

Times get tougher for tenants

Over 200 reports of "mobbing" in BCN last year

CATALONIA TODAY

● More and more Barcelona residents are complaining about being pushed out of their homes by property owners, a practice known as "mobbing," especially in Ciutat Vella, the city's historic centre.

In 2007, some 223 people lodged complaints with the municipal consumer rights office, doubling the number of complaints lodged in 2006. Of those, 202 resulted in legal action.

A quarter of those cases last year were in Ciutat Vella. Given the predominance of cases there, Barcelona City Council is opening an office in the district this month to deal with the rise in complaints.



Tenant points to a deteriorating wall

beyond tenants' means.

While the situation is not a pleasant one for anybody, Albert Gonzalez, the city's director of commerce and consumer rights, says it is particularly hard on the elderly.

"They are people in their 80s who have problems with mobility and with understanding a situation that is beyond them or their level of education," he says.

While the number of complaints last year was double that of the year before, officials deny that this reflects a major increase in the problem. Gonzalez says the jump in figures largely reflects a new classification system, which includes cases not previously seen as mobbing.

The problem is especially hard on the elderly

There are numerous ways in which property owners have tried to get rid of tenants. The most common include letting the property deteriorate to the point where the building is almost uninhabitable, refusing to accept monthly payments and then evicting tenants for unpaid rent, or simply raising the rent

Enough is enough for souvenirs

Barcelona puts a lid on shops selling tourist trinkets near landmarks

ROSA DÍAZ/ CATALONIA TODAY

● Barcelona wants to stop the plague of souvenir shops from spreading any further. From now on, any potential entrepreneur looking to hock fake Barça jerseys and Mexican *sombreros* in the tourist hotspots of la Sagrada Família and Parc Guëll will not be able to open his or her souvenir shack.

The law might seem too little too late for some, but it has caused sighs of relief in some quarters. Antoni Torrens, president of l'Associació Amics del Passeig de Gràcia, says the new law "will allow us to preserve passieg de Gràcia from being saturated [by souvenir shops] as has happened in la Rambla."

The districts of Sagrada Família and Parc Guëll now join the already protected district of Ciutat Vella. Additionally, 30 build-

The city says the shops "pollute the landscape"

ings of "national interest" outside these designated areas have been selected as areas restricting more souvenir shops. For these buildings, the new law prohibits the opening of such shops



The kind of eye-sore that the city is trying to limit/L. JUANOLA

within 30 metres of their entrances. Among the landmarks are Casa Batlló, el Castell de Montjuïc, Casa Calvert, Vapor Vell de Sants, Casa Vicens, Casa Calvert and la Fundació Tàpies.

The City Council justifies the curb the of growth of this type of business due to the "negative impact" these shops have on the urban landscape, above all when shop owners do not obey regulations. According to the plan, souvenir shops "pollute the landscape and its architectural values when display racks invade

the buildings' facades."

Furthermore, the city deems that the huge number of these establishments concentrated so densely around certain landmarks and tourists sights "impoverishes the economic fabric of the city because it forces out businesses that serve local residents."

The law defines a souvenir shop as any establishment that designates over 20% of its merchandise to "the retail sale of items directed principally to tourists as gifts or souvenirs.



Barcelona tourists stick to well-beaten paths

● We all suspect that tourists tend to follow well-beaten paths in Barcelona, but actually seeing confirmation of those paths in an aerial view is impressive, if not alarming. Scientists at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Massachusetts Institute of Technology came up with an ingenious way to chart tourist movements. Rather than use surveys or plant GPS sensors on tourists, they catalogued tourist photographs posted on Flickr, which left geographic—and chronological—evidence of their movements. The result achieved what tourist agencies spend large amounts of money to find out and verified the latest thinking about visitors to Barcelona: the city needs to promote other worthy destinations, which would also relieve the congestion seen above./Photographic imagery copyright 2008 Institut Cartogràfic de Catalunya.



Rabadán, head of the Mossos's cultural heritage task force/ GABRIEL MASSANA

Barcelona a hub for stolen art

Police see rise in illegal art and artifact trade

CATALONIA TODAY

● Barcelona is becoming a centre for the illegal trafficking of stolen art and artifacts, according to the head of the Mossos d'Esquadra's special task force on stolen cultural and historic heritage, Tomás Rabadán,

Recent evidence of this growing trend can be seen in the fact that three of the eight people arrested in the recent bust of a

major art forgery operation were Catalan gallery owners.

While police have registered a decrease in recent years of cases involving the theft of local art and artifacts in Catalonia, Barcelona is becoming a popular place to trade artistic or archaeological valuables stolen or forged elsewhere due to the interest shown by local buyers and Catalonia's geographic location.