



THE URBAN POLITICS OF SQUATTERS' MOVEMENTS

edited by
MIGUEL A. MARTÍNEZ LÓPEZ



The Contemporary City

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The Urban Politics of Squatters' Movements

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The following chapters are all written by SqEK members. Since 2009 we have been meeting yearly in different European cities. An email list that comprises more than 150 subscribers serves as a platform for general communication in terms of solidarity and exchange of news, academic articles and various PhD dissertations. This exceptional network of activist research provides us with an exciting environment of cooperation and also with first-hand insights. Hence, many of our accounts about squatting in Europe are also substantially informed by the hundreds of participants in the SqEK meetings and the local activists from each city where we met. This book is thus made thanks to their invaluable hospitality, comments, analyses and

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Commons and Autonomy as Alternatives to Capitalism (2014); ‘Moving towards criminalisation and then what? Examining discourses around squatting in England’ in Squatting Europe Collective (eds.) *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles* (2013).

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Introduction: The Politics of Squatting, Time Frames and Socio-Spatial Contexts

Miguel A. Martínez López

The unlawful practice of squatting vacant buildings without the owner's permission again came to the fore in 2008, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Not surprisingly, higher numbers of unpaid mortgages, procedures of foreclosure and home evictions awakened the attention of the media in affluent and increasingly polarised societies where homeownership and financialisation were on the rise. Even though not uncommon in previous years, squatting was earlier usually considered an invisible and marginal phenomenon, but increasing rates and prominence of squatting in Western cities came to represent a visible indicator of the economic recession.

This last crisis of capitalism did not come all of a sudden. It followed from the devastating effects of neoliberal policies in place since the 1980s which curtailed housing benefits and privatised social housing stocks, among others (Mayer 2016). European Union authorities dictated austerity policies and enforced them on some state members with financial troubles (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, and Italy), even after some of these had experienced a decade of spectacular economic growth (in particular, Spain and Ireland). The same medicine of cutbacks, privatisation, deregulation

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and commodification of all kinds of goods and services (Lazzarato 2012) had been administrated by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the WB (World Bank) to Latin American and Asian countries in previous decades, with poor egalitarian results (Davis 2006). At the same time, the free flows of international capital targeting the sovereign debt of the weakest countries were also involved in massive investments in global real estate speculation and financialisation (via mortgages) (Lapavitsas 2013, ch. 9), which was behind most of the processes of urban renewal, redevelopment and gentrification that expelled the poor, the precariat and the working classes from the core of urban life (Slater 2015). Spatial segregation and unaffordable housing affect migrants and refugees too, especially after the emergency waves of migrants of 2015 (Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2017). The combined effect was an increase in homeless people and marginalised groups seeing squatting as a feasible and reasonable last resort, regardless of its legal implications.

The social and political history of squatting, however, is not very well known. The occupation of buildings has been an enduring practice in many European cities over the past four decades, although each case has its own rhythms and forms of expression. Sometimes squatting is a reaction to the hardships mentioned above, but it is also a well-established repertoire of political protest by youth and leftist-anarchist movements. Any attempt to unveil the history of squatting must first deal with the challenges of media stereotypes and criminal prosecution. Secondly, squatting practices must be defined and demarcated. Slums (squatted settlements) can be confused with the occupation of empty buildings, but it is also a productive theoretical challenge to investigate similarities (Aguilera and Smart 2016). Thirdly, internal diversity within all forms of squatting in terms of social composition and motives needs to be clarified for external observers and commentators. Fourthly, local and historical variations also deserve more careful analysis beyond the simplistic characterisation of squatting as an illegal behaviour—especially because, under particular circumstances, squatting has also been legally accepted, regulated and normalised (Ward 2002), in the form of ‘adverse possession’ (Fox et al. 2015) as the rehousing of slum dwellers (Neuwirth 2006) demonstrates, not to mention the legalisation of particular squats in many European cities as we will see in the following chapters.

In this collective research we assume that all squatting has relevant political implications. Although many squatters’ primary motive is simply to meet their own housing needs, they tend to be supported by social organisations with a specific political agenda. Even individual and

clandestine practices of squatting with no connection to politically aimed groups may be interpreted as a reaction or contestation to the economic inequality engendered by capitalism and the political parties that sustain it. There are also squatting practices that remain covert for some time until activists run campaigns and establish multiple networks of solidarity to resist evictions (Martínez 2016). Squatted Social Centres (SSCs) of various kinds and ideological orientations, sometimes in combination with housing, represent the most visible expression of political squatting. SSCs are thus the public face of squatters as a protest movement (Martínez 2013). They make political demands related to the occupied buildings, the urban areas where they operate and urban policies at large. In addition to their critique of mainstream urban politics and capitalism, squatters active in SSCs develop a creative side (Holloway 2010)—self-management of their collective resources, direct democracy, non-commercial activities, and more egalitarian relationships than in the mainstream daily life. Squatters had long been responding to financial and speculative dynamics of capital in European cities, to housing shortages and to the limitations of housing policies, for several decades before the burst of the recent financial bubbles.

Such generalisations should not prevent us from detailed analyses of how contexts and squatters' practices evolve. Furthermore, we need to take into account how squatters see themselves, which is not always as part of a specific urban movement, as well as how are they seen by others. The occasional phenomena of fascist SSCs and the business of selling and renting out occupied buildings, for example, indicate that not all forms of squatting contest the reproduction of the capitalist city. Even when squatters' movements hold a progressive or left-libertarian view, their internal controversies about their relationship with the authorities (Martínez 2014), with other movements and with their surrounding neighbourhoods, suggest no taken-for-granted developments or outcomes. Some researchers point to internal contradictions, cleavages and discriminatory behaviours among some groups of squatters (azozomox 2014; Kadir 2014). Corporate reactions to the spread of squatters can also reinvigorate the criminalisation of homelessness and the securitisation of property, which results, for example, in anti-squatting companies (Dadusc and Dee 2015; Manjikian 2013).

This volume thus intends to shed light on the development of squatting practices and movements in nine European cities by examining the numbers, variations and significant contexts in their life course. We aim to reveal how and why squatting practices shifted and to what extent they engendered urban movements. The contributors have measured the volume and

changes in squatting over various decades as accurately as possible according to the available data, mostly by focusing on SSCs. These accounts are more exhaustive than previous research, but still the slippery nature of squatting requires broad estimates and interpretations. Furthermore, we do not believe numbers of squats speak for themselves. They are no more than one statistical manifestation of multiple social practices within opportunity and constraining structures. We therefore need to distinguish them, select the most significant ones, trace the social relations that link them all and propose a meaningful understanding of the whole. Our main advantage is that many of us are insiders in the field (we squatted or participated in squats), and we have frequently discussed our views with other squatters. SqEK (Squatting Europe Kollektive) has been the activist-research network that allowed us to exchange information, visit squats all over Europe and meet regularly, which forged an inspiring ground to supplement our own investigations of squatting. This volume also continues a series of four preceding books (Cattaneo and Martínez 2014; Moore and Smart 2015; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2017; SqEK 2013), one edited journal (<https://www.trespass.network/>) and various special issues in academic journals (for example, Piazza 2012; Polanska and Martínez 2016), each publication focused on a particular topic and theoretical emphasis. Here we attempt to compare systematically the cycles, contexts and practices of squatting in nine selected cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Rome, Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen, Rotterdam and Brighton). In the next sections I present the framework of concepts and debates that underpin this perspective.

ARTICULATIONS BETWEEN AGENCY AND STRUCTURE

Research on squatting commenced with some pioneering works (Bailey 1973; Corr 1999; Koopmans 1995; Mayer 1993; Priemus 1983; Wates and Wolmar 1980), but many case studies followed in the early 2000s (Adell and Martínez 2004; Mikkelsen and Karpantschhof 2001; Martínez 2002; Mudu 2004; Pruijt 2003; Ruggiero 2000) and later on, especially from 2010 onwards. Overall assessments based on comparisons across Europe have seldom incited researchers. Some authors highlighted that besides the provision of shelter, the practice of squatting may serve other combined or alternative purposes such as setting up counter-cultural and political venues, the preservation of threatened built heritage and urban areas, and the development of environmentally friendly and anti-capitalist lifestyles (Martínez 2013; Pruijt 2013a). It has also been noted that

squatters follow a cross-national pattern of DIY (do-it-yourself) and non-exploitative practices that paved the way for small-scale alternatives to capitalism despite the backlash against the squatters' movements in many European cities (Martínez and Cattaneo 2014, p. 245). A concise historical review of squatting in both Western and Eastern Europe has pointed to the opportunities for squatting-autonomous movements from specific sociopolitical systems, welfare regimes, ownership regimes and urban restructuring (Steen et al. 2014, pp. 6, 15–16), although it fails to recognise the transnational connections between North and South European squatters' movements.

One strand of research about squatting predominantly focuses on the squatters' agency and identity issues. This occurs, for instance, with the insiders' narrations of events within Amsterdam's squatting scene (Adilkno 1990), the ulterior interpretations of its decline according to the activists' 'narratives, strategies, identities and emotions' (Owens 2009, p. 18) and the analysis of everyday practices and attitudes that debunk prevailing myths and stereotypes (Kadir 2014). Closely linked to them, constructivist approaches aim at disclosing the discursive strategies that different actors (journalists, politicians, academics, think tanks, NGOs, squatters, etc.) perform and their effects in terms of 'cultural wars' and 'revanchist politics' (Pruijt 2013b), 'securitisation policies' (Manjikian 2013) and mass media criminalisation (Dee and DeBelle 2015). Ethnographic insights from homeless migrants who squat (Bouillon 2009) and from squatters engaged in the politics of migration (Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2017), the cultural and ideological framings of political squatting (Moore and Smart 2015), and the squatters' 'legal wisdom' (Finchett-Maddock 2014) also crucially involve the dimensions of subjectivity, symbolic interactions and forms of representation (De Moor 2016).

Another strand of research pays more attention to the structures, contexts and external conditions that constrain the development of squatters' movements. Far from deterministic approaches such as those in which every social practice is a mere expression of dominant values, material distributions of resources and legal stipulations, most of these studies explore the articulation of squatters' agency with social, political and spatial contexts (Cattaneo and Martínez 2014; Dee 2014; Holm and Khun 2010; Koopmans 1995; Mayer 1993; Pruijt 2003; Mudu 2004; Piazza and Genovese 2016; Polanska and Piotrowski 2015; Steen et al. 2014). Squatters mobilise as an organised and collective response to those contexts, but they also mobilise their subjective aspirations, their symbolic and material

resources, and their alliances with other social movements and groups. They do this in a strategic manner—that is to say, actions are decided according to the evaluation of the existing circumstances and performed within their boundaries—not as a mechanical or direct reaction to particular grievances. The different ways squatting is used as a means of protest (alternative housing, emergency shelter, artistic venues, SSCs, etc.) show that there are significant conditions that may affect activists. Additionally, variations of strength and membership over time suggest external influences can also hinder squatters' capacities. Despite being able to name common traits of squatters' movements across Europe, we must acknowledge, too, the differences in the structural contexts they face.

As Koopmans (1995, pp. 9, 149) notes: 'The development of social movements is best understood by focusing on the availability of political opportunities for mobilization, rather than on the intensity of grievances among their constituencies, or on their organizational strength and resources. . . . The theory must consider why, within the constraints set by their environments, social movement activists consciously choose one strategy and not another.' Opportunities for mobilisation may stem from structures other than the political—social, spatial, economic and cultural. Moreover, activists' agency entails strategic choices and actions as well as social networks in which they become empowered—allies, opponents, recruits, sympathisers, supporters, and so on. Accordingly, this book investigates the articulation of socio-spatial and political opportunities for squatting, on the one hand, and the squatters' strategic choices, on the other, with the number of effective squats one of their most salient outcomes. We add a historical perspective by borrowing the notion of 'protest cycles' in order to understand how structure–agency articulations fluctuate over time.

PROTEST CYCLES

The notion of 'protest cycle' usually refers to specific periods of time when different social movements, organisations and conflicts intensely challenge the political order—without necessarily ending up in a revolution (Tarrow 1994, p. 263). Increased numbers of people participating in collective action and innovative repertoires of protest are features of every wave of mobilisation. The main traits of protest cycles or waves are the following: 'heightened conflict, broad sectoral and geographical extension, the appearance of new social movement organisations and the empowerment of old ones, the creation of new "master frames" of meaning and the invention of

new forms of collective action' (Tarrow 1995, p. 92). In their metaphorical meaning, 'wave' relates to the rise and fall of protests as a whole, while 'cycle' implies the return of periods of many protests after periods on the wane.

This social movements approach focuses on the time frames of generalised disorder when the magnitude of protest remains above the average compared to other periods and their decline (Kriesi et al. 1995, p. 113). It does not deal with 'short-term fluctuations' or the 'development of single movements', but with 'large-scale protest waves whose intensity, scope and longevity force members of the national polity to take sides' (Kriesi et al. 1995, p. 113). However, nothing prevents likewise examining cycles for particular movements. The protest cycle approach promises to reveal the ties between the movement under observation and other social movements. Thus, as we will show in the coming chapters, many authors prefer to distinguish periods, phases, stages or 'internal life-cycles' of the squatting movement, when its relation with wider protest cycles is not evident. Notwithstanding the above, the terms 'cycle' and 'waves' are still frequently used when observers are able to identify peaks and valleys of the movement activity in relation to influential contexts. Assuming these warnings, the protest cycles approach enables us to understand the changing manifestations of social movements according to other movements and (mainly) political contexts. This is particularly important for the analysis of squatting given its often-underground development which makes it harder to recognise its long history of accumulated experiences. An excessive concentration on the movement itself might miss essential content of its mobilisation and its specific singularity within the whole set of protest events, mobilisations and contextual conditions simultaneously at play.

According to Kriesi et al. (1995, pp. 117–119), protest waves tend to last from 10 to 15 years. Tactical innovations occur in the early stages, peak development and conflicts are present towards the middle or during the last half of the cycle, and movements decline in terms of radicalisation when they face dilemmas regarding their institutionalisation and the split-up of their SMOs (Social Movement Organisations). In the European cases (Germany, Netherlands and Italy) studied by Kriesi and colleagues, squatting appeared as one of the most confrontational and innovative tactics until they were tamed by the state powers.

Similarly, Koopmans (1995, pp. 148–155) suggests a model of protest cycle analysis with an initial phase followed by the expansion and growth of the protests, which would lead to their weakening or even disappearance.

For him, the categories of ‘novelty’, ‘size’ and ‘militancy’ would define the components of agency in each phase, while ‘facilitation’, ‘repression’ and ‘chances of success’ would be the structural dimensions that interplay with the movements’ agency. Initially, ‘novelty is the most important base of power. Because the public at large is not yet mobilized, pioneer movements attract few participants. . . . Violence is also not an attractive option because the public and the media have serious moral objections’ (Koopmans 1995, p. 150). Squatting is thus considered one of the novel, unconventional and confrontational forms of protests that can spark protest cycles. In the phases of expansion and growth, more formal and professional SMOs tend to take the lead because they have more sustained resources such as members and funding, their leaders are more identifiable and their actions more predictable for the media and the authorities. In these phases, ‘tactical innovations like site occupation and squatting lose their ability to surprise, are no longer attractive to the media, and authorities learn to deal with such actions more effectively’ (Koopmans 1995, p. 151). From there movements could only move forward by relying on increased numbers, increased militancy, strong identities or strong alliances with established political actors. This is the period when movements are more likely to split ‘over strategy, and the moderate and radical wings are increasingly separated’ (Koopmans 1995, p. 152) and the dilemmas between institutionalisation and radicalisation usually end up with the decline of the protests and movements.

As our case studies reveal, squatters’ movements in many European cities do not fit perfectly well in Kriesi’s and Koopman’s models. Its long duration throughout various decades and its different alignment with protest cycles demands special attention to the ways it expands, vanishes or survives. The boundaries of internal cycles of the movement may be defined by alliances with other movements, economic cycles, urban dynamics and diverse social compositions of the squatters’ movement.

Owens (2009), for example, argued that any ‘objective decline’ is inserted necessarily into a narrative where some events are interpreted as signs of decline, even immediately after the early defeats, and some others as continuous success, even at the late phases. In the case of Amsterdam’s squatting movement, ‘the cultural side of the movement grew dramatically in the 90s, as the movement’s centre moved towards larger cultural centers . . .[and] explicit political activities in the movement waned’ (Owens 2009, p. 39). According to him, this shift is explained by the placeless and increasingly globally bound connections of radical politics in

the city, without assuming any inherent tendency to fade out within the movement.

The rise of the alter-globalisation movement in the late 1990s and the transnational contestation to the Iraq war in 2003 (Scholl 2012) indicate how European squatters became more involved in protest cycles beyond their own cities. This, in turn, reinforced their resilience in Italy (Mudu 2004) and Spain (Martínez 2007) or animated the focus on squatted and autonomous non-squatted social centres in the UK (Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006; Chatterton 2010) and Poland (Piotrowski 2014).

Regarding the temporal discontinuities of squatting movements in Western and Eastern European cities, Steen et al. (2014, pp. 9–13) compare first the social movements of 1968 and the ‘youth revolts’ of the 1980s: ‘Instead of pacifist 1960s flower children or radical activists fighting for a certain victory, disenchanted and disillusioned youths with ‘no future’ rose up. . . . The revolting youth seemed to have lost faith in society: in the welfare state, political parties, the economy, the trade unions, popular culture, etc. The denounced grand political programs and the idea of (workers’) revolution and instead sought to establish small, liberated islands for experiments with autonomy and self-management’ (Steen et al. 2014, p. 9). Conversely, Katsiaficas (2006, pp. 1–9) observes more continuity between the New Left of the 1960s and the autonomous movements of the 1980s and 1990s in Central Europe. Although he does not examine similar developments in Spain, France and UK, for example, squatters and other autonomous activists belong to a long-term wave of antisystemic movements who ‘seek to change governments as well as everyday life, to overthrow capitalism and patriarchy’ (Katsiaficas 2006, p. 8).

Steen et al. identify cycles of squatting according to decades (1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s) and the predominant cultural content of each cycle (optimism/pessimism, theoretically-oriented/action-oriented, hippies/punks, pacifism/militantism). They only mention state repression (‘the growing strength of the police apparatus that often made the 1980s tactics seem obsolete’: Steen et al. 2014, p. 13) and the links with the alter-globalisation movement in the 1990s and 2000s as explanations of the shifting cycles (Flesher and Cox 2013). Although I agree with their general assessment about the capacity of the alter-globalisation movement to synchronise squatting and autonomous struggles all over Europe, repression is just one of the various aspects of the political process and other contextual circumstances that influenced the short life cycles of squatting in each city. Koopmans (1995, pp. 170–173), for example, describes the origins of the

Berlin squatters' movement according to the process of radicalisation of both national (anti-nuclear campaigns) and local (citizens' initiatives critical with urban renewal plans) struggles once moderate demands and conventional repertoires of protest did not achieve much success. In particular, he points first to the political instability of the Berlin Senate in the early 1980s and their inconsistent, hesitant and contradictory responses to the radicalisation of squatters (Koopmans 1995, p. 175). Eventually, the interactions between squatters and authorities were marked by concessions, legalisations and harsh repression to the radical wings that concluded with the 'terminal institutionalisation' (Pruijt 2003) of the movement. However, Koopmans was not able to follow up the cyclical resurgence of the movement due to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, this time without internal splits about the issue of legalisation but ending up in another long period of institutionalisation and calm. In the following chapter we will see that the ups and downs of squatting in Berlin are more the exception than the rule, although the analytical insights provided by Koopmans are very valuable to identify key opportunities and constraints for the development of squatting.

SOCIO-SPATIAL STRUCTURES

Concerning the notions of 'contexts' other than the political process, and 'socio-spatial structures' the literature is not very explicit. The latter is hardly mentioned as such (Soja 1980, p. 208; Nicholls 2011, p. 192) but can be defined as the sets of relationships resulting out of processes of social construction of space and time. These processes are driven by the dominant configurations of class, ethnicity and gender, among other social divides. Socio-spatial structures are not merely the spatial distribution of social groups, but also the configurations adopted by the production, conception and transformation of spaces and places. As Harvey (1996, p. 231) points out, 'the social constitution of spatio-temporality cannot be divorced from value creation or, for that matter, from discourses, power relations, memory, institutions, and the tangible forms of material practices through which human societies perpetuate themselves.' Political interactions, thus, would be an essential component of socio-spatial structures. Therefore, urban movements participate in the creation of socio-spatial structures but are also constrained by them. Opposition to the dominant socio-spatial structures and the intention to change them is expressed within the opportunities and possibilities of the political, economic, social and cultural environment in which movements operate.

In applying this perspective to our subject, instead of conceiving every squatted building as the outcome of the sole decision of activists (agency) or the volume of squats in every period as the mere sum of individual cases (elements), we should explain the broader relations and process that produce such outputs. For example, the interactions of squatters with the housing market, the urban plans, the local and supralocal authorities, and the community organisations in a particular urban area would shed more light on the variations of squatting than just the estimation of the housing needs or the activists' intentions. Housing vacancy and housing policies are two of the main socio-spatial conditions that facilitate or constrain squatting but can hardly explain the rise and lifespan of a squatters' movement without considering activists' strategic choices according to a broader political and urban environment.

Some theoretical proposals emphasise the 'polymorphy of socio-spatial relations' (Jessop et al. 2008, p. 396) and argue for an articulation of 'structuring principles' such as territory, place, scale and networks. In a similar vein, Pickvance (2003, p. 105) calls for 'the concentration on the political context in which urban movements developed. This recognized that urban movements are not spontaneous responses to objective inequalities or deprivations but form more easily under certain social and political conditions than others.' For him there are relevant contextual conditions that favour or constrain the movement's capacity: the process of urbanisation itself, the state intervention on collective consumption (including the co-optation and the funding of civic organisations), and the general economic and social conditions (due to the cyclical occurrence of crises and periods of relative affluence and growth) (Pickvance 1985, pp. 40–44).

Mayer (2006, 2016) pointed out the context of economic globalisation that has transformed urban politics due to city-branding strategies, the construction of mega-projects, shrinking municipal budgets, the outsourcing of public services and the competition between cities for attracting capital investment. As she indicates, this 'is the political and socio-spatial environment which has reconfigured the fault lines that furnish both opportunities and constraints for social movements' (Mayer 2006, p. 204). Nevertheless, movement activities also shape this framework. Therefore, both the activists' consciousness and tactics should be considered in order to explain their outcomes (Fainstein and Hirst 1995, p. 198).

Similarly, social movements scholars define 'political opportunity structures' (POS) by highlighting the openness of, or access to, state institutions, the cohesion of the elites, state repression, political alliances, media coverage

and recognition, and, for some, also the subjective perception of those opportunities and constraints by the social groups involved (Tarrow 1994; McAdam 1996; Meyer 2004). As far as I know, there are only a few attempts to bridge the above conceptions in the research of urban movements (Franzén 2005; Jacobsson 2015; Nicholls et al. 2013; Weinstein and Ren 2009) apart from the works already mentioned about squatting (Cattaneo and Martínez 2014; Dee 2014; Holm and Khun 2010; Koopmans 1995; Mayer 1993; Pruijt 2003; Mudu 2004; Piazza and Genovese 2016; Polanska and Piotrowski 2015; Steen et al. 2014).

Some authors focus on the specific urban renewal regimes and housing policies in order to assess the evolution of every squatting movement in particular cities. This is what Pruijt (2003, 2014) argued in his comparisons between Amsterdam and New York. In contrast to the prevailing assumptions in most social movements studies, the long duration of urban squatting, especially for housing and counter-cultural purposes, is explained by Pruijt (2013a, p. 50) according to Castells' (1983) claim that squatters satisfy collective consumption and promote the city as a use value against commodification which, in turn, would not entail a specific expiry date. Notwithstanding, Pruijt admits that 'political squatting' and 'conservational squatting' follow a more classic life dynamics of evolution with radicalisation, institutionalisation, co-optation and identity loss at their ending stages. This fate would not apply so easily to 'squatting as an alternative housing strategy' and to 'entrepreneurial squatting' because 'squatting has the unique property of combining self-help with demonstrating an alternative and a potential for protest' (Pruijt 2013a, p. 50). However, since SSCs frequently combine political and 'entrepreneurial' traits (and, often, residential functions too) no regular pattern could be deduced from Pruijt's assumptions.

For Holm and Kuhn the long-term dynamics of the squatters' movement in Berlin was determined, above all, by the 'broader urban political context' (2010, p. 644). Thus, they unveil how squatting underscored different urban struggles among or independently from other urban movements while facing urban restructuring plans, the housing shortage, property speculation and the displacement of low-income residents. Again, legislative shifts that made squatting subject to a more effective prosecution and crucial political events such as the unification of Eastern and Western Germany, shaped the urban protest cycles. Interestingly, a higher repression of squatting in Berlin radicalised its most autonomist branch but did not result in new occupations.

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

Ownership regimes and especially the legal ambiguities or conflict among owners may facilitate both the occupation and the duration of squatting initiatives (Holm and Khun 2010; Piotrowski 2014; Steen et al. 2014, p. 15). The depopulation and revitalisation of city centres and the industrial restructuring of certain urban areas (Martínez 2013) are also identified as powerful drivers of squatting moves:

When squatters moved to the city centres in the late 1970s, cities across Western Europe had been in the midst of a prolonged crisis, struggling with a long list of socioeconomic ills. ... Large urban areas were left empty, thus forming an ideal material basis for squatting. Autonomous activists turned to the inner cities as an arena for experimenting with autonomy and self-management. However, as squatters brought new life to the inner cities and deindustrialisation led to a definitive turn to service industries, the city centres became popular again and capital returned. ... As a result, in many cities, squatting moved from the city centres to the outskirts. (Steen et al. 2014, p. 16)

The preference for city centres recalls Lefebvre’s demand of the right to occupy the core of the city in terms of access to facilities, services and sufficient social density to guarantee an ‘urban democracy’ for all (Lefebvre 1969, p. 31). Squatters aim at locating SSCs in the most convenient buildings and urban areas for people to gather, meet and develop activities. Even if they are expelled from the city centres when speculative dynamics are too pressing on their activity, squatters would select urban locations among the available ones most appropriate to their goals. Regarding squatting for housing, the centrality issue may be less relevant, although communal forms of squatting tend to prefer close locations of squats with each other, in the same neighbourhoods.

These insights invite us to ask more in-depth questions: Which contexts are most significant in order to understand social movements' performance and evolution? How structured are those contexts? What kind of specific interactions between movements and contexts do occur? To what extent are contexts able to determine, shape and condition social movements?

PRACTICES AND MOVEMENTS

One underlying assumption of this book is that squatting practices may shape squatting movements, and they often do. This is not always straightforward. From the point of view of some squatters, their actions are not directly intended to protest the housing question—markets and policies. Squatters can be sometimes isolated from other activists and their particular squatting experience may last just a few hours or days. There is also the problem of merging movements focused on the housing question and movements with broader anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and anti-racist views. The practice of squatting can hold very different meanings for them, especially in tactical terms—what is squatting for? Squatted houses and SSCs are thus quite different practices when not combined in the same buildings, which can also be a source of conflicts. A social movement, finally, is not merely defined by the activists' concerns and demands. Their practices must be socially aggregated, as they continually interact with other political actors and threaten established power structures. A social movement 'consists of a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of repeated public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. . . . The claim-making usually engages third parties such as other power holders, repressive forces, allies, competitors, and the citizenry as a whole' (Tilly 1999, p. 257).

The practice of squatting is sufficiently contentious to contribute to the history of urban movements—in short, social movements concerned about spatial issues in cities. However, many practitioners feel reluctant to place it at the centre of their social and political activity, so that their belonging to a so-called squatters' movement seems more an academic construction from without. Even when squatting is considered a political protest, activists may be devoted to many other forms of protest, which makes it difficult to name their movement just based on their claims of buildings and urban spaces. It is easier to share a squatters' identity at the peak periods of confrontation, when the movement grows to an unexpected size and the topic of squatting enters the media and political agendas. This leaves the valley periods of low

profile conflicts, but continuous lawbreaking practices sustained by interrelated groups, hidden. Indeed, all the squatting movements studied in this book experienced heydays but also decades of not-so-noisy development. Some non-squatted autonomous social centres can also be identified as key participants in the squatters' movements (see the chapters about Brighton and Copenhagen, for example). Internal divisions or coexistence of different squatting movements in the same city may indicate more the crucial issue of legalisation (and the role of social movement organisations) in a usually very radical and decentralised movement, than its subsidence.

The historical review of the squatters' movements in European cities, according to the available data and our contextual interpretations of their significance, makes it possible to distinguish to what extent there was a persistent and politically disruptive activity performed by squatters. As Tilly observes (1999, p. 267), occupations are paradigmatic unconventional direct actions which are seldom used by social movements compared to their dedication to persuade authorities and audiences of the activists' legitimacy. Therefore, the continuation of squatting appears as a powerful indicator of a movement's activity, although it is examined here according to the social and political processes in which they occur. Squatters raise flags and banners, write pamphlets and magazines, highlight dereliction and urban speculation, open the doors of the squats to campaigners and speakers of all sorts, claim the right to housing and to the city centre for the homeless, for those on the verge of expulsion or already displaced from their original neighbourhoods, and also for all who are marginalised in the economic, cultural, social and political spheres. All these practices are intimately associated to the specific squatting actions, and can even occur in absence of effective squatting if squatters are taking a rest while preparing the next occupation. In sum, we conceive the existence of squatting movements beyond the mere aggregation of squatting practices, when continuous challenges to the status quo are performed by all who squat and support squatting (the website <http://planet.squat.net/> represents well how squatting movements and other social movements in favour of squatting communicate their practices and political discourses).

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The main source of empirical information we used in all the case studies is a database in which every single squat has been identified as extensively as possible. Although different contributors created their databases with different contents or selection criteria, we all initially reproduced and expanded

the categories set by Mudu (2004): name, location, dates of occupation and eviction, type of space, duration of previous vacancy, ownership, political networks involved, activities developed, legal circumstances, negotiations with owners or authorities, use of the space after the eviction, fascist assaults, organised groups making regular use of the space, provision of housing, websites and other sources of information about the case. Analyses of the data were subject to our distinct local knowledge of the movements' scenes, political conflicts and urban transformations. Some SqEK members contributed to disseminate the statistics collected in the databases via interactive maps (see <https://maps.squat.net/en/cities> and <https://www.trespas.network/>).

The nine cities/metropolitan areas examined here were selected because the squatting movements were active there for some decades. They also represent cases in different European countries, different urban sizes, and different strengths and configurations of the squatting movements. Researchers are all familiar with the squatters' scenes in their respective cities and most of us have presented our interpretations at the SqEK meetings yearly. Finally, we decided to write collectively the three chapters of the second part of the book (focused on cycles, institutionalisation and housing) as a way to discuss the systematic comparison of all the case studies, instead of leaving the editor with that sole burden. These final chapters, then, provide an overview of the whole book and can be considered the general conclusions of our research, although not necessarily shared by all who do not author every chapter.

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