

CHAPTER 3

SQUATTING CYCLES IN BARCELONA: IDENTITIES, REPRESSION AND THE CONTROVERSY OF INSTITUTIONALISATION

Galvão Debelles, Claudio Cattaneo, Robert González, Oriol Barranco & Marta Llobet

Squatting in the metropolitan area of Barcelona is analysed here by distinguishing protest cycles and larger socio-political contexts. We identify 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; 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, 2014; Munck, 1997). If structural factors affect activists' choices, we should also consider the content of these choices and the decision-making processes (Piazza & Genovese, 2016, p. 292). Thus, we argue that movements evolve through continuous experimentation and reflexive refinement of political ambitions and organisational forms (Haiven & 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 & 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 article is the result of a fruitful dialogue between research ‘on’ movements and research ‘for’ movements, as recommended by Haiven & 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 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 1991/92: Less than 10 SSCs and a steady state of low growth.
2. 1992-93 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 1996/97: Low activity, only increasing towards the end of the cycle.
2. 1996/97 to 2010/11: 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 1995/96: Irregular figures due to small numbers of SSCs and very different survival rates.
2. 1995/96 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 2009/10: 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. 2009/10 to 2013: Ratios fall again, with more evictions than occupations.

[insert Figures 3 and 4 here]

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); 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 organized 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 of 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 (Gonzalez, Blas & Peláez, 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 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 five SSCs per year between 1977 and 1986, to less than ten in 1987-93, 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 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, who provided bulletins detailing the activities of SSC, and Contra-Infos, who 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 SSC. This second phase was marked by the highest growth rates and the fastest flows (53 new SSCs were opened and 38 were evicted in 1998-99), 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 & 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 & 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, Gonzalez & Martí, 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 28th 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 embraced 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 3 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 help 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-stigmatise 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 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. The volume of news on *okupas* was comparable only to the criminalisation period of 1996-97 (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 4th 2006, a policeman was injured by a flowerpot thrown off the roof-top 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, forthcoming). Processes of corruption and projects of state-led gentrification linked to the building were disclosed ten 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 (Catteneo, 2008, pp. 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 & García, 2015).

The violent eviction of the protest camp in Plaça Catalunya by the police 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 enthusiastically with the labour unions. 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 11th 2011 (Bernardos & Costa, 2015). The threat was effective and a few days before the end date the mayor 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, etc.

Another significant landmark was the SSC El Banc Expropiat, located in a banking office of 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 SSC 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 to take place.

By February 2014, La Carboneria, a SSC at the city centre with an active political agenda, got 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, 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 Liris (squatted as part of the campaign to stop El Banc Expropiat's eviction), over a dozen squatted 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 re-construction 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 2012-14, repression has focused on individuals related to those spaces and other libertarian collectives (Group Against Criminalization, forthcoming). 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 has 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.

[Insert Table 6 here]

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.

The third cycle (2006-10) 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 organizational 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, pp. 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 by 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 & Alemany, 2012, pp. 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 (Martinez & Garcia, 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 neoliberal urbanism many years before the current economic crisis unfolded. After more than twenty 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 (relative) 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 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 who 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.¹ These illegal practices to protect property rights are being met with broader alliances between the three types of squatting categories we have identified, neighbours and other social movements.

1

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

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, who can now become increasingly targeted by repression.

References

- Alfama, E; González, R; Vargas, G.; Peláez, L. (2004). La red crítica global en Cataluña en los albores del siglo XXI. VII Congreso Español de Sociología, Universitat d'Alacant, Federación Española de Sociología.
- Asens, J. (2004). La represión al movimiento de las okupaciones: del aparato policial a los mass media. In R. Adell and M. Martínez (eds.) *¿Dónde están las llaves? El movimiento okupa: prácticas y contextos sociales*. Madrid, Los libros de la Catarata.
- Baucells, J. (1999). L'ocupació d'immobles en el Nou Codi Penal, in Asamblea d'Okupes de Terrassa (eds.), *Okupació, repressió i moviments socials*. Barcelona: Edicions Kasa de la Muntanya-Diatriba.
- Barranco, O. and González, R. (2001). Los movimientos contra la globalización neoliberal. Una perspectiva militante, in Riera, M. *La Batalla de Génova*. Barcelona, El Viejo Topo.
- Barranco, O., González, R. and Martí, M. (2003) La construcció mediàtica del moviment okupa. Presented at the VIIth Congress de l'Associació Catalana de Sociologia, Reus.

- Beaud, S. and Weber, F. (2003). *Guide de l'enquête de terrain. Produire et analyser des données ethnographiques*. Paris, La découverte.
- Bernardos, Á. G., & Costa, M. I. (2015). La ciudad en disputa: crisis, modelos de ciudad y políticas urbanas en Barcelona. *Quid 16. Revista del Área de Estudios Urbanos*, (5), 39-68.
- Brockett, C. (1991). The Structure of Political Opportunities and Peasant Mobilization in Central America. *Comparative Politics*, 53, 253-274.
- Cattaneo, C. (2006). Investigating neorurals and squatters' lifestyles: personal and epistemological insights on participant observation and on the logic of ethnographic investigation. *Athen ea Digital* vol. 10, pp. 16-40.
- Cattaneo, C. (2008). *The ecological economics of urban squatters in Barcelona*. PhD thesis UAB Barcelona <https://sqek.squat.net/resources/>
- Cattaneo, C. And Tudela, E. (2014). El Carrer es Nostre! The autonomous movement in Barcelona, 1980-2012. In van der Steen et al., (eds.) *The city is ours*. PM Press, Oakland. Colau, A., & Alemany, A. (2012). *Vides hipotecades. De la bombolla immobiliària al dret a l'habitatge*. Barcelona: Angle Editorial.
- Debelle, G., (2010). Anàlisi crítica del discurs de textos periodístics de la premsa comarcal catalana sobre l'okupació. Master thesis coordinated by Soriano, J., presented at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Debelle, G., (2015). La stigmatisation des squatteurs dans les médias catalans. In *French Journal for Media Research*, 4/2015.
- Dee, E.T.C., Debelle, G., (2015). Examining mainstream media discourses on the squatters' movements in Barcelona and London. In *Interface*, vol 7 (1): 117-143.
- Diani, M. (1998). Las redes de los movimientos: una perspectiva de análisis. In VV AA, (1998). *Los movimientos sociales, transformaciones políticas y cambio cultural* (Coords. Ibarra, Pedro y Tejerina, Benjamín). Madrid, Trotta.

Flesher Fominaya, C. (2014). Debunking Spontaneity: Spain's 15-M / Indignados as Autonomous Movement. In *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, 14:2, 142-163.

Group Against Criminalization (GAC), (2016). Some recent mainstream media representations of squatting in Barcelona. In *Fighting for spaces, fighting for our lives: squatting movements today*, Edition Assamblage.

Gomà, R., González, R., Martí, M., Pelàez, L. Barranco, O. and. Brunet, D. (2003). Joventut, okupació i polítiques públiques a Catalunya. Col·lecció Estudis, núm. 11, Observatori de la Joventut, Secretaria General de la Joventut, Generalitat de Catalunya.

González, R. (2004). La okupación y las políticas públicas: negociación, legalización y gestión local del conflicto urbano. In R. Adell and M. Martínez (eds), *¿Dónde están las llaves? El movimiento okupa: prácticas y contextos sociales*. Madrid, Los libros de la Catarata, pp. 151-177.

González, R. (2008). Okupació i autogestió: una pràctica política juvenil?. *Nous Horitzons*, vol. 189 pp. 51-59.

González, R. (2015). El moviment per l'okupació i el moviment per l'habitatge: semblances, diferències i confluències en temps de crisi. In *Recerca, Revista de Pensament i Anàlisi*, vol.17 pp. 85-106.

González, R, Blas, A, y Peláez Ll. (2002). Okupar, resistir y generar autonomía. Los impactos políticos del movimiento por la okupación. In Ibarra, P. Martí, S. and Gomà, R. (eds.), *Creadores de democracia radical. Movimientos sociales y redes de políticas públicas*. Barcelona, Icaria, p. 187-218.

González, R. y Barranco, O. (2007). Construyendo alternativas frente a la globalización neoliberal. Resistencias juveniles en Catalunya. In Prieto, R. (ed), *Jóvenes, globalización y movimientos altermundistas*. Madrid, Revista de Estudios de Juventud.

Haiven, M., & Khasnabish, A. (2014). *The radical imagination: Social movement research in the age of austerity*. Zed Books Ltd..

Herreros, T. (1999). Introducció: el moviment okupa a finals del segle XX. In Assemblea d'Okupes de Terrassa (eds), *Okupació, repressió i moviments socials*. Barcelona, Edicions Kasa de la Muntanya-Diatriba.

Ibarra, P., Martí S., Gomà, R. (coords.). (2002). *Creadores de democracia radical. Movimientos sociales y redes de políticas públicas*. Barcelona, Icaria.

Joni, D. (2011). *Que pagui Pujol!: una crònica punk de la Barcelona de los 80*. La Ciutat Invisible, Barcelona.

Kitschelt, H. (1996). Political opportunity structures and political protest: anti-nuclear movements in four democracies. In *British Journal of Political Science*, 16, 55-85.

La Vanguardia y Europa Press, (09 de septiembre 2014) La Sareb cede a la Generalitat el edificio de Sabadell ocupado por 146 personas.

Llobet, M. (2004). Contracultura, creatividad y redes sociales en el movimiento okupa. In R. Adell and M. Martínez (eds), *¿Dónde están las llaves? El movimiento okupa: prácticas y contextos sociales*. Madrid, Los libros de la Catarata, pp. 179-203.

Manjikian, M. (2013). *Securitization of Property. Squatting in Europe*. New York: Routledge.

Martínez, M. (2002). *Okupaciones de viviendas y de centros sociales: autogestión, contracultura y conflictos urbanos*. Virus, Barcelona.

Martínez, M. (2004) Del urbanismo a la autogestión: una historia posible del movimiento de ocupación en España. In R. Adell and M. Martínez (eds) *¿Dónde están las llaves? El movimiento okupa: prácticas y contextos sociales*. Madrid, Los libros de la Catarata, pp.61-88.

Martínez, M. (2010). El movimiento de okupaciones: contracultura urbana y dinámicas alter-globalización. In Prieto, R. (ed), *Jóvenes, globalización y movimientos altermundistas*. Madrid, Revista de Estudios de Juventud.

- Martínez, M. & García, A. (2015). The Occupation of Squares and the Squatting of Buildings: Lessons From the Convergence of Two Social Movements. In *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*. Retrieved from <http://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1145/1107>
- McAdam, D. (1998). Orígenes conceptuales, problemas actuales y direcciones futuras. In P.Ibarra and B. Tejerina (eds.), *Los movimientos sociales. Transformaciones políticas y cambio cultural* (89-111). Madrid, Trotta.
- Mir, J., França, J., Macías, C., Veciana, P. (2013). Fundamentos de la Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca: activismo, asesoramiento colectivo y desobediencia civil no violenta. *Educación Social. Revista de Intervención Socioeducativa*, 55, pp. 52-61.
- Molano, P. (2015). Interview to Pablo Molano published by La Directa on the 19/02/2016 in an article called “Homenatge a Pablo Molano”, Retrieved from <https://directa.cat/homenatge-pablo-molano> [Abril 7 2017]
- Mudu, P, 2014. Ogni sfratto sarà una barricata: squatting for housing and social conflict in Rome. In Squatting Europe Kollektive (Cattaneo, C. & Martínez, M. eds.), *The Squatters' Movement in Europe*, London: Pluto Press.
- Munck, G., (1997). Formação de Atores, Coordenação Social e Estratégia Política: Problemas Conceituais do Estudo dos Movimentos Sociais. In *Dados* vol. 40 no. 1, Rio de Janeiro
- Piazza, G. & Genovese, V. (2016). Between political opportunities and strategic dilemmas: the choice of ‘double track’ by the activists of an occupied social centre in Italy, *Social Movement Studies*, 15:3, 290-304.
- Pruijt, H. (2003) “Is the Institutionalization of Urban Movements Inevitable? A Comparison of the Opportunities for Sustained Squatting in New Cork City and Amsterdam”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 27 pp. 133-157.

Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca. *Manual obra social la PAH.*

<http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/MANUAL-OBRA-SOCIAL-WEB-ALTA.pdf>

Salmerón, R. A. B. (2014). Guerra jurídica: gubernamentalidad de excepción sobre movimientos sociales en Cataluña. *Revista de derecho Penal y Criminología*, 4(11), 37-56.

Steen, B, Katzeff, A and van Hoogenhuijze, L. (Eds.) (2014). *The City is Ours. Squatting and autonomous movements in Europe from the 1970s to the present*. Oakland CA: PM Press,.

Taller Viu, (2006). *El cielo està enladrillado*. Retrieved from

<http://www.sindominio.net/violenciaurbanistica/?q=node/6>

Tejerina, B. (1998). Los movimientos sociales y la acción colectiva. De la producción simbólica al cambio de valores. In Ibarra, P. & Tejerina, B. (Eds.), *Los movimientos sociales, transformaciones políticas y cambio cultural*. Madrid: Trotta.