

PART I

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## Case Studies

## Socio-Spatial Structures and Protest Cycles of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid

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This chapter examines the historical, political, urban and social circumstances that shape the squatting movement in the city of Madrid (Spain). The guiding research questions are as follows: Why have the volume of squats, their location and duration changed? Are there any distinguishable patterns in that evolution? How significant are in this development political, urban and media contexts? To answer these questions, I draw on the concepts of ‘protest cycles’ and ‘socio-spatial structures’ – as they are presented in the introductory chapter of this book.

Squatting in Spain is seldom perceived as a durable urban movement. Only a few cases of eviction even reached the national headlines. Most of the squats were reported in the local news. Media coverage focuses primarily on evictions and legal issues (Alcalde 2004; Casanova 2002; Dee and Santos 2015). Media rarely note how Squatted Social Centres (SSCs) serve as urban nodes for the articulation of social movements. Over a few decades SSCs in Madrid hosted fundraising events, talks and exhibitions. They provided rooms for holding meetings and planning campaigns available to a wide range of groups and organisations, such as anti-militarist, feminist, environmental, anti-racist, anti-fascist, free radios, open-source, anti-prisons,

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M.A. Martínez López (ed.), *The Urban Politics of Squatters’  
Movements*, The Contemporary City,  
[https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95314-1\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95314-1_2)

workers' unions, animal rights, anti-war, or anti-neoliberal struggles. This function as a 'spatial resource' has remained essentially unchanged since the inception of the movement between the late 1970s and mid-1980s.

In the following sections I present first the methodological approach followed to collect empirical information about SSCs in Madrid. Second, I distinguish the initial period (1977–1995) of the squatters' movement characterised by a transitional regime to a liberal democracy associated with new social movements and massive inflows of foreign and speculative capital in the property markets. The next period (1996–2010) starts with the criminalisation of squatting in 1995–1996. Despite increasing repression and a more intense wave of capitalist globalisation in the metropolitan area of Madrid, SSCs continued to grow and tighten links with international migrants and the alter-globalisation campaigns. The third period of squatting (2011–2015) begins with the 15M mobilisations and a substantial increase in SSCs following the global financial crisis. Squatting for housing became more public and politicised. Anti-neoliberal movements and squatters established strong alliances with each other.

I argue that these changes are caused by the specific urban and political conditions of each period, included the extraordinary duration of some flagship SSCs. There are few cases of legalisation, due to a general refusal to negotiations with the authorities, and the relations between squatters and other social movements are fundamentally articulated with the socio-spatial structural conditions.

## METHODOLOGY

The main methodological tool for this research is a database of all the cases of SSC located in the metropolitan area of Madrid (both municipality and region according to the boundaries of the autonomous community, comprising 6.5 million of inhabitants in 2013) 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. Nevertheless, the pioneering cases in fact functioned as 'social centres' and inspired subsequent generations of activists. One of those buildings remains occupied today. Although some autonomous and self-managed social centres that were never illegally occupied are closely interconnected with the same activist and squatters' networks in the city, they are excluded from this database in order to focus on the practice of squatting. Thus, when an SSC is legalised, only the period of

illegal occupation is registered. There were four cases of explicit legalisation after negotiations with the local or regional authorities, and at least three more in which squatters achieved an agreement with private owners, although no statement was made public so I treat them as confidential.

Data about squats exclusively dedicated to housing are also excluded from this analysis. However, according to my records and observations, at least 30 SSCs hosted residents. In some cases the main purpose of the occupation was to provide a house for the squatters but later they decided to open up some parts of the building as a cultural and political venue. Many squatters of SSCs were also occupying apartments in other buildings but they preferred not to openly publicise their home squats in order to postpone a possible eviction, but also aiming at avoiding more legal risks than those associated with SSCs. When it comes to SSCs, activists tend to argue that they do not reside in the property but just make use of it and let others use it as well (Seminario 2015, pp. 185–221). In general, accurate identification of most squats for housing in Madrid was not possible due to their secret nature, but we can estimate that numbers are much larger than SSCs, especially after 2008. Just as a rough indicator, the Ombudsman's Department acknowledged that 766 flats in social housing estates throughout the Madrid region were classified as 'illegally occupied' by 2012.<sup>1</sup>

The empirical information collected to fill the database stems 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.<sup>2</sup> The engagement of the researcher in various SSCs 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

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.defensordelpueblo.es/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2013-03-Estudio-Viviendas-Protegidas-Vac%C3%ADas-Anexos.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> In particular, these four projects: <http://www.ucm.es/info/america2/okcrono.htm>, [www.okupatutambien.net](http://www.okupatutambien.net), [https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Lista\\_de\\_centros\\_sociales\\_de\\_Ja\\_Comunidad\\_de\\_Madrid](https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Lista_de_centros_sociales_de_Ja_Comunidad_de_Madrid), <http://www.agitamadrid.org/guia-de-espacios>

memory of squatting in Madrid (Seminario 2015). The secondary data about districts and municipalities in terms of income, unemployment, population and vacancy rates all stem from the main regional statistics department<sup>3</sup> and from others' analyses (Alguacil et al. 2011; González and Pérez 2013; Naredo 1996; Rodríguez 2007) (Table 2.1 and Fig. 2.1).

### EARLY SQUATTING AND TRIGGERING CONDITIONS: AN INNOVATIVE URBAN PROTEST IN A TRANSITIONAL REGIME (1977–1995)

In Madrid and in most of the medium-size and large Spanish cities (Barcelona, Zaragoza, Valencia, Bilbao, etc.) the squatters' movement as such started around 1984–1985 (Martínez 2002, pp. 141–146). Political squatting implies an explicit claim of every occupation as a form of protest in addition to making actual use of the occupied premises. By hanging banners at 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. This public visibility adds to the organisation of protest actions and the expression of critical discourses so that squatters politicise their occupations.

However, groundbreaking occupations of buildings did occur before the mid-1980s. In the case of Madrid, the influential citizen movement (Castells 1983) took over around 500 houses between 1976 and 1978 (Alía 1978). More significantly, trade-union anarchists also occupied buildings that they considered their legitimate properties confiscated by the fascist Franco's regime (1939–1975). Thus, an active network of *Ateneos Libertarios* (AL), not all in squatted premises, emerged during the years of the transition to democracy (1975–1979) (Carmona 2012, pp. 479–489; Seminario 2015, pp. 23–77). The activities they hosted, their political commitment and openness to local residents were very similar to subsequent SSCs, 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 up to today.

The pioneering AL influenced the first three self-managed SSCs (Mantuano, Migrans and Bulevar) that were opened in the transitional

<sup>3</sup><http://www.madrid.org/iestadis/>

**Table 2.1** Duration of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid, 1977–2015

	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Cycle 3		Total				
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%			
	1977–1984	1985–1990	1991–1995	1977–1995	1996–2003	2004–2010	1996–2010	2011–2015			
Up to 3 months	4	5	15	55.81	15	17	43.24	17	44.74	73	47.10
3 months–1 year	0	0	2	4.65	4	9	17.57	7	18.42	22	14.19
1–5 years	3	1	7	25.58	10	16	35.14	14	36.84	51	32.90
More than 5 years	1	1	4	13.95	2	1	4.05	0	0.00	9	5.81
Total	8	7	28	100	31	43	100	38	100	155	100

Source: Author

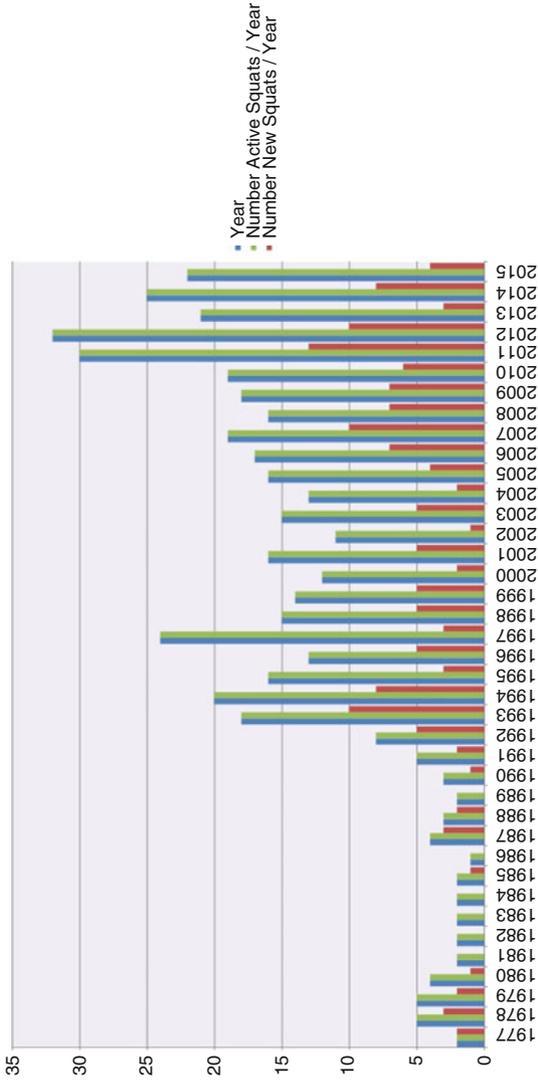


Fig. 2.1 Number of new and active Squatted Social Centres per year. Madrid, 1977–2015 (Source: Author)

period again without suggesting any common identity as squatters. They illegally broke into the buildings and some of their members were in contact with European squatters. These SSCs were also attached to their local neighbourhoods, to anarchism, to post-1968 counter-cultural inspirations and to new social movements.

The first democratic municipal elections after the dictatorship in 1979 signalled the decline of the citizen movement and, at the same time, the rise of other social movements—environmentalism, pacifism, free radio stations, solidarity with inmates in total institutions, and so on. The previous intense cycle of strikes in the workplaces was neutralised by the industrial restructuring and the pacts between union leaders and major corporations, which resulted in a period of high unemployment (around 22%: Alguacil et al. 2011, p. 114). This shift in the protest cycle determined the distinctive politicisation of squatting. While the early squatters of the late 1970s were connected with 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 faced a severe decline in grassroots struggles and movements, in addition to very poor expectations for decent jobs and affordable housing (Casanova 2002; Martínez 2002).

Political squatting emerged as one of the early radical urban movements of the 1980s in response to the failure of the social democratic government of Madrid (in coalition with the communists from 1979 to 1983, and alone until 1989) and the country (in office from 1982 to 1993) to satisfy the demands of large portions of the young generations. However, there were only a few durable squats in those initial years. All the occupations of the decade, starting in 1985, were launched almost by the same first collective of squatters and took place in the inner city. Initially, only one (Arregui y Aruej) was able to last three months, but it was located in the border of the city centre, in a peripheral working-class area (Puente de Vallecas), which allowed the inclusion of many activists from the surroundings (Murgui 2008, p. 390). The second squat (Minuesa), which became the flagship of the movement, lasted six years (1988–1994). It emerged out of political squatters' solidarity with the workers of a former printing company. These workers demanded compensation before the demolition of the factory and the houses attached to it. This squat was also the first to name itself an SSC in a conscious move aimed to imitate the labels used by the Italian squats that some activists had visited during those years (Seminario 2015, p. 176).

Regular contacts with Italian, German and Dutch autonomists expanded the range of political activities which became part of the Madrid squatters' identity—talks, video forums and campaigns on a wide range of issues such as anti-fascism, international solidarity, anti-repressive campaigns, and autonomous women's movements. However, the immediate urban and social environment of Madrid squatters prompted them to focus first on youth unemployment and the rising social housing shortage. They also explicitly challenged the first wave of intense urban speculation (due, mainly, to the incoming international capital in a more stable and liberal political regime once Spain became a member of the European Economic Community 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, called Pasillo Verde). Minuesa and other long-lasting and emblematic SSCs also served as a meeting point for organising rallies and protests such as the refusal to NATO and the opposition with regard to military conscription, which was the leading movement between 1989 and 2002 (Aguirre et al. 1998).

In a straightforward move, squatters intended to interrupt the process of capitalist reproduction of urban space in which disuse and abandonment were usual stages prior to further redevelopment. Initially squatters 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 these buildings were effectively transformed into residential towers by private developers. Centrally located squats (71% in 1985–1990 and 39% in 1991–1995) represented an open showcase for their urban and political claims. Soaring land and housing prices peaked around 1990 (Naredo 1996), which denied other social movements access to central spaces where they could meet and disseminate their demands. Squats filled this gap.

A key turning point in the period came in 1992 as mega-events entered the urban political arena in three Spanish cities (Olympics in Barcelona, International Expo in Seville, and European Cultural Capital in Madrid). SSCs contesting these mega-events helped establish closer ties with activists from across the country.

Following the first successful examples in the 1980s, the practice of squatting was quickly replicated in other areas of the metropolitan area—29% of all the SSCs in the period 1991–1995 were located in metropolitan municipalities.

In addition, squats in this period enjoyed a favourable legal context. Until 1995–1996 squatting was not a criminal offence but a civil one. Squatters could only be evicted after being sued in civil courts or because of preventive measures taken by the police, but they usually did not face prison or economic sanctions (Seminario 2015, pp. 185–196).

Squatting expanded impressively between 1991 and 1995, with 28 cases of SSCs. The high frequency of new squats per year, the high density of their mutual informal connections and the increasing media coverage, contributed to the configuration of a new urban movement. Although most attempts at squatting during the cycle 1977–1995 lasted less than three months, 8 cases were able to survive up to two years, and 6 remained occupied more than five years. Therefore, the second part of the cycle (1991–1995) ended with a substantial number of cases that reinforced the movement.

While between 1985 and 1990 almost all squatting took place in two areas of the city (the city centre, mostly in the downgraded neighbourhood of Lavapiés, or nearby; and the slightly more peripheral Puente de Vallecas), between 1991 and 1995 squats expanded to many other districts, in particular to another central area, Tetuán (21% of the new squats in 1991–1995), where migrants, poor residents, old buildings and drug trafficking were more concentrated. High vacancy rates in these areas coexisted with some municipal plans for urban renewal.

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. In total, 10 abandoned or vacant schools regained life due to political squatters during the cycle 1977–1995 (which represented 23% of total SSCs in the cycle) while empty residential buildings became more attractive for squatters from 1991 onwards (26% in the period 1977–1995).

Negotiations between squatters and owners were not usually reported by the media (Casanova 2002, p. 34) if they existed at all. Two squats initiated in 1991 (La Prospe and Seco) later became (in 2001 and 2007, respectively) the first successful cases of legalisation and relocation (Martínez 2014). As an illustration of the above trends, Seco occupied a former school located in a decaying area of Puente de Vallecas waiting for residential redevelopment. Until 1991 the social democratic local government did not help squatters to find ways out for their claims which contrasts sharply with the four cases of

legalisation that conservative governments will grant to some squatters in the following cycles.

Between 1985 and 1988 a small group of activists, *Asamblea de Okupas* (AO) acted as a social movement organisation (SMO), coordinating and preparing the occupations, mostly in the city centre. SSCs such as Minuesa and David Castilla (1994–1996) served as exemplary landmarks for subsequent occupations. A coalition of autonomist groups, *Lucha Autónoma* (LA) was formed in 1990 (Casanova 2002) and squatting was one of their main fields of political activity, although most squatters were not affiliated with LA and this organisation was unable to replace AO as the movement's SMO. In sum, formal coordination of squats only occurred at rare moments despite the dense informal networks of social and political cooperation. Nevertheless, SSCs attracted activists, local residents and sympathisers from across the metropolitan area (Table 2.2 and Fig. 2.2).

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

A new Penal Code came into force in 1996, which criminalised both squatting and refusing military conscription, making them subject to be punished with jail sentences. This legislation at the national scale addressed two of the more active social movements at that time, raising the political stakes of civil disobedience in those arenas (trespassing vacant property and objection to compulsory military recruitment). Quite unexpectedly, the increase in legal sanctions did not prevent squatting, but rather the opposite—the numbers of SSCs continued to soar. Accumulated experiences of the squatters and their response to the criminalisation of squatting coalesced with a similar favourable context of urban and political conditions.

It is worth noting that the criminalisation of squatting undermined the accelerated rhythm of expansion taking place in Madrid over the precedent sub-cycle (1991–1995). Overall, the yearly average of new SSCs between 1985 and 1990 was 1.2, climbing to 5.6 between 1991 and 1995. The figure was 3.9 between 1996 and 2003, and rose again to 6.1 between 2004 and 2010. However, if we count together the two phases of 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). Moreover, the calculation of the active (non-evicted) SSCs per year shows that the average is 7.4 in 1985–1995 and 15.9 in 1996–2010. In spite of increased legal

**Table 2.2** Location of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid, 1977-2015

	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Cycle 3		Total	
	Number		Number		Number		Number	
	1977-1984	%	1996-2003	%	2011-2015	%	2011-2015	%
City centre	3	44.19	24	56.76	15	39.47	76	49.03
City periphery	5	37.21	3	20.27	16	42.11	47	30.32
Metro area	0	18.60	4	22.97	7	18.42	32	20.65
Total	8	100	31	100	38	100	155	100

Source: Author

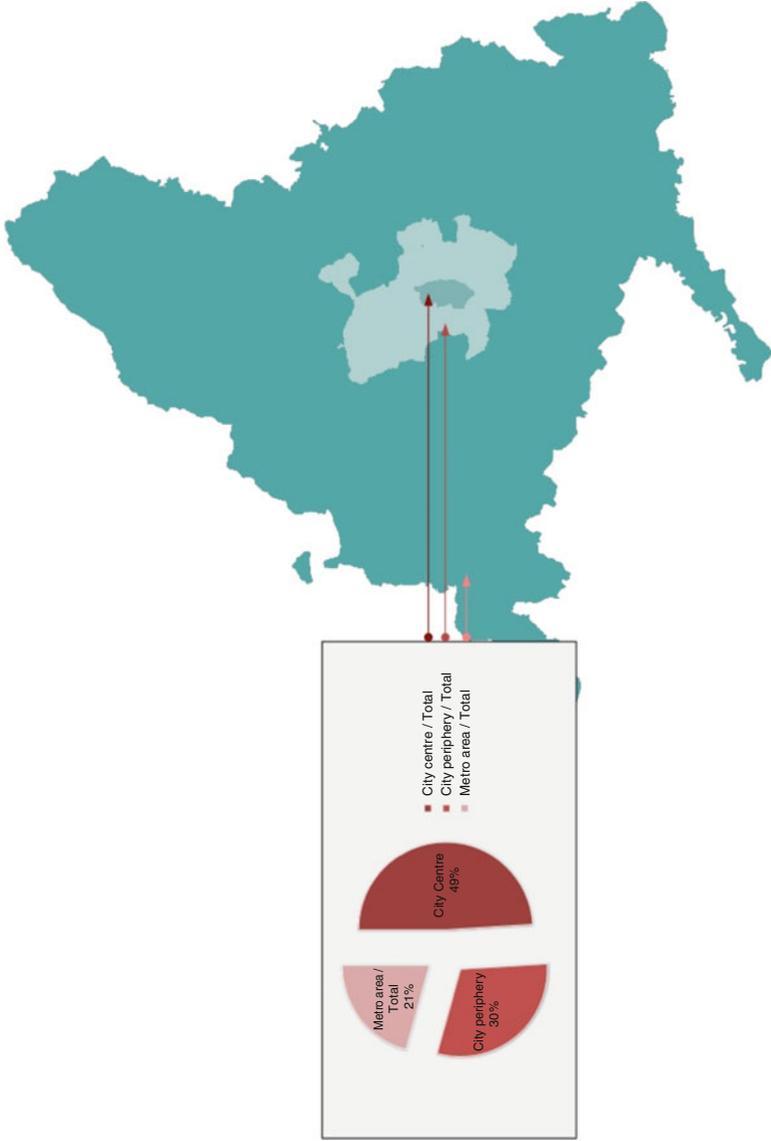


Fig. 2.2 Percentage of Squatted Social Centres according to location. Madrid, 1977–2015 (Source: Author)

difficulties and risks, these figures indicate that the criminalisation policy failed to stop this growth.

Regarding the urban political context of this period, the conservative governments (1989–2015) backed the globalisation process in Madrid and the entire metropolitan area. Multinational corporations, many of them resulting from the privatisation of public services, expanded overseas, especially in Latin America. Their headquarters were located in Madrid city centre and some (Telefónica and Banco Santander, for example) were behind landmark redevelopment operations on the city fringes, while other highly speculative plans were strongly fuelled by the local government (“Four Towers” in Paseo Castellana, for example) (Rodríguez 2007, pp. 55–69, 87, 144). This economic globalisation of the city gave birth to another period of real estate speculation to which squatters remained critical and active.

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 depended on migrants’ cheap labour as well as on qualified and badly paid Spanish youth and women. The construction sector benefited, for example, from land for new developments in the 12 most peripheral areas (PAUs) within the municipal boundaries of Madrid. Within this context, 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 rise of urban tourism, the city-backed processes of gentrification in the inner areas and the big infrastructural projects aiming to attract the Olympics, all engendered one of the most speculative real estate markets worldwide.

These conditions had two main consequences for squatting: (a) Housing and leisure became less affordable for more people, as the central zones became the main battleground for renovation, residential displacement and concentration of tertiary jobs; and (b) Private or corporate owners managed their urban properties in a more active manner in order to take advantage of changing prices and expected benefits. Therefore, many squatters declared that the opportunities for squatting waned, even as the vacancy rate remained roughly constant. Owners were more willing to sell or renovate empty buildings, so they took all 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 why in Cycle 2 only 4% of the squats lasted more than five years – although 35% (26 SSCs) of them were still able to remain between one and five 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 continued within the city centre (57%), particularly 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) where gentrification was faster (González and Pérez 2013). Thus, the migrant population and their conflicts over citizenship rights and documents became part of the political agenda of some SSCs (for example, *Patio Maravillas*, *Seco* and *La Enredadera*).

In this period SSCs enhanced their social and political profile so they became attractive to a broader metropolitan public in spite of their illegal status. The relative scarcity and privatisation of public spaces, in addition to unaffordable housing, formed the basis of the squatting movement. The squatting scene, building on its legacy of alternative music, social theatre, political talks and campaigns, environmentalism, feminism, free radio stations, hacklabs, and so on, grew by making new connections to urban movements of cyclists (Lorenzi 2011), street artists, participatory architects and urban gardeners, amongst others. The strength of the movement facilitated a strong wave of occupations in the metropolitan municipalities, especially in the sub-cycle 2004–2010 (13 SSCs, which represents 30% out of all the cases in that sub-cycle).

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 SSCs, helped people squat and published a textbook, a sort of advisory legal guide and technical toolbox, *Manual de Okupación*. 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). This was one of the few massive mobilisations that followed the decline of the struggles connected to the Global Justice Movement (GJM) between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s. Madrid was a simmering place for the GJM, with many activists travelling to global summits, opposing oil-wars, and spreading locally

anti-neoliberal struggles from all over the world such as the Zapatistas from Chiapas (Mexico). Squatters in Madrid pioneered alter-global campaigns in 1992 and 1994 (Martínez 2007), but new groups and political discourses became attached to SSCs (in particular, the three *Laboratorios*) following the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in 1999 in close connection with the late developments of Italian autonomism (Flesher 2014, pp. 62–72).

SSCs continued to broaden their political issues. Animal rights activists established themselves at some SSCs to spread their ideas, and vegetarian/vegan dining became quite popular in the squatting scene. LGBTQ activists also gained visibility and joined the SSCs milieu. At the same time, workers' demands, strikes and unions lost their earlier appeal among squatters, although some labour issues were supported, 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 together launched direct actions of protest. The RES started in 1998, but did not take place between 2000 and 2005. Significantly, a typical practice was to squat a building during the RES week of actions. Squatting was, then, a central stance in the autonomist identity of this coalition which replaced the defunct LA by 1999. Despite the prevailing decentralised and informal networks, the RES eventually served to merge squatters with other social movements beyond the walls of the squats.

The social democratic turn of the central government in 2004 had almost no impact in the repressive policies against radical activism. Social democratic and conservative elites cohesively shared support for the plans for urban growth in Madrid into the most vibrant global city and metropolitan region in Spain. Despite the ongoing repression of squatters, many SSCs remained active or sprung up. A few, such as the feminist and autonomist squat *Eskalera Karakola*, were even able to negotiate with the political elites and obtained a legal relocation to municipal premises with a low rental price, after eight 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. This is in addition to the legalisation of *Seco* in 2007 (Martínez 2014). Two other attempts at gaining legal status in that period failed, while, in parallel, most of the SSCs refused to initiate any kind of negotiation with the authorities. A new side effect of these cases is that some squats (for example, *Patio Maravillas*) obtained more positive and

**Table 2.3** Type of building of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid, 1977–2015. Percentages

	<i>Cycle 1</i>	<i>Cycle 2</i>	<i>Cycle 3</i>	<i>Total</i>
Office building	9.30	2.70	0.00	3.87
Commercial building	0.00	10.81	13.16	8.39
Residential building	27.91	40.54	26.32	33.55
School	23.26	5.41	10.53	11.61
Industrial building	23.26	25.68	7.89	20.65
Ground floor business	4.65	5.41	7.89	5.81
Other	2.33	5.41	13.16	6.45
No data	9.30	4.05	21.05	9.68
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Author

**Table 2.4** Property of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid, 1977–2015. Percentages

	<i>Cycle 1</i>	<i>Cycle 2</i>	<i>Cycle 3</i>	<i>Total</i>
State-owned	25.58	21.62	26.32	23.87
Privately-owned	51.16	63.51	60.53	59.35
No data	23.26	14.86	13.16	16.77
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Author

frequent media coverage, which counterbalanced the past tendencies to emphasise stigmas and stereotypes of squatters associated with marginalisation, deviated lifestyles and police repression—as happened, for example, in the eviction of *La Guindalera* in 1997 when more than 150 activists were arrested (Tables 2.3 and 2.4).

## GLOBAL CRISIS AND THE CONVERGENCE OF URBAN MOVEMENTS (2011–2015)

The shock brought about by the global financial crisis in 2008 led to an unexpected and deeper neo-liberal turn by the social democratic central government. In addition to reforming the labour market and retirement schemes, the central government bailed out many banks and cut back fundamental public services. During those years hundreds of cases of political corruption were disclosed. Austerity policies also contributed to driving unemployment rates above 20% (which were much higher for the youth, women and foreign migrants) and a dramatic rise in foreclosures, homelessness and poverty. Conservatives and social democrats together agreed in

2011 to prioritise the satisfaction of creditors' returns in the national expenditure over other social needs. These policy decisions and the general socio-economic decline helped undermine the legitimacy of the democratic regime among the citizenry, provoking the massive outcry known as 15M or *Indignados* movement in May 2011 (Castells 2012; Flesher 2014).

The squatters' movement also took part in the 15M 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 experienced activists, many new 15M groups launched the occupation of empty buildings in order to develop SSCs. Simultaneously, thousands of individuals and families occupied empty houses in a more discreet manner, although a wide array of cases were now being aired by the media. Already established SSCs also hosted 15M groups and the number of participants, visitors and activists in squats notably increased (Abellán et al. 2012; Martínez and García 2015). Furthermore, many saw the cultural, social and political activities carried on in SSCs—such as food banks, free shops, co-operatives, fund-raising activities, and so on—as an extension of the 15M movement, and not only as a replication of previous squats. Coverage of squatting frequently entered the national news.

Compared to previous decades, the media provided a more positive image of squatting, particularly emphasising the diverse range of needy people now partaking in squats. This was achieved mainly due to the activity of a specific SMO—the PAH (*Plataforma de Afectados por las Hipotecas*, Platform for People Affected by Mortgages). Born in 2009, the PAH gained public support, improved its organisation and created more local branches in close alliance with 15M groups (Colau and Alemany 2012). Initially, the PAH became known for their direct actions to blockade evictions of people unable to pay mortgages. In 2011 the PAH started to occupy buildings, which 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. PAH activists avoided the term “squatting” (*okupación*), preferring to use “liberated” or “recuperated” to describe their new occupations. They did this in order 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 lifestyle alternative. They pressured authorities to get a more

favourable legislation and provision of social housing, and banks or developers to obtain affordable rentals. They also embraced an open interaction with mainstream journalists.

This strategy effectively challenged 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 substantially influenced current generations of left-libertarian squatters which increased the diversity within the squatting movement and enhanced the public legitimacy of squatting at large.

Madrid was one of the cities where new squats were abundant. The aforementioned context merged with local circumstances to fuel the number of occupations. On the one hand, among the various neo-liberal policies underway, conservative governments and economic elites still persisted in efforts to bring the Olympic Games to the city. After three failed attempts, this implied public spending on infrastructure built for that purpose. There was an initial public support for the ‘Olympic dream’ before 2008. Afterwards, the public saw clearly the economic nightmares such megaprojects can bring. The construction and financial-related sectors commenced to decline. With vacancy rates again rising, there was an increase in both public debates in the media about this issue and more social contestation, such as squatting attempts. The real estate market was losing ground, but the prices of urban land and buildings did not decrease as quickly to make housing generally affordable for all (López and Rodríguez 2011).

The new housing struggles brought together political squatters, 15M activists and the new recruits of sympathisers and supporters. In that context, the conservative local government granted legal status to one more SSC which had been previously evicted from municipal premises—*Montamarta*, located in San Blas, a peripheral working-class area. More striking and devastating was the move by municipal and regional governments to privatise large portions of the already-limited stock of social housing. International financial investors known as ‘vulture funds’ took advantage of those deals, lobbied to change the regulations and bullied poor and old residents in order to evict them and redevelop the estates. This new front of urban disputes around dispossession contributed to a wider acceptance and tolerance of squatting as well. As a consequence, 2011 saw the highest number of new occupations (SSCs) in a single year (13) out of

the whole period 1977–2015. Cycle 3 is also the period with the highest number of yearly active SSCs (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 base (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 fuelled the displacement of vulnerable populations, as well as 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 2013). This intense cycle of mobilisations permeated the political contents of SSCs and new alliances with different social movements were also established.

## 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, squatting did not become an urban movement until the mid-1980s. However, after the institutionalisation and co-optation of many citizens' and workers' organisations in the 1980s, emerging urban movements such as those of the squatters were not initially a matter of concern for the local governments (Villasante 2008, pp. 237–241). On the contrary, urban elites were busy fuelling the construction industry with huge projects of urban renewal and development, transport infrastructure, urban tourism and global companies (Alguacil et al. 2011, pp. 120–127). The influx of international capital in Spain followed the incorporation in the European Union-to-be in 1986. In the first cycle (1977–1995), squatters responded to high vacancy rates and restructuring processes in specific urban areas and buildings, while enjoying a favourable legal framework. Some SSCs were able to consolidate their activity and to provide affordable space in the city centre for other social movements which, in turn, reinforced their mutual support and articulation. The unexpected long duration of some SSCs served as emblematic flagships and breeding places for the next generations of activists.

The second cycle (1996–2010) represents a surprising upsurge of squatting once the criminalisation framework was implemented in 1996. This

evidence contradicts the outcomes of repression observed in Copenhagen (Mikkelsen and Karpantschov 2001) and Berlin (Holm and Kuhn 2010). After a steady growth in the sub-cycle 1996–2003 SSCs grew again at higher yearly rates in 2004–2010. This pace is rooted in both past experiences and contextual circumstances.

On the one hand, squatters resisted the criminal charges by occupying new places immediately after being evicted. Still active SSCs from prior periods and a considerable number of long lasting squats in Cycle 2 represented hubs and exemplary landmarks for the coming generations of activists. Although most squatters refused to negotiate with the local authorities, three cases of legalisation did succeed. In addition, most SSCs shared their accumulated knowledge about legal strategies to litigate in courts in order to dismiss any evidence that could imply intention of dwelling and remaining on the premises. A few campaigns for legalisations and the coordinated protest actions launched by new autonomist organisations (RES) obtained more media visibility, which occasionally challenged the prevailing stigmas about squatting.

On the other hand, squatters became more articulated with the struggles around the GJM while facing the rising speculative bubble and globalisation of the major Spanish city-region. This protest wave fuelled squatting as one of the most urban-centred forms of direct action and civil disobedience, and forged new social alliances with international migrants in some cases. As usual, SSCs provided infrastructural and spatial resources to emerging movements. Intense activity in the construction sector and the increased real estate speculation made squatting more difficult to sustain for longer periods, 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 signalled by the uprising of the 15M/*Indignados* movement in 2011 which ignites the most intense period of squatting ever—in both newly initiated and still-open SSCs per year. The number of activists in squats was reinvigorated through the emergence of a distinctive housing movement (led by the PAH), as well as the coalitions between political squatters and the anti-neoliberal movement connected to the 15M. Together they helped reformulate the public outlook of squatting. More media visibility, more negotiations with local authorities and banks, and more public debate about the housing crisis, all contributed to giving squatting a boost. Despite the ongoing criminalisation, social tolerance and legitimisation of squatting was higher than ever before (Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5** Squatted Social Centres, protest cycles and socio-spatial structures in Madrid, 1977–2015

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Sub-cycle</i>	<i>No. SSC</i>	<i>Role in life cycle</i>	<i>Protest cycles</i>	<i>Socio-spatial structures</i>	<i>Interactions</i>
Cycle 1	1977–1984 (8 years)	8	Early squatters	Pro-democracy and workers' and citizens' movement	Local government: social-democrats	Libertarian claims in the transition to democracy
	1985–1990 (6 years)	7	Triggering of the squatting movement	Anti-NATO and new social movements (NSM)	Massive social housing and public facilities in city periphery	Rise of autonomist politics (LA)
	1991–1995 (5 years)	28	Growing of squatting	Anti-militarism and NSM	Economic crisis and industrial restructuring Local government: conservatives Megaprojects Urban renewal in city centre First wave of urban speculation	Emblematic 6 SSCs lasted more than 5 years Favourable legal treatment High and specific vacancy rates as opportunities
Cycle 2	1996–2003 (8 years)	31	Reaction to the criminalisation of squatting	Global justice movement	Local government: conservatives Economic boom and immigration Urban renewal and development in metropolitan area	Focus on city centre Continuity, growth and diversity to counter criminalisation
	2004–2010 (7 years)	43	Metropolitan expansion of squatting	Local coordination of struggles and emerging movements	Global and neo-liberal city: properties subject to intense speculation	Higher media visibility of new emblematic SSC 3 SSCs were legalised Vacancy contested More SSCs in peripheral and metro areas

*(continued)*

**Table 2.5** (continued)

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Sub-cycle</i>	<i>No. SSC</i>	<i>Role in life cycle</i>	<i>Protest cycles</i>	<i>Socio-spatial structures</i>	<i>Interactions</i>
Cycle 3	2011–2015 (5 years)	38	Broader legitimation of squatting	15M/ <i>Indignados</i> movement and housing movement	Local Government: conservatives (up to 2015) and “new leftist” social-democrats (since May 2015) Economic crisis and outmigration Austerity policies	Convergence with housing and anti-neo-liberal struggles Long duration (1–5 years) of more SSC More SSC in city periphery 1 SSC was legalised More negotiations with authorities and owners

Source: Author

Because the economic crisis devastated many working-class districts of Madrid, squatting, in tight association with 15M groups, developed exceedingly (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 that allowed squatting to also be present there.

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 the most targeted, and private properties were squatted persistently more often (59%) than state-owned.

The Madrid case demonstrates that the variations of squatting in terms of numbers, location and duration of the movement, depend not only on the political squatters' will to criticise capitalism and real estate speculation. Vacancy, especially due to the long process that urban renewal operations take, is one of the main socio-spatial opportunities for squatters, but not the only one. More than vacancy rates, it was the ups and downs of speculative operations that forced squatters away from many areas of the city centre in certain periods. As has been shown, the significant role of criminalisation signalled a change of cycle in squatting. In Madrid, the colour of municipal governments did not play a significant role in their usually antagonistic view of squatters, but it is worth noting that the few legalisations of SSCs over the three cycles occurred after negotiations with conservative governments. In general, the squatters' movement refused these agreements. However, the global financial crisis created new conditions and forms of squatting for housing with more activists favourable to legalise the occupations. The analysis of the third cycle also made clear that alliances forged between squatters and other social movements were at the roots of the survival and sharp rise of squatting. These alliances changed over time but SSCs were always very useful for other activists which, in turn, reinforced the public support to squats. Therefore, squatters' initiatives and responses to their environment were articulated to the aforementioned structural constraints more relevant in each period.

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## Squatting Cycles in Barcelona: Identities, Repression and the Controversy of Institutionalisation

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Squatting in the metropolitan area of Barcelona is analysed here by distinguishing protest cycles and larger sociopolitical contexts. We identify

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M.A. Martínez López (ed.), *The Urban Politics of Squatters' Movements*, The Contemporary City,

[https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95314-1\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95314-1_3)

the different social movements related to squatted social centres (SSCs) and, in the most recent time period, housing struggles. Why have SSCs hardly been institutionalised? How have squatting practices evolved throughout the years? We argue that specific political opportunity structures (POS) help explain the different tactics and orientations adopted by the squatters in four consecutive stages covering the period 1977–2013. In particular, legislative changes led to the first change, new forms of global mobilisations influenced the transition from the second cycle to the third, and the emergence of social movements at the national level was the most relevant context at the two final stages. Throughout the entire trajectory of the squatters' movement, severe state repression narrowed their political opportunities.

POS can be described according to six dimensions on which political opportunities may vary. These include (a) the degree of openness of the institutional political system to social movements, (b) the stability of political elites' alignment, (c) alliances between movements and elites, (d) propensities towards repression of movements, (e) the wider protest cycles at play, and (f) policies responding to movements' demands (Brockett 1991; Diani 1998; Kitschelt 1996; McAdam 1998; Tejerina 1998). These structures of the political environment can either encourage or discourage collective action. We interpret how the squatters' movement interacted with the POS by identifying the factors that influence squatters' strategies while focusing on the continuity of practices, which are related to the dimensions of the POS but not determined by them (Flesher Fominaya 2014; Munck 1997). If structural factors affect activists' choices, we should also consider the content of these choices and the decision-making processes (Piazza and Genovese 2016, p. 292). Thus, we argue that movements evolve through continuous experimentation and reflexive refinement of political ambitions and organisational forms (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014, p. 15).

Although the chapter shows that heterogeneity is characteristic of squatting, we argue that this complexity can be tentatively simplified into three components. The *okupa* movement refers to the opening, self-management and defence of SSCs. The housing movement, mainly represented by the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH, Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), occupies buildings with different purposes and tactics than the *okupa* movement. A third strand bridges territorialised struggles and more moderate social movements who use squatting to obtain access to space from institutions in order to create legal social centres. In the following sections we also discuss the configuration of these identities along the five cycles of mobilisation.

## METHODOLOGY

All the authors of this chapter have been engaged in various social movements, although only two of us have been regular participants in SSCs. Accordingly, we practise activist research ‘by distancing’ (Beaud and Weber 2003, pp. 46–52)—we are primarily social agents of our object of study, so we need to abstract from it in order to carry out research. However, as activist researchers, it is problematic to break fully with the perspectives that keep us directly involved and affect us as participants (Cattaneo 2006, 2008). For those less active in squatting, research on this subject is conducted ‘by approaching’—analytical distance can be more easily maintained, researchers are more open to surprises and may be more inquisitive in order to offer fresh interpretations of the events under scrutiny. Thus, this chapter is the result of a fruitful dialogue between research ‘on’ movements and research ‘for’ movements, as recommended by Haiven and Khasnabish (2014, p. 57).

The data on which this chapter is based comes from two main sources. The first one collects the contents of 20 interviews with activists from SSCs and written documents produced by squatters and other housing rights activists. This set of information is both first hand and secondary (Alfama et al. 2004; Gomà et al. 2003; González 2008; Ibarra et al. 2002). Most of it is dated from the early 1970s up to 2007.

The second source is a database of 368 SSCs that were active in the metropolitan area of Barcelona from 1977 to 2013. In creating this database we conducted 10 interviews with activists who have been involved in squatting for more than 20 years. Their selection aimed at covering the most significant municipalities (Barcelona, Terrassa, and Sabadell) and neighbourhoods of the main city (Gràcia, Sants, Nou Barris, Sant Andreu, and Ciutat Vella). They also represent part of the internal diversity within the movement, in terms of links with local residents, level of politicisation and ideological backgrounds. Quantitative data were also gathered from the publicly available Info-Usurpa archive—this publication is a weekly agenda of the activities offered by most SSCs since 1996. Info-Usurpa is a good proxy of active SSCs until 2011. For the period after 2011 we completed the information with online web and wiki pages, and also from Twitter and Facebook searches.

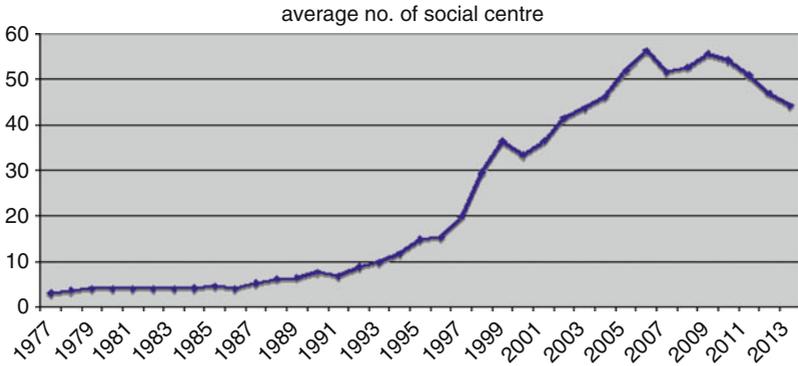
For the housing movement, three local nodes of the PAH were investigated—Barcelona, Sabadell, and Terrassa. They also represent some internal diversity within the PAH while being the most salient groups of the region in terms of membership, social support, and political impact.

Information was collected during 2014 through an ethnographic approach. For each node, a two-month period of both participant and non-participant observation was conducted by attending PAH assemblies, meetings and actions. In addition, we analysed their publications and the transcripts of 16 in-depth interviews (8 in Barcelona, 4 in Sabadell and 4 in Terrassa) in which at least one interviewee from each group held a leadership role and long activist experience.

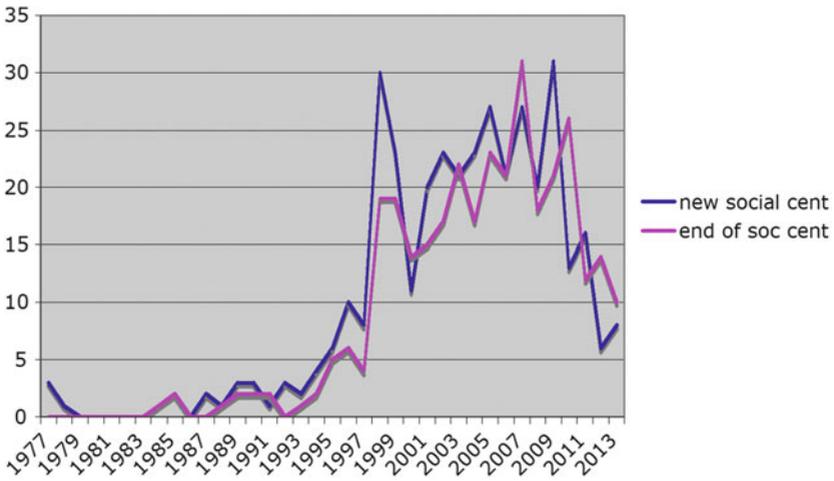
## CYCLES

The analysis of the database allows identification of cycles of SSCs according to:

- (a) Stocks (average of open and active SSCs per year)
  1. 1977 to 1991/1992: Less than 10 SSCs and a steady state of low growth.
  2. 1992–1993 to 1999–2000: More than 10 SSCs and a fast yearly growth.
  3. 2000 to 2006: More than 35 SSCs and slow growth.
  4. 2006 to 2013: Slow decrease from more than 50 to around 40 SSCs.
- (b) Flows (newly opened and evicted SSCs)
  1. 1977 to 1996/1997: Low activity, only increasing towards the end of the cycle.
  2. 1996/1997 to 2010/2011: High rate of new SSCs at first, high rate of evictions later, from 1998 (more than 20 evictions per year).
  3. 2010/11 to 2013: Limited activity in the flow of new occupations but also in the number of evictions (around 10 per year).
- (c) Ratio between flows and stocks
  1. 1977 to 1995/1996: Irregular figures due to small numbers of SSCs and very different survival rates.
  2. 1995/1996 to 2001: Flows/stock ratio reached 40% (for every 10 open and active SSCs no more than 4 new SSCs were squatted each year).
  3. 2001 to 2009/2010: High activity in new occupations and evictions, with the newly open occupations/active stock ratio above 50% and the evictions/stock ratio above 40%.
  4. 2009/2010 to 2013: Ratios fall again, with more evictions than occupations (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2)



**Fig. 3.1** Average number of open and active SSCs per year (stock) in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, 1977–2013 (Source: Authors)



**Fig. 3.2** Newly occupied and evicted SSCs per year (flows) in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, 1977–2013 (Source: Authors)

Despite these trends matching closely to our broader knowledge of the squatters’ movement, we do not identify cycles only according to quantitative calculations. Cycles are distinguished according to the mobilising capacity of social movements, squatters inclusive, and their articulation with the POS dimensions. Thus, we suggest splitting the third cycle of

ratios (2001–2010) into two periods, so we end up with five significant cycles of squatting in Barcelona: (1) Emergence and consolidation (1977–1995), (2) Golden age (1996–2000), (3) Maturity (2001–2005), (4) Bifurcation (2006–2010), and (5) 15M and austerity (2011–2013).

### *Emergence and Consolidation (1977–1995)*

After the fall of the dictatorship, politically motivated squatting emerged in 1977 and became consolidated as a social movement later on. The first example we know of took place in the abandoned rural village of Gallecs. The village was squatted by an environmental group aiming to protect the area from development plans. In the same year, residents of Nou Barris, a working-class and peripheral neighbourhood of Barcelona, sabotaged the space occupied by a highly polluting asphalt plant and reconverted it into the *Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris*. This SSC was legalised in 1998 and is still very active at the time of writing. Both pioneering cases, although politically motivated, were not counter-cultural in the same way as squatting at that time in other European cities (Steen et al. 2014). The first example of this type took place in 1984 when the punk collective *Colectivo Squat Barcelona* squatted a space in the city centre with the support of local libertarians and in close ideological connection to counter-cultural movements from abroad. Subsequent cases of squatting were mostly carried out by young anarchist and punk activists, and their SSCs did not last more than a few months. Over the 1980s squats were opened in Gràcia and Sants districts and in the nearby town of Cornellà de Llobregat. A strong libertarian identity pervaded the political campaigns of these squats opposing capitalism, militarism, fascism, patriarchy and homophobia (Joni 2011). In particular, the SSC *Ateneo Libertario de Gràcia* became a central reference for further organised squatting actions.

The early 1990s was the heyday of squatting in Gràcia. In 1989 the SSC *Kasa de la Muntanya* came to life after the occupation of the old military barracks. Despite numerous attempts at eviction and campaigns for criminalisation, this stronghold of the movement is still in the hands of squatters, almost three decades later. The Squatters' Assembly of Barcelona (an occasional coordination group) was also created in 1989, although its activity decreased substantially after the mid-1990s. The campaign against the Olympic Games in 1992 led to protests against speculation and the squatting of Murtra in Poble Nou neighborhood and the *Casal Popular* in Guinardó. It also forged tighter cooperation between squatters and

participants in other social movements based in neighbourhoods and universities, and also with feminism and anti-militarism (González et al. 2002).

University students, for example, occupied an old wine cooperative (La Garnatxa). Then, squatters took La Hamsa, located in the neighborhood of Sants and also a remarkable flagship of the movement during the 1990s. Solidarity with the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico and the campaigns against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and against neo-liberal elements of the European Union widened the involvement of squatters in the main mobilisations of the protest cycle of the time period.

We argue that the issue of identity was central during this first cycle. Squatters focused on creating counter-cultural political spaces and enjoyed broad social support. Their discourse was mainly oppositional (anti-capitalism, anti-militarism, anti-fascism, anti-homophobia, etc.), although they also participated in other local struggles. In this phase, which lasted 19 years, the average stock was 6.13 active SSCs per year—numbers grew steadily from less than 5 SSCs per year between 1977 and 1986, to less than 10 in 1987–1993, and then 15 in 1995.

### *Second Cycle: Golden Age (1996–2000)*

The second cycle was marked by the new penal code in 1996 (Asens 2004, p. 329) and national media coverage of the resistance to the eviction of the SSC Cine Princesa. Higher levels of repression required increased militancy. A surprising outcome of this period was the expansion and strengthening of the movement, as well as increases in public support. The criminalisation of squatting with fines and imprisonment was highly contested and controversial (Baucells 1999; Herreros 1999). In part due to the controversy, politically oriented squats (including houses squatted by political motivated squatters) grew from 40 to 150 between 1996 and 1998, according to a special judicial committee. Despite an intense campaign of evictions from 1998 to 2001, in 2003 there were around 100 squatted houses and SSCs in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, of which at least 28 were SSCs (González 2004).

A report by the National Police published in 1998 acknowledges the failure of the criminalisation of squatting:

In a broad sociological study on urban tribes of Barcelona, conducted in 1993 and updated in 1995, the existence of stable groups of squatters was identified, although it seemed by then to be in slight decline. Thus, how can we

explain its spectacular resurgence in 1996? Were sociologists wrong in their studies when they detected thirteen youth subcultures in Barcelona? Were squatters a tribe in stand-by that then decided to start protesting frantically after the inclusion of squatting in the Penal Code? Or are they a group manipulated by more extremist anti-systemic organisations that found squatting a well valued issue by public opinion and the media?

During this period the Catalan press tended to link squatters, identified by particular aesthetic dress codes, with violent behaviours (Barranco et al. 2003). Despite media coverage being ambivalent prior to 1996, as many news articles were still sympathetic to squatters, the efforts of the police to stigmatise squatters appeared effective in influencing the media. The eviction of the centrally located *Cine Princesa* confirmed a new regime of repression, but also highlighted the broad social support enjoyed by squatters, for instance, among neighbourhood associations.

Between 1996 and 1998, Barcelona's Squatters Assembly met regularly, becoming an important coordination mechanism for the movement. Two important media outlets were inspired by this assembly: Info-Usurpa, which provided bulletins detailing the activities of SSCs, and Contra-Infos, which produced news about squatting and other radical social movements. Spectacular actions such as the replacement of the Spanish flag with the squatters' symbol at the Catalan Government headquarters in 1998, and massive demonstrations (for example, in support of *La Hamsa* in 1997, and against speculation and fascism in 2000) illustrated the strength of the movement.

By the end of this cycle, the coordination of the movement declined while the identities of individual squats became increasingly differentiated. Nonetheless, by 2000 there were around 35 established SSCs. This second phase was marked by the highest growth rates and the fastest flows (53 new SSCs were opened and 38 were evicted in 1998–1999), with an average number of 26.9 open and active SSCs per year.

### *Third Cycle: Maturity (2001–2005)*

With the rise of the alter-globalisation movement around 2001, squatters widened and reinforced their networks with other social movements such as environmentalists, cooperatives, anti-racists, feminists, pacifists, and LGBTQ-activists (González et al. 2002; Herreros 2004; Martínez 2007). Squatters were more engaged in organising counter-summits and social forums, but the squatting movement lost some prominence as other social movements

became more active (González and Barranco 2007). Members from these emerging movements also started squatting, thus altering substantially the prevailing squatters' identity (Llobet 2004).

The cycle of international protests became visible in Barcelona around 2000 through mobilisations such as the Abolition of Foreign Debt Campaign, the Campaign Against the Military Parade, and the massive participation of Catalan activists in the Prague demonstrations against the World Bank and the IMF (Barranco and González 2001). In the following year, big demonstrations challenging the World Bank preceded further intense campaigns against neo-liberal Europe in 2002 and the Iraq War in 2003–2004. Squatters were active in all these movements.

State-led repression peaked in 2001 when a broad anti-terrorist operation was conducted against squatters, accusing them of cooperation with the armed Basque group ETA (Asens 2004; Barranco et al. 2003). Afterwards, active resistance to evictions that involved clashes with the police began to become scarce. State repression against squatters and other radical activists prompted squatters to generate more synergies with other social movements. For example, a demonstration took place in Barcelona on July 28, 2001, against both the attempt to evict SSC *Kasa de la Muntanya* and repression towards protesters at the Genoa summit. Other opportunities for coalitions emerged when alter-globalisation campaigns involved not only SSCs but also rented (non-squatted) social centres. Furthermore, squatters also collaborated with local neighbourhood movements concerned about real-estate speculation and gentrification (for example, a Platform Against Speculation was formed in 2002). Another indicator of the confluence between different movements was the Euro May Day demonstrations in 2004 and 2005 which protested the increase of precariousness in working conditions.

Squatters engaged in the movement against capitalist globalisation contributed with their approach and skills in civil disobedience and non-violent direct action. SSC *Can Masdeu*, located in the outskirts of Nou Barris, illustrates the mutual influence between squatters and global justice activism in which they were regularly engaged. *Can Masdeu* embraces a vague identity, avoiding the stereotypes about squatters propagated by the media during the 'golden age' of the movement? Their tough non-violent resistance to eviction in 2002, which lasted for three days, received positive reports in mainstream media. *Can Masdeu* enjoyed the support of neighbouring residents and many other organisations, such as schools visiting their community gardens, which helps explain the lack of eviction attempts since.

Former squatters in alliance with other activists also promoted rented, although horizontally self-managed, social centres such as *L'Ateneu de Sants*, *Ateneu Candela* in the municipality of Terrassa, *Rosa de Foc* and *La Quimera* in Gràcia, *Kasumay* in Ciutat Vella, and *El Brot* in Sant Andreu. The Catalan independentist left followed suit and set up their own, usually rented, autonomous social centres.

In 2004, there were two significant protests during which street confrontation met the eviction of SSCs *Hamsa* and *Pati Blau*. In addition, regarding the transformations of the spatial context and its contestations, the influence of squatters in the campaign against the 2004 Forum of Cultures was crucial to unveil the speculative urban operations behind that mega-event.

In total, 43.9 SSCs per year was the average record for this third cycle.

#### *Fourth Cycle: Bifurcation (2006–2010)*

The year 2006 witnessed the emergence of a new housing movement. It demanded specific policies such as affordable rents and the provision of more social housing. In contrast with most squatters, housing activists were willing to form legal associations and negotiate with local powers in order to achieve their goals. For them, squatting was also considered instrumental to those ends (González 2015, p. 99). We argue that this phase represents a watershed in the squatters' movement of Barcelona as some sectors foresaw the housing question as an opportunity to scale-up squatting to the mainstream.

In the context of a wider housing mobilisation movement, some squatters decided to engage in negotiation strategies to expand and de-stigmatisate the practice of squatting. SSC *Espai Social Magdalenes* (ESM), located at the city centre, pushed forward with this approach (Mir et al. 2013, pp. 55–56). Activists joined former residents subject to mobbing by the owner who wanted to redevelop the site into a hotel. ESM entered into a negotiation process with the city administration to stop the hotel project, allow tenants to stay, and obtain a legalised social space on the ground floor. These negotiations failed and were criticised by many as the experiences of squatters in other countries indicated that it would facilitate the eviction of squats opposed to negotiation.

Struggles against real estate speculation and affordable housing shortages were reinvigorated by ESM (Taller Viu 2006). ESM was also part of a campaign aimed at occupying vacant blocks in central Barcelona intending to confront institutions with an outcry for social housing. This vision for scaling up squatting for housing to broader audiences was largely inspired

by similar movements in Rome (Mudu 2014). A platform for housing related to this approach, *V de Vivienda*, gained momentum with crowded sit-ins across numerous Spanish cities. Just a few years before the outburst of the global financial crisis, this mobilisation channelled the grievances of the precariat in the midst of an intense real estate bubble.

Mass media reporting on squatting and a new wave of criminalisation contributed to widen the divide between SSCs and housing activists (Dee and DeBelle 2015). The volume of news on *okupas* was comparable only to the criminalisation period of 1996–1997 (DeBelle 2010, p. 149), but this time politicians stigmatised *okupas* in order to avoid public debate on housing in spite of increasing social discontent on the matter (DeBelle 2015). Thus, while the housing movement hardly gained attention by the media, stories around *okupas* multiplied, most of them in a negative and stigmatising tone.

The attempted criminalisation of *okupas* was driven by a discourse of moral panic. On February 4, 2006, a policeman was injured by a flowerpot thrown off the rooftop of the squat *Anarkopenya*. This building was squatted in 2002 and its activity was limited to rave parties. Although the Barcelona City Council owned the building, they did not attempt to claim it back, surprising in a context of high eviction rates (GAC 2016). Processes of corruption and projects of state-led gentrification linked to the building were disclosed 10 years later by a journalistic investigation and a documentary film, *Ciutat Morta*.

Later, in July 2006, the eviction of the squat *La Fera* brought about severe disturbances. After the summer, in October, the community gardens and playgrounds of the Forat de la Vergonya square were also cleared after six years of self-management (Cattaneo, 2008, p. 46), leading to significant confrontations with the police. Meanwhile, politicians and the media intensified their stigmatisation of *okupas*. This period of criminalisation revived the latent image of the *okupa* from the ‘golden age’ and translated it in the following months into overwhelming police pressure on demonstrations and other protest actions. In January, an anarchist activist was arrested in a squat in Girona and sent to jail on terrorist charges. Tensions escalated further when in May 2007, the Barcelona Squatters’ Assembly called for a march to defend squatted spaces. Protesters were closely surrounded by police officers who also charged using an illegal weapon—the *kubotán*. One of the protesters punched a police officer carrying this weapon and was later sentenced to three years of prison.

It was not until September 2010, three days before the general strike that took place on the 29th, that a highly contentious squatting action took

place again. Radical sectors of different struggles squatted the Banesto Bank, in Plaça Catalunya, the square where people would camp during the following spring. These protests and larger networks of coalitions between activists, beyond those experienced in SSCs, represented the first social responses against the global financial crisis and austerity policies. By the end of this period we registered an average of 54.2 SSCs per year.

### *Fifth Cycle: 15M and Austerity (2011–2015)*

The fifth cycle was not initiated by squatters, but it represents yet another turning point for the praxis of squatting. The 15M movement deeply shook not only local but also national and international grassroots politics. Housing activists had popularised sit-ins in public squares as a repertoire of action over the previous years, before the occupations of squares in May 2011. Radical squatters rapidly disseminated their experience with self-management among the thousands gathered at Plaça Catalunya. Demonstrations and occupations of public squares occurred across Spanish cities, not only in Barcelona. Recruits came from all walks of life and from various movement backgrounds. In addition, many new squatting initiatives were planned at the squares (Martínez and García 2015).

The violent eviction by the police of the protest camp in Plaça Catalunya went viral through social media and mainstream outlets. After one month of occupation, activists decentralised their assemblies to neighbourhoods and towns across Catalonia. When 15M assemblies called to blockade the Catalan parliament one month later, the media again engaged in intensive criminalisation of activists (Salmerón 2014). In response, a massive rally was held, with 190,000 participants.

Mobilisations in this cycle revolve around the austerity policies implemented by the conservative Partido Popular. Another general strike on March 2012 reproduced a more traditional repertoire of class struggles, although 15M activists also joined the strike enthusiastically. The police charged peaceful crowds standing in Plaça Catalunya, causing panic and later, clashes. Until late that night, barricades were erected in the city centre while people expressed their rage against austerity policies. Throughout the next few months, over 100 activists from independentist, communist, anarchist, and autonomist milieus (many engaged in squats) were arrested (Molano 2015).

Meanwhile, other repertoires of action emerged. For example, Sants' neighbourhood associations had warned the municipal authorities that they would squat *Can Batlló*, an abandoned factory earmarked for a luxury

redevelopment, if their claims were not heard by June 11, 2011 (Bernardos and Costa 2015). The threat was effective and a few days before the end date the major gave the keys to the association. Since then around 200 people self-manage that municipal property, while development plans unfold. *Can Batlló* hosts a library, archives, workshops for printing and repairs, a housing cooperative, and so on.

Another significant landmark was the SSC *El Banc Expropiat*, located in a banking office in Gràcia. It was squatted in late October 2011 and was run by a coalition of anarchist squatters and new activists from the 15M movement. *El Banc Expropiat* represents an example of inclusivity and radicalism, as a space where basic libertarian values are promoted by a very heterogeneous mix of people, including immigrants and children. Both cases show two rising trends related to squatting: institutionalised social centres in historical buildings and SSCs in banking offices.

During this cycle, evictions of well-known and well-attended SSCs took place, such as the fifth eviction of *La Rimaia*—one of Barcelona's leading SSCs, very much involved in the 15M. This eviction took place in May 2012, just before the anniversary of 15M. The following year, it was the turn of *Can Piella*, another prominent SSC, which connected urban and rural squatting. With the help of their neighbouring farmers who used their agricultural machinery, barricades were set up around the house to impede police access. During the year the police also sealed off many SSCs to impede certain activities from taking place.

By February 2014, *La Carboneria*, an SSC at the city centre with an active political agenda, was evicted as well. By mid-2014, there were already eight squatted banking offices in Barcelona, such as *l'Entrebanc*, *La Vaina*, *La Porka*, *La Industria*, *El Rec*, and *La Industria*, among others. Most of them were located in the Eixample neighbourhood, the main middle and upper class district with little history of previous SSCs. During the first half of 2014 there was an average of one new squat per month. These projects are, as the squatting movement has always been, quite diverse. Counted together with the *Casal Tres Lliris* (squatted as part of the campaign to stop *El Banc Expropiat's* eviction), over a dozen banking offices have been squatted to date.

Another episode of conflict and solidarity was the eviction of SSC *Can Vies* in May 2014 that led to massive riots throughout Barcelona and protests all over Spain. In *Sants*, street protests lasted for a week. The building had been occupied for 17 years and held an important position in the neighbourhood's recent popular history. *Can Vies* squatters reacted also by launching a

crowdfunding campaign to reconstruct their partially demolished building during the eviction. They requested 70,000 euros and received almost 90,000 euros to pay for judicial expenses and the reconstruction of the SSC. The potential of two sectors of the squatting movement united: the antagonism of the *okupa* movement combined with mass popular discontent succeeded in bringing the eviction to a halt, while the cooperativists and the institutional sector of the squatting movement made symbolic and concrete gestures of solidarity, such as the crowdfunding initiative, where activists from both movements blended.

Street confrontations in Barcelona were for many years an essential part of the initial *okupa* repertoire of action. However, in this cycle police repression targeted them in particular. After the wave of evictions in 2012–2014, repression has focused on individuals related to those spaces and other libertarian collectives (GAC 2016). Since late 2014, over five ‘anti-terrorist’ operations have been conducted throughout Spain. Several SSCs and houses were raided in Barcelona, Madrid, Palencia, and Granada. There have been 67 arrests so far, based on accusations of taking part in an anarchist terrorist organisation. Indeed, the Catalan police have increasingly recurred to the logic of war and the criminal law of the enemy to repress the growing popular discontent (Salmerón 2014).

These police operations fit into a broader criminalisation of social unrest through several changes in the Spanish Penal Code brought in from 2015. Indeed, one of these, the ‘gag law’ severely restricts civil liberties, as NGOs, professional organisations, the EU and the UN have all pointed out (Table 3.1).

## THE *OKUPA* IDENTITY AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF SQUATTING

As we have seen, during the second cycle the squatters’ movement displayed a strong anti-speculation critique and a radical view of self-management. After the 2000s, with the birth of the alter-globalisation movement, the *okupa* identity lost its appeal for many, who turned to other political identities even when performing squatting actions. This is the ‘maturity age’ of SSCs when many new projects mushroomed, although the radical outlook of the movement became looser. In the ‘maturity age’ there were less confrontational direct actions and SSCs tended to last longer, with some becoming integrated in the daily life of their neighbourhoods.

**Table 3.1** Protest cycles, socio-spatial structures and SSCs in Barcelona metropolitan area, 1977–2015

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>No. of active SSCs (average stock per year)</i>	<i>Role in life cycle</i>	<i>Protest cycles</i>	<i>Socio-spatial context</i>	<i>Interactions</i>
Cycle 1 1977–1995 (18 years)	10 with slow growth and steady state	Early squatters Triggering of the squatting movement Metropolitan expansion of squatting	Pro-democracy and workers' and citizen movement Anti-NATO and new social movements (NSM)	Local government: social democrats Massive social housing and public facilities built in city periphery Economic crisis and industrial restructuring Mega-projects Urban renewal in city centre First wave of urban speculation	Libertarian claims in the Transition to democracy Rise of autonomist and libertarian politics Six emblematic SSC lasted more than five years Favourable legal treatment High and specific vacancy rates as opportunities Focus on Gràcia, Sants and Sant Andreu districts, plus some metro cities
Cycle 2 1996–2000 (5 years)	10 and fast growth	Reaction to the criminalisation of squatting Growth of squatting Increase in social support	Squatters as early risers of the global justice movement	Local government: social democrats Economic boom and increased immigration Urban renewal and development in metropolitan area	Continuity, growth and diversity to counter criminalisation Higher media visibility of new emblematic SSC Vacancy contested
Cycle 3 2001–2005 (5 years)	More than 35 and slow growth	Confluence of the squatter movement with other movements	Global Justice and anti-war movements Local coordination of struggles and emerging movements	Local government: social democrats Development of the global and neo-liberal city (Forum 2004) Properties subject to intense speculation	Strong <i>okupa</i> identity Hybridisation of the <i>okupa</i> identity with the alter-globalisation movement Growth of legal social centres from the independentist left More SSCs in city centre

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>No. of active SSCs (average stock per year)</i>	<i>Role in life cycle</i>	<i>Protest cycles</i>	<i>Socio-spatial context</i>	<i>Interactions</i>
Cycle 4 2006–2010 (5 years)	Slow decline from 50 to more than 40	Broader legitimisation of squatting for housing Squatting as a tool for other social movements	Early housing movement Students movement against Bologna (EU high education scheme)	Local government: social democrats Housing crisis and co-optation policies (progressive housing regional law)	Some attempts of negotiation with authorities and owners Bifurcations in the movement regarding legalisation and negotiation Emerging housing movement Highly contentious evictions
Cycle 5 2011–2015 (5 years)	More than 40, continuity and growth	Broader de-stigmatisation of squatting New wave of squatting by a new generation of activists	15M/Indignados Housing movement	Local Government: Conservative (up to 2015) and Radical social democrat (since May 2015) Economic crisis and outmigration Austerity policies	Convergence with housing and anti-neoliberalism struggles Inclusive strategies to fight back against repression and criminalisation Bank offices occupied as SSC and bank-owned buildings squatted for housing

Source: Authors

The third cycle (2006–2010) is marked by increased repression and internal splits. Those demanding the legalisation of squats, such as *Espai Social Magdalenes*, were strongly criticised by other squatters. These opposed the legalisation initiatives based both on anti-authoritarian/libertarian principles and on historical experiences of the demise of squatter movements in other European countries. The fourth cycle is characterised by a latent *okupa* identity, while squatting actions as popular responses to the financial crisis multiplied. Within this context, squatting achieved greater social support and legitimacy. The new repressive wave in this and the next cycle united squatters once again, especially from 2013 onwards around the evictions of *Can Vies* and *Banc Expropiat*. This recalls similar joint efforts in 1995 around the *Cine Princesa* and the opposition to the criminalisation of squatting.

As a consequence, we argue that the *okupa* identity holds an essentially defensive character. It gains momentum when a coordinated defence must be articulated to resist evictions. In other words, squatters were able to spontaneously create temporary organisational spaces and ties of mutual support to defend them without any need of hierarchical or centralising structures within the movement. It could thus be argued that SSCs in Barcelona put their ideological differences aside when their collective survival was challenged.

By 2006 the squatters' movement already comprised three generations of activists who had close relationships with each other. Many newcomers were previously involved in other non-squatted social centres or *ateneus*, in the de-growth movement, cooperatives, neighbourhood assemblies and alternative media (González 2008, p. 58). As some squatters from the first and second cycle started exploring other possibilities for social change beyond squatting, a more fragmented discourse emerged. Until then most of the squatters from Barcelona had shared a loose and informal consensus around the importance of non-negotiation.

Since the 15M, several attempts of negotiation have been made to avoid eviction or to obtain legal spaces without embracing the *okupa* identity. *Can Batlló* and *Ateneu Flor de Maig* are paradigmatic of the alliances between movements whose identities do not revolve around the *okupa* identity, but nonetheless use squatting as a tool for achieving their goals. Both are legalised social centres. The case of *Ateneu Flor de Maig* is significant because squatters helped neighbours to squat the property once the lease agreement was terminated in 2012. This action forced the City Council in 2014 to buy the building and respect its self-management by local residents. Another illustration of these mutual aid ties occurred

when *Can Batlló* made public statements to support *Can Vies* during the riots. Activists from *Can Batlló* got also involved in the reconstruction process and in fund-raising events held in solidarity with victims of the anti-terrorist repression. Thus, although the media and politicians use stereotypes of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ squatters to criminalise those who don’t negotiate, practical cooperation between legal social centres’ activists and squatters who refuse to legalise their spaces occurs quite often.

The housing movement represented by *V de Vivienda* first and the PAH later (Colau and Alemany 2012, p. 65) projected another identity for squatters during the last two cycles. Instead of *okupa* (with a preference for a non-conventional ‘k’) they endorsed the term *ocupa* (the conventional word for “occupy”). This movement might have contributed to de-stigmatise squatters in general in the mainstream media.

According to the Bank of Spain over 98,000 evictions of primary houses were executed between January 2012 and June 2014. The PAH reacted to this dramatic situation by blocking evictions, supporting evicted debtors, performing practices of civil disobedience and demanding legal changes. Squatting was later added to their repertoire as an urgent response to foreclosures. In the interviews we conducted, the Barcelona, Sabadell, and Terrassa PAH nodes conceive squatting mainly as a tool for self-help.

The majority of the interviewees justified squatting as a last resort: a means to solve the basic need of shelter in a context of rising unemployment and impoverishment. Squatting is thus framed as a way to recover housing for those with unbearable financial debts. PAH squatters only occupy bank properties as a way to recover what was already theirs. They do not see themselves as *okupas*. For them, squatting has the aim of forcing the bank to negotiate affordable rental contracts. Some interviewees also express their support for SSCs if the buildings were abandoned and state-owned, while others reproduce and reject the stigmatised image of the *okupa*.

Interaction between the PAH and the squatters’ movement happened behind the scenes, and some concrete actions show that both movements have cooperated with each other (Martínez and García 2015). The squatting of the 15-O building in Barcelona in 2012, for example, illustrates this cooperation. In 2013 the PAH Sabadell occupied three buildings owned by the public bank, SAREB, and then negotiated a deal for the persons involved in the action. The negotiation implied that activists left those buildings but that the 146 people who participated in the action would be re-housed elsewhere. The deal also implied that one of the buildings with 40 units would be managed by the Catalan government to provide further social housing (according to *La Vanguardia* and *Europa Press*, 9/9/2014).

## CONCLUSIONS

Squatters were pioneers in fighting real estate speculation and neo-liberal urbanism many years before the current economic crisis unfolded. After more than 20 years of existence in Barcelona, the squatters' movement articulated around SSCs faced internal conflicts over the issue of legalisation. The differentiation process that resulted from these splits shaped the discourse of the housing movement that rose to prominence from 2009 onwards. Thus, we argued that previous squatters' experiences nurtured the new housing struggles. Later, they also contributed to the new waves of both squatted and non-squatted self-managed social centres following the mobilisations of the 15M movement.

The wide scale and visibility of the PAH seems to indicate that squatting nowadays enjoys more legitimacy than in previous periods of intense criminalisation. Both the PAH and the 'institutionalised squatters' in legal social centres are willing to engage in negotiations with the ruling classes. This distinguishes them from squatters opposed to any form of legalisation, and translates into a (relatively) favourable treatment. Yet, the recent 'gag law' includes several tools that facilitate the repression of squatters, and open the way for a severe increase of repression on all fronts.

Throughout the different cycles, the emergence of new movements destabilised previously existing squatters' practices, and then translated into new forms of collective action. The squatting practices described in this chapter have been shown to be tightly connected to their broader urban context. Squatting practices have both transformed the POS—by making squatting a fact and a possibility for many—and adapted to the POS of each cycle. Although we acknowledge the importance of internal conflicts, we have also highlighted the capacity of squatters to unite against external threats as a crucial factor of analysis.

In the last cycle, the use of anti-terrorist tools has allowed the Catalan police to combine the repression of the libertarian movement with attacks to some of the oldest squats in the city. This sort of repression isolates some sectors that are deemed a threat. It *produces* them as a threat, as an enemy. Also, at the time of writing the conclusions to this chapter, paramilitary-bailiff companies have appeared in Barcelona and mobbing practices in general are on the rise.<sup>1</sup> These illegal practices to protect property rights

<sup>1</sup> See <https://stopdesokupa.noblogs.org/> for a concrete example.

are being met with broader alliances between the three types of squatting categories we have identified, neighbours and other social movements.

It is hard to tell how differentiated squatting practices will evolve. But it seems that they will do so facing an unprecedented increase in violence. We argued that these repressive dynamics are tied to broader criminalisation processes against those excluded by necessity or choice. Notwithstanding our concern about this trend, we conclude that squatters have accumulated knowledge across cycles on how to overcome coercive mechanisms through mutual support. It is thus reasonable to expect that they will remain an important resource for other movements, which are now likely to become increasingly targeted by repression.

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