



# Squatting in Europe

*RADICAL SPACES, URBAN STRUGGLES*

**SQUATTING EUROPE KOLLECTIVE**



*"Amidst the proliferation of post-political banter, it is refreshing to see the time-tested politics of pre-figurative direct action being taken so seriously. This is a must-read for anybody who wants to better understand how the politics of squatting offer a set of transformative strategies for creating a more egalitarian world." – Nik Heynen, University of Georgia*

Squatting offers a radical but simple solution to the crises of housing, homelessness, and the lack of social space that mark contemporary society: occupying empty buildings and rebuilding lives and communities in the process. Squatting has a long and complex history, interwoven with the changing and contested nature of urban politics over the last forty years.

Squatting can be an individual strategy for shelter or a collective experiment in communal living. Squatted and self-managed social centres have contributed to the renewal of urban struggles across Europe and intersect with larger political projects. However, not all squatters share the same goals, resources, backgrounds or desire for visibility.

*Squatting in Europe* aims to move beyond the conventional understandings of squatting, investigating its history in Europe over the past four decades. Historical comparisons and analysis blend together in these inquiries into squatting in the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, France, Germany and England. In it members of SqEK (Squatting Europe Collective) explore the diverse, radical, and often controversial nature of squatting as a form of militant research and self-managed knowledge production.

Essays by Miguel Martínez, Gianni Piazza, Hans Pruijt, Pierpaolo Mudu, Claudio Cattaneo, Andre Holm, Armin Kuhn, Linus Owens, Florence Bouillon, Thomas Aguilera, and ETC Dee.

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Edited by the Squatting Europe Kollektive

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# **Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles**

Edited by the Squatting Europe Kollektive

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# PREFACE

*Margit Mayer*

THANKS TO THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT, THE CALL TO SQUAT IS ONCE again raised more widely and acted upon with increasing frequency. The movements of the Arab Spring and the 15M movement in Spain, which catalyzed similar “real democracy” movements of ‘*Indignados*’ in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Greece, as well as the Occupy movement in the US all started out with taking over – not buildings but – public and private squares and plazas. Most of these movements used the (re)appropriated spaces to set up tents, kitchens, libraries, and media centers to collectively organize their assemblies and working groups, their rallies and marches, as well as their everyday lives in a horizontal, self-managed, and direct-democratic style. In the process, they have transformed public spaces into commons – common spaces opened up by the occupiers who inhabit them and share them according to their own rules. As with squatters of social centers or large buildings, the occupied squares represent(ed) not only a collective form of residence on the basis of shared resources, but also a political action: in this case laying siege to centers of financial and political power. Importantly, they have also served to explore direct-democratic decision-making, to prefigure post-capitalist ways of life, and to devise innovative forms of political action. As with squatting, the practice of occupying has enacted a democratic (re)appropriation of public squares epitomized by their inhabitation. As with squatting, the power



of bodies that continue to be present – that don't go home at the end of the demonstration and that speak for themselves rather than being represented by others – exerts a forceful message as it gives *ongoing presence* to political protest.

In today's situation of the worldwide spread and the open future of the Occupy movement, it is helpful to take some lessons from squatters' movements as they have influenced the trajectory of many contemporary movements and struggles. Squatting is a unique form of protest activity that holds a potential of unfurling energies; it focuses action in a way that is prefigurative of another mode of organizing society and challenging a paramount institution of capitalist society: private property.

## THE SPECIAL FEATURES OF SQUATTING

SQUATTING – SIMPLY defined as living in or using a dwelling without the consent of the owner - occurs in many different circumstances, and as such, even if it occurs with the intention of long-term use, is not necessarily transformative of social relations. Most forms of stealth squatting or other forms of deprivation-based squatting, whether carried out by homeless people themselves or by advocate activists opening up buildings for destitute would-be squatters, are not part of transformative progressive social movements.

Thus, squatting as a tactic can be used by individuals to improve their housing situation outside of any social movement, or it can be used, as a technique or action repertoire, by a variety of different social movements (including right-wing movements). Of the many different types of squatting, the one highlighted in this book is part of wider progressive or radical social movements. This squatting movement assertively operates in the open (rather than stealthily), engages in networking and coalition building with tenant organization and urban or environmental and/or other social justice movements; it makes explicit demands on the state, calling (most often) for affordable, decent housing and social centers, but also for (more or less) radical solutions to the underlying causes of the lack of adequate housing and social infrastructures. Crucially, it uses the occupied space not only for collective living arrangements, but also for collective self-organization and empowerment, in the case of the self-managed social centers for political and counter-cultural activities.

Thus, for these movements squatting is a two-fold experience: it involves, first, the actual act of civil and social disobedience, which then

allows other counter-cultural and militant practices to take hold, pre-figurative free spaces to be built, and thick bonds of solidarity to be forged. Horizontal and assembly-oriented forms of self-organization and political participation are as essential to this practice as cooperative management and direct democracy. But since the movement is also making use of the illegal act of squatting (also as a way to draw public attention to massive social and housing problems, the high social cost of speculation, or the waste of public land and buildings), this challenge to the primacy of the individual right to private property puts the movements at risk of repression, even when they enjoy broad legitimacy and popular support. Repressive or containment strategies of the state often force the movements to ‘choose’ either eviction or some form of legalization. But under specific circumstances, some squatting movements have been able to experiment with double track strategies and been able to go back and forth between (or even apply simultaneously) direct action and negotiation, most often in some kind of division of labor between radical core groups and more moderate supporters, and thereby managed to extend their squats and with them the infrastructures for their collective living, working, and political organizing.

Even where squats have been evicted with more or less police force, their actions have often led to saving old buildings from being demolished; in many European cities squatters movements have enhanced political participation of tenants and residents, and led to new forms of institutionalized participation and “careful urban renewal” instead of “urban removal.”

Observers have also begun to identify certain patterns and waves of squatting that correlate with movement cycles and different phases of urban development and urban politics, shifting from fordism to neoliberalism.

### **WHAT’S NEW ABOUT SQUATTING IN NEOLIBERALISM?**

THE NEOLIBERALIZATION OF capitalism has reintroduced “accumulation by dispossession” as a way to solve the problems of flagging capital accumulation (cf. Harvey 2005). As with original accumulation, it involves the conversion of common, collective, and state forms of property rights into exclusive private property rights and the suppression of rights to the commons. Neoliberal forms of dispossession complement the (intensification of) the older, time-tested forms by also chipping away at common property rights that have been won in the course of

the Fordist class struggle (such as access to education, health care, welfare, and state pensions) and reverting them to the private sector.

However, neoliberalization dissolves forms of social solidarity not only in favor of private property, economization, and marketization, but also in favor of unbridled individualism, personal responsibility, and entrepreneurial activation. These latter dimensions resonate in some ways with movement values of self-determination and empowerment, and with its critique of the bureaucratic and paternalistic Fordist welfare state. In both neoliberal as well as new social movements' visions instead of the state, individuals, communities, and voluntarism should be playing stronger roles so as to create more vibrant societies. Both view 'too much state intervention' as hindering not only personal development and self-realization, but also societal self-regulation – which the neoliberals, of course, prefer to see happening via the market and economic rationality, whereas progressive movements would like to see happening through alternative networks.

In the course of the neoliberalization of urban governance, a series of political demands as well as organizational forms of the new social movements have become incorporated into the neoliberal project. With new public management and the shift from public to private and semi-public institutions via outcontracting, not only established third-sector but also oppositional organizations were integrated into this regime; and with the shift from centralized to local and more differentiated modes of decision-making, more consensus-oriented and participatory modes found their way into local governance.

What's more, with intensifying interurban competition, cities have discovered cultural revitalization and creativity-led economic and urban development policies as a useful strategy to enhance their brand and improve their global image. Becoming a 'creative city' is increasingly seen as necessary to attract tourists, global investors, and affluent middle and upper classes. Politicians have thus become keen to instrumentalize dynamic local subcultures and harness them as a competitive advantage in the interurban rivalry. In this context, the cultural milieus of artists and other 'creatives', subcultural scenes including squats and self-managed social centers, have taken on a new function as they mark urban space as attractive. They charge them with cultural capital, which in the scheme of 'creative city' policy then becomes transformed by investors into economic capital.

Clever urban politicians harness the cultural production that goes on in squatted centers as branding assets that contribute to the image of

‘cool cities,’ ‘happening places’ or sub-cultural magnets. Many German cities offer contracts for interim use of urban space (see for Berlin’s example Colomb 2012), while Dutch cities have created a so-called ‘Breeding Grounds’ policy in order to “maintain and recreate the cultural functions previously performed by large squats” (Owens 2008, 54).

Not just in Holland, but also in the UK, an industry of anti-squat agencies has sprung up, where interim use of vacant private property is managed on the owners’ behalf on the basis of “guardian angel” contracts that require payment of utilities but not rent, and that strictly control the rights of the temporary tenants: they are in a very weak legal position, the agencies barely respect their privacy, often neither visitors nor pets are allowed; the tenants may be prohibited from contacting the press, and they can be evicted with 14 days’ notice. About ten times more vacant spaces in Holland are occupied by such “anti-squatters” than by actual squatters thanks to this clever commercial strategy, and in spite of the infringements of the residents’ rights, most appear to appreciate living in high-value central city real estate (cf. Priemus 2011; Buchholz 2011).

Neoliberal urban policies thus on the one hand manage to hijack and incorporate alternative and subcultural activism including the creativity of squatters (who, in the process, may find it difficult to maintain their political autonomy), while on the other they entail intensifying repressive strategies, stricter laws, tougher policing, and hence more evictions and fiercer criminalization of squatting. Often local authorities implement both strategies simultaneously, which tends to sharpen the differences among and create collisions between cultural and political squatters. As a result, radical political action and alternative cultural production that before had been part and parcel of the same movement increasingly become differentiated and sometimes even opposed to each other. Such processes can be observed in all European cities, and have accelerated in the wake of the economic crisis, which has provided a rationale for dismantling alternative infrastructures and for cutting back on funding for self-organized projects of all kinds – at the same time as neoliberal urban regeneration and hyper-gentrification of central city land accelerates displacement pressures and threatens leftist “free zones” and alternative infrastructures, seeking to displace them with trendy bars, chic new designer stores, and expensive condos.

This hostile environment has been making radical oppositional politics far more challenging than in the past.

Even while critical of neoliberal urban policies and resisting ‘creative city’ programs, the activities of squatters often end up contributing to upgrading and valorizing such contested urban areas – the more so where cultural experimentation has displaced political radicalism. At the same time, demands for self-management and self-realization have lost their radical edge, as participation and self-management have become essential ingredients of sub-local regeneration programs as well as in the public discourse (if with the purpose of encouraging activation and self-responsibilization rather than political empowerment). In this situation, struggles for the recognition and legalization of autonomous squats are taking on a qualitatively new political significance. Withdrawing these spaces from neoliberal utilization for profit-making and disrupting the private property-based logic of capitalist urbanization puts the struggle over the proper conception of rights on the agenda. And claiming the currently secondary rights – such as the right to economic security, education, or housing, the right to organize, or rights to freedom of speech and expression – as primary over and against the right to individual private property and profit, would “entail a revolution” (Harvey 2006: 57) because the latter is essential to capital accumulation as the dominant process shaping our lives.

The more people comprehend the logic of this system the more they see housing being speculated upon while their own access to adequate shelter becomes precarious. Claiming housing as a right has a great potential to win mass support. Once that argument has entered the collective imagination (re)appropriating vacant buildings becomes a logical and defensible next step.

## **NEW OPPORTUNITIES OPENED UP THROUGH THE CRISIS AND THROUGH OCCUPY**

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS created a situation, where more people are without (adequate) housing, while more than enough buildings owned by the 1% sit vacant awaiting better yields. The “market” as well as the political and legal system favor those owners and stigmatize those who struggle to find shelter. In this situation, occupying is not only the logical response, but is increasingly resorted to, politicizing previously apolitical squats by foreclosed and homeless people.

After their eviction from squares and plazas all over the US, the Occupy movement has fanned out into neighborhoods to (re)claim abandoned and foreclosed properties for ordinary people. The Spanish

15M movement, after it was pushed off the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, joined community groups and came to the defense of homes threatened by foreclosure, occupied an abandoned hotel and more than 30 buildings, and secured, through negotiations with the federal government, a vacant tobacco factory and turned them into social and community centers. “Occupy the ‘hood!” became a new rallying cry, spin-off organizations (such as Organize4Occupation, O4O – with the second O crossed through with the squatting sign) were formed, direct action events at bailed-out banks and the physical presence of Occupiers at threatened buildings have prevented evictions, and re-taken and refurbished homes, while other actions have disrupted auction sales of foreclosed houses.

With these actions, new connections are forged between the Occupy movement and community-based groups that have been resisting evictions and displacement for a long time, lending more visibility to those struggles. As these campaigns become more coordinated, they scale up local struggles, turning them into regional movements that protest the same banks at the same time or go to each others’ rallies; and participants increasingly see themselves as part of national and international movements.

## **SQEK AND THIS BOOK**

MAINSTREAM RESEARCH HAS paid scarce attention to the unfolding of squatting movements, their dynamics, their differences, their transformations, let alone their new challenges. With careful observation and analyses of squatting movements and the development of self-managed social centers in a variety of European cities this book provides a huge treasure trove of insight into the differentiated experiences, path-specific developments, internal operations, unique achievements and challenges of the politics of occupying – from the period of Fordist growth via deindustrialization and urban restructuring all the way to the current neoliberal era and austerity politics. With an emphasis on comparative research and the involving of activists in the research, the Squatting Europe Kollektiv has chosen the most productive methodology to push our understanding of this extremely important yet under-researched movement.

Several chapters in this book do a great job identifying the radical and transformative potential of those squatting movements that challenge the neoliberal market logic and are political while at the same

time providing movement infrastructures. Especially the large squats that serve as (self-managed) social centers along with places of residence (integrating counter-cultural, political and productive activities) and that strengthen the political activities of the local movements, are analyzed in order to comprehend how they offer not merely spaces for performances, happenings, concerts, exhibits, community organizing, and homes, but also for organizing protest and political events, and how they manage to be open not just to movements and the alternative scenes, but also to urban residents beyond those circles, which allows them to serve as “recruiting” spaces.

Much still needs to be better understood – about the containment strategies of the authorities, the management strategies of the squats themselves, the local and global sides of this movement and its relationship to the anti-globalization and Occupy movements. But the chapters brought together in this book by the Squatting Europe Kollektiv provide an excellent base for gaining a better understanding of these questions and for building the power of this movement, by researchers and activists together.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Miguel Martínez, Gianni Piazza and Hans Pruijt*

WHILE HOMELESSNESS IS RAMPANT WORLDWIDE, THE PRODUCTION OF empty spaces is a regular feature of contemporary society. When buildings sit empty for a long time while homelessness persists, it is clear that in these cases markets and states fail to fulfill their expected role as effective allocators of space. Often, people decided to take matters into their own hands by squatting a diversity of spaces: office blocks, factories, theaters and bars as well as houses. For some squatters, squatting is a purely individual solution; others feel that the possibilities of squatting should be developed further, feel solidarity towards other squatters and work to build a squatters' movement.

Squatting is also an intervention in urban development and renewal, i.e. urban and housing politics and spatial adjustment, which is re-interpreted and shifted. Squatting often involves attempts to practice non-hierarchical and participatory organizational models. Squatted social centers offer an alternative mode of activities such as critical and radical political meetings and countercultural events outside of, and in antagonism with, commercial circuits. Social center activists and squatters are thus often engaged in broader protest campaigns and social movements, fighting against precariousness, urban speculation, racism, neo-fascism, state repression, militarization, war, locally unwanted land use, privatization of education/university reforms. By drawing attention to the existence of vacant buildings, sometimes on prestigious

locations in metropolitan areas, squatters question neo-liberal ideology. An example is a demonstrative Parisian squat that existed just in front of the Presidential Palace. Squatting helps to show the vacuity of current political debate. Politicians call for social cohesion and self-responsibility. However, when people actually take these values seriously by engaging in squatting, they are often treated as criminals who undermine social integration.

Squatting may not be seen to be a very powerful movement. However, looking at its history and reflecting on the links with other movements and its international dimensions makes one realize that it is by far not as marginal as it may seem at first glance.

In the following chapters, researchers associated with the Squatting Europe Kollektive (SqEK) present an analytical and explanatory tour of the European squatting experience.

In chapter 2, Hans Pruijt addresses the diversity in squatting by developing a typology. Five basic configurations, various combinations of features that fit together well and are effective, are discussed. In the case of squatting, configurations differ with respect to the characteristics of the people involved, type of buildings, framing, demands made by activists, mobilization and organizational patterns. Each configuration also entails specific problems. *Deprivation based squatting* involves poor people who are distressed because of severe housing deprivation. Typically, middle class activists open up squats for poor people to move into. This set-up deflects accusations of queue-jumping, making this configuration appropriate when squatting has little legitimacy. In *squatting as an alternative housing strategy* people organize squatting to meet their own housing needs. *Entrepreneurial squatting* offers opportunities for setting up nearly any kind of establishment, without the need for large resources nor the risk of getting bogged down in bureaucracy. Prime examples are the occupied social centers that are prominent in Italy and Spain. *Conservational squatting* involves squatting as a tactic used in the preservation of a cityscape or landscape against efficiency-driven planned transformation. All these four configuration have political aspects, but they are also squatting projects that are driven by ulterior political motives, particularly engaging in anti-systemic politics. This fifth configuration is called *political squatting*.

The next three chapters are about entrepreneurial and political squatting, especially in the shape of establishing social centers. In chapter 3, Pierpaolo Mudu traces the development of squatted Self-Managed Social Centers (CSAs) in Italy. Overall, 250 Social Centers

have been active in Italy over the past 15 years, especially in urban areas. Currently about 100 are open as venues for social, political and cultural events. He argues the main impetus was the disappearance in the 1970s of traditional public spaces and meeting places such as open squares, workplaces, party offices or the premises of groups involved in the antagonistic, i.e. anti-capitalist and anti-fascist, movement. Social centers have been opened by a variety of grassroots left-wing organizations and collectives, some have an autonomist and others an anarchist political flavor. They are commonly organized through forms of direct democracy and in non-hierarchical structures. The task first on a Social Center's agenda is daunting: it must renovate and refurbish privately or publicly owned empty properties and turn them into usable public spaces open to the general public. For this task it relies exclusively on collective action, i.e. cooperative working modes which do not come under the provisions governing regular employment contracts. There is considerable variation in size, attitudes towards legalization, acceptance of commercial sponsorship for performances, and orientation towards the neighborhood.

In chapter 4, Gianni Piazza examines the decision-making processes in squatted social centers. He approaches this issue by comparing two social centers located in the Sicilian city of Catania. These centers were very different in terms of campaigns and activities, political ideological orientations, relation to national networks, legal position and attitude towards institutions. The methods used were participant observation, analysis of self-produced documents and semi-structured interviews. The social center *Experia* had a coherent radical Marxist political identity, carefully shielded by refraining from building ties with the local government. Decision-making was strictly consensual, which in case of disagreements led to delays. The social center *Auro* had a much more variegated identity, it united groups with cultural interests and radical political groups, and it was legalized after striking a deal with the city government. Central decision-making was largely confined to the building and matters of infrastructure, while the various groups made decisions about their own activities. Decision-making was consensual, unless there was a stalemate as a result of disagreement. In such cases, a switch to majoritarian decision making occurred. This guaranteed speed, which was fitting for a social center that opened itself up to the community.

Squatters' movements often have links with other social movements. In chapter 5, Miguel A. Martínez López examines the relationships between the Spanish squatters' movement, especially as manifested in

social centers and the alter-globalization movement. He points to various area of overlap:

- squatters staged protests against international commercialized megaprojects such as the Olympic games,
- counter-information on global issues, information about protests in Europe and Latin-America and about the Zapatista movement in Chiapas (Mexico) widely circulated in social centers,
- the Zapatista ideology of not seizing power but encouraging self-organization in civil society extended into the social centers,
- social centers as organizations became increasingly involved in alter-globalization movement actions.

In addition to the overlap, there were also various similarities between the two movement scenes such as the use of artistic and humorous tactics mixed with street confrontations with police, the combination of party and protest, a Do-It-Yourself ethic, a high level of countercultural coherence between means and ends, a fondness of the idea of creating temporary autonomous zones, an ideology of “the personal is political” and “think globally, act locally”, plus a willingness to take personal risks. In terms of organization, both were characterized by an open and horizontal model of organization with assemblies as the platform for decision-making and a rejection of official spokespeople, formal organization and institutionalization; both scenes consisted of roughly half of their membership of university graduates.

Chapter 6, by Claudio Cattaneo, addresses a different configuration of squatting: squatting as an alternative housing strategy, i.e. people who squat a place for themselves to live in. Squatting as an alternative housing strategy can facilitate a variety of lifestyles that cannot be easily accommodated by the regular housing market. A prominent example is communal living. In this chapter, the focus is even more specific, because it is on communal living with very little money, with the objective of having a low environmental impact and in rural or rural-urban areas. The strength of the case under analysis, *Can Masdeu* in Barcelona, resides also in the combination of housing, numerous public activities and the involvement of the surrounding neighbours in the squat.

Chapter 7, by Andrej Holm and Armin Kuhn, highlights yet another configuration: conservational squatting. In an analysis of the history of the Berlin squatters' movements, their political context and their effects on urban policies since the 1970s, they show how massive mobilizations at the beginning of the 1980s and in the early 1990s developed in a context of transition in regimes of urban renewal. The crisis of Fordist city planning at the end of the 1970s provoked a movement of 'rehab squatting' (*Instandbesetzung*), which contributed to the institutionalization of 'cautious urban renewal' (*behutsame Stadterneuerung*) in an important way. In contrast to this first squatting wave in Berlin, they contend the large-scale squatting during in the 1990s – mainly in the Eastern parts of the city – as political squatting.

The various squatters' movements covered in this book did not develop in isolation. There was international diffusion, which is the topic of chapter 8, by Lynn Owens. This chapter reveals as the key mechanism of diffusion the frequent visits by squatters to fellow activists in emergent movements in other countries, with the explicit objective to spread knowledge and experience. For example, the squatters' movement of Berlin (covered in chapter 7) and of Madrid (described in chapter 5) had visits by Dutch squatters that were significant events in their history. Between established movements, exchange of knowledges and experiences continued through international meetings.

Deprivation based squatting, the final configurations of squatting, i.e. middle class activists opening squats to help poor people, is at the heart of chapters 9 and 10. In France, this is the prevalent configuration of squatting. In chapter 9, Thomas Aguilera maps out the squatters' movement in Paris, clearly showing the different strategies adopted by city officials when facing the perseverance of squatting actions, in spite of the lack of a very unified movement.

Squatting is often shrouded in masculine ideological rhetoric about struggle, claiming the "right to the city", creating "temporary autonomous zones" and so forth. Nevertheless, squatters are in principle quite vulnerable because of the strong legal protection of private property and the virtually unlimited repressive powers of the state. Plus, the squatters who actually live in their squats, as opposed to squatters who are involved in a social centers, are sitting ducks for the forces of repression. Mostly, their fate can be determined by decisions that authorities take about them. Within bounds defined by the legal framework and the political alignments there is variation in such decisions. Therefore, in chapter 10, Florence Bouillon presents an analysis

of the processes of categorizations of squats that applied by government officials in France.

In the last decades, Spain and the Netherlands have seen changes in their relevant legal framework resulting in an increasing criminal persecution of squatting. In England, this process is also under way. In chapter 11, ETC Dee examines the role of media discourse in the move towards criminalization of squatting in England. In spite of being a long-term and well-established practice in this country, due to a relatively favourable legislation, recent mass media discourses have contributed to display a rather negative image of squatters. Stereotypes of squatters, thus, tend to hide the relevant variations of the squatting practices as well as pave the way for a more repressive treatment by the authorities.

# SQUATTING IN EUROPE\*

*Hans Pruijt*

URBAN SQUATTING IS LIVING IN – OR OTHERWISE USING – A DWELLING without the consent of the owner. Squatters take buildings intending relatively long-term use. Urban squatting can be distinguished from squatting on vacant land. Occupancy without legal title has always existed, but this article focuses on squatting that is organized by, or at least supported and/or inspired by, a social movement. This kind of inspiration comes from an activist-promoted master framework that is based on empowerment and enables ‘cognitive liberation’ (Nepstad, 1997: 471) inasmuch as it lets people see empty buildings as opportunities and imagine that collective support for occupying those buildings can be organized.

In Amsterdam in 1966 activists from the anarchist Provo Movement launched such a framework in the form of a ‘White Houses Plan’. A ‘working group’ announced that they would distribute lists of empty houses and would paint the doors and doorjambes of empty homes white. The ‘Woningbureau (Housing Bureau) de Kraker’ was established in 1969. The name reflects the fact that Dutch squatters started

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\* This is a reprint of the article published in Pruijt (2012, The Logic of Urban Squatting. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* DOI:10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01116.x) which is based on previous research and publications (Pruijt 2004a and Pruijt 2009)



to use the special term 'krakers' to designate people who aim to turn their squats into long-term homes (Van Tijen, 2008). In Berlin, the term *instandbesetzen*, a conflation of *instandsetzen* (renovate) and *besetzen* (occupy) was coined.

Contemporary urban squatting in Europe can be seen as flowing from organized squatting in the 1960s, but squatting is not dependent on a climate of countercultural upheaval. The fact that squatting took place on a large scale shortly after the second world war (Friend, 1980; Johnstone, 2000) testifies to this.

The literature offers widely divergent interpretations, conveying the impression that the squatters' movement is an elusive one. Various authors portray the movement as a collective actor pursuing a particular goal. For Corr (1999: 3), its goal is 'to redistribute economic resources according to a more egalitarian and efficient pattern', for Wates (1980) it is to address housing issues, while Mamadouh (1992) sees it as a means to assert a romantic small-is-beautiful vision against the dominant functionalistic practice of city planning. Kallenberg (2001) classifies squatting among the utopian struggles, which would imply that the goal of the squatters' movement is a better society. Katz and Mayer (1985) suggest that the goal is to enable and further self-help. Adding to the variety, there are authors who see squatting not as goal-directed but as a movement driven by a need for countercultural and/or political expression (Lowe, 1986; Van Noort, 1988). Assessments diverge too in this strand of the literature. Clarke et al. (1976: 58) see squatting as an example of a middle-class counterculture and Wietsma et al. (1982: 4) as a 'way to shape one's life and one's living environment in a way that breaks with imposed norms and laws'. For McKay (1998) it represents a manifestation of Do-it-Yourself culture. Della Porta and Rucht (1995: 121-123) classify the squatters' movement as a 'left-libertarian' movement, while, in sharp contrast, Katsiaficas (1997: 115) pictures squatters as progenitors, and later a wing of the 'international *Autonomen*', a more or less Leninist strand of political activism. Martínez (2007: 381) views them as a 'rhizomatic' or 'immediatist' movement, while Adilkno (1994) sees them as postmodern, post-ideological and mass-media-influenced. And some emphasize that people squat to lead an 'extreme way of life' (Anon, 1998: 20).

None of these assessments is completely incorrect; overviews of squatting show a great variety of squatting projects within countries and also within cities (Wates and Wolmar, 1980; Wakefield and Grrrt, 1995; Birke and Holmsted, 2007; Birke, 2009; Kaulingfreks et al.,

2009; van Gemert et al., 2009) and any of these interpretations will fit somewhere, some time, to some extent and in some way.

This article is an attempt to contribute to a comparative analysis of squatting that takes diversity as the starting point, rather than setting off from one particular interpretation that would be spot-on in some cases, but that would appear to be a very artificial model in others. The core of the article is the development of a typology of urban squatting, specifically designed as an alternative for the often-made distinction between squatting as a way of meeting a housing need and squatting as a way of satisfying a need for countercultural and/or political expression (Lowe, 1986) that has already been shown to be incorrect by Kinghan (1977) and Van der Pennen et al. (1983). The latter found that meeting unmet housing needs was an important motive for all squatters.

The theoretical and conceptual base is as follows. For the general framework, I have drawn on contingency theory. McAdam and Scott (2005) introduced contingency theory in the context of social movement studies, but so far it has seen little use in social movement research. Contingency theory explains diversity as the result of adaptation to optimize efficiency and effectiveness. In the case of squatting, awarding an important role to efficiency and effectiveness is appropriate because squatting hinges on a transformational process: unused buildings are transformed into safe, acceptable or comfortable homes, or spaces that are used in other ways and infused with life. Mintzberg (1983) conceptualized adaptation as congruence, i.e. achieving a fit with the environment, and configuration, achieving internal consistency. In Mintzberg's (1983) terminology, which I adopt, configurations are internally consistent combinations of features that correspond logically to specific environmental characteristics.

In selecting the dimensions of description I have drawn on New Social Movement theory, because this approach is inherently comparative and because the squatters' movement has been counted among the New Social Movements (van Loo et al., 1984; Ziere, 1992). The concept of New Social Movements implies a comparison with old or classic movements. New Social Movements are said to have a network structure and an informal, unstable and enthusiastic model of organization (Calhoun, 1993) which offers participants the flexibility to be active without a fixed commitment (Tarrow, 1994). Participants are primarily middle class (Pichardo, 1997). Kriesi (1989) identifies the key actors in a New Social Movement as belonging to a specific section of the middle class: cultural and social service providers. These actors

oppose threats to their autonomy posed by technocrats and bureaucrats and would like to see a society with little managerial control. We can infer that when such activists apply their idea of an ideal society to their own movement this will result in attempts to build network structures with horizontal decision making. In terms of goals, New Social Movements are said to differ from other movements because they focus not just on political goals but also on cultural objectives, on enacting a cultural identity (Melucci, 1989; Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Finally, the literature on New Social Movements suggests that activists tend to be active in more than one of the movements that make up this movement family (Kriesi et al., 1995). These various characteristics, which are said to set New Social Movements apart from other movements, can be translated into dimensions of description: activists' goal, class, form of organization and cultural and political embedding.

A contrasting literature exists that emphasizes demands and the agency of activists who design frames to organize experience by simplifying and condensing aspects of 'the world out there', to find resonance and to guide action (Benford, 2000). Therefore, I include demands and framing among the dimensions of description.

Beyond these dimensions derived from social movement theory, I include the type of buildings as a dimension that is highly specific to squatting.

The empirical base is squatting experience in the Netherlands, the UK, Germany and Italy. The Netherlands can be seen as a real-life laboratory that offered activists ample opportunities to explore what is possible in squatting. This is because affordable housing shortages were persistent, while between 1971 and 2010 it was possible to squat without breaking the law. All types of squatting are present in the 45 years of Dutch squatting history, but some possibilities were less developed in the Netherlands than in other countries. For this reason, I have included the UK, Italy and Germany. The UK was the scene of systematic campaigns to organize squatting for poor people (Bailey, 1973; Wates 1980), and the practice of creating and running large-scale squatted social centres was well developed in Italy (Mudu, 2004). Germany (Geronimo, 1995) and Italy (Welschen, 1996) offered cases in which activists involved themselves in squatting for ulterior political motives. Together with a similar case in the Netherlands, this provided a base for analysing political squatting.

I studied squatting in the Netherlands by using the extensive descriptive literature and through interviews, examination of the archives

and systematic collection of documentation produced by the movement. An important source of information was the complete set of issues of the main squatters' periodical (*Kraakkrant*, 1976-81) and its successors (*Laatste Waarschuwing*, 1981, *Bluf!*, 1981-88, *NN*, 1988-95 and *Ravage*, 1996-2002). Direct observations at meetings, parties and actions including lobbying and other events were made from 1977-85 and 2003-10. Squatting in the UK, Germany and Italy was mainly studied using the available literature, although visits to squats in these countries were made.

The resulting typology consists of 5 basic configurations of squatting. Configurations are combinations of features that are logically consistent and fit to the environment, and can therefore be expected to be efficient and effective.

The five configurations are:

1. Deprivation-based squatting
2. Squatting as an alternative housing strategy
3. Entrepreneurial squatting
4. Conservational squatting
5. Political squatting.

Below I will derive the various squatting configurations, placing an emphasis on developing the logic of each configuration. A complete, systematic overview of the dimensions of the configurations is given in Table 1.

Note that the restrictive definition of squatting as relatively long-term occupation excludes the use of buildings as crash pads, as well as demonstrative occupations.\* Conceptually, squatting projects are the units of analysis. A squatting project can only belong to a single configuration, but it is possible for squatting projects belonging to different configurations to share the same building.

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\* 'Relatively long-term use' means that the squatting action is intended to make relatively long-term use possible, though not necessarily by the same people. In fact, in some squats inhabitants and users come and go in rapid succession.

## DEPRIVATION-BASED SQUATTING

THE OLDEST CONFIGURATION may be called deprivation-based squatting. This configuration involves poor, working-class people who are suffering severe housing deprivation. Severe housing deprivation means more than having a need for housing; it implies that such people have virtually no other options than living in a shelter for the homeless. A further restriction is that such individuals have a specific status that allows them to be seen as deserving accommodation. Generally, there is a broadly shared opinion about who does and who does not deserve to be housed. The norms that govern this are time- and place-specific. In England in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, only married people with children tended to be eligible to be defined as homeless (Wates, 1980).<sup>\*</sup> In the 1960s in the Netherlands, being a homeless married couple without children was sufficient to be classified as deserving (Duivenvoorden, 2000).

A key aspect of this configuration is that it is tightly organized. A prototypical example of deprivation-based squatting is the ‘family squatters movement’ in the UK in the late 1960s. Activists determined to organize housing for homeless families started the movement in 1969. They did this by squatting and then distributing housing that local authorities, put under pressure by squatting actions, had turned over to them. These were houses that had been removed from the regular rental stock. A Family Squatting Advisory Service was established to organize this distribution, which had one paid staff member (Bailey, 1973).

A different form of this configuration is mass squatting. The 1945-46 wave of squatting in ex-military camps in the UK, initiated by a committee of ex-servicemen (Friend, 1980) is an example.<sup>\*\*</sup> Large-scale deprivation-based squatting was not confined to the 1940s. Groups of home-seekers occupied flats in Italy in the late 1960s (Welschen, 1996: 82-6).

Starting in the early 1970s, the specific housing predicaments of newly arrived migrants gave rise to deprivation-based squatting. For example, in 1974 a Surinamese action committee in Amsterdam led squatting in around 100 apartments in the *Bijlmermeer* by newly arrived immigrants from Surinam (Van Diepen and Bruijn – Muller,

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<sup>\*</sup> Apart from pregnant women, elderly and sick people.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Some accounts of this squatting wave emphasize self-organization (Friend, 1980), other accounts stress the leadership by cadres of the Communist Party (Hinton, 1988).

1977), and in Frankfurt, in the early 1970s, there were also activists who occupied buildings in order to provide housing for immigrants (Grundmann et al., 1981: 48). In 1998 in Bologna, the 'The Committee without Frontiers' and *Rifondazione Comunista* organized squatting for North African immigrants (Fekete, 1998). Contemporary examples of deprivation-based squatting projects exist. In 2010, the squatters' association *Zwart-Rode Vrijheid* (Black-Red Freedom), set up to provide housing for people with various personal troubles, was thriving in the Dutch town of Etten-Leur.

An organizational pattern that makes a clear distinction between activists and squatters fits the configuration of deprivation-based squatting. The activists open up buildings for the squatters and support them. This division of roles fits the overall logic of the configuration, because it clearly puts the squatters in the position of people who need to be helped. It also implies some protection against possible accusations of queue jumping: the activists do not take the initiative and organize squatting for selfish motives; they do it to help others. A social distinction between the squatters and the activists, when the activists are of middle-class origin, is functional here.

In deprivation-based squatting, it is possible to take advantage of the perception that the squatters are needy and deserving by choosing empty buildings belonging to owners who have a (moral) obligation to house the needy and would therefore be embarrassed to be seen evicting squatters. Among such owners are the state and the Church. Ideally, the target for squatting is regular housing stock, left empty for inexplicable or inexcusable reasons. The better the condition of the buildings, the more embarrassing it is that the owners have left them empty.

The central demand in this configuration does not involve structural change, but instead focuses on helping the squatters to obtain (temporary) leases or alternative accommodation. This type of squatting can be variously embedded in socialist, humanitarian and/or religious activism; one may say that it constitutes a protest against government inefficiency and insensitivity.

Careful framing can help win supporters and put pressure on the authorities. In this configuration, the framing is straightforward. The needs of homeless families, who ideally have become distressed for reasons beyond their control, i.e. the working poor, are pitted against the insensitivity of bureaucrats and politicians. Squatters claim respectability, which enables the public to identify with them. When evictions take place, a shock effect is produced by the uncivilized or insensitive

behaviour of the authorities or their agents. Bailey (1973) describes how bailiffs, by violently evicting families from squatted council-owned houses in London, created a public relations disaster for the city officials who had hired them.

A more radical political demand that is sometimes made is to requisition unused private property. An example is the campaign undertaken by a Brighton group who called themselves the 'Vigilantes'. In 1945 they occupied houses that were only rented during the holiday season. This resulted in a new law that made requisitioning possible. It was only implemented in Labour-run cities (Friend, 1980).

In the UK, the limitations of this configuration in terms of the demands that can be raised became apparent when, in 1946, 1,500 people squatted investor-owned apartments in London, with Communists playing an organizing and supporting role. In contrast to the generally positive coverage of the government-owned ex-military camp occupations, much of the press reporting was hostile as the right of individual owners to do with their property what they pleased was attacked. Evictions and punishment ensued (Friend, 1980: 116; Johnstone, 2000).

Deprivation-based squatting is susceptible to cooptation, i.e. transformation into a form that is useful to state officials (Pruijt, 2003). A salient example of cooptation can be found in the history of squatting in the UK. There, some squatters' organizations were transformed into management offices that rented out short-life public sector accommodation. This was called 'licensed squatting' (Bailey, 1973; Pettitt, 1980). The deals with local authorities that made this possible required squatters' organizations to give up organizing squatting. Lowe (1986: 148) called licensing 'a classic example of the cooptation of a critical social movement'.

A specific problem of this configuration of squatting is that it has little to offer to people whom the authorities or the public do not recognize as having a genuine housing need (ASS, 1996: 31). Home-seekers who have problems beyond homelessness, or people whose lifestyle ostensibly deviates from the mainstream, will have difficulty meeting the respectability requirement.

A further problem, to the extent that there is a division of roles between activists and squatters, is that the continuity of squatting depends on a small core of activists who may shift interest or burn out. It is also very important that squatters in this configuration have no other serious problems beyond homelessness, such as substance abuse,

dealing drugs or stealing, sexual or domestic violence. If they do, additional risks of repression loom, and activists supporting squatters who have multiple problems run the risk of turning into unpaid social workers (Grundmann et al., 1981: 49).

## **SQUATTING AS AN ALTERNATIVE HOUSING STRATEGY**

A NEWER CONFIGURATION might be called squatting as an alternative housing strategy, i.e. squatting as a more or less viable alternative to (sub)renting. Compared to the previous configuration, it is less restrictive. Squatting as an alternative housing strategy opened up squatting to people of middle-class origin. Examples are students or downwardly mobile individuals who have chosen to dedicate themselves to activities that bring few financial rewards, e.g. visual artists and musicians. Squatting as an alternative housing strategy is wide open to home-seekers outside the category of people seen, at that specific time, as urgently in need of housing – for example, people who are unmarried, have no children, are young or are well-trained.

Coming from a desperate situation is not required, this configuration is open to squatters who were not previously homeless but lived in a rented room or a student dormitory and want to move into an apartment. Squatting as an alternative housing strategy can be attractive for people who want to live in a group and cannot find legal accommodation that makes this possible and for radical DIY enthusiasts, who would rather create housing for themselves by investing a lot of time in it than working long hours in a job to pay a high rent (Moan, 1980). Simply living rent-free without investing a lot of time is also possible, if one is either lucky enough to find a place that does not need much work or willing to put up with primitive circumstances.

Although it opened up squatting for people of middle-class origin, squatting as an alternative housing strategy is available to the poor and vulnerable. For the latter, it has advantages over deprivation-based squatting, because it involves less or no stigmatization.\*

That we are dealing with a configuration that is distinct from deprivation-based squatting is illustrated by the reflections of Pettitt (1980:

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\* I would count poor people living unspectacularly and hidden in a squat as squatting as an alternative housing strategy, unless it has been organized for them by militants. If militants organized it for them, it would be deprivation-based squatting.



122) who decided to move into a squat herself, after a period of time during which she had dedicated herself to the London Family Squatting Movement and helped others to squat:

Somehow we accepted the reasoning which implied that if one wasn't in a 'family', then one didn't need a permanent home of one's own. My own train of thought went something like this: 'Me? But I've got a degree! How can I justify needing to squat? I don't look deserving enough. It'll make squatting look silly if people like me do it, with no cockney accents and no children.

In this configuration, the basic desire is not to get help but to be left alone and in peace. Demands are mainly tactical tools toward the goal of being left alone. Because demands are not very important, in contrast to deprivation-based squatting, in this configuration there are no strict requirements on framing, although explaining the action to neighbours and to the public may be helpful. Squatters do not present themselves as unlucky souls who require assistance. The disempowering effect of being (self-)labeled as deprived is avoided. Squatters do not stigmatize themselves as losers, instead they derive pride from a self-created housing solution.

The fact that squatters do not claim to be among the deprived and needy, and are not presented as such, gives rise to potential moral and legitimacy problems when they squat homes that are intended to be let to low-income people. In the Netherlands, this applies to social housing that is distributed under state control. Moral and legitimacy problems do not occur, however, with types of buildings that allow squatting to be seen as adding to the affordable housing stock, rather than fighting for a share of it. Suitable buildings include commercial spaces that were never intended to be used for housing. Large buildings that do not contain apartments but are suitable for communal living also fit into this configuration well. The same holds true for rental units that have been taken off the market because of demolition plans. Housing which is (far) below rentable standard is suitable, as are empty homes that are so expensive that they can never be counted as being part of the affordable housing stock.

When spaces that meet the criteria outlined above are chosen, squatting becomes a two-edged sword: squatters help themselves outside the perimeter of the existing affordable housing stock and at the same time, by removing themselves from the waiting queues for authority-allocated

housing, indirectly help other low-income home-seekers.

Compared to deprivation-based squatting, squatting as an alternative housing strategy involves less division between activists/organizers on the one hand and squatters on the other. There is more self-organization in autonomous teams, and less top-down organizing. 'Less' is not 'none' – the phenomenon of informal leadership exists, although it is sometimes contested; in the Netherlands, for instance, there was a longstanding debate about 'union bosses' in which the rise of leaders was criticized. Logically, self-organization is an appropriate concept in a configuration in which squatters are not defined as needy.

Some authors, for example Lowe (1986), see this type of squatting as a way of satisfying a need for countercultural and/or political expression. This, however, obscures the fact that meeting housing needs tends to be an important motive for all squatters regardless of whether they are subculturally oriented (Kinghan, 1977; Van der Pennen et al., 1983). Indeed, many squatters live in a squat just as they would in a rented place, at least in the Netherlands. Thus, it seems more accurate to note that squatting as an alternative housing strategy can be embedded in counterculture and politics. This entails the following.

Apart from accommodation, squatting offers the opportunity to adapt the housing situation to a chosen lifestyle. Punks may, for example, choose to live together with punks, feminists may start a women's squat. Experimenting with communal living is easy. Squatted commercial spaces can be converted in creative ways. In Amsterdam, for example, an artist built a small wooden house inside a large space in the former *Handelsblad* building (also known as the NRC building). Squatting offers ample possibilities for creative interior and exterior decoration.

Empowerment is an element in counterculture and countercultural politics. It results from the act of establishing squats. Squatters break free from a dependent attitude toward both the state and the market, at least in the area of housing, and distance themselves from the bureaucratically regulated way of home making. They gain self-confidence because they take care of their own housing needs, by occupying a building and making it inhabitable. They break the power exerted over them by city planning, waiting lists and the norms of private property rights, which require that homeless people remain quietly homeless while around them houses stand empty.

One of the appeals of squatting is that it promises an immediate tangible result in the form of a realized squat. This is different from

political participation through formal channels in which a division of labour, hierarchy and inevitable compromise make it difficult for participants to trace the result of the energies they have invested.

Some squatters involve themselves deeper in squatting. They form a network or squatter scene. Spending time in the company of other squatters is rewarding because of the shared experience and because it offers the relaxation of not having to defend the principles of squatting. The non-squatting environment tends to label squatters as different, which in itself helps forge a group identity. Know-how on technical matters, such as dealing with owners, locks, windows, broken floors, plumbing, heating, electricity and how to obtain relevant supplies is rapidly disseminated.

Ideology is only loosely coupled to practice. All squatting is highly practical, but, in contrast to deprivation-based squatting, demands to authorities are relatively unimportant when squatting is an alternative housing strategy, obviating the need for a clear consistent explanation of actions. This allows for considerable freedom when creating an ideology around squatting such as instant anarchism, i.e. suddenly discovered with little influence from the anarchist tradition, or ideologies with an anti-capitalist or anti-property-rights theme. Another possibility is to emphasize continuity with mainstream values such as self-reliance, community and liveability. The non-centralized structure further promotes ideological diversity.

Within the squatter scene, movement building can take place. We can distinguish different forms of organization in the squatting movement:

- General cooperation and mutual assistance. This means that squatters make themselves available to other squatters or potential squatters to provide advice, help them out with problems or organize a group that assists when a new building is squatted. Neighbours help each other and cooperate.
- Internal organization in large buildings. In large buildings a lot has to be arranged collectively, for example the energy supply. Commonly, there will be regular house meetings.
- Associations. The establishment of squatter groups is very important, especially in districts in which mainly separate apartments or small apartment buildings are squatted. Squatter groups have meetings and some collective money. Squatter groups and collectives that occupy large buildings can start to work together, thereby forming a wider movement.
- Structured networks without division of labour. For example, a

telephone tree for mobilizing support in case of an eviction threat.

- Organization based on a voluntary division of labour. This entails the creation of small institutions that provide services to squatters or those interested in squatting. Examples include information services for potential squatters that sometimes maintain lists of empty properties and provide advice to make squatting accessible and more likely to be successful; collectives that write squatting manuals; and squatters' media such as newsletters, magazines, radio and television stations, websites, online forums and mailing lists. In Amsterdam, a bureau exists that investigates property speculators: the SPOK, *Speculatie Onderzoeks Collectief* (Speculation Investigation Collective). Art centres such as *Tacheles* in Berlin, described by Holm and Kuhn (2011: 7) as spaces created to 'help squatters achieve self-realization', book shops and public kitchens have a function as part of the infrastructure of the movement.

- Organized campaigns. A goal can be, for example, to squat a large property. Squatters develop a strategy, mobilize people, assign tasks, cooperate during the action and evaluate afterwards.
- Overarching citywide, regional or national organizing. Collective threats, such as proposed anti-squatting legislation, stimulate squatters to call overarching meetings and organize protests in their cities, to coordinate national protests and set up committees.
- Coalitions with tenants. For example, to improve living conditions in the neighbourhood.

Squatters' movements can overlap with other movements in protest waves. Squatters' movements are part of a 'left-libertarian social movement family' (della Porta and Rucht, 1995: 121-3), including, for example, the ecology movement and the new peace movement. The movements within this family have organizational overlaps. Squatters can take the notion of applying direct action, and their experience with it, to sundry troubled spots in society. Historic examples from the Netherlands in the 1980s of squatters branching out into other fields are:

- A blockade of the road leading to the nuclear power plant in Dodewaard and blockade actions against the transportation of

nuclear waste on its way to be dumped in the sea; as well as blockading the entrances to the Shell laboratory complex in Amsterdam as part of anti-apartheid protests.

- Direct action tactics, pioneered in the squatters' movement, have also been transferred to anti-militaristic protest. Military command bunkers and one military office were raided and documents detailing contingency plans in a State of National Emergency were stolen, displayed and published. A similar action occurred at a building used by a covert police observation unit.
- A raid to disrupt an extreme rightwing party meeting in a hotel ended in a devastating fire caused by a smoke-bomb.
- Squatters have also played a major role in urban protests, for example against the construction of the new town hall in Amsterdam, occupying the site with an 'Anti-City Circus', or derailing Amsterdam's campaign to attract the Olympic Games by harassing the International Olympic Committee members assembled in Lausanne. In 1999, squatters were active in the logistics part of a tour, the 'Inter-Continental Caravan', of 500 Indian peasants through Europe who wanted to show how Western policies affect their lives.

Squatting as an alternative housing strategy can lead to various outcomes. A key payoff of squatting is that it enables people to satisfy their immediate housing needs by direct action, i.e. creating (often temporary) homes. According to a 1981 study (Van der Raad, 1981) Amsterdam housed around 9,000 squatters. Duivenvoorden (2000) estimated that in the Netherlands as a whole, between 1965 and 1999, 50,000 people lived in squats at one time or another. Also of interest is the longevity of the squats. There is a relation with quality because a longer life expectancy for a squat makes it possible to invest more in repairs, construction and maintenance. Wates (1980) estimated an average life span of several months, but less than one year, for squats in the UK. I estimate an average squat life span of several years in the 1980s, strongly declining after 1994, for Amsterdam.

Some squats have become permanent homes through legalization. The Municipality of Amsterdam bought 200 buildings that were

occupied by squatters (Duivenvoorden, 2000: 323), thereby legalizing them. This fitted in with an already formulated government policy to supply housing to young people. The role of pressure caused by resistance to evictions cannot be discounted. Officials then turned most of these buildings over to established housing associations that concluded lease contracts with individual squatters (Draaisma and Hoogstraten, 1983). This allowed squatters to consolidate what they had achieved. The flip-side is that legalization takes away the alternative edge (Bussemaker, 1986). Because legalization entails repairs and sometimes conversion to the level required by the building code, it tends to increase costs, putting an end to the situation where money matters little. In this situation, some people with very low incomes have to leave, or they become dependent on some arrangement by which they can substitute work for 'rent'. Nevertheless, in the Netherlands few, if any, opportunities for legalization have been missed. In Berlin, however, there were a sizeable number of squatters who refused to negotiate for legalization.

Squatting can cause a housing shortage to gain prominence on the political agenda. The media can play an independent role in this. This occurred in the case of *Vetterstraat* in Amsterdam in 1965. The squatters were just trying to help themselves, but a newspaper printed the following comment:

A big riot might be useful. We risk forgetting that in this country there is a disgraceful housing shortage. The burden of this is passed almost exclusively onto a varying group of young people. The housing situation is a sick spot in our society. But we have almost made this illness invisible (Trouw, 7 January 1965).

In the Netherlands, a major effect of squatting is that it has put the housing shortage on the political agenda. In 1978 in Amsterdam, a twenty-year-old could expect to wait more than 7 years to be allocated a *distributiewoning* (literally, 'distribution apartment', a social housing unit). The minimum age to be put on the waiting list was twenty-five. From that point, one had to wait a few years to get to the top of the queue. In 2011, in Amsterdam it still takes years of patience to eventually obtain an apartment in the 'social sector', i.e. state-controlled housing for citizens with low and medium incomes.

Sometimes squatters explain their actions as a protest against a shortage of affordable housing and refer to this when mobilizing public

support. An example is the ‘*Groote Keijser*’ in Amsterdam in 1979-80, a case in which squatters refused to give up a row of occupied canal houses (*Keizersgracht* 242-252). They explained their stand as a protest against a housing shortage that affected 50,000 home-seekers in a population of 600,000.

In the monumental inner city of Amsterdam, squatting led to the establishment of new ‘weak’ functions, such as housing young people, often living in groups – weak in the sense that these functions tend to lose out in the competition for land because there is little financial profit to be made from them. In some cases these functions are protected through legalization (Duivenvoorden, 2000: 323; Breek and de Graad, 2001).

A specific problem of squatting as an alternative housing strategy is that two of the strengths of this configuration – that many people can do it and that the organizational structure is decentralized – simultaneously represent weaknesses because they limit the possibilities for squatters to exert social control over their fellow squatters. This is relevant because of the precarious legitimacy of squatting. To illustrate this: in a 2006/ 2007 survey (N = 2173) in the Netherlands, 36.8% of respondents agreed with the statement ‘Squatting an empty building should always be forbidden’; 42.5% disagreed.\* Cases can occur in which squatters damage the building and/or display behaviour that disturbs the neighbours, contributing to a media backlash.

## **ENTREPRENEURIAL SQUATTING: SOCIAL CENTRES, FREE SPACES, BREEDING PLACES**

SQUATTING OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES for setting up almost any kind of establishment without the need for large resources or the risk of becoming mired in bureaucracy. Examples of such projects are neighbourhood centres, squatters’ bars that provide an infrastructure for squatting as an alternative housing strategy and raise money for actions and charity projects, artists’ work spaces, practice facilities for bands, women’s houses, restaurants, print shops, theatres and movie houses, tool-lending services, alternative schools, daycare centres, party spaces, art galleries,

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\* I inserted this question in an online questionnaire for the CentERpanel of CentERdata, as part of the project *Arbeid, Bedrijf en Sociale Zekerheid in Nederland*, 2006. The CentERpanel is an appropriate representation of the Dutch-speaking population.

book and information shops, spiritual centres, give-away shops (shops in which everything is free), food shops, saunas, workshops, e.g. for bicycle repair or car or boat restoration, environmental or third-world-oriented projects or social projects such as a shelter for people in distress or an advisory service with language training for migrants.

In Italy entrepreneurial squatting projects tend to be routinely labelled as social centres. Activists in other countries such as Spain and the UK have adopted this label. In 1998, 150 squatted self-managed social centres in Italy offered opportunities to enjoy and develop social life in a non-commodified environment (Maggio, 1998: 234). Mudu, (2004) counted 200 social centres in Italy.

Ruggiero (2000: 170) states that social centres have important functions in reducing loneliness and repairing the lack of opportunities for identity building caused by the decline of large workplaces, unions and political parties. They also allow unemployed people to engage in productive activity such as organizing concerts and producing and selling CDs, magazines and T-shirts. Social centres maintain strong links with the alternative music scene. Some see this as meaningful work with a welcome degree of self-control, for others it represents self-exploitation (Wright, 2000: 128). The centres provide contacts, access to resources and opportunities for acquiring skills that are relevant in the job market (Ruggiero, 2000: 182-3).

Often social centres or free spaces are established together with housing. In the Netherlands, squatters promoted the combination of functions in one building as an asset in its own right (Duivenvoorden, 2000: 252-3).

The scale and the type of buildings can vary. Examples range from one small storefront to a large commercial centre, a military complex, warehouse, shipyard or an entire village.

Because of the broad range of entrepreneurial squatting, it is hard to make general statements about the class origin of participants. In the Netherlands, there were many artists as well as others who have had at least a few years of university training. Consorzio Aaster (1996: 29) reports on a survey among 1,395 users of social centres in Milan that includes the level of education as a variable. Of the respondents, 36.1% had at least a few years in university, 20.1% had no more than the compulsory 3 years of secondary education. Mudu (2004: 926) indicated that visitors to social centres in the northern and central parts of Italy also tend to be mixed in terms of social class, while social centres in the south tend to involve 'people living on the fringes of society'.



As far as organization is concerned, there is variation, if only because the scale varies so much. A fairly common characteristic is informal organization. The status as squats limits external obligations. Because of this, there is relatively little need for formal organization, as long as there is no legalization. Mudu (2004) observes that the informal structure of squatting projects allows for continued progress even when there is a high turnover of participants.

In terms of factors that promote mobilization, unemployment is important. When substantial youth unemployment exists, such as existed in the Netherlands in the early 1980s and has existed in Spain since 2005, there are large numbers of resourceful young people looking for opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. Initiatives often appeal to specific age or ethnic groups. For example, an Italian survey of social centre visitors (N = 1,395) showed that only 4.9% were older than thirty-five (Consortio Aaster, 1996: 23). However, some centres, such as the *Leoncavallo* in Milan, have multiple spaces and activities that attract different age groups. And in the UK the Exodus collective in Luton started by organizing raves, branched out into squatting, and became known for cutting across ethnic barriers (Malyon, 1998).

Entrepreneurial squatting projects are practical and are therefore not very dependent on sophisticated ideological framing. At least at the start, whipping up a lot of public support tends to be unnecessary. This changes when there is an eviction threat, which can prompt activists to demand that city administrators and politicians act to help save the project. When the need for framing arises, it is logical to advance a functionalist frame, emphasizing the valuable role of the project in the community, for example as a breeding place for the creative class (Romano, 1998; Florida, 2002; Pruijt, 2004b; Uitermark, 2004).

As far as countercultural and political embeddedness in this configuration are concerned, there are two issues that are regularly debated.

The first issue is whether legalization results in the loss of the oppositional edge. An in-depth study of squatted 'free spaces' in Amsterdam describes the commonly occurring effects of legalization as a loss of links to various societal structures, of ties with other free spaces, and a decline in dynamism and political engagement (Breek and de Graad, 2001: 77).

There are projects where oppositional identity did not wither away, but rather died abruptly with legalization, such as the *Groote Keijser*, the already mentioned canal houses *Keizersgracht 242-252*. In other legalized squats it eroded gradually, for example in the NRC-complex, *Tetterode* in Amsterdam. Sometimes a role in alternative culture has

remained, such as in the case of the *Poortgebouw* in Rotterdam, which has remained a venue for alternative music. An important factor is the level of control that occupants retain after legalization. Often legalization involves a non-profit housing organization taking control of the building and turning the squatters into individual tenants. In other cases, the ex-squatters remain in control as a collective (Breek and de Graad, 2001: 50).

Legalization is not the only explanation for the erosion of the Dutch squatter scene's political edge. There has been a general decline in left-wing protest in the Netherlands since 1980, which was the apex of a protest wave. After 1980 resources for social movements in the Netherlands also declined, as it became both easier and more necessary for young people to find paid employment. The state also began to put pressure on students to complete their studies swiftly.

Some projects did retain an oppositional edge after legalization, such as the *Mehringhof* in Berlin and *Vrankrijk* in Amsterdam. *Vrankrijk* was bought by its squatters.\* It is worth noting too that various legalized projects, such as *Kulturzentrum Lagerhaus* in Bremen or the *Fabrik* in Berlin never had an oppositional identity; from the beginning they focused on (alternative) culture.

The second discussion is whether it is possible to escape the trade-off between, on the one hand, choosing to assume a countercultural/political identity and thus only attracting members of a highly exclusive 'scene', for instance vegan anarchists, or, on the other hand, choosing to attract a wide range of people at the expense of becoming culturally mainstream and non-political.

Marco (2000: 14), who was active in the Eurodusnie collective in Leiden in the Netherlands, criticized the Dutch squatter scene for being exclusive, and contrasted it to the large number of social centres in Italy, which he describes as central gathering places for the 'anti-capitalistic part of the population' while also appealing to a wide variety of people. Many social centres solve the dilemma by offering space for a broad range of activities. Attracting a large audience – the *Leoncavallo* in Milan, for example, gets 100,000 visitors per year – places a burden on activists. They may see their ideologically inspired engagement slide

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\* *Vrankrijk* was closed by the Municipality in 2009 in the aftermath of a violent incident in 2008 between members of the bar group and two intoxicated visitors, that left one visitor disabled. The collective was accused of obstructing the police investigation.

into cleaning up the mess after a consumerist crowd.

Managing the social centres entails walking a narrow line between a 'ghetto mentality' and 'possible normalization as social enterprises' (Wright, 2000: 132). Perhaps predictably, some have criticized the social centres for having become commercial enterprises. Several social centres got together to draw up a plan, the Charter of Milan, to leave behind self-chosen isolation, confrontations with the police and 'prejudice-ridden, anti-institutional discourse' and instead to develop a 'more subtle infiltration of local institutions, a dialog that is not subservient but attains a new quality of antagonistic practice' (Klein, 2001; Maffei, 2002: 134). Membretti (2007) speaks of flexible institutionalization. Some representatives of social centres tried to counter the threat posed by the Berlusconi ascendancy by running, successfully, for local office (Klein, 2001).

Most of the visitors come to the centres for their social contacts and for concerts and art (Ruggiero, 2000). However, the social centres are also 'social and cultural hubs' in a network that supports mobilization against, for instance, capitalist globalization (Klein, 2001). The Italian social centres have spawned an innovation in the protest repertoire, the 'Tute Bianche': a block of demonstrators dressed in white overalls symbolizing invisibility or ghostliness as a result of post-Fordist restructuring (Azzellini, 2002), later called 'Disobbedienti', 'the disobedient' (Mudu, 2004). Some centres are more politically oriented and some are more oriented toward (counter)culture. Tensions along this distinction also exist within centres. In addition to this, there are differences between autonomist and anarchistic centres (Wright, 2000).

Entrepreneurial squatting has a wide array of possible outcomes. Projects can develop into institutions that have a long life span. As an example, the *Vrijplaats Koppenhagsteeg* in Leiden, the Netherlands lasted 40 years as a squat before it was evicted in 2010, and plans for its resurrection in another location exist. Most long-lasting initiatives acquired a legal status, such as the squatters' bar *Molli Chaoot* in Amsterdam that has been in existence since 1979, and Amsterdam's anarchist bookshop *Fort van Sjakoo*, that was squatted in 1977.

In the Dutch town of Utrecht, the main venue for pop concerts, *Tivoli*, with 300,000 visitors per year, was opened up in 1980 by punk-music-loving squatters. In Amsterdam, the *Paradiso* pop music club was started by a squatting action in 1967. In Italy, major elements of the cultural landscape, such as the *Forte Prenestino* in Rome and the *Leoncavallo* in Milan are the products of entrepreneurial squatting.

*Leoncavallo*, which started in the 1970s, obtained a long life by adopting the strategy of squatting another building after eviction but continuing to use the same name. *Leoncavallo* has been evicted and reopened in other buildings several times.

A few firms got started in squatted premises. In 1981, the collective *De Spruitjes* (The Sprouts) started selling vegetables in *de Paleisstraat* in Amsterdam, close to the Royal Palace. By establishing their shop in a freshly legalized squat they could defy the economic logic that bans greengrocers from central locations, and continued to do so for 18 years. Bier & Co, a specialty beer importer with more than 35 employees in 2011, started in the early 1980s in several squatted buildings. It was a cooperative before it was changed into a regular private company. In 1983 the brewery 't IJ, producer of biological beers, started in a squat on the bank of the IJ river in Amsterdam.

That the many artists' workspaces created in squatted buildings contributed to the favourable climate for the arts in Amsterdam was acknowledged by the municipal authorities: the City set up a bureau dedicated to the preservation and creation of 'breeding grounds' to ensure the continuous supply of affordable space for artists. An outcome of entrepreneurial squatting is the build-up of experience that can be used in a different context. In Amsterdam, for instance, an organization, Urban Resort, was created to make unused office and commercial buildings available at low cost to people starting out in the cultural or creative sector. One of their projects was the building that was left behind by the newspaper *Volkskrant*. Urban Resort's managing director Jaap Draaisma drew on experience gained in the large *Weijers* squat, which was opened in 1981 and included housing, a restaurant, an evening shop, a squatters' bar and an espresso café, and concert facilities, and was in the process of acquiring many more initiatives when it was evicted in 1984.

## CONSERVATIONAL SQUATTING

THE FOURTH CONFIGURATION, conservational squatting, involves squatting as a tactic used in the preservation of a cityscape or landscape. The goal is to prevent a transformation, in many cases a planned transformation, and to promote development in a different direction. Such opportunities arise because impending changes in land use result in vacant buildings. Squatting can increase resistance to land use change because the hot spots of the change – those places where the original inhabitants and users have already been displaced – become populated again.

Historic buildings that are standing empty awaiting demolition offer opportunities. Entire neighbourhoods that are scheduled for clearance, or at least partial clearance, have also invited conservational squatting alongside other types of squatting. Examples are:

- The Tolmers Square neighbourhood in Camden, London, in the early 1970s, where houses were to be replaced by office blocks.
- The *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood in Amsterdam, also in the early 1970s, that was planned to be cut through by an urban motorway, built in a corridor cleared for subway construction and lined by office blocks, as well as to be the site for a new hotel.
- *Kreuzberg* in Berlin. In *Kreuzberg* in 1979, the community action group 'SO 36' occupied an empty fire station to prevent its demolition. The activists proceeded to occupy houses that were slated for razing, because they wanted to preserve both useable housing stock and the structure of the neighbourhood.
- *Friedrichshain* in Berlin, 1990. Activists exhorted people to squat empty houses in the *Mainzer Straße* to prevent destruction. This project involved 11 houses and 250 occupants (Holm and Kuhn, 2011).

Conservational squatting can also be undertaken to preserve the social function of a given building in the face of gentrification, for example low-income housing that the owner wants to convert to market-rate condominiums, in other words to gentrify.

For a movement aiming to preserve a cityscape from being destroyed by the construction of infrastructure, squatting buildings in critical locations is one of the tactics that can be employed. Here, the buildings themselves are not very important, the objective is to get in the way of the planned infrastructure. Examples are the No M11 Link Road campaign in the UK in the 1990s and the *Betuwe* Railway (1998-99) in the Netherlands. In such cases, squatters have the advantage of being immune to the standard NIMBY reproach, because they move into the area precisely because of the opportunity to contribute to the protection of the environment or the neighbourhood.

The actors in conservational squatting tend to be 'middle class interventionists' (Wates, 1976: 127) such as students or professionals

who move into the area (cf. Bosma et al., 1984).<sup>\*</sup> The ‘middle class interventionists’ tend to be young people with a special interest along with a housing need. In the Tolmers Square neighbourhood, the first ‘proper’ squatters were three architecture students (Wates, 1976: 160). They learned about the neighbourhood and its problems when they did a case study as part of their degree program. The students discovered that there had been no inhabitant participation in the planning process and that the Council was only interested in the land, not in the inhabitants and their fate following redevelopment (ibid.: 120). Their recommendations amounted to a plea for piecemeal redevelopment and renovation of as many buildings as possible instead of demolition. In a meeting that they set up with inhabitants, the Tolmers Village Association was created, in the daily management of which the student squatters played an important role. In the *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood in Amsterdam, at least two of the initiators and central activists in the resistance against the planned transformation had prior activist involvement in spatial planning issues (Bosma et al., 1984). In 2000, environmentalists were among the activists who squatted the military fortress *Pannerden* in the Netherlands, which had fallen into disrepair after its last use in 1940. Their idea was to prevent further decay, and move against possible redevelopment of the building as a hotel. The squatters created homes, a museum, a visual artists’ workspace and cultural activities and conducted monthly tours of the fortress.

Conservational squatting can also develop from squatting as an alternative housing strategy, when the squatted building is threatened to be demolished and when the occupants see opportunities for restoration. An example is a row of six houses in the *Nieuwelaan* in Delft, built in 1912, that was squatted in 1981. In 1995 the squatters presented a plan for a complete renovation.

Another possible starting point for conservational squatting is to take over the baton from tenants who are resisting a planned transformation. An example is the resistance that started in 1975 against a planned parking garage in *Piersonstraat* in the Dutch town of Nijmegen. In 1980 the tenants had exhausted all possibilities to thwart the scheme by legal

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\* Occasionally, long-established residents, who may be more working class, squat as well – not for their housing, because they already live in the area, but to create a meeting space for neighbourhood action (Amsterdam, *Bickerseiland*); their children may start squatting as well (Amsterdam, *Nieuwmarktbuurt*)

action, and the city had been successful in removing tenants by offering rehousing and financial compensation. One of the leaders of the tenants' protests approached the Nijmegen squatters' group, requesting that they start taking over houses directly after they were vacated (van Wakeren, 1998; Bruls, 2006). The squatters called a mass protest and built street barricades in an attempt to prevent eviction and demolition.

Because conservational squatting is dependent on support from regular inhabitants, and can involve cooperation with tenants and other interested parties, it is logical that activists try to control who will squat available empty houses. In the Tolmers Square Neighbourhood, there was an 'informal screening system' for prospective squatters (Wates, 1976: 161). In Amsterdam's *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood, activists set up a group that distributed houses that were to be squatted. To be accepted, prospective squatters had to meet criteria such as being prepared to stay to the end, i.e. the eviction, and being ready to fight. The activists backed this up by establishing a scheme in which the squatters would collectively pay for necessary repairs, which made squatting houses that were in an exceptionally bad condition a more reasonable proposal, and by running a technical service centre where various construction tools could be borrowed. They also made a commitment to arrange for rehousing after a possible eviction.

Core activists exercised control in the neighbourhood. Drug addicts were asked to leave. Bosma et al. (1984) quotes a squatter who recalled that one of the leaders did not allow him to paint the outside woodwork of his house in 'hippie colours', he had to use a traditional canal house green.

Activists using conservational squatting in a neighbourhood planning struggle are likely to be faced with two types of conflict, as both the Tolmers Square and the *Nieuwmarkt* cases bear out. One is a conflict of interest between the preservationists and inhabitants who want to move out of the neighbourhood anyhow and are planning to benefit from a rehousing scheme when their home is demolished. The second conflict is one of lifestyle; squatters can antagonize longstanding residents. Noise disturbances can exacerbate this.

A key ingredient of conservational squatting is the demand that planners change course. For this reason, careful framing is important. It involves making planners, investors, developers, municipal decision makers, etc. accountable and showing that the building or neighbourhood is worth preserving. If applicable, squatters can seek to demonstrate the historic value of their squat. A classic example is a house at *Achter Clarenburg 2*, in Utrecht. The City bought it in 1969, planning

to demolish it to make way for a new road. Students squatted it in 1971. One of them, a history student, discovered features hidden behind a modern facade and clutter that showed that the house was built around 1330. Alerted by this discovery, the central government's Monument Preservation Service scrambled to get it listed (Van den Berg, 2007). In Rotterdam, one of the city's last farmhouses was ready for demolition when it was squatted in 2005. The squatters presented plans that combined preserving the farmhouse as a historic building (van Ooststroom, 2010), celebrating Dutch rural traditions, farming ecologically and hosting cultural activities.

The fact that squatting is sometimes seen as destructive – and buildings have sometimes been trashed by squatters – can be a reason for squatters to explain that their actions can contribute to conservation efforts. Activists in the *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood reported in a newsletter about the squatter conversion of commercial buildings on the *Zwanenburgwal* as follows:

The block has been squatted and converted by the occupants themselves at their own expense, with an enormous effort. Gas, electricity and water have been installed; toilets, heating, walls etc. constructed. While the municipality has not done anything here in decades, this is the first complex in the *Nieuwmarkt* where existing buildings have been converted into affordable housing. At this moment around 100 people live in 55 apartments. In the complex, four children have already been born (*Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt*, 1977: 11, 13).

In an architecture, housing and urban planning magazine, Bijlsma et al. (1974: 13) promoted squatting as an important tool for citizens who want to help conserve their city and neighbourhood.\* They argued

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\* Alongside other actions such as spreading information in the neighbourhood about the plan, organizing a neighbourhood-residents group, supplying the media with information while attracting the attention of journalists by (playful) protest, naming and shaming property developers, establishing legal protection for the neighbourhood using the opportunities provided by planning laws, trying to prevent the construction of new roads that would provide increased accessibility and make the neighbourhood interesting for property developers, sharing information with other neighbourhood groups, and taking disruptive action.



that squatting is a way of preventing property developers, investors or the state getting rid of unwanted houses by tricks – such as making holes in the roof or letting the door stand open to attract drug users or ‘sleeping bag tourists’ in the hope that they will destroy it or cause it to burn down. The authors add that a neighbourhood that looks run-down attracts investors, which is a reason for activists to make sure that squatted houses look good. The squatters who lived in *Fort Panmerden* made it clear to the public that they had a rule not to apply paint or drill holes in the structure.

In terms of outcomes, squatting can be a successful means of saving buildings. The already mentioned medieval house in Utrecht was restored, and one couple from the original squatters was still living in the house 40 years later. In Delft, the renovation of the *Nieuwelaan* houses that were squatted in 1981 finally began in 2004. In 2006, *Fort Panmerden*’s squatters were summoned to leave. The squatters refused because there was not yet a definitive plan for renovation and because they suspected that the fortress would remain empty. It took the police, aided by the army who sent men and equipment including three bridge-laying tanks, two days to carry out the eviction (Visser, 2006). Three weeks later, squatters retook the fortress. This time, instead of an eviction an agreement was concluded that allowed the squatters a role as managers of the fortress until renovation started in 2008. After the renovation, former squatters were involved in the foundation that assumed responsibility for the fortress. Other conservational squatting projects failed, or partly failed. The houses in *Piersonstraat* in Nijmegen were cleared, which caused a riot, although the parking garage was never built.

Conservational squatting also made an impact on neighbourhood-wide planning conflicts. Wates, writing about the Tolmers Square neighbourhood (1976: 81), concludes that ‘the only effective way of preventing the physical fabric from deteriorating proved to be the squatting of empty buildings’. The buildings on Tolmers Square itself did not survive, but surrounding Georgian streets escaped demolition and office construction in the area was less extensive than originally planned.

In the *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood, squatters were able to hang on to their buildings on *Zwanenburgwal* and *Ververstraat*, preserving them from demolition. The struggle against a planned motorway through the *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood, in conjunction with a subway line underneath, and surrounded by office blocks involved a coalition between elitist conservationists, who were mainly interested in preserving

monuments, and anarchist activists who wanted a mixed-use, affordable vibrant neighbourhood in which the human scale predominated. The subway line was built as planned but the motorway project was stopped after an activist campaign, which caused prospective developers of office buildings to lose interest. Furthermore, the City made two changes to the plans that were in accordance with the activists' demands that entailed restoring the original street plan. One decision was to place a new housing block at the south side of the *Anthonesbreestraat* in such a way, that only a space wide enough for a narrow street remained, precluding its eventual later development as a major traffic artery. This decision was made after a violent confrontation during an attempted demolition in 1974 and following a recommendation made by officials to give in to the demands as a way to prevent further deterioration of relations (Hoekema, 1978). The second decision was to construct new housing on top of the subway tunnel, a considerable extra outlay, which was put on the subway construction budget (Mamadouh, 1992).

In 1975, while the squatters were preparing the defence of the squats on the *Rechtboomsloot*, which included a hanging and covered bridge across the canal, the City Council revoked an earlier decision to create new subway lines after the one that cut through the *Nieuwmarkt*.

In the case of *Kreuzberg*, the project overview of the *Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1987* (Feye, 1987) lists various buildings, that were slated for demolition, squatted and finally renovated. Feye (ibid.: 198) notes that the squatting actions in *Kreuzberg* prepared the climate for the policy change that occurred in 1981. This change entailed buildings no longer being stripped from tenants; a switch was made to a more careful method of urban renewal. Instead of the originally planned demolition of 2,200 apartments, only 14 side wings and backhouses were demolished.

Successful use of squatting to prevent the conversion of affordable rental properties into condominiums occurred in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (Kaulingfreks et al., 2009: 12, 94). When the owner of the block *Zwaerdecoonstraat/Snellinckstraat* had managed to induce half of the tenants to move out and had the insides of the empty apartments demolished, the remaining tenants organized squatting by students and artists in an attempt to block gentrification. Squatters who caused a disturbance were told to change their behaviour or leave. Policymakers found the creative community that developed attractive, which led to the decision to renovate the buildings as affordable rentals. The tenants were able to stay while the squatters had to move on to another

neighbourhood. Although, as in this case, squatters can clearly fight gentrification, at least since 1981 (Mier and Jansen, 1981), the issue has been raised as to whether squatters may inadvertently be spearheading gentrification (Pruijt, 2003). Perhaps it would be more correct to say that squatters may spearhead preservation, which may be a precondition for gentrification.

## POLITICAL SQUATTING

SQUATTING CAN BE a promising field of action for those who are engaged in anti-systemic politics and who identify themselves with revolutionary or 'autonomous' ideas. For them, power – in this configuration counterpower vis-à-vis the state – is important. Squatting is not a goal in its own right; it is attractive because of its high potential for confrontations with the state. The label 'political squatting' does not imply that I see other forms of squatting projects as apolitical, indeed, as Wates (1976: 160) suggested, squatting is generically political. I have chosen this label because here the involvement in squatting is driven by an ulterior anti-systemic political motive. The reason for considering political squatting as a separate configuration is that it has its own logic, which deviates sharply from the logic of the other configurations. A case in point is the Amsterdam squatting group called the '*Woongroep Staatsliedenbuurt*', which had a strategy that was coherent in itself but that did not fit in logically with squatting as an alternative housing strategy, deprivation-based squatting, entrepreneurial squatting or conservational squatting. The most salient way in which this group was different was in organizing large-scale squatting of social (low-income) housing allocated by the municipal housing authority. For the other squatters in Amsterdam, this type of housing was off limits because they felt that squatting was all about adding to the low-income housing stock, not competing for a share of it. Disapproving of the squatting of distributed social housing is consistent with what I described as 'squatting as an alternative housing strategy'. The '*Woongroep Staatsliedenbuurt*' also did not fit into the configuration of deprivation-based squatting: many participants squatted for themselves, it was not their ideology to help a group that was being wrongfully ignored by the authorities. The *Woongroep Staatsliedenbuurt*'s main justification for squatting allocated low-income housing was that the municipal housing queue system functioned as a way of pacifying the tens of thousands of home-seekers (Duivenvoorden, 2000: 151).

In line with this argument, the municipal housing distribution office was attacked several times; files were destroyed. The idea was that a collapse of the housing queue system would set the scene for a revolt of home-seekers. Thus, in this case, the driver was a political motivation.

Before this, in Germany in the early 1970s there had been a wave of political squatting. Political groups that had part of their roots in the student movement, such as the '*K-Gruppen*', Leninists known for their internal disputes about the 'correct line', and especially '*Spontis*', representing a more anti-authoritarian strand, launched squatting projects in various cities. This wave started after activists had become disillusioned with an earlier strategy of trying to radicalize workers by taking up blue-collar jobs and becoming active within firms. When it became apparent that this strategy was not effective, they decided to focus their attention on the sphere of reproduction, that is on working-class neighbourhoods. Most activity was in Hamburg and Frankfurt, cities ruled by social democrats (BesetzerInnenkongress, 1995). During a radio debate, a Frankfurt activist explained:

It was about exposing speculation with buildings and land; we wanted to show that the Frankfurt social democrats were exceedingly reformist and to document that the so-called reformists tactically cooperate with financial capital (transcript published in Grundmann et al., 1981: 49).

and

We really thought for some time that it should be possible to widen the housing struggle cycles – the occupations, evictions and mass organization in-between – beyond the, at most, 5,000 or 6,000 people that participated, and that this could become an influential factor in changing the political landscape, at least in Frankfurt. I still recall how thrilled we were to read headlines in the *Frankfurter Neue Presse* like 'Dual Power in Frankfurt'. And for a little while, we were prepared to believe this; that there was a dual structure of urban power: the formally institutionalized one, and us (transcript published in *ibid.*: 51).

In 2003 political squatting made a very short comeback in the Netherlands, albeit in a very moderate shape. '*Rood*' ('Red'), the youth

organization of the Socialist Party (SP), positioned on the left wing of the social-democratic *Partij van de Arbeid*, started a campaign of occupations to address the housing shortage for young people, which involved actual squatting.

Especially when compared to squatting as an alternative housing strategy, there is a relatively pronounced distinction in political squatting between leaders and the rank and file. Together, political squatters may view themselves as a vanguard, poised to lead a mass into a wide-ranging struggle. They see the non-political squatters, i.e. squatters whose projects fit in the other configurations, as potential recruits for this mass that they will lead.

In Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, political groups such as *Lotta Continua* latched onto the occupations that had started spontaneously (Rising Free, 1973; Welschen, 1996: 82-6). In a later phase, *Autonomi* became involved, seeking confrontations 'even if it contributed little or nothing to the preservation of occupied houses' (Welschen, 1996: 86, my translation).

The *Autonomi* consisted of different groups that partly fought against each other and partly complemented each other. They tended to join other groups, for example in mass demonstrations, and then take violent action. They refused to comply with the restraint on violent behaviour asked for by demonstration organizers. They also tried to obtain hegemony over the entire countermovement (Welschen, 1996).

Welschen (1996: 129-30) points out that *Autonomist* ideology was rooted in Leninist thought, adapted by Toni Negri and others to the reality that young people were getting less inclined to participate in top-down controlled movements; the ideological leaders thought that concentrating on concrete action, instead of building an organization, would lead to a cycle of increasingly severe confrontations with the state. The idea was that such confrontations would, in turn, stimulate the centralization of the movement.

In Amsterdam, political squatters developed the strategy of taking over the defence of several buildings whose occupants had lost hope of being able to stave off eviction, and turning these into fortified focal points for confrontations with the state. A high-profile example is the *Groote Keyser*. The political squatters were especially interested in mobilizing against the social democratic party that was in control of city politics. They also worked hard to create stable structures in the squatters' movement, with the ideal of building a coherent, prepared

group of disciplined activists who were committed to confronting the state. Many squatters who did not share the ideological background of the political squatters went along with this, led by feelings of solidarity. This course of action seemed attractive because it helped squatters win concessions, and because of the empowerment brought about by stronger organization and the experience of being taken seriously by the local state and the media.

Nevertheless, a cleavage developed in the Amsterdam squatter scene. Squatters who saw squatting primarily as an alternative housing strategy or as a basis for entrepreneurial projects increasingly disliked the centralized coordination and the almost paramilitary organization and style that surfaced in confrontations. It started to dawn on them that they had been manipulated by the political squatters.

The political squatters, in turn, became disappointed: they resented the large number of squatters who, in their view, acted without a clear political vision, i.e. squatting as an alternative housing strategy, or were only interested in their own small enterprises, i.e. entrepreneurial squatting. A conflict erupted, following a small internal uprising against the leadership of the political squatters, and an attempt by the political squatters' leaders to reconstruct the movement that entailed branding some squatters 'traitors'.

In terms of framing, the theme of treason seems recurrent. It is a type of accusation that can be directed both at social democrats in city governments as well as against squatters operating in other configurations.

The outcomes of political squatting tended to be disappointing for the participants. The political squatting campaign of the early 1970s in Frankfurt and other German cities ended in evictions, not in the mass mobilization that activists had hoped for. German political squatting did not even leave a legacy that inspired future squatters: the next German squatting wave that started in 1979 followed the pattern of squatting as an alternative housing strategy (Koopmans, 1995: 170).

In Amsterdam, a conflict with other squatters in 1988 forced the political squatters to withdraw from the scene (Adilkno, 1994). This infighting was not just about goals, or ideology or organization structure. It involved various characteristics that together set the configuration of political squatting apart from squatting as an alternative housing strategy and entrepreneurial squatting. Therefore, this internal conflict can be understood as interconfigurational conflict.

In the Berlin squatters' movement, a fissure developed along the dividing line between squatting as an alternative housing strategy and

political squatting. Inspired by developments in Italy, some of the squatters began to define themselves as ‘*Autonomen*’, the part of the movement that refused to negotiate about legalization. The *Autonomen* were especially enraged about the repression directed against squatters and criticized the other squatters for only fighting to preserve their own free spaces and not against the system:

Conquering ‘free spaces’ and making them secure . . . this is classical reformism. That does not destabilize any system – the capitalist system reacts very flexibly: free spaces can be integrated, resistance channelled into ghettos without explosive power: playgrounds (Geronimo, 1995, quoted in BetsetzerInnenkongress, 1995: 16).

In Amsterdam in 1982 a ‘Militant Autonomen Front’ claimed a light bomb attack on the municipal housing distribution office. This provoked a devastating attack from within the squatters’ scene, in which the *Autonomen* were subtly ridiculed. The protagonists were the editors of the squatters’ magazine *Bluf!* (‘Bluff!’). An involuntary accessory was Ton van Dijk, a journalist of the mainstream magazine *Haagse Post*, who was eager to produce a juicy story about emerging terrorism in the Netherlands. The editors of *Bluf!* approached him and offered to arrange, in return for money, an exclusive interview with the Militant Autonomen Front. Ton van Dijk was blindfolded, taken to a ‘secret location’, and given the opportunity to interview three masked ‘members of the Militant Autonomen Front’. These roles were played by the *Bluf!* editors themselves, who had prepared for the interview by memorizing an extensive array of revolutionary clichés. The *Haagse Post* published the nonsensical interview as its cover story, showing the photograph of the brave journalist in the company of the three masked men, that was supplied as part of the interview deal. *Bluf!*, in turn, published a picture of the blindfolded journalist surrounded by the three grinning *Bluf!* editors (Kommando GIRAF, 1982).

## CONCLUDING NOTES

THE ROOT CAUSE of diversity in squatting is that those who initiate squatting projects have varying goals. In the typology developed in this article, there is no type of squatting that has subcultural expression as its goal. This is because of the importance of the need for space for all

squatters, including those engaged in subcultural expression. Instead, there is the configuration ‘squatting as an alternative housing strategy’ where the goal is to house oneself, and in which there is a two-way relation between squatting and countercultural expression: the opportunities for countercultural expression are a bonus that adds to the attractiveness of squatting, and once someone is settled in a squat, she or he will find an environment that is, to some extent, conducive to countercultural development. Thus, I argue against making subculture the central point in our understanding of squatting.

Neither does ideology seem to be a good starting point for an analysis of squatting. In squatting, ideology is loosely coupled to practice. Seeing it as loosely coupled is a way to avoid tripping over some paradoxes, such as that between the belief espoused by squatters that ‘the squatters’ movement is dominated by a great revulsion against hierarchical order, authority, planning and pressure’ (Wietsma et al., 1982: 134) and the existence of hierarchical order, authority, planning and pressure within the movement, several examples of which have been presented in the pages above.

For all configurations, there are solid examples that show that they can be viable. Of the two configurations in which housing is most central, deprivation-based squatting and squatting as an alternative housing strategy, the latter seems to have everything going for it. It is open to everyone, regardless of social class, it is interesting for resourceful activists but can simultaneously offer a haven for vulnerable people. It allows a wide range of skills to be exercised, empowers and produces fun instead of a display of misery.

This leads to the question: why does deprivation-based squatting exist at all? The analysis presented above suggests that the reason is legitimacy. Squatting is a breach of property rights, and thereby likely to provoke negative reactions. The breach of property rights can be easier to swallow when it involves housing needy people in buildings that belong to owners who have a moral obligation to house the needy. Deprivation-based squatting offers this opportunity.

Helping oneself, as in squatting as an alternative housing strategy, can be an extra tax on tolerance. This effect can, however, be mitigated by targeting houses or buildings that are either too dilapidated or too sumptuous to be let as affordable housing. This can deflect accusations of queue-jumping. The extra tax on tolerance caused by self-help is not present in deprivation-based squatting, at least in cases where it is clearly organized to help other people. Thus, the level of tolerance



is a situational factor, to borrow a term from Mintzberg's (1983) contingency theory, with deprivation-based squatting fitting a low level of tolerance. The UK squatting history suggests that deprivation-based squatting paved the way for squatting as an alternative housing strategy.

Entrepreneurial squatting, in so far as it involves providing a service to the community, can deflect attempts to portray squatters as usurpers, in addition to the effect already produced by targeting unwanted buildings or buildings that have at least been empty for a long time. A deprivation-based squatting project can be incorporated as a separate division in an entrepreneurial squatting operation.

Squatting as an alternative housing strategy and entrepreneurial squatting, once some legitimacy has been established, could go on forever, unless there is very efficient repression or all potential opportunities are destroyed by an effective 'anti-squatting' industry, i.e. specialized firms that offer to prevent squatting by putting tenants into properties that might be squatted, relying on those tenants to keep squatters out, but offering them no security of tenure.

The fairly common idea that movements inevitably have a life cycle does not seem to apply to squatting as an alternative housing strategy and entrepreneurial squatting. Tarrow (1994) describes a life cycle dynamic that involves the increased use of violent means and militant rhetoric to motivate core participants and continue to get public, media and state attention, while this in turn causes supporters to walk away. Such an escalation can occur in the resistance against evictions, but this does not have to affect the squatting of new buildings. Van Noort (1988) observes that squatters in Amsterdam had become trapped in a dynamic of radicalization, causing them to lose all attractiveness. However, in contrast to his assessment, squatting continued. In terms of the configurations, it was political squatting that was subject to a radicalization dynamic, leaving squatting as an alternative housing strategy and entrepreneurial squatting unaffected.

Castells (1983: 328) suggests that the inevitable fate of urban movements is institutionalization leading to identity loss, while Kriesi et al. (1995) describe protest as occurring in waves, in which institutionalization is the phase between protest and reform. Mamadouh (1992) shows how city planners co-opted the views promoted by squatters; however her conclusion that this was the end of the squatters' era proved to be unwarranted. Conservational squatting was affected, not squatting as an alternative housing strategy nor entrepreneurial squatting. In addition, conservational squatting later resurfaced in the form of resistance

to gentrification. That squatting as an alternative housing strategy and entrepreneurial squatting do not seem to have a life cycle dynamic can help explain why squatting can be persistent over time.

Squatting is, along with rent strikes and the development of alternative spatial plans, one of the few action repertoire strategies that are specific to urban movements. Urban movements can be seen as aimed at realizing collective consumption demands within a framework of promoting the city as a use value against commodification (Castells, 1983). Squatting has the unique property of combining self-help with demonstrating an alternative and a potential for protest. The various configurations point to different possibilities. Deprivation-based squatting addresses problems in the provision of social housing, while conservational squatting asserts a vision of a city in which citizens are not spatially sorted according to income, functions are integrated and a small-scale urban fabric is maintained. Squatting as an alternative housing strategy can address exclusion from the housing market, for example of young people, or a housing shortage in general, but it can simultaneously demonstrate the use value of buildings, blocks or neighbourhoods that planners have slated for demolition, or develop into a protest against real estate speculation. In so far as promoting squatting as an end in itself is part of the movement's identity, it offers a barrier against cooptation. Entrepreneurial squatting can be a means to advance cultural demands. Examples are venues for pop music that were originally created by squatting. Finally, political squatting can increase the level of disruptiveness that the other types of squatting already have potentially, but it carries the risk of triggering internal conflict and a repressive backlash.

	<b>Deprivation based squatting</b>	<b>Squatting as an alternative housing strategy</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial squatting</b>
<b>Activists' goals</b>	Providing housing for needy people.	Creating housing for themselves, while adding to the affordable housing stock.	Setting up an establishment.
<b>Class</b>	Lower class squatters supported by middle class activists.	Middle class (but not exclusively).	Middle class (but not exclusively).
<b>Organization</b>	Top-down, division between activists and beneficiaries.	Horizontal.	Mixed.
<b>Type of buildings</b>	Regular low-income housing stock inexcusably left empty.	Buildings that are either too bad or too good to be rented out as low income housing.	Non-housing spaces.
<b>Demands</b>	Modest. Temporary housing or alternative accommodation. (Better) place on waiting list.	Being left alone.	Being left alone.
<b>Framing</b>	Clear message: insensitive bureaucrats ignore needs of homeless people.	Focus on action, framing not very important.	Valuable role of the establishment in the community.
<b>Cultural and political embedding</b>	Sometimes a tenuous link with radical politics.	Embedded in counter culture, ties with other movements.	Embedded in counter culture, ties with other movements.
<b>Outcomes</b>	Cooptation likely.	Repression and legalization.	Repression and legalization.
<b>Specific problems</b>	Does not work for people whose housing needs are not widely acknowledged. Top down organization limits movement spread and increases vulnerability.	Social control.	Preserving identity after legalization. Trade-off between alternative identity and wide appeal.

	Conservational squatting	Political squatting
<b>Activists' goals</b>	Preserving a cityscape or landscape.	Building up counter-power to the state.
<b>Class</b>	Middle class (but not exclusively).	Middle class (but not exclusively).
<b>Organization</b>	Mixed.	Top-down.
<b>Type of buildings</b>	Buildings emptied because of a planned change in land use.	Few restrictions.
<b>Demands</b>	Reversal of planning.	Confrontation is the essence, demands are at most supplementary.
<b>Framing</b>	Against technocratic planning and destruction of the environment.	Depicting social-democrats as traitors.
<b>Cultural and political embedding</b>	Embedded in counter culture, ties with other movements.	Links with Marxist organizations or movements.
<b>Outcomes</b>	Sometimes concessions won.	Makes squatting a more prominent target for repression. May also – in the short term – help squatters win concessions.
<b>Specific problems</b>	None.	Conflicts with squatters in other configurations.

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# RESISTING AND CHALLENGING NEOLIBERALISM: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ITALIAN SOCIAL CENTERS\*

*Pierpaolo Mudu*

IN THE 20TH CENTURY, ITALY SET THE EXAMPLE FOR AN EXTREME CAPITALISTIC accumulation model within a party system connoted by self-interest, patronage and downright corruption. The 20-year fascist regime, the 50-year political hegemony of the Christian Democrats (DC) as the ruling party and the ensuing Berlusconi era set a doleful record. At the same time, the strongest communist party in the Western world and a myriad of collectives, associations and non-parliamentary leftist political groups bore testimony to the efforts of the Italian working class to resist and fight capitalistic models of life (Virno and Hardt 1996).

Extremely slow piecemeal reform, repressive police state methods and shady dealings designed to shift the blame for violent attacks by right-wing extremists onto the political left were the tools used to inhibit mass opposition to the economic restructuring masterminded

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by the DC in the decade from 1968 to 1979 (Melucci 1996). Those were days of social unrest marked by coordinated worker/student protests in factories and workplaces, schools and universities (Balestrini and Moroni 1997). The reorganization of Fordist production and the transition to models of flexible accumulation based on the widespread use of temporary work contracts and the grey economy brought about a drastic change in the possibility of carrying out political activity in conventional spaces (i.e. workplaces, schools and universities) and in the traditional premises of political parties. The result was a dramatic decrease in political spaces. In the latter half of the 1970s and early 1980s, a generalized switchover of the anti-capitalist and anti-fascist antagonistic movement towards more extreme forms of political struggle often entailing the use of armed violence resulted in an “individual and atomized response which expresses itself in disengagement from collective action and disillusionment” (Melucci 1996:272). In the 1980s, faced with the advent of flexible accumulation and globalized markets, the traditional left-wing parties and workers’ unions proved unable to devise new spaces for social and political action. Hence the birth of new movements within the political left (environmentalist and anti-nuclear groups) and right (the separatist *Lega Nord* party). The strategy adopted by extreme left-wing groups to counter the new order emerging in Italian cities was to set up Self-managed Social Centers.

Social Centers revolutionized the political map, especially in suburban working class districts traditionally far removed from the center of political and economic events. Here, they sparked off a fresh cycle of social struggles geared towards gaining control of existing spaces and devising new ones. In this paper, some preliminary remarks on the origins of Social Centers, their links with *Autonomia Operaia* in the 1970s, work modes and practices, will provide the starting point for an in-depth analysis of the movement’s social composition, evolution in time and political track record. One main achievement to the credit of Social Centers is the part they played in renovating empty privately and publicly owned properties. In doing so they helped focus attention on land use issues and the struggle for re-appropriating social time. Its remarkable geographical coverage has been and still is a far from negligible strength, which afforded action even in areas where capitalist control of space and production (though varying in scale throughout the country) was greatest. An analysis and assessment of the links between Social Centers and the anti-neoliberal counter-globalization movement (which actually dates back to its early beginnings) requires

a more critical approach with concomitant focus on the past history of the workers' movement.

## THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL CENTERS

THE EARLIEST FOREBEARS of Social Centers were worker associations organized as mutual aid societies, cooperatives and then *Case del Popolo* (Houses of the People) which arose within the emerging socialist movement at the end of the 19th century, strongly influenced also by political figures such as Bebel, Vandervelde, Jaures, Owen, Fourier and Shulze-Delitsch (see Degl'Innocenti 1984). "*Case del Popolo*" like the "*Maisons du peuple*" in France and Belgium, were designed and planned constructions (De Michelis 1986). These organizations and buildings were violently dismantled by the Fascist regime and remained disused following World War II as left-wing political activists looked instead to political parties and unions for support.

After World War II, Italy was still a predominantly peasant-based society, but in the 1950s and 1960s it went through furious, if incomplete, modernization and industrialization, a first economic miracle. Then, however, in the 1970s and 1980s, when the processes of industrialization were still not complete, the Italian economy embarked on another transformation, a process of postmodernization, and achieved a second economic miracle. One might usefully pose the Italian case as the general model for all other backward economies in that the Italian economy did not complete one stage (industrialization) before moving on to another (informatization) (Hardt and Negri 2000:288-289).

Upon its first emergence in Italy in the 1950s, the compound noun "*Centro Sociale*" denoted a "community center" set up and run by municipal authorities (see Ibba 1995; Tortoreto 1977). Its current denotation, i.e. a venue for political activity and, ultimately, the emblem of a distinct social category, gradually emerged over the 1970s (Ibba 1995). In the latter half of the 1970s, the PCI (Italian Communist Party) seemed to be in the process of breaking the hegemonic position of the DC and taking over the government of the country. In the end, this epoch-making event did not happen, as the PCI entered into a compromise agreement – the so-called "historical compromise" – with the DC and formed a "national coalition government" with them between 1976 and 1979. Coupled with the crisis of the party system, which was gradually losing its former role as the sole agent for political organization and debate, the PCI's drift towards more moderate institutional political programmes

provided scope for action to dozens of left-wing grassroots organizations and collectives. Some non-parliamentary left-wing groups modified their action within cities by playing an active part in protests in factories and schools, thus prioritizing the “microphysics of power” over the methods of institutional conflict. The emerging movement for women’s rights was drawing attention to the perennial rift between private and public life; instead of waiting for the promises of a post-revolutionary society to come true in a highly improbable future, women preferred to voice their criticisms in the political arena of everyday life issues (Balestrini and Moroni 1997). In particular, backed by increasing sectors of the movement, they found fault with the typical Marxist-Leninist assumption that the revolution in private relations should be deferred until after the rise to power of the working class and reorganization of the economic order and pressed for a reversal in priorities. The favourite subjects discussed within the antagonistic movement in Italy were the collective needs of women and working class youths, the marginalization of entire neighborhoods in metropolitan areas and the surge in heroin abuse. These years saw the birth of *Autonomia Operaia* (Workers’ Autonomy), a federation of variously sized and composed collectives which urged into action thousands of people and managed to gain the support of numerous intellectuals, including Franco Berardi, Paolo Virno, Nanni Balestrini, Lucio Castellano and Antonio Negri.

*Autonomia* emerged in the post-1960s heyday of “workerism”, an interesting distinctively Italian version of Marxist thought theorized and developed by Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna and Negri in open contrast to the original theoretical core of Marxism-Leninism (Wright 2002). The collectives that were associated in *Autonomia* conceived of crisis no longer as a “social collapse,” a blast ignited by the inability of capitalists to meet social needs, but rather as the explosion of social relations whose great complexity could not be traced back to ruptured capital-labor relationships. Crisis was looked upon as the exact opposite of a catastrophe (Castellano 1980). Since its earliest days, the workers’ movement had thought of seizing power as the necessary assumption for changing relations of production and shaping a project for social reform. In contrast, minimizing the importance of the seizure of power by the working class, the points at the top of *Autonomia’s* political agenda were the hatred of work, upward delegation of responsibilities and a call for guaranteed wages (see Comitati Autonomi Operai di Roma 1976). Far from being the mere expression of the logic of refusal and negation in principle as the typical response to the erosion

of standards of life in capitalist society, its aims and practices prefigured a glimpse of the modes of life and social relationships that the “new society” of the future was expected to vouchsafe (see Comitati Autonomi Operai di Roma 1976).

*Autonomia* had its strongholds in Rome, Milan, Padua and Bologna. One of its best-known tag lines “create and build worker autonomy as counterpower in factories and city districts”, condenses in a few words years and years of intense political activity in workplaces, universities and schools, and was aimed at opposing the Italian establishment overall, including the PCI and the largest pro-leftist union, the CGIL (Virno and Hardt 1996). In the same period, the movement launched a cycle of pro-housing initiatives which led thousands of people to squat uninhabited flats in Rome, Milan and Bologna.

Although the “Neighborhood Committees” set up in Rome in the 1970s operated in close collaboration with local political institutions, they were actually pursuing social objectives comparable to those of the Social Centers movement (see Testa 1979). Along with hundreds of pro-squatter actions and other initiatives designed to attract the attention of the general public, they were part of the Roman movement’s strategy to build a collective political entity and make up for the loss of meeting places such as the large industrial concerns where people had previously been able to come together especially in cities in the north of Italy (Comitato di Quartiere Alberone 2000).

Significantly enough, it was in the north of Italy, more precisely Milan,\* that first-generation Social Centers arose (Cecchi et al 1978) in 1975. These followed the harsh class struggles associated with the abrupt shift away from an industrial economy towards the construction of an economy based on finance, fashion and service industries, accompanied by a relentless rise in rents. Starting from the latter half of the 1970s, sheds, warehouses and other industrial premises owned by Pirelli, Innocenti, OM, Falck, Breda, Alfa Romeo or Marelli in Milan stopped production and were closed down. By the late 1990s, industrial

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\* The growth of the first-generation Social Centers movement resulted in a rapid eclipse of the newly-born Proletarian Youth Clubs. Over 50 clubs were operating in Milan between 1975 and 1976, though their action was confined to a lesser scale than that of Social Centers. Like the latter, they were concentrated in peripheral working-class districts, but while Social Centers took over vacated industrial properties, most of the clubs carried on their activities in a single room (Consorzio Aaster et al 1996).



properties totaling 7 million square meters had been vacated in Milan alone, not to speak of peripheral municipalities such as Sesto San Giovanni, where closures affected a total of another 3 million square meters (Censis 2002). Two hundred and eighty thousand workers lost their jobs in industry in Milan between 1971 and 1989 (Foot 2001).

At the end of the 1970s, the non-parliamentary groups that had joined forces either with *Autonomia*, or with hundreds of other independent organizations, “Neighborhood Committees” and Social Centers came under attack from reactionary forces. By 1979 only a few of the Social Centers set up in the 1970s still existed, among them was the *Leoncavallo* squat in Milan. After that date, the surviving Social Centers kept a low political profile and seldom hit the headlines or attracted the attention of the general public. In the latter half of the 1970s, a network of local radios, bookstores and political collectives remained active and carried on their action.\* With the support of non-Marxist groups, including the Punk movement whose supporters used their bodies as a strong means of protest in public spaces, they created the background for the birth of second-generation Social Centers (Consorzio Aaster et al 1996; Dazieri 1996).

Two turning points in the process of growth and expansion of second-generation Social Centers in the 1980s deserve mention. First, towards the end of 1985, the *Hai Visto Quinto* school in Rome and many other properties were occupied in quick succession. The year 1985 was a turning point for two reasons: secondary school students gave life to a movement involving the occupation of a huge number of school buildings and the left-wing parties were defeated in a referendum launched to protect wages and salaries.

Second, the *Leoncavallo* Social Center in Milan was stormed by the police in August of 1989. This event was extensively covered in all

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\* From among the numerous broadcasting stations established in support of the movement, let us mention just a few: “*Radio Popolare*” and “*Radio Onda d’Urto*” in Milan, “*Radio Onda Rossa*”, “*Radio Proletaria*” and “*Radio Citta Futura*” in Rome, “*Radio Sherwood*” in Padua, “*Radio Kappa*” and “*Radio Citta*” in Bologna. Groups close to *Autonomia* were continually operative in *Via dei Volsci* in Rome when thousands of people were living in illegally seized flats especially in peripheral districts such as *Primavalle*, *S. Basilio* and *Spinaceto*. Small-scale squatting initiatives were also launched in Milan around *Piazza Aspromonte* and *Via dei Transiti*, and in Bologna, *Via del Pratello*

media and, coupled with the first national convention of Social Centers held in Milan on 23 and 24 September 1989, helped bring the movement back into the limelight. The logo adopted by most Social Centers in the 1980s, a flash of lightning that breaks through a circle, symbolically represented the end of a long period of marginalization and social rejection (Tiddi 1997). After 1985 the second-generation Social Centers gradually developed distinctive characteristics which will be the specific focus of this paper.

## **A REVIEW OF SOCIAL CENTERS' PRACTICES**

AS SOCIAL CENTERS differ greatly from each other in origin, political affiliations and organizational modes, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive description of the movement as a whole (Bregman 2001; Dines 1999; Pierri and Sernaglia 1998). From 1985 onwards, second-generation Social Centers adopted a number of collective practices and common symbolic definitions, building up a network that shares certain specific characteristics.\* Some of these are worth mentioning and can be subsumed under four points. First of all, they adopt the acronym "CSOA" (*Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito*) if they are squatters or "CSA" (*Centro Sociale Autogestito*) if they use premises made available by local authorities at no cost. It is worth noting that some Social Centers do not accept the description "squatted place" and prefer that of "squatted space" instead. Second, they self-produce and self-manage social, political and cultural events and adopt all relevant decisions in (usually weekly) meetings open to the general public. Third, to finance their activities they mainly rely on funds collected by selling low-price snacks and beverages during these events. As the affiliates of a Social Center are "volunteer" workers, they do not earn regular wages or salaries. Fourth, they have formed a network based on similar political affiliations. Most Social Centers are close to the extreme political left and made up of either communists or anarchists.

As considerable differences emerge depending on the geographical scale or time frame adopted from time to time, these characteristics are only useful for the purposes of this analysis.

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\* The methodology of research includes direct observation, access to self-produced materials and newspaper articles. In addition I had a number of informal conversations and telephone contacts that provided background information and clarified details.

### *Squatting, Illegality and Conflict*

Social Centers illustrate participatory modes of action designed to bring about change through a deliberate use of conflict (Ansini and Lutrario 2002). Squatting is an essential component of the strategic mix of these Social Centers not only because it involves breaking the law, but because it is a way of obtaining what has been denied (Solaro 1992). An illegal act such as squatting is also intended as a way to draw attention to the waste of public land and buildings and the high social costs of building speculation (Romano 1998). In practice, as also in other contexts, the primary result of the struggle for rights is space (Mitchell 2003). In terms of organization, a Social Center usually operates “beyond the law”: it has no written charter, and has an extremely high turnover of participants. These modes offer an alternative option to the bureaucratic organization of so many aspects of our social and political life and illustrate forms of direct, non-hierarchical democracy. Huge financial resources and a horde of operators working for profit would be needed if the empty buildings taken over by Social Centers



**Figure 2:** Rome: details of graffiti on the outer walls of the Ex Snia Viscosa established in the warehouses of a vacated industrial plant. Source: photo by F Ianniello



**Figure 1:** Milan: the Leoncavallo has been established in vacated printing offices; Rome: the Intifada has been established in a disused school building. Source: photo by P Mudu and G Mudu

were to be renovated in strict accordance with the law. As things stand, the architectural heritage restored and covered by graffiti in Social Centers includes a vast number of buildings, disused industrial premises, deconsecrated churches, unused schools and movie theatres, etc, which had remained deserted for decades (see Figures 1 and 2). The relevant projects proved costly and complex to complete (Vicararo 2003), providing space to hundreds of Social Centers in many Italian cities.

A deep gulf separates Social Centers, which pragmatically accept some sort of relationship with institutions, from those that oppose any such contacts in principle. 1993 marked the beginning of negotiations between municipalities and Social Centers for the legalization of squats. While some continued to oppose them, most Social Centers endorsed such negotiations and following a lengthy confrontation process within the movement and between Social Centers and some municipal governments, a few Social Centers were officially assigned the properties and spaces they had so far illegally held. By 1998, about 50% of the existing Social Centers had entered into agreements with the private or, more often, public owners of the squatted properties (Eurispes 1999). Social Centers have generally had difficulty liaising with the parties of the institutional left and have deliberately stood clear of the more conservative or neo-fascist parties (which in turn opposed the movement by dubbing Social Centers “dens of criminals”). At present, Social Centers enjoy the open support of the “Communist Refoundation Party” (PRC) and, to a lesser degree, of the “Party of Italian Communists” (PdC) and “Greens”. On the leftwing political front, relations are especially difficult with the Left (Figure 2: Rome: details of graffiti on the outer walls of the Ex Snia Viscosa established in the warehouses of a vacated industrial plant) Democrats (DS), whose allegedly ambiguous stances on subjects such as war, neoliberalism and citizenship rights often spark off mutually confrontational actions.

### *Self-production and Self-management*

Of the two words forming the compound noun “Social Center”, the term “social” is all-important since the very first contacts with a Social Center are usually mediated by friends and prompted by the desire to be with other people (Consorzio Aaster et al 1996; Pierri and Sernaglia 1998; Senzamedia 1996). The wish to come together outside costly commercial circuits is a need/right claimed by the affiliates of all Social Centers (Maggio 1998). Those who join a Social Center often end up

masterminding the creative drive behind new cultural trends in music\* and theatrical activities. Very often, Social Centers help launch cultural trends (e.g. cyberpunk) to a larger audience (Ansini and Lutrario 2002). The activities which take place in Social Centers make for a very long list (see Table 1, the information provided in numerous websites, or Gallini and Genova 2002).

**TABLE 1:**  
**A selection of activities carried out by Social Centers**  
**1985-2002**

- Political debates and documentation events, legal advice
- Solidarity actions in favor of immigrants and Roma
- Concerts, film clubs, exhibitions, libraries, pubs, restaurants
- Discotheques and dancehalls for the elderly
- Rehearsal and recording rooms, theatres, gyms
- Production and distribution of records and CDs, books, magazines, cartoons
- Study courses in music, photography, dancing, yoga, Linux, etc

### *Self-financing*

Until the mid-1990s, only volunteers were active in Social Centers and no salary or wage earners were envisaged (Lombardi and Mazzonis 1998). The fact that some Social Centers have resolved to pay salaries to some of their regular volunteers has resulted in ongoing debate, within the groups, concerning proper forms of militancy and the logic of wage earning outside of official circuits. Moreover, a few Social Centers have accepted forms of public and private sponsorship. Among them is a Social Center in Rome whose weekly discotheque evenings are sponsored by the Virgin Group. This decision ignited divisive debate between those prepared to accept compromise as long as this helped the

\* In the 1980s, Social Centers mainly specialized in ragamuffin and punk music; the late 1980s saw the explosion of Hip Hop groups, which in part (*99 Posse, Assalti Frontali, Isola Posse*) acquired considerable renown some time later; more recently, their musical mix seems to be even more abundant.

growth of their centers (some went so far as to set up real and proper firms) and those upholding the principle that growth should exclusively be attained through procedures that would ensure complete independence (<http://www.tmcrow.org/csa/csa.htm>; Membretti 2003).

### *Political Identity and Social Networks*

The squatters of a Social Center usually enjoy the support of dozens of sympathizers and habitués who readily give a hand when it comes to organizing special initiatives. In addition, there is a mass of occasional visitors who pass by with friends or are attracted by special events. In Milan, the average monthly number of visitors to a Social Center was found to be 20,000 (Maggio 1998) and a comparable figure can probably be assumed for Rome as well. In short, Social Center attendance can be classed as a marginal, but nonetheless “fruitful” collective activity (Moroni 1994:43). Compared with the situation in northern and central Italy, where Social Centers are visited by members of all social classes, Social Centers in the south are prevalingly supported by people living on the fringes of society (Dazieri 1996).

Regular frequenters and occasional visitors of Social Centers make up a mix whose composition varies greatly in terms of age, gender, educational level and social class. The recent entry of foreign immigrants into this very peculiar social network has resulted in a strong emphasis, within Social Centers, on the need for immigrants to be granted citizen rights. Although some sort of hierarchical structure is at times found to exist among Social Centers and within Social Centers, the movement as a whole can still be described as a search for a “multi-centered non-hierarchical affiliation network” and this network structure is indeed one of the most interesting aspects of the movement. Each Social Center can be described as the central node of a network of activists, sympathizers and occasional visitors, and each such node plays a role in building a collective identity founded on the sympathetic attitudes of an informal circle of occasional visitors prepared to travel in a wide gravitational area to attend events in one or the other Social Center (Consorzio Aaster et al 1996:60). In terms of “status”, Social Centers may range from a simple meeting place attracting visitors from one specific neighborhood only, to internationally known hubs such as the *Leoncavallo* in Milan and the *Forte Prenestino* in Rome. An additional major characteristic of this network is quick mobilization: these centers not only attract over 5,000 people to concerts or raves organized in a very tight timeframe (see Tiddi 1997), but are equally swift when it comes to responding to neoliberalist

policies. Social Centers have revolutionized long-standing conventional demonstration procedures and political communication codes by organizing street parades with demonstrators feasting and dancing to the music produced by sound systems mounted on trucks. Political parties were quick to imitate and take over these new demonstration modes. Unlike official center-left political parties, they do not need weeks or months to organize political events in public spaces.

In terms of political ideology, most of the supporters of Social Centers are libertarian anarchists or communists. To build a political identity, they rely on continual interaction, which becomes particularly intense during the preparations for social events aimed at denouncing neoliberalist policies from a wide spectrum of different perspectives. Routledge's comment that "This heterogeneous affinity was precisely not an 'identity', rather it represented a collectivity based upon the processing of differences through symbolic and direct action" (Routledge 1997:365) is consequently a fair description of this movement as well. Matters for debate include major subjects such as globalization, war, solidarity with Palestine and Chiapas, racism, the rights of minorities, the rejection of copyright law, the production of GMOs, the legalization of marijuana, etc, and are usually the object of clear and critical in-depth analysis.

## **THE UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL CENTERS ACROSS ITALY**

AS A RESULT of the Italian capitalistic model, there are marked differences between regions in terms of the prevailing mix of agricultural, industrial and informational activities. Large-size industrial concerns are mainly concentrated in the north-west, in the areas around Milan, Turin and Genoa (i.e. Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria). The north-east of Italy is characterized by industrial districts which have successfully specialized in traditional sectors such as the textile, clothing, footwear, furniture and other comparable industries (Bagnasco 1992). Farming and service industries have been the traditional mainstay of southern Italy's economy. Average wage and salary levels in the south are half those in the north and young people in search of first jobs account for 40% of the total as compared with the north's 11% rate (Graziani 1998). Due to the huge civil service apparatus, the situation in Rome does not fit within either of the pictures outlined above and calls for separate analysis (Ginsborg 1998).



Politically speaking, the north-west ceased its long-standing left-wing affiliation upon the dissolution of the PCI in the 1990s. The north-east had been a stronghold of the DC, since the end of World War II, but in the 1990s the place of the DC was taken over by Mr Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* party and the *Lega Nord*. Only in central regions does the political left still enjoy majority consensus. In the south, the DC – and now *Forza Italia* in their place – have always wielded control in all regions with just a few exceptions.

It is far from easy to keep track of the map of Social Centers over the past 18 years throughout Italy.\* Between 1985 and 2003, over 200 centers were established and operated in Italy (see Figure 3 and Table 2), being distributed among all but two regions (The Aosta Valley,

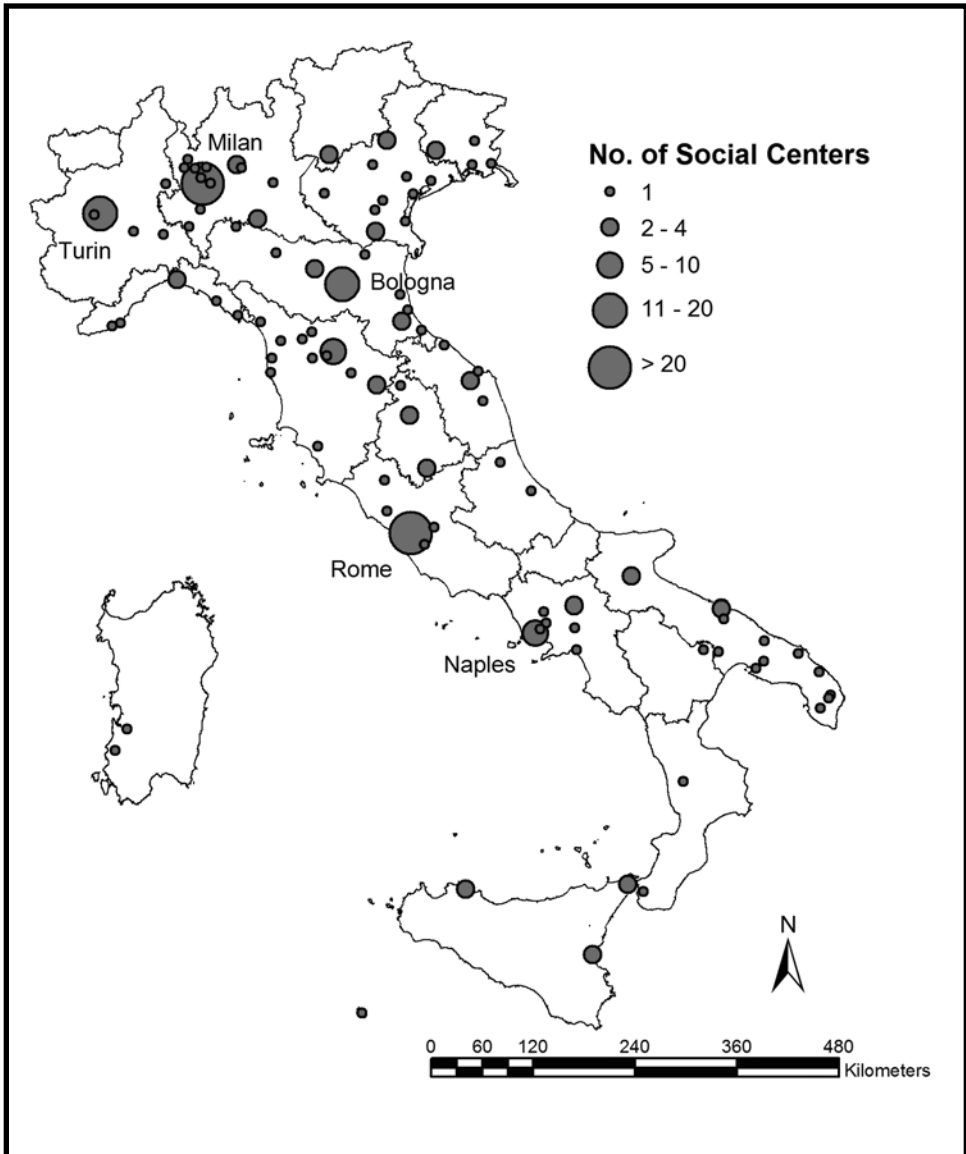
**Table 2:** Social Centers in Italy 1985-2003

Area	Frequency	%
North	116	44.3
North-east	(73)	(16.5)
North-west	(43)	(28.1)
Center	99	37.8
South/islands	47	17.9
Total	262	100.0

\* Our statistics on Social Centers active in Italy between 1985 and 2003 derive from a personal survey which is still under way, and from other sources, including journals, websites (E.C.N., *Isole nella Rete* and *Tmcrew*) and books (Adinolfi et al 1994; Dazieri 1996). The total stated includes squats which have been active for at least two months. As a few groups may meanwhile have been obliged to move to another squat, this number is likely to exceed the actual total by about 10%. Two ostensibly distinct Social Centers with the same or different names may in fact have been established by the same group (cases in point are the *Leoncavallo* squat in Milan and the *Pirateria* and *Alice* squats in Rome). The total number of Social Centers calculated for 1985-2002 based on this method exceeds 260. Previous surveys of Social Centers, eg those by *Isole nella Rete* (see <http://www.ecn.org>) or Pierri Sernaglia on behalf of the union organization CGIL (<http://www.cgil.it/org.programma/webprep/cso2.htm>) underestimated the relevant total by about 25%. The 1985-2003 total also seems to fall short of the actual number, at least as far as the latter half of the 1980s is concerned.

Molise). Considering that few centers have been established in Abruzzo, Basilicata, Sardinia and Calabria, it is evident that the movement has difficulty taking root in the south (squats in southern Italy account for only 17% of the total).

An additional problem in many towns in southern Italy stems from the “control” of the territory by criminal organizations. In 1996, a Social Center in Bari vacated its *Fucine Meridionali* squat because it



**Figure 3:** Distribution of Social Centers in Italy 1985-2003

proved unable to challenge rampant mafia gangs in the neighborhood (ECN 1996). The few Social Centers established in southern Italy were mainly concentrated in Campania, Puglia and Sicily. The geopolitical map of Italian cities is seen to affect the viability and growth of Social Centers, but not their birth, since even cities with marked rightist and conservative traditions have had Social Centers.

A local university has always been a major factor contributing to the growth of the Social Center movement. Most squats date back to 1990-1993, the years immediately after large protest movement occupations in all Italian universities. It is worth mentioning that about 130 Social Centers were active in 2001-2003.

There is no denying that economic and political prospects, organizational resources, social institutions, education levels and the effects of broad-scale social change vary greatly from place to place, with concomitant effects on the practices adopted by the movement (Miller 2000). The changing political affiliations of militants, the example set by the movement's grassroots organization and the Social Center experience of students who returned to their native provincial towns after years spent in university cities produced a rapid increase in the movement's geographical coverage.

In the 1980s, Social Centers were mainly operating in peripheral and decentralized areas. At the top of their agenda was the fight against heroin diffusion and building speculation, as well as the effort to break free from the ghettos in which they had been trapped since the 1970s, when mass arrests of *Autonomia* activists, dubbed as criminals, obliged the antagonistic movement to retreat for the sake of maintaining connections and a network that could again prove useful at a later stage. Anyway, there is some ambiguity in the fact that resistance is always countered by segregation, dominance and exile (Routledge 1997). Following the second wave of squatting initiatives, which started about 1985 and reached a peak in the 1990s, Social Centers sought to qualify their role throughout the territory.

The Roman map of Social Centers roughly reflects that of the political parties of the institutional left in terms of territorial distribution, but is utterly different in terms of modes of conduct and the network's spatial mobilization strategies. The fact that most of the existing Social Centers are concentrated in the traditional pro-worker and pro-PCI part of the city, namely its eastern districts (Mudu 2004) confirms close links, at least at neighborhood level, with the class structure and the parties that institutionally represent it. The first Roman Self-Managed

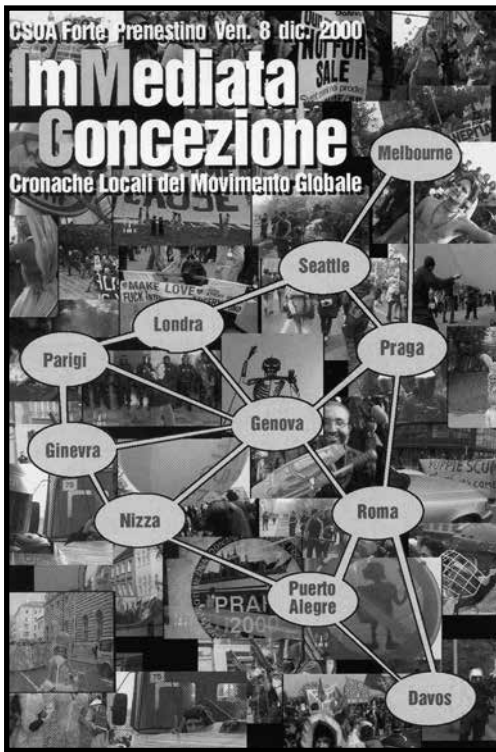
Social Center, *Hai Visto Quinto*, was set up in 1985, followed in quick succession by *Blitz* and *Forte Prenestino*, *Alice nella citta*, *Break Out*, *Ricomincio dal Faro*, *Intifada* and *Zona Rischio*. All of them proved highly influential and built an extremely varied, though very efficient network successfully engaging in the organization of political events and musical happenings (Tozzi 1991).

Two Social Centers were set up by *Autonomia* in Bologna: *Isola* in 1987, and *Fabbrika* in 1989. The *Pedro* squat in Padua dates from 1987. In that same period, the Milan Social Centers (*Leoncavallo*, *Conchetta*, *Garibaldi*) were experiencing a revival thanks to the vitality of a new generation of activists. On 16 August 1989, the police stormed the *Leoncavallo* CSOA in Milan. The unexpected resistance of the squatters led to a riot. The police demolished the center and violently beat the squatters (see Federazione milanese di Democrazia Proletaria 1989). Soon after, the evicted squatters re-entered the center and literally rebuilt it brick by brick. The property was a privately owned factory situated in a typical working-class neighborhood not far from the city center. It had remained vacant for about ten years, but the situation in the neighborhood had changed due to the design of the majority party on the City Council, the corrupt, neoliberal-minded Italian Socialists (PSI), to support building speculators and expel its original working-class residents. This goal was all but impossible to achieve, since the prices of flats in Milan had been soaring to levels unprecedented in Italy. As the *Leoncavallo* property had been a squat since 1975, the news of the police raid made the headlines for weeks. When Social Centers found themselves all of a sudden at the center of public attention, they were met with unexpected solidarity from the general public. Thanks to the extensive press coverage of a reality which few people knew about, the *Leoncavallo* became the symbol of all Italian Social Centers, thus ending the first stage in the movement's history.

## INSIDE THE ANTI-GLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT

IN 1994, THE Italian Social Centers had promptly responded to the revolt against the Mexican government in Chiapas by supporting campaigns in solidarity with the rebels. Some Social Centers looked upon Zapatism as a situation similar to theirs, a movement towards bottom-up local self-development founded on the rejection of the example set by the seizure of the "winter palace" and a political organization not in terms of being but in terms of doing (Holloway 2002).

Social Centers were not entirely new to internationally coordinated actions. In the 1980s they had helped promote solidarity with Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Palestine and the Basque movement in Spain, and in the 1990s the countries at the top of their agenda were Chiapas, Palestine and Kurdistan. Solidarity is pursued not only by organizing fund-raising events for particular projects or circulating videos and information brochures on the areas concerned, but also through trips and work camps in the countries involved whenever possible (as in the case of Nicaragua). Worldwide, Social Centers liaise with Marxist and/or libertarian groups devoted to political self-determination projects including the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), though some social centers support Maoist groups such as *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru. Zapatism marked a break-away from traditional solidarity policies with specific focus on the "South" of the World and a progress towards proactive solidarity with two-way exchanges.



**Figure 4:** Rome: a brochure on anti-globalization initiatives printed by the Forte Prenestino

From the anti-WTO marches in Seattle in November 1999 to this day, the movement has been pressing for a different direction in the globalization processes under way worldwide and has played a proactive role in the international arena (see Figure 4). In this process, it greatly benefited from on-line communication modes afforded by modern web technology. Its standing within the overall anti-liberalist movement grew thanks to the extensive press coverage of important demonstrations and meetings in Prague (Czech Republic) in 2000, Genoa (Italy) in 2001, and Porto Alegre (Brazil). In July 2001, the Italian Social Centers movement made an effective contribution towards mobilizing dozens of thousands of people in protest against the G8 Summit in Genoa (Andretta et al 2002) – a far-reaching event which shed light on an arrogant and ruthless use of power.

As mentioned before, this most recent stage in the evolution of the Social Centers movement is marked by a growing use of web technology. The earliest on-line information and documentation network, the “ECN” (European Counter Network), was set up in the 1990s and is still in operation. It set the example for a large number of Social Centers’ specific websites (among which is Tactical Media Crew: <http://www.tmcrew.org>) providing information on events that may be of interest to the movement as a whole. The Italian node of the global Indymedia network is closely linked to Italian Social Centers.

The importance of Social Centers within the movement opposing neoliberalist globalization processes lies in their ability to mobilize thousands of people in a snap. People take to the streets in their thousands even for local demonstrations, earnestly and constantly committed to gaining fresh understanding and experimenting with what they have learnt in an effort to make available fresh social spaces and press for global political space.

## THE CURRENT STAGE: POLITICAL TRENDS

THOROUGH POLITICAL AND structural changes in the overall context necessitated redefining existing inter-Social Centers relations. The “official” network that the Social Centers had been gradually building in more recent years had in fact been severely affected by different political affiliations. Initially, there were two main groups, one of which was close to *Autonomia* and such cult broadcasting stations as *Radio Onda Rossa* in Rome and *Radio Sherwood* in Padua, while the other one was closer to anarchical movements. In the 1990s, the political

map of Social Centers became even more complex and diversified and *Autonomia* split into two factions: the “*Disobbedienti*” and the movement associated with the grassroots-union organization (Cobas).

In short, today’s Social Centers movement is split into five groups: the *Disobbedienti* (Dissentients) who originally dubbed themselves *Tute Bianche* (White Overalls) and assumed their new name after the anti- G8 demonstrations in Genoa in 2001, following the “Milan Charter”;<sup>\*</sup> the Network for Global Rights operating in close collaboration with the Cobas Union since its establishment in March 2001; a pro-anarchist group; and a fourth group with Leninist leanings which in 2003 dubbed itself “*Europposizione*”. The fifth group includes Social Centers that do not identify with the affiliations of any of the former.

The fastest-growing group within Social Centers, the “*Disobbedienti*”, adopt Negri’s theorizations on the “multitude” and in their practical action they focus greatly on themes such as biopolitics and the politics of bodies. They entertain fairly formal relations with institutions and some of their supporters have been elected to the Municipal Councils of Milan, Rome and Venice. They are particularly close to the PRC. The Global Rights Network was founded by groups previously associated with the Roman section of *Autonomia*; it liases with the COBAS union, but not with the PRC, and its affiliates oppose any form of delegation of responsibility upward. Analysing the disintegration process under way within the class system, the Global Rights Network aims to provide evidence of the so-called proletarianization of the labor force and press for the parity of manual and intellectual work.

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\* On 19 September 1988, a group of Social Centers in the north-east of Italy (*Pedro* in Padua, *Rivolta* in Mestre, *Leoncavallo* in Milan and others) and in Rome (*Corto Circuito*) defined and adopted the “Milan Charter” which lays down a number of primary goals including the following. (1) The right of male and female undocumented migrants to freely circulate outside “Temporary Detention Centers”. (2) Decriminalization of offences associated with the exercise of denied social rights. Decriminalization of substance abuse. Release of seriously ill inmates and ailing AIDS patients from prison as part of a movement away from the logic of internment and total institutions. (3) The introduction of guaranteed minimum citizen’s incomes.



**Figure 5:** Milan: details of graffiti inside the Leoncavallo. Source: photo by P Mudu

## **SURVIVAL: LIMITS AND PROBLEMS**

IN ITS HISTORY to date, the movement has experienced both the traditional rifts between opposing factions within the historical political left, e.g. the confrontation between anarchists and communists, and new ones stemming from the movement's specific and original experience (see Figure 5 where a kind of Aztec calendar symbolically represents the revolutionary left experiences). One major watershed is that between "pragmatic-minded" groups and groups not prepared to strike any compromise with institutions. Moreover, some of the better-organized and richer Social Centers in the north-east have made attempts to gain control of the movement as a whole.

The debate within the movement points to diverging opinions concerning the way relations with "external" society should be handled, i.e. the opportunity to define and establish centers unrelated to the requirements of a given neighborhood (TAZs, Temporary Autonomous Zones) or, conversely, check the tendency towards isolation or self-referentiality. A TAZ is a temporary squat used to evade government control in respect of clandestine social activities, raves or other happenings. If it escapes detection, it can be dismantled and set up again elsewhere for a shorter or longer period of time (Bey 1993). The opposite of a



TAZ is a Social Center which concentrates on the problems and needs of the neighborhood in which it is located. Nevertheless, although the TAZ definition circulates widely within Social Centers, it is valid only in a small number of cases (Quaderni Libertari 1994). An additional obstacle to the growth of a Social Center are the difficulties encountered in circulating self-produced materials, e.g. music recordings.

In part, these problems have to do with cross-generational misunderstandings between militant squatters and equally difficult relations between the latter and external visitors. As far as the gender composition of Social Centers is concerned, there is no denying that women are still a minority (see Membretti 2003; Senzamedia 1996). Last but not least, let us mention the emergence of would-be leaders in a few Social Centers, as well as the fact that difficult inter-center relations may be responsible for a low degree of coordination (Andretta et al 2002). As far as within-movement communication is concerned, it is a recognized truth that hardly any Social Center – and especially those located at a distance from each other – have regular interaction except when they come under external attack or during preparations for particularly important events or demonstrations (interview with Daniele Farina, Milan Leoncavallo, in Dazieri 1996).

Despite its difficulties, the “*Disobbedienti*” continue to have a loose affiliation to the Global Rights Network, but both movements have little contact with Leninist and pro-anarchist groups. The degrees of openness of the latter vary greatly from city to city, so that it is their interrelations with other groups and, generally, individuals that makes the difference. These divisions become particularly noticeable when all the sections of the movement come together on the occasion of demonstrations and radio programmes.

Lastly, the survival of a Social Center may be jeopardized by external attacks, for instance from fascist groups or the police. Over half the existing Social Centers have suffered at least one such attack since their establishment.

## CONCLUSIONS

SELF-MANAGED SOCIAL CENTERS are an innovative form of the Italian movement born of the social crisis caused by the transition, in the 1970s, from Fordism to the present accumulation regime. Comparable, though smaller movements have developed in Germany, Spain, Great Britain, Switzerland and the Netherlands (Bieri 2002; Martinez Lopez

2002), but not the United States, with the sole exception of New York (Pruijt 2003).

First-generation Social Centers were established as early as the 1970s as part of an overall anti-institution movement, but it was only in 1985 that squatters occupied an empty building with the intention of using it for social, political and cultural events planned in the course of meetings open to all. This event gave rise to a movement that quickly spread throughout Italy and led to the occupation of over 250 properties in a period of some 15 years. “Though it may be hard to tell at first, the social centers aren’t ghettos, they are windows – not only into another way to live, disengaged from the state, but also into a new politics of engagement” (Klein 2001). Due to their successful attempts to provide venues for the material resolution of conflicts, over the years the Italian Social Centers movement has emancipated the antagonistic movement from the “ghetto” in which it was constrained. Thus it has actually opened up a window into novel strategies of resistance and ways of combating neoliberalist globalization policies. Social Centers were successful both because they were a public movement “in the making”, committed to the creation of spaces and forums for public discussion, and because they experimented with new cooperation models not founded on the use of paid labor (Maggio 2000; Vecchi 1994).

An analysis of the development of Social Centers in time points to analogies with the history of the working class (especially its struggle for the establishment of a welfare system and cooperatives) and the anarchist movement. In 1852, in “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon”, Marx himself found fault with the tendency to build parallel circuits, accusing the proletariat of converging towards “[...] a movement renouncing an overthrow of the old world by means of its great resources, and instead seeking to achieve its salvation behind society’s back, privately, within its limited conditions of existence, and hence necessarily coming to naught” (Marx 1996:39). There can be little doubt that the very idea of creating havens free of capitalistic relations is a mere illusion and that the self-referential isolation policies pursued by some Social Centers will only make it easier to discourage, repress and marginalize the movement. But the broader Social Centers’ challenge is to change the existing state of affairs by committing their networks to local-scale actions geared towards furthering socialization processes and mutual aid – a goal that must be attained by working not behind society’s back, but rather by looking beyond dominant social relationships.

The most important achievement to the credit of the Social Centers movement is probably its contribution to renovating publicly and privately owned vacated properties as an alternative to property speculation. Considering that Social Centers mostly operate in degraded peripheral areas, this action plays a role in counteracting the unfair spatial distribution of urban resources. While devising and perfecting its anti-neoliberal strategies, the movement underwent radical change and today it is a sort of continuum formed both of temporary associations such as TAZs and stable organizations some of which continue to prioritize confrontation and struggle, while others have accepted subsidies from private individuals and local governments. The complex approaches, activities and connections of Social Centers make it difficult to examine them in conjunction with New Social movements formed of temporary or single-issue organizations. In fact, the analyst is confronted with two different, though closely interconnected efforts: on the one hand, actions consistent with traditional class struggle, geared towards re-appropriating social space and time; on the other, collective demands intended to deny the legitimacy of power and the current uses of social and intellectual resources. The spectrum of possible responses to these demands is necessarily wide, and Social Centers are currently prioritizing small-scale actions that sometimes prove capable of fueling more thorough changes, particularly in showing the potentiality of self-management and self-production. The extent to which this model or its single parts can be made to work on a higher scale or extended to the rest of society will necessarily depend on the ultimate outcome of a confrontation process designed to redefine the power relationships. It would be naive to assume that Social Centers will be able to re-define the balance of power simply by criticizing the existing state of affairs and suggesting alternative social models and lifestyles. What is needed is a libertarian project with an inherent potential for expansion in terms of attracting growing sectors of the population and capable of overcoming the existing balance of power. It is an irrefutable fact that, from the outset, the declared aim of Social Centers has not been to seize power, but to help break up existing power structures and that all these practices can be interpreted as an “exodus” from, or “scream” against, dominant practices. As there is no denying that going beyond the existing power structure requires breaking new ground in an unexplored territory (Holloway 2002), the movement’s prospects for further growth will ultimately depend on whether or not Social Centers will be able to discard outworn action modes, devise means of changing the people

involved and critically analyse the composition of social classes today. Although this approach might at first sight bear some resemblance to that of the separatist *Lega Nord*, a party preaching disentanglement from traditional power circles, an abyss separates the Social Centers movement from the *Lega*. The most important of many far-reaching differences is the stark contrast between the Social Centers' aim to dismantle power structures and build a social "order" founded on solidarity and the *Lega's* anti-solidarity policies. This conclusion is all the more convincing since the spaces provided by Social Centers are open to all, including the very immigrants targeted by the *Lega's* racist policies.

In summarizing, Social Centers are committed to confounding the continuous message of the power structure inviting citizens to keep away from political activity since "there is no way things can be changed". This message is closely reminiscent of the fascist regime's call to the people to abstain from political action and leave the "burden" of decision-making to the Duce, the fascist party and fascist corporations. Hence the need not to underrate the part that this minority movement can play in the fight against neoliberalism.

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# HOW DO ACTIVISTS MAKE DECISIONS WITHIN SOCIAL CENTRES?

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN AN ITALIAN CITY

*Gianni Piazza*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES WITHIN THE ITALIAN SOCIAL CENTRES, the way in which occupants and activists usually take their decisions is the focus of this article. The Social Centres (SCs) in Italy have been defined as autonomous spaces set up by left-wing radical activists (mainly students and unemployed youth), who occupy and/or self-manage unused buildings in the cities (based upon a conception of free spaces), where they organize political campaigns, social and countercultural activities; territorially rooted, they contest the moderation and bureaucratization of environmental associations and political parties, proposing radical forms of action and participatory organizational models (della Porta and Piazza 2008: 43). Social Centres is the abbreviated term for “Squatted (Occupied) and/or Self-Managed Social Centres” (*Centri Sociali Occupati e/o Autogestiti* – CSOA-CSAs), because squatting and/or self-managing vacant buildings represent their identity traits; however, SCs repertoire of actions includes other unconventional forms as symbolic protests, pickets, road and railway blockades, occupations of institutional offices, unauthorized demonstrations, that sometimes end in clashes with police.



During the last decade alone, scholars have begun to study the Italian SCs, notwithstanding the phenomenon is quite older with its roots in the mid-seventies (Dines 1999; Berzano and Gallini 2000; Ruggiero 2000; Becucci 2003; Mudu 2004; Membretti 2007; Montagna 2006); they have highlighted, on the one hand, SCs have long been the most radical groups, among the main actors of urban conflicts and of those related to LULU-Locally Unwanted Land Use (della Porta and Piazza, 2008); on the other hand, SCs can be considered the most important radical sector of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) in Italy – quantitatively and qualitatively – for its effective contribution towards mobilizing thousands of people in demonstrations and meetings against neo-liberal globalization (della Porta *et al.* 2006).

These studies have pointed out the SCs, denouncing the rarity of space for sociability outside of commercial circuits and campaigning against market-oriented renewal and property speculation in the cities, are urban but not exclusively local protest actors. They are urban actors because they are spatially localized in the city centres or in the peripheral/working class districts (and are not local chapters of extra-local organizations), however their reach of action is often not only local, but also regional, national and global; the issues faced are both local (social spaces and services, housing, urban renewal, etc.), although always set in general framework, and extra-local (migration, no militarization, no war, alter-globalization, etc.). Unlike other important urban actors (i.e. the citizens' committees) the SCs are generally more ideological, with an universalistic identity, and usually last longer than the former, which are instead more pragmatic, unstable, set up *ad hoc* with localistic identity; in some cases SCs ally with committees, in others they promote and intertwine with them, giving extra-local, trans-territorial and cross-issues dimensions to the LULU campaigns, in which both are involved (della Porta and Piazza 2008; Piazza *et al.* 2005).

Moreover, research stressed how SCs 'are also very heterogeneous in cultural background, objectives and forms of action' (della Porta *et al.* 2006: 41). If at the beginning of the 1990s 'there were two main groups, one of which was close to *Autonomia* ... while the other was closer to anarchical movements' (Mudu 2004: 934), the SCs' area is currently and continuously split into several groups and networks, very fluid and unstable.

Here I propose a typology of the Italian SCs, which is a reworking of models previously elaborated by other scholars (Dines 1999;

Montagna 2006), based on their political and ideological orientation, the networks/areas they belong to, the aims pursued and activities carried out (political, social, countercultural), the campaigns and issues faced, the legal status (occupied or assigned), and the attitudes towards institutions (hostile, pragmatic, strategic).\*

**Table 1:** Typology of Social Centres

<b>Ideological orientation</b>	<b>Network/Area</b>	<b>Aims/Activities</b>	<b>Campaigns/ Issues</b>	<b>Legal status</b>	<b>Attitude towards Institutions</b>
<b>Anarchism</b>	Anarchists-Libertarians	Political, counter-cultural	Antimilitarism, repression, environment, cultural/editorial	Illegally occupied	Hostile, closed
<b>Negri's theory (Multitude)</b>	Ex-Disobedients (North-East SCs)	Political, social	Citizenship income, no-copyright, precariousness immigration, welfare from below, Lulu, militarization, university	Officially assigned	Strategic, negotiation
<b>Marxisms/ Leninism</b>	Antagonists (Autonomists, Antimperialists); Leninists; Revolutionary communists; Non-Aligned	Political, social, counter-cultural	Anti-fascism, internationalism, repression, labour, grassroots unionism, housing, Lulu, university	Illegally occupied; Officially assigned	Hostile, closed; Strategic, negotiation
<b>Non-ideological/heterogeneous</b>	Non-Aligned	Political, counter-cultural	Citizenship income, precariousness, new rights, immigration, anti-fascism, media-communication	Officially assigned	Pragmatic, strategic, negotiation

- a. The Anarchists and Libertarians who, although divided among themselves in different networks, 'refuse any kind of formalisation of their structures and dialogue with state institutions, but also with movements that they judge too moderate' (Montagna 2006: 296; Berzano *et al.* 2002); these social centres are always

\* The typology is a work in progress, because of lack of information about some social centres and the networks are very fluid and loose – they are formed and dissolve very quickly – linking also other type of grassroots actors (committees, collectives, groups, rank-and-file unions, etc.).

illegally occupied and political/countercultural activities are carried out.

- b. The ex-Disobedients, who adopt Negri's theorizations on the "multitude"; they entertained fair relations with local institutions and were particularly close to PRC\* until 2004 (Mudu 2004: 934), when they broke with left parties and radicalized their forms of action; their attitudes towards institutions oscillate between strategic and pragmatic, and many social centres are officially assigned.
- c. Then, the areas and networks which base their political analysis on Marxist or Leninist class categories: the Antagonists, the Anti-imperialists, the SCs linked to *Autonomia*; others with Leninist leanings (2003-4 "*Europposizione*"), and the Revolutionary Communists who refuse any relationship with state institutions and are considered the most radical SCs; within these areas usually SCs are illegally occupied and have hostile attitudes towards institutions, but some can be officially assigned and keep strategic relations with local administrations; further, social activities addressed to the neighbourhood in which the centres are located are carried out, beyond the political and/or countercultural ones; besides some Marxist SCs are not aligned to any networks.
- d. Lastly, there are non-ideological SCs or heterogeneous ones, in which different ideological leanings coexist; they are *Non-Aligned/Affiliated*, because do not belong to any of the former networks and include SCs both with a more political orientation and a more countercultural one (Montagna 2006); usually they are more moderate and have pragmatic or strategic attitudes with institutions in order to obtain the official assignment of the premises.

## 2. MODELS OF DECISION-MAKING: THE FRAMEWORK

CONSIDERING THIS POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL fragmentation, I wondered if all SCs shared similar types of decision making, notwithstanding their

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\* Party of Communist Refoundation. Some of *Disobedients'* leaders have been elected to the Municipal Councils of Milan, Rome, Venice and to the National Parliament.

differences. The existing research has been less focused on this feature, except for those concerning the SCs belonging to the ex-Disobedient sector. In particular, the use of the deliberative method in the internal decision-making process emerged, as Becucci states: ‘The deliberative method ... within the Assembly ... does not use the system of the count of ayes and nays, but is based on the search for consensus and tendential unanimity ... the Disobedients’ movement prefers the search for consensus. In the case there are positions that do not offer shared solutions, the problems under discussion are momentarily suspended to be faced later’ (2003: 90). But, are the other SCs’ political practices inspired to deliberative democracy\* too, or do they follow other models? Which of their methods are adopted in internal decision-making? What are the dynamics and mechanisms characterizing their decision-making processes?

In order to answer these questions, first I have considered the typology elaborated by della Porta and her Demos Project group (2009; see specifically Andretta 2007: 116-120), that proposes four models of democracy within the groups of GJM, by crossing the two dimensions of the type of participation (indirect with delegation upward *vs.* direct without delegation) and of the decision-making method (vote or strategic negotiation *vs.* consensus) adopted for the treatment of preferences (aggregation *vs.* transformation) in the formation of political choices: a) *Associational Model* (delegation and preferences aggregation); b) *Assembleary Model* (without delegation and preferences aggregation); c) *Deliberative Representation Model* (delegation and preferences transformation); d) *Deliberative Democracy Model* (without delegation and preferences transformation). Nonetheless, the two models based on delegation upward are in my opinion useless for my purposes, because social centres have always been characterized by direct democracy, the refusal of internal and external delegation and the denial of formal representation (Mudu 2004; Montagna 2006). Then, their decision-making should oscillate between the Deliberative and the Assembleary models. But, the remaining dimensions (method and preferences) are too stretched to define as deliberative an internal decision-making, because

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\* Deliberative democracy, ‘refers to decisional processes in which under conditions of equality, inclusiveness and transparency, and a communicative process based on reason (the strength of a good arguments) are able to transform individual preferences, leading to decisions oriented to the public good’ (della Porta, 2006: 2; della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 241).

in literature ‘deliberation takes place under conditions of plurality of values, including people with different perspectives but facing common problems’ (della Porta 2006: 2); since the internal decisional process of a SC can take place in an homogeneous ideological context, but also in a heterogeneous one, I changed the denomination of models on the basis of the method adopted alone (Consensual *vs.* Majoritarian), avoiding, for example, to define as deliberative a decision-making process in which consensus is reached when values and perspective are shared by all members.

Besides, since decision-making is a process and not a single act, and therefore changes can occur during it. A process starting as Consensual can become Majoritarian and vice versa. I have considered the two models as the opposite poles of a continuum in which the real decision-making of the SCs can be placed: the proposed models are conceived indeed as ideal-types and the empirical cases can be more or less close to them. In order to facilitate the analysis and the empirical check, I introduced two intermediate models regarding the cases in which Consensual and Majoritarian Democracy are not the exclusive practices adopted in decision-making processes. Thus, we will have four models, starting from the Consensual pole, along the continuum, towards the Majoritarian one.

### *1. Consensual Model.*

Consensus is always the decision-making method and preferences transformation occurs (if initially different) when decisions, unanimously, are taken; when unanimity is not reached, preferences are not aggregated (never vote nor strategic negotiation among different positions), no decision is taken, issues under discussion are momentarily suspended to be faced later. Notwithstanding, if a unanimous decision is impossible to reach on issues considered crucial by activists, it can entail an internal split and the exit of the dissentients from the group.

### *2. Consensual-Majoritarian Model.*

The process is mainly consensual (the rule), but it becomes majoritarian when unanimity is not reached (the exception); in any case a decision must be taken, thus when the preferences are not transformed, they are aggregated by strategic negotiation (compromise or agreement) or by voting (majority decision).

### 3. *Majoritarian-Consensual Model.*

The process is mainly majoritarian (the rule), but it becomes deliberative when crucial issues are faced (the exception); usually preferences are aggregated and decisions taken by voting or strategic negotiation, but some issues (considered very important for the survival of the group) require unanimity and thus preferences are transformed (even to avoid internal split and the exit of minorities).

### 4. *Majoritarian Model.*

The process is always majoritarian: voting is the decision-making method and preferences aggregation occurs entailing the formation of majorities and minorities. Shared decisions\* (compromise or agreement) can be taken without voting, only by strategic negotiation among different positions.

My initial hypothesis was that all social centres shared an internal decision-making logic according to the Consensual Model. In fact, on the basis of the previous research, every social centre seemed to be characterized by the exclusive adoption of the consensual method considered ‘the only one accepted by everyone’ (Mudu 2004: 926), and by decisions unanimously taken in order to make choices shared by all members.

In order to test this hypothesis I designed my research around comparison of two SC with great differences between them (in terms activities carried out, political affiliation, ideological orientation, attitudes towards institutions, etc.), to see if they, notwithstanding their numerous differences, had similar decision-making practices. For this reason I have selected two SCs in Catania (in Sicily) with the most different characteristics: a) *Experia*, a political squatted SC, belonging to the most radical national network, which refuses any contact with public institutions; b) *Auro*, a moderate countercultural and non-affiliated SC, whose premises have been officially assigned by local institutions.

Nevertheless, as we shall see in the following pages, the findings of this research are unexpected and thus require an explanation through

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\* I have not used in these models the term “shared decision” (or shared solution) as synonymous of “unanimity decision”, in order not to make confusion: the former means “agreement” or “compromise” as the outcome of a strategic negotiation among actors that aggregate their preferences, while the latter means a decision unanimously reached by the preferences transformation.

the procedure of re-identification and/or cultural re-collocation (Pizzorno 2007a: 66-70). Explanation here is not pursued singling out constant relations between variables, but understanding and interpreting the meaning of actors' actions (*ibidem*: 70-82).

The research, carried out between 2004 and 2008, was based on three principal sources: a period of participant observation during the internal meetings of the SCs; the analysis of self-produced documents; above all, a set of semi-structured interviews with SCs' activists, serving as my key-informants, in order to understand the meaning of their practices and being able to interpret them.\*

In the following pages, first I will briefly analyse the phenomenon of squatting in Catania, reconstructing the history, the activities and campaigns, the organizational structure and the internal decision-making of two SCs: *Experia* and *Auro*. Finally, I will make some conclusive remarks returning to the hypothesis outlined above and discussing them in particular from a comparative perspective.

### 3. SQUATTING IN CATANIA

CATANIA IS THE second largest city in Sicily with a population of 340,000 inhabitants. Its economy is mainly based on trade and services with a few industries, the most important is specialized in high technology (ST-Microelectronics). Unemployment, under-employment and the presence of organized crime (*Mafia*) are usually considered its main social problems. The urban fabric is like the "leopard's spots", that is characterized by the alternation of popular (lower-class) neighbourhoods and residential (upper-middle class) quarters both downtown (historical centre) and in peripheral areas. As far as local government is concerned, Catania had been always governed by moderate municipal administrations led by Christian Democrats until 1992; from 1993 to 1999 a centre-left coalition had ruled the city, but from 2000 to the present time, centre-right administrations led by *Forza Italia* and now *Popolo delle Libertà* (People of Liberties) – have governed the Municipality. The political culture of the majority of the population is indeed moderate and conservative, given the low density of social capital and the weak tradition of associationism; nevertheless, a few leftists groups, citizens' committees, NGOs, civic and environmental associations are active in

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\* The findings are valid until the eviction of CPO *Experia* on 30 October 2009.

protests and mobilizations on various issues in the city (Piazza 2004a; Piazza *et al.* 2005).

The first squatting took place in Catania in June 1988 when the Committee for Self-Managed Social Spaces – set up by two groups of activists belonging to the Autonomous and the Anarchist areas – occupied the SC *Experia*. It was located in one of the oldest popular neighbourhoods of Catania, in a former cinema within an ancient building owned by the Sicilian Region. After abandoning the centre only two months later because of some arson attacks of Mafia origin, the activists of the Autonomous area squatted a new SC, *Guernica*, in another area of the town (in a middle-class district) in March 1989. In autumn 1991, an internal split occurred because of the adhesion of some militants to the “revolutionary communist” area, harshly criticized by the other activists of the *Autonomia*, who, after have exited from *Guernica*, occupied a new squat, the *Auro*, together with a group of students. In February 1992 police evicted simultaneously both *Guernica* and *Auro*, without active resistance by occupants. After a brief occupation of a private building in the spring of the same year, the activists of *Guernica* re-occupied *Experia* for the second time in May 1992.

### 1. *The Squatted Popular Centre (Centro Popolare Occupato) ‘Experia’*

The CPO *Experia* was exclusively characterized by the political identity of the occupying group, based on a radical version of Marxist ideology. This created significant consequences for their the choices of political campaigns and for their orientation toward the inhabitants of the local neighbourhood within. The *Experia* activists, in fact, defined themselves as “revolutionary communists” to stress the difference with communists belonging to the institutional left, refusing conventional politics and relationships with institutions and representative democracy,\* and identifying the “proletarian referent” (people to who they address their political activities) in subaltern classes living in “popular” districts of the town, as *Antico Corso* where the social centre was located. The political choice to address their own activities and their capacity of “social aggregation”\*\* to the lowest social classes of popular neighbourhoods,

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\* This characteristic partially changed after the eviction in 2009.

\*\* I mean the capacity to attract people from outside in order to create “sociality”, that is according to Pizzorno: “the formation of a relationship between two or more persons... that, thanks to the relation in which they recognize



and the affiliation with a national political area (the “revolutionary communist”), was confirmed in 1998 by the change of denomination from CSOA to CPO (Occupied Popular Centre). Nonetheless, in the 1990s the activities of *Experia* were focused almost solely upon political and counter-information campaigns, e.g. anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, internationalist, because they were unable to involve the inhabitants of the lower classes districts.

In 2000, the CPO *Experia* contributed to the set up of the citizens’ committee “*Antico Corso*”, with whom they campaigned against the threat of eviction by the local Authorities and against the construction of an university building in the back yard of the centre, denouncing urban speculation and demanding housing and social services for residents (Piazza 2004a; 2004b). It was a turning point: a new generation of young activists, especially students, adhered to *Experia*, which also obtained the support of the neighbourhood people and of the other local movement organizations (I1; I5).

In 2003, after an internal debate, the *Experia* militants decided to diversify their tasks, to leave the management of the SC to the younger activists in order to raise social and youth aggregation, while the oldest activists founded a political propaganda journal, “Without Bosses” (*Senza Padroni*). There was a shifting of phase characterized by the openness of the SC toward new groups and social actors, according to the words of a young activist: “The youngest comrades have had a very strong role in re-opening *Experia* to other social subjects that didn’t frequent *Experia* for many years. So we invented the Festival of the grass-roots groups, we gathered students, we were very present in the schools and slowly new activists joined us’ (I1).

As a consequence of the generational turnover, the activities of *Experia* aimed to social and political aggregation were re-launched. “No aggregation, no struggle. No struggle, no rights” has been the slogan which has characterized this phase of *Experia*. An interviewee says: “For me a social centre is above all a place of ‘aggregation’. When you come in the social centre, you feel part of a place, of an aim, of a community of comrades; you do not feel disaggregated, isolated. It is the difference between ‘place’ and ‘non-place’: a place where you feel actively part of something” (I5). Here the strong feeling of belonging and identification with the SC emerges corresponding to the value of

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each other a certain identity, they exit from the state of *loneliness* or *isolation*” (2007a: 17-18).

‘collectivity’ (community) shared by all activists. The SC is not conceived as a closed community, a “happy island” separated from the rest of the city (I3), but a ‘laboratory of resistance within society to intervene on concrete, political and social problems’ (I1). Notwithstanding, the defence and strengthening of the political identity of the squatting group, rather than the defence of the centre as a physical place, has become an end in itself.

Meanwhile, the political campaigns characterising *Experia* have gone on during these years: the antifascist,\* anti-imperialist and internationalist campaigns, supporting Palestinian struggle and against the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq. After a period of crisis (2007), mainly due to less attendance and engagement of some activists, in 2008 the *Experia* militants aggregated new groups and carried out new activities within the centre (cycle and juggler workshops, ‘popular gym’, *capoeira* dance), whereas the student activists were involved in the university movement. On 30 October 2009, the SC was brutally evicted by police, receiving the solidarity of local residents and of associations, unions and left parties of the city. After some unsuccessful attempts to reoccupy the *Experia*, on the Spring of 2011, their militants and other radical left activists occupied another vacant building, a former communal gym (“*Le verginelle*”) in the same area of the city, which they however left some months later.

#### *a. Organizational structure and internal decision-making.*

The organizational structure of *Experia* was informal, participative, horizontal and non-hierarchical and no internal leading group, formally separated from the entire membership, existed. It was mainly based on the “management assembly” or “management committee”, which met weekly on Monday evenings. The assemblies were generally public and open to everyone (I5), even to outsiders, individual or collective actors (*inclusiveness*), with the exclusion of only fascists and policemen (I1). Nevertheless, some meetings with “different compositions” (I1) could be held, where some (generally external individuals or groups)

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\* Antifascist campaigns are strongly felt by SCs and other leftist radical groups in Italy for political and historical reasons: they perceive their struggles against the neo-fascist groups, currently very active in urban areas, in continuity with those of *partisans* during the fascist regime (1925-1945) and of leftist activists in the 1960s and 1970s against *stragismo* (terrorist bombing massacres) and the “Strategy of Tension” (see Cento Bull, 2007).

participated only in the debates on the issues in which they were interested and then, when other issues were discussed, they spontaneously went out; besides, some “closed-doors meetings” could be held, that is without the presence of outsiders, when problems defined as “sensitive” were faced. Then, there were two types of decision making settings: one more inclusive where all people with an interest in the issues discussed (even the outsiders) could participate; another more exclusive, reserved only to the “hard core” of the occupants.

All decisions were taken during the assemblies and were binding for all members, exclusively by the adoption of the *consensual method*, that is through the discussion and the pursuit of unanimity, without any voting, as it was clearly stated by the interviewed activists: ‘Everything is decided during the management committee through debate. Someone proposes an initiative or a campaign; the proposals, which can come internally from a comrade or externally from other groups or individuals, are discussed within the management committee and, if they are interesting and congruent with our goals, we decide on them’ (I5); ‘decision are taken unanimously through consensual methods’ (I1); ‘if someone doesn’t agree, we try to discuss it until the end’ (I3); ‘there are no voting mechanisms’ (I5); ‘the issues faced sometimes are long currents of debate which we open, we temporary abandon and which emerge again during the years’ (I1).

When some divergence arose, participants tried to convince the others by their argumentations. The internal clashes and disputes were faced through the debate and very long discussions and resolved only with the achievement of unanimity; in the case in which a shared solution was not found, the discussion was postponed with the result of a “decisional stalemate”: ‘the discussion is not set aside but postponed, even if this implies to paralyse the activity; so we have to talk again if we all do not agree. It’s happened before and it happens now’ (I1).

Therefore, when decisions were taken, *preferences transformation* occurred, also on the basis of new elements (information, data) emerging in the course of the debate: ‘the mechanism of the transformation of the initial preferences exists and has existed in almost every meeting and among almost all the comrades. It also depends on the new information, a new element which I’ve never thought about .... Personally, there have been times when I thought that my position, on the basis of the others’ opinions, was wrong, and times when I was right notwithstanding the others’ positions’ (I1). When the preferences

transformation did not happen, no decision was taken, but they were never aggregated by voting or strategic negotiation, because internal cohesion was a value and a trait of *Experia* collective identity.

*Rational argumentations* were often used during discussion in order to convince other participants and to transform their preferences, but always within the shared collective identity. In fact, when an activist proudly stated that ‘we’ve never done things which could harm our identity, just to reach a better effect, and we have preferred not to have relationships with other groups rather than to make something to the detriment of our ideological identity’ (15), it meant that identity, ‘in order to keep itself, must aim at coherence of the choices during the time’ (Pizzorno 2007a: 27).

There were no internal groups autonomously managing the spaces of the SC until 2008. Nevertheless, with regard to political issues, the *Experia* activists sometimes discussed these issues with the senior militants, with whom they shared the political-ideological area. It was during this type of meetings that tensions and disputes could arise between the young activists of the SC and the first occupants of the *Experia*. The generational clash seemed to be based more on the tactics and forms of communication than on the political contents, between the more pragmatic young activists and the more ideological old militants. Usually a common solution was found by consensual method or, more rarely, by a compromise between the autonomy of the occupants and the political weight of the senior militants.

## 2. *The Self-Managed Social Centre (Centro Sociale Autogestito) ‘Auro’*

The Social Centre *Auro*, is still situated in the historical centre of Catania, located within a former nunnery. It is currently property of the municipality. The *Auro* was occupied in the autumn of 1991, according to one of the earlier squatters, ‘by a group linked to the area of *Autonomia*, and by individual militants, people set outside political groups and aggregated to this specific project, primarily based upon the idea of taking a place in the town, setting it free and using it in order to make various kind of activities, e.g. political campaigns, collectives, groups working on NGOs and artistic and cultural aims’ (12). Evicted by the police on February 1992, *Auro* was re-occupied after a little while by the same activists, who restarted cultural and artistic activities and counter-information ones.

As a matter of fact, differently from *Experia*, the main traits

maintained until 2008 by *Auro* were the preference for (counter)cultural and counter-information activities, and a reach of action extended to the whole town, especially to young circles. In addition to countless weekly concerts, there were many groups enacting experimental workshops, including one for the experimentation of new computer technologies of communication, the *FreakNet MediaLab*. Moreover, political activities were carried out during the 1990s through the organization of assemblies and debates about various issues: against wars, solidarity with Palestinian people, about immigration, precarious work, drug addictions and for the liberalization of the marijuana.

In 1998, as a consequence of a threat of eviction and a following negotiation with the centre-left communal administration, the building was officially assigned at no cost to the occupants by the municipality (*use commodatum*), although the squatters did not sign the agreement because, according to an activist, ‘that entailed restrictions that would have allowed them to kick us out any moment’ (I2). The “legalization” of *Auro* and its transition from an “Occupied and Self-Managed Social Centre” (CSOA) to the following denomination “Self-Managed Social Centre” (CSA) happened subsequently to an internal debate between supporters and opponents that, as an activist reminded, has reappeared at times also during the later period: ‘When in 1998 there was the concession by the municipality, there was also a division within the social centre, because a group didn’t agree. This problem is always open and we still discuss it now: there is an internal group hostile with respect to institutions and someone else who, on the contrary, tries to safeguard the place and to maintain this close relation (to the municipality)’ (I4).

In 2001, the *Auro* activists participated in the mobilizations against G8 in Genoa, and to the brief life of the Catania Social Forum, but only as individuals, because the main feature of *Auro* was the lack of a political-ideological identity shared by all members, in the words of one activist: ‘differently from other SCs, *Auro* lacks of a political collective. *Auro* has a management assembly that doesn’t coincide with a political collective, and this is a paradox, because you can share a space with many people politically similar with a common identity – anti-fascism, anti-liberism, no war, and so on – but the problem is that you can’t act together with them, there isn’t a unified political message’ (I4). It did not mean that *Auro* was lacking of a collective identity, as it was perceived by their members, but that it was an inclusive identity which encompassed different political-ideological leanings, even if they were

not shared by all activists.

In fact, the lack of a shared ideological orientation was the reason why *Auro* was not affiliated to any SC network or national political area; this condition was perceived by an interviewee as a problem, but it is also claimed proudly as a positive specificity of *Auro* identity: “We don’t have a national area as a reference, simply because every activist has his own area. The problem is that there isn’t a common identity, although it’s not a real problem, except in the perception of the outsiders, but in my opinion it’s not a defect but a different way of being’ (I4).

In 2007-2008, the *Auro* mobilized as part of two political campaigns, together with other local groups: an anti-fascist campaign, and against the sale of the municipal real estate heritage through a company constituted by the Commune with the intent to restore budget debts; a campaign strongly felt by *Auro*, because the project of sale included also the building where the SC is situated, and thus entailing threat of eviction. In the following years the people who self-managed *Auro* changed with the entry of an anarchist group.

#### *a. Organizational structure and internal decision-making*

The organizational structure of *Auro* was horizontal, non-hierarchical but fragmented, because it was formed by “the management assembly” and various internal groups that autonomously managed their own spaces within the social centre, being obliged to respect just the general rules of the centre.

It was described by an activist as a “container”: ‘*Auro* can be viewed as a container, within which there is the management assembly that decides the rules and main management activities (cleaning, shopping for the bar, and so on). Other internal spaces are subdivided and organized autonomously. Every group working within *Auro* has an unquestioning autonomy in its choices, except that the obligation to respect the general rules of the centre; therefore, there is a minimal coordination within the structure but no political interference in the choices of the groups. Anyway there are also things made by all the groups together to support *Auro* as a whole’ (I2). The idea of a “container” was confirmed by another activist, who defined this kind of structure as a set of “microcosms”, stressing the strong internal fragmentation, the lack of cohesion, the difficulty to reach unitary positions, but also claiming the autonomy of the groups: ‘*Auro* is a container, a set of microcosms, also because every individual is a microcosm. Currently, *Auro* lacks of cohesion and people working within it are in very small

groups. Everyone is autonomous and this is a specificity of this place. Several groups participate to the management assembly that doesn't make 'iron rules', so that those who transgress them are not deviants to be punished; of course, there are a few cohabitation rules assuring a pacific management of the place' (I4). Also what was perceived as a problem (lack of internal cohesion) was also claimed as a peculiarity of *Auro* collective identity (autonomy of individuals and groups in managing internal spaces).

The management assembly of *Auro* was an open and weekly meeting that was held on Monday evenings. Issues regarding the centre as a whole were discussed and decisions were taken. As an interviewee explained: 'The decision-making setting is the management assembly: anyone, also an outsider, can make a proposal, and every suggestion will be discussed in its internal articulation, or collectively elaborated; if it is just an idea, we try to decline all its points and convert it in action' (I4).

The decisional method adopted by *Auro* during the meetings should be the consensual one, as the interviewed senior militant stated: 'there is always the search for consensus ... there are never votes' (I2). Nevertheless, the youngest activist described a different process in which the adopted method oscillated between the consensual one preferred by activists, although considered scarcely realistic, and the majoritarian one, used to solve internal divergences and conflicts, when unanimity was not reached: 'Our method is a good mediation between the two methods (consensual and majoritarian), because we are aware that unanimity is difficult to reach. Not always everyone agrees, thus there is a majority. We think it is difficult finding an unitary position about a specific question, and if an issue splits the assembly, we have a problem; in fact, divergences and internal conflicts usually can be solved, so that we firstly try to search as much as possible for consensus, especially through mediation, but if it isn't possible, we take a decision by majority rule' (I4). In this case, activists adopted the majoritarian method to avoid the "decisional stalemate" by voting, even if it occurred rarely: 'if an agreement is impossible to reach, there will be a decision taken by majority, because we can't stop or fossilize, we have to do something and a decision must be taken; the voting, eventually, is for show of hands, but rarely we come to this kind of situation' (I4). Therefore, a "culture of decision in any case" emerged, that is the willingness to make activities, even if not always shared by everyone, as another trait of collective identity.

The preference transformation usually occurred when unanimous

Dimensions	EXPERIA	AURO
Activities/Aims	Political and social	Cultural and political
National area	Revolutionary Communist	Non-affiliated
Ideology	Radical Marxist	Heterogeneous
Collective identity	Exclusive	Inclusive
Denomination	CPO	CSA
Legal position	Illegally occupied	Officially assigned
Attitudes towards Institutions	Closed, refusal	Openness, negotiation
Organizational structure	Cohesive	Fragmented

**Table 2:** Main dimensions of the social centres in Catania

decisions were taken and rational argumentation was used during debates. This transformation was facilitated, in the opinion of the interviewees, thanks to the low ideological rigidity and pragmatism of *Auro* activists. In fact, differently from *Experia*, the decisions which were taken were not rigidly binding for all members, because people disagreeing with a decision were not obliged to implement it, as a consequence of the internal autonomy. Therefore, preference transformation did not always occur, because when initial different positions expressed by participants remained far from each other during the process, the preferences were aggregated by voting and a decision was made by majority rule.

#### 4. COMPARATIVE CONCLUDING REMARKS

IN CONCLUSION, I make some considerations regarding the findings and the hypothesis formulated in the introduction from a comparative perspective. As mentioned in the introduction, the two social centres studied in Catania were very different according to their main dimensions (Table 2).

Regarding their organizational structures, they could seem similar, both horizontal, non-hierarchical, based on the refusal of delegation upwards and on the primary role of the management assembly; but actually they differed significantly because the structure of *Experia* was more cohesive and homogeneous, whereas *Auro* was fragmented in several groups which autonomously managed their own internal spaces. In connection with this last aspect, the two social centres investigated significantly differed with regards to the internal decision-making processes. In fact, the process of *Experia* was closer to the Consensual Model, while that of *Auro* to the Consensual-Majoritarian



one. Although activists from both social centres adopted the consensual method to solve internal divergences and to take unanimous decisions, transforming their preferences during the debates, they considerably diverged when unanimity was not achieved; while *Experia* occupants never aggregated their preferences (never voted nor negotiated), no decision was taken and issues under discussion were momentarily suspended to be addressed. The *Auro* activists aggregated their preferences by voting (majority rule) in order to take a decision in any case (not always implemented by minorities). Therefore, the *Experia* internal decision-making was always Consensual, while that of *Auro* was only 'mainly' but not exclusively Consensual, because it became Majoritarian when their activists were not able to take an unanimous decision.

On the basis of these findings, my initial hypothesis appears only partially confirmed, because the research has provided unexpected outcomes. In fact, while the results regarding the *Experia* decision processes confirm the hypothesis that they are characterized by the Consensual Model, the findings concerning *Auro* decision-making are different from those hypothesized in the introduction; it can be defined according to the intermediate model, surprising for the use of the majoritarian method and the aggregation of preferences.

The unexpected findings can be explained through the procedure of re-identification (ends) and/or cultural re-collocation (beliefs and information), according to Pizzorno (2007a). The Italian sociologist, criticizing the rational choice theory (see Pizzorno 1986; 2007b), states that when an unexpected action happens (because the hypothesis foresaw, given certain circumstances, another type of action), it does not mean that it was irrational or not understandable, but that we have to find another kind of rationality to explain it, re-identifying the ends (re-identification) and/or beliefs and information (re-collocation) as different from those we initially supposed (Pizzorno 2007a: 70). In fact, an action can be explained when it is carried out for certain reasons, that is when the means adopted, on the basis of beliefs and information owned by the actor, are effective and coherent to pursue certain ends; when the means adopted appear incoherent or ineffective, it means that the ends and/or the beliefs/information are actually different from those previously supposed as real; thus we have to change the ends and/or the beliefs (identifying the real ones) to reconstruct the meaning of the action, thus re-establishing its rational coherence (*ibidem*. pp. 64-65).

Considering my research, I started from the hypothesis that all SCs

exclusively adopted the consensus method in order to always take unanimous decisions, and that this was based on shared beliefs in the refusal of delegation and hierarchy in favour of self-management. But, as shown with the decision-making of the *Auro* the consensus method was not exclusively adopted: it became majoritarian when unanimity was not reached. This requires I have to changing its ends (re-identification) and/or beliefs (re-collocation). The ends of the *Auro* decision-making process was its effectiveness, that is a choice had to be made in any case, because its beliefs stressed more the preference for the “decision in any case” and internal autonomy, rather than for collective choices and the social centre cohesion (preferences shared by *Experia* activists).

Thus I have re-established the internal coherence of decision processes according to scheme “ends-beliefs-means”; that is, the two social centres adopted different means, because their ends and beliefs were different, although not completely; in other words they did not share one and the same collective identity, conceived in this scheme as ‘a set of beliefs and preferences of the actor at the moment of the choice’ (*ibidem*: 67). The *Experia* (exclusive) identity and the *Auro* (inclusive) identity were both based on the refusal of delegation (autonomy) and hierarchy, but the former was also based on a radical version of Marxist ideology which stressed the values of ‘collectivity’ (community), internal cohesion and social aggregation; the latter, on the contrary, underlined more the preferences for the “decision in any case”, pragmatism, and for the self-management of their spaces (internal autonomy).

Nevertheless, if the (immediate) ends of decision-making are obviously those of taking decisions (shared or not), these choices are in their turn means to pursue other ends; thus we have to find the (long-term) ends followed by decision processes, answering the question: Why SCs activists take collective decisions? They make choices because they want to establish rules, to take positions on certain issues but, above all, to make radical political collective actions which they call “antagonist”, and social and countercultural activities, defined as “self-managed”; thus we have to find what kinds of collective action/activities are chosen as the outcome of decision-making (manifest ends). The *Experia* militants preferred social aggregation activities and radical political actions, while the *Auro* activists were more oriented towards countercultural and self-managed activities.

But there is another end pursued by participating in decision making processes, although not explicitly manifest (latent), that is the

maintenance and strengthening of collective identity, which depends on the coherence of choices made during the time (Pizzorno 2007a: 27); therefore, activists have to make coherent decisions, not only regarding the content (ends) but also the way in which they are taken (means), in order to maintain their identity. If identity is different, then the ends and means will also be different, of course. Nevertheless, if we conceive collective identity not only as a specific set of beliefs and preferences which are shared by a group, but also as processes by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by others – as a part of this group (della Porta and Diani 2006: 91; Pizzorno 2007a: 23),\* coherence of choices made will ensure recognition to identity.

Therefore, for the *Experia* militants it was coherent adopting the Consensual model in order to make radical political actions and social aggregation activities, because they recognized themselves and were recognized by others as a social aggregation place and as a radical cohesive and unitary actor, in this way maintaining and strengthening their identity. In fact, majority decision would have been too dangerous for the identity and cohesion of the group, because it could have entailed internal rifts between majority and minority too deep to be worked through. On the contrary, the *Auro* activists made coherent choices adopting the intermediate model in order to make countercultural and self-managed activities, because they recognized themselves and were recognized by others as an “open and neutral place”, where people could autonomously manage internal spaces, thus maintaining and strengthening their identity. The eventual formation of majorities and minorities in the internal decision-making, differently from *Experia*, did not jeopardise the low cohesion of the group nor their identity, because in their conception it was more important to be free to manage autonomously the internal spaces, than the feeling of belonging to a broader community (the social centre as a whole).

This connection between different models of decision-making processes and identities, varying from one SC to another, recalls the concept of “group style” elaborated by Paul Lichterman, that is “a recurrent pattern of interaction that arises from a group’s taken-for-granted understandings about how to be a good member in a group setting.

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\* Other social actors are those that Pizzorno calls “Circles of Recognition”, which ‘are formed by people we know who are able to judge, directly or indirectly, the choices of the actor, even if he does not have any intention to belong to their group’ (2007a: 146).

Group style is how people coordinate themselves as a group; there are different ways to be together as a group, and thus different group styles” (2006: 539). In fact, decisional processes can be included in “recurrent patterns of interaction”, depending on collective identities, which in turn comprise “group’s taken-for-granted understandings”; so they vary according to different group styles, but always maintaining group bonds (internal cohesion) and drawing group boundaries (*ibidem*: 540).

Lastly, I am surely aware that these results are valid only for the empirical cases investigated, and they cannot abruptly be generalized to other social centres, although “comparative analysis can contribute to obtain valid inferential conclusions” (Isernia 2001: 149). At any rate, the models of internal decision-making proposed could be a useful analytical tool for future research, extending it to other empirical cases in other urban areas.

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# THE SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT IN SPAIN: A LOCAL AND GLOBAL CYCLE OF URBAN PROTESTS\*

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“A rhizome establishes endless connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles.”

(Deleuze & Guattari 1977)

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT IN SPANISH CITIES IN the 1980s coincided with the first important crisis of the neighbourhoods' movement. The latter, a protagonist movement for a great part of the transition period between 1975 and 1982, has been studied by several scholars (Castells 1983; Villasante 1984) who have emphasized its combination of demands for collective facilities and democratic reform. In reality, although the practice of squatting was very common in earlier urban movements, these were composed of different generations (age cohorts) of activists (Villasante 1984; 2004). Squatting activists

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were mainly young people who started to adopt lifestyles and ideas that had spread through other European countries in previous decades and which they tried to imitate, albeit in a slightly diffused manner. Although clear lines of continuity may be identified between the events of May 1968 and the new 'alternative' social movements on which they had a substantial impact, this was not a somewhat delayed revival of the communitarian and libertarian spirit of that era (Bailey 1973; Fernandez Duran 1993).

The practice of squatting in abandoned buildings was initially a way of finding spaces to strengthen the most radical aspects of the new social movements (NSMs) (conventionally reduced to environmentalism, pacifism and feminism), but also of other more fringe and alternative movements (students' and workers' autonomy, counter-information, anti-fascism, solidarity with prisoners, and international solidarity). It immediately spread as a movement with the characteristic features of an urban movement, an alternative political scene and counter-cultural practices that distinguished it from other social movements.

As we shall see later, only sensationalist reports in the media seemed to acknowledge the movement's existence in the mid 1990s. Social scientists have paid scant attention during the years of its long journey, a journey that began more than two decades ago. It is clear that this social movement has not mobilized large numbers of the population, as either activists or sympathizers.\* However, it cannot be excluded so easily from the political and social analysis of our urban environments. Its relevance and significance lie in both the actual characteristics of the movement and its relationships with other movements and with the key problems of the social context in which it operates.

This article will affirm that the squatters' movement is an excellent example of an urban movement with a 'radical left' approach and, simultaneously, one of the areas to have undergone the strongest political and social 'counter-cultural' innovation, largely as a prelude to what has since developed into the alter-globalization movement.

Of all the alternative movements to have appeared during the last two decades in Spain, the anti-militarist movement and, in particular, the *insumision* campaign (refusal to serve compulsory military service) have been those that have achieved the highest level of political

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\* Something that is nevertheless always difficult to quantify accurately because it alludes to activists, collaborators, demonstrators, participants in activities and so on.

confrontation and success in terms of their objectives (Aguirre 1998). This movement managed to enter public debates, draw attention to protests and channel the broader anti-militarist sympathy of society in its favour, and all this with relatively few activist and organizational resources. Its small membership and politically radical nature (rejecting alternative national service and calling for the full dismantling of armies), dealing with issues fundamentally affecting young people in the process of finding employment and becoming independent from their families, became an extraordinary paradigm for those who were new to squatting. The seminal work of Manuel Castells (1983) on the issue of urban movements pointed to an interesting approach to their structural dimensions (economic, political and cultural) and effects. Later criticisms of his model (Pickvance 1985; 1986; Fainstein & Hirst 1995; Marcuse 2002; Martínez 2003) stressed the need to focus on other social and political dimensions of their context, and on organizational resources, given the difficulties of understanding urban movements such as that of the squatters (Lowe 1986; Pruijt 2003).

Therefore, it is appropriate to explain the genesis and development of these types of movements and to identify their peculiarities and impacts by complementing the traditional approaches of social sciences with others that emphasize the movements' complexity: their networks of transversal relationships with other movements and with different social contexts, their own reflexivity, their capacities for creativity and for providing public goods (Martínez 2002a).

From this perspective, the squatters' movement will be presented as a 'rhizomatic' movement, with multiple connections between the 'nodal points' of networks, composed of these people, ideas, events or spaces, characterized by non-linear evolution based on ruptures, reconstitutions and alliances, with the opening up of new possibilities for expression, entry and metamorphosis (Deleuze & Guattari 1977). Or as an 'immediatist' movement: criticizing the immediate sources and impacts of power whilst rejecting utopias and ideologies that project liberation from the existing forms of domination onto a distant future (Foucault 1982). Or as a movement generating revolutionary situations and temporarily autonomous zones, creating workers' committees that release the working class from their alienation, experimenting with urban design to promote community meetings (Debord 1995/1976), protesting against capitalist domination through insurrections of 'poetic terrorism', using music and ridicule, guaranteeing the invisibility and invulnerability of protesters (Bey 1996/1985).

These theoretical approaches draw attention to aspects of the squatters' movement which are initially indiscernible and normally relegated and undervalued in more conventional press and academic articles. They also overcome analytical simplifications that focus almost exclusively on: (a) the criminal nature of the movement's main activity (squatting as a violation of private property); (b) the subcultural and fringe nature of squatting activists (squatting and squatters as an 'urban tribe' with their specific dress code, discourse and original customs) (Feixa 1999); (c) the juvenile nature of this social movement (squatting as a passing and transitory collective action, limited to satisfying temporary needs for accommodation—or temporary concerns—of young people during their period of emancipation from their families).

Based on findings reported in earlier research (Martinez 2002b; Pruijt 2003; 2004; Adell & Martínez 2004), this study follows an analysis of the squatters' movement which, firstly, identifies the persistent and consistent aspects of this set of urban practices which intervene in local and global policies. In that sense, this article embarks on a presentation of the historical evolution of the squatters' movement which is structured along the basis of certain dimensions (such as claims over the housing question and an explicit conflict with local authorities) that have conferred its social relevance and its relationships with other social movements and organizations.

Secondly, the analysis proceeds towards an explanation of some of the contributions made by the squatters' movement, such as its radicalism and political creativity both within the movement itself and in relation to the urban, political and social contexts with which it has interacted.

In its aim of achieving both objectives, this article focuses on the alter-globalization movement as the main benchmark of validation. To this end, it asks the following questions: to what extent did the squatter movement precede the alter-globalization movement, and to what extent have its local characteristics been incorporated into that movement? The final section presents evidence on these questions and provides some answers.

Most of the findings presented here stem from a long period of participant observation within many (*Centros Sociales Okupados y Autogestionados*/Squatted and Self-Managed Social Centres) CSOAs and squatted houses in medium and large cities all over Spain. I studied squats during the period 1997-2004, though I have subsequently continued to collect documents and visit CSOAs. Sometimes my

participation took the form of giving talks or organizing workshops, but more frequently I simply attended concerts, exhibitions, talks, music festivals, meetings and demonstrations and visited people I knew. My notes varied in length, as they were dependent on the length of my stay in each city and the type of involvement and fieldwork I undertook. Therefore, I made extensive use of information produced by the movement itself through its various pamphlets, underground magazines, self-recorded video tapes, internet websites and mainstream media. I conducted more than thirty in-depth interviews with activists in different cities (mainly between 1998 and 2003, with squatters living or working in CSOAs in Madrid, Barcelona, Vigo, Bilbao, Valencia, Seville and Saragossa). Empirical data provided in other works (also based on personal interviews and some focus groups) have been also used (see Ehrenhaus & Perez 1999; Martinez 2002b; Batista 2002; Adell & Martinez 2004; Llobet 2005). Historical examination, comparison with the experience of squatting in other European countries, contextualization of Spanish social processes and urban politics, and critical analysis of qualitative and quantitative data (basically provided by news in publications like *IPA-Molotov*, *La Campana*, CNT Newspaper, *Contra Infos*, etc.) were the guidelines of the methodological strategy adopted. Due to space limitations, the inclusion of specific interview extracts has been avoided. Instead, a general assessment of the evolution of this local and global urban movement has been favoured.

### **MISSING POINTS IN THE HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MOVEMENT**

As is the case with many social phenomena, it is not very enlightening to give an account of the history of the squatters' movement by simply grouping together facts in successive phases. That approach has virtues in terms of charting events with respect to specific dates and building an overall historical perspective but is insufficient in terms of explanatory quality. For that reason, here, influenced by Foucault and Guattari, there is a combination of that approach with an identification of relevant 'catalysts', 'triggers' and attempts at 'restructuring' in the development of the movement. Before considering these elements, it should be remembered that the consideration of a set of practices as a 'social movement' is the result of a slightly artificial external operation. This is particularly true in the case of squatting, not just because its practitioners often refuse to see themselves as members of a supposed

squatters' movement but also because the experiences of each squatted building, district or city where successive squats have appeared include uniquely local characteristics that force us to undertake a very accurate and delicate appreciation of their common features.

According to the aforementioned three concepts, the approach promoted here may be summarized in the following way.

### *Catalysts*

The young people behind the emergence and development of squatting in different cities during the 1980s and 1990s shared a common experience of unemployment, job insecurity, difficulties in access to accommodation, and the development of cultural outlets independent of state institutions or other formal organizations. Certain circumstances and social phenomena operated as 'catalysts' for the consolidation of the movement, such as the relative lack of a precise legal and political framework for the definition of squats, and the extraordinary survival capacity of certain squats which served as a benchmark for others in the same city and elsewhere.

### *Triggers*

The squatters' movement endured strong judicial and political repression following the introduction of the Penal Code of 1995. Although the Penal Code established stronger penalties and laid down the framework for a more severe persecution of squatting, in the years immediately after its introduction the number of squats, and naturally, evictions increased. That led to a stronger presence of squatting as an issue in the mainstream media. The movement diversified and multiplied as it suffered unprecedented criminalization and stigmatization. As tensions with local authorities increased, the consolidation of certain internal tendencies within the movement, such as a rejection of what was seen to be its institutionalization, the possible legalization of squats, and a preference for urban districts targeted by planning authorities for restructuring and development, became apparent.

## **CONTINUITIES AND RESTRUCTURING**

THE SQUATTING OF buildings for housing purposes has always been a feature of the movement. However, the strength and public significance of the movement have been achieved through the use of squatted buildings as CSOAs. In them, the functions of residential buildings have

been integrated, subordinated or eliminated in favour of a broad range of counter-cultural, political and productive activities open to other social movements and sectors of the population beyond the 'alternative scene'. As the development of the movement was marked by a diversification of the social networks involved and greater experience of the participants and activists, the squatters' movement began to establish new alliances and embrace non-squatted social centres and social organizations from a broad spectrum of the alter-globalization movement or from the districts and cities where squats had appeared.

The article now moves to a diachronic evaluation which is accompanied by a guiding chronology.

### **FIRST PHASE (1980-95)**

THIS PERIOD CAN be traced back to the very first squats that appeared in residential buildings and were publicly claimed as part of protest activities by the young people involved\* until the introduction of the so-called 'Penal Code of Democracy' which criminalized squatting in abandoned buildings and refusal to undertake military service, in a clear political U-turn designed specifically to persecute these two alternative social movements.

Multiple squatting in residential buildings began to spread in the main Spanish cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Bilbao and Valencia) and slowly a different type of squats, which were also used for other activities (concerts, discussions and debates, meetings of specific groups) open to non-residents of the buildings in question, began to make their appearance. Although there had already been some similar 'squatting' experiences with an exclusively 'social centre' role during the transition period, the squatters' movement started with young people who lived in squatted houses and who became increasingly committed to the dynamism of the CSOAs. This mutual relationship produced a tension that was often resolved by a drastic separation of squatted buildings used for housing purposes and others used as social centres. In fact, it was the CSOAs that gradually attracted more young people to the squatters' movement (and other social movements that used squats to meet, raise funds and

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\* That sets them apart from other types of squatting in dwellings by individuals or families who preferred not to attract attention but rather to satisfy their housing needs without making any broader social claims or criticisms through that act.

promote themselves) and made sure that new activists were recruited to the movement in order to guarantee the survival of the squats, providing support during evictions and then squatting in the buildings themselves.

Due to the high intensity of militancy in all facets of daily life and the insecure nature of living conditions and survival within the CSOAs, and even the elevated rhythm of organizing and performing all types of counter-cultural activities, activists were constantly leaving (but replaced by others). However, the personal satisfaction offered by the experience of immediate emancipation in terms of accommodation, social relations and political activity, coupled with the stimulus of emblematic squats that had already been around for more than 3-5 years (some are now more than 15 years old), were some of the main attractions for the squatter activists who were multiplying in many Spanish cities.

Attention must also be drawn to another relevant element operating as a catalyst, i.e. that is that the number of squats (more than 80) was at least double the number of evictions (around 40) and that these took place at a small personal cost, and relatively little repression, though in many cases they took place without any legal guarantees. Eviction processes during that period were slow and allowed squatters to find alternative squats with relative ease. The authorities were only able to penalize squats with fines and, at most, force eviction but many squatters were arrested because they refused to do their national service rather than because of their participation in squatting. The mass media gradually and in a rather ambivalent fashion began to present a highly stigmatized image of squatters, without, however, ever treating them as either a social movement or a threat to social order.

## **SECOND PHASE (1996-2000)**

THE ACCUMULATION OF strengths, experience and generational renewal within the movement led to the establishment of CSOAs as the main structural elements of all squats, counter-cultural activities and related social movements. With the enactment of the Penal Code, some CSOAs openly challenged the new legal and political framework, increasing their public presence, protest repertoire and alliances. Passive and active resistance to evictions also increased, with more street confrontations with the police. The 'Battle of the Princesa Cinema' in Barcelona,\* the

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\* Cine Princesa was located at the core of Barcelona's CBD (central business district). Its squatting took place in 1995 as a symbolic protest action

death of a squatter during eviction from a theatre in Valencia and the successive evictions and re-squatting of the 'Gaztetxe' in Pamplona\* drew the attention of the mass media and authorities to the movement, prompting a quantitative leap in terms of its public visibility.

Housing was still a structural problem in Spanish society. There were also other serious crises in the late 1990s (inflation, downturn in the construction of social housing, among others), with a worsening of the prospects for young people. However, the squatters' movement embraced these issues within a broader lifestyle perspective in which all productive, reproductive and civic aspects are questioned. During that period, residential buildings and CSOAs continued to be squatted, but the new legal panorama led to numerous evictions and much harder repression with documented cases of abuse, illegal eviction, prison sentences and personal persecution. What is surprising is that the cycle of squats, evictions and new squats did not cease with stronger repression. As a result, there were more than 130 registered squats compared with 100 evictions in this five-year period.

The CSOAs organized a wide variety of activities\*\* and their political and counter-cultural specialization separated them even more from squatting in residential buildings for housing purposes, though not necessarily from people who lived in squats, as sometimes the two worlds continued to mix. Due to increasing levels of repression suffered by the movement, coordination meetings between the different squats were considered more important than ever in many cities but they rarely achieved continuity over time. Nevertheless, during this period, political contacts between squats in different cities increased

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against the new Penal Code, but, rather unexpectedly, it lasted for seven months. After the evictions, a number of large demonstrations took place in Barcelona and in other cities as an expression of solidarity. Confrontation and clashes with the police, during these demonstrations, led to a large number, 42, of arrests, more demonstrations and attempts to squat this building again. This was the first time the squatter's movement gained such widespread attention from the mainstream media (see Martinez 2002a).

\* Gaztetxes are CSOAs in the Basque Country with an explicit global anti-capitalist orientation albeit some of them complement this with a fight against the Spanish state (see Gonzalez et al. 2002, pp. 188-89)

\*\* Such as artistic and counter-information activities, training workshops, employment cooperatives, and organizational platforms for broader campaigns and certain political parties.



through participation in joint demonstrations and the creation of the first online communication lists.

Finally, the most significant trends during this period were the evident restructuring of the movement with an increase in rural squats with many links with urban squats and, in particular, a convergence of the squatter movement with alter-globalization protests in which squatters had participated in previous years. Despite the fact that these protest events were not particularly well attended, they included more artistic protest activities and more resources (lorries, music, etc.) and were much better prepared given the ever present potential for violent repression by the police (Adell 2004). However, the dramatic increase in the number of attacks on public amenities or companies during some of these demonstrations, together with the strategy of some political authorities to associate the movement with armed groups, such as *Euskadi ta Aslatasuna* (ETA), prompted the mass media to transmit a more negative image of squatters and promoted an increase in their criminalization and persecution (Gonzalez et al. 2002; Alcalde 2004; Asens 2004). All this partially undermined the movement's social legitimacy. However, its long history had already become well known among young people and especially among social movements from which squatters obtained new support, regardless of any negative media stigma attached (Alcalde 2004; Asens 2004).

### **THIRD PHASE (2001–2006)**

RECENT YEARS HAVE been dominated by a crisis in the squatters' movement in both Spain and other European countries (Pruijt 2004; Herreros 2004). Nevertheless, we cannot easily proclaim its demise because new squatting and networking initiatives continue and the movement's philosophy has come a long way. What is true is that squats have disappeared in some cities whereas in others there has been no squatting for several years. Evictions have been more conclusive, with fewer opportunities for re-squatting or the stability of collectives with evicted CSOAs. A high density of squats and evictions similar to those in previous years has only been maintained in the metropolitan area of Barcelona and in various cities and towns of the Basque Country.

Another aspect worth highlighting is that prison sentences have only been applied in rare occasions and since the previous period the courts have often been more lenient (or, at least, divided) with respect to the application of the law. In this sense, eviction proceedings have

been more repressive and have been concluded more quickly but on the other hand, rulings and sentences have often been delayed for years, once again favouring attempts to take as much advantage as possible of squatting without any great fear of immediate penal repercussions. During this period new and sporadic negotiations were also held with the owners of squatted buildings or with authorities, but practically no rulings in favour of squatters have taken place\* (Gonzalez 2004). In addition, no formal organizations were created for channelling the claims of squatters through institutional channels, since in Spain housing has not been a highly specialized area of voluntary social work, in contrast to the situation in The Netherlands or the United States (Corr 1999; Pruijt 2003). In fact, demonstrations, joined by the squatters' movement, against urban speculation and housing shortages have only recently, since 2006, become widespread.

The two main aspects of restructuring in this phase were: (1) the appearance of new self-managed but non-squatted social centres (either rented or purchased) that prolonged the activities performed in the CSOAs or which continued to be linked to them in a new, more varied and open network of activism (Herreros 2004; Martinez 2004); and (2) the convergence with part of the alter-globalization movement which strengthened international links by participating in key European demonstrations (Prague, Genoa, Gothenburg, Athens) together with many other organizations and collaborating in demonstrations organized in Spain (Barcelona in 2001, Seville and Madrid in 2002, the anti-war demonstrations of 2003).

### **MORE THAN JUST AN URBAN MOVEMENT: OSCILLATIONS BETWEEN THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL**

FROM THE ANALYTICAL perspective adopted here, it was demonstrated that it is rather inappropriate to see the squatters' movement as simply a youth movement or as isolated illegal actions to satisfy housing needs. In contrast, there are sufficient indicators to confirm that this is an urban movement (Pickvance 2003; Mayer 2003) that is durable in time and has given rise to a first-order political conflict with the

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\* There are records of three such cases but, even then, the many particularities of these cases prevent them being classified as successful cases of 'institutionalization'.

dominant political and economic system: in particular, squats are publicized, communicated and justified through the use of both alternative and mainstream media sources. Squatters therefore try to participate in the political arena and social life beside the fact that they occupy empty buildings. This is also evident when the provision of housing by squats is often combined through the openness of the CSOAs to other activists, sympathisers and audiences, with the organization of various cultural activities and protest events over different issues. Following to Castells's insights on urban movements (Castells 1983), we verify that social reproduction, local power and cultural identity were crucial dimensions of squatting.

The consistency of the movement over time stems, above all, from its internal networks of social relationships that are formed between the different squats and with other social organizations and guarantee the continuity of both projects and activist involvement independently of each specific squat. However, it would be a gross mistake to solely classify this urban movement as a movement of the young, since getting a place to live and expressing yourself is not only a definitive means of emancipating yourself from your family but also an aspiration of any adult person. Although most activists are young and have relatively unstable lives, when they squat they normally start to live away from their families of origin and work in temporary jobs or in the black market economy, while simultaneously embarking upon an intense process of political socialization whereby they learn to exercise their civil rights, collective organisation and self-expression when it comes to defending squats and participating in different social struggles.

However, it is true that these common features have been questioned by some within the movement, who argue that squatting is only a means for achieving other ends. As we shall show later, these types of declarations only represent symptoms of the alter-globalization enthusiasm that has always fuelled squatting, despite the fact that its most immediate actions have been restricted to local spaces in the districts or cities where the squats are located. In fact, the existence of a national or Europe-wide movement has also been critiqued, by alluding to the fact that the specific development of squats in each city displays greater consistency. However, regardless of the interactions that have taken place with local governments, it is important to note that it has been this level of government that has repeatedly been the main actor with which all groups of squatting activists have had to test their political strategies, and this has also been independent of the question of

ownership of squatted properties because most were neither municipal nor public (owned by regional or central state authorities) (Martinez 2002b, p. 245).

The internal heterogeneity of the movement is generally the third argument for questioning its consistency as a social movement. At times of greatest friction, the press and certain political authorities have resorted to classifying squatters as either 'good' or 'bad', making a distinction between those willing to negotiate and violent radicals, between those who only claim residential buildings or social spaces and those who are more interested in public protest, agitation and civil mobilization. Academic publications tend to highlight the differences between leaders and passive followers, differences between groups with different ideologies (e.g. anarchists, communists and nationalists) or divisions according to social class, gender or family. Squatters themselves may agree with those and other classifications related, for example, to their personal experience of squatting or their participation in other social movements (Llobet 2005, pp. 309, 324).

However, it is not hard to identify a common magma of libertarian and autonomous principles in almost all the experiences, promoting an assembly-orientated self-organization independent of political parties, trade unions and more formalized organizations and, above all, drawing attention to the open dimensions of society and politics censored by the institutional and commercial media. Once again, none of these issues can be described as the passing concern of young people, even if this is the time in their lives when they grow into squatter activists.

Furthermore, some social aspects must be highlighted concerning the urban and political definition of this movement, such as the structure of socio-spatial opportunities that activists have systematically exploited in order to set up squats, such as the fact that squats have relied on the existence of large, unoccupied and abandoned or dilapidated estates in order to develop. Different squats have been able to concentrate in specific parts of cities and establish more or less intense relationships with one another during those long periods of urban speculation or town planning, right before these areas are transformed into new residential, commercial or business service areas (Martinez 2004). Of course, these types of urban transformations are not confined to Spanish cities. This is a much more global phenomenon. However, only some places have been used for collective actions such as squatting (particularly evident in Spain but also in Italy and, to a lesser extent, The Netherlands).

Lastly, the most controversial dimension of the movement is its counter-cultural element, which represents one of its strongest links with the global dimension of the movement. Does that mean that squatters do not have material needs? Could counter-culture be a refuge enabling its practitioners to avoid the important problems of society? Is it a post-modern movement that seeks maximum instantaneous pleasure through social diversity, partying and a nomadic lifestyle, all tinged with vague ideological anti-capitalist affirmations?

In some countries, like Germany, squatting has been seen as an example of a counter-cultural movement committed to building a collective identity in strong opposition to other actors but with certain ambivalence with respect to power and material living conditions (Rucht 1992; Koopmans 1995, pp. 17-37). One of the premises of this article is that this counter-cultural dimension is more easily understood by linking it to a constant collective creativity in all facets of daily life which are, in turn, developed as a reaction to perceived global constrictions (Llobet 2005, pp. 49, 95). This position can be summarized in the following premises.

(a) Active participation in the squatter movement creates a lifestyle that involves forms of expression, socializing, and social organization within a frame of relatively austere material survival. Therefore, the cultural nature of the movement consists of all these aggregated forms of the squatters' 'lifestyle'.

Even though this is very difficult to verify with precision, our sample of interviews suggests that around half of the squatters were university graduates. Nevertheless, these squatters did not use their qualifications for related employment. Temporary jobs, self-employment in cooperatives, the informal economy and mutual aid were the more typical way for squatters to earn a living, irrespective of class origin. For those with a middle-class background, their material conditions deteriorate when they adopt a squatting lifestyle, regardless of the fact that they occasionally make use of family resources (more often than squatters with a working-class background). Nonetheless, it is estimated that approximately a third of squatters are of working-class origin. Consequently, individual material necessities are largely resolved collectively or within the practices of the aforementioned squatters' lifestyle.

(b) If the social practices associated with squatting tend to be seen as 'counter-cultural', this is mainly because on a more conscious or ideological level squatters seek to oppose and overcome the dominant culture. 'Dominant culture' refers to forms of production, consumption, social relationships and political decision-making. These are processes

of searching without any specific end. At best they can be seen as experiments or laboratories but that does not imply wandering in a limbo of theories, discourses and debates. Instead, the opposite is true. The actual experience of civil disobedience exercised through the action of squatting enables other practices to take root and reveal the counter-cultural character of the movement.

Low-priced tickets to music concerts and other spectacles and the money collected from such events are used to finance squats or other similar causes. The free promotion of training workshops on the use of new technologies or craftwork, the opening of squats to promote books or political campaigns, and the setting up of libraries, work cooperatives or language schools for immigrants are just some of the facets that establish a high level of counter-cultural coherence between means and ends. It is true that such dynamics often distract activists from other political struggles (employment) and that the main social problem associated with squatting (urban speculation) is only combated through the action of squatting, which until recently lacked more far-reaching alliances and tactics. However, this should not prevent us from acknowledging the contributions of the squatting movement, the coherence of many of its practices and the establishment of free spaces for expression and criticism of the dominant culture.

## **THE BOOMERANG EFFECT OF ALTER-GLOBALIZATION STRUGGLES**

THE ALTER-GLOBALIZATION ENTHUSIASM that has fuelled the squatter movement right from its origins shares certain common features with the development of the European squatters' movement: the campaign against the Olympic Games, for example, successfully promoted by Dutch squats in 1986 (ADILKNO 1994, pp. 129- 147), and, more recently, the Social Forum of Genoa in 2000, where the 'Disobedient' and 'White Overalls' emerged from the Italian CSOAs to resist police attacks during protests against the G8 summit (Famiglietti 2004), are a direct manifestation of the fact that squatting has always been understood by its protagonists as something 'more than just living'. That something more turns the political protest into a 'politics of desire' (P&P: 'party and protest') and the search for a broader self-sufficiency (DIY: 'do it yourself').

Hence, it seems that from an ideological standpoint and bearing in mind the types of counter-cultural actions undertaken, the squatter's

movement has always had a global vocation that differentiates its activities from those squats whose sole purpose is to satisfy housing needs. Moreover, some would classify this movement in Spain as a 'precursor' or even 'instigator' of an entire cycle of protests, which influenced, through their example of radical democracy, an entire family of social movements converging in the alter-globalization movement (Herreros 2004). For others, the gradual adhesion of the squatter movement to the alter-globalization movement and the subsequent crisis of the former and the rising success of the latter reveal the successful culmination of one of the predominant discourses (among the most developed) in the squatting movement, namely the search for greater social autonomy and multiple alliances in movements that criticize the capitalist order (Calle 2004).

From sustained participant observation and according to documented records and interviews, I believe there is abundant evidence to justify that original global (or alter-global) orientation of the squatters' movement. First of all, information circulating in Spanish CSOAs has always included news about squats and libertarian protests in Europe and Latin America. This international involvement had a direct practical consequence in the action repertoire adopted by Spanish squatters, such as conferences and festivals\* in order to collect funds for specific causes, protest events in front of diplomatic buildings in Spain and the boycotting of products produced by globally targeted companies.

Global concerns and new styles of interactions between social movements, through the strong links that squatters kept with the campaign against obligatory national service throughout Spain and with the free local radio stations that also tend to act as platforms for counter-information on global issues, were also developed. Squatters themselves pioneered early alter-globalization protest campaigns: such as the '*Desenmascaremos el 92*' (Let's unmask 1992) against the commercial nature, urban speculation and social control involved in the international Megaevents celebrated in Barcelona (Olympic Games); the election of Madrid as the European Capital of Culture and the World Expo in Seville in 1992; and the '*50 años bastan*' (50 years is enough) campaign against the policies of the World Bank, which held its summit meeting in Madrid in 1994.

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\* These counter-cultural activities had a global flavour. Alternative music bands from other, mainly European, countries performed in Spanish CSOAs and Spanish bands went to squats abroad.

In the same year, 1994, Spanish CSOAs served as one of the main means for disseminating information on the uprising of the EZLN (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*/Zapatista Army for National Liberation) in Chiapas (Mexico), which coincided with the entry into force of the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). This activity took the form of solidarity and support groups in various CSOAs, trips by activist squatters to Chiapas as 'international observers' and involvement of various CSOAs (mainly from Catalonia, Madrid and Andalusia) in the organization and provision of infrastructures for the Second Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism that took place, in decentralized form, in various parts of Spain in 1998.

There has also been a gradual extension of relationships with European CSOAs (particularly Italian social centres), with visits and debates to organize discussions and protest actions at 'counter-summits' and demonstrations of the alter-globalization movement in Prague (2000), Genoa (2001), Barcelona (2001) and European Social Forum in Florence (2002). Another global turn can be observed in the use of the internet by Spanish squatters with specific mailing lists and their own webpages (although most were not maintained on a regular basis), but also promoting Indymedia nodes and, above all, organizing hack meetings for expanding free software and extensive electronic training within the squatters' movement, albeit on a very unequal basis, as highlighted by Sadaba and Roig (2004), and Ramos and Martinez (2004).

Since the last years of the 1990s, squatters have been active in other types of events with both a local and global dimension, such as those involving lock-ins and demonstrations by undocumented immigrants, which have proven to be particularly conflictive and publicly relevant in Madrid (2000-1) and Barcelona (2004-5).

Finally, all of this background experience merged together with the alter-globalization movement and squatters participated in mobilizations making an international impact such as: the public referendum, held parallel with the national elections, promoted by RECADE (*Red Ciudadana para por la Abolicion de la Deuda Externa*/Civil Network for the Abolition of External Debt) (2000) involving CSOAs from Catalonia, the Basque Country and Madrid; protesting against EU meetings during Spain's presidency (2002) involving CSOAs from different Spanish cities (e.g. Santiago de Compostela and Seville) and against the Iraq War (2003); and campaigns against hypocrisy, waste and urban speculation coinciding with the 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures in Barcelona (Unio Temporal d'Escribes [UTE] 2004).



As mentioned by Herreros (2004), in many of these actions, the squatters' movement has been associated with other groups and social movements (and sometimes even with political parties and traditional trade unions), always promoting its model of open, horizontal and assembly-orientated political participation. However, it has also suffered, to a certain degree, isolation and self-inflicted marginalization in some cases\* in order to preserve the whole content of its radical discourse in a coherent manner. This is a crucial question in any process of convergence and coordination of different ideological principles and origins, one that also affects the entire process of federating in cases quite similar entities. What are the minimum points on which those alliances are founded? To what extent can they move forward together? Who influences who? Are the minority groups doomed to disappear despite initially being the most influential?

As is acknowledged by some authors (see Klein 2002; Notes From Nowhere 2003; Santos 2005), the alter-globalization movement has not just embraced a broad mixture in its composition but has also revived forms of political organization of a more libertarian nature, promoting models of direct democracy, seeking the maximum participation of all its members, prioritizing the assembly-orientated debate and consensus above the delegation of power and representation by leaders, in practice rejecting authoritarianism of any ideological form and promoting direct action and civil disobedience as legitimate forms of civil expression.

In Spain, parallel to the decline of neighbourhood associations following the first municipal elections after the end of the dictatorship in 1979 (Castells 1983; Villasante 1984), the same approach was adopted by anarchist trade union organizations which also tried, albeit relatively unsuccessfully, to revive the libertarian ideals of the transition and post-transition period. However, it was alternative movements, such as the squatting, anti-militarist, feminist and counter-information movements (later, also joined by some factions of the environmentalist movement), which most openly continued that tradition by forming a type of neo-anarchism committed more to specific practices than to strategic reflections on the transmission of their ideological axioms to the rest of society, bringing forth a new cycle of protests that culminated in the above-mentioned alter-globalization alliances.

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\* By creating, for example, an alternative counter-platform to the already fairly alternative and critical 'plural platform' of Barcelona 2001.

Of all these movements, the squatters' movement was most successful in combining that ideological approach with a global perspective and intense local and militant action. It is perhaps the movement that has demanded the most personal commitment in all areas of life, though prison sentences, with the high personal costs they entail, were more severe for opponents of military service, many of whom were also squatters. In this context, interesting political innovations of this movement included the rejection of official spokespeople (when they appeared, they tended to do so with their faces covered), public leaders or to setup formal organizations registered by the administration\* and which may be entitled to receive subsidies. The actions of civil and social disobedience were not limited to squatting in abandoned buildings; other actions included calling demonstrations without notifying government delegations, peacefully resisting police attacks on rooftops during evictions or causing damage in streets and public buildings when the demonstrations were repressed by the police, and the performance of festive elements during demonstrations.

Consequently, in view of the aforementioned, we may acknowledge the strong influence of the squatters' movement on the alter-globalization movement and on the many groups that have fed into it. We may identify both the sources of its influence and the elements that favoured its coalition with other alter-globalisation organizations:

1. The high level of geographic mobility of squatters and alter-globalization activists from many countries thanks to the greater availability of cheap flights since the 1990s;
2. Greater expertise in the use of electronic communication equipment, albeit on a very unequal basis, as mentioned earlier, if we compare the most advanced CSOAs with those most isolated from new communication technologies;
3. And, above all, the embracing of the Zapatista discourse, which fuelled anti-capitalist resistance in a way equally detached from both political and revolutionary parties, and whose goal was not 'to seize power' but for 'civil society' to organize itself and for

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\* According to the Spanish Constitution, any association is deemed to be legal from the moment it is created and it has no obligation to inform the corresponding Register of its existence.

governments to be formed and based on participatory democracy: ‘lead by obeying’.

All of these points may also represent maximum limits that most squatters are, nevertheless, unwilling to relinquish. In fact, social forums have gradually embraced an autonomous and radical nucleus increasingly detached from the institutionalizing trends of other formal organizations such as trade unions and political parties, which are more willing to negotiate within the official forums of international organizations or even to join a type of international ‘new left’ party.

This argument leads us inevitably to a consideration of the possible ‘boomerang effect’ that this invisible success of squats has had on the actual squatters’ movement.

We must consider that the global enthusiasm for opening up and allying with other non-squatter collectives, spreading forth as much as possible the ideas of autonomy and disobedience, was never a discourse that developed in all types of squats and CSOAs. From what we know about the general European experience, squatting environments have a strong proclivity for endogamy and towards protecting their signs of identity.\*

The most dynamic, durable and politicized CSOAs in large cities, or in suburban areas,\*\* when compared with squats in residential buildings and more isolated squats, have been more effective in breaking down the barriers of prejudice and in embracing a plurality of actors and support in both the squats themselves and in their acts of protest. That attitude prompted them to participate in local and global platforms in which they had to share demonstrations or manifestos with other organizations. The experiences of these different groups of squatters have, in turn, dragged along many of the most reticent members, although some have even been actively against that, as they considered them to be ‘reformist’. For instance, some CSOAs have focused exclusively on organizing concerts while at the other extreme, some Italian CSOAs are groups more interested in promoting the model of disruptive actions of the Black Bloc (Famiglietti 2004). In any case, it would be a

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\* The way a person entering a CSOA dresses and speaks, who accompanies them and where they work are all part of the implicit questionnaire faced by many newcomers.

\*\* Such as in the cases of *Can Masdeu*, near Barcelona, or *La Casika*, near Madrid.

simplification to claim that this global enthusiasm was characteristic of all squatting experiences and squatter activists. However, it can be argued that some effects of its influence can be identified in the increasing involvement in alter-globalization initiatives by most of CSOAs.

We should also ask ourselves the following question: are squats in danger of drowning in the tide of the new (and, for many, ephemeral) 'movement of movements'? Calle (2004) suggests that this problem affects both squatters and the alter-globalization movement. Squats have not been perfect schools for self-management and direct democracy and the alter-globalization movement has yet to show its capacity for survival and consistency. In this sense, we must refer back to the most genuine urban and constant qualities of the squatters' movement, namely its local focus, roots and effectiveness.

A single CSOA may be the best platform for capturing persons and collectives with similar concerns in order to draw attention to themes and social struggles censored by the mass media and to introduce new activists to practices of civil and social disobedience already widely experimented within the movement over two decades, but its potential is even greater when linked to other CSOAs, to squats in residential buildings and to a network of groups and organizations in districts and cities that help to gain more public legitimacy and increase the chances of survival for the squats. The self-provision of accessible accommodation and spaces for nurturing counter-cultural creativity and forms of socialization, freed from the shackles of dominant morals, are the real ends of the squatting movement and also have the virtue of making the movement's critique of real estate speculation and the falseness of civil participation pronounced by municipal governments all the more credible.

Consequently, the squatter movement has faithfully adopted the slogans of the post-1968 NSMs, 'the personal is political' and 'think globally, act locally'. This politicization of daily, reproductive and more spatially proximate environments, and the knowledge of these local dynamics and public acknowledgement obtained through such experience, has ensured that the strength of, and need for, squats has been maintained firmly as an integral part of the alter-globalization movement. Therefore, the crisis in the squatters' movement cannot be attributed to either the boom of the alter-globalization movement, or, in particular, the containment actions by local authorities (structures of opportunities), or the management strategies of the squats themselves (mobilization of resources), because much of the social legitimacy

(local and global) of its autonomous practice (identity) has already been achieved (Martinez 2004; Herreros 2004).

## CONCLUSIONS

THIS PAPER HAS highlighted three aspects of the squatter movement in Spanish cities: (1) its historical development, identifying the importance of the counter-cultural actions of CSOAs beyond squatting in residential buildings; (2) the local roots of squats in relation to the persistent conflict with local authorities and strong activist dedication to everyday, domestic, socializing aspects and so on; (3) an incipient innovation in the repertoires of political action and in the alter-globalization objectives that have gradually spread through much of the squatters' movement.

As can be seen, we are dealing with a typical social paradox, namely a movement that is local and global at the same time. In order to unravel its purpose, it was worthwhile to distinguish the origins, consequences and mutual relationship of both dimensions (the local and the global).

As one of the movement's slogans implies, 'They can evict [us from] our homes but not our ideas'. Since its creation the movement has simultaneously combined a local and global orientation; it aims both to satisfy material needs for self-managed accommodation and meeting spaces and to intervene in the social life of districts and cities, always promoting the projects of many social movements and fostering the circulation of ideas and persons, and protest actions, in relation to squatting, social problems and anti-capitalist causes that affect many other countries.

The consequences of that dual attribute (local and global interlinks) have had different effects on the local and global dimensions of the squatters' movement. Precisely due to the gradual increase in involvement and convergence with the alter-globalization movement, incorporation of these inter-global concerns in the different groups of squatters has occurred at different speeds, and there have even been internal divisions regarding the approaches and ways of developing this participation. However, there has never been any opposition to the continuation of local 'restructuring' actions and initiatives for the counter-cultural usage of abandoned spaces. Other factors, and not increasing globalization, are therefore responsible for the crisis of the squatters' movement in some cities.

We could therefore ask ourselves whether that paradox is paralyzing the movement and whether this has to be overcome with a leap to

conventional rationality. These questions would be particularly relevant in the case of other urban movements that seem to be less involved in alter-globalization dynamics.

The information referred to in this study suggests that this has actually been a fruitful paradox, not just for the movement to the extent that it has been able to fuel its own internal creativity, providing stimuli for activists and for the development of new squats, but mainly for other social movements with which it has interacted, providing them with the spaces offered by CSOAs and contributing models of radical protest.

In contrast to traditional urban movements (e.g. the neighbourhood movement) and more innovative movements (e.g. the environmental movement focused on urban issues), the 'transmission effect' seems to have been relatively scarce. It is difficult to predict whether these movements might also be influenced by the squatters' movement in the future, though, according to the independent and libertarian philosophy of this movement, each organization and movement must follow its own path. Cooptation, institutionalization and stabilization of alliances have always been some of the conservative perils openly challenged by squatters.

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# URBAN SQUATTING, RURAL SQUATTING AND THE ECOLOGICAL-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

*Claudio Cattaneo*

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PRESENT ENERGY, CLIMATE AND ECONOMIC CRISES, it is important to consider the relationship between the ideals of the autonomous squatting movement and the practical effects that its activity have in terms of reduced material and energy consumption and of economic performance.

This article highlights the ecological economics of the squatting community. To a large extent independent from capitalism, wage labour and monetary circulation, it is based more on self-organization, mutual aid, recycling, use of renewable energies and renewable materials; as well, agro-ecological practices and permaculture principles are applied when possible. This system, partially independent from financial and man-made capital, is based on human and natural capital and it can work beyond capitalistic market arrangements: a type of social ecology (Bookchin, 1997) where the central element is the material environment (be it a city or the rural and natural countryside) and where people are not separate because they form part of this living environment.

Going further with this intuition, this article also shows that squatting goes beyond urban movements. As a result of urban growth, an

exodus that has left many rural tenures abandoned, combined with radical ideals, are the base of the neorural movement which, in many cases, takes the characteristics of rural squatting. This allows even better the development of a natural economy.

The principles of squatting rely on political motivations (Martinez-Lopez, 2002), squatters are related to counter-culture and radical politics (Prujit, 2004) and the phenomenon, largely present and sometimes even institutionalized within Western societies, forms part of autonomous and political social movements. The underlying hypothesis is that squatters, because of their radical political vision, want to get free from certain forms of capitalist control -for example from being employed on a routine base, or from paying a mortgage to a bank, but also by keeping some anonymity over the internet. By doing so, they learn how to satisfy their needs with a great degree of autonomy from the conventional patterns of paying for rent, of needing a paid job, of consuming and spending money. The thesis I defend is that while urban squatters are to a large extent autonomous from money, rural squatters, who satisfy most of their needs directly from the surrounding natural environment, also achieve higher degrees of autonomy from the system of man-made products. In this way both urban and rural squatters provide a micro model for local solutions to the ecological and economic crises such as making the best use of urban waste materials, skipping for food, developing ingenious DIY applications, promoting cooperation, sharing know-how, practising mutual aid, farming with organic agriculture, integrated ecosystem management, sharing of experiences in communal life and challenges in its organization. All these solutions can be considered social innovations: alternative to many technological innovations, which increasingly depend on complex artificial systems, social innovations stem from within personal capacities and social organization, which is particularly relevant in those cases where the sense of community is stronger.

In synthesis my positive argument is that, stemming from the political, there are further levels of autonomy that squatters can achieve; my normative argument aims at the inclusion of these experiences within the spectrum of sustainable solutions both innovative, resilient and practical against the ecological and economic crises.

Throughout this article I will make wide use of an little known expression: technically speaking, rather than “economy” – which is generally too often understood only in relation with money, markets and capitalist accumulation – it is proper to talk of *oikonomy*. This, in

Ancient Greek terms means “management of the house/community”, for Aristotles it represented “the art of living well”. Polanyi (1944) also considered the distinction between the familiar embedded economy and the socially disembedded market economy. In the former, typical of pre-industrial non-capitalist societies, the economy must be considered in a substantive way, in the sense that it simply looks at how material needs are met in relation to the social and natural environment, and where the formal economic principles – such as utility maximisation or scarcity – cannot apply. Similarly, Weber (1905) considered that the self-interested acquisitive economy based on rational utility maximization was strongly influenced by the Calvinist religious belief oriented towards the duty of diligent application in labour and of self-restraint in consumption, with a result in unprecedented capitalist accumulation. On the other hand *Oikonomics* is only a means to an end, namely need-satisfaction for a good life; money can be useful, but the squatting example shows that is not fundamental for a good life. For instance, rather than selling most of their time on the labour market and rather than participating in the competitive capitalistic system, when possible squatters directly employ their time to satisfy their own needs; they do so by using and developing their own social and personal capacities as well as by making the best use of the materials supplied by their local environment, be it urban waste or renewable natural resources.

From this *oikonomic* perspective it is important to acknowledge that the squatting movement includes rural phenomenon. The study of rural squatting is now particularly interesting because, due to the growing energy and economic crisis, life in the cities – largely based on non-renewable resources (like agro-industrial food production and long food miles) – will become more difficult. It is likely that the right to the land and the issue of how to access it will gain increasing importance. *Reclaim the fields!* is the example of an autonomous rural movement recently raising across Europe ([www.reclaimthefields.org](http://www.reclaimthefields.org)). As fossil fuels become extremely expensive, the present global territorial structure based on urban growth could radically change while living alternatives, based on renewable energies, re-localized economies and land exploitation for subsistence purposes will likely become more frequent. To this extent, the practice of rural squatting can well represent a degrowth society, in which Latouche’s “8 Rs” – namely re-evaluate, re-conceptualize, re-structure, re-localize, re-distribute, reduce, re-use and recycle – are manifest. In case of an enduring economic crisis, access to both a roof and a land represents an opportunity which can allow for

the satisfaction of basic needs with a higher degree of autonomy from the global economic system: working the land is in fact a source of self-employment and of natural income. For the future, it is likely that the urban movements will be joined by rural movements in their social and political struggles against the respective powerful *elites*, being *bourgeois* or aristocratic.

The rest of the article develops as follows: section 2 presents the theoretical legacy of squatters' life-styles and their main characteristics. Starting from the moral motivation towards not paying for rent, it explains how less money is employed for need satisfaction and why this behaviour is low-impact, therefore, ecological. Section 3 is a novel contribution from an Iberian case-study presenting how different rural squats and neorural communities are collectively managed and organized across two dimensions:

1. the line between monetary and non-monetary *oikonomy* and
2. the line between personal economies and communal integration.

In fact communal living can assume different characteristics so that different degrees of communitarianism and of autonomy – namely, from the money and from the system of man-made production – are exposed. The case shows that neorural ideals behind these real-life experiences tend towards the communitarian rural way of life and towards organic agriculture principles related to material autonomy. Section 4, finally, offers some insights over the steps that follow political autonomy and that differ between urban, rurban\* and neorural squat communities.

This work is the result of participant observation (Cattaneo, 2006 and 2008) during nearly a decade, in which I have been participating as an academic observer, but primarily as a member of the Barcelona squatting community and of the Iberian neorural movement.

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\* This is an abbreviation for “rural-urban” a combination which is possible in the Collserola hills of Barcelona, a natural park with an agrarian past, now in part revived by squat experiences set only few kilometres away from the Barcelona city centre.

## 1. A SIDE EFFECT OF SQUATTING: MONEY-FREE, LOW-IMPACT LIVING AND COMMUNITARIAN ORGANIZATION

AMONG THEMSELVES SQUATTERS build links not mediated by traditional parental or social-class rules nor by the market. These links are extended to the outside social and ecological environment, be it the local neighbourhood, larger urban movements or the local territory in rural areas.

Although a rising evidence of urban sites squatted for gardening shows that the rural phenomenon is entering into the hearth of the cities, urban squatters' main occupation does not relate to the work of the land – they live in the midst of a metropolis, with other political, social and subsistence priorities. However, their economy has a small environmental impact because they tend to shun the market and the material impacts associated to market production and distribution. Rather than buying new products, they prefer to recycle goods and materials, eventually they buy second-hand; they show a set of ethics opposed to consumerism, beginning from the fact that they “recycle” abandoned buildings – in which to live or carry on social activities – and that they reform them employing simple tools, primary materials and voluntary semi-professional work.

In contrast with the modern tendency that could be restated as “become independent, live by yourself, be free”, urban squatters live instead in a community and consider independence at another level. They do not need to depend on banks, real estate business or a paid job; rather, they develop their personal capacities and promote cooperation within the squat and the local community. They make extensive use of natural oikonomic means more than monetary or financial ones. To the extent possible, they also grow their own food and collect rainwater.

### *Theoretical legacies to autonomous life-styles.*

If the conventional economy is characterised by a production side and a consumption side –supply and demand – which are connected by external and often impersonal markets, in the squatting oikonomy these elements tend to melt into the same, into a micro embedded economy as Karl Polanyi (1944) named it. If market action is characterised by self-organisation, this primarily refers to human processes: the market is said to be self-organized because there are human beings behind it acting accordingly to their own interests. The principles of self-organization however, do also apply to cooperative and social processes such

as squatting or autonomous social movements, and where individual interest of the market agent is substituted by the communal interest of the collective.

The squatting self-organized oikonomy is nothing more than a return to pre-capitalist origins, where market exchange is fairly limited and is often sought as barter, with face-to-face relationships and common trust dominating the transactions. Primarily, it is a return to household modes of production and -in the urban gardens and neo-rural cases- to communal land management. These are historical economic institutions which are independent from the market and from private or state property. The original point of squatters' economies, particularly urban ones, is to live next to the market and yet to be capable of reviving an alternative economic system, typical of a time when competitive economic dynamics were only marginal aspects of life. Neorurals' and squatters' organizations have similarities with Malinowski's (1922) gift economy and Sahlins's (1974) Domestic Mode of Production and relate to Becker's (1976) theory of allocation of time and Kropotkin's (1915) biological and historical analysis of mutual aid as a factor of evolution in social life. The key to understanding these processes is to consider them as a self-organised bio-economy.

"*Tornallom*" is a Valencian farmer's expression which literally means "return the back" and constitutes the reciprocal exchange of physical work: "one day you help me, another day I will help you": this physical effort, which serves the *oikonomic* purpose, becomes the reciprocal currency, without the need of money. This need is an indicator of insufficiency, as opposed to self-sufficiency, with respect to access to the skills and means that are required for subsistence production for a good life. Money, originally a concrete means to ease the exchange of goods and services, within the capitalistic economy and the dominance of the financial dimension becomes immaterial, more artificial and, therefore, impersonal. Its counterpart, a remunerated job, also does so when is related to alienating economic processes such as the industrial ones applied both in factories and in farming. The means employed in production and the working environment adapted to their optimal functioning are increasingly artificial. In *Tools for Conviviality* Ivan Illich highlighted the impossibility of certain complex technologies and of related production systems to be good for a convivial and well-lived life (Illich, 1973). Georgescu-Roegen, one of the fathers of Ecological-Economics, argued that more social inequalities among workers, and among citizens who can or cannot afford certain consumption patterns,

are a consequence of the ecologically unsustainable industrial economic processes. He therefore added a political issue to the ecological one (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971).

On the other hand, the squatters' self-organised bio-economy is based on a political reasoning in line to the above mentioned intellectual criticisms, and closely related to the independence of their thought from the mass behaviour that industrial economic processes promote. As Marcuse (1954) already sought in his *One Dimensional Man*, self-determination of needs and their satisfaction is an act of freedom, which also seeks to improve autonomy against external control (be this at the work place or in the determination of standardised living patterns). Moreover, this independence of thought reaches the extreme point where squatters – if this is coherent with their ideals – are ready to commit a crime. Direct action and civil disobedience can be traced back to David Thoreau (1849). Squatters' independent ethical base is the necessary condition to be ready to commit the crime of squatting. The sufficient condition is to be collectively organised towards mutual political support and to be able to resist repression. By not paying rent and through collective organization, the doors to a radically different lifestyle are opened.

*The case against paying rent:  
the Spanish evidence of real estate speculation*

Squatting alien property is a criminal act. However, dignified housing -which is a democratic right- is still far from common people's possibilities, with increasing rent prices that make housing extremely expensive, so that most life-time needs to be sold on the labour market, creating a spiral towards individualism, monetary dependency and a scarcity of free time.

Here follow six statements (*Taller contra la Violencia Inmobiliaria y Urbanisitca*, 2006) showing the temporal trend in some aspects of the "housing question" in Spain.

1. From 1960 to 2005, the percentage of flats for rent of the total decreased from 40% to 10%.
2. In 1973, 34% of new housing constructions were destined to be an officially protected home (VPO), but in 2005 it was only 4%.



3. While in 1997 industrial credit was 3.3 times more than real estate credit, in 2005 the credit to the real estate market became higher than credit to industry.
4. From 1990 to 2004, the average debt of a home increased from 45% to 60%. This means that lenders – mainly banks – virtually own the majority of the value of all Spanish homes.
5. From 1997 to 2005, the average cost of a flat increased 150% while average salaries increased only 34.5%. This means that in one generation (1980-2005) the price of a home equivalent to lifetime salary increased from 14 months to 14 years.
6. The price of land as a share of the final price of a house increased, between 1985 and 2005, from 25% to 55%. In particular, banks own 350 million m<sup>2</sup> in Spain.

Facing this trend, many people would claim that leaving abandoned properties, although protected by the law, is an immoral act. However, squatters also have the capacity to do something against it, by freeing spaces for the development of collective living and social projects which, in turn, allows them the possibility of free time away from the labour market.

An opposite spiral is created towards the free collective development of personal capacities and of social capital. A non-consumerist life-style is likely to occur where not only homes and spaces for social centres are recycled, but also food, clothes and many other objects that can be somehow useful. Do-it-yourself becomes the leitmotif of a squatter's life.

*An explanation of how squatting allows living with less money.*

The following explanation is an *oikonomic* analysis focusing on money only as a means and on need-satisfaction as the real goal. The hypothesis is that time availability and different ways to employ it is the main means of production available to all. Time can be sold on the labour-market – in exchange for money – or can be employed directly for the satisfaction of needs. All humans have the same basic needs, Maslow (1954) and Max-Neef (1992, 1993 and 1995) dealt with this argument. Although what is defined as a basic need varies over time and

space, what is required for survival are the physiological ones (i.e. food, sleeping) and basic material ones (i.e. a shelter, clothes); then there are immaterial ones that might, or might not be satisfied through market or material consumption: in fact needs, particularly immaterial ones, are satisfied in different ways: how are squatters' needs met? How do they get them from outside the market? What is their material nature? How do they employ their personal and collective working time? This deep economic issue, central to tackling the ecological crisis, will be presented here and, with respect to neorural communities, in the next section.

With respect to conventional lifestyles, squatters adopt several time-viable non-money alternatives. The first and foremost is housing: within a single night, a squatter can have a home that can last from a few hours only to -in the best cases- several years. With some luck, a lot of time and money are saved from paying a landlord or a bank's mortgage; the financial costs of squatting mainly refer to the materials required to refurbish the place and to the legal costs.

The ecological economics of squatting can be said to be free from barriers to exit from the labour market. Rent is in fact such a big overhead cost that make it almost impossible for an average person to live without constant monetary income, which makes the sale of labour time a very relevant aspect in a person's life.

Individualism in society and nuclear families of, on average 2 or 3 members, make life more expensive because of the many overheads that cannot be shared. On the other hand, living in relatively large communities of around 10 people or more – which is quite common in many urban and rural squats – allow for economies of scale: costs are reduced when things are done or purchased in bulk. Therefore, household economies of scale are guaranteed by the division of activities over a large number of community members to contribute to time-use efficiency in household tasks. For instance in *Can Masdeu*, a 20-people rural squat in the hills of Barcelona, communal living implies cooking a meal once a week/fortnight, food shopping once a year, working to raise money for the communal economy twice a year in a group of four, working another 10 hours per week maintaining the orchard, house and/or social centre, etc. One person is in charge of buying food, one of keeping the accounts and paying the bills (telephone, internet, vehicles insurance, magazine subscriptions, etc.), three are in charge of the orchards, another of organizing household maintenance and cleaning tasks, six are dedicated to the social centre, community

gardens and environmental educational activities.

Common to many squats is the provision of a “free-shop” where unwanted clothes can be freely left or taken; the setting up and the maintenance of home-made squat infrastructure (electricity, water, kitchen, sanitation, furniture) is very diverse because normally different people, with a wide range of skills and knowledge, have contributed to it: no-one has to know each and every skill but still has the potential to learn them all. No professional services are paid to set-up and maintain a housing project or a social centre. Moreover, the peculiar economies of scale enjoyed in a community allow the services provided by such infrastructure to be enjoyed by many: for instance, not only is setting up a kitchen is cheaper because it is done with voluntary work and employing basic tools and materials, but its costs are divided over a larger number of persons who share it; the same is true for vehicles which, far from being status-symbols, are used for transportation and are commonly shared by a larger amount of people. While mainstream culture is based on individualism, associated to the idea of independence, collective organization represents an enriching alternative from the personal point of view, with positive side benefits in terms of living with less money and, consequently, with a lower ecological impact.

The third relevant aspect of a squat’s *oikonomy* is its upstream integration of production processes (do-it-yourself). This means that rather than buying a product, this or parts of it can be self-produced. For instance bread is self-produced and only flour is bought. Home and social centre infrastructures are self-assembled and self-installed (provided the technical know-how): only the materials are required, and might be freely recycled from the urban environment. Because its members have the know-how and the basic skills of a welder, a carpenter, a farmer, a painter, a mechanic, a plumber, a baker, “do-it-yourself” becomes in a squat the most basic opportunity for money-saving and collective self-employment.

Differently from conventional households where consumption occurs irrationally and is often driven by consumerism, mass-fashion and manipulative advertising, living in an urban or rural squat requires a certain attention to the “how to do it” in a different way. It is at no cost: collective organization requires an effort towards enhanced communication and horizontal processes of decision-making (see, for instance, Piazza, this volume), which can be time-consuming, but that at least leave open the possibility towards the self-determination of how to live.

## 2. RURAL SQUATTING IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA: SELF-ORGANIZED COMMUNAL SYSTEMS.

THE ECOLOGICAL ECONOMIC perspective of squatting is even more evident in the rural context, whose presentation contributes to the configuration of autonomous life-styles. Rural squatting is present in Spain already since the Revolution, between 1936 and 1939, with large-scale processes of land collectivization. The Spanish countryside is widely characterized by rural abandonment. Migratory trends towards the cities have occurred since the late '50s as a consequence of the mechanization of agriculture and of the arrival of fossil fuels. With the birth in the late '70s and early '80s of the neorural movement the first rural villages were occupied by groups of people interested in self-organization and eco-socialism as well as oriented towards economic self-sufficiency. Magazines such as *Integral* or *AjoBlanco*, which focussed on ecological and communal living and on the return to the country, inspired these young generations in their moves. An extensive description of the ethics and realities of neorural squatters is given by Badal (2001), while some ideological foundations of rural squatting can be found in *Colectivo Malayerba* (1996).

In this context, I highlight the value of oikonomic organization within rural squats because it represents an interesting case of material autonomy. This is characterized by the combination of a highly communitarian sharing of labour time and a prevalence, over individual paid work, of non-monetary self-employment within the community and money-raising collective activities.

Looking from a time-use perspective, the neorural oikonomic activity can be characterized by:

- labour time employed within the community for the generation of a monetary income;
- labour time employed within the community for the direct satisfaction of personal and communal needs;
- labour time employed outside the community, sold in the labour market.

As well, individuals undertaking these labour activities can do them according to their personal needs or to those that are collectively provided, in a proportion that varies according to how they are organized.

In general the collective project tends to be more communitarian the more isolated is the community.

In summer 2009 a rural squat gathering (*Jornadas de Okupación Rural*) was organized in Sieso, a squatted village in the Aragon Pyrenees. An afternoon debate was dedicated to sharing knowledge on how different communities organize their economy, which productive activities are undertaken and how the communal sphere is integrated with the personal.

Presentations came from the participants in 4 rural squatted villages (the hosting village of Sieso and, from Navarra, Lakabe, Rala and Arizkuren); 3 rural squats (*Can Masdeu* and *Kan Pasqual* in Barcelona and *La Casa* in Valladolid) and 3 other neorural communities related to autonomous social movements (*Alcoy*, in Valencian Community; *Escanda* in Asturias and *Manzanares* in Castilla). The diversity of the forms of organizing and the different weight of the communal economy among the participating projects was great.

All projects share a collective way to earn and to manage money, but with large variations. In some cases the community is financially self-sufficient, in other cases financial support is granted from external institutions (one case), or through the formal contribution of its members (three cases, 20, 50 and 100 Euro/month respectively) who find individually the way to this income.

How collective income is generated also varies among neorural communities: it can be from primary production (orchard, honey, meat, 3 cases) with direct sales to the consumers; bread making (3 cases, direct sale); hosting events (international summer camps, courses, bar and restoration services, local celebrations, 4 cases); or other services (i.e. horse-keeping). Also, and particularly in the more isolated communities unable to easily access markets and consumers, some of its members look for temporary jobs away from home (seasonal recollection, brick-work) and pass the income to the community once they return.

In general, communal labour time is organized mainly in a collective way, where everybody contributes equally -there might be systems to enhance that, like communal working days during the week- and where work is not remunerated. The most common activities are orchard and food production and elaboration; building and infrastructure maintenance, rehabilitation and construction; energy supply (the main one is fire-wood collection, chopping and storing) and water and irrigation system maintenance. All communities have different types of communal infrastructure and activities, which contributes to the

direct satisfaction of personal needs and communal requirements, thus diminishing the dependency on monetary income. All have orchards, chickens, in some cases, bees, goats and sheep, all have access to a baking oven; they have many tools and at least one general workshop, as well as capacity to store recycled and construction materials, wood and primary agricultural products. They are organized to participate in seasonal recollection (i.e. for olive oil) or to collectively manage agricultural crops elsewhere (olive and almond trees). As long as an “income” of natural products and resources is secured, autonomy from money and from the system of man-made production is possible.

The weight of the individual economy within the community is also quite different, ranging from where all kind of income is communal to mixed-economies, where people can have their own income as well as a communal income for the community's expenses. This last case is particularly relevant within rural squats because different individuals might have a preference towards particular personal consumption patterns, which the proximity to the city makes it more possible. In general, given the precarious situation of squatting -and also of land tenure- the property of personal capital is not collectivized, although the use of this capital (which could be a car, or some tools) is widely shared.

The amount of money that the collective economy of these squatting projects requires varies from very little (one case, 20 Euro/person/month), to more considerable levels (250 Euro/person/month, for one community which is not squatted), although this depends on how many needs the community is able to satisfy, summing up, from a minimum where only basic housing and food are provided, to a maximum where any kind of personal expense is included (such as tobacco, education or travels).

The two most isolated places rely on extremely little financial needs (around 200 Euro/person/month, all included), moreover it has to be acknowledged that a good part of these expenditure is invested in the re-construction of the villages, with returns on a less precarious quality of life. Newer communities tend to have higher re-construction costs and less capacity to self-generate this income.

Marginal barter exchange is often present, particularly among isolated projects relatively close to each other and, if it exists, through the participation in a barter network.

From an energetic point of view, in the rural cases fuel-wood is used for almost all basic needs (cooking, heating, baking), and electricity comes from renewable sources (PV panels in most cases and

wind-generators in 3 cases – 2 of which have been self-made); in very few cases closer to the city, electricity is freely taken from the grid.

Table 1 shows, as a summary, the difference in energy use -as an indicator of ecological autonomy- among neorurals, rurban and urban squatters, and the relevant facts on the importance of human endosomatic energy. Table 2 offers a comparison of how vital elements are supplied in a sustainable community -similar to a rural squat- and in the commonly known petrol-based civilization. These are the different points towards a human ecological economy which the squatting experience shows to be possible.

In synthesis, the rural squatting experience results from the application of the traditional squat ideology based on political antagonism, anti-capitalism and autonomous self-organization, combined with the neorural perspective, inspired by a return to simpler and more communitarian lifestyles and by the minimization of human impact on nature. The evidence of this radical application of the squatting principles is a political action rehabilitating abandoned villages and the rural way of life.\* The life-styles of rural squatters represent an alternative system with different degrees of autonomy from the main political economic system characterized by industrial capitalist production. This issue is discussed in the following section.

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\* Their political activity -although not directly referring to rural squatting- is connected with ecological activism in defence of the local territory, against development plans and macro-infrastructure for instance the High Speed Train in the Basque country (<http://www.sindominio.net/ahtez>), the Very High Voltage line in Catalonia ([www.nomat.org](http://www.nomat.org)), in defence of the Collserola park in Barcelona ([www.collserola.org](http://www.collserola.org)) or, in the past years, against the construction of the Itoiz Dam (<http://www.sindominio.net/sositoiz>). As well, rural squatted communities are active in the organization of rural squat gatherings, some participate in the network of ecovillages ([www.ecoaldeas.org](http://www.ecoaldeas.org)); in the preservation of local and traditional seed varieties (for instance *Ecollavors* in Catalonia [http://www.redsemillas.info/?page\\_id=4](http://www.redsemillas.info/?page_id=4)); in the edition of the fanzine “La Llamada del Cuerno”. These important aspects refer, however, to political ecology and environmental conflicts that are beyond the introductory scope of this work.

ENERGY USE				
Primary source	Secondary source	Rural uses	Rurban uses	Urban uses: other squats
Solar – photosynthesis	Vegetables Cereals Animals: traction meat and eggs milk and cheese manure Wood: firewood gathering	Food – vitamins Marginal production ploughing calories and proteins calories and proteins input for orchards Heating and cooking mushrooms, chestnuts, herbs	Food – vitamins marginal production input for orchards –imported Heating, bread cooking	
Solar -photo-voltaic		For light and radio	some	
Solar - thermal			Shower, some kitchen	
Wind - electricity			some	
Electricity from the grid (70% nuclear)			light, fridges, computers, workshops, marginal heating	Household appliances Space heating
Fossil fuels		Cooking, marginal Transport, marginal Ploughing, marginal	Cooking Transport Electricity, marginal	Cooking, space heating
Importance of endosomatic energy		Non sedentary life Non-material needs are satisfied using personal capacities Self-determination of need-satisfiers		

**Table 1:** comparison of energy use, from rural to urban squats. Source: Cattaneo, 2008.

### 3. URBAN SQUATS, RURAL SQUATS: WHAT KIND OF AUTONOMY? THE STEPS BEYOND THE POLITICAL.

LITERATURE ON THE urban squatting movement can highlight its socio-political aspects (Adell and Martinez-Lopez, 2004; Martinez Lopez, 2002; Prujit, 2004; Reeve, 1999 and 2005). Within these contexts the main ambition is built upon motivations that have originated in an autonomous way from the conventional mentality of the average society, which is mainly influenced by the State system (its laws and educational system), by the capitalist spirit, by social norms often rooted in religious beliefs which are in turn supported and enhanced by the



Vital element	Sustainable community	Petrol-based civilization
Water	Self construction and restoration of rainwater collection systems. Purification through grey-water systems. No black-water production	Great infrastructures of river channelization. Sea water desalination. Dams and reservoirs. Chemical and organic depuration of grey and black waters.
Shelter	Bio-construction with innocuous materials. Reparation of old houses.	Great real-estate investments. Construction with toxic and polluting materials (cement, petrol metals, synthetic fibres). High prices.
Heat	Wooden stoves from local woods. Passive solar heating.	Massive burning of petrol derivatives, thermal and nuclear power plants.
Electricity	PV panels, home-made wind generator.	Massive burning of petrol derivatives, thermal and nuclear power plants. Large scale wind farms.
Food	Organic gardens, recollection from woods and fields. Interchange. Consumption in co-operatives.	Industrial food of low nutritional quality. Great supermarkets. High consumption in refrigeration or processing.

**Table 2:** comparison of how vital elements are supplied. Source: Cattaneo and Gavaldá, 2010.

mass-media. Be it a counter-culture movement, a housing strategy, or a direct action with an antagonist political message, they all represent behaviours very different from mainstream ones, typical of western culture and life-styles. I intend this as political autonomy, in the sense that its subjects are able to think in an autonomous way and consequently they act accordingly, realizing radical and antagonist ideas. In particular, in the case of rural squatting, a commonly understood paradigm, contributing to shaping the political perspective, is the necessary interconnectedness of the human with the natural *milieu* which can be characterized as a political ecology. The defence of the environment, its values and the discourse over the rural way of life play a strong role among rural squatters, more important than the defence of social-class values, typically a more urban struggle. Rurban squatters, in particular, act as a bridge transmitting political ecological ideas to networks of urban actors. These political avant-gardes, like many other social movements, generate novel discourses which are independent from the mainstream ones, rooted in the western-based consumerist imaginary. As seen, in the context of this autonomy of thought, one can find justifications for breaking the system of State legality, which is clearly a political act.

However, I have highlighted that this autonomy of thought, manifested in radical political (and ecological) thinking and motivations, representing the ecological economics of the urban and rural squatting

movement, evolve through direct action into real behaviours. The resulting reality can be described by two further types of autonomy, namely economic autonomy (and its relation to employing time for living with less money) and ecological autonomy (for living with more natural and less industrially produced means).

Concerned with the capacity to maintain the squatting experience, I have observed (Cattaneo, 2008) that this relies on the maintenance of the capitalist system of waste production (and of rural abandonment): if there were no more abandoned buildings, current forms of squatting would not be possible; the sustainability of the experience is, paradoxically, closely interconnected with the existence of a system that produces waste. The squatting phenomenon can therefore be said to be ecological insofar as it makes an efficient use of a waste product; insofar as it can recycle – like in a natural cycle – useless waste into a useful product, by means of social organization, creativity and originality. Literally, an “autonomous spirit” that manifests into autonomous spaces.

In particular, a relationship exists which proves that, the farther away from the city, the higher the levels of autonomy that are achieved: provided that urban squats have limited access to primary natural sources, in case of a drastic reduction in the amount of products that are generously given and of real-estate waste that urban squatters can re-use, it is likely that they would have a harder time to survive than the more resilient rural squats, although their autonomous spirit will make it easier to adapt and survive than average people. Although largely depending on the system of industrial production (and waste) urban squats gain easy access to a large number of people and can be an example of money-free low-impact living/development of social and political activity/socializing, based on non-consumerist ethics and largely working, from the material perspective, on the recycling of urban waste: in fact, in the case of people squatting for living/housing, squatting culture can be an inspiring and visible source of ideas of how to slightly move away from more conventional life-styles. From the purely socio-political perspective, the source of inspiration comes from knowledge sharing, solidarity, horizontal relationships and all those cultural traits that, although integrated within some fringes of civil society, are mainly not common traits to the dominant political perspective: they have the potential to manifest radical political aims directly at the core of where the established power is set.

On the other hand, more isolated rural squats, although often unknown – and the aim of this contribution is to start lifting this veil

– have strong socio-ecological values, as highlighted in the Iberian case study. They are set in physical places geographically isolated, abundant in land (and capacity of primary production) and are organized in a way that achieves higher degrees of ecological and material autonomy: neorural squatted settlements have lower population density, rely on photosynthetic primary production and develop local systems independent from the energy, food and material inputs generated in the urban system.

To explain it in a similar way, the *oikonomic* system of urban squatters can be characterised by what they do not consume of the capitalistic system of production and labour; they are “ecological” because they consume economic waste so to extend the life-cycle of artificial products and materials; the neorural *oikonomy* instead is characterised by patterns of ecological production and consumption and by the management of the rural landscape where they live in: neorurals are ecological because they produce and consume less and in a more ecological way.

In the middle between the urban and the rural environment, and just a few kilometres away from cities, lays the potential of rurban squats. Here the perspective is that offered from a bridge between two different squatting realities. For the case of Barcelona, *Can Masdeu* and *Kan Pasqual* are antagonistic projects from both a political and an ecological perspective and, beyond some autonomy from money, they show a slight degree of autonomy from the economic system: like in rural communities, they carry on farming activities and generate energy from renewable sources; as well, endosomatic (human) energy is largely employed instead of machines. Cattaneo and Gavaldá (2010) show that endosomatic energy accounts for 16% and 38% of total energy consumed in *Kan Pasqual* and *Can Masdeu* respectively, while the share of non-renewable energies -mainly coming from cooking gas, petrol for vehicles and, only in *Can Masdeu*, electricity- is of 10% and 29% respectively. Yet rurban life is not so fully rural because of the proximity to cities: notwithstanding the orchards, most food is still introduced from outside because the land available is not enough for pastoral activities or cereal cultivation. Neither is food autonomy their mission: higher achievements towards ecological autonomy must be traded against the potential for social transformation and political activism within the cities, so to contribute, among many other political objectives, to the ruralization of cities and against further territorial sprawl.

In general, it can be said that the re-vindication of use rights over certain types of “built capital” of alien abandoned property is visible

both in the urban and in the rural environments. Rural squatting connects with other aims beyond housing and political social activity, such as living in relationship with agro-natural capital. It implies a particular relationship with the means of subsistence and capital employed, which means a further interpretation of autonomy, whose radicality can be understood as a literal “going back to the roots”.

Table 3 represents in a synthetic form the different typologies of autonomy here considered. Further degrees of autonomy imply previous ones: a rural squatter’s ecological autonomy implies also an autonomy of time and money, as well as an autonomy of political thinking characterized by a morality that breaks a law. Common to all is this kind of law-breaking political autonomy, manifest in choosing certain life-styles, closely related to vibrant autonomous spaces.\* The *oikonomic* means employed under different squatting modalities are shown in the last column.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

IN THIS ARTICLE I have introduced the ecological-economic perspective of the squatting phenomenon, by looking at the *oikonomic* means squatters

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\* It is interesting to mention how some choices over life-styles are made: from my personal experience, it seems that many people squatting for housing/living wish to be masters of their time, notably are selling less of their life-time in exchange for money and accept the consequent adaptation to precarious living conditions normally not experienced by people living a more conventional life. The latter, on the other hand, put a priority over a secure and constant source of income such as a long-term employment, to a decent housing and to very high levels of material, consumerist expenditure. Among those who experience more or less extended squatting living experiences, I have found no real evidence of how they have decided to live in a more urban or more rural settings. In fact there are many cases of people having lived in both; also, I have observed a tendency towards going away from the city (after intensively squatting in cities during many years, a more tranquil rural setting, not necessarily squatted, is sought). Finally, some people have alternated periods of urban squatting with periods of paying rent, or different (non-monetary) landlord agreements. Decisions are often due to particular conditions, temporal opportunities and, in general, freedom to experiment life in different *milieus*.

Type of autonomy	Example of lifestyle	Main oikonomic means
<b>Political: autonomy of thought</b>	Conscious and ethical consumers, boycott of certain capitalistic products	Paid working time, political activism, social relationships and communication. Use of certain squats.
<b>Economic: autonomy from money</b>	Urban squatters	Collective organization, social relationships and communication personal skills and know-how, urban waste. Management of and/or life in urban squats.
<b>Slightly ecological</b>	Rurban squatters (i.e. Collserola, Barcelona)	Community, social relationships and communication, personal skills and know-how, land, urban waste. Management of squatted buildings and some land.
<b>Highly ecological</b>	Isolated neorurals	Local community, personal skills and know-how, free time. Management of rural squatted buildings and large fractions of land.

**Table 3:** steps towards autonomy, a synthesis.

employ to live with less money. Doing this, I have also attempted to bridge the case of rural squatting, less known in the literature. The substantive findings of this article answer the guiding question: “to what extent are squatters autonomous from the economic and political system?” At least as it regards the difference between urban and rural squatters, the answer shows that urban squatters, able to live with little money and capable of collective self-organisation, are more autonomous than the average urban population, both in economic and socio-political terms. Rurban and rural squatters achieve also increasing degrees of ecological (material) autonomy: neo-rural settlements constitute a system with greater autonomy than urban squats, which are still dependent on the energy inputs and material recycling of the urban system. Urban squats are not as ecologically autonomous as neo-rural communities but they contribute in the shaping of antagonist social and political values.

In analysing the squatting phenomenon, the ecological perspective cannot be dissociated from the political and economic vision. To this extent, as an alternative to increasing social control and the erosion of democratic freedoms perpetrated by the State and its connection with capitalist interests, the incoming energy and economic crises is an opportunity to look for the constitution of more decentralized and autonomous communities, inspired by radical ideals and based on collectivism and self-organization.

For further analysis I see questions related to driving social change -another fundamental role associated to squatting- and the relationships that rural autonomous experiences can have. What kind of social change is necessary? What kind of adaptations to more sustainable lifestyles and relationships are necessary, as a response to the ecological crisis? These are questions that the ecological economics of urban and rural squatting can help in addressing.

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# **SQUATTING AND URBAN RENEWAL: THE INTERACTION OF THE SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT AND THE STRATEGIES OF URBAN RESTRUCTURING IN BERLIN\***

*Andrej Holm and Armin Kuhn*

SQUATS HAVE BEEN A FEATURE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF MANY CITIES IN developed capitalist societies. Existing studies mostly concentrate on investigating the political and legal conditions for squats (Bodenschatz et al., 1983), probing the motives and forms of squatter movements (Pruijt, 2004) or reassessing their character as a new social movement (Grottian and Nelles, 1983; Koopmans, 1995). These approaches trace cycles of squatter movements back to changed legal conditions and social inequalities, especially in the housing provision, as well as to socio-political and subcultural turning points. They therefore reveal important factors that determine the development of squatter movements, but we believe that it was first and foremost the broader urban

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political context that determined if and how squatter movements arose. We take Berlin as an example to show that the dynamics of squatter movements are closely connected to changing strategies associated with urban renewal, and that in each case they emerge from the crisis of the previous urban-renewal regime. We begin by looking at Pruijt's typology of squats (Pruijt, 2004) and research that shows how aspects of movements were integrated into neoliberal urban policies (Rucht, 1997; Schmid, 1998; Mayer, 2002) to analyse the specific relationship between squatter movements and urban-renewal policies in Berlin. In the following section, after contextualizing the Berlin squats within the campaigns that were waged by the social movements of the time, we discuss the background of Berlin's urban politics, and in the next two sections consider the two high points in housing conflict that took place at the beginning of the 1980s and around 1990, respectively. We focus on the influence of squats on urban restructuring policies. In addition, we provide a typology of the urban-renewal regimes operating in Berlin in the penultimate section. Against this background, we argue in the concluding section that in each case the Berlin squatter movements developed at moments of transition between various models of urban renewal, and that they contributed in greatly varying degrees to these processes of transformation. While the squats at the beginning of the 1980s contributed decisively to the implementation of a policy of 'cautious urban renewal', the squats of the 1990s constituted an alien element in neoliberal redevelopment policy in East Berlin.

## **URBAN POLICY AND THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT CONTEXT OF THE FIRST BERLIN SQUATS**

THE TUNIX CONFERENCE, organized in Berlin in 1978, brought to an end a cycle of social movements in the Federal Republic that had begun with the student riots of 1967-68. The 'red decade', as historian Gerd Koenen termed the years from 1967 to 1977, had not only laid the foundations for new social movements against atomic power, war and militarization, but also for the sexual-equality movement. It paved the way for sectarian experiments involving the setting up of new revolutionary parties and for the increasing radicalization that led up to the armed resistance of the Red Army Faction and the Movement 2 June. A turning point came when sections of the movement reacted to the 'German Autumn' of 1977 and the level of government repression at the time by withdrawing from mainstream society and setting

up specific alternative projects. Berlin came to be the centre of this rapidly growing alternative movement. In 1979 the alternative scene that grew around pub collectives, bicycle workshops, district newspapers and printing houses reached an estimated membership of 100,000 people (Scheer and Espert, 1982: 19) and provided many of those active in the movement with a form of economic security beyond that provided by capitalist wage labour.\* The issue of suitable living space quickly became of central importance for these projects, and squats seemed to be a way of appropriating such space. In addition, squatting fitted the political approach of the alternative movement: its intervention in urban restructuring, preoccupation with the problems posed by apartments standing empty, the housing shortage, property speculation and displacement – all these issues constituted an opportunity for the movement to go beyond its own needs and personal concerns, and thereby escape the potential pitfalls of a politics of representation.

While the alternative movement was growing rapidly, Berlin's urban politics slipped into a veritable crisis. The housing shortage – in 1980 alone some 80,000 people were registered as seeking apartments – was not simply the result of established territorial boundaries preventing the 'frontier town' from expanding in size. It was more a case of the public programme of redevelopment favouring the speculative strategy of keeping apartments vacant. According to Senate statistics, 27,000 apartments were uninhabited in 1978 (Bodenschatz et al., 1983: 301). House owners and housing associations deliberately allowed houses to become derelict with the expectation that they would be able to demolish and re-build or fundamentally modernize them using government funding, and eventually charge correspondingly higher rents.

The ruling Social Democratic Party in Berlin pursued an uncompromising policy of 'redevelopment by eviction' in the inner-city districts. Described as a 'feudal, bureaucratic way of disposing of people' (Eichstädt-Bohlig, cited in Nitsche, 1981: 210), this policy, and the associated displacement of the low-income population along with a large number of commercial operations, provoked widespread resistance in the 1970s. In *Kreuzberg*, in particular, tenants' committees, citizens'

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\* However, it should not be forgotten that many alternative economic organizations lived from the social welfare of their 'staff'. The significance of social security for wide-ranging and long-lasting mobilizations, and the radicalism of the new social movements in the Federal Republic of Germany, cannot be overestimated (Mayer, 1986).

action groups and other urban political groups protested for many years against the restructuring of the area around the *Kottbusser* Gate. Their influence was, however, extremely limited, and their participation in town-planning decisions was at best symbolic (Laurisch, 1981: 26). For the most part, resistance and squatting campaigns continued to produce no results.

A crisis of legitimation in urban housing policy was finally reached in December 1980, when a corruption scandal involving building contractor Dietrich Garski cast doubt upon the Senate's policies and exposed the murky amalgamation of the Senate's policies with building contractors, redevelopment agencies and housing associations. The resignation of the Senate a few weeks later heralded the 'miry end of an era' (Matthies, 2006). The relative power vacuum that lasted right up to the victory of CDU (Christian Democratic Union) candidates in the elections of May 1981 paved the way for the explosive expansion of squatter movements in the months that followed.

### **REHAB SQUATTING AND 'REVOLT 81'**

THE FALL OF the Senate in January 1981 was preceded by a sweeping 'radicalization' of the movement (Koopmans, 1995:171). The housing wars to which this led can be divided into three phases: emergence, expansion/differentiation and downfall. The first phase had already begun as early as February 1979, when the citizens' initiative 'SO 36' considered 'everything produced by the constitutional state' as exhausted, and organized the first 'rehab squats' (Aust and Rosenblatt, 1981: 36). The squatters' practice of occupying houses and immediately starting to renovate them was meant, on the one hand, to point out the longstanding deterioration and emptiness of the apartments, and on the other hand, to create acceptance of this method of civil disobedience. The public and political success of these first squats had further repercussions: until December 1980, 21 houses had been occupied by squatters in Berlin. As early as March 1980 a 'squatters' council' was set up to act as the point of contact and negotiation in dealings with state authorities. The district and the Senate's initial response was a willingness to negotiate with these first rehab squatters, although the authorities were inconsistent in their political strategy.

The actual starting point of 'Revolt 81', the beginning of the second phase of the squatting movement, was 12 December 1980 (Michel and Spengler, 1981). On this date, an illegal eviction carried out by police

in the Berlin district of *Kreuzberg* provoked a street riot that lasted until the morning of the following day. In the months that followed, new houses were occupied by squatters on an almost daily basis, peaking in the summer of 1981 at around 165 houses (Koopmans, 1995: 174). The overwhelming majority of these apartment buildings were situated in the districts of *Kreuzberg* (approx. 80) and *Schöneberg*. Massive demonstrations, street riots and direct action, combined with the associated erratic expansion of Berlin's squatter movement, was part of a Europe-wide revolution that began in Zurich in May 1980. The Zurich opera house riots were the prelude to a two-year phase of severe disputes surrounding an Autonomous Youth Centre owing to a shortage of spaces for alternative youth cultures. Within the context of a Europe-wide crisis in the Fordist model of economic growth and rising unemployment, the slogan 'Zurich is burning' served as inspiration for an entire generation of mostly disaffected youth.\* A widespread lack of perspective and conservative roll-back against the authoritarian break-up of 1968 constituted the foundation on which the revolt spread like wildfire, initially in the Federal Republic of Germany (Freiburg im Breisgau, Hamburg, Berlin, Bremen and Hannover), then on to Amsterdam and later to Britain (Katsiaficas, 1997: 107ff; Schultze and Gross, 1997: 35).

The 1980 revolt enabled a new political generation to enter the stage, something which was not attributable to the alternative movement. Very little reliable data concerning the social composition of Berlin's squatter movement are available. An article published in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* on 12 August 1983 states that 65% were men, 35% under the age of 21, 40% between the ages of 21 and 25, 36% school children or students, 26% in employment, and 38% unemployed or without a recognized job (Pökatzky, 1983: 9). These figures coincide with analyses that identified two large groups within the squatter movement from the outset (AG Grauwacke, 2008: 45): on the one hand, the 'alternatives', most of them middle-class students or academics; and on the other hand, a group of people who were 'marginalized', either willingly or unwillingly, most of them under the age of 21 and with a proletarian background. This heterogeneity in social structure is also reflected in the diversity of political beliefs and squat-related goals. The movement developed within a few months and was arguably aware of its heterogeneity but never quite wanted to refer to itself in such terms. For a different view of the

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\* The revolt was broader, both thematically and in terms of people, which is why the term 'youth movement' that was used at the time is misleading.

movement, it is helpful to consult the typology developed by Hans Pruijt (2004), which categorized different types of squats according to their respective motives and goals. Pruijt differentiates between deprivation-based squatting, squatting as an alternative housing strategy, entrepreneurial, conservational and political squatting (ibid.: 37).\*

At first, the diverse interests did not conflict with each other. On the contrary: the dynamic of the rehab squatter movement was based first and foremost on the 'radical' forces that made use of the political power vacuum to occupy a substantial number of houses in the shortest possible time, thereby ensuring a level of conflict potential that largely prevented immediate evictions. Such strategies were focused on confrontation, and benefited at the same time from public acceptance and support, which resulted from the long 'work of fermentation' by citizens' action groups and tenants' representative offices and their strategy, which was largely aimed at negotiation and mediation. Soon, however, the conflict between a political course of confrontation, on the one hand, and the strategic pursuit of alternative urban political goals on the other, came to the fore. By the time the issue of legalization of houses arose, conflicts between 'negotiators' and 'non-negotiators' could no longer be covered up: the faction that could be attributed to the alternative movement wanted to hold on to the houses and was increasingly prepared to put this interest before an earlier consensus – no negotiation until 'political' prisoners were released, and an 'overall solution' for all squatted houses. The contingent of 'non-negotiators' began to differentiate themselves from the alternative movement by referring to themselves as 'autonomists' (cf. Schwarzmeier, 2001: 50ff), and accused negotiators of giving up the political struggle and of resorting to the mere preservation of their own spaces.

The strategies that the government pursued were aimed at dealing with this conflict, focusing on the squats and the 'crisis' they triggered. The SPD (Social Democratic Party)-led transitional Senate under the leadership of Hans-Jochen Vogel, which came into office in February 1981, wanted to convert the squats 'into legally ordered conditions that were also in complete harmony with civil law'.\*\* Evictions would only

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\* This last term is, of course, infelicitous: in spite of the polemic at the time, there was undeniably a political aspect to other approaches too. But since any alternative term is equally ambiguous and one-sided, in this article we shall use the term 'political' squats specifically to mean this last type.

\*\* Government declaration of Berlin's governing mayor, Hans-Jochen Vogel, on 12 February 1981 (quoted in Sonnewald and Raabe-Zimmermann, 1983: 67).

be possible if specific criminal charges were made – trespassing alone was not enough – and if prerequisites for immediate renovation were in place (cf. Bodenschatz et al., 1983: 322).

After the elections in May 1981, the CDU-led Senate under Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker reversed the relationship between selective integration and suppression. Any efforts made towards integrating the ‘peaceful’ squatters were repeatedly thwarted by the Minister for the Interior, Heinrich Lummer, a committed advocate of the hardline faction in the department of public prosecution and the police authorities, who had already counteracted the moderate course pursued by the SPD-led Senate. Lummer divided the squatters into ‘those ready to negotiate’ and ‘criminals’. He proclaimed a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach to new squats, and launched a large-scale offensive against demonstrations and similar protest actions. House searches conducted on the pretext of tolerating no ‘lawless spaces for criminals’, were often used either to damage the houses in such a way that they became uninhabitable, or simply to evict their occupants with immediate effect. The wave of repression (cf. Brand, 1988: 204ff) that began with the CDU-led Senate’s entry into office reached its sad climax on 22 September 1981, when Klaus-Jürgen Rattay, an 18-year-old squatter, fleeing from baton-wielding police, was knocked down and killed by a Berlin Transport Authority bus as he crossed the street.\* This was the turning point that led into the third phase and to the downfall of the squatter movement. After the summer of 1981, the movement’s ‘vanguard in Berlin rapidly crumbled away’ (Bacia et al., 1981: 127). It was a sign of their ‘aggressive helplessness’ that TUWAT, an ‘extravaganza’ staged in August 1981, brought together up to 3,000 people from the whole of Germany (Mulhak, 1983: 242). Even the ‘alternative’ squatters ‘believed that the chance of houses being legalized had been diminished by the new CDU-led government’ (ibid.). In the following ‘psycho winter’ there was a temporary absence of repression and consequently absences of unity, and the squats that housed autonomist ‘non-negotiators’ were ground down by deferred internal conflicts (AG Grauwacke, 2008: 65ff). The urban policy initiative in the squatter environment felt that the work they had been doing over many years was now in jeopardy. At the same

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\* If we take stock of repression in the first year of the squatter movement (December 1980 to December 1981), figures reveal: 2,000 people injured by police units, one of them fatally, and 4,972 court proceedings, of which only 3% actually resulted in prosecutions (Brand, 1988: 216, 228).

time other conflicts came to the fore, such as mobilization against the NATO Double Track Decision, the West Runway at Frankfurt Airport and the Brokdorf nuclear power plant.

While the squatters 'had lost the initiative', urban political groups began to 'incorporate the squatter movement into their ideas and policies for housing' (Bodenschatz et al., 1983: 324). Prominent patrons from churches, colleges, the arts and culture scene and the unions who had moved into squatters' houses for their own protection, declared shortly after Rattay's death that they intended to 'prevent the rehab squatters' just cause from disappearing in a fog of violence conjured up by the Senate' (EA, 1981: 86). In negotiations with the *Kreuzbeug* district authority and the Senate they instigated a moratorium on evictions that lasted until Easter 1982 (Bodenschatz et al., 1983: 322). At the same time, squatters from across the spectrum of the alternative movement, in collaboration with urban political campaigners, began to establish supporter associations that would act as models for legalization beyond the scope of individual houses. Attempts to legalize houses more extensively were, however, repeatedly thwarted by the strategy of escalation pursued by the Minister for the Interior, who ordered evictions on the slightest pretext, often in the middle of negotiations (ibid.: 325). This 'type of pre-concerted' interplay (Pökatzky, 1983) between the negotiating table and evictions characterized the entire 'legalization' process right up to the final evictions in the autumn of 1984. Koopmans (1995: 178) totals up the figures: of 165 squatted houses, 105 were finally 'contractually pacified' by rental or purchase agreements, and the occupants of 60 were evicted.

The legalizations were only a partial success: by the end of 1984 the squatter movement was finally crushed, or rather, 'pacified'. Only a few legalized houses enjoyed financial support under the 'self-help housing' programme launched in 1982. In spite of everything, spaces for collective and alternative lifestyles remained a marginal phenomenon. At the same time, the legalization of houses established the division of the movement, making it easier to criminalize the autonomist 'non-negotiators'. The latter were all the easier to criminalize because 'sections of the squatter movement', by virtue of their militant actionism and subjectivist misconception of autonomy, gave up 'every right to turn their own ideas into the reality of other social spheres', and isolated themselves in the process (Geronimo, 1990: 96). The legalization of houses ultimately signified the end of any political dimension to the squats beyond the scope of housing policy.

The housing policy incentives that remained had a particular influence on the International Building Exhibition set up in 1979, and undoubtedly constituted a success for the squatter movements. As a publicly financed and commercially organized institution in the 1980s, the exhibition became a new centre of power for urban building (Bernt, 2003: 46). Its old-building section was a ‘reservoir for departmental policies opposed to the demolition policy’ and became the driving force behind the ‘twelve principles of cautious urban renewal’ that assimilated the core demands of tenants’ groups, urban political groups and rehab squatters. Although these principles were never laid down by law, they had a significant impact, even beyond Berlin (ibid.: 52). But not even these successes remained untarnished. One effect of decentralization and the expansion of opportunities to participate in local decision-making processes was that even the conflicts had to be dealt with locally. ‘While the legal parameters were preserved, decision making was moved down a level, to the centres of conflict, and activists were integrated into a consensus-seeking process with the aim of gaining more acceptance and identification with decisions in the neighbourhood’ (ibid.: 56). Even the survival of hard-won achievements in housing policy, rooted above all in the work of the International Building Exhibition, seemed to depend on the successful outcome of these attempts to find a compromise. As Karl Homuth (1984: 37ff) put it in an early study, ‘cautious urban renewal replaced the violent character, bureaucratic paternalism and inscrutability of these plans with careful, step-by-step processes that were easier to comprehend and more socially adjusted’, yet this would not come into full effect for several years.

## **SQUATS IN EAST BERLIN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1990S**

THE SQUATS IN East Berlin at the beginning of the 1990s can only be viewed within the context of the explosive social changes that took place during the turnaround (*Wende*) and reunification. The political power vacuum of the *Wende* period, and the massive loss of authority on the part of the police and municipality facilitated the large-scale occupation of vacant old buildings in the inner city. In addition, the GDR’s housing policy, oriented towards new buildings, was creating the main basis of urban buildings for the squats. After years of reconstruction in Berlin, a city scarred by the destruction of war, the housing problem was to be solved by erecting industrially manufactured apartment



buildings that were for the most part developed in large estates at the outer city limits in the form of new towns or districts. As a result of this one-sided orientation, the inner-city areas, consisting of old housing that had been ideologically devalued as the legacy of capitalist urban development, were neglected in town planning and were showing signs of structural decay (Hoscislowski, 1991; Hannemann, 2000). The outcome of this real-socialist practice of disinvestment was not only poor refurbishment of apartments in the old housing areas but also a vacancy rate of up to 20% in particular districts. A total of 25,000 old apartments were vacant, most of them in the inner-city districts (SenBauWohn, 1990). Accordingly, squats during the *Wende* period concentrated on housing stock in the inner-city districts of East Berlin that dated back to the *Gründerzeit* (a time of rapid industrial expansion in Germany around 1900).

In total, around 120 houses were occupied by squatters in the inner-city districts of *Mitte*, *Prenzlauer Berg* and *Friedrichshain*, and sporadically around the district of *Lichtenberg*. Based on an analysis of the usually fortnightly (but weekly at times of intensive mobilization) *Squatters' News*, issues of the video magazine *AK Kraak*, as well as interviews with those who were active at the time and personal recollections of the period, the dynamics of squatting in East Berlin can be divided into three distinct phases. These can be distinguished according to both the character of the squats and their main geographical focal points.

The first phase of squats encompassed the period from December 1989 to April 1990. The majority of the 70 or so houses occupied by squatters during these months were in *Mitte* and *Prenzlauer Berg*. In comparison to earlier squatted apartments – ‘*schwarz wohnen*’ (‘residing illicitly’) had a long tradition in the GDR – the character of squatted houses clearly changed in the winter of 1989 to 1990. Houses were occupied openly and assertively. Banners, secured windows and barricade-like doorways soon made these houses sites for an anarchistic, libertarian experiment against everything that was petit-bourgeois, against Nazis (who had already begun to organize themselves in very large numbers in the final years of the GDR) and against every form of rule. The squatters during this first phase were mostly East German youth, who were largely already acquainted with one another from various subcultures and political scenes. They were then joined by the first West German and international ‘fanatics’ and artists, who by and large were integrated in a friendly way into the new squat. In particular, the squat called the ‘art department store’ in the *Oranienburger Strasse*

(*Tacheles*) and the squat at 5 *Schönhauser Allee*, which served as the headquarters of the art and culture project called WYDOX, focused on creating spaces that would primarily help squatters achieve self-realization. Their function as a place of residence was merely secondary (see Galenza and Havemeister, 2005). They were, in turn, joined by individual squats made up of citizens' action groups, who focused on preventing the planned demolitions of entire old housing blocks in the districts of *Prenzlauer Berg* and *Mitte*. Most of these houses were legalized relatively quickly into cooperatives and 'cautiously' renovated by means of financial incentives.

In his typology of squats, Pruijt (2004) identifies a heterogeneous mix of different strategies during this first phase of squatting at the beginning of the 1990s. In addition to squats that focused on squatting as an alternative housing strategy, some squats quickly became established as centres for exhibitions and other events (entrepreneurial squatting), while other squats had the goal of actively preventing existing demolition plans (conservational squatting).

A second phase of squats, lasting from May to July 1990, centred geographically on the urban district of *Friedrichshain*. During this period the squats underwent a qualitative and quantitative expansion, growing by a further 50. In their search for places to live as well as new adventure, an increasing number of 'unpolitical' groups also experimented with squatting. In addition to the mainly East German squatters, there were now squats that for the first time were being organized by West Germans or West Berliners. These squatters had been affected by the housing shortage in West Berlin and had partly been brought together through political protests. They were predominantly students who collectively moved into vacant houses in the East. The main focal points were still *Prenzlauer Berg* and *Mitte*. In *Friedrichshain* only a handful of houses were occupied by squatters at this time. In the April 1990 issue of *Interim*, the newsletter for West Berlin's 'alternative' scene, members from the oppositional 'church from below' drew attention to houses in *Mainzer Strasse* that had been left vacant since 1987, and put out a call to the squatter movement (see Arndt, 1991). In their announcement they said: 'If there are really enough squatting opportunities for everyone, if it's more a case of a lack of people willing to take them up, and if it will maybe help avert or impede a further destruction of houses along western lines, then why not?' (ibid.: 32).

At the beginning of May the 11 vacant houses in *Mainzer Strasse* were occupied by squatters. With over 250 occupants, the 'Mainzer',

as it was called, swiftly became the centre of the *Friedrichshain* squatter scene. Alongside many facilities (bookshop, second-hand bookseller, public kitchen) the first *Tunten* (gay) house project in East Berlin and a women's/lesbian house were set up. Those who lived in these houses on *Mainzer Strasse* were mainly West Berliners and members of the West German autonomous movement (Benjamin, no date). The coordinating committee that operated between the occupied houses, the 'squatters' council', pursued a strategy of confrontation, in particular through initial negotiations for contractual legalization of squatted houses.

In Pruijt's typology this second phase of squats in East Berlin may be more clearly characterized as 'political' squatting. Houses that were occupied by squatters were no longer considered mere free spaces for self-realization, but more markedly as sites of confrontation with the state authorities and as symbols of political self-positioning.

A third phase of the East Berlin squatter movement began at the end of July 1990. The number of new squats was reduced when the municipal authorities in East Berlin started implementing the 'Berlin Line' ordinance, in terms of which, from 24 July 1990 onwards, no new squats would be tolerated, and independently of any criminal charges or eviction notices, squats would be evacuated by police within 24 hours of occupation. In early November evictions of squatters from 2 houses in *Prenzlauer Berg* and *Lichtenberg* gave rise to violent conflict. After evictions on the morning of 12 November 1990, around 50 squatters from the houses on *Mainzer Strasse* spontaneously demonstrated their solidarity with the evicted squatters. According to police reports, squatters reacted to the introduction of police reinforcements and the use of water cannons and armoured personnel carriers in *Mainzer Strasse* by bombarding the police with flares, throwing roof tiles, cobblestones, paving slabs, sacks of cement, slingshots and Molotov cocktails (Arndt, 1991: 13). During the night, a violent street riot ensued that lasted for hours. Attempts by around 1,500 police officers, all from the West, to force their way into the street were unsuccessful, despite the use of water cannons, armoured personnel carriers and stun grenades (ibid.: 21). This escalation of violence made a negotiated solution less and less likely, in particular because the West Berlin police ignored the district's political protagonists and focused instead on eviction by force. In the early hours of 14 November, *Mainzer Strasse* was cleared by a total of 3,000 police officers from all over Germany, several helicopters and ten water cannons. With over 400 arrests made and many casualties on both sides, this was the violent turning point in the East Berlin squatter movement.

The evictions in *Mainzer Strasse* clearly demonstrated that the option of militantly defending squatters' houses had failed. This realization prompted the majority of groups in squatted houses to come to the negotiating table. During district-specific negotiations, usage agreements on the majority of houses were drawn up with the respective housing associations. However, when East Berlin properties were being reassigned to their previous owners or their respective heirs, these contractual agreements were no longer considered reliable. In the case of a number of squatted houses, reassignment led to conflict with the private owners and to more evacuations well into the 1990s.

In contrast to the wave of squatting of the early 1980s, internal debates between 'negotiators' and 'non-negotiators' in the East Berlin squats remained confined to specific time periods. After the dramatic evictions of squatters from the houses in *Mainzer Strasse* in particular, only a few squatters refused to accept a negotiated solution. This change in attitude is evident from the ratio of around 30 evicted squats to 90 legalized ones during this time. While around three-quarters of all the houses in East Berlin were contractually safeguarded in the early 1980s, in West Berlin the figure was scarcely more than 60%. After legalization, many former squatters began to make structural improvements and, following their own initial renovations and repair work, undertook more comprehensive restructuring, often in the context of public development programmes. In the course of the 1990s the Berlin Senate spent over 250 million euros on what was known as the 'self-help housing policy' development programme. In total, over 3,000 units were renewed in this way, many of them former squats (Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin, 2002). On the basis of lease agreements that were concluded over many years and as a result of people having a substantial personal stake in the modernization of the buildings, modern housing conditions were created in the context of these programmes. In some districts, the renovation of former squats was the first clear sign of urban renewal in the making.

## **SQUATTING AND URBAN RESTRUCTURING**

THE SQUATTER MOVEMENTS of the 1980s and 1990s were similar not only in terms of their solidity; we can also identify numerous parallels between the processes involved. First, in each case a political power vacuum was the condition for the explosive proliferation of both

movements: in the 1980s the death throes of the SPD-led Senate of January 1981, and the transitional government's restricted capacity to act; and in the 1990s the fall of the Berlin Wall and the institutional chaos that followed. Secondly, in both cases a violent demonstration of restored sovereignty in urban policy constituted a turning point that ended in the defeat of the movements: on the one hand, the eviction of 8 squats on 22 September 1981, during which Klaus-Jürgen Rattay came to a violent end; and on the other hand, the eviction of *Mainzer Strasse* on 14 November 1990. In both cases this restoration of sovereignty was preceded by widespread shifts in political power at the broad urban level: the election of the CDU-led Senate in 1981, the formal reunification of Berlin and the annexation of the former GDR into the Federal Republic on 3 October 1990. Thirdly, a further similarity was the fact that extensive legalization models could in each case only be applied to houses in public or not-for-profit ownership, whereas for houses that were in private ownership only individual rental, leasehold or purchase agreements were drawn up. And fourthly, the conflicts within both squatter movements ran along similar lines: while in 1990 the conflict between 'negotiators' and 'non-negotiators' was not as acute as it had been in the early 1980s, the conflict of interest between, on the one hand, 'conservation' squatting and 'squatting to try out collective forms of living', and on the other hand, the 'political' or autonomous squats, was the same. It was symptomatic that in both movements the squats organized by citizens' action groups were the first to draw up agreements and legalize their houses.

Despite all these similarities, however, we must also take proper account of the differences. The squats of the 1980s were part of an extended and differentiated alternative subculture that centred on the inner-city districts of *Kreuzberg* and *Schöneberg*, which made up not only the ideological background for the squats, but also the environment of their social and political supporters. The squats in the 1990s, by contrast, consisted more of alien elements in a situation of sweeping, radical change. While there were continuities with the GDR practice of 'residing illegally', and many houses were rooted in their respective neighbourhoods, they could nevertheless not be considered part of the more extensive movement in the eastern inner-city districts. However, the most marked difference between the squats of the 1980s and 1990s may be found in the role each played in urban restructuring. We shall now explore this difference in more detail.

## THE ROLE OF SQUATS IN URBAN RESTRUCTURING

THE POLICY OF urban renewal pursued in Berlin can be divided into three clearly distinguishable phases and models: first, what is known as 'areal redevelopment', carried out between 1963 and 1981; secondly, the policy of cautious urban renewal, which was pursued between 1981 and 1989; and thirdly, post-Fordist urban renewal in East Berlin, pursued from the early 1990s. The Berlin squatter movements in each case accompanied the transition to a new model of urban renewal. For this reason we shall examine in more detail the specific network of relations between squatters and the implementation of new types of urban renewal.

'Areal redevelopment' describes an approach that focused on the widespread demolition of housing stock that is in need of renewal, as well as the building of new, modern housing developments. The 'First Berlin Urban Renewal Programme', approved by the Berlin Senate in 1963, provided for the demolition of 10,000 housing units. The renewal model was based on developers (mostly housing associations) buying up mostly private property in the redevelopment areas and extensive financial support for demolition and new house-building work from public funds for the Social Housing Development Programme (Dahlhaus, 1968; Zapf, 1969). Aspects of this authoritarian form of urban renewal that were particularly criticized were the failure to involve residents, the concerted destruction of existing neighbourhood structures, and the demolition of low-cost housing stock that would not be replaced. In spite of comprehensive funding, rents in the new buildings were markedly higher than those in the old building areas (Becker and Schulz zur Wiesch, 1982).

The policy of cautious urban renewal was born out of this criticism of the redevelopment of spaces. In implementing urban renewal it focused on three types of 'caution': caution in construction, which involved preserving the building stock and modernizing one step at a time; social caution, which involved preserving the composition of the social structure wherever possible and allowing tenants in the redevelopment areas to stay in their houses; and finally, the principle of caution in planning policy, comprising widespread involvement and participation by residents in renewal activities. A participatory model of urban renewal was tried out. Nevertheless, there was no change in the material basis for urban renewal. Even cautious urban renewal rested on extensive public funds and a transfer of the plots of land to (often urban) redevelopers, so that in spite of other goals, urban renewal was

from then on organized by the state and distanced from the market (Konter, 1994; Bernt, 2003).

The squats of the early 1980s were of major importance for the implementation of cautious urban renewal. The squat houses and the squatters occupying them provided the trigger, as well as objects and partners, for a new model of urban renewal. First, the concentration of the squatters' houses in future or pre-designated redevelopment areas was a consequence of the legitimation crisis in the redevelopment of spaces. Squatters, citizens' action groups and a critical section of the public attacked in equal measure, if not always as one voice, the planned demolition of whole streets. The self-presentation of the squatter movement as 'rehab squatters' essentially suggested a criticism of the (by then usual) demolition-approach to development. Secondly, the squatted houses not only triggered a new policy of urban renewal; they were at the same time a kind of experimental laboratory in which new instruments of urban renewal were trialled.

The eviction of squatters was not the only way in which the city reacted to the regulatory requirement to end the existence of 'lawless spaces'. For the first time, some of those living in squatted houses were granted a say in the renovation and design of their houses. Collective usage agreements, gradual modernization and the deflationary integration of self-help interests represented completely new forms of urban renewal and the end of the authoritarian urban-renewal regime of redeveloping spaces. The apparent coherence of the participatory principles behind cautious urban renewal, along with the squatters' notion of 'self-empowerment', can be viewed as a third level of successful integration of squats into cautious urban renewal. Apart from some basic criticisms of the de-politicization of housing (Homuth, 1984) and of the eviction of squatted houses, described as 'preventative counter-insurgency', an independently minded political alliance consisting of alternative groups, squatters, the Alternative List (the later Green Party) and professional town planners and architects agreed to reject the bureaucratic and authoritarian urban renewal of the past, and to work together to create alternative models.

Post-Fordist urban renewal in East Berlin in the 1990s was clearly distinguishable from the cautious urban renewal in the western part of the city by criteria relating to real estate, urban planning and finance. The enormous renewal requirements of around 180,000 apartments in old buildings, the crisis in public finance and the privatization of property brought about by restitution in redevelopment areas led to a

form of urban renewal 'financed first and foremost by property owners' (Berlin Senate, 1993). Instead of using funds and transferring ownership to redevelopment agencies, the authorities attempted to implement the social and building objectives of urban renewal in East Berlin using town planning legislation. The mode of control deployed for urban renewal could be characterized as an increasingly negotiation-oriented administrative action (Holm, 2006: 90). Rather than imposing direct control through 'money', the redevelopment objectives of the 1990s were to be strengthened using 'laws and commandments' as means of control. In the process, multifaceted systems of negotiation between tenants, property owners and urban authorities were created. The redevelopment regime, in particular contractors and tenants' committees, used moderation and consultation to provide, wherever possible, conflict-free implementation of urban renewal. Now the decisive factors were not merely economic criteria, but also cultural and social resources. Educated tenants in particular, and those closely involved with social networks, were better able to make their interests count in the individualized negotiation of modernization plans (Häußermann et al., 2002).

Unlike the West Berlin squatter movement in the early 1980s, squatters in East Berlin did not play a central role in implementing a new redevelopment regime. Squatted houses were, in fact, an alien element in the new regime of urban renewal. As in West Berlin, the regulatory strategy the city's government was pursuing gave squatters huge scope for structurally renovating their houses. In East Berlin the authorities for the most part had recourse to solutions already tried out in the West. The routine unwinding of self-help programmes and collective tenancy contracts had absolutely no innovatory potential for implementing the new redevelopment model in East Berlin, focused as it was on individual negotiation and private investments. These programmes, on the contrary, brought about only cautious renewal of small niches. The special role of squatted houses not only created discord between East and West, but also explained the squatters' far-reaching avoidance of district conflicts. Their special status made cooperation with tenants and district initiatives difficult. For example, widely held fears regarding the restitution process and changing property ownership played only a minor role in former squats that had long-standing leasehold agreements. Contact between district initiatives and squatters' houses existed primarily in cases where private property owners tried to evict the squatters themselves. For example, a fire on the roof of the squats



in *Dunckerstrasse 14/15* in *Prenzlauer Berg's Helmholtz Square* led to a massive show of solidarity between neighbours and can be regarded as the birth of many neighbourhood initiatives that still remain active in the area today. In view of otherwise divergent interests of residents, such shows of solidarity were, however, isolated cases.

Research carried out on movements such as the *Kreuzberg* squatters in the 1980s shows that urban social movements cannot really be understood when considered in isolation, and that they must instead be viewed against the background of general social change. In the context of the Fordist redevelopment of spaces in particular, squats can be seen as catalysts for areal development. The orientation towards housing preservation in the founding period, the demand for a detailed process of renewal, and even the implementation of an extended environment for urban renewal, can be seen as crystallization points for post-Fordist urban renewal (Jahn, 1994). In this way, the *Kreuzberg* squatter movement illustrates the modernizing function ascribed to urban social movements (Rucht, 1997). The institutionalization of social movements that Margit Mayer (2009: 15) termed 'from protest to programme' was reflected in the practice of 'self-help in building', but also in the categorical acceptance of cautious urban renewal. In his studies of Zurich, Christian Schmid (1998) refers to a dialectic of urban social movements and Zurich's 'global city formation', and in particular identifies the impulse of urban protest movements and subcultural activities to bring about a cultural openness and the formation of a cosmopolitan image of the city (ibid.: 221). In Berlin, too, there were attempts to incorporate the squatter movement's multifaceted and often self-organized cultural forms of expression into the image of a vital and creative city. Urban protests and squatter movements should not be analysed as something in opposition to the neoliberal urban development, but must always be considered in terms of their restructuring impulse.

If we divide neoliberal urban policies into 'roll-back' and 'roll-out' phases of neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002), the history of Berlin's urban renewal shows that in *Kreuzberg* in the 1980s new forms of control and governance were being implemented while Fordist funding instruments were maintained. It was only when the model was applied to East Berlin's redevelopment areas in the 1990s that a clear roll-back of the earlier welfare-state foundations of urban renewal became noticeable. The economy of urban renewal, no longer based on public funding and public redevelopment agencies, now drew on private investments of professional property developers. However, the communicative

incorporation of modernization projects, the involvement of non-governmental agencies and the rhetoric of 'cautious urban renewal' all survived. The squatter movement's demands for a cautious treatment of building structures and for more participation were absorbed into the 'software' of neoliberal urban renewal, while changes in 'hardware' did not occur until urban renewal was extended into East Berlin. The squatters were not so much the engines of this second transformation in urban renewal as they were alien elements in its development. Its abstention from a personal urban political agenda isolated the squatter movement of the 1990s from other urban protest movements.

### **A NEW URBAN POLITICAL MOVEMENT?**

LEFTIST MOVEMENTS TODAY are again taking up urban restructuring as a theme, and a 'movement of free spaces' seems to be picking up the loose ends left by the squatter movements in the 1990s. In Berlin, these themes were first revived in the campaign for a social centre between 2001 and 2005. Mobilization against the eviction of a longstanding housing project at 59 *Yorckstrasse*, as well as the occupation of the former Bethanien Hospital and its use as a social centre a few days after the evictions of June 2005, revived the debate on urban restructuring and free spaces. And discussions around this subject in the Berlin movements in 2008 seemed for the time being to have reached a peak: the 'squatter action days' held all across Europe in April, the successful prevention of a possible eviction of the social centre *Köpi*, the 'emancipatory space' action days at the end of May, and finally a referendum that was called by the alliance 'Sink the Mediaspree', with 87% of participants voting against a large-scale urban restructuring programme.

After 15 years' delay, how did urban movements assume such political significance within the current model of post-Fordist urban renewal? The first decisive factor was the emergence of a 'new' political movement in the 1990s, for which the Zapatista uprising in 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico, and the protests in Seattle in 1999 and Genoa in 2001 can be considered the most important reference points. Thus, for instance, the campaign for a social centre initiated a short time after Genoa was less an expression of a lack of space for leftist movements than a culmination of the convergence of groups and trends in the context of a movement critical of globalization (cf. Lebuhn, 2008: 30ff). A second reason is the accelerated urban renewal in Berlin's inner-city districts. Luxury modernization, rising rent costs and social

displacement are no longer confined to the districts of *Prenzlauer Berg* and *Mitte*, but can be seen increasingly in other inner-city districts such as *Friedrichshain*, *Kreuzberg* or *Neukölln*. Furthermore, former squatter houses are now no longer excluded from these trends. Changes in ownership or a revived interest in profit on the part of existing owners have affected the leftist ‘free spaces’ at 59 *Yorckstrasse* and currently also at 54 *Rigaer*, the *Köpi* and 183 *Brunnenstrasse*. This has led to broader alliances such as the ‘*Wir Bleiben Alle!*’ (‘United We Stay’) campaign, brought into being to organize squatters’ action days, or through participation in the ‘Sink the Mediaspree’ initiative, which was started in 2006. It remains uncertain how far this new political interest will have noticeable repercussions for current urban renewal policy, or whether, in fact, we can expect a break with the current redevelopment model. The increasingly strained housing-policy situation, the large number of new and old groups and initiatives, and initial institutional successes such as the victorious referendum against the Mediaspree development are at least signs of a new wave of urban policy disputes.

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# **HAVE SQUAT, WILL TRAVEL: HOW SQUATTER MOBILITY MOBILIZES SQUATTING**

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“WE WILL NOT LEAVE!” THIS DEFIANT STATEMENT IS THE TYPICAL RESPONSE from squatters threatened with eviction. To leave would be to give up, to lose one’s home or a community’s social center, to lose a building back into the real estate market, to lose autonomy, to lose face. Thus, when eviction looms, squatters will do nearly everything to hold on to the building, whether that involves going through legal channels to increase their claims over the property, waging a public relations campaign to turn local sentiment in their favor, or, if all else fails, employing more militant tactics, such as barricading the space and defending it against the police. Leaving is losing. Stability is security. It is not only their space that is under attack, but also their identity, because what is a squatter without a building to squat? To successfully occupy a building, they must refuse to leave.

Except, of course, when they want to. While resistance for squatters is often, and most publicly, performed simply as staying put, the reality is more complex. In fact, as David Harvey (2005: 42) notes, sometimes “the only form of resistance is to move.” It does not always make sense to stand and fight to the end. Escape can be a powerful supplement to open conflict as a response to power, and squatters often build elaborate escape paths from their buildings as part of preparing



its defense (ADILKNO 1994). Escape, however, is simply one way to move. Squatting provides a stable place to live and work, and by doing so, it also launches various complementary and conflicting forms of mobilities. At its simplest level, squatters must always keep an eye towards their next location. While particular squats are not always possible to maintain, flexibility and mobility guarantees that squatting can be. Thus movement may be from one street to another, from one neighborhood to another, or possibly to new cities or countries. Squatting provides stability by creating a resting place for transient populations; it also creates new opportunities and desires for mobility. Squatting sets people into motion, drawing them to cities to become squatters, to experience their culture, to learn their tactics. If the individual squatter's maxim might be stated as create stability while preparing for mobility, this is even more the case when examining squatters' movements. Squatters' struggles emerged in many European cities in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and quickly spread across urban, national and international spaces. The spread of squatting across Europe was more than merely the abstract diffusion of ideas and tactics; it was driven by the spread and physical movement of actual squatters. Amsterdam squatters went to Berlin. Berlin squatters went to London. London squatters went to Barcelona. Barcelona squatters went to Amsterdam. Sometimes movement provides an escape, sometimes an exchange, and often both.

Squatting is about space. At its most basic, it is about people with not enough space appropriating it from people they think have too much. Squatting is also about place; it is a tool to defend place, as well as to redefine it. Generally, squatting is about turning empty spaces into meaningful places. To fill these spaces with meaning requires a lot of hard work, both to repair and renovate the building and to convince others that their efforts at place making are legitimate and worthwhile. To do this, squatters draw on many resources, grounding their meaning in the concepts of "the local" and "stability." Despite the important role these two bundles of practices play in successful squatters' movements, this should not be taken to mean that squatting is exclusively, or even primarily, about the local and the stable. In fact, a careful reading of the successes of squatters' movements in Europe reveals that squatting is at least as dependent on cultivating and strengthening strategies of the translocal and of mobility. This tends to be underplayed in public discourse, though, since it does not fit easily with common sense ideas of community, which squatters appeal to in their claims, even as they complicated it through their actions.

Using the case study of the emergence and mobilization of the Amsterdam squatters' movement in the late 1970s and 1980s, I will show the critical role that activist mobility played in the simultaneous formation of a local and international squatters' movement. Mobility is critical in understanding contemporary social movements, even one as seemingly place based and resistant to moving as squatters' movements appear to be. I argue that you cannot fully explain and analyze the emergence and activity of a social movement without paying close attention to the actual movement of people who constitute it. Even the most intensely local politics are the product of many forms of mobility. It is not that the political creation of the local actually ignores the importance of mobile bodies to their issue, it is just that they are too easily dismissed as nothing more than "outsiders" or as secondary actors: belonging is placed in opposition to mobility. Mobility is not just about difference. Movement both homogenizes and differentiates. Flows of people, things, and ideas produce unique places, as well as spaces of sameness, linking them together into a broader web of paths and connections. I hope to show how squatting provides both "moorings" and "mobilities," feeding and being fed by its simultaneous local and transnational context. This dynamic is fundamental to understanding the emergence of the Amsterdam squatters' movement and how other local and national movements emerged alongside it due to the forms of mobility practiced by squatters.

## MOVEMENTS MOVE

HOW MANY SOCIAL movement dynamics get missed through the thorough, but partial, focus on the "social" as opposed to the "movement"? When mobility is studied, the focus is primarily either on a momentary movement, like the protest march (Barber 2002), as well as the maps they generate (Wood and Krygier, 2009), or on large-scale elite mobility and the formation of transnational social movement organizations (Keck and Sikkink 1998). But as protest and protestors have globalized in their fields of struggle, the importance of mobility for all kinds of activists has also increased.

Activist mobility is central to creating durable forms of collective identity. Urry (2000, 2007) and Kaufman (2002) both argue that conceptions of society and the social, including social movements, need to be rethought through approaches based on mobility. That is, to focus on the "social" side of social movements requires a fuller engagement

with issues of movement. Mobility, like place, is relational. That is, mobility is meaningful in relationship to other forms; it is always plural, never singular. Moreover, mobilities produce a way of relating. They are how we form and make sense of relations to others (Adey 2009: 18). Building solidarity across space can play a critical role in forming an effective collective identity. McDonald (2006) points us towards new ways of conceptualizing movement solidarity, ideas that are in line with theorizing the practices of traveling activists. Importantly, he supplements the concept of solidarity with his own, “fluidarity,” which is based on more fluid and fleeting identifications, which are not a sign of weakness, but rather of flexibility. Travel lends itself to such models of collective identity – fluid because travel is at its core transient and changing, but also solid, since travel is embodied. Bodies and politics travel through space and are grounded, at least for some period of time, in a specific place. “Bodies and embodiment occupy the center of activist experience...the body keeps recurring, to the point where it threatens to take control of experience” (54).

McDonald builds on Urry’s (2000) concept of the *Bund*, based on the German word for association, as an important basis of identification and action, one that combines ideas of belonging and mobility. Unlike conventional forms of community, the *Bund* is intense, impermanent, and mobile (McDonald 2006, 95). This ties in well with both travel and squatting. Not opposites, they are rather different manifestations of the same desires. One is captured at rest (but even then still mobile, even when promising “we will not leave”) while the other is in motion (even while the beliefs and practices remain stable within the cycle). Protests have always been a place where ideas are shared and communicated – not just to the larger public, but also to other activists and participants. When activists travel, it can spark increased innovation, information sharing and identity building. As Eyerman (2006) argues, mobile activists create new forms of political interactions, which provide “additional space for education and political and social interaction between activists and with the local community. Demonstrations in other words have become extended periods of intensive political socialization” (206).

Mobility is a way of being in and defining space, and space matters to movements. Tilly (2000) lays out the most important ways space affects movements. Movement participants act in space, and are therefore enabled and constrained by it. Movements act on spaces. And movements change spaces. Cobarrubias and Pickles (2009) show how movements

actively work to imagine the spaces of contention. For example, activists produce maps as a means to re-imagine and redirect political action and outcomes. During the past decade, global justice summit protests have played a key role in creating an alternative space of political contention and discourse. Mobility is key to the strategy and identity of these protests, as denoted by the emergence of a new political actor, the “summit hopper.” Featherstone (2003) follows the “Inter-Continental Caravan” in the way its movement across spaces creates new maps of grievances. As McDonald (2006) points out, this mode of politics as travel “underlines the importance of a grammar of experience associated with displacement and voyage” (44). And when activists arrive at their new destination – the place of protest, which is itself a protest of place – they seek to redefine cities to make them suitable for political confrontation, as Shields (2003) shows in his analysis of protesters’ appropriation of the tourist maps of Quebec City in 2000.

Place can be understood as either territorial or relational (Nicholls 2009). Traditionally, place is treated as territorial, as a fixed and solid entity. Nicholls (2009) argues that such conceptions are problematic in a world defined by mobility and flux. Rather place is better seen as an area “where actors with different statuses, geographical ties, and mobilities interact in fleeting and unstructured ways” (80). Massey (2005) defines place as “always under construction...It is never finished; never closed. Too often space has been relegated to a frozen, immobile state” (9). Thus, “conceptualizing space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics” (59). She claims that simplistic treatments of place leave it vulnerable to being cast as a victim in current debates about globalization, even by its claimed defenders. While the local is often posited as the opposite of the global, and thus both threatened by and the primary basis of resistance against globalization, Massey shows that the reality is more complex: “local places are not simply always the victims of the global; nor are they always politically defensible redoubts against the global” (101). Thus, local production of the global offers some chance to affect global mechanisms through local politics – not merely as defense but to reshape the global itself (102). Mobility of political actors, and the concurrent politicization of mobility, is one way in which activists participate in complicating how space and place are understood, opening it up not just to flows of people, but also to new ideas and practices. As Massey notes, “the closure of identity in a territorialized space of

bounded places provides little in the way of avenues for a developing radical politics” (183), so when activists struggle for more immediate demands, they are often simultaneously resisting the closures of space. While Nicholls (2009) supports Massey’s relational understanding of place, he argues that it also lacks a working theory of collective action that can explain how place is made and remade by collective actors.

To address this omission, he recommends bringing mobility and place theory into social movement research. Such a move offers important perspectives on how place creates opportunities for diverse actors to come together, how this coming together affects power relations, and, most importantly for this work, how activist nodes get linked together to form a broader social movement space (Nicholls 2009, 83). Building on this latter point, he asserts that social movement place-making and mobility create productive conditions for forming and cultivating collective ties, increasing the number of possible contact points for diverse actors with similar goals to come into contact with each other. “While these complex interactions can spawn new alliances, they also play a role in lowering cognitive barriers, freeing the flow of information between different organizations, and spurring innovation” (85). Mobile activists spread ideas and identity, and in doing so facilitate the future spreading of new ideas and identities.

This social movement space is the product of both mobility and stability. Moorings make mobility possible. They act as enablers, allowing actors to experience the mobility of themselves and others, as well as creating destinations for movement (Adey 2009: 21). Relationships between the fixed and the mobile are recursive: mobilities defined fixedness and create further fixedness, albeit not without tensions (23). Mobility, especially in repetition, creates stability and formulates attachment – to movement, but also to place, as well as the people and things one travels with. Technology, which makes mobility possible, is also assumed to render it redundant, by delinking communication from proximity. But closeness does not replace the need or desire for “real contact” – it actual intensifies it (18). Mobile life is constituted through a “material world that involves new and distant meanings” (21). Mobility is not the inverse of stability, nor does it always challenge forms of stability. Instead, to be fixed and to be mobile are two related and interactive aspects of social movement activity, and it is important to understand the conditions under which these relations support or undermine the other.

In recent years, social movements have drawn on ideas of Deleuze and Guattari (1980) in formulating both strategies and self-understandings,

particularly their idea of the nomad. They locate their social position in opposition to citizens, sedentary actors, who are not necessarily immobile, but when they move, they travel over familiar routes, returning to the same places. Nomadism, however, takes a different tack, not one of rigidity and permanence, but fleeting, free lines of flight without an endpoint. The nomad relies on spatial features, but is not governed by them. The nomad travels through open, smooth space, navigating not from global knowledge (i.e., “the map”), but by localized engagement. The nomad engages with a space that is “localized but not delimited”. Nomadism, despite (or perhaps because of) its romantic opaqueness, has been appropriated by numerous radical political actors. Nomadism is equated with resistance (Adey 2009: 60). Day (2005) argues that Deleuze and Guattari’s third category, the smith, is more appropriate. The smith is neither nomadic nor sedentary, but is a hybrid moving back and forth, guided by an “involuntary invention” of new tactics and strategies (403). This actor creates both moorings and movements, a network of connections that itself is always in flux.

Another concept appropriated from Deleuze and Guattari is deterritorialization. To deterritorialize is to decontextualize relations, often as process of reterritorializing them into a new context. Fernandez, Starr, and Scholl (2011) in their book on the social control of dissent, show how summit protests can be seen as a conflict between police and protests to control space through processes of ongoing territorialization. As they show, this is not limited to the space of the actual protest, but begins long before, as activists try to move through space in order to contribute to the action, and the state seeks to limit their movement as much as possible, sometimes changing the laws to do so. Mobility sits at the heart of new European spatial visions (Adey 2009: 10). That is, the new Europe is a product of new forms of mobility, for capital, consumer goods, and people. This ideal Europe is only possible, though, through the exclusion of others’ movement, primarily non-European immigrants, but also oppositional political actors. In the run ups to recent summit protests, governments have suspended the Schengen agreement which allows free movement across borders, in order to render activists immobile (Fernandez, Starr, and Scholl, 2011).

That government officials have become so interested in constraining the mobility of activists could be taken as one more sign of the success of such movement to the larger movements. But while travel tends to serve certain positive needs and goals of activists, it is not without its own costs, such as a tendency to inflate the appearance of the depth and

breadth of opposition, which can result in tactical blunders and missteps, as well as organizational infighting (Katsiaficas 1997). Networks and links built on mobility are often maintained by and oriented towards the needs of the most affluent and elite participants, since they are the ones who can most easily travel.

Mobility is riven with differences and access issues. While it is easy to celebrate, it is not always simply positive. It is gendered, it affects abilities to participate, it can disrupt consensus, it can erase public-private boundaries (Adey 2009: 88). Additionally, Nicholls (2009) argues that there are two moments in social movement mobilization. First, forming loose connections between activists who share grievances and identity create identification with a general cause. Second, directed and coordinated mobilities produce a network of affiliated activists who can participate in shared actions. This second moment often creates tensions with the first. “The ability to overcome geographical and cultural obstacles makes it possible for ‘mobile’ activists to forge a coherent social movement space, but in doing this, they introduce new points of antagonism that pit them into conflictual relations with their less mobile and more locally grounded comrades” (91). Mobility – and the control over mobility – is power (Adey 2009, 104).

## **SQUATTING: A PLACE TO MOVE**

AT FIRST BLUSH, squatting presents a very straightforward relationship to place, as captured in a popular slogan for squatters facing eviction: “We will not leave.” This demands a stable conception of place, one that resists change and disruption by staying put. Already, however, the first signs of complexity emerge from this stance – to resist change is also a form of making change. This is common in social movements, where demands for larger social change are often accompanied by activists’ efforts to protect their own most cherished values and practices. But there is still more to the story, as place carries within it its own complications. For squatters, place is about much more than stability, it is equally about mobility. To have a place of one’s own provides more than a place to rest one’s head; it also creates a destination for others, as well as a home base for one’s own movement, producing a node in a larger network of travel. Squatters, of course, recognize the importance of certain forms of movement to the success of squatting – squatters don’t simply occupy buildings, they also move in, move through, and when compelled to leave, they move on. As much as squatters emphasize their

commitment to *not moving* during their confrontations with police and government authorities, in fact, squatting has always been at least as much about creating free and rewarding forms of mobility as it is about creating a place to stay.

Activists have long been travelers, whether they are the revolutionaries of old, who traveled both to foment revolution and to join already existing rebellions, or today's global justice activists, who travel to economic and political summits to protest the decisions and decision makers there. Likewise, travel offers escape for political actors, whether it is to be on the run from the law or just to get a break from the grind and potential burnout of feeling "stuck" in the same place. In this chapter, I use the history of the squatters' movement of Amsterdam to explore the ways that squatting is used as a tool to redefine both urban place and social movement space through creating new forms of both stability and mobility.

## STABILIZING SQUATTING

MOBILITY IS A political tool, but it can also be a severe liability. Amsterdam squatters initially had to do an enormous amount of work to link an effective politics to their actions, and much of this effort was directed at grappling with the relationships between squatting, stability, and mobility. In the 1960s, Amsterdam squatters could count many enemies – the police, the landlords, the property speculators, the government. Yet they also faced a less likely foe: the countercultural tourist. The Provos, a small but influential anti-authoritarian group, staged fantastic "happenings" during the early to mid 1960s, fueling a burgeoning youth culture based on opposition to authority, creativity and drug use (Mamadouh 1992). As post-war Europe recovered, mass tourism returned. Tourists flocked to Amsterdam. While some came for the canals and the Rembrandts, others were more interested in the drugs and the hippie scene. The Provos, a precursor to the squatters' movement, proposed the White House campaign in late 1960s in response to the growing housing crisis, where they urged people to live in abandoned buildings to save them from disrepair and provide cheap housing for those in need (Duivenvoorden 2000).

Although activists were slow to take up this call, countercultural tourists were already way ahead of them in terms of occupying empty houses. "Tourist squatting" was quite popular in Amsterdam (Pruijt 2004), with travelers sleeping in Vondelpark or Dam Square, as well as



any empty building they could find. These tourists showed little interest in repairing buildings or helping neighborhoods. In fact, their goals were often the opposite: destruction could be far more entertaining. Squatters, more interested in addressing the housing situation than in no-frills tourism, bristled against intrusions into their physical and political space. In the early 70s, Nieuwmarkt squatters distributed posters proclaiming, in Dutch, English, German, French, and Arabic, “Our neighborhood is no campground” (Duivenvoorden 2000: 85), hoping to drive tourist squatters out, and to distinguish themselves as a “good” type of squatter: one who intended to stay and contribute to the community over time. Culturally, activists and tourist squatters were quite similar, and the activist milieu even attracted their own tourists. But activists and tourists clashed over squatting’s meaning. Activist squatters worried tourist squatters hindered their goals, leaving destroyed buildings and public outrage in their wake, and confusing the public by conflating cultural changes advocated by the youth movement with social and structural changes to buildings and neighborhoods. Making squatting the basis for a political movement required successfully shifting the tactic from the domain of tourists to activists, which meant that squatting had to be made about stability rather than mobility. Activists argued that the value of squatting came from the ability not just to move in, but also to stay. Their public missives were increasingly marked by commitments to the long term – to being good neighbors, to being good caretakers of buildings. In this formative moment of the squatters’ movement, the need was to connect squatting with a very fixed and stable conception of place, one that minimized mobility.

This battle was most hotly contested during the early periods of the political movement, as it sought to stabilize itself as a legitimate public actor, emphasizing the stabilizing effects of squatting. As political squatting grew in size and influence, direct challenges to tourist squatting dissipated. But the tension remained, as evidenced by the defense of the Groote Keijser. Following a particularly violent eviction at the hands of the police in 1978, squatters decided that they were no longer willing to vacate buildings without a defense when the eviction orders came. When the eviction for the Groote Keijser was ordered in 1979, squatters decided this was where they would make their stand: “We will not leave.” To transform the building into a symbol of stability and steadfastness required work, not just in barricading the doors, but also in replacing and changing the residents and their commitments, since many living in the building at the time were either apolitical or

traveling tourists. ADILKNO (1994: 47) asks, “But why should those houses whose front-door keys had been handed around by tourists just last summer, houses that had had Israelis barbecuing on the floor, start to function as a symbol of the people’s will?” The reasons were pragmatic: the building was big enough to hold a lot of defenders, strategically located on a canal, and owned by a particularly reviled speculator. Securing the building, however, meant expelling the tourists. Squatter Theo remembers giving them a deadline to leave, warning that if they did not leave willingly, he would return “with a larger gang to throw them out” (De Stad 1996: 126). With the building barricaded, the tourists and apolitical residents removed, the squatters waited in their fortress for the police. But the police, and the expected confrontation, never came. Instead, the showdown occurred elsewhere. After resquatting an evicted building on Vondelstraat in early 1980, squatters successfully drove off the police with a spontaneous explosion of violence. They barricaded the street, holding it for a weekend, and transformed it into a carnivalesque zone – the “Vondel Free State.” But the end came as suddenly as the beginning. Monday morning, tanks crashed through the barricades, sent by the city to restore public order (Andriesson 1981). Despite this massive show of force, the movement prevailed, saving the Vondelstraat squat and increasing their presence and influence in Amsterdam city politics (Duivenvoorden 2000).

To effectively politicize squatting meant a focus on stability, in relation to the building and to the neighborhood, as well as to the identity of the actors and the movement itself. To be a good squatter meant to stay. To be a successful movement meant to stay. However, as soon as the movement experienced its first major successes, this same stability became the basis for a dramatic increase in mobility, both into and out of Amsterdam.

## MOBILIZING SQUATTING

“HELP! THE SQUATTERS are coming – Cologne falling into chaos?” (quoted in Duivenvoorden 200: 179). In Amsterdam, during the early months of 1980, squatters’ efforts to hold on to their squatted homes escalated into a series of violent standoffs with authorities. And the tactics were not just heavier, they were also more effective, as squatters held on to their buildings, beating back not just the police, but also real estate speculation in the city as a whole. But following their triumphant stands, members of the movement were doing more than

simply basking in their victories. Their performances on the streets of Amsterdam had been so successful, they decided to take their show on the road. Establishing their travel itinerary was not difficult, as the invitations to visit other activist groups were pouring in from across Europe. While local activists tended to treat them as conquering heroes, many other residents were far less enthusiastic about their visit. A November 1980 trip to Hamburg prompted the local press to warn, “The rioters are coming!” (quoted in Duivenvoorden 2000: 180). While admittedly sensationalistic, such alarm was not wholly unfounded. The trips by Amsterdam squatters sparked a string of political riots throughout Germany and Switzerland, culminating in fierce fighting between squatters and police in Berlin in mid-December of that same year. And the travel kept coming. In 1981, Amsterdam squatters added France, Italy and Spain to their destinations. These political tourists successfully exported their ideas, identity, and tactics across Europe, much to some locals’ dismay. On one level, this is simply a tale of how activists used mobility to share tactics and strategy. On another level, though, it reveals the complex ways in which a local place can be constructed and contested, as well as how mobility shaped, for better or worse, the way squatters mobilized across Europe.

By the time Amsterdam squatters took to the road in 1980, travel was already responsible for existing relationships with foreign squatting groups. While most traveled as squatters or activists, early forms of travel primarily took the form of individuals going to meet and stay with other individuals. That is, squatters traveled just as friends travel, but gaining political skills and insight in addition. For example, one of the more prominent Amsterdam squatters spent time in Frankfurt during the early 1970s, a time of widespread unrest over housing issues, as well as staying for long periods in the squatting underground in London during the mid 1970s (Theo, de Stad 2000). He not only learned how things were done in each location, but also got to know the people involved; both types of connections would play a key role in his contributions to the Amsterdam squatters’ movement, as well as its efforts to spread its gospel beyond its own borders. Furthermore, during the 1970s, calls for solidarity were already crossing borders. Christiania, the squatted “free state” in Copenhagen, was calling for international support and for sympathizers to travel to help resist threatened evictions as early as 1975. At this point, though, travel was either individual or sporadic and based on big evictions. Systematic and representative travel did not emerge fully until 1980, with the success of Vondelstraat

and the subsequent rise to prominence of squatters as a political force in Amsterdam.

The politics of Amsterdam spilled over into other cities, first by the media images that spread throughout Europe and the world, and then through the movement of squatters as they toured other squatting hotspots. The dramatic Vondelstraat victory, coupled with April's coronation riots (Duivenvoorden 2000), drew worldwide attention (Andreissson 1981). Amsterdam squatters exploited their notoriety. In fact, the touring had already begun before the confrontations on Vondelstraat. Only one week earlier, Amsterdam squatters were in London, at the "International Squatters Festival" organized by the London Squatters' Union. There they brought films of recent protests and evictions, as well as squatting handbooks and other bric-a-brac to sell in order to finance the trip. They were joined by squatters from Berlin at the all day meetings and presentations, one of the first examples of an international convergence of squatters.

The summer of 1980 was a busy one for Amsterdam's squatters, and not only because the political situation was heating up in the city. Through travel they forged stronger ties with their German "fellow travelers." In May and June, they paid visits to Cologne, Hamburg, and Münster, followed by trips to Darmstadt, West Berlin, and Nürnberg in the months that followed. As stated in a travel report published in the *Kraakrant*, the local squatters newspaper, travel and exchange between the Netherlands and Germany was both informal and organized, with the goal being both to teach and to learn.

In the previous year many Amsterdam squatters traveled to Germany in order to see how squatters organized there. Also, people have on their own initiative made "tours" through German squat-cities, in order to describe squatter activities in Amsterdam, accompanied by films and video. There was a great interest for such information in Germany. ("Duitsland," 1980: 5)

Cologne squatters were to first to invite their Amsterdam comrades for a visit, creating a public meeting for them to show their films and speak about the conditions in Amsterdam and the keys to their strategic and organizational successes. The organizers promised an opportunity to learn from Amsterdam's accomplishments, and to spark discussion over local squatting politics. The visiting squatters shared information at 2 different meetings – one with about 30 people, the other with several hundred – on specific actions, but also on their general shift in tactics, from passive to active resistance, which had proved so successful

and was being touted as the model for squatters elsewhere (Erik, Tara, John, & Vincent 1980). Weeks later, squatters arrived in Hamburg; the poster for the event promised,

As you know, the housing struggle in Amsterdam is at a high point: just during the coronation of Beatrix, 220 houses were occupied by squatters. The squatters struggle against the vacancy of living spaces and against real estate speculation in the Netherlands. Despite massive police and military force the squatters won't let themselves be repressed – they simply need a roof over their head. In Amsterdam 50000 people seek housing. Just as many people in Hamburg have been seeking housing for years. Must Hamburgers also soon start squatting? The Dutch squatter has existed for already 10 years. We want to learn from them how they fight the housing crisis. Therefore we have invited them to a discussion with squatters from Amsterdam. They are bringing a film along, reports over their actions, e.g., the coronation day, and information on how the organize themselves.

The local press was not amused, warning, “The rioters are coming!” (quoted in Duivenvoorden 2000: 180). When the Amsterdam squatters took to the road, they represented more than just simply a successful political movement; they also represented the fears of those invested in protecting the status quo. They symbolized the fact that no locality was fully safe from political disruption and destabilization, because the boundaries of each local place were fluid and contested. However, they also called into being the most dangerous political actor: the outsider. While they certainly sought to help their squatting comrades, the presence of outside activists was at odds with efforts for local actors to create a basis in stability and locality that was so important to the Amsterdam squatters during their formative stages.

The Amsterdammers were ostensibly teachers, but they also learned critical information about the different conditions for squatting in other national and local contexts. For example in a report about their trip to Cologne, the squatters related the hysteria surrounding their visit; “the way the press criminalizes squatters was highlighted by the visit of 4 squatters to town and the headlines, “Help! The Squatters are Coming!” and “Chaos in Cologne” – as if the Amsterdam squatters had come to participate in violent defense of the big squat in town” (Erik et al., 1980: 23). Still, they left town hopeful for the future of squatting in that city, as they felt that “lots of people coming to the talk were also first exposed to the new squat Stollwerch, which they hope will be the start of larger involvement in the movement there” (23).

Information and people were flowing across borders, but so far the effects on action were negligible. Amsterdam squatters came, spoke, then went home, leaving their hosts to plan their own actions. With time, possibly from a combination of intensification of the situation in Germany, the changing expectations of the presentations, or simply the motivational power of the speakers, these presentations became preludes to more “hands-on” actions. For example, a visit to West Berlin in December coincided with an episode of fierce fighting between squatters and police in the heavily squatted Kreuzberg district. The fingerprints of Amsterdam squatters were all over the event. “German police reports pointed not only to the presence of Amsterdam squatters, but also that the fighting methods employed looked to be transplanted directly out of the Netherlands” (Duivenvoorden, 2000: 180). A newspaper story covering the event noted, “the presence of Amsterdammers on the fight stage is no surprise to German police, because Amsterdam squatters were already active in West Berlin. Also, Dutch squatters took part in the occupation of a chocolate factory in Cologne in May and June earlier this year.”

The situation intensified with a March 1981 visit to Nürnberg. There was very little actual squatting going on in the city at the time, and local organizers wanted to change that. The head of KOMM, a youth center in the city, traveled with friends to Amsterdam and got interested in the housing crisis and squatting, and started squatting upon returning home. The first visit by the Amsterdammers in late January 1981 generated a successful talk at KOMM, with about 200 people attending (Muller 1980). The Amsterdammers taught about their own movement, as well as shared techniques for those who wanted to squat themselves. Originally, they had planned to show films of recent actions, such as the Vondelstraat defense, but because KOMM received money from the city, city officials forbid the films to be shown at the center. What they were learning was already worrisome enough to authorities. The local police chief voiced concerns,

the youth were told precisely how the squatters in Amsterdam work, the tactics against the police, how to best barricade their house, or how to resist eviction by the police...I find that a scandalous affair. There are only a few empty houses here. It is very dangerous, what the Dutch squatters are doing now in Germany. (Muller 1980: 1)

The concern was not that the Amsterdammers were meeting with other squatters, but that they were trying to create new squatters' movements out of thin air. About a month later, they returned for another effort to show the films at a different venue. When the police arrived to shut the meeting down, the people present reacted with spontaneous demonstration, marching through the city, breaking windows, and damaging cars, doing extensive monetary damage. The disturbance was blamed on Amsterdam squatters, with authorities anxious that their influence was spreading beyond the main German squatting centers like West Berlin.

It was in Germany that the Amsterdam squatters forged the closest bonds through the most frequent travel. But their travels extended across much of Western Europe. The same week as the events in Nürnberg, other Amsterdammers were in Barcelona giving a similar talk to squatters there. At the same time, a large-scale convergence in Paris brought together squatters from all over Europe to meet and discuss strategies, tactics, and political goals, as well as build stronger personal networks within the movement. The meetings in Paris were the first major international conference of squatters in Europe. It was quickly followed by another conference in Münster, Germany. Both featured significant participation by Amsterdam squatters, who were generally recognized as the largest, most organized and most successful of the European movements. Thus their knowledge and experiences were consistently sought out. These early meetings grew larger over the course of the early 1980s, later growing beyond the confines of local and national borders, as well as expanding the issues into a more generalized oppositional ideology and politics. They provide a model for later, and much larger, protest meetings that brought together European radicals in a transnational forum, such as the anti-EU summit held in Amsterdam in 1998, as well as the summit protests of the 21st century (Fernandez, Starr, and Scholl 2011).

Although the visitors from Amsterdam were tasked with providing an inside view of the movement, they were far from the only travelers offering such information. In fact, many Germans were also making less formal forays to Amsterdam, such as the authors of the piece, "Amsterdam in Autumn" (1980) who visiting the city for a week in the fall of 1980 to stay with friends in a squatted house and gain a better understanding of both the tactical side of the movement and the everyday life of squatters in the city. It seems it was not just the squatters who were traveling either, as "The West German police have already

sent researchers to Amsterdam to study the methods of the squatters” (“Amsterdamse Kraker” 1980: 1) in order to better contain the growing German squatters’ movement.

In their efforts to legitimize and strengthen their burgeoning movement, Amsterdam squatters focused on developed a practice and image based on stability and spatial fixity. However, successfully achieving these goals launched them out into the world with new forms of mobility. It was their ability to stay put in the face of forces, both physical and ideological, that were trying to pry them lose that produced the conditions for unleashing waves of mobile squatters out into the larger European social movement space. They toured the squatting cities of Europe, teaching strategy, forging stronger organizational ties, and educating and being educated on the general and the specifics of squatting in Europe. The same connections built during these travels created new networks for other forms of travel, this time bringing non-local squatters into the city – sometimes for a quick visit, and sometimes for much longer stays.

Squatting, despite being intensely local in focus, grew and survived as a movement in Europe because of the mobility of activists. They helped form a translocal network of actors who not only could draw on each other’s knowledges and numbers, but also created a larger European squatter identity. This larger burgeoning European squatters’ movement drove new forms of mobility both by creating destinations and by creating a general social movement space that facilitated travel by making it possible to move from city to city and never fully leave “the movement.” As this case also shows, there are risks with creating a space of mobility completely encapsulated within social movement space. You risk cutting off ties to “the local” and creating yourself as an outsider. When squatter tactics become “Amsterdam tactics,” this reveals the limits of mobility in movement building. However, refusing the advantages of mobility is no guarantee of being spared its costs.

## **TRAVEL SOUVENIRS: SOMETHING TO REMEMBER**

THIS IS ONLY a very narrow window into the complex travel patterns among European squatters. These early trips coming from and to Amsterdam in 1980-1981 show how quickly mobility became integrated into basic squatter practices. Even in this small slice, we can see the emergence of the key role travel played in building not just the content of the movement, but also its symbolic power. Activists are no



different from anyone else – they travel, and they do so for a lot of different, and sometimes even conflicting reasons. Thus, activist networks can closely resemble friendship networks, connecting individuals across movements, even when the movements themselves have no formal ties. Information and tactics can flow through such channels but can be sporadic and unreliable. Still, these ties provide existing connections which can help facilitate more formal travel and interactions when needed.

While these informal networks based on individual travel were key to later travel of activists as representatives of movements, there were other important precedents worth noting. That is, before Amsterdam squatters started traveling, their reputations preceded them, as images and stories of their actions circulated through mainstream and alternative media alike. Thus, they were already well known before trying to make their tours, a fact that certainly made planning easier, as well as receptions more welcoming, at least on the part of other activists, if not necessarily the authorities. Therefore, what the Amsterdammers brought with them was not necessarily completely new to the audience – most were likely familiar with the famous images of the tanks at Vondelstraat – but rather to provide depth to issues already known, as well as organizational and tactical lessons from a movement that was enjoying victories. When the Amsterdammers traveled, they traveled not as individual squatters, but as representatives of an entire movement, a movement that was winning and thus appeared to offer important lessons to other similar movements and their participants.

As travel became more common, as well as being recognized as an effective means of building networks to facilitate the flows of information and resources, even more formal solutions emerged. Conferences and convergences provided new destinations that opened up the discussions beyond the one-way, teacher-student model employed at the beginning. At these squatter conferences, most activists met each other as travelers all occupying a neutral place, where the exchange of ideas was opened up even wider. At the same time, while building new sorts of relationships at the organizational and movement level, new affective and friendship ties were being made as well, ties that would help to facilitate not just future travel and action, but also a growing sense of collective solidarity – not just as squatters, but also as holders of an oppositional transnational and translocal European identity.

Intramovement, international travel provided a means for building identity at multiple levels. First, individual activists gain identity through traveling *as a squatter* and being recognized upon arrival *as a*

*squatter* and by being recognized upon return *as a squatter with new insights*. That is, they traveled as someone with something to teach, but arrived also as someone with something to learn, which becomes something new to teach upon their return, setting up a cycle of education and information diffusion. Second, places and their local movements gain identity through the contact and collaboration with other places through travel – they become places that are both similar to other places, through the shared experience of squatting, but also unique: differences that only become meaningful in the context of the larger field. Moreover, activist travel becomes a way to participate in complicating conceptions of place and the local, while still acting to defend them. Finally, the larger “squatter movement” also gains a broader identity that transcends local differences, even as it celebrates them – primarily by keeping the idea of “destinations” and a defense of the local alive inside the larger collective space and identity.

Thus, the movement of movement actors creates destinations, new places to go to, and worlds, new places to be in, as well as the subject position of the agent that travels between and within them to hold them together. That is, although cities and scenes get made into destinations worth visiting (either because they have a surplus or a deficit of information), the travel network being constructed allowed squatters to “stay in the same place” i.e., the larger squatter movement itself – with its own culture, rules, tactics, and goals, all converging through the interplay of activists across borders. This network of squatters’ movements contributed to the formation of an alternative European identity, one that emerges alongside other competing Europes, including the hegemonic EU vision of a united Europe. Their Europe matched the broader trajectory of globalization, which is to link the local to the transnational, bypassing the central role of the state, as well as resistance to the state, which had traditionally regulated these relationships.

Travel certainly built complex activist identities, but it also embodied a symbolic enactment of the politics of the broader squatters’ movements. Squatting was at its heart about the creation and defense of home. At the same time, though, it played out an entirely new vision of what a home could be: home did not imply a static place to live in, but also provided room for movement (as well as movements). The choice to stay or to leave was always present in the squatted vision of home. To resist the police was not always about the need to stay, but more often about the need to defend the autonomy of choice – one should be able to choose when to stay and when to leave. Such a politics takes

a skeptical view of borders, particularly the political borders which constrain the autonomy of the individual. Squatters celebrated the power of a DIY (do-it-yourself) practice, so they always sought to *do* their politics, not just espouse it. Therefore it is no surprise that the squatters' tactics would combine the demand to stay with the freedom to leave, always trying to strike a balance between the two, a balance further reflected in the desire to create a space where the individual and community contribute to each other, rather than repress or reject.

While these flows of people and ideas through movement safe spaces produce a network of horizontal connections connecting the local to the transnational, places that are safe for both escape and recovery, there are negatives to the geographic expansion of the movement, particularly a geographic expansion that is not matched by a similar expansion of numbers. Thus, if the space of the movement and its politics grows faster than the population – and in some cases, as happened in the later part of the 1980s, in the opposite direction of membership – then growth will create a lot of “empty space” between activists. This allows for the “illusion of mass militancy” which undermines the local and connections to the “actual” audience of action, as politics, particularly at this time remained under the control of the state and local authorities. Moreover, such freedom of movement allows, as well as fosters, internal splits, which can only be solved through making links to like-minded actors in a different city or country, a process of factionalization that wrecked not only the squatters' movement as time went on (Owens 2009), but also similar autonomous movements in Germany and Denmark (Katsiaficas 1997).

Travel continues to play an important role in the formation of both local and transnational radical movements, embodying the movement's dynamicism and global reach, raising consciousness, spreading tactics, and effectively knitting communities together. Yet travel in movements remains contested. Some critics argue that mobile activists are bad for movements, as they disrupt local communities, reproduce privilege, and emphasize escape over engagement. But the situation is more complex. Travel connects people across places and places across people, thereby offering a means of bridging diffuse global networks with dense local networks, pulling the two towards each other. These connections, however, are not seamless, creating new tensions and contradictions, calling for a deeper investigation of an anarchist politics of place and travel. What kind of practices and knowledges does travel produce or obstruct? A key point of contention is over the politics of place, which is more

complicated than the simple traveler/local distinction. Activists straddle the difficulties of defending old conceptions of place and locality while creating new ones. As globalization expands the reach of both the issues and voices of radical politics, increased access to travel creates new political identities. For the squatters of Amsterdam, and those of Europe, travel played a central role in establishing both the uniqueness of the local context as well as the generality of transnational identities and representations. Travel helped produce powerful forms of political action, based not on integration, but on “experiences of alterity, of the in-between. We can see this in the tension between travel and emplacement, between speed and stillness, between the virtual and the embodied” (McDonald 2006: 223). Squatting is principally about residence and stability, about locality and community, but to build and protect those, it also became about mobility and flux. This allowed for the creation of a broader social movement space that let squatters move between buildings, between cities, and between states, carrying information, strategies, and tactics across these borders. Squatting made new mobilities possible; new mobilities, in turn, made squatting possible. The importance of mobility for a movement so bound to a strong sense of place highlights the relational aspects of place and how activists contribute to building and expanding that open sense of place. However, even open places remain bounded, and the successes of mobile squatters brought with them new tensions to the movement, because the strongest language of defending the local remains one of a stable territory. Squatting continues to struggle with and respond to this tension openly, which is why it remains such a fruitful case for examining how place and movement get built though and into social movements more generally.

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# CONFIGURATIONS OF SQUATS IN PARIS AND THE ILE-DE-FRANCE REGION: DIVERSITY OF GOALS AND RESOURCES\*

*Thomas Aguilera*

THE LATEST NATIONAL SURVEY ON HOUSING (ANNUAL REPORT OF Fondation Abbé Pierre, 2011) shows that in France more than 3.6 million people live in precarious housing conditions. Among them, more than 600,000 people do not have a roof. Paris is one of the densest European capitals and space is a rare resource. However, paradoxically, we estimate that 9% of the housing in Paris is vacant\*\* (more than

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\* This chapter comes from a paper presented at the SqEK meeting which took place in Berlin, 29-31 March 2011, in “New Yorck” Squat and from a paper presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of Social Sciences, CEU, Budapest, May 2011 (also published in [http://blogs.sciences-po.fr/recherche-villes/files/2011/05/WP\\_Aguilera\\_2011-03.pdf](http://blogs.sciences-po.fr/recherche-villes/files/2011/05/WP_Aguilera_2011-03.pdf)). I thank the researchers and activists for their remarks and comments.

\*\* Nevertheless, these vacant housings are not only vacant over a long period but above all are the results of “turn over”, relocations or renovation programs. Thus, we cannot estimate precisely how many houses are vacant for a long period (Driant, 2009).



120,000 vacant houses).<sup>\*</sup> Many housing associations and organizations, and above all squatters, denounce this situation. Likewise, there is also a huge problem of a lack of cultural spaces in Paris. Some surveys show that an artist has to wait more than 30 years to get a workshop and that the city council only assigns 6 workshops per year (Langlois-Mallet, 2008; Lextrait, 2001). In this context, squatting could be seen as a solution to these problems.<sup>\*\*</sup> It lets inhabitants acquire a house or a workshop. In fact, there were more than 2,000 squatters in Paris in June 2010 (Aguilera, 2010). They live in an illegal place. Sometimes, social centers propose an alternative way of occupying urban space: they develop cultural and social activities beyond the traditional and institutional policies. They can also be an open place where people can talk about politics. Nevertheless, the squat is also a problem for public actors and urban planners. On the one hand, in France, private property is fundamental and constitutionally protected. It means that the juridical institutions cannot allow an illegal occupation if an owner complains. On the other hand, the right to housing is also fundamental (even if it is lower than the right to property in the hierarchy of the French Constitution). The squat becomes a public problem built within the tension between these two rights.

How can we explain the persistence of squatting? During the spring of 2010, more than 21 squats existed in Paris and we can have all the reason to believe that they just represent the visible part of a shadowy phenomenon. Understanding the role of disorder enables us to understand how the national and city governments try to build and preserve public order. The policy makers<sup>\*\*\*</sup> have to bargain with squatters because

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\* Insee-Local Datas, Paris, datas from *Insee, RP1968 à 1990 dénombremments - RP1999 and RP2006 exploitations principales*: [http://www.statistiques-locales.insee.fr/FICHES/DL/DEP/75/COM/DL\\_COM75056.pdf](http://www.statistiques-locales.insee.fr/FICHES/DL/DEP/75/COM/DL_COM75056.pdf)

\*\* The “squat” is not defined by the French Law but we use the term squat to design an occupation of a building without the authorization of the owner: the squatters do not sign a contract with the owner (“une occupation sans droit ni titre”) and thus, live illegally in the building.

\*\*\* When we mention on the paper “public actors” it can mean different things. We specify in each cases who we are talking about. In Paris, we have a central municipality with its city council and assembly of representatives. In our case, the Housing Department and the Culture Department are the most relevant actors which intervene. Then, we have local municipalities in each district (there are 20 districts). The representatives from the local

they are part of *multilevel urban governance* including the federal government, the police, the municipality, the real estate investors, the public housing developers, and the owners. Although the squat is an illegal settlement, it is recognized by authorities to contribute to the life and the development of the city. A squat could be generally defined as an unsanctioned, collective or individual, occupation of a building in order to live or develop activities in it without the consent of the owner. Different types of squats exist and each scholar working on squats gives his own typology: Cécile Péchu (Péchu, 2010),\* Florence Bouillon (Bouillon, 2009)\*\* and Hans Pruijt (Pruijt, 2004)\*\*\* all deploy their own. In this paper, we address all kind of squats precisely in order to understand the different configurations of settlements. We present in this chapter the different configurations of squats in Paris and the surrounding region, and the relationships between squatters and local officials. In the first section, we present the data and the methodological approach (I). In the second section, we present squatting as a challenge to urban policies: the squat is at the same time a roof, a tool for advocating

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city council intervene sometimes to bargain with squatters and to negotiate with the central representatives. They can appear as mediators. However, most of the time, it is the central Housing Department which decides the outcome of a squat (cf. Aguilera, 2010).

- \* Cécile Péchu defines two types of squats. The first type of squats is the “classist squats”: squats to obtain housing rights structured by speeches centered on the right of workers and poor, especially in the post-war and during the 1970’s. The squat is a tool amongst many other. The second type is “the counter-culture” squat: they aim at changing people’s life and occupying vacant places. The squat is an end itself and not only a means to get something.
- \*\* Florence Bouillon defines two types of squats. The first type is the squat of “activities” where artists, activists live. Sometimes, they provide social assistance. The second type is the squat of “poverty” where clandestine immigrants, poor people or drug addicts live.
- \*\*\* Hans Pruijt prefers to give different “configurations” of squats and not a static typology. The first configuration is the occupation due to poverty, “deprivation based squatting”. Then, he defines the occupation as an “alternative housing strategy”. The third configuration is the “entrepreneurial” squat which hosts social centers or bars. The fourth is the “conservationist” squat which aims at preserving the living framework in the city. Finally, the “political” squat.

the strengthening of the right to housing and a critique against housing and cultural policies (II). Finally we present the different configurations of squats in Paris (III).

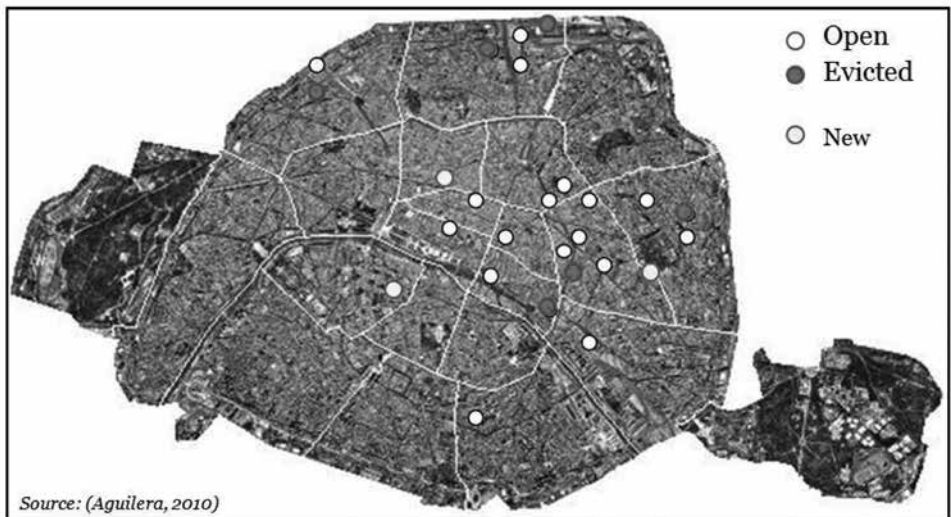
## I. DATA AND LOCATIONS OF SQUATS IN PARIS AND THE ILE-DE-FRANCE REGION

WE CHOSE TO take into account all types of squats based on the juridical definition. We built up a database containing 60 squats since 2001, the year of the election of the new socialist mayor Bertrand Delanoë, of which 21 remained open in 2010. In Paris, we classified 17 “artistic” squats, two “political and activist” squats, two “emergency and precarious” squats. First, we adopted an ethnographic approach (observation, participant observation and interviews) in order to document the world of squatting in Paris and to understand the functioning of the collectives and above all the relationships between squatters, humanitarian, nongovernmental organizations and associations defending the housing right, officials, lawyers, housing developers, and neighbors. Then, we conducted interviews with officials, local representatives from the city council, urban developers, and lawyers. We spent more than 130 hours of directly observing and conducted 39 interviews over 65 hours with: 15 squatters; one homeless person; three merchants; one neighbor of a squat; the housing department director of the city council of Paris (twice); the culture department director of Paris; one local deputy mayor; one local urban planning deputy mayor; four police commanders; one lawyer; one local social worker; one journalist; the director of the mission “Squat et Rave” of *Médecins du Monde*; the director of the *Fondation Abbé Pierre*; two association leaders; one director of security for a social housing developer; two directors of the GPIS (*Groupement Parisien Interbailleurs de Surveillance* / Security Organization for the Housing Developers of Paris). We also did a daily review of national (*Le Monde*, *Libération*) and local (*Le Parisien*) newspapers and websites (squat.net, Rue 89, Mediapart) in order to update my database.

### *1.1. The geography of squats in Paris: the poorest part of the territory?*

At the very beginning of the research, we strove to update our view of squatting in Paris. Indeed, during the interviews we realized that no one was able to present current data: where are the squats? How many squatters live in Paris? Each actor had a part of the answer because they

had to deal with a particular matter. We thus tried to pool all the information needed together in order to give an updated landscape of squats in Paris. A quantitative work enabled us to confront and confirm some of our hypothesis. The second objective of this qualitative and quantitative work was to develop a geographical analysis of the squatting phenomena in Paris. We built maps in order to understand the different logic both of the squatters and the officials in charge of creating and executing housing and cultural policies.



**Figure 1:** Geography of squats in Paris (2009-2010)

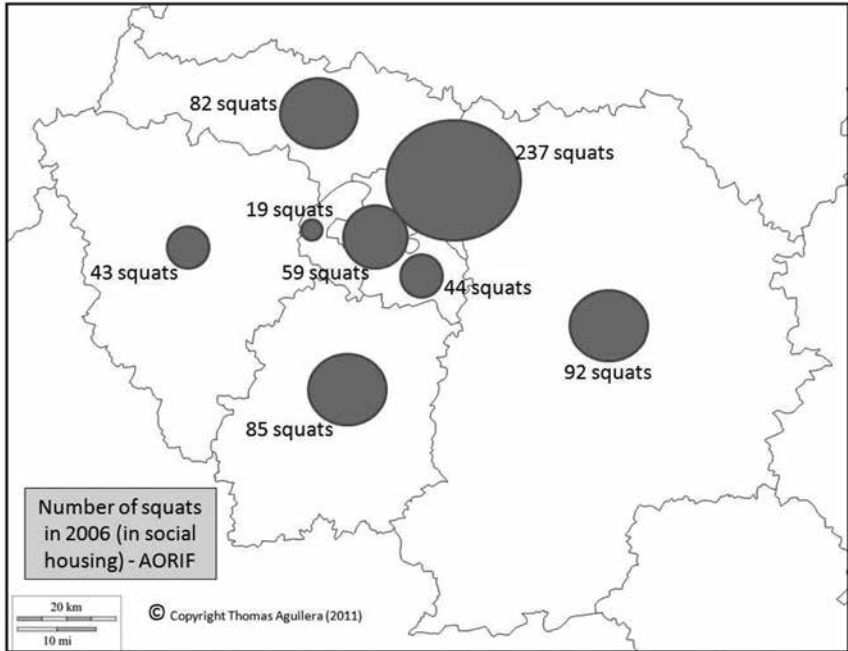


**Figure 2:** Incomes (median) in Paris (INSEE, 2008)

This map lets us understand some of the logics at work. Most of the squats are in the north and east of Paris on the right side of the Seine. The 18th district is the poorest of Paris. The median annual wage per family is 16,766 Euros while in Paris as a whole it is 23,293 Euros (INSEE, 2007). The buildings are old and much more damaged compared to the other districts of Paris. Indeed, 72,7% of the houses are in buildings which were built before 1949 (63% for Paris) (INSEE, 2006). Many important renovation and building programs have been implemented in the 2000s in order to provide affordable public housing. Nevertheless, during the renovation programs many buildings stay vacant and provide good opportunity for squatters. Thus, the social composition and the housing context in the 18th district have allowed squatters (precarious families, drug addicts, immigrants but also artists) to use these spaces to live. This district is also the drug market of Paris and attracts many drug addicts. The renovation programs implemented by social developers caused the eviction of squatters and their transfer in the north of Paris (*Porte de la Chapelle*). Nevertheless, in March 2010 the eviction of the last squat in the north pushed squatters to return to the 18<sup>th</sup>. We find many squats in the 19<sup>th</sup> district where there are many vacant spaces and Brownfield sites that squatters have easily occupied. Many artists live in this district and there is a large and active cultural life (and the local city councils sometimes support them). The 13<sup>th</sup> district hosted many squats during the 2000s (*les Frigos, l'Atoll 13, la Glacière, le Barbizon*) but the renovation programs and the intense surveillance built around social housings has successfully prevented new squatting.

### *1.2. Squats of public housing at the regional scale*

The squats in Paris are mainly what we call “activity” squats which are predominantly composed of social centers and artists. They represent up to 80% of the “visible” squats in Paris City. The rest of the occupations are made up of “emergency and precarious” (10%) and of “political” squats (10%). However, in order to broaden the perspective at the regional scale, we found an official data base from the association in charge of coordinating all social housing developers (AORIF, 2006). This database only concerns squats of social housings (owners are public housing developers) and we estimate that there are 1800 squats in the whole region (1,200 squats are in private buildings) if we follow this two unique surveys on squats in Ile-de-France (Quercy, 2002 and AORIF, 2006).



**Figure 3:** Squats in social housing Ile de France Region. Map: own conception / Data from AORIF, March 2006

At the regional scale, the squats are spread out according to the income distribution and the quality of the buildings. Some observations and interviews with housing developers allow us to assume that they have a stronger capacity to protect themselves from squatters in the richest departments (in the south and west). The department of *Seine-Saint-Denis* is deeply impacted because of the co-presence of a precarious population, illegal immigrants who cannot legally afford a house and a very vulnerable precarious, housing stock.

## II. SQUATS AS CHALLENGES TO URBAN POLICIES

MORE THAN SIMPLE occupations, an illegal occupation is a mode of action to resist to the political order, to contest public authorities and to assert a right to housing while being a first response to this claim and a survival strategy. If we follow Cécile Péchu, we are dealing with “sectorial illegalisms” (Péchu, 2010: 10): “an illegal spot for the immediate realization of the claim. The squat is at the same time a negotiation tool and a response to the request that it supports”. This definition enables us to understand that the squatters build their

own place while asserting (more) spaces to live or survive. Three main features appear here.

The first is that squatters *short-circuit* and “*hack*” the urban housing and cultural policies (Aguilera, 2010). Indeed, they are *out* of the legal and traditional frame for resource allocation of spaces provided by the city council and public and private developers. For example, they usually do not subscribe for a social housing or a workshop, and this maybe for numerous reasons: sometimes by choice because they refuse to wait for institutional allocations but more usually because they don't have access to the “official channels”. They do not sign up for social assistance (Warin, 2008, 2009, and 2010).\* They do not either have the social resources nor the “administrative and legal knowledge”. Thus, they find the ways to obtain these resources: “the urban poor often have to step outside the law in order to gain access to housing” (Azuela et Duhau, 1998:157). Legality is too expensive, so people self-organize in order to find the means to survive.

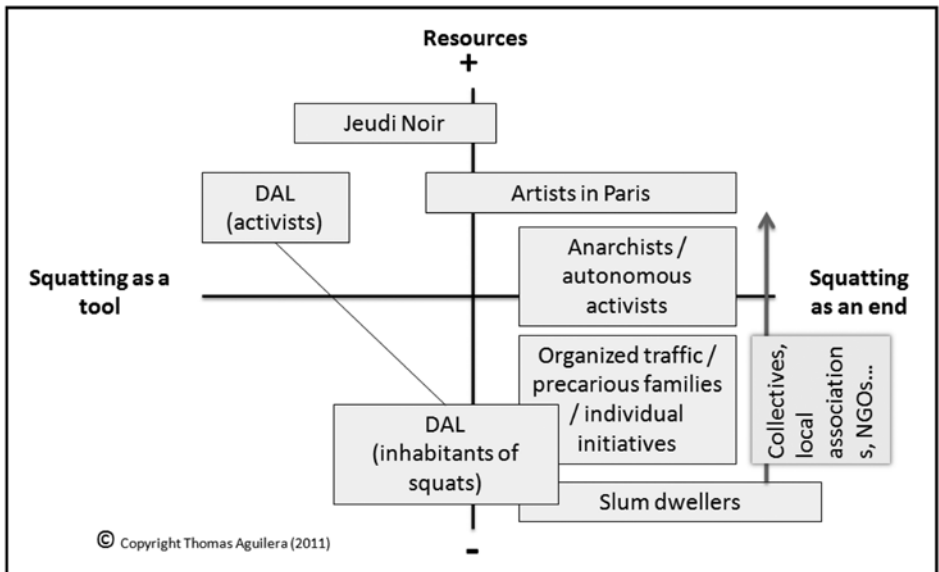
The second remark is that these spaces of illegality are, in general, spaces of *precariousness*. Moreover, this financial fragility assures the transition to a legal fragility: “The very fact that a city is divided into ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ areas has profound implications for society as a whole, since a truly public order, in the sense of social norms to which all members of society must adhere, does not exist. As long as a substantial part of the population gains access to land by a different set of process from the rest of society, it is clear that not all individuals are subject to the same rules, regardless of whether or not those rules can be formally classified as “law” (Azuela et Dubau, 1998:157).

The third feature is that squats appear at the same time as a *critique* of the urban policies, a *tool* to ask for a roof and a *strategy* to survive without public support. The squat as a mode of action (Péchu, 2010) combines a strong political discourse against housing policies (DAL, *Jeudi Noir*) or the political order in general (for example for the anarchist squats of *Montreuil*, East-Paris), with demands for welfare, housings (from the federal government or the municipalities) and shelter for homeless people. The most striking example seems to be in 2009 in the

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\* Philippe Warin calls this kind of situation the “*non recours*”: people who are supposed to benefit from social assistance from the State do not effectively receive it. It can be because of the deficiency of some institutions, of the maladjusted aid or because some individuals refuse it or do not know the procedure to get it. In our case, squatters do not sign up for public housing.

Parisian squat of “*Rue Baudelique*” (18<sup>th</sup> district of Paris), which hosted during one year more than 2000 undocumented immigrants coming from 25 different nationalities while petitioning for legal regularization and documents. They illegally inhabited a place to enter into the legality. Furthermore, we can interpret this mode of action as *anti-free rider* (Olson, 1987), in the sense that to get the benefits of the squat (a roof and relocation to legal housing) people have to be squatters (Péchu, 2010). Thus, we understand that we come back to an old debate concerning squats. Is it used as a tool or as an end? Even if we can show that illegal occupations combine both dimensions (Merklen, 2009), we try here to distinguish them in order to understand the differences between various configurations. We propose a factorial analysis with two axes: one concerning the means/ends cleavage, the other one representing the level of resources of the dwellers. We call “resources” the social (networks), economic (financial resources) and political (links with officials, representatives, lawyers, media and police) capital held by the squatters.



**Figure 4:** Configurations of illegal occupations

Hans Puijt examines the phenomena of the institutionalization of squatting wondering if the “institutionalization of an urban movement is inevitable”? (Puijt, 2003). He defines three configurations. The first one is the *terminal* institutionalization. It “implies that, in the repertoire



of action, convention replaces disruption. The second is *flexible* institutionalization, when conventional tactics complement disruptive ones” (Pruijt, 2003:136). The third is the *cooptation* whereby one part of the squatters, usually the less radical or the leaders, is absorbed into leadership of the city. This analysis is linked to the resources and goals. For Hans Pruijt, the squat as an aim is more vulnerable to repression from public actors and is less likely to persist while the squat as a means, as a tactic to get other resources (mainly a house), allows some positive results. Thus, he distinguishes the squatting movement and the housing movement. In Paris, we have both kinds and we present in the next section the different cases.

### III. THE CONFIGURATIONS OF SQUATS AND THE CONDITIONS OF MOBILIZATION

ON THE TOP of the resources axis, we observe one kind of squat particularly used by the “*Jeudi Noir*” (Black Thursday) collective, who are dedicated to media logic, and the association “DAL” (*Droit Au Logement* – Housing Right Association). These two collectives use squatting as a tool and a mode of action for activists. But the squat is also a goal itself for artists, anarchist activists and precarious families who are looking for a roof to survive.

#### *3.1. Jeudi Noir: media logic, building agendas and cooptation*

This collective was founded in 2006 to denounce the high price of housing in France. Its first actions were to invite journalists to visit flats to show the extremely high prices of housing for students and precarious families. Then, it added another mode of collective action with squatting in 2007. The activists have since opened 13 squats. They seek and find vacant buildings to squat and draw the attention on the inefficient housing policy of the municipality and of the State. Two main claims are highlighted by the collective: the application of the DALO\*

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\* The DALO (*Droit Au Logement Opposable*- Rights to Housing Law) was voted in 2007. The aim is to increase the right of people waiting for social housing to go on the offensive against the State during a juridical procedure. This law has been inefficient because the queue to get a house in Paris is too long to be effective.

and of the requisition law of 1945.\* One of the specificities of the action group compared to the other Parisian squatters is their massive use of Media: “we don’t want more activists but more Media” (Collectif Jeudi Noir, 2009). The media logic is the central dimension of their action. The squat is only a tool to draw the attention of the media and thus of national and local representatives. We call them “agenda builders” because they are able to create two kinds of “cycles of attention” (Baumgartner and Jones, 2005). The first agenda concerns squats. Each occupation of *Jeudi Noir* increases the number of articles about squats in newspapers and television. The second agenda is Housing policies. Each occupation represents the opportunity to challenge politics.

A brief sociology of the members of the group shows that they are students, artists but also activists (ecologists, socialists, and extreme-left activists) who do not necessarily need to squat. During the juridical procedure in 2010, one of the leaders selected the more precarious people to put their name on the official list of the squatters in order to prevent the risk of a bigger fine because of the solvency of some of them. Indeed, in France, the judge analyzes the personal situation of the squatters to know if they are “truly” poor and need a roof to survive or if they do not necessarily need to squat (Bouillon, 2010). The result of the juridical procedure often depends on the solvency of the squatters. We analyze here a “professionalization of precariousness”: the aim is to build a “precarious” movement with no precarious people. As we explained above, the squatters from *Jeudi Noir* are often students, architects, and artists. Compared to other kind of squatters, they have more economic resources. But poverty becomes a resource to gain legitimacy in a social conflict where the judge could be more lenient with the poor.

What is very interesting in this squatting movement is the relationship between the leaders, who do not live in the squat, and the local officials. Indeed, the leaders are now officials themselves (one is a representative of the regional assembly, another is a member of the Socialist Party, and another is a representative of a local municipality of Paris). They have a strong political capital and thus, strong social resources. They build quasi-friendly relationships with the representatives of the municipality of Paris, with the head of the housing department and

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\* The Law of Requisition was voted in 1945. It allows the State to requisition housings in shortage period to rent social housings. It was used during the 1950s during the reconstruction post-war period, during the 1990 and the 2000.

with the policemen in charge of controlling them. Thus, they accept the rules of the political game, of representative democracy, while other squatters denounce it. Moreover, although they squat, they respect the rules of the public order. Their presence is not disruptive at all. Usually, city officials come to support them in their action, and take advantage of this public tribunal to criticize the national government. For example, the mayor Bertrand Delanoë came to the squat “The Marquise” at *Place des Vosges*. The President of the Region, Jean-Paul Huchon always assists them during juridical procedures. Just before the night of the eviction of the last squat “*avenue de Matignon*”, a communist member of the National Assembly slept in the street in front of the squat to block policemen.

### 3.2. *Droit au Logement (DAL)\*: a housing movement using squat as a means*

The DAL movement was born in 1990 from a division with the “CML” (*Comités des Mal-Logés / “Committee of people in bad housing conditions”*). The CML used the squat in a “classist” way if we follow the typology of Cécile Péchu (Péchu, 2006, 2010). They squatted social housings to denounce the way the State allocates housing. The occupations were carried out during the electoral campaigns to draw the attention of the candidates and the media. However, the creation of the DAL represents a change in the repertoire of action. At the very beginning the DAL refused to use squatting as a mode of action: they wanted to avoid action that was too disruptive and not to be considered as “an illegitimate” actor in order to be able to negotiate with public authorities. But in 1993, they squatted again in *Avenue René Coty* and in the “*rue du Dragon*” in 1994. This last occupation made the DAL enter into the public sphere thanks to a massive use of the media and had three main results. First, each squatter was relocated by the State and the squat was evicted. Second, the State accepted to use the Requisition Law of 1945. Third, the Right to Housing was declared “constitutional”. By disturbing public order and using an illegal tool of activism, DAL achieved their goals. For Cécile Péchu “this is a cover of the squat that lies between the spectacular action intended to put pressure on authorities

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\* To get more information about the DAL we recommend reading Cécile Péchu (2006). She conducted an important work over 10 years and this book is excerpted from her PhD dissertation. She mainly writes on the period from 1990 to 2002.

and real action to resolve the housing problem of squatters” (Péchu, 2006). Squatting by DAL is “efficient”: Each occupation is followed by the relocation of 90% of the squatting families (mainly precarious African families). In the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> districts of Paris (the most heavily squatted districts), they rehoused almost 700 families with 15 squats. In the *Seine-Saint-Denis* department, almost 100 squats have accommodated 1000 families. In the 19<sup>th</sup> district of Paris, 6 squats organized by the DAL were evicted since June 2002. After each eviction, the activists succeeded in getting relocation of all the families from the State, the City Council or the SIEMP (“*Société Immobilière d’économie Mixte de Paris*”/ *Public-Private Housing Developer of Paris*).<sup>\*</sup> This is the result of many negotiations between leaders, officials and families. It shows us that the DAL has a considerable political and social capital which is used by the activists during these conflictual negotiations.

Nevertheless, the squat is only one mode of action among others for this housing movement. The DAL combines different kinds of action which are, sometimes led in the same place: demonstrations, sit-ins, real squats, symbolic squats, hunger strike, office occupation, illegal accommodation, and concerts. This combination enables the activists to target different actors: the national government, municipalities, private owners, housing developers. The “efficiency” of the movement is partly due to this strategy. The proportion of squats in their total number of actions increased even while only representing 8% of the actions of the DAL, and 20% of the actions of the CML (Péchu, 2006:462). But the DAL has a stronger use of the media to bring the housing problem into the public sphere. Cécile Péchu distinguishes two types of squats: the “real” squat and the “symbolic” one. The real one is used both as a house and as a mode of asserting the right to housing. The symbolic one is only used to publicize a message. The temporality is the similar to the one of the *Jeudi Noir*: the squats emerge during electoral campaigns and “non-expulsion period”.<sup>\*\*</sup> However, nowadays, since the creation of *Jeudi Noir*, the DAL has received less attention in the media than the former. This is due to the fact that the DAL has less social and political networks than *Jeudi Noir* and is therefore a less institutionalized

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\* The SIEMP is a public-private company directed by the Housing Deputy Mayor of Paris. It is the most important public real estate developer in Paris (mainly responsible for social housing).

\*\* The article L613-3 of the French *Housing Code* forbids the expulsion of people from a house between November 1<sup>st</sup> and March 15<sup>th</sup> of each year.

movement. Indeed, as we showed the activists of *Jeudi Noir* are closer to the political class while those from DAL prefer to build an open conflict with officials and representative in order to put them under pressure to obtain the relocation of the families. DAL is closer to the “squat of deprivation” of Hans Pruijt and the “classist” type of Cécile Péchu. The leaders nevertheless maintain relations with officials but they use them in a very different way. They call them to request more houses rather than to require help against eviction. The number permanent activists in the association are no more than 20. The decisions are very centralized and the DAL movement corresponds to a Pruijt’s notional of *flexible* institutionalization.

### 3.3. *Artists and social centers*

The squat appears as a mode of action. The two cases above show that it can be used as a means to obtain more than a roof over one’s head. It is the “housing side” of issue squats. Nevertheless, the squat can also be an individual and collective occupation aiming at living alternatively in the city beyond the official public policies and the rules of the ownership: counter-culture, alternative art against commercial and mainstream art, concerts, and innovative social services provided to the inhabitants of the district or homeless people. People can chose to organize themselves to demonstrate that self-organization of society is possible and to struggle against an individualist society based on private property rights. In France, the word “squat” includes all the meanings we present in this paper, but in other countries the specific configuration we are evoking in this section is the “social center”. People wishing to create new human relations as well as social and cultural activities, enter illegally in a building and appropriate the place. Of course the squatters also use the building as a house but the main goal is to turn into a place of meetings, festivals, concerts, theater plays, art classes, kindergarten, or bicycle workshops. All these activities are linked to the daily life of the neighborhood which usually accepts the presence of the squatters and defends them against when the owner wants to evict them (Aguilera, 2010). Most of the Parisian social centers are animated by artists (17 of 21 in 2010). We observed that all of these social centers and artistic squats are more or less tolerated by the City Council.

#### *Artists in Paris: squatting under agreement*

There is a profound problem concerning cultural spaces in Paris. Some surveys show that an artist has to wait more than 30 years to get

a workshop. As we presented before, squatting can be both a problem for public actors but at the same time, a solution. In fact, for artists it is a solution in the sense that illegally occupying a building enables them to create and exhibit inside Paris: “*we need more space to live and create. In Paris, some spaces are unoccupied so we enter and use the place*” (Mathilde, squatter). Since the election of the socialist mayor in 2001, Bertrand Delanoë, local public actors are rather tolerant towards these kinds of squats because officials became aware that Parisian voters like these cultural places and that they develop interesting projects.

Indeed, sometimes squatters provide local and social services in the face of the inefficiencies of the public and legal system. Squats reveal problems in the city, compensate for a lack of local activities and inspire the city council. Many squats in Paris (the “*Jardin d’Alice*”, the “*59 Rivoli*”, “*La Générale*”, “*TDV*”, the “*Petite Rockette*”, ...) provide art classes and exhibitions in places where the municipality is unable to. Sometimes, officials prefer to build strong relationships of trust with the squatters rather than to repress them. This is the case of a specific association: MACAQ (*Mouvement d’Animation Culturelle et Artistique de Quartier / Local Cultural and Artistic Association*). This association which was born in the 17<sup>th</sup> district of Paris and has a very special relation with the left wing of the city council. MACAQ organizes the carnival of Paris, many cultural events, and bric-a-brac sales. The municipality externalizes the management of these social and cultural activities. The logic is the same concerning vacant housing. The housing department director told me that he gives “concessions”<sup>\*</sup> to MACAQ to squat building if they are empty and too expensive to renovate. He calls them “professional squatters”. Thus, nowadays they squat the 123 *rue Tocqueville* in the 17<sup>th</sup> district where they host many associations:

“It’s a good deal for all of us. The municipality doesn’t have to pay repairs and surveillance. For the squatters, it is an opportunity to get a building legally for some time. When we have a building where we don’t have any project we call them and they squat” (Housing Department director of the Municipality of Paris).

Furthermore, some squats provide social services. Since 2005, the artists who squat in the “*Petite Rockette*” host 14 homeless people with

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\* We refer to a “precarious lease”. We present this specific contract below.

the help of the NGO “*Médecins du Monde*”. Thus, social centers challenge and “serve” the municipality at the same time.

Thus, the City Council adopted two political instruments\* which allow it to control and govern the squats in Paris (Aguilera, 2011). The first is the project and the call for project proposals. When the City Council wants to retrieve the management of a building for a specific project, the Housing or the Cultural department launches a call for project proposals and sometimes squatters are welcomed to participate in imagining the future of this building. Squatters have to enter the legal sphere and accept the status of urban planners or experts. They have to present an application like the squatters of the “*Petite Rockette*” did with the help of the NGO “*Médecins du Monde*”, or the artists of the “*Forge de Belleville*” in 2009. This process forces squatters to respect administrative norms: budgets, security norms, public order. They have to determine the allocation of the place (artistic place with workshops, living place with bed rooms, etc). They have to accept the ground rules of the urban planning.

The second instrument is a juridical contract between squatters and the owner, the precarious lease, which allows the squatters to stay in the building for a determined and limited period (18 months generally) and for a small rent (around 1000 Euros per month). It is an instrument of normalization of the relationship between squatters and owners. Thus, it is a first step to reduce the tension between property rights and housing rights. Moreover, it is a means for the municipality to control illegal spaces. The squatters and the owners are both winners in this process and both parties usually accept it.\*\* The squatters can stay and the owner avoids a juridical procedure of eviction which is quite a burden. From illegal to contractual, squatters change their status but they stay in the same location and keep, more or less, the same activities. On the one hand, squatters have to accept some ground rules to stay. On the other hand, as squatters are innovators in terms of social and cultural practices, they urge public actors to innovate. Parisian representatives, who have adopted these two instruments as vectors of

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\* Political instruments are dispositive device of government: “both technical and social systems which organize particular social relationships between political power and people governed, functions of the representations and the meanings it supports” (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004:13).

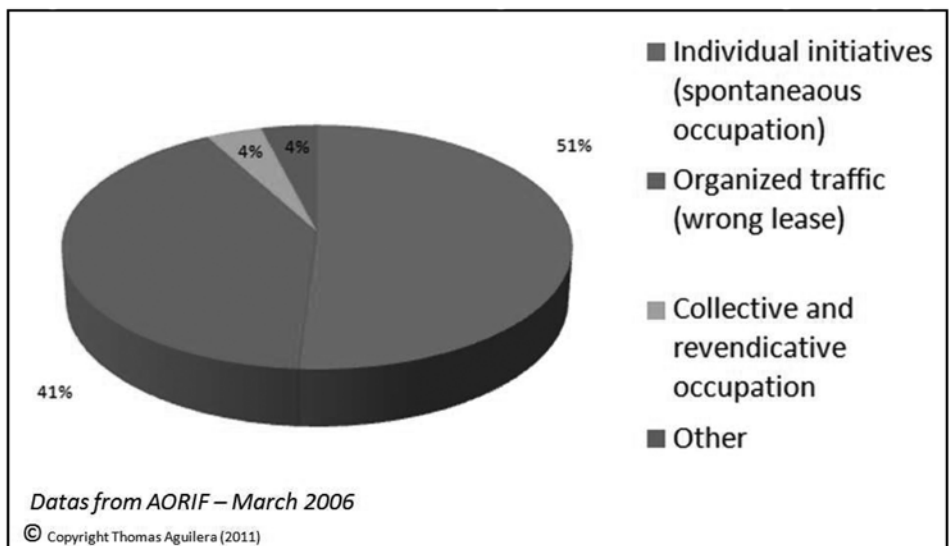
\*\* In March 2010, 16 squats were under this kind of agreement with the City Council.

public policy innovation, were inspired by squatters for the last two years: they created new festive and cultural places: the “104”, the “100 rue de Charenton”, the “Petit Bain” etc.

However, although this is not the mainstream opinion, some squatters (mainly anarchists) refuse to deal with the municipality and criticize squatters who accept it denouncing it as “institutionalization”. Some of them told me that the squat loses its identity and its own value if it is legalized:

“We are legal now. We lost the freedom of illegality... When we were illegal we were not allowed to do anything so we were able to do everything! Nowadays we cannot do anything within the [boundaries of the] law” (Pablo, squatter).

In Paris, the extreme-left wing and non-institutionalized squats are absent. We can find some in the periphery like in *Montreuil* with some anarchist groups who refuse to deal with state actors. The consequence is that the squats are more ephemeral. A larger European comparative work should show that Parisian squats are less politicized than in Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, Geneva, and Amsterdam. A last group of squats are the *invisible* squats.



**Figure 5:** Types of squats in social housings (owners: social housing developers). Pie Chart: own conception / data from AORIF, March 2006



### 3.4. "Invisible squats"

As we have already mentioned, we estimate that there are 2,000 squats in the *Ile-de-France* Region. The problem is that most of them are invisible: we can observe them when the owner becomes aware of the situation and wants to evict them. Some interviews let us think that the Prefecture (*deconcentrated local state*, the representation in region of the federal State) would have built up a database but at the moment we are not able to have access to the files. The only exhaustive database we can use is the one presented in the first section of this paper. It only concerns squats in buildings owned by social housing developers. We observed 661 squats at the regional scale in 2006.

The Housing Developers are frequently victims of squatting for three reasons and during three particular moments. First, when developers renovate buildings the flats are empty and vulnerable; second, during relocation of renters and "turn over"; third, during the construction. 51% of the squats presented here are small squats of flats. Homeless people or precarious people enter in a flat when they know that it is empty. In 41% of the cases, some networks of people have a good knowledge of the situation of relocations and renovations. During interviews, some actors told us that they can paid-off the doormen and some security officers of developers to get the addresses of empty flats. They enter a flat, change the lock, write a fake lease and sell it to precarious and immigrant families unable to check the veracity of the situation. Besides, the region hosts also some cases of squats whole or mainly composed of drug addicts. The last one in the north of Paris hosted hundreds of drug users. It was evicted in March 2010. The inhabitants of these squats consider the occupation as the primary goal because they want a roof and nothing else. The aim of squatting is to live in worthy conditions and to avoid sleeping in the street. There is not any process of institutionalization and the inhabitants benefit from staying invisible. They don't have many resources but have the skills to open a squat.

In this section, we have analyzed the different configurations of squatting in Paris, specifically according to two main cleavages: resources of squatters and their goals. The process of institutionalization takes two main forms: cooptation as with *Jeudi Noir*, flexible as with DAL and artists. For some scholars (Castells, 1983; Piven and Cloward, 1974) as well as for the political radical squatters, the process of institutionalization means the decline and loss of identity of the urban movement. However, squatters in Paris usually accept a flexible institutionalization. They create their own identity which is a combination

of interests. They develop strong rational strategies radicalizing some positions on the one hand (the main tool of their activism is illegal) and accepting the rules on the other (the rules of the negotiation). Squatters have many resources. They are able to mobilize their own resources to create a “disturbing” situation (McAdam, 1982). They have built many networks, of which some are informal: squatters move a lot between different squats and they know each other. Besides, they have established formal networks of sociability in order to exchange experiences, information and to organize events.\* In Paris, 70% of the squats belong to the *Intersquat* Network which is a Parisian initiative, although it is connected to many European squats in Rome, Barcelona, Berlin, and Geneva. The members of *Intersquat* meet once a month to exchange their experiences. They talk about new techniques for squatting, avoid eviction, and organizing a legal defense. They also circulate the addresses of newly vacant buildings. Finally, they organize several European events and meetings between squatters elsewhere in Europe (held in a different capital every year). This network gives the squatters some resources they can use to address officials. They know how to speak, how to organize an official meeting, how to defend themselves legally, they also know the Parisian territory (their databases of vacant buildings are more complete than the official ones) and how to mobilize the media to be visible.

## CONCLUSION

AS IN EVERY country in Europe, we find very different types of squats in Paris and its region. We can distinguish different configurations depending on the resources of the squatters and on their goals. The squats and social centers in Paris are the most visible. But they are only the small part of the iceberg. Most of the squats are invisible and hidden and we have to integrate them in the analysis when we are talking about squats even if their inhabitants are not activists. Indeed, we presented the squatting group “*Jeudi Noir*” which uses the media in order to attract attention to the housing problem in France and the DAL which is able to organize big events to relocate poor families. Many artists squat in Paris and have quite good relationships with the local officials,

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\* Every year they “open” all the squats of Paris to organize public exhibitions to show the reality of the squat to citizens. It is the “FOU” festival (*Festival des Ouvertures Utiles / Festival of Useful Occupations*).

which allow them to stay and participate to the development of the city. However, we have shown that many squats are invisible. They host precarious people who need shelter in order to survive. In that last case, squatting is not a choice and the mobilization to defend themselves is very difficult.

These different configurations imply different responses from state actors. In fact, as we have shown, artists and social centers are usually tolerated by the Paris city council which needs them to build a European cultural capital. Indeed, officials know that the city can attract tourists if it is a “creative” and innovative city. The political squats are also often supported by the left wing city council which considers them as a tool to critique the national right wing government. However, this side of public policies does not have to prevent us from observing the “dark side” of these relationships. Squatters without any resources (media, social and/or cultural capital) are usually evicted and the municipality does not intervene to support them. The police and the discipline of the city still work in Paris in order to control squatting. The police intervene during the daily life to avoid squatting in empty buildings and when the judge orders an eviction, the police carry it out.

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# **WHAT IS A “GOOD” SQUATTER? CATEGORIZATION PROCESSES OF SQUATS BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN FRANCE**

*Florence Bouillon*

A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT LAWS FAVOURING THE RIGHT TO HOUSING have been adopted in France in the last three decades. A respite from expulsions during winter (15 November to 1 March), grace periods, financial support, social accompaniment and re-housing of tenants in case of expulsion (1998 law against eviction) are some significant measures characterizing these evolutions. Clearly, the right to housing has progressed. Though the problem of bad housing is far from resolved in the absence of an adequately ambitious social housing policy, these laws testify to a consensus of society and politics on the importance that must be given to the problematics of exclusion from “decent” housing in France today.

Yet, it is remarkable that all these measures contain restrictive clauses concerning squatters. If they confer rights on holders of lease agreements, it is left to judges to decide when the occupants have “actually” occupied the space. Evidently, the legislator concerned with respecting private property did not wish to grant the occupant “without right or title” the same security as a tenant. How does the magistrate then

decide whether or not to apply the laws for advantages in housing to illegal occupants of empty houses?

A first glance at the decisions of French courts relating to squatters shows that squats are evicted mechanically. Indeed, in 96.4% cases (CERCRID [*Centre de Recherches Critiques Sur Le Droit*], 2003) judges accept demands for the expulsion of squatters and travellers installed on lands without amenities. This reading of the litigation of squats is found to be partly contradicted by ethnographic investigations made in Marseilles squats between 1998 and 2005.\* This inquiry consisted of a long-term direct observation conducted within fifteen squat areas. During these stays, several narratives of expulsion were assembled and police interventions in the squats were directly observed. Furthermore, 18 interviews on eviction procedures were conducted with squatters, a lawyer, a judge in chambers and several policemen. Finally, I had access to some thirty judicial files relating to squats. I also assisted in the hearings in seven cases.

All this evidence allowed me to complete and nuance the statistical data (on the quasi-systematic expulsion of squatters) and update the diverse modalities of intervention in squats. In fact, even before an eviction procedure came to my notice, a significant part of the squats were subject to expulsion by the police. Statistics cannot take them all into account and moreover, they say nothing of the respite the judge can award occupants. Finally the decision of expulsion does not imply that it is always effective, the prefect must order of the police force to carry out the eviction, which is not always the case.

It is clear from these few observations that where the technical and mechanical application of the “spirit of the law” is presumed, we are in fact confronted with a “game”. The question that then comes up is twofold: what are the precise outlines of this margin of maneuver and how do government officials use it?

In order to answer these questions, I posit that law is a social activity (Weber, 1986) and as such, it constructs itself (Latour, 2002). In other words, it produces and transforms itself at each moment of its

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\* This investigation was conducted as part of a thesis in anthropology defended in 2007 at the École des Hautes études en Sciences Sociales [EHESS] and published in 2009 as *Les mondes du squat*. This article is a revised and updated version of an article published in the journal *Déviance et Société* in 2010 as “Le squatteur, le policier, le juge et le préfet: procédures en actes et classements ad hoc”.

elaboration and application. From this perspective, law is a shifting, unstable subject that leads to a systematic work of interpretation by those who are in charge of writing as well as applying it. I will therefore see with a sociologist’s gaze, with the intention of being empirical (ethnographic) and focused on the practices of the production of normativity (Dupret, Ferrié, 2004, 355), to advance the following hypothesis: the squat is a place of normative tension,\* which in order to be resolved requires a work of categorisation by the different institutional actors involved. The procedures of classification and categories of judgment mobilized is henceforth the object of investigation.

## THE SQUAT IN THE LAW’S EYES

BEFORE CONSIDERING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS’ PRACTICES ON SQUATS, the legal framework of their action must be specified. Two important qualifications are laid down by the French legislature. The first strictly separates people who enjoy rental lease even if it is no longer binding, from those who never signed one. It must be mentioned straightaway that only the holders of a lease explicitly enjoy the measures favouring housing rights and especially those protecting occupants from expulsion. Others form the big category of “occupants without rights or titles”, and the application of these measures depends on how government officials judge the situation.

This first distinction having been established, a second one must be made within ‘occupation without rights or title’ between contractual situations (official housing, use on loan, precarious conventions of occupation...) and non-contractual (squatters, occupants of unconstructed land, strikers and demonstrators who occupy a premises or a public space). The existence of a contract, even if properly speaking it is not a lease, gives rights, particularly the right to stay on in the places. Squatters are, along with Roma [gypsies], amongst the least protected of all inhabitants. Be as it may, a squat does not constitute an offence in France.\*\* As civil litigation, it falls under the jurisdiction of

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\* Both in the juridical sense of the term of a conflict as I shall be demonstrating, between norms relating to property rights and those accruing to housing rights and in sociological understanding as moral and social norms show.

\*\* In the last few years several attempts were made to criminalize the squat. Thus, a proposal to amend the 1998 law legally banned any respite to



the magistrate's court. Apart from smash and grab or break-in, which are difficult to establish, squatters therefore risk "only" eviction. So that this eviction can take place, a juridical procedure is necessary *a priori*: according to article 61 of the 9 July 1991 law, except in a special arrangement, expulsion or eviction from a building cannot be pursued except by a court decision or minutes of conciliation and after orders to quit the premises. Yet, sometimes, for several reasons, squatters leave before any procedure is undertaken: they ignore its existence, they do not wish to have dealings with the law, they don't intend to remain in this building, they suffer from forms of intimidation from the landlord, neighbours or police... indeed, as the cases described here will show, the squat is the object of immediate eviction by police officers. Three actors thus play a crucial role in the expulsion of squatters: the police officer (by evicting forcibly or not), the judge (by allocating a grace period or not) and the prefect (by lending the support of the police or not). On what grounds do these government officials decide the destiny of inhabitants and determine the different treatments observed?

## TENSIONS OF POLICE JUDGMENTS

ACCORDING TO FORMER squatters who were questioned, evictions from squats by "strongmen" commissioned by landlords are less frequent in France today than some twenty years ago. With the institution of laws favouring the right to housing, tolerance of such evictions has diminished. A visit of Internet sites on defence of landlords rights also indicates that they are at present informed of the risks they run in case of "violent" evictions.\* If today armed expulsions by landlords or even in

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squatters, whilst the project of a law on internal security (2001) foresaw punishing squats with 6 months imprisonment and a 3000-euro fine. In the two cases, the clause was finally removed after pressure from associations defending housing rights. The last dates from February 2011: in the framework of a new law on security parliamentarians voted the adoption of an amendment making "residence squats" liable to a year's imprisonment and 15 000 euro fine. This amendment has an essentially ideological aim, the illegal occupant of a house already being condemned by French law to the same penalties for "infringement of residence".

\* Such an expulsion does not give squatters the right to reoccupy the premises, but the landlord can be the object of a procedure for acts of violence. See for example "*Logement squatté: il faut réagir vite!*" published by the site "*Logement*

certain cases by exasperated neighbours, have not entirely disappeared,\* expulsions taking place without procedure and by force are above all carried out by police officers.

In which case can the police then evacuate a squat without waiting for the judge’s decision? In other words, what does the “special arrangement” mentioned in the 9 July 1991 law empirically cover? The most frequent response to this question, from police officers as well as squatters, refers to the “48 hour rule” of occupation. Over and above this period, the procedure is not compulsory and the prosecutor or police officer can decide to terminate the occupation. This rule, which is not registered as such in the texts, corresponds to the somewhat vague notion of being caught red-handed (*flagrant délit*). According to article 53 of the penal procedure code, ‘flagrant délit’ is defined as a misdemeanour actually being committed or having just been committed. It is therefore first of all correlated to a notion of time. But this time is more flexible than the 48-hour rule would imply. Police officers must in fact carry out an interpretive work that consists of defining the occupation. Are the inhabitants already living in the squatted place and does the place or its occupants present some kind of danger? When they are notified of the opening of a squat (the information comes in most cases from the neighbours), police officers estimate the situation both from a visual and discursive point of view: whilst police officers try to penetrate inside a squat, something that is difficult to do if the inhabitants are reluctant, they simultaneously proceed to investigate the neighbourhood in order to identify the duration of the life of a squat and characterize its occupants. The assessment of a squat is oriented by the search for “traces” of habitation, which determine the possibility and relevance of an immediate intervention.

More precisely, in addition to the elapsed occupation time, the eviction depends upon a general interpretation of the situation. My observations considered four aspects: the presence of a violation (offence by

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*squatté : il faut réagir vite!*” and reproduced on the address [<http://www.boursorama.com/patrimoine/information/detail-dossier.phtml?num=2256086>].

\* A recent example was greatly mediatised because of the violence: it concerned a landlord who had mobilized a private militia to forcibly evict youngsters occupying his building in the Paris region. Messages posted on French forums of Internet sites devoted to property investment testify to the support this type of practice receives amongst a section of the French population.

entering the place, illegal electric connection...), the social difficulties apparently encountered by the occupants, the pressure exercised by the neighbourhood and/or the landlord for expulsion and the supposedly criminal character of activities conducted in the squat (consumption of drugs, etc.). Finally, the nature of the occupation must be decided in order to determine the correct attitude: if the question is of a settled home and if the occupants have not been guilty of any other offence, then the squat is transformed into a “residence” and the police forces should not intervene. On the other hand, if the squat is not yet lived in, or if it constitutes an acknowledged danger,\* then police intervention must be instantaneous.

But the field inquiry revealed other possibilities within the scope of police intervention, which more or less respect this legal framework. Indeed, in the eyes of some police units,\*\* and in some cases, forcible evictions take place on the borders of the law. As one of the policemen interviewed explained, if the “families” benefit from the advantages of eviction within a legal framework,\*\*\* people seen as “marginals” are likely to be evicted at all costs: “more or less legal subterfuges to intervene” are then found. In Marseilles, the field inquiry showed that squats occupied by “young strays”, mainly isolated adolescents without papers from Maghreb, are evicted in this manner. Suspected of delinquency and generating a strong feeling of insecurity amongst neighbours, these adolescents do not have any means of opposing the police (no knowledge of French or of legislation and lacking external support, etc.). The squats they occupy have the shortest life expectancy, at best from a few days to some weeks. Squats occupied by the Roma, currently victims of ostracism in France, are sometimes also evicted without any legal procedure.

If police activity is, here as elsewhere, framed by the law, law enforcement consequently falls on the borderline of legality. Police inquiry in the squats aims at distinguishing a “residence” squat from a “public order problem” squat. Thus, the squat is certainly typical of the police mission’s dual nature as identified by Dominique Monjardet (1996). It

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\* A danger for the neighbourhood or for the inhabitants themselves, for example in the case of an unsafe building on the verge of collapse.

\*\* My facts do not allow me to estimate precisely whether this kind of practice is widespread or not.

\*\*\* I will come back to the magistrates’ classification of squat inhabitants on the basis of their degree of legitimacy.

consists of both “applying the law” and “using force”. It remains to be known how the judgment of police officers is constructed and the nature of the evidence arousing their suspicion or their compassion. The protective power of the “family” was mentioned, but it can be offset by the great disqualification of groups like Romas. Besides, my inquiry shows the strong indexing of police controls according to the physical appearance of people (sex, age, clothing style, skin colour), which influence police controls in France (Jobard, Lévy, 2009). Thus, more than facts, a set of “representations” related to the more or less assumed huge deviancy of squat inhabitants operate as discriminatory factors in police activity amongst occupants who have neither rights nor titles.

### **JUDGES FACE TO FACE WITH SQUATTERS: TO BE (OR NOT TO BE) OF “GOOD FAITH”**

BECAUSE SOME INHABITANTS of squats are spotted too early and/or because they are not perceived as legitimate inhabitants, they do not benefit from the legal procedure before eviction. For various reasons, many will leave on their own account without waiting for this procedure. This could be due to ignorance (of legal protection offered by the procedure), intimidation (exercised by the landlord, neighbours, police) or mobility (departure for another city, asylum in another accommodation...). Only a section of the inhabitants of squats who cannot be quantified precisely will therefore appear before a judge and the prefect.

Most often, in more than 75% of squat cases (CERCRID, 2003) squatters are judged by a court hearing, “accelerated procedure” or “emergency”. It has been noted that the judge nearly always pronounces eviction from a squat: consequently, granting or refusing a respite is the principal stake in a court hearing.

The construction and housing code authorizes the judge to grant respites extending from 3 months to 3 years, whatever the status of the occupant. Amongst the decisions examined by CERCRID, such a respite is granted to squatters only in 6,5% of the cases (CERCRID, 2003: 80). Therefore, it goes without saying that most often, when confronted with a squat situation, the judge evicts without any other kind of consideration. From the judges’ perspective, who are the (rare) “legitimate” squatters?

My field inquiry and more specifically the motivations behind judges’ decisions as revealed by the files examined, show that judges grant respites to squatters on grounds that suit the two involved parties. As

far as the landlord is concerned, three elements are decisive: first, the status and position of the landlord of the occupied building, because the loss suffered by a physical body (small private landlord) is estimated to be more important than the loss experienced in the same situation by a legal entity (such as a society or public person such as a collectivity). On the other hand, the length of time during which the building was vacant before being occupied is evoked, because it reflects a more or less advanced state of abandonment. Finally, as an extension of this second element, the judge is attentive to the landlord's real interest in his property: the latter should be proved with material evidence (minutes of public meetings, estimates of building firms, etc), that the building is the object of current or future projects.

Thus, lively debates sometimes take place between the landlord of a premises and its occupants, the former trying to demonstrate that the building will be soon restored, accommodate tenants or sold, whereas the latter will on the contrary attempt to prove that the projects advanced are fictional or circumstantial. Without generalizing all situations of squatting, it could be said that in Marseilles, from 1999 to 2005, out of twenty odd evictions from premises, about half underwent repairs and were occupied. The rest remained in the same state, that is to say empty and run down.

When the judge thinks in terms of content his decision cuts across these considerations and those of squatters. The question is to find a "right balance" between the landlord's constitutional and inalienable law to his property and the social and sanitary situation of squatters. As far as the latter are concerned, the defence lawyer's primary aim is to convince the judge that squatters are in real material difficulty. He must prove that even if they have no rights or titles, they are driven to occupying the premises. They are not usurpers but "truly poor". The occupants' modest incomes are then displayed along with the lack of regular work and "the state of necessity" in which they find themselves. It is also recommended that occupants be shown to have taken other steps to find accommodation. The judge will be all the more indulgent if the occupants have exhausted all legal solutions and in particular, presented files to HLM offices whose certificates and file numbers will be produced. Above all, these arguments aim to testify the squatters' *good faith*, that is to say, their real desire to acquire legality.

Having proved that they are "genuine" poor, squatters and their lawyers have to demonstrate that they are also "good" poor. Groups, particularly youngsters are very quickly designated as "bands" and arouse

strong suspicion. On the other hand, the squat is commonly considered an anarchic, anomic place where immorality reigns. Consequently, the squatters’ lawyer must show his clients’ inoffensive nature. He insists on their moral feelings and their aspirations to normalcy. He specifies that they are not “drug addicts”, they “don’t steal” and their marginalisation does not necessarily coincide with delinquency. He affirms the occupants’ insertion in their neighbourhood and if possible, presents letters and petitions of support signed by neighbours.\* The fact that a recognized association supports the squatters particularly their daily life style inside the squat can be factors of reassurance for the judge.

Thus, the associational framework (the famous DAL association, the organization advocating for the right to housing that since the beginning of the 1990s organized appropriation of empty buildings for people without residence or those who were badly housed) is therefore an advantage even if it is in no way a guarantee, for some squats supported by organisations of this kind have suffered immediate evictions. But for the lawyer, it can tilt the balance of power in favour of squatters more than in the case of an isolated occupation. However, the presence of an association in a court hearing of squatters occurs rarely.

In juridical processes, squatters are classified according to three major criteria: the “genuine poverty”, “sincerity” and “harmlessness”. The question is to prove that they suffer from marginality and do not represent a danger for the collectivity. Squats resulting from poverty in which occupants justify their practice by the need to survive are most likely to be effective on grounds of “good faith” so that the stigma of delinquency can be successfully averted. Alternative squats (artistic, political collectivities) have more difficulty in appearing as squats from necessity; but they are also less suspected of deviancy than the former.

A short description will illustrate the preceding statements. It lists the arguments mobilized by lawyers in court hearings of a squat of artists. Installed in the enclosure of a partially disused municipal building in the neighbourhood of the *Panier* in Marseilles, the SLAAF (Sans Local d’Activités Artistiques Fixes) was opened in 2000 and evicted in 2002.

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\* The opponent party’s lawyer can submit complaints to the judge about nocturnal noise or petitions. The neighbour’s opinion is thus taken very seriously and the judge’s position is largely determined by the impression created by the squatters.

There were fifteen of us, mostly inhabitants or SLAAF sympathizers, present in the hearing of 7 January 2001. The squatters' lawyer opened the debate. He began by pleading the inadmissibility of the complaint, arguing that the mayor of Marseilles was incompetent to act in the arenas of culture such as housing that fall under the district Council's jurisdiction. The mayor's lawyer then spoke. He quickly rejected the formal arguments and asserted the legal nature of the right of action. He then came down to the facts by developing five successive points. First, he recalled the illicit nature of the occupation and contested that the occupants penetrated into the building without breaking-in. He then insisted on the antiquated and dangerous aspect of the premises. Indeed, the premises were unfit for habitation. He evoked the illegal electrical connections set up by the squatters, which constitute a source of danger. His defence dealt essentially with the illegitimacy of the dwelling. He first questioned their need: One of them was even the son of the judge, Your Honour! The lawyer then distinguished these illegal artists from those who rented workshops and lodgings on the floor of the same building by paying a rent as was required to the municipality. Or, it was not enough to carry a portfolio of designs under the arm to be an artist. Not only were the so-called squatters hardly artists, but above all, they were a source of danger: the lawyer quoted a letter sent to the mayor by these legal artists saying the place was now open to all and they lived in fear of robberies. The occupation was therefore not as peaceful as they claimed! Besides, the legal artists had a real project for the building (space for exhibition, pedagogical space and cultural restaurant) supported by the city council. Like his adversary, the city council's lawyer claimed he did not wish to argue about who were true artists. But his entire plea attempted to redefine the fake bourgeois/young authentic artist couple, which he knew to be at the heart of the defence, as true serious and constructive artists/rebellious and immature youngsters. The squatters' lawyer then took the floor and pleaded on fundamental grounds. He began by asserting entry into the premises without break-in. Then he very clearly opposed SLAAF occupants to the "false artists" mentioned above, whom he tried to discredit: Do you see Van Gogh writing a letter denouncing poor artists? He castigated

the rich artists, whose main activity consists of hand kissing and eating starters in social receptions at the town hall. These were the real artists! He clamoured, pointing to us, seated on the benches in the courtroom. Armed with the thin file prepared by the squatters, the lawyer then intended to give proof of the works realized and the additional value added to the place. He insisted on the cleanliness. The city council would therefore not be cheated. Quite the contrary. He then talked of the activities organized by the inhabitants, from the opening of SLAAF in the neighbourhood and the letters of support from artisans and neighbouring shopkeepers. This occupation was peaceful and even appreciated. They were not drug addicts, nor delinquents! He then mentioned the electricity bills that had been duly paid. They were not parasites! Above all, the lawyer wanted to prove the occupants’ good faith. He insisted on the real needs of housing by providing copies of demands for social housing. He evoked letters sent to the city council in order to open a dialogue after the proposal of mediation had been refused. Finally, the lawyer attacked what he termed the phony associative project of the resident artists. In no case would this project materialize before June. He asked for the grant of respite until September.

At the court’s exit, SLAAF occupants were happy. They had appreciated their lawyer’s plea and his frankness. On my part, I note three schemes of legitimacy identified earlier (genuine need, sincerity, harmlessness). However, I will never know if the judge in charge of the file was sensitive to them. After the hearing and certainly with the mediation of the affair by the regional press, the mayor withdrew his complaint and went to the extent of promising the inhabitants the signature of a convention of precarious occupation. But some weeks later, he changed positions and summoned them to appear once again before the court where their eviction would finally be announced.

### **THE PERFECT ULTIMATE RESORT: THE QUESTION OF “TROUBLING PUBLIC ORDER”**

ONCE THE JUDGE decrees eviction, it is up to the prefecture to finally decide if a squat should or shouldn’t be evicted by authorizing the use of force. Besides, basically, re-accommodation (or more often no



re-accommodation) of squatters also depends on the prefect.

When does the prefect postpone eviction? From my observations, the government official generally takes such a decision in case of a risk of serious public disorder. This is adopted when the squatters are supported and threaten to mediatise their situation and/or when they appear to suffer from particularly dramatic living conditions. Young children clearly inspire more compassion than adults, in particular single men who are perfect figureheads of the “bad” poor.

Adjournment of eviction normally opens the way to negotiation between the government official and the landlord, who, since the 1998 law (which, in this sense, is also a protector of property rights), receives compensation for the sum of unpaid rents. Thus, the inhabitants of some squats benefit from a form of juridical status quo, while awaiting re-accommodation and/or seizure of the occupied building by public powers. They settle their occupation dues on a monthly basis and the state pays the remaining amount. Another question, which the prefect must decide is whether or not to grant accommodation to the evicted squatters. As opposed to occupants with titles, there is no legal compulsion to re-accommodate squatters after an eviction. Re-accommodation again falls within the discretionary power of the administration. Fieldwork revealed that in most cases, no re-accommodation is granted. Persons identified as without fixed domicile (Sans Domicile Fixe [SDF]), alternative groups (who however do not all ask for access to ordinary housing), “isolated” immigrant workers, foreigners without papers... are those who practically never benefit from re-accommodation. The presence of young children and the institution of a balance of power by mobilisation of inhabitants and their support (associations, militants, neighbours) could nonetheless positively influence the decision to re-accommodate.

Moreover, it must be noted that when housing is assigned, most of the time it is simply temporary accommodation: some nights in a hotel or a place in a household. It is not rare that inhabitants refuse these proposals, even if it means putting up encampments in the same street, so as to draw the attention of the media and public authorities to their situation. Some only see this as “manipulation” by associations more anxious to ensure their own publicity than help the evicted. However, one can easily imagine people tired of being shunted from one temporary accommodation to another hoping to find some stability at last. Moreover, as I frequently observed, the reluctance to accept accommodations miles away from the neighbourhoods where families have

been living, where children are going to school or parents working and where links of sociability and solidarity have been constructed, makes perfect sense and renders suspicions of “manipulation” or allegations of so-called demands of “special treatment” redundant.

Thus, in most cases, the prefect does not postpone eviction of squatters nor does he apply the step of re-accommodation. When he grants the assistance of law enforcement agencies, the last stage of eviction begins. A letter from the prefecture is addressed to the police agreeing upon a date with the bailiff. An eviction calls for some organization: on the fixed date, the bailiff, the police officers, the locksmith and the removal men are all present. Most evictions take place early in the morning. Physical resistance is rare and occurs essentially in political squats. Once the eviction is carried out, a locksmith is responsible for immediately shutting the premises. Next, the squat is walled up and “anti-squat” armoured doors are installed. Sometimes too, the insides of the place are destroyed (police forces speak of rendering an apartment “lifeless” so as to discourage new squats).

Eviction is not only a traumatizing moment, it further undermines the inhabitants. Thus, Claire Lévy-Vroelant and Jérôme Segal make the following observations on the eviction of 150 Romas from a building in *Montreuil* in 2003: “this eviction adds to the misery of precariousness. Efforts at integration are shattered. Children were enrolled in primary or secondary school, in special classes, access to health care was instituted by constituting medical files, the demand for literacy classes was going to be heard, etc” (2003, 224). Evictions consequently lead to heightened impoverishment of populations already victims of ostracism and great social vulnerability. In no sense do they resolve the squat “question”, because in the absence of an alternative, it is highly probable that the persons concerned will sooner or later occupy a new building. Eviction thus contributes to producing the very situation it was supposed to end: occupation without right or title to vacant housing.

## CONCLUSION

AS FAR AS a squat is concerned, the “spirit of the law” is finally not so easy to identify: the legislator as we saw, does not oblige the judge to protect the inhabitant who has neither right nor title, whilst leaving him the opportunity to do so. It is in this zone of uncertainty that a judge, a police officer or a prefect can exercise his power of discretion. The tension is then between two perceptible poles: ultimately it must

be determined if the squatter is a “voluntary marginal” or a “victim” of bad housing.

The ethnography of litigation of a squat confirms the importance of a “delinquent” reading of a squat by government officials. Social, economic and residential fragility of the large majority of inhabitants is hidden by the stigma of deviance. By offending the “absolute and sacred” right of private property, squatters don the clothes of the “wicked”, even seditious poor from whom society must above all be protected. In this general repressive frame, some differentiations are nonetheless applied. The figure of the child, because it is linked to innocence and equally part of a legal compulsion to protect it, appears most effective in changing the stigma. But it does not form an unshaken bastion. Besides, it is always open to “reversal” since bad living conditions in a squat could be a motive to place children with foster parents. Parents then find themselves obliged to take up the responsibility and emotional cost of a situation they suffer. Other parameters more often work against the inhabitants: the fact of being young, male and especially foreign. At the moral level these modalities of classification are objects of a juridical translation through channels of categories like “good faith” and “troubling public order”. These ad hoc grading of squatters on which the forms of procedural acts will depend, update the dialectic between “true” and “false” poverty, which has lain behind the reversibility of a policy of assistance quickly veering to repression when confronting target populations (Geremek, 1997).

However, it would be wrong to affirm that laws in favour of housing rights have no effect on government officials’ decisions on squats. Indeed, several examples\* testify that some judges and prefects base themselves on laws favouring housing of “disadvantaged people” to grant respites to occupants without rights or titles. But on the subject of the squat, nothing is won. Firstly, because as mentioned in the

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\* Suffice it to quote the decision of 2001 taken by a judge in chambers whom I met during my fieldwork. He granted a respite of one year to around fifty occupying Comorian families and authorized their expulsion only on the condition that they be re-housed decently by explicitly referring to the 1998 law against exclusions. Several articles of the daily *Le Monde* mentioned that the 1990 Besson law had also, in its time, influenced the severity of courts on squatters. A new inquiry would be required that would permit us to evaluate if the recent adoption of the homelessness act has had repercussions on squat litigation or not.

introduction, of the persistence of initiatives to criminalize the practice or limit squatters’ rights. On the other hand, some “favourable judgments” for squatters have not become a precedent, as Joane Benhayoun’s thesis of law affirms (2005): jurisprudence on the subject has shown itself to be undeniably protective of property rights during the last few years, although measures upholding the right to housing have not ceased to multiply. Therefore, if the question of law remains decisive as far as future living conditions of squatters are concerned, that of social “norms” is equally so. Today, it is also around collective representations of the realities of a squat that struggles must be conducted.

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# MOVING TOWARDS CRIMINALISATION AND THEN WHAT? EXAMINING DOMINANT DISCOURSES ON SQUATTING IN ENGLAND

*ETC Dee*

ON MARCH 31, 2011, AN EARLY DAY MOTION\* WAS PROPOSED IN THE House of Commons by Mike Weatherley, Conservative Member of Parliament for Hove. The motion read ‘This house believes that squatting should be criminalised’. This was the latest step in a series of events instigated by Conservative Party outrage at gypsy and New Age traveler land occupations in the run up to the 2010 General Election. It is expected to result in a revision of the trespass laws which will make squatting illegal. In this article, I will document and analyse the recent discourses around squatting which have been both created and exploited by politicians and journalists.

I outline and explain several dominant discourses, concentrating on media stories from national and local newspapers in Brighton and London. These discourses exist in the media but (as will be seen) both shape and are shaped by the attitudes of the general public, in a

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\* A one sentence suggestion for debate, usually employed to rally support for a particular cause.

reflexive loop. The stories fluctuate in emphasis and effect, although recently most stories have tended more to the negative perception of squatting and its protagonists. With the onset of proposals to criminalise squatting there seems to have been a noticeable shift in tone, which is due to a multiplicity of factors and cannot be said to be accidental.

Before moving forward, I would like to make two quick procedural notes:

Firstly, a comment on the use of the word ‘England’. It might be thought simpler to speak of squatting in the United Kingdom, but the UK consists of England, Wales and Scotland. In the latter, the law is different and there is no legal basis for squatting (and it seldom happens). It also seems unfair to include Wales when discussing only English newspapers and therefore I speak only of England, in particular Brighton and London.\* There are squats throughout the UK both in the countryside and the urban environment, but these two cities are often mentioned in the media, so I concentrated upon them.

Secondly, regarding sources, I have been tracking squatting stories in the media for the last two years. For this piece I refer to the most pertinent articles, and tend to focus on four newspapers (all dailies). These are the *Daily Mail* (a right-wing tabloid), *the Guardian* (a left-wing broadsheet), the *Daily Telegraph* (a right-wing broadsheet) and the *Brighton Argus* (a right-wing local newspaper).

## CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

FOLLOWING THE WORK of Norman Fairclough, I will take an approach to discourse analysis grounded in linguistics and applied to social theory. Discourse is taken to be spoken or written language use, which can be examined as a form of social practice (1993: 138). Discourse analysis explores the frequently opaque relations between discursive practices and wider social and cultural structures. Such practices “arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power” (1993: 135). The relations can be described as opaque since they may not necessarily be comprehensible to those participants producing the actual discourse.

Drawing a demarcation between ‘critical’ and ‘descriptive’ analysis,

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\* Although it can be mentioned that a Wales Online article states that in 2010 the number of squatting cases in Wales had risen by 40%.

Fairclough investigates the ‘ideological-discursive formations’ which exist within an institution (1985: 739). He claims that it is usually a simple matter to identify one ideological-discursive formation which is clearly dominant and others which are dominated. When one ideological-discursive formation becomes dominant and remains unchallenged, then the norms which represent the background knowledge will slowly become naturalized and therefore become the norms of the institution itself. They will also become completely opaque to the language users (1985: 751).

The institution is taken to be a “pivot” between the higher level social formation and the lower level social event, “an apparatus of verbal interaction” (1985: 749). I will argue later that the views represented by mainstream media discourses on squatting can be broken quite simply into several ideological-discursive formations, with one clearly dominating.

The important point to recognise here is that Fairclough has identified a manner in which language use (itself shaped by prior knowledge and experience) comes to reinforce the ideological-discursive formation. In this way, “discourse makes people, as well as people make discourse” (1985: 750). Fairclough’s analysis is theoretically supported by the work of Foucault, who suggests that “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (1979: 93). An important corollary is that there is space for change, in that ideological-discursive formations can be altered. However, the domination of a particular framework can of course be dangerous, since then the background knowledge becomes fixed to a certain ideological perspective which can be difficult to change.

Language is recursive. It both forms and reflects opinions. With discourses on squatting, it is possible to observe how the media stories both form attitudes and manipulate them, by drawing on stereotypes. As Fairclough comments, “it is vital that critical discourse analysis explore the tension between these two sides of language use, the socially shaped and the socially constitutive” (1993:134).

To give an example of such an analysis, Fairclough examines the script of a television series which involves the questioning of a woman (who is the victim of rape) by two policemen and discovers implicit propositions suggesting that the policemen hold sexist attitudes as part of their background knowledge, which then shapes their behaviour in the context of the dominant ideological-discursive formation (1985: 741).



In another example, Fairclough studies extracts from Lancaster University's undergraduate prospectuses for the years 1967-8, 1986-7 and 1993. In the light of the increasing marketization of higher education structures generally in the UK, he discovers how the discursive practices themselves have become marketized through textual analysis and also in terms of social practice. As he comments, "the 1967-8 entry gives information about what is provided on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. In the 1993 prospectus, by contrast, the promotional function is primary; it is designed to sell the university and its courses to the potential applicant" (1993: 156).

In both cases then, by close attention to the text Fairclough can extrapolate conclusions. The suppositions here are that communication through language is a type of social interaction, which is structured, and further that this inherent structure can be affected by language itself. These seem perfectly reasonable assumptions to make since language clearly does affect the domains of discourse which are constructed. As Giddens observes, "there can be no theoretical defence for supposing that the personal encounters of day-to-day life can be conceptually separated from the long-term institutional development of society" (1981:173).

## **HOW AN IDEOLOGICAL-DISCURSIVE FORMATION IS CONSTITUTED REGARDING SQUATTING**

THERE IS AN interesting discrepancy between public views of squatters in the Netherlands and England. The modern wave of squatting began at the same time (the late 1960s and early 1970s) in both countries, spurred by the need to provide housing in a time when many buildings stood empty. Even though as Paul Chatterton observes there is a "long history of the dispossessed building their own housing and infrastructure through the emergence of self-managed squatter settlements", recent discourses around squatting have diverged considerably in the two countries (2010: 240).

In the Netherlands, the squatter is known as a 'kraker', after the verb 'kraken' ('to crack') which came to be used colloquially as meaning 'to squat'. Krakers are known as responsible, trustworthy people who occupy buildings to protest at speculation, provide housing for those in need, set up social projects, preserve monuments and take advantage of emptiness to sidestep queues for housing, on Pruijt's fivefold typology (2004a). Drug-users and thieves who may use squatting as a pretext for

stealing copper pipes from a building are lumped together under the term ‘junkie’ rather than ‘kraker’. The dominant ideological-discursive formation is clearly one that is favourable to squatters and one in which squatters (particularly those in Amsterdam) have been recognised as actors participating in city planning (Pruijt, 2004b). However, as Owens notes, this recognition was only won through hard work since “squatting’s political nature is not given. Activists had to battle over the meaning and purpose of squatting in order to make it their own” (2008:47). Dutch squatters are expected to have researched the history of the building (for example finding out who the owner is and whether there are any planning permissions granted), behave non-violently unless provoked and to have cordial relations with the police.

All of this is very different in England, where the stereotypical view of squatters is more along the lines of drug-addicted criminals who shit in buckets, trash buildings and generally cause disturbance, as represented fictionally in Doris Lessing’s novel ‘The Good Terrorist’ (1985) and various media stories. In illustration, I can point to reports in the Brighton Argus.

One entitled ‘Websites give guidance for how to squat in Brighton’ reports upon the existence of squatter advice networks. Regarding a recently evicted squat, it accuses the squatters of causing £20,000 of damage and leaving faeces in every room of the building (May 10, 2009). That year, May 1 had just seen a successful anti-arms trade protest by a group called SmashEDO and the article features a photograph of a mournful owner looking through a broken window with SmashEDO scrawled on a wall. Leaving aside the question of how damage amounting to £20,000 can be done to an empty property without a wrecking crew, it seems there is a political subtext to this story.

Another article has clear political overtones, which mask the fact of an illegal eviction. ‘Inside the home of amateur anarchists’ reports on a police raid on a squat as part of the security drive (termed Operation Otter) in the run up to the Labour Party Conference which took place in Brighton in 2004 (September 24, 2004). Three people were arrested on suspicion of burglary before being released the next day, by which time the house had no doubt been re-secured by the owner. There appears to have been no real security threat, with rooms being described as “typical of those occupied by many students, littered with books, videos and clothes” (ibid).

In both these stories, squatting appears to be the superficial topic through which other political points can be made.

Steve Platt tracked media perceptions of squatting from the 1960s to the 1990s and notes that whilst squatters often had media coverage to thank for successes, the relationship was a stormy one. During the 1970s:

Coverage could at times be almost unrelievedly hostile. It was one thing when squatting involved ‘respectable’, self-evidently ‘deserving’ cases of homeless families occupying empty council properties, often as part of a well-disciplined campaign led by people who were not themselves homeless. It was quite another when the squatters were perceived to be less respectable and deserving – single people, ‘outsiders’, ‘hippies’, ‘dosers’ or drug-takers, people without the same steady eye for how their image might play in the media – particularly if they turned their attentions towards empty privately-owned properties or were seen to have some sort of wider political agenda (1999).

I shall return to the discussion of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ squatters later on, here I would simply note that Platt’s analysis is still valid today. I shall now examine reports about squatting in the English mainstream media, primarily newspaper articles written at the national and local level and websites from various groups. I will first analyse media stories about squatters characterised as ‘millionaire’ squatters (since they are occupying properties worth £1 million or more). Next, I will analyse the division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ squatters. This is followed by a discussion of how such discourses were affected by the proposed criminalisation of squatting.

## **‘MILLIONAIRE’ SQUATTERS**

BEGINNING IN THE late 2000s and continuing up to the present day, the mainstream media (by which I mean the daily national newspapers and their internet news sites, local newspapers in London and Brighton and in addition the BBC news website), have regularly featured news stories concerning large, expensive houses which have been squatted. These stories tend to relate who the mansion belongs to and what the squatters think about their new, temporary utopia. A couple of times a month, the discourse of the ‘millionaire’ squatters reliably reappears.

Until quite recently, when other factors appear to disrupt the tone,

there tends to be some sympathy for the squatters which could be explained by the framing of the squatters as slightly mythologised ‘Robin Hood’ figures, taking back for the people what has been stolen from them by the ultrarich. Whilst private property is sacrosanct under capitalism, it appears that there is a boundary beyond which there is a certain public sympathy for those who squat houses worth millions which are standing derelict. The need to protect private property is coming into conflict with a basic belief which frames emptiness as itself criminal when people have a need for housing.

This tension is also apparent in France. According to Thomas Aguilera, writing in this volume about Parisian squats, “private property is fundamental and constitutionally protected. It means that the juridical institutions cannot allow an illegal occupation if an owner complains. On the other hand, the right to housing is also fundamental (even if it is less than the right to property in the hierarchy of the French constitution)” (page 210).

For example, in Brighton, a £1.75 million property called Fife House (once owned by Edward VIII) was occupied in December 2008. In the *Daily Mail*, a journalist surmises that neighbours “fear it is only a matter of time before the invaders start throwing wild parties” but allows the squatters to retort that they are caring for the property (December 11, 2008).

Groups squatting large expensive properties in London have included the Really Free School, the VHS Video Basement, the Da! Collective and the Oubliette. The Really Free School occupied properties at 5 Bloomsbury Square, 34-35 Fitzroy Square, 6 Rathbone Place and 48 Whitcomb Street, and I shall examine them in more detail later on.

The VHS Basement take the stance of non-cooperation with mainstream media, with a public message on their blog entitled ‘Dear Guardian Wankers’ in answer to an enquiry from a journalist:

We are not interested in any sort of coverage from the mainstream media. Aside from the fact that they are usually factually incorrect, and make everyone come across as complete wankers, we see any news articles or similar as detrimental to the squatting movement. It is articles like this that have, and will lead to the laws being changed, making it much harder for squatting to exist at all (December 21, 2009).

Such a response suggests that these squatters are aware of the negative

discourses around squatting and have decided to follow a policy of non-cooperation with the media. Presumably the thinking is to not make matters any worse by aiding the creation of such narratives. However, the question must be asked how possible it is to step outside of the narrative. For all its attractions, non-cooperation leaves no room to create alternative narratives (hard as that may itself seem to be).

The Oubliette ('dungeon' in French) is an arts collective which has squatted properties such as an old language school in Waterloo, a Mayfair mansion left empty for twelve years and two former embassies near Green Park. Their spokesperson, Dan Simon, claims that the group is not squatting but rather using each temporary space to run an arts project which needs no funding from either the public or private sectors. He states that in each place the group has attempted to make contact with the owner, proposing that they run the arts project until whatever time the owner requires the use of the building again and offering to maintain the building, with the twin benefits being that neighbourhood property values do not fall as a result of dereliction and the need for paid private security is removed (*Guardian*, December 21, 2009). In this sense, it seems that the collective are attempting to import the notion of a brokered anti-squat deal from the Netherlands, where it has often worked successfully. They are also working to change the ideological-discursive formation around squatting at root, with a redefinition of their actions.

So it seems that squatters might battle the dominant ideological-discursive formation, which is negative towards them, by either refusing to participate (VHS Basement) or by redefining what is meant by the term 'squatter' (Oubliette). Both reactions are in some way challenging the legitimacy of the current dominant framework.

It is not surprising that the Oubliette squatters would want to present themselves as something different to the standard definition of the term. This is an attempt to codify a new subjectivity. Foucault suggests this tactic as a form of resistance to the state, perhaps the most effective tool at our disposal. He states this most clearly in his 'Afterword – The Subject and Power' in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (edited by Dreyfus and Rabinow):

The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state, and from the type of

individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries (1982: 216).

An action that also attempted to engage with the ideological-discursive framework around squatting, in this case aided by a broadly sympathetic media, was the occupation of the London home of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of the Libyan dictator Colonel Gaddafi. A group called Topple the Tyrants took possession of the house in Hampstead Garden Suburb in March 2011. It is estimated to be worth £10 million. Within the context of the popular Libyan uprising, this action was almost universally praised.\* In one article, the squatters were referred to as “protesters” throughout and provided with ample space to make their political point in their own words (namely that the occupation had taken place “in solidarity with the people of Libya”) (*Guardian*, March 9, 2011). Note also the use of the word ‘occupation’, rather than ‘squatting’. By talking about a squatting action without using the term ‘squat’ itself, the usual connotations attached to the term are avoided and the action can be judged on different grounds, namely that the son of a tyrant’s empty property has been seized in solidarity with the people who are being oppressed by Gaddafi. The only dissenting voice was that of Mike Freer, the local Conservative Member of Parliament, who condemned the action and advised the squatters that “they need to let the UK Government deal with the situation” (*Hendon and Finchley Times*, March 16, 2011).

The case of Mark Guard is instructive. Described by the *Daily Mail* as a “serial squatter” and also “crusader for the homeless and the underdog”, Guard was spokesperson for a group which squatted a string of properties in 2009, many of which belonged to high profile celebrity figures (December 10, 2009). Thus, there are news stories documenting the occupation of homes belonging to former Home Secretary David Blunkett, the ex-wife of billionaire Roman Abramovich and TV cook Nigella Lawson. These residences cost their owners £4 million, £15 million and £33 million, respectively (*Daily Mail*, December 10, 2009; October 19, 2009; November 24, 2009).

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\* Robert Halfon, MP, actually tabled an amendment to Weatherley’s Early Day Motion (Squatting should be criminalised) which read: “with the exception of the squat in the house of Saif al-Gaddafi in North London”.

Squatting predominantly in Belgravia in West London, the group also occupied the 80 room former Sudanese embassy and a £12 million house on the same street as the residence of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (*Daily Mail*, October 19, 2009).

In all the articles mentioned in the above paragraph, the occupiers are consistently described as ‘squatters’, with the only descriptive modifier being ‘serial’. This highlights the neutral tone of the reports, for which the focus is not the act of squatting or even the related politics, but rather the shocking emptiness of these properties.

In an interview with Guard which concentrates on “the scandal of London’s empty mansions”, he claims that the Belgravia group is composed of “good squatters” as opposed to “bad, anti-capitalist squatters” (*Evening Standard*, October 26, 2009). Whether he is presenting this view as a tactic or it is actually a belief he holds is unclear and perhaps this fuzziness is useful for him.

Guard certainly comes across as a modern Robin Hood. Indeed, this impression is helped by the fact that he was unsuccessfully prosecuted for stealing electricity. He was apparently filming a group of people squatting an abandoned building in Camden, north London, on August 1, 2009 when they entered through an open window and set off the burglar alarm. The squatters fled, but Guard, a qualified electrician, stayed behind in order to turn off the alarm.

He stated he was acting in the public interest by putting on the electricity momentarily to give himself enough light to reset the alarm. However, the police who arrived in response to the alarm arrested him and later charged him with stealing electricity. Despite Guard’s offer to pay the electricity company 1p, he had to appear in court to face the charge of stealing 0.003p of electricity. Unsurprisingly, when Guard requested trial by jury the judge threw out the case and the Crown Prosecution Service (funded by the taxpayer) ended up paying costs of £4,200 (*Daily Mail*, August 19, 2009). In the reporting of this story, Guard is certainly not portrayed as a criminal but rather participates in a separate discourse, namely that of the ordinary man caught up in a Kafkaesque nightmare of bureaucracy.

So it certainly is possible for squatting and squatters to be depicted in a favourable tone, but only perhaps when another discourse is involved, so that the negative discourse concerning squatting is overridden by a larger ideological-discursive framework such as the discourse concerning the scandal of the rich owning houses which they leave empty, or, as just seen, the discourse of state bureaucracy gone

mad (a favourite theme for the *Daily Mail*).

### THE DIVISION OF THE 'GOOD' AND THE 'BAD'

PAUL DANLER WRITES “Polarization between good and evil, between friend and foe, or to put it less linguistically, black-and-white painting is an important strategy in political discourse”. He goes on to conclude that ambiguity is not permitted since this “might allow for critical and independent reflection on the listener’s part” (52: 2005).

In the media, squatters tend to be described in one of two ways. There is a certain shorthand at work which enables ‘good’ squatters who are protesters, occupiers or an art group to be distinguished from ‘bad’ squatters who are aggressive, lifestylists, serial, unlawful and unwanted (Florence Bouillon’s chapter in this volume examines the classification in the French context).

Steve Platt records that from the 1970s onwards, squatting has had a “viciously antagonistic” relationship with the media (1999). In terms of critical discourse analysis, it seems clear that the current dominant ideological-discursive framework surrounding squatting is that squatters are ‘bad’. If nothing else, the fact that squatters repeatedly have to emphasise that they are ‘good’ not ‘bad’ demonstrates the power of this stereotype. If squatting is considered as direct action against capitalism, both because it attacks the very notion of private property and because it allows participants the opportunity to indulge in activities of their own choosing rather than being compelled to work so as to pay their rent, it is of course clear why those in positions of power would want to characterise squatters as ‘bad’. And as is seen below when articles relating to criminalisation are examined, the media can certainly function as an organ of power.

To give some examples of the good/bad divide, I refer first to an article entitled ‘Squatters occupy £3 million house on “millionaire’s row”’. This group of three squatters were careful to self-identify themselves as ‘good’ squatters, with one being quoted as saying “I don’t mind being called a squatter, but I am a good one. We are normal people, we go to work”. He clearly wants to avoid being stereotyped by the background knowledge which forms the dominant ideological-discursive formation. (*Daily Telegraph*, July 15, 2009).

In the previously mentioned *Daily Mail* article about Fife House in Brighton, one neighbour is quoted as saying “They look like scruffy students with combat trousers and baggy jumpers with holes in. But



they're very polite and well-spoken. They seem like your typical middle-class dropouts" (December 11, 2008).

In a chapter of his book *Black Bloc, White Riot* entitled 'Semiotic Street Fights' A.K. Thompson discusses the good/bad distinction with regard to anti-capitalist activism in the United States.

He argues that by defining the term 'activist' within criminal law, the state has "managed to limit the scope of the possible within the realm of dissent" (2010:34). He then proceeds to observe that in fact the division of 'good'/'bad' permits those making the distinction to enforce their power "since the goal of designation is not so much to recognise as to regulate the designated object, and since state officials reasoned that 'terrorists' might embed themselves within the law-abiding crowds [...] it followed that the vigilance of law enforcement officers needed to extend to 'good' protesters as well" (2010: 35). In other words (and returning to the domain of squatting) all squatters are still 'bad' at the end of the day under the dominant ideological-discursive framework. There is ultimately no escape for the 'good' squatter.

To take an explicit example of the discourse of the 'bad' squatter, I refer to the case of John Hamilton-Brown, whose newly bought home in Archway, London, was squatted in early 2011. In an article entitled 'My £1 million house is ruined' a journalist records how "cigarette butts, fruit and discarded wine bottles were strewn across every room in the house which was awaiting renovation after they spent six weeks inside". The 'they' refers to squatters, who are described as "cowardly", a "gang" and "mostly in their early 20s and European" (*Daily Mail*, March 7, 2011). There is a subtle hint here towards a racist discourse familiar from many other debates, when 'the other' is blamed for every problem under discussion. This can be seen more clearly in a *Daily Telegraph* report entitled 'Eastern Europeans praise Britain's 'lax' squatting law' which details how "twenty foreign nationals, mainly eastern Europeans" had taken possession of a council-owned building and spends much more time emphasising the possible disruption to its conversion into two new classrooms for a school than assessing the reality of the situation (March 13, 2011). Despite quoting both a squatter known as Tom who said "We are good squatters. We treat the places we live in with respect. We keep the place clean and tidy – we ask visitors to take their shoes off when they enter" and Peter Walker, Merton's cabinet member for education, who remarked "teachers from the school have told us that the only sound they have heard coming from the squat is the sound of a Hoover," the aim of the

article is clearly to fit the story to the campaign to criminalise squatting (on which more below). To emphasise this point, Mike Freer (the Conservative MP for Finchley and Golders Green who was concerned by the squatting of the Gaddafi mansion) is quoted as saying “what they are doing should be illegal”.

Steve Platt observes that the media prefers to tell an “individual story rather than providing meaningful social analysis” and thus resorts to describing “straightforward heroes and villains” (1999). This is certainly true, but further we can identify the underlying forces affecting the stereotyping itself, as we shall see below.

## CRIMINALISATION

I WILL NOW move to a brief consideration of recent media articles concerning the proposal to criminalise squatting. Certainly, there are a multiplicity of factors at work here, but nevertheless there does appear to be a concerted attempt to manipulate public opinion and police opposition. As Thompson states with regard to activism in the United States, “representing activists as criminals and security threats (a category that takes on its full significance under the society of control) allowed state actors to initiate legal courses of action designed to more effectively regulate dissent” (2010:32).

Regarding the proposed criminalisation of squatting, a rash of stories appeared in the Daily Telegraph, which began a campaign supporting Mike Weatherley’s call to change the laws concerning squatting. Since time and space do not permit me to list all the examples, I shall reference some of stories below, examining some implicit propositions and drawing out some general themes. Any emphasis is mine.

In ‘The middle class *serial* squatters *exploiting* the law’ (March 6, 2011), the *Telegraph* focuses on the Really Free School group, which it terms “a *ragtag* bunch of up to 40 activists and undergraduates”, who are “dressed in *scavenged* clothes and *ripped* vintage tweed jackets”. The owner of one Bloomsbury property which was squatted remarks: “It was all very *middle class*. They were intelligent students, certainly not impoverished. I suppose if I was going to have squatters I couldn’t have asked for better ones.” The squatters are ‘good’ as opposed to ‘bad’ in terms of the easily formed stereotype, but the language of ‘serial’ and ‘exploiting’ (both used in the title) suggests that they are not to be praised. There appears to be a threat to the middle classes from within, from their very children rebelling against them. Describing the dress

code of such actors is codifying them as a threatening rabble rather than equal participants in a debate over urban planning.

In “Squatting *to be made illegal*, vows Clarke” (March 18, 2011), the language used is clear. “Police *will* be able to force entry” and “the days of ‘squatters’ rights’ *will* be over”.

Kenneth Clarke, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice is reported by a conveniently anonymous source to be “sick of seeing cases of law-abiding people fighting to regain possession of their properties”, with the result that “officials *are now drawing up* plans to make such property invasions illegal”. As you will have noticed, there is nothing conditional about the Daily Telegraph’s campaign to ‘stop the squatters’ (a campaign for which it has in fact already claimed victory), with ‘will’ being repeatedly used in its simple future sense. Other articles are entitled “Squatting Laws Endorse *Theft*”, “Squatters: How the law *will* change” and “Coalition *to make* squatting a criminal offence” (February 27, 2011; March 18, 2011; March 19, 2011). It does not seem to be a question of whether squatting will be made a criminal offence, but when.

Indeed, another article written on the same March weekend in a different newspaper states that “Police *will get new powers to evict offenders who seize unoccupied properties*” (Independent, March 19, 2011). It goes on to declare “the days of *anarchist* collectives living rent-free in Georgian townhouses are numbered” and argues that the new law is necessary following “a series of high-profile cases where squatters have invaded properties worth millions in *elegant* streets in central London”. Clearly, anarchist squatters have no right to be on elegant streets. A certain order has been transgressed. Whilst there is a commonsensical feeling that buildings should not be left empty, especially by those who are rich enough to own many properties, it seems for some reason (perhaps the sheer number of squatters, or the increased visibility of squats or simply as an excuse for repression) there is also now a feeling that squatting is menace which must be stopped.

Most controversially, the Housing Minister announced in April that home-owners were able to use sledgehammers to break back into properties which had been occupied (legally) by squatters, saying “it’s their home and they are perfectly entitled to” (Independent, April 3, 2011). The Minister, Grant Schapps, justified this stance with the comment that “it’s physical *violence against property, not the person*”. For Schapps, the moral right appears to lie with the home-owner who can regain possession using any means possible. Whilst this may seem acceptable,

it is easy to imagine borderline cases (a single mother gets one week overdue on rent payments, a jealous husband breaks into his former house), which could lead to difficulties. Also, the power of the ideological-discursive formation is sharply laid out here, since even though so-called anarchists were widely condemned in the media for targeted property destruction against symbols of inequality (the Ritz restaurant, banks, etc) during the TUC ‘March for an alternative to the cuts’ on March 26, 2011, Schapps is able to utilise the same distinction for very different ends. Only an ideological-discursive formation which is dominant in the extreme would be able to perform this sort of manipulative reading.\*

It seems the discourse on squatting changes over time, to suit various political goals. In the early 1970s there was a prior campaign to criminalise squatting and Steve Platt observes it was “as hysterical as it was inaccurate” (1999). He records the opinions of various newspapers:

- *Daily Telegraph*: “Innumerable houses up and down the country are now in illegal occupation by organised gangs of thugs, layabouts and revolutionary fanatics”.
- *The Times*: “It has become increasingly clear that the act of squatting is no longer carried out by, or on behalf of, deprived and homeless people”.
- *Daily Mail*: “Many thousands – in all probability the majority – of squatters are freeloaders and layabouts ... Strong laws are needed to prevent the forces which are undermining the democratic processes of our country”.

Thus we can see similar language being used to generate a demand for criminalisation which on that occasion (and subsequently in the early 1990s) was unsuccessful. More recently, there appears to be a distinct progression in the general discourse from the amused and detached tolerance of the ‘millionaire’ squat stories described earlier to a new, more aggressive stance. A ‘new’ (or repeated) discourse centred around generational and class elements is forming. The theme is one of

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\* The focus on the justifiable use of violence seems likely to form the kernel of any change to current laws, via an adjustment of Section 6 of the Criminal Justice Act 1977.

middle-class parents having to confront the exploits of their supposedly wayward children who are ‘good’ squatters in that they are middle-class, political and intelligent but who are also ‘bad’ squatters in that they are manipulating the law to their own ends and challenging the very notion of private property. The employment of the parent/child relationship is in itself denigrating and of course not necessarily true. Squatters are from all ages and backgrounds.

Writing about “activist milieus” in general anthropologist David Graeber observes that it is impossible to stereotype such a broad grouping (2009: 245). However he does tentatively conclude that such milieus can be “a kind of meeting place, between downwardly mobile elements of the professional classes and upwardly mobile children of the working class” and this is probably also true of squatters in England (2009: 253).

This new discourse can then be seen as an attempt to shear off some of the values of the ‘good’ squatter and add them to the dominant ideological-discursive framework of the ‘bad’ squatter. Previous attempts to criminalise squatting were thwarted in the 1970s and 1990s but this would suggest that the current attempt is more sophisticated and has learnt from previous mistakes. Certainly, as the work of Steve Platt has shown, this is a discourse which reoccurs periodically.

## CONCLUSION

WHEN I BEGAN writing this article it was to explore an interest in the differences between the mainstream attitudes to squatting in the Netherlands and England, two countries where I have squatted and researched squatting. The best way to do this seemed to be to track media stories as they happened. Whilst writing, the Conservative Party’s plans to criminalise squatting emerged and started to colour the media discourse, so I was well placed to track the changes.

Using the terms of Critical Discourse Analysis, it seems clear that in England the dominant ideological-discursive formation around squatting is being shaped to facilitate this criminalisation. The mainstream background knowledge around squatting is already negative overall, despite frameworks around ‘good’ squatters still existing. Discourses around ‘millionaire’ squatters, ‘bad’ squatters and ‘middle class’ squatters are manipulated by those in power using the media. There are a multiplicity of factors at work here, but as seen above some tactics used are race, class, age and education. It must be noted that arguments

based on gender have not really featured, possibly because the term squatter is itself gender-neutral.

Squatting appears to be a node where various values intersect regarding morality and legality. Whilst those in power may wish to protect private property at all costs, there is a persistent view held by the public at large and reflected in the mainstream media that leaving properties empty is inexcusable and occupation can be justified under certain conditions.

In terms of engaging with the prevalent media discourses, various squatting groups attempt to shape the parameters of the discourses, with the aim of creating a discourse more favourable to squatting by sidestepping the usual associations of the term 'squatter' and redefining it. It is debatable how successful this tactic has been, but this chiefly serves to indicate the strength of the dominant ideological-discursive formation. One way in which to encourage the process of redefinition would be for squatter groups to engage with local communities on projects which would serve to amplify the widely held feeling that squatting is legitimated by housing need or lack of governmental provision of essential services. This will no doubt happen in a time of economic downturn (and has an inspiring precedent in the actions of *Jeudi Noir* in France).

What else does this mean for the future? It seems likely that there will soon be an attempt to criminalise squatting, but precise details on how exactly this will be done are for the moment scarce.\* Nevertheless, a war for public support will be fought in the mainstream media and whilst individual groups such as the VHS Basement may choose to refuse engagement with the media, it seems important to battle the dominant ideological-discursive formation and to work to change the background knowledge concerning squatting since even if the law is passed, contestations over the meanings of squatting will continue in different fields.

Further, the making of law is one thing and its enforcement is quite another; in Spain the phenomenon of squatting actually increased following criminalisation (Martinez, 2011). There is of course no coherent single voice of the English squatting community although various groups such as North East London Squatters, Squatters Network of Brighton and SQUASH (Squatters' Action for Secure Homes) do exist. But no one voice is required or necessary. If various different groups and individuals all commit to local and national battles over the meaning of the term 'squatting', then this may well eventually have a positive

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\* A Government consultation has now been announced on July 13, 2011.

impact in terms of preserving the value of squatting as anti-capitalist direct action.

One factor which must be recognised is the threat of deliberate misrecognition, as identified by Thompson. Within his domain of discourse this refers to “the threat that takes as its premise the interchangeability of activist and terrorist – in order to tighten the screws of regulation” but it is an easy stretch to imagine state actors first criminalising squatters and then referring to them as terrorists (2010: 33). In fact, the recent events which occurred in May 2011 in the Stokes Croft area of Bristol show how easily squatters can be characterised as terrorists. In the context of ongoing non-violent protests against the opening of a supermarket, a police raid on a local squat in search of molotov cocktails was perceived as an illegal eviction and this led to two nights of sustained rioting. It is of course worth mentioning that no molotovs were recovered and the squat’s four inhabitants vehemently denied any connection to the anti-supermarket campaign.

Examining the situation in Berlin, Holm and Kuhn assert in this volume that “the dynamics of squatter movements are closely connected to changing strategies associated with urban renewal, and that in each case they emerge from the crisis of the previous urban-renewal regime” (page 162).

According to the Empty Homes Agency, there are more than 80,000 empty homes in London and almost 740,000 across the country,\* and it is likely that in the current economic downturn more, not less, will become empty. And therefore squattable.

## POSTFACE

This article was written 2010-11, before the criminalisation of squatting in residential buildings in 2012. For more information and updates, please see Squatters Action for Secure Homes (<http://www.squashcampaign.org/>) or the Advisory Service of Squatters (<http://www.squatter.org.uk/>).

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# ABOUT THE SQUATTING EUROPE KOLLECTIVE

THIS BOOK IS JUST ONE OF THE RESULTS OF A LONG STANDING WORK OF mutual collaboration, debates and visits that we SqEK (Squatting Europe Kollektive) began in January 2009. Since then our network has expanded and we have met several times in different European cities (Madrid, Milan, London, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam and Copenhagen so far), and in a non-European one (New York). SqEK has gathered scholars and activists who have contributed to this network according to their various backgrounds. Past or present political activism around squatting has been the main inspiration for many of us, but we also work together in order to develop a thorough, systematic and critical knowledge about this so frequently forgotten social movement. Both activism and research, thus, define our recent trajectory and our forthcoming activities. Articles, books and in-depth academic debates are as important as the support to protest campaigns and to specific squats, consultancy for militants, and the spreading of the rich and valuable experiences of squatting all around Europe.

We deem there is a political responsibility of social scientists in a context of the incremental repression of squatting in European countries. To shed light on this issue through the analysis of its different sides, contributions and involved social conflicts, seems to us a way of necessary scientific intervention into current political debates. People's reactions against social cutbacks in Greece, Spain, France or UK in



the last few years have also pointed out to the tight connections that these anti-neoliberal movements keep with squatting and previous social movements based on direct democracy and self-organisation. Non-squatted social centres and alike social initiatives such as protest camps keep also close threads with squatting experiences, which also emerge once again in places where they had been disappeared. Nowadays the illegal status of squatting should not be an excuse to cover and diminish the relevance of the squatters' movement in radical and grassroots politics.

All the authors who contribute to the present volume are currently involved in ongoing research about squatting and these chapters are just some pieces of their larger works. As it is showed by the amount of references quoted in the book, the seemingly hidden reality of squatting in Europe can now be regarded as solidly grounded in the research of these and other scholars. Sociology, political science, anthropology, history and, even, ecological economics are the major disciplinary approaches to the issue of squatting in this book. However, these academic boundaries are continuously crossed and put into question by most of the authors. According to the initial intentions of the SqEK promoters, the different traditions, theoretical insights and empirical tools of all the social sciences should be useful in order to understand the complexity of squatting. Therefore, transnational comparisons, attention to the diverse forms of squatting and to political contexts, are the crucial lines of analysis that SqEK tries to encourage. More about SqEK at: <http://sqek.squat.net>.