



The Occupation of Squares and the Squatting of Buildings: Lessons From the Convergence of Two Social Movements

English Translation of:
“Ocupar las plazas, Liberar edificios”

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Introduction

To celebrate the first anniversary of the Spanish M15 (May 15, 2011) movement (henceforth M15M), a new international call to take over the streets and demonstrate against neoliberal policies was launched some months ago. The May 12 and 15 (2012) call (*#12M15M*) is a continuation of the O15 (October 15, 2011) one. According to the Real Democracy Now (DRY, *Democracia Real Ya*) and Sol Camp (*#AcampadaSol*) web pages, more than 1,000 cities in 90 countries (most of them in Europe and all over the American continent) hosted demonstrations following the O15 call, with Rome, along with the Spanish cities, among the most well-attended. Although there were no so



accurate records of the #12M15M mobilisation, the streets were filled again and the international revolts facing the capitalist crisis rise up continuously in different cities. The M15M was clearly inspired by the Arab uprisings against their authoritarian governments the same year. Simultaneously, the M15M served as an inspiration for the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement that started in New York on September 17, 2011. Due to the notoriety of the latter, all of these transnational, global or alter-globalisation networks and coordinated actions, have become known simply as the *Occupy* movement.

Beyond the well developed technological capabilities of these 'rooted cosmopolitans' (Tarrow 2005) to mobilise activists and supporters through diverse Internet tools and bring them into the streets and squares, there are relevant features and shifts within the M15M that deserve attention in order to understand its social and political significance as an anti-neoliberal movement. In particular, keeping in mind the transnational frame of this wave of protests facing the global capitalist crisis (something that, for instance, was also thoroughly attempted more than a decade before, against the "global summits" and the war in Iraq, and through campaigns such as Reclaim The Streets: Adell 2011: 130, Shepard and Smithsimon 2011), we will focus here on the connections the M15M had with rooted, local and spatial struggles. By doing so, we will show that specific actions, such as camping in the squares and squatting buildings, allow us to identify the links between socio-political impacts, movement strategies and the evolution of conflict. Furthermore, we argue that a convergence between two different movements occurred: the M15M and the squatters' movement (Adell et al. 2004, Martínez 2007, Domínguez et al. 2010). Our aim here is to explain why this convergence occurred and what consequences it brought about.

The protests against politicians' corruption and financial aid to the banks, which paved the way for the first huge wave of protests from the spring of 2011 onwards², were still, and even much more strongly, guiding the movement one year later. However, the 2012 Global May stressed much more specific claims over the newer and deeper neoliberal turn adopted by the Spanish governments during the worst years of the recent economic crisis³: cuts and privatisation measures in public education and health services,

2 Adell (2011: 135-137) has estimated that around 2,500,000 people attended the different M15M calls between May and November 2011, all over Spain. Within the same period, at least 67 demonstrations were directly called by the M15M in Madrid and around 500,000 people attended. This is a surprisingly huge mobilisation since the summer time traditionally discourages this sort of intense political activity.

3 During the last year of its mandate, the social democrat Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE, *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) imposed a labour reform (contested by a general strike in September 29, 2010), reduced public employees' salaries on average 10%, extended the age of retirement from 65 to 67 years of age and reached an agreement with the conservative Popular Party (PP, *Partido Popular*) in order to reform the Constitution and give total priority to paying the State debt, above any other public expenses. The PP won the General Elections in November 20, 2011, although there was a slight increase of abstention and non-valid votes as an effect of the M15M; the latter did not give support to any particular political party, but many members recommended voting for other parties apart from the PSOE and PP, or not to vote. With an ever increasing unemployment rate (close to five million people in May 2012), among other general troubles, the PP went farther with the adoption of neoliberal decisions: a new job market reform of the job market (contested by a General Strike in March 29, 2012, with much greater success than the one two years previously, due now to the punctual confluence of the M15M and all the labour unions), heavy cuts in public services (mainly education and health), fiscal reform and extraordinary tax exemptions for hidden fortunes, new financial aid to banks, etc. Indeed, the rise and fall of Spain's so called "economic miracle," under the rule of both social democrats and conservatives, was based on "a restoration of profit—and also of demand—through financial avenues, with the

labour reforms which -among other aggressive aspects- made it cheaper and easier to fire employees, and a dramatic absence of public policies to provide access to adequate dwelling⁴. Over the last year, the issue of housing gained visibility and recognition in the media agenda as a consequence of increasing actions and campaigns carried out by the M15M activists. Squatting buildings became one of the most prominent ones and was highly unexpected only some months before, although the squatters' movement had been active for almost three decades. This move to squatting and the subsequent wave of new squats evolved in parallel, and as a response, to the widespread wave of evictions of foreclosed homes. In Madrid, the M15M also expanded to or merged with other anti-neoliberal struggles such as the protests against cuts and privatisations in education, health and water services, solidarity with non-documented immigrants and, among many others, the institutional and economic support given to the Pope's visit. The main difference is that the squatters' movement had the longest experience of all of these new struggles. Squatting, indeed, was more effective in terms of the movement's material achievements and people who benefited from mobilisation.

In the first section of this article we will describe both the transnational and local scope of the M15M as an anti-neoliberal contestation. Afterwards, we will explain how and why squatters joined the M15M and, viceversa, how M15 activists approached squatting. Thus, we will provide evidence about the utilitarian role that already existing squatted social centres played in the M15M. Finally, after the camps were evicted, we will show how an explosion of new squats took place due to the initiatives of the M15M's new activists. Our explanation of this process of convergence rests in what we call the 'cumulative chains of activist exchanges' since the three aforementioned aspects of the process reinforced each other. The structural equivalence of the occupied camps and the squatted social centres (in terms of assemblies, self-management and social disobedience), sparked mutual collaboration from the very beginning. Camps within the occupied squares also turned into strategic ends, examples of direct democracy (Graeber 2011, Taibo 2011) and identity symbols of the M15M beyond their original function as a powerful repertoire of protest (Marcuse 2011), in a similar way as squatted social centres tended to be performed and defended. Last, but not least, squatting gained legitimacy within the M15M due to the initial collaboration as well as the increasing success of the Stop Foreclosures campaign. The M15M encouraged new activists to self-organise in many different groups: some of them went to work in pre-existing squatted social centres while others started to squat houses and social centres on their own. On the one hand, this mixture slightly reduced the radical and anti-systemic discourse of squatting. On the other, the anti-speculation discourse was incorporated into an anti-crisis one where squatting was justified by the extreme needs of increasing numbers of the population⁵.

generous involvement of accumulation mechanisms operating through the built environment and residential production" (López and Rodríguez 2011: 10) instead of "a strategy of income from innovation" (ibid.).

4 The five demands agreed upon by DRY-Barcelona and several organisations and popular assemblies also added: social accountability for the State debt and no more money for the banks, a more just fiscal reform and implementation of a general basic income (DRY-Barcelona 2012).

5 The empirical sources for this chapter are: 1) 23 questionnaires given to squatters and M15 activists during November 2011; 2) the authors' participant observation in the camps, squats, neighbourhood assemblies, working groups, e-lists and Facebook special groups of M15 activists and sympathisers (one of us is a regular activist in a squatted social

The M15M facing the neoliberal crisis and fighting for public space

Contrary to the State regimes framing the Arab uprisings and occupations of squares, the Spanish State was not ruled by an authoritarian or post-colonial regime. However, a similar discontent with the corruption of politicians, the high cost of living and the dramatic rate of unemployment, made the comparison easier when a group of 40 people decided to stay and camp in plaza *Puerta del Sol* (Madrid) after the unexpectedly crowded demonstration on May 15, 2011. The example of Tahrir Square in Cairo (Egypt) was explicitly mentioned by some of the first occupants. The previous European wave of protests also encouraged participants in the demonstration and the occupations of the following days: university students promoting the *Onda Anomala* in Italy, the series of strikes against the French government's decision to raise the retirement age, the protests of Portuguese youth (*Geração à Rasca*), the mobilisations in the United Kingdom against increases in university fees, Iceland's popular movement, which achieved a change of government, a new Constitution made from the bottom-up and the punishment of speculative financial practices, etc. (Observatorio Metropolitano 2011: 67-122). Alternative and independent media (for instance, the bi-weekly publication *Diagonal* and recent e-journals such as *Periodismo Humano*) on the one hand, and electronic social networks (such as Facebook and Twitter) on the other, had been widely covering all of this news during the previous months. Protesters who occupied Syntagma Square in Athens (Greece), Saint Paul Church's surroundings in London (UK) and Zucotti Park in New York (USA) declared they were inspired by *Puerta del Sol* (Saleh 2011). While most of these transnational mobilisations, feeding back on each other, were clearly concerned with the enhancement, deepening and accountability of democracy at large (Negri 2001, Tilly 2007), we agree with those authors who do not separate that aspect from their anti-crisis and anti-neoliberal criticisms as a continuity of the global justice movement (Calle 2005, Iglesias 2011, López and Rodríguez 2011).

The M15M was a sudden but also late mobilisation given the rapid downward spiral of general economic indicators and widespread political scandals since 2008 (Naredo and Montiel 2010). The State at large and specific policies implemented by Central, Regional and Local governments framed the principal grievances. The quality of the democratic regime was subject to overt and generalised complaints, for the first time since the Transition times after Franco's Dictatorship. New political passions arose all over the country. New slogans acquired immediate popularity: "They call it democracy and it isn't" (*Lo llaman democracia y no lo es*), "They do not represent us" (*Que no nos representan*), "Our dreams do not fit into your ballot boxes" (*Nuestros sueños no caben en vuestras urnas*), "Error 404. Democracy Not Found" (originally in English), "We won't pay your crisis" (*Vuestra crisis no la pagamos*), "Violence is when you cannot pay the bills" (*Violencia es no llegar a fin de mes*), "Politicians, bankers and capitalists: you are organised crime" (*Políticos, banqueros y capitalistas: sois el crimen organizado*)... The municipal elections of May 22, 2011, offered the main political window for the

centre and in a M15 popular assembly); 3) a collection of around 50,000 electronic documents made up of mass media news, activists' web pages and weblogs, Facebook and Twitter messages, video recordings, professional documents, etc. Most of the information refers to Madrid, although news, personal conversations and visits to other Spanish cities were also taken into account.

M15M's starting challenge to the institutional system. This window had the advantage of global media coverage of the electoral process. Activists, along with politicians, and even instead of the latter, were international journalists' main focus. National media had to compete with the attention that, for example, The New York Times gave to the Sol Camp on its front page. The camp's challenge consisted in people (and self-made constructions)'s persistence in the square after the explicit official prohibition in the days before the municipal elections. More than 30,000 people attended and peacefully supported the Sol Camp on the eve of the elections, although the authorities repeatedly threatened that act of civil disobedience. While the occupation of Madrid's main square triggered similar occupations in most of the big Spanish cities and intense political debate all over the country, the media coverage changed its focus once the movement started to face fierce repression. In particular, the violent eviction of Plaza Cataluña (Barcelona) on May 27, 2011, resulting in 120 injured activists (Boyero 2011; *Público*: January 11, 2011) signalled the shift from attention to the M15M's anti-neoliberal discourse, toward the increasingly repressive contentious dynamics with the authorities (McAdam et al. 2001, Meyer 2004). However, the M15M stayed alive and was the fresh air that fed the following, endless, mobilisations against the privatisation of water services, the cuts in the public health and education systems, and the worsening of labour conditions due to the the job market reforms⁶.

Another controversial and usually hidden dimension of the M15M is its social composition. While hegemonic media and some surveys stressed the predominance of young people with a middle class origin (Calvo et al. 2011), our observation of the Sol Camp, assemblies and working groups in Madrid emphasise a heterogeneous composition of different ages, social class and political experience in which the main axis of coincidence would be the precariousness of life (directly suffered by them or as a serious concern for the future generations) (*Política en el borde de la cornisa* 2011). The social category of *precarariat* includes all of those for whom their basic needs depend on the unstable benefits of welfare policies, those who rarely enjoy a safe and well paid job, and those who are not entitled with full citizenship rights: temporary workers, unemployed workers, domestic workers, granted workers (hired without a formal contract), poor retired workers, non-documented immigrants, disabled people, prostitutes, students and researchers without a regular income, intermittent artists, people evicted from their homes due to their incapacity to pay the mortgage, etc. Women and internet-friendly or “native” users contributed to inclusive and novel forms of political language within the movement. For the first time ever in Spain the weak ties of this heterogeneous *precarariat* or *multitude* became politically active and were able to challenge the social fragmentation and stigmas of marginalisation generated by the elites (Mudu 2009). According to Pastor (2011) the strong autonomy of this movement from the political parties and workers' unions, also appealed to a wide range of newcomers to the political arena as a means to

6 This orientation may also be seen as a conservative tendency in terms of maintaining the basic structure of the Welfare State, which, above all, in Spain has clearly always been much worse than in most central and northern European countries (Pino 2007, Navarro 2002, Herreros and Rodríguez 2011, Lenore 2011).

oppose political and economic elites, and their neoliberal policies, rather than being fuelled by a “positive” common political programme⁷.

How, then, did the M15M turn to local public space and squatting buildings as relevant matters of its activity? Apparently, the initial scale outlined by this protest was the arena of national politics. As we have seen, the transnational origins and resonances were also immediately at play. The interesting thing is that the local scale of the Sol Camp and the way it was dismantled offers an important perspective to understanding both the M15M's strategies of evolution and its identity configuration. During the camp's month of life, general assemblies occurred regularly and became the privileged locus of sovereignty and deliberation. Around 23 committees and 18 working groups formed the political structure of internal organisation, keeping continuous and close albeit occasionally conflictive, contact with the general assemblies. During the first week of existence, apart from bringing thousands of visitors to the camp and participants into the assemblies and small groups, one of the key initiatives was the organisation of neighbourhood popular assemblies. This move was aimed at preventing a decline in the mobilisation in case the camp were suddenly evicted, as was expected. Although the camp resisted all threats until June 12, 2011 (even after that date, some installations remained independently from the general consensus), around 116 popular/citizen assemblies started to gather weekly, from May 28, in the neighbourhoods and municipalities of the Madrid metropolitan region⁸. These “M15 assemblies” worked as new SMO (social movement organisations), side by side the working groups who remained active after the self-dismantling of the camp. Without repeating the installation of tents and mobile physical structures, the M15 popular assemblies reproduced the spirit of the occupation of Puerta del Sol and provided new breath and strength to the whole movement. In spite of the parallel celebration of weekly assemblies in Sol until the present (although much less well attended in comparison to the first five months), M15 assemblies adopted their own subdivision into committees and working groups, created new events and structures of coordination (even an independent journal in 2012), and, above all, were the meeting point for dealing with local affairs as well as keeping alive the bonds with the M15M's original concerns.

What we see here is the emergence of a new urban movement (Castells 1983, Mayer 1998, Nicholls 2010) which replicated several features of the “citizen movement” during the transition to democracy (1975 onwards: Pérez et al. 2008): a decentralised grassroots structure (then, contrary to the M15M, with strong influence from leftist political parties and labour unions), a demand of basic infrastructure and public services (indeed, the M15M aspires to preserve the legacy of those struggles) and broad proposals of political change aiming for the creation of new democratic institutions and social justice. The strive for democratisation that could have seemed revolutionary then, may appear simply *conservative* now given ongoing neoliberal policies. Nowadays, self-

7 However, DRY and other groups (see, for instance, www.madrilonia.org with a manifesto of fifteen “social rights”) obtained ample support for their positive proposals and claims, according to the abundant visits to their web pages and their resonance through different social networks. There were endless debates in general assemblies and within many working groups aimed at achieving a consensus about the M15M's four or ten principal demands, but the entangled and decentralised structure of the movement did not allow for such a goal.

8 Currently (May 2012), around 50 popular assemblies are still currently active and mutually coordinated.

management and assemblies are considered by the M15M as improved forms of direct and participatory democracy, rather than simple means to manage local affairs. The M15M agenda contends with immigration, financial flows, the real-estate bubble, the electoral system and non-violent civil disobedience, all these topics being awkward for activists during the last moments of the Cold War. The use of new technologies of communication also entails an increased capacity for recording, producing and disseminating every type of event in real time. Compared to activists of the late 1970s, the M15M seems more empowered and quickly mobilised, while facing lesser degrees of repression when occupying public space (Shepard and Smithsimon 2011)⁹. However, both urban movements arose during the declining stage of a previous period of economic growth and both oscillated between different scales of concerns (Villasante 2011).

Secondly, the Sol Camp in particular and the occupation of public space in general became crucial in the M15M's identity formation. The squares and the streets were obviously the means for channelling the public demonstrations of discontent, but, from the first days, the occupation of Sol with the setting up of a *temporary city within the city* turned that means into an end. Camps have been tried before as a protest repertoire (Calle 2005: 118, Adell 2011), but they had never taken place at the so called “zero kilometre” of Spain, the city's most commercial and emblematic place for tourists as well as for natives. The chief offices of the regional government are located right there. This landmark is frequently the final destination of demonstrations. It has been renovated several times during the last decades and motorised traffic has been severely restricted since the last reform. The tents, plastic, wood, paintings on the pavement, organic gardens, kindergarten, computers and the continuous flows of people meeting there and practising free speech went beyond the mere utilisation of the place for expressing other political demands. First, Sol became a symbol and paradigm of the free appropriation of public space, the right to public deliberation without mediators and the practice of direct democracy through assemblies, committees and working groups. For activists and sympathisers, the Sol Camp represented the ultimate exercise of the right to the city (Marcuse 2010, Lopes 2010). The M15M started there and the defence of the occupations was transformed into the defence of the kind of “counter-power” that heterogeneous and self-organised life entails (Negri 2001). Thus, a spontaneous tactic rapidly acquired the category of strategic end in spite of the awareness of the finite duration of this experimental “city within the city.” The occupation and appropriation of public space

9 The first big event of brutal repression faced by the M15M occurred during the eviction of the Plaza de Cataluña Camp (Barcelona) in May 27, 2011. In Madrid, the main episode of police brutality against the M15M appeared in August 2011, when a demonstration against the visit of the Pope ended with police beating peaceful demonstrators. Police violence escalated in the following months and in Madrid, during the first year of the M15M, more than 105 activists were arrested (along with 71 more during the last General Strike, March 29, 2012), more than 75 people were sentenced to fines, more than 114 were identified by the police as squatters, eight people faced court trials, accused of different crimes (Asamblea Antirrepresiva en Madrid 2012) and some immigrants could have been deported to their home country (this is difficult information to verify, but there are some cases out of Madrid such as this one: <http://www.kaosenlared.net/component/k2/item/1769-deportado-de-forma-poco-etica-un-integrante-del-15m-valencia.html>). In Madrid, a working group called the “anti-repressive assembly” started to meet and react more intensively in 2012 as a response to that escalation. This increasing repression is partially due to the conservative governments' less tolerant policies, but the socialists (and even the “united left” in Cataluña) have also maintained a hard line towards social movements in the past years (Fernández 2006).

entered the normal vocabulary of national politics and added to the available resources of civil disobedience.

The amazing consequence of this unexpected change may be conceptualised as establishing a tie of solidarity and comprehension with the occupation of buildings which, in turn, has a longer experience of claiming the same twofold approach (Pruijt 2003, Adell et al. 2004, Domínguez et al. 2010). Squatters also discovered a new type of “occupied and self-managed social centre” in the open air, at the core of the city, with a greater echo and acceptance by society at large in comparison to most of the relatively marginal squats.

How did occupiers and squatters merge?

First of all, before the Sol Camp, some DRY members had meetings in a squat (Patio Maravillas) in order to organise the demonstration of May 15, 2011. Squatters, autonomists and anarchists also joined that demonstration but within a minority block of no more of one thousand people (out of no less than twenty five thousand demonstrators). In fact, the occupation of Sol was proposed as a response to the clashes and riots at the end of the demonstration. These involved some members of DRY and some participants in the libertarian and autonomous block, among others. Twenty-four people were arrested and, as a quick protest, a group of 40 decided to sleep at Puerta del Sol.

I returned to Sol, injured by the police strikes, and there the last plastic bullet impacted my body. I guess it happened that I felt too angry and just found people as angry as me, or even more. I remember that someone took a speaker and said we were going to stay there until all the arrested were freed. I have to admit that that looked crazy because none of us, from the social movements, ever thought to propose that in this central place, in such a vulnerable place. (A, 32 year-old woman)

Certainly it was a very spontaneous group. (...) Those with flags were people of Anonymous, but also \people remained who were enthusiastic and politically conscious, squatters, people linked to ReS¹⁰. These were those who saw the [political] opportunity to stay. (...) Nothing to do with the media image of the squatters as hippies. (B, 23 year-old woman)

The first night I did not know anyone. Some people, of ages between 20 and 30, were familiar to me because we had seen each other in social centres like Casablanca or Tabacalera. (C, 28 year-old woman)

According to our enquiry, half of the people who pioneered the occupation of Sol had previous connection to squatted social centres due to occasional or frequent visits, but not as full time activists of the squatters' movement. The following day some tents and more solid structures were erected. The initial plan was to camp until the election day, May

10 ReS (Let's Break the Silence, *Rompamos el Silencio*) is a yearly campaign (occasionally they call for attending other protest events during the year), naming the most active autonomist organisation in Madrid after an older one, LA (Autonomous Struggle, *Lucha Autónoma*), which disappeared at the end of the 1990s (Wilhelmi 2000). ReS started in 1998 and often launched actions of civil disobedience and temporal occupations of buildings (Roig 2010; Res 2009, 2011).

22nd. The second night police evicted the camp and activists went to the nearby squatted social centre Casablanca (at a distance of around 500 metres from Sol) to rest, hold an urgent meeting and call for support for the occupation planned for the next day. This call succeeded and thousands of people attended the general assembly by covering half the plaza with tents. The camp's official prohibition increased the number of people gathered to defend it and to practice the largest event of 'social disobedience' of recent democratic times. Not only well organised activists decided to disobey the command to evacuate the square, but also different social groups joined the challenge and all together were able to reduce the risks of an eventual police attack¹¹.

The camp was not a sort of utopian micro-city. Rather, it could be defined as an experiment in self-management with the capacity to break up the normal quotidianity hosted by the public space (VV.AA. 2011). This "anomalous institution" (Toret et al. 2008) emerging with the occupation of public space inaugurated, for most, an autonomous form of everyday life politics which implied living, sleeping, eating, meeting, deliberating, taking decisions, protesting, creating and expressing one's self in an open and overexposed public space. The previous commercial, tourist and transitional functions of Sol were temporarily substituted by residential, political and rooted (a-place-where-to-stay) functions promoted by the camp (Requena 2011: 14-18). Not by chance many squatters applauded Sol as if it were a sort of squatted social centre where non-commercial culture, alternative politics and critical coexistence were able to develop: the culture of gifts and cooperation; openness to everyone interested in the creation, maintenance and defence of the space; the priority given to grassroots politics, direct democracy and issues censored by the mass media. Contrary to most of the squats, however, the Sol Camp simultaneously occupied the virtual territory of internet and was open to all through the availability of different kinds of records, transmissions and communications (Kaejane 2011). Squatters, then, had to also face their own challenges over public communication when they approached Sol given their usual reluctance to be so overtly exposed.

There is enough coffee and food (a lot is brought by the neighbours). Cleaning occurs regularly and everybody reminds you that this is not a gathering to drink alcohol. Last Thursday there were a pair of spaces for kids to play and paint. Everyone is listening to everyone. (...) The collective effort of taking care of the space results in the creation of a little liveable world where all are welcome. It is the same we read about Tahrir some months ago. (...) The democracy we want is the very organisation of the [occupied] square. (Fernández-Savater 2011)

¹¹ More than 30,000 people gathered in Sol the night before the municipal elections. A similar event of social disobedience in Spain occurred on March 13, 2004, with a massive sit-in in front of the PP and the Government Agencies the night before the general elections and two days after the terrorist attacks in Madrid. The PP government tried to avoid taking responsibility for its support and involvement in the Iraq war. Instead of showing the evidence of the Al-Qaeda authors, a government speaker publicly declared that ETA (the Basque independentist armed group) was behind the attacks. These lies provoked a large spontaneous mobilisation that some researchers (Sampedro et al. 2005: 248) estimated between 5,000 and 7,000 in Madrid, and between 15,000 and 23,000 all over Spain (see also Iglesias 2011: 181).

Therefore, squatters found the model of self-management and direct democracy practised in Sol extremely appealing. Initially, the closest squatted and non-squatted social centres (Patio Maravillas and Casablanca, on the one hand, and Tabacalera, on the other) gave support to the camp, stored construction materials and hosted meetings of particular working groups. Many experienced squatters joined several of these groups (feminism, politics, communication, conduction of assemblies, cleaning and cooking, among those we could directly observe) and, especially, those in charge of organising the neighbourhood assemblies. In addition, a lot of previous activist and squatting background was introduced into the M15M, full of youngsters and a diverse precariat without previous political involvement, apart from a few particular episodes and internet campaigns.

The squatters' movement contributed to the M15's structure and the context in which it emerged by avoiding vicious manipulations in the key assemblies, by trying to decentralise the structure of power, always backing arrested people and being very cautious about mass media. (E, 30 year-old woman)

We saw how the messages we [squatters] tried to spread throughout the years without any success, such as self-organisation and disobedience, suddenly reached all kinds of people who did not fit the profile of revolutionary militant we were used to. (F, 28 year-old man)

Following the implicit references of the last interviewees, it must be noticed that different conflicts also arose. For example, some squatters who offered interviews to journalists criticised those M15 activists who tended to appear too often in front of the cameras, using their own names and expressing their own opinions instead of just informing about the collective decisions made by the assembly. Many women with squatting experience were also very active in the feminist committee and faced a lot of initial resistance to the recognition of discrimination against women, so that they tried to promote the use of inclusive language and to denounce specific aggression women suffered during the camp. Squatters, side by side with other autonomists, libertarian and extreme-left militants, tended to concentrate into the so called "long-term politics" committee which criticised and vetoed some proposals agreed upon by the parallel "short-term politics" committee. While the former was more focused on a revolutionary programme and a general strike, the latter suggested a viable agenda of a few political reforms to be demanded immediately from the authorities. In general, the autonomist and libertarian tradition of squatters provided them with a strong concern about the "conservative" role of political parties and institutionalised labour unions, resulting in a permanent critique of any flag, symbol or explicit link to those organisations. Notwithstanding, the anarchist symbol (a circled A) was also a matter of conflict because it was considered a coherent symbol with the spirit of the M15M by some squatters, while it recalled a partisan symbol for the majority of people living in the camp. Institutional politics and most formal organisations, therefore, were strongly left aside due to the squatters' contributions, but this happened throughout different controversies. Finally, we may also mention the impact of the intense 'militant dedication' that applied to both squatters and new M15 activists, but not to all the residents, visitors and people involved in the occupation of the square. Among the latter, there were various "free riders," there because they could get free food and

beverages, or because they simply enjoyed chatting and meeting people. Among them, a small group of homeless and mentally disabled people also joined the camp. Some of them, along with a few artists, opposed the self-dismantling of the camp. Most of the squatters, on the other side, opted for moving the camp to the neighbourhood assemblies - a sort of self-eviction which may be regarded as a contradiction to the previous ethics of “squat and resist”, or as a new political learning for squatters¹².

Once the occupation of Sol ended, occupiers and squatters continued to converge. The most salient way of doing so was the integration of some working groups into the regular life of squatted social centres such as Casablanca and Patio Maravillas. In practice, this meant the recruitment of new squatting activists who had to learn many things slightly different from what they lived at Sol Camp: activities aimed at obtaining money, the physical works in the building, legal issues and involvement in court trials, adaptation to the political principles and agreements already running the squats, etc. The reward was the availability of free and central urban space where to meet, organise, store their belongings and continue their political engagement with the M15M. The latter meant, basically, the connection with other working groups and with the general assembly that was still celebrated every Sunday in Sol, their participation in demonstrations and in the neighbourhood assemblies. Of course, the integration into the squats also entailed more time and energies devoted to the inside-life of the squatters' movement, new bonds with collectives within the squats and, for some, also their disposition to squat themselves for living.

I did not know any squats before M15. I had a very distorted and old image of the squatters' movement, anchored on punk and ignorance... I like punk. When we [the Archive working group] started to participate in Casablanca is when I saw the real functioning of a squatted centre and how people organise themselves to bring about different projects with different motivations and common work. My perception changed sharply -from knowing nothing to feeling interested in collaborating and knowing the squatting scene. (G, 40 year-old woman)

My knowledge about the squatters' movement was very superficial. Since M15 I have come to know the movement in more depth (...) Before, I occasionally visited the Laboratorio [a squatted social centre of 2003 located in the same neighbourhood as Casablanca]. Now I have a very positive view about the squats, less based on prejudices. (H, 45 year-old woman)

¹² It is worth noting that, during the first weeks of the Sol Camp, the term “squatter” (*okupa*) was not very well accepted by some newcomers to activism. Indeed, the government was accused of being “squatters” of the democratic institutions as a way of labelling their corruption and misbehaviours. The same was applied to the police forces when they did not allow people to enter Sol. In that first stage of the movement, the word “okupa” still kept negative connotations of marginality, illegality and radicalism, which were supposed to contradict the pretended massive sympathy generated by the M15M and its purpose of deepening the democratic system and preserving welfare services. Even after several months of the mutual interaction of squatters, the M15 participants and anti-foreclosures activists, when the occupation of the Hotel Madrid started the night after the O15 demonstration, some people cried “We are not squatters! We are not squatters! This is not the M15, the M15 does not do this!” (according to two interviewees who were present, L and N, women, 25 and 26 years old).

Before BiblioSol [the Library working group] became integrated into Casablanca, I admired the squatters' movement. The M15 did not change that perception, rather it enhanced it. I know much more now about how it works and the methodology of conducting assemblies. (J, 19 year-old woman)

The interviews confirmed that occupiers had sympathies and affinities with the squatters, but these were not based on many previous interactions. Activists in the occupation of the square were not very familiar with squatting or had just visited some squats, not too often, to attend parties, talks or workshops. All of that added to the contacts established during the camp. Finally, each group was free to decide where to meet after the camp disappeared, and some working groups decided to move to squats. Casablanca, for example, initially hosted four of those groups (archive, library, arts and general strike), along with many other M15 activists who used the social centre for meeting (the libertarian assembly, the Lavapiés neighbourhood assembly, the legal committee, the anti-repressive assembly, etc.) without full integration as a stable collective. A full integration into the squat meant both increasing activist dedication and more detailed knowledge of the responsibilities that squatting a building implies. As the following interviewee notes, these consequences also provoked internal divides in the working groups and a slow process of involvement and mutual acceptance:

The relationships within the social centre were not very easy. It is not due to any refusal or aggression but because of the indifference shown towards the new people. It is something complex and understandable, and it has a solution. Moreover, the participation of BiblioSol members into the social centre is not evenly distributed. (J, 19 year-old woman)

Regarding the social composition, in the case of Casablanca we observed that the age range and predominant university qualifications were similar between occupiers and squatters. Their respective discourses, on the other side, differed slightly. Squatters emphasised their opposition to urban speculation, the social housing shortage and the lack of access to affordable spaces where to develop social activities able to get rid of State control and market laws. Occupiers stressed a more general anti-crisis and anti-neoliberal discourse. Both shared a focus on autonomy and direct democracy, which, in turn, evolved to solidarity and to reactive campaigns against the repression suffered by the M15M and akin mobilisations.

A new wave of squatting after the M15M: why?

As we have described above, many squatters were influential and active during the Sol Camp and, later on, as members of the popular assemblies which consolidated the M15M in neighbourhoods and villages all over the metropolitan region of Madrid. In September 2011 a new movement known as the “green wave” started to mobilise teachers and secondary school students against the new austerity measures of the Madrid's regional government. This movement was organised in very autonomous ways and through extensive assemblies, what could be interpreted as a direct influence of the M15M in which many of them were involved. Many university students and M15M participants supported and joined the strikes and demonstrations launched by the “green

wave”. However, traditional labour unions tried to hegemonise the “green wave” either at the level of assemblies or by showing their flags and symbols at the street demonstrations (Álvarez and Saleh 2011). Labour unions within the public schools were also inevitably involved in order to call and mobilise professors during the several days of strike they promoted. The comparison with exchanges with squatters shows a very different pattern. Instead of an arrow of influence from the M15M into the “green wave”, there was a constant process of mutual interactions between squatters and M15 activists (occupiers of the squares, first, and members of different working groups and popular assemblies, later). The M15M benefited from the squatters while squatting was expanded thanks to the M15M. Both movements shared principles of autonomy and self-management. They reinforced each other. Thus, an unforeseen convergence was silently developed¹³.

The main evidence underlying the aforementioned process of convergence is the increasing number of squats over the last year and the M15 activists' increasing support for squatting. In Madrid, the first attempt to squat a residential building by some former occupiers of Sol was in August 2011. This was a failed initiative quickly aborted by the police, but took place in the area close to Sol and helped to bring about narrow ties with other experienced squatters. Previously and outside of Madrid, in June 19, 2011, two other squatting initiatives by M15 activists occurred: in Zaragoza (*Paraguas*, evicted eleven days later: Diagonal 2011a) and in Cádiz (*Valcárcel Recuperado*, evicted in January 10, 2012: Diagonal 2011b). Significantly, both groups of activists tried to avoid the term “squatting” (*okupación*): “This is not a squat, but a recuperation of a public space” (Ramos 2011), “This is a different occupation, a process of transformation” (leaflet of *Valcárcel Recuperado*). At the end of the summer, a group of activists in the popular assembly of a working class district of the South of Madrid, took over a building with the purpose of setting up a self-managed social centre (*La Osera*, squatted in September 24, 2011, and still open). Three days before, a famous squatted social centre in Bilbao was evicted after 13 years of activity, which resulted in a lot of national and international solidarity during the summer, plus notorious media attention (Kukutza and Egia 2011). Squatting entered the mass media's political agenda again beyond their local coverage, which had been the usual approach since the late 1990s. The M15 initiatives of squatting in different Spanish cities became noticeable news due to those cases and, in particular, due to all the salient ones of the following months. After the international demonstration of October 15, 2011, the wave of publicly known squats rose continuously. For instance, one occupation of a residential building in Barcelona (the *150*, which obtained legal relief after a judge declared that no eviction was possible: Mir-García 2011), in Madrid (the Hotel Madrid, evicted in December 5, 2011) and others in Seville, Oviedo, León, Vigo, Burgos, Granada and San Sebastián with different fortunes in terms of duration, and also with differing degrees of connection with the M15M¹⁴.

13 From the first days of the M15M, conservative media attempted to accuse squatters (according to their devilish image of squatters as the not sufficiently persecuted destroyers of the sacred right of private property) of being the authentic organisers of the M15M, regardless of its obvious plural composition and its initially *moderate* demands (Alsedo 2011). These kind of articles, however, just shed light on the rising bonds that were being constructed between squatters and M15 activists. Squatters provided material help and political support, but they did not organise nor drive the M15M because no individual organisation was capable of doing that.

14 *Centro Social Recuperado Mercado Provisional* (Seville): <http://mercadoprovisional.blogspot.com/> *La Madreña*

Concerning this vibrant atmosphere of new squats, two central distinctions must be made: 1) some squats are mainly dedicated to social, cultural and political activities (self-managed *social centres*) while others are mainly used for residential purposes, although some combinations of both functions are also frequent; 2) all the squatted social centres are openly claimed and defended while in the case of squats used as homes, most of them are carefully preserved without publicity, as stealth squatting. Only through informal means of communication and interviews with members of three organised groups of Madrid (the Squatting Office -*Oficina de Okupación*-, the Housing Office -*Oficina de Vivienda*- and the working groups on housing within the popular assemblies -*Grupos de Vivienda de las Asambleas Populares*-) were we aware of the huge number of occupations after the summer of 2011 in Madrid although no exact figures can be offered in the case of squatted dwellings. For example, two of those activists declared:

There has been a lot of stealth squatting made by individuals for living, people who are in the street, who have been left in the streets. (...) People in the neighbourhoods tell you about too many cases every week. (...) Dozens, dozens. I wouldn't say hundreds but, at least, dozens, specially here in Lavapiés [city centre]. (L and N, women, 25 and 26 years old)

Regarding the squats mainly used as dwellings, these can be divided into those which were promoted by M15 activists (former occupiers of Sol and members of the popular assemblies or working groups) and those promoted by squatters (many of them also actively engaged in M15 actions, groups and assemblies). Additionally, there are two other categories remaining in a status of partial public visibility (known for some neighbours and activists, but not openly visible nor necessarily claimed as squats): squatted houses for undocumented immigrants who were helped by former squatters and M15 activists (at least, one whole block in Madrid); and squatted houses for foreclosed families and individuals who were helped by their own neighbours and by PAH (Platform of People Affected by Foreclosures, *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*) activists¹⁵. Another category should include those homeless people, foreclosed individuals and unemployed youngsters who asked for temporary shelter in houses and social centres which were squatted before May 15, 2011. Finally, according to the high numbers of people asking for information every Thursday at the Squatting Office (located at the squatted social centre Casablanca) and the success of the distribution of a very detailed and updated “squatting handbook” (in November 5, 2011: *Okupatutambien 2011*), we

(Oviedo): <http://15moviedo.org/?p=562> *Centro Social Recuperado Laboratorio Social* (León): (<http://www.leonoticias.com/frontend/leonoticias/Los-indignados-Comienzan-Las-Labores-De-Limpieza-Dentro-De-vn84890-vst216> y <http://tomalacalleleon.org/> Granada: <http://acampadagranada.org/2011/11/19/nota-informativa-acampada-granada-liberacion-de-espacio-publico/> and <http://www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/acampada-granada-15m-desalojo-negociacion-centro-civico-abierto-rector> Burgos: <http://www.diagonalperiodico.net/Carta-al-barrio-de-Gamonal.html> y <http://diariodevurgos.com/dvwps/se-recupera-un-espacio-en-gamonal.php>

¹⁵ Some cases gained media coverage due more to police repression than the will of the squatters. For example, the same day that a family of five members (a 29 year-old mother; three little children of four, two and one; their grandmother of 52; and their great-grandmother of 87) was evicted, “the whole neighbourhood mobilised in order to get a shelter for the four generations of this family. (...) The unique solution was to occupy an empty apartment in a building.” (Díaz 2011) Another case: “The group of squatters -comprised of precarious young people, students, unemployed, immigrants and a foreclosed family- declares that they couldn't remain [because of the security guards' pressure] without the help of neighbours, M15 members and individuals.” (Hervás 2012)

may estimate that hundreds of houses were also taken over throughout the year based on their own self-help.

Table 1. Squatted Buildings in Madrid (Municipality and Region) Linked to M15M

Name	Type	Entering date	Eviction date	Ownership
Centro Ocupado Templo del Sol	Social Centre and Housing	June 19 / 2011	March 3 / 2012	Private company
Centro Social Cultural y Autogestionado La Osera de Usera	Social Centre	Sept. 24 / 2011	July 5 / 2012	IVIMA (Public Company owned by the Regional Government)
Local Autogestionado La Hormigonera	Social Centre	Sept. 2011	Not evicted yet (May 2012)	Private owner
Komplejo Okupado Autogestionado Laberíntico Anarquista (KOALA)	Social Centre and Housing	Oct. 1 / 2011	April 26 / 2012	Private company
Hotel Madrid	Social Centre and Housing	Oct. 15 / 2011	Dec. 5 / 2011	Private company
Espacio Vecinal Liberado Montamarta	Social Centre	Oct. 23 / 2011	Dec. 5 / 2011	Municipal Government
Centro Social Okupado y Autogestionado 16.0	Social Centre	Nov. 16 / 2011	Not evicted yet (May 2012)	Regional Government
Espacio Sociocultural Autogestionado EKO	Social Centre	Nov. 26 / 2011	Not evicted yet (May 2012)	Private company
Edificio Corredera 33	Housing	Nov. 17 / 2011	Febr. 2 / 2012	Private company
Edificio Concepción Jerónima 11	Housing	Nov. 25 / 2011	March 26 / 2012	Private owner
Centro de Salud Liberado de Galapagar	Social Centre	Nov. 28 / 2011	Not evicted yet (May 2012)	Regional Government
Barracón del Consenso de Rivas	Social Centre	Dec. 3 / 2011	Not evicted yet (April 2012)	Municipal Government
Centro Social La Salamanquesa	Social Centre	Dec. 28 / 2011	May 25 / 2012	Private company
Centro Social Okupado y Autogestionado La Burla	Social Centre	January 2 / 2012	Jan. 4 / 2012	Central Government
Edificio Sebastián Elcano 36	Housing	January 2012	Not evicted yet (April 2012)	Private company
Espacio Vecinal Okupado y Autogestionado La Cantera	Social Centre	March 11 / 2012	Not evicted yet (May 2012)	Private company
Centro de Convergencia Semana de Lucha por la Vivienda	Social Centre	March 18 / 2012	March 25 / 2012	Private company

Source: authors' research according to interviewees, social centres' websites, mass media and www.okupatutambien.net.

According to Table 1¹⁶, we have counted seventeen overtly public and collective squats after May 15, 2011. Out of this figure, fourteen functioned as social centres and three exclusively as dwellings, although at least three cases combined both aspects. We have not included, then, all the individual cases (some of them received a media coverage) and semi-public collective squatting actions that occurred simultaneously. All the evictions were forced, except one case of self-eviction (Centro de Convergencia) decided by activists who organised the Week of Pro-Housing Direct Actions that developed in the meantime and after a fierce media campaign against the occupation. In terms of ownership, eleven buildings belonged to private owners or companies, while six were State-owned. This particular condition did not affect, in a conclusive manner, the duration of the squats since each case faced different court trials, owners' plans, media pressures and social support. However, it is clear that only two of the six State-owned buildings were evicted, while this happened in almost half of the private-owned ones. Furthermore, those State-owned buildings were also the ones which lasted less (two and 43 days, respectively) in contrast to the privately-owned and already evicted buildings whose duration oscillated between 51 days and nine months (the latter, Templo del Sol, was a rare case of semi-public squat ruled by former occupiers of Sol who were not interested in social and political activities, only in “personal” workshops, yoga and so on). These seventeen cases of public and collective squats differ substantially from the rhythm of previous squats: six were opened in 2009 and five more in 2010. Therefore, given the addition to the already existing squatted social centres in Madrid, the actual volume (May 2012) comprises twenty (most of them without people living permanently inside).

Three relevant features of this novel situation may be pointed out:

a) Instead of the word “squatting” (*okupación*), the words “liberation” or “recuperation” of spaces were generally preferred in order to attract a broader spectrum of people to the buildings who were not familiar with the squatters' experiences and could see them as either too radical or too marginal. Nonetheless, sooner or later in all the cases it was necessary to deal with the legal issues related to squatting (technically, in legal terms: *usurpación*) and the word “squatting” was increasingly used without the first ambiguity or as a combination of all the equivalent words (even *ocupación*, without the supposedly more radical “k”)¹⁷. The anti-speculation discourse, thus entered into the usual political anti-crisis language of the M15M due to this convergence with the squatters' movement. Squatting of empty buildings, therefore, as happened with the occupation of the squares, became a relevant ingredient of the M15 identity – both may even be considered diffuse and anomalous.

16 We have not included some cases such as the Social Centre La Piña (located at the El Escorial village and squatted in August 2011) because we could not find any link with the M15M. Two other cases of squatted houses (León, Tres Peces and Huertas) were not included because squatters could not remain in the buildings for more than a few hours after taking them over. In the latter cases, however, there is no doubt that most of the squatters were active participants in the Sol Camp.

17 See, for example, how the three first issues of the M15M journal try to keep that ambiguity and oscillation between the terms *liberación* and *okupación* (Madrid15M 2012).

b) Secondly, these squatting initiatives stemmed from groups of activists involved in the M15M but only in few cases a whole popular assembly decided to squat (this unusual consensus was reached, for instance, in the neighbourhood of Carabanchel). In most cases, the preparation and execution of entering a vacant building was launched as an “independent” action but once the social centre was opened, the popular assembly of the area would give support, meet there and organise things together. This cautionary separation was required, according to some squatter-occupiers, by the necessary secret process of squatting in order to avoid owners increasing their security measures or the appearance of the police. Therefore, only a few groups of activists planned the squatting action, contrary to the usual open decisions and transparency of the M15 popular assemblies and working groups. Furthermore, the initial separation was also produced because it was not easy to reach a consensus about the squatting actions.

c) Squatting became more and more legitimised by M15 activists and supporters. Social centres achieved the condition of being practical means of fighting back against cuts and privatisations while providing free, accessible and self-managed social services for locals. Squatted houses, on the other hand, were conceived as a *natural* solution, a socially self-organised one, to the lack of social housing and the increasing amount of homeless and foreclosed people¹⁸. This dramatic situation for thousands of families and individuals was increasingly treated by mass media as an unbearable problem to which only few organisations and movements were protesting. Thus, squatting entered the public discourse as one of the possible alternatives to deal with this extended social problem¹⁹.

Concerning squatting, I believe that the M15M has achieved what we [squatters and autonomists] were not able to do during several decades: to turn squatting into a natural discourse and repertoire, as a valid alternative for broader audiences without scandalous prejudices which were so frequent before. Nowadays there are many more people involved in these processes [of squatting] who never would have approached a squatted social centre before. Now squatting is seen as the temporary residential alternative and response to the housing question and the eviction of people from their homes. This is an enormous qualitative shift. (A, women, 32 years old)

18 According to the “popular legal initiative” which demands cancellation of debt with a bank once the mortgage is not paid and the bank obtains the ownership of the house as a compensation, between 2007 and 2010, more than 271,000 foreclosures were launched as judicial procedures in Spain. This includes four times the number of foreclosures during 2010 in comparison with 2007 (Proposición de Ley 2012). During 2011, more than 58,000 foreclosures were effectively executed in Spain (Muriel 2012).

19 The new legitimacy of squatting, especially for the M15M activists, can be seen through manifold expressions. For example, minutes and documents of popular assemblies: “The occupation of empty buildings is not an attack on the system, but self-defence against the continuous loss of rights. Squatting is not the ideal solution to the housing problem, but it is a valid option in our struggle if the goals are public.” (<http://acampada-adh.blogspot.com.es/2011/11/debate-derecho-la-vivienda-desahucios.html>) Another examples is the news media and the debates it produced, in particular, those published in the most leftist media: “The M15 is not behind all the cases of squatting and not even all the different people who participate in the M15 support these actions, but there is a high degree of acceptance.” (Herrera 2011); “I consider as legitimate and even healthy in democratic terms, squatting buildings belonging to companies who obtained their wealth thanks to the sweat and hopes of thousands of people, who have destroyed the real economy, who had defrauded the money which is needed in health and education, and who had fed the endless chain of corruption.” (Vidal 2011)

Worth to note within this process is the role played by PAH. This formal organisation started, in November 2010, a campaign called “Stop Foreclosures”. Many PAH activists had previous political experience in “*V de Vivienda*”, the pro-decent housing movement which was active between 2006 and 2010 (Blanco 2011). The new campaign was developed mainly in Cataluña and Murcia but was extended to Madrid after the irruption of the M15M. When evicted people (or people in risk of being evicted) went to the Sol Camp and, later, to the popular assemblies asking for help, the PAH activists offered their skills as mediators and their active solidarity attempting to avoid the evictions. Peaceful means of protest in front of the houses were their usual way of behaviour, which found a favourable echo with the peaceful social disobedience also preferred by the M15M. More than 100 evictions were stopped between November 2010 and November 2011 in different cities and the campaign has been even more intense in recent months. The “help of the M15M” was crucial to enhance the campaign and to recruit activists for specific calls. Immigrants and working class people were the usual targets of evictions so they also joined the pro-housing activists, the M15 precariat, squatters and the traditional neighbourhood activists (in the case of Madrid, the PAH was narrowly connected to another formal organisation, the FRAVM, Regional Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Madrid, *Federación Regional de Asociaciones Vecinales de Madrid*). Mass media coverage was very positive from the beginning, although police repression was also increasingly damaging to the initial success of the mobilisations and mediations with banks and political authorities.

What we argue here is that the Stop Foreclosures campaign was a crucial mechanism in order to advance quickly in the convergence between squatters and M15 activists. The housing question gained priority within the M15 agenda through personal cases presented in the assemblies. The PAH was very influential in some of the working groups and in the Housing Office regarding two basic demands to the State: the provision of affordable rental housing and legislation about making the cancellation of mortgage debt compulsory once the keys are handed back to the bank. These demands were strange for the squatters and, in particular, for the Squatting Office, but the solidarity with people affected by unemployment, lack of a regular income and the threat of eviction, mobilised squatters too. On the other hand, in September 2011, the PAH brought forth another public campaign called “Social Foundation” (*Obra Social*), in which it proposed the “recuperation” (in other words, the squatting) of foreclosed and empty properties. This was an evident response to the escalated repression they were facing. The consequence was to embrace the tactics of squatting while preserving the pressure on the State and the banks (<http://afectadosporlahipoteca.wordpress.com/obra-social-pah/>). Obviously, this perspective ameliorated the relationships with both squatters engaged in the M15M and squatters who remained relatively apart. In the case of Madrid, given the internal division within the PAH concerning the promotion of squatting, most of the cases were supported by the Housing Office and some working groups on housing issues dependent on the popular assemblies, which combined both approaches -direct action and affordable social housing.

A lot of PAH activists belong to the FRAVM. (...) Some very active people within the PAH definitely vetoed squatting as a solution. (...) Through PAH people who are in favour of squatting, we [the Housing

Office] are in contact with families and people who are interested in squatting. Most of the support has been given to individual families squatting. These have not been public squats because this is the strategy they decided to follow. If Corredera and Concepción Jerónima [squats for living] were public, it is because that group wanted to be so. (N, 26 year-old woman)

The major public impact of the new wave of squats was the Hotel Madrid, located at 100 metres from Puerta del Sol. Activists entered there the night after the O15 demonstration, replicating the squatting action in Barcelona. While the squatting of the *Edificio 150* of Barcelona was carefully prepared in advance by a group of squatters (La Rimaia) and a pro-housing collective (500x200) with the same historical roots as the PAH (the “V de Vivienda” / *Plataforma per un Habitatge Digne* movement), the Hotel Madrid was a spontaneous action decided on during the night of October 15, 2011, after the initiative of a group of activists with previous experience in squatting and in V de Vivienda and the ReS, who founded the Housing Office the following day (albeit it was a project they were had been working on for months in advance). The PAH and the popular assemblies backed these take-overs²⁰. In Madrid, the Housing Office was also comprised of activists who were, at the same time, members of PAH, the M15 working groups and the Squatting Office. The initial assemblies and the hard work of self-organisation seemed to produce an ordered process of allocation, but, suddenly, the centrality of the squat attracted evicted people, poor immigrants and homeless individuals who did not wait for the decisions, rules and the queue established by the Housing Office, so they occupied the rooms of the Hotel on a first come, first serve basis. The purpose of the Housing Office activists was to invite people to squat different places after temporarily living in the Hotel, and at least two groups behaved in such a way (the occupations of Corredera and Concepción Jerónima streets). According to many informants, coexistence within the Hotel Madrid was difficult due to internal cleavages between those who participated in the Housing Office and those who did not care about any organisational criteria and even used violence to preserve their right to stay. Different ages, economic situations, cultural and political backgrounds, criticisms coming from different sources, and continuous breaking of the general agreements, made that particular case a quite conflictive experiment of squatting both for living and for serving as a social centre. However, the Hotel Madrid was a success in terms of public and international publicity, playing the role of being a sort of substitute for the Sol Camp where thousands of interested visitors and activists entered and where some M15 working groups and the Popular Assembly of Madrid gathered. The urban centrality of this squat, again, allowed for society at large and for the M15 activists in particular, to debate about housing rights and the right to the city in a moment of relative decline of the M15M -around November 20, 2011, when the movement was not able to articulate a coordinated alternative challenge to the general elections.

20 See, for example, the note published on the PAH website (<http://afectadosporlahipoteca.wordpress.com/2011/10/16/reapropiaciones-de-verdhabitatge-y-hotelmadrid/>) and the video where a PAH-Madrid member, and also part of the Housing Office, tells about the experience of the Hotel Madrid (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74_vizxHGoY).

Conclusions

The topic of the convergence between different social movements has not been explored much among social movement scholars (unless we count theorisations about the coevolution of movements or the reaction of countermovements: Oliver and Myers 2003, Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). In this chapter we have argued that the M15M and the squatters' movement experienced such a convergence. For us, convergence does not mean a full integration of the involved movements turning into a new one, nor punctual and isolated collaborations between them. Rather, we refer to a mutual approach and understanding, first of all, and a continuous and sustained collaboration, secondly. This entails more than a strategic alliance. The exchange of mutual support evolves to mutual contamination of their repertoires of action and identities. Thus, both (or more) movements reinforce each other while keeping their respective autonomy, without any of them ruling the other(s). After a time of walking along together, they may become separated and again take their own independent ways. The latter situation is still not the case regarding the M15M and the squatters' movement in Madrid after a year of positive feedback between them. In general, while the squatters provided their occupied spaces as infrastructure for the M15M, their skills and knowledge concerning the housing question (and urban speculation), and their political experience in developing autonomous ways of self-organisation, the M15M activists contributed with a more open connection to the claims of different social groups, an anti-crisis and pro-Welfare State discourse, a decentralised network of coordinated assemblies and working groups, and an intense use of all possible means of communication.

According to our empirical analysis, squatters were very active in the occupation of the square at Puerta del Sol by engaging in different ways of conducting assemblies, participating in political debates and contributing with their own material and social resources. Squatted social centres were also very influential for a lot of young people who entered political life and social movements for the first time due to the landmark occupation of Sol. They served as places to become socialised with practical examples and theoretical principles of autonomous self-management. This happened even before the Sol Camp, although during its month of existence, the nearby squats (and also a non-squatted self-managed social centre) were intensively used by M15 activists. After the self- eviction of the Sol Camp, some working groups became stable projects within squatted social centres. Afterwards, some groups closely linked to popular assemblies or who were involved in the Sol Camp, started to squat by themselves. A new wave of squatting houses and social centres arose, and the flows of mutual aid between squatters and the M15 activists increased the legitimacy of squatting. This legitimacy was also promoted by the explicit campaigns of solidarity launched by formal organisations like the PAH. Families and individuals who were evicted due to their inability to pay their mortgages attended the M15 popular assemblies, the PAH meetings, the already existing Squatting Office, and also the new M15 active collectives such as the Housing Office and the working groups on housing issues. The "Stop Foreclosures" campaign was the principal meeting point for all of these new pro-housing activists and its successful actions stem from that sustained collaboration. The crucial role of this campaign, however, complemented the chain of all the previous activists' exchanges we have mentioned.

The occupation of Sol was a sudden event in a highly relevant square of the city centre which was occupied with tents and a sort of temporary self-made city, for the first time ever. A political structure of direct democracy made up of general assemblies, committees and working groups was as embedded within the physical occupied space as a general anti-crisis protest, that the occupation turned into a fundamental element of the M15M identity. As argued before, the occupation of the square was a kind of open squatted social centre. Squatters appreciated that while also contributing to shape it in accordance to their autonomous ways of self-organisation. This imbrication also implied that squatters accepted more inclusive and transparent modes of functioning. Already existing squatted social centres proved they could be useful tools for keeping the camp alive and for providing shelter to many of the initiatives that emerged in the Sol Camp. When this was not sufficient, M15 activists also decided to squat by themselves, being cautious about the different feelings and opinions about squatting within the M15M. The more experienced squatters also gave information, material resources and personal support to most of the new squats. In addition to these flows of exchange, there were structural conditions that helped the convergence to take place. On the one hand, the predominant precarious social composition of both movements was quite similar, although the M15M included a broader range of the population affected by the crisis. On the other hand, the key elements of the political opportunity structure were very much favourable to the convergence during the first period of the M15M (between May 15 and November 20, 2011). The central government applied a neo-liberal turn and the parliamentary political parties were highly divided. Mass media coverage of the M15M was unusually wide and detailed, probably caused as a reaction to or competition with the huge flows of independent information produced by citizens through the internet. Repression was not too destructive at the beginning, although it escalated in the following months, late enough given the solid political structure and ways of response that the M15M had already created. Each new squat took advantage of the specific conditions of the building and its ownership, but their extensive social support contributed to reduce the impact of repression. The convergence between squatters and M15 activists, finally, resulted in concrete and material victories by exploiting social and autonomous use of abandoned buildings, which were specially needed during the winter time. The new squats also contributed by offering examples for many of the new homeless and precarious workers who, thus, could made use of this direct action as an immediate solution to their housing needs.

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