RESEARCH ARTICLE

SQUATTING, COMMONS AND CONFLICT: A DISCUSSION OF SQUATTING'S CHALLENGES TO THE COMMONS

Galvão Debelle dos Santos

Autonomous University of Barcelona

ABSTRACT: This piece aims to provide critical distance to the notion of the commons, increasingly used in academia to depict social movements. Squatting shows particularly useful to expose the blind spots of neo-institutionalist approaches but also confronts the unitary and homogenizing Marxist "urban commons" narratives. A circumstantial history of squatting in Barcelona is provided to contextualize the internal conflict examined in this paper. Then, an introduction to the case study, Espai Social Magdalenes (ESM), is provided. ESM was the stage of an intense conflict opposing different sectors of Barcelona's squatters' movement. I use interviews made with activists close to the squatter's movement to reinforce the theoretical claims of this piece with their assessments. Arguably, untamed and open conflict is at the heart of squatting, leading to movements that are far from the pacified and orderly framework of a significant part of the commons literature.

1. Introduction

Squatting turns empty properties into a dwelling and relational space through direct action, thus directly challenging private property and encouraging resistance to legal but violent policies such as evictions and displacement (Aguilera, Bouillon, Lamotte, 2018). It confronts the illegitimacy of abandonment with the

legitimacy of use. Squatters claim back parts of the city that are under attack by real estate speculators, creating bonds with pre-existing forms of urban life, which include conviviality, distinct forms of popular culture, working-class housing heritage, and styles of dissent and conflict against authorities which are (or were) embedded into the daily life of specific sectors of the urban population. As such, squatting can foster strong links of mutual support against real estate abuses and other forms of alienation produced by economic injustice. Speculation within the real estate market invariably translates into overproduction and underuse of the housing stock (Harvey, 2014), which is although protected by laws enforcing private property, despite many constitutional orders formally subordinate individual property to social needs.

Squatting has been studied through the "commons" framework on the ground that the squatting movements provide a wide array of resources for communities (Di Feliciantonio, 2017; Ferreri, 2016, Finchett-Maddock, 2016; Gargiulo and Cirulli, 2016; Montagna and Grazioli, 2019; Seyfert, 2016). Squat resources are many-folded and in constant re-definition, and include affective and relational tools, technical skills, and support to retake control over one's economic and affective life, access to commodities virtually free from economic barriers (food, clothes, etc.). Yet, a quantitative-centered view of squatting fails to account for its intense relation with inhabiting as a social fact. Inhabiting is an activity that consists of appropriating something exterior to the self (Illich, 2004), of adapting a place to oneself (Colin, 2016). The particular sort of appropriation implied in squatting is justified by use-value, in contrast with the dominant understanding of housing as a commodity, an exchange value, on which contemporary urban policies are based (Lefebvre, 1972).

Furthermore, squatters' diversity regularly leads to highly political and meaningful internal conflicts, making further collaboration mutually undesirable. This absence of a stable governance structure clashes with the neo-institutionalist emphasis on commons' collective capacity to enforce (formal and informal) rules and create robust mechanisms to regulate conflicts and authority (Dawney et al., 2015; Leyronas and Bambridge, 2018; Ostrom and Hess, 2007, p. 67). Barcelona squatters' movements seem to have betted for dense and intensive coordination only when external threats required so (Debelle, 2019). This pragmatic and affinity-based collective organizing also contrasts with the Marxist concern to "govern the commons" (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Lordon, 2019). Although the capacity to unite against common threats is a key factor for squats' longevity, the opposite is also true. Sometimes, organizing apart creates a greater capacity for external conflict against the property regime.

I conduct this exploration using theoretical concepts and methodological tools coming from activist research and militant experiences. I present a discursive analysis of movement sources and a series of interviews realized in 2012 within the framework of a project called MOVOKEUR. The interviewees were involved in the squatters' movement at a time arguably relevant, as it corresponded with a significant attempt to legalize a squat through negotiations with the city council.[1] By focusing on a few discursive structures, I try to show the positioning of different social actors with regard to the issue of negotiating or not with the authorities. The case study chosen for this piece is an example of how different political means and goals within a movement lead to irreconcilable conflict.

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1 Of course, the interviewees' views are not representative of the complexity of this case study, nor account for many other perspectives that exist on this subject. See Terra Cremada „De la Magdalenofobia a la creación de espacios autónomos" for an example: https://terracremada.pimienta.org/delamagdalenofobiacas.html

2. The commons framework

The paradigm of the "commons" claims its historical roots in pre-liberal Europe before the process of enclosures created the basis for the "primitive accumulation of capital" (Marx, 2011). Although their presence can be traced worldwide, the concept of the commons comes from self-management traditions present in Northern and Southern Europe. The English term logically comes from the former geographical area, comprising both the UK, Germany, and Scandinavian countries (Bruun, 2015). Commons are not always opposed to the property as such, and can indeed be based on forms of collective property, adapting variegated characteristics across time and space. Nordic commons were resources over which no modern property rights existed (Olwig, 2005), while the commons of the Iberian Peninsula tend to become inscribed in formal documents or other contracts similar to rent, use contracts, etc. (Moro, 1981).

One remarkable breakthrough for the commons literature has been the work of Elinor Ostrom (2015). Olstrom notably challenged Hardin's (2009) thesis of "the tragedy of the commons", which considers human nature as egoistic and thus prone to produce "free riders". Ostrom reminds us that the state and the market are most often taken for granted in orthodox analysis, while their undesirable consequences are overlooked.[2] On the contrary, commons are characterized by property relationships that reflect the collective decisions of the users (Algarra, 2015; Sastre, 2018; Rodrigo, 2010), overriding its merely economic dimensions. The commons can thus be defined as *integrated and coherent systems constituted by a resource, a community, organizational rules related to a shared goal, and a governance structure* (Dietz, Ostrom, Stern, 2003 in Leyronas and Bambridge, 2018).

Ostrom's analysis, though, focuses on resources with an environmental character – may these be water resources, fields, forests, and so on. Yet, the community that creates and upkeeps the commons cannot be assumed to pre-exist (Dawney et al., 2015). Even when resources are available to an existing community, it doesn't follow that these will become commons. In fact, non-environmental resources often only exist if they are produced (Federici and Caffentzis, 2013). Resources become a common by virtue of a collective organization: communities create commons, not the other way around. Commons only come to exist as such if and when decision-making structures and spaces are socially reproduced by its (or part of its) users. The centrality of the labor of social reproduction makes the verb "commoning" preferable, as it puts the emphasis on the *process* through which resources are kept in common (Blomley 2005, Dardot and Laval, 2015). Although the use and the object can't be separated from each other, the nature of the link between the two is worth reflecting upon.

Missing out on social reproduction is particularly problematic when looking at collective endeavors affected by exclusion, misery, repression, etc. Although empty flats could be considered as resources, their availability is only made possible through squatting. But resistance can only take place if relational ties are built to engage, maintain, and expand the movement's capacity for conflict (Dee, 2019). Even more so, squatters' persecution could lead to a final outcome characterized by negative resources – such as fines or prison sentences, but also physical and psychological harm, etc. The risk involved in squatting illustrates that political goals have more importance than the use of the resource itself: what matters is that people set their minds to do certain things together (Picard, 2015). Regardless of what squatting enables (a dwelling space, a social center, a workplace, etc.), the private use and appropriation of resources are secondary to the participation itself.

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2 Furthermore, empirical evidence shows that, in certain cases, bottom-up community self-management of resources is more efficient both ecologically and economically, compared to centralized and state-led distribution of responsibilities (Olstrom, 2015).

Marxist scholars have brought use-value to the fore by analyzing external pressures on "urban commons" and, more broadly, the relationship between commons and capitalist enclosures (Dawney, Kirwan, Brigstocke, 2015). Enclosure processes take place both materially (e.g. through gentrification and displacement) and immaterial (e.g. the dispossession mechanisms of cognitive capitalism) (Harvey and Smith, 2005). As such, struggles for the commons in the liberal era have been labeled as "urban commons", a catch-all term used to articulate many-fold political discourses (De Angelis, 2017; Federici, 2018; Hardt and Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012; Holloway, 2010; Mattei, 2011). Holloway's (2010, p. 30) synthetic phrasing illustrates the simultaneous reach and vagueness of the concept: "if capital is a movement of enclosing, the commons are a disjointed common-ing, a moving in the opposite direction, a refusing the enclosure, at least in particular areas".

Squatting fits this definition as it relates to systemic dynamics of an enclosure such as urban speculation. Yet, aggregating variegated practices under a single term favours the reading that common organizational rules related to a shared goal exist at a movement scale. An attempt to bypass the limitations of an all-inclusive term is the categorization of certain commons as "anarchist commons" (Jeppesen et al, 2014).[3] This phrasing accounts for the far-reaching adaptive strategies needed by squatters to face up to a hostile environment (De Angelis, 2017, p.196). Yet, its focus on a particular ideology fails to acknowledge that, if all squatter's movements share one characteristic, it's precisely their heterogeneous nature.[4] Tales of convergence and unity repeatedly collide with internal conflicts, as such often perceived as either pointless or counterproductive But is it so? As Lauren Berlant points out, it seems reasonable to "hold in suspicion the prestige that the concept of the commons has attained" and I will do so here by looking closer at the importance of (internal) conflict.

3. A dynamic contextualization of the case study

Conflict is always a sort of action that creates a relationship. It is an action that implies the existence of others and an intentional interdependence. Its first outcome is the creation of a shared situation, in which the actions of each part refer to that of the other (dos Santos, 2001). This definition departs from the phenomenological perspective that conflict is a structural element of society that is mediated by the gift (Godbout and Caillé, 1992). Following the theoretical work of Marcel Mauss, Caillé and Dzimira argue that class struggle takes the form of confrontations in which each part seeks the recognition of their singularity and participation in a community through displays of generosity (Caillé and Dzimira, 2009). Although the norms regulating conflicts become inscribed in the juridical system, they are negotiated in symbolic (Godbout and Caillé, 1992; Mauss, 1923) and extralegal terms (Arendt, 2005; Boilleau, 1995).

Squatting is particularly interesting in this regard, as it challenges private property's most prominent feature: the right to exclude (Blomley, 2008). Trespassing and locating one's body long enough in a private place with no legal title inevitably expose individuals to a threat of enmity from its legal owners. For this reason, Rowan McMilian argued that squatting is an antagonist political practice in itself, as it objectively

3 This concept provocatively brings together a pre-liberal popular practice (commons) with a political ideology born as a response to the development of the state-capitalist form (anarchism). The story of this historical continuity has been developed by some authors (Sastre 2018; Algarra, 2015, Ward, 2002, Rodrigo Mora, 2010).

4 In fact, this diversity translates in different stances towards the commons paradigm. While Bologna squatters claim that they are the true commoners, opposing to the authorities discourses on the commons (Bianchi, 2018), Barcelona squatters tend to refuse the term all together under the formula "We have nothing in common" (Debelle, 2017; Rossini et al. 2017).

exposes squatters to the asymmetrical violence of the state enforcing private property (Milligan, 2016). But enmity is relational, and the degree of state violence varies according to the political context and squatters positioning (Verdier, 2018). It thus seems more precise to say that squatting is *potentially* antagonist: if no action is taken to avoid confrontation, at some point squatters will be removed by force in an antagonist stand-off (Debelle, 2017).

Yet, while it is true that the state-market system generates antagonism, movements also have agency. The tension between inclusion (inside) and exclusion (outside) has a dynamic character. As such, exclusion is a fluctuating dynamic, making it more accurate to talk about processes and/or situations of exclusion (Colin, 2016). Although subjects' objective position is hardly negotiable, their subjective stance – of compliance or contestation – influences the treatment they will get. Put differently, *the enemy is something one becomes* due to one's actions and condition (Krøijer and Sjørslev, 2011), by virtue of a relationship that is delimited in time and space, with other political actors. Enmity is thus imminently relational (Krøijer, 2013). As such, the willingness to accept or refuse to give up on antagonism becomes a crucial factor to distinguish different logic of confrontation.

Capturing the dynamics brought about by different confrontational stances requires a throughout the historical account of movements' actions and how diverse logics developed across time, a task undertaken in previous research (Dee and Debelle, 2015; Debelle, 2010, 2015, 2017; Debelle, Cattaneo, González, Barranco, Estany, 2017; Rossini, Azozomox, Debelle, 2017). Barcelona's squatter struggles relate to five cycles of protest that are linked with the evolution of squatting practices in Barcelona. Squatting has existed throughout Catalonia's history, but here the experiences that took place before the mid-nineties are outside the scope of this article. The experiences that took place after ESM are also left out. This section sketches the broader dynamics fuelling the episode at hands, and focuses on the third cycle: bifurcation. The historical account will focus on the facts that account for the significance of ESM.

The first cycle corresponds to the Golden Age of squatting in Barcelona (96' - 01'). It was marked by the entry into force of the new criminal code in 1996, to which the squatting of private property was added (Asens, 2004: 329)[5]. Paradoxically, the increase of repression was accompanied by the expansion and strengthening of the movement. Social support augmented, notwithstanding an uneven media stigmatization (Barranco; Gonzalez & Martí, 2003). State-organized repression provoked a state of permanent conflict with the police, which peaked in 2001 when an anti-terrorist operation accused squatters of belonging to ETA, a Basque independentist organization (Asens, 2004; Barranco, Gonzalez and Martí, 2003). The movement began to reflect some signs of change that were determinant for the occupation of ESM to take place

From 2000 onwards, the global anti-capitalist movement emerged, opening the second cycle that lasts from 2001 until 2006. SSC's lost protagonism, as other social movements became more active (González and Barranco, 2007). Anti-globalization transformed the *okupa* identity. Over time, more squats started to characterize their struggle through different narratives for social change than those typically associated with squatter's counter-cultural antagonist values.[6] This is the "maturity age" of Squatted Social Centres, where many projects emerge but the general radical character of the movement decreases. A squat that corresponds with this trend is Can Masdeu, occupied during the last days of 2001. Squatters claim that "Can Masdeu was

5 The article 245.2 of Chapter V of the Criminal Code typified the fact "of occupying a property, a house or a building without authorization, or of keeping them against the will of the owner" (Baucells, 1999).

6 The movie" El taxista ful", available on Youtube, shares movement reflections on precariousness.

founded to host a gathering of activists against climate change in March 2002"(Can Masdeu, 2018).[7] In previous research, we provided the following description of the symbolic relevance of this squat:

> An example of this change of strategy is provided by the squatted social center Can Masdeu, in Barcelona's neighbourhood of Nou Barris, who advocated a vague identity, avoiding the squatter stereotype created by the media during the "golden age" of the movement. The non-violent resistance to the eviction of Can Masdeu, which lasted for 3 days, received partially sympathetic treatment in the media. Still, it was the public support of the neighbours and the strong social network that Can Masdeu has gathered around its project that prevented this social center from being evicted, which nowadays (2016) stands as one of the oldest unlegalized social centers in Barcelona. (Debelle et al. 2017).

Can Masdeu illustrate both how squatters enhanced the contention repertoire of the anti-globalization and the characteristics of the new approach to squatting that would then become widespread? On the one hand, evictions became less immediate, making it more worthy to re-squat elsewhere than to try and defend each space threatened with eviction. On the other hand, staying longer also meant stronger ties to the neighbourhood, something that always require time (Dee, 2018). By then, some sectors of the movement criticized that this favourable situation was the result of years of fiery struggles, and shared their concerns about the depoliticization of squats (Debelle, 2017). Unified coordination lost importance, as the movement expanded out of the city centre and SSC's obtain more longevity. Bonds between squats and their respective territories grew steadily. The early and mid-2000's also implied the birth of the pro-housing movement, which would later become Spain's largest squatters' movement.

The third cycle (2006 – 2011) is the period on which this article focuses on, and it starts with the pro-housing movement's call for multitudinary protests. All across Spain's squares, people gathered to protest against soaring housing prices. These actions were given little attention, whilst stories around "okupas" multiplied. Criminalization peaked in late 2006 in the context of upcoming elections.[8] Politicians campaigned against squatting to avoid a serious debate on housing (Debelle, 2015). This cycle is marked by the transfer of powers over public order from the Spanish police to the Catalan police, the Mossos d'Esquadra (Molano, 2015). The enactment of strict municipal civic laws in early 2006 also favoured a moral panic to emerge over squatting.[9] Nonetheless, squatting kept expanding to new sectors, this time with new approaches favouring negotiating the occupations. Although facing stark repression, radical squatters also adapted to these new circumstances and reinvented their practices, as the following protest cycles would show.

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7 Interestingly enough, some activist from Can Masdeu came from CSO Torreblanca, a squat that ended up negotiating with the municipal authorities of Sant Cugat, a city very close to Barcelona. Torreblanca was granted a legal status, but for some activists the process had been unsatisfactory. Thus, when Can Masdeu was squatted, the option to negotiate was not on the table.

8 Indeed, the volume of news is only comparable to the period of 96-97, yet this time systematically in a negative tone (Debelle, 2010: 149).

9 On February 4th 2006 a police agent was severely injured by a flower pot thrown from a squatted place, generating a peak of "okupa" related media attention. The documentary film "Ciutat Morta", that explains the case of the "4-F" by interviewing its protagonists, received an historical audience of half a million viewers on the day it was finally aired on TV3, the main television channel of the Catalan autonomic authorities (Group Against Criminalisation, 2016).

4. Espai Social Magdalenes

The aforementioned narrative shows why ESM can be seen as the culmination of the trend created by the movements that sprang out of the anti-globalization movement (Debelle 2010, 2015, 2017; Dee and Debelle, 2015). This protest cycle would lead to the creation of the pro-housing movement, and by 2006 the platform V de Vivienda would bring thousands to the streets. A squat largely involved in these protests was Miles de Viviendas, in which some were against legalization while others were against it.[10] It was in this context that some squatters explored negotiation strategies to expand and de-stigmatise the practice of squatting. Some activists involved in Miles de Viviendas moved on to Espai Social Magdalenes (ESM), located at the city center, and were the first to openly push forward with this approach (Mir, França, Macías, Veciana, 2013). ESM was part of a campaign called *Promoció d'Habitatge Realment Públic* (PHRP), meaning "Promotion of Truly Public Housing". The campaign aimed to occupy vacant blocks in the center of Barcelona to confront institutions with an outcry for social housing.

Five buildings were occupied between 2006 and 2007: Magdalenes, Amargòs, Tallers, Avinyó, and Panses. The PHRP auto-defined itself as a network of "civil disobedience" to "self-restore the fundamental right to housing".[11] In line with the housing movement, the PHRP subscribed to the "Letter of Measures Against Real-estate and Urbanistic Violence" and its call to undertake civil disobedience actions until the administration ensured the right to housing and the city".[12] PHRP activists joined former residents subject to mobbing effectively reinvigorating struggles against urban speculation (Taller VIU, 2006). It is worth noting that the PHRP didn't identify itself with the discourse of the commons, but made great emphasis on claiming "rights", of which the constitutional right to housing (contemplated in Article 47).

In the case of ESM, when the occupation of the building took place, only three neighbours still resisted. Hotel Catalonia had acquired the building in 2004 and planned to construct a hotel. Activists' resistance delayed the eviction long enough (April 2010) for the construction license to expire. However, the construction at Carrer de les Magdalenes 13-15 did take place. In fact, in March 2018, the government's commission of the City Hall presided by Ada Colau, would sign a compensation for Hotel Catalonia of 800.000€, after the Catalan Supreme Tribunal of Justice ruled that they had suffered damages (La Vanguardia, 30/03/2018). ESM's vision for scaling up squatting for housing to broader audiences was largely inspired by similar movements in Rome (Mudu 2014). In fact, ESM's assembly also invited municipal representatives from the Italian capital to their space.[13]

In their 2008 campaign "We construct spaces, we produce rights", the collective stated its willingness to legalize their building and Amargós, causing controversy and explicit distancing from other assemblies.[14] For antagonist sectors, legalization implies significant inconvenience After legalization, the formalization of the rights of dwellers and users can enhance unequal power relationships within the collectives. At the movement level, legalized squats are employed as examples of the "good" squatters in order to further

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10 In a previous article, I mistakenly claimed that Miles de Viviendas was the first squat assuming the discourse of legalization (Dee and Debelle, 2015), but as Azozomox since kindly pointed out, it is not so.

11 Manifesto, available at https://sindominio.net/phrp/?q=ca/node/143 [last accessed on March 23rd 2020]

12 "Es presenten es primeres promocions d'habitatge realment públic a Barcelona", accessible at https://sindominio.net/phrp/index174e174e.html?q=ca/category/5/31 [last accessed on March 23rd 2020]

13 This information is contained in "Dossier 07 2002", a document in which the ESM lists all the activities that have taken place in the social center. Accessible at https://www.slideshare.net/ESMagdalenes/dossier-07-2008 [last accessed on March 23rd 2020]

14 "Dossier 07 2002", see Footnote 13.

criminalize the "bad" squatters. The horizon of legalization is a structural incentive to upkeep a pacified, clean, orderly, civic image of squatting. This is valid both for poor "needy" squatters and for middle-class "social entrepreneurs", who gain material advantages if they are successfully recognized as such by the authorities (Rossini et al. 2017). It goes without saying that repression will also cause more costs for all squatters, such as evictions, re-squatting, fines, police profiling, etc. Nonetheless, Barcelona's squatter's movement became strong precisely when squatting became a criminal offence and repression increased.

ESM was offering the authorities a control mechanism in exchange for the promise of stability, formalized with the legalization of the building. In the campaign presentation, ESM demands that the hotel licence is taken away from Hotels Catalonia, that both buildings are bought by the administration, that uses rights over the space of the social centre are transferred to their association, that neighbours keep their apartments and the remaining flats are given to a housing cooperative. The document later states that their association would comply with "presenting an activity report" to the administration every five years. This openness to negotiate has arguably been a factor that allowed the occupation to last until 2010 (González, 2019). Considering movement bargaining power as a resource, ESM becomes a relevant case study of internal conflict over collective resources. The matter at hand, it seems, is how conflicts over which direction to take – more bureaucracy or more repression – are dealt with.

5. Methodology

The method used for the analysis privileges the social meaning of discourses. In short, I define discourse as the use of language in social contexts. On a first level, discourse analysis studies meaning as part of the social process. That is to say, semiosis designates this abstract and general definition of discourse (Fairclough, 2001). On a second level, the term discourse can also refer to the language used within a certain field or a specific social practice. Political discourse is an example of this sort of discourse. Finally, discourse can also be understood as the rhetorical coherence of a certain social perspective. This sort of discourse can be exemplified by the neoliberal discourse on globalization. Discourses are ways to represent and act upon certain aspects of the world. Methodologically, discourse analysis is important because the use of language is simultaneously constitutive of social identities, social relationships, and systems of knowledge, representation, and belief over the world. Discourse maintains and reproduces these three dimensions while contributing to transform them. Generally, these layers can be identified with the perspectives of different social actors (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2013).

I study discourse as speech acts in concrete contexts, and critically assess their content departing from empirical reality (Jones and Collins, 2006). Taking context into account is needed to evaluate if a discursive event contributes to the reproduction of power relationships (Debelle 2010, 2013, 2017). Study objects must be researched within their own conditions of existence and their socio-historical evolution. Objects framed in open systems modify themselves due to their internal relationships and to the symbiotic ties, they maintain with other systems and their contextual setting (Pujante and López, 2012). As the interpretations of the analyst are dependent on its social position and experience, it is unreasonable to establish a single meaning for each speech act (Street, 2005). The task at hand is to detect and discuss the dominant meanings that characterize the materials under study (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, Roberts, 1978). Interpretative processes imply a hermeneutic dimension in which certainty does not exist (López, 2013).

The materials used for this paper are one concrete result of the MOVOKEUR research project that sprang out of the SqEK network.[15] The investigation consisted of a West-European-wide comparison of squatters movements of several kinds, on levels such as structural factors, protest cycles, urban planning policies, etc. The interviews were conducted to study the protest cycles that followed the outburst of the anti-globalization movement. In total, nine interviews were conducted throughout 2013. The interviewees were asked about the importance of SSC within the broader anti-globalization movement, but also about ESM in particular. Interestingly, the interviews were made by an advocate of an approach that is sympathetic to ESM's attempt to legalize. It thus becomes relevant to look at the dialectic between the interviewer and the interviewees. It is well known amongst journalists and social scientists engaging in interviews that the questions condition the answers. Indeed, each interviewer had his/her own perspective on strategy, values, etc. Although this way of using interviews implies less control over the materials, it also represents the opportunity of studying "insiders' discourse".

6. Interviewees' views on the conflict over ESM

As described above, ESM's legalization attempt was the object of many controversies and conflicts, as others felt that this squat's initiative was going against the tradition of not negotiating with authorities that had characterized most squats so far (Rossini et al., 2018). As this article chooses to focus on the discourse of ESM, one wonders why other collectives would not only refuse to sign the manifest, but also break ties with this squat. Why then was the decision of this collective the object of such distrust and anger? Ada Colau, who was involved in ESM and is, at the time of writing [2020], Barcelona's mayor, recognizes that what happened was quite the opposite of what she had expected:

> The fact that a movement that is supposed to be close to you – such as the squatters movement – signals you as a traitor because you have invited a councilor from Rome that expropriate empty flats didn't help at all. The case of the invitation to Rome's councilor was particularly polemic, to us, it was clear that this person was promoting housing policies such as expropriation and use contracts that were ten thousand times more powerful than what a social center could ever dream about. But as he was doing it from an institutional position it was a sacrilege to invite him to a squatted space. The trial that was made to Magdalenes by the so-called squatters' movement was a monstrosity and demonstrated an alarming level of sectarianism and political short-sightedness (Colau).

Colau's statements generally convey a negative appreciation of Barcelona's squatter's movement. To have a second opinion on what happened between the SSC movement and ESM, we'll look at the collective interview made at Can Masdeu to three residents of the squat. As discussed before, Can Masdeu stands as one of Barcelona's oldest non-legalized squats, as by 2002 their determined non-violent resistance caught the authorities by surprise. When asked about the assembly's stance on legalization, the response was that there is no consensus and that both paths would lead to profound and difficult compromises. The interviewees were asked about how they thought about dealing with the collective bargaining power of the movement. Below, Guillem and Quique explain their perspective on the conflict over Magdalenes:

Guillem: I think that it somehow reflects one of the poles or extremes of this diversity of visions about squatting that proliferates from 2001-2002 onwards. (…) Magdalenes was a clear bet to build and conquest rights. I think that these are different political traditions, one of them can be represented by the Forat and that somehow sums up the tradition of the SSC and squatting until the year 2000. That is to say, creating self-referential counter-cultural movements, betting on building other sorts of relationships, another routine, another lifestyle, another world to ourselves, in parallel. The other tradition bets on creating social transformation wherever we are, building alliances, etc. These are two ways to respond to the existential "Why?". We squat to create a new world amongst ourselves or to intervene in our surroundings.

Quique: Magdalenes confronted the movement with the need to expand the reach of that which is considered possible while questioning what was allowed and what wasn't. Here in Barcelona, there were very important taboos and they decided to bypass them. Maybe their ways were very confrontational but then it must be said that they had heard siren chants from the District officials of Ciutat Vella. In a way, I also think that they weren't excessively open, in a sense they were also creating a world for themselves, but it was another tradition.

Their interventions provide the critical distance to Colau's claims about squatter's dogmatism. Although coming from different places, both interviewees highlight how different ESM' activists were when compared to other squatting experiences such as the Forat de la Vergonya.[16] In any case, the second interviewee argues that each approach to squatting generates its own universe of "sameness", although of different sorts. The pre-existing affective resonance that allowed for ESM's experimentation vanished, and was replaced by hostility and internal conflict that undermined the attempt to legalize the building. Even when taking into account that all squatter's movements are diverse, ESM shows that squatter's movements' heterogeneity can be underpinned to the adherence to certain (unwritten) rules. It is now worth taking additional critical distance and looking at the dialectic between the interviewer and the interviewees.

The questions of the interviewer reveal his goal to construct a counter-power that "consisted in the stabilization of a series of movement institutions linked to a political strategy of strength accumulation." The interviewer also specified that by accumulation he referred to "affects, complicities, militant, social and citizen power". In short, the questions referred to a logic of capitalization of protest in which SSC is conceptualized as "an infrastructure, a space of formation of desires, interests and subjectivities "in common". The interviewer recognizes that the commons need to be up-kept and betted on a strategy that pushes for institutionalization. The insistence of the interviewer on this issue was met with resistance from some of the interviewees. After being asked repeatedly about institutionalization, Ivan Miró finally summed up that:

In Barcelona, in parallel to diverse squatting experiences, there were always legal or safe spaces that have had a rearguard role, for instance, to host a radio, to develop communication projects, archives, this has always existed. If you like, the bet to squat was not that much an attempt to stabilize buildings as much as it was a bet to fight. Of course, there were strong defeats, buildings, and experiences were lost – for example Miles de Viviendas or La Rimaia amongst many others – that could have become very powerful, but that's how the pressure of a real estate and finance governed metropolis works. Many

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16 The Forat is a square that was taken over by the neighbours to solve the ruinous state in which the administration had left it (Catteneo, 2008). A community emerged, blending mobilized neighbours with squatters and other activists, although not without episodic conflicts and hardship. For over 6 years, this very centric square became a place for self-organization in the midst of an intense conflict with the authorities. The claims of the neighbours were not dismissed so easily, although little negotiation in terms that are similar to ESM took place.

things were won as well, Miles was lost but the AAVV [neighbours association] stopped the urban plans for the area. What do we prefer: to lose a building or that 25.000 people lose their houses? (Miró, 2012)

Although closely related to cooperatives movements, this interviewee refuses to apply the logic of accumulation to SSC. This is particularly interesting because cooperative practices are based on juridical tools that allow private and collective accumulation, as the interviewee also highlights during the conversation. Why then would it be reasonable to refuse to use those tools to try to secure buildings? As Miró rightly points out, the logic of squatting goes beyond the immediate buildings that are being occupied. What's missing from the picture is the possibility of rupture. The confrontational stance of squatters not being complemented with negotiation "to bring about concrete results" was also brought to the fore in another interview, this time to Jesús Rodríguez:

> Some movements must take a stand and articulate a negation or radical critique of the dynamics of the state. It is fine to maintain this positive character, but at some point, it is necessary to make a more direct confrontation, to expose the most flagrant contradictions. It is necessary to foster this public emergence of the existence of a social conflict. (…) Power, the higher classes that control the city, live the world like a Risk game, analysing things from the perspective of a certain fear of the attacks from poor or popular sectors. Obviously, the police, the institutions, and justice are here to defend them, but they do a very possibilist reading of power, being careful to avoid things from getting out of hand. (Rodríguez)

Here too, the interviewee dodges the suggestion implied in the question, this time coming from a journalistic perspective (Rodríguez, 1999). His answer bears some similarities to the one of Miró insofar it insists on the importance of squatting is a tool to create conflicts or to make them visible. In turn, conflicts can displace the line between what is acceptable and unacceptable. The concrete result mentioned by Rodríguez is a sort of accumulation, yet of a different sort: when movements produce conflict, authorities think twice before using force. This is made explicit by Arbide, a lawyer and participant in Miles and Magdalenes: "Indeed, the bottom line is where you locate the "accumulation point", in the very same experience or in the tension created by challenging the institutions." Arbide goes further when he brings to the fore that people, not places, are at the core of the movement:

> I think that accumulation comes more often from the transmission from some activists to others and for the responsibility that some figures within the movement have taken up, reference people more than referent spaces. It is curious because in Barcelona there are still many squatted spaces, but they are not experiences that have accumulated or where one can spot the fabric or trajectories of the movement. It is easier to detect people who have transited through the different cycles and are now in different projects than to locate this accumulation in a specific place. In Barcelona, there was always more restlessness than movement or more movement than alternative institutionalization. It is a city in which many things happen, many interesting things, that become a reference for people in other places, but strangely crystallize less here than elsewhere. (Arbide)

Seeing people's accumulated experience as the resource/commons makes legalization problematic in terms of class analysis. The technical skills and social/cultural capital needed to negotiate with administrations are unevenly distributed. In other words, not all squatters will have the same opportunities for legalization due to their social characteristics and political aims. Arbide underscores that "the process of negotiation somehow ends up playing an over-dimensioned role in the project's politics, not so much because the contents or the political orientation conditions you, but more so because it is such a complicated process and it requires a series of know-how and pieces of knowledge that end up taking up loads of time for

yourself". On the contrary, squatting without legalization requires practical skills that are more common amongst popular classes (electricity, plumbing, etc.). Legalization not only changes the characteristics of the resource, but it also affects the social reproduction of the community.

7. Conclusions

Years have passed since the conflict over ESM's legalization attempt. Although the scope of this article impedes a throughout analysis of the path followed by the different sectors involved in this conflict, it still seems relevant to mention it briefly. Time would lead some of the actors who tried to legalize ESM to bet on municipalism, win local elections and offer to legalize (squatted) spaces through the commons approach. High profile figures of the municipalist platform of Barcelona en Comú, such as Gala Pin and Ada Colau, were involved in ESM and Miles de Viviendas. A decade later, the seemingly insignificant differences between squatters transformed into an undeniable chasm: those fighting against institutions and those fighting within institutions. As the interviewees emphasize, the relationship maintained towards legality was at the core of this dispute over the use of collective resources. Far from being anecdotal, internal conflict and the split that followed were key episodes for movement history.

As such, the empirical materials under scrutiny provide helpful insights on the limitations of the commons framework to think about conflict. The conflict against the property regime is hardly quantifiable, adopting different shapes across time and spaces, becoming sometimes more elusive and institutionalized, while on other occasions more antagonistic and untamed. Squatting is always political and potentially antagonist challenges the neo-institutionalist tendency to presuppose already-available resources. It is only through external conflict, once the occupation has been carried out, that squatters obtain some sort of bargaining power. One could go around this issue by saying that activists' commitment to making squatting possible *is* the resource being pooled together, in a display of virtuous rivalry. But the absence of external conflict remains an important shortcoming of the environmental commons approach.

Marxist and post-Marxist scholars worked their way around this limitation by conceptualizing the structural danger posed by capitalism. Organizing against the threat of eviction shared by all squatters can somehow be captured as a resistance to enclosure, as the Marxist urban commons approach proposes. The concept illustrates the existence of a common enemy but has a limited heuristic capacity to account for the *different* ways movements deal with the threat of de-activation and co-optation. Indeed, the state-market system often tries to include agonist-leaning sectors to fully isolate antagonists and prevent solidarity to take place across different struggles (Holloway, 2010). Precisely because no sane movement can be homogeneous, capitalism attempts to create new division lines by combining strategic moves favouring some actors while enforcing harder repression on others (Rossini et al., 2017). Failing to conceptualize internal conflict makes ruptures and splits seem like movement failures instead of politically significant moments.

Movements are not always characterized by stories of efficient resource allocation, convergence, and idyllic functioning. This is all the more relevant because relational ties become of utmost importance in adverse contexts. Using *commoning* as a verb surely highlights the difficult social reproduction processes on which common resources depend. Yet, talking about commoning will fall short to explain squatter's movements as long as the "point of accumulation" remains ill-located. People, not places, are the heart of movements (Simone, 2004). As most interviewees show, using the strength of collective resistance to legalizing one's building was perceived as breaking with reciprocity dynamics related to resisting external pressures. Each part argued in favour of constructing an (external) conflict of a different sort to oppose enclosure. The unity needed to sustain the external conflict was the resource over which internal conflicts

emerged. Using a catch-all term to conceptual resistances falls short to explain why an internal conflict took place at a movement scale: antagonist squatters brought collaborations to a halt, as legalization was seen as an unacceptable turn towards middle-class politics.

Heading towards a conclusion, it is worth recalling that squatters organize by consensus. This decision-making process always implies that (at least some) participants make concessions to others. Although conflict is seemingly absent as the result can only be the agreement of all parts, internal conflict management is located at the core of the movement. These politics of giving and take constitute the fragile and ever-changing balance of collective ties. It is through this constant re-negotiation that bonds are created, up-kept, or broken. This article discussed the public part of this conflict within the movement, as it would have been inappropriate to meddle in any further. Only movement debates were discussed, leaving aside the fact that ESM was never a static and homogeneous entity. Quite on the contrary, ESM was riddled with shifting tensions and contradictions among its inhabitants and participants. The intensity of squatting practices brings to the fore the reciprocity codes that are essential to resist external threats. Framing squatting as a commons seems to be downplaying the tensions between external and internal conflicts that ensue the social reproduction of antagonism.

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Author's Information

Galvão Debelle is an independent researcher interested in struggles over property relationships. He holds a Ph.D. in Communication Sciences from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (2017). He has published in English (*Interface* journal) and French (*French Media Journal of Media Research*) about the criminalisation of squatting, and took part in some of the collective writing projects of the Squatting Europe/Everywhere Kollective. His research focuses on crisis-related exceptionalism, squatting and financial bail-outs, discourse analysis, and activist research.