

# THE SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT IN SPAIN AND EUROPE: CONTEXTS, CYCLES, IDENTITIES AND INSTITUTIONALISATION

## Abstract

The Squatters' Movement, reclaiming the social use of empty buildings as residential and socio/cultural places, is a cross-European phenomenon that started around the mid 1980s in Spain and some decades before in other countries. In spite of the short duration of many squats and the fast change of activists involved, this urban movement as such has been consolidated among other alternative, new and alter-global social movements. The present research project aims to know the evolution of the Squatters' Movement in some of the main European metropolitan areas (Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Malaga, Seville, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, London, Paris, Berlin, Milan and Rome). In particular we want to explain that evolution according to the different legal, urban, socio-cultural and political contexts; the different cycles of mobilisation; and the strategic interactions between squatters, authorities, owners and other social organizations. Two principal questions arise within this theoretical framework: a) How social identities are set up through different practices of squatting, cultural expressions, discourses and social networks? b) What kind of 'institutionalisation regimes' had taken place according to different urban settings and different models of strategic interactions? Systematic comparison between cities can provide, then, a general test of patterns and relevant singularities in order to verify the influence of the aforementioned four factors (contexts, cycles, identities and institutionalisation) in the outcomes of the Squatters' Movement: political socialisation and participation, socio-cultural innovation and creation, and urban restructuring.

## Hypothesis

Social impacts of the squatters' movement are caused by a variable combination according to each city, of a) contextual structures of opportunity; b) cycles of mobilisation; c) social construction of identities; d) processes of interaction with authorities and owners.

## General Aims:

1. To know the evolution of the squatters' movement in 12 metropolitan areas (Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Malaga, Seville, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, London, Paris, Berlin, Milan and Rome) according to its social, political, cultural and urban dimensions.
2. To determine the variations between the cases and their common patterns according to the structural factors: contexts, cycles, identities and institutionalisation regimes.
3. To discover the causal relations between the structural factors and the social impacts of the squatters' movement.

## Specific Aims:

- To identify the singularities of the political, legal, social, urban and cultural opportunity structures for the squatters' movement in each metropolitan area.
- To establish the cycles of evolution and mobilisation of the squatters' movements in order to determine the main factors which had an influence on their emergence and expansion.
- To know the processes of symbolic and discursive performance which are crucial to define the social

identities of squatting and those of the actors involved in their social networks.

- To analyse the specific institutionalisation regimes by looking at the interactions between activists, authorities and owners.
- To define the social, political, cultural and urban impacts of the squatters' movements on their local, national and European contexts.

## **Methodology**

1/ Historic data bases.

2/ Analysis of urban areas and maps.

3/ Discourse analysis (interviews, videos, symbols, texts, websites, mass media...).

4/ Participant observation of practices, spaces, conflicts, events and discourses.

5/ Social network analysis.

6/ E-surveys.

7/ Workshops and public debates.

## **Work Plan**

(detailed plans will be defined in the first internal workshop)

## **Outcomes**

2-3 articles / year

2-3 papers at conferences / year

1 final book

1 website

2-3 workshops / year

(at least 2-3 members of the Research Group as authors)

## **Budget**

|              | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | TOTAL |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Direct costs | 32800 | 21600 | 25600 | 80000 |

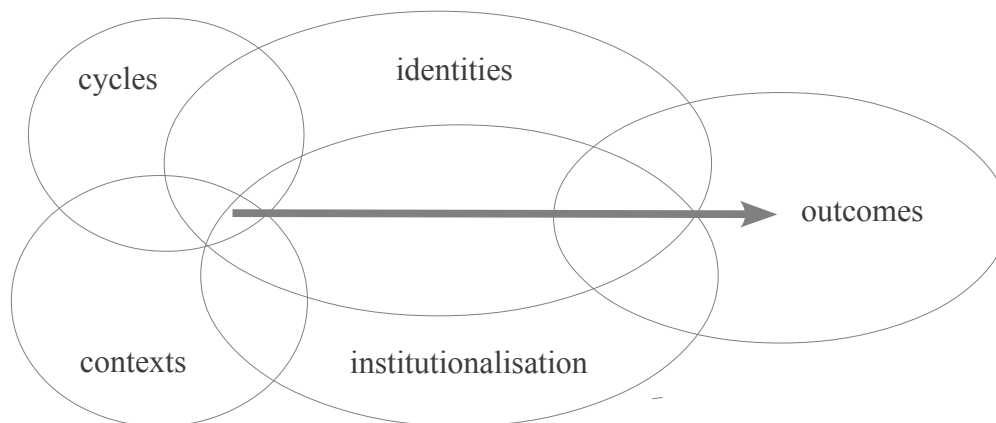
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## What do we want to know? // Specific Research Questions

1/ How were cycles, contexts, identities and institutionalisation intertwined? (And how do we define here 'intertwining'?)

2/ Did that set of interactions make a substantial (and differential) influence in the movement's outcomes? (And what kind of 'outcomes' we are referring to?)

Figure 1: intertwinings and outcomes



## [CYCLES]

3/ How different / similar was the evolution of the squatters' movement in the selected 12 metropolitan areas (Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Malaga, Seville, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, London, Paris, Berlin, Milan and Rome) according to its social, political, cultural and urban dimensions?

3.1/ Which were the specific cycles of evolution and mobilisation of the different squatters' movements?

3.2/ Did they fit any metropolitan, national or transnational pattern?

3.3/ How can be explained the average and different durations of squats?

3.4/ Was there any significant concentration of squats in particular urban areas?

3.5/ Are the type of owners of the squatted buildings a crucial factor in order to understand the kind of lawsuit and the agreements between squatters and owners?

3.6/ What kinds of buildings were subjected to the squatting actions?

3.7/ How important were the squats for housing purposes compared to those aiming to promote social activities and political claims?

3.8/ Was the evolution of squatting following a parallel or opposing path to that of other social / urban movements, or to specific urban policies?

3.9/ Was the squatters' movement the substitute, the follower or the initiator of other social / urban movements?

3.10/ (Intertwining with identities) How many generations of squatters can be distinguished and which were their own features?

3.11/ (Intertwining with contexts) What kind of structural factors and contextual conditions were more influential in order to explain the emergence and, if so, the expansion, impacts and decline of the squatters' movement in each metropolitan area?

3.12/ (Intertwining with institutionalisation) How relevant, in quantitative and qualitative terms, were the cases of squats which reached explicit agreements with private owners and authorities?

## [CONTEXTS]

4/ What kind of socio-spatial and political opportunity structures were the main dimensions for explaining the evolution, practices and impacts of the squatters' movements?

4.1/ What elements or forces coming from the context outside the movement provide effective opportunities and threats, favourable or constraining tendencies for its development?

4.2/ How important were other social movements, activist networks and coalitions of urban movements (and their strategic choices along recent history) as part of that influential context?

4.3/ What about the recent local history of interactions between authorities, markets, population and movements?

4.4/ What about other social (demographic trends, ethnic composition, gender exclusion, cleavages of social class, etc.) and spatial (waves of gentrification, urban speculation, urban mega-projects, centre-periphery location, urban plans, privatisation policies, stock of vacancy, etc.) conditions of the neighbourhoods where squats take place?

4.5/ How do squatters perceive all the opportunities and obstacles embedded in their specific contexts?

4.6/ Who were the main political allies of squatters (professionals, for instance)?

4.7/ Did the hegemonic mass media operate against or in favour of squatting?

4.8/ Did the cohesion of elites and the degrees of repression over squatters play a determining role in the impacts of the squatters' movements?

4.9/ How important was the dialectical relation between the local space and the

global / transnational flows where squatters were also involved?

4.10/ (Intertwining with institutionalisation) Which were the main points of access to the State and market institutions?

4.11/ (Intertwining with identities) Did the scene of squatting vary among cities according to specific contextual conditions?

## [IDENTITIES]

5/ How was the identity of squatters built up through their concrete practices, activities, discourses and social networks in which they participate?

5.1/ What kinds and degrees of autonomy, self-management, direct democracy and mutual cooperation were achieved within squats?

5.2/ How deep the everyday life and social relationships were transformed within squats?

5.3/ Which were the main contradictions experienced by squatters according to their claims of use value, non-commercial, openness, gender awareness, anti-authoritarianism, environmentalism, etc.?

5.4/ How did they managed their own public image (as rooted cosmopolitans, nomadic, precarious, creative people, transgressors, counter-cultural, marginal youth, etc.) through both mass media and independent media?

5.5/ How did squatters use technologies of communication and intervene in the development of alternative means of communication (e.g. copy-left, open-source, hacking, etc.)?

5.6/ What processes of symbolic and discursive performance were crucial to provide a legitimacy to squatting?

5.7/ Who were the most relevant social actors (enemies / opposing actors, allies, sympathisers, neighbours, indifferent population, etc.) linked to squatters?

5.8/ What kind of interactions did they keep among the different social networks in which squatters were involved?

5.9/ How were the relationships (and liminalities) between squatted houses, squatted Social Centres and non-squatted Social Centres?

5.10/ Was the label of 'movement' a relevant one for the self-identification and self-knowledge of squatters (for instance, as a squatting movement, a housing movement, a neighbourhood movement or a Social Centres movement)?

5.11/ How was squatting promoted (handbooks, counselling, helping others to squat, etc.)?

5.12/ How socially diverse was the composition of activists, attendants and mobilised sympathisers?

5.13/ What types / configurations of squats could be distinguished according to their main functions, benefits, forms of organisation, etc.?

5.14/ What role did the squats play in the local scene of leisure, sociability, arts and grassroots / radical politics?

5.15/ Which were the predominant repertoires of protest, mobilisation, resistance and political expression in general launched by squatters?

5.16/ (Intertwining with institutionalisation) What symbolic frames were crucial to drive the processes of institutionalisation?

## [INSTITUTIONALISATION]

6/ How were the variations of the 'institutionalisation regimes' in each city by looking at, on the one hand, the interactions between activists, authorities and owners, and, on the other, the broad socio-political impact of squatting?

6.1/ Which are the conditions that make possible the specific negotiations between autonomous activists and city officials, legalisation being one of the possible outcomes?

6.2/ Who takes the initiative of the negotiations?

6.3/ How is this leading role mediated by crucial variables such as mass media coverage, the specific field of public policy involved and the support of formal organisations?

6.4/ Was the squatters' concept of the State an influential framework along their interactions with authorities?

6.5/ What kind of concessions did the squatters obtain due to negotiations and/or legalisations?

6.6/ Were squatters coopted and neutralised as radical activists once the squats were legalised?

6.7/ Was the local squatters' movement divided into new splits after the legalisation processes?

6.8/ Why some squats had access to negotiations and some others had not?

6.9/ How non-institutional were the squatters' action repertoire of action, their membership and their ways of decision-making?

6.10/ What aspects of squats (stability, legitimisation, alternative culture, etc.)

contributed to shape them as 'anomalous institutions'?

6.11/ How did squatters deal with the legal constraints to their actions and styles of life?

6.12/ Which were the consequences of lawsuits and the different means of legal defence of squats?

## **Research Group**

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