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PERSPECTIVE OF PROTEST CYCLES AND  
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### **ABSTRACT**

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

**KEYWORDS:** Squatting, Protest Cycles, Socio-Spatial Structures, Madrid.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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

The main empirical source of information for this research is a database of all the cases of Squatted Social Centres [SSC] located in the metropolitan area of Madrid (municipality and region) from 1977 to the end of 2015. In total, 155 cases were collected. It must be noted that 8 cases took place between 1977 and 1980 in a period where there was no squatters' movement known or identified as such. However, the pioneering cases worked indeed as "social centres" and were inspirational for the following generations of activists. The territory under examination is the "metropolitan region of Madrid" which is limited here to the Autonomous Community of Madrid (6.5 million of inhabitants in 2013) where the main municipality is located (with an official figure of 3.2 million residents in 2013).

This research is also based on 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 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. The engagement of the researcher in various social centres also resulted in supplementary data from minutes of internal assemblies and workshops, informal talks and observational notes. In addition, the author was involved in the collective organisation and facilitation of a series of 14 debates held between 2008 and 2010 with the explicit aim of reconstructing a political memory of squatting in Madrid. Finally, once collected, the dates of occupation and eviction, and the location of the squats were entered into a freely accessible on-line map<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. EARLY SQUATTING AND REGIME TRANSITION (1977-1995)

In Madrid and in most of the medium-size and big Spanish cities (Barcelona, Zaragoza, Valencia, Bilbao, etc.) the squatters' movement as such started up around 1984-1985 (Martínez, 2002, pp. 141-146). Political squatting implies an explicit claim of every occupation as a social or political form of protest in addition to making actual use of the squatted premises. By hanging banners in the windows, painting the doors and walls, using the symbol for squatting which was popularised in other European countries, delivering pamphlets to the neighbours or presenting the case to the mass media, the claim goes

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<sup>1</sup> <http://maps.squat.net/en/cities/madrid/squats#>

public. However, occupations of buildings also occurred before the mid-1980s. In the case of Madrid, the influential citizen movement had taken over around 500 houses between 1976 and 1978 (Alía, 1978). More significantly, trade-union anarchists also occupied buildings that mostly they considered as their legitimate properties which were confiscated by the fascist Francoist regime (1939-1975). Thus, an active network of “Ateneos Libertarios” (AL), not all in squatted premises, emerged in the years of the transition to democracy (1975-1979) (Carmona, 2012, p. 479-489; Seminario, 2015, p. 23-77). The activities they hosted, their political commitment and openness to local residents were very similar to the subsequent SSC, although the AL never identified themselves as belonging to any ‘squatters’ movement’ –but to the anarchist one. One of those squatted AL in Madrid (AL Villaverde) has remained active in the same building until nowadays while all the others were evicted before the mid-1980s. The influence of the pioneering AL was also noted in the first three self-managed and squatted “cultural centres” (Mantuano, Migrants and Bulevar) that were opened in the transitional period again without a very explicit reference to a common identity as a squatters’ movement. Although they illegally trespassed in the buildings and some of their members were in contact with European squatters, these experiences were above all attached to their local neighbourhoods, to anarchism, to counter-culture and to other social movements, without focusing much on the issue of the occupation itself.

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

The occupations starting in 1985 were launched almost by the same first collective of squatters and took place at the inner city. Initially, only one (Arregui y Aruej) was able to last three months but was located in the border of the city centre, in a peripheral working-class area (Puente de Vallecas), which propitiated the inclusion of many activists from the surroundings. The second squat (Minuesa) which became the flagship of the movement lasted 6 years and commenced due to the solidarity of political squatters with the workers of a former printing company who demanded compensations before the demolition works for a redevelopment of the area. This squat was also the first to name itself as a SSC in a conscious move aimed to imitate the labels used by the Italian squats that some activists visited at those years (Seminario, 2015, p. 176). Regular contacts with Italian, German and Dutch autonomists expanded the range of political activities which became part of their identity and intersected with it -talks, video-forums, campaigns, etc. such as anti-fascism, international solidarity, anti-repressive campaigns, autonomous women’s movements, etc.

However, the immediate urban and social environment of Madrid squatters obliged them to focus first on youth unemployment, a rising social housing shortage in close parallel to the first wave of intense urban speculation (due, mainly, to the incoming international investments in a more stable and liberal political regime, once Spain became member of the European Union in 1986: Naredo, 1996) and the plans for urban redevelopment of various parts of the city centre (for example, the former industrial area and old rail tracks next to Minuesa, named as Pasillo Verde). Minuesa and other long lasting and emblematic SSC also served as a meeting point for organising rallies and protests such as the solidarity campaign with people imprisoned by drugs abuse, the refusal to NATO (with triggered huge mobilisations until a national referendum was held in 1986) and the opposition to the military conscription which was the most challenging social movement to the state between 1989 and 2002.

Another significant aspect of the emergence of squats in Madrid is that the movement focused mainly on properties located in the city centre. Most were industrial buildings (57% out of the total between 1985 and 1990, and 23% in 1977-1995). Years later, some of them were effectively transformed into residential buildings. Political occupations, then, intended to interrupt the process of capitalist re-production of the urban space in which disuse and abandonment were usual stages prior to further redevelopment. By making use of the buildings, squatters explicitly questioned and challenged real-estate speculation while simultaneously making visible and satisfying their own spatial needs. Besides, their central location (71% in 1985-1990 and 39% in 1991-1995) facilitated a sounding showcase of their urban and political claims. The soaring prices of land and housing that came to a peak around 1990 (Naredo, 1996) prevented other social movements from access to central spaces where to meet and disseminate their demands.

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

The expansion of squatting between 1991 and 1995 is outstanding -28 cases of SSC. The frequency of new squats, the high density of their mutual informal connections and the increasing attention paid to them by the local mass media, contributed to the configuration of a new urban movement. Although most of the attempts of squatting in the cycle 1977-1995 lasted less than 3 months, 8 cases were able to survive up to 2 years, and 6 remained occupied more than 5 years. While between 1985 and 1990 almost all the squats took place in two areas of the city (the city centre, mostly in the downgraded neighbourhood of Lavapiés, or nearby; and the peripheral Puente de Vallecas, although very close to the city centre), between 1991 and 1995 they expanded to many other districts and, in particular, to another critical area of the city centre (Tetuán, with 21% of the new squats in 1991-1995) where immigration, poor residents, old buildings and drug trafficking were more

concentrated. High vacancy rates in these areas coexisted with the inception of plans for urban renewal and the rehabilitation of buildings. In total, 10 abandoned or vacant schools regained life due to political squatters during the cycle 1977-1995 (which represented a 23%) while empty residential buildings became more alluring for squatters from 1991 onwards (26% in the period 1977-1995). The displacement of schools to the city periphery or their shutting down due to new legal requirements in terms of equipment, safety and size, created a specific spatial opportunity for squatting. Other industrial and residential buildings were threatened with demolition in the light of the renewal plans, involving the construction of wider streets and road capacity, as it was the case in Tetuán.

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

### **3. CRIMINALISATION AND THE GLOBAL JUSTICE WAVE (1996-2010)**

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

Regarding the urban political context of this period, the conservative governments (1989-2015) backed the globalisation process in Madrid and the whole metropolitan area. Multinational corporations, many of them resulting from the privatisation of public services, led overseas expansions, especially in Latin America. Their headquarters were located in Madrid city centre and some of them (Telefónica and Banco Santander, for example) were behind landmark redevelopment operations in the city fringes, while other highly speculative plans were strongly fuelled by the local government ("4 Towers" in

Paseo Castellana, for example) (Rodríguez, 2007, pp. 55-69, 87, 144). Intense inflows of international migrants made Madrid their main arrival node, sometimes in transit to other Spanish or European cities. Officially registered immigrants represented 3.4% of the municipal population in 2001 and 16.9% in 2008 (Alguacil et al., 2011, p. 135). Since the mid-1990s, the economic boom was based on migrants' cheap labour force as well as on qualified and badly paid Spanish youth and women. The construction sector benefitted from the very flexible urban policies that provided huge pieces of land in 12 new residential and commercial areas (PAUs) within the municipal boundaries of Madrid –plus many more that mushroomed in the metropolitan municipalities. On the one side, housing prices escalated an official average of 48% in the city of Madrid between 2000 and 2006. On the other side, public housing supply diminished dramatically. A global class of well-off employees and investors, the rising of urban tourism, the city-backed processes of gentrification in the inner areas and the big infrastructural projects aiming to justify the candidature for the Olympics, engendered one of the most speculative real estate markets worldwide.

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

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

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

Madrid was a simmering place for the GJM or alter-globalisation movement with many activists travelling to global summits, opposing oil-wars and spreading locally Zapatism and anti-neoliberal struggles all over the world. Squatters in Madrid pioneered alter-global campaigns in 1992 and 1994 (Martínez, 2007), but new groups and political discourses became attached to many SSC (in particular, the three Laboratorios) since the Seattle demonstration in 1999 in close connection with the ulterior developments of Italian autonomism. Animal rights activists found SSC as adequate places to propagate their claims and vegetarian/vegan dining became quite popular in the squatting scene. LGTB and queer activists also gained visibility and joined some SSC. On the contrary, workers' demands, strikes and unions lost past appeal among squatters, although they were underpinned, for instance, by the campaign about female-migrant domestic-workers (in La Eskalera Karakola) or when anarchist unions joined the yearly Week of Social Struggles [Semana de Lucha Social Rompamos el Silencio, RES] where squatters, feminists, environmentalists and other activists launched altogether direct actions of protest. The RES started in 1998, but was not called for between 2000 and 2005. Significantly, a usual practice in every RES was to squat a building during the week of actions.

The social-democrat turn of the central Government in 2004 had almost no impact in the repressive policies against radical activism such as squatting. Social-democrat and conservative elites shared their cohesive support to all the plans of urban growth in Madrid as the most buoyant city and metropolitan region in Spain. Surprisingly, given the conservative opposition to progressive gender agendas by the local government, a feminist and autonomist squat (Eskalera Karakola) was able to negotiate its status and to obtain a legal relocation to municipal premises with a low rental price, after 8 years of squatting (1996-2004). In 2001 another school project hosted in a squatted building (La Prospe) also reached an agreement of legalisation with the conservative party in the regional government. They added to the successful legalisation of Seco in 2007 (Martínez, 2014). Other two attempts for gaining legal status in that period failed, while, in parallel, most of the SSC refused to initiate any kind of negotiation with the authorities. A striking side effect of the few cases of legalisation is that some squats obtained a very positive and frequent media coverage which counterbalanced the precedent wave of stigmas and stereotypes of squatters associated to marginalisation, deviated lifestyles and police repression –as it happened, for example, in the eviction of La Guindalera in 1997 when more than 150 activists were arrested.

#### **4. GLOBAL CRISIS AND THE CONVERGENCE OF URBAN MOVEMENTS (2011-2015)**

The shock brought about by the global economic crisis in 2008 determined an unexpected neo-liberal turn taken by the social-democrat central government in Spain. In addition to reforms in the labour market and the retirement scheme, the central government paved the way for the bailout of many banks and the cutbacks in various public services. Over those years the mass media were already disclosing hundreds of cases of political which added to hiking unemployment rates beyond 20% (which were much higher for the youth, women and foreign migrants) and a dramatic rising tide of foreclosures, homelessness and poverty. Conservatives and social-democrats also agreed in 2011 to modify an article of the Spanish Constitution according to the instructions set by the European Union in order to satisfy the creditors' returns as a priority in the national expenditure. Most of these policy decisions and the general socio-economic decline contributed to undermine the

legitimation of the democratic regime among the citizenry and provoked the massive outcry of the 15M or Indignados movement in May 2011. The squatters' movement also took part in the 15M movement with specific urban manifestations and outcomes that differed significantly from previous periods (Martínez and García, 2015).

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Although the occupation of buildings was occasionally used as a repertoire of protest in the heydays of the citizen and pro-democracy movement of the late 1970s, political squatting only turned it into a continuous urban movement from the mid-1980s onwards which became a substitute to the abovementioned ones. However, after the institutionalisation and co-optation of many citizens’ and workers’ organisations in the 1980s, emerging urban movements such as the squatters’ were not a matter of concern for the municipal governments. On the contrary, the urban elites were busy by fuelling the construction

industry with huge operations of urban renewal and development, transport infrastructures, tourism and global companies (Alguacil et al., 2011, pp. 120-127) and the influx of international capital in Spain following the adherence to the European Union. Squatters made use of the opportunities open by the high vacancy rates and restructuring processes in specific urban areas and buildings, while enjoying a favourable legal framework. The unexpected long duration of some SSC served as emblematic example and breeding places for the next generations of activists.

A surprising achievement of my analysis is that the evolution of squatting was not substantially altered by the criminalisation framework implemented in 1996 –which is a completely opposed outcome of the criminalisation observed in Copenhagen and Berlin, for example: Mikkelsen and Karpantschov, 2001; Holm and Khun, 2011. After a steady growth in the sub-cycle 1996-2003 (with a yearly average of 3.9) SSC grew again at higher yearly rates (6.1) in 2004-2010. The explanation of this pattern has to do both with the past experiences and the contextual circumstances of the protest cycle and the socio-spatial structures. On the one hand, squatters resisted the penal persecution by occupying new places after being evicted. Active SSC from prior periods and still a considerable number of long lasting squats in Cycle 2 configured the hubs that served as exemplary landmarks for the coming generations of activists. Although most squatters refused to negotiate with the local authorities the legal condition of their occupations, a few cases were successful in that endeavour and most cases shared their accumulated knowledge about legal strategies in order to litigate in courts -basically, by dismissing any evidence that could imply intention of dwelling and remaining in the premises for ever. Campaigns for legalisations and coordinated actions by autonomist organisations (RES) obtained more media visibility that occasionally challenged the prevailing stigmas about squatting.

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

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

Since the economic crisis devastated many working-class districts of Madrid, squatting in tight association with 15M groups developed extraordinarily (42% of the cases) in the city periphery. Nevertheless, the initial opportunities of high vacancy in the central areas under

renewal created solid activist communities and networks associated to other social movements interested in using the free spaces supplied by SSC. Thus, squatting in the city centre was continuously intense and emblematic all over the decades and represented a stronghold for the self-reproduction of the movement. What is noticeable is that the processes of legalisations in Cycle 2 and the frequent negotiations in Cycle 3 which continued with the more favourable radical social-democrat government after May 2015, within the context of economic recession and residential emergency, contributed to alleviate the stigmatised media image of squatting and to enhance public tolerance towards the new occupations.

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