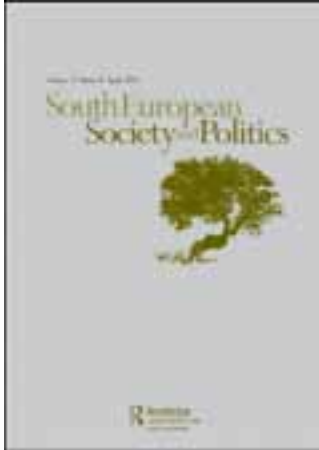


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The Squatters' Movement: Urban Counter-Culture and Alter-Globalization Dynamics

Miguel Martínez

Squatting in abandoned houses and buildings in Spanish cities has been a continuous occurrence since the early 1980s. CSOAs (Centros Sociales Okupados y Autogestionados/ Squatted and Self-Managed Social Centres) acquired greater public importance than buildings squatted only for housing purposes. Nevertheless, both forms of squatting have taken place simultaneously. This article delineates the main characteristics of this movement by taking into consideration: (a) spatial trends, (b) the ideological principles, (c) attempts at coordination and (d) the interrelationship with other social movements. This exercise develops a working definition of the squatters' movement in Spain which allows us to argue that its repertoire of protest and political objectives represents an innovation in the cycle of alter-globalization demonstrations which the squatters' movement has actively joined.

Keywords: *Squatting; Urban Movements; Counter-Culture; Alter-Globalization; Spain*

A rhizome establishes endless connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles.
(Deleuze & Guattari 1977)

The emergence of the squatters' movement in Spanish cities in the 1980s coincided with the first important crisis of the neighbourhoods' movement. The latter, a protagonist movement for a great part of the transition period between 1975 and 1982, has been studied by several scholars (Castells 1983; Villasante 1984) who have emphasized its combination of demands for collective facilities and democratic reform. In reality, although the practice of squatting was very common in earlier urban movements, these were composed of different generations (age cohorts) of activists (Villasante 1984; 2004). Squatting activists were mainly young people who started to adopt lifestyles and ideas that had spread through other European countries in previous decades and which they tried to imitate, albeit in a slightly diffuse manner.

Although clear lines of continuity may be identified between the events of May 1968 and the new 'alternative' social movements on which they had a substantial impact, this was not a somewhat delayed revival of the communitarian and libertarian spirit of that era (Bailey 1973; Fernández Durán 1993).

The practice of squatting in abandoned buildings was initially a way of finding spaces to strengthen the most radical aspects of the new social movements (NSMs) (conventionally reduced to environmentalism, pacifism and feminism), but also of other more fringe and alternative movements (students' and workers' autonomy, counter-information, anti-fascism, solidarity with prisoners, and international solidarity). It immediately spread as a movement with the characteristic features of an urban movement, an alternative political scene and counter-cultural practices that distinguished it from other social movements.

As we shall see later, only sensationalist reports in the media seemed to acknowledge the movement's existence in the mid 1990s. Social scientists have paid scant attention during the years of its long journey, a journey that began more than two decades ago. It is clear that this social movement has not mobilized large numbers of the population, as either activists or sympathizers.¹ However, it cannot be excluded so easily from the political and social analysis of our urban environments. Its relevance and significance lie in both the actual characteristics of the movement and its relationships with other movements and with the key problems of the social context in which it operates.

This article will affirm that the squatters' movement is an excellent example of an urban movement with a 'radical left' approach and, simultaneously, one of the areas to have undergone the strongest political and social 'counter-cultural' innovation, largely as a prelude to what has since developed into the alter-globalization movement.

Of all the alternative movements to have appeared during the last two decades in Spain, the anti-militarist movement and, in particular, the *insumisión* campaign (refusal to serve compulsory military service) have been those that have achieved the highest level of political confrontation and success in terms of their objectives (Aguirre 1998). This movement managed to enter public debates, draw attention to protests and channel broader anti-militarist sympathy in society in its favour, and all this with relatively few activist and organizational resources. Its small membership and politically radical nature (rejecting alternative national service and calling for the full dismantling of armies), dealing with issues fundamentally affecting young people in the process of finding employment and becoming independent from their families, became an extraordinary paradigm for those who were new to squatting. The seminal work of Manuel Castells (1983) on the issue of urban movements pointed up an interesting approach to their structural dimensions (economic, political and cultural) and effects. Later criticisms of his model (Pickvance 1985; 1986; Fainstein & Hirst 1995; Marcuse 2002; Martínez 2003) stressed the need to focus on other social and political dimensions of their context, and on organizational resources, given the difficulties of understanding urban movements such as that of the squatters (Lowe 1986; Pruijt 2003).

Therefore, it is appropriate to explain the genesis and development of these types of movements and to identify their peculiarities and impacts by complementing the traditional approaches of social sciences with others that emphasize the movements' *complexity*: their networks of transversal relationships with other movements and with different social contexts, their own reflexivity, their capacities for creativity and for providing public goods (Martínez 2002a).

From this perspective, the squatters' movement will be presented as a 'rhizomatic' movement, with multiple connections between the 'nodal points' of networks, composed of these people, ideas, events or spaces, characterized by non-linear evolution based on ruptures, reconstitutions and alliances, with the opening up of new possibilities for expression, entry and metamorphosis (Deleuze & Guattari 1977). Or as an 'immediatist' movement: criticizing the immediate sources and impacts of power whilst rejecting utopias and ideologies that project liberation from the existing forms of domination onto a distant future (Foucault 1982). Or as a movement generating revolutionary situations and temporarily autonomous zones, creating workers' committees that release the working class from their alienation, experimenting with urban design to promote community meetings (Debord 1995/1976), protesting against capitalist domination through insurrections of 'poetic terrorism', using music and ridicule, guaranteeing the invisibility and invulnerability of protesters (Bey 1996/1985).

These theoretical approaches draw attention to aspects of the squatters' movement which are initially indiscernible and normally relegated and undervalued in more conventional press and academic articles. They also overcome analytical simplifications that focus almost exclusively on: (a) the criminal nature of the movement's main activity (squatting as a violation of private property); (b) the subcultural and fringe nature of squatting activists (squatting and squatters as an 'urban tribe' with their specific dress code, discourse and original customs) (Feixa 1999); (c) the juvenile nature of this social movement (squatting as a passing and transitory collective action, limited to satisfying temporary needs for accommodation—or temporary concerns—of young people during their period of emancipation from their families).

Based on findings reported in earlier research (Martínez 2002b; Pruijt 2003; 2004; Adell & Martínez 2004), this study follows an analysis of the squatters' movement which, firstly, identifies the persistent and consistent aspects of this set of urban practices which intervene in local and global policies. In that sense, this article embarks on a presentation of the historical evolution of the squatters' movement which is structured along the basis of certain dimensions (such as claims over the housing question and an explicit conflict with local authorities) that have conferred its social relevance and its relationships with other social movements and organizations.

Secondly, the analysis proceeds towards an explanation of some of the contributions made by the squatters' movement, such as its radicalism and political creativity both within the movement itself and in relation to the urban, political and social contexts with which it has interacted.

In its aim of achieving both objectives, this article focuses on the alter-globalization movement as the main benchmark of validation. To this end, it asks the following questions: to what extent did the squatter movement precede the alter-globalization movement, and to what extent have its local characteristics been incorporated into that movement? The final section presents evidence on these questions and provides some answers.

Most of the findings presented here stem from a long period of participant observation within many (Centros Sociales Okupados y Autogestionados/Squatted and Self-Managed Social Centres) CSOAs and squatted houses in medium and large cities all over Spain. I studied squats during the period 1997–2004, though I have subsequently continued to collect documents and visit CSOAs. Sometimes my participation took the form of giving talks or organizing workshops, but more frequently I simply attended concerts, exhibitions, talks, music festivals, meetings and demonstrations and visited people I knew. My notes varied in length, as they were dependent on the length of my stay in each city and the type of involvement and fieldwork I undertook. Therefore, I made extensive use of information produced by the movement itself through its various pamphlets, underground magazines, self-recorded video tapes, internet websites and mainstream media. I conducted more than thirty in-depth interviews with activists in different cities (mainly between 1998 and 2003, with squatters living or working in CSOAs in Madrid, Barcelona, Vigo, Bilbao, Valencia, Seville and Saragossa). Empirical data provided in other works (also based on personal interviews and some focus groups) have been also used (see Ehrenhaus & Pérez 1999; Martínez 2002b; Batista 2002; Adell & Martínez 2004; Llobet 2005). Historical examination, comparison with the experience of squatting in other European countries, contextualization of Spanish social processes and urban politics, and critical analysis of qualitative and quantitative data (basically provided by news in publications like *IPA-Molotov*, *La Campana*, *CNT Newspaper*, *Contra Infos*, etc.) were the guidelines of the methodological strategy adopted. Due to space limitations, the inclusion of specific interview extracts has been avoided. Instead, a general assessment of the evolution of this local and global urban movement has been favoured.

Missing Points in the Historical Reconstruction of the Movement

As is the case with many social phenomena, it is not very enlightening to give an account of the history of the squatters' movement by simply grouping together facts in successive phases. That approach has virtues in terms of charting events with respect to specific dates and building an overall historical perspective but is insufficient in terms of explanatory quality. For that reason, here, influenced by Foucault and Guattari, there is a combination of that approach with an identification of relevant 'catalysts', 'triggers' and attempts at 'restructuring' in the development of the movement. Before considering these elements, it should be remembered that the consideration of a set of practices as a 'social movement' is the result of a slightly artificial external operation. This is particularly true in the case of squatting, not just because its practitioners often

refuse to see themselves as members of a supposed squatters' movement but also because the experiences of each squatted building, district or city where successive squats have appeared include uniquely local characteristics that force us to undertake a very accurate and delicate appreciation of their common features.

According to the aforementioned three concepts, the approach promoted here may be summarized in the following way.

Catalysts

The young people behind the emergence and development of squatting in different cities during the 1980s and 1990s shared a common experience of unemployment, job insecurity, difficulties in access to accommodation, and the development of cultural outlets independent of state institutions or other formal organizations. Certain circumstances and social phenomena operated as 'catalysts' for the consolidation of the movement, such as the relative lack of a precise legal and political framework for the definition of squats, and the extraordinary survival capacity of certain squats which served as a benchmark for others in the same city and elsewhere.

Triggers

The squatters' movement endured strong judicial and political repression following the introduction of the Penal Code of 1995. Although the Penal Code established stronger penalties and laid down the framework for a more severe persecution of squatting, in the years immediately after its introduction the number of squats, and naturally, evictions increased. That led to a stronger presence of squatting as an issue in the mainstream media. The movement diversified and multiplied as it suffered unprecedented criminalization and stigmatization. As tensions with local authorities increased, the consolidation of certain internal tendencies within the movement, such as a rejection of what was seen to be its institutionalization, the possible legalization of squats, and a preference for urban districts targeted by planning authorities for restructuring and development, became apparent.

Continuities and Restructuring

The squatting of buildings for housing purposes has always been a feature of the movement. However, the strength and public significance of the movement have been achieved through the use of squatted buildings as CSOAs. In them, the functions of residential buildings have been integrated, subordinated or eliminated in favour of a broad range of counter-cultural, political and productive activities open to other social movements and sectors of the population beyond the 'alternative scene'. As the development of the movement was marked by a diversification of the social networks involved and greater experience of the participants and activists, the squatters' movement began to establish new alliances and embrace non-squatted social centres

and social organizations from a broad spectrum of the alter-globalization movement or from the districts and cities where squats had appeared.

The article now moves to a diachronic evaluation which is accompanied by a guiding chronology.

First Phase (1980–95)

This period can be traced back to the very first squats that appeared in residential buildings and were publicly claimed as part of protest activities by the young people involved² until the introduction of the so-called ‘Penal Code of Democracy’ which criminalized squatting in abandoned buildings and refusal to undertake military service, in a clear political U-turn designed specifically to persecute these two alternative social movements.

Multiple squatting in residential buildings began to spread in the main Spanish cities (Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Bilbao and Valencia) and slowly a different type of squats, which were also used for other activities (concerts, discussions and debates, meetings of specific groups) open to non-residents of the buildings in question, began to make their appearance. Although there had already been some similar ‘squatting’ experiences with an exclusively ‘social centre’ role during the transition period, the squatters’ movement started with young people who lived in squatted houses and who became increasingly committed to the dynamism of the CSOAs. This mutual relationship produced a tension that was often resolved by a drastic separation of squatted buildings used for housing purposes and others used as social centres. In fact, it was the CSOAs that gradually attracted more young people to the squatters’ movement (and other social movements that used squats to meet, raise funds and promote themselves) and made sure that new activists were recruited to the movement in order to guarantee the survival of the squats, providing support during evictions and then squatting in the buildings themselves.

Due to the high intensity of militancy in all facets of daily life and the insecure nature of living conditions and survival within the CSOAs, and even the elevated rhythm of organizing and performing all types of counter-cultural activities, activists were constantly leaving (but replaced by others). However, the personal satisfaction offered by the experience of immediate emancipation in terms of accommodation, social relations and political activity, coupled with the stimulus of emblematic squats that had already been around for more than 3–5 years (some are now more than 15 years old), were some of the main attractions for the squatter activists who were multiplying in many Spanish cities.

Attention must also be drawn to another relevant element operating as a catalyst. That is that the number of squats (more than 80) was at least double the number of evictions (around 40) and that these took place at a small personal cost and relatively little repression, though in many cases they took place without any legal guarantees. Eviction processes during that period were slow and allowed squatters to find alternative squats with relative ease. The authorities were only able to penalize squats

with fines and, at most, force eviction but many squatters were arrested because they refused to do their national service rather than because of their participation in squatting. The mass media gradually and in a rather ambivalent fashion began to present a highly stigmatized image of squatters, without, however, ever treating them as either a social movement or a threat to social order.

Second Phase (1996–2000)

The accumulation of strengths, experience and generational renewal within the movement led to the establishment of CSOAs as the main structural elements of all squats, counter-cultural activities and related social movements. With the enactment of the Penal Code, some CSOAs openly challenged the new legal and political framework, increasing their public presence, protest repertoire and alliances. Passive and active resistance to evictions also increased, with more street confrontations with the police. The 'Battle of the Princesa Cinema' in Barcelona³, the death of a squatter during eviction from a theatre in Valencia and the successive evictions and re-squatting of the 'Gaztetxe' in Pamplona⁴ drew the attention of the mass media and authorities to the movement, prompting a quantitative leap in terms of its public visibility.

Housing was still a structural problem in Spanish society. There were also other serious crises in the late 1990s (inflation, downturn in the construction of social housing, among others), with a worsening of the prospects for young people. However, the squatters' movement embraced these issues within a broader lifestyle perspective in which all productive, reproductive and civic aspects are questioned. During that period, residential buildings and CSOAs continued to be squatted, but the new legal panorama led to numerous evictions and much harder repression with documented cases of abuse, illegal eviction, prison sentences and personal persecution. What is surprising is that the cycle of squats, evictions and new squats did not cease with stronger repression. As a result, there were more than 130 registered squats compared with 100 evictions in this five-year period.

The CSOAs organized a wide variety of activities⁵ and their political and counter-cultural specialization separated them even more from squatting in residential buildings for housing purposes, though not necessarily from people who lived in squats, as sometimes the two worlds continued to mix. Due to increasing levels of repression suffered by the movement, coordination meetings between the different squats were considered more important than ever in many cities but they rarely achieved continuity over time. Nevertheless, during this period, political contacts between squats in different cities increased through participation in joint demonstrations and the creation of the first online communication lists.

Finally, the most significant trends during this period were the evident restructuring of the movement with an increase in rural squats with many links with urban squats and, in particular, a convergence of the squatter movement with alter-globalization protests in which squatters had participated in previous years. Despite the fact that these protest events were not particularly well attended, they included more artistic

protest activities and more resources (lorries, music, etc.) and were much better prepared given the ever present potential for violent repression by the police (Adell 2004). However, the dramatic increase in the number of attacks on public amenities or companies during some of these demonstrations, together with the strategy of some political authorities to associate the movement with armed groups, such as Euskadi ta Aslatauna (ETA), prompted the mass media to transmit a more negative image of squatters and promoted an increase in their criminalization and persecution (González et al. 2002; Alcalde 2004; Asens 2004). All these partially undermined the movement's social legitimacy. However, its long history had already become well known among young people and especially among social movements from which squatters obtained new support, regardless of any negative media stigma attached (Alcalde 2004; Asens 2004).

Third Phase (2001–6)

Recent years have been dominated by a crisis in the squatters' movement in both Spain and other European countries (Pruijt 2004; Herreros 2004). Nevertheless, we cannot easily proclaim its demise because new squatting and networking initiatives continue and the movement's philosophy has come a long way. What is true is that squats have disappeared in some cities whereas in others there has been no squatting for several years. Evictions have been more conclusive, with fewer opportunities for re-squatting or the stability of collectives with evicted CSOAs. A high density of squats and evictions similar to those in previous years has only been maintained in the metropolitan area of Barcelona and in various cities and towns of the Basque Country.

Another aspect worth highlighting is that prison sentences have only been applied in rare occasions and since the previous period the courts have often been more lenient (or, at least, divided) with respect to the application of the law. In this sense, eviction proceedings have been more repressive and have been concluded more quickly but on the other hand, rulings and sentences have often been delayed for years, once again favouring attempts to take as much advantage as possible of squatting without any great fear of immediate penal repercussions. During this period new and sporadic negotiations were also held with the owners of squatted buildings or with authorities, but practically no rulings in favour of squatters have taken place⁶ (González 2004). In addition, no formal organizations were created for channelling the claims of squatters through institutional channels, since in Spain housing has not been a highly specialized area of voluntary social work, in contrast to the situation in The Netherlands or the United States (Corr 1999; Pruijt 2003). In fact, demonstrations, joined by the squatters' movement, against urban speculation and housing shortages have only recently, since 2006, become widespread.

The two main aspects of restructuring in this phase were: (1) the appearance of new self-managed but non-squatted social centres (either rented or purchased) that prolonged the activities performed in the CSOAs or which continued to be linked

to them in a new, more varied and open network of activism (Herreros 2004; Martínez 2004); and (2) the convergence with part of the alter-globalization movement which strengthened international links by participating in key European demonstrations (Prague, Genoa, Gothenburg, Athens) together with many other organizations and collaborating in demonstrations organized in Spain (Barcelona in 2001, Seville and Madrid in 2002, the anti-war demonstrations of 2003).

More than Just an Urban Movement: Oscillations between the Local and the Global

From the analytical perspective adopted here, it was demonstrated that it is rather inappropriate to see the squatters' movement as simply a youth movement or as isolated illegal actions to satisfy housing needs. In contrast, there are sufficient indicators to confirm that this is an urban movement (Pickvance 2003; Mayer 2003) that is durable in time and has given rise to a first-order political conflict with the dominant political and economic system: in particular, squats are publicized, communicated and justified through the use of both alternative and mainstream media sources. Squatters therefore try to participate in the political arena and social life beside the fact that they occupy empty buildings. This is also evident when the provision of housing by squats is often combined through the openness of the CSOAs to other activists, sympathisers and audiences, with the organization of various cultural activities and protest events over different issues. Following to Castells's insights on urban movements (Castells 1983), we verify that social reproduction, local power and cultural identity were crucial dimensions of squatting.

The consistency of the movement over time stems, above all, from its internal networks of social relationships that are formed between the different squats and with other social organizations and guarantee the continuity of both projects and activist involvement independently of each specific squat. However, it would be a gross mistake to solely classify this urban movement as a movement of the young, since getting a place to live and to express yourself is not only a definitive means of emancipating yourself from your family but also an aspiration of any adult person. Although most activists are young and have relatively unstable lives, when they squat they normally start to live away from their families of origin and work in temporary jobs or in the black market economy, while simultaneously embarking upon an intense process of political socialization whereby they learn to exercise their civil rights, collective organisation and self-expression when it comes to defending squats and participating in different social struggles.

However, it is true that these common features have been questioned by some within the movement, who argue that squatting is only a means for achieving other ends. As we shall show later, these types of declarations only represent symptoms of the alter-globalization enthusiasm that has always fuelled squatting, despite the fact that its most immediate actions have been restricted to local spaces in the districts or cities where the squats are located. In fact, the existence of a national or Europe-wide movement has also been critiqued, by alluding to the fact that the specific

development of squats in each city displays greater consistency. However, regardless of the interactions that have taken place with local governments, it is important to note that it has been this level of government that has repeatedly been the main actor with which all groups of squatting activists have had to test their political strategies, and this has also been independent of the question of ownership of squatted properties because most were neither municipal nor public (owned by regional or central state authorities) (Martínez 2002b, p. 245).

The internal heterogeneity of the movement is generally the third argument for questioning its consistency as a social movement. At times of greatest friction, the press and certain political authorities have resorted to classifying squatters as either 'good' or 'bad', making a distinction between those willing to negotiate and violent radicals, between those who only claim residential buildings or social spaces and those who are more interested in public protest, agitation and civil mobilization. Academic publications tend to highlight the differences between leaders and passive followers, differences between groups with different ideologies (e.g. anarchists, communists and nationalists) or divisions according to social class, gender or family. Squatters themselves may agree with those and other classifications related, for example, to their personal experience of squatting or their participation in other social movements (Llobet 2005, pp. 309, 324).

However, it is not hard to identify a common magma of libertarian and autonomous principles in almost all the experiences, promoting an assembly-orientated self-organization independent of political parties, trade unions and more formalized organizations and, above all, drawing attention to the open dimensions of society and politics censored by the institutional and commercial media. Once again, none of these issues can be described as the passing concern of young people, even if this is the time in their lives when they grow into squatter activists.

Furthermore, some social aspects must be highlighted concerning the urban and political definition of this movement, such as the structure of socio-spatial opportunities that activists have systematically exploited in order to set up squats, such as the fact that squats have relied on the existence of large, unoccupied and abandoned or dilapidated estates in order to develop. Different squats have been able to concentrate in specific parts of cities and establish more or less intense relationships with one another during those long periods of urban speculation or town planning, right before these areas are transformed into new residential, commercial or business service areas (Martínez 2004). Of course, these types of urban transformations are not confined to Spanish cities. This is a much more global phenomenon. However, only some places have been used for collective actions such as squatting (particularly evident in Spain but also in Italy and, to a lesser extent, The Netherlands).

Lastly, the most controversial dimension of the movement is its counter-cultural element, which represents one of its strongest links with the global dimension of the movement. Does that mean that squatters do not have material needs? Could counter-culture be a refuge enabling its practitioners to avoid the important problems of society? Is it a post-modern movement that seeks maximum instantaneous pleasure

through social diversity, partying and a nomadic lifestyle, all tinged with vague ideological anti-capitalist affirmations?

In some countries, like Germany, squatting has been seen as an example of a counter-cultural movement committed to building a collective identity in strong opposition to other actors but with certain ambivalence with respect to power and material living conditions (Rucht 1992; Koopmans 1995, pp. 17–37). One of the premises of this article is that this counter-cultural dimension is more easily understood by linking it to a constant collective creativity in all facets of daily life which are, in turn, developed as a reaction to perceived global constrictions (Llobet 2005, pp. 49, 95). This position can be summarized in the following premises.

(a) Active participation in the squatter movement creates a lifestyle that involves forms of expression, socializing, and social organization within a frame of relatively austere material survival. Therefore, the cultural nature of the movement consists of all these aggregated forms of the squatters' 'lifestyle'.

Even though this is very difficult to verify with precision, our sample of interviews suggests that around half of the squatters were university graduates. Nevertheless, these squatters did not use their qualifications for related employment. Temporary jobs, self-employment in cooperatives, the informal economy and mutual aid were the more typical way for squatters to earn a living, irrespective of class origin. For those with a middle-class background, their material conditions deteriorate when they adopt a squatting lifestyle, regardless of the fact that they occasionally make use of family resources (more often than squatters with a working-class background). Nonetheless, it is estimated that approximately a third of squatters are of working-class origin. Consequently, individual material necessities are largely resolved collectively or within the practices of the aforementioned squatters' lifestyle.

(b) If the social practices associated with squatting tend to be seen as 'counter-cultural', this is mainly because on a more conscious or ideological level squatters seek to oppose and overcome the dominant culture. 'Dominant culture' refers to forms of production, consumption, social relationships and political decision-making. These are processes of searching without any specific end. At best they can be seen as experiments or laboratories but that does not imply wandering in a limbo of theories, discourses and debates. Instead, the opposite is true. The actual experience of civil disobedience exercised through the action of squatting enables other practices to take root and reveal the counter-cultural character of the movement.

Low-priced tickets to music concerts and other spectacles and the money collected from such events are used to finance squats or other similar causes. The free promotion of training workshops on the use of new technologies or craftwork, the opening of squats to promote books or political campaigns, and the setting up of libraries, work cooperatives or language schools for immigrants are just some of the facets that establish a high level of counter-cultural coherence between means and ends. It is true that such dynamics often distract activists from other political struggles (employment) and that the main social problem associated with squatting (urban speculation) is only combated through the action of squatting, which until recently

lacked more far-reaching alliances and tactics. However, this should not prevent us from acknowledging the contributions of the squatting movement, the coherence of many of its practices and the establishment of free spaces for expression and criticism of the dominant culture.

The Boomerang Effect of Alter-Globalization Struggles

The alter-globalization enthusiasm that has fuelled the squatter movement right from its origins shares certain common features with the development of the European squatters' movement: the campaign against the Olympic Games, for example, successfully promoted by Dutch squats in 1986 (ADILKNO 1994, pp. 129–147), and, more recently, the Social Forum of Genoa in 2000, where the 'Disobedient' and 'White Overalls' emerged from the Italian CSOAs to resist police attacks during protests against the G8 summit (Famiglietti 2004), are a direct manifestation of the fact that squatting has always been understood by its protagonists as something 'more than just living'. That something more turns the political protest into a 'politics of desire' (P&P: 'party and protest') and the search for a broader self-sufficiency (DIY: 'do it yourself').

Hence, it seems that from an ideological standpoint and bearing in mind the types of counter-cultural actions undertaken, the squatter's movement has always had a global vocation that differentiates its activities from those squats whose sole purpose is to satisfy housing needs. Moreover, some would classify this movement in Spain as a 'precursor' or even 'instigator' of an entire cycle of protests, which influenced, through their example of radical democracy, an entire family of social movements converging in the alter-globalization movement (Herreros 2004). For others, the gradual adhesion of the squatter movement to the alter-globalization movement and the subsequent crisis of the former and the rising success of the latter reveal the successful culmination of one of the predominant discourses (among the most developed) in the squatting movement, namely the search for greater social autonomy and multiple alliances in movements that criticize the capitalist order (Calle 2004).

From sustained participant observation and according to documented records and interviews, I believe there is abundant evidence to justify that original global (or alter-global) orientation of the squatters' movement. First of all, information circulating in Spanish CSOAs has always included news about squats and libertarian protests in Europe and Latin America. This international involvement had a direct practical consequence in the action repertoire adopted by Spanish squatters, such as conferences and festivals⁷ in order to collect funds for specific causes, protest events in front of diplomatic buildings in Spain and the boycotting of products produced by globally targeted companies.

Global concerns and new styles of interactions between social movements, through the strong links that squatters kept with the campaign against obligatory national service throughout Spain and with the free local radio stations that also tend to act as platforms for counter-information on global issues, were also developed. Squatters themselves pioneered early alter-globalization protest campaigns: such as

the 'Desenmascaremos el 92' (Let's unmask 1992) against the commercial nature, urban speculation and social control involved in the international Megaevents celebrated in Barcelona (Olympic Games); the election of Madrid as the European Capital of Culture and the World Expo in Seville in 1992; and the '50 años bastan' (50 years is enough) campaign against the policies of the World Bank, which held its summit meeting in Madrid in 1994.

In the same year, 1994, Spanish CSOAs served as one of the main means for disseminating information on the uprising of the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/Zapatista Army for National Liberation) in Chiapas (Mexico), which coincided with the entry into force of the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). This activity took the form of solidarity and support groups in various CSOAs, trips by activist squatters to Chiapas as 'international observers' and involvement of various CSOAs (mainly from Catalonia, Madrid and Andalusia) in the organization and provision of infrastructures for the Second Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and Against Neo-liberalism that took place, in decentralized form, in various parts of Spain in 1998.

There has also been a gradual extension of relationships with European CSOAs (particularly Italian social centres), with visits and debates to organize discussions and protest actions at 'counter-summits' and demonstrations of the alter-globalization movement in Prague (2000), Genoa (2001), Barcelona (2001) and European Social Forum in Florence (2002). Another global turn can be observed in the use of the internet by Spanish squatters with specific mailing lists and their own webpages (although most were not maintained on a regular basis), but also promoting Indymedia nodes and, above all, organizing hack meetings for expanding free software and extensive electronic training within the squatters' movement, albeit on a very unequal basis, as highlighted by Sádaba and Roig (2004), and Ramos and Martínez (2004).

Since the last years of the 1990s, squatters have been active in other types of events with both a local and global dimension, such as those involving lock-ins and demonstrations by undocumented immigrants, which have proven to be particularly conflictive and publicly relevant in Madrid (2000–1) and Barcelona (2004–5).

Finally, all of this background experience merged together with the alter-globalization movement and squatters participated in mobilizations making an international impact such as: the public referendum, held parallel with the national elections, promoted by RECADE (Red Ciudadana para por la Abolición de la Deuda Externa/Civil Network for the Abolition of External Debt) (2000) involving CSOAs from Catalonia, the Basque Country and Madrid; protesting against EU meetings during Spain's presidency (2002) involving CSOAs from different Spanish cities (e.g. Santiago de Compostela and Seville) and against the Iraq War (2003); and campaigns against hypocrisy, waste and urban speculation coinciding with the 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures in Barcelona (Unió Temporal d'Escribes [UTE] 2004).

As mentioned by Herreros (2004), in many of these recent actions, the squatters' movement has been associated with other groups and social movements (and sometimes even with political parties and traditional trade unions), always promoting

its model of open, horizontal and assembly-orientated political participation. However, it has also suffered, to a certain degree, isolation and self-inflicted marginalization in some cases⁸ in order to preserve the whole content of its radical discourse in a coherent manner. This is a crucial question in any process of convergence and coordination of different ideological principles and origins, one that also affects the entire process of federating in cases quite similar entities. What are the minimum points on which those alliances are founded? To what extent can they move forward together? Who influences who? Are the minority groups doomed to disappear despite initially being the most influential?

As is acknowledged by some authors (see Klein 2002; Notes From Nowhere 2003; Santos 2005), the alter-globalization movement has not just embraced a broad mixture in its composition but has also revived forms of political organization of a more libertarian nature, promoting models of direct democracy, seeking the maximum participation of all its members, prioritizing the assembly-orientated debate and consensus above the delegation of power and representation by leaders, in practice rejecting authoritarianism of any ideological form and promoting direct action and civil disobedience as legitimate forms of civil expression.

In Spain, parallel to the decline of neighbourhood associations following the first municipal elections after the end of the dictatorship in 1979 (Castells 1983; Villasante 1984), the same approach was adopted by anarchist trade union organizations which also tried, albeit relatively unsuccessfully, to revive the libertarian ideals of the transition and post-transition period. However, it was alternative movements, such as the squatting, anti-militarist, feminist and counter-information movements (later, also joined by some factions of the environmentalist movement), which most openly continued that tradition by forming a type of neo-anarchism committed more to specific practices than to strategic reflections on the transmission of their ideological axioms to the rest of society, bringing forth a new cycle of protests that culminated in the above-mentioned alter-globalization alliances.

Of all these movements, the squatters' movement was most successful in combining that ideological approach with a global perspective and intense local and militant action. It is perhaps the movement that has demanded most personal commitment in all areas of life, though prison sentences, with the high personal costs they entail, were more severe for opponents of military service, many of whom were also squatters. In this context, interesting political innovations of this movement included the rejection of official spokespeople (when they appeared, they tended to do so with their faces covered), public leaders or to setup formal organizations registered by the administration⁹ and which may be entitled to receive subsidies. The actions of civil and social disobedience were not limited to squatting in abandoned buildings; other actions included calling demonstrations without notifying government delegations, peacefully resisting police attacks on rooftops during evictions or causing damage in streets and public buildings when the demonstrations were repressed by the police, and the performance of festive elements during demonstrations.

Consequently, in view of the aforementioned, we may acknowledge the strong influence of the squatters' movement on the alter-globalization movement and on the many groups that have fed into it. We may identify both the sources of its influence and the elements that favoured its coalition with other alter-globalisation organizations:

1. the high level of geographic mobility of squatters and alter-globalization activists from many countries thanks to the greater availability of cheap flights since the 1990s;
2. greater expertise in the use of electronic communication equipment, albeit on a very unequal basis, as mentioned earlier, if we compare the most advanced CSOAs with those most isolated from new communication technologies;
3. and, above all, the embracing of the Zapatista discourse, which fuelled anti-capitalist resistance in a way equally detached from both political and revolutionary parties, and whose goal was not 'to seize power' but for 'civil society' to organize itself and for governments to be formed and based on participatory democracy: 'lead by obeying'.

All of these points may also represent maximum limits that most squatters are, nevertheless, unwilling to relinquish. In fact, social forums have gradually embraced an autonomous and radical nucleus increasingly detached from the institutionalizing trends of other formal organizations such as trade unions and political parties, which are more willing to negotiate within the official forums of international organizations or even to join a type of international 'new left' party (see also Flesher Forminaya in this volume).

This argument leads us inevitably to a consideration of the possible 'boomerang effect' that this invisible success of squats has had on the actual squatters' movement.

We must consider that the global enthusiasm for opening up and allying with other non-squatter collectives, socializing as much as possible the ideas of autonomy and disobedience, was never a discourse that developed in all types of squats and CSOAs. From what we know about the general European experience, squatting environments have a strong proclivity for endogamy and towards protecting their signs of identity.¹⁰

The most dynamic, durable and politicized CSOAs in large cities, or in suburban areas,¹¹ when compared with squats in residential buildings and more isolated squats, have been more effective in breaking down the barriers of prejudice and in embracing a plurality of actors and support in both the squats themselves and in their acts of protest. That attitude prompted them to participate in local and global platforms in which they had to share demonstrations or manifestos with other organizations. The experiences of these different groups of squatters have, in turn, dragged along many of the most reticent members, although some have even been actively against that, as they considered them to be 'reformist'. For instance, some CSOAs have focused exclusively on organizing concerts while at the other extreme, some Italian CSOAs are groups more interested in promoting the model of disruptive actions of the Black Bloc (Famiglietti 2004). In any case, it would be a simplification to claim that this global

enthusiasm was characteristic of all squatting experiences and squatter activists. However, it can be argued that some effects of its influence can be identified in the increasing involvement in alter-globalization initiatives by most of CSOAs.

We should also ask ourselves the following question: are squats in danger of drowning in the tide of the new (and, for many, ephemeral) 'movement of movements'? Calle (2004) suggests that this problem affects both squatters and the alter-globalization movement. Squats have not been perfect schools for self-management and direct democracy and the alter-globalization movement has yet to show its capacity for survival and consistency. In this sense, we must refer back to the most genuine urban and constant qualities of the squatters' movement, namely its local focus, roots and effectiveness.

A single CSOA may be the best platform for capturing persons and collectives with similar concerns in order to draw attention to themes and social struggles censored by the mass media and to introduce new activists to practices of civil and social disobedience already widely experimented with in the movement over two decades, but its potential is even greater when linked to other CSOAs, to squats in residential buildings and to a network of groups and organizations in districts and cities that help to gain more public legitimacy and increase the chances of survival for the squats. The self-provision of accessible accommodation and spaces for nurturing counter-cultural creativity and forms of socialization, freed from the shackles of dominant morals, are the real ends of the squatting movement and also have the virtue of making the movement's critique of real estate speculation and the falseness of civil participation pronounced by municipal governments all the more credible.

Consequently, the squatter movement has faithfully adopted the slogans of the post-1968 NSMs, 'the personal is political' and 'think globally, act locally'. This politicization of daily, reproductive and more spatially proximate environments, and the knowledge of these local dynamics and public acknowledgement obtained through such experience, has ensured that the strength of, and need for, squats has been maintained firmly as an integral part of the alter-globalization movement. Therefore, the crisis in the squatters' movement cannot be attributed to either the boom of the alter-globalization movement, or, in particular, the containment actions by local authorities (structures of opportunities), or the management strategies of the squats themselves (mobilization of resources), because much of the social legitimacy (local and global) of its autonomous practice (identity) has already been achieved (Martínez 2004; Herreros 2004).

Conclusions

They only answer unasked questions. Their attention is focused on the proximity of an event and when the time comes, they are the ones who act without hesitating. Once they have accepted the invitation, the event starts to happen. Then they find themselves together in an '*extra-media*' space. There is a *metamorphosis*. The study of the movement takes a step backwards. Its task is to record an account of the stories of those who return. (ADILKNO 1990, p. 236).

This paper has highlighted three aspects of the squatter movement in Spanish cities: (1) its historical development, identifying the importance of the counter-cultural actions of CSOAs beyond squatting in residential buildings; (2) the local roots of squats in relation to the persistent conflict with local authorities and strong activist dedication to everyday, domestic, socializing aspects and so on; (3) an incipient innovation in the repertoires of political action and in the alter-globalization objectives that have gradually spread through much of the squatters' movement.

As can be seen, we are dealing with a typical social paradox, namely a movement that is local and global at the same time. In order to unravel its purpose, it was worthwhile to distinguish the origins, consequences and mutual relationship of both dimensions (the local and the global).

As one of the movement's slogans implies, 'They can evict [us from] our homes but not our ideas'. Since its creation the movement has simultaneously combined a local and global orientation; it aims both to satisfy material needs for self-managed accommodation and meeting spaces and to intervene in the social life of districts and cities, always promoting the projects of many social movements and fostering the circulation of ideas and persons, and protest actions, in relation to squatting, social problems and anti-capitalist causes that affect many other countries.

The consequences of that dual attribute (local and global interlinks) have had different effects on the local and global dimensions of the squatters' movement. Precisely due to the gradual increase in involvement and convergence with the alter-globalization movement, incorporation of these inter-global concerns in the different groups of squatters has occurred at different speeds, and there have even been internal divisions regarding the approaches and ways of developing this participation. However, there has never been any opposition to the continuation of local 'restructuring' actions and initiatives for the counter-cultural usage of abandoned spaces. Other factors, and not increasing globalization, are therefore responsible for the crisis of the squatters' movement in some cities.

We could therefore ask ourselves whether that paradox is paralysing the movement and whether this has to be overcome with a leap to conventional rationality. These questions would be particularly relevant in the case of other urban movements that seem to be less involved in alter-globalization dynamics.

The information referred to in this study suggests that this has actually been a fruitful paradox, not just for the movement to the extent that it has been able to fuel its own internal creativity, providing stimuli for activists and for the development of new squats, but mainly for other social movements with which it has interacted, providing them with the spaces offered by CSOAs and contributing models of radical protest.

In contrast to traditional urban movements (e.g. the neighbourhood movement) and more innovative movements (e.g. the environmental movement focused on urban issues), the 'transmission effect' seems to have been relatively scarce. It is difficult to predict whether these movements might also be influenced by the squatters' movement in the future, though, according to the independent and libertarian philosophy of this movement, each organization and movement must follow its own

path. Cooptation, institutionalization and stabilization of alliances have always been some of the conservative perils openly challenged by squatters.

Notes

- [1] Something that is nevertheless always difficult to quantify accurately because it alludes to activists, collaborators, demonstrators, participants in activities and so on.
- [2] That sets them apart from other types of squatting in dwellings by individuals or families who preferred not to attract attention but rather to satisfy their housing needs without making any broader social claims or criticisms through that act.
- [3] Cine Princesa was located at the core of Barcelona's CBD (central business district). Its squatting took place in 1995 as a symbolic protest action against the new Penal Code, but, rather unexpectedly, it lasted for seven months. After the evictions, a number of large demonstrations took place in Barcelona and in other cities as an expression of solidarity. Confrontation and clashes with the police, during these demonstrations, led to a large number, 42, of arrests, more demonstrations and attempts to squat this building again. This was the first time the squatter's movement gained such widespread attention from the mainstream media (see Martínez 2002a).
- [4] Gaztetxes are CSOAs in the Basque Country with an explicit global anti-capitalist orientation albeit some of them complement this with a fight against the Spanish state (see González et al. 2002, pp. 188–89).
- [5] Such as artistic and counter-information activities, training workshops, employment cooperatives, and organizational platforms for broader campaigns and certain political parties.
- [6] There are records of three such cases but, even then, the many particularities of these cases prevent them being classified as successful cases of 'institutionalization'.
- [7] These counter-cultural activities had a global flavour. Alternative music bands from other, mainly European, countries performed in Spanish CSOAs and Spanish bands went to squats abroad.
- [8] By creating, for example, an alternative counter-platform to the already fairly alternative and critical 'plural platform' of Barcelona 2001.
- [9] According to the Spanish Constitution, any association is deemed to be legal from the moment it is created and it has no obligation to inform the corresponding Register of its existence.
- [10] The way a person entering a CSOA dresses and speaks, who accompanies them and where they work are all part of the implicit questionnaire faced by many newcomers.
- [11] Such as in the cases of Can Masdeu, near Barcelona, or La Casika, near Madrid.

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