How Do Squatters Deal with the State? Legalization and Anomalous Institutionalization in Madrid

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Abstract

Radical and autonomous urban movements like the European squatters’ movement tend to resist integration into the institutions of the state, although particular legal and political conditions in each country or city may significantly alter this tendency. In this article, I examine the controversial issue of ‘institutionalization’ among squatters, focusing on the few cases of legalized squats (social centres) in the city of Madrid. Negotiations with the state authorities and processes of legalization are the major forms of institutionalization involving squatters. However, an anomalous kind of institutionalization also emerges once squats, whether legalized or not, become consolidated and socially accepted. For squatting to have a successful impact, then, depends on both the type of autonomy achieved by squatters and the different outcomes of the processes of institutionalization. The case of Madrid provides empirical evidence that: (1) negotiations with state authorities were very frequent among squatters, but most were defensive; (2) the few cases of legalization were due to specific conditions such as the urban centrality of the squats, single-issue identities, social network solidarity, favourable media coverage, formal organizations working as facilitators and the squatters’ leadership of the process. Furthermore, legalized squats in Madrid preserved a high degree of autonomy, self-management and ties to other radical social movements. In conclusion, both the legalized squats and the squatters’ movement in Madrid as a whole, avoided ‘terminal institutionalization’ and, instead, gave shape to a ‘flexible’ one.

Introduction

Social movements share features and also differ from one another. The type of movement, its goals, life cycle, social composition, available resources and the significant contexts, among other aspects, provide valuable clues to facilitate analysis both of movements’ patterns and their singularities. Case studies stress the uniqueness of some movements, but, taken as a source for larger comparisons, can also help to define common qualities and tendencies across time, space and culture. In this article I deal with a general issue for social movements — the relationship between urban movements and...
the local authorities. However, I will look at a very specific case of interaction between activists and authorities — the legalization of squatted social centres in the city of Madrid between 2001 and 2011. Legalizations of squats have been unusual in Spain; they are also often a taboo subject among political squatters all over Europe. Due to the controversy that legalizations entail, they may be seen as either positive or negative outcomes of squatting. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether legalizations of squats may be considered as straightforward instances of institutionalization and state assimilation, which reduce the squatters’ autonomy and anti-systemic radicalism, or whether these legalizations contribute to alternative forms of institutionalization.

My principal research question is as follows: how were the cases of legalization of squats possible within their local context? Second, I argue that legalizations of squats are just one of the possible institutional relationships that are crucial for understanding even radical and autonomous urban movements like that of the squatters. Finally, I contend that an ‘anomalous institutionalization’ needs to be distinguished among the various forms of interaction between organizations and activists associated with particular movements and state institutions.

In a clear and concise overview, Pickvance (2003: 103–5) suggested an analysis of urban movements by filling the gap between urban sociology and social movement theory. Accordingly, he pointed out three main strands of research: (1) a focus on the ‘actual (and highly diverse) effects of urban movements, . . . what was done . . . [and] what changes in people’s lives resulted’ (ibid.: 103–4); (2) ‘interest in political power . . . the relations between urban protest and state authorities’ (ibid.: 104); (3) ‘concentration on the political context in which urban movements developed . . . [to recognize] that urban movements were not spontaneous responses to objective inequalities or deprivations but formed more easily under certain social and political conditions than others’ (ibid.: 105). Regarding social movements at large, Giugni argues that movements’ outcomes should be distinguished between: (1) those that bear directly on movement demands; and (2) those which ‘are often indirect, unintended, and sometimes even in contradiction to their goals’ (Giugni, 1998: 386). Beside the political opportunity structures and the use of disruptive tactics mediating the interaction of movements and authorities, Giugni proposes to examine how impacts are also due to the way that movements are organized and to public opinion.

Pickvance’s and Giugni’s guidelines provide a very useful theoretical framework for researching the diverse impacts of squatting and the specific context-based power relationships in which squatters are involved. They seem to me quite complementary to Pruijt’s (2003) analytical proposals, which I will also follow closely. Pruijt argues that ‘effective organized squatting’ tends to resist ‘terminal institutionalization’ unless state repression, cooptation and, sometimes, legalization, fatally undermine its legitimacy, support and duration. By ‘terminal institutionalization’ he refers basically to the shift ‘in the repertoire of action [when] convention replaces disruption’ (Pruijt, 2003: 136). ‘Squatters themselves are drawn towards legalization because squatting is not only a political activity but an economic activity as well’ (ibid.: 135), which steers most squatters towards any sort of ‘flexible institutionalization’ — that is, where ‘conventional tactics complement disruptive ones’ (ibid.: 136), after negotiations with state officials or representatives.

Pruijt’s argument may be summarized as follows: squatting is characterized by the predominance of disruptive tactics but the legalization of squats does not necessarily prevent squatters from remaining radical, nor lead them mainly into the institutional arena. Legalization is pragmatically convenient for most squatters, but erodes the squatters’ capacity to protest against the urban speculation underlying the building they occupy. This contradiction, indeed, is used by authorities in order to develop an overall strategy to counteract squatters’ radicalism. As we shall see later, empirical evidence shows that in some cases the neutralization of the squatters’ oppositional force was effected through a general process of legalization (e.g. in Berlin), while in other cities (e.g. Copenhagen) an intense repression was applied with similar neutralizing results,
whereas, in contrast, neither repression nor extensive legalization destroyed the squatters’ scene in yet other places (e.g. Amsterdam).

While I agree with Pruijt in general terms, my concern is that flexible institutionalization should refer not only to an eclectic repertoire of action, with a prevalence of non-conventional means, but also to a lack of general cooptation of the majority of squatters, so that neither they nor their activities become widely integrated into state institutions, state policies or capitalist firms and interests. Furthermore, I suggest that the legalization of squats may not lead to terminal institutionalization if former squatters remain closely tied to the initiatives of radical politics, give support to other squatters and keep a high degree of self-management and autonomy from formal organizations, the state and the capitalists. The Madrid case will be used both to test this thesis empirically and to provide a detailed analysis of the process and context of legalization in order to generate further comparisons all over Europe (which do shape the relevant geographical and political context for this particular squatters’ movement; see Martínez, 2012; Pruijt, 2013a).

My aim here is to explain the conditions that make possible the specific negotiations between squatters and city officials, legalization being one of the possible goals and outcomes. Negotiations are conceived as strategic interactions based on power relationships within particular contexts. In the case of Madrid, I have observed that squatters took the initiative in the negotiations when trying to obtain a legal status for squats. However, this proactive role was mediated by crucial variables such as the mass media coverage, the specific field of public policy involved and the support of formal organizations. Not least important were the ideological cleavages and social networks existing within the local squatting movement. These had a strong influence on the course of the negotiations and some internal splits, although not irreconcilable, occurred after the legalizations. It is also significant that, instead of squatted houses, only squatted social centres, and only a few of these, were legalized in Madrid. Thus, it is worth asking if those exceptional cases were paving the way for a period of legalization applied to all kinds of squatting. Or, were they, unintentionally, facilitating the decline of squatting? The political context that emerged in Spain after 15 May 2011 offered new proofs to verify that the opportunities to legalize squats increased in parallel with a new and surprising wave of squatting initiatives and a more favourable social image for squatting due to the extreme housing crisis suffered by large numbers of people. The M15 movement is the label used to designate the Occupy-like movement that started with the occupation of many squares in Spanish cities after the 15 May 2011 demonstrations. The movement targeted political corruption, the unemployment rates, public aid to the banks, the housing shortage and the cuts in most public services (Martínez and García, 2012).

The remainder of the article is divided into three sections. In the first of these, I distinguish three general types of institutionalization and discuss how squatters are involved in each of them. In the second, I focus on the key concepts, negotiations and legalization, in order to understand the main interactions between squatters and state authorities in Madrid. The third consists in a narration of the process of legalization of several squats in Madrid, according to the local context and the theoretical approach previously defined.

The squatters’ movement facing institutionalization

For many activists, squatting is only a practice, a radical gesture rather than a movement. It is both a survival tactic and a quintessential political attitude, a lifestyle, without any formal mediation. This could be understood as taking control of basic needs into their own hands, doing the right thing and not waiting for the ruling elite’s decisions. If they experience the necessity of a shelter or the lack of accessible space
for social intercourse, they claim this as a fundamental right. Consequently, if there are plenty of vacant buildings, it is legitimate to appropriate them. Vacancy is mainly due to market speculation and serves, exclusively, the real estate proprietors’ spurious interests. Spatial needs are socially organized as a result of the reproduction of inequalities of wealth and the failure of the welfare state to redistribute wealth, housing policies being among the major instruments for so doing. Thus, the expression ‘squatters’ movement’ seems to many squatters a mass media label to produce stereotypes and understate what they actually do. Diversity and subjectivity among squatters are claimed as conclusive proof that every squatter exercises his or her freedom according to particular and unique circumstances. However, I argue that a squatters’ movement acquires theoretical and practical coherence when squatting becomes a collective, coordinated, visible and sustained effort against the above mentioned market and state forces.

The predominant activists’ discourse depicts a deep commitment on the part of most squatters to preserving their autonomy from political parties, trade unions, NGOs, formal organizations, real-estate dynamics, mass media companies and state institutions in general (Castells, 1983: 322), including academic social sciences — although many European squatters have university degrees and many of them are familiar with books, articles and concepts produced by social scientists. According to Neidhart and Rucht’s definition (1991: 450–1) a ‘social movement’ may be conceived: ‘as an organized and sustained effort of a collectivity of inter-related individuals, groups and organizations to promote or to resist social change with the use of public protest activities . . . People involved in social movements play very different roles . . . : core activists, participants, contributors and sympathizers . . . Movements do not necessarily go through an inherent “natural” life cycle to end up in the status of institutionalization, but rather follow an unsteady course’. Therefore, squatting becomes a movement when it is not an isolated action or an occasional tactic by other movements and organizations, but when ‘squatting itself is a means and primary goal at the same time, . . . is at the centre [of] a community of squatters who cooperate’ (Pruijt, 2003: 143). According to these definitions, most squatters would agree that they belong to a broad movement which produces numerous ‘protest activities’ mainly by using a ‘non-institutionalized action repertoire’ and the constitution of ‘mobilized networks of networks’ without formalized membership and decision making (Neidhart and Rucht, 1991: 452).

Even less conflictive for squatters would be Tarrow’s (1998: 21) definition: ‘collective challenges expressed by people who share common goals and solidarity in a continuous interaction with elites, opponents and authorities’ (my translation). I also agree with the emphasis on instability, evolution and strategy that has been proposed, for example, by Owens (2009: 31): ‘Yet social movements are more than the sum of their actions. They are also a cluster of unstable and evolving identities, all intimately tied to strategic choices’. Pruijt (2004: 36; 2013a) provides a thoughtful list of definitions of the squatting movement. In sum, for him ‘effective squatting’ would entail ‘a sustainable way to repair, heat and maintain buildings, and deal with owners, authorities and the community . . . contributing to the push for a lively, low-income people friendly city . . . Squatting is a way of providing last-resort housing solutions’ (Pruijt, 2003: 134, 136).

The squatting movement in European cities began to be recognized in the 1970s and 1980s as part of new urban uprisings, movements and political regimes (see, for example, Bailey, 1973; Dunleavy, 1980; Wates and Wolmar, 1980; Castells, 1983; Priemus, 1983; Lowe, 1986), although systematic research was not abundant until the 1990s (see, for example: Mayer, 1993a; Koopmans, 1995; Mikkelsen and Karpantschof, 2001; Martínez, 2002; Pruijt, 2003; Adell and Martínez, 2004; Mudu, 2004; Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2006; Membretti, 2007; Bouillon, 2009; Owens, 2009; Aguilera, 2010; Holm and Kuhn, 2010). The legalization of squats has often been a crucial point of analysis. In principle, legalized squats are cut off from the stock of radical activists’ material and symbolic assets. If a building or apartment is not squatted any more, residents or users
will stop using it as a political tool to oppose urban speculation. Dwellers in former squats are not squatters any more, although they can still help and support other squatters. Former squatters, anyhow, face different problems compared to their previous living conditions. Squatters’ radicalism, autonomy, anti-systemic and anti-institutionalization attitudes are challenged by the moderate and institutional arrangements resulting from legalization. As a consequence, it is generally assumed that squatting loses its predominantly contentious and confrontational style of opposing the capitalist system, and most of squatters’ efforts are taken up by conventional actions. A fruitful combination of radical means and utopian ends is replaced by instrumental bargaining with state authorities. In addition, internal cleavages among squatters in favour or against legalization could drive the movement to fade out. The lesson is: one way or another, sooner or later, the legalization issue cannot be avoided by squatters, so they need to be prepared to deal with it. Nonetheless, we need to examine whether empirical reports and analytical categories match each other.

First of all, I will elaborate on the core concept of institutionalization. This can have three basically different meanings and, I shall argue, squatting may be involved in all of them.

**Type I institutionalization: integration of the movement into state institutions**

The integration of a movement into state institutions tends to end up in both the total disappearance of the movement and the regular adoption of institutional means by its former members. In the case of squatting this would imply, for example, the utilization of buildings only within legal regulations (private property, renting, temporary permission, etc.), the changing of squatters groups into political parties, and the preferential participation of activists in formal and bureaucratic planning procedures. Some former radical activists claim that they defend from inside state institutions the same ideas that they defended before as part of an autonomous movement, but they tend to underestimate the constraints imposed upon them by both the institution and the ruling groups within it. Assimilation to the dominant patterns within the state, then, would be pervasive.

This kind of institutionalization has been theorized as a highly probable stage in the evolution of movements in order to overcome the disadvantages of contentious politics such as instability, informal organization and decision making, lack of resources, exclusion, repression, waning influence, diminishing mobilization capacity and overall decline (Lourau, 1978; Piven and Cloward, 1979; Ofte, 1990; Alberoni, 1991; Ibarra, 1995; Tarrow, 1998; Tilly, 2007; Suh, 2011). Turning to bureaucratic and conventional politics would stem from either strategic choices by the movement’s organization or the macro dynamics of state construction and democratization involving movements. This integration can also be considered as temporary, tactical and fragile. Thus, insiders are able to spread their movements’ goals inside the institutions, but this window may be narrower at a later stage so, unusually, activists might go back to the streets again (Touraine, 1978: 87–9, 131–2).

The squatters’ movements in Germany and Denmark are good examples of those that have been almost eliminated due to repression, legalization and some concessions to activists. In Berlin, while some squatting groups accepted long-term legal leaseholds and participated in public self-rehabilitation programmes, others were rapidly evicted (Mayer 1993b; Koopmans, 1995: 170–9; Sabaté 2009). The legalizations in the 1980s started when the movement lost the political initiative and suffered harsh persecution, so that it ‘established the division of the movement, making it easier to criminalize the autonomist “non-negotiators” ’ (Holm and Kuhn, 2010: 5–6), and similar defeats were experienced in the 1990s. Furthermore, ‘extensive legalisation models could in each case only be applied to houses in public or not-for-profit ownership, whereas for houses that were in private ownership only individual rental, leasehold or purchase agreements were
drawn up’ (Holm and Kuhn, 2010: 9). Squatting is still supported by German autonomists and occasional squatting actions are openly promoted from time to time, but the squatters’ movement has disappeared as a particular branch within the autonomist movement as a whole.

Mainstream institutionalization also succeeded in Copenhagen. Christiania was, for several decades, an exceptional case of sustained squatting that survived under pressure, but ended recently in a complete legal defeat. Squatters are now obliged either to leave or to buy the properties. Repression of squats and immediate evictions became the general pattern, although local authorities allowed and even subsidized a few legal social centres for radical and autonomist activists to meet — one, at least, of which was previously squatted (Folkets Hus), while in other cases agreements were reached with the owner (Candy Factory 1) and with the city government (Candy Factory 2) after a different building had been squatted before, and the case of the famous Ungdomhuset, from which squatters were evicted in 2007 after well-publicized street battles, also forced the City government to provide activists with a new self-managed Youth House in a less central area of the city (Mikkelsen and Karpantschof, 2001: 618; Hellström, 2006; Fox, 2010; author’s own fieldwork). Only a few squatted social centres, therefore, found a legal solution, while most of the residential squats were fiercely repressed, with Christiania being an exceptional case that ended up in ‘terminal institutionalization’ after four decades of both political and legal resistance. Some stealth-squatted houses, nevertheless, are still functioning.

In Italy at least three squatters obtained seats as city councilors during the 2000s. A political party was even born in a very well-known squatted social centre (Leoncavallo) that had attempted to become legal for more than three decades (Membretti, 2007). Although this was an isolated and failed case of legalization, it is considered one of the most institutionally integrated squats by the Italian squatters’ movement due to those negotiations, the squatters’ alignment with party politics and their participation in official programmes fighting social exclusion.

‘Licensed squatters’ in the UK during the late 1970s did not alter the dominant practices of the squatting movement, but those who benefited kept squatting separate from their lives (Lowe, 1986: 143). Due to the high volume of squatting in the UK and the lack of a systematic account it is difficult to generalize, but there is plenty of evidence that local authorities and owners agreed with squatters’ legal solutions to remain, renovate or own the buildings (interviews during my own fieldwork and archive at 56a Infoshop, London). However, the British central government finally opted for criminal legislation against squatting which came into force in September 2012 and increases the police’s capacities to evict residential squats (Ministry of Justice, 2011; Rose, 2012).

The legalization of some big squats in Amsterdam (for example, Overtoom 301, Plantagedok and Vrankrijk) did not prevent the eviction of many others, but opened institutional channels in particular for ‘the cultural side of squatting’ (Owens, 2009: 228), which became a valued tourist attraction for the city and was partially accepted by the city government, by then devoted to art production (ibid.: 237–47) as a strategy to

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1 As these authors describe at the end of their article (Holm and Kuhn, 2010: 12), and I verified in 2010–11 while talking to former squatters in Berlin, legalization does not mean a safe dwelling for ever. Owners can evict legalized squats once the period of the leasehold expires — or even before, if they convincingly argue in court that some conditions of the agreement have been violated. Recently, this kind of event triggered new attempts to squat and confrontational campaigns.

2 When I refer to my own fieldwork, I mean above all the visits undertaken and debates in which I participated as a member of SqEK (Squatting Europe Kollective) during meetings held since 2009 in Madrid, Milan, London, Berlin, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, New York and Paris. During these events I and other SqEK participants had the opportunity to talk to different activists, collect documents and visit numerous squats. Over the same time period I have also paid other independent visits to several of these cities, and conducted interviews and obtained more first-hand information about local squats.
marketize and globalize the city. The repressive law that criminalized squatting in October 2010 obliged squatters to open negotiations with the authorities in order to obtain a legal status or to move from place to place every few weeks or months, facing a new wave of violent evictions by the police. As in the UK, this combination of legalization and repression has not led the squatters’ movement to disappear yet.

Type II institutionalization: consolidation of new institutions by social movements

Apart from integration into state institutions, structures and regular dynamics, it is possible to distinguish a more social or cultural form of institutionalization. In particular, social movements can contribute to the consolidation of social, cultural and political institutions such as deliberative councils. Recognition by the state and legal regulation are not compulsory to stabilize new social institutions, but can help more than the simple social legitimation achieved in a first stage. Movements that become active creators of new institutions are those able to transform issues once marginal into mainstream politics or culture. Feminist and pacifist movements were extremely efficient in doing this, but civil rights movements also helped to produce new legal rights, anti-discrimination policies and public debate (see, for example, Eder, 1998; Goodwin and Jasper, 2009). This type of institutionalization covers different degrees of success or impact that the movement may obtain before, or instead of, achieving integration into state institutions, if any: for example, the opportunity to testify in congressional hearings, the inclusion of issues in the political agenda, desired changes in policymaking and legislation, etc. (Burstein et al., 1995). Another example is the participatory budget and the World Social Forum, which were born in Brazil as a result of the endeavours of various social movements, and obtained wide social backing and political acceptance all over the world (Santos, 2003).

Above all, squatting has the advantage of keeping open a continuous social debate about the housing question and the right to the city. In those countries, like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, where it lasted for a long time as a non-criminal behaviour, squatting became a broadly legitimate and frequent practice. In particular, slightly more than half (53%) of the Dutch Parliament in 2009 voted in favour of criminalizing squatting, while almost half (46%) voted against it. The same year, a survey was conducted among the Dutch population in which only 36.8% agreed with the statement ‘Squatting an empty building should always be forbidden’, compared to 42.5% who disagreed (Pruijt, 2013b). The more squatting is practised and legitimated as a normal way of satisfying social needs, or as one of the possible options not too far separated from the prevalent patterns around us, the more it may help the acceptance of a new social institution.3 However, this does not mean that squatting can easily reach the mainstream status of being the most used way of having access to a place to live or to develop social activities. To take over abandoned places that are not your property may be socially accepted in a similar way as homosexual cohabitation, marriage and child-rearing have become socially accepted in some societies, regardless of the specific legal support obtained in each state.

Even after being broadly accepted, the image of squatting in the mass media may remain a very negative and stigmatized one (Dee, 2013). In order to fight its image of marginality, the squatters’ movement sometimes appeals to society with nicely designed

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3 Social legitimation depends on social opinions but also on the frequency of practices. Sometimes both aspects may be in contradiction. Thus, the British government has estimated the number of squatters in the UK at 20,000 (in 2011), while an opinion poll concluded that 81% of the population think that the squatting laws should be changed to make it a criminal offence [http://yougov.co.uk/news/2011/11/11/criminalise-squatting/]. Squatting, then, has not reached mainstream status, but it is a subcultural resource widely used for decades by thousands of people. Nevertheless, both kinds of figures have usually been disputed for their inaccuracy (Dee, 2013).
books and well-argued documents displaying the most positive sides of squatting (Kraken Nederland, 2009; SQUASH, 2011; Kukutza and Egia, 2011). In the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Germany, many social centres, whether still squatted or only squatted in the past, are very well known as venues for music concerts and cultural events, sometimes with a massive attendance. Squats, then, have contributed to creating a certain social institutionalization of subcultural circuits and scenes — indeed, as ‘countercultural’ forms of opposition to mainstream patterns, independent of the legal regulations that apply. Another example: artistic squats in Paris had access to the local government in order to sign temporary agreements because their image was positive for city-branding policies, while poor people and immigrants in precarious squats enjoyed fewer chances to negotiate (Bouillon, 2009; Aguilera, 2010).

**Type III institutionalization: creation of anomalous institutions**

Before a new institution is socially legitimized, social movements can create ‘anomalous institutions’ that remain on the margins of society due to lack of knowledge about them or their members’ wish to experiment with social life apart from the mainstream political culture. In my view, anomalous institutions represent a countercultural opposition to dominant institutions. This may be achieved despite some basic legitimization and legalization of their practices. They emerge from the creativity and diversity of decentralized groups and individuals, without any central entities to provide them with a common programme (McKay, 1998). Therefore, anomalous institutions may be defined as the forms that allow a high degree of social autonomy to express themselves. These may lead, in the end, to a claim for legitimation and legalization, but without these being their most significant goals. Instead of classic ‘counterpowers’ or ‘workers councils’ aiming at a coordinated substitution of the state (Debord, 1967: 38), this sort of institution would recall the ‘hacking ethic’ (the transgression of established rules and private property as a way to promote general intelligence) (Stallman, 2002), the ‘rhizome’ (multiple and horizontal connections) (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) and ‘constituent powers’ (Negri, 1994: 369–408). The case of the Zapatistas’ self-managed communal councils can be regarded as an example of this sort of challenging institution that emerged in between the indigenous movement and the state (Klein, 2002: 217).

The long duration of a movement and its deep experience in the production of principles, rules and behaviours can thus entail a sort of social institutionalization, although the movement may not be broadly accepted by society at large or may even face a severe legal punishment. This is the case of most self-managed squatted social centres and some communal squatted houses (Pattaroni and Togni, 2009) when they claim their right to differ (Young, 1990: chapter 6), without necessarily asking for broad social recognition. Nevertheless, they institutionalize their own norms (legality), styles of contentious politics, cultural circuits and everyday-life behaviours — for instance, by doing things for themselves and through mutual aid. They also create a sort of ‘hidden law’ where ‘the State chooses not to look’ (Finchett-Maddock, 2010: 31–37). The more they consolidate these spaces and social relationships, the more we could call them institutions. There is not much difference between helping poor people to find shelter through collective squatting and organizations becoming mature by adopting creative solutions to the housing shortage. In the end, the legalization of squatting appears as just one option among others, one that can facilitate stability to all the activities carried on by the squatters. Whether legal or not, experiments in the self-management of collective resources remain as relatively tolerated but rare institutions in the countercultural sphere of society, unless the whole movement or some groups enter the cultural/subcultural mainstream (type II) or gain full access to existing state institutions (type I).

Anomalous institutions are also referred to as ‘movement institutions’ since they display open conflict with hegemonic social, economic, cultural and political institutions. Accordingly, they have been variously defined as: ‘flexible, mobile, nomadic institutions, . . . stable laboratories of encounters, . . . neither private nor public [but]
community-managed, . . . offensive Social Centres, proliferating war machines’ (Toret et al., 2008: 121–27; Universidad Nómada, 2008). In the case of squatting, some information desks (take, for instance, the Kraakspreekuur in Amsterdam or the well-established London based Advisory Service for Squatters with its celebrated Squatters Handbook: http://www.squatter.org.uk/), bars, bookshops, publications, alternative think-tanks, non-legal cooperatives, festivals (see, for example, the Intersquat regular events in Paris and Berlin: Aguilera 2010: 37) and non-squatted autonomous social centres that support squatting, constitute a ‘social movement infrastructure’ (SMI) (Kriesi, 1996: 223; Uitermark, 2004: 228, 242; Owens, 2009: 175) or informal social networks (Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 172), serving as the raw materials of anomalous institutions.

Rucht (1990: 224) has argued that some contentious repertoires of action, like civil disobedience, can also achieve an (albeit marginal) socially institutionalized status once state repression seriously discourages violent expressions of dissent. Even some political opportunity structures (pre-election periods or governmental crises, for instance) and ‘strategic interactions’ between activists and authorities have been considered as secondary institutional frameworks shaping collective actions and as ‘relatively permanent features of a country’s political landscape’ (Goodwin and Jasper, 2009: 313–14; see also, Piven and Cloward, 1979: 14, 21–3; Tilly, 1984: 47–50, 76–80; Tarrow, 1998: 51). Like expatriates who can live for a long time with subaltern and unclear rights, some countercultural expressions by movements persist in society, relatively hidden but also relatively respected, as part of the social diversity.

Therefore, Pruijt’s ‘terminal institutionalization’ fits type I, but ‘flexible institutionalization’ can fit both types II and III (see Table I). Cooptation of some squatters (e.g. as elected politicians, public managers or university professors) or of some squatting organizations (e.g. as housing associations who quit squatting after obtaining subsidies) can result in any of the three types of institutionalization, but more likely type II. When cooptation, concessions and legalization are not generalized to the whole squatters’ movement of a city or urban area, then the movement is characterized by flexible institutionalization.

Table 1 Types of institutionalization of movements

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<tr>
<th>Main Feature</th>
<th>Main Effect</th>
<th>Probable Outcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>I) Integration in state institutions</td>
<td>Legality</td>
<td>State assimilation</td>
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<td>II) Consolidation of new institutions</td>
<td>Legitimacy</td>
<td>Part of cultural and subcultural mainstreams</td>
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<tr>
<td>III) Creation of anomalous institutions</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Tolerance of a countercultural opposition to state and social mainstreams</td>
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International Journal of Urban and Regional Research
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European squatters have frequently been labelled with a ‘counter-cultural’ or ‘revolutionary’ identity in terms of being ‘essentially negative, defined by opposition to something else, [seeking] conflictive interaction with political opponents, from whom they tend to get similar reactions that will reinforce the group’s identity’ (Koopmans, 1995: 19). This means they are primarily anti-systemic and, therefore, anti-institutionalization, resisting in practice types I and II of institutionalization. Although they may recall types II and III as part of their explicit discourses seeking respect for their goals and actions, these enter an endless circle if the status quo remains: ‘the goals pursued are so radical that changes in their direction are almost by definition insignificant . . . [and activists] tend to interpret concessions as an effort to appease the movement and to keep it from attaining its ultimate goal. Therefore, countercultural activists sometimes fight those who favour such “reformist” changes even harder than they do their “true” opponents’ (ibid.: 32).

Accordingly, success for them is not linked to institutionalization, but to mobilization, participation and reaction to decisions taken by elites. Hence, the more squatters suffer repression by the state, the more they reinforce their opposition to state institutions. ‘Even when countercultural movements employ legal action forms they are confronted with much higher levels of repression and receive much less facilitation from established actors than instrumental and subcultural movements, which are less threatening to the status quo’ (ibid.: 21). Following Koopmans’ classification, ‘instrumental’ identities and purposes, thus, could fit in type I; ‘subcultural’ ones could correspond to type II; and ‘counter-cultural’-oriented movements would fall into type III or outside the picture.5

The key point is that there is always a significant diversity within the squatters’ movement (Uitermark, 2004) (not all the squatters are countercultural,6 or not always), and repression may be unavoidable. Therefore, dealing with the institutionalization process always arises as a decisive and inevitable moment.

Negotiations between squatters and the state

It is obvious that any process of legalization of a squat requires previous negotiations between the squatters and state officials, politicians or the private owners of the building. Legalizations, as we have argued before, may lead to different types of institutionalization, and not necessarily to an exclusive participation within the frame of conventional politics. Squatters can also negotiate with the state by pursuing other goals than legalization.

I define negotiations as one type of ‘strategic interaction’ between activists and authorities (this is a concept usually referred to by Tilly in most of his more recent works: see, for example, Tilly, 2007); but they are also central to Foucault’s conception of power

5 See also Kriesi (1996: 222-7) for a more developed analysis. For him, the institutionalization of countercultural social movement organizations (SMOs) occurs when these increasingly turn their activities to the preservation of their own existence, resources and membership. In so doing, they become more oriented to interacting with the authorities and to avoiding the direct participation of their members – that is to say, to avoiding mobilization, confrontation and, eventually, actions aiming to achieve social legitimation. Otherwise, they remain radicals or reinforce their radicalization (ibid.: 231). In the case of the squatting movement, there are few SMOs (perhaps just some groups who offer information, advice and support for squatters in each city, or who strive for some political coordination), so it is more accurate to identify every group of squatters as behaving as an SMO.

6 For instance, the internal diversity of squatters grew once they promoted and became more and more involved in alter-globalization (in Spain: Martínez, 2007; González, 2011: chapter 4) and environmental movements (in Italy: Della Porta and Piazza, 2008: 60-4; in Britain: McKay, 1998: 3-8).
Negotiations are productive processes in the political playground, specific moments of contentious politics and social mechanisms binding actors and practices. Instead of simple rational calculations, negotiations respond to incremental tensions between the parties where instrumental goals, collective identities, emotions and current policies define both the modes of interaction and the possible outcomes. In addition to the understanding of negotiations as procedural means inside state institutions, I primarily regard them as genuine social and political institutions outside the state. In a similar manner, Burstein et al. (1995: 279–81) define ‘bargaining’ as ‘any situation in which two or more parties seek conflicting ends through the exchange of compensations. The essential element in bargaining is that concessions are rewarded’.

My own observations in Madrid and in other cities allowed me to distinguish four types of negotiation in regard to squatting (see Table 2):

1 **High-level negotiations.** These are aimed at winning legal occupation of the building for squatters. Depending on who is the owner and what state agencies are concerned with the management of the building or area, negotiators may vary, although squatters demand meetings at the higher level of (local) state responsibilities. In case of success, former squatters could remain for a long or indefinite period of time, at the cost of paying rent or a mortgage and/or taxes.

Aguilera (2010: 63–81) distinguishes three types of high-level negotiations implemented in Paris: mediation, project and temporary housing (convention d’occupation précaire). The empirical cases he describes, similar to what I observed in Madrid, display how tortuous the roads can be to achieve a legal, and not necessarily stable, status, within this informal environment of urban politics. Squats, thus, are managed in accordance with a case-by-case policy, according to media resonance and specific political tools, when authorities are willing to negotiate. Otherwise legal repression is always ready to be applied due to the strong prohibition of squatting.

2 **Transactional negotiations.** These negotiations occur when squatters want to participate in public benefits, plans or services. Frequently, this demands face-to-face encounters with authorities before proceeding with formal applications. Squatters, thus, attain both political recognition and basic resources enabling them to persevere with their regular activities. Authorities can claim an inclusive attitude to all kinds of civic groups, squatters included, at the same time that they command evictions.

Holm and Kuhn (2010: 10) mention the participation of Berlin squatters in ‘cautious urban renewal plans’ in an alliance with alternative groups, the Alternative List-Green Party and professional town planners and architects who ‘agreed to reject the bureaucratic and authoritarian urban renewal of the past’. See also Pruijt’s (2003: 135) observations about the Netherlands: ‘involvement in neighbourhood politics and planning allows squatters to find allies and show themselves as constructive citizens, which has a moderating effect on repression; proposed anti-squatter legislation drives squatters to establish channels for lobbying’. Few cases of this involvement of squatters in conventional forms of citizen participation can be found in Spain, although a recent case was observed in Barcelona where Can Masdeu agreed to participate in the urban planning of the Collserola Park where the squat is located.

3 **Survival negotiations.** There are defensive negotiations in which squatters engage in order to prevent, or delay as much as possible, their forthcoming eviction. Hence, time is the most precious resource in play. By all legal means known, available and ideologically acceptable to squatters, they attend court cases and interact, at least, with judicial officials, owners’ attorneys and lawyers who defend squatting. As many squatters argue, these lawsuits can result in great media attention on urban speculation and could provide social legitimacy to squatting by framing the injustice of the eviction.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Consequences for Squatters if Successful</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-level negotiations</strong></td>
<td>- Private or public owner of the building</td>
<td>• Legal safety, temporal and spatial stability • Social and political recognition • Access to subsidies, plans, etc. • To pay rent, mortgage, taxes, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Local (or central) state</td>
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<td>- Mediators and facilitators</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transactional negotiations</strong></td>
<td>- Local (or central) state</td>
<td>• Money for rehabilitation and social activities/programmes • Key information about policies and urban plans • Social and political recognition • Indirectly, to avoid or delay eviction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Independent planners</td>
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<td>- Other formal or movement organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Survival negotiations</strong></td>
<td>- Private or public owner of the building</td>
<td>• Legal defence of rights to housing and to use vacant space • Public exposure of speculation and threats to squatters • Longer duration of squatting • Deal with repression</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Judicial court</td>
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<td>- Squatters' attorneys</td>
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<td>- Municipal architects</td>
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<td><strong>Forced negotiations</strong></td>
<td>- Judicial court</td>
<td>• Reduce personal damages and injuries • Reduce penal punishment</td>
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<td>- Police</td>
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<td>- Squatters' attorneys</td>
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Albeit not often extensively reported by media, or simply delayed until several years after the eviction day, some famous lawsuits in Spain (Cine Princesa in Barcelona, Guindalera and Laboratorio 3 in Madrid, etc.) have proved to be excellent events for the squatters’ movement (Casanova, 2002: 161; Martínez, 2002: 155–77; Asens, 2004: 301; Cañedo, 2006). Press releases and conferences, besides the support of squatters’ relatives, formal organizations and public celebrities, increased the media audience for the cases and the political value of this sort of judicial performance. In Madrid, the Laboratorio and Patio Maravillas, for instance, also accepted a visit and inspection by municipal architects in order to verify the structural conditions of the building. Thus, if the building was not officially declared to be in ruins, no-one could claim a rapid eviction only based on that aspect.

4 Forced negotiations. Basic defensive negotiations with state elements happen when squatters feel forced to deal with the police. If squatters want to avoid detention, being hit and accusations of public disorder or resistance to authorities, sometimes a talk with police officers may help. As I have experienced directly in one of the squats (PSOA Malaya, Madrid) in the case of an immediate eviction, squatters can accept the convenience of establishing direct communication with the police officers or with their political superiors, and to plan it carefully, aiming to reduce personal injuries and to keep their belongings safe.

It is worth observing that all types of negotiations involve the actors’ will to interact. The ‘forced’ level is the most ambiguous one because it is mixed with squatters’ reactions to the threat of repression. However, this expected event can be planned in advance and negotiators can be appointed if the opportunity to talk appears. Often there is more time for planning and to decide whether to engage or not in other types of negotiations. Obviously, squatters wish to remain in the building they occupy. Thus, negotiations are a tool for fulfilling this desire, with some additional or alternative outcomes too. In the lower levels of negotiations, the defensive ones, only a few extra hours or months can be gained, but personal safety and the political spread of the cause are also valued as complementary outcomes from negotiations. In the higher levels, an increasing political challenge to authorities may also steer the hidden agenda of the negotiations. In the case of successful legalizations, as was the case in Madrid, squatters could accept an alternative location in which to continue their activities.

Concerning squatting, I find the above classification more useful than others such as, for example, the one proposed by Burstein et al. (1995). The purposes of each level of negotiation do not correspond exactly to their six types of ‘policy responsiveness’ as a measure of successful outcomes for the movement — access, agenda, policy, output, impact and structural. Most of these address the legal dimension, while in my classification only high-level and some transactional negotiations share a similarly explicit aim. In my scheme there is also a clear hierarchy of outcomes, although they can either overlap or be reached independently. Yet most squatters keep the basic purpose of remaining radical outsiders and anti-systemic while squatting, so some attempts to introduce themselves into the institutional system cannot be properly regarded as movement goals. Both social disobedience to the prohibition on squatting and public protest are still their best resources when they negotiate. Given that, there is also a more radical attitude, which rejects any contact between squatters and state representatives or servants, this being odd in a context like the Spanish one where there have been few opportunities and attempts to get a legal status for the squats. Street riots, clashes with the police, illegal demonstrations and refusal of any mediating organizations are, then, preferred to negotiations by the most radical wing of the squatters.

7 See Della Porta and Reiter (1998) for a more systematic account of interactions between activists and police, especially during demonstrations. Several cases in Spain were analysed by Asens (2004).
In the Spanish context, when negotiations are aiming at the legalization of a squat, the City Council tends to be the target of squatters’ opposition, even when other state agencies or private companies own the disputed building (Martínez, 2002). City policies at large, however, tend to be subordinated to negotiations over a particular building. Specific proprietors’ interests, on the contrary, may influence negotiations. However, socio-cultural and political activities delivered in squats and criticisms of the system of allocation for public housing deal directly with collective consumption issues (Castells, 1983: 319–20; Dunleavy 1980: 53, 159). As a consequence, challenges to the local authorities, and occasional negotiations with them, are possible due to the strength of the squatters’ cultural autonomy and experienced self-management. Burstein et al. (1995: 279–281) argue that ‘outsider groups’ like squatters may increase their ‘bargaining resources’ by means of protest and the activation of ‘third parties’. Castells (1983: 322) also admitted the mediation of ‘organizational operators’ between urban movements, society and the political system. In particular, he pointed to the mass media, professionals and political parties as facilitators. These appeared again in the cases of legalization of squats in Madrid.

Due to the ongoing changes in urban politics and the overall effects of neoliberal policies, negotiations between civic organizations and the local government may simply diminish the previous antagonism to groups like the squatters (Mayer, 2006) by shifting movement organizations ‘from direct action to service delivery’ (Fainstein and Hirst, 1995: 186), unless negotiations follow current practices of mobilization and confrontation (Fainstein and Fainstein, 1993: 65). Certainly, the side effects of negotiations may be regarded as ‘risks’ for activists because they can lose their original motivations for squatting. But they can be considered just a structural feature of liberal democracy, ‘an institutional method for selecting leaders’ (Alford and Friedland, 1985: 250–3) and for conflict regulation, according to the ‘managerial perspective’ (Pickvance, 1984: 46).

Legalization of squats in Madrid

The legalization of squats in Spain has been rare. Squatting in Spain started in the mid-1980s as a predominantly youth and autonomous-libertarian movement, and enjoyed a vague legal status until 1995. From then onwards, according to a new Penal Code, squatting became a criminal offence. Notwithstanding that, in the mid-1990s the wave of squatting was at its height and only at the end of that decade did the movement experience a slight decline due to criminalization, stigmatization by the media and the emergence of the alter-globalization movement in which squatters also participated from the beginning (Martínez, 2007; González, 2011: chapter 4). Since 2007, in cities like Madrid squatting has spread again. The uprisings that started in the spring of 2011 with the M15 movement also gave birth to a strong resurgence of squatting all over the country. Thousands of evictions due to foreclosures and the powerful campaigns against them had the indirect consequence of increasing the social legitimacy of squatting, both for residential purposes and for social centres (Martínez and García, 2012). The turning point of May 2011 has meant a slight shift from the predominant attitude among Spanish squatters who previously opposed legalization but now would consider it, reflecting the view in favour of it by those who support squatting.

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8 This would fit in with the ‘organizational level’ of the ‘class perspective on the democratic State’ (Alford and Friedland, 1985: 345–53) since people who squat are not, in principle, wealthy enough to buy or rent a place. Moreover, even when some squatters are wealthy or belong to the middle or upper classes, they join a general claim for free access to abandoned properties and a better social distribution of spatial resources for all. That is to say, there is an immediate demand to accommodate themselves in the loopholes of capitalist urban speculation in parallel with a broader contestation of the capitalist system.
It was in the Basque Country where more cases of legalization occurred due to its specific political situation and the conception of ‘squatted social centres’ as ‘youth houses’, usually falling under the management of municipal youth policies that frequently accepted squatting as a first step previous to obtaining a stable and legal space (Donostialdeko Okupazio Batzarra-Likiniano Elkartea, 2001; Martínez, 2002: 239–42). Yet there has been a recent case of a more genuine and ambitious ‘social centre’ (instead of only a ‘youth house’) being legalized after several years of squatting, evictions and hard negotiations (http://www.astragernika.net/). In Catalonia there was only one squatted social centre that achieved legalization (González, 2004: 170–3; 2011: 216–18), although there were a few other failed attempts (the most salient was Magdalenes: Contra-Infos # 392, 2005; http://magdalenes.net) and there were also a few cases of agreements with private owners (for example: La Nave, own fieldwork). In Málaga another group of squatters negotiated from the start, in 2007, and reached an initial agreement with the local, regional and central state in order to legalize that experience of ‘cultural creation and citizen participation’ (http://www.lainvisible.net/). The striking thing is that most of these cases were not sufficiently known nor publicly debated amongst the squatting movement. For most Spanish squatters, legalization was a taboo subject not deserving any careful analysis. Based on my own research,9 I will now give a brief description of the case of Madrid.

**The case of Madrid**

In a preliminary account of all the social centres squatted in Madrid since the mid-1980s (including 8 additional cases of social centres occupied since 1977 that were more linked to the anarchist or citizen movement than to a European-style squatters’ movement), I identified around 145 cases. Sometimes social centres also housed people. Exclusively residential squatted buildings or apartments are more difficult to count due to the fact that most remain secret. Of the buildings squatted as social centres, only four were legalized (Seco, Eskalera Karakola, Montamarta and La Prospe), one of them (La Prospe) being not exactly a squat, but mainly a sort of a free school for adults. There was also another similar case of an open-air urban garden (Esta Es Una Plaza) which also obtained a legal agreement with the local council after being squatted. One squatted social centre in two locations (Patio Maravillas) made great efforts to be involved in high-level negotiations in order to obtain a state-owned building where a self-managed social centre could be developed. The most salient case of a legal self-managed social centre, often referred to as a squat by the mass media, was never squatted, although some former squatters initiated and joined the project (Tabacalera). Finally, I was informed of two cases of informal agreements with private owners that allowed the squatters to remain without any fixed date, until the owner had plans for the building. One of these latter cases was a collective house and the other combined a social centre with people living on the upper floors (Enredadera).

**Fully legalized squats**

The case of La Prospe does not exactly belong in the squatting movement at first glance, but became very close to it during its campaign against eviction. In 1977 this Popular School for Adults (PSA) was one of a number of groups who squatted, as a social centre,
a building owned by the official labour union (Falange) during the Dictatorship. Once it had been evicted from the building in 1980, La Prospe alone moved into a property belonging to the Catholic Church, whose rent was paid by the, initially reluctant, municipality (Social Democrats) after a short period of squatting. In 1991 the renting contract expired and the Church wanted the school out of the building. Activists then initiated a public campaign and a strong mobilization to avoid eviction from the place where they remained as squatters. After several years of losing all their cases in the courts, negotiations with the political parties and in particular with the Conservatives, who were ruling both the local and the regional government, were fruitful. In 2001, the regional government gave them free permission to legally use a public-owned building in the same area (a former working-class neighbourhood in the North East, now very close to the city centre) for a period of 50 years (González, 2011: 270–1).

La Prospe was not seen by the authorities as a typical squatters’ collective, but as an alternative school, for poor people mainly, with a very long trajectory and international recognition, although closely linked to leftist and libertarian ideals. Since the Church’s attempts at speculation had been revealed, La Prospe’s activists both supported squatting in general and publicly expressed their will to squat again if negotiations failed. Although most of the squatters in Madrid did not want to legalize their social centres, there was warm support for La Prospe’s high-level negotiations. La Prospe appeared as an example of well-conducted self-management and autonomous political commitment for all the progressive social movements of the city. After the legalization they continued to have the same style of working, with the same political connections (with autonomists and anarchists), and frequently offered their premises for events by other radical organizations (González 2004: 166–7). In conclusion, it is a solid and socially recognized anomalous institution within the city.

The second successful case of legalization involved a group of women squatters, Eskalera Karakola, with previous experience in mixed-sex squats. In 1996 they occupied a very old building, almost in ruins, which was used almost exclusively by women. The private owner of the building reclaimed it in 2003, but activists had already begun a public campaign asking the city government (Conservatives) to buy the building and to transfer it for free to the squatters. The squatters lost a court case, but the campaign resonated widely in local media and also received international support. The city council did not buy the building but, in turn, offered the occupation of two nearby public basements, in the same street (Lavapiés neighbourhood, in the inner city centre), for a very low rent (Marinas, 2004: 219–23, see http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/antigua_casa). The former squatted building was finally demolished a few years later, and the vacant land is now awaiting construction plans.

It is significant in this case that squatting was never denied by these feminists (and post-feminists) as part of their political identity, but it never enjoyed the same level of importance as gender politics (involving related issues such as women’s labour precarity, LGTB-Q militancy, migrant house workers, prostitution, sexist violence, etc.) from a radical and autonomist perspective. Thus, the demand for legalization of the squat or access to a different building was less due to the rights gained through the action of squatting than to the continuity of an independent feminist project. The latter was better accepted by the local authorities as a conventional civic claim than the multiple goals associated with the squatters (González, 2011: 272–81). In contrast to the previous case, the Eskalera Karakola’s attempts to negotiate a legal solution caused controversies among the squatters’ movement and did not receive unified support due both to the general taboo on the legalization of squats and to different approaches to gender issues. Notwithstanding this, the legalized women’s social centre kept the same autonomy and self-management of the space as before. Most of these feminists also remained very much involved in other social movements. Although they lost part of their popularity once they occupied a legal space, the social centre is still a central reference for alternative feminism and autonomism so it could also be considered a stable and anomalous institution.
The Seco social centre is the third case of full legalization of a squat. The squatted building was an old school subject to a renewal plan in a working-class area not far from the city centre. The first squatters formed one of the groups of the extreme-leftist organization (Lucha Autónoma) who participated in dozens of squatting actions during the 1980s and 1990s (Casanova, 2002). The building was self-abandoned after a first period of squatting (1991–97), and the re-squatting (1998–2007) opened up a political orientation much more connected to the neighbourhood and concerned about the current renewal plan, the problems of social exclusion, citizen participation and social housing. It is evident that these squatters experienced a turn to more conventional urban issues. As a consequence, they decided to join the neighbourhood association, worked together with independent urban planners and organized film festivals with the attendance of famous film makers supportive to the squatters’ demands for relocation in a public building. After a very long campaign, combining disruptive and conventional means, they were allowed to use a City-owned two-floor space with the obligation of paying a normal rent that could be partially subsidized on a year-by-year basis (Fernández and Ramos, 2009).

Seco’s activists did not conceal their long experience as squatters, but they consciously decided to separate from the predominant aesthetics, symbols and political discourse of the squatters in Madrid. Instead, they adopted a more conventional image by linking themselves to the neighbourhood association and to the demands for citizen participation in the urban renewal process. Thus, they united their demand for a new location for the social centre with demands for the rehousing of poor and old residents. This legalization process suffered the same harsh criticisms from many squatters of Madrid as the process led by Eskalera Karakola. However, wide social solidarity and impressive media coverage gave them substantial help in conducting the difficult negotiations with the local government. The new legal social centre combined the traditional style of neighbourhood associations working hand in hand with traditional residents of different ages, and the innovative contents of anomalous institutions such as solidarity with migrants (even by helping them to squat), hack-labs, free and copy-left culture, urban gardening, etc. (Martínez, 2010: 80–7).

Failed attempts at legalization

Apart from the three cases of legalization, it is worth exploring further the surrounding context in terms of other attempts and the general oppositional attitude. Regarding failed attempts at legalization in Madrid, most of the squatters tend to forget that the first local organization of the squatting movement (Asamblea de Okupas) initiated a discussion with the (Social-Democrat) Mayor in 1987 asking for self-managed spaces. This had no result and was not well known to later squatters, although the attempt was noticed in some fanzines and books (Casanova, 2002: 34, 165; Rivero, 2008: 50). As a legacy of that coordination of squatters, during the next decade the strongest organization among squatters was an ‘autonomist’ structure comprising libertarian and extreme-left groups (Lucha Autónoma). Squatting was one of the emblems of this organization, but many other struggles were relevant too (precarious work, feminism, students’ strikes, anti-fascism, anti-militarism, etc.). When this sort of social movement organization (SMO) was dealing with a very strong internal crisis, the decision of the most popular and massive squat (Laboratorio) to launch a negotiation process with the municipal authorities (together with the traditional neighbourhood associations) produced a huge controversy and a split between several factions of squatters in the city (Casanova, 2002: 162–9; Vidania, 2003; Vidania and Padilla, 2008: 56; González, 2011: 260). The social success of the Laboratorio, which had three different locations between 1997 and 2003 (plus a few days in another squat and several years more on a vacant plot), was mainly based on the massive attendance of people at its events (Cañedo, 2006). Most of these users did not care about the internal political issues of the social centre such as the process of negotiation with the City and the eviction threats. Apart from the large number...
of theoretical texts and debates that these squatters produced, and the support obtained from a new network of neighbourhood associations (Red Lavapiés), there were almost no ‘high-level’ meetings with authorities.

It is evident that the squatters’ will and initiative to conduct a process of legalization are not enough. Neither are social legitimation and the help of formal organizations. The powerful cultural activities hosted by the Laboratorio changed the general image of squatting in the city and could have been used as a policy sector apart from political squatting, as education, neighbourhood participation and women’s issues were for the legalized squats. However, political campaigns like opposition to the war in Iraq, which was strongly associated with this squat, and the refusal of the local government to recognize the project and to legalize it, were crucial to the negotiations. Apart from paving the way for the subsequent attempts at legalization, in 2010 some of the participants in the Laboratorio reached an agreement with the Ministry of Culture to develop a similar experiment in anomalous institutionalization in a very big building, in the same urban area, which had never been squatted before: Tabacalera. To some extent, Tabacalera enjoyed the fruits of efforts made a decade before. Self-management and independent and free culture were the main axes that defined this project, and usually the mass media identified it as a squat, regardless of its being legal from the beginning. Although the Tabacalera became a self-managed social centre standing relatively apart from the squatters’ scene in Madrid, after May 2011 it was used frequently by many working groups and the local popular assembly that emerged out of the occupation of Sol square.

In 2007, a new squatted social centre in an increasingly gentrified area of the city centre (Malasaña) opened its doors: Patio Maravillas. From the initial meetings, a majority of the squatters expressed their aspiration to achieve legal status, thus provoking an early division within the group and the exit of dissidents. Attempts to negotiate were delayed and the first meetings with the municipality only took place more than one year after the squatting action. After their eviction from the first location and the squatting of a new building, the same group tried several times to contact political representatives and to continue with the conversations, but the process was very slow: a few more meetings were held and did not reach any specific agreement. A piece of vacant land that was offered by the municipality as a possible future location for a self-managed building in the neighbourhood was also squatted as a way of obtaining a guarantee for that uncertain promise. Some months later, along with several of the formal organizations (neighbourhood associations, NGOs, etc.) that supported the squatters’ demands, the squatting of a City-owned building (almost in ruins and subject to obvious speculation) was also carried out, but the squatters were evicted some weeks later. Following the paths of the Laboratorio, the Patio Maravillas mobilized massive attendance for its activities, wide media coverage and an innovative way of combining culture and politics, local networks and wider movements (Patio Maravillas, 2008: 84).

Patio Maravillas always showed their intention to learn the lessons of previous cases of legalization and even got the support of state institutions such as the National Museum of Contemporary Art, following similar alliances previously established with La Invisible (in Málaga) and Tabacalera. Although independent arts and free culture were often the core of the favourable image of them presented by the mass media and also incorporated into municipal planning documents (the Strategic Plan for the City Centre, for instance), they also showed a more mixed, ambiguous and anomalous identity in combination with other militant activities such as solidarity with migrants, LGTB+Q.

10 The new experimental but legal (without paying any rent and even enjoying some subsidies) self-managed social centre of Tabacalera was promoted by some people who participated actively in the previous Laboratorios, but they were not the majority of the new collective. As a matter of fact, they declared that ‘Tabacalera is not a squat. Our political struggle is not about urban speculation and there is no core group with a high degree of militant politicization setting up the lines of the process’ (Ana and Raquel: http://blogs.latabacalera.net/autogestion/).
hackactivism, neighbourhood festivals, urban biking and squatting. This complex was probably not so easily understandable for narrow-minded politicians. Once again, the Patio’s desire to legalize their projects faced the opposition of other squatters who even once attacked the building with a small explosive device. The Patio activists always remained in close contact with other groups of squatters and alternative movements in Madrid, including M15, while trying to involve neighbourhood associations and wider formal organizations (leftist political parties, environmental groups, etc.) in the defence and utilization of their squat. The latter attitude was not very frequent in other squatted social centres, but became an example for most of the new ones that emerged from the M15 movement (Martínez, 2010: 88–95; Martínez and García, 2012).

The rejection of legalization

Finally, as an example of the predominant attitude of rejection of legalization among the squatters in Madrid, I will present the case a group of squatters who occupied six buildings between 2006 and 2012: Escoba, Alarma, Malaya, Mácula, Casablanca and Raíces (we will refer to it as Casablanca for short, since this was the best-known). All of these squats were located in the city centre (Lavapiés and Arganzuela), which helped to attract activists and sympathizers from all over the metropolitan region. This central position was also crucial to explaining the notoriety of their political positions. In these squats a more libertarian or anarchist trend to the autonomism was dominant, which included the rejection of any kind of transactional and high-level negotiations (following the same pattern among most of the squats). The novelty is that Casablanca combined strong support for squatting (for example, by hosting a Squatting Office which provided legal advice and published a how-to-squat book) with a respectful attitude towards pro-legalization squatters. Although no more than ten activists from the original group were still involved in Casablanca, the decisions and agreements reached over the years were still guiding everyday life and political principles. Like most of the Madrid squatters until May 2011, Casablanca’s activists consciously dealt with current survival and forced negotiations, but firmly rejected any sort of transactional and high-level ones (Martínez, 2010: 96–102). Hence, squatting as a means and an end was quite important for them, politically speaking. The close connection between Casablanca and the many working groups and the local popular assembly that were born as part of the M15 movement increased the social legitimation of this squat, which lasted two and a half years. Thus, this squat was also able to host a great diversity of people and projects, which increased its identity as an anomalous institution.

The issue of legalization was hidden and purposefully avoided in the political debates within Casablanca. It was a taken-for-granted issue. Before the events of May 2011, there were few ties with legal social centres like Tabacalera (some, occasionally, with Seco) although the M15 movement increased mutual, but indirect, collaborations. While squatting and social inclusiveness were explicitly pursued by Casablanca, the legalization of the squat was considered a topic on which it would be extremely difficult to obtain a consensus among the most active members, so it was almost never mentioned in assemblies. One of the exceptions was a SqEK (Squatting Europe Kollective) conference in February 2012 in which squatters from Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris and Brighton presented their knowledge of legalizations in their respective cities. Strikingly, this event in Casablanca was full at that time — around 60 people attended, not all regular members of the assembly. Therefore, Casablanca represented the prevalent stance of the squatters: direct opposition to both the state and major urban speculators such as real-estate companies and banks. Legal defence in court was considered the maximum degree of negotiation that should be maintained with the state. This did not prevent further cleavages between different political squats due either to their opinions about ongoing legalization processes or to other conflicts (physical aggression, exclusive coordination, etc.). This means that the rejection of legalization was not a sufficiently key
element to keep squatters united. In fact, a new series of meetings of different social centres occurred after the celebration of the first year of the M15 movement (12–15 May 2012), and a rented but autonomous social centre (La Piluka) was one of the regular participants. The M15, thus, was crucial in encouraging this new network of mutual aid between self-managed social centres.

Table 3 presents a summary of the main categories that have been used to compare, first, the three cases of legalization and, second, two cases of failed attempts (including the case of a social centre that was legal from the beginning) and one case where legalization was never considered an option. The first observation is that the ownership of the building and the need to deal with a Conservative party in the government were not relevant at all when squatters and state officials (from the City Council, mainly) started to negotiate. All the three cases of legalization moved their project to a new location provided by the state, although the economic conditions varied very much between them. With similar strategies, previous (Laboratorio) and further (Patio) attempts at legalization failed. The reason, according to the argument above, is that they were not able to neatly separate their strongest single-issue identity (creative, independent and free culture, in these cases) from all the political dimensions tied up in their projects (squatting, campaign against the war, the M15 movement, etc.). An additional verification of this analysis is that the Tabacalera project was initially defined as a basic cultural and artistic initiative with a political emphasis on self-management, cost-free status and sharing, instead of focusing on urban speculation or other social struggles. This creative image and the interest of the central government, at that time in the hands of Social Democrats, in opening up a wedge in a very conservative political area (both the city and the regional governments were controlled by the Conservatives), helped the Tabacalera to start on a legal basis from the beginning and to benefit from the accumulated knowledge of some former squatters.

As I have argued before, there were no other major variables that could determine the success of the processes of legalization such as the trajectory at the courts or the urban location. Lawsuits were used as typical forms of legal self-defence and as means to expand their claims, but did not help to preserve the continuation of the project since Spanish criminal law always favours the owner in cases of squatting. The central location of all the cases also contributed to the mass media coverage, but it was not crucial to helping the attempts of Laboratorio and Patio. Furthermore, a recent case of legalization (Montamarta) occurred in a peripheral neighbourhood (San Blas) and in a City-owned building (an old, abandoned market). Again, the political context of previous experiences of legalization (included those of vacant land) and the shift in the attitudes of squatters after the M15 movement, opened an easier path to the legalization of this former squat, although it was also an exception among the more than 20 visible occupations that occurred in Madrid after May 2011.

Conclusions

The principal aim of this article was to explain how the legalization of some squats was possible in the urban and political context of Madrid. I also wanted to verify if the various legalizations had led the political squatters, the particular squatters’ projects and the squatters’ movement as a whole to forms of ‘terminal institutionalization’ and of full integration into state institutions. My general answer may be summarized in three steps:

1 Most of the squatters engaged in negotiations with the state, but in a context of a general refusal on the part of the squatters to strive for legalization, the most frequent negotiations were defensive in order to defend themselves in the courts and to reduce police repression.

2 All kinds of negotiation involve a certain degree of institutionalization, but, in a context where only a few cases led to full legalization, the general outcome was a
Table 3 Comparative dimensions of strategic interactions between six squats and the state in Madrid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A) Prospe</th>
<th>(B) Karakola</th>
<th>(C) Seco</th>
<th>(D) Laboratorio</th>
<th>(E) Patio</th>
<th>(F) Casablanca</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership of the building</strong></td>
<td>1 Private (Fascist Union) + 1 Private (Church)</td>
<td>Private (Individual)</td>
<td>Private (Individual)</td>
<td>1 Public (Ministry) + 2 Private (Companies) + 1 Private (Political Party) + 1 Public (City) [+ 1 Public, Ministry]</td>
<td>2 Private (Companies) (+ 2 Public, City)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location (urban area)</strong></td>
<td>Prosperidad. City centre (inside M-30) former working-class area, now mixed</td>
<td>Lavapiés. City’s historical centre, poorer part, migrant and socially mixed area</td>
<td>Adelfas. City centre (inside M-30) former working-class area, now mixed</td>
<td>Lavapiés, City’s historical centre, poorer part, migrant and socially mixed area</td>
<td>Malasaña. City’s historical centre, socially mixed but highly gentrified area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State level in high-level negotiations</strong></td>
<td>Regional government</td>
<td>Local council (Public Housing Corporation)</td>
<td>Local council (Public Housing Corporation)</td>
<td>Local council [+ Ministry of Culture]</td>
<td>Local council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governmental political party counterpart</strong></td>
<td>(Social Democrats) + Conservatives</td>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>Conservatives [+ Social Democrats]</td>
<td>Conservatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campaign for legalization</strong></td>
<td>Strong, disruptive + legal procedures</td>
<td>Strong, disruptive + legal procedures</td>
<td>Strong, disruptive + legal procedures</td>
<td>Weak, disruptive mainly</td>
<td>Strong, disruptive + legal procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lawsuits</strong></td>
<td>Lost (and evicted) without penalties</td>
<td>Lost without penalties (civil court)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Lost (and evicted) without penalties (all in criminal courts)</td>
<td>None yet (but 1 eviction without penalties)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope of the support received</strong></td>
<td>Local + national + international</td>
<td>Local + national + international</td>
<td>Local + national</td>
<td>Local + national + international</td>
<td>Local + national + international</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue at stake</strong></td>
<td>Alternative education</td>
<td>Independent centre for women</td>
<td>Neighbourhood participation in urban renewal</td>
<td>Independent and innovative culture [+ M15 movement]</td>
<td>Mixed (neighbourhood services, rights for precarious people, free culture, M15 movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negotiations</strong></td>
<td>High-level + survival</td>
<td>High-level + transactional + survival</td>
<td>High-level + transactional</td>
<td>High-level + survival + forced</td>
<td>High-level + survival + forced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legalization</strong></td>
<td>Yes (2001, 50 years, free license)</td>
<td>Yes (2005, low rent)</td>
<td>Yes (2007, high rent)</td>
<td>No (Yes, later, in a non-squatted building)</td>
<td>No (but attempted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-management after legal</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Links to radical movements after legalization</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Tabacalera is here considered as an indirect continuation of Laboratorio, so it is referred to in square brackets in the same column.
‘flexible institutionalization’ where some squats, whether legalized or not, obtained more social legitimation than others and some were able to experiment with more creative initiatives and social diversity than others, and no case ended in a predominant integration into state structures and conventional politics.

3 Legalizations were possible due to the accumulation of experience from previous failed attempts, the aid of political networks including different formal organizations, wide and favourable mass media coverage, the strong will and perseverance of the squatters pursuing their goals of recognition and stability and, above all, the specific group’s capacity to depict itself as having a single-issue identity in which squatting was set aside.11

It is worth asking why in all these cases, the legalized and non-legalized squats may be considered as anomalous institutions. This category has been employed here as a way of distinguishing the countercultural, experimental and mixed orientations of collective projects that had a significant duration and social recognition, although not enjoying all the benefits of being considered a mainstream cultural or subcultural institution. The boundaries between types II and III of institutionalization are not easy to demarcate and sometimes both types may overlap, but the distinction has two advantages: (1) it allows one to divide the ‘flexible institutionalization’ proposed by Pruijt (2003) between the two types, subcultural and countercultural movements, suggested by Koopmans (1995) and others; (2) it allows one to verify Pruijt’s suggestion that some cases of legalization do not imply a ‘terminal institutionalization’ — as a full integration into conventional politics and the state institutions does — if the local squatters’ movement remains strong and non-conventional means of protest are prevalent. What my analysis adds to this is that all these well-known social centres that I have described, due to their very convenient and powerful city-centre locations plus their unexpected permanence, were able to preserve a strong commitment to an autonomous and self-managed way of functioning and retain bonds with other radical movements even after some of them became legalized. When legalization was sought for, alliances with formal organizations and increased involvement in the state bureaucracy were almost compulsory. Intense campaigns of solidarity and social mobilization through the mass media were also time-consuming. By contrast, the squats that were reluctant to legalize felt released from those kinds of work and constraints, thus concentrating on their regular countercultural affairs. However, in spite of those differences, I have observed that all of them made instrumental decisions in order to obtain social legitimation in the eyes of a broader audience beyond the autonomous movements. Moreover, none of them jeopardized their countercultural strength, social diversity, cultural creativity and radical political challenges to the dominant neoliberal order. The pervasive influence of the M15 movement in most of these social centres, and the political background and infrastructures that the social centres gave to the M15 activists, provide a proof of how all, to different degrees and in different forms, became anomalous institutions.

My analysis has not covered all the relevant questions about strategic interactions between squatters and the state. The repression of squatters, for example, has many different aspects that transcend the limitations of this research. The same may be said regarding the housing and urban policies that are among the major constraints and opportunities for the development of squatting. In turn, I have argued that four general types of strategic interaction in the form of negotiations shape the decisions that squatters take when facing the state, usually the local and urban levels of the state. As was pointed

11 Education, women and citizen participation of neighbours were the crucial single-issue identities in the three successful cases of legalization. However, Seco and Karakola, as well as Laboratorio and Patio, negotiated directly with the head of the city planning department. Participation and women’s policies were located in peripheral and powerless departments within the local government, so squatters strategically steered their efforts to meet with the more powerful planning authorities.
out before, the fact that most squatters participated in ‘survival’ and ‘forced’ negotiations reveals the subtle forms of institutionalization in which they are involved. This differs from the stigmatized image of squatters as living almost completely on the margins of society and the state, something that is reinforced by a parallel ideological self-identity displayed by some squatters. On the other hand, when some groups of squatters initiate ‘high-level’ negotiations with authorities in order to legalize the occupied buildings, this does not mean that the squatters want to be totally integrated into mainstream society and politics. Legalization provides stability, a means to access new resources and political recognition by the authorities. This entails a higher degree of institutionalization and more, and more intense, relationships with politicians, state officials and social elites, compared to squats that reject legalization. However, ‘transactional’ and ‘high-level’ negotiations do not necessarily imply, as the evidence from Madrid shows at least, that squatters abandon the countercultural, experimental, autonomous and self-managed styles of developing the social centres. A combination of both conventional and unconventional means of action, with the prevalence of the latter, tends to be the general pattern for all the squats and former squats.

Another conclusion emerging from this examination is that a solely actor-based explanation is not sufficient. The starting point for negotiations is a particular group of squatters who take the decision on the basis of an internal debate regarding their own experience, how they conceive the squatting movement and the state, the local political context, etc. Second, there is a strong pressure on the squatters when their building is in ruins, subject to imminent demolition, or to known speculation, so that negotiations must go fast and become more instrumental than ideological. In the absence of immediate threats, the squatters can delay their interactions with state elites or officials, and this makes it easier to plan the negotiations in advance and fight for a more convenient deal. Third, apart from the case of La Prospe, most of the attempts to become legal involved many other actors as mediators and facilitators, such as members of formal organizations, professionals who contributed their technical skills to write official documents and journalists who could produce positive narratives in the mass media. In addition, other squatters and activists from other social movements, even in the controversial context of Madrid, heeded calls to demonstrate and give support to the squats aiming at legalization. Identities and images projected by squatters also played a crucial role in the development of the negotiation process. As I have argued, if styles of dress and speech, and the tone of the discourses, are easily assimilated to the dominant stereotypes of squatters, the likeliness of being heard by the authorities decreases. An excessive insistence on the legitimate critique of urban speculation and defence of the right to decent housing, or a refusal to form a legal association, to pay rent or to move to alternative locations, tend to be seen as intransigence by city officials and local politicians. Thus, negotiations may be aborted if these radical discourses appear in the foreground.

With respect to the political context, successful cases of legalization cannot be explained by the Conservative political party in the city and regional governments of Madrid having any ideological affinity with the squatters. Not even parliamentary leftist parties could play a conclusive mediating role in support of these squatters. Instead, the stories of legalization could be interpreted as the authorities’ tactics of conflict regulation when facing strong networks and campaigns of civic actors. Before these particular campaigns, the authorities did not have any explicit plan either to fully integrate the squatting movement institutionally or to dissolve it, although they were aiming to repress it. Actually, pro-legalization squatters brought about a more flexible and open opportunity structure as opposed to one that was otherwise rigid and closed in accordance with the elites’ conservative and neoliberal policies. In particular, that was the case of Seco’s activists when they proposed an alternative urban renewal plan based on principles of citizen participation, the right of the population to be rehoused in the same area, social housing for young people and a new location for the squatted social centre. Facing this challenge and the social mobilization behind it, the municipality was obliged to give an answer and to partially accept those demands.
I also observed that splits between the ‘radical’ (anti-legalization) and ‘moderate’ (pro-legalization) branches of the Madrid squatters’ movement occurred as a result of the legalization attempts. Yet there were also internal divisions among squatters resulting from differing ideologies and political practices (vegan-anarchists, libertarian-autonomists, anti-fascists, M15-squatters, etc.). No less important, there were outstanding initiatives to coordinate and gather all the groups of squatters and radical activists (like the Anti-racist Football Festival of Alcorcón and the coordination of social centres after the M12M15-2012 events). In conclusion, pro-legalization squatters did not suffer extreme isolation but the same kind of internal differences that already existed within the local squatters’ movement. However, as has been shown elsewhere (Martínez, 2010: 102–23), the main political polarization stemmed from the respective conceptions of both the state and the squatting movement: (1) pro-legalization squatters are more prone to see the state as a fragmented entity and a crucial agent in the redistribution of public goods, while they do not believe that a common political discourse within the squatting movement exists or should exist at all; (2) anti-legalization squatters just want to destroy the state for it is seen, essentially, as a source of injustice and repression, while they trust in radical movements like squatting as a coherent ensemble of different groups pursuing the increase of challenges to power elites.

Finally, I argue that the success of the squatters’ movement cannot be assessed by the cases of legalization because, first of all, this is not a shared goal for all squatters. Success is better measured by everyday life participation (Llobet, 2005), the joy of regular mobilization, criticism directed against urban speculation and housing shortages pointing to the state and capitalist elites as responsible, the example offered to society by the squatters’ anomalous model of direct democracy and sustained and efficient self-management (Cattaneo and Gavaldà, 2010). This interpretation is concomitant with Hirschman’s (1982) emphasis on the satisfaction experienced by the movement leaders and participants during the process of mobilization, and with Tarrow’s (1998: 288, 293) remark: ‘movement success is its power to defy and to disrupt. . . . Participation in the movement politicizes and empowers’ (my translation). Thus, legalisation may be interpreted as one of the possible options that squatters face in order to achieve some material and instrumental resources, although this obliges them to engage in high-level and demanding forms of negotiations with the state (Burstein et al., 1995: 277). The squatters cannot escape from the inevitable dilemma of choosing between the different types of negotiation with the state, at least as it has been verified in the case of Madrid. However, to reach a legal status for the squatted building after a process of negotiation does not define in advance what type of institutionalization the squatters, the squatters’ groups and the whole squatters’ movement might end in. The anomalous institutionalization of squatting may include legalized squats (as happened in Madrid), but is founded in the long experience of squats, even as nomadic resistance after eviction from one place after another, in the social construction of free and accessible venues to gather, meet, create, produce, communicate, organize and attend alternative events.

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