civic Groups and Public Agencies.....	24
4	Critical Analysis: Olot	26
5	Works Cited	31
6	Appendix 1 – Glossary	33
7	Appendix 2 – Key interview data and transcripts	34
8	Appendix 3 – Visuals	35

1 Introduction

1.1 Town profile, challenges around just (housing and ecological) transition

Olot (Girona) is the capital of the Garrotxa *comarca* with a population of approximately 40,000 residents, around 62% of the *comarca*'s total population. Located 110 km northeast of Barcelona toward the Pyrenees and French border, Olot is inland and surrounded by the *La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park*, a forested landscape representing the most significant volcanic area of the Iberian Peninsula (Nogué and Sala i Martí, 2017). Tourism in the Garrotxa is moderate and nature-focused, centered on small-scale rural accommodation. Second homes present but less dominant than in coastal or high-mountain areas of Catalonia. Olot functions as the *comarca*'s service hub rather than as a principal vacation destination.

The combination of regional centrality, topographical and regulatory constraints on expansion, and the growth of its industrial economy produces a structurally tight housing market. Demand concentrates in and around the historic core (Nucli Antic), while simultaneously many buildings there remain underused, in disrepair, or are uninhabitable ruins. The coexistence of high vacancy in buildings in the Nucli Antic and strong housing demand by predominantly migrant workers dependent on Olot's labor market, frames many of the city's current tensions.

The Nucli Antic exhibits the most acute manifestations of inequality. Its dense medieval fabric is defined by narrow, irregular streets susceptible to poor ventilation and dampness, with most buildings narrow, multi-storey blocks owned by individuals or families, few who live there themselves. At various points since 2001, more than half of flats stood vacant in the Nucli Antic, compared to a far lower townwide share; in 2009, 23.3% of buildings were in bad repair or ruin (Bonet et al., 2009), despite five years of **public works and building upgrades** funded by the Catalan government under the Llei de Barris regeneration framework. Ownership fragmentation limits coordinated rehabilitation and slowing the return of units to stable occupancy. The prevalence of walk-ups without elevators further excludes older residents, people with disabilities, and larger households.

These physical characteristics intersect with the social structure of the center, where racialized migrant residents constitute a significantly higher proportion than the town. As of 2012, the Nucli Antic had the highest concentration of those born outside of Spain, at 43.5%, followed by the neighborhoods of and Sant Miquel (37.9%, directly southwest of the Nucli Antic) and Les Tries (36.6%, adjacent to Sant Miquel) (Consorci d'Acció Social de la Garrotxa, 2012).



Figure 1. Map of Olot. Source: <https://sig.olot.cat/>

Documentation requirements, income volatility linked to shift work, and widely reported discriminatory landlord screening processes concentrate migrant households in substandard housing stock. Overcrowding, informal rental arrangements, and squatting are common coping strategies. In 2023, Olot was reported to have 156 squatted properties (AGN, 2023), framed within culturally coded political debates around safety and security, though Olot has a low crime rate compared to medium-to-large settlements in Girona and to Catalonia.

Recent research on urban vulnerability in Olot conceptualizes these conditions as the intersection of residential exclusion and territorialized social disadvantage, arguing that housing degradation and weakened neighborhood infrastructures mutually reinforce one another rather than operating as separate phenomena. This perspective situates the Nucli Antic’s housing crisis within a broader process of spatialized inequality (Carrera et al., 2021; Carrera Fossas, 2023; Carrera-Fossas and Brugué, 2025).

The capital of the Garrotxa is experiencing sustained population growth, driven by international labor migration. **Olot is one of the municipalities with the highest levels of industrial employment in Catalonia** (see Table 1). Key sectors include agro-food processing (mainly pork and charcuterie), machinery and metallurgy, and plastics, paper, and chemical industries. Most firms are small- and medium-sized and associated with local supply chains, though major

companies such as the delicatessen company Noel operate macro-plants¹. The area is considered part of the “fuet corridor”, referring to the dry-cured Catalan sausage (Colell, 2024b).

As of 2025, 27.8% of residents were born outside Spain, though this is likely an undercount of those in informal housing and working in the informal economy, particularly elder care. Such trends began appearing in the mid-1990s and have remained steady, while the Spanish-born population has remained stable. International migrants living in Olot are predominantly from India, Morocco, Honduras, Gambia, Romania, China, Ukraine, Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru. Population projections anticipate an additional 17.7% increase between 2025 and 2034 (Idescat, 2025b), among the highest rates for non-metropolitan Catalan municipalities. This local population growth, like in nearly all Catalonian municipalities, is attributed **to international migration rates counteracting low natality, paired with aging populations, in which there would otherwise be population stagnation or decline**. On the other hand, Olot has limited internal migration from elsewhere in Catalonia or Spain; as such, **the population predominantly comprises lifelong local residents and comparatively lower-income international migrants who are more likely to experience housing vulnerabilities**.

Tenure patterns contribute to these outcomes: owner-occupation dominates, with 23.5% of residents being renters. The construction of new housing, both market-rate and subsidized, performed a more visible role in the town from 1999 to 2011 under Socialist Party (PSC) leadership, when 3,889 new homes were completed (724 subsidized), while from 2012-2024 under the center-right Catalan independentist party formation of *Convergència i Unió/Junts per Catalunya (Junts)*, 964 new homes were completed (100 public), despite increased population growth (Diari de Girona, 2025) and swelling waiting lists for public housing.

The Nucli Antic has a population density of over 13,000 per km², over double the town's average. However, it also high levels of vacancy and abandonment: as of 2021, the town had a reported 6-6.3% of dwellings vacant, excluding others classified as “very low consumption” buildings classified as underutilized and/or intermittently squatted. Despite high owner-occupancy rates in Olot overall, 86% of owners of properties in the Nucli Antic do not live there (Ajuntament d'Olot, 2026). As of 2023, there are an estimated 1,060 empty homes in the town, located predominantly in the Nucli Antic (Masó Ros, 2023). Local housing activists claim that there are closer to than 1,300 empty apartments in the town, around 8.3% of the total housing stock (Costa-Pau, 2025). The rapid rise of international migration in Olot, like elsewhere in Catalonia, have driven debates around cultural and linguistic

¹ For example, *Olot Meats operates multiple slaughterhouse, packaging, and processing facilities claiming the capacity to process up to 18,000 pigs per day for an international market. Noel, one of the principal manufacturers of pork products for the Spanish market, also operates a number of facilities in the area.*

integration which have aided the rise of the new far-right, ethno-nationalist independentist political party **Aliança Catalana (AC)**, led by the mayor of Ripoll, 30 kilometers away. In the most recent election, the AC formation captured 15.45% of Olot's votes, behind Junts (36.7%) and just behind the PSC (16.9%), who has accused the city's leadership of shifting its discourse around migrants' integration and perceived criminality toward that of the AC (Diari de Girona, 2025), especially through emphasis on residential squatting. Olot's Mayor, Agustí Arbós, maintains that the city needs to "pause" or better regulate growth in order to preserve the quality of the welfare state, ensure adequate service provision, and allow for more effective integration. While he has rejected simplistic links between immigration and insecurity, emphasizing that most newcomers seek work and integration, he has called for a broader public debate about demographic policy and municipal capacity in Catalonia, placing security and migration as the central themes of his mayoralty. Arbós argues "Catalonia welcomes more than 150,000 newcomers each year, and we doubt that at this pace it is sustainable to maintain quality services without planning.... If we don't have quality services, it's^[00:00].

Multiple journalistic reports describe how racialized migrant workers — even those with stable jobs — face open discrimination in the rental market (Bernabé, 2024). Landlords and agencies have been observed to systemically and illegally refuse to rent apartments because applicants are foreign or perceived as "outsiders," regardless of their ability to pay (Colell, 2024a, 2024b). The rise of exclusionary political currents are widely perceived to reflect, and increase, local tensions and procedural barriers for immigrant households seeking formal leases or registration. Responding to such tensions, In 2021 the Olot City Council launched a participatory process to address ethnic/racial discrimination in real estate, involving local government professionals, residents' and immigrant associations, and real estate agents. A diagnosis of the situation was made and a series of measures were agreed upon, but with limited tangible results or enforcement. With migrants increasingly being blamed for the town's problems, groups like Soms Garrotxa [We are Garrotxa] and Stop Racisme Lloguers [Stop Racism in Rentals], were formed to were formed to combat hate speech and combat residential discrimination, while the housing activist group Plataforma d'Afectats per la Hipoteca [Platform for People Affected by Mortgages, or PAH] has been revived in the Garrotxa.

Local government has placed emphasis on historic heritage enhancement in the Nucli Antic, commercial dynamization, environmental stewardship improved tourism positioning. The **Firal d'Olot** project received the 2025 European Architectural Heritage Intervention Award in the *Outdoor Spaces* category for its transformation of a historic public space combining heritage preservation with contemporary design. Interlinked with the heritage character of the historic center, policy instruments have attempted to mobilize underused housing stock and support rehabilitation, with mixed results. Vacancy tax premiums aim to deter long-term emptiness, but the combination of fragmented titles, heritage restrictions, and steep rehabilitation costs has slowed take-up, and enforcement is minimal. Past participatory processes and integrated action plans have prioritized returning vacant units to use in the Nucli Antic, improving habitability, and diversifying ground-floor functions, but participation has been uneven. Immigrant households are under-represented due to language barriers, work schedules, and trust. Energy-efficiency programs, leveraged through the Sustainable Energy Action Plan and EU funds, have produced visible upgrades in municipal buildings and some private dwellings,

yet targeting has been largely technical rather than social; low-income renters in least efficient homes have not systematically benefitted in proportion to need.

The *Pla Integral d'Actuacions de Millora* (Integral Plan for Improvement Actions, or PIAM) is Olot's integrated regeneration framework coordinating urban, social, and housing actions; the model was first introduced around **2014** through the participatory improvement plan in Sant Miquel and was later extended to guide interventions in the Nucli Antic. Since its creation, it has evolved through successive implementation phases — including early public-space projects between **2019–2022**, policy and planning adjustments in **2024**, and its integration into the larger Pla de Barris i Viles program awarded in **December 2025**.



Image source: <https://arquitecturaviva.com/obras/unparelldarquitectes-can-sau-en-olot-gerona-973p9>

Itziar González, architect, urbanist, and civic mediator who previously served as Commissioner for Ciutat Vella at the Ajuntament de Barcelona (2007–2010), where she promoted participatory planning and ethical urban governance, has led a major participatory regeneration process in the Nucli Antic of Olot since 2024, framing it as a long-term “social architecture” strategy connected to strategic documents for the city’s *Llei de Barris i Viles* funding candidacy from the Catalan government. The initiative, funded by the Girona provincial government and implemented by the city hall through González, engaged hundreds of residents, associations, and local stakeholders through assemblies, cooperative working spaces, and co-design methods to define priorities for housing, commerce, and public space.

Olot was awarded the largest amount of any Catalan municipality in December, 2025, and is now entering an implementation phase, guiding a multi-year transformation plan that combines physical interventions with ongoing participatory governance. Full planning documents remain publicly unavailable.

Taken together, Olot’s housing inequalities reflect a constrained land-use framework shaped by protected landscapes; a historic core marked by high vacancy, limited accessibility, and fragmented ownership; cessation of public housing production amid rising need; and a retrofit agenda that has prioritized municipal assets and better-resourced owner-occupiers over low-income tenants. Layered onto these structural conditions is demographic growth tied to essential but lower-wage sectors, with migrant residents concentrated in the most physically constrained neighborhoods. **The resulting mismatch reinforces spatialized inequality: low-income and migrant households are more likely to face overcrowding, instability of tenure, or occupancy in buildings with accessibility and energy-efficiency deficits.** Energy-efficient cooperative and public-private pilot schemes have been explored in the historic center, but their scale remains modest relative to identified needs and the volume of potentially convertible housing stock. With the new Llei de Barris i Viles funding, **what remains vague is how comprehensive regeneration strategies for Olot will specifically address current imbalances, combat residential segregation, and the proportion of social and subsidized housing that will be produced in the historic center.**

1.2 Green Transition and Housing Interventions in the Nucli Antic of Olot: Precedents

The Nucli Antic has been the principal focus of regeneration policy since the early 2000s. Under the Catalan *Llei 2/2004 de Barris*, Olot implemented an integrated intervention between 2004 and 2011 with approximately €7.4 million in co-financed investment. Initial actions prioritized public-space renewal and selective building rehabilitation, followed by programs aimed at housing improvement and community cohesion. Although these measures enhanced the physical environment and symbolic centrality of the historic core, they did not substantially expand affordable housing or resolve structural barriers to rental access. Retrospective assessments of the Llei de Barris intervention suggest that although urban quality and public space improved, vacancy persistence and rental scarcity remained unresolved structural features of the neighborhood (Bonet and Pybus, 2009). This historical sequencing is significant for understanding current regeneration debates.

Recent policy cycles reposition the Nucli Antic within a broader climate and social-equity framework. The *Llei de Barris i Viles 2025–2029* proposal secured roughly €15 million in regional funding—around €25 million combined with municipal resources—alongside the designation of the Nucli Antic as an *Àrea de Conservació i Rehabilitació* (Area of Conservation and Rehabilitation, ACR). This legal framework establishes targeted rehabilitation zones and obligations intended to mobilize underused housing through energy-efficient retrofits, vacancy activation, and coordinated regeneration. The strategy emphasizes long-term participatory governance and a shift from aesthetic renewal (“regeneration”) toward integrated neighborhood-building (*fer barri*), in González’ framing.

Energy transition initiatives form a central pillar of the current approach and Olot has been a pioneer in such approaches. Partnerships with Fundació Europace and earlier pilots such as

HolaDomus have introduced technical audits, financing mechanisms, and guidance for deep retrofit, aligning local climate objectives with housing policy. These programs seek to address low owner uptake of rehabilitation while advancing energy efficiency and habitability, although their distributive impact on vulnerable tenants remains under evaluation, and have been scaled up to the scale of the province of Girona.

Overall, the contemporary framework of the rehabilitation of the Nucli Antic of Olot combines unprecedented funding, cross-party institutional support, and a growing emphasis on social architecture. Planned actions include dozens of retrofit, public-space, and environmental projects, with objectives to activate several hundred dwellings—among them a limited but undefined number of new or recovered affordable units. **Whether this new phase can translate ecological upgrading into measurable reductions in exclusion and housing inequality remains a central open question guiding current debates. The central tension lies in whether ecological upgrading and rehabilitation can be aligned with distributive housing justice.**

Table 1. Key data on case study area of Olot.

	Municipality-wide	Nucli Antic
Characteristics (general social type, economic activities, density, etc.)	<p>Population of 39,500 residents (62% of comarca of the Garrotxa). Principal employment sectors: Industrial (37% employment, 48% gross value added), tertiary sector (31% employment).</p> <p>Median age is low, at 40.8, compared to Catalan municipal averages (87/947). Municipal population has increased 8.4% between 2021 and 2025 and was projected to increase 17.7% between 2025 and 2034 (Idescat)</p> <p>Average per capita income in 2022: was €17,350 in 2022, (90.6% of Catalan average).</p>	<p>Population density of 13,118 per km²</p>
Duration	<p>HolaDomus: pilot project (2020-2024) for the energy-efficient retrofit of homes, led by Olot-based Fundació Europace with technical support of town.</p> <p>Currently expanded to GarrotxaDomus (comarca) and GiDomus (province of Girona).</p>	<p>2004- publication of Pla d’Intervenció Integral (PII)</p> <p>2004-2009: Llei de Barris public works and building upgrades (creation of plaza, road extensions, gardens and riverfront parks.</p> <p>2010-2021: Contracte de Barris, beginning</p>

		<p>emphasis on rehabilitation of storefronts and residential rehabilitation.</p> <p>2022–2025: Implementation phase of multiple EU NextGen-funded projects focused on commercial revitalization, public-space upgrades, digitalization, and sustainability in the Nucli Antic</p>
<p>Funding</p>	<p>EU Horizon 2020 (€314,000)</p> <p>Funding of pilot project HolaDomus for the energy-efficient retrofit of homes, led by Olot-based Fundació Europace</p> <p>EU NextGen (€5.47 million):</p> <p>Biomass boiler installation in municipal indoor pool.</p> <p>Urban design and bicycle infrastructure— €822,072</p> <p>Landscape and environmental improvements for green spaces</p> <p>Energy efficient rehabilitation of supportive housing and day-care support for elderly (Residència Sant Jaume, €1.25 million)</p> <p>Urban regeneration of the historic center (1.56 million), combining commercial revitalization with public-space upgrades and tourism focus</p> <p>Town of Olot: subsidies for pre-1980 residential building</p>	<p>Province of Girona:</p> <p>€15,000 to Olot to support the technical drafting of the <i>Memòria d'Intervenció Integral</i> for Nucli Antic regeneration</p> <p>Generalitat de Catalunya:</p> <p>€7.3 million, Llei de Barris (2004-2009); €2.1 million Contracte de Barri (2010-2011); €15 million Llei de Barris (2026–2030) for 53 actions in the historic center as part of <i>Pla de Barris i Viles (2025-2029)</i> framework</p> <p>Town of Olot: ~€10 million from municipal and EU funds to match <i>Pla de Barris i Viles</i> funding</p>

	<p>renovations (since 2021): 30% to 40% of eligible costs.</p> <p>GarrotxaDomus and GiDomus are funded by EU funds, private foundations, and public bodies.</p>	
Actor constellation	Fundació EuroPACE (recipient of EU Horizon 2020 funds)	See “funding”, plus list of civic groups, private actors, etc.
Aims and objectives	Regeneration, energy efficient retrofit, addressing social cohesion	Regeneration, energy efficient retrofit, addressing social cohesion
Specific physical measures	See previous	See previous
Accompanying housing policy/regulatory measures	<p>2000s: Local Housing Office consolidation with municipal and Generalitat funding</p> <p>2010: Social rent mediation/anti-eviction (application of Llei 25/2015 of Generalitat)</p> <p>2018: HolaDomus retrofit pilot (with EU funds, Europace)</p> <p>2020: Vacant housing property tax surcharge in municipal fiscal ordinance (regulatory, largely unapplied)</p> <p>2023: Declaration of Olot as a tense market and new rules for large owners (Generalitat application of Spanish Housing Law)</p>	<p>2014-18: +B Participatory municipal regeneration strategy with housing elements, Sant Miquel and Nucli Antic</p> <p>2017-21: PIAM Nucli Antic (with housing elements)</p> <p>2024-25: Pla de Barris update and regeneration and retrofit frameworks with municipal and Diputació de Girona support, Nucli Antic priority area</p>
Key social tensions or/and benefits between greening and housing	Whether ecological upgrading and rehabilitation can be aligned with distributive housing justice.	Same, focal point of tensions around housing conditions and migrant residential segregation and fears of eventual expulsion with improvements.

2 Methods

This case study draws on qualitative research conducted in 2025, combining semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. The methodological approach was designed to capture civic and institutional perceptions of green transition initiatives and their relationship to housing inequalities in Olot, with particular attention to governance processes and neighborhood-scale impacts.

In total, 8 interviews were conducted. Interviewees included municipal policymakers and technical staff, architects and planners involved in regeneration activities, neighborhood and housing activists, and an anonymous civically-engaged actor. Interviews were conducted in Catalan and Spanish.

Sampling of policymakers and technical staff drew on contacts established during the preparation and participation in the ReHousIn Policy Lab (March 2025) and through contact with participants in public-facing events related to housing and green transition initiatives in Olot. Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

Community organization representatives and neighborhood activists were identified through their public engagement in media, participation in civic initiatives, or involvement in neighborhood assemblies and campaigns related to housing, redevelopment, and environmental issues. Initial contact was made through institutional email addresses associated with their organizations or, when requested by participants, via WhatsApp.

Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed in their original language. Interviews were conducted in Catalan or Spanish and transcribed directly by the researchers, then translated using the software Whisper or SoftCatalà with personal information removed and subsequently cleaned. Transcript verification was conducted while listening to original audio recordings to ensure accuracy.

Analysis and coding were completed in English, for later comparability with other case European case studies, using Atlas.ti following a shared codebook developed by the Autonomous University of Barcelona ReHousIn team (Appendix 3). Coding focused on recurring themes related to housing access and affordability, perceptions of green transition initiatives, participation and governance processes, distribution of benefits and harms, and neighborhood identity and recognition.

Documentary analysis included municipal and district planning documents, policy reports, technical studies, academic literature, and grey literature produced by neighborhood associations, advocacy organizations, and media outlets. These materials were used to identify interviewees, contextualize findings, and triangulate claims.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. While the interview sample includes a range of institutional and civic actors, it does not fully capture the perspectives of all resident groups affected by redevelopment, particularly more precarious populations with limited organizational representation or those who do not identify with dominant civic/social movements in Olot. Interviews were conducted while the town of Olot was awaiting the results of its bid for major financing from the Catalan government for the regeneration of the Nucli Antic, placing

limitations on the town’s ability to share plans. As of February 2026, these plans have not been fully released to the public. Thus, the rapidly evolving nature of the redevelopment projects examined means that findings reflect perceptions and expectations of *ongoing processes* rather than fully realized outcomes.

3 Civic Perceptions of Green Initiatives in Case Study Areas: Olot

3.1 Precedents and implementation

Civic actors consistently describe current green transition initiatives as unfolding within a longer trajectory of housing neglect and uneven urban management in Olot, particularly in the Nucli Antic. **Rather than depicting planning or energy retrofit initiatives as entirely new directions, interviewees frame them as delayed responses to longstanding structural deterioration.** Skepticism resonates with evaluations of the earlier Llei de Barris cycle, which exhibited tensions between ambitious regeneration objectives and highly limited transformation of housing access structures (Bonet and Pybus, 2009). The memory of that earlier intervention informs contemporary caution toward physical-first regeneration strategies.

An elected representative and former housing activist recounts a prolonged period in which the historic center was physically degrading without decisive intervention. Their description combines building collapse, abandonment, and the reactive posture of authorities:

“In the Nucli Antic, we fought for many years because buildings were literally falling apart. There were years when entire buildings, or parts of buildings, collapsed into the street... It had been totally abandoned. The attitude was like, ‘One day it’ll fall, and when it does, we’ll clear the rubble and save ourselves the cost of a proper demolition or rehabilitation.’ ... When we say ‘the PIAM was done,’ we mean the document was produced. Then there’s a whole execution process that hasn’t been completed.”

In civic accounts, this period of neglect forms the essential backdrop against which contemporary regeneration, or “neighborhood-making”, efforts must be understood: as the accumulated consequences of deferred maintenance and fragmented ownership.

A local planning representative’s involvement in diagnostic research as a consultant reinforces this perception. What began as a survey of empty buildings revealed a more complex social reality: occupied dwellings in extremely poor condition. Her consolidated account highlights both the technical and social complications:

“What they hadn’t imagined was that there were buildings in very poor condition where people were actually living... you have to rehouse people, some were squatters, so it wasn’t clear who was responsible for the rehousing, and the owners had little interest... In the end, entering 100% of the dwellings was impossible... it wasn’t mandatory anyway, it was voluntary.”

Implementation is therefore described as constrained from the outset by legal frameworks, voluntary access, and unclear responsibility for rehousing vulnerable occupants illustrating that rehabilitation is not merely a technical upgrade to improve energy efficiency; it is inseparable from displacement risk by means of renovation.

Civic actors also emphasize structural constraints on expansion. A neighborhood association representative underscores that even ongoing construction will not resolve the housing imbalance:

“Incasòl [Catalan Land Institute] continues building, but it won’t solve the housing problem... you’d need to expand the POUM [town plan]... and that’s how things are right now.”

Thus, precedents and implementation are perceived as shaped by three conditions: historical neglect in the Nucli Antic, partial execution of planning instruments, and structural limits on new housing supply. Green transition initiatives are layered onto these pre-existing housing inequalities rather than replacing them.

3.2 Participation and governance (procedural)

Civic actors describe Olot as possessing a strong culture of civic associations and activities while simultaneously identifying procedural asymmetries that affect migrant-majority neighborhoods in the Nucli Antic, whose participation in such initiatives are comparatively low.

An anonymous local civic actor emphasizes this density of civic networks and collaborative practices, but also the weaknesses of local democratic decision-making:

“There is something we do have, as a territory: there is a lot of citizen participation, there are many organisations, a lot of collaborative work, a lot of network-based work... The vast majority [of migrant residents] are not naturalized, therefore they cannot vote and their demands and needs do not translate into City Council policies... Priority is given to the 4 or 5 complaining neighbors instead of prioritizing 500 students and their families.” (Civic actor)

In this account, participation is simultaneously robust and filtered. The presence of many organizations does not guarantee equal influence or overall representativeness. Migrant households concentrated in apartment blocks in the Nucli Antic are perceived as structurally disadvantaged in formal governance processes due to citizenship status, linguistic skills in Catalan, and electoral weight.

An NGO representative describes alternative forms of civic engagement emerging within the Old Quarter, particularly through cooperative and cultural initiatives. These initiatives are framed as spaces of collective resilience rather than institutional power:

“We talk a lot about this space being... these islands of resilience, of hope, of socialization, of self-organization, where new projects can emerge.”

Such spaces are described as important for neighborhood identity and cohesion and claiming the right to the city, but do not replace — or always influence — formal decision-making structures.

Housing mobilization is described as persistent yet limited. A neighborhood association representative characterizes Olot as socially introverted, noting low turnout at housing protests. Activism around eviction and discrimination depends on committed cores rather than broad civic waves.

Participation, therefore, is not absent. Rather, civic actors perceive it as unevenly translated into housing policy—particularly where migrant tenants lack voting rights and are concentrated in the Nucli Antic.

3.3 (In)equity (distributional)

Distributional inequality — especially in housing — is the most prominent theme across civic interviews. The Nucli Antic is repeatedly identified as the spatial concentration of vulnerability. As documented in recent qualitative research on community mediation in Olot, processes of dialogue and recognition can temporarily reconstruct relational trust, yet they also reveal the limits of neighborhood-level interventions when underlying housing inequalities remain unresolved (Carrera-Fossas and Brugué, 2025). The interviews analyzed here echo that tension between relational repair and structural constraint.

Civic actors describe a structural paradox: significant vacancy alongside acute housing precarity. An NGO representative articulates this contradiction succinctly:

“Then, the whole issue of housing is difficult. There are 1,200 empty dwellings in Olot... The situation is very precarious, and squatting is often necessary... there is a political perspective that does not accompany this at all, that stigmatizes it even more.”

During the January 2023 presentation of the PIAM functional program, participants explicitly raised concerns regarding gentrification, speculation, and the fate of residents in affected buildings, questioning both the socioeconomic profile of future inhabitants and the absence of a clear housing strategy within early phases of the intervention (González Virós, 2024).

Vacancy is described as coexisting with rising rents, discriminatory practices, and informal arrangements. An elected representative and former housing activist provides a consolidated description of rent escalation and its social consequences:

“In Olot, rents had never been this high. The average was 400 or 450 and now it’s almost doubled... We’re in a context of necessity and either you take it or someone else will... Two nights at a *pensión* and then out... You’ll end up squatting, what else can you do? ... Housing is needed to solve a big problem.”

Rent escalation is described as particularly affecting migrant workers employed in meat-processing plants and overcrowding and room-sharing are presented as coping strategies.

Beyond questions of thermal comfort and fairness in the housing market, the anonymous civic actor links these housing conditions directly to individual and public health and safety impacts:

“These people have housing problems... Some have to share with other families... We find that many of these families... have problems of unhealthiness, mold, dampness, heating systems that are disastrous.”

Energy inefficiency is therefore not described solely as an environmental deficit or thermal comfort, but as a driver of economic strain and respiratory risk.

An elected representative and former housing activist further connects housing insecurity to legal precarity: **distributional inequality is described as intersecting with immigration status, reinforcing long-term vulnerability.**

“If you get a criminal complaint and you don’t have nationality, that becomes a criminal record... And when you later apply for nationality... they don’t give it to you.”

Across interviews, **inequity in Olot is framed less as generalized urban inequality and more as concentrated housing injustice within the Nucli Antic and migrant-majority neighborhoods dominated by apartment rentals.**

3.4 Political mobilization

Political mobilization in Olot around housing and social inequality is described as present but limited in scale and intensity. Civic actors emphasize that activism exists — particularly around eviction resistance and anti-racist organizing — but does not generate mass participation.

Neighborhood association representative characterizes Olot as socially introverted, suggesting that mobilizations rarely translate into broad civic pressure:

“When the PAH organizes a mobilization, very few people show up... It’s a very introverted society... It doesn’t carry weight.”

This limited scale is described as particularly significant in the Nucli Antic, where housing precarity is most acute but residents are less likely to mobilize publicly. Migrant tenants, especially those without nationality, are perceived as reluctant to participate in confrontational activism due to legal vulnerability. Activist networks compensate for limited turnout by coordinating across collectives:

“They decided in an assembly that we have to support the PAH... On a rotating basis, one or two people from the assembly go to the PAH to support the assembly.”

Mobilization is therefore sustained through organizational solidarity rather than mass participation.

At the same time, civic actors note the growing politicization of migration and housing. A local health expert observes that housing difficulties affecting migrant workers are increasingly framed within political narratives emphasizing immigration control rather than structural supply deficits:

“There is a tougher line on the issue of immigration... and these people have housing problems.”

The reliance on squatting as a coping mechanism to respond to inaccessibility of rental housing has been mobilized on the political right to argue that migrants are acting unlawfully, bringing the combined questions of housing and community cohesion into heated debate.

However, green transition initiatives themselves — such as energy retrofits or public space improvements — have not generated comparable mobilization, instead being treated predominantly as an administrative concern, leaving housing accessibility and security as the central axis of civic contestation.

3.5 Socio-ecological impacts/benefits (positive)

Despite the strong emphasis on housing precarity, civic actors also acknowledge positive socio-ecological dimensions of Olot’s urban context.

A local health expert emphasizes the town’s environmental assets and the legacy of earlier urban greening initiatives, and that the desire for a green or desirable town center is not a concern specific to the political left:

“Now we have monumental trees, huge trees, that provide shade, that provide coolness, that also give us a sense of belonging... And those were policies promoted by conservative parties.”

Urban tree planting and access to surrounding natural landscapes are described as core parts of Olot’s identity, but also that “nature” is something that exists all around Olot, rather than in the Nucli Antic itself. Civic actors also note that the distribution of green infrastructure within the urban core is uneven, with limited internal green space compared to peripheral residential areas.

Beyond housing and green space, an elected representative and former housing activist highlights the establishment of a new primary care center (CAP) in Sant Miquel as an example of redistributive public investment:

“The new health centre... that’s what we’ve always been asking for: public services that go there.”

While not strictly a green intervention, the CAP is described as part of broader efforts to rebalance services toward historically marginalized neighborhoods. An NGO representative points to community-led cultural and cooperative initiatives in the Nucli Antic that aim to revitalize ground-floor spaces and foster social cohesion:

“These spaces can generate economic activity, but also social cohesion... it’s about activating what is already there.”

Positive socio-ecological impacts are described in terms of identity, localized revitalization, and selective service provision. However, civic actors emphasize that these benefits do not resolve housing inequality in the Nucli Antic or its comparative state of neglect compared to the town as a whole.

3.6 (Civic perceptions of) socio-ecological impacts/harms (negative)

Negative impacts associated with urban change are primarily described through the lens of housing affordability and displacement risk rather than any critique of the value of green transition and energy efficiency activities within themselves.

A local planning representative articulates concerns about gentrification emerging through well-intentioned rehabilitation, but that Olot is not unsusceptible to gentrification, particularly in the Nucli Antic:

“There’s such huge economic inequality... Even if the intention isn’t to speculate... if young people come who can pay 800 euros rent... there are people paying 200 euros each, ten of them in one flat, and they won’t be able to live there anymore.”

This perception reflects anxiety that energy-efficient retrofits and aesthetic improvements may indirectly increase rental values beyond what migrant households can afford, or that this is an intentional element underlining motivations to “regenerate” the center as an area more oriented toward tourism, retail, and revitalized housing at the expense of its current residents.

An elected representative and former housing activist connects rising rents to structural necessity and competition:

“We’re in a context of necessity and either you take it or someone else will. That’s the big problem we have, which is also why rents are rising so much.”

Scarcity of available rental units, rather than any direct effects of tourism in Garrotxa, are described as the main drivers of price escalation. Civic actors repeatedly stress that Olot is not experiencing large-scale tourist pressure; instead, labor demand and limited supply create competition in the rental market.

The risk of displacement is therefore framed not as immediate mass eviction, but as gradual substitution. Rehabilitation may attract higher-income tenants, while migrant households are pushed into more precarious arrangements or informal occupation.

Negative socio-ecological impacts are thus **described as indirect: environmental improvements and regeneration, when not accompanied by strong housing protections, risk reinforcing distributional inequality in the Nucli Antic.**

3.7 Tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors

Civic actors describe multiple tensions shaping housing governance and regeneration in Olot. One axis of tension concerns property owners and enforcement. An elected representative and former housing activist criticizes subsidy schemes for façade rehabilitation that lack rent controls or follow-up:

“You’ve allocated half a million euros and you’re telling me you have no guarantee of control or supervision? They could put them at €1,000 a month, which is totally prohibitive.”

This reflects a broader concern that public funds may indirectly increase private asset values without securing affordability. The elected representative and former housing activist further highlights symbolic regulatory measures perceived as targeting low-income residents:

“They want to prohibit laundry being visible from the street... Obviously, it’s an aporophobic and racist measure.”

Other interviewees have noted that the city is seeking to limit the amount of new kebab shops opening in ground-floor units, contributing to the **perception that there is clear exclusionary cultural coding occurring in the Nucli Antic, which such measures are interpreted as privileging aesthetic considerations over the lived realities of migrant households in dense housing blocks.**

Another axis of tension concerns industrial labor demand. A local health expert describes the dependence of the meat-processing industry on migrant labor and the housing consequences of this demand:

“These people are needed for the slaughterhouses... and they end up sharing housing in very poor conditions.”

Thus, power dynamics are described as extending beyond municipal policy to include economic actors whose labor needs shape housing pressures. Across interviews, the Nucli Antic emerges as the space where these tensions intersect: between rehabilitation and affordability, aesthetics and subsistence, enforcement and legal vulnerability.

3.8 (Civic perceptions of) innovative governance mechanisms

Civic actors recognize certain policy tools aimed at addressing housing inequality, though they describe their scale as limited. There is cynicism toward previous participatory processes which did not seem to lead to much material change in the city.

Neighborhood association representative references acquisitions through the legal tools of *Tanteig i Retracte* (the legal right of first refusal for public bodies to buy residential properties on the market and convert them to social housing), though such purchases are described as modest in relation to the scale of vacancy.

“There have been some of these apartments that the Generalitat has bought, about 27 or 28.”

An elected representative and former housing activist discusses planned public housing developments intended to facilitate temporary rehousing during rehabilitation:

“The idea... is to use those units for when the Nucli Antic blocks have to be renovated... so you need to plan for their return.”

These mechanisms are framed as innovative attempts to avoid permanent displacement. However, civic actors emphasize that implementation depends on funding and sustained coordination.

Energy retrofit programs are also acknowledged as innovative, as offering improvements to whoever will end up living in these units, and having ecological benefits, but participation is perceived as deeply uneven. Owners must apply voluntarily, and vulnerable tenants lack leverage to initiate improvements. Innovation, therefore, is recognized but described as incremental relative to structural housing need in the Nucli Antic.

3.9 (Civic perceptions of) tourism and market pressures

Despite the attraction of the broader Garrotxa area, tourism is not described as a primary driver of housing inequality in Olot, and highly-qualified transnational migration is not understood to be driving gentrification as it is in Catalan cities. Civic actors emphasize that market pressures are linked more closely to labor demand and limited supply than to short-term rentals.

An elected representative and former housing activist notes rapid rent escalation in recent years:

“Last year it was the municipality in Girona with the biggest increase in prices.”

Interviewees reference demographic growth, industrial employment, and speculative holding of vacant dwellings — its own sort of downward pressure — as driving forces in the dual challenges of vacancy and housing crisis in Olot. Such speculative holding is sometimes perceived as strategic, in sense of widening awareness among property-owners that there may be various rehabilitation subsidies to capitalize upon: costs that

might otherwise have been borne themselves in response to the increasing land rent their properties could demand.

3.10 Gaps in Perceptions Between Civic Groups and Public Agencies

Comparison between civic and institutional interviews reveals important divergences in emphasis, framing, and scale — particularly regarding housing degradation in the Nucli Antic and the relationship between green transition and migrant precarity.

Civic actors consistently foreground overcrowding, rent escalation, vacancy, and legal vulnerability affecting migrant tenants in the historic center. Institutional representatives, by contrast, tend to frame these same conditions through strategic planning, technical feasibility, and structural urban dynamics.

A municipal technician describes the degradation of the Old Town as a widely recognized urban process linked to housing and vacancy, presenting it as a structural phenomenon rather than as an immediate distributive injustice:

“All the political groups... detect the same thing, which is a process of degradation at the same time linked to the city’s housing problem... there are hundreds or close to a thousand dwellings without use, and, moreover, there is an evident degradation... It is a process that we see everywhere, that town cores reach this point.”

In this framing, degradation and obsolescence is normalized as part of a broader, naturalized life cycle affecting historic centers. Civic actors, in contrast, describe the Nucli Antic through lived realities of overcrowding, dampness, unsafe heating practices, and housing exclusion concentrated among migrant households.

Municipal technician’s discourse frequently shifts toward scale and technical logic in differentiating Olot’s needs from that of large cities. When discussing energy transition, he emphasizes density, feasibility, and infrastructural design rather than social differentiation:

“Olot has 1,400 inhabitants per square kilometre... Some things make sense here; some things make sense [in Barcelona] too... If a public institution sets up an energy community in Barcelona... each person gets practically nothing... Here, yes, you can approach it differently... The solutions, depending on the logic, some are transferable, others there’s nothing to discuss.”

The municipal technician also explicitly characterizes his own political role as technical:

“I’m a technical politician... part of the success or non-success of what we will do is in the details. And the details have a lot of technical and economic components. They are not obvious.”

Here, the problem is framed in terms of spatial scale and technical viability. By contrast, civic actors focus on whether retrofit programs reach low-income renters in deteriorated buildings

in the Nucli Antic. This technocratic framing contrasts with civic narratives centered on housing despair, discrimination in rental markets, and the cumulative effects of legal precarity on migrant residents.

An Olot town councilor responsible for urban planning, similarly acknowledges past failures in housing policy but situates them within an evolving strategic framework and a predominating perception that social housing is a failed social experiment that does not fit the needs of the town. Reflecting on earlier public housing interventions in the Nucli Antic, he states:

“All public housing development has been a disaster... they concentrated the most vulnerable part of Olot’s population... Therefore, we must create housing that integrates... we will try to create a social mix in the neighbourhood.”

Where civic actors describe the ongoing concentration of vulnerability as a current injustice, the town councilor frames integration and social mix as planning objectives intended to correct past mistakes. The emphasis is on design principles and future balance rather than on immediate overcrowding or rent escalation, but arguments around the concentration of poverty are interpreted by some civic actors as a pretense to gentrify the Nucli Antic.

Institutional representatives also tend to situate green transition within long-term policy trajectories. A town councilor highlights the pioneering institutionalization of energy transition within the municipality, part of earlier collaborations made possible by EU funding:

“People started talking about energy transition here 14 years ago... a specific council department for energy transition was created... It was given a budget allocation.”

The green transition is thus presented as incremental, planned, and embedded within municipal governance structures. Civic actors, by contrast, question whether energy-efficiency initiatives have benefited low-income tenants in the least efficient housing stock.

Finally, differences appear in the framing of market and tourism pressures. Civic actors express concern that rehabilitation may indirectly contribute to rent increases and gradual displacement in the Nucli Antic. A municipal technician downplays tourism pressure relative to larger cities and emphasizes morphological constraints:

“Here tourism exerts the pressure that it exerts, which is much less than in other places like Barcelona... if you want to have a habitable old town with good conditions, then urban planning does not solve it through normal channels, because the buildings are what they are... it doesn’t resolve itself.”

Here again, the problem is described as one of built form and technical limitation, rather than as a question of distributive justice.

Taken together, institutional discourse is predominantly strategic, technical, and long-term in orientation. It emphasizes feasibility, integration, density, infrastructure design, and phased implementation. Civic discourse, by contrast, centers lived housing precarity, migrant vulnerability, rent escalation, and uneven access to rehabilitation benefits — especially in the Nucli Antic.

The divergence is therefore not one of direct contradiction, but of analytic lens and temporal scale. For institutional actors, the Nucli Antic represents a complex planning challenge requiring coordinated technical intervention and long-term restructuring. For civic actors, it remains the immediate epicenter of housing inequality and migrant precarity within Olot's green transition.

4 Critical Analysis: Olot

The Olot case illustrates that green transition in a medium-small, industrial municipality operates differently from metropolitan contexts commonly associated with green gentrification, though **there are fears that with regeneration and retrofit initiatives, housing disparities in Olot will be further amplified. Ecological initiatives in Olot are layered onto a pre-existing housing regime characterized by labor-driven demand, spatial containment, vacancy concentration, and limited decommodified housing provision. The critical analytical question is not whether green transition has directly produced housing inequality, but whether it interacts with structural housing vulnerabilities in ways that reinforce them over time.**

Section 3 demonstrated that housing inequality in the Nucli Antic predates current regeneration cycles and strategies explicitly framed within the discourse of green transition. Civic actors consistently describe overcrowding, rent escalation, dampness and energy inefficiency, discriminatory rental access, and legal precarity among migrant tenants. These conditions are embedded in long-term patterns of fragmented ownership and insufficient rental supply. **There are widespread doubts that such a pattern is changing, despite a discursive shift to more participatory planning in recent years. This is based on historic precedent: the Llei de Barris intervention (2004–2011) improved public space and urban infrastructure but did not substantially alter the structural housing distribution. Vacancy remained high, and protected rental stock did not expand at the scale required to rebalance the market.**

Nevertheless, the new Pla de Barris i Viles 2025–2029 and the designation of the Nucli Antic as an ACR signal a renewed and more ambitious intervention framework. Approximately €25 million in combined regional and municipal funding represents a significant commitment for a municipality of 40,000. The regeneration framework explicitly anticipates temporary relocation during block-scale rehabilitation processes, yet presents this as managed and reversible rather than displacement-driven.

Although rent escalation, overcrowding, and recourse to informal or squatted housing indicate that structural displacement linked to labor-driven demand and long-standing market constraints is already occurring in Olot, there is no clear evidence that recent

green transition initiatives within themselves are directly producing large-scale displacement, suggesting instead that ecological interventions are unfolding within — and potentially intensifying — an already unequal housing regime rather than generating that inequality. Such concerns about this dynamic are more anticipatory in nature, and civic actors articulate fear of incremental valorization: **rehabilitation of vacant or deteriorated housing stock, combined with improvements in public space and environmental quality, are anticipated to gradually increase rental costs in a context of limited supply and accelerate residential displacement** Rent escalation is already occurring and widely perceived as severe, but interviewees attribute rising rents to labor-driven demand and scarcity. **The perceived risk is cumulative rather than immediate, based on future substitution: regeneration may attract higher-income Catalan households or young professionals capable to pay higher rents — the profile assumed to be prioritized by landlords — gradually displacing migrant and lower-income tenants.** This layering of ecological intervention onto pre-existing inequality reflects broader findings in neighborhood governance research, which show that **local policy innovation often operates within structurally unequal housing regimes that municipalities only partially control (Carrera et al., 2021), and may demonstrate willingness to do so.**

The historical trajectory of the Nucli Antic reinforces this interpretation: former Llei de Barris programs significantly upgraded urban space and infrastructure without fundamentally altering ownership fragmentation or vacancy dynamics (Bonet and Pybus, 2009). The current regeneration cycle therefore unfolds within a housing structure shaped by earlier, only partially transformative interventions.

Differences between typologies of intervention are analytically significant. “Hard” densification replacing lower-density housing is largely absent in Olot, while “soft” densification measures focus on bringing vacant buildings back into residential use or improving the conditions of occupied residential buildings. Geographic containment within the volcanic natural park limits outward expansion, and demolition-led redevelopment is minimal. Nature-based solutions are incremental rather than transformative, contributing to environmental improvement without fundamentally restructuring land markets, and are more focused on the town’s fringes.

Retrofit, as incorporated into complex social regeneration, constitutes the most socially consequential dimension of green transition. Energy transition initiatives such as district heating and the HolaDomus and Europace-supported rehabilitation programs demonstrate technical innovation. However, participation remains owner-dependent and administratively complex. As Section 3 showed, many migrant tenants occupy rental units in buildings requiring substantial intervention but lacking proactive ownership engagement. Thus, **retrofit risks reinforcing inequality if not explicitly targeted toward energy-poor rental dwellings while protecting tenants.**

in the context of a structurally constrained housing market characterized by labor-driven demand and vacancy paradoxes in Olot, ecological improvement reinforces housing inequalities unless explicitly integrated with decommodified housing expansion and strengthened tenant protection.

Housing Justice and Inequality in Context

Catalonia, like Spain's overall housing system, has historically been dominated by owner-occupation, with limited social rental provision and, until recently, relatively weak tenant protections (Allen et al., 2004; Pareja-Eastaway and Sánchez-Martínez, 2017, 2023). **Although recent legislative reforms created in the Spanish government and applied by the Generalitat have introduced rent regulation in designated “tense” areas — of which Olot is included — such smaller municipalities operate within a distinct political economy environment where enforcement capacity and public housing stock remain limited².**

Olot's industrial base is central to its housing dynamics. **Meat-processing and agro-food sectors rely heavily on migrant labor. This labor-housing nexus generates continuous rental demand for low to moderate-cost units. Yet access to formal rental contracts is uneven. Civic actors report systemic discriminatory practices, overcrowding, and prevalent informal and fraudulent arrangements. The Nucli Antic is frequently referenced in municipal and policy discourse as a priority area where housing vulnerability and integration challenges intersect.** Local narratives and demographic data closely associate housing pressures for migrants with older and lower-quality housing stock in segregated areas in and around the Nucli Antic. **It is in the Nucli Antic that newly created housing could most likely address increasing housing demands through soft densification, but this requires political will beyond the consensus that the historic center is in need of regeneration warranting significant external public funds.** The creation of an “Espai Cooperatiu Ciutadà” and a cross-departmental governance structure illustrates the municipality's attempt to institutionalize coordination capacity across housing, social services, culture, and economic promotion. Whether this capacity translates into distributive housing transformation remains an open question.

The vacancy paradox deepens this tension. Despite census and energy consumption-based estimates of 1,060 vacant dwellings citywide and several hundred within the Nucli Antic, rental scarcity persists. Vacancy is linked to fragmented inheritance, speculative retention, rehabilitation costs, and limited enforcement of vacancy penalties. The ACR designation seeks to mobilize around 300 units through structured rehabilitation zones — including a limited number of protected units—but relative to demographic growth and rental demand, this remains modest.

The persistence of substantial vacancy echoes patterns already identified during the first Llei de Barris diagnostic phase in 2019, when high vacancy and structural

² Olot is officially designated by the Spanish government as a “**zona de mercado residencial tensionado**,” meaning it falls within the areas where the Housing Law allows special rental-

deterioration were central to the neighborhood's vulnerability profile (Bonet and Pybus, 2009) Two decades later, the endurance of this condition highlights the limits of regeneration strategies that priorities spatial upgrading without fundamentally restructuring housing access mechanisms.

Empirical analyses of vulnerability in Olot emphasize that **residential exclusion and weakened neighborhood organization are structurally intertwined, and that improving physical conditions without altering housing access mechanisms risks reproducing inequality** (Carrera Fossas, 2023). **The vacancy paradox in the Nucli Antic exemplifies this structural entanglement.** At the same time, mediation initiatives in the neighborhood demonstrate that while collective agency can be rebuilt at micro-scale, relational repair cannot substitute for distributive housing reform (Carrera-Fossas and Brugué, 2025)

The historic trajectory of the Llei de Barris is analytically instructive and reveals an important sequencing issue. The initial regeneration phase prioritized public-space and infrastructure upgrades. While addressing physical degradation, these interventions did not substantially expand protected housing or restructure rental access. The block-based (“illa”) methodology of current site-specific retrofit and complex social regeneration approaches, where intervention is organized around spatially bounded units combining physical rehabilitation, re-parceling under community-oriented urbanist Itziar González emphasizes integrative community-building (“fer barri” instead of regeneration, creation of shared “cooperative” spaces for neighbors’ debate and co-production), signaling recognition that **physical improvement alone is insufficient, but without significant quantitative expansion of decommodified rental stock and proactive measures to include migrant residents, but the culturally-coded, socio-economic objectives of “integration” raise questions in the current political environment of rising anti-migrant sentiment.**

Housing inequality in Olot is also juridical. Civic actors describe how **eviction processes and criminal complaints affect Spanish nationality applications, deepening migrant precarity.** This intersection between immigration governance and housing insecurity situates Olot within broader European debates on the social dimensions of labor migration. The locally industrial economy depends highly on migrant workers, yet housing provision remains systemically misaligned with this structural demand. However, this must also be understood in the context of Spanish President Pedro Sánchez’s January 2026 announcement launching an **extraordinary regularization process aimed at granting legal status and work permits to hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants residing in Spain. In Olot, the policy is unlikely to augment population growth but may accelerate the shift toward formal rental contracts, making existing housing shortages more visible and increasing pressure on affordable units and local planning capacity, along with possibilities for longer-term political enfranchisement of migrants in the town.**

Energy transition introduces a further justice dimension. Olot has institutionalized energy transition within municipal governance, demonstrating prolonged political commitment and technical innovation through seeking and capture of EU funds and close collaboration with non-profit foundations such as Europace. Yet energy justice literature emphasizes that decarbonization strategies must prioritize vulnerable households to avoid regressive effects (Bouzarovski and Simcock, 2017; Bouzarovski et al., 2018; Bouzarovski, 2022). In Olot, retrofit

participation depends largely on owner initiative. Interviews suggest that most rental units occupied by migrant tenants remain outside systematic intervention. **Without linking retrofit subsidies to affordability guarantees and protections against renoviction, energy transition risks benefiting property owners at the expense of tenants by increasing asset values without securing tenant protections,** In Olot, it is unclear if there is political will to address this distributional tension.

Housing justice in Olot therefore hinges on alignment between ecological transition and structural housing reform. Vacancy mobilization, protected rental expansion, anti-discrimination enforcement, and tenant protections must accompany public-space upgrades, active mobility infrastructures, and retrofit schemes, if green transition is to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities. If not, the physical improvements in the Nucli Antic may be perceived as “revanchist” in the way that gentrification is often framed in terms of gentrification in larger settlements, generating greater social tensions between “insiders” and “outsiders” which define contemporary political debates in Catalonia.

Short Reflections

The Nucli Antic of Olot is a symbolic and population center of Garrotxa. Today, it embodies historical degradation, concentrated migrant tenancy, high vacancy, and contemporary regeneration ambition. **The ACR designation and Pla de Barris funding signal unprecedented political consensus around its transformation, but not the details of the socio-economic conditions of a newly transformed historic center. There is rhetorical emphasis on “making a neighborhood,” but less clarity regarding for whom this neighborhood is intended.**

In conclusion, Olot demonstrates that green transition in medium-small industrial municipalities operates through incremental layering rather than dramatic restructuring. It does not automatically generate green gentrification, but neither is it socially neutral or conceptualized in a way to reduce housing inequalities for the most vulnerable. **In a context defined by labor migration, vacancy paradoxes, and spatial containment, ecological transition must be explicitly integrated with housing justice instruments if it is to avoid reinforcing entrenched inequalities.** The Nucli Antic remains the decisive terrain where this integration will determine whether regeneration produces inclusion or gradual substitution, which will surely be a political dynamic that breaks down the vague consensus around the imperatives of regeneration and residential energy efficiency.

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6 Appendix 1 – Glossary

Abbreviations

AC	Aliança Catalana (Independentist Catalan Party)
Generalitat	Government of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia- public body
PSC	Socialists' Party of Catalonia (Partido de los Socialistas de Cataluña)
PIAM	The Pla Integral d'Actuacions de Millora (Integral Plan for Improvement Actions)
PAH	Plataforma d'Afectats per la Hipoteca (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages)
POUM	POUM (Pla d'Ordenació Urbanística Municipal), City Urban Plan

Terms and Concepts

Right to first refusal:	In the <i>Tanteig i Retracte</i> system in Catalonia, public authorities are legally allowed to acquire properties before private buyers, ensuring they are repurposed for social housing.
Tense housing market zones	Areas designated by Autonomous Communities, in alignment with the Spanish Right to Housing Law, in which rent caps and increased tenant protections are put into place. In these areas, new (long-term) contracts cannot exceed the price of the last contract in force for the previous five years after the annual update (3% as of 2024).

7 Appendix 2 – Key interview data and transcripts

#	Position of Interviewee	Sector/company	Date of interview	Media
1	Town councilor	Department of Urban Planning and Public Space (Regidor Urbanisme), City of Olot & Fundació Europeace, a non-profit organization that aims to fight climate change by improving people's well-being.	9 July	In person
2	Municipal technician	Department of Energy Transition (Regidoria de Transicio Energetica), City of Olot	9 July	In person
3	Local planning representative	Celobert - architecture and planning coop who work on EU funded projects in Barcelona and Olot.	15 July	In person
4	Local health expert	Local health expert	5 Dec	In person
5	NGO representative	Resilience Earth - NGO (Articulacio Ecosistemica)	9 Dec	In person
6	Neighborhood association representative	AAVV Barri Sant Miquel. (associació de veïns de Sant Miquel - Sant Miquel residents' association)	5 & 9 Dec	In person
7	Elected representative and former housing activist	Olot City Council elected representative, former housing activist.	11 Dec	In person
8	Local politician	Former Olot City Councilor and spokesperson for En Comú Podem	9 Dec	In person

8 Appendix 3 – Visuals



Figure 1. Map of Olot. Source: <https://sig.olot.cat/>





Figure 2: Collection of fieldwork photos – Olot historical city center.



Figure 3. El Firal project, Paseo de Miquel Baly (source: <https://annaugenibach.com/2023/04/03/el-firal-de-olot/>)