URBAN POLITICAL SQUATTING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROTEST CYCLES AND SOCIO-SPATIAL STRUCTURES

LA OKUPACIÓN URBANA DE CENTROS SOCIALES EN MADRID: UNA PERSPECTIVA DESDE LOS CICLOS DE PROTESTA Y LAS ESTRUCTURAS SOCIO-ESPACIALES

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Resumen

Los períodos de crisis económica ponen de manifiesto fenómenos que anteriormente obtenían mucha menor repercusión pública. Este es el caso de la okupación de edificios urbanos con diferentes motivaciones y propósitos. Aunque en España las experiencias más visibles de este fenómeno se remontan a finales de la década de 1970, apenas existen estudios sistemáticos que hayan caracterizado y explicado su evolución a lo largo de las últimas décadas, incluyendo los años posteriores a la reciente crisis económica global. Más aún, es notable la carencia de marcos teóricos que transcrian el análisis de las okupaciones desde la agencia de los activistas y los conflictos legales que comporta. El presente trabajo, por lo tanto, intenta superar esas limitaciones. Por una parte, adopto una perspectiva que distingue los ciclos de protesta política y las estructuras socio-espaciales significativas en cada etapa del movimiento de okupaciones. Por otra parte, se aplica esa perspectiva al caso específico de Madrid para el que se han recopilado todos los casos de centros sociales okupados desde 1977 hasta finales de 1995. En particular, el análisis se concentra en la duración, localización y el tipo de propiedad de los inmuebles okupados de acuerdo a los contextos urbanos y políticos significativos en cada ciclo. El argumento principal es que la evolución creciente del movimiento se explica mejor por las interacciones dentro de cada ciclo (entre activistas, medios de comunicación, autoridades y otros movimientos sociales) que por las dinámicas de especulación inmobiliaria y crisis económica en general.
Abstract

There is a growing interest in the issue of squatting vacant buildings due to the economic crisis and the reactions to foreclosures. Up to date most research focuses on the squatters’ agency and the legal conflicts associated to trespassing. However, a joint analysis of political, historical, urban and social contexts of squatting is still missing. In this paper I adopt the perspective of protest cycles and socio-spatial structures to illuminate how urban political squatting evolves according to significant contexts. The empirical evidence that supports this approach stems from the city of Madrid. I examine all the cases of squatted “social centres” from 1977 to 2016 by determining the dimensions that help interpreting their urban impact. Instead of viewing the development of squatting as a mechanistic reaction to housing shortages, high vacancy rates and urban speculation I argue that (1) the squatters’ movement was configured in tight articulation with other social movements, (2) critically responded to various urban and political dynamics, and (3) was able to self-reproduce itself by making use of specific opportunities in each period while keeping some crucial and long lasting strongholds.

Key words: Squatting, Protest Cycles, Socio-Spatial Structures, Madrid

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing interest in the issue of squatting vacant buildings due to the global financial crisis and its housing foreclosure effects since 2008. Apart from some pioneering works (Wates and Wolmar, 1980; Mayer, 1993; Koopmans, 1995; Corr, 1999), the occupation of vacant buildings without the owner’s permission did not receive much academic attention until recently (Cattaneo and Martínez, 2014; Steen, Katzeef and Hoogenhuijze, 2014). Besides the provision of shelter, the practice of squatting may serve other combined or alternative purposes such as setting up counter-cultural and political venues, preserve threaten built heritage and urban areas, develop environmental and anti-capitalist lifestyles, etc. (Martinez 2013, Pruijt 2013a). Different social groups take over urban premises, ranging from homeless people and migrants to artists and political activists –either independently or while cooperating with each other. Due to the illegal condition of these practices squatters tend to keep these actions stealth. In spite of the political implications of all kinds of squatting, we can conventionally
designate as ‘political squatting’ those cases that go publicly visible and are subject to explicit demands about the occupied buildings or beyond those specific properties which are expressed by the squatters (Cattaneo and Martinez, 2014, p. 2-5).

One strand of research about squatting focuses on the squatters’ agency and identity issues. This is the case of the insiders’ accounts of events within the Amsterdam’s squatting scene (Adilkno, 1990), ulterior interpretations of its decline according to the activists’ “narratives, strategies, identities and emotions” (Owens, 2009, p. 18) and the analysis of everyday practices and attitudes that debunk prevailing myths and stereotypes (Kadir, 2014). Closely linked to them, constructivist approaches aim at disclosing the discursive strategies that different actors (journalists, politicians, academics, think tanks, NGOs, squatters, etc.) perform and their effects in terms of “cultural wars” and “revanchist politics” (Pruijt, 2013b), “securitisation policies” (Manjikian, 2013) and mass media criminalisation (Dee and Santos, 2015). Ethnographic insights from homeless migrants who squat (Bouillon, 2009), the cultural and ideological framings of political squatting (Moore and Smart, 2015), and the squatters’ “legal wisdom” (Finchett-Maddock, 2014) also involved crucially the dimensions of subjectivity, symbolic interactions and forms of representation. What they usually lack is an articulation of agency with the significant socio-spatial contexts, structures and developments over time. Furthermore, the configuration of squatting as an urban movement tends to be overlooked.

Conversely, in this paper I adopt a perspective that builds upon more structural analyses (Mayer, 1993; Koopmans, 1995; Pruijt, 2003; Mudu, 2004; Holm and Khun, 2011; Dee, 2014; Polanska and Piotrowski, 2015). My aim is to examine the historical, political, urban and social circumstances that shape the squatting movement in a given city –Madrid (Spain). In particular, the guiding research questions are as follows: Why the volume of squats, their location and duration have changed? Are there any distinguishable patterns in that evolution? How significant is in this development the context comprising the local governance of squatting, the legal constraints, the public image associated to squatting and the urban areas where squats are rooted? In order to answer them I draw on the concepts of ‘protest cycles’ and ‘socio-spatial structures’ which have been hardly used jointly in the study of urban movements. Although historical reviews of the squatters’ movement are often recalled in a great part of the literature (Cattaneo and Martinez, 2014; Steen, Katzeef and Hoogenhuijze, 2014) and recent
projects of city maps and databases have been launched\(^1\), systematic analysis on the above aspects altogether are missing.

**METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

The main but not exclusive empirical source of information for this research is a database of all the cases of Squatted Social Centres [SSC] located in the metropolitan area of Madrid (municipality and region) from 1977 to the end of 2015. In total, 155 cases were collected. It must be noted that 8 cases took place between 1977 and 1980 in a period where there was no squatters’ movement known or identified as such. However, the pioneering cases worked indeed as “social centres” and were inspirational for the following generations of activists. In addition, one of those buildings is still occupied nowadays. Autonomous and self-managed social centres that never were illegally occupied are excluded from this database in spite of being closely interconnected with the same activist and squatters’ networks in the city\(^2\). Nevertheless, when a SSC is legalised, only the period of illegal occupation is registered. There were only 4 cases of explicit legalisation after negotiations with the local or regional authorities, and at least 3 in which squatters achieved an agreement with private owners – although no statement was made public by the squatters about the latter cases so the researcher must keep their identification confidential.

In addition to these records, I have registered 14 cases of urban land plots subject to illegal occupation\(^3\). Squatters of buildings were often involved in those projects. In spite of their main dedication to community gardens, many of these spaces worked as a sort of outdoor social centres where to screen movies, hold talks, organise art exhibitions, etc. However, I have withdrawn them from the main data collection because they do not involve actually existing buildings. Another exceptional case that has been removed from the main set subject to analysis is an occupied village (Navalquejigo) which is located at approximately 50 kilometres from the city core of Madrid. Although this occupation combined squatted houses and some cultural activities I consider it more a case of rural (or rur-urban) than urban squatting – and not very much tied to the squatters’ movement scene.

\(^1\) [http://maps.squat.net/en/](http://maps.squat.net/en/)
\(^2\) There are not more than 10 cases by 2015. These and many other grassroots initiatives that sometimes interact with squatters were recently collected and displayed at [http://www.viveroiniciativasciudadanas.net/civics/iniciativas/](http://www.viveroiniciativasciudadanas.net/civics/iniciativas/)
\(^3\) This figure stems from both direct observation and the review of the community gardens network: [https://redhuertosurbanosmadrid.wordpress.com/](https://redhuertosurbanosmadrid.wordpress.com/)
Furthermore, the data about squatted houses fall under a slippery territory so I dismiss them as well. First of all, not less than 30 squatted social centres hosted residents. In some cases the main purpose of the occupation was to provide a house for the squatters but later on they decided to open up some parts of the building as a cultural and political venue. This is the reason why they are included in the data base. Usually, the residential function is not publicly recognised by the squatters because it entails more legal risks. If they admit to dwell permanently in the occupied building, a judge might interpret there is a clear intention to pursue an unlawful appropriation which is subject to a harsh sanction. Conversely, when it comes to social centres, activists tend to argue that they do not reside in the property but just make use of it and let others to use it as well (Seminario, 2015, p.185-221). Therefore, researchers are not granted permission to account the residential function of squats unless a prudential time has passed after both the eviction and the judicial trial, if it were the case. This applies specifically to the current active squatted houses or the recent ones in the last 5 years. For past periods, an accurate record of squats exclusively used for housing purposes was not possible either because squatters themselves asked for secrecy (even when the situation of their tenancy was well known among their political and social networks) or because large numbers of these squatters were simply apart from any political coordination. Notwithstanding, just as a rough indicator, the Ombudsman’s Department acknowledged that 766 flats in social housing estates all over the Madrid region were classified as “illegally occupied” by 2012⁴.

The territory under examination is the “metropolitan region of Madrid” which is limited here to the Autonomous Community of Madrid (6.5 million of inhabitants in 2013) where the main municipality is located (with an official figure of 3.2 million residents in 2013). Other surrounding provinces also fall under the metropolitan influence of Madrid because, for example, commuting distances are below one hour, but the cases of SSC were so few and locally oriented that follow them up did not worth the effort.

The main categories of the database reproduced and expanded those used by a previous study in Italy (Mudu, 2004): name, location, dates of occupation and eviction, type of space, duration of previous vacancy, ownership, political networks involved, activities developed, legal circumstances, negotiations with owners or authorities, use of the space after the eviction, fascist assaults, organised groups making regular use of the space, provision of housing, websites and

⁴ https://www.defensordelpueblo.es/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2013-03-Estudio-Viviendas-Protegidas-Vac%C3%ADas-Anexos.pdf
other sources of information about the case. The empirical information stemmed from secondary sources (academic publications, mass media news, websites, weblogs, activist documents, mapping projects, etc.), direct accounts by the researcher as a participant and activist observer (occasionally since 1988, and on a more regular basis from 2007 to 2013) and by contrasting, verifying and enhancing prior attempts to identify squats. The engagement of the researcher in various social centres also resulted in supplementary data from minutes of internal assemblies and workshops, informal talks, observational notes and 16 formal in-depth personal interviews conducted between 2008 and 2015 which were intended to cover broader topics regarding the evolution and contexts of squatting. In addition, the author was involved in the collective organisation and facilitation of a series of 14 debates held between 2008 and 2010 with the explicit aim of reconstructing a political memory of squatting in Madrid. Finally, once collected, the dates of occupation and eviction, and the location of the squats were entered into a freely accessible on-line map. As for the secondary data about districts and municipalities in terms of income, unemployment, population and vacancy rates, they all stem from the main regional statistics department and from specific ready-made research (Naredo, 1996; Rodríguez, 2007; Alguacil et al., 2011; González and Pérez, 2013).

Table I. Duration of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid, 1977-2015. Absolute figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
<th>Cycle 2</th>
<th>Cycle 3</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Up to 3 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 months – 1 year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 year – 5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Duration</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

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5 In particular, these four projects: [http://www.ucm.es/info/america2/okcrono.htm](http://www.ucm.es/info/america2/okcrono.htm) [www.okupatutambien.net](http://www.okupatutambien.net) [https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Lista_de_centros_sociales_de_la_Comunidad_de_Madrid](https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Lista_de_centros_sociales_de_la_Comunidad_de_Madrid) [http://www.agitamadrid.org/guia-de-espacios](http://www.agitamadrid.org/guia-de-espacios)


7 [http://www.madrid.org/iestadis/](http://www.madrid.org/iestadis/)
Figure 1. Active Squatted Social Centres Per Year / Period, Madrid (different scales)
Source: http://maps.squat.net/en/cities/madrid/squats

Graph 1. Number of New and Active Squatted Social Centres Per Year, Madrid 1977-2015. Source: Author
THEORY

The notion of ‘protest cycle’ usually refers to specific periods of time when different social movements, organisations and conflicts challenge intensely the political order -without necessarily ending up in a revolution (Tarrow, 1997, p. 263). More people than before participating in collective action and innovative repertoires of protest are symptoms of every new wave of mobilisation. The main features of protest waves would be the following: “heightened conflict, broad sectoral and geographical extension, the appearance of new social movement organisations and the empowerment of old ones, the creation of new ‘master frames’ of meaning and the invention of new forms of collective action” (Tarrow, 1995, p. 92). This approach, thus, aims to understand the periods of generalised disorder when the magnitude of protest remains above the average compared to other periods and their decline (Kriesi et al., 1995, p. 113). It does not deal with “short-term fluctuations” or the “development of single movements”, but focuses on “large-scale protest waves whose intensity, scope and longevity force members of the national polity to take sides” (Kriesi et al., 1995, p. 113). When applied to a particular movement, then, it incites to unveil their ties with other movements, the peaks and valleys of wider protests and the relevant political context at large. In the case of the squatters’ movement, their interaction with local, either municipal or metropolitan-regional authorities, may also illuminate their changing manifestations.

As for the definition of ‘socio-spatial structures’ there is less agreement and even less frequent usage. Although it is hardly mentioned as such (except, for example, Soja, 1980, p. 208; Nicholls, 2011, p. 192) the main idea behind refers to the structures as sets of relationships resulting out of processes of social construction of space (and time). These processes are driven by the dominant configurations of class, ethnicity and gender, among other social divides. Socio-spatial structures are not merely the spatial distribution of social groups, but also the forms of how spaces and places are socially produced, shaped, conceived and modified. As Harvey (1996, p. 231) points out, “the social constitution of spatio-temporality cannot be divorced from value creation or, for that matter, from discourses, power relations, memory, institutions, and the tangible forms of material practices through which human societies perpetuate themselves.” Urban movements, then, participate in the creation of socio-spatial structures while are also constrained or enticed by them. Thus, instead of conceiving every squatted building as the outcome of the sole decision of activists (or the volume of squats as the mere sum of individual cases), this perspective invites to observe the broader relationships which produce such an output. For example, the interactions of squatters with the housing market, the municipal policies and the community
organisations operating in a particular urban area would shed more light on the variations of squatting than just an estimation of the housing needs or the activists’ intentions.

Recent theoretical proposals emphasise the “polymorphy of sociospatial relations” (Jessop, Brenner and Jones, 2008, p. 396) and claim for an articulation of “structuring principles” such as territory, place, scale and networks. In a similar vein, Pickvance (2003, p. 105) calls for “the concentration on the political context in which urban movements developed. This recognized that urban movements were not spontaneous responses to objective inequalities or deprivations but formed more easily under certain social and political conditions than others.” Similarly, social movements scholars define ‘political opportunity structures’ by pointing to key contextual dimensions such as the openness or access to state institutions, the cohesion of the elites, state repression, political alliances, media coverage and recognition, as well as the subjective perception of the opportunities and constraints by the social groups involved (Tarrow, 1994; McAdam, 1996; Meyer, 2004). As far as I know, no attempt has been done in order to bridge the above conceptions in the research of urban movements.

According to various authors (Kriesi et al., 1995, pp. 117-119), protest waves tend to last from one decade to fifteen years. Tactical innovations occur in the early stages, peak development and conflicts are present at the middle or at the last half of the cycle, and movements decline in terms of radicalisation when they face dilemmas regarding their institutionalisation and the split up of their SMOs (Social Movement Organisations). In the European cases (Germany, Netherlands and Italy) researched by Kriesi et al., squatting appeared as one of the most confrontational and innovative tactics until they were tamed by the state powers. Further studies showed that, for instance, squatting in Italy continued its expansion beyond the decline of the cycle of the 1970s (Mudu, 2004) and so it did in the Netherlands after the 1980s –although with a less contentious outlook. In particular Owens (2009) argued that any objective decline is inserted necessarily into a narrative where some events are interpreted as signs of decline, even immediately after the early defeats, and some others as continuous success, even at the late phases. In the case of the Amsterdam’s squatting movement, “the cultural side of the movement grew dramatically in the 90s, as the movement’s centre moved towards larger cultural centres […] and] explicit political activities in the movement waned” (Owens, 2009, p. 39). According to him, this shift is explained by the place-less and increasingly globally-bound connections of radical politics in the city, without assuming any inherent tendency to fade out within the movement.
The rise of the alter-globalisation movement in the late 90s up to the transnational contestation on the Iraq war in 2003 (Scholl, 2012) indicates how European squatters became more involved in protest cycles beyond their own cities. This, in turn, reinforced their resilience in Italy (Mudu, 2004) and Spain (Martinez, 2007) or animated the focus on squatted and autonomous social centres in the UK (Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2006; Chatterton, 2010) and Poland (Piotrowski, 2014).

Owens also argues that, at the same time, the changing urban context constrained the development of squatting in Amsterdam: “While the housing situation improved, the opportunities for squatting simultaneously shrank. […] With the urban renewal projects of the city centre complete, fewer buildings were being emptied. […] Owners developed new strategies to keep their houses in use, such as the kraakwacht (squat watch). Finally, the city was no longer experiencing a population exodus.” (Owens, 2009, p. 226) Even more, squatters faced new legal threats when squatting was made a criminal offence in 2010 (Pruijt, 2013b; Dadusc and Dee, 2015) which adds to the above mentioned socio-spatial constraints.

It is also worth noting that the first waves of squatting in Europe were also embedded into the so-called new social movements (Koopmans, 1995) and a wider European protest cycle after 1968 (Katsiaficas, 2006; Geronimo, 2012). However, some authors preferred to focus on the specific urban-renewal regimes and housing policies in order to assess the evolution of every squatting movement in particular cities. This is what Pruijt (2003, 2014) argued in his comparisons between Amsterdam and New York, and so did Holm and Kuhn (2010) in the case of Berlin. In contrast to the prevailing assumptions in most social movements studies, the long duration of urban squatting, especially for housing and countercultural purposes, is explained by Pruijt (2013a, p.50) according to Castells’ (1983) claim that squatters satisfy collective consumption and promote the city as a use value against commodification which, in turn, would not entail a specific expiry date. Notwithstanding, Pruijt admits that ‘political squatting’ and ‘conservational squatting’ follow a more classic life dynamics of evolution with radicalisation, institutionalisation, co-optation and identity loss at their ending stages. This fate would not apply so easily to ‘squatting as an alternative housing strategy’ and to ‘entrepreneurial squatting’ because “squatting has the unique property of combining self-help with demonstrating an alternative and a potential for protest.” (Pruijt, 2013a, p. 50) Since SSC in Madrid mostly combine ‘political’ and ‘entrepreneurial’ traits (and, often, ‘residential’ functions too) no evident pattern could be deduced from Pruijt’s assumptions.
For Holm and Kuhn the long-term dynamics of the squatters’ movement in Berlin was determined, above all, by the “broader urban political context” (2010, p. 644). Thus, they unveil how squatting underscored different urban struggles among or independently from other urban movements while facing urban restructuring plans, the housing shortage, property speculation and the displacement of low-income residents. Again, legislative shifts that made squatting subject to a more effective persecution and crucial political events such as the unification of Eastern and Western Germany, shaped the urban protest cycles. Interestingly, a higher repression of squatting in Berlin radicalised its most “autonomist” branch but did not result in new occupations.

Given these tight associations between protest cycles and socio-spatial structures in the case of the squatters’ movement, I will use them to identify their significance in the evolution of SSC in Madrid. They justify, first, the distinction of internal life-cycles of the squatters’ movement in interaction with broader structures and cycles. Secondly, this framework provides a ground for interpreting the main figures and categories of squatting over the years by looking at urban and political contexts at play.

EARLY SQUATTING AND TRIGGERING CONDITIONS: AN INNOVATIVE URBAN PROTEST IN A REGIME TRANSITION (1977-1995)

Squatting in Spain is seldom perceived as a long lasting urban movement. Only the eviction of a few cases reached the national headlines. Most of the squats remained portrayed in the local news if they became reported eventually. In spite of the changes observed in the media coverage of squatting mainly about evictions and legal circumstances (Casanova, 2002; Alcalde, 2004; Dee and Santos, 2015) what is usually missing in its mainstream representation is how political squats served as nodes for the articulation of local squatters and other social movements. Over decades SSC in Madrid hosted fundraising events, talks and exhibitions. They set up rooms for holding meetings and planning campaigns available for a wide range of groups and organisations involved in various social movements –such as the anti-militarist, feminist, environmental, anti-racist, anti-fascist, free radios, open-source, anti-prisons, workers’ unions, animal rights, anti-war, or anti-neoliberal ones. This function as a “spatial resource” has not been essentially modified since the inception of the movement in the late 1970s and mid-1980s. Nonetheless, most changes stemmed from the combination of this cluster of movements, the relative hegemony of one or two in each historic cycle and the role of squatting within them.
In Madrid and in most of the medium-size and big Spanish cities (Barcelona, Zaragoza, Valencia, Bilbao, etc.) the squatters’ movement as such started up around 1984-1985 (Martínez, 2002, pp. 141-146). Political squatting implies an explicit claim of every occupation as a social or political form of protest in addition to making actual use of the squatted premises. By hanging banners in the windows, painting the doors and walls, using the symbol for squatting which was popularised in other European countries, delivering pamphlets to the neighbours or presenting the case to the mass media, the claim goes public. However, occupations of buildings also occurred before the mid-1980s. In the case of Madrid, the influential citizen movement (Castells, 1983) had taken over around 500 houses between 1976 and 1978 (Alía, 1978). More significantly, trade-union anarchists also occupied buildings that mostly they considered as their legitimate properties which were confiscated by the fascist Francoist regime (1939-1975). Thus, an active network of “Ateneos Libertarios” (AL), not all in squatted premises, emerged in the years of the transition to democracy (1975-1979) (Carmona, 2012, p. 479-489; Seminario, 2015, p. 23-77). The activities they hosted, their political commitment and openness to local residents were very similar to the subsequent SSC, although the AL never identified themselves as belonging to any ‘squatters’ movement’ –but to the anarchist one. One of those squatted AL in Madrid (AL Villaverde) has remained active in the same building until nowadays while all the others were evicted before the mid-1980s. The influence of the pioneering AL was also noted in the first three self-managed and squatted “cultural centres” (Mantuano, Migrans and Bulevar) that were opened in the transitional period again without a very explicit reference to a common identity as a squatters’ movement. Although they illegally trespassed in the buildings and some of their members were in contact with European squatters, these experiences were above all attached to their local neighbourhoods, to anarchism, to counter-culture and to other social movements, without focusing much on the issue of the occupation itself.

The first democratic municipal elections after the dictatorship in 1979 signed the decline of the citizen movement and, at the same time, the rise of new social movements -environmentalism, pacifism, free radio stations, solidarity with inmates in total institutions, etc. The previous intense cycle of strikes in the workplaces was neutralised by the industrial restructuring and the pacts between union leaders and the major corporations, which ended up in a period of high unemployment in the coming years (around 22% out of the active population: Alguacil et al., 2011, p.114). This shift in the protest cycle determined the distinctive politicisation of squatting as well. While the early squatters of the late 1970s were connected to the struggles to restore democracy, to reclaim public housing and urgent local facilities,
and to push for radical workers’ unions, the young generation of political squatters in the mid-1980s challenged a severe decline in grassroots struggles and movements, in addition to very poor expectations for getting decent jobs and affordable houses (Casanova, 2002; Martinez, 2002). The social-democratic government of Madrid (in coalition with the communists from 1979 to 1983, and alone until 1989) and the country (from 1982 to 1993) did not satisfy large portions of the young generations so political squatting emerged as one of the early radical urban movements of the 1980s decade, although with a scarce numbers of durable squats.

The occupations starting in 1985 were launched almost by the same first collective of squatters and took place at the inner city. Initially, only one (Arregui y Aruej) was able to last three months but was located in the border of the city centre, in a peripheral working-class area (Puente de Vallecas), which propitiated the inclusion of many activists from the surroundings (Murgui, 2008, p. 390). The second squat (Minuesa) which became the flagship of the movement lasted 6 years and commenced due to the solidarity of political squatters with the workers of a former printing company who demanded compensations before the demolition works for a redevelopment of the area. This squat was also the first to name itself as a SSC in a conscious move aimed to imitate the labels used by the Italian squats that some activists visited at those years (Seminario, 2015, p. 176). Regular contacts with Italian, German and Dutch autonomists expanded the range of political activities which became part of their identity and intersected with it -talks, video-forums, campaigns, etc. such as anti-fascism, international solidarity, anti-repressive campaigns, autonomous women’s movements, etc. However, the immediate urban and social environment of Madrid squatters obliged them to focus first on youth unemployment, a rising social housing shortage in close parallel to the first wave of intense urban speculation (due, mainly, to the incoming international investments in a more stable and liberal political regime, once Spain became member of the European Union in 1986: Naredo, 1996) and the plans for urban redevelopment of various parts of the city centre (for example, the former industrial area and old rail tracks next to Minuesa, named as Pasillo Verde). Minuesa and other long lasting and emblematic SSC also served as a meeting point for organising rallies and protests such as the solidarity campaign with people imprisoned by drugs abuse, the refusal to NATO (with triggered huge mobilisations until a national referendum was held in 1986) and the opposition to the military conscription which was the most challenging social movement to the state between 1989 and 2002 (Aguirre et al., 1998).
Another significant aspect of the emergence of squats in Madrid is that the movement focused mainly on properties located in the city centre. Most were industrial buildings (57% out of the total between 1985 and 1990, and 23% in 1977-1995). Years later, some of them were effectively transformed into residential buildings. Political occupations, then, intended to interrupt the process of capitalist reproduction of the urban space in which disuse and abandonment were usual stages prior to further redevelopment. By making use of the buildings, squatters explicitly questioned and challenged real-estate speculation while simultaneously making visible and satisfying their own spatial needs. Besides, their central location (71% in 1985-1990 and 39% in 1991-1995) facilitated a sounding showcase of their urban and political claims. The soaring prices of land and housing that came to a peak around 1990 (Naredo, 1996) prevented other social movements from access to central spaces where to meet and disseminate their demands.

Year 1992 was a key turning point in the period because mega-events entered the urban political arena in three Spanish cities (Olympics in Barcelona, International Expo in Seville, and European Cultural Capital in Madrid). Contestation to these mega-events involved the political agenda of many SSC and narrowed their mutual ties all over the country. Following the first successful examples in the 1980s, the practice of squatting was quickly replicated in other areas of the metropolitan area (for example, squats in metropolitan municipalities represented 29% in the period 1991-1995). In addition, all the squats of this period were also subject to a specific and favourable legal context – always with a national scope of application. Until 1995-1996 squatting was not a criminal offence but a civil one. Squatters could be evicted after sued in civil courts or because of the preventive measures taken by the police, but they did not usually face prison or economic sanctions (Seminario, 2015, p. 185-196). This, on top of the pioneering impulses, contributed to a rapid growth of political squatting in Madrid until the legislative change in 1995.

The expansion of squatting between 1991 and 1995 is outstanding -28 cases of SSC. The frequency of new squats, the high density of their mutual informal connections and the increasing attention paid to them by the local mass media, contributed to the configuration of a new urban movement. Although most of the attempts of squatting in the cycle 1977-1995 lasted less than 3 months, 8 cases were able to survive up to 2 years, and 6 remained occupied more than 5 years. While between 1985 and 1990 almost all the squats took place in two areas of the city (the city centre, mostly in the downgraded neighbourhood of Lavapiés, or nearby; and the peripheral Puente de Vallecas, although very close to the
city centre), between 1991 and 1995 they expanded to many other districts and, in particular, to another critical area of the city centre (Tetuán, with 21% of the new squats in 1991-1995) where immigration, poor residents, old buildings and drug trafficking were more concentrated. High vacancy rates in these areas coexisted with the inception of plans for urban renewal and the rehabilitation of buildings. In total, 10 abandoned or vacant schools regained life due to political squatters during the cycle 1977-1995 (which represented a 23%) while empty residential buildings became more alluring for squatters from 1991 onwards (26% in the period 1977-1995). The displacement of schools to the city periphery or their shutting down due to new legal requirements in terms of equipment, safety and size, created a specific spatial opportunity for squatting. Other industrial and residential buildings were threatened with demolition in the light of the renewal plans, involving the construction of wider streets and road capacity, as it was the case in Tetuán.

Negotiations between the squatters and the owners were not usually reported if existed at all. Some contacts with the municipal authorities around the occupation of Argumosa in 1987 were quickly forgotten by most of the forthcoming activists (Casanova, 2002, p.34). Notwithstanding, two squats initiated in 1991 (La Prospe and Seco) became later on (in 2001 and 2007) the first successful cases of legalisation and relocation (Martinez, 2014). Significantly, the building occupied by Seco was a former school located in a decaying area of the district of Puente de Vallecas waiting for residential redevelopment. United squatters and residents jointly demanded affordable public housing for all the neighbours and the use of a municipal property where to continue with the activities of the SSC. Anyhow, the social-democratic local government until 1991 did not help to find ways out to most of the squatters’ claims which contrasts sharply with the 4 cases of legalisation that conservative governments granted to some squatters later on.

Between 1985 and 1988 a small group of activists (Asamblea de Okupas, AO) behave as a SMO, coordinated and prepared the occupations, mostly in the city centre. SSC Minuesa (1988-1994) and David Castilla (1994-1996) among others located at the city core served as exemplary landmarks for subsequent occupations as well as a spatial reference for various autonomist groups. A coalition of these groups was formed in 1990 (Lucha Autónoma, LA) (Casanova, 2002) and squatting was one of their main fields of political activity, although most of the squatters were not affiliated to LA and this organisation was unable to replace AO as the squatters’ SMO. Formal coordination of squats, in fact, only occurred in punctual moments regardless the dense informal networks of social and political
cooperation. Nevertheless, SSC attracted activists, local residents and sympathisers from all the metropolitan area.

Table II. Location of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid, 1977-2015. Absolute figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
<th>Cycle 2</th>
<th>Cycle 3</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City centre</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City periphery</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro area</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Location</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
SQUATTING AFTER ITS CRIMINALISATION: CONSOLIDATION WITHIN GLOBAL AND ALTER-GLOBAL DYNAMICS (1996-2010)

In 1996 a new Penal Code came into force. Since then, both squatting and the refusal to the military conscription were considered criminal offences subject to be punished with jail sentences. On the one hand, this legislation at the national scale was addressing two of the more active social movements at that time. The stakes of civil disobedience in those arenas (trespassing vacant property and objection to compulsory military recruitment) were raised politically and entailed more legal sanctions. On the other hand, and quite unexpectedly, this context did not prevent squatting to occur, but rather the opposite, figures of SSC continued to soar. Nonetheless, the criminalisation of squatting undermined the accelerated rhythm of expansion that was going on in Madrid over the third sub-cycle (1991-1995). The yearly average of new initiated SSC between 1985 and 1990 was 1.2, climbing to 5.6 between 1991 and 1995. This figure was 3.9 between 1996 and 2003, and rose again up to 6.1 between 2004 and 2010. However, if we count together the two phases Cycle 2 (1996-2010), the yearly average of 4.9 was even higher than the 3.2 observed in two last sub-cycles of Cycle 1 (1985-1995). Even beyond, the calculation of the active (non-evicted) SSC per year shows that the average is 7.4 in 1985-1995 and 15.9 in 1996-2010. In spite of the legal difficulties and risks, these figures indicate that the criminalisation policy failed in terms of preventing the increasing opening of political squats.

Regarding the urban political context of this period, the conservative governments (1989-2015) backed the globalisation process in Madrid and the whole metropolitan area. Multinational corporations, many of them resulting from the privatisation of public services, led overseas expansions, especially in Latin America. Their headquarters were located in Madrid city centre and some of them (Telefónica and Banco Santander, for example) were behind landmark redevelopment operations in the city fringes, while other highly speculative plans were strongly fuelled by the local government (“4 Towers” in Paseo Castellana, for example) (Rodríguez, 2007, pp. 55-69, 87, 144). Intense inflows of international migrants made Madrid their main arrival node, sometimes in transit to other Spanish or European cities. Officially registered immigrants represented 3.4% of the municipal population in 2001 and 16.9% in 2008 (Alguacil et al., 2011, p. 135). Since the mid-1990s, the economic boom was based on migrants’ cheap labour force as well as on qualified and badly paid Spanish youth and women. The construction sector benefitted from the very flexible urban policies that provided huge pieces of land in 12 new residential
and commercial areas (PAUs) within the municipal boundaries of Madrid – plus many more that mushroomed in the metropolitan municipalities. On the one side, housing prices escalated an official average of 48% in the city of Madrid between 2000 and 2006 (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2007, p. 169). On the other side, public housing supply diminished dramatically. A global class of well-off employees and investors, the rising of urban tourism, the city-backed processes of gentrification in the inner areas and the big infrastructural projects aiming to justify the candidature for the Olympics, engendered one of the most speculative real estate markets worldwide.

Concerning squatting the above conditions had a double consequence: a) housing and leisure became less affordable for more people, being the central zones the main battleground in terms of renovation, residential displacement and concentration of tertiary jobs; b) private or corporate owners managed their urban properties in a more active manner in order to take advantage of the changing prices and expected benefits. Therefore, many squatters declared that the opportunities for squatting waned, although the vacancy rate remained roughly constant. Owners were more ready to sell or to renovate the empty buildings, so they took all the possible measures to prevent squatting and to swiftly evict any undesirable occupant – either squatters or old tenants paying low rents. This active contestation over vacant properties explains that in Cycle 2 only 4% of the squats lasted more than 5 years – although 35% (26 SSC) were still able to remain between 1 and 5 years.

Therefore, the criminalisation of squatting helped to secure private properties, usually after a court trial, in a context of urban expansion and intense globalisation of capital. However, the already consolidated networks of activists and the previous experiences of squatting provided a more variegated ground for social and political backlash. Most political squats (57%) continued attached to the city centre, in particular to the areas with higher rates of migrant residents and where the gentrification progress was slower (Lavapiés and Tetuán) compared to the neighbouring ones (Huertas-Cortes, Palacio and Malasaña-Universidad, for example) where gentrification was faster (González and Pérez, 2013). Thus, migrant population and their conflicts about citizenship rights and documents also entered the political agenda of some SSC (for example, Patio Maravillas, Seco and La Enredadera).

The relative scarcity and privatisation of public spaces, besides the housing unaffordability, were also reflected in the squatting scene with new connections to urban movements of bikers (Lorenzi, 2011), street art, participatory architecture, urban gardens, etc. without losing the legacy of alternative music, social theatre, political talks and campaigns, environmentalism, feminism, free radio stations, hacklabs,
etc. In this period SSC enhanced their social and political profile so they became attractive for a broader metropolitan public in spite of their illegal status. In addition, especially in the sub-cycle 2004-2010 a strong wave of occupations took place in the metropolitan municipalities (13 SSC that represented the 30% out of all the cases in that sub-cycle). Thus, political squatting was continuously spread into the city periphery and the metropolitan region in a more balanced proportion.

By the end of the cycle, the Squatting Office [Oficina de Okupación], initially located in the Palacio Okupado Malaya (2008) and operating on a regular basis since then at different SSC, helped people to squat and published a textbook or Advisory Guide for Squatting –also available on-line. Furthermore, squatters became involved, although not as core organisers, in the movement for decent and affordable housing that erupted in 2006 (Blanco, 2011; Colau and Alemany, 2012) –one of the few massive mobilisations that followed the decline of the struggles connected to the Global Justice Movement (GJM) towards which the first generations of squatters were more devoted. Madrid was a simmering place for the GJM or alter-globalisation movement with many activists travelling to global summits, opposing oil-wars and spreading locally Zapatism and anti-neoliberal struggles all over the world. Squatters in Madrid pioneered alter-global campaigns in 1992 and 1994 (Martínez, 2007), but new groups and political discourses became attached to many SSC (in particular, the three Laboratorios) since the Seattle demonstration in 1999 in close connection with the ulterior developments of Italian autonomism (Flesher, 2014, pp. 62-72). Animal rights activists found SSC as adequate places to propagate their claims and vegetarian/vegan dinning became quite popular in the squatting scene. LGTB and queer activists also gained visibility and joined some SSC. On the contrary, workers’ demands, strikes and unions lost past appeal among squatters, although they were underpinned, for instance, by the campaign about female-migrant domestic-workers (in La Eskalera Karakola) or when anarchist unions joined the yearly Week of Social Struggles [Semana de Lucha Social Rompamos el Silencio, RES] where squatters, feminists, environmentalists and other activists launched altogether direct actions of protest. The RES started in 1998, but was not called for between 2000 and 2005. Significantly, a usual practice in every RES was to squat a building during the week of actions. Squatting was, then, a central stance in the autonomist identity of this coalition which replaced the melting of LA by 1999. Although political squatters seldom setup coordination bodies and no SMO was representing them, the RES eventually served to merge them with classic left-libertarian politics regarding class, gender and ethnicity in addition to criticisms of the unfair global economy and its military implications.
The social-democrat turn of the central Government in 2004 had almost no impact in the repressive policies against radical activism such as squatting. Social-democrat and conservative elites shared their cohesive support to all the plans of urban growth in Madrid as the most buoyant city and metropolitan region in Spain. Surprisingly, given the conservative opposition to progressive gender agendas by the local government, a feminist and autonomist squat (Eskalera Karakola) was able to negotiate its status and to obtain a legal relocation to municipal premises with a low rental price, after 8 years of squatting (1996-2004) (González and Araiza, 2016). In 2001 another school project hosted in a squatted building (La Prospe) also reached an agreement of legalisation with the conservative party in the regional government. They added to the successful legalisation of Seco in 2007 (Martínez, 2014). Other two attempts for gaining legal status in that period failed, while, in parallel, most of the SSC refused to initiate any kind of negotiation with the authorities. A striking side effect of the few cases of legalisation is that some squats obtained a very positive and frequent media coverage which counterbalanced the precedent wave of stigmas and stereotypes of squatters associated to marginalisation, deviated lifestyles and police repression –as it happened, for example, in the eviction of La Guindalera in 1997 when more than 150 activists were arrested.

Table III. Type of Building of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid, 1977-2015. Percentage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Building</th>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
<th>Cycle 2</th>
<th>Cycle 3</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office building</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial building</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>10.81</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>8.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential building</td>
<td>27.91</td>
<td>40.54</td>
<td>26.32</td>
<td>33.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>23.26</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>11.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial building</td>
<td>23.26</td>
<td>25.68</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>20.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundfloor business</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>6.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No data</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>21.05</td>
<td>9.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL Location</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
GLOBAL CRISIS AND THE CONVERGENCE
OF URBAN MOVEMENTS (2011-2015)

The shock brought about by the global economic crisis in 2008 determined an unexpected neo-liberal turn taken by the social-democrat central government in Spain. In addition to reforms in the labour market and the retirement scheme, the central government paved the way for the bailout of many banks and the cutbacks in various public services. Over those years the mass media were already disclosing hundreds of cases of political which added to hiking unemployment rates beyond 20% (which were much higher for the youth, women and foreign migrants) and a dramatic rising tide of foreclosures, homelessness and poverty. Conservatives and social-democrats also agreed in 2011 to modify an article of the Spanish Constitution according to the instructions set by the European Union in order to satisfy the creditors’ returns as a priority in the national expenditure. Most of these policy decisions and the general socio-economic decline contributed to undermine the legitimation of the democratic regime among the citizenry and provoked the massive outcry of the 15M or Indignados movement in May 2011 (Castells, 2012; Flesher, 2014). The squatters’ movement also took part in the 15M movement with specific urban manifestations and outcomes that differed significantly from previous periods (Martínez and García, 2015).

In particular, following the occupation of squares and the enduring wave of demonstrations and protest campaigns over three years (until, roughly, the European elections in May 2014) the number of new squats in Madrid rose as never before. Instead of being promoted by experienced activists, many new
15M groups and neighbourhood assemblies launched the occupation of empty buildings in order to develop SSC. Simultaneously, thousands of individuals and families occupied empty houses in a more secret manner, although a wide array of cases were aired by the mass media. Already established SSC also hosted 15M groups and the number of participants, visitors and activists in squats increased notably (Abellán et al., 2012; Martínez and García, 2015). Furthermore, the cultural, social and political activities carried on in SSC—such as food banks, free shops, co-operatives, fund-raising activities, etc.—were also considered as an extension of the 15M movement, and not only as a replication of previous squats. The media coverage of squatting changed suddenly in most of the newspapers, with many cases entering the national news. Compared to past decades, the media image of squatting was also more positive and tolerant with the squatters’ motivations—now being identified with a diverse range of needy people more than merely urban activists or anarchists-autonomists.

The most salient factor in order to explain the newly social acceptance of squatting was the parallel rising success of a housing movement led by a specific SMO—the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por las Hipotecas, Platform of People Affected by Mortgages). The PAH was born in 2009, two years before the 15M movement, but gained a higher public support, improved its organisation and created more local groups, due to the activity of 15M groups and assemblies (Colau and Alemany, 2012). Initially, the PAH became known by their direct actions to avoid or interfere the eviction of people unable to pay mortgages or rents. These involved sit-ins, blockades and demonstrations that sometimes ended up with harsh police repression. In a sharp contrast with previous squatters, PAH activists made many efforts to negotiate with banks, local authorities and judges in order to find specific solutions for the families and individuals in risk of eviction or already turned into homelessness. Another striking difference with political squatters was the PAH’s claim for increasing the stock of affordable social housing in order to deal with the situation of residential emergency.

Nevertheless, in 2011 the PAH started to occupy buildings and that was enthusiastically supported by political squatters as well as other 15M activists. These occupations targeted mainly the buildings owned by banks, real estate developers or state institutions. Even the term “squatting” [okupación] was avoided in many of the new occupations and others such as “liberated” or “recuperated” spaces were preferred by PAH activists. Their intention was to focus on the housing needs and possible policies to meet them rather than portraying squatting as a radical gesture or a prefigurative form of anti-capitalist housing or life-style alternative. Thus, the history and debates about squatting were not their priority. Pressure on
both authorities in order to get a more favourable legislation and provision of social housing, and large-scale private companies in order to obtain affordable rentals were at the top of their political agenda. An open interaction with mainstream journalists was also embraced. This strategy was able to challenge the dominant legal procedures and some squatters of houses were allowed to remain in the occupied buildings or, in case of forced eviction, they were not sentenced to jail imprisonment (Abellán, 2015; De Andrés et al., 2015; Gonick, 2015; Martínez and García, 2015). At the same time, these orientations influenced substantially the extant generations of political squatters which increased the diversity within the squatting movement and enhanced the public legitimacy of squatting at large.

Madrid, specifically, was one of the cities where the cases of new squats were more abundant. The aforementioned context merged with local circumstances that fuelled the number of occupations. On the one hand, among the various neo-liberal policies underway, conservative governments and economic elites still persisted in bringing the Olympic Games to the city. This was a continuous failure after three attempts and implied huge public spending on infrastructures built to that end. The initial public support to the “Olympic dream” before 2008 became afterwards, in turn, an example of the economic nightmares that mega-projects involved. The construction and financial-related sectors commenced to decline. Vacancy rates rose, there was more public debates in the mass media about this issue and, consequently, more social contestation and squatting attempts. The real estate market was losing ground, but the prices of urban land and buildings did not decrease as quickly as to make housing generally affordable for all (López and Rodríguez, 2011).

The new housing struggles grouped political squatters, pioneer activists in the 15M and the new recruits of sympathisers and supporters. SSC and members of other social movements who used regularly those spaces cooperated with the new occupants of houses. The conservative local government hardly reacted to the situation except in one case that ended up in a legalisation after being previously evicted from squatted municipal premises -Montamarta, located in San Blas, a peripheral working class area. On the contrary, both municipal and regional (metropolitan) governments decided to privatise large portions of the already limited stock of social housing. International financial investors (also called “vulture funds”) took advantage of those sales, pressed to change the applicable regulations and started bullying poor and old residents. As a consequence, another front of urban disputes and new forms of dispossession was opened up with the involvement of tenants and even owners of former public housing estates which contributed, additionally, to a wider acceptance and tolerance of squatting. In year 2011 we register the
highest number of new occupations in a sole year (13) out of all the period 1977-2015. Cycle 3 is also the only period with the highest number of yearly active SSC (an average of 26 cases).

Although the new wave of squats continued the previous locational patterns in some central areas (Lavapiés and Tetuán, above all), most of the foreclosures, evictions and new squats took place in neighbourhoods with high rates of unemployment and working-class composition (Martínez and García, 2015). This implies that the process of gentrification that was rooted in large parts of the city centre over the previous two decades was not reversed. Quite the opposite, it contributed to keep displacing both the vulnerable population and housing struggles to the urban periphery. These neighbourhoods were also the most damaged by the cuts in education and health services which also engendered innovative protest campaigns (Sánchez, 2103). Activists from the latter interacted closely with squatters and housing activists so that SSC recreated their functions as crucial hubs for anti-neoliberal urban policies.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the occupation of buildings was occasionally used as a repertoire of protest in the heydays of the citizen and pro-democracy movement of the late 1970s, political squatting only turned it into a continuous urban movement from the mid-1980s onwards which became a substitute to the abovementioned ones. However, after the institutionalisation and co-optation of many citizens’ and workers’ organisations in the 1980s, emerging urban movements such as the squatters’ were not a matter of concern for the municipal governments (Villasante, 2008, pp. 237-241). On the contrary, the urban elites were busy by fuelling the construction industry with huge operations of urban renewal and development, transport infrastructures, tourism and global companies (Alguacil et al., 2011, pp. 120-127) and the influx of international capital in Spain following the adhesion to the European Union. Squatters made use of the opportunities open by the high vacancy rates and restructuring processes in specific urban areas and buildings, while enjoying a favourable legal framework. In an almost silent way some SSC were able to consolidate their activity and to provide affordable space in the city centre for other SMO which, in turn, reinforced their mutual support and articulation. The unexpected long duration of some SSC served as emblematic example and breeding places for the next generations of activists.
A surprising achievement of my analysis is that the evolution of squatting was not substantially altered by the criminalisation framework implemented in 1996—which is a completely opposed outcome of the criminalisation observed in Copenhagen and Berlin, for example: Mikkelsen and Karpantschof, 2001; Holm and Khun, 2011. After a steady growth in the sub-cycle 1996-2003 (with a yearly average of 3.9) SSC grew again at higher yearly rates (6.1) in 2004-2010. The explanation of this pattern has to do both with the past experiences and the contextual circumstances of the protest cycle and the socio-spatial structures. On the one hand, squatters resisted the penal persecution by occupying new places after being evicted. Active SSC from prior periods and still a considerable number of long lasting squats in Cycle 2 configured the hubs that served as exemplary landmarks for the coming generations of activists. Although most squatters refused to negotiate with the local authorities the legal condition of their occupations, a few cases were successful in that endeavour and most cases shared their accumulated knowledge about legal strategies in order to litigate in courts -basically, by dismissing any evidence that could imply intention of dwelling and remaining in the premises for ever. Campaigns for legalisations and coordinated actions by autonomist organisations (RES) obtained more media visibility that occasionally challenged the prevailing stigmas about squatting.

On the other hand, squatters became more articulated with the GJM, new struggles and various anti-neoliberal campaigns while facing the rising speculative bubble and globalisation of the major Spanish city. This protest wave fuelled squatting as one of the most urban-centred direct actions of civil disobedience while, simultaneously, offering infrastructural and spatial resources to the emerging movements. The intense activity in the construction sector and the associate processes of real estate speculation made squatting more difficult to last for longer periods, anyhow, especially in the highly contested neighbourhoods of the city centre which were also subject to more private surveillance. Conversely, this opened up opportunities for squatting in many peripheral and metropolitan areas.

The demarcation of Cycle 3 is the most obvious one given the uprising of the 15M / Indignados movement in 2011 which ignites the most intense period of squatting ever—in both new SSC initiated and active per year. Not only the articulation of political squatters with this anti-neoliberal movement reinvigorates the numbers of activists in squats but also the emergence of a distinctive housing movement (led by the PAH) helped reformulate their public outlook. More media visibility, more negotiations with local authorities and banks, more exposure and public debate about the housing crisis, are the main social conditions that make squatting to boost again. Legal persecution, even for squatted
houses, was still under the criminalisation framework but social tolerance and legitimation of squatting was higher than ever before, so illegal actions based on solid grievances could not be easily or totally overcome by state repression.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Sub-Cycle</th>
<th>No. SSC</th>
<th>Role in Life Cycle</th>
<th>Protest Cycles</th>
<th>Socio-Spatial Structures</th>
<th>Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 1</td>
<td>1977-1984 (8 years)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Early squatters</td>
<td>Pro-Democracy &amp; Workers’ &amp; Citizen Movement</td>
<td>Local Government: Social-democrat Massive social housing and public facilities in city periphery Economic crisis and industrial restructuring</td>
<td>Libertarian claims in the Transition to democracy Rise of autonomist politics (LA) Emblematic 6 SSC lasted more than 5 years Favourable legal treatment High and specific vacancy rates as opportunities Focus on city centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1990 (6 years)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Triggering of the squatting movement</td>
<td>Anti-NATO and New Social Movements (NSM)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1995 (5 years)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Growing of squatting</td>
<td>Anti-militarism and NSM</td>
<td>Local Government: Conservative Mega-projects Urban renewal in city centre First wave of urban speculation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2</td>
<td>1996-2003 (8 years)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Reaction to the criminalisation of squatting</td>
<td>Global Justice Movement</td>
<td>Local Government: Conservative Economic boom &amp; Immigration Urban renewal and development in metropolitan area Global &amp; Neoliberal city Properties subject to intense speculation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2010 (7 years)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Metropolitan expansion of squatting</td>
<td>Local coordination of struggles &amp; emerging movements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 3</td>
<td>2011-2015 (5 years)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Broader legitimisation of squatting</td>
<td>15M / Indignados Movement and Housing Movement</td>
<td>Local Government: Conservative (up to 2015) and Radical Social-democrat (since May 2015) Economic crisis &amp; Outmigration Austerity policies</td>
<td>Convergence with housing and anti-neoliberal struggles Long duration (1-5 y) of more SSC More SSC in city periphery 1 SSC was legalised More negotiations with authorities and owners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
Since the economic crisis devastated many working-class districts of Madrid, squatting in tight association with 15M groups developed extraordinarily (42% of the cases) in the city periphery. Nevertheless, the initial opportunities of high vacancy in the central areas under renewal created solid activist communities and networks associated to other social movements interested in using the free spaces supplied by SSC. Thus, squatting in the city centre was continuously intense and emblematic all over the decades and represented a stronghold for the self-reproduction of the movement. Other parameters, such as the type of occupied buildings or their ownership did not show any significant variations over the three cycles. Both residential (34%) and industrial (21%) buildings were always the most targeted ones, and private properties were persistently more often squatted (59%) than state-owned ones. The cases of legalisation (3 of them in private properties) illustrate that neither of those parameters played a significant role in their success, and litigations at the judicial courts were the preferred battleground for most squatters in all the periods. What is noticeable is that the processes of legalisations in Cycle 2 and the frequent negotiations in Cycle 3 which continued with the more favourable radical social-democrat government after May 2015, within the context of economic recession and residential emergency, contributed to alleviate the stigmatised media image of squatting and to enhance public tolerance towards the new occupations.

REFERENCES


