

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS
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Clarissa Cordeiro de Campos

**Squatting for more than Housing:
Alternative Spaces and Struggles for The Right to the City in Three Urban
Areas in Brazil, Spain, and the Basque Country**

Belo Horizonte
2020

Clarissa Cordeiro de Campos

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Final Version

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Supervisor: Profa. Dra. Rita de Cássia Lucena Velloso

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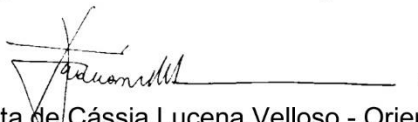
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Squatting for more than Housing: Alternative Spaces and Struggles for The Right to the City in Three Urban Areas in Brazil, Spain and the Basque Country

CLARISSA CORDEIRO DE CAMPOS

Tese submetida à Comissão Examinadora designada pelo Colegiado do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Escola de Arquitetura da UFMG como requisito para obtenção do grau de Doutor em Arquitetura e Urbanismo, área de concentração: Teoria, produção e experiência do espaço.

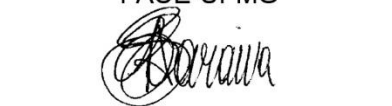
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Adapted from the poem CIDADE, by Augusto de Campos, 1963

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa propõe que o espaço produzido em ocupações urbanas contribui para mudanças na forma como as pessoas se relacionam umas com as outras, em suas visões de mundo e, finalmente, para mudanças em suas relações sociais. Como ponto de partida, considera-se o espaço urbano ao mesmo tempo produto e condicionante de relações sociais, tradicionalmente controlado pelo planejamento urbano, em geral favorecendo os interesses das classes dominantes. No entanto, uma vez que o espaço é socialmente produzido, ele também carrega uma potência emancipatória, conhecida por vários movimentos sociais urbanos que têm em práticas espaciais insurgentes ferramentas importantes de resistência contra políticas neoliberais contemporâneas. Neste sentido, este estudo visa discutir movimentos sociais urbanos que têm como principal forma de atuação a ocupação não autorizada de propriedades urbanas, no contexto das lutas pela moradia e pelo direito à cidade, especificamente os movimentos de ocupação, na Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte, Brasil, na cidade de Madri, Espanha, e em seis municípios do País Basco, dentro dos limites territoriais espanhóis, focando, embora não se restringindo aos últimos dez anos. Uma vez que estudos em ambos os contextos têm se concentrado principalmente em casos ou regiões particulares, sem em geral se engajar em uma perspectiva intercontinental, este estudo também visa contribuir para preencher esta lacuna. Metodologicamente, o trabalho apresenta uma abordagem qualitativa e comparativa, com coleta de dados a partir de pesquisa documental e bibliográfica, além de estudos de casos, sugerindo o uso crítico das noções de *espaços diferenciais* em oposição aos *espaços abstratos*, e o *direito à cidade* em Lefebvre; e o conceito de *heterotopias* em Foucault como principais lentes teóricas. Diferenças contextuais, formas de apropriação, transformação e uso do espaço, repercussões e desafios, especialmente no que diz respeito a autogestão, formação de redes, criminalização e outros aspectos legais são discutidos em cada caso. Ao mesmo tempo em que se argumenta que formas de injustiça habitacional e de opressão sócio-espacial têm sido principais razões para ocupações não autorizadas nos três contextos, este estudo também sugere que suas lutas estão intimamente ligadas a uma disputa mais ampla pelo direito à cidade.

Palavras-chave: Movimentos de ocupação urbana. Espaço Diferencial. Heterotopias. Direito à Cidade.

ABSTRACT

This research proposes that the space produced in urban squats greatly contributes to changes in how people relate to each other, their world views, and, ultimately, to changes in their social relations. As a start point, it assumes that urban space is at the same time a product and a conditioner of social relations, traditionally controlled by urban planning, which usually favors the interests of the ruling classes. Nonetheless, once space is socially produced, it also carries an emancipatory potency, well known by several urban social movements that have in insurgent spatial practices important tools of resistance against contemporary neoliberal policies. In this sense, this study aims at discussing urban social movements that have as their primary form of action the unauthorized occupation of urban property, in the context of struggles for housing and the right to the city, specifically squatting movements, in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in the city of Madrid, Spain, and six municipalities of the Basque Country, within Spanish territorial limits, focusing, but not restricted to the last ten years. As studies on both contexts have mostly focused on particular cases or regions, without engaging in an intercontinental perspective, this study also aims at contributing to filling this gap. From a methodological point of view, it has a qualitative and comparative approach, with data collection from documental and bibliographic research and case studies, while suggesting a critical use of Lefebvre's notions of *differential spaces* as opposed to *abstract spaces*, and the *right to the city*; and Foucault's concept of *heterotopias* as key theoretical lenses. Contextual differences, distinctive forms of appropriation, transformation, and use of space, related repercussions, and challenging issues, especially concerning self-management processes, networking, criminalization, and other legal aspects, are discussed in each case. At the same time as it is argued that housing injustice and other forms of socio-spatial oppression have been the main reasons for unauthorized occupations in all three contexts, this study also suggests that squatters' struggles are intimately connected to a broader dispute for the right to the city.

Keywords: Urban Squatting Movements. Differential Space. Heterotopias. Right to the City.

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PART I:

INTRODUCTION

METHODOLOGY

ON A PERSONAL LEVEL: MY CHOICE FOR STUDYING THE SQUATTING MOVEMENTS

In my early contacts with Lefebvre's theories of space, it was his imperative on the inescapable connection between the production of an appropriate space and any possible changes in life and in society (Lefebvre, 1991) that intrigued me the most. Maybe because I had been reflecting for quite some time about how the task of architects and urbanists of designing spaces could be developed in a less heteronomous, top to bottom way, by means of becoming part of a more democratic and participative production of space.

For some years after my graduation in architecture and urbanism in 2005, I had been specializing and working mostly with technical matters of environmental comfort, energy efficiency, and architectural design of health care facilities. That meant dealing with regulations, statistics and numbers which reportedly guaranteed safe, to a certain point sustainable and pleasant environments without, however, much need for the participation of the people who would live, work or circulate within the spaces generated—be them buildings or open areas in the city.

Even though this kind of technical knowledge has important applicability in architectural and urban design, and while I consider this a positive experience as an architect and urbanist myself, on a personal and intuitive level I felt the need of pursuing other forms of professional exercise, more in tune with the people who actually use, transform, and ultimately give meaning to the spaces produced.

By 2014 I started working as an assistant professor at the *Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei* [Federal University of São João del-Rei], where I had the opportunity to engage with students and several of my colleagues on how to think, design and produce space in a more open, collaborative and inclusive manner. One of my first attempts in that direction occurred during a bimonthly design studio that I offered in 2015, and that later became an extension program of that university until early 2017. It was based on recurrent proposals by students in design studios, seeking to improve the conditions of public areas in the city that did not offer adequate, quality spaces for cyclists and pedestrians.

Initially, we had the relatively simple tasks of proposing a bicycle route in the city and of testing one of its sections by installing a temporary bike lane over a weekend, so we could collect opinions and make our observations. The next step would be to evaluate and discuss our results with the community in open sessions.

On the one hand, the experience presented positive results, such as the engaged and collaborative work of the students who immediately took the project as their own and were able to act with remarkable autonomy and the participation of numerous people in the temporary bike lane. On the other hand, the local population was not as involved as it should have been, being consulted mainly in a post-occupancy moment, through interviews and questionnaires. There was also low attendance to the open sessions, which were held in two moments, at the university and the City Council.

Added to the various criticisms received (related to the format of the temporary bike lane, its location, lack of knowledge about its functions and others), the low interest of the local community in the open sessions for discussion led us to reflect on the need for more active and democratic participation of the population, from the beginning of such processes (to define needs, goals, and priorities), throughout decision-making activities, and possibly also during the implementation phases of proposals related to the urban space.

More generally, however, this line of thought already underlies, at least on paper, and to some extent, contemporary forms of institutionalized participatory processes. Is it possible to say, though, that when the local community is formally involved in participatory practices regulated by the state or other institutions, such processes are, in practice, effective forms of direct participation? Specifically, concerning proposals for the urban space (say related to infrastructure, public facilities, or to how and where public resources should be applied), do institutionalized participatory processes effectively contribute to making cities more democratic? Or more directly, is it possible to affirm that the needs of the poor are also met?

Three decades of *Orçamento Participativo* [Participatory Budget] experiences in Brazilian cities have shown us that institutionalized channels do not suffice, as it is clear that the interests of economic elites are still prioritized over the needs of the poor. Notwithstanding the possible advantages that effective participatory policies might

provide (including the availability of public finance and expertise), the alarming issues of segregation and displacement observed globally in contemporary cities, the lack of basic infrastructure, and the peripheral location of many social housing complexes in relation to the provision of public services and facilities, to name a few, point to the need for more profound changes in society.

This brings me back to the first words of this brief prelude. Should we consider, as Lefebvre (1991) proposed, that changing life and society is so intimately connected to the production of an appropriate space, how is this production of space to be done and by whom? What makes any material space appropriate for changes in life and society? What are these changes, in what scales do they occur, and how can we identify them?

During my first two years of doctoral research, my readings on historical and contemporary approaches to power relations and/in space; on space at the same time as product and conditioner of social relations; on criticisms to the heteronomous and institutional production of space; as well as on the notion of *the right to the city* guided me to the study of autonomist, self-managed insurgent spatial practices. Specifically, it was the many readings on urban occupations of lands for self-construction and of abandoned buildings in the Brazilian context, and on urban squatting in Europe that gave me the first clues of how I could try for myself to discuss and understand the connection of production of space and changes in life and society.

Later, during my fieldwork activities, I had the opportunity of visiting many such spaces and talking to residents in occupations, activists, and other participants in the squatting movements, both in Brazil, Spain, and the Basque Country. This included my own choice to further engage and regularly participate in a workgroup at an autonomist squat located in a central and economically privileged region of Belo Horizonte (the third-largest urban agglomeration in Brazil).

Those experiences allowed me to contact activists, collectives and social movement organizations that have in the core of their actions the struggles to appropriate, use and transform space in a different manner, that opposes the system imposed by the dominant classes and neoliberal governments which produces oppressive cities by means of institutionalized practices.

In practical terms, the expression we so frequently use to refer to squatting movements in Brazil, the *sem-teto* [roof-less] movements, reflects with millimetric precision a key driver of unauthorized occupations in both contexts, that is, the housing injustice. However, as much as the struggles for effective rights to dignified housing (beyond unfulfilled legal guarantees) are a tremendous task, it would undoubtedly be oversimplistic and incomplete to reduce their complex and diverse backgrounds, needs, and desires, demands and daily practices to that sole objective.

In their speeches and practices, squatters demonstrate that their struggles refer to a much broader range of rights which include not only access to quality urban infrastructure, public services and facilities, but also to be recognized as citizens, producers of culture and knowledge, political agents, and to be seen and legitimized as participants of the life in the cities.

Most importantly, it is in leaving the plan of the utopias and producing real spaces that carry internal contradictions, power, and counter-power, and in their quotidian practices, achievements, and challenges that they show us that changes are possible. An adequate space for changing life and changing society is neither perfect nor immutable, but real and contradictory, challenging and critical in its core, it is collectively produced every day, and everchanging according to the needs and desires of those who use and appropriate it.

I propose that the space produced in urban squats greatly contributes to changes in how people relate to each other, their world views, and, ultimately, to changes in their social relations. This is the main argument and passion that drives this research.

1. INTRODUCTION

'Change life!' 'Change society!' These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 60).

This study assumes that the struggles over power on urban space by social movements are important forms of daily anti-hegemonic¹ resistance against contemporary neoliberal policies. In this sense, it accompanies several authors who have historically considered space at the same time a product and a conditioner of social relations (such as Lefebvre, 1991, 2016; Soja, 2000; M. L. de Souza, 2006). This means saying that space, traditionally controlled by heteronomous urban planning and institutionalized participation, is not merely the physical and inert base on which one acts. On the contrary, in its articulations, openings and closures, circulations, interruptions, and its locations, space becomes crucial for the way one lives and acts and, thus, to the configuration of *power relations* (as suggested by Foucault, 1995), that usually favor the interests of the ruling classes, to the detriment of the poor.

The themes of cities as central environments or essential loci for the development of capitalism, or where power relations are conformed and reshaped, determined and challenged, in a dialectic relation that has in its extremes impositions and subversions; and traditional urbanism as a related instrument of domination, have also been addressed in many different works. In Guy Debord's theory of a society dominated by the spectacle², urbanism represents "capitalism's methods for taking over the natural and human environment," by means of which capitalism "can and must refashion the totality of space into its *own particular decor*," following its path toward total domination (Debord, 2014, pp. 90–91). Edward Soja, in turn, uses the term *simcities*³ to define the "composite product of the restructured urban imaginary," and seeks to critically explore

¹ "Hegemony implies more than an influence, more even than the permanent use of repressive violence. It is exercised over society as a whole, culture and knowledge included, and generally via human mediation: policies, political leaders, parties, as also a good many intellectuals and experts. It is exercised, therefore, over both institutions and ideas" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 10).

² According to Guy Debord, "the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images", and "in all of its particular manifestations — news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment — the spectacle is the *model* of the prevailing way of life" (Debord, 2014, pp. 2–3).

³ An adaptation of the name of one of the world's most popular computer games, *SimCity* (Soja, 2000).

"a different and more subtle form of social and spatial regulation, which literally and figuratively 'plays with the mind,' manipulating civic consciousness and popular images of urban space and urban life to maintain order" (Soja, 2000, pp. 324 & 339). Soja (2000) associates the spectacle with the manipulation of people's desire concerning cities and urban life, largely benefiting the real estate market, and also with a strong influence on their worldviews, by continuously and positively pointing to what would be an ideal way of life.

Similar to Debord (2014), Soja states that "under advanced capitalism the organization of space becomes predominantly related to the reproduction of the dominant system of social relations" (Soja, 1989, p. 91). For this reason, in his view, class struggle "must encompass and focus upon the vulnerable point: the production of space, the territorial structure of exploitation and domination, the spatially controlled reproduction of the system as a whole" (Soja, 1989, p. 92). M. L. de Souza (2010), on the other hand, in an article in which he discusses emancipatory possibilities of urban movements, considering contexts of action *with the State, despite the State, against the State*, affirms that spatial practices are indispensable since space is at the same time product and conditioner of social relations. In this light, the author suggests, attempting to change social relations without changing the spatial organization would be counter-intuitive. The change of concrete society would, therefore, imply not only a change of social relations but a change of social space, that is, a *socio-spatial* change (M. L. de Souza, 2010, p. 22).

Thus, given the importance of the production of space in the reproduction of existing social arrangements and relations within the framework of the structural combination between capitalism and representative democracy, Milagres (2016) suggests, processes of self-management can be read as vectors of politicization and a field of experimentation of the daily relationship with space and radical democratization of its production. Within the many possibilities that could encompass self-management processes, the present study suggests that insurgent spatial practices—that is, those practices that are fundamentally rooted in the appropriation, transformation and use of space, in opposition to long naturalized, homogenized, heteronomous and oppressive socio-spatial relations—constitute potent possibilities to express, experiment and even prefigure other possibilities for life and society. Insurgent spatial practices present us

with an infinitude of possibilities—they may vary in duration, from brief and transient actions to more enduring practices; in scale, by responding to very localized demands or by articulating broader networks; in number of participants, and many others. In practice, they may include messages and images painted or projected on facades; artistic, cultural, and political demonstrations in streets and squares; and, among many others, *the practices of unauthorized occupation⁴ of land and buildings, commonly referred to in English as squatting*. It is in the latter that lies the focus of this research.

In addition to self-management and the essentially quotidian character of certain insurgent spatial practices, as is the case of squatting, it is also important to highlight the importance of the notion of *networking* as a tool for mutual support, strengthening and legitimating of the initiatives to which this study intends to address. M. L. de Souza (2010) responds to this collective character through the concept of *politics of scale*. According to the author, politics of scale can be defined as the articulation of actions and agents operating at different scalar levels (that is, with different magnitudes and scopes) in order to maximize effects, neutralize or diminish the impact of adverse actions or take advantage of favorable situations, for example, by expanding spheres of influence (by expanding audiences, sensitizing possible allies, etc.) and providing political synergies (by recruiting new supporters, sealing alliances, etc.) (M. L. de Souza, 2010).

In practical terms, and from a broader point of view, it is possible to point to a historical concern with integration as a way of strengthening social movements in the European context, as pointed out by the work of several authors (M. A. Martínez López, 2013; Mayer, 2013; Mudu, 2013; Owens, 2013; Vasudevan, 2017b). As an example, Owens (2013) suggests that although essentially local, squatting “grew and survived as a movement in Europe because of the mobility of activists. They helped form a translocal network of actors who not only could draw on each other’s knowledge and numbers, but also created a larger European squatter identity” (Owens, 2013, p. 201).

Squatting is principally about residence and stability, about locality and community, but to build and protect those, it also became about

⁴ “Though it is ancient as a tactic, the verbal injunction ‘Occupy’ is of recent vintage. In a global context, it first appeared in the 2000s in the slogan of the Brazilian landless workers movement [*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST*]: ‘Occupy, Resist, Produce’” (McKee, 2016, p. 21).

mobility and flux. This allowed for the creation of a broader social movement space that let squatters move between buildings, between cities, and between states, carrying information, strategies, and tactics across these borders. Squatting made new mobilities possible; new mobilities, in turn, made squatting possible (Owens, 2013, p. 205).

According to M. L. de Souza (2010), in Brazil, it can be said that the activists of the *sem-teto* [roof-less] movement are in reality a type of squatters who are generally quite politicized and basically poor people, usually informal workers in 'hyper-precarious' situation and not middle-class youth, as can be usual in Europe.⁵ Regarding the specific context of the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (RMBH), in which the field phase of this research took place in Brazil, the vast majority of squatters are, in fact, poor families who occupy due to housing needs. However, it is important to note that, especially in the last ten years, there have been some developments, including squatting by middle-class youth and students (albeit in smaller numbers), and a pronounced tendency to form networks.

Furthermore, this study also follows the authors that consider squatting as social movements instead of isolated initiatives (as for example Babic, 2015; Martínez, 2020; Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández, 2012; Owens, 2013; M. L. de Souza, 2010 and others). In this regard, M. L. de Souza (2006, p. 340) makes an accurate differentiation between social *activism* and social *movement*. Social *activism* as the author suggests should be considered as a broader concept, constituted by different forms of organized, essentially public and collective actions, which may include local activisms that operate more or less as mere pressure groups “in order to preserve certain privileges or obtain some gains in the general framework of the economic and political status quo, and without criticizing status quo as such” (M. L. de Souza, 2006, p. 340).

Social *movement*, on the other hand, would be a special kind of social activism, particularly ambitious and critical, “at the same time embedded in place-specific experiences and committed to more general, ‘universal’ ethical values and broader political goals” (M. L. de Souza, 2006, p. 340). In this sense, while every movement can be considered as an activism, the reciprocal is not true (M. L. de Souza, 2001). Moreover, as Padrones Gil (2017) suggests, in a social movement the methods

⁵ As will be discussed throughout this work, however, the squatting movements in Spain and the Basque Country should not be simply regarded as conformed by middle-class youth alone.

learned and the way in which its protagonists are socialized significantly influence the search of solutions and the strategies of action adopted, which also vary according to the socio-political and cultural context in which these people are immersed.

From the above, and having in mind the different social, political and economic contexts addressed; the different practices, strategies and points of view shared by squatters and other activists during interviews and informal conversations; the different forms and types of squats identified in the course of the present research; and also some of their common interests, features, and shared identities, this study chooses to refer to them as *squatting movements*, in the plural. Furthermore, it should be noted that squatting movements, as also proposed by Padrones Gil (2017), can be understood as heterogeneous small nodes that articulate and coordinate their actions according to their own interests, needs, and demands—while at the same time, each space preserves its own autonomy and capacity. They are, therefore, specific types of social movements, to put it this way.

Especially in Madrid and the Basque Country—as will be seen in more detail in the course of this work—there is a pronounced presence of squats that are not specifically for housing (at least in terms of how they publicly present themselves), but rather engaged with a great plurality of social, political and cultural concerns. Nonetheless, even in these contexts, as is certainly the case in the RMBH, squatting movements are historically and deeply related to struggles for decent housing—if not by providing housing, through criticism and direct opposition to unjust laws, regulations and urban policies based on naturalized relations of private property, real estate speculation and other forms of social-spatial injustice, by providing safe spaces for housing movements to meet, and many others (see for example González et al., 2018; M. A. Martínez López, 2013, 2015a; Padrones Gil, 2017; Vasudevan, 2015, 2017b).

It should also be noted that at the same time as urban squatting movements in the three territorial settings addressed—the RMBH, the city of Madrid and six municipalities of the Basque Country—remarkably oppose different forms of housing injustice (such as homelessness, precarious housing conditions, high costs of dignified housing, and others), they also encompass a much broader range of political, economic and social issues. Moreover, in their diverse types and forms—in the scope

of this research, land and building occupations in the RMBH, social centers in Madrid and *gaztetxes*, which can translate as houses of the youth, in the Basque Country—urban squats present social-spatial configurations, internal dynamics and relations that intentionally differ from those historically controlled by traditional and institutional agents. In this sense, while acknowledging the many challenges squatters face in their initiatives and day-to-day relationships, this study suggests that the *right to the city* as proposed by Lefebvre (2016), and also many of the ideas contained in the notions of *differential spaces* (Lefebvre, 1991) and *heterotopias* (Foucault, 2008a) are valid theoretical lenses for their study.

Finally, among the many possible metaphors that could make reference not only to the daily-constituted relationships in squats, but also to the power contained in their capacity, as localized initiatives, to articulate among themselves and with other actors, and to their insistence on continuing to exist and resist despite all opposing forces, two especially inspiring ones stand out. I first came across one of them when reading the book originally titled *Survivance des lucioles* [Survival of fireflies] of Georges Didi-Huberman (2011). Even though the author does not make any direct references to squatting, his metaphor of the *fireflies* is a powerful reminder of the importance of small daily resistances. For them to be perceived, the author proposes, it is necessary to look away from the spectacular "fierce projectors" since they can be only signs, singularities, pieces, passing glimpses, and dimly luminous. Fireflies, to put it this way (Didi-Huberman, 2011).

Looking away does not mean ignoring the existence of alienating or homogenizing mechanisms. It means, on the contrary, to maintain a critical attitude towards reality, which would allow, in a second moment, to turn our look towards the points of resistance. The metaphor of the *fireflies* refers to a sometimes-intermittent existence of daily local actions, subject to fragilities due to isolation, lack of visibility, and others. On the other hand, it recognizes the power contained in small initiatives to strengthen each other, to exchange knowledge and experiences, and thus to influence each other and (possibly) a more comprehensive and complex context.

The second metaphor came to my ears for the first time in a visit to a land occupation for housing named *Vitória*, on the border between Belo Horizonte and Santa Luzia, in

the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. By the end of a presentation of women who lived there and were considered leadership figures by the local community, they explained to the people present: we are all like ants; the working class, when we have our anthill stepped on, we all climb on the feet of whoever stepped on it. And then they sang:

*Pisa ligeiro, pisa ligeiro!
Quem não pode com as formigas não assanha o formigueiro!*⁶

Later on, once again, the ant metaphor was mentioned, this time during an interview with a resident of *Dandara*, another land occupation for housing in Belo Horizonte. The squatter, who had been living there for about ten years, was telling of the many difficulties in establishing themselves on the terrain, the collective resistance despite the constant police siege, and the slow and persistent work to build houses and urban infrastructure. "It was the law of the ant," he said.

Both the metaphors of fireflies and ants speak of the importance of looking at localized forms of counter-power that, however small or localized, have in their capacity to articulate a possibility of mutual strengthening. Moreover, while fireflies have in the delicacy of their lights the possibility to escape the reach of the fierce projectors of oppression, the ants show us a courageous combativity. Although this work does not claim that squatters are precisely one or the other, and while admitting that metaphors are not able to embrace the complexity of the proposed theme, the idea of fireflies and ants, and the poetic possibility that they could oscillate between them, was, however, a valuable inspiration.

1.1. Why compare the RMBH, Madrid and six municipalities in the Basque Country

There is currently a rich bibliography on squatting. Nonetheless, in the scope of the present research, most publications refer to the European context, especially cases and analysis from Western European countries. These include views on squats as alternatives to capitalism, as vectors of autonomous practices and struggles for housing and the right to the city; squatting and its connections with art and culture,

⁶ Step lightly, step lightly! Who cannot with the ants does not tease the anthill!

gender and ethnic issues; interfaces between squatting, mainstream, and alternative media; institutionalization, criminalization and repression; historical aspects, and many others. Of the ones that address Spain, frequently including Madrid in their analysis, but also the Basque Country, the topics mentioned (and more) can be found at (Barranco et al., 2018; Cattaneo et al., 2014; M. A. Martínez López, 2018; M. A. Martínez López & García Bernardos, 2014; Martínez, 2002, 2020; Moore & Smart, 2015; Padrones Gil, 2017; Squatting Europe Collective, 2013; Vasudevan, 2017b), among others.

In the specific context of the RMBH, there are also works that present several aspects of squatting, including both land and building occupations; interfaces and interconnections between squatting, other social movements, and supportive collectives; legal issues, repression, evictions and displacements; squats as spaces of autonomy, as urban commons, and their contradictions; squats in relation to theories of space, and others. Readings that include these topics, but not limited to them, can be found, for example, at Bastos et al., 2017; Franzoni, 2018; Lelis, 2016; Lourenço, 2014; Moreira, 2017; Nascimento & Libânio, 2016; Nogueira, 2019; Tonucci Filho, 2017 and others.

Most of the times, however, while some of the authors mentioned above, on all three contexts, may argue that squatting movements share essential ties with other social movements and actors, which can be local, regional or even international, most have focused on particular cases, localities or regions, without engaging in an intercontinental perspective of urban neoliberalism and its contestations. Therefore, an initial consideration would be that this study aims at contributing to filling this gap.

Moreover, although admitting that there are significant contextual differences between the local realities and struggles in the regions addressed, located both in the global South and North, as suggested by Mayer (2012), fundamental change in society is necessarily linked to contesting the global reach of capitalist accumulation, which makes it necessary to identify commonalities and connectivities generated in the realities of globalization. While following what this author proposes, this study adds that it is equally important to understand the different strategies adopted in each context, their repercussions, and contradictions, and also particularities, unique goals,

and demands. If research is to contribute in any way to the struggles of social movements—and I believe this is an important goal in studies that address insurgent socio-spatial phenomena—it is vital to seek to understand the differences and their causes, while also maintaining a critical view on conflictive issues.

It is also important to note that while accessing squats during open activities and events may be easy, the same cannot always be said of engaging in more open conversations and/or scheduling interviews with squatters and other activists, who on their turn would be willing to share information. As squatting is considered illegal, the actors who participate or are connected to this form of activism usually share several security concerns. Furthermore, giving interviews and acting as a host or guide while presenting spaces for a visitor is time-consuming, which means that whenever squatters decide to assume this type of task, they are not dedicating their time to other activities related to their collective interests. Not to mention that squatters have other commitments, jobs, and personal interests, which add to their responsibilities as members of collectives and social movements. Additionally, as will be addressed later on in this study, as part of their political and ideological points of view, some squatters also choose not to engage with institutional agents or representatives—which may apply to researchers connected with universities.

For all these reasons, in view of being able to pursue the study of squatting movements, from a comparative approach, while at the same time engaging in an intercontinental perspective, it was also necessary to work within a framework of possible opportunities. In this sense, especially during the fieldwork abroad, the choice to focus on Madrid and the Basque Country was, to a large extent, based on the possibility of being introduced to members of the squatting movements and other activists by people who were more familiar to them.⁷ This made it possible for me to access different venues, schedule interviews, and interact more freely with different

⁷ Namely Professor Miguel A. Martínez López, my supervisor during a doctoral internship at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF), Uppsala University, in Uppsala, Sweden, Sheila Padrones Gil, author of a recent doctoral research on the squatting movements in the Basque Country, and Evin Deniz, a postdoctoral researcher in San Sebastian, Basque Country, as will be presented in more detail in the methodology session.

actors in the short term—that is, in a way, reducing the more extended periods of time in which trust relationships are usually created.

Nevertheless, those are not the only reasons that justify such a comparison. Despite contextual differences, urban neoliberalism has been historically contested by squatting practices and movements in Brazil (mostly since the 1990s) and Spain (since the 1980s, including both Madrid and the Basque Country). Furthermore, although Brazil and Spain both have important and consolidated constitutional regulations such as the social function of private property (implying that the right to private property is necessarily tied to its use according to the general interest), and the right to adequate housing, housing injustice remains a key driver of unauthorized occupations in all addressed contexts.

In practice, even if an important part of the existing legislation in both countries aims at combating the perpetuation of real estate speculation—which is basically the constitution of a stock of empty and unused properties by a wealthy minority, in the expectation that their market value will increase in the future—instruments available to curb this type of practice are hardly ever employed or are insufficiently applied, in a clear prioritization of the right to private property over the guarantee of its social function. Similarly, in both contexts, housing policies have not been sufficient to overcome the issue of housing access by the least privileged populational groups, resulting in significant housing deficits—including inaccessible rental and purchase costs, inadequate or overcrowded housing conditions, or in more extreme conditions, and in the absence of any options, even living on the streets, as will be discussed in more detail later on. Thus, although considered illegal, the unauthorized occupation of unused land and buildings might be seen as a “tool in the hands of lay citizens to meet the constitutional dispositions” (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 117)—which is also frequently a part of squatters’ arguments to justify their actions.

If opposing oppressive and neoliberal urban policies and struggles for the right to housing are common denominators to the squatting movements here discussed, so is the vast plurality of other demands related to socio-spatial justice they encompass. Depending on local specificities, these may include urban infrastructure, access to public transportation, services and facilities, leisure and job opportunities, cultural,

political, and other neighborhood-oriented projects, and many others. Moreover, the remarkable spatial struggles to appropriate the city center present in all these squatting movements also indicates that, as suggested in Campos & Martínez (2020), the fulfillment of the right to housing is not complete unless accompanied by adequate living conditions, social visibility, and political recognition, pointing to a broader dispute for the right to the city. This pattern, followed by at least half of the squatted social centers in Madrid, and also a clear trend in Belo Horizonte over the last decade (Campos & Martínez, 2020), was observed during the field visits in the Basque Country as well.

It is important to note, however, that land occupations for housing in peripheral areas are still the majority of cases in the RMBH (of which Belo Horizonte is the main city). These are basically constituted by poor people, frequently unemployed or under precarious and informal work conditions. In squatting large portions of neglected land, they have as a primary objective to stay put and consolidate their communities, while at the same time struggling for adequate living conditions.⁸ In Spain, on the other hand, while there are also cases of unauthorized occupations of empty land within the boundaries of the consolidated city, these are mostly used for setting up community gardens and meeting places; land occupations for housing only occasionally appear in peripheral areas of main cities, usually hosting “Roma people from Eastern Europe and Portugal, or immigrants from Morocco” (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 123). Additionally, such cases are usually supported by the charitable work of some religious organizations and NGOs, instead of representing forms of autonomous struggles for the right to adequate housing and are connected to claims for relocation into formal (state-subsidized) accommodation (Campos & Martínez, 2020).

In contrast, the squatting of buildings is a well-established practice in Spain. Their most visible (or publicly known) examples in Madrid and the Basque Country are squatted social centers and *gaztetxes*, respectively. In both cases, they are spaces for meeting

⁸ Although this is an important feature of squatting in the RMBH, it is not generalizable for the country as a whole. The way in which occupations are organized, their goals, processes of self-management, forms of negotiation and others may vary significantly in different cities and regions of Brazil. To cite one example, while in Belo Horizonte, when a group of people decides to squat their intention usually is to stay where they are, in São Paulo, on the other hand, it is also usual to have temporary, provisional camps, as part of a negotiation strategy for the inclusion of the occupants in public housing programs.

and organizing diverse activities by a wide range of social movements and activists, also aiming at being open and accessible spaces for local neighborhoods and the city. Unauthorized occupations of empty buildings for housing purposes, while also being widespread, especially after the 2008 crisis, represent a different phenomenon, and usually happen in a stealth operation—a condition of invisibility that has rendered it difficult to measure (Campos & Martínez, 2020).

Finally, before moving on, a differentiation placed in the title of this work, which is maintained throughout the text, should also be mentioned. It refers to the choice made for treating Spain and the Basque Country as two differentiated contexts, even if referring to the Basque parcel that is within Spanish territorial limits. While the Basque expression *gaztetxe*, the ideas contained in it, and its singularities—as will be seen in more detail later on—make it something peculiar of the Basque Country, this was not entirely the reason that led to this decision. In reality, it was based on the interviews and informal conversations with squatters and other activists, during which some of them made clear a strong sense of identity and belonging, connecting them to the Basque Country as a differentiated entity, apart from Spain.

As an example, one of the interviewees (who even preferred to speak in English rather than Spanish) expressed the following opinion: *“we feel like it is not part of Spain. The social movements in general, including occupations, gaztetxes, we feel different. So maybe you will relate to Brazil, Spain, and the Basque Country”* (BC1)⁹. In this sense, although the constitutive (social, cultural, historic) aspects of the Basque Country, their connections with the Basque Country within French territory, as well as the relationship of the squatting movement in the region with independentist struggles are not part of the scope of this research, a choice was made to use the suggested differentiation in the course of the present work.

1.2. Object

The object of the proposed research are the social movements that have as their main form of action the unauthorized occupation of urban property, in the context of

⁹ A squatter from *Txantxarreka gaztetxea*.

struggles for housing and the right to the city in the broad sense, specifically urban squatting movements.

1.3. Objective

Its main objective is to study some of the potencies and limits of everyday practices in urban squats in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in the city of Madrid, Spain, and in six municipalities of the Basque Country, within Spanish territorial limits, from the analysis of self-management aspects, the formation of networks, legalization related issues, goals, and achievements, focusing, but not restricted to the last ten years.

1.3.1. Specific objectives

- To study the correlations between the production and use of space and the configuration of power relations, through bibliographical and documental survey from diversified sources.
- To study the proposed contexts from a geopolitical, economic, and social point of view, in relation to the squatting movements, especially in the last ten years (although not restricted to that time frame), employing bibliographical and documental survey from diversified sources.
- To identify and analyze some of the main features of squatting movements in the proposed contexts, with particular attention to their motives, goals, practices, the different actors involved and their subjectivities, utilizing bibliographical and documental survey from diversified sources, and empirical data analysis.
- To identify and analyze some of the repercussions of squatting movements in the proposed contexts, including forms of production and use of space, reverberations on different scales, legitimization of demands, formalization, and realization of rights, unconventional property relations, and other potentialities, by means of

bibliographical and documental survey from diversified sources, and empirical data analysis.

- To identify and analyze some of the contradictions, fragilities, and challenging issues of squatting movements in the proposed contexts, including repressive practices, criminalization, and other legal issues, by means of bibliographical and documental survey from diversified sources, and empirical data analysis.
- To update the data concerning the occurrence, duration, location, and other information related to land and building occupations in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, with the production of a map and a table that systematize the data collected.

1.4. Thesis overview

The present work is structured in parts I, II, and III, covering respectively the introductory remarks and methodology; theoretical framing; case studies, correlated analysis, and discussions followed by general conclusions. In Part I, chapter 2, *Methodology*, the general methodological approach of the proposed research is presented, including information on the bibliographic and documental review, and the thesis' main theoretical framing; the advantages and limits of a comparative approach in urban studies (especially when studying squatting movements); the doctoral internship held at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF), University of Uppsala, Sweden; and, finally, specific details of the three phases of fieldwork proposed for the present research.

In part II, chapter 3, *Power relations and space*, initially proposes an in-depth study of the idea of power in Michel Foucault, including his concepts of discipline, governmentality, conduct, counter-conduct, and others, pointing to a correlation between spatial control and power strategies. Following, this same chapter presents critiques of traditional urban planning and institutionalized participation, as well as an introduction to the importance of self-managed spatial practices as emancipatory possibilities. At the end of part II, in chapter 4, *Insurgent spatial practices: urban*

squatting movements, initial concepts, and analysis guidelines are presented, suggesting the notions of differential spaces (Lefebvre, 1991), heterotopias (Foucault, 2008a), and the right to the city (Lefebvre, 2016) as possible theoretical approaches to the study of urban squatting movements.

In part III, chapter 5, *Squatting the city from south to north!* a brief historical and socio-economic contextualization of the three addressed contexts is presented, focusing on correlations with urban squatting movements. In this same chapter, after further conceptualization and general characterization of urban squatting, an introduction to the empirical data and initial analysis of the fieldwork conducted in Madrid, the Basque Country, and the RMBH are presented. In chapter 6, *Squatters' everyday life: self-management and networking*, and in chapter 7, *Criminalization, contradictions, and a few crossroads, or: against the ineffectiveness of empty words, emancipation and meaning*, constitutive aspects of squatters' everyday life are presented and discussed.

Taking into account the points of view of the different interviewees and my own observations, in addition to the theoretical framework previously presented, the mainly discussed topics were self-management practices and the formation of networks by squatters, as well as the increasing criminalization of their actions and the legal status of squats, in relation to the remarkable repression and state violence to which they are often subjected. From the comparative approach suggested as one of the methodological dimensions of this study, it has been sought to understand and discuss how the discourses and practices in the different contexts reflect and/or oppose local realities, while at the same time often sharing similar general principles. Likewise, it was possible to identify a number of challenging and even conflictive issues which, although related to the same general themes addressed, sometimes presented markedly different motivations.

Finally, towards the end of Part III, general conclusions and possibilities for future research on urban squatting movements are also suggested. At the end of this volume, Appendices A and B present the material produced for conducting the fieldwork in the addressed contexts. Appendix C, in turn, contains the result of the data update on land and building occupations in the RMBH.

2. METHODOLOGY

To know the fireflies, one must observe them in the present of their survival: one must see them dance alive in the middle of the night, even if that night is swept away by some fierce projectors. Even for a little while. Yet, for little to be seen: it takes about five thousand fireflies to produce a light equivalent to that of a single candle (Didi-Huberman, 2011, p. 52).

The proposed study has a qualitative and comparative approach, with case studies, while suggesting a critical use of Lefebvre's notions of *differential spaces* as opposed to *abstract spaces*, and the *right to the city*; and Foucault's proposals on the concept of *heterotopias* as key theoretical lenses in the analysis of the insurgent spatial practices here addressed. In a first moment, fieldwork was conducted in Madrid, Spain, and in six different municipalities of the Basque Country, as part of the activities proposed for a seven-month doctoral internship abroad started in September 2018, at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF), Uppsala University, in Uppsala, Sweden.¹⁰ After my return to Brazil in 2019, fieldwork was also carried out at the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (RMBH), Minas Gerais.

In addition to an extensive documental and bibliographic review, the methodological strategy included participant observation and the conduction of semi-structured interviews with activists, researchers, participants, and/or residents of urban occupations, social centers, and *gastetxes*. The analysis of self-produced documents in the visited venues, when possible, and previous academic research also integrate the research method, as will be presented in more detail later on.

As Groat & Wang (2002, p. 257) note, the qualitative method tends to focus on contemporary phenomena and has as its main strengths "its capacity to take in the rich and holistic qualities of real-life circumstances or settings" as well as being "inherently more flexible in its design and procedures, allowing adjustments to be made as the research proceeds." At the same time, qualitative research seeks to understand how the respondents themselves make sense of their environment and their practices while

¹⁰ Financed in part by the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* [CAPES Foundation]—Brazil—Finance Code 88881.189843/2018-01.

relating the shared information with the researcher's interpretation of the collected data (Groat & Wang, 2002).

Participant observation is an important tool in a qualitative investigation. In connecting the researcher through immersion and participation to the experiences of a particular context, and by assigning her a dual role—at the same time an investigator and player in a particular milieu—participant observation may have as results penetrating insights and highly contextual understanding (Guest et al., 2013). Additionally, it contributes for the formulation and selection of more relevant questions to ask during interviews or informal conversations, at the same time as being embedded in a particular context produces data that transcends the limits of what can be learned from an interview script (Guest et al., 2013).

The deeply contextual insights and flexibility of participant observation make it a powerful source of qualitative insight. The density of data produced and the intensity of the data collection experiences it entails can produce meaning on both professional and personal level that few other approaches can rival. While it can be time and labor intensive, participant observation is an important addition to any qualitative researcher's tool kit (Guest et al., 2013, p. 109).

On the other hand, especially in the case of international research, the researcher is not necessarily viewed as a complete insider and other challenging issues may have to be addressed, such as language, translation, and difficulties in data interpretation (Guest et al., 2013). The information collected during participant observation may also be unique to the individual collecting the data (different participant observers will notice different nuances and make different judgments), and it can be difficult to generalize from (Guest et al., 2013). Therefore, it is essential to use other types of data collection methods, such as interviews and documental analysis, which may lead to a more objective and substantiated assessment of the gathered information. A comparative approach with different case studies, on its turn, may contribute to verify if some of the findings are also observable in other sites.

Finally, due to my participation for a more extended period and deeper engagement with a local squat at the RMBH, specifically in this case, an ethnographic approach to the fieldwork was also adopted. Ethnographic research implies an in-depth engagement with site-specific settings, in which the researcher plays an established

role in the situation under study, involving a robust and active participant observation as a primary mode of data collection (Groat & Wang, 2002). In this case, as will be described in further detail later on, my identity as an activist and as a researcher was known and accepted by the other members of the group.

2.1. The case for a comparative approach to urban squatting movements

Despite the many methodological difficulties it poses, I have no doubt that comparative research is essential. It is intellectually stimulating because it forces the researcher to eschew simple statements of process by demonstrating either that in another city the same phenomenon is explained by different processes or that different phenomena are brought about by the same process. [...] It forces any investigator to think harder than they would have done otherwise (Gilbert, 2020, p. 34).

Comparative approaches to urban studies have been a recurrent theme of debate in the field (e.g., Bollens, 2007; Gilbert, 2020; Grashoff & Yang, 2020; McFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2011, 2016) which includes not only methodological concerns but a broad spectrum of critical assessments ranging from challenging particularities and possible limitations to remarkable advantages and innovative possibilities of creative thought.

According to Grashoff & Yang (2020), some of the arguments that can be raised against comparative research in urban studies include technical obstacles (such as language barriers and geographical distances) and contextual differences (scales, strategies, different property regimes, and others). Similarly, long-standing assumptions that propose a fundamental incommensurability of different kinds of cities that are considered just too different in terms of their levels of development, cultural or policy context, economic system or political environment to warrant any co-investigation, have profoundly limited the scope of urban comparative research (Robinson, 2011).

The present study, nonetheless, accompanies Robinson (2011, 2016), in her views on comparative research capable of promoting careful reflection on different contexts and therefore allowing to bring different insights from elsewhere, contributing to test theoretical propositions and to identify limitations or omissions in existing accounts. Comparison may be eager to engage with existing conceptualizations without settling

for a universalizing theoretical practice while committing to thinking through a diversity of urban outcomes and to starting to theorize from many different start points (Robinson, 2016).

Similarly, McFarlane (2010, p. 726) suggests that comparative thinking as a research strategy can be especially useful in international urban studies, and when critically applied, it may open room for innovation by revealing “assumptions, limits, and distinctiveness of particular theoretical or empirical claims.” Additionally, comparisons may contribute to illuminating unexpected similarities, drawing lessons from other experiences and questioning laws, institutions, and their related values and practices including in our own contexts, sometimes even subverting previously held assumptions (Grashoff & Yang, 2020, p. 1).

Even though such a remarkable critical potential makes a strong case in favor of a comparative strategy, especially in the case of intercontinental comparative studies a reflected approach is necessary that takes into account existing terminology and concepts that cannot always be used interchangeably (Grashoff & Yang, 2020) or require objective and well-delimited definitions. Additionally, it should avoid the attempt of integrating sites, people, and processes into pre-given positions, remaining open to learning from different contexts McFarlane (2010). Finally, the limits of located insights must be respected (Robinson, 2016), keeping off misplaced generalizations, as much as contextual differences and particular underlying processes require close attention and critical examination (Gilbert, 2020).

Regarding specifically the study of urban squatting movements, as Martínez (2020) proposes, rather than merely acknowledging their existence in different places, and that they differ from one another, a comparative approach allows an assessment of distinctive characteristics, limitations and achievements, and of how these struggles differ and what they have in common when influenced by specific socio-political and urban contexts.

While urban occupations are essentially local, the formation of networks is a vital feature of urban squatting movements. Their many interconnections, exchanges of knowledge, information, and forms of mutual support are essential tools for meeting demands, resistance, and legitimation. Squats always exist in relation to each other,

to different collectives, movements, and actors, in many different scales and degrees. This research proposes that their study, discussion, and understanding should occur in the same way—that is, in relation and not in isolation—justifying the choice of a comparative approach. This does not mean that more focused researches that have the goal of investigating in great detail singular (or fewer) cases are not relevant or do not apply. Quite the opposite, in-depth surveys with a more restricted scope are valuable sources of information that not only are important assets by themselves but are also crucial for more extensive and comparative approaches as proposed for the present study.

Complementarily, as McFarlane (2010) suggests, the complex particularities of each place imply that lessons decurrent from comparative analysis can rarely be transferred directly, and may not be directly useful in another context. The author argues for *indirect learning* through *translation*, or the creative adaptation and transformation of knowledge and theory in order to inform new perspectives (McFarlane, 2010). The creative exchange of knowledge is a vital strategy, long known by squatters. In practice, it implies the production and distribution of informative material, direct interaction during visits to other squats, the formation of collectives that give general advice and support to occupations and many others. Shared information ranges from how to enter abandoned premises for the first time and making them habitable, to dealing with legal issues, planning strategies for resistance and an infinitude of other possibilities, always critically adapted to each specific case. This suggests that not only a comparative approach is suitable for the study of urban squatting movements, but just as important, these movements have much to inform on strategies of comparison.

Mention should be made that the cases proposed for this research did not follow a territorially restrictive criterion based on formal administrative boundaries—as would be the case, for example, of restricting the case studies to the official limits of a particular city, leaving aside any cases that were left out on a map. Networking and circulation amongst squats, of course, are not restricted to official borders between cities, states, or countries, and it would, therefore, be incoherent and counterproductive to use this parameter to limit the location of the urban occupations considered. As Robinson (2011) observes, even though the national scale or the territory of the city

are both relevant and, in some cases, might be suitable for comparative studies, neither of them can remain as the *assumed units* of comparison in urban studies.

[...] there are many urban processes for which neither formal administrative boundaries nor the functional regions of cities would be the relevant scale for comparison. Instead, processes that exceed a city's physical extent—circulations and flows—as well as phenomena that exist and operate at a smaller scale than the city should be the relevant units for comparison (Robinson, 2011, p. 14).

In this research, the squatting movements in three different urban areas—the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (Brazil), the city of Madrid (Spain), and six municipalities in the Basque Country—are put in a comparative perspective. Even though data collection methods were adjusted according to each case, as will be addressed in the following sessions, the information gathered was mainly aimed at better understanding local backgrounds (including socio-economic aspects, property relations, territory configurations, legal parameters, and others), self-management, and organizational processes, networking and challenging issues such as legalization related issues, and other internal contradictions. Rather than merely trying to identify similarities or differences that could be directly compared, this study follows Robinson's (2016) argument in favor of addressing the diversity and variation across the cases and shared processes or outcomes as a basis for comparing—while also aiming at building solid grounds for critical creativity.

2.2. Bibliographic and documental review

During the second half of 2016 and in 2017, I took mandatory courses in the Post-Graduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism at *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* [Federal University of Minas Gerais] (UFMG). At that time, I also began my documental and bibliographical survey, to which I dedicated myself in greater depth from the first half of 2018 when I also started writing my first draft proposal for the thesis, its structure, chapters, and general outline.

In a first moment, the documental and bibliographic review had as a primary goal the critical study of authors who have historically developed theories which relate a) the production of urban space with the conformation of power relations and social

dynamics; and b) the insurgent production of urban space with the subversion of naturalized power relations and social dynamics. These included¹¹ Lefebvre's (1991, 2016) views on space as a tool of thought and action and as a means of control and domination, his notions of *social space*, *abstract space* and *differential space*, and criticisms on what he calls *ideology of participation* versus *real and active participation*, or *self-management*; Foucault (1982, 1995, 2008b, 2008a, 2010), focusing on his notions of *heterotopias*, *discipline*, *governmentality*, *conduct*, and *counter-conduct*; and Souza (2001, 2006, 2011) with emphasis on his concepts of (*insurgent*) *spatial practices* and related criticisms on institutionalized participatory channels.

Additionally, the study of Lefebvre's (2016) ideas on the *right to the city* and other authors who have engaged in this discussion in more recent decades (such as Brenner et al., 2012; Harvey, 2008; Martínez, 2020; Merrifield, 2011; Mitchell, 2003) was also an essential part of the documental and bibliographic survey. Previously to my period abroad, I also engaged with readings on the existing insurgent spatial practices in the European context, specifically squatting, where the first part of my field visits was conducted. Some of the key sources consulted were Martínez López (2002, 2020), Moore & Smart (2015), Padrones Gil (2017), Squatting Europe Kollektive (2013) and Vasudevan (2015, 2017b). Further on, as a specific approach to the Latin American and Brazilian contexts, and urban occupations in Brazil, other inspiring works were added to this list (see for example Bastos et al., 2017; Franzoni, 2018; Lanz, 2009; Moreira, 2017; Nascimento & Libânio, 2016; Tonucci Filho, 2017).

From the proposed theoretical approach and the in-depth study of all three intended contexts, it was possible to critically analyze the collected data having in mind the following questions: what are the potencies, possibilities, tendencies, fragilities and challenging issues of the cases addressed, concerning their particular urban, social, political and economic contexts? What are the outcomes and ramifications of the verified initiatives? What are the distinctive features and possible approximations between the proposed contexts? In referring to the production of differential space in urban occupations, or to their view as heterotopias, what are the limits of such

¹¹ These examples are by no means intended to exhaust all authors and works consulted or verified.

assumptions? To what extent is the notion of the right to the city appropriate to the study of urban squatting movements?

As partial results of the documental and bibliographic review, I was able to publish two papers (Campos, 2019c; Campos & Clark, 2018), additionally to having two book chapters approved for publication in Brazil (Campos, 2019b, 2019a) and co-authoring one article with prof. Rita Velloso, currently under review for possible publication as an essay on The International Journal of Housing Policy blog and website (Velloso & Campos, 2019).

2.3. Doctoral Internship at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF), Uppsala University, Sweden

The Doctoral Internship at the IBF was carried out from September 2018 to March 2019 and allowed a closer approximation with the European context, where squatting stands out as an urban social movement at least since the 1960s. During that period, I was under the supervision of Professor Miguel A. Martínez López. Supporter and researcher of the squatting movements, prof. Martínez had his first contact with a squat in 1989, in Madrid, Spain (Martínez, 2020). His many publications on the European squatting scene include discussions on several of their main features, dynamics, and challenging issues such as self-management, networking, legalization and institutionalization, relations with migrants, hegemonic narratives on squatters, and many others. Some of his ideas on the subject can be found in Martínez (2002), his first book, and also in Martínez (2020), his most recent work, among others.

Additionally, professor Martínez is one of the founders of the Squatting Europe Collective, (later renamed as Squatting *Everywhere* Collective, SqEK), created in 2009 with a group of scholars with different backgrounds and disciplines (such as history, anthropology, geography, sociology, political science, economy, criminology, architecture, and arts), who were in some cases also activists, interested in the squatting movements in different European cities (Martínez, 2020). This activist-research network usually organizes meetings at least once a year and its members have had several collective and individual publications over time (for more on SqEK's

collective publications see Cattaneo et al., 2014; M. A. Martínez López, 2018; Moore & Smart, 2015; Squatting Europe Kollektive, 2013; Squatting Everywhere Kollektive, 2018), which allowed them to elaborate systematic comparisons of squatting movements in the European context (Martínez, 2020).

In August 2018 I was included in the SqEK mailing list, which allowed me to follow and participate in the collective's discussions, and to receive plenty of publications from academics and activists, news on squatting movements in different parts of the world (especially in Europe) in addition to other types of material including videos, event communications, reports, and others. Much of the shared material was directly consulted during the writing of this work.

As partial results of my doctoral internship at the IBF, I submitted and discussed detailed reports of my fieldwork activities with prof. Martínez, especially relating them to my proposed theoretical and interpretative approach. My participation in the regular seminars held at that Institute, including three presentations of my own research, allowed me to receive feedback from other Ph.D. students and professors. Moreover, prof. Martínez and I co-authored a book chapter published by the UCL Press (Campos & Martínez, 2020) in which we compare specific forms of squatting in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and in the city of Madrid, Spain.

Finally, during that period I actively participated in the writing of the project *Urban Struggles for the Right to the City and Urban Commons in Brazil and Europe*, an international partnership between the IBF / Uppsala University and the School of Architecture / UFMG, coordinated by my supervisors in Brazil (prof. Rita Velloso) and during my doctoral internship in Sweden, and funded by CAPES and STINT (The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education). This project, from now on referred to as the *CAPES/STINT Cooperation Project*, was approved and includes international workshops and conferences in Brazil and Sweden between 2019 and 2022, as well as joint publications and scholarships for Ph.D. students and post-doctoral researchers for their studies abroad on both teams.

Among the activities already carried out as part of the CAPES/STINT Cooperation Project, I presented partial results of my fieldwork in Brazil at the *1st Workshop The Right to Housing and the Right to the City in Latin America and Europe* which took

place at the IBF, Uppsala University on December 17 and 18, 2019.¹² Additionally, the *2nd Workshop Urban Struggles for the Right to the City and Common Lands in Brazil and Europe* was held from 9th to 13th March 2020, at the School of Architecture / UFMG, continuing the project's activities. Finally, If the CAPES/STINT Cooperation Project is renewed, I may receive a scholarship to conduct part of a post-doctoral research as a member of the Brazilian team, at the IBF, Uppsala University. If confirmed, this will be an opportunity to continue to follow possible paths for the proposed theme, which have not been covered by this research, as suggested in its concluding remarks.

2.4. Fieldwork

Fieldwork was mainly conducted in three different moments of this doctoral research, including two study trips (to Madrid and the Basque Country) during my period abroad, in addition to data collection in the RMBH, Brazil. In general, their main objective was to allow a closer approximation with the different actors in the squatting movements, their backgrounds, contexts, and the nature of their struggles in the cases addressed. That is, to better understand the reasons, goals, and finalities of the squatting movements, their daily practices, methods and scales of action, their repercussions, achievements, and challenging issues, in addition to their points of view, impressions, and evaluations.

In doing so, this fieldwork allowed the identification of distinctive features that differentiate and/or approximate the squatting movements here addressed, putting their different responses to neoliberal cities and policies in a comparative perspective. As will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapters, the case studies reinforce the proposition of having the notion of the right to the city as an appropriate lens to look into the squatting movements and their broad range of struggles and illustrate the many ways in which they demonstrate that it is possible to change life by appropriating, using and producing different spaces.

¹² Financed in part by the STINT budget for this project.

In practical terms, the preparatory phase for the fieldwork on all three contexts included first contacts and scheduling of interviews and visits to urban squats by email and phone contacts. Ideally, visits included the conduction of audio recorded interviews (with activists, researchers, residents, etc.), either individually or in a group. When allowed, pictures were taken, and, in some cases, it was possible to have access to self-produced material.

For the conduction of semi-structured interviews, a basic script with key questions was elaborated (see Appendix A). After a preliminary introduction (including an outline of the proposed research, permission for recording the conversation, and confidentiality issues regarding sensitive information and privacy concerns), two initial questions were presented, referring to their personal experiences and their views on the history of the occupations, collectives and/or social movements organizations they participated in, depending on each case. The following questions addressed self-management and organizational processes, networking, the involvement of political platforms in occupations, collectives and/or social movements, their perceptions on negotiations and/or agreements with owners and/or governments (especially to what concerned their views on legalization and formal ownership), and to their struggles, needs, desires, and achievements. During the interviews, people were also asked to point at any positive or negative aspects they observed in the issues approached.

As these were semi-structured interviews involving a more open dialogue, the script served as a guide to ensure that a minimum content was addressed, without however being treated as a rigidly applied questionnaire. Especially in the case of Madrid, where the interviews were conducted in collaboration with Prof. Martinez, the research interests of both interviewers and his prior knowledge of several of the visited squats led to a broader range of questions, which certainly goes beyond the content presented in Appendix A. Additionally, and even though this was not the case in Madrid and the Basque Country, before each recorded interview in Brazil a version in Portuguese of the *Consent to use Audio Recording* presented in Appendix B was signed with the interviewees. According to the agreement the rights over the recorded words are shared between researcher and interviewees, giving the first consent to use them in this research and other related studies, while at the same time protecting the confidentiality of the interviewee when her/his words are cited and publicly distributed.

Nonetheless, when the interviews were recorded, a copy of the audio recordings and transcriptions of the recorded interviews was mailed to each interviewee individually (or in a group, in the case of collective recorded conversations), including the ones from Madrid and the Basque Country. They were then asked if they would like to check and inform if there was part of the content they would rather have reviewed or not published at all. If that was the case, a reply—either informing necessary changes, non-publishable excerpts, doubts, or perhaps the need for more time to look at the files—was expected in one month. In most cases, it has also been possible to contact the interviewees by phone (messaging) to inform them that the files were sent and to make sure that they received them.

In one case (BH7, listed on Table 1) the interviewee chose to review the entire transcription in order to make it more suitable for writing language, even though they were informed that this type of edition was going to be made by myself, before including any conversation extracts in the final text of the thesis. In two cases, it was not possible to contact interviewees in Madrid (M2 and M3, *Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela*, indicated in Table 1). Nonetheless, their opinions were taken into consideration since, as mentioned, verbal authorization for use was given at the time of the interview. One of the interviewees requested that her opinions should not be disclosed since, according to her, they had changed completely (M1, *Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela*, EVA). Thus, although this interviewee is listed in Table 1, her statements were not mentioned in this study. Except for punctual adjustments in a few transcribed terms, no other changes were required.

When interview excerpts were used, none of the interviewees had their real names cited (unless directly authorized). I have translated all quotations from Portuguese and Spanish to English. As a reference for the reader, Table 1 indicates dates, localities (country or region and city), names of squats where conversations took place (or a “_” when the interview occurred in other places, according to the interviewees’ preferences) and a code for each interviewee, composed by the first letters of the locality and a number, in the same order that the interviews occurred. In one case, the interviewee asked to be identified by an alias. For group interviews, one code was assigned to each participant. Further details about field visits and other activities will be presented in the following sessions.

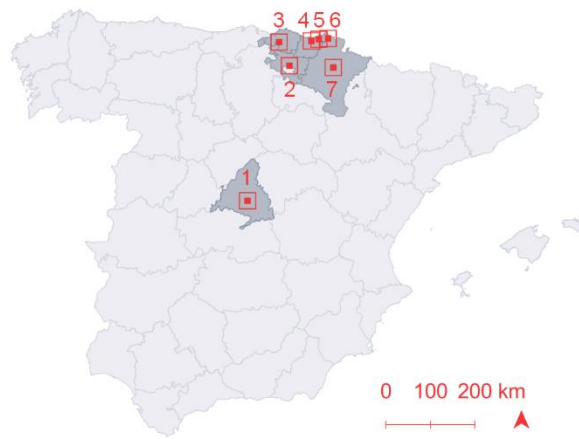
Table 1*Interviews, Oct. 2018 – Sep. 2019*

Interviewee Code	Date	Locality	Squat
M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6	Oct. 30, 2018	Spain, Madrid	Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela - EVA
M7	Nov. 02, 2018	Spain, Madrid	Espacio Sociocultural Liberado Autogestionado -e.s.l.a EKO
M8	Nov. 12, 2018	Spain, Madrid	La Dragona (vicinity)
M9	Nov. 12, 2018	Spain, Madrid	Espacio Sociocultural Es La Salamandra
M10, M11, M12, M13	Nov. 12, 2018	Spain, Madrid	Centro Político Kolectivizado La Bankarrota
BC1	Jan. 28, 2019	Basque Country, San Sebastian	Txantxarreka
BC2	Jan. 29, 2019	Basque Country, Irun	Lakaxita
BC3	Jan. 30, 2019	Basque Country, Pamplona	Maravillas (vicinity)
BC4, BC5	Jan. 31, 2019	Basque Country, Vitoria	Talka
BC6, BC7, BC8	Feb. 01, 2019	Basque Country, San Sebastian	–
BC9, BC10, BC11	Feb. 02, 2019	Basque Country, Vitoria	Errekaleor
BC12, BC13	Feb. 04, 2019	Basque Country, Zarautz	Putzuzulo
BC14	Feb. 05, 2019	Basque Country, Bilbao	–
BC15	Feb. 05, 2019	Basque Country, Bilbao	–
BC16	Feb. 06, 2019	Basque Country, San Sebastian	Kijera
BC17, BC18	Feb. 07, 2019	Basque Country, San Sebastian	–
BH1	Jul. 03, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	Ocupação Carolina Maria de Jesus
BH2	Jul. 03, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	Ocupação Dandara
BH3, BH4	Jul. 05, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	Ocupação Pátria Livre
BH5	Jul. 05, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	–
BH6	Jul. 11, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	Ocupação Paulo Freire
BH7	Aug. 01, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	–
BH8	Aug. 06, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	–
BH9	Aug. 15, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	Casa de Referência da Mulher Tina Martins
BH10	Aug. 20, 2019	Brazil, Santa Luzia	Ocupação Vitória
BH11	Aug. 28, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	Ocupação Dandara
Zenite, BH12, BH13	Sep. 03, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	Kasa Invisível
BH14	Sep. 13, 2019	Brazil, Belo Horizonte	–

2.4.1. Spain and Basque Country

Figure 1

Field Visits in Spain, 2018/2019



- 1: Madrid / Community of Madrid
 2-7: Vitoria, Bilbao, Zarauz, San Sebastian, Irun, Pamplona / Basque Country

The fieldwork in the European context included study trips to Madrid, Spain (from 28 October to 13 November 2018), and to six municipalities of the Basque Country, within Spanish territorial limits (from 28 January to 8 February 2019)—Figure 1.¹³ In total, there were 15 visits to social centres, squats, and *gaztetxes*, and 31 people agreed to be interviewed, either individually or collectively. From those, eight field visits, three individual interviews, and two group interviews took place in Madrid; and seven field visits, six individual interviews, and five collective interviews in the Basque country.

2.4.1.1. Madrid

Madrid is Spain's capital city with a population of 3.2 million; it is part of a broader metropolitan region encompassing over 6.5 million inhabitants (Campos & Martínez, 2020). The study trip to this city lasted two weeks (from 28 October to 13 November 2018) and was undertaken in collaboration with Prof. Martínez. During our preliminary planning activities, we decided to contact in a first moment squats already known or

¹³ All the maps presented in this study were elaborated using the software QGIS 3.8, a free and open-source geographic information system, that can be found on <https://www.qgis.org/en/site/>, last accessed on 04 May 2020. Official data sources were used for all the maps, and the shapefiles used were edited by the author. For the maps corresponding to Spain, Madrid and the Basque Country: data was retrieved from *Centro de Descargas, Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica*, <https://bit.ly/2VwqNYO>. For Brazil: retrieved from *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* <https://bit.ly/3bzIY6t>; *Plano Metropolitano RMBH* <https://bit.ly/3eHF4tj>; and *BHMAP, Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte* <https://bhgeo.pbh.gov.br/>.

considered of interest by Prof. Martínez, who had been engaged in activist-ethnography in Madrid, mainly between 2007 and 2013 (Campos & Martínez, 2020).

Considering our time available in the city, we planned to visit at least five occupied social centers (*La Ingovernable*, *La Enredadera*, *La Dragona*, *La Quimera de Lavapiés*, and *Espacio Sociocultural Liberado Autogestionado—e.s.l.a EKO*) and other three legalized social centers (*La Salamandra*, *Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela—EVA* and *Eskalera Karakola*), to attend at least one general assembly (or similar activity) in each social center and interviewing at least one of the people involved in each of them. A first contact was made by email (or by leaving a message on their websites) with each of the social centers we intended to visit, in order to introduce ourselves, and express our interest in attending assemblies and doing interviews. Three of the contacted social centers responded to this first attempt (e.s.l.a EKO, EVA, and *La Ingovernable*), of which two agreed to give interviews (e.s.l.a EKO and EVA).

As the social centers in Madrid usually made available their scheduled activities (including assemblies) on their websites, we decided that on all the other cases, we would go to the informed address on dates and times of scheduled assemblies and ask if we could participate. Whenever possible, we would introduce ourselves to the people present, declare our purposes, methods, and expected results, after which we would ask if any of the presents could give us an interview. Whenever asked about a counterpart or contribution in case we had an interview granted, in addition to making future publications available for free, we proposed future participation in discussions and other meetings (especially prof. Martínez, who lives in Europe and whose connections in Madrid makes it possible for him to visit more often), as well as presented the possibility of researching topics of direct interest to the social centers in the future.

Nonetheless, even though the dates and times of the assemblies were published online (meaning they were probably opened to the general public), our proposals were not always well seen or accepted on the spot. When we presented ourselves as researchers or scholars, and therefore connected to an institutional domain, some of the people were not interested in giving interviews or willing to share information. As

Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández (2012, p. 169) observe, there is a “permanent tension between openness and closeness” in squats in Madrid.

While most groups are apparently open to the incorporation of new members, this is a very slow process of getting in touch, building mutual trust and sharing efforts in multiple activities. The same applies to researchers who are not familiar with the squatting milieu (Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández, 2012, p. 169).

Table 2

Field Visits in Madrid, Oct./Nov. 2018

Social Centre	Beginning	End	Status	Visits (2018)		Address
				Dates	Activities	
La Ingobernable	Apr. 2017 ⁽¹⁾	Nov. 2019 ⁽¹⁾	Evicted	Oct. 29	Assembly	Calle Gobernador 39 ⁽¹⁾ Centro
	Feb. 2020 ⁽¹⁾	Apr. 2020 ⁽¹⁾	Evicted	–	–	Calle Alberto Bosch 4 ⁽¹⁾
EVA	... 2015 ⁽²⁾	–	Legal	Oct. 30	Recorded group interview Assembly	Plaza de Legazpi 7 ⁽²⁾ Arganzuela
La Quimera	May 2013 ⁽³⁾	–	Illegal	Oct. 30	Assembly	Calle del Amparo 24 ⁽³⁾ Lavapiés
EKO	... 2011 ⁽⁴⁾	–	Illegal	Nov. 02	Rec. individual interview	Calle Ánade 10 ⁽⁴⁾ Carabanchel
Enredadera	Dec. 2008 ⁽⁵⁾	–	Illegal	Nov. 05	Assembly	Calle Anastasio Herrerro 10, Teután ⁽⁵⁾
La Dragona	... 2008 ⁽⁶⁾	Oct. 2019 ⁽⁹⁾	Evicted	Nov. 12	Rec. individual interview	Avenida de Daroca 90 ⁽⁶⁾ La Elipa
Salamandra	... 2016 ⁽⁷⁾	–	Legal	Nov. 06 Nov. 12	Assembly Rec. individual interview	Calle Encomienda de Palacios 52, Moratalaz ⁽⁷⁾
Bankarrota	Feb. 2015 ⁽⁸⁾	–	Illegal	Nov. 12	Rec. group interview	Calle Encomienda de Palacios 46, Moratalaz ⁽⁸⁾

⁽¹⁾ <https://ingobernable.net/> ⁽²⁾ <https://www.evarganzuela.org/>

⁽³⁾ <https://www.facebook.com/laquimeradelavapiés.csoa/> ⁽⁴⁾ <http://eslaeko.net/>

⁽⁵⁾ <https://laenredaderadetetuan.wordpress.com/> ⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.nodo50.org/eldragondeaelipa/>

⁽⁷⁾ <http://lasalamandra.info/> ⁽⁸⁾ <https://bit.ly/2Ri375Z>

⁽⁹⁾ https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/10/18/madrid/1571389398_081175.html

In this sense, most of the times we were asked to wait for future contact, after the assembly voted internally, especially in the cases of occupied spaces. Legalized social centres were, in general, more opened to our presence in assemblies and the

conduction of interviews. An important factor that contributed to facilitating the scheduling of interviews was professor Martínez's previous experience as an activist in Madrid. We frequently met people to whom he was familiar in the places we visited, and on some occasions, it was also possible to contact individual activists he knew and who were still involved with social centers.

By taking the steps described above, we were able to visit eight social centers, one of which (*La Bankarrota*) was not initially predicted. Due to limitations of time and our scheduling of assemblies and interviews, we were not able to visit *Eskalera Karakola*. Unfortunately, during our time in Madrid, we were also not able to schedule visits or interviews in occupations exclusively aimed at housing. Their greater criminalization makes these spaces less accessible and open to sharing information. All the visited social centers and their names, dates of beginning and end (if this is the case), legal status (when listed as legal it refers to any type of agreement, either with private owners or the local government), dates of the visits, the activities we participated in, and addresses are listed on Table 2.

2.4.1.2. *Basque Country*

Similarly to Madrid, the study trip to the Basque Country was conducted during two weeks, from January 28 to February 8, 2019. This time the visits and interviews were conducted by me in four different regions of the Basque Country. They included the cities of San Sebastian, Irun and Zarautz (in the Gipuzkoa region, with populations of approximately 187 thousand, 62 thousand, and 23 thousand, respectively), Bilbao (in Bizkaia, approximately 347 thousand inhabitants), Pamplona (Navarra, approximately 202 thousand inhabitants) and Vitoria (in Araba, approximately 252 thousand inhabitants).¹⁴ The fieldwork had as its main goal to visit as many *gaztetxes* as possible and other types of squats and social centers, if identified, in addition to conducting at least one interview in each place visited. The interlocution between prof. Martínez and

¹⁴ Retrieved from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* online <https://www.ine.es/index.htm> on 19 Jun. 2020.

two local activists and researchers from San Sebastian was a key factor in successfully scheduling visits and interviews.

One of them, Evin Deniz, a postdoctoral researcher, provided me with the contact for a local lawyer, supporter of the squatting movements in the Basque Country, who agreed to be interviewed and eventually also put me in connection with other activists in the region. Sheila Padrones Gil, author of a recent doctoral research on the squatting movement in the Basque Country, specifically in the region of Donostialdea, in Gipuzcoa (Padrones Gil, 2017) was also a key contact. She was able to introduce me to a member of the local Squatting Office in San Sebastian, that gives general assistance for squatters (and for individuals or collectives who want to squat), either for housing or for other political reasons, while aiming at contributing to legitimate the squatting movement in the region. She also intermediated several of my contacts with activists and participants in *gaztetxes* in and around San Sebastian and accompanied me to a few visits to local squats, while sharing valuable impressions and information.

These combined efforts provided me with a list of possible places to visit (see Table 3 for their names, types, cities and the approximate distance from San Sebastian, where I was based during this phase of field research) and people to interview, including squatters, scholars, supportive lawyers, and other activists. After contacting as many people as possible (by email, messages, and phone calls), I was able to schedule visits and interviews with participants from six *gaztetxes* and one squatted neighbourhood (*Txantxarreka*, *Lakaxita*, *Maravillas*, *Talka*, *Errekaleor*, *Putzuzulo*, and *Kijera*), in addition to six individual activists and supporters. Table 4 shows the names, types, dates of beginning and end (if this is the case) and legal status of the squats, dates of visits and interviews, the activities I participated in, cities, and addresses of the visited places.

Table 3*Possible Places to Visit in the Basque Country, Jan./Feb. 2019*

Name	Type	City	Approximate distance from San Sebastian
Txantxarreka	Gaztetxe	San Sebastian	–
Kijera	Gaztetxe	San Sebastian	–
Firestone	Gaztetxe	San Sebastian	–
Letaman	Gaztetxe	San Sebastian	–
Txerrimuño	Gaztetxe	Lezo	10 Km
Putzuzulo	Gaztetxe	Zarautz	20 Km
Lakaxita	Gaztetxe	Irun	20 Km
Beasaingo	Gaztetxe	Beasain	40 Km
Zizpa	Gaztetxe	Baiona	50 Km
Maravillas	Gaztetxe	Pamplona	70 Km
Astra	Gaztetxe	Gernika	80 Km
Errekaleor	Squatted Neighborhood	Vitoria	95 Km
Talka	Gaztetxe	Vitoria	95 Km
Karmela	Squatted School	Bilbao	95 Km

As can be observed in Table 4, on three occasions, it was not possible to record the interviews. As the interviews occurred at the same time as we were walking around the premises and the interviewees were presenting the sites, for practical reasons, it was not possible to use the recorder. In those cases, notes were taken as thoroughly as possible during the interviews, and later (in the same days), they were expanded into more detailed registers.

Table 4*Field Visits in the Basque Country, Jan./Feb. 2019*

Name Type	Beginning	End	Status	Visits/interviews (2019)		City
				Dates	Activities	Address
Txantxarreka Gaztetxea	...	–	Illegal	Jan. 28	Rec. individual interview	San Sebastian Heriz Pasealekua 22
Lakaxita Gaztetxea	...	–	Illegal	Jan. 29	Rec. individual interview Meeting: StopDesahucios	Irun Anaka Kalea 20
Maravillas Gaztetxea	...	Jan. 2017 ⁽²⁾	Evicted	Jan. 30	Rec. individual interview	Pamplona Calle Navarrería 17
Talka Gaztetxea	Dez. 2018	Feb. 2019	Evicted	Jan. 31	Rec. group interview	Vitoria Zapatari Kalea 101
	Dez. 2019 ⁽⁴⁾	May 2020	Illegal	–	–	Vitoria Korreria Kalea 33
Errekaleor Squatted Neighborhood	...	–	Illegal	Feb. 2	Group interview (not recorded)	Vitoria Errekaleor Kalea
Putzuzulo Gaztetxea	...	–	Illegal	Feb. 4	Group interview (not recorded)	Zarautz Bizkaia Kalea 36
Kijera Gaztetxea	Sep. 2018	–	Illegal	Feb. 6	Individual interview (not recorded)	San Sebastian Kanpandegi Kalea 2
Off-site interview 1 (group)	–	–	–	Feb. 1	Rec. group interview	San Sebastian
Off-site interview 2 (individual)	–	–	–	Feb. 5	Rec. individual interview	Bilbao
Off-site interview 3 (individual)	–	–	–	Feb. 5	Rec. individual interview	Bilbao
Off-site interview 4 (group)	–	–	–	Feb. 7	Rec. group interview	San Sebastian

(1) <https://bit.ly/2Tm9IAJ> (2) Interview with BC3 (3) <https://www.facebook.com/putzuzulo/>

(4) <https://bit.ly/2YipuhN>

2.4.2. Brazil

Figure 2

Field Visits in Brazil, 2019



1: RMBH / Minas Gerais

The fieldwork in Brazil was conducted in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (RMBH), in the state of Minas Gerais, center-south region of the country, mainly between May and September 2019—Figure 2. Capital of Minas Gerais, and with over 2.3 million inhabitants, Belo Horizonte is the sixth-largest city in Brazil in terms of population. If we consider the cities that form the RMBH, and the Metropolitan Collar (municipalities around the Metropolitan Region, under its influence)¹⁵, we count over 5,4 million inhabitants¹⁶, in the third-largest urban agglomeration in Brazil.

Visits included land occupations for housing/self-construction and squats in abandoned buildings, both for housing and for other political and cultural uses. In total, nine field visits to occupations were conducted and 15 people agreed to participate in interviews, either individually or in a group.

Additionally, since May 2019, I have been participating in the *Grupo de Trabalho - Arquitetura* [Work Group - Architecture, GT-*Arquitetura*], at *Kasa Invisível* [Invisible House], an anticapitalistic and autonomist squat in the central area of Belo Horizonte. The set of three *Art Déco* houses had been abandoned for over 15 years before its occupation in 2013. Later on, in October 2018 the *Coletivo Kasa Invisível* [Invisible House Collective] begun making calls on the internet for the collaboration of architects in their process of resistance, involving negotiations with public authorities and the

¹⁵ Minas Gerais. Lei Complementar 89, de 12 de janeiro de 2006. <http://fnembrasil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/RM-BH-LeiComplementar89.pdf>, access on 24 December 2018.

¹⁶ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, “Sinopse do Senso Demográfico 2010”, https://ww2.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/censo2010/sinopse/sinopse_tab_rm_zip.shtm, access on 18 December 2018

family that has formal ownership of the houses, and their possible recognition as historical and architectural heritage.

Over time, a group of (mostly female) professionals and students was formed, mainly in the field of architecture, but not restricted to it. The *GT-Arquitetura* is open to anyone interested in participating in the collective, self-managed, and mostly do-it-yourself processes of maintenance, restoration, and architectural management of the houses. The *GT-Arquitetura* usually meets once a week at *Kasa Invisível*, but other encounters may occur if maintenance is necessary or when there are other types of planned activities.

Nonetheless, from the 26 people inscribed in a message group created for the communication between the members of this workgroup, less than half that number actively engage in exchanging information or attending the weekly meetings. Despite the reduced number of frequent participants, the group has been able to propose and organize discussions and events, produce architectural registers and proposals, and contribute to the dialogue between the *Coletivo Kasa Invisível* and the Council of Cultural Heritage of Belo Horizonte. In fact, in November 2019, the Council of Cultural Heritage unanimously approved the recognition of the occupied houses as historical and architectural heritage and formalized its support for the *Coletivo Kasa Invisível*.

There is no denying that being an activist-researcher, that is, actively participating in the movement that is also the focus of one's study, is not a simple task to manage. According to Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández (2012, p. 172), activist-research "consists of a scientific work done by activists with different degrees of political commitment and scientific qualification." Activist-researchers, in turn, "do not abandon their scientific skills and concerns in order to become full-time activists. Rather, they aim at combining both social dimensions of their research activity in a virtuous, yet variable, manner" (Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández, 2012, p. 167).

Similarly, Bartholl (2018), refers to a *militant investigation*, as at the same time an act of investigation and of militancy, which reflects on the struggles in order to strengthen them; an investigation conducted by someone directly involved and inserted into the researched processes, in a context of militancy. A strong argument in favor of this type of investigation is that only a close look from within and an identification with the

movements and subjects in question can lead to reflections that actually facilitate understanding and can strengthen the practices of resistance that they reflect (Bartholl, 2018). Additionally, as Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández (2012, p. 170) observe, an activist-research process can produce results that challenge “common assumptions, stereotypes, hidden episodes, and self-identities,” also presenting itself as a chance to internally (and publicly) discuss “the movement’s weaknesses, troubles and past declines [...] as much as the strengths, the legitimate aspirations, and past achievements.”

It should also be noted that the objective, pragmatic, and scrutinizing character of the scientific work not rarely comes at odds with the necessity to select and preserve sensitive information that might potentially harm others. A constant critical effort is also necessary when using knowledge and information produced and shared collectively in individual publications or presentations that count many points in academic environments, as is also the case (even though more subjectively) of having privileged access to urban social movements and/or collectives.

When I started my participation in the *GT-Arquitetura*, besides expressing my interest in collaborating with this workgroup, I presented my doctoral research proposal and explained that it had as one of its cases of analysis the RMBH—and therefore it would include information about *Kasa Invisível*. This was not a problem for the other participants, which included some representatives of the *Coletivo Kasa Invisível*, the group responsible for the general management of the squat. At a later stage, some of them also agreed to be interviewed.

2.4.2.1. *The Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (RMBH)*

Complementarily to my participation in the *GT-Arquitetura* at *Kasa Invisível*, some of my previous contacts with other researchers, supporters, and/or participants in urban social movements and squats in Belo Horizonte were of vital importance for the scheduling of visits and interviews at the RMBH. The names, types, dates of beginning and end, legal status and locations of the visited urban occupations, the dates of visits and interviews, and the activities I participated in are listed in Table 5. Only one of the

interviews (in Dandara) was not recorded, as requested by the interviewee. As in the previous cases, notes were taken during the conversation and were later expanded into a more detailed register, only a few hours after the interview.

Table 5

Field Visits in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, May/Sep.2019

Name Type	Beginning	Status	Visits/interviews (2019)		City
			Dates	Activities	Region/District
Vitória ^{(1) (2)} Land/housing	... 2013	Illegal	May 20 Jun. 20 Aug. 20	Playground construction Playground construction Rec. individual interview	Santa Luzia Izidora region
Carolina Maria de Jesus Building/housing	Sep. 2017	Legal	Jul. 03	Rec. individual interview	Belo Horizonte Centro
Dandara ^{(1) (2)} Land/housing	Apr. 2009	Legal	Jul. 03 Aug. 28	Rec. individual interview Individual interview	Belo Horizonte Céu Azul
Pátria Livre Building/housing	Sep. 2017	Illegal	Jul. 05	Rec. group interview	Belo Horizonte Santo André
Paulo Freire ^{(1) (2)} Land/housing	... 2015	Illegal	Jul. 11	Rec. individual interview	Belo Horizonte Barreiro
Tina Martins ⁽¹⁾ Building /support for women in situations of violence	Mar. 2016	Illegal	Aug. 15	Rec. individual interview	Belo Horizonte Funcionários
Kasa Invisível Housing / Cultural	... 2013	Illegal	Sep. 03	Rec. group interview	Belo Horizonte Lourdes/Centro
Rosa Leão ^{(1) (2)} Land/housing	... 2013	Illegal	Sep. 25	Group visit (Home/City/World) ⁽³⁾	Belo Horizonte Izidora region
Esperança ^{(1) (2)} Land/housing	... 2013	Illegal	Sep. 25	Group visit (Home/City/World) ⁽³⁾	Santa Luzia Izidora region
Off-site interview 1	–	–	Jul. 05	Rec. individual interview	Belo Horizonte
Off-site interview 2	–	–	Aug. 01	Rec. individual interview	Belo Horizonte
Off-site interview 3	–	–	Aug. 06	Rec. individual interview	Belo Horizonte
Off-site interview 4	–	–	Sep. 13	Rec. individual interview	Belo Horizonte

⁽¹⁾ Bastos et al., 2017 ⁽²⁾ Nascimento & Libânio, 2016 ⁽³⁾ Seminar held at the Faculdade de Direito/UFMG. International Network for Social Housing. Maria Fernanda Repolês; André Luiz Dias; Denise M. Nascimento; Thaís L. Isafas (Org). <https://moradiacidemundo.wordpress.com/>

Additionally, during the fieldwork activities in Brazil and throughout all the documental and bibliographical review, data was systematically collected in order to update as much as possible the registers of existing occupations in the RMBH, mainly since the 1990s, when the number of urban occupations started to increase in this metropolitan region. Data was also retrieved from the online press and other media, including websites of social movements, collectives, and occupations, as well as printed material produced in squats, when available.

Together, two recent reports (Bastos et al., 2017; Nascimento & Libânio, 2016) pointed to the existence of 34 land and building occupations in the RMBH until 2017, to which I added 13 more recent cases from my own observations. Other 19 cases were identified during the Workshop *10 Anos de Ocupações na RMBH* [10 Years of Occupations at RMBH] held on October 21, 2019, at the School of Architecture / UFMG¹⁷ with the participation of twelve people, including faculty, students, researchers, local leaderships and activists connected to the squatting movements in Belo Horizonte. In total, 66 occupations have been identified (the complete list of occupations and other related information are presented in Appendix C of this thesis).

Valuable information was also shared during interviews, allowing the construction of a broad picture of the current configuration of occupations in the RMBH. In addition to their names and locations, whenever available data also included their main purpose and types (whether land occupations for housing/self-construction or of abandoned buildings), dates of beginning and end (year and month) in each case, and the estimated number of families. As much as possible, their current situation was described, ranging from legal, illegal, or evicted to more detailed information of their status. Depending on the case, it was also possible to inform the different groups, collectives, and/or social movements that promoted initial organizational processes, previous to the occupations themselves. Finally, an effort was made to identify the formal ownership of the occupied properties when the information was available.

¹⁷ Workshop held as part of the activities of the *Cosmópolis* research group of the School of Architecture/UFMG, and co-organized by Professor Rita de Cássia Lucena Velloso (research group coordinator), Thiago Canettieri de Mello e Sá (post-doctoral researcher/UFMG), Marina Sanders Paolinelli (PhD student/UFMG) and myself.

Complementarily, a map was produced with the location of the identified occupations (presented in chapter 5 and more detail in Appendix C of this thesis). The map was elaborated in the software QGIS 3.8, a free and open-source geographic information system¹⁸. The shapefile database for the limits and municipalities of the RMBH was the *Cartographic Bases* of the *Plano Metropolitano RMBH* [Metropolitan Plan RMBH].¹⁹ The shapefiles for Belo Horizonte's sub-districts (*Barreiro, Centro-Sul, Leste, Nordeste, Noroeste, Norte, Oeste, Pampulha* and *Venda Nova*), on their turn, were retrieved from the 2010 Demographic Census Territorial Database of the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] (IBGE).²⁰

For the location of the land and building occupations on the map, information was gathered from the *Cartographic Bases* of the *Plano Metropolitano RMBH*, which identified a total of 14 urban occupations at the RMBH in 2014. Additionally, the shapefile database created for the maps in Nascimento & Libânio (2016), ceded by the PRAXIS research group of the School of Architecture / UFMG, added another nine cases to the previous survey, with a total of 23 occupations.²¹ After checking, systematizing, and formatting the data from the aforementioned databases, the 42 remaining land and building occupations were added to the map from the address and location information collected during the documental research and fieldwork, as well as from the analysis of photos and aerial images of the occupations.

Finally, another vital source of information on the case of the RMBH was provided by the valuable experiences and points of view shared during the seminar *Dez anos de ocupações urbanas na RMBH: História, lutas e novos caminhos* [Ten years of urban occupations at RMBH: History, struggles, and new pathways] held at the School of

¹⁸ Available at <https://www.qgis.org/en/site/> last accessed on 04 May 2020.

¹⁹ Interdisciplinary network at UFMG for research and extension in metropolitan planning <http://www.rmbh.org.br/central-cartog.php> last accessed on 16 Jun. 2020.

²⁰ Retrieved from IBGE online <https://bit.ly/3arhnmT> last accessed on 16 Jun. 2020.

²¹ D. Morado. Personal communication, e-mail, October 17, 2019. G. Cruz. Personal communication, e-mail, October 18, 2019.

Architecture / UFMG from June 26 to 28, 2019.²² Inspired by the increasing number of occupations in the RMBH since 2008/2009, accompanied by the growth and strengthening of local social movements and other initiatives, as well as the crescent academic production in the field, the seminar aimed to contribute to a cartography of such local insurgent spatial practices, and to make a critical balance of their struggles, experiences, and tendencies.

As a result, representatives of several urban social movements, residents of occupations, activists, members of collectives, and other actors active in institutional spheres such as universities, sectors of the progressive Catholic Church, City Council, and members of left-wing political parties were brought together, allowing fruitful discussions. Among the issues addressed, debates on the history of urban occupations in the RMBH, their daily practices, challenges and tendencies, the prominent role of women as local leaders, the role of technical advisory collectives, institutional actors and their implications, and others, significantly contributed to my understanding of this complex, sometimes contradictory, and certainly vibrant urban phenomenon that I propose to investigate.

²² Seminar held as part of the activities of the *Cosmópolis* research group of the School of Architecture/UFMG, and co-organized by Professor Rita de Cássia Lucena Velloso (research group coordinator), Thiago Canettieri de Mello e Sá (post-doctoral researcher/UFMG) and Marina Sanders Paolinelli (PhD student/UFMG). <https://bit.ly/2NHxCCq> last access on 22 Jun. 2020.

PART II:

POWER RELATIONS AND SPACE

**INSURGENT SPATIAL PRACTICES:
URBAN SQUATTING MOVEMENTS**

3. POWER RELATIONS AND SPACE

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind," which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures (Foucault, 1982, p. 785).

According to Foucault (1982), power is not something that just exists, in a concentrated or diffused form, by itself. The exercise of power is not merely a relationship between partners (individual or collective) and, in itself, it is not violence; nor is it a consent which, implicitly, is renewable—even though consensus and violence may be instruments or results of power relations.

In this sense, contrary to what they may seem when contemplated on their surfaces, for Foucault, power relations cannot be simply understood as impositions or more or less stable adjustments between parts, according to a hierarchical relationship. Behind these explicit or tacitly accepted rules, written laws, or unspoken codes of social conduct, there is for the author a much more complex and subtle dimension, which occurs at various scales, from individuals to populations, at the level of everyday actions. In other words, power is a way in which certain actions modify others; that is, power exists only when it is put into action:

[...] it is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions (Foucault, 1982, p. 789).

Complementarily, as M. L. de Souza (2006) suggests, even though power has much to do with persuasion, it does not necessarily imply lying, cheating, prevaricating, blackmailing, intimidating, or any form of explicit coercion. In a truly democratic society, M. L. de Souza (2006) points out, the possibility of being persuaded and the freedom to do what one wants are not contradictory among themselves, as long as it happens based on genuine dialogue and in the absence of structural asymmetries of power.

This study assumes that space, in a correlated manner, should not be thought of as merely a physical and inert base on which one lives, circulates, interacts. On the

contrary, it accompanies Lefebvre's (1991, p. 26) notion of social space as a social product that "also serves as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power," as well as M. L. de Souza's (2006) considerations of space as at the same time a product and a conditioner of social relations.

In its articulations, openings and closures, circulations, and interruptions, and in its locations, settlements, and zonings, space becomes crucial for the way we live and how we act toward ourselves and others and, in this sense, to the configuration of power relations. In fact, traditional urban planning has historically taken advantage of the correlation between space and power, or spatial organization and control, in a heteronomous way, from top to bottom, in a clearly *asymmetrical power relation*. Space thus produced serves as a tool of power that benefits the interests of neoliberal governments and the dominating classes, to the detriment of the less favored.

It is important to clarify, though, that referring to such a heteronomous production of urban spaces, and ultimately of contemporary cities, does not always imply a direct or clear imposition of certain spatial forms, locations, and flows. Institutionalized participatory processes, extensively criticized in urban studies literature (see for example Lefebvre, 2016; M. Martínez López, 2011; M. A. Martínez López, 2013; Milagres, 2016; M. L. de Souza, 2006), not rarely operate as mock exercises of direct democracy and, while there is an apparent involvement of the general population in decision-making processes, the neoliberal status quo is comfortably secured.

There is, though, the possibility that institutionalized participatory processes may present certain advantages (such as the availability of public budget and plenty technical resources) that could contribute to a more democratic production of city spaces. It is no coincidence that many urban social movements that struggle for social justice have historically advocated for more inclusive, accessible, democratic forms of urban planning. Although not always expressed or elaborated in these terms, it is as well known to them as to the ruling classes and governments that urban space and the way it is produced, appropriated or dominated are determinants for the configuration of power relations—and, therefore, it is an object of dispute.

Other groups, however, present us with alternative types of insurgent spatial practices that, as Harvey (2008) affirms, seek to remodel the city in a different way to that advocated by the interests of the state and the ruling classes. As an example, urban squats, focus of this research, represent localized but integrated focuses of resistance that insist, sometimes by necessity, others by conviction and very often by both, on fighting head-on against naturalized power structures and on demonstrating that other forms of social relations are possible. These local insurgencies bring the poetic metaphor of the *fireflies*—or might it be an *ant* metaphor?—to a plural, challenging reality, and have in their essentially articulating, mutually supportive character one of their greatest potentialities.

As Soja (2013) synthetically exposes, four key elements connect this *spatial consciousness* to the search for spatial justice: 1) human geographies are socially produced (reflecting Lefebvre's notion of the social production of social space); 2) instilled with social power, these created geographies can be both oppressive and enabling (following Foucault's conceptualization of the relations between space, knowledge, and power); 3) oppressive or unjust geographies can be changed, made less oppressive and more just, through orchestrated socio-spatial action; and 4) spatial awareness and collective struggles for geography can provide a unifying effect for the coalition between various organizations and social movements, increasing the strategic importance of the quest for spatial justice.

3.1. Power relations: control and subversion

According to Foucault (1982, p. 777), the central goal of his work from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s was “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.” For the author, the expression *subject* suggests a form of power that subjugates, either by making subject to someone else by control and dependence or tied to oneself (herself, himself), by self-conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982).

This would involve placing them in complex relations of production, signification, and power. In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, originally published

in 1975, Foucault presents a critical view of the changes in the French penal system, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, to the establishment of incarceration as a predominant form of punishment, as it occurs contemporarily. A fundamental concept presented by him in this work is that of the *discipline*. Discipline binds the exercise of power over the body (of an individual or a population) to the distribution of objects in space and the objectification of the masses. Furthermore, just as this relation can be observed in a prison, a monastery, or a workshop, it could also be verified in a city.

For the time frame of his analysis, Foucault (1995) relates the proliferation and generalization of disciplinary methods to certain economic and social aspects, regarding especially 1) a restructuring of what he calls economy of illegalities, characterized by a shift from the attack of bodies to the seizure of goods, that is, crimes, in general, less violent and more frequent which, together with protests from various social strata against public executions²³, pointed to the need of a reform to punish better, with more universality and necessity; and 2) the advances of capitalism (complexification of machinery, expanding number of workers and the increasing division of labor), which turned supervision into a constant necessity and at the same time part of the production process.

If the economic take-off of the West began with the techniques that made possible the accumulation of capital, it might perhaps be said that the methods for administering the accumulation of men made possible a political take-off in relation to the traditional, ritual, costly, violent forms of power, which soon fell into disuse and were superseded by a subtle, calculated technology of subjection. In fact, the two processes—the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital—cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital (Foucault, 1995, p. 221).

²³ Up to the end of the eighteenth century in Europe, because the law represented the will of the sovereign, when a crime was committed it was considered as an offense to the sovereign himself. In this sense, the ceremony of punishment represented his invincible force, demonstrated by the imbalance and excess of torture. It was the *spectacular* manifestation of the sovereign's power (Foucault, 1995).

In *Security, Territory, Population*²⁴, Foucault (2008b) addresses once again the theme of the disciplines, referring to the power exercised by a shepherd over his flock, that is, the relation established between a Christian religious leader and his followers during the period of the Christian pastorate originated in the third century. This form of power, as Foucault (1982) points out, looks after each individual during his entire life and implies an ability to direct his conscience. What differentiates both contexts, in his vision, is that “in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the disciplines became general formulas of domination” (Foucault, 1995, p. 137).

In this sense, Foucault expands his discussion of the disciplines by introducing in his analysis concepts concerning an understanding of the government of others in a broader sense. For him, from the eighteenth century, the population begins to be recognized as a political character that must be administered, and the word *public* starts to refer to the population considered from the point of view of their opinions, their ways of doing, their behaviors, their habits, their fears, their prejudices, of their demands, it is on what one acts through education, campaigns, and convincing (Foucault, 2008b).

A relationship of pure and simple obedience, as in the pastorate or sovereignty, ceased to be sufficient in the conduction of the population taken as a whole. The government of men needed to intervene on the conscience of the people, modify their opinion and “with their opinion, their way of acting, their behavior as economic subjects, their behavior as political subjects” (Foucault, 2008b, p. 367). Thus, even though the disciplinary objective described by Foucault (1995) as that of creating docile and productive bodies, of increasing their forces in economic terms of utility and diminishing them in political terms of obedience remained, other mechanisms were necessary.

These mechanisms which would, during the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, allow for the management of the population taken as a set of natural phenomena, Foucault (2008b) calls *security* which, instead of establishing obedience, make the elements of reality work with each other, conceding for necessary fluctuations (economic, social, spatial, etc.), delimited in acceptable milestones.

²⁴ Lectures at *Collège de France* (1977-1978).

To the vast set of institutions, procedures, analyzes and reflections, the calculations and the tactics that allow the exercise of this form of power that has as main target the *population*, by main way of knowing the *political economy* and by essential technical instrument the *security devices*, Foucault (2008b) gives the name of *governmentality*. To say that power relations have been progressively governmentalized means to say that they were elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of state institutions (Foucault, 1982).

In the interest of this research, in addition to the notion of disciplines, that binds the exercise of power over bodies to spatial features and functionalities, another fundamental concept refers to the effects of these diffuse, ever-present and reciprocal power relations on the quotidian of people, namely the *conducts*. For Foucault (2008b) conducts are the activities that consist in conducting or conduction, but they also the way a person conducts himself or herself, the way he or she allows himself/herself to be conducted, the way he/she is conducted and how he/she behaves under the effect of a conduct that would be the act of conduct or of conducting.

Conduct and governmentality are related to Foucault's idea of a microphysics of power, in the sense of a power that intends to be present in all spaces and aspects of social life. Still concerning these notions, it is worth mentioning yet the philosophical approach Foucault (2010) presents on *The Government of Self and Others*²⁵, in which he proposes a discussion on the history of the discourse of governmentality related to the constitution of an individual as subject for himself and others. It is in this third time frame of analysis, from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE to the beginning of the Common Era in Greece, that Foucault identifies the first formulations of the problems

²⁵ Lectures at the *Collège de France* (1982-1983).

of governmentality, around the ancient notion of *parrēsia*²⁶ and the exercise of power through true discourse (Foucault, 2010). What seems to be an essential thread in his notion of *parrēsia* lies in its intentionality, as the discourse of truth, to conduct others in their own conduct.

Nonetheless, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is important to keep in mind that the exercise of power, in Foucault's view, only exists in relation to free subjects—that is, freedom is a condition for the exercise of power. “Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when a man is in chains. (In this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint)” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790).

By being free, individual or collective subjects may act, behave, or react in several ways, and therefore, in a power relation, freedom's refusal to submit cannot be excluded as a possibility. It is thus possible to speak of an agonism²⁷, a reciprocal incitation and struggle, or a permanent provocation (Foucault, 1982).

Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal. A relationship of confrontation reaches its term, its final moment (and the victory of one of the two adversaries), when stable mechanisms replace the free play of antagonistic reactions. Through

²⁶ In *The Government of Self and Others* Foucault presents a critical overview of several Greek classical texts from the fifth century BCE onwards, especially concerning the notion of *parrēsia*. According to Foucault (2010), the term *parrēsia*, frequently translated as free-spokenness, free speech, etc., originally meant (in the context of the Greek democracy), the exercise of a true, reasonable, agonistic discourse, from a position of ascendancy or superiority, in the field of the polis—the political right to speak out freely in a debate, or in a confrontation, where others with the same right were free to express themselves as well. In this sense, it can be said that what “is associated with the game of *parrēsia* is speaking the truth in order to direct the city, in a position of superiority in which one is perpetually jousting with others” (Foucault, 2010, p. 157). As Foucault (2010) points out, over time there were modifications in this notion of *parrēsia*, especially in the sense of a greater range, as it begins to appear in the field of politics in different regimes, and as an “action to be exerted, not only on the body of the entire city, but on the individual's soul, whether this be the Prince's soul or the citizen's soul [...]” (Foucault, 2010, p. 206). He also connects the exercise of *parrēsia* to different forms of Christian teaching and also to philosophical practice and discourse (Foucault, 2010).

²⁷ Foucault's neologism is based on the Greek word which means “‘a combat.’ The term would hence imply a physical contest in which the opponents develop a strategy of reaction and of mutual taunting, as in a wrestling match” [Translator's note] (Foucault, 1982, p. 790).

such mechanisms one can direct, in a fairly constant manner and with reasonable certainty, the conduct of others (Foucault, 1982, p. 794).

It is in this sense that Foucault (2008b) associates with the power of conduct what he calls *counter-conducts*: struggles against the procedures put in place to conduct others, and that have as their objective another conduct, to be conducted otherwise by other conductors, for other purposes, through other procedures and other methods.

It is important to note, however, that the disciplinary mechanisms did not cease to exist with the emergence of governmentality. Neither did the law lose applicability. On the contrary, as Foucault (1982) points out, the modern Western state has integrated the pastoral power in a new political shape, spreading it out into the whole social body, which made it possible for the state's power to be both individualizing and totalizing.

3.2. Spatial control as a power strategy

What makes the notion of discipline relevant to this study is its essential connection to space. It proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space, where each individual has his/her own place, avoiding distributions in groups, breaking dangerous communications, supervising and individualizing bodies without, however, giving them a fixed position, but distributing them and circulating them in a network of relations (Foucault, 1995).

A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), or to observe the external space (cf. the geometry of fortresses), but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them (Foucault, 1995, p. 172).

According to Foucault (1995), in the eighteenth century, Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*²⁸ represented the architectural figure of this context. The *Panopticon* is a mechanism that responds to the needs of the discipline by automatizing and deindividualizing power, as well as allowing for the observation of behavior through the distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, and gazes (Foucault, 1995). Nonetheless, here the *Panopticon* should not be understood as a fixed architectural typology, but instead, as Foucault (1995) proposes, a generalizable model of functioning, a general principle or a network of mechanisms, a *panopticism*, whose object and end are the relations of discipline. Thus, as a general principle or idea, it could be expanded and applied to other spatial forms.

The idea of a spatial organization that aims to control where one can live or (how and when to) circulate, most often not through direct orders but by the insertion into a naturalized dynamics of bodies in space, as if a punitive logic has in fact been applied to the whole of society, is by no means foreign to how contemporary cities are planned. As Souza (2010) suggests, such coercive spatial practices have been concretely of various types, including dispersion, segregation, confinement, access interdiction, monopoly, or oligopoly of spatial resources, in addition to more subjective strategies, as the induction of behaviors through signs inscribed in space.

Not only are these strategies of power and political control, but many of them come as essential mechanisms for profit-oriented processes that completely disregard the needs of populations considered to be standing in their way. Displacements, as an example, are in many cases a severe outcome of such processes, that include gentrification and rent increases, but also evictions, slum clearances, relocation programs, and others—despite the fact that they are frequently preceded by a rhetoric of urban renewal or technical necessity (Baeten et al., 2016).

²⁸ “We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery” (Foucault, 1995, p. 200).

Segregation, one of the many possible devastating consequences of displacement—even though people can be stigmatized, marginalized, and segregated without ever being forced out of their neighborhoods—may also be considered as a strategy of controlling and neutralizing *unwanted* populations. Segregation locates (in many cases significant) populations in specific areas of the cities, with limited access to political, economic, and cultural centralities that, in turn, are greatly served with infrastructure and services reserved for the elites. As Lefebvre (2016) points out, this means their deprivation of urban life and the expropriation from the best results of their productive activities.

In this sense, Lefebvre (1991, p. 358) considers that “thanks to the operation of power practical space is the bearer of norms and constraints. It does not merely express power - it proceeds to repress in the name of power [...]. As a body of constraints, stipulations and rules to be followed, social space acquires a normative and repressive efficacy.” Similarly, as stressed by Mitchell (2003, p. 182), the regulation of public space also regulates which actions can be considered legitimate and the role of various groups as members of the legitimate public.”

If space is made useful by the governing entities, be them representative of the state, or private interests, say the real estate market, and contributes to an individual and collective coercion of bodies, a possible question to be made is: does the taking of power over space to transform it and use it more autonomously constitutes an effective strategy of counter-conduct?

This is a relevant point of investigation, especially considering that historically, urban space has been proper to differentiate and hierarchize, to compare and normalize, to homogenize and exclude. The different, that is, the unable to meet the standards and norms imposed by the capital and by private property, are in most of the cases excluded and forced to the margins. Only those who are able to conduct themselves accordingly—the rich, the owners, and sometimes the docile and productive workers—are welcomed to the center.

This question reflects a power opposition proposed by Foucault regarding the power of administration over the ways people live, or in more contemporary terms, the opposition between neoliberal territorial and housing policies over people who occupy

and use space autonomously. Or even between formal work relations and the constitution of cooperatives and alternative economic activities, or of institutionalized participation and decision-making over self-management.

On the other hand, once space is socially produced, as proposed by Lefebvre, it is possible to affirm that it also carries in itself an emancipatory potency, which is well known by several urban social movements. This is the discussion we propose to initiate from the next item.

3.3. Socially produced space

As M. L. de Souza (2010) proposes, spatial practices have historically served either domination, coercion, imposition from the top down or from the outside into the laws and norms that regulate the life of a group or society (in a word, to heteronomy), or emancipation, self-determination, legitimate self-defense, self-government, the free and lucid institution of laws and norms by the body of citizens, directly (in a word, to autonomy). This study follows the use of the term *spatial practices* instead of just *space* or *social practices* alone, separated from the material space in which they occur, for understanding that there is a clear correlation between them (spatial and social practices and relations), although it cannot be described as a mere cause and effect relationship.

Similarly, Soja (1989, p. 80) suggests that even though space in itself may be primordially given, its organization and meaning are products of social transformation and experience, and therefore we should refer to space as a social construction, instead of limiting it to “something external to the social context and to social action,” or “its naively given container.” As discussed in previous items, this study also follows the assertion that space is not naively produced or given. Nonetheless, despite how clear the intentions of the planner may be—say, to design spaces as a tool of control; or, well-intentionally, as tools of emancipation—it is no less accurate to say that the (ever-changing) meanings and uses of urban space establish themselves only in a posterior moment when its materiality is socially appropriated.

Many quotidian examples give us an idea of how this works. A very commented one is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, or Holocaust Memorial, in Berlin, Germany. Designed by the architect Peter Eisenman and built in 2005, it is dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust of World War II.²⁹ According to the architect's web page, the monument "makes for a place of loss and contemplation, elements of memory."³⁰ As you walk around the thousands of concrete blocks where the proximity gives passage to only a few people at a time, and which become higher down the terrain, something close to the proposed meaning may appeal to you. Nonetheless, it is not unusual to see people taking *selfies*, children playfully running around, and lively talking teenagers.

As Lefebvre (2016) suggests, neither the architect, nor the urbanist, nor the sociologist, nor the economist, nor the philosopher or the politician can take from the nothing, by decree, new forms and relations. They do not have the powers of a thaumaturge, he says, nor create social relations: only social life in its global capacity has such powers. More generally, it is each society, or as specified by Lefebvre (1991), each mode of production and its specific relations of production that produce their own peculiar spaces. In the specific case of capitalism, Debord (2014) considers that urbanism is the method that provides the material foundation and prepares the ground for the technical forces of capitalism to act, and take over the natural and human environment. Lefebvre (1991) calls the instrumental space thus produced, that is, in the context of capitalism and as a tool of domination and power³¹, *abstract space*. Abstract space "has something of a dialogue about it, in that it implies a tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a contract, as it were, of non-violence. It imposes reciprocity and a commonality of use" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 56). In other words, "abstract space is the arrangement of space that makes capitalism possible, even as the social relations of capitalism make abstract space possible in the first place" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 29).

²⁹ Retrieved from Berlin.de online <https://bit.ly/39xZSQG> on 05 May 2020.

³⁰ Retrieved from Eisenman Architects online <https://bit.ly/38uc5Xd> on 05 May 2020.

³¹ In Lefebvre's (1991, p. 358) terms, power "- which is to say violence - divides, then keeps what it has divided in a state of separation; inversely, it reunites - yet keeps whatever it wants in a state of confusion."

In this context, it seems that traditional urban planning, that is, the predominant, heteronomous way in which contemporary urban space is planned and regulated, is the perfect tool for producing abstract space. When the production of (abstract) space is regulated by the agencies of political power, and its only improvements are related to technical details or relatively better amenities, in the service of the capital, the project of *changing life* is left as “no more than a political rallying-cry to be taken up or abandoned according to the mood of the moment” (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 59–60). On the other hand, as previously mentioned, traditional urban planning has been under sharp criticism over the years. Whether demanding for greater openness and democratization of institutionalized processes or positioning themselves in more combative and radical ways, aiming at emancipatory practices, groups from various political and ideological views constantly question the way in which our cities are produced.

In the Brazilian context, decades of debates regarding conventional, heteronomous urban planning have brought to light the agenda of *Reforma Urbana* [Urban Reform], submitted as a popular amendment during the rewriting of the Constitution of 1988 ³² (Maricato, 1994). The expression urban reform as here applied does not refer merely to a reshaping or a remodeling of the physical space, the creation of new spatial forms

³² According to Maricato (1994) the Internal Statute of the Constitution provided for the possibility of the presentation of a popular amendment written by at least 30,000 voters; a total of six national entities and dozens of regional and local entities signed the presentation of the amendment that was submitted to the National Congress with 160,000 voter signatures.

As Maricato (1994) recounts: the Urban Reform movement emerged from initiatives of sectors of the Catholic Church, such as the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* [Pastoral Land Commission] (CPT). The meetings promoted by the CPT aimed to support the construction of an entity that would advise urban movements, still in the late 70s. The *Articulação Nacional do Solo Urbano* [National Urban Soil Articulation] (ANSUR) was also created with this intention in the early 1980s. ANSUR was intended to assist in the development of a platform that would bring together the main demands of urban movements, contributing to their unification. This was the root of the *Movimento Nacional pela Reforma Urbana* [National Movement for Urban Reform]. Finally, created during the constitutional popular amendment procedures [in 1987], the *Fórum Nacional da Reforma Urbana* [National Forum of Urban Reform] (FNRU), constituted by several professional entities and NGOs was the heir of the accumulation of initiatives and proposals assembled during this short period.

Still active, the FNRU identifies itself as a national articulation of popular and social movements, NGOs, class associations and research institutions with the purpose of fighting for the right to the city, modifying the process of social and spatial segregation in order to build truly fair, inclusive and democratic cities. Retrieved from <http://forumreformaurbana.org.br/> on 17 May 2020.

or a new spatial order—it refers mostly to the desire for a social reform, to raise the level of social justice, by means of changing how the production of space is regulated and of a new balance of power (M. L. de Souza, 2006, 2011). Some of the most important objectives of the urban reform are to curb land speculation and real estate speculation, to reduce the level of intra-urban socioeconomic-spatial disparity, thus reducing the level of residential segregation, and to democratize as much as possible the planning and management of urban space (M. L. de Souza, 2006, 2011).

Complementarily, increasing democratization in decision-making processes can be considered a broad-spectrum political concern on a global scale. As M. Martínez López (2011) suggests, in the political systems governed by representative democratic institutions, more and more discourses have proliferated, calling for reforms that increase their participative character, praising the virtues of citizen participation. In this sense, it is important to ask ourselves if there is indeed a real commitment on the part of the proponents, and if the results achieved have a real impact on improving people's lives and promoting greater social justice. Similarly to what M. Martínez López (2011) proposes, though, this work agrees that citizen participation is still a rhetoric, in the sense of a more discursive formalism than a reality rich in participative practices and experiences.

3.4. From criticisms of institutionalized participation to self-management and autonomy

If on the one side several progressive sectors of society have historically struggled for a more democratic and inclusive production of contemporary cities, on the other, institutionalized participatory processes regulated by the state can present risks to urban social movements, especially related to their capacity and conditions of autonomy. Here we follow M. L. de Souza's (2001) notions of collective and individual autonomy, the first referring to the equality of chances of participation in relevant decision-making processes regarding the collectivity; and the second as depending on both strictly individual and psychological circumstances, as well as on political and material factors, in which socialization processes constantly make emerge lucid individuals, endowed with self-esteem and averse to political tutelage. Autonomy, to

live according to one's own rules, is then the inverse of heteronomy, or to live according to externally imposed rules, from top to bottom (M. L. de Souza, 2001, 2006).

In the case of institutionalized participatory processes, when people are not given the conditions to take part in decision-making processes other than to choose between a few previously formatted, ready-given, limited options; or to actively participate in defining the methods and rules of those processes—which is more often than not the case—autonomy is, as a direct consequence, left out. Institutionalized participatory processes have also been criticized in relation to the possibility of cooptation, manipulation by politicians, and influence of the state on civil society organizations and their militants (M. L. de Souza, 2006). In some cases, this may even generate internal conflicts or distrust among members of certain collectives and/or social movements concerning the conduct of participants with a closer approximation with institutional actors.

In a correlated manner, such processes may also be strongly subordinated to the interests of politically and economically privileged groups, that maintain specialists and technicians with the power to define the processes that, although forging an appearance of equal power of decision, do not broaden or even consider the field of action of the people (Milagres, 2016). In the specific case of urban planning, this technocratic conception of participation has been particularly influential, and technical professionals are usually considered as the only agents with appropriate scientific knowledge for planning (M. Martínez López, 2011).

As an example, the *Política Nacional de Participação Social* [National Policy of Social Participation] (PNPS) was instituted in Brazil by President Dilma Rousseff's administration in May 2014.³³ While having as one of its objectives to consolidate social participation as a *method of government*³⁴, the PNPS had as some of its guidelines not only the recognition of social participation as a citizen's right and *expression of*

³³ When commenting on the PNPS we cannot fail to observe that the same progressive government that implemented this law, less than two years later also approved law 13,260 (March 2016), known as the Anti-Terrorism Law. This created precedents for the curbing and criminalization of the action of individuals, collectives and social movements when exercising their freedom of assembly and demonstrations in Brazil, as explained in more detail in Chapter 7.

³⁴ Decree 8.243, May 23, 2014 (Art. 4). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/33fvg4k> on 17 Mar. 2020.

autonomy but also the integration between mechanisms of representative, participatory and direct democracy.³⁵

If the PNPS on the one side deftly appropriated the concept of autonomy by bringing to an institutional sphere a mode of action proper of independent initiatives, it nevertheless represented a possibility of increasing the channels for democratic participation in Brazil. Less than five years later, however, in April 2019, a presidential decree³⁶ revoked this National Policy, which was no longer in the interest of the recently elected and openly conservative Brazilian federal government. This example illustrates how institutionalized dynamics and participatory channels can also be fragile, as “radical” as they might sound. As M. L. de Souza (2006, p. 335) observes, “taking part in institutionalized, state-led participatory processes is a ‘risky business,’ and the more the ruling party (or parties) is efficient in providing effective participatory channels and forums, the bigger is the risk for social movements.”

Regarding citizen participation in urban planning processes, M. Martínez López (2011) proposes two main categories, which he calls *one-dimensional models* (referring to the dominant conception of poor and subaltern participation, controlled widely by experts), and *multidimensional models* (that emphasize contextual dimensions, mechanisms of interaction, and the qualities of the social organizations). Schematically, one-dimensional models are problematic because they distribute participation processes on a scale of degrees whose determining variable is only the greater or lesser capacity to decide based on technical knowledge; they are elitist, and consider that citizen participation depends, fundamentally, on the will of the elites and experts, *allowing* the population to become involved; and the experts are seen as the only guarantors of the scientific nature of the knowledge produced in the processes thanks to their supposed neutrality and their hegemonic role in them (M. Martínez López, 2011).

Multidimensional models, on the other hand, consider that citizen participation is much broader than just an exercise in limited decision making, and therefore participatory actions are necessary to allow public debate and interaction in terms of the contents of the planning, the rules and ways of developing the process and results evaluation;

³⁵ Decree 8.243, May 23, 2014 (Art. 3). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/33fvg4k> on 17 Mar. 2020.

³⁶ Decree 9,759, April 2019. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2wWmTy0> on 17 Mar. 2020.

they do not consider participation processes as a transfer of power by elites and experts, respecting autonomous initiatives; experts are supposed to expand their radius of action in an integrated and communicative way while remaining critical both in the sense that their scientific knowledge is questioned, as well as reviewing their own assumptions and contributing to the processes of participatory planning with provisional plans, suggestions, and decisions, integrating the debates and differences expressed up to that moment (M. Martínez López, 2011).

Nonetheless, even if we accept the possibility of institutionalized participatory processes that may be well-intentioned, and include features that bring them closer to such multidimensional models; or that as M. L. de Souza (2006) and Milagres (2016) suggest, they may provide material gains to social movements, such as access to public funds, or even serve for political-pedagogical purposes, there is still a question to be considered: if on principle such processes restrict the conditions of individual and collective autonomy, then to what extent do they contribute to real changes in life and in society aimed at socio-spatial justice?

If urban social movements are to be critical towards institutionalized participatory processes, then instruments designed and appropriated by neoliberal governments should always be looked at in the context of stabilizing mechanisms that may contribute to keeping the order of things as they are. Therefore, in Lefebvre's (2016) radical differentiation between an *ideology of participation* (a more or less developed simulacrum of social activity that allows the acquiescence of the people concerned and at issue to be obtained at the lowest price) and *real and active participation* that he finds in self-management, this study chooses to concentrate on the latter.

The main interest of this research resides, then, on *self-managed groups aimed at insurgent spatial practices*. For purposes of conceptual delimitation, these are here considered groups that a) construct their identities strongly on the basis of practices of *territorialization* (M. L. de Souza, 2010); b) produce spaces by *appropriation*, making *meaning* and *collectivization* (Morawski, 2015); c) without political and economic privileges, they organize themselves to try to broaden their power of action and decision, following *self-defined rules* (Milagres, 2016).

In this broad universe, more specifically, this study focuses on urban squatting movements. As will be addressed in more detail ahead, such movements have their own distinctive features. In their many different expressions, they may vary in levels of accessibility and openness to participation by people considered as outsiders, encompass a variety of political orientations and struggles, have diverse views on legal matters, and different relations with institutional agents. Urban squatting comprises land and building occupations, ranging from single houses to entirely squatted communities and neighborhoods. Moreover, just as much as the squatting movements are richly diverse, there can also be a remarkable sharing of common principles, strategies, and aspirations, as we will begin to discuss in the next chapter.

4. INSURGENT SPATIAL PRACTICES: URBAN SQUATTING MOVEMENTS

M. L. de Souza (2010) calls spatial practices those practices that are strongly and directly impregnated with the spatial dimension of society, in aspects ranging from identity to organization, for which he proposes six general types, that can be summarized as follows: 1) *Territorialization in the strict sense*, or the appropriation and control of space by means of or with the help of physical presence (as is the case, for example, of squatting); 2) *Territorialization in the broad sense*, when unidentified territories, formal rights and legal prerogatives of private owners are challenged and rules imposed by the state are broken by provocative symbols and without the lasting physical presence of transgressors/challengers (e.g. clandestine actions of graffiti); 3) *Refunctionalization / restructuring of material space*, that is, adaptation of the material spatial substrate to new needs or new functions in the course of long-term maintenance of dissident territories; 4) *Ressignification of places* by means of culture, symbolism and discourse as battlefields; 5) *Construction of alternative economic circuits*, or the development of alternatives to the capitalist market and to the capitalist production relations in terms of income generation, production, marketing and consumption; and finally 6) *Building of spatial networks*, involving multi-scale strategies integrating experiences of local or regional resistance and their respective dissident territories, allowing synergies to be achieved between organizations and activists from various places.

While systematization of phenomena is an important methodological tool for their understanding, in practice, the quotidian of urban social movements is fluid, and their actions can be inserted in more than one—or several—of the types listed above, and certainly include other unforeseen characteristics. Thus, even though in a first moment this research is mostly concerned about what M. L. de Souza (2010) calls *territorialization in the strict sense*, depending on the cases to be addressed, other features will be taken into consideration. It should also be mentioned that, to date, there have been rich conceptualizations, theorizations, and empirical studies on squatting, with several contributions from different authors worldwide. In part, what draws attention to such movements is the fact that they create and adapt in multiple ways alternative economic activities and modes production, social interaction, and organizational processes that diverge from contemporary neoliberal models. In doing

so, as Vasudevan (2015) suggests, they prefigure a different social order, while seeking to build conditions for social justice and autonomous forms of collective life.

In the context of this research, the main reason for focusing on the squatting movements is that all this occurs in an indissoluble and mutually compelling way to the appropriation, adaptation, and production of their own specific spaces. Squatted lands, premises and buildings correspond and are made as adequate as possible (depending on the availability of resources, technical knowledge, organizational skills, work capacity, etc.) to their collective use. In this sense, at least as far as the plan of intentions is concerned, use value outweighs exchange value. There is thus a possibility that these spaces will fundamentally differ from the oppressive spaces of control naturalized by neoliberal models of society. Complementarily, as McKee (2016) observes, squatting involves holding space, not as an end in itself, but to provide a base of operations that makes it possible to expand and deepen the struggle, even beyond its immediate site. Therefore, there is necessarily a “simultaneous shutting-down of the space as controlled by the powers that be, and a reactivation of that space through the antagonistic invention of new forms of communal life and mutual care outside relations of property and the wage, however fleetingly” (McKee, 2016, p. 21).

Insurgent spatial practices, as is the case of squatting, go beyond denying certain imposed and/or heteronomously controlled forms of social-economic relations or modes of production. There is also a refuse to how space is controlled, distributed, organized, owned. Such a complex and broad scope certainly does not come free from challenges and contradictions. Therefore, in their study, it is vital to consider the possibility of internal conflicts, which may be related to legalization, formalization of agreements, institutionalization, forms of ownership, the possibility of autonomy losses, disputes over territories, occasional expressions of gender inequality, and others. The presence of conservative agents that may disrupt internal dynamics, external acts of sabotage by the state (such as power and water supply interruptions), constant eviction threats, growing repression, and the increasing criminalization of the squatting movements are also important factors to be taken into consideration.

It is also essential to have in mind that squats exist in relation to their neighborhoods and all the other social-spatial aspects of the city (or even on larger scales, regionally

and internationally), other occupations and other social movements, collectives, militants, governmental institutions and political parties, and many others—and thus they should not be studied in isolation. Finally, the analysis of the consequences, effects, and/or repercussions of squatter's practices, whether temporary or permanent, may contribute to the understanding of their possibilities to, in Lefebvre's terms, *change life*.

This study then proposes that urban squatting movements can be studied as particular types of insurgencies against a broad range of neoliberal policies and their effects, by means of the appropriation, transformation, and production of spaces for housing, counter-cultural activities, political standing, and others, for periods of time that can vary from almost immediate evictions to decades of resistance. In this context squatting actions may constitute *counter-conducts*—in the sense proposed by Foucault (2008b) and discussed in the previous chapter—and have as one of their potencies the capacity to create *prefigurative policies*, that is, to formulate and engage with a set of principles and forms of action geared at objective possibilities to change life.

Moreover, in their diverse types and forms (social centers, *gaztetxes*, land and building occupations for housing and many others), urban squats may also present us with social-spatial configurations, dynamics, and relations that differ (at least to a certain point) from those historically controlled by traditional and institutional agents. In this regard, and despite not making direct references to the squatting movements, both Lefebvre (1991) with his notion of *differential spaces*, and Foucault (2008a) in proposing the study of *heterotopias*, have theorized about the possibilities of other spaces, which scape or deny the dominant logics of social control by means of controlling space.

Finally, at the same time as urban squatting movements are in most cases deeply related to forms of housing injustice (homelessness, precarious housing conditions, high costs of dignified housing, etc.), squatters' struggles encompass a much broader range of political, economic and social issues, ranging from demands over public services and infrastructure to a desire to take over the city. In this sense, this study also suggests that the notion of *the right to the city*, as firstly proposed by Lefebvre (2016), is another valid theoretical key in their study. Although the intention of this

research is not to fit the squatting movements, squatting actions, or squats into such theoretical frameworks, it considers that these are relevant theoretical lenses in their study to the systematization of their rich backgrounds, practices, and articulations, and to their understanding. Conversely, the analysis of squatters' everyday dynamics, material practices, challenges, and achievements, in turn, may contribute to testing such theories and identifying possible developments.

4.1.A possible spatial approach to squats: Lefebvre's Differential Space

What runs counter to a society founded on exchange is a primacy of use (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 381).

Among his theoretical formulations in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) critically examines some of the social, political, religious, and economic developments in Europe from classical antiquity to the emergency of capitalism, and up to the 19th century. All such developments, he suggests, occurred in relation to the production of a corresponding space that contained, enabled, reflected, and influenced these historical transformations. Lefebvre (1991) thus proposes that forms of social organization, modes of production and reproduction, structures of power and belief, cannot be understood in isolation, separately from the space where they occur.

As much as there have been historical changes in politics and power relations, in technological capacity and economic dynamics, and in social relations, space (and the production of space) has also changed—and should be considered instrumental in such processes. Following this line of thought, Lefebvre addresses each time frame of his analysis with particular focus on the changes and conflicts that resulted in economic, social, and spatial relations mediated by the capital and by the search for profit—and on how such relations could be subverted.

Back in Classical Antiquity, Lefebvre (1991) suggests, even though ancient Greece and Rome had different social, cultural, political, and religious frameworks, in both contexts, their modes of social organization generated a specific type of space, which he calls *absolute space*. This space, essentially political and religious in character, apparently transcendent, sacred and magical, already implied, as proposed by Lefebvre (1991), mechanisms of mediation (identification, imitation): the imaginary was

transformed into the real in sacred or cursed locations, temples, commemorative or funerary monuments, palaces, and cities, influencing the formation of people's minds.

Everything in the societies under consideration was situated, perceived and interpreted in terms of such places. Hence absolute space cannot be understood in terms of a collection of sites and signs; to view it thus is to misapprehend it in the most fundamental way. Rather, it is indeed a space, at once and indistinguishably mental and social, which comprehends the entire existence of the group concerned [...] and it must be so understood (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 240).

As Lefebvre (1991) continues, he proposes that later on, in the Medieval Period, social relations more focused on commercial activities and the new central role of commerce in the cities eventually inaugurated the need for a surplus production in the countryside: not only the population living in the cities needed to be fed, the work of craftsmen required enough raw material. Added to the growing importance of private land ownership, this context led to the gradual supplanting of absolute space by the production of another space, the space of secular life, of the written word, of commerce; but also already the space of power and control, under the triune God (its religious character preserved), the King, the Father (Lefebvre, 1991). Since then cities not only begun to be organized as markets but over time they also became part of networks that connected territories through roads, lanes, rivers, and canals—this already a reflection “of the abstract and contractual network which bound together the ‘exchangers’ of products and money” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 266).

Lefebvre's dialectical approach thus points to space as both a result and a facilitator of social relations, and to an intentional production of space over the centuries already as a device to dynamize and organize religious, political and economic activities, to guarantee political power and to control the whole of society—even before the rise of capitalism. Nonetheless, Lefebvre (1991) observes, it was only with the advent of capitalism and the world market in the 19th century that the economic sphere became dominant, and could no longer be separated from the relations of power.

Lefebvre (1991) proposes that with the advent of capitalism, a new type of space emerged, at the same time bearer, driver and a result of changes in social, political and economic relations—this space, which he calls *abstract space*, not only is where the world of commodities is deployed but is also a commodity in itself, its entirety

having assigned to it an exchange value. Still repressive in its essence, space remains dominated by the ruling classes, but with a dramatic compliment: it is now used by them as much as a tool of power as for the generation of profit.

Though with significant contextual differences and varying in form and intensity, some of the fundamental aspects of the abstract space, as suggested by Lefebvre (1991), can still be observed in contemporary neoliberal cities around the globe. It implies an unprecedentedly specialized, institutionalized, and oppressive spatial planning, oriented towards social, political, and economic control, and can be systematized as follows:

1) It is institutional (because it is instituted by a state) and political (for it is a product of violence and war)—violence referring to the reinforcement of political power and authority, giving rise to a sequence of force-repression-oppression, which varies in intensity; but also to an instrumentality of space and to an authoritarian, brutal spatial practice that disperses, divides, segregates.

2) Fragmenting and separating, abstract space hierarchizes, excludes, segregates (or integrates), locates specificities and places, aiming at controlling them; this operation designates roles and values to particular places, determining specialized and/or (more frequently) selectively prohibited areas—for work, for leisure, for daytime or night-time, etc.; imposed control is, nonetheless, usually invisible and unconsciously accepted—the imposition of physical barriers are more extreme cases of this type of separation. Additionally to being reinforced by administrative subdivisions, scientific and technical specialization, fragmentation is mostly enhanced by the sale of space in lots.

3) Although abstract space is not homogeneous and political power creates fragmentation in order to control it, this tendency towards domination is concealed, contradictions are masked, and an apparent significance and coherence are instilled into space by the logic operation of urban planning; abstract space thus appears homogeneous and has homogeneity—that is, the elimination of difference, of obstacles, of whatever stands in the way of the ruling forces—as its goal and orientation.

4) Urbanism, or spatial planning, presented as the product of objective, sophisticated technical expertise (taken for established facts), has been an effective instrument for the conformation of abstract space.

As previously discussed, traditional urban planning remains highly institutionalized. Although much has been discussed on the need for more democratic cities, in general, even supposedly participatory urban policy instruments have not proved enough to alter the neoliberal logic of producing and consuming the space-as-commodity in contemporary cities. Technical expertise remains, in practice, considered the most legitimate form of knowledge. Not only issues that actually demand technical knowledge (such as ensuring structural stability, rainwater flow calculations, topographic studies, and others), but all kinds of decisions that concern the use of space in cities (distribution of uses, leisure areas, services, connections, and access, etc.) are generally a prerogative of experts. Nonetheless, it is quite common to find alternative and ingenious solutions to all kinds of spatial issues in so-called "informal settlements," often more creative and interesting than those found in the "formal city."

Additionally, there is still a clear instrumentalization of the city space, despite the institutional discourse being apparently (and formally, legally) favorable to its democratization. True and active participation, with popular decision making, based on emancipatory practices and collective autonomy, represent high-risk factors for those who want to remain in control. Therefore, contemporary zoning and administrative planning of urban areas remain heteronomously established, defining the forms—hierarchical, specialized, commodified—in which cities materialize.

The strategic location of economically privileged areas and decision-making centers, or of residential areas for the elites or the poor, defines who will or will not have adequate access to certain areas of the city, or will spend more or less time on their daily journeys. Centers of political and economic power are then defined, and populational groups considered undesirable are to some extent contained in certain areas, either distant (hidden, invisible, on the margins of the city) or, when unavoidable, kept close but segregated (as in the case of slums and *favelas* incrustated in privileged centers), facilitating their control.

This type of control (which is not expressed in so-called democratic institutional discourses) may occur in a concealed way, say by the time spent to go from one place to another, which leaves no residue for any activities other than the daily displacement of home-work-home; by signs of power or sacredness inscribed in space, which define places with restricted access to people belonging to certain classes or beliefs; through the purchase and rental prices of housing and work units, which define who can inhabit (or have domain over) certain areas of the city based on their acquisitive power, etc. In other cases, control can be imposed in an openly repressive manner, involving practices that range from the setting up of spatial barriers and the express prohibition of access to certain areas depending on the day or time, to violent police actions to expel homeless people, street vendors, squatters, demonstrators and others.

Furthermore, even though socio-spatial control is made possible by mechanisms that, in practice, separate and segregate (that locate, hierarchize, specialize), abstract space is still oriented towards homogenization. When seen as obstacles to the maintenance of the status quo, certain populational groups will be targeted for neutralization, criminalization, or exclusion. This may be the case not only of those who remain outside the logic of the capital and exchange value (either in activist insurgent contexts and by means of alternative practices, or simply due to the need to survive) but also of groups that (even though sometimes may be considered profitable niche markets) struggle against male dominance and heteronormativity, defy prejudices, dogmas or privileges.

As Lefebvre (1991, p. 419) points out, though, his study goes beyond the proposal of a theory of space: it is “informed from beginning to end by a project [...] of a different society, a different mode of production, where social practice would be governed by different conceptual determinations.” In his opinion, among the obstacles and the reasons for the eventual failure of several groups who have already endeavored to invent a new, communal life, is their inability to invent a new, appropriate space. Real changes in life—that is, to create and live new forms of social relations and modes of production, different from the oppressive, violent power relations characteristic of capitalist societies—Lefebvre (1991) proposes, are not possible without an equally new spatial practice, that implies the production of new spatial forms and relations.

This *other* space, appropriate for different, fairer, communal social relations, Lefebvre (1991) calls *differential space*, “because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 52). Although he did not define in detail what the forms and features of such differential spaces would be, nor how they could be produced and what modes of production they would embrace or facilitate (“no one has a right to speak for those directly concerned”), Lefebvre (1991, p. 364) did propose certain requirements and pointed to some already existing possibilities. According to Lefebvre (1991), such new spatial forms and spatial practices would imply:

- 1) Instead of private property and domination (exchange value), appropriation, collective ownership, and permanent participation (use value).
- 2) A practice whose invention and materialization depend not on the actions of experts, but on the creativity and collective autonomy of the people who live or use such spaces.
- 3) The collective and multi-scalar action (from everyday activities to global relationships) of different groups who, endowed with the desire to change life, seek to appropriate space.
- 4) The formation of coalitions, alliances, collectives, and/or plural networks, including varied (and even contradictory) interests, instead of the rule of isolated, particular social groups or classes.

Bastos et al. (2017) suggest that the differential space theorized by Lefebvre is the space engendered by the contradictions of abstract space, originating in the dissolution of social relations oriented by the homogenization, fragmentation, and hierarchy of abstract objects and subjects. Differential space also means the end of private ownership of space and its political domination by the state, its production coming from the complete overlap between a profoundly transformed daily life and a practice of spatial difference that aims at restoring the different possible uses of space—that is, to enable spatial appropriation against the pathogenic homogenization of a rationalized, coercive, hierarchical space commanded by capitalist and state logic (Bastos et al., 2017).

Even though Lefebvre (1991) does not make direct references to the squatting movements (already existing in Europe when he first published his views on *The Production of Space*), in some passages he suggests the emergence and persistence of *difference* on the margins and peripheries, excluded or forbidden, in the form of resistances or of externalities. As an example, he mentions that

[t]he vast shanty towns of Latin America (favelas, barrios, ranchos) manifest a social life far more intense than the bourgeois districts of the cities. [...] Their poverty notwithstanding, these districts sometimes so effectively order their space—houses, walls, public spaces—as to elicit a nervous admiration. Appropriation of a remarkably high order is to be found here. The spontaneous architecture and planning [...] prove greatly superior to the organization of space by specialists who effectively translate the social order into territorial reality with or without direct orders from economic and political authorities. [...] [A] conflict of this kind eventuates either in the emergence of unforeseen differences or in its own absorption, in which case only induced differences arise (i.e. differences internal to the dominant form of space) (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 373–374).

In this sense, it also seems opportune to discuss the collective forms of appropriation of private or public property (i.e., buildings or land belonging to individuals, companies or governments) undertaken by squatters in a context of struggles against neoliberal urban policies, oppressive and/or structural economic and social issues, in the light of Lefebvre's appeal and theory. In their quotidian insurgent spatial practices, these actors put housing injustice, the capitalist mode of production, gender, and ethnic issues to the test; they promote mutual aid and support, counter-cultural activities and forms of alternative economy; exchange knowledge and information throughout a vibrant network of relations that includes other collectives, movements, and agents, locally, regionally and even internationally.

The spaces they produce and adapt are not *destined* to generate maximum profit or to be commercialized as a commodity, but to the primacy of use: in their communal areas, kitchens or gardens, during the open activities they promote, in their daily organizational and collective decision-making processes, squatters demonstrate that a different life, one that is not based on profit rates, private property and repressive social control is a tangible possibility.

It is important to observe, though, as Lefebvre (1991) himself emphasizes, that space is fundamentally endowed with contradictory relations, and therefore we cannot

exclude the possibility that such counter-spaces or counter-projects can be absorbed, integrated, recuperated or destroyed by the forces of homogenization—especially considering that they may embrace, to varying degrees, the quantitative and the homogeneous (the abstract).

In their analysis of several squats located in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, Bastos et al. (2017) consider that their spaces are dialectically tensioned between abstract space and differential space, between domination and appropriation: neither one nor the other, but both at the same time. Although the authors highlight the potencies associated with the production of another space from a different daily life, oriented by use value and through appropriation, at the same time they recognize the existence of agents capable of conducting processes that conform abstract space, exploiting weaknesses inherent in experiences that are embryonic and/or under construction, such as the informal real estate market and the entry of narcotics trafficking agents that create authoritarian power relations and weaken political mobilization.

Concerning such contradictory relations, which could present risks for the different and insurgent, Lefebvre (1991, p. 380) makes a brief comment in his 1974 book that could also be said about certain squatting practices; he says: “the masses must *survive* before they can *live*.” Especially in the case of squatting for housing (but we could also include here other types of squats, for example, those that provide working space, or for collective encounters and meetings that otherwise might not happen), most of the times carried out by people who have no other option but to occupy (or to take their chances in the streets), there is a primary necessity for shelter, for a roof over their heads, before they are able to take other actions, that might fulfill other needs and desires.

People have to survive before they can start living. This need for survival, in the case of squatting movements, is directly related to the possibility of staying put. After all, in case of evictions, squatters lose the most basic tool of their struggles: space. This is a key reason for a recurrent, challenging, and many times contradictory issue amongst squatters: seeking legalization. In many cases (as will be addressed in greater detail on Chapter 7), legal and/or formal agreements with private owners or local

governments occur under the condition that squatters must begin to follow external rules, which, among other issues, means losing autonomy. On other occasions, regularization and the entrance of institutional agents may mean a loss of communal spirit, or community spirit, and the predominance of private space and privacy instead of collective areas and integration, as reported by some squatters. Additionally, though it is not advisable to generalize (for the squatting movements and squats are significantly differentiated), in certain contexts, there may be a tendency towards institutionalization, with or without associations with political parties, which could lead to co-optation.

Moreover, the increasing repression and criminalization of squatting movements, added to frequent and violent evictions, clearly favor private or public proprietors who have not fulfilled their legal obligation to guarantee the social function of their properties, to begin with. These and other institutional strategies—that include not only violence, but also manipulative and biased discourses, debilitating methods such as not providing squats with necessary infrastructure, and others—show a clear pressure towards homogenization, with the elimination (or at best the absorption) of these insurgent initiatives.

Finally, the following questions may contribute to the discussion on whether or to what extent the spaces produced in the context of squatting can be considered as types of differential space: are there potencies contained in the junction of struggles due to the need of space as a means of survival (habitat) and struggles oriented towards the desire to have a full and participative life in the city (inhabit)? Are squatters oriented to the production of a type of differential space? In these contexts, what features and practices point to the production of differential spaces? What contradictions can be observed in squatted spaces?

4.2. A possible spatial approach to squats: Foucault's Heterotopias

A very broad concept found in Foucault's work, which is also directly related to space is that of *heterotopias*. It appears in the text *Des espaces autres. Une conférence inédite de Michel Foucault*, published for the first time in 1984, based on the transcript

of a lecture given by the author in 1967 to the *Cercle d'études architecturales*³⁷ (Foucault, 2008a translators' note).

The term refers to certain types of spaces, other spaces, different and separated from the spaces controlled and regulated by the normalizing powers acting in relation to society. In his work, as much as Lefebvre, Foucault did not directly relate heterotopias with squats, even though they were already an existing practice throughout Europe in the late 1960s, by the time he first presented this notion. Nevertheless, more recently a number of authors (for example Allweil & Kallus, 2008; Boyer, 2008; Cenzatti, 2008; Dehaene & Cauter, 2008; Heynen, 2008; Lang, 2008) have returned to this idea, and in connection with Foucault's concept of counter-conducts, they have raised discussions on the possibility of studying certain insurgent spatial practices under the lens of *heterotopia*.

Referring to a possible history of space, Foucault (2008a) makes a differentiation between the medieval space, or space of localization, consisting of a hierarchic, dichotomous ensemble of places (sacred/profane, protected/open, urban/rural, etc.); and a more recent type of space, that of the emplacement.³⁸ "The emplacement is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements; formally, we can describe these relations as series, trees, or grids" (Foucault, 2008a, p. 15).

This problem of the human emplacement is not simply the question of knowing whether there will be enough space for man in the world—a problem that is certainly quite important—but it is also the problem of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, spotting, and classification of human elements, should be adopted in this or that situation in order to achieve this or that end. We are in an epoch in which space is given to us in the form of relations between emplacements (Foucault, 2008a, p. 15).

Emplacement, then, is linked to the idea of something that works in relation to another, inside of a network, at the same time that already it dialogues with the notions of discipline and governmentality that Foucault would develop in the following years.

³⁷ Nonetheless, according to Sohn (2008, p. 43), "the term appeared for the first time in Michel Foucault's work in the preface to *The Order of Things*, published in 1966."

³⁸ In Foucault's text, emplacement should be considered a technical term, that is space or rather place in the era of the network as opposed to extension. The space of emplacement only exists as 'discrete space', an instance of one of the possible positions that exist within a set of positions (Foucault, 2008a, pp. 23–24 translators' note).

Among the sites existing within this network of relations, Foucault turns his attention to those “that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored, or reflected by them,” contradicting them (Foucault, 2008a, pp. 16–17). These would be of two main types: utopias and heterotopias.

Utopias, in Foucault’s (2008a, p. 17) view, are emplacements with no real place, or fundamentally unreal spaces, that “have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society”; they are society itself perfected, or else society turned upside down. In contrast, Heterotopias are real, effective spaces that are “absolutely other than all the emplacements that they reflect, and of which they speak,” they are a sort of counter-emplacements, or a type “of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable” (Foucault, 2008a, p. 17).

Heterotopia is a term Foucault borrowed from the medical and biological discourse, meaning spatial displacement of normal tissue, or a dislocated organ (Boyer, 2008; Sohn, 2008). Medical heterotopias are, in a direct relation to Foucault’s use of the term, anomalous situations which deviate “from the normal and *correct* order of things”—on the other hand, they have no known causes and no secondary effects, while “Foucault’s heterotopias have an essentially disturbing function: they are meant to overturn established orders, to subvert language and signification, to contrast sameness, and to reflect the inverse or reverse side of society” (Sohn, 2008, pp. 43–44).

Foucault (2008a) classifies heterotopias in two major types. The first one, *Heterotopias of crisis*, most usual in “primitive” societies, are places “reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.” (Foucault, 2008a, p. 18). The second and more recent type he calls *heterotopias of deviation*:

[...] those in which individuals are placed whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the mean or required norm. Cases of this are rest homes and psychiatric hospitals; there are, of course, the prisons, and one

should perhaps add retirement homes that are, as it were, on the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation since, after all, old age is a crisis, but it is also a deviation since, in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation (Foucault, 2008a, p. 18).

According to Cenzatti (2008), while the crisis represents a temporary absence, individuals in between recognized social roles, deviations are considered much more permanent. “In short, modern heterotopias are no longer spaces of passage between social roles. They are for deviants, people who do not fit into the dominant social norm and, even if individually they may return to productive, normal, social roles, as a group they remain excluded from the working of society” (Cenzatti, 2008, pp. 76–77).

As essential characteristics, heterotopias always have functions or roles in relation to the rest of space, that may be to create a space of illusion—allowing one to be temporarily free from the constraints of social life, as in the case of brothels—or a space of compensation—as perfect, meticulous, and well-arranged as ours is disorderly, ill construed, and sketchy, as some colonies may have worked (Foucault, 2008a). They also presuppose a system of opening and closing, which makes them both isolated and penetrable, that is, “one can only enter with a certain permission and after having performed a certain number of gestures” (Foucault, 2008a, p. 21). Additionally, they are necessarily collective or shared spaces (Dehaene & Cauter, 2008), and, finally, they are spaces “of contestation and reverberation, never closed nor completed but open to constant reinterpretation and invention (Boyer, 2008, p. 64).

Within this line of thought, and in an effort to extend Foucault’s periodization to a more contemporary context, Cenzatti (2008) proposes another type of heterotopias, which he calls *heterotopias of difference*. In his opinion, “in relation to the production of ‘heterotopias of deviance,’ a fundamental change is that the social norms from which deviance emerges (that deviance mirrors) have become more flexible, and deviance a more transient concept” (Cenzatti, 2008, p. 77).

As the author points out, this change occurred not only through struggles over the *right to difference* but it was also influenced by the economic context of the Post-Fordism, in the mid-1970s, characterized by the (re-)emergence of alternative organizations of production which “*require* small and changing markets to be economically viable” (Cenzatti, 2008, p. 78). In this sense, different lifestyles and social, cultural or sexual

identities can be inserted “in the machinery of production and consumption as niche markets, as pools of labour, as sources for new commodifications” (Cenzatti, 2008, p. 78).

An important question regarding heterotopias, in general, is whether they are meant to oppress, control and discipline those who are inside them, or if they can also be places of emancipation, subversion, and resistance (Allweil & Kallus, 2008; Dehaene & Cauter, 2008; Heynen, 2008). As Heynen (2008) points out, since in Foucault’s thought liberation and subjugation work as counterforces against each other, one should not be surprised that for him, heterotopias are places where indeed both forces operate.

In that sense, Heynen (2008) affirms that pursuing the idea of heterotopia offers a productive strategy to investigate the ongoing transformations of urban and social life. With that in mind, it seems that poverty (like old age, in Foucault’s view) could be placed somewhere between deviance—since in a society where the capital is the rule, those who cannot access it occur in a kind of deviation—and crisis—once even though people in this condition are actually expected to remain where they are, contradictorily, the illusory discourse of capitalism insists on affirming that they could (would certainly) emerge from their underprivileged condition as a member of the so considered legitimate society, provided they make a real effort, are productive, follow the given rules, in short, by means of (the perverse myth of) meritocracy.

Considering the possibility of thinking about heterotopias as places for emancipation and struggle against the status quo, or as products of insurgent spatial practices, it could also be possible to look at squats as heterotopias that contest the normalized order of things (e.g., regarding the lack of access to housing due to poverty, commodification of life, etc.). In addition, urban squats exist in relation to all the other elements in the urban network. They are not isolated entities; on the contrary: having a dialogical relation with local neighborhoods and forming cohesive, diversified networks is strategic to their survival, to the effectiveness of their actions, and increases the possibility of broader political transformations.

Squats offer another discourse, one that seeks to oppose the neoliberal discourse, conveniently inscribed in the everyday life of the cities. At the same time, for as long as they are occupations, they remain outside all places, differentiated from them (be it

because they are not inside normalized socio-spatial relations based on the capital; or because they give a new meaning to the place of the family life, to the private life, to the life in individuality, by being places of common life, etc.). Neither public nor private spaces, squats also have a relative permeability that may depend on the political positions, intentions, and backgrounds of those who want to access them.

On the other hand, even though squats had existed for a long time, and indeed were an existing phenomenon when Foucault first proposed the notion of heterotopia, they do not seem to quite fit either of his two great types. As Cenzatti (2008) points out, in the case of heterotopias of crisis, there are fixed spaces and changing population; and as for the heterotopias of deviance, fixed spaces, and fixed populations.

Living in a squat is not necessarily a permanent condition, just as the occupied space is not always the same. For several reasons, new people may come and go, or the entire group may need to move to a different location, not because they are going through a moment of crisis after which they are welcomed back into society, but due to evictions, agreements with local governments or formal owners, their own internal conflicts, etc. Thus, squats may be constituted of changing spaces and changing populations.

By relating the notion of heterotopia with Henri Lefebvre's (1991) triad *spatial practice* (the dialectical process of production of physical spaces), *representations of space* (the organization of our knowledge of space, or the conceptualized space in its many disciplines), and *representational spaces* (or spaces as directly lived, occupied and transformed by inhabiting and using them; spaces that overlay physical spaces and make symbolic use of them), Cenzatti (2008) suggests that heterotopias are representational spaces, and therefore they disappear the moment the social relations that produced them cease to exist.

Similar to Foucault's notion of heterotopias, Cenzatti's idea of heterotopias of difference share important characteristics with squatted spaces, as in both cases there is a fluctuation between contradiction and acceptance; invisibility and recognition; existence and non-existence; and the fact that they are spaces produced, used and transformed as part of everyday life, but still deviating, sometimes closer, sometimes further away from the naturalized order of things. Nonetheless, an important question

could still be made: if we consider squats under the lenses of heterotopia and representational spaces, can we really say that they disappear entirely when the social relations that produced them are no longer in place?

If we consider Lefebvre's (1991) assertion that representational spaces leave traces that may influence, later on, other activities, then that might not be the case. And that is something we should not ignore when discussing squatting movements. Even though the appropriation and production of space are integral aspects of their struggles, in their practices and discourses, and in their essentially prefigurative character, squatters present us with the possibility of different social relations and practices, and alternative forms of spatial organization. Thus, even if ephemeral or temporary, in the spaces they produce, resides a potency of influencing and reverberating in other spheres, scales, and times.

Nonetheless, the idea of heterotopias seems like an appealing theoretical key in the analysis of space produced in the context of squatting movements, especially when considering them as particular types of counter-conducts. In this case, however, how to approach the great variety of scales and types of squats, and their complex and eventually contradictory features and practices? Furthermore, equally important, can we still speak of heterotopias in cases where squatters aim (or achieve) legalization and/or regularization, that is, to be formally accepted as part of the norm?

4.3. The Right to the City on the horizon?

Lefebvre first published his ideas on *The Right to the City* only a few months before the uprisings of May 1968 in France.

Indeed, Lefebvre was a researcher and teacher at the University of Nanterre, a newly built campus located between the slums of the Parisian working class periphery. The May 68 movement really began on 22 March 1968 in the University of Nanterre when a group of students occupied the administration tower of the campus, denouncing the arbitrary authority of the so-called "Mandarin," the omnipotent administrative council of the university led by professors. His group of researchers from the philosophy department of Nanterre inspired the 68 movement (Fricaudet, 2019, p. 62).

Although his focus were the French cities and urban life that developed over a century of industrialization, some of the problems Lefebvre discussed persisted over more than 50 years—and in many cases were greatly globalized and naturalized by contemporary forms of speculative and financial capitalism. To cite a few, heteronomous urbanization processes, segregation, and lack of access to housing by the poor are now deeply rooted worldwide, despite local socio-political and economic differences.

This is one of the reasons why the notion of the right to the city has been extensively discussed and to some extent (even if tentatively or debatably) applied over the years from South to North, by many actors, be them representative of the state, private interests, academia, social movements, or others. Not only this resulted in fruitful theoretical proposals and developments in Lefebvre's thesis (as can be found in Marcuse, 2012; Martínez, 2020; Mayer, 2012; Merrifield, 2011; Mitchell, 2003), but elements of the right to the city have also figured as part of recent urban policies (albeit more than often in a reductionist and limited fashion) and have also served as a recurring slogan of certain urban social movements.

According to Mayer (2012), the effort to include the right to the city as a basis for the elaboration of urban agendas started in the early 1990s. A gradual process of discussions and meetings included national and international organizations, such as the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and the Brazilian National Forum of Urban Reform (FNUR) at first, followed by UNESCO and, later on, the World Social Forum (WSF) and other human rights groups (Mayer, 2012). In 2010 the right to the city was the theme of the United Nations (UN) World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and in 2016 it was included in the UN's New Urban Agenda, a 20-year urbanization strategy agreed in Quito, Ecuador (Minton, 2017).

Such diversified attempts to discuss and even bring the right to the city to practical terms by many different agents may also relate to a double characteristic of the term that, as Marcuse (2012) observes, is at the same time an intuitive and compelling slogan, and a complex, provocative theoretical formulation. Paradoxically, the right to the city has been echoed by actors who, in practice, may directly oppose each other or, at the very least, have conflicting interests—say urban social movements and governmental forums that propose neoliberal urban policies.

At the same time that the notion of the right to the city has somewhat been incorporated into laws, governmental agendas and policies, it is striking, however, how frequently the demands of grassroots initiatives are contrary to the results of these same policies, which supposedly share with them the same democratic principles. If there is such general interest in the right to the city, then why is it still necessary to fight for? And why, in practice, does it remain restricted to only a privileged portion of the population? Firstly, this points to a partial, incomplete, fractional, or even biased use of the Lefebvrian notion in the writing of legal instruments. This may be related, as suggested by Marcuse (2012) and López (2020), to the broad, abstract, all-embracing characteristic of the concept itself.

As an example, Brazilian law n. 10,257/2001—the City Statute—regulates and complements the urban policy instruments provided for in Articles 182 and 183 of the country's Federal Constitution of 1988.³⁹ The City Statute has as one of its general guidelines to guarantee the *right to sustainable cities* (Art. 2), understood as the right to urban land, housing, environmental sanitation, urban infrastructure, transportation, and public services, work, and leisure, for present and future generations.⁴⁰ Furthermore, in its text, the City Statute reaffirms the democratic and participative management of urban projects and policies (especially Art. 2, 4, 40, 43, 44 and 45), and the fulfillment of the social function of properties, while regulating instruments aimed at avoiding real estate speculation (see for example Art. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 39).⁴¹

On the one side, some of the constitutive elements of the right to the city as defended by Lefebvre (2016) are to a certain point mentioned throughout the text of this law, as is the case of one's capacity to access different parts of the city with quality transportation and within a reasonable time, to be contemplated with adequate public spaces and services, to have access to dignified housing and work, and the possibility

³⁹ Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988, Oct. 5, 1988. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Qhkpl1> on 15 Mar. 2020.

⁴⁰ Law 10.257, Jul. 10, 2001. City Statute. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2WdF4Ky> on 15 Mar. 2020.

⁴¹ Law 10.257, Jul. 10, 2001. City Statute. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2WdF4Ky> on 15 Mar. 2020.

of participating in the processes of producing the city—even though participation is still understood as a heteronomously controlled process.

Nonetheless, and while admitting the importance of legal guaranties that may contribute to the legitimization of urban social movements and their demands, the right to the city, as Marcuse (2012) observes, exceeds the notion of a legal claim, also implying a moral claim, a right to social justice, that necessarily suppresses certain privileges enjoyed by a few. Institutionally enumerated rights, observes Mayer (2012), even if fully realized (which is usually not the case), target particular aspects of the current city as it exists, instead of aiming at transforming the existing city.

Such partial uses and their limited practical repercussions send us back to a brief passage of Lefebvre's 1968 book, where he suggests that the right to the city *affirms itself as a cry and a demand* (Lefebvre, 2016, p. 127). This implies that the right to the city is not something to be given, nor passively accepted. It requires appropriation, through social struggle, and a critical, autonomous (in the true meaning of the word), revolutionary conduct. As much as certain components of the right to the city may be listed in laws and regulations, it remains as something to be fought for. As obvious as it might seem, a real change is not in the plans of those who assure their privileges by maintaining the status quo.

More in tune with the Lefebvrian notion, Mayer (2012) observes, the right to the city that urban social movements refer to is an oppositional demand that challenges the claims of the rich and powerful, and as such, it exceeds the juridical scope. Specifically, in the case of the squatting movements, even though Lefebvre's agenda did not take them directly into consideration (Martínez, 2020), some squatters from European countries are certainly familiar with his ideas (Vasudevan, 2017a). However, even when that is not the case, in their practice, they articulate a right to the city that continuously challenges what it means to think about and inhabit the city (Vasudevan, 2017a). In their claims, they counter “the exclusion of many social groups from the urban core” while at the same time providing “them with non-commercial and self-managed services, dwellings, social encounters, and opportunities for political mobilisation” (Martínez, 2020, p. 48).

A similar observation can be made concerning the Brazilian context. As an example, the *Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Vilas e Favelas* [Movement of Struggles in Neighbourhoods, Villages, and Favelas] (MLB) is a national social movement that considers squatting a fundamental strategy of struggle and anti-capitalist resistance.⁴² They have recently published a set of proposals for urban reform, that among other aspects, state that *the city is the place of diversity, of meeting, of collective coexistence, of democratic life. That is why all people should have the right to the city, understood as the right to land, means of subsistence, housing, environmental sanitation, health, education, public transportation, food, work, leisure, and information. The right to the city is also the right to say in which city we want to live, the right to change the city, to recreate it, to democratize it* (Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Vilas e Favelas, MLB, 2019).

For Martínez (2020, pp. 53–54), even though a right to the city approach presents some benefits in the conduction of research on squatting movements, such as providing “key questions in order to interpret the political framing of squatters’ claims and identity”; and suggesting “theoretical dimensions that further empirical analysis may test, elaborate and expand,” in the author’s opinion the Lefebvrian proposal also has some limitations. In addition to hardly indicating “how to study actual activist practices, organisational resources and networks, strategic interactions, and broader relations with third parties and significant contexts,” Martínez (2020, p. 54) suggests that the notion of the right to the city as proposed by Lefebvre, as broad as it may be, does not suffice to cover all kinds of claims, social-spatial practices, opportunities and challenges that most squatters’ struggles encompass. The author contends

that the right to the city approach illuminates the theoretical interpretation of squatting movements as far as: (1) these activists perform concrete appropriations of urban spaces; (2) squatted spaces are centrally located in relation to other urban facilities and social networks; and (3) beyond occupying empty properties for dwelling, squatters develop deep practices of self-management, self-help, direct democracy, the empowerment of the dispossessed and oppressed by capitalism, non-commercial services, social encounters, and infrastructures for political mobilization (Martínez, 2020, p. 56).

⁴² Retrieved from <https://www.mlbbrazil.org> on 17 May 2020. MLB is also important in this study for their outstanding participation in squatting organizational processes in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, among other social movements and collectives.

While having the right to the city as a theoretical lens to study the squatting movements seems appropriate, either for the fact that such movements sometimes apply the term themselves to refer to some of their own claims and actions; or in relation to the content of their practices and demands, it is certainly not the case (and, particularly, it is not this work's intention) to simply verify whether or not they fit into it, as if it were a paradigm that needs to be met. On the contrary, in their practices and discourses, squatters appropriate, actualize and create new meanings for what a right to the city should be in order to meet their demands.

As an example, squatters who participate in *gaztetxes* in the Basque Country not rarely express a desire to have one *gaztetxe* in every neighborhood or at least one in every city. They wish to create open and collective spaces that are references for the people nearby—instead of the institutional venues offered by local governments or private enterprises that aim at maximum profit. Similarly, in Madrid, squatters have referred to social centers as places where the local community can discuss the demands of their neighborhoods, propose and participate in collective activities as alternatives to the total commodification imposed by the neoliberal city. Moreover, in the meantime, in both contexts, the practices of squatters transcend their own spaces, flow into the streets in manifestations, informal meetings, participating in activities in other squats, and many others. *A right to the city that is also to take over the city.*

Moreover, this study suggests that the notion of centrality, a vital aspect of the right to the city as proposed by Lefebvre, should be looked at with caution. As Merrifield (2017) suggests, Lefebvre linked the right to the city with a geographical right to the center of the city (one that was overpriced, becoming gentrified and turned into a tourist spectacle). There are indeed several squats in central economic and/or political areas of cities—or in well-served neighborhoods that form other centralities, not necessarily located in the geographical city center—their locations intentionally chosen to allow as much access as possible to a full, complete, inclusive urban life. Other examples, as will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5, show us that centrality may have different meanings for different people—or as Lefebvre (1991, p. 332) himself suggests, “centrality is movable,” and the permanence in the city center might, in some cases, even be contested by squatters.

In the RMBH, for example, most land occupations for self-construction—which sometimes house thousands of families—are located in the peripheries, on large pieces of disused land with no urban infrastructure. Massive squatting actions, which, if at first responding to the primary need for survival, are followed by a profound desire to live. They encompass the creation of new spaces, the demand for services and infrastructure, the exigency to be heard and seen as producers of culture, knowledge, and alternative forms of work. Here, the right to the city is often related to coming out of the shadows of invisibility, to cease to inhabit a non-space, to cease to be non-citizens, to be recognized as political beings. *A right to the city that is also to produce and integrate the city.*

Thus, this research proposes that when analyzing the squatting movements under the lens of the right to the city it is also essential not to fall in the trap of an *undifferentiated general will*, which is part of the neoliberal speech (for instance a general will for order and security, and what order and security mean, and for whom, according to the dominating classes). It is necessary, therefore, to make room for difference and understand that not everyone needs or desires the same things, nor has the same references or experiences the same subjectivities.

Moreover, when Lefebvre (2016) formulated his ideas on the right to the city, he suggested that the problematics of segregation had not yet been raised politically, at the same time as it had been concealed by the housing issue. Differently from what was the case then, the issue of segregation has now been intensively discussed over the years not only in academic circles but also by social movements, progressive political parties, and others. Governmental instances, nonetheless, still tend to approach the housing question separately, concealing the problematics of segregation and displacement.

In this sense, the differentiation proposed by Lefebvre (2016) concerning the right to the habitat—to shelter, to the material resources of the city—and to inhabit—to act, to socially and individually engage in decision-making processes and to truly participate in the life of the city—is still an important point to be discussed. Even though both are necessarily included in his notion of the right to the city, it is still the first part of the dyad that dominates recent housing policies and their results. When this happens,

displacement, segregation, and exclusion easily occur, even if they are kept invisible in technocratic speeches.

There is also remarkable intersectionality among squatters and their struggles, whose practices and discourses are frequently related to feminism and to combating racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and others, which adds to Lefebvre's emphasis on the working class. Squatters not only articulate the right to housing with a multitude of other aspects of urban life but also constantly challenge the opposition between the right to property and the right to appropriation, as proposed by Lefebvre. Whether by making themselves present in better-serviced areas of the cities or producing their own spaces, squatters continually present us with a multitude of possibilities ranging from demanding better infrastructure and political representativeness to having the freedom to build alternative and autonomous ways of life.

In studying squatting movements as struggles for the right to the city in the broadest sense, however, an important question to keep in mind is what this means for the squatters themselves. What rights are fought for in squats? What do squatters need, what are their desires? How do they perceive the matter of individual or collective ownership? Finally, some of the challenging issues faced by urban squatters' movements may contribute to our understanding of the limits of self-management and direct democracy practices, political mobilization, networking, anti-capitalist actions, and alternative economy activities—especially when inserted in neoliberal, capitalist contexts.

PART III:

**SQUATTING THE CITY FROM SOUTH TO
NORTH!**

**SQUATTERS' EVERYDAY LIFE: SELF-
MANAGEMENT AND NETWORKING**

**CRIMINALIZATION, CONTRADICTIONS
AND A FEW CROSSROADS, OR:
AGAINST THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF
EMPTY WORDS, EMANCIPATION, AND
MEANING**

CONCLUSIONS

5. SQUATTING THE CITY FROM SOUTH TO NORTH!

As mentioned before, the term *insurgent spatial practices* refers to a number of actions and practices geared towards the occupation, transformation, and use of space in a different way from that currently promoted by neoliberal states and their dominant cultures.⁴³ As examples can be mentioned ephemeral manifestations such as street protests, riots, and demonstrations, or more permanent situations (at least as far as intentions are concerned), which is the case of occupations of public spaces, unused or unproductive land, empty (abandoned) buildings and premises. Squatting fits into the last group. As Owens (2013, p. 186) suggests, squatting is fundamentally about space, that is, “about people with not enough space appropriating it from people they think have too much.”

The choice for the study of the squatting movements relies precisely on the fact that they illustrate so well Lefebvre’s premise that *changes in life and society are only possible with the production of an adequate space* (Lefebvre, 1991). In fact, the changes in social relations aimed at and prefigured by squatters happen by means of, during the course of, and/or because of the production and use of their own space—in a reciprocal relation.

As proposed by Ince (2010), prefigurative politics can be manifested in several manners, including organizational strategies and decision-making practices. At the same time, prefiguration implies a fundamental re-imagination of revolution, transforming it “from a singular, rupturing event, into a process, since ‘the revolutionary act’ takes place in the everyday lives of people in the here and now,” as they develop skills and nurture the necessary relations for a post-capitalist life (Ince, 2010, p. 28). Furthermore, the author suggests, prefigurative struggles should not be seen as having a pre-conceived or specific endpoint, but rather as nonlinear processes, inherently unpredictable and exploratory, without fixed solutions (Ince, 2010). In his view, it implies the creation of participatory spaces of/for autonomous social practices and solidarity, rooted in the every day and engaged in struggles for improvements in the

⁴³ “‘Dominant culture’ refers to forms of production, consumption, social relationships and political decision-making” (M. A. Martínez López, 2013, p. 126).

present, in a constant effort to remain self-critical and self-organized, while at the same time seeking to prefigure future emancipatory worlds, “located at once within, against and beyond capital and the state” (Ince, 2010, p. 345). As can be illustrated by the following excerpt, squatters sometimes express in their speeches that they understand the potency contained in their own prefigurative practices:

I think the most important is to show people that it is possible for you to organize with a few people. For example [in the case of *Kasa Invisível*], ten people managed to squat and keep a house in downtown BH [Belo Horizonte], technically the wealthiest area in the city, and make it a lively, self-managed space that is not geared towards profit-making activities [...]. It is open to anyone, whether they have money or not. And from an educational perspective, to show people that it is possible to make a building something communal, to make a space something communal and everything that circulates in it to be communal. [...] To show other people that it is possible. If [in a] city with three million people, we can inspire 100 more people to make spaces like this, we will have more and more and more, right? ⁴⁴

Thus, also in the context of squatting movements, instead of representing a pre-conceived or immutable future, or simply imagining new possibilities, what this study suggests as prefigurative practices include their capacity of effectively changing the here and now—even if on a small scale, even if temporarily. They show that a different present is already possible and that in the future, changes in life can be broader, more inclusive, more legitimate. They also show us that changes may be hard to achieve and that they come with their own contradictions—real utopias are not perfect. As exemplified in a booklet from a squat in the Basque Country, it is not a question of waiting for the definitive change, but of starting now to change our attitudes and our way of life on a path that seems slow and hard, but which it is necessary to start.⁴⁵

The following chapters aim to address the urban squatting movements in the suggested contexts—the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (RMBH), Brazil, the city of Madrid, Spain, and six municipalities of the Basque Country, within Spanish territorial limits. Following the choice of a comparative approach and in an effort to better systematize the proposed analysis, data was organized following the lines of

⁴⁴ Interview with Zenite, who participates in the *Kasa Invisível* Collective and lives in *Kasa Invisível* occupation in Belo Horizonte.

⁴⁵ *Lakaxita Gaztetxea*. Booklet published by *Lakaxita Gaztetxea* in 2011, courtesy of the interviewee (BC2).

investigation suggested in the main objective of this research. Thus, after a general contextualization, conceptualization, and initial identification, aspects related to self-management, networking, legalization, goals, and achievements in the cases covered will be addressed. For the discussions proposed in each item, it was sought to identify potencies, limits and contradictions, positive and negative aspects, from the point of view of activists and residents, as well as those resulting from my own observations made in the field.

5.1. A brief historical and social-economic contextualization

According to Lanz (2009), the strikes organized by the *Sindicato Revolucionario de Inquilinos* [Revolutionary Union of Tenants] in the spring of 1922 in Veracruz, Mexico, represented the first major urban revolt in Latin America in the 20th century. A third of the city's inhabitants joined in the strikes, occupations, and demonstrations against the abusive prices of housing rents for the lower classes; however, in the end, the movement was violently suppressed by the army and later co-opted by the social-reformist government, with the help of a rent control legislation (Lanz, 2009). In Latin America, Lanz (2009) suggests, urban social movements that beyond mere political negotiation, aimed at a social transformation, were historically able to unfold only periodically, in a context of specific conditions, including not only socioeconomic characteristics, but mainly the system and policies of each national state.

In Brazil, for instance, the preceding years of the military coup that imposed a dictatorial period in the country were characterized by a political effervescence, with demonstrations, strikes, peasant organizations demanding agrarian reform, and others. However, these movements were perceived with suspicion by various sectors, especially military ones, which saw a possibility of communist infiltration. The dictatorial period—begun in 1964 and lasting for 21 years—was characterized by the violent persecution of individuals and organizations identified as leftists, tutelage of the political class, police and judicial control of social movements, and had as some of its important tools censorship, arbitrary arrests, torture, and murder.

This, however, did not entirely prevent civil society groups from organizing themselves even under dictatorship—including the middle classes, with the student movements as a vanguard—opposing the military regime, creating residents' associations, demanding more political participation, calling for their civil rights and supporting the development of a critical conscience (Lanz, 2009; F. J. B. de Souza & Silva, 2017). Such social movements spread throughout the 1980s and had a decisive participation in the elaboration process of the new Constitution of 1988.

Later on, since the 1990s, M. L. de Souza (2006) observes, there has been an ascension or growing importance of the *sem-teto* [roof-less] urban social movements in Brazil. Although the expression *sem-teto* has historically been used to refer to the street population, especially by the mainstream media, activists of *sem-teto* movements participating in occupations are in reality a specific type of squatters, usually poor people, informal workers in hyper-precarious situations and generally quite politicized (M. L. de Souza, 2006). The *sem-teto* movements deeply relate to the lack of decent housing and land for the poor, also including an important rural dimension. They have as one of their primary forms of action the taking of power over space, squatting abandoned buildings and/or rural and urban unproductive lands belonging to the state or reserved for real estate speculation.

An outstanding example is the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra* [Landless Rural Workers' Movement] (MST),⁴⁶ founded in 1984. It includes about 350 thousand families and is currently organized in 24 Brazilian states in the five regions of the country. Their main objective is to achieve the Agrarian Reform (i.e., the democratization of land ownership, with prioritization of the production of healthy food and an economic model that distributes income while respecting the environment), and one of their primary means of struggle is the occupation of unproductive rural lands.

The *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto* [Roof-less Workers' Movement] (MTST),⁴⁷ on its turn, organizes urban workers through worker's unions and popular movements. Created within the MST in 1997, it also exists to date and has as a primary objective to combat capitalism and the state that represents its interests, based on the

⁴⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.mst.org.br/> on 30 Mar. 2020.

⁴⁷ Retrieved from <https://mtst.org/> on 30 Mar. 2020.

construction of popular power. They fight for housing and decent living conditions within the context of the Urban Reform. One of its most important forms of action is the occupation of unused urban land and abandoned buildings.

Of particular importance in the case of RMBH, the MLB and the *Brigadas Populares* [Popular Brigades] can also be cited as examples. MLB was founded in 1999 and is present in over 15 Brazilian states. They advocate for urban reform, for the right to live with dignity and for the right to the city, having squatting as one of their main forms of action.⁴⁸ The Popular Brigades, on the other hand, exists since 2005 and is present in 12 states in the country. They are committed to a broad range of causes such as housing, public health, education and transportation, prison rights, and other issues. As one of their practices, they support and help organize several urban occupations.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding the existence of important social movements that have been active in various regions of the country for several decades, the account of a resident of a land occupation in the RMBH (BH2)⁵⁰ illustrates how in practice the struggles for housing can cross generations and become a constant in their lives:

Actually, my story with occupations starts in 1989, when I was four years old. My mother, she was a member of the MST in the struggle for her house, and we lived for a while in the staircase of São José Church, in downtown Belo Horizonte. Then we went to the margins of MG-020, the old road that connects Belo Horizonte to [the city of] Santa Luzia, and also the entrance to the Novo Aarão Reis neighborhood, which was an occupied land at the time.

Significant contextual differences (economic, political, social) in European countries and other regions of the global north imply a different history of urban social movements. However, it is still possible to say that unfair housing conditions for the less privileged classes have also deeply influenced their actions and agendas. In her analysis of urban social movements and the right to the city (mainly) in countries in the Euro-North American core, Mayer (2012) proposes four distinct waves of broad urban mobilizations from the mid-twentieth century to the 2000s. The author points to their deep connection with housing issues, but also with other aspects of social-spatial

⁴⁸ Retrieved from <https://www.mlbrasil.org/> on 30 Mar. 2020.

⁴⁹ Retrieved from <https://brigadaspopulares.org.br/> on 30 Mar. 2020.

⁵⁰ BH2 is a resident and leadership figure in the *Dandara* occupation.

justice, and to a growing articulation and politicization, that can be summarized as follows:

- 1) First wave: 1960s movements as reactions to the crisis of Fordism, in a period when class struggle had already shifted from the factories to the neighborhoods. Their demands were mainly related to housing, rent, democratic participation and better, accessible urban infrastructures and services.
- 2) Second wave: induced by austerity politics during the 1980s. Still geared at housing needs, urban social movements were in great part, related to squatting movements. They also included several middle-class-based movements that were more diversified, self-centered, and in a few cases with reactionary or xenophobic demands.
- 3) Third wave: corresponded to new defensive movements that emerged during the 1990s aimed at protecting some of the privileges they still held, to anti-gentrification struggles that opposed neoliberal policies and to a greater politicization of conflicts towards *whose city it was supposed to be*.
- 4) Fourth wave: coincided with the beginning of the crisis of neoliberalism in 2001 (deterioration of the socio-economic scenario, economic stagnation, replacement of welfare politics with workfare systems, intensification of corporate urban development, and sharper social divides). It represented a greater articulation of urban protest resulting in the convergence of several different demands under the *right to the city* slogan.

In the European case, however, urban squatting movements go beyond the struggles of the 1980s. In his book *The Autonomous City: A history of urban squatting*, Vasudevan (2017b) elaborates a comprehensive historical analysis of squatting in several European cities such as London, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Berlin, and several Italian cities, mostly related to the lack of affordable housing, housing precariousness, the need for basic infrastructure and also the activists' desire to build a different kind of city. In his opinion, "the occupation and re-appropriation of empty buildings and houses by squatters in various major cities in Europe from the late 1960s

onwards offered a direct challenge to urban speculation, widespread housing shortages and commercial planning initiatives” (Vasudevan, 2015, p. 325).

In this sense, urban squatting movements can be considered as an integral, though marginal, part of the history of housing development in Europe that can be traced since the late 1960s and the 1970s, when groups of young people began to squat houses in a number of major cities (Babic, 2015; Vasudevan, 2015, 2017b). From this period onwards, “a major wave of urban squatting grew first in countries like Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK, France, Switzerland and Italy and, in more recent decades, in places such as Spain, Greece and Poland” (Vasudevan, 2015, p. 325).

According to Padrones Gil (2017), the 1970s were years of great social upheaval in Spain. Francisco Franco's death in 1975, after almost four decades of dictatorial regime, and the transition to democracy, the author observes, brought about opportunities to modify the very restrictive structure of political opportunities that existed during the regime. A large part of the citizens begun to integrate themselves into new political frames in order to satisfy their needs, including the strengthening of important neighborhood movements (Padrones Gil, 2017). In this same period, rural-to-city migration flows pushed many people from working classes to squat in Spain, although it was not until the mid-1980s that left-libertarian squatting began to exist in Spanish cities (González et al., 2018). Initially aimed at providing spaces to strengthen the practices of new social movements, from that period onwards a wave of squatting actions took place in Spain, while numerous activists started to occupy empty buildings to live and transform, frequently located in central areas of major Spanish cities (M. A. Martínez López, 2013, 2015b). From then on, squatting soon spread as an urban social movement, with its own particular identity, permeated by counter-cultural practices and alternative political scenes (M. A. Martínez López, 2013, 2015b).

According to Padrones Gil (2017), in the specific case of the Basque Country, a climate of unusual violence came from numerous armed groups that, although gradually disappearing from the political scene, converged in the 1980s. Violence in the streets

became part of everyday life, with armed actions by ETA⁵¹ and various other groups that emerged with different objectives—but also including state terrorism, which turned the Basque Country into a police state (Padrones Gil, 2017). The demand for social centers for the youth, which later came to be called *gaztetxes*, began in this context, in the late 1970s. Later, during the 1980s, industrial dismantling led to waves of young people looking for places to carry out activities organized according to their interests, having as a consequence squatting actions in different cities, at first as symbolic actions but later with a more permanent character (Padrones Gil, 2017).

More recently, especially since 2008, a year that “marked the beginning of a global financial and economic crisis, unprecedented since the 1930s” (Fricaudet, 2019, p. 60), governmental attempts have not been able to mitigate the dramatic impacts of social-economic decay on the lives of a great part of the global population. On the contrary, governmental measures included deep cuts in social and public programs, as well as threats to (or losses of) civil, political, social, and economic rights for many groups (Mayer, 2012). As a result, the politicization of urban movements grew, articulations between deprived and excluded groups with more privileged ones increased, and the right to the city has been demanded by more and broader groups (Mayer, 2012).

Also linked to the 2008 global financial crisis, there has been a revival of the European squatting movement in the last twelve years, not only due to governments’ austerity measures but also to refugee and migrant solidarity promoted by squatters that criticize violent and militarized border regimes and offer alternatives to anti-immigrant policies through mutual aid, direct action and solidarity (Chattopadhyay, 2015; Vasudevan, 2017b). Repressive immigration policies, contradictorily, do not deter the informal hiring of undocumented workers, instead creating an industry of fraudulent documentation that further increase migrant workers’ precariousness (Chattopadhyay, 2015).

⁵¹ ETA, whose acronym stands for “Basque homeland and freedom”, was founded as a cultural organisation in 1959 when the region was suffering brutal repression under the Franco dictatorship. Its aim was the establishment of an independent Basque state in northern Spain and southern France. The group officially announced the end of its activities in 2011. Retrieved from The Guardian online <https://bit.ly/2XpA9p9> on 19 May 2020.

Confronted with growing waves of refugees, the industrialized nations, despite their clear dependence on these migrant groups to augment their local labour pools, began tightening their borders and expelling these so-called 'undocumented' populations. But notwithstanding stiffening governmental policies that sought to harden frontiers and seal off waterways, masses of refugees continued to penetrate across national borders, moving towards areas of economic privilege. Such draconian policies of containment, seeking to repel the growing foreign presence, ultimately forced these transient communities into an underground network of non-sanctioned relations: prostitution, black-market economy and other illegal activities (Lang, 2008, p. 216).

Particularly in Spain, since 2008 the housing crisis has been especially acute, with high rates of unemployment and massive home evictions, which has directly contributed to the emergency of new urban social movements, such as the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* [Platform of Affected by the Mortgage], or the PAH, in 2009, and the 15-M Movement in 2011 (González et al., 2018; Vasudevan, 2017a). In addition to fighting for the rights of people facing expulsion from their homes, as is the case of the PAH, and other forms of direct action contrary to neoliberal policies, both of them were responsible for bringing new life to the squatters' scene, that has recently reached the highest social legitimation ever (González et al., 2018; Vasudevan, 2017a). Also in the Basque Country, the economic crisis that began in 2008 and its restrictive policies revived local struggles for decent housing, leading to greater legitimization of the squatting movement—even though the 15-M did not impact as much the Basque Country, some of the most recent squats derived from groups that emerged in the same camp⁵² (Padrones Gil, 2017).

While in the first moment, the most severe impacts of the 2008 crisis were felt by countries in the Global North, economical rates in Latin and South America were predominantly still rising. According to Cardoso (2018), in the years 2000-16, some of the countries in South America were able to reduce external vulnerability by establishing socioeconomic policies towards social inclusion, recovery of the state role, and by setting foreign policies with relative independence. With this strategy, some countries, including Brazil, did not immediately suffer as much from the impacts of the global financial crisis and were even able to continue expanding domestic consumer

⁵² The 15M Movement emerged on May 15, 2011, with a series of demonstrations throughout Spain, the most important in number and impact being the camp at the *Puerta del Sol* square in Madrid. Retrieved from the *Movimiento 15M* online <https://bit.ly/379cfm7> on 19 May 2020.

markets (Cardoso, 2018). As an example, a recent report demonstrates that between 2002 and 2014 there was a consistent reduction of socioeconomic inequality in Brazil, reaching its lowest level in 2010 compared to the previous 50 years—the result of investments in education and social programs, as well as the economic stability promoted by the *Plano Real* [Real Plan].⁵³

At the same time, however, Latin American countries have historically invested in economic policies mainly oriented to the export of agricultural-mineral raw materials, in detriment of integration and productive diversification. From 2013, a decline in exports and the market value of raw materials represented an essential factor for the current undermining of Latin American economies (Katz, 2016). Brazil is no exception: since 2014, the socio-political-economic scenario in the country has drastically changed. Processes of privatization and/or scrapping of state-owned companies are rampant, food security policies are being dismantled, the income of workers is falling, unemployment rates are increasingly high, and domestic markets, in turn, are shrinking (Cardoso, 2018).

The economic crisis in Brazil provided justification for cutbacks in social policies during Dilma Rousseff's administration (2011-2016)—the first woman to be president of Brazil. Popular dissatisfaction led to massive demonstrations in July of 2013 in the country's major cities, demanding improvements in public transportation and education, while questioning the immense expenditures associated with the financing of the World Cup (Katz, 2016). Former President Rousseff, from the center-left oriented *Partido dos Trabalhadores* [Workers' Party] (PT), was impeached in 2016 due to an institutional political coup, being replaced by her vice president, Michel Temer. According to Santos Junior (2016), this represented a turn to the right for Brazilian urban policy. However, a rise of right-oriented parties and politicians had already been in the move in Latin America in the previous decade. They sustain a narrative

⁵³ The report from Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV) is entitled *Qual foi o impacto da crise sobre a pobreza e a distribuição de renda?* [What was the impact of the crisis on poverty and income distribution?]. It analyses data from before the *Plano Real* (Real Plan, a government program that had as one of its main objectives the stabilization of the Brazilian economy, and which implemented the *Real* as the new national currency) in 1994, to the end of president Temer administration in 2018. Retrieved from FGV online <https://bit.ly/3bt5nRI> on 26 Mar. 2020.

predominantly directed at market freedom, fight against corruption, and combating violence while counting on the support of mass media.

From the end of 2014 to June 2018, the inequality indexes in Brazil started rising at a rate 50% higher than they had been falling in the preceding years—the same as during the years 1986 to 1989, when the country reached its record of inequality.⁵⁴ In practice, from the end of 2014 to the end of 2017, the increase in poverty was 33%, going from 8.38% to 11.18% of the Brazilian population.⁵⁵ In this scenario, although still deeply motivated by housing injustice, urban squatting movements in the country have presented a broader spectrum of struggles for socio-spatial justice, especially in the last decade. In the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (RMBH) alone, the third-largest urban agglomeration in Brazil, more than 20 thousand houses were built in land occupations in the last ten years, housing over a hundred thousand people.⁵⁶ On the other hand, if land occupations for self-construction in peripheral areas are still the most usual form of squatting, occupations of buildings in central and economically privileged areas of large cities such as Belo Horizonte have been growing in number.

The desire for political standing, demands for greater access to urban infrastructure, services, culture, leisure, workplaces, and other centralities are just some of the aspects that add up to their struggles, which have also come to include more diversified actors, with origins in the middle class, institutional sectors and others. Over time, their organizational processes increasingly included transdisciplinary advisory collectives, social movements, and/or leftist parties, academics, and university students. This led to the emergence of other types of squats, geared at culture, political standing, support for women victims of violence, for work, and others. Taken together, their struggles include initiatives against neoliberal policies, racism, segregation, state violence; for

⁵⁴ Retrieved from FGV online <https://bit.ly/3bt5nRI> on 26 Mar. 2020.

⁵⁵ The value of the poverty line in August 2018 corresponded to 233 *reais* per month (just over 50 Euros per month) per person. Retrieved from FGV online <https://bit.ly/3bt5nRI> on 26 Mar. 2020.

⁵⁶ Based on the lectures of Frei Gilvander, Izabella Gonçalves and Leonardo Péricles at the seminar *Dez anos de ocupações urbanas na RMBH: História, lutas e novos caminhos* [Ten years of urban occupations at RMBH: History, struggles, and new pathways] held at the School of Architecture / UFMG from June 26 to 28, 2019. Part of the activities of the *Cosmópolis* research group, this seminar was co-organized by Professor Rita de Cássia Lucena Velloso (research group coordinator), Thiago Canettieri de Mello e Sá (post-doctoral researcher/UFMG) and Marina Sanders Paolinelli (PhD student/UFMG).

feminism, for work, for better access to transportation and an infinitude of services and urban infrastructure, and many others. This reinforces a narrative frequently approached by social movements, collectives, and activists, who argue for the *right to the city*.

It is, therefore, possible to say, as Babic (2015, p. 299) suggests, that “in recent decades, squatting is no longer just a solution to housing deprivation, but has become a unique way of life.” Squatting is about taking power over space and changing it according to the purposes of the occupiers. Nevertheless, not only that: it is also about the possibility of different, fairer, freer social relations.

5.2. What is urban squatting? Terminology and conceptualization

[...] squatters work to create utopias located in the practices of the here-and-now rather than those projected into the future by the urban growth machine that sells dreams of the ideal city and chimeras of prosperity for the wealthy few. They think that no utopia is achieved without struggle or contestation (M. A. Martínez López, 2015b, p. 254).

Most publications on urban squatting refer to experiences in European and other Northern countries. The case studies carried out in the course of this research, however, as well as other recently published investigations (see, for example, Bastos et al., 2017; Franzoni, 2018; Moreira, 2017; Nascimento & Libânio, 2016; Tonucci Filho, 2017 and others) suggest that urban squatting in different places of the globe share important common features, particularly concerning general principles and ideals. On the other hand, differences in contexts and practices reveal the complexity and rich diversity of their objective manifestations.

In the previous chapters and sessions of this study, some of the general features and principles of urban squatting were addressed, in an effort to draw initial correlations between them and the proposed methodological tools and theoretical approaches. So far, then, we have assumed that:

1) At the same time as squatting practices are deeply related to housing injustice, they are also strongly connected to other political concerns and social claims that, depending on each case, may include legal and institutional disputes; alternative

economy and other anti-capitalistic practices; gender, ethnic and queer related concerns; countercultural endeavors, and many others. In other words, squatters frequently articulate the right to dignified housing with innumerable other aspects of urban life.

2) Squatting comprises the occupation of abandoned premises (meaning single houses, multi-story buildings, or even entire neighborhoods) followed by their adaptation and transformation for new uses; and also, the occupation of unproductive/abandoned land for self-construction. In this process, there is a prevalence of use value over exchange value; that is, the appropriation of space is not an end in itself, and it is not destined to speculation, commodification, or profit. Moreover, the permanence of the squatters in these environments can vary from almost immediate evictions to decades of resistance.

3) While usually committed to site-specific projects and concerns, squatters usually share a critical and politicized attitude towards the issues they address, often engaging with broader political, social, economic dimensions and disputes in different scales (locally, regionally, internationally). Together with their ability to form alliances and networks, this contributes to a sense of cohesiveness and shared identity—although more often than not in a loose and non-formalized way—making it possible to talk about squatting movements.

4) Squatters contest the normalized order of things and therefore seek to build more autonomous forms of collective life, having self-management as a main tool. Their practices have historically constituted important forms of direct action in different parts of the globe, albeit contextual differences may imply different strategies, methods, objectives. No less critical, squatters' practices are constantly challenged either by external agents or conflicts, as well as by their own internal contradictions.

It is important to note, as obvious as it might seem, that when referring to urban squatting, we mean the action of living or otherwise using premises *without the consent of the owners* (Babic, 2015; Pruijt, 2013), be them public or private actors. Additionally, as M. A. Martínez López (2015a) points out, it also requires a durable vacancy or abandonment, enough to establish that the owner does not need it in the short term. “For instance, to mention a common misunderstanding, if a residence is broken into

when their owners or tenants go on vacation, this is not a squat, but a distinct serious offense” (M. A. Martínez López, 2015a, p. 36). Some of the visited squats in Madrid were located in buildings that had been abandoned for decades before they were occupied. As examples, this was the case of the *Espacio Social Okupado Autogestionado La Dragona*, which was unused and neglected for 26 years⁵⁷ and *Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela*, EVA, for 32 years.⁵⁸ In the Basque Country, *Kijera Gaztetxea*, located in a former school, was abandoned for over a decade before being claimed by the squatters. *Maravillas Gaztetxea*, on its turn, occupied a historic palace abandoned for over 20 years.⁵⁹

In the RMBH, there are also several cases of buildings or land that had been abandoned for over a decade or two before being squatted. To mention a few examples, *Pátria Livre* occupation is located in a privately owned building that was closed and emptied 25 years before.⁶⁰ *Casa de Referência da Mulher Tina Martins*, on its turn, was first located in a public building that came into disuse over 20 years before its occupation.⁶¹ Or, as stated by Zenite, an interviewee familiar with the history of *Kasa Invisível*,

[the formal owners of the set of houses where *Kasa Invisível* is located] had a name on paper that did not belong to any of them. It is actually the estate of a patriarch who died. [...] They neither need nor care about this house, to the extent that it was kept closed for 20 years, being degraded, destroyed by rain and several other factors.

This study also follows the critical analyses and empirical data presented by authors who suggest that as a result of their actions squatters may become relatively autonomous in terms of housing, focusing on do-it-yourself practices, in addition to

⁵⁷ Retrieved from *La Dragona* online <https://www.nodo50.org/eldragondelaelipa/> on 27 Apr. 2020.

⁵⁸ Retrieved from <http://mercadolegazpi.org/> on 28 May 2020.

⁵⁹ Retrieved from the compilation of communications from the assembly of *Maravillas Gaztetxea* (Aug. 2017 - Nov. 2018) available at <https://bit.ly/370U2H8>. Last access on 04 Jun. 2020.

⁶⁰ As informed during the interview with BH3, who participates in the National Coordination of the *Movimento das Trabalhadoras e Trabalhadores por Direitos* [Movement of the Women and Men Workers for Rights], MTD, and is also an activist lawyer.

⁶¹ As informed during the interview with BH9, a member of the *Movimento de Mulheres Olga Benário* [Olga Benário Women’s Movement] and one of the coordinators of the *Tina Martins* occupation.

assembling new forms of dwelling, instead of simply submitting to bureaucratically regulated housing by the state and the market (Pruijt, 2013; Vasudevan, 2015). As a result, squatters not only counter the power exerted over them by normative and heteronomous city planning but also contest unjust norms of private property rights—such as long time-consuming waiting lists, expensive rental rates, housing shortages, real estate speculation and false civil participation (M. A. Martínez López, 2013, 2015a; Pruijt, 2013).

Squatting also implies intense processes of political socialization that may work as pedagogical tools for the collective exercise of civil rights, self-organization, and self-expression (M. A. Martínez López, 2013). For example, new skills may come as a result of direct knowledge exchanges—as in certain do-it-yourself practices in which a more experienced actor teaches her/his abilities to the others. As in other cases, I was told during my visit to *Talka*, a recently squatted feminist venue in the city of Vitoria, Basque Country, that whenever they needed to solve a problem in the building the women did workshops amongst themselves (on how to do building work, fix electrical infrastructure, and others) so that all of them could learn how to do it.

Furthermore, a broad range of practical situations that are not primarily geared at learning something new may entail gains in experience and knowledge to be used in the future. Examples include internal task divisions (such as cooking, cleaning, maintenance, etc.); challenging situations such as assemblies in which different opinions and political views might make it harder to reach consensus; the organization of resistance against police violence or eviction threats and many others. Active socialization may also result in greater politicization of many squatters, who, in the process, learn more about the legal basis of their struggles, even when they come from very precarious contexts and squat out of necessity. For instance, on many occasions, activists and squatters in the RMBH talked about the relevance and personal gratification concerning what they learned from their experiences in occupations. One of such cases was portrayed in the recollections of BH2, who lives in *Dandara* land occupation:

[When I moved to this occupation] I did not know that I was here to make a law be enforced, to ensure rights that were already guaranteed in the Constitution [...]. I had no solid arguments to tell people that I

was not a land thief. All I knew how to say was: "guys, I need to, I have two small daughters."

Experiences outside the squats and/or during interactions with other agents and domains may also result in gains of new insights into the dynamics of institutional spheres and their intricacies, say during negotiation meetings with local governments or legal hearings with formal owners. Additionally, certain urban social movements and collectives sometimes promote formative activities in different areas such as legal education, communication, construction and maintenance, agroecology, and others, besides promoting political debates. The same interviewee above, for instance, pointed to several activities organized by the

[...] groups that are helping constitute the community. They have a concern to open [our] vision for these political issues. To discuss, for example: "Why are there [mostly] black people in the peripheries?" "Why are we not at the Federal [University]?" "Why are we now able to get into college, but we still cannot get into a Federal [University]?" (BH2)⁶²

In another example, an interviewee from the Basque Country (BC17) cited the *Oficina de Okupación de Donostialdea* [Donostialdea Squatting Office], which organizes and conducts workshops and counseling of various types related to occupations, including both *gaztetxes* and housing squats. As examples, the interviewee mentioned people or groups that know little about squatting but intend to occupy, and therefore need general guidance; more experienced people or groups that may be facing some kind of legal problem; different collectives or spaces that demand workshops on specific topics, among others. Their objectives include disseminating information, facilitating squatting actions, and contributing to the strengthening and legitimization of the squatting movement in the region.⁶³

⁶² Federal Universities in Brazil are leading research, teaching and extension centers, with undergraduate and most graduate courses at no cost to the students. However, the number of positions is limited and very competitive, which implies the need for a strong previous educational background, which is generally not adequately guaranteed by the government for the low-income population.

⁶³ Based on the interview with BC17, an activist from San Sebastian whose first experiences with squatting started by the time the 15-M movement began, involving his participation in different activities in occupied spaces. He also participates in the Donostialdea Squatting Office.

Another distinctive feature of squatting is the multiplicity of uses given to their spaces, even when housing is a key driver. It is not rare that squats are also used as workplaces or for other activities related to the squatters' livelihoods, for the dissemination of information (like setting-up underground radio stations or producing zines and newspapers), gatherings, and parties, and many others, which differ from case to case. Moreover, M. A. Martínez López (2015a) observes, as most squats have a non-commercial character, many of their activities are open, free, or low cost. Their activities are also frequently connected to "counter-cultural creativity and forms of socialization, freed from the shackles of dominant morals" (M. A. Martínez López, 2013, p. 133).

A remarkable example from the Spanish case is the movement for free radios, started after the fall of Franco's regime, as told by Padrones Gil (2017). Linked to other social movements that were developing at that time, they had a similar path to that of squatting, the author observes, seeking horizontality and democratization of information, in an attempt to recover rights that had been denied to them during the dictatorship (including freedom of expression). The first ones arose in Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia, becoming an active part of the squatting movements as a useful tool of struggle and transmission of ideas (Padrones Gil, 2017). Some of the visited squats that had self-managed radio stations as one of their activities were *Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela* (EVA) and *Espacio Sociocultural Es La Salamandra in Madrid* and *Putzuzulo*, in Zarautz, Basque Country. The squatters from *Errekaleor*, in Vitoria, Basque Country, also had plans to build their own radio station.

Squats can sometimes also be associated with the idea of *Autonomous Zones* or free cultural spaces, which may be temporary or permanent: "a topographically open space, be it landscape or building, a *Freiraum* or 'free space' embedding counter-cultural traditions and values" (Waalwijk, 2015, p. 72). Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ), as firstly proposed by Bey (2004), cannot be objectively defined, nor are they loaded with dogmas that describe how they should be created. According to the author, it is more useful and interesting to look at these creations, at some past and present TAZ, and to speculate on future manifestations. By evoking a few prototypes, he says, we may be able to assess the potential scope of this complex, and perhaps even glimpse an "archetype" (Bey, 2004).

Even though some squats—or some moments or events in squats—may share certain features with Bey’s broad notion of TAZ, a discussion on this topic would exceed the limits proposed for the present research. As an example, however, Bey (2004) suggests that the greatest advantage or strength of TAZ lies in their invisibility, or in their ability to remain unnoticed. There are, in fact, cases of squats that remain, to a certain point, invisible or unnoticed, by choice, as a strategy of permanence, especially in the case of some housing occupations. In other cases, invisibility can also be a tool to avoid sudden and/or violent evictions, in the early moments of existence of a squat. Nonetheless, even when that is the case, once those moments have passed, sometimes it happens that those squats become as visible as possible, with their various open activities being made public in as many media as possible. Different from the invisibility of the TAZ, very frequently squatters have in their visibility a tool for resistance and legitimacy, political standing, and expression—and also for inclusion and openness for those who are excluded from the mainstream culture or who simply want to participate.

We can, however, refer to squats as generally autonomist forms of collective life that share a radical political vision, even though, as pointed out by different authors (such as Fucolti, 2015; Lledin, 2015; Moore, 2015), depending on each case, it may be ideologically defined as anarchist, neo-anarchist, post-autonomist, communist, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, animalist (or in a few words, respect and protection of the rights of all animals), feminist, queer and others. It is also important to understand that *autonomy* goes beyond being solely a general feature of the squatting movement; it is, in fact, a necessity. As can be expected, if squatters want to get free from certain forms of capitalist control, as Cattaneo (2013, p. 140) observes, it is absolutely necessary that “they learn how to satisfy their needs with a great degree of autonomy from the conventional patterns of paying for rent, of needing a paid job, of consuming and spending money.”

By acting in such an autonomous manner in order to restore the social function of abandoned buildings (which in many cases are also degraded), and infused with a non-individualistic attitude, squatters not only seek practical solutions for housing and workplace issues but, equally important, they demonstrate that it is possible to live in a different way. Such autonomous principles also contribute to the definition of self-

management methods that usually include assembly oriented decision-making processes (M. A. Martínez López, 2013). Depending on each case, their internal dynamics may be more or less connected to other social movements and collectives—sometimes even sharing ties with progressive left-wing political parties—or tend to complete independency.

Furthermore, squatting goes beyond urban social movements, also including a rural phenomenon that, according to Cattaneo (2013, p. 140), as its urban counterpart has autonomy and self-management, political antagonism and anti-capitalism as some of their principles. Rural squatters, however, combine these ideals with the perspective of a return to simpler, more communitarian ways of life, geared at minimizing the human impact on nature (Cattaneo, 2013). In this sense, in addition to being relatively autonomous from money, rural squatters also satisfy many of their needs using resources from the surrounding natural environment, which means that they can become more autonomous from the system of human-made products (Cattaneo, 2013). Nonetheless, rural squatting will not be addressed here, due to time and scope limitations.

However, this study includes yet another important form of squatting that should be added to the various possibilities presented so far. It corresponds to the cases of land occupations in the RMBH that, while located in urban areas, according to local squatters and other activists, aim to have a *rururban* (rural-urban) character. As some of the activists and squatters shared during interviews, in their understanding this implies: 1) the possibility of living in self-constructed houses, with collective practices of family agriculture, the democratization of access to healthy food, environmental-friendly practices, and others; and 2) access to infrastructure, services, cultural spaces and other amenities present in urban areas.

It should also be mentioned that even though squatting is usually associated with leftist movements, in the last three decades, there have been cases of squatting by right-wing groups in European countries (Warnecke, 2020). In a historical overview of right-wing squatting in Europe, Warnecke (2020) suggests that *nazi* squatters (as he calls them) not only openly refer to leftist squatters but frequently relate to some of the same social issues, also adopting many of their forms of action. However, the author

observes, their concept of solidarity and commitment is racially motivated, exclusive, and frequently linked to current political trends of the extreme right. As an example, in 2014, the campaign *Hogar Social*, an extreme right organization in Spain, “occupied houses in Madrid to draw attention to the housing shortage. At the same time, the far-right in Spain linked rather leftist ideas of social justice with xenophobic beliefs: the occupations should create housing exclusively for native families” (Warnecke, 2020, p. 225). Although the author also mentions examples in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and France, according to him, right-wing squats are in very small numbers and thus cannot be considered as a successful and independent squatting movement in Europe. Also, due to scope limitations, this form of appropriation of space by right-wing extremist groups will not be addressed in more detail in this study.

Furthermore, squats should not be confused with slums or shantytowns (M. A. Martínez López, 2015a), nor with *favelas*, in any of the studied contexts. If, on the one hand, in the Spanish and Basque cases, the vast majority of squats result from the occupation of long-abandoned buildings, in Brazil, land occupations for self-construction are much more frequent. Nonetheless,

in the Brazilian context, the formation of favelas began around the end of the nineteenth century, in part related to the first regulatory urban processes in the country. What social movements call ‘occupations’ are [in general] a more recent phenomenon that can be traced back only as far as the 1980s. [...] occupations are usually supported from their inception by collective actors such as social movement organisations, leftist political parties, university groups and so on [even in the cases of building occupations]. Furthermore [...] [in many cases] occupations are preceded by a long period of careful collective preparation [before the initial squatting action takes place] (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 113).

As an example, *Vila Corumbiara*, established in 1996, was the first land occupation for housing in Belo Horizonte preceded by a period of planning and organization, with the participation of an urban social movement—firstly the *Liga Operária* [Workers’ League], followed by the onset of MLB.⁶⁴ A member of this movement shared in a few

⁶⁴ As informed during the interview with BH1, a member of MLB acting mainly in the mediation of negotiations between the occupations organized by this movement and the Minas Gerais state government.

words part of what is involved in the organizational dynamics of certain occupations in the RMBH:

In the production of an occupation, there is a part that no one sees. That we are in and out, the fights, the leadership formation, the coming and going of things in the kitchen, the mapping of nearby supermarkets that might become partners... That is, it is very hard to tell [in every detail], you know? Because it is another relationship, it is another involvement, everybody knows your name, and you just cannot know everybody's name, but there is always a coffee, a trade, a story of a burdensome life...(BH1)

Previous organizational processes, however, are not exclusive for the case of RMBH. As I was told during the visit to *Talka* (Vitoria, Basque Country), a group of 30 to 40 women planned for several months before they took action. According to the interviewees,⁶⁵ this preliminary period of organization was necessary because there were no previous examples of this type of feminist articulation in Vitoria on which they could draw inspiration. Other squats had different goals and strategies, in addition to having occurred in previous years, in other political circumstances. If, in the first moment, it seemed rather complicated to gather a group of women to squat a building, they told me, this organizational period was of great importance for them to achieve this objective.

Finally, it is important to note that the terms squatting, squatters, and squat, though very usual in the English language, comprise a wide and varied range of objective manifestations, including other locally defined terms. In Italy and Spain, for example, people may use the term *Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito* or *Centros Sociales Okupados*⁶⁶ y *Autogestionados* [Self-Managed Squatted Social Centers], CSOA; and also *Centro Sociale Autogestito*, *Centros Sociales Autogestionados* [Self-Managed Social Centers], CSA, when the premises used are provided by local authorities at no cost (Fucolti, 2015; M. A. Martínez López, 2013; Mudu, 2013; Piazza, 2013)—or simply Social Centers.

⁶⁵ Based on the interview with BC4 and BC5, both squatters from *Talka*.

⁶⁶ The use of a characteristic and distinctive language is a common element in squatting movements in Spain. Its main manifestation is the use of the 'k' to replace the 'c' in the word that gives the movement its name. By transforming the grammatical rules, what is being shown is a disagreement with the established order; an order that ranges from these writing rules to the way society is structured (Padrones Gil, 2017).

In several cities in the Basque Country, on the other hand, it is more common to find the term *Gaztetxes* (or House of the Youth, in a direct translation)—even though providing housing is not their primary goal, as will be discussed in more detail ahead. In Brazil, as previously mentioned, squatters and other activists, members of urban social movements, or collectives frequently use the term *Ocupações* [Occupations]. These specific names not only are used by the squatters themselves to refer to the spaces they appropriate, use and transform, but they also reflect contextual specificities and local cultures that give them distinctive meanings. Therefore, they help us understand the unique, local features of the cases addressed. Some of their many peculiarities will be discussed in more detail in the following sessions.

5.3. Squatting's typologies, configurations, and forms

Typologies systematise heterogeneity. They tend to emphasize differences and are, to some extent, an end in themselves. But typologies can also be used as a springboard for exploration and as an analytical tool (Grashoff & Yang, 2020, p. 11).

As mentioned earlier in this work, squatting practices comprise important common principles such as mutual aid, knowledge sharing and solidarity practices, resulting in the formation of alliances and networks. Squatters also frequently seek to build more autonomous, inclusive, and collective lifestyles. On the other hand, urban squatting is present in many cities in different countries, south and north in the globe, immersed in diverse social, political and economic contexts. In reflecting, countering or adapting to local contexts, their practices become very plural and sometimes present quite diverse trends. As a consequence, squatting becomes a complex phenomenon, rich in strategies, methods, objectives, and formats. Typologies can contribute to the understanding of urban squatting movements by systematizing or synthesizing key features, goals, tendencies, and other parameters, allowing a general overview of their diversified practices. A frequently cited typology of urban squatting (see for example Babic, 2015; González et al., 2018; Grashoff & Yang, 2020) was proposed by Puijijt (2013). From an empirical base consisting of squatting experiences in the Netherlands,

the UK, Germany and Italy, the author proposes a typology with five basic configurations⁶⁷ of squatting in the European context. They are:

1. Deprivation-based squatting
2. Squatting as an alternative housing strategy
3. Entrepreneurial squatting
4. Conservational squatting
5. Political squatting (Pruijt, 2013, p. 21).

In Pruijt's typology, the *deprivation-based squatting* can be considered the oldest configuration. It "involves poor, working-class people who are suffering severe housing deprivation. Severe housing deprivation means more than having a need for housing; it implies that such people have virtually no other options than living in a shelter for the homeless" (Pruijt, 2013, p. 22). An important contradiction in this configuration, in terms of the level of autonomy of the participants, is the fact that there can be a clear distinction between activists (who open up buildings) and squatters (supported by them), pointing to a sort of dependency relation, with the squatters in a more passive position of people who need to be helped (Pruijt, 2013). This being the case, a significant problem would be that "the continuity of squatting depends on a small core of activists who may shift interest or burn out" (Pruijt, 2013, p. 24).

Squatting as an alternative housing strategy, on the other hand, "opened up squatting to people of middle-class origin. Examples are students or downwardly mobile individuals who have chosen to dedicate themselves to activities that bring few financial rewards, e.g. visual artists and musicians" (Pruijt, 2013, p. 25). According to the author, though, this configuration is also available to the poor and may present advantages since it is not (or is less) stigmatized—different than the previous case, squatters do not present (or self-label) themselves as losers, in need of help or assistance; instead, they pride themselves on a self-created housing solution. In terms of autonomy, Pruijt (2013) notes, in squatting as an alternative housing strategy, squatters themselves are often activists/organizers, meaning that there is more self-organization in autonomous teams rather than top-down organizing.

⁶⁷ According to the author, configurations are combinations of features that are logically consistent and fit to the environment, and can therefore be expected to be efficient and effective (Pruijt, 2013, p. 21).

Entrepreneurial squatting, Pruijt's third configuration, presents a wide range that makes it difficult to generalize the class origin of the participants or their organizational methods. Usually, it is related to setting up all kinds of establishments without the need for substantial resources or too much bureaucracy (Pruijt, 2013). Depending on the type of activity conducted by the squatters, it may contribute to better and stronger networking and improve their relationship with the neighborhood, or even to their acceptance by local authorities, if that is the case. For instance, artistic squats have been more tolerated or subsidized by authorities over others, because they are seen as city landmarks for the so-called creative class and appeal to tourists (M. A. Martínez López, 2015a).

Examples of such projects are neighborhood centres, squatters' bars that provide an infrastructure for squatting as an alternative housing strategy and raise money for actions and charity projects, artists' work spaces, practice facilities for bands, women's houses, restaurants, print shops, theatres and movie houses, tool-lending services, alternative schools, daycare centres, party spaces, art galleries, book and information shops, spiritual centres, give-away shops (shops in which everything is free), food shops, saunas, workshops, e.g. for bicycle repair or car or boat restoration, environmental or third-world-oriented projects or social projects such as a shelter for people in distress or an advisory service with language training for migrants (Pruijt, 2013, p. 32).

While such a diverse range of activities is an important feature of squatting, if we consider that the term *entrepreneurial* is usually related to activities that strategically aim at profiting, though, there is a risk that the use of this term may imply the idea of squats as businesses in the most traditional sense of the word. Furthermore, the notion of entrepreneurship has been propagated in a fallacious manner, as a way of being successful or of controlling one's own destiny on the basis of pure and simple meritocracy—meaning the achievement of professional and financial success based on individual qualities that are not affected by constitutive factors of society such as inequality, political and economic circumstances, access to dignified housing and satisfactory working conditions, and others. Very differently from this, in the cases addressed in this study, when activities are held aiming at fundraising, be them temporary or more permanent, they are hardly ever aimed simply at making *profit*. More usually, the money raised is meant for improvements in local infrastructure or other collective projects or the livelihood of the people involved. That is, in a logic very distinct from that usually associated with *entrepreneurship*.

Conservational squatting, in turn, is considered by Pruijt (2013) as a tactic to preserve a cityscape, a landscape or the social function of a given building in the face of gentrification and/or demolition. It may develop from other forms of squatting when there is an opportunity for restoration, as the author observes, which also works as an opportunity to demonstrate that it is worth preserving the building or neighborhood.

The goal is to prevent a transformation, in many cases a planned transformation, and to promote development in a different direction. Such opportunities arise because impending changes in land use result in vacant buildings. Squatting can increase resistance to land use change because the hot spots of the change—those places where the original inhabitants and users have already been displaced—become populated again. Historic buildings that are standing empty awaiting demolition offer opportunities (Prujt, 2013, p. 37).

In the case of *political squatting*, Pruijt's fifth configuration, squatting is seen as a confrontational strategy of counter-power vis-à-vis the state, and squatters may see themselves "as a vanguard, poised to lead a mass into a wide-ranging struggle. They see the non-political squatters, i.e., squatters whose projects fit in the other configurations, as potential recruits for this mass that they will lead" Pruijt (2013, p. 45). Nonetheless, squatters usually share a political ethos and fundamentally oppose—in their practices and speeches—unjust or oppressive norms, laws and politics imposed by the dominant classes. In this sense, though this study acknowledges the existence of squats that have political standing as a primary goal, it certainly does not mean that other types of squats are non-political in character.

Additionally, according to Padrones Gil (2017), Pruijt's typology does not take into account neither rural nor symbolic squatting. The first, in her view, encompasses three different modalities: squatting of land; squatting of houses in rural areas; and squatting of abandoned villages with the aim of re-inhabiting them and creating new social models from them; all of which preserve as a common and distinctive ingredient the return to the land. The latter refers to temporary campaigns of denunciation in which emblematic buildings in a state of abandonment or disuse are used to point out speculative practices of city councils and companies (Padrones Gil, 2017).

Furthermore, this research suggests that Pruijt's configurations should not be understood as completely separated categories, even when applied to the European context. Squats' different configurations often overlap or combine, possibly changing

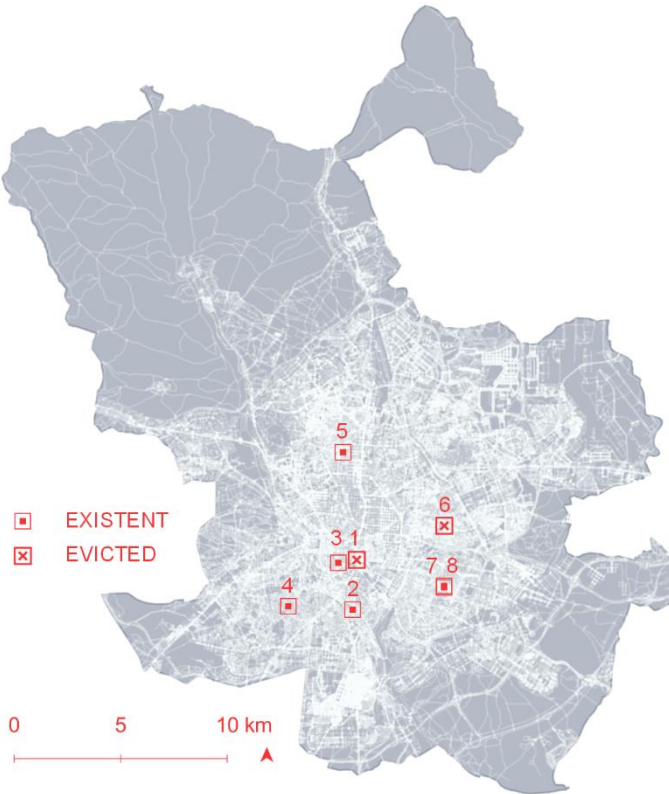
over time, according to the squatters' interests and necessities. Additionally, different types of squats and activists may share common interests and ties that influence how they act and organize. In this sense, the applicability of a typological proposition for the understanding of urban squatting movements, even in the case of a carefully constructed one such as Pruijt's (2013), requires careful and contextualized analysis.

Finally, although some of the main features pointed by Pruijt (2013) may coincide with squats in the RMBH, the aim of the present study is not to determine whether or not it applies to this case. Not only *rururban* land occupations are not contemplated in his proposal, but peculiar local characteristics, goals, strategies and other conformative aspects of the squatting movement in this context would require a specific typology. Nonetheless, Pruijt's work was an important starting point of reflection for the proposed analysis. An initial approach to the specific contexts addressed by this study, and the different types of squats visited during fieldwork activities will be presented in the following items.

5.3.1. Madrid, Spain: Centros Sociales [Social Centers]

During the field research in the city of Madrid between October 28 and November 13, 2018, it was possible to visit eight social centers (Figure 3). While at the time all of them were active, more recently, two have been evicted—*La Ingobernable* (1) and *Espacio Social Okupado Autogestionado La Dragona* (6). Other two enjoyed agreements with local authorities—*Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela*, EVA (2), and *Espacio Sociocultural Es La Salamandra* (7). Even if at first such agreements may provide, temporarily and to some extent, more stability, recent events have shown that they can be somewhat fragile. This was the case with *La Salamandra*, which, as an interviewee recently reported⁶⁸, lost its space due to a change in the municipal government.

⁶⁸ M9. Personal communication, e-mail, February 22, 2020, and May 25, 2020. M9 has participated in *La Salamandra* since the beginning of its activities when it was still a squatted social center. She also participated in other social movements in Madrid, including the 15-M demonstrations, in the *Puerta del Sol* square.

Figure 3*Field Visits in Madrid, Oct./Nov. 2018*

- 1- La Ingobernable; 2- EVA;
 3- La Quimera; 4- EKO;
 5- La Enredadera; 6- La Dragona;
 7- La Salamandra; 8- Bankarrota

neighborhoods within a radius of at most 7 kilometers from the city center. In general, they enjoyed good access to public transportation, commerce, and services.

It is also important to note that given the secret nature of most squatted places for housing, only squatted social centres (although some may also house people and most are closely connected to housing issues) have been historically recorded: 155 cases from 1977 to 2016 (M. A. Martínez López, 2018, as cited in Campos & Martínez, 2020).⁷⁰ Of these, around 50% were located in the city center, 30% in peripheral

⁶⁹ The expression *(re)okupado* [re-occupied] refers to the fact that the same building had previously been squatted to lodge the social center *El Laboratorio 2*, evicted in 2001. Retrieved from *Diagonal* online <https://bit.ly/2Y3dzEF> on 26 Apr. 2020.

⁷⁰ Martínez López, M. A. (2018). Social-Spatial Structures and Protest Cycles of Squatted Social Centres in Madrid. In M. A. Martínez López (Ed.), *The Urban Politics of Squatters' Movements*. Palgrave Macmillan, 38.

Furthermore, the legalization of social centers is an issue debated by the activists themselves, as will be seen in more detail in chapter 7. The four remaining locations were also squatted social centers, that is, they had no legal agreements either with the local government or private formal owners— *Centro Social (re)Okupado y Autogestionado La Quimera de Lavapiés* (3)⁶⁹, *Espacio Sociocultural Liberado Autogestionado -e.s.l.a EKO* (4), *La Enredadera* (5) and *Centro Político Kolectivizado La Bankarrota* (8). From the map shown in Figure 3, it is possible to note that in all cases, the visited buildings were located either in the central areas of Madrid or in

neighborhoods of the Madrid municipality (even though they were still well connected with the center due to efficient public transportation) and 20% were distributed among other metropolitan municipalities (Coordinadora de Vivienda de la Comunidad de Madrid, as cited in Campos & Martínez, 2020).⁷¹

During the fieldwork conducted in Madrid—visits, interviews and informal conversations included—the political character of the social centers was clear in a context of remarkable plurality of ideological perspectives. Moreover, there seemed to be mostly a mixture of middle class and working-class people present in the venues. At the same time, as far as it was possible to identify, while some of the visited squats were located in buildings of public property, others belonged to private companies and banks. In general, the spaces we visited were referred to as self-managed and mostly autonomous, open to the local neighborhoods and the city, where people could participate and propose several activities—including assemblies, meetings, debates, classes, recreational activities, and others. Additionally, while the desire to constitute spaces for social transformation and collective practices may be seen as common traces, the degree of openness to some actors, however, could vary from case to case. *La Quimera* (Figure 6) and EKO (Figures 5 and 7), for example, are both squatted social centers that share strong political perspectives, which reflect in their clear choice not to seek formal agreements with local authorities.

La Quimera, existing since May 2013, has as some of its principles horizontality, autonomy, self-management, self-defense, mutual support, and to provide a safe space for the activists.⁷² The building is located in the Lavapiés neighborhood, city center of Madrid, in an area that went through a gentrification process, causing the replacement of former residents by others (of higher economic power), while at the same time becoming a rather touristic region. Although several open activities were advertised in their social media at the time, the squatters participating in *La Quimera*

⁷¹ Coordinadora de Vivienda de la Comunidad de Madrid (2017). *La vivienda no es delito [Housing is not a crime]*. El Viejo Topo, 55.

⁷² Retrieved from *La Quimera* webpage <https://bit.ly/36xLV4P> on 26 May 2020.

are openly at odds with economic and governmental institutions.⁷³ In practice, this means that people who are connected to political parties, companies, public or private foundations and other institutions or institutionalized initiatives may not be able to access all activities conducted in this social center.

As an example, during our visit, once we presented ourselves as researchers linked to different universities, and asked about the possibility of holding an interview, we were not allowed to follow the assembly scheduled for that day until the end (although in the online call there were no restrictions on who could participate). Even though the people present did not exclude the possibility of giving us an interview at another time, we were asked to send the questions in advance, by message on their website. However, due to our limited time in Madrid, other visits and interviews already confirmed, it was not possible to follow the suggested procedure. According to the latest information provided by *La Quimera* in September 2019, due to unforeseen circumstances, the space would remain temporarily closed for renovations to recondition and rehabilitate the building for better use of the social center.⁷⁴

While equally not interested in agreements with local authorities, EKO, a squatted social center that exists since 2011, presents itself in a more comprehensive manner. Their building is located in Carabanchel, a mostly working-class neighborhood that, over more recent years, had been receiving people displaced from regions under processes of gentrification. As we were told during our visit⁷⁵, EKO is defined as an alternative to capitalism, a horizontal social center, also linked to feminism. Although over the years they have had moments of greater or lesser openness, the interviewee told us, more recently, their goal has been to become as open as possible to the local neighborhood. This also means that people with different political inclinations are welcomed to participate in their activities. They see ideological labels as a limiting factor and prefer to have more open and general principles that allow them to build

⁷³ *Quimera, as an autonomous space is a learning process, it is a collective response that sustains an open conflict with the economic and political institutions of this city, but it is also the reflection of a common desire to live here and now in a different way.* From their webpage <https://bit.ly/36xLV4P>. Last access on 26 May 2020.

⁷⁴ Retrieved from *La Quimera* webpage <https://bit.ly/36xLV4P> on 26 May 2020.

⁷⁵ Interview with M7, a participant in EKO, dedicated to the work group responsible for the management of the solar energy generation system in this squatted social center.

connections with different initiatives and the neighborhood instead of being part of a more closed, restrictive collective. As the interviewee observed:

In fact, at the door, you will see some symbols that are anti-fascist, anarchist, right? But that comes a bit from the previous stage. Right now, we would not put it among our principles because we do not want to define ourselves that way beforehand. Even though most of us are [anarchists, libertarians] [...], well, we do not want to put a label on ourselves that limits us [...]. As a basic principle, no. Among the principles of the EKO I was telling you before, you will not see anarchism, but you will see horizontality, self-management, feminism, the struggle against capitalism and any other form of oppression (M7).

This autonomous perspective, combined with the interactions with the local neighborhood, proved significant in 2016 when EKO had its water and energy supply interrupted, also losing access to internet services. Instead of giving up the building or trying to negotiate an agreement, the interviewee recalled, they were able to install an autonomous self-built system for collecting rainwater and started implementing photovoltaic panels, intended to replace their gasoline generator (Figure 5). As we were told during our visit, they also installed antennas for wireless internet, shared with some of the neighbors nearby.

Regarding their legal status at the time of the visit, the interviewee also told us that the owner of the building, a private company, was in bankruptcy. In his opinion, although this might be a comfortable situation (in terms of eviction threats), the growing real estate pressure in Carabanchel could lead to the purchase of the building by another party. For financial reasons, it would not be possible for EKO to buy or rent the building, nor this issue had been the subject of conclusive discussions in assemblies—in case of an imminent eviction, he told us, maybe they could just try to squat somewhere else.

Still concerning the relationship between social centers and the surrounding communities, several interviewees expressed a similar concern or desire as the one presented to us in EKO. More than becoming legitimized by local neighborhoods, social centers ideally aim at becoming reference places where the people who live nearby can participate in collective activities, accessible to all. It can also be expected that eventually, those who join the many talks and discussions, dance classes, library activities and others, start participating in maintenance and organizational activities and decision-making processes—even though, in general, they are not mandatory.

In other examples, not only squatters demonstrated awareness and opposed the consequences of gentrification processes that forced many people out of their original neighborhoods, but in some cases, there was also a conservational character (as proposed by Pruijt, 2013), echoing in their choices and opportunities of where to occupy. Real estate speculation, the privatization of buildings that had former public uses, the abandonment and neglect of bank-owned buildings were also among their reasons for squatting and promoting collective projects. Finally, the need to provide safe places to hold meetings of various collectives and their respective activities was also an important argument.

La Ingobernable (Figures 7 and 8), a squatted social center ideologically aligned with feminism and ecologism, and contrary to the capitalist mode of production, was initially squatted in April 2017.⁷⁶ Squatters occupied a historical building dated 1936⁷⁷, which was originally destined to house a public university and was later used as a public health facility. More recently, however, it had been ceded by the local government to a local architect for the construction of a private museum. Its occupation, the collective argues on their webpage, had as a primary objective to preserve its collective character. In fact, during the visit, it was possible to note that the building—located in a very touristic, economically privileged area in the city center of Madrid—was in a very good state, and many people were waiting to participate in the activities scheduled for that day (which was also the case of other visited social centers). After being evicted in November 2019, in February 2020, the collective squatted another building only a few blocks away from their original location. Their new squatted building, however, only endured for a couple of months this time: local authorities had them evicted once again in April 2020.⁷⁸

Similarly, *La Dragona*⁷⁹ (Figure 6), squatted by the end of 2008, was located in one of two identical historical buildings connected with a walkway, that are part of the

⁷⁶ Retrieved from <https://ingobernable.net/> on 26 Apr. 2020.

⁷⁷ Retrieved from the *Madrid, Ciudadanía y Patrimonio* association online <https://bit.ly/3aJsWVw> on 28 Apr. 2020.

⁷⁸ Retrieved from <https://ingobernable.net/> on 26 Apr. 2020.

⁷⁹ This was the only occasion in Madrid when it was not possible to enter the building, for personal reasons of the interviewee (M8), a local activist who participated in this squat from the end of 2009 until mid-2016, especially in activities related to their library.

architectural complex of La Almuneda cemetery, existing since 1884⁸⁰. When the building was first occupied, it had been abandoned for 26 years, and the cemetery had been ceded at low cost by the municipality to a Spanish private company.⁸¹ When the funeral services were privatized, as we were told during the interview (M8), one of the buildings was remodeled, but the other remained unrepaired and unused. The squatters' actions were, at the same time, a form of denouncing, of opposing to privatization and speculation, and an attempt to make use of the space that had been abandoned. They aimed at freeing it for young people, the workers of the neighborhood and the city.

As the interviewee recalled, the groups that first participated in *La Dragona* were the Nueva Elipa Neighborhood Association, the local communist youth and, not long after, a group of scouts linked to a parish in the vicinity. This was how he got to know the place: full of young people coming from the Scouts. The interviewee also told us that, in his opinion, one of the most potent activities in *La Dragona* during his time was the numerous musical groups that rehearsed, recorded music, and made concerts. The use of the cemetery's electricity supply, he observed, made it possible to carry out such a large amount of musical activities.

In 2015, the interviewee continued, the municipal government of Madrid formally requested a dialogue with *La Dragona* to negotiate a use agreement of the space. It was a very confrontational moment in the squat, with divided opinions, and as a result, he recalled, not only those who were in favor of reaching an agreement but also many musical groups and other collectives (especially those with institutional ties) ceased to participate in *La Dragona*. Although this was also the case for the interviewee, he was able to tell us that no agreement had been reached, and, for this reason, there was a legal process underway against the squat. More recently, after years of resistance, the local government finally evicted them in October 2019.⁸²

Though also an important aspect in other examples, in the cases of *La Enredadera*, *La Salamandra* and *Bankarrota*, the need to have a safe and protected space for

⁸⁰ Retrieved from the *Servicios Funerarios de Madrid* <https://bit.ly/3eZ95ox> on 28 Apr. 2020.

⁸¹ Retrieved from *La Dragona* online <https://bit.ly/31TLn8Y> on 27 Apr. 2020.

⁸² Retrieved from *El País* online <https://bit.ly/3d5UxC3> on 26 May 2020.

meetings was also a primary reason to squat. During our visit to *La Enredadera* it was possible to access the ground floor of the squat, located in Tetuán, a working-class neighborhood, adjacent to more economically privileged areas in Madrid. According to the information on their website,⁸³ *La Enredadera* had its origins by the end of 2007 and during 2008, when some people who lived in the neighborhood began to gather in the streets to carry out various activities such as talks and screenings, aiming to recover the public space. By the end of 2008, as the cold weather approached, they decided to occupy an abandoned building and have a secured space for their meetings.

After several months of recovery work, they were finally able to open their doors to the local community in June 2009. *La Enredadera* identifies itself as a very diverse group of people but with the common intention of building a more just and supportive neighborhood. In their conception, it is a space for social transformation and collective learning on how to relate to each other in a different way, eliminating power relations. They also aim to create tools to change a system that oppresses them, based on inequalities and exploitation of the planet. Although *La Enredadera* faced threats of eviction, closure, and shutdown of their activities over the years, the squatters continue to resist.⁸⁴

La Salamandra, on its turn, presents itself as a socio-cultural space of co-management between the *Junta de Distrito* [District Council] and the neighbors of Moratalaz, a mostly working-class neighborhood close to the city center of Madrid. Their goals include: to promote common identity and shared objectives, also articulating local activism; to be an alternative for leisure and accessible culture; to identify demands and needs of the neighborhood, and others. Among their values are self-management, horizontality, secularism, feminism, animalism, and ecology. Additionally, all activities in *La Salamandra* are open and free.⁸⁵ At the time of our visit, they were located in a

⁸³ Retrieved from <https://laenredaderadetetuan.wordpress.com/> on 27 Apr. 2020.

⁸⁴ Retrieved from <https://laenredaderadetetuan.wordpress.com/> on 27 Apr. 2020.

⁸⁵ Retrieved from *La Salamandra* online <http://lasalamandra.info/> on 27 Apr. 2020.

building that used to be a public school but was left abandoned and unused for six to ten years before being squatted for the first time.⁸⁶

After the 15-M demonstrations in Puerta del Sol square in 2011, the movement moved to the neighborhoods, including Moratalaz. By then, young and more senior people participated in debates, lectures and other activities in the streets aiming to increase social conscience in the region. With time, however, some of the young people started to look for safe and sheltered places to gather, especially when winter approached. Due to the years of abandonment, the consequence of a public privatization policy that interrupted financial resources, the chosen building, squatted by the end of 2012, was fairly deteriorated. After months of work—this time also including the participation of both young and older people—they were able to open the doors of *Salamanquesa*, as they called the squatted social center at the time.

After a while, there was a complaint and a notification, according to which they should leave the site—otherwise, they would be fined and evicted. The group then decided to leave in 2013. In the next few years, even though the building was sporadically used as a school, it was left unoccupied for most of the time. The group of activists, however, still held meetings in another squat near the site—*La Bankarrota*, occupied in 2015 with the participation of some of the former squatters of *Salamanquesa*. During this period, part of them decided to negotiate an agreement with the local authorities and were finally able to get a permit to use the former building. From this negotiation emerged *La Salamandra* in June 2016. As part of their agreement, the building would be co-managed, and its use shared by *La Salamandra* (starting at 5 pm) and the municipality/district council (in the mornings). Restrictions regarding the proposal and conduction of activities were made to political parties and unions. The agreement, however, was informal (despite the activists' efforts to formalize it, for they were aware that this was a weak spot).

This fragility was eventually confirmed: due to a change in the municipal government, in mid-July 2019, the district council had the building closed, having as an official

⁸⁶ The following account of *La Salamandra* is based on 1) interview with M9; and 2) M. A. Martínez. Personal communication, e-mail, November 13, 2018. Message forwarded from another participant in *La Salamandra*.

justification the summer holidays—but they never reopened.⁸⁷ Their project, however, has not entirely come apart. Activists from La Salamandra remain engaged and have been discussing the need for institutional support and funding.⁸⁸ According to publications in their social media, they have also been engaged in mutual support actions.⁸⁹

As mentioned above, *La Bankarrota* was occupied by a collective formed in part by activists from the *Salamanca* in February 2015, called *Colectivo Nadie*. According to the information on their webpages⁹⁰, the building where they are located is property of Bankia, a Spanish bank that had been abandoned for five years. *La Bankarrota* was conceived as a free-use center for any political group to the left of the social-democracy and a meeting point for all social movements in Moratalaz neighborhood—as their introductory text reads, there is room for both (certain) political parties and anarchist movements, there is room for reformist and also revolutionary approaches. Additionally, they define themselves as self-managed, feminist, vegan, anti-capitalist, anti-racist and against all forms of oppression.

By the time of our visit, as we were told,⁹¹ most of the people from *Colectivo Nadie* were no longer participating in *La Bankarrota*. Even though their initial idea was to have a social center that offered many different activities and an open space for the local neighborhood, most of them opined that in practice *La Bankarrota* was functioning as a type of shelter for two collectives (*Moratalaz Despierta*, to which the interviewees belonged, and *Distrito 14*), that had meetings and some internal activities there. Even though they consider this an important function, otherwise the collectives might have no other safe place to meet, they had different expectations for the future and therefore were planning to reactivate the space.

⁸⁷ Retrieved from *La Salamandra* online <https://bit.ly/2ZJhR33> on 26 May 2020.

⁸⁸ M9. Personal communication, e-mail, May 25, 2020.

⁸⁹ Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/lasalamandramoratalaz> on 26 May 2020.

⁹⁰ Retrieved from *cpk La Bankarrota* on facebook <https://bit.ly/2M1x611> and <https://labankarrota.noblogs.org/> on 26 May 2020.

⁹¹ Based on the group interview with M10, M11, M12 and M13, all participants in *La Bankarrota*. While most of them had previous experiences in other social movements and collectives, in the case of M13 participating in *La Bankarrota* was a first experience as an activist.

Concerning their legal situation, as the interviewees recalled, as soon as they squatted the building, the police came to the site, but no one identified themselves. As a result, after a few months, they received a letter informing them that if no one identified themselves, a precautionary eviction would be carried out. One of the squatters then identified herself, and a lawsuit for usurpation was initiated. It was a long time before the legal process was completed in February 2018. However, since the squatter claimed that she did not live there and had no connection with the squat, they told us, she was eventually absolved, and no new lawsuits were filed against *La Bankarrota*. It seemed to be a general impression that Bankia had little interest in the building, although they expressed concern that this was not a stable situation. At the time, they also did not know whether there were any further complaints against them (but in any case, they had not been notified).

EVA (Figure 9), on its turn, is located in Arganzuela, a densely occupied (apparently) middle-class neighborhood. Some of their objectives are to organize activities related to leisure, education, and culture, in addition to identifying, discussing, and proposing solutions and alternatives to the demands of the neighborhood. The activities they organize are open and generally free, seeking to promote the participation and integration of the neighborhood residents.⁹² Their projects and actions also relate to feminism, ecology, alternative economy, housing issues, and others.⁹³

The building they currently use, of public property, is an important example of modern Spanish architecture from the 1930s, the *Mercado de Frutas e Legumes de Legazpi* [Fruit and Vegetable Market of Legazpi]. It was closed in 1983, remaining only a few of its areas in use. Later, in 2007, neighborhood associations and social movements began to demand the use of the market for community equipment. At the same time, projects for the area were also proposed by the municipality that included the demolition of part of the building and/or the construction of new spaces, with the possibility of exploitation by private initiatives. The local social organizations, however, opposed these projects, arguing that they did not respect the historical importance of the building and prioritized private enterprises. At the same time, they argued for the importance of creating a space for collective use managed by the local neighborhood

⁹² Retrieved from their original Project <https://bit.ly/2XHTRwn> on 28 May 2020.

⁹³ Retrieved from EVA online <https://www.evarganzuela.org/> on 28 May 2020.

itself. Later, in 2015, as none of the governmental projects was implemented and the building remained unused for more than three decades, EVA, a local initiative created in the midst of the described circumstances, decided to reopen the building to the neighborhood. In addition to holding open activities and meetings, at the end of that same year, they presented a collective project to the municipality. Finally, after over two years of negotiations, in February 2017, they were able to reach an agreement.⁹⁴

Different from *La Salamandra*, however, as we were told during our visit to EVA,⁹⁵ they hold a formal agreement with the municipality to use part of the building, valid for four years. From a total of 34,000 square meters, EVA holds a temporary permit to use and self-manage a 1,000 square meter area of the old market,⁹⁶ provided they follow the initially agreed guidelines. As part of the use cession, the local government partially subsidizes them (including, for example, their water and electricity supply).⁹⁷ When the financial resources are not sufficient, the interviewees told us, the group may promote fundraising initiatives, like a crowdfunding they organized in 2017. Although EVA remains in the same place, the municipality still has plans for the area. According to information from December 2019, an ongoing project that had already entered the construction phase was paralyzed due to structural and cost issues.⁹⁸

From a more general point of view, it is possible to say that in the visited social centers in Madrid there were people of different ages, (usually) from young adults apparently in their twenties or thirties to more senior participants. Though it was not common to see children, on the day of the visit to EVA, there was a group of infants participating in specific activities. While in some cases—such as *La Bankarrota* and *La Quimera*—

⁹⁴ Historic background retrieved from the *Mercado Legazpi* online <http://mercadolegazpi.org/> on 28 May 2020. For more details on the projects proposed for the market and its history, see also the documents available on the same website. On EVA's flickr website <https://bit.ly/3queAw5> there are over 1,000 photos of the market. Last access on 28 May 2020.

⁹⁵ Interview with M2, M3, M4, M5 and M6. All of them participate in various activities in EVA, including maintenance, assemblies, and others. M2 and M3 also participate in the *grupo de consumo* [group of consumption], a group of people/neighbors who came together to change their consumption and eating habits, promoting a model of consumption that is more respectful of the environment and people. M4 is mostly engaged with the library. M5 and M6 also participate in a cultural collective of EVA, called *Espacio Vital Creativo* [Creative Vital Space].

⁹⁶ Retrieved from their crowdfunding campaign on <https://bit.ly/2ZloBhS> 28 May 2020.

⁹⁷ From their original Project. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2XHTRwn> on 28 May 2020.

⁹⁸ Retrieved from the *Mercado Legazpi* <http://mercadolegazpi.org/noticias/> on May 28 2020.

there seemed to be a more representative presence of young people, in others—EVA and EKO—the interviewees mentioned that they missed a more significant presence of the youth. Even though it was not possible to know the exact participation per age, it was clear that, in the case of Madrid, as proposed by Martínez López (2013), the squatting movement should not be seen as merely a youth movement.

It was also not unusual to see bars on the ground floors—as was the case in EKO, *La Ingobernable* and *La Enredadera*—that provided food and drinks for sale during events. In none of the cases, however, did it seem to be a permanent or main activity (what might be the case for an entrepreneurial project), but a sporadic one. As many activists also stated, when activities in social centers are not for free, the amount charged is not always fixed (people can contribute with whatever amount is possible for them), and often reverts to the maintenance of squats, collectives and their projects.

It is also important to mention that feminism, frequently cited as a political concern of social centers, is of historical importance for the squatting movement in Madrid. In general, feminist movements have in common struggles for equality of rights, female empowerment and the freedom from patriarchal patterns built on gender-based norms. In the case of squatting movements in Madrid, issues regarding the role of women who, although in numerical terms had a presence in squats similar to that of men, but in qualitative terms might have less participation or influence in debates, as well as assume roles considered traditional, led to the formation of feminist collectives very early on (M. A. Martínez López & García Bernardos, 2014). An important example given by these authors is the *Colectivo Ligadura* [Ligadura Collective], the first autonomous collective in Madrid integrated exclusively by women, started in 1985; although it was dissolved in 1994, little by little other examples of autonomous feminism began to proliferate. A more recent example—even though due to time limitations it was not possible to visit them—is *Eskalera Karakola*, a social center specifically for women, squatted in 1996, in the Lavapiés neighborhood (M. A. Martínez López & García Bernardos, 2014; Padrones Gil, 2017).

Finally, as far as it was possible to observe and according to the information shared during interviews, social centers are, in general, not geared at providing housing. As an example, we were told by the interviewee in EKO (M7), that one of the activities that

have always taken place in this social center, and in his opinion, probably the most important one, is the *Asamblea de Vivienda* [Housing Assembly], the name given to the PAH of the Carambachel neighborhood. When asked if the participants in EKO had ever discussed turning part of the (six-story) building into a housing project, however, he mentioned that, although he might support it, this possibility has always been rejected, mostly due to legal issues and the need for a minimum housing infrastructure:

No, it has always been rejected. In my personal opinion, I think that legally it would change the situation of the building a little, it would be weaker. So traditionally [the possibility of turning part of the space into housing] has been rejected. I particularly think that this center would be transformed if one floor were [destined for] housing. First of all, because we can afford it since it [the building] is huge. It would also mean that there would be people here all day so that the ground floor could probably be opened more often. There would be more people working on things like space management, cleaning, infrastructure, and this could lead to a more powerful change (M7).

There are some of us who have that perspective, but well, it would be very difficult to achieve, there would be a lot of resistance, and it would probably not be accepted. [...] For example, the infrastructure perspective that I am considering is what would have to be done with this place to make it inhabitable [...]. The water self-management project, the electricity self-management project, so the next step should be, well, also the Internet, getting hot water [...] trying to get a heating system, which is another thing to have a relatively decent housing (M7).

According to González et al. (2018), Spanish social centers have always had close relations to housing issues. Some of them, the authors observe, even perform residential functions, although they do not make it public. Activists who participate in squatted social centers, even when not hosting dwellers in their premisses, on many occasions cooperate with housing struggles in other ways (for example by denouncing housing speculation, struggling against urban redevelopment plans and neoliberal gentrification in central areas, or serving as campaign bases) (González et al., 2018). The provision of housing by squats is thus often combined through the openness of the social centers “to other activists, sympathizers and audiences, with the organization of various cultural activities and protest events over different issues” (M.

A. Martínez López, 2013, pp. 123–124).⁹⁹ The present study follows what these authors suggest, although it is also worth noting that not necessarily all people who participate in activities in social centers are directly engaged in housing struggles. While it can be said that there is general support for housing issues, and that this is certainly a central concern, there is a much wider scope of backgrounds, objectives and aspirations that shape the squatting movement in Madrid.

⁹⁹ In their analysis of squatted social centers and their ties to housing issues and other housing movements in a number of European countries, including Spain, González et al. (2018) propose four different configurations of squatted social centers in relation to squatting for housing as proposed by Puijt (2013), ranging from occasional support and interactions to more permanent alliances. These can be summarized as follows: 1) *Abolitionism*, in which the housing question is considered part of a general strategy against capitalism, attacking private property, and aiming to abolish it (or at least question it); 2) *Communalism*, when squatting for housing is part of a counter-cultural or communitarian strategy, questioning not only capitalism and private property, but also traditional family households and modern individualism; 3) *Pragmatism*, that is, squatting for housing as a way to meet the urgent housing needs of the poorest or marginalized people (such as migrants and refugees), leaving criticism of capitalism or private property in a secondary position; and 4) *Unitarianism*, when all forms of squatting are embraced by the same core group of activists who work together on a regular basis, involving both squatted social centers and buildings occupied for housing (González et al., 2018).

Figure 4

Espacio Sociocultural Liberado Autogestionado -e.s.l.a EKO, Madrid, Spain, 2018



Rooftop terrace. Photo by the author

Figure 5

Espacio Sociocultural Liberado Autogestionado -e.s.l.a EKO, Madrid, Spain, 2018

A**B**

A) Side facade. B) Solar plate. Photos by the author

Figure 6

La Quimera (2015) & La Dragona (2019), Madrid, Spain

A



B



A) *La Quimera*, partial facade. *La Semilla* online <https://bit.ly/3c8E3I6>

B) *La Dragona*, on the day of their eviction. *El País* online <https://bit.ly/3d5UxC3>

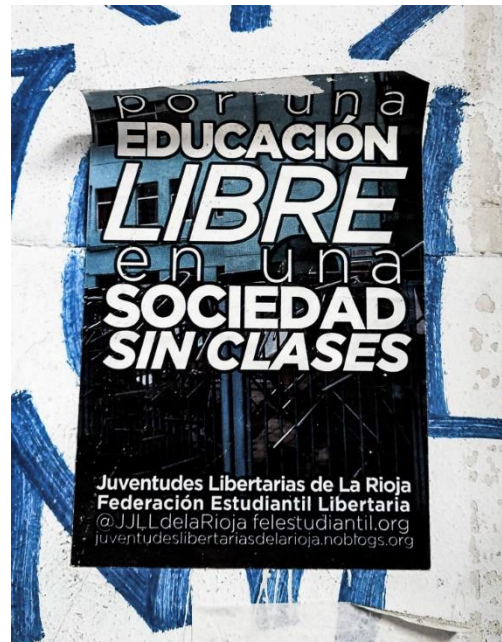
Figure 7

e.s.l.a EKO & La Ingovernable, Madrid, Spain, 2018

A



B



C



D



A) EKO, poster B) EKO, poster C) Ingovernable, stencil D) Ingovernable, poster.

Photos by the author

Figure 8

La Ingobernable, Madrid, Spain, 2018



Facade. Photo by the author

Figure 9

Mercado de Legazpi, EVA, Madrid, Spain, 2015/2016

A



B



A) Internal courtyard, 2015.

B) View from outside, 2016. Photos: EVA Arganzuela on flickr <https://bit.ly/3queAw5>

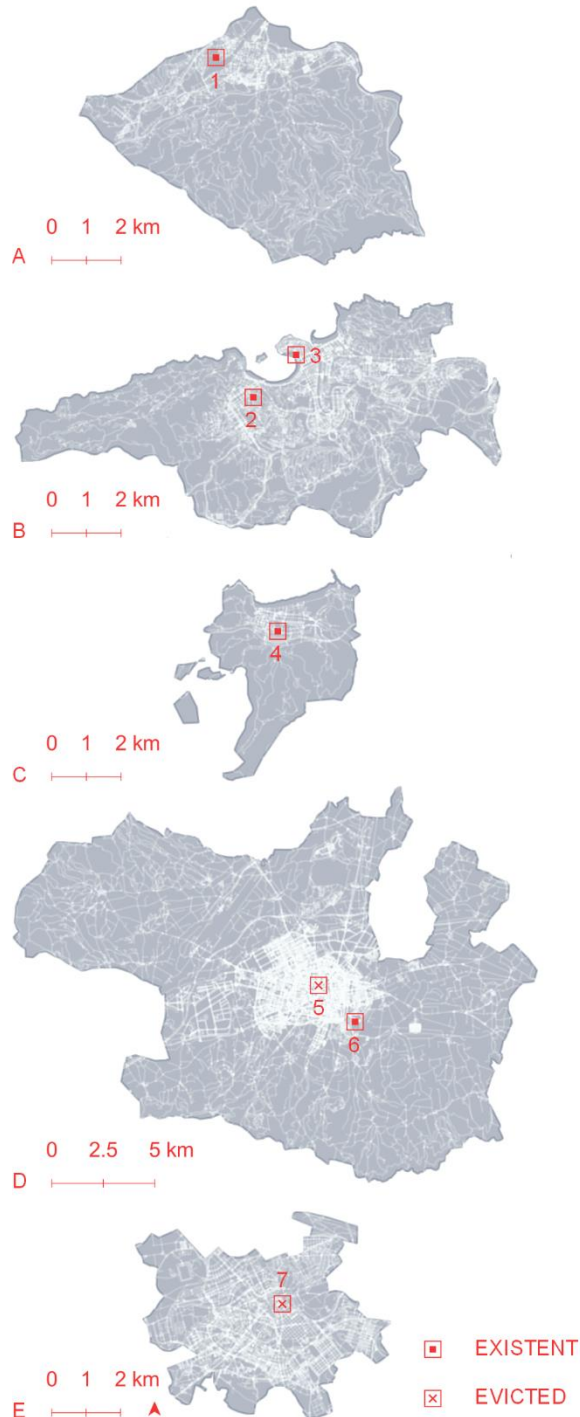
5.3.2. Basque Country: *Gaztetxes* [Houses of the Youth]

During the field research in the Basque Country between January 28 and February 8, 2019, it was possible to visit six *gaztetxes* and one squatted neighborhood—*Errekaleor* (6)—in five different cities: Irun, San Sebastián, Zarautz, Vitoria and Pamplona (Figure 10). At the time, six of the places were active, and one had just been evicted—*Maravillas Gaztetxea*¹⁰⁰ (7). Another *gaztetxe*, *Talka* (5), was evicted weeks after the visit, although about a year later, women from the same collective squatted another house in the same city. At the time, two of them enjoyed agreements to stay in their buildings—*Lakaxita Gaztetxea* (1), though their agreement with the municipality was informal; and *Putzuzulo Gaztetxea* (4), but the interviewees were not sure whether or not it was still in effect. Similar to Madrid, the visited buildings were located either in central areas of the cities or close to more densely urbanized areas. In general, they also enjoyed good access to public transportation, commerce, and services. Furthermore, as observed by Padrones Gil (2017), in the context of the Basque Country, although some of the squats are on private property, preference is given to buildings belonging to public institutions or, failing that, to large companies. In terms of class origin, the author points out, there is a mixture of middle class and working class. Additionally, according to the information shared during the interviews, there seems to be a common ideal that every town or every neighborhood should have its own *gaztetxe*. In general, *gaztetxes* are referred to as self-managed, autonomous spaces, where people can participate and propose activities—such as meetings, classes and discussions on several topics, recreational activities, and others.

¹⁰⁰ As explained to me in a personal message by Sheila Padrones Gil (author of a doctoral research that presents an in-depth study on the squatting movement in the Basque Country, Padrones Gil, 2017): in the Basque language the terms *gaztetxe* and *gaztetxea* have the same meaning. However, the particle "a" at the end of the word includes a definite article to the expression. Thus, while *gaztetxe* can be translated as "house of the youth", *gaztetxea* should be translated as "*the* house of the youth". When the expression *gaztetxe* is passed to the plural, the Basque language also presents other grammatical rules, which imply the use of the particle "k", that is, *gaztetxeak*. Depending on the transitivity of the verb in the sentence we can also read *gaztetxeek*, plural, with an "ek" in the end. However, the interviewee opined, the use of these plurals and grammatical rules may not make sense in an English translation, suggesting to simply use "*gaztetxes*", with an "s", which they also adopt in their own translations to Spanish.

Figure 10

Field Visits in the Basque Country, Jan./Feb. 2019



- A) Irun: 1- Lakaxita Gaztetxea. B) San Sebastián: 2- Txantxarreka Gaztetxea; 3- Kijera Gaztetxea. C) Zarautz: 4- Putzuzulo Gaztetxea. D) Vitoria: 5- Talka; 6- Errekaleor. E) Pamplona: 7- Maravillas Gaztetxea.

During the interviews and other informal conversations, squatters and other activists frequently expressed a view on *gaztetxes* either as alternatives to the institutional spaces offered by local governments or as grassroots initiatives that make up for the lack of places where people can meet. In this sense, as a local activist with close ties to the squatting movement in the Basque Country opined during an interview (BC18), they share similarities with the social centers in Madrid. As an example, during an interview with a squatter (BC1) from *Txantxarreka* (Figure 11), a *gaztetxe* in San Sebastián, it was mentioned that their activities started in 2013 as an initiative of a collective of young people who wanted a self-managed space to spend their free time (instead of in bars or venues provided and controlled by the municipality). After identifying a possible location for their project, an abandoned house previously used as a public school for young children, they were able to negotiate with the local government (at the time formed by the *abertzale* left, of independentist character, as stated by the interviewee), which granted them a four-year use agreement. More recently, though, in 2017, the political

context changed, and the new municipal government, formed by the right-wing Basque Nationalist Party, did not renew their agreement. In the interviewee's opinion, however, the fact that many young people from the vicinity participate in the *gaztetxe* and the good relationship they enjoy with the neighborhood strengthen them politically. They decided not to leave the venue, even though they no longer had an agreement.

Though *gaztetxes* are primarily not squats for housing, also similar to the social centers in Madrid, Padrones Gil (2017) suggests, the squatting movement in different geographical areas of the Basque Country is closely related to the struggles for decent housing. Firstly, as it was possible to understand during the field visits, squatters participating in *gaztetxes* generally oppose real estate speculation and the displacement of lower-income populations from central and historic areas of the cities—a process at least in part linked to the growth of tourism in the region. As several activists mentioned either during interviews or informal conversations, many buildings in the old areas of the cities were being bought by private individuals or companies, either to speculate or to transform the historic buildings in hotels, which led to the formation of a strong *anti-turistification* movement. Some of the participants were also connected with different *gaztetxes*. Furthermore, *gaztetxes* offer safe meeting places for housing movements, not to mention that some of the activists who participate in *gaztetxes* also squat empty units to live. Finally, some *gaztetxes* offer support for migrants in precarious situations.

Txantxarreka is also one of such cases. On the day of the visit, it was only possible to see the first floor and external areas of their two-story house because, as informed by the interviewee (BC1), a group of African immigrants was living there at the time. *Lakaxita* (Figure 12) a *gaztetxe* in Irun, was also giving support for migrants in transit, and immigrant communities that lived in the city. As I was told during the interview in the squat¹⁰¹, help was provided with access to food, internet, clothes, as a place to meet, to have parties and celebrations, or even as a place to rest. As I was informed,

¹⁰¹ Based on the interview with BC2, who participates in *Lakaxita* (and also in activities in other squats in the Basque Country) since 2009. In previous years she had also participated in activities in a social center in Malaga, Spain.

though, no one actually lived in this *gaztetxe*, and when necessary, temporary accommodations were usually provided by the local government.

As shared during the interview, the story of *Lakaxita* is connected to another *gaztetxe* that existed in the same city many years before. In 1995 an old match factory was squatted, becoming the first *gaztetxe* of Irun. A few months later, however, a group of young people accidentally caused a fire in a building next to the factory, while playing with matches to light chimneys. The building ended up completely burnt, bringing an end to the *gaztetxe*; in the following years, there were a few attempts to squat other places, but without success.¹⁰² At the beginning of the 2000s, the interviewee continued, some of the people who participated in the first *gaztetxe* were still demanding from the municipality a place for meetings of different groups and young people, which, however, proved ineffective. Meanwhile, the group had already identified the place where *Lakaxita* is currently located—a three-story house that had been empty for several years. In the first moment, they contacted the owners, a railroaders' housing cooperative, but in face of their doubts about whether or not to make an agreement, a decision was made to occupy the house.¹⁰³ The interviewee shared how the occupation took place:

[...] the young people created a party called *El Jaion*, which is still celebrated. *Jaion* means, in Spanish, something like a big party, or a good party. "*Jai*" means party and "*on*" means "big," but it also means "good," right? So, it has that double connotation. It consists of a truck with a group of musicians, coming from a neighborhood that, well, historically, has been a combative neighborhood. It passes through the whole city, with people in costumes, dancing, and so on. [...] In the beginning it did not come here, it ended up in a town square. But in the second year that *El Jaion* was celebrated, they came here, and *Lakaxita* was occupied. So that was, let us say, the origin, it was used as an opening. So now, every year, we celebrate [Lakaxita's] birthday with *El Jaion*.

El Jaion was conceived from the beginning as a demonstration-concert, with the intention of demanding a *gaztetxe* for the city.¹⁰⁴ That was the beginning of *Lakaxita* in

¹⁰² *Lakaxita Gaztetxea*. Booklet published by *Lakaxita Gaztetxea* in 2011, courtesy of the interviewee (BC2).

¹⁰³ *Lakaxita Gaztetxea*. Booklet published by *Lakaxita Gaztetxea* in 2011, courtesy of the interviewee (BC2).

¹⁰⁴ *Lakaxita Gaztetxea*. Booklet published by *Lakaxita Gaztetxea* in 2011, courtesy of the interviewee (BC2).

2005. They identify themselves as a self-organized collective space oriented towards culture, feminism, ecology, having contributed to the constitution of the movement against housing evictions in Irun, among others.¹⁰⁵ Still according to the interviewee, after about a year of occupation, the owners filed a complaint for usurpation of private property. Nonetheless, as their plans to build housing units in the area were never concretized (the municipality did not give them a license), the owners finally accepted an agreement with the activists in *Lakaxita*, who were granted permission to use the space until there was another project for it.

Around the years 2014/2015, however, due to a new urban plan for the region, the municipality bought the house and the terrain from the cooperative. The plan had several implementation phases, the third of which included the replacement of *Lakaxita* by a garden, by the year 2030. This led to a campaign for the permanence of *Lakaxita*. As a result, the interviewee explained, an informal agreement was made that the *gaztetxe* could continue on the same site until the urban project was implemented in the area. This was still the situation of *Lakaxita* by the time of the visit.

Lakaxita is also where the *Stop Desahucios*¹⁰⁶ collective meets in Irun, one of their most potent activities in the interviewee's opinion, as it attracts many people who otherwise would not go to the *gaztetxe*—whether because it is a squat, or because it has the connotation of being a place for young people. In fact, different interviewees also from other squats (BC2, BC15¹⁰⁷, BC18) mentioned that a number of collectives have been discussing the connotation of the term *gaztetxes* as places for young people. As I was told, while in the '80s, when the movement started, it was mainly organized by young people, some of the current participants are still the same—which was also observed by Padrones Gil (2017). According to this author, this sometimes

¹⁰⁵ Retrieved from <http://lakaxita.org/jaion/> on 02 June, 2020.

¹⁰⁶ *Stop Desahucios* [Stop Evictions] is a campaign by the PAH. Once the notification of an eviction is received, their actions involve trying to prevent the judicial commission from carrying out the eviction, which usually includes the presence of the police, blocking the doors of the household with the bodies of the activists (Barranco et al., 2018).

¹⁰⁷ BC15 has participated in the squatting movement in the Basque Country for many years as a squatter and, as he observed, as a musician. In addition to participating in *gaztetxes*, he also lived for 15 years in a squatted house. He started working as a lawyer for the movement in 2008, having given support to many of them including older ones like *Kukutza* (a *gaztetxe* in Bilbao that lasted from 1996 to 2011) and more recent cases such as *Talka* and *Maravillas*.

led to adopting the name social center, instead of *gaztetxe*, or not using either of these terms to define their spaces. There are cases when more senior people participate very actively in such spaces, and there also seems to be an understanding that the view of *gaztetxes* as spaces for the young may keep people of higher age from joining. This was also the opinion of BC15, for whom activists who squatted 30 or more years ago and are still part of the movement have many experiences to share, which can be an important contribution for younger activists.

Additionally, *Gaztexes* can sometimes provide more permanent workspaces for activists, (to a certain point) outside the oppressive boundaries imposed by traditional work relations within the capitalist mode of production. In their spaces, it is also usual that they promote sporadic sales of various products such as T-shirts, magazines, food, beverages and others during events as a way to obtain funds for maintaining their activities, collectives and spaces. For this purpose, on some occasions, modest fees may also be charged for entrance to parties and concerts, in addition to receiving donations. *Lakaxita*, for example, is the place of work for a cooperative of participative architecture, and a cooperative for distribution and sales of agroecological products. Additionally, as was also the case of the *gaztetxe* at *Errekaleor* and *Putzuzulo*, they had a bar on the ground floor.

Putzuzulo (Figure 13) is a *gaztetxe* close to the city center in Zarautz. The two-story squatted building belongs to a local developer and real estate speculator, who also owns a construction company, and has close ties with the municipality.¹⁰⁸ After squatting the building in 2005, they were able to negotiate an agreement with the owner and the municipal government. As there were already plans for the construction of new housing units on the site, according to the agreement they could use part of the building—the owner uses part of the first floor as a deposit, but it is completely separated from the *gaztetxe* by a wall, built by the squatters—but only temporarily. As the interviewees recalled, in a first moment, the use cession was officialized, and they agreed to make some security adjustments to the building (such as the installation of fire extinguishers and emergency signs).

¹⁰⁸ Based on the interview with BC12 and BC13, both squatters from *Putzuzulo Gaztetxea*.

At the time of the visit, the municipality also provided and paid for their water and electricity supplies, in addition to having installed new windows in the building. None of the interviewees, however, were sure whether the agreement was still in force, or when they would be expected to leave the building. In addition to the several activities that are organized in this *gaztetxe* (meetings, events, concerts, music rehearsals, diverse classes, and workshops), a small radio station, which they have in operation, stands out. It has been active since their first day, at first only by internet but later also by FM broadcast. Besides their own radio programs, they are also part of a radio network, broadcasting programs from other stations.

Struggles against real estate speculation and displacement, especially connected to the issue of *touristification*—or the prioritization of tourism as an object of consumption instead of the interests of the local population—adds to a feeling of belonging or a connection that some of the activists revealed in their comments concerning their neighborhoods and cities. *Kijera Gaztetxea*, for example, is located in a former school (named *Orixe*) in the old part of San Sebastian, where many of the squatters studied as children.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, in the squatters' view, the people who lived in this area of the city were going through a displacement process, due to the privilege given to tourism:

They are turning our neighborhood into a theme park based on tourism and hotel businesses. They are forcing neighbors to leave a neighborhood that is aging and losing living conditions. Where are we going to live? How are we going to live?¹¹⁰

As the interviewee (BC16) recalled, the building where they are located has had different uses over the years. It was the first school in San Sebastian to have classes only in Basque, but during the *Franquismo*,¹¹¹ it was given other purposes, as determined by the government. It later became a private school, after which it was turned into a public school until 2006. From that year, the building remained empty until it was squatted in September 2018, about five months before my visit. The activists in *Kijera* also enjoy a close relationship with the neighbors' association—some of them

¹⁰⁹ Based on the interview with BC16, a squatter from *Kijera Gaztetxea*.

¹¹⁰ *Conoces el Gaztetxe Kijera?* [Do you know the Gaztetxe Kijera?]. 2018. Pamphlet about the *gaztetxe*, courtesy of BC16.

¹¹¹ Spanish dictatorial period that lasted almost four decades, officially ending in 1975.

even participate in both—and have good connections and interactions with the people from the surrounding neighborhood, aiming to become a point of reference for the vicinity. An outstanding example, I was told, are the activities for children, organized in this *gaztetxe* by about 40 local parents at least once a month, due to the lack of a covered, protected area for the neighborhood children.

Three months after the occupation took place, in December 2018, the municipality communicated *Kijera* about their intention to evict them.¹¹² At the moment of the visit, they were still under eviction threat, preparing to resist—some of the squatters were sleeping on the site temporarily, so there were people 24 hours in the *gaztetxe*. Other strategies were being organized, although, for security reasons, the interviewee told me, these could not be revealed. Additionally, a few days before my visit, the municipality had presented them with the possibility of a use cession. The negotiation, however, was to be intermediated by the neighbors' association as, according to the interviewee, the municipality was not willing to negotiate directly with the squatters. Not only was this not a problem for them (as mentioned before, some of the squatters were part of the neighborhood association), but in the interviewee's opinion, the decision to accept an agreement or not should be made by the neighborhood, collectively. Due to the eviction threat, some of their activities had been canceled, especially the ones for children.

Similar to *Kijera*, there are other examples of *gaztetxes* that share a conservational intentionality (to use Pruijt's, 2013, term), seeking to reactivate and to give new uses and meanings to long-abandoned historic buildings in old areas of Basque cities, by means of collective projects. As an example, *Maravillas* (Figure 14), a *gaztetxe* started in September 2017, was located in the three-story *Palacio del Marqués de Rozalejo*, a historic building from the 18th century¹¹³ that had been abandoned for over 20 years,¹¹⁴ in the *Casco Viejo*—the central, historic part of Pamplona. Some of the arguments presented by the squatters to have an occupation in the area were their opposition to

¹¹² *Conoces el Gaztetxe Kijera?* [Do you know the Gaztetxe Kijera?]. 2018. Pamphlet about the *gaztetxe*, courtesy of BC16.

¹¹³ Retrieved from navarra.es online <https://bit.ly/3gS8nu8> on 04 Jun. 2020.

¹¹⁴ Retrieved from the compilation of communications from the assembly of *Maravillas Gaztetxea* (Aug. 2017 - Nov. 2018). Available at <https://bit.ly/370U2H8>. Last access on 04 Jun. 2020.

the gentrification process underway in *Casco Viejo*, accompanied by the privatization of public spaces, the proliferation of hotel businesses and a significant increase in rental prices, which forced many previous residents to leave the neighborhood.¹¹⁵ Additionally, they aimed at becoming a social center for the neighborhood and the city, making up for the lack of self-managed spaces for people to meet (outside bars and other private places). They presented themselves as contrary to capitalism, real estate speculation and the prioritization of tourism in the region, and as related to feminism, animalism, mutual support, labor self-defense (related to the struggles for workers' rights), and others. *Maravillas* would then be a space for cultural, political and leisure activities, a tool to move towards social transformation.¹¹⁶

Although attempts were made to negotiate with the government of Navarre, it was not possible to reach an agreement. Therefore, less than one year after the beginning of their activities, in August 2018, the interviewee reported¹¹⁷, they were evicted for the first time. Shortly after, the collective squatted the same building again, but the local authorities had the *gaztetxe* evicted once more in January 2019, after which they proceeded to interdict the building, based on safety allegations. For this reason, this was the only time in the Basque Country when it was not possible to see the inside of the building. At the time of the interview, there was an offer from the municipality, with the participation of a group of neighbors, for a new agreement proposal. In the interviewee's opinion, their close relationship to the local neighborhood continued to be manifest even during this conflictive period:

[...] we were surprised to find another day, written on the door [of the *gaztetxe*] by the children of the *Escuela de San Francisco*, 'if we could please find another *gaztetxe* because they are on the street.' So this shows a little that we also reached out to children and older people, no? Well, all this work in the neighborhood, I see it as very positive.

¹¹⁵ Based on the compilation of communications from the assembly of *Maravillas Gaztetxea* (Aug. 2017 - Nov. 2018). Available at <https://bit.ly/370U2H8>. Last access on 04 Jun. 2020.

¹¹⁶ Based on the compilation of communications from the assembly of *Maravillas Gaztetxea* (Aug. 2017 - Nov. 2018). Available at <https://bit.ly/370U2H8>. Last access on 04 Jun. 2020.

¹¹⁷ Based on the interview with BC3, a squatter from *Maravillas Gaztetxea*.

Talka, on its turn, was located in the historical *Palacio de los Álava-Velasco* (owned by a local family), an imponent baroque construction of the 17th-18th centuries¹¹⁸, abandoned for several years, in the central area of Vitoria. As I was told during the interview,¹¹⁹ it was an initiative of (both cis and transgender) women from a local anti-capitalist feminist movement, who desired a non-institutional self-managed space, started in December 2018. The *gaztetxe*, focused on feminist self-defense and the creation of a mutual care network, was intended to be a place for the movement to develop projects and make new alliances, open to the local neighborhood and independent from the institutional spaces offered in the city. They were evicted less than three months later, in February 2019.

On the night of the visit, as the interviewees reported, they were already under eviction threat, having had their electricity supply cut a few days before and being constantly approached by the police whenever they entered or left the building. In their view, as *Talka* was the most recent squat in Vitoria, it was probably easier to evict them. At the time, the collective of women had already cleaned part of the building, damaged by the years of abandonment, but they still had considerable maintenance and recovery work ahead. Although they had been there for no more than two months, as the interviewees shared, they already had the support of many of the local inhabitants. Nonetheless, in some cases, they felt discriminated against, which they believed was also related to the fact that they were cis and transgender women, with their own independent initiative. In December 2019¹²⁰, the feminist movement occupied another house, also in the old part of Vitoria. According to more recent information¹²¹, however, the squat was evicted once more in May 2020.

According to Padrones Gil (2017), although to a lesser extent than men, many women are part of the squatting movement in the Basque country, holding an influential role in its practices—in fact, she observes, *Matxarda* was the first house squatted exclusively by women in the Basque Country, back in 1988, by a collective of the same name.

¹¹⁸ Retrieved from the *Patrimonio Cultural Vasco* online <https://bit.ly/2XCWoJw> on 05 Jun. 2020.

¹¹⁹ Based on the interview with BC4 and BC5, both squatters from *Talka*.

¹²⁰ Retrieved from *berria* online <https://bit.ly/2yddTGg> on 30 Apr. 2020.

¹²¹ Retrieved from *Norte Expres* online <https://bit.ly/308ZhmY> on 04 Jun. 2020.

These women, who had been in the squatting movement for a long time, felt the need to squat by themselves because, despite being within a self-proclaimed libertarian movement, they realized that they still had less political weight than men, and reproduced some of the same roles that they criticized (Padrones Gil, 2017).

All these experiences also illustrate well the strong political character shared by the activists from the squatting movements in the Basque Country. In addition to having a markedly anti-systemic or anti-capitalist, autonomist and collectivist ethos, examples include feminist, queer, anti-racist, environmentalist, animalist and other struggles. Among them, *Errekaleor* (Figures 15-18), a squatted neighborhood for housing and various other activities organized by the activists, stands out in a constant effort for greater autonomy, still existing after almost a decade. As the interviewees¹²² explained, *Errekaleor* was built around the 1950s to provide housing for industrial workers. After several decades, during the 1980s, they started being removed, based on allegations that the buildings no longer offered appropriate safety conditions. However, according to the information shared during the interview, an urbanistic plan for the area, aligned with a more recent trend to promote the construction of high-standard residential buildings, was an important part of the reason why the former dwellers were forced to leave.

Though only relatively close to the central, commercial area of Victoria, in 2012, once the process of relocating the original inhabitants was almost complete, a group of students from the University of the Basque Country saw an opportunity to squat the empty unities—which, according to Padrones Gil (2017), occurred with the consent and approval of the three remaining families. At the time of the visit, there were 150 people living in *Errekaleor*, including families with children. There are over ten housing blocks, with three floors each, although it was not possible to determine whether all the units were in use. In addition to the housing unities, with time a local church that was part of the neighborhood was turned into their own *gaztetxe*. An existing gymnasium was also adapted to accommodate larger events and several recreational activities, as well as other empty spaces, that were made suitable for various other projects. To cite a few, they were able to set up a music rehearse studio (where they also had plans to

¹²² Based on the interview with BC9, BC10 and BC11, all squatters from *Errekaleor*.

implement a recording studio and a radio station); a library where they offered Basque classes; the production of a weekly magazine to inform residents about past actions, future plans, activities and other texts; a bread oven that at the time was under construction and testing; and also accommodations where visitors could sleep for a few days.

In the outdoor, there were a few playgrounds, green areas and a community vegetable garden that could also be used by people who did not live in *Errekaleor*—although due to the cold weather, there were not many people in the streets. Moreover, after they had their energy cut by the police in 2015¹²³, the interviewees told me, they decided to make a crowdfunding campaign to buy and install solar boards. Although part of the project had already been implemented (Figure 17), at the time, they were not yet self-sufficient—and therefore, they did not use any overly consuming equipment, such as electrical heaters (which were desirable during the winter). In the interviewees' opinion, they have been able to maintain a good relationship with the previous families and other neighbors nearby.

As in the case of the social centers in Madrid, the good state of the many visited venues—located in buildings that had been abandoned and neglected, kept empty for speculation or were waiting to be demolished to make room for urban renovation projects—are a reflex of the squatters' constant effort of collective maintenance, mostly based on do-it-yourself practices. The many people present when there were scheduled activities organized by activists and collectives (as was the case in *Lakaxita*, *Kijera* and *Talka*) also corroborate the squatters' discourse concerning the need to create open, aggregating and independent spaces as an option for the local population.

¹²³ According to Padrones Gil (2017), *Errekaleor* had its power supply interrupted on many occasions, and resisted to several eviction attempts.

Figure 11

Txantxarreka Gaztetxea, San Sebastián, Basque Country, 2019



Facade. Photo by the author

Figure 12

Lakaxita Gaztetxea, Irun, Basque Country, 2019



Facade. Photo by the author

Figure 13

Putzuzulo Gaztetxea, Zarautz, Basque Country, 2019



A) Facade. B) Radio station. C) Internal staircase. Photos by the author

Figure 14

Maravillas Gaztetxea, Pamplona, Basque Country, 2019



Facade. Photo by the author

Figure 15

Errekaleor, Vitoria, Basque Country, 2019



Facade. Photo by the author

Figure 16

Errekaleor, Vitoria, Basque Country, 2019



Facades. Photo by the author

Figure 17

Errekaleor, Vitoria, Basque Country, 2019



Solar plates. Photo by the author

Figure 18

Errekaleor, Vitoria, Basque Country, 2019

A



B

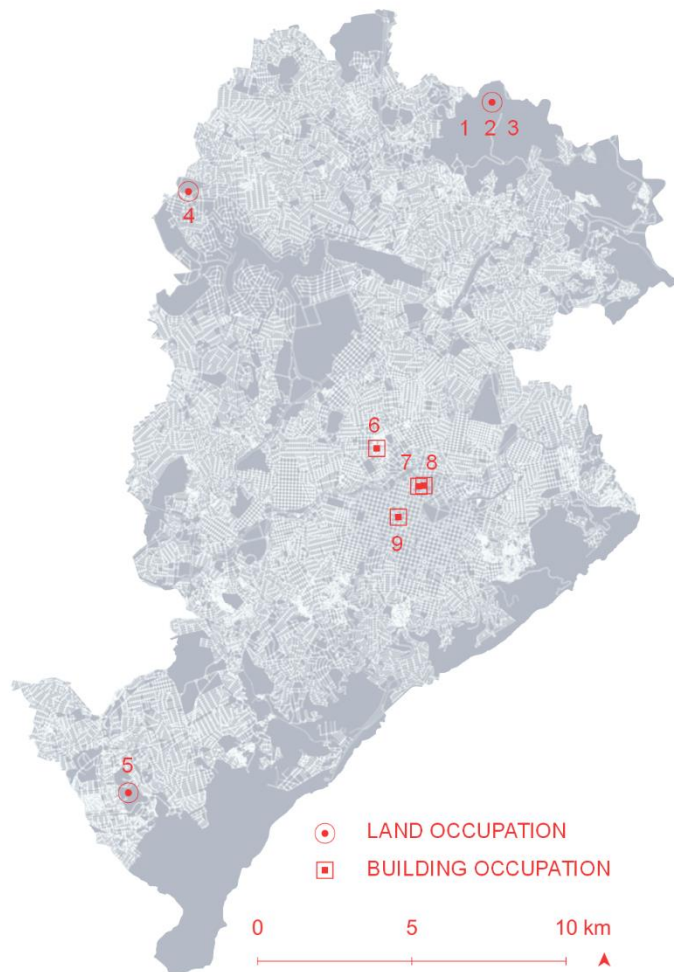


A) One of the playgrounds. B) Internal facade. Photos by the author

5.3.3. Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte, Brazil: Ocupações [Occupations]

Figure 19

Field Visits in Belo Horizonte, May/Sep. 2019



1- Vitória; 2- Rosa Leão; 3- Esperança; 4- Dandara
5- Paulo Freire; 6- Pátria Livre; 7- Carolina Maria de Jesus
8- Casa de Referência da Mulher Tina Martins; 9- Kasa Invisível

During the field research in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (RMBH) between May 20 and September 25, 2019, it was possible to visit nine occupations (Figure 19). Three of them were land occupations for housing in the border of Belo Horizonte and Santa Luzia—*Vitória* (1), *Rosa Leão* (2) and *Esperança* (3), together sometimes referred to as *Izidora* by squatters and activists—and two were land occupations for housing in Belo Horizonte—*Dandara* (4) and *Paulo Freire* (5). The other four—*Pátria Livre* (6), *Carolina Maria de Jesus* (7), *Casa de Referência da Mulher Tina Martins* (8), and *Kasa Invisível* (9) were building occupations in Belo Horizonte. Of these, two were exclusively for housing (6, 7), one included housing, cultural and other

political uses (9), and one was focused mainly on the support of women in situations of violence (8). At the time of the visits, all occupations were active. In two cases—*Carolina Maria de Jesus* and *Izidora*—there were agreements with the state government, though not completely implemented. Another land occupation—*Dandara*—had limited recognition as a neighborhood by the municipality, with some

services provided, but without property title of the houses. As displayed in Figure 19, while some of the visited occupations were located in central areas of Belo Horizonte (6-9), others were in more peripheral neighborhoods (1-5).

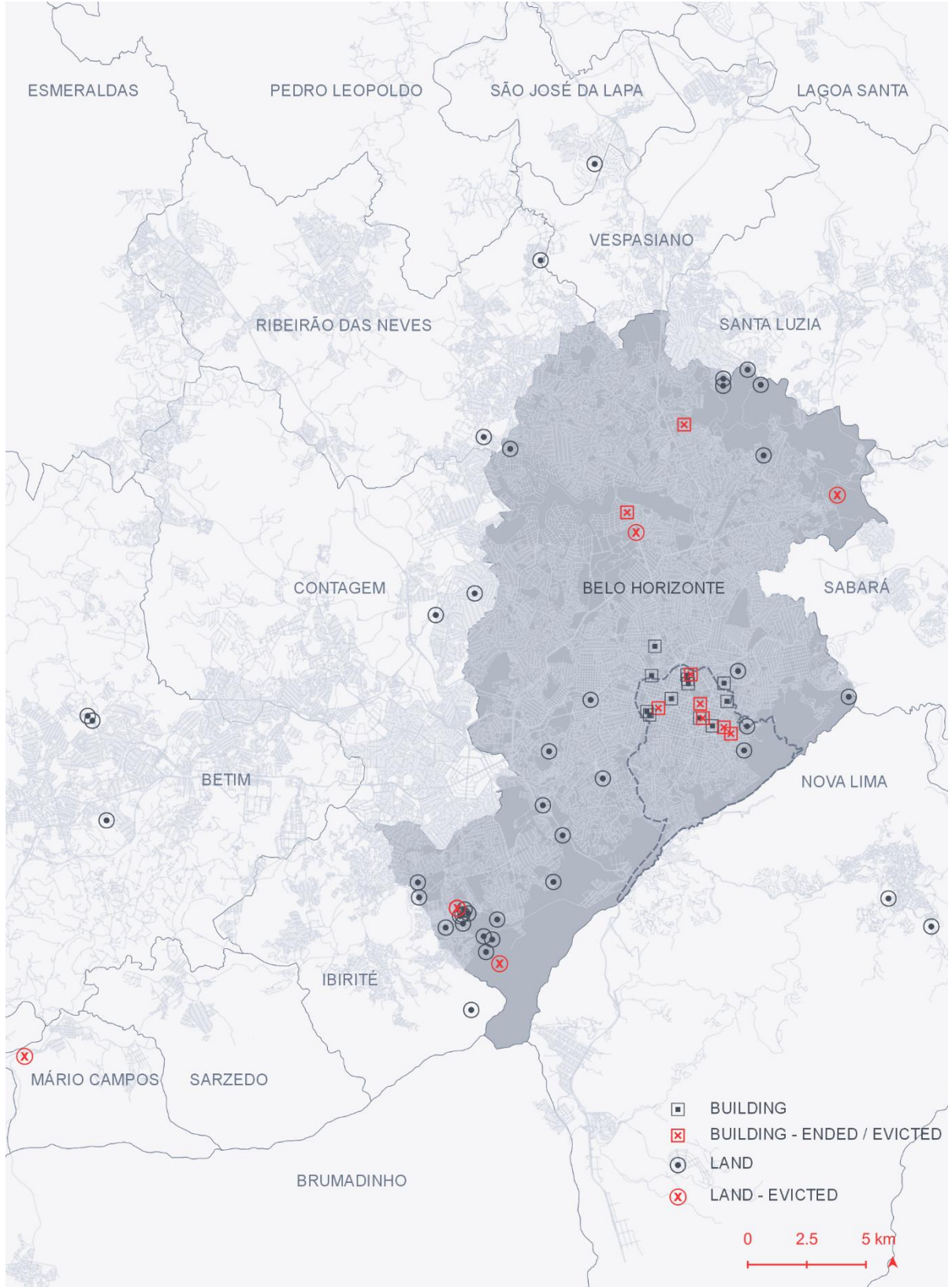
The map presented in Figure 20 ¹²⁴ includes all 66 occupations identified in the RMBH during this research (a more detailed version of this map and a data table can also be found in Appendix C). The vast majority of identified occupations, 94% (62) of the total, were either for housing or included housing as one of their main objectives. Additionally, *land* occupations for housing represented 68% (45) of the total, most of them located in peripheral neighborhoods of Belo Horizonte. Land occupations in the RMBH can include tens to thousands of families (that is, large numbers of women, men, and children of all ages), in areas that may not offer adequate access to quality urban infrastructure, public services, cultural venues, leisure areas, job opportunities and others. The people living in land occupations, in their great majority, are poor and frequently unemployed, or informal workers.

Occupations of abandoned buildings, however, add up to a significant share of 32% (21) of the total. As can be observed on the map in Figure 20, different from land occupations, with very few exceptions, building occupations are in central and economically privileged areas of Belo Horizonte. In fact, the area delineated by the dashed line on the map (Figure 20), where most of the identified building occupations are located, corresponds to the center-south region of the city, where a large part of the high-income population is concentrated, with good conditions of urban infrastructure, important healthcare facilities, various public services, intense commerce, cultural centers, leisure areas and many others—in short, what is often missing or is poorly provided on the outskirts of the city.

¹²⁴ Map elaborated and edited by the author based on 1) data provided by Professor Denise Morado, from the PRAXIS research group of the School of Architecture, UFMG (D. Morado. Personal communication, e-mail, October 17, 2019. G. Cruz. Personal communication, e-mail, October 18, 2019); 2) shapefile database retrieved from *Plano Metropolitano RMBH, Macrozoneamento da Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte*, UFMG, 2014 <https://bit.ly/3eHF4t>, last accessed on 04 May 2020; 3) Shapefile database retrieved from *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*, IBGE census sectors directory for the 2010 census <https://bit.ly/3bzIY6t>, last accessed on 04 May 2020; 4) Information provided by residents of occupations in the RMBH, members of social movements and activists, in addition to field observations between 2018 and 2020.

Figure 20

Land and Building Occupations in the RMBH, 2020



Moreover, if on the one hand building occupations are in most cases for housing (17 of the 21 registered cases have housing as either their primary objective or include housing as one of their objectives), some of the most recent cases also include cultural uses, support for women in situations of violence, and other political purposes—such as safe spaces to hold meetings of different collectives, the organization of talks, debates, campaigns and protests, parties, cultural events and other activities. Equally important, not only the squatters desire to access the many benefits of being located in central areas, but in many cases, they also aim to provide collectively built, reference spaces, open to the local neighborhoods and the city. Similar to land occupations for housing, people who live in building occupations are most frequently poor, in many cases unemployed or informal workers of various ages.

It should also be mentioned that in the case of building occupations that do not have housing as a purpose—as is the case of *Casa de Referência da Mulher Tina Martins* [Reference House for Women Tina Martins]—or when housing is not their *only* purpose—for example, *Kasa Invisível* [Invisible House]—for the most part the squatters themselves are the activists/organizers that define internal rules, engage in workgroups, participate in decision-making processes, etc. In many cases, they also belong to other collectives and/or broader urban social movements. Such squats may also include people of middle class and working-class origin, without excluding the possibility of participation by poor people. In the case of occupations for housing (in abandoned lands or buildings), on the other hand, as previously mentioned, many actors support and participate not only in organizational processes that precede them but also after they are more consolidated. These include different social movements, collectives, and activists, and even individuals and groups connected to diverse institutions—such as students, university faculty, representatives of left-wing political parties, progressive sectors of the catholic church and many others. While these actors may also be present and support other types of squats, in housing occupations, the squatters, that is, the people who live in the occupations, may be more often differentiated from the supporting activists.

On the one hand, some of the people who live in occupations for housing are also members of urban social movements and/or collectives, often acting as coordinators or leading figures in these communities. On the other (and in great part), squatters

from housing occupations may not be activists, and their participation in organizational or decision-making processes can vary from a highly active, politicized and participant one to a limited and occasional interest. In this context, it is also important to observe that, in the scope of the present study, when informed that a specific social movement or collective has organized or participated in the organization of an occupation, it does not mean that there were no other agents or groups involved. It is rather a reference to the information received during interviews or from other sources, when specified.

In the case of *Tina Martins*, as the interviewees recalled (BH1, BH9), their first occupation occurred on March 8, 2016, organized by the *Movimento de Mulheres Olga Benário* [Olga Benário Women's Movement]¹²⁵, with the participation of MLB. At first, the occupation was located in another building, belonging to UFMG, in the city center of Belo Horizonte, unused for ten years. Shortly after the first occupation, a repossession order was issued.¹²⁶ After a few months, however, based on an agreement involving the state government and other federal agencies, they obtained a two-year use cession of a state-owned house in the Funcionários neighborhood, relatively close to their previous location. According to one of the interviewees (BH9), after two years, the agreement was not renewed—despite several attempts at renegotiation—but even so, they chose to remain in the same place.

Since their initial plans, the interviewee continued, their primary objectives were to give visibility to the severe issues of violence against women in Belo Horizonte and to demand more spaces with adequate conditions to assist and shelter women in vulnerable situations. This is why in a first moment, the activists considered establishing *Tina Martins* as a *Casa Abrigo* [Shelter House]¹²⁷, a service that, in their

¹²⁵ Feminist movement for better living conditions, equality of rights and socialism existent in Brazil since 2011. Retrieved from their webpage, <https://bit.ly/2XGL2nO> on 05 May 2020.

¹²⁶ Retrieved from *Tina Martins'* page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/casatinamartins/>, access on 21 December 2018.

¹²⁷ Although there are some examples of Shelter Houses in Brazil since 1986, these were formally established by the *Lei Maria da Penha* [Maria da Penha Law] (published in 2006, it created mechanisms to curb domestic and family violence against women). Their main goals are to provide psychological, social, and legal assistance, guidance for professional activities and income generation programs, in addition to offering pedagogical accompaniment to children who eventually accompany the assisted women. Psychologists or social workers also analyze criteria related to the aggressor's behavior, such as criminal history and others. Retrieved from *Conselho Nacional de Justiça* online <https://bit.ly/2UienTq> on 05 May 2020.

evaluation, had insufficient availability in the state of Minas Gerais. However, when they learned that this type of service was exclusive for women who have had their lives threatened and that various institutional resources were needed for their protection, the interviewee continued, they chose to create a different type of space. They have thus become a place of temporary shelter and support for women who, although in situations of violence or vulnerability, are not at risk of their lives. As I was told, this was something new, even from the point of view of the institutional spheres, which started to refer women to *Tina Martins*.

During the interview, it was also possible to learn that their activities include counseling, both psychological and legal, with temporary accommodation for women (although vacancies are limited due to restricted physical area and infrastructure); workshops, talks and debates, with the aim of making the place a center for political discussion to strengthen and contribute to women's autonomy; meetings of other movements and collectives; a monthly fair with women exhibitors, among others. While some of their activities are restricted to women temporarily hosted in the squat, others are open to women in general or may include the participation of men, depending on the case. As both interviewees affirmed and according to the information on their website, *Tina Martins* is the first women's occupation of this kind in Latin America.¹²⁸

In fact, it is possible to say that feminism and feminist struggles are essential aspects of the squatting movement also in the RMBH. Firstly, principles such as equality of rights, women's empowerment and emancipation, contrary to oppressive and naturalized patriarchal models and violence against women, are frequently present in discussions in occupations, reflected in their internal norms, in the discourses of social movements, and many others. As an example, one of the interviewees (BH3) carefully explained to me why the name *Movimento das Trabalhadoras e Trabalhadores por Direitos* [Movement of the Women and Men Workers for Rights] (MTD)¹²⁹ has the term "women" in the feminine first:

¹²⁸ Retrieved from *Tina Martins'* page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/casatinamartins/>, access on 21 December 2018.

¹²⁹ Movement started in Brazil in the year 2000 having as a priority the organization of the unemployed population in struggles for their rights. Retrieved from *Brasil de Fato* online <https://bit.ly/3bfVUg0> on 06 May 2020.

[Although it is a workers' movement], we thought it was important to mark it in the name. The "women" comes first because we are mostly women. Our base is a majority of women, and within our strategies, one of the central points [...] is the debate of women's lives. Against violence, for day-care facilities [which contribute to providing adequate working conditions for mothers], for equality. So, a diversity of aspects that deal specifically with women's lives, which is something central to us (BH3).

Additionally, most coordinators and/or leadership figures in housing occupations are women. In the case of *Rosa Leão*, for example, according to Franzoni (2018), they constitute their totality, being about ten women in this task. According to the author, they conduct priority activities such as assemblies, meetings, and negotiations with local authorities. Additionally, feminism, as a critique of women's working conditions, and the creation of mutual care networks, are also important. As Franzoni (2018) observes, the role of coordinator is a particular challenge for women who divide their time between paid activities and care-related tasks, historically relegated to the interior of their own homes. Finally, the possibility of having a place to live, even if in an occupation, brings with it the possibility of having the minimum of physical and financial security, also reflected in the possibility of better nutrition for the family, the rupture of abusive relationships and independence in relation to men (Franzoni, 2018). This is also reflected in the statements of a number of interviewees, as in the following passages:

One thing we joke about is that every occupation generates divorce and children. And it is true, you know? Because it is a very liberating process for women (BH1).

The whole struggle in Dandara was made up of women. [...] It is not just a speech. On the marches, it was the women with their children who were there. To do the *mutirões*,¹³⁰ the women with their children, too (BH2).

Occupations of buildings in the RMBH may also have a conservational character—to use Pruijt's (2013) term—and directly oppose real estate speculation, as is the case, for example, of *Kasa Invisível* (Figures 21 and 22). The squat comprises a set of three *Art Deco* houses dating back to 1938 in the Lourdes neighborhood, one of the most privileged, central areas of Belo Horizonte. As I was told during the interview in this

¹³⁰ Term in Portuguese that refers to the collective work, by the local community and their supporters, to build urban infrastructure, housing, and others. Collective self-construction.

squat (Zenite, BH12, BH13),¹³¹ after being used as residences of the owning family in the early decades of their construction, the houses remained empty and unused for about 20 years before their occupation in 2013. *Kasa Invisível* is self-managed by a mostly anarchist, anti-capitalist, and autonomist homonymous collective. Their initial intention was to squat a place in the central area of Belo Horizonte to provide housing for some its members (currently four families live there), in addition to constituting a venue for cultural events and political discussions open to the city.

Nonetheless, as the interviewees told me, during the first three years of occupation it was not yet clear for the collective who precisely the owners of the houses were—they knew that the houses belonged to a local family and that there was an ongoing process for an inventory of the properties, left as an inheritance by the deceased original owner. At that time, however, they did not know whether there were “powerful” people in the family or if there were family members living nearby. For this reason, they feared that there could be some form of immediate (or even illegal) police action against them. Thus, at first, they decided to use the site only for housing, as discreetly as possible—hence the name *Kasa Invisível*, or Invisible House. In addition, the process of organization, cleaning and initial maintenance of the houses took time (years, even) since they had been neglected during decades of abandonment.

In late 2016, as activists from other collectives and occupations also engaged with *Kasa Invisível*, they finally decided to open the house to the city. From then on, the strategy became to make *Kasa Invisível* as visible as possible, and in doing so, showing that the houses had an important social function. After over five years of occupation, however, in 2018, as the interviewees recalled, the original owners filed a repossession suit. Although it was denied in court, the squatters decided to pursue their permanence on the site based on two strategies: 1) a judicial one, based on a process of adverse possession;¹³² and 2) an extrajudicial one, based on the

¹³¹ All participants in the *Kasa Invisível* Collective. Zenite also lives in the squat.

¹³² According to the *Estatuto da Cidade* [City Statute], Brazilian law 10.257/2001, the instrument of adverse possession applies to those who possess as their own an urban area or construction of up to two hundred and fifty square meters, for five years, uninterruptedly and without opposition, using it as their home or as their family’s home. Under these conditions, the petitioner will acquire domain of the property, as long as he/she is not the owner of another urban or rural property. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Wwh7Ni> on 05 May 2020.

recognition of the houses as historical heritage—which was recently formalized by the Board of Cultural Heritage of Belo Horizonte, with the participation of *Kasa Invisível*. Their main argument was that the collective use of the site as a historical asset for all people should be given priority over real estate speculation by the private owners, who clearly did not need the houses. Although neither of these two proceedings has reached a conclusion yet, *Kasa Invisível* continues to resist. In addition to providing housing for people who actively participate in the squat, they organize workshops, discussions and screenings on several topics, fairs, parties, and many other events. The space is also opened to activities and meetings organized by other collectives and movements.

In both *Tina Martins* and *Kasa Invisível*, as in all other visited occupations, in general, the money raised from events (although many of them are open and free), fairs, sales of food, beverages and others is used either for maintenance, construction works (as in the case of *mutirões*), for the continuity of the squatters' projects and for the remuneration of those who did the work (usually the squatters themselves). As in the other cases addressed in this study, squatters practices are not aimed at obtaining maximum profit, but at moving forward, whether by necessity or by choice, in a different, alternative way, that opposes what is imposed by conventional and oppressive relations within the capitalist mode of production. Donations are also welcomed, and not rarely, squatters and their supporters use their own money or work voluntarily on collective projects.

Another important aspect of squats in the RMBH in relation to working conditions is that not only may they provide workspaces for activists, but collective activities (such as communal vegetable gardens in land occupations, food cooperatives and others) can be effective means of subsistence and sources of income. As important, the possibility of living closer to work can be lifechanging. This was one of the reasons why the families from *Pátria Livre* (Figure 23), a housing occupation started in 2007 and organized by the MTD, chose to squat a building in Santo André, a working-class neighborhood close to downtown Belo Horizonte. The building where the 14 families are located is on the margins of *Pedreira Prado Lopes*, the oldest favela in the city,

dating from the beginning of the 20th century. As the interviewees (BH3, BH4¹³³) told me, the five-story building belonged to a telephone company that went bankrupt and was later sold to a private individual. Before the occupation, the building had remained empty and unused for about 25 years.

The choice for this building is also related to the crucial ties (cultural, social, family) that the squatters share with *Pedreira Prado Lopes*, having built their lives in this territory.¹³⁴ Moreover, the interviewees observed, this is a central area, with equipment and public services to which they do not want to lose access. They also consider this a form of resistance against real estate speculation and the pressure that families suffer to leave the region. In fact, one day before the occupation completed one year, in 2018, the formal owner of the building entered a repossession suit, which is still in progress. Although they are at risk of eviction, the interviewees claimed that the intention of the residents and the movement is to resist and not to leave the place.

Many housing occupations in the RMBH organize different activities open to the local neighborhoods. If, on the one hand, their primary goal is to provide housing for the squatters, on the other, activities such as fairs, traditional parties, screenings, debates, talks, or even lectures and book launches are frequent. In the first moment, the organization of open activities and their broad advertisement on different social media gives more visibility to recently squatted spaces, not only as a means of raising funds and other resources, but also to make themselves known and gather support. In doing so, they become less susceptible to violent police actions, and illegal evictions, or at least are able to mobilize a backup network when necessary. At this point, urban social movements and collectives are still very present and continue to engage in organizational processes.

¹³³ BH4 is a resident and coordinator of the *Pátria Livre* occupation and also participates in the MTD.

¹³⁴ This study follows the concept of territory proposed by Souza (2015), according to which territorialized space is an instrument for the exercise of power. Power, for the author one of the dimensions of social relations, in its turn is also exercised with reference to a territory and very often by means of a territory. For Souza (2015), the territory would then be the spatial projection of power relations. Moreover, the author highlights, the concept of territory is to be considered beyond the exercise of state sovereignty, but also in relation to different scales and situations, including those of the daily life, of individuals and social groups.

Over time, activities may become more and more related to local demands—as *mutirões* or maintenance and agroecology workshops in which interested people can learn different do-it-yourself techniques at the same time as they contribute to building something necessary for the occupation. This, however, does not mean that other types of projects and activities are excluded. In the case of *Pátria Livre*, for example, the families intend to transform a spacious shed they have on their premises into a cultural venue. They already use the space for dance and capoeira workshops, meetings of a folkloric group named *Cavalo Marinho* [Seahorse], carnival rehearsals and other events. Their idea is that the place should also generate work and income since part of the families are unemployed or have informal and precarious jobs, insufficient to guarantee minimum living wages. Furthermore, by opening the space for the entire community, the interviewees opined, *Pátria Livre* will benefit not only the 14 families that currently live there but also the 9,000 families that live in *Pedreira Padre Lopes*.

Another notable example, *Carolina Maria de Jesus*, is a building occupation for housing in Belo Horizonte. Started in September 2017 and organized by MLB, *Carolina Maria de Jesus* was first located in the Funcionários neighborhood (a privileged high-income region of the city), housing about 200 families. The choice of the building was due to its location in a central area of the city, with access to urban infrastructure and various services, spaces for culture and leisure, as well as job opportunities. Since the squatted building had been left empty and unused for years, the movement also argued on the basis of fulfilling its social function. As in the previous cases, since the beginning of the occupation, numerous collective and open activities were held in the squat.

Moreover, even when occupations for housing come from situations of extreme necessity, squatters usually do not stigmatize themselves as losers; on the contrary: although they recognize the hardships and many of the contradictions present in their territories, they usually show pride in the solutions they have created for themselves. However, it should be noted that they are still the target of prejudice and criminalization of their activities, having police violence (and/or pressure) been one of the most mentioned issues during the interviews—even though none of the questions directly addressed this topic. Similar to other cases, *Carolina Maria de Jesus* was under intense police pressure since the beginning of the occupation. In two episodes in May

2018, the police flew by helicopters over the building, making low flights near the windows of the residents; according to them, on one of the occasions, there was a simulation of entrance, with the launching of ropes from the helicopter on their terrace.¹³⁵ Curiously, at that time, although at least two repossession orders had already been issued, MLB and other representatives of *Carolina Maria de Jesus* were participating in negotiations with local authorities, including the state and municipal governments, and the owner of the building, a social security company.

As an interviewee (BH1) told me, although MLB and the families claimed this specific building for housing, in June 2018 an agreement was reached according to which: 1) the families wishing to remain in the central region of the city—which, according to a survey conducted by MLB, were the majority—would be resettled in another building and receive pecuniary aid to pay rent for two years; 2) Two plots of land with adequate infrastructure in the Barreiro neighborhood (southern region of Belo Horizonte) would be made available for the families that preferred to live in houses, also receiving pecuniary aid for self-construction. At the time of the visit, the families had already moved to the new building, in the central region of Belo Horizonte, where they currently live. Also, according to the interviewee, part of the available funds was being managed by the MLB, with the consent of the families to pay for the necessary maintenance works (mostly carried out by specialized companies). As the two plots of land had not yet been made available, part of the families was receiving pecuniary aid individually and living elsewhere, until the agreement was fully implemented.

As mentioned earlier in this study, it is very usual that long processes of organization, that may last for several months, precede squatting actions in the RMBH. Besides choosing the location, discussing internal rules, and introducing future residents to the principles of the social movements involved, it is during this period that squatting strategies are defined. Even though this may also be the case for building occupations, this process is of particular importance in land occupations, as it provides the necessary conditions for a fast squatting action, as safely as possible.

First, consider the large number of families starting an occupation. To name one case, in 2009, when the *Dandara* occupation began in Belo Horizonte, about 100 families

¹³⁵ Retrieved from MTST online <https://bit.ly/2YeGLXP> on May 13 2020.

entered the land (a number that multiplied in a few days reaching around 1000 families; currently, over 2,000 families live in Dandara)¹³⁶. The families usually arrive on the site to stay, and therefore they need minimum infrastructural conditions to live on the grounds since the first day of occupation. Furthermore, due to the usually long periods of abandonment, there may be all kinds of waste on the terrains, tall grass and other inconveniences. Not to mention that for strategic reasons, occupations generally occur at night; and, on the next day, due to the large number of families that usually participate, it sometimes takes no more than a few hours for them to be noted. Therefore, they also need to be prepared for sudden (and often violent) evictions by the police. A comment from a member of MLB, who also participated in the first moments of *Paulo Freire* occupation (Figures 23 and 24) gives us an idea of how agile that event can be:

Paulo Freire's [first] dawn for me is one of the most exciting things in my life. It was 45 minutes [of collective work on the site], and we looked around and had an occupation. One hundred and fifty families, one hundred and fifty tents, a nursery, a kitchen. It is very impressive!¹³⁷

Nevertheless, for squatters in land occupations for self-construction, the perspective of a roof over their heads is only a first step. Once the territory is occupied and people start to settle, their struggles continue, sometimes for many years. The squatted areas are usually abandoned terrains that do not have sewerage system, water network, electrical network, street pavement and others. In addition to that, as occupations are considered illegal, in a first moment, the local government does not provide them with the necessary infrastructure. Therefore, the residents build much of it themselves, working collectively, as much as they can. This means sometimes opening streets without appropriate machinery, temporary electrical and water networks and, of course, their own homes. Difficulties in accessing several types of public services have also been reported. For example, public healthcare facilities and schools may not

¹³⁶ As informed during the interviews with BH7 and BH11.

¹³⁷ Talk during the Seminar *Dez anos de ocupações urbanas na RMBH: História, lutas e novos caminhos* [Ten years of urban occupations at RMBH: History, struggles, and new pathways], held as part of the activities of the *Cosmópolis* research group of the School of Architecture/UFMG, from June 26 to 28, 2019. Co-organized by Professor Rita de Cássia Lucena Velloso (research group coordinator), Thiago Canettieri de Mello e Sá (post-doctoral researcher/UFMG) and Marina Sanders Paolinelli (PhD student/UFMG).

accept people who live in occupations using as justification the absence of proof of fixed address.

In my second visit to *Dandara* occupation, one of the interviewees (BH11)¹³⁸ mentioned that for quite some time, public schools and healthcare facilities in the region refused to enroll or assist families living there. They also faced difficulties in finding work. The justification given in all these cases was the need to present a proof of fixed address—although in the interviewee’s opinion, most of the time, the negatives were due to discrimination against the squatters. With the assistance of the activist lawyers who supported *Dandara*, the solution adopted was to issue a "declaration of residence" instead. As other interviewees also stated:

[...] another very serious thing: there is a [public] healthcare center down here, just five minutes away. And there is another one up there too, also five minutes away. Neither of them accepts [to attend] residents of the occupations (BH6/*Paulo Freire*).¹³⁹

No community resident could enroll their children in school. [...] They did not accept the people living in the community. [Public] healthcare units, the same thing. It is like this: [if] we do not have a proof of fixed address, we cease to exist (BH2/*Dandara*).

In this sense, it can also be said that for the most part, people who decide to squat and live in a housing occupation in the RMBH do so in a context of necessity—or urgent necessity. While some of them may come from overcrowded situations (for example, by living in the houses of family members, frequently also low-income, as a favor), others were no longer able to pay rent, or simply lived in the streets (as shelters are often overcrowded). Furthermore, to have a place to live without needing to pay rent means more financial autonomy, which to some people is as simple as being able to pay for food:

[Not paying] rent? [...] Nowadays, I can eat a piece of meat every day, today I eat what I plant. I made stewed papaya today, the day before yesterday we made fried banana. I have *ora-pro-nóbis*¹⁴⁰, I have parsley, chives, I have guava, I eat better (BH10).¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ BH11 has lived in *Dandara* since its beginning in 2009.

¹³⁹ BH6 is a resident and coordinator of the *Paulo Freire* occupation

¹⁴⁰ Edible plant rich in nutrients, typical of the region.

¹⁴¹ BH10 is a resident and coordinator of the *Vitória* occupation.

[...] but in the general life of families, what always comes is the question of security [...] from harassment with girls to the question of the dispute of boys within the drug traffic. So, having a space like this to play for children too. [...] There is the most concrete and objective improvement that is 'I paid rent before, and now I do not pay anymore,' so people can eat better (BH3).

Oh, it changes a lot, right? I mean, because paying rent is something that you sleep with it and wake up with it. So, we can eat better. With difficulty, but we can still have some leisure, buy some clothes, a shoe. So that is it; it helps a lot (BH4).

According to the *Fundação João Pinheiro* [João Pinheiro Foundation] (FJP), the excessive burden with urban rent—urban families with a *family* income of up to three minimum wages¹⁴², who live in a house or apartment (durable urban residences) and that spend more than 30% of their income on rent—represented 50% of the total housing deficit in Brazil in 2015.¹⁴³ The Southeast region of the country, where the RMBH is located, concentrated 61.4% of the country's urban families associated with this component of the housing deficit (a total of 1.524 million families). This need for *survival*, however, connects to other possibilities for a future *life*, as illustrated in the excerpt below, translated from an online publication of the *Paulo Freire* occupation:

What is a vacant lot?
 For us, it is POSSIBILITY.
 Possibility of a roof, of rights, of dignity.
 Possibility of meeting, growth, strengthening, empowerment.
 Possibility!
 For Joana and Rita to emancipate themselves.
 For Leandro, Miguel and Jorge to have daycare.
 For João, for Ana and for Márcia to go back to work.
 Possibility to transform under sun, rain and wind a void into home.

¹⁴² The current minimum wage in Brazil is R\$1,045 (approximately 174 Euros).

¹⁴³ The housing deficit in Brazil corresponds to the deficiencies of the housing stock. It is understood as the most immediate and intuitive notion of the need to construct new housing units for the solution of social and specific housing problems detected at a certain time. This estimate encompasses the dwellings without conditions to be inhabited due to the precariousness of the constructions or wear of the physical structure, which therefore must be replaced. It also includes the need to increase the stock, due to forced family cohabitation (families intending to constitute a single-family home), low-income residents with difficulties to pay rent in urban areas and those living in rented houses and apartments with great density. Finally, it includes housing in non-residential premises (Fundação João Pinheiro & Diretoria de Estatística e Informações, 2018).

A home to come back after work, to reunite the family, to study, rest, and play...¹⁴⁴

Paulo Freire (Figures 23 and 24) is a land occupation for self-construction that started in May 2015. Housing over 300 families¹⁴⁵, it is located in Barreiro, southern portion of Belo Horizonte, and was also organized by MLB. The brief account below gives us a glimpse of how the construction work was carried out on the site after the occupation, its current situation, and future demands.

We did the *mutirão*, and everyone participated. We installed water hoses, and then the sewerage system. [...] The sewerage system was more complicated because we did it per street, and on some weekends, we could not get anyone to come because people had other commitments. But we rescheduled, and with that, we managed to do it. [...] From that point on, everyone started to build their brick houses. It was very fast. Currently, only four or five families still live in *madeirite*¹⁴⁶ shacks. Now our struggle is for water and electricity [with regular provision by the local supplying companies], a regularized address, bus lines nearby [...] and the title of possession (BH6).

There was at least one eviction attempt in *Paulo Freire* by the state military police, in the first month of occupation. According to the available information, the land supposedly belongs to a private bus company¹⁴⁷, although they were not able to present documentation proving ownership. As some social movements affirm, this is a recurrent situation in Barreiro, where the practice of *grilagem*¹⁴⁸ is common, reflecting in the inconsistency or lack of documentation on the part of individuals or companies claiming to be landowners.¹⁴⁹ In some cases, the failure of self-appointed owners to produce documents and the long periods of abandonment of the land for speculation—sometimes over 20 years—form useful arguments in favor of squatters, against

¹⁴⁴ Retrieved from the *Paulo Freire* Community page on Facebook <https://bit.ly/3ch2mVg> on 08 May 2020.

¹⁴⁵ Retrieved from <http://ocupacaopaulofreirebh.blogspot.com/> on 13 May 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Low cost board made with wood veneers.

¹⁴⁷ Retrieved from the *Estado de Minas* newspaper <https://bit.ly/2YYqeJg> on 13 May 2020.

¹⁴⁸ In short, *grilagem* is the name given in Brazil to the practice of falsification of documents for the purpose of claiming ownership of land or buildings, usually for profit.

¹⁴⁹ Retrieved from *A Verdade* newspaper <https://bit.ly/3dpMFuY> on 08 May 2020. *A Verdade* [The Truth] is a printed and digital newspaper, distributed in several states of Brazil with the support of social movements such as MLB, *Movimento de Mulheres Olga Benário*, CPT and others. They identify themselves as at the service of the struggle for socialism, in opposition to the capitalist press.

eviction threats. It is no coincidence that in the course of shortly over a decade several land occupations for housing have emerged in this region—a total of 13 new occupations were identified in this study, including *Irmã Dorothy* 1 and 2 (2007, 2010), *Camilo Torres* (2008), *Eliana Silva* 1 and 2 (2012), *Olaria* (2014), *Nelson Mandela* (2014), *Professor Fábio Alves* 1 and 2 (2014, 2018), *Paulo Freire* (2015), *Temer Jamais*, *Fidel Castro* and *Marielle Franco* (all started in 2016). For further data, see Figure 31 and Table 6 in Appendix C.

Even in other regions of the city, it is not unusual for the alleged owners to be unable to produce documents proving property of lands. According to Lourenço (2014),¹⁵⁰ this was also the case of *Dandara* (Figures 29 and 30), one of the most emblematic cases of land occupations for housing in Belo Horizonte. Started in April 2009, it is located in the Céu Azul neighborhood—although not close to the city center, there are middle and working-class neighborhoods nearby, with public transportation, commerce, and services. In fact, Lourenço (2014), who actively participated in the process of design and implementation of an urban plan for this occupation, points out that the choice of the terrain was a consequence of previous mapping in different cities in the RMBH, conducted by both the Popular Brigades and the MST. The possibilities that the terrain offered for a collective life, with particular emphasis on family agroecology practices, while being close to an area with urban infrastructure and various services, were decisive. However, as the land was owned by a private construction company and had a high market value, the occupation was strongly litigated (Lourenço, 2014).

¹⁵⁰ For more detailed information on *Dandara*'s process of organization and implementation from 2009 until 2014 see Lourenço (2014).

As reported by two of the interviewees (BH5, BH7)¹⁵¹, before the occupation took place, there was a long organizational period that lasted about a year, with relevant participation of the Popular Brigades and the MST. Next, a temporary camp with canvas tents was set up in a restricted area of the land—as is very usual in land occupations in the RMBH. In the case of *Dandara*, however, this situation lasted for three months, due to constant police surveillance—a situation aggravated by the large number of squatters in the occupation (in less than a month the number of families increased from 150 to around 1300) (Lourenço, 2014). It was also in this context that an urban plan for the area was designed, based on local legislation, with the participation of architects and students from architecture and geography courses from PUC-Minas¹⁵² and UFMG (Lourenço, 2014). Besides possibly favoring future regularization, as mentioned during an interview (BH5), the plan also aimed to concretize some of the initial expectations that oriented the choice of the terrain.

One of the main features of the urban plan for *Dandara*—that included wide streets, areas for collective use, public facilities, environmental conservation areas and others—were large, collective plots. According to Lourenço (2014), even though the process involved the participation of residents, it was the proposal of collective plots that generated most controversy amongst them. This can be illustrated by the

¹⁵¹ BH5 is an activist lawyer. He participated in the foundation of the Popular Brigades in 2005, in the creation of the *Espaço Comum Luiz Estrela* [Luiz Estrela Common Space] in 2013, an important cultural squat in Belo Horizonte, and continues to be part of them. He also participates in the *Coletivo Margarida Alves* [Margarida Alves Collective], a feminist collective of legal advice, created in 2012 in Belo Horizonte, focusing on social movements, urban occupations, traditional communities, and others.

Friar and priest of the Carmelite Order, BH7 has participated in the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* [Pastoral Land Commission] (CPT) in Belo Horizonte since 1994. Over the years, as he recalled, he participated in the formation of popular leaderships in the countryside, while also engaged in pastoral militancy in the struggles for rural lands. More recently, since 2005, he has also supported urban struggles for housing. He has followed and supported several squats in Belo Horizonte, among them the *Dandara* occupation. He has also documented (in texts, photos, videos, interviews, and other media) many demonstrations, marches and occupations that have taken place in Belo Horizonte in the last 15 years, which according to him, on some occasions helped to prevent evictions.

The CPT was created in 1975, linked to the Catholic Church (although it soon acquired an ecumenical character), during the dictatorial period in Brazil. Its main objectives are to be of service to the cause of rural workers and to support their organization. Retrieved from <https://www.cptnacional.org.br/> on 14 May 2020.

¹⁵² *Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais* [Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais].

statement of an interviewee who lives in Dandara (BH2) when asked about the original urban plan for the site:

Well, that is one of the problems. [...] Why can't we have ours? Our plot, our individual space? [...] And that was one of the questions to the collective plot proposal, which on paper, I think is something very beautiful, you know? To have several families on a collective plot with our little vegetable garden and us living there, all peace and love. Not that we want to go to the asphalt,¹⁵³ but we want to live a little bit of that freedom of the asphalt, which is like this: me here in my house, enjoying my things. [...] It is [about] seeing the other person's desires, the other person's dreams. Because everyone who was here trying to build this community, I know they were full of good intentions. But on the other hand, they were kind of launching possibilities for us that they themselves would not want to live, you know? (BH2).

In the opinion of another interviewee (BH5), however, this was also the result of interference from narco-trafficking agents who aimed at the future commercialization of plots, and whose arguments—mostly related to individuality and privacy as fundamental aspects for well-being and security—proved very convincing among the families. A second urban plan was then elaborated, keeping many of the original premises, but with individual plots.

The implementation of the finalized plan was not easy, either. As an interviewee (BH11) recalled, the police—whose constant presence lasted for about two years—blocked the access of machinery, equipment and construction materials, even in small quantities in wheelbarrows. Thus, the first streets were built manually, with hoes and other similar tools. Bricks for building the houses were, in some cases, loaded in minimum quantities at a time in strollers. Small rooms were built under the canvas tents still assembled that were removed only after the construction work was finished (at least in part). "It was the law of the ant," said the interviewee, referring to the work done little by little and with much persistence. Currently, at least 2500 families live in Dandara.¹⁵⁴ Even though the residents do not have a property title of their houses, an interviewee explained (BH2), the community is consolidated and more legitimized as a neighborhood. For about three years, they have had regular water supply, and the

¹⁵³ The term "asphalt" is frequently used by squatters from land occupations in the RMBH to refer to the areas considered as the formal city, with access to essential services such as street paving.

¹⁵⁴ According to BH7.

infrastructure for regular electricity supply is currently being implemented. Over time, however, due to the arrival of more families in the occupation, new plots were demarcated on areas that should be for environmental preservation or collective use (Lourenço, 2014).

It is also important to mention that occupations carried out without previous organizational processes such as the one presented above are often referred to as *spontaneous occupations*, as opposed to *organized occupations*, with the participation of social movements. Nonetheless, during the Workshop *10 Anos de Ocupações na RMBH* [10 Years of Occupations at RMBH]¹⁵⁵, it was consensual among local leaderships and activists connected to the squatting movement in the RMBH that the term *spontaneous* may not be appropriate. They argued that, in general, there is always an organizational process, even if it is carried out by the future residents—and that it would be more appropriate to refer to an organizational process carried out by the community itself. In their opinion, the organizational processes carried out by the communities should be recognized and not disregarded (which is the case when we consider such occupations as merely spontaneous).

Vitória, Rosa Leão and *Esperança* (Figures 25-29), all land occupations for housing started in mid-2013, were initially organized by the local community. Together with the *Zilah Sposito-Helena Greco* occupation, which started in September 2011 (see also Figure 31 and Table 6 in Appendix C), they are sometimes referred to as *Izidora* occupations, in reference to the name of the region where they are located. According to one of the interviewees (BH7) who has followed their history from the start and is still in close contact with them, together, these four occupations currently house about 9000 families. This number is compatible with the information presented by Franzoni (2018)¹⁵⁶, according to which about 8000 families lived in the *Izidora* communities in 2018. Also according to Franzoni (2018), this is one of the most emblematic socio-

¹⁵⁵ Workshop held on Oct. 21, 2019, as part of the activities of the *Cosmópolis* research group of the School of Architecture/UFMG, and co-organized by Professor Rita de Cássia Lucena Velloso (research group coordinator), Thiago Canettieri de Mello e Sá (post-doctoral researcher/UFMG), Marina Sanders Paolinelli (PhD student/UFMG) and myself.

¹⁵⁶ For a detailed overview of *Izidora's* socio-territorial conflict from 2013 to 2018, see Franzoni (2018).

territorial conflicts in Latin America¹⁵⁷—which was also stated by two other interviewees (BH10, BH12). Even though there was no previous interference from local social movements, as I was told, some of the squatters soon contacted activists and asked for their support in the local organization.

One day I was in the *Dandara* Occupation, and [one of the residents] of *Rosa Leão* arrived: 'Frei Gilvander, help me! Come organize us because a week ago some people occupied an area next to my house.' The place was not yet called *Rosa Leão*. I went there. It was a mess, each one fencing their own plot with wire and leaving no streets. It was going to turn into a slum. Then the following week, *Esperança* Occupation began; the other week *Vitória* Occupation began. [...] I spent a few months calling the Popular Brigades and MLB, but it took them several months to realize that they had to embrace this struggle as well. So, there was much more difficulty for us to start organizing, and when we tried to organize, a lot could not be organized anymore (BH7).

Another interviewee (BH8)¹⁵⁸, who participated in the first meetings between the Popular Brigades and the squatters in the *Izidora* region, opined that their call for support was somewhat natural. She believes this was due to the intense participation of the Popular Brigades in the *Dandara* occupation, which at the time was already a reference for other occupations in Belo Horizonte. Furthermore, in previous years the Popular Brigades had already supported *Zilah Sposito-Helena Greco* occupation in resisting an eviction by the municipality. Nonetheless, as a resident and coordinator from *Vitória* (BH10) recalled, when she moved to this occupation in 2015, there were tensioned relations and internal conflicts related to disputes over plots in the territory. According to her, this led to some distancing on the part of certain social movements and collectives active in the region—even though they were able to maintain limited

¹⁵⁷ Due to the political articulation of the resistance network, *Izidora's* occupations were selected in September 2016 as a case to be considered at the fifth session of the *Tribunal Internacional de Despejo* [International Court of Eviction], a civil society space, parallel to the United Nations Habitat III Conference. The session took place in Quito/Ecuador on 17 October 2016, and the case of *Izidora* was represented by the *Coletivo Margarida Alves de Advocacia Popular* [Margarida Alves Popular Advocacy Collective]. Among 88 cases from around the world, the 7 most significant in terms of severity and number of people affected were chosen, among them the conflict of the *Izidora* occupations. Besides Brazil, cases from the Democratic Republic of Congo, France, South Korea, Israel, United States and Ecuador were selected. (Isaiás, 2017, as cited in Franzoni, 2018). Isaiás, T. L. S. (2017). *Mulheres em luta: feminismos e Direito nas ocupações da Izidora* [Women in struggle: feminisms and Law in Izidora's occupations] [Master Dissertation]. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais.

¹⁵⁸ BH8 is currently a councilwoman in Belo Horizonte, and also a member of the Popular Brigades.

external support to the occupations. With time, she continued, when some of the squatters were able to organize themselves and became legitimized as local coordinators, a closer relationship with social movements and collectives was finally re-established:

When I got here, [...] there was a terrible conflict of dispute over plots. [...] For this reason, there was no coordinator [from local urban social movements] inside the occupation anymore. One day, one of them, from outside, [...] organized a walk from here to the city of Santa Luzia, to demand some rights. [...] That day, a lot of people got together, but there was no interlocutor [inside here]. [...] So we asked ourselves: 'What are we going to do with this bunch of people? We did not plan anything; there was no strategy; how are these people going to eat?' Because what until then was a simple walk for the mayor to receive us, a simple walk became two days of camping. What were we going to do?

[Then me and two other residents articulated to organize the meals for the camp]. A lot of people came quickly to help us to prepare and distribute the food. [...] And that was the beginning. Even so, at no point did I think about leadership. Never in my life. Soon after that [...], we organized the children's party. It was a wonderful party and without outside help. [...] We asked for money in the square, we held a fair, we asked for money in shops. [...] And [from that party on] the movements began to re-approach.

They [the movements] did not stop acting; in no way, they kept acting from the outside. Only here on the inside, inside the territory, they did not. [...] And as we stood up like this, the movements saw it and said: 'these women inside, they can help us. We can help them out here, and they can help us from inside. They will be the bridge of information for the community.' That was how we started: as a connecting bridge (BH10).

The *Izidora* region was historically constituted by three farms: the *Granja Werneck*, belonging to Hugo Werneck's descendants, under the homonymous company *Granja Werneck S/A*¹⁵⁹; part of the old *Fazenda Tamboril*, owned by *DMA Distribuidora S/A*, which owns large supermarket chains (Epa, MartPlus and ViaBrasil); and *Fazenda Capitão Eduardo*, which belonged to the heirs of Antônio Ribeiro de Abreu (Franzoni, 2018). Around 70% of the families living in *Vitoria*, *Rosa Leão* and *Esperança* are in the area officially considered as *Granja Werneck*.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, given that the

¹⁵⁹ Acronym referring to *Sociedade Anônima* [Anonymous Society], a legal form of incorporation of companies with capital distributed in shares.

¹⁶⁰ Retrieved from the Minas Gerais Court of Justice website <https://bit.ly/3bEfD9n> on 14 May 2020.

northern vector of Belo Horizonte (where the occupations in question are located) is an important axis of urban expansion in the RMBH, from the year 2000, as reported by Franzoni (2018), billionaire interests linked to large urban projects were articulated in the region.

In this context, as in other cases, in addition to eviction threats,¹⁶¹ the families from *Izidora* suffered with police repression and violence, especially during demonstrations. With time, however, not only some of the urbanistic projects for the region ended up not being confirmed, but as of 2017 the new mayor of Belo Horizonte—Alexandre Kalil of the *Partido Humanista da Solidariedade* [Humanist Party of Solidarity], center-right oriented—differently from the previous administration, presented a speech oriented to the need to respect and support the demands of *Izidora's* occupations (Franzoni, 2018).

In November 2018, as a result of years of struggle, an agreement was finally signed, with the participation of the Minas Gerais state government and the municipality of Belo Horizonte. According to the agreement, the *Companhia de Habitação de Minas Gerais* [Housing Company of Minas Gerais] (Cohab Minas)¹⁶² offered *Granja Werneck S.A.*, in exchange for the squatted land, a farm of equivalent area, located in Sabará, also in the RMBH. Cohab Minas, in turn, became the owner of the property rights of *Granja Werneck*, and made a commitment to 1) allow the occupants to remain there, as holders¹⁶³; 2) propose and organize an administrative procedure for *Regularização Fundiária Urbana de Interesse Social* [Urban Land Regularization of Social Interest]

¹⁶¹ The first judicial decision authorizing the use of police force for coercive removal of *Izidora's* families was issued as early as July 2013. In effect for almost two years, including an occasional police presence with threatening attitudes in the region, this decision was suspended in June 2015. Later, in September 2016, the eviction order was renewed, this time for almost 9 months, when it was suspended again in April 2017 (Franzoni, 2018).

¹⁶² Part of the indirect administration of the state of Minas Gerais, its main objective is to plan and execute actions related to housing of social interest (low-income housing) in the state. Retrieved from *Cohab Minas* online <https://bit.ly/2XEzMIk> on 12 May 2020.

¹⁶³ According to Brazilian law 10.406, 10 Jan. 2002, *a holder is one who, in a relationship of dependence on another, retains possession on his behalf and in compliance with his orders or instructions*. Retrieved from http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/2002/l10406.htm on 12 May 2020.

(Reurb-S)¹⁶⁴; 3) ensure the subsequent titling of the occupants, with broad participation of social movements and coordinations. In 2019, however, due to a change in the state government, there was a setback in the previously signed agreement, which is still pending. This is what one of the interviewees (BH10) reported:

At the end of last year [2019], a barter agreement was signed [referring to the agreement previously described]. [...] But Zema [Romeu Zema, governor of the state of Minas Gerais since January 2019, of the right-wing *Partido Novo*] today no longer recognizes the agreement. But [...] the agreement was signed at the CEJUSC [Judicial Center for Conflict Resolution and Citizenship], at the Court of Justice. It is the 'apple of Kalil's eyes' [currently still the mayor of Belo Horizonte] [...] as he is advertising it. So how is Zema going to go back on it?

[...] I will tell you one reality: he is not going to get us out of here, no one. [Especially] because of the size of this place today, right? If he does that, any moves about it, he is going to be buying a big fight, because today the *Izidora* conflict is the biggest land conflict in Latin America and the seventh biggest in the world! In the world (BH10).

From the cases addressed in the RMBH, it is possible to observe that also in this context, there is a strong political character in the squatting movement, including housing occupations. In this context, too, while different occupations may present similar features, there is a significant plurality in ideological points of view. Moreover, even squats that are not primarily geared at housing share close ties with local housing movements. Not only are they frequently opposed to real estate speculation and

¹⁶⁴ According to Brazilian law 13.465, 11 Jul. 2017, *urban land regularization* encompasses legal, urbanistic, environmental and social measures aimed at the integration of *informal urban settlements* into the formal urban territorial planning and the titling of their occupants.

An *informal urban settlement* is considered by this law to be that which is clandestine, irregular, or in which it has not been possible to carry out, in any way, the titling of its occupants.

The objectives of an urban land regularization process are: 1) to identify informal urban settlements that should be regularized, organize them and ensure the provision of public services to their occupants in order to improve urban and environmental conditions in relation to the previous informal situation; 2) promote social integration and the generation of employment and income; 3) guarantee the social right to decent housing and adequate living conditions; 4) guarantee the effectiveness of the social function of the property; 5) grant effective rights, preferably on behalf of the woman, among others.

Finally, urban land regularization of social interest applies to informal urban settlements predominantly occupied by low-income population, thus declared by the Municipal Administration.

Retrieved from http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/ Ato2015-2018/2017/Lei/L13465.htm on 12 May 2020.

openly defend the guarantee of the social function of vacant property, but many squatters are also members of social movements that struggle for housing.

Furthermore, in the cases presented in the RMBH, the concern of the squatters with the maintenance and good conditions of the occupied buildings and self-constructed houses in land occupations also stands out. This work, on many occasions, is done with do-it-yourself techniques, exchange of technical knowledge and also materials between occupations. The participation of supportive architects (and professionals from other areas) is frequent, and sometimes works of greater complexity include the participation of hired professionals. Additionally, not rare squatters from housing occupations are also workers in the construction sector¹⁶⁵ who build their own houses and frequently participate in *mutirões*—although due to the low income of squatters, the houses often remain for years without finishing with paint, ceramic and other materials.

In the next chapters, the models of self-management in different squats and contexts, their different approaches and views on networking, legal issues and correlated repercussions and contradictions will be addressed in further detail.

¹⁶⁵ A historically underpaid and often informal sector in Brazil, frequently with no properly guaranteed rights for workers.

Figure 21

Kasa Invisível, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2018



Facade. Photo by Cadu Passos, ceded by *Kasa Invisível*.

Figure 22

Kasa Invisível, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2019



A: Detail of side facade. B: Poster. C & D: Workshop/*mutirão* of alternative construction methods—earth plastering. Photos by the author.

Figure 23

Pátria Livre & Paulo Freire occupations, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2019

A



B



C



A) Pátria Livre. B) Pátria Livre, painting on the wall. C) Paulo Freire, detail on a house.
Photos by the author

Figure 24

Paulo Freire occupation, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2019



General view. Photo by the author

Figure 25

Vitória occupation, Belo Horizonte/Santa Luzia, Brazil, 2019

A



B



A) One of the houses. B) Collective vegetable Garden in a backyard.

Photos by the author

Figure 26

Vitória occupation, Belo Horizonte/Santa Luzia, Brazil, 2019



A) *Mutirão* to build a playground. B) Children playing in one of the toys. C & D) Signs in the meeting shed. Photos by the author.

Figure 27

Vitória, Rosa Leão & Zilah Sposito-Helena Greco occupations, Belo Horizonte/Santa Luzia, Brazil, 2015

A



B



A) *Vitória*. Partial view of *Esperança* occupation in the upper left corner.

B) *Rosa Leão* in the center. *Zilah Sposito-Helena Greco* in the inner green área.

Photos by Marcílio Gazzinelli, archive of the *Escritório de Integração, PUC Minas*.
Images ceded by Tiago Castelo Branco

Figure 28

Esperança occupation, Belo Horizonte/Santa Luzia, Brazil, 2015



Photo by Márcio Gazzinelli, archive of the *Escritório de Integração, PUC Minas*.
Images ceded by Tiago Castelo Branco

Figure 29

Esperança occupation, Belo Horizonte/Santa Luzia (2019) & Dandara occupation (2009), Belo Horizonte, Brazil

A



B



A) *Esperança*, houses under construction and tyre support wall. Photo by the author.

B) *Dandara* in 2009. Photo by Marcílio Gazzinelli, ceded by Tiago Castelo Branco.

Figure 30

Dandara occupation, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2011 & 2014

A



B



A) *Dandara* in 2011.

B) *Dandara* in 2014. Photos by Marcílio Gazzinelli, ceded by Tiago Castelo Branco.

6. SQUATTERS' EVERYDAY LIFE: SELF-MANAGEMENT AND NETWORKING

[...] squatting challenges the everyday life of squatters. Domestic issues such as cleaning, cooking, maintaining the common areas, taking care of kids and those who are ill, usually defy gender relations and patriarchal patterns, not without continuous conflicts to face (M. A. Martínez López, 2015a, p. 10).

As previously mentioned in this study, Lefebvre (2016) proposed a radical differentiation between an *ideology of participation*, referring to institutionalized and heteronomously controlled participatory processes, and *real and active participation* that he identified as self-management. Even if we consider that state-led participatory processes may provide material gains to social movements or to a certain point contribute to political-pedagogical purposes as suggested by Souza (2006); or that depending on the political, economic and social context, there may be different models of participation, some of them more open to debate and the perspectives offered by autonomous initiatives, as proposed by M. Martínez López (2011); that is, even if we consider the possibility that institutionalized participatory processes may be well-intentioned or include positive aspects, they also tend to impose restrictions to the conditions of individual and collective autonomy, while generally favoring privileged groups in powerful positions.

In this sense, as already questioned in chapter 3, to what extent do such processes contribute to real changes in life and society aimed at socio-spatial justice? As suggested in that same chapter, *instruments designed and appropriated by neoliberal governments should always be looked at in the context of stabilizing mechanisms that may contribute to keeping the order of things as they are*. As will be seen in more detail ahead, self-management processes also include the definition of sets of rules to be followed by the people involved. In this sense, as institutionalized participatory processes, they too may include restrictions on what one can or cannot do in different situations. What fundamentally differentiates them is that in self-management processes these rules are defined by the participating group itself, instead of being imposed on them (as usually occurs in institutionalized participatory processes); in self-management, the rules can also be reviewed and changed collectively over time, based on past experiences or new demands. Equally important, self-management, in the scope of the present research, is usually a tool to achieve goals that respond to

the interests and demands of popular initiatives and social movements, prioritizing them.

As much as self-management is an inherent part of squatters' everyday lives, so are their processes of networking—that is, their aptitude and capability to form networks in different scales. As Cattaneo (2013, p. 143) observes, squatters build links among themselves and extend them to the outside in a way that is “not mediated by traditional parental or social-class rules nor by the market.”

Since its creation the movement has simultaneously combined a local and global orientation; it aims both to satisfy material needs for self-managed accommodation and meeting spaces and to intervene in the social life of districts and cities, always promoting the projects of many social movements and fostering the circulation of ideas and persons, and protest actions, in relation to squatting, social problems and anti-capitalist causes that affect many other countries (M. A. Martínez López, 2013, p. 134).

More than a simple will to interact, networking is vital for squatters as a means of exchanging knowledge, gaining legitimation and support (from the surrounding neighborhood, the media, or even local governments), strengthening initiatives, diversifying mobility possibilities (e.g., in case of eviction), amplifying their range of action, etc. Networking can also occur at different levels, such as between different squats (locally, regionally, or even internationally), squats and their neighborhoods, squatters and other activists, and others, which can happen all at the same time.

6.1. Self-Management as a transformative tool

Self-management is not an easy term to define in a few words. First of all, self-management is not configured by a fixed set of previously defined rules—quite the contrary. As previously mentioned, self-management inevitably entails the possibility of changing the rules, including new parameters or excluding criteria that no longer fits the group's objectives or organizational procedures. Therefore, different squats tend to have different models of self-management, better adapted to their own goals and internal dynamics. This was also confirmed by the many different experiences shared by interviewees from social centers in Madrid, Basque *gaztetxes* and occupations in the RMBH. Aspects like frequency of meetings and assemblies, horizontality concerns,

decision-making procedures, openness to participation by external people, number of participants and others may present significant variations from one case to another. Specifically, in the cases addressed in the RMBH, it should be noted, striking differences in the scales of occupations—which ranged from a few dozen (or hundreds) squatters to thousands of people—the types and objectives of squats also reflected in the models of self-management adopted. As mentioned by a member of MLB,

it is very difficult to talk in a generalized [or homogeneous] way about the processes of self-management. [...] Because besides the objectives being very different, the scale of things is very different. A collective of mostly university-educated people managing a cultural space, and a housing space for 80 times more people, who mainly do not even have high school education [are two very different situations]. So, I think that the urgency of a housing occupation leads to another kind of need for self-management (BH1).

When referring to self-management in the context of squatting movements, this study suggests that it is possible, however, to make a number of general assertions, as long as local and particular features are taken into consideration. *An important common characteristic*, then, is that *self-management usually encompasses decision-making processes that include the conduction of general assemblies and other meetings*, which can eventually transcend the temporal existence of the squats themselves.¹⁶⁶ In other words, they may occur previously to the squatting action—say, as previous organizational processes—or even afterward, in case of evictions, internal decisions to end a squat, etc.—as a way to maintain engagement and ensure the survival of collectives, plan future actions and others.

Regarding the cases considered in this study, the most usual form of previous planning was related to the search for long-abandoned buildings and/or lands to occupy, including information on who the formal owners were and, whenever possible, the legal status of the property. In some cases, previous visits to a selected building or land may also occur in order to evaluate as much as possible access possibilities, internal

¹⁶⁶ *Lakaxita*, in the Basque Country, was the only case in which an assembly-based model was no longer in effect. According to the interviewee (BC2), the general assembly of *Lakaxita* had been dissolved due to an internal conflict between the groups that used the space. Thus, by the time of the interview, the organizational and decision-making processes in this *gaztexte* were mostly done by different groups, separately, according to a previously agreed internal space division.

conditions, the necessity of future maintenance work and others. Previous meetings were also organized to define strategies for both entering buildings or terrains and resisting/avoiding evictions during the first days of occupation (when they tend to be more vulnerable to immediate police action). In some cases, in Madrid (EVA) and the Basque Country (*Lakaxita*, *Txantxarreka*), some of the collectives also attempted to negotiate agreements with local governments/private owners on the use of the spaces before a decision to squat was finally made.

A critical differentiation to be made, however, is that while in Madrid and the Basque Country, such organizational processes were usually conducted by the activists, members of collectives and of social movements, *who were also squatters themselves*, this was not the case in most housing occupations in the RMBH. As mentioned earlier in this study, in the latter, long periods of previous organizational activities were frequently conducted by social movements and other actors (collectives, university faculty and students, etc.), with the participation of families that would partake in an occupation (the squatters), which, at least in a first moment, were (usually) not activists themselves.

For instance, in the case of occupations organized by the MLB, examples of this preparatory phase have lasted almost a year, and included the definition of internal rules, strategies for squatting and resisting, and a type of collective formative process on the movement itself. "Nobody enters [the territory] without knowing that we are a movement for urban reform and socialism and that we operate by division of tasks" (BH1). In addition to guaranteeing a swift entry into the location and enabling the setup of basic infrastructure for the permanence of the squatters (as mentioned in chapter 5), the previous organizational activities may also promote further politicization of many of the participants. In fact, some of the interviewees reported having gained more knowledge about their rights, in addition to having developed a more profound desire to change society, instead of limiting their expectations to solving individual housing problems. As also mentioned in a number of interviews, during such processes, some of the participants may become activists, join collectives and social movements.

Additionally, in the case of large housing occupations (of buildings and/or land) in the RMBH, some of the interviewees pointed to different, interconnected scales of self-

management. When occupations are organized by social movements, they usually remain in a prominent position with continued engagement in organizational processes even after the occupation has taken place—although with time such ties may be more blurred, with a tendency towards greater autonomy of the squatters. In this sense, while some assemblies occur with the participation of representatives of (ideally) all families and social movements involved, others are meant for coordinators and members of social movements. As an example, an interviewee from *Pátria Livre* occupation explained part of their internal dynamics:

All families here are organized in the movement [MTD]. So, we have general assemblies of the militants of the movement, the base of the movement. [...] Decisions on housing relations are made in this base group. [...] Some decisions need to be transferred to the coordination either because it was not possible to reach a consensus or because they are contrary to our statute. So 'are we going to reformulate the statute or not?' We produced the statute in assemblies, the statute for organizing the occupation. It has already been changed three times because one thing is what you first thought; another thing is what day-to-day life reveals. New needs arose, and other things that we thought would be an issue were not an issue (BH3).

A *second general feature* present in all contexts addressed relates to a particular concern with *horizontality*. Assemblies (and other meetings) frequently imply horizontality-based decision-making processes or, as observed by Mudu (2013), they are oriented towards direct and non-hierarchical democracy. In other words, all participants should have equal chances to have their points of view considered by the rest of the group and equal conditions of opinion and participation, without power imbalances. Nonetheless, while horizontality may be (ideally) part of such processes, it is not simple to achieve, and hierarchical relationships are quite common—whether tacitly existent or assumedly adopted. The method used in decision-making processes may also vary, ranging from exclusively by consensus to a predominance of discussion sessions followed by voting. Furthermore, while in many cases assemblies and meetings are open to the general public, some may be restricted to a smaller core of participants.

In most of the cases addressed by this study, as informed during the interviews, decisions were either made exclusively by consensus (EKO and *La Dragona* in Madrid; *Putzuzulo*, *Kijera*, *Lakaxita* and *Talka* in the Basque Country); or by a hybrid model between consensus and voting, whereas voting was used as a last resource, when it

was not possible to reach consensus, in case of emergencies, or when there was not enough time to make new assemblies for deliberation (*La Salamandra* and EVA in Madrid; *Maravillas* and *Errekaleor* in the Basque Country; *Pátria Livre* and *Kasa Invisível*, in the RMBH).¹⁶⁷ While some of the activists mentioned that it was not usual to have impeditive controversies (to the point of obstruction that would prevent a decision from being made), others pointed to a few downsides. Examples were the long periods required to make decisions due to disagreements or diversity of opinions and/or the failure to undertake certain actions and/or activities due to the lack of consensus. In other cases, decisions were always made by voting (*La Salamandra* in Madrid; *Txantxarreka* in the Basque Country; *Paulo Freire* and *Tina Martins*, in the RMBH). In most cases, however, it was mentioned that although they voted, results were frequently consensual.

In both Madrid and the Basque Country, the general assemblies were usually open to all who wished to participate. They were also scheduled in their social media, and, in some cases, external people could even vote. This was the case in *La Salamandra*, in Madrid, where we participated in an assembly and were allowed to vote (in case we wished to do so). As informed by the interviewees, general assemblies were also open in EKO, *La Dragona* and EVA, in Madrid, and *Txantxarreka*, in the Basque Country. Differently, in *Kijera* (due to an imminent eviction threat, as explained by BC16) and *Errekaleor*, both in the Basque Country, only members of the squat or residents were allowed to participate. This was also the case of *Kasa Invisível*, in the RMBH. In all other cases, when mentioned, the assemblies of occupations in the RMBH were meant for the participation of squatters and members of social movements (also including other collectives and actors when there were specific demands, and their participation was necessary)—without explicitly excluding the possibility of participation of other

¹⁶⁷ This was also the case of *Astra*, in the city of Guernica, and *Carmela* in Bilbao, two other self-managed spaces in the Basque Country, used as examples by BC14. As the interviewee reported, they usually did not vote. When there was no consensus, decisions were frequently postponed to subsequent assemblies. In other cases, workshops were held for further discussion.

BC14 is a professor at the University of the Basque Country. He participates in a research group focused on issues related to participatory democracy and autonomous processes of popular movements. As some of their activities he mentioned mediation in negotiations with governmental entities and the facilitation of internal processes, articulation between squats and their neighbours, political education, and others.

people. In this case, however, general assemblies were not scheduled in their social media.

Regarding the conditions of horizontality, while several of the interviewees in all three contexts referred to it as an aspiration or an ideal, it was also mentioned that some of the participants might have greater influence in discussions and decision-making processes. In both Madrid and the Basque Country, in most cases, this was related to *informal hierarchies*, which led to power imbalances in assemblies and other meetings. Some of the reasons mentioned by the interviewees were: 1) people who had participated in a squat for longer and/or had more time available to participate in internal activities could have more access to information or be considered as more experienced, therefore holding prominent positions (as pointed out by M7/EKO, in Madrid; BC1/*Txantxarreka*; and BC14 in the Basque Country); 2) people who were new to the squat might not feel as comfortable as others in expressing their opinions, or might need to better understand internal dynamics (BC1/*Txantxarreka*, Basque Country); 3) gender issues, that is, the opinions expressed by men could overshadow those expressed by women and other similar situations (BC2/*Lakaxita* and BC14, Basque Country)¹⁶⁸; 4) individuals who might eventually assume leading roles for other reasons (M8/*La Dragona*, Madrid); 5) unfamiliarity with processes based on horizontality, which could lead to difficulties in such processes, as expressed by M4 in EVA, Madrid:

[...] I find it very interesting, very attractive and very pleasant, on the one hand, to be in a space where you have that freedom to operate on the same level. And I also see that it is very complicated because each of us has a vision, I think, of what EVA is and what we want to do in the space, and sometimes... to achieve that true horizontality, which is also based on a consensus and on a space of mutual care is very complicated because I do not think we are used to working like that in society either. So, for me, it is a challenge, it is enriching, and it is also difficult (M4).

In the case of the RMBH, in addition to the possibility of informal hierarchies in decision-making processes, especially in housing occupations organized by social movements, some of the interviewees identified other *intentional and/or assumed hierarchical relations*. To cite one example, in the case of occupations organized by

¹⁶⁸ This was also mentioned by BH2 in *Dandara* occupation, RMBH.

the MLB, the squatters who decide to join this social movement on many occasions also become *coordinators or leadership figures*. In this case, as observed by one of the interviewees, it is part of the movement's strategy to make sure that coordinators actually live in the occupations, as a way of guaranteeing that future decisions will be made according to the specific demands of each site. As observed by a member of the movement,

there is no one [no coordinator] who is not a resident because it does not make sense. It is about the territory. It is the people in the territory who will know what to say: does it still make sense to have a collective kitchen? Does it make sense to have a school for both young people and adults? Is it a demand here? (BH1)

The existence of clear leaderships or coordinators is an important feature of land and building occupations for housing in the RMBH.¹⁶⁹ In fact, while acknowledging the distinctive features between the different social movements present in occupations in the RMBH, their particular modes of action and political points of view, it is, however, possible to say that the formation of leaderships and coordinators in occupations is something common to many of them. At the same time, this points to decision-making processes that are not (at least entirely) horizontal. In this regard, interviews revealed that while some activists saw hierarchical relations as necessary or even desirable, others pointed to a combined model (in which hierarchical relations exist but are not absolute), or even to the need to seek more horizontal models. The three excerpts below (the first taken from an interview with a participant of the Olga Benário Women's Movement, the second and third from members of the Popular Brigades) illustrate the points of view mentioned.

The Reference House for Women Tina Martins is managed by the Olga Benário Women's Movement. [...] It is not a horizontal movement; there is a coordination. [...] We cannot give anyone who comes here a responsibility in their hands, we are attending, we are responsible for a few lives inside this house. [...] And other than that, we have a dispute with the state, so we need to have very strong security, right? It is not just anyone who comes here that can have access to our information (BH9).

Then you will ask me: who decides to hold a demonstration? These decision-making processes about demonstrations, they take place in coordination forums. [...] A whole tactic is going to be developed, which

¹⁶⁹ People considered to be community leaders are also often present in *favelas* and other low-income communities in the RMBH.

can be made more or less explicit for the group of people who are going to participate in the action. And then the action is carried out. [...] Hierarchy is present in every decision-making or discussion process. There is no process without hierarchy because we are in a hierarchical society, right? It is also necessary to analyze case by case where the hierarchy is established. [...] For example, you could say that there is a [relationship of] hierarchy between an actor of the [social] movement [...] and a coordinator of a territory, but this is not [necessarily] true. Political decisions, when they are implemented, [...] are often deconstructed by practice. So, the hierarchies are also very relative (BH8).

I think that [social] movements are increasingly striving to engage in horizontal constructions. I see that, that effort. But they are still very hierarchical. [...] At the same time that the territories are more horizontally built, the organic structure [of the social movements] is still quite hierarchical; there is a national leadership and so on and so forth (BH5).

On the other hand, with time and when the risks of eviction may become attenuated by greater stability in housing occupations, ties with social movements (or, better saying, the presence of external actors belonging to social movements) usually decrease. While in a first moment this points to the possibility of greater autonomy of the squatters in terms of self-management, some of the interviewees have mentioned a decrease in collective initiatives and activities, and a tendency to greater individuality and privacy—as well be addressed in further detail in chapter 7.

A third general feature refers to the decisions made, and the rules defined during assemblies. The interviews conducted in all three contexts also revealed that they might be mandatory even for those who did not participate in a particular decision; or, in other cases, what has been decided should ideally be followed by all, but the individual autonomy of each is prioritized. In the specific case of the RMBH, it was also mentioned by some of the interviewees that not following rules considered more relevant, essential, or imperative could even result in the expulsion of individuals from a squat. These included the perpetration of acts of violence against women¹⁷⁰ and

¹⁷⁰ According to Padrones Gil (2017), in the case of the Basque Country sexual assault may also result in the expulsion of the perpetrator from a squat. According to the author, the person is totally removed from the space, which can lead to their absolute exclusion from social life if this is their main place of socialization. Excessive drug use, Padrones Gil (2017) observes, also often becomes a reason for punishment or, at least, of debate.

robbery (BH6/*Paulo Freire*; BH14¹⁷¹), drug trafficking, people who keep empty plots in land occupations without living on them (BH6/*Paulo Freire*); and physical violence of any type (BH3/*Pátria Livre*).

For example, here we do not accept, as a rule of the movement [MLB], violence against women. There can be no such thing as violence against women. If the woman so desires, she has [our] support, together with *Olga Benário* and *Tina Martins*. [...] And the man [who has perpetrated the acts of violence] is expelled from here. The man is expelled. And so is drug trafficking, which is very strong in this region. [...] Here in the occupation, we have already had many problems with people who were involved [with drug trafficking], and we had to have conversations: 'not here, here this is not possible.' And thank God it has been working (BH6/*Paulo Freire*).

The plots here are for living, although I know that many people are holding [their plots] here just to have the opportunity to sell because the sale is only allowed after five years.¹⁷² And since it is already so close, a lot of people are holding onto it. [...] [But] it is not fair to stay here with the plot and without living [because there are many people in need and waiting for a chance to come and live here] (BH6).

The sale of plots has also been addressed as a conflictive issue by an interviewee from *Dandara* Occupation (BH2). "In the old days," she opined, "the sales of plots used to de-legitimize our struggles. Because all people wanted was to say that we did not need a place to live since we were occupying and selling." In this case, however, the interviewee did not mention any expulsions of people who were selling them—a powerful group which she referred to as coordinators—but, instead, of people who bought plots but for different reasons were no longer able to afford them. Furthermore, according to her, spaces that in the initial urban plan were reserved for collective use ended up being sold. Currently, although there are still plots being sold, she observed, it is not a problem as it used to be:

Nowadays, people have their homes, they have jobs, they have access to school, they have access to healthcare; restricted, but they do. Now, if they leave, it is because they really want to leave, and with what they sell here, they will be able to buy elsewhere, right? (BH2).

¹⁷¹ BH14 is a member of the Popular Brigades, and was closely involved in the organizational processes of *Vicentão*, a building occupation which claimed the city center as a place to live and also to work, existing in downtown Belo Horizonte between Jan. 2018 and Feb. 2019.

¹⁷² According to the interviewee (BH6), this is a rule of the movement (in the case of the *Paulo Freire* occupation, MLB); or a direct consequence of a smaller presence of the social movement after five years of occupation, which then becomes more autonomous.

A third interviewee, member of the Popular Brigades and who had close contact with *Dandara* since the beginning of the occupation (BH5) opined that although housing occupations are related to the need of the squatters for shelter, there are certain actors who, although they are a minority that is not representative of the families, try to infiltrate and make profit. In large part, he told me, this occurs due to the absence of the public power, which does not meet the demands of social movements for the registration of families, the assessment of which families are registered in social assistance policies, which families have other property or not. In his view, the movement cannot alone block every opportunist, every oppressor. In *Dandara's* case, he assessed, the conflicts generated by the sale of plots of land were also related to the presence of drug traffickers: "we managed to maintain the green area until [the years] 2013/2014, until it was occupied by the trafficking and allotted, in a very sad situation" (BH5).

As a fourth general aspect, self-management also means *putting decisions and plans into practice, usually through task division*—activities varying according to the type of squat and other particularities. These may include internal and/or quotidian tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, gardening, building and maintenance, communicating and managing social media, taking care of children, and others; external and/or eventual activities, including exchanging materials and information, visits to other occupations for several reasons, meetings with governmental entities, etc.; or even urgent, unexpected, demand-oriented or mutual-support-related ones such as demonstrations, resisting evictions, and an infinitude of other possibilities. In general, activities are organized through the setting up of workgroups (that may also be called commissions and/or others), which have a more permanent or temporary character depending on the type of demand. Workgroups may also be entitled to a certain degree of autonomy and to make decisions without necessarily approving them in general assemblies (although the type of decisions is not usually formally regulated and may vary from case to case). The frequency of meetings of each workgroup may also vary, depending on the type of activity and internal dynamics. In some interviews, it was

mentioned that who participates in regular activities in squats may also be expected to participate in assemblies and/or workgroups.¹⁷³

As a fifth general feature, the degree of engagement or participation of people in self-managed processes may also vary—depending on their different interests, time availability or other factors. In general, though, it is possible to say that self-management is deeply imbricated in the lives of squatters, even compromising, as suggested by M. A. Martínez López (2015b, p. 252), “the whole of everyday life for the people most involved in it.” Self-management is, therefore, much more a way of living collectively than it is something that happens sporadically, during assemblies and meetings.

The number of people participating in assemblies or workgroups was an important issue, mentioned by interviewees in all three contexts. As examples, some of the interviewees mentioned that the number of people present could be quite oscillating (*Txantxarreka/BC1* and *Putzuzulo/BC12* and *BC13*, in the Basque Country) and was not always enough for the activities they wished to perform (*EKO/M7*, Madrid; and *Kasa Invisívell/Zenite*, *BH12* and *BH13*, RMBH). In other cases, interviewees opined that sometimes it was difficult to encourage people to participate in assemblies (*Lakaxita/BC2* and *BC15*, Basque Country; *Paulo Freire/BH6*, *Vitória/BH10* and *Dandara/BH2*, RMBH), even though more people may participate in other activities. In one case in Madrid the low attendance in assemblies and/or the eventual lack of people participating in workgroups, in the interviewee’s opinion (*EKO/M7*), was related to the fact that the squat was not in the city center—where, according to him, attendance was usually higher. In the RMBH, on the other hand, some of the interviewees linked it to conditions of greater stability in some occupations (when people had already built their houses, or there was no significant risk of eviction), as exemplified below.

¹⁷³ Some of the work groups mentioned during interviews—which vary from case to case—were: *bienvenida* [welcoming] group (exclusively mentioned in Madrid and existing in almost all social centers, with the main objective of receiving new proposals for the conduction of activities); treasury; fund raising; security; management of the keys; communication; management of the water supply and solar energy system (when existing); maintenance and infrastructure; youth related groups; daycare; education; natural environment; culture; architecture; *loja grátis* [free store] (a space where donated clothes and other objects are acquired for free by those in need); juridical, and others.

It is really hard for us to mobilize people here nowadays, you know? Because nowadays everyone has built their houses, they lock themselves inside their walls, and we have to keep knocking on the doors, insisting, insisting. But we can do it, you know? In the end, we always get a good number of people to do things (BH6/*Paulo Freire*).

The general assemblies ceased to be effective from the moment Kalil [the current mayor of Belo Horizonte] said that this was a won cause, that nobody needed to do anything else. That was our biggest problem because the people settled down, they ceased to fight, and they forgot that besides saying that the land is ours, we needed water, light, sewage, a school, a health center, buses (BH10/*Vitória*).

Moreover, in some cases in Madrid and the Basque Country, the understanding of the meaning of the term self-management varied, which also pointed to particular issues addressed in different squats. As examples, two of the interviewees in EVA, Madrid (M3 and M5), mentioned that the term self-management is somewhat technical, and many people may not understand what it means. In their opinion, people might think it is business-related; or they may not realize that participating in open activities, that do not require any form of economic counterpart, imply other forms of collaboration (such as participating in maintenance and organizational activities, for example). In another case, when asked about their model of self-management in general, the interviewee from *La Dragona*, Madrid (M8), made a differentiation between self-employment and self-management. In his view, self-employment was related to activities that generated income for squatters, individually. It was quite conflicting, he told us, because a part of the activists considered it as an inappropriate way of making money from a social movement. Self-management, on the other hand, was associated with activities that generated resources for the maintenance and activities of the social center, collectives, or social movements. The interviewee in *Txantxarreka*, Basque Country (BC1), on his turn, mentioned that they were not seeking to be subsidized by the municipality, because they wanted to self-manage, strongly linking the idea of self-management to self-funding.

In fact, *raising funds and other resources* for different activities is here considered our *sixth general aspect* of self-management in the context of urban squatting movements. Financial resources are necessary to pay for supplies and guarantee the maintenance of squats, to support social movements and collectives, pay for electrical and water supply (when necessary), or even the occasional payment of fines due to legal proceedings (as observed during some interviews in the Basque Country), and many

others. As mentioned in chapter 5, squats may present us with many possible tools for gathering funds and other resources—including selling food and beverages in events, crowdfunding campaigns, donations, or even squatters' own resources, and others. When agreements are reached with local governments, it is also possible that they partially fund some of the venues or provide pecuniary aids for the squatters. In most cases, interviewees opined that the money raised was primarily (if not only) reverted to maintaining squats and funding collectives and social movements. However, there were also examples in which it was broadly accepted—or even desirable—that part of the money raised was destined to the people who worked in events and other activities, which seemed to be a recurrent case in the RMBH.

Of that money from the events, a part is for the families who worked at the events, because we also want this space to generate jobs and income. As [BH4] mentioned, part of the families is unemployed or has very precarious jobs, insufficient to guarantee a [minimum] income. So, part [of the money raised] is directed to who worked at the events, who cooked, who sold. Another part is directed to the movement [or the maintenance of the building] (BH3/*Pátria Livre*).

As discussed in this session, self-management presents squatting movements with many positive aspects, such as the possibility of defining rules and making choices that respond to different realities and scales, including a significant plurality of participants (in terms of origins, political views, age, gender, class and others). Ideally, self-management also implies horizontality-based processes, as a way to promote true and broad participation of the actors involved. On the other hand, hierarchical relationships can exist, and, in some cases, they may lead to conflictive situations among squatters. In other occasions, low attendance to assemblies and other meetings, or a limited number of participants in workgroups may also be a limiting factor. Different views on self-management, internal disagreements, or difficulties in reaching consensus may also imply time-demanding processes and, in the extreme, cause delays or even prevent certain activities from taking place.

Nevertheless, as a process that gives space for collective change, for learning from past experiences and improving for future situations, for proposing and experimenting, and for creating spaces that adapt and respond to community demands—for all this, this study contends that self-management is largely what makes squatting, in itself, a change. Moreover, from the many qualities and contradictions, strengths and

downsides that self-management presents us with, there is also a continuous shaping of a framework of practical experiences, which may be appropriated by other actors in the future. This study then suggests that self-management can be seen as a transformative tool for life and for social relations, which—why not?—can be adapted and used at various scales.

6.2. Networking as exchange, as strengthening, as survival

[...] for ‘social networks’, I refer not only to electronic ways of expression and interaction, but above all to the social milieu where social movements relate to each other by creating families of movements, political cultures and fertile grounds for the promotion of radical activism (M. A. Martínez López, 2015a, p. 9).

When referring to squatting movements, as much as self-management is a tool for coming up with new ideas and putting them into practice, networking is a powerful tool for mutual support, exchanging experiences and knowledge, for strengthening and legitimizing. The formation of networks can also occur in different scales, from local interactions to forging regional alliances or even international bonds. They may include other activists, collectives, social movements, institution-based actors (such as representatives of universities, religious institutions, or even political parties), people from surrounding neighborhoods and other squats, and many others. Networks can also be dynamic, being activated if necessary, their elements constantly changing over time. Other relationships can be more permanent, and their combined actions endure for longer. Furthermore, these ties may be informal, loose, and occasional or, to some extent, intentionally framed.

According to López (2013, 2015b) when squatters communicate with neighborhood communities and the local population, it makes it possible to argue for the legitimacy of the movement’s actions, attract people and collectives with similar concerns, draw attention to particular themes and social struggles, and also introduce new activists to usual practices within the movement. As presented in Chapter 5, in several of the cases addressed an important—and sometimes primary—objective was to be as open as possible to the surrounding neighborhoods, in the direction of becoming reference spaces for collective and alternative activities, discussing local demands and holding

meetings of local groups that might not yet have a safe space to conduct their own activities. Both the social centers in Madrid and the *gaztetxes* in the Basque country, in their majority, shared this remarkable quality. When visits occurred on dates and times when there were scheduled activities—as was the case in *La Ingobernable*, EVA, *La Quimera*, EKO and *La Enredadera* in Madrid, and also in *Lakaxita*, and *Kijera*, in the Basque Country— there was a significant flow of people, the greater the number of activities planned.

This concern with further integration with local communities was also an important feature in both land and building occupations in the RMBH. Even in the case of occupations mainly geared at providing housing as a primary and urgent need, forging ties with people from the vicinities and the city, and planning open activities was part of their agenda. Interviewees from *Pátria Livre* (BH3) and *Kasa Invisível* (Zenite, BH12, BH13) explicitly spoke of their desire to constitute themselves also as open and referential spaces, more focused on the local community in the former and the city as a whole in the latter. Perhaps an important differentiation to be made in relation to the other cases, especially in land occupations, neighborhoods in the making, would be precisely that in constituting themselves as neighborhoods, they must focus on their own demands first. However, as an interviewee from *Dandara* (BH2) observed, their struggles would bring improvements to other neighborhoods nearby as well, and this was why, in her opinion, it was important to have unity. For example, she told me, when they demand improvements—say, the construction of a school, a healthcare center, street paving and appropriate sewage systems—these are not exclusively for the people in *Dandara*. On the contrary, they would inevitably include other underserved districts nearby.

The organization of activities that promote integration with people from the “outside” also presents important opportunities and contributes to strengthening their demands. In this regard, it is actually possible to refer to all three addressed contexts in this study. When people living nearby (or people from other regions of the city and other places) participate in the activities organized in squats or even propose and organize new activities, they contribute to give meaning and to put into practice the idea of having open spaces for the community and the city; they show support for the squatters’ demands and initiatives to create self-managed spaces, alternative cultural venues,

housing spaces and others; they contribute to giving visibility to grassroots initiatives and social struggles; they may become more familiarized with the arguments, models of organization and modes of action of squatting (and other social) movements; and sometimes even become activists themselves.

Additionally, in contributing to bring to the plan of practice the squatters' arguments in favor of use value and the social function of property, and their ideals of fairer social relations and autonomy, a supportive community largely contributes to the legitimization of their demands. As consequences, squats may have better chances of permanence in both short—when sites are recently occupied they may be the target of immediate eviction actions—and long term; there may be further politicization and awareness of issues related to a broad range of social struggles; squatting movements may gather new members, which is vital since due to several factors (age, greater stability, work, low availability) there can be considerable fluctuation in the number of activists and many others.

There are many ways to integrate with others. From forming all kinds of organizations, participating artistically and culturally in the community, being politically active and protesting, to providing spaces and activities opened to other people who are not necessarily squatters are only a few possibilities. The act of sharing materials and do-it-yourself knowledge or disseminating information about the movement may also contribute to the construction of a cohesive network. In his article on Social Centers in Italy, Fucolti (2015, p. 197) cites as examples of such activities “study courses in music, photography, dancing, yoga and martial arts, movies, concerts, rehearsal and recording rooms, art exhibitions, restaurants and wine bars, libraries, legal advice, theatre, dancing hall and gyms, hacklabs and bookshops, etc.” As M. A. Martínez López (2015a, p. 9) points out, “instead of a house just for living, the building may be transformed into a public venue open to any kind of activities.”

For instance, it may serve as a meeting place for different political groups and campaigns who cannot enjoy other convenient or non censored spaces for their activities. It may host workshops, or collectives or solidarity kitchens. It may help as storage for all kinds of construction and artistic materials, plants, toys, books. Gardens on the rooftops and balconies are also common. Free or clandestine radio stations and do-it-yourself publications, zines or newspapers, may find adequate shelter in squats. Of course, squats are excellent venues for parties and the performance of musical gigs, theatre, films, circus,

dance, acrobatics, exhibitions, etc. (M. A. Martínez López, 2015a, pp. 9–10).

Many of these were mentioned as examples of activities that took place in the specific cases addressed in this research. While Fucolti (2015, p. 197) and M. A. Martínez López (2015a) focus on cases in the European context, examples cited during the interviews in the RMBH include movie sessions, concerts, theater groups and presentations, parties, workshops, discussions, classes, popular pre-ENEM¹⁷⁴ courses, book launches, communal kitchens and daycare, production of a newspaper and other publications, fairs, carnival blocks rehearsals and many others. As exemplified by one of the interviewees from the RMBH, these may include a wide diversity of people and activities, including some that are generally not part of the daily routine of occupations:

[...] in the morning the church sisters would have a moment there with the families and make donations of things, in the afternoon there would be students, militants and in the evening the punks would make *saraus*. So, although it was a housing occupation, at *Caracol*,¹⁷⁵ we experienced this artistic confluence as well (BH5).

[Since the occupation of the *Espaço Comum Luiz Estrela*], I started trying to converge these dimensions, to take the theater we produced at *Trupe Estrela* into [other] occupations and to conduct Theatre of the Oppressed workshops.¹⁷⁶ Last year we took FIT, the main theater festival here in Belo Horizonte, International Theater Festival,¹⁷⁷ to the occupations (BH5).

As suggested by M. A. Martínez López (2013), the possibilities of strengthening and legitimizing offered by such connections are even more significant when linked to other

¹⁷⁴ The *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* [National Secondary Education Exam], ENEM, is currently the main form of evaluation for access to higher education in Brazilian public universities.

¹⁷⁵ *Caracol* was a building occupation for housing in Belo Horizonte, which lasted for three months, between 2006 and 2007.

¹⁷⁶ The *Espaço Comum Luiz Estrela* [Luiz Estrela Common Space] is a mainly cultural squat existing in Belo Horizonte since 2013.

The Theatre of the Oppressed was created by Brazilian dramaturge and militant Augusto Boal. It is a methodology of social-political intervention and investigation of the power structures that are at the core of oppression, in order to contribute to the struggles of the oppressed, to individual and collective emancipation and to social transformation (for more on the subject see also Barbosa & Ferreira, 2017).

¹⁷⁷ The FIT, International Theatre, Stage and Street Festival, has been held for over 20 years in Belo Horizonte. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2XteC0l> on 13 Apr. 2020.

squats, and other groups and organizations in districts and cities. Interactions with other squats are a way to exchange knowledge, experiences, materials, and others, and may even contribute to having a place to stay or meet in case of evictions. Together with links with other initiatives, social movements and collectives, these connections may add to the many causes supported by squatters, also contributing to broadening and enhancing a mutual support network. Other actors such as university faculty, students, architects, lawyers, and other professionals that support squatting movements can provide juridical advice, participate in urban plans, maintenance activities, the construction of vegetable gardens, the implementation of alternative sanitation techniques, and many others, depending on each case.

As suggested by Padrones Gil (2017) in her research on the squatting movement in the Basque Country, it would not be possible to solve some situations without professional allies, as for example legal advice. Legal proceedings involve large amounts of money, especially if the case is lost, but they can be dramatically reduced with the support of lawyers who can help avoid or mitigate the cost of paying fines, and also for working at reduced prices (Padrones Gil, 2017). As an example, two of the interviewees from San Sebastian (BC6, BC7),¹⁷⁸ were activist lawyers who participated in a collective of lawyers of the Basque Country, named *Askatasun Kolektiboetarako Abokatuak* (AKAB), or *Abogados y Abogadas por las Libertades Colectivas* [Men and Women Lawyers for Collective Liberties]. The collective included not only lawyers and jurists but also law students and people with other qualifications who wished to contribute.

As the interviewees reported, although they had been acting collectively for some time, in 2018 they presented themselves publicly for the first time. Among their activities, they carry out formation and counseling work not only for squatting but for social movements in general. These include themes such as what to do when facing arrests or evictions, how repression by the state and the police works, what are the consequences of squatting (or other) actions, what are the risks taken, etc. In case of

¹⁷⁸ Based on the interview with BC6 and BC7, both lawyers who provide legal support for social movements in the Basque country, especially in San Sebastian. BC6 and BC7 have been participating in activities in *gaztetxes* for several years, but they do not consider themselves as squatters. BC6 has also participated as an activist in the student movement and in the anti-repression movement, in which he continues to be involved as a lawyer.

legal problems, the collective also offers support. Their activities, the interviewees observed, are carried out with different collectives, in *gastetxes*, at the university and other places. As a matter of principle, the collective does not express opinions on the decisions of the groups seeking their guidance, but only presents the legal implications of the different options.

Interactions between different squats and other actors are also an important feature in the context of the RMBH. Not only many leaderships and coordinators in land and building occupations are (or become) members of other social movements and/or collectives, there are several other initiatives that support them. As examples, there are collectives and groups that give legal advice, such as the *Coletivo Margarida Alves* [Margarida Alves Collective], focused on social movements, urban occupations, traditional communities, and others;¹⁷⁹ advice and support in architecture and urbanism, as the project *Arquitetura na Periferia* [Architecture in the Periphery], which also includes micro-financing for the purchase of construction materials or hiring specialized services;¹⁸⁰ promote collective and sustainable agriculture, such as the *Agroecologia na Periferia* [Agroecology in the Periphery] initiative, and many others. There is also a notable presence of Universities—represented by research and extension groups, faculty, and students, that propose and participate in several activities (mainly) when demanded. An eventual interaction with leftist political parties may also occur (as is also de case in Madrid and the Basque Country).

It is also important to mention a significant presence of religious entities (especially) in land occupations for housing in the RMBH. As pointed out by Moreira (2017), there is a religious element in the struggles for land (and we add, also in the struggles for housing, in general, in the RMBH), that exists and cannot be ignored. The religious aspect of these struggles, the author continues, depending on how it is experienced, may or may not be an obstacle to human emancipation (Moreira, 2017). In the case of the RMBH, more progressive groups of the church, and also some of the conservative branches of Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches are present. According to Moreira (2017), Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches are present in large

¹⁷⁹ Retrieved from <http://coletivomargaridaalves.org/> on 16 Jun. 2020.

¹⁸⁰ Retrieved from <https://arquiteturanaperiferia.org.br/> on 16 Jun. 2020.

numbers in Brazil,¹⁸¹ with great media insertion and permeability in various social groups, including those of low income. Aiming at profiting and accumulating capital, Moreira (2017) suggests, certain pastors and priests imply that to prosper individually is a blessing and that whoever gives more offerings and pays tithes religiously will be more blessed and have prosperous economic growth. The faithful masses, on their turn, do not see these actions as spoliation, but as a path to personal blessings (Moreira, 2017). On the other hand, certain groups of the church, adept of the Liberation Theology¹⁸² (although in smaller numbers), are strongly committed to the emancipatory causes of the less favored classes, with a critical, protesting, and subversive posture (Moreira, 2017). An outstanding example, the *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* [Pastoral Land Commission] (CPT), has an important involvement in the struggles for housing and land in the RMBH.

In referring to the existence of certain groups that interfere with internal dynamics, social relations and the production of space in land occupations for housing in the RMBH, one of the interviewees (BH5) opined that when the state is absent (state as public policies and recognition of the rights of possession over a territory), it contributes to undermining occupations in many ways. In his view, as in politics there is no empty space of power, not only drug trafficking but also other agents such as Neo-Pentecostal churches will operate in the sense of establishing a local power—which often goes against what the social movements advocate, defend and practice.

Even though the speeches and practices of religious entities in the context of the squatting movements exceed the scope of the present study, it is here suggested, however, that a direct correlation of the type *conservative-bad*, *progressive-good*, at

¹⁸¹ The main Pentecostal churches established in Brazil since 1910 are: *Congregação Cristã no Brasil*, *Igreja Evangélica Assembleia de Deus*, *Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular*, *Casa da Bênção*, *Igreja Pentecostal Deus é Amor* and *Igreja Pentecostal O Brasil Para Cristo*. There are hundreds of other Pentecostal churches. The main Neo-Pentecostal churches created in Brazil, since 1976, are: *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, *Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus*, *Comunidade Evangélica Sara Nossa Terra* and *Igreja Apostólica Renascer em Cristo* (Moreira, 2017).

¹⁸² The Liberation Theology defends, for example, ecumenism as a proposal of religious tolerance, the abolition of compulsory clerical celibacy—celibacy should be optional—the election of priests, bishops and even the Pope by the Christian communities and the end of priestly ordination of men or inclusion of priestly ordination of women, a proposal defended by the Feminist Movement of Liberation Theology (Moreira, 2017).

least in principle, should not be established as a baseline. It is important to consider the possibility that small churches and precarious temples located in land occupations may have different prerogatives than those of large and luxurious religious buildings on the “asphalt”, also adapting their practices to local realities—without excluding, naturally, the possibility of predatory practices such as those described above. Furthermore, internal relationships in occupations are complex, which would demand further investigation of particular cases.

Finally, especially in the case of some land occupations for housing in the RMBH, there is also an undeniable interference from drug-trafficking agents as referred to on more than one occasion in the course of this work. Although they should not be disregarded, it is important to note that whenever mentioned by interviewees, such agents were considered as harmful or undesirable. In some cases, it has been possible to control and/or avoid their presence in occupations—as exemplified in the previous session, from an interview with BH6/*Paulo Freire* occupation, and which can also be inferred from the excerpt below, from an interview with BH3/*Pátria Livre* occupation.

[...] There is a dynamic of occupations that unfortunately happens, especially when the occupation is in the periphery like ours, you see, we are inside a *favela*. [But this] is an occupation where there is no drug trafficking. We have managed to keep this environment here as a safe space, a really organized space, a space geared towards things beyond housing (BH3).

On the other hand, it is not possible to determine how enduring the absence of—or better saying, the distancing from—narcotrafficking agents will be. It is more likely that it demands a constant effort from leaderships, coordinators, and social movements, without, however, being able to find a permanent solution. After all, drug trafficking is a widespread, intricately, highly structured phenomenon, involving actors from very diverse origins, not to mention remarkably powerful (and violent). In this sense, as one of the interviewees (BH5) observed, there is no way to avoid some kind of contact or dialogue with drug trafficking agents. Sometimes, he told me, it is needed in order to pacify relations or conflicts; in others, dialogue is necessary as a form of negotiation. In the interviewee’s opinion, their power to influence the production of space in an occupation is sometimes greater than that of the state.

Furthermore, from the cases addressed during the course of this research, it was also possible to note that the formation of networks can present variations in intensity, levels of activity and engagement, types and numbers of participants, and other factors. Not rare, supportive actors are called upon when a specific demand arises, without necessarily having permanent participation in a squat (or in squatting movements). In case of unexpected or urgent matters, such as eviction threats/orders/actions, cases of police violence or when it is necessary to pressure local governments to meet certain demands, very frequently squatters are able to swiftly activate a broader network in order to undertake collective actions—ranging from joint publications in social media and demonstrations to attempts to resist and remain in their spaces. It is not usual, however, that networks, in the context of squatting movements, are formally organized or structured as such by specific platforms. Fundamentally dynamic, squatters' networks are more frequently built upon looser ties of affinity, shared interests and different levels of availability and necessity.

As observed by Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández (2012), even though there have been some attempts, the squatters' movement in Madrid has not experienced a regular or formal coordination. The authors suggest that ties among squatters, however informal, “showed to be stronger than both the apparent ideological conflicts among squatters and the various attempts of failed coordination” (Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández, 2012, p. 175). Some of the opinions expressed by interviewees in the social centers seem to point in the same direction. In EKO, for example, the interviewee (M7) observed that even though from time to time he has seen attempts to organize networks of social centers in the city, such initiatives turned out to be only temporary because, in his view, each place had its own dynamics, its own difficulties. In his opinion it was preferable to build ties with other actors in Carabanchel (the neighborhood where EKO is located), based more on the territory than with a *supposed* squatting movement which would result in transforming Madrid.

I believe that, as I said before, I prefer to weave ties with other actors here in Carabanchel much more based on territory than with a supposed squatting movement in Madrid that will result in a transformation of Madrid. Well, I do not reject it, but I think that if we focus on specific territories and try to create alliances there, it is better (M7).

In other cases, squatters also pointed to more informal and eventual connections. As a few examples, the interviewee from *La Dragona* (M8) suggested that the music groups in that squat had many contacts with other social centers and that activists, individually, also visited other venues, participating in their activities. He also mentioned that the presence of many social movements and neighbors' associations in *La Dragona* was an important factor for them. The interviewees from *Bankarrota* observed that they still had a relationship of collaboration with *La Salamandra*, sometimes planning activities together. One of them (M10) also mentioned that one of the first collectives he participated in had meetings in *Eskalera karacola*. According to him, even though it was a space for women, the men in his former collective never experienced any limitations in that social center. In EVA, one of the interviewees (M6) mentioned that he also conducted *capoeira* classes in *La Ingobernable*.

In some cases, however, squatters expressed a desire for a more structured integration among social centers. One of the interviewees in EVA (M6) opined that he missed further synergy between social centers. "There is, for example, no [mutual] agreement among the squats, no [general] assembly, no general organization. Each squat goes one by itself, and each squat has its own characteristics. They are [still] very segregated, segmented from each other" (M6).

It should be mentioned, however, that more recently was created the *Red de Espacios de Madrid Autogestionados* [Network of Self-Managed Spaces in Madrid], REMA.¹⁸³ Integrated by 22 different initiatives, among them *La Ingobernable*, *La Enredadera*, *La Salamandra* and EVA, their first public presentation occurred during an open assembly in January 2020.¹⁸⁴ In their founding Manifest, they placed the right to the city as the binding element of the different points of view present in self-managed spaces of the city. They called upon the neighborhoods of Madrid, movements, platforms, collectives, and associations that participated in self-managed spaces, organizations that worked to create a more just and sustainable society, and the people of the city to stand against mediatic discredit, institutional persecution and the retraction of social,

¹⁸³ Retrieved from REMA on Facebook <https://bit.ly/2UNVJTz> on 04 Jun. 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Retrieved from *Comunizar* online <https://bit.ly/2zxkIW> on 04 Jun. 2020.

equality, environmental and democratic participation policies.¹⁸⁵ Part of their Manifest can be read below:

We are the social centers and the community spaces that have existed, exist and will exist in Madrid, we are many gazes, but only one to defend your right to the city. Will you join us?

[...] In recent times, there has been an increase in the harassment of institutions against social centers, self-managed, communitarian, and citizen managed spaces, which have been contributing for many decades to the solidary and democratic construction of the neighborhoods of Madrid. These spaces, created from citizen demands, self-organization and often legitimate civil disobedience as a form of collective expression of the right to the city, question the logic of a system that makes us all users or clients of a city in which we should be the main protagonists of its construction.

[...] Let us collectively defend these spaces and, consequently, the right to build a better city together. Let us continue to weave dreams to show that another world is possible.¹⁸⁶

In the case of the Basque Country, as previously mentioned, it is quite common that people who were part of the squatting movements back in the 1980s still currently participate in *gaztetxes*, other squats and self-managed spaces. Some of the interviewees even expressed concern in relation to the meaning of the term *gaztetxe*, as house of the youth, that might no longer fit the plurality of people from different generations in this and other social movements. In this regard, as suggested by Padrones Gil (2017), although there are squatted spaces with the same ideological tendencies as those that emerged in the 1980s, it is rare for them to come into close contact. In this sense, the author continues, the older squatters rarely get close to the new squats—although they always support them. In some spaces, therefore, there is neither a transmission nor a generational relay, which leads to a weakening of the movement (Padrones Gil, 2017).

There have been, however, some attempts to compensate this gap and to create more cohesive networks aiming to consolidate the squatting movement in the Basque Country. According to Padrones Gil (2017), mainly two institutions have been created for this: the *asambleas de okupación* [squatting assemblies] of the various territorial

¹⁸⁵ Retrieved from REMA on Facebook <https://bit.ly/2UNVJTz> on 04 Jun. 2020.

¹⁸⁶ Retrieved from REMA on Facebook <https://bit.ly/2UNVJTz> on 04 Jun. 2020.

zones and the *Oficina de Okupación* [Squatting Office] of each of them. Ideally, Padrones Gil (2017) observes, the different squatting assemblies would try to put together aspects shared by all the squatted spaces while devising strategies against repression; and the offices were intended to be places to legitimize the movement, including legal advice in case of eviction, identification or complaint.

The information shared during interviews, however, revealed different understandings and knowledge among squatters about the existence and functioning of these initiatives. When interviewees mentioned their existence, they usually acknowledged their important part in improving communication among squats. In some cases, interviewees identified different initiatives or an intermittent operation instead of a continuous existence. Lack of available time for participants to engage with or to organize their activities was also mentioned, and some squatters were unsure whether some of them were still active.

As examples, the interviewee in *Txantxarreka* (BC1) noted that there had been attempts to form an assembly of all *gaztetxes* in San Sebastian. According to him, some of their main objectives were to have general meetings every two months, to build a list of available resources in different *gaztetxes* (which could be exchanged), and to organize the activities planned in different venues, so that they did not coincide. In his opinion, however, it was not very efficient in part due to the lack of available time by the participants. A member of the Squatting Office of San Sebastian (BC17) recalled that around 2017, there was an assembly of *gaztetxes* active, which attempted to organize collective activities. Even though he opined that after that experience, the communication between different squats improved and that, in his opinion, it would be good to have a general meeting at least every three months, he was not sure whether it was still active or not. The interviewee in *Kijera* (BC16), also in San Sebastian, mentioned having knowledge of two *coordinadoras de gaztetxes* [gaztetxes' coordinators] that seemed to try to organize a more general network.

Similarly, a squatter from *Maravillas* (BC3), in Pamplona, mentioned that there was an organized network in the city called *coordinadora de gaztetxes*. According to him, their primary objectives were to coordinate the activities in different *gaztetxes*, so that there were no overlapping events, in addition to having a cohesive network of mutual

support. Another interviewee (BC14) referred to a *coordinadora de gaztetxes* of the Basque Country—while the interviewee in *Txantxarreka* (BC1) mentioned the existence of a "big table" of all the *gaztetxes* in the Basque Country, that met about every three months. Although not all *gaztetxes* participated, he observed, it was a valuable opportunity to discuss their general situation. Finally, the interviewee from *Lakaxita* (BC2), in Irun, mentioned that they had rarely managed to coordinate the *gaztetxes*, as a whole. Nonetheless, in her opinion, it would be positive to have eventual general meetings, share knowledge, discuss internal conflicts, exchange information on how other squats have been dealing with property issues, and others.

On the other hand, many of the squatters mentioned more fluid and informal connections between different *gaztetxes*. As examples, the interviewees from *Txantxarreka* (BC1), *Errekaleor* (BC9, BC10 and BC11), and *Putzuzulo* (BC12) opined that squatters visit other *gaztetxes* and participate in discussions and other activities. The interviewees from *Talka* (BC4, BC5) affirmed that there was mutual support among the occupations of Vitoria, where they were located, including the exchange of materials and tools. Additionally, they had a workgroup specifically dedicated to making external contacts with other squats of women in other cities to know their projects, learn from them and exchange knowledge. In other cases, it was mentioned (BC2/*Lakaxita*, BC9, BC10 and BC11/*Errekaleor*) that a network of *gaztetxes* can be quickly activated when urgent actions of mutual support are necessary. Below is an excerpt from a manifesto published on the occasion of the eviction of *Maravillas Gaztetxea*, also in support of *Kijera Gaztetxea*, under eviction threat at the time.

We are all Maravillas

We say that we are all *Maravillas* and, at the same time, that this is not a *gaztetxe*, but a way of understanding the world. For some time now, these have ceased to be simple slogans to materialize in practice. We are one when it comes to building our projects in our towns and neighborhoods, and we are one when it comes to defending them. And as it could not be otherwise, we have all participated side by side in *Maravillas'* exemplary struggle, and we continue to do so. That is why we see the need to raise our voices in unison in their defense against what has happened in recent weeks and certain political positions that we heard again after the recovery of space, after a massive demonstration, and its subsequent new eviction.

[...] In conclusion, we want to reaffirm our support for *Maravillas* in this struggle, whose spirit is stronger today than ever and which will sooner

or later conquer a space. We also send our greetings of solidarity to *Kijera Gaztetxea* in *Donostia* [Basque for San Sebastian], which is in danger of being evicted.

[Signed by:] *Barañaingo Gaztetxea, Burlatako Gaztetxea, CSOA Esparru Gaztetxea, Errotxapeako Gaztetxea CSOA, Maravillas Gaztetxea, Taupada Gaztetxea.*¹⁸⁷

In the case of the RMBH, there are no specific initiatives geared at forming and organizing a specific network of all squats, promoting general meetings and collective activities among squatters. Additionally, none of the interviewees reported attempts in this direction. However, as previously mentioned, several of them were organized by (or with the participation of) social movements. Especially in the case of occupations for housing, these organizations usually make themselves present for long periods of time, actively influencing and contributing to their organizational processes. These dynamics, to a certain extent, inserts squats into the logics and circuits of the social movements themselves. The social movements, in turn, are usually part of formally organized networks at national level. As an example, MLB and the Popular Brigades¹⁸⁸ are both members of the *Frente Povo Sem Medo* [People Without Fear Front]¹⁸⁹ created in 2015 with the aim of mobilizing various social movements and collectives in opposition to policies of austerity, dismantling of rights and others.

¹⁸⁷ Published on 25 Jan. 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/maravillasgztetxea/> on 04 Jun. 2020.

¹⁸⁸ As much as it was possible to verify, MLB and the Popular Brigades are currently the most active social movements in terms of organizing or participating in the organizational processes of urban squats in the RMBH. From the total of 66 identified occupations in the course of this research (see the complete table in Appendix C), at least 15 were organized by or with the participation of social movements. From these, in only one case neither the Popular Brigades nor the MLB participated in organizational processes.

¹⁸⁹ The following initiatives participate in the *Frente Povo Sem Medo*: *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto* (MTST), *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT), *Central dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras do Brasil* (CTB), *Intersindical - Central da Classe Trabalhadora*, *União Nacional dos Estudantes* (UNE), *União Brasileira dos Estudantes Secundaristas* (UBES), *Associação Nacional dos Pós Graduandos* (ANPG), *Federação Nacional dos Estudantes do Ensino Técnico* (Fenet), *Uneafro*, *Círculo Palmarino*, *União de Negros pela Igualdade* (Unegro), *Igreja Povo de Deus em Movimento* (IPDM), *União da Juventude Socialista* (UJS), *Rua - Juventude Anticapitalista*, *Coletivo Juntos*, *União da Juventude Rebelião* (UJR), *Juventude Socialismo e Liberdade* (JSOL), *Coletivo Construção*, *Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Vilas e Favelas* (MLB), *Mídia Ninja*, *Coletivo Cordel*, *União Brasileira de Mulheres* (UBM), *Bloco de Resistência Socialista*, *Rede Emancipa de Educação Popular*, *Brigadas Populares*, *Coletivo de Mulheres Olga Benário*, *Juventude da Esquerda Marxista* and *Coletivo Literatura Marginal*. Retrieved from SINSEJ online <https://bit.ly/2AGgHgu> on 18 Jun. 2020.

Nevertheless, even though this correlation may result in forms of mutual support and contribute to giving visibility to squatters' demands—including, for example, sharing information on a larger scale, announcing and mobilizing people to demonstrations, producing collective notes of repudiation against eviction threats and police violence, among others—this specific type of structured networking was not mentioned by any of the interviewees. On the other hand, most of them referred to the eventual activation of mutual support networks in case of necessity, informal ties with other squats, groups or initiatives with similar scopes and/or concerns, and the eventual presence of supportive collectives and/or activists, related to a number of specific demands. As shared by a squatter from *Kasa Invisível*,

a strategic point is for us to have web pages, to have channels in all possible media, to open the space [...] so that other collectives that do not have their own space can hold their events, their meetings, their seminars, their internal or external events, and their parties to raise funds as well. So, we now permeate several groups in the city. We have a good relationship with the other housing movements. Thanks to their tips and information exchanges, we were able to get [regular water supply]. [...] A lot of the structure that we have now is due to this good relationship with other movements, other collectives. Also, the legitimacy that we have in the city, before the public power in a negotiation—either in the Judiciary, there in court, or in the mediated conversation that we are also starting with the Public Prosecutor's Office, and with the Public Patrimony too [...]. All this is creating a basis for legitimacy, to put it this way, and solidarity, two things that I think are fundamental for us to secure the house in the event of an eviction process [...] (Zenite).

Interviewees from *Dandara* (BH2), *Paulo Freire* (BH6) and a member of MLB (BH1) also mentioned that in urgent situations, differences are left aside, making it possible to quickly activate multiple actors to act collectively. As illustrated by BH2, “whenever something [happens]: 'ah, *Eliana Silva*, demonstration, let's go', '*Tomás Balduino*¹⁹⁰ has an eviction order, let's go', '*Izidora*, there is a problem there, let's go there too', you know?” Moreover, from the information shared by squatters and other activists, this type of networking, which becomes more apparent and stronger in moments of necessity, in the case of occupations for housing, is more usual than constant informal

¹⁹⁰ Two squats were identified with the name *Tomás Balduino*, both land occupations for self-construction in the RMBH. One of them is located in the city of Ribeirão das Neves and started in 2014. The other, started in the same year, is located in the city of Betim.

interactions by affinity and shared interests. The latter exists, though, and may also occur between different types of squats.

The presence of social movements, technical advisors, supportive collectives, university-related groups and others were also frequently mentioned during interviews. While, in most cases, squatters saw their interactions as positive, they sometimes also pointed to more contentious issues, indicating that even well-intentioned initiatives may not come free of contradictions. As examples, it was mentioned that sometimes certain groups did not respect the dynamics of life in occupations (the interviewee, BH2, was talking specifically about *Dandara*) and impose dates and times when residents cannot attend. Other initiatives, she added, seemed to intend to do some kind of "charity", treating squatters as "poor wretches"—which is not how they see themselves—instead of proposing activities aimed at their empowerment. Furthermore, the interviewee continued, other groups would give advice, but without providing squatters with enough information to “move on without having that advice a second, third, fourth time, right? Which is one way of keeping us prisoner” (BH2).

In another case, the interviewee from *Vitória* occupation (BH10) explained that in order to discuss the demands in a territory, it is necessary to have an experience of it, "to be with your feet on the ground, with your feet in the mud, in the dust." Therefore, she affirmed, in our combined work with social movements, in their work within the community, "we always say at every moment that we are the ones who live in the territory, we know what is best for us, right?" In her opinion, sometimes there was a certain divergence of ideas, and at some moments it seemed that social movements and/or supportive collectives were “deciding their [own] lives; they forget that the life is ours [...] and they forget to ask if we think it is really good” (BH10).

It is also important to mention that such complex networks of activism and solidarity may occur across different cities or even countries (Vasudevan, 2015, 2017b); contributing to the formation of a “transnational network of shared experiences and material-spatial infrastructures” (M. A. Martínez López, 2015b, p. 252); and also to the creation and strengthening of common identities of the squatting movements. In this sense, as proposed by Owens (2013), squatting networking is also related to mobility. In his opinion, however, squatters’ mobility may give rise to internal tensions and

contradictions, because “networks and links built on mobility are often maintained by and oriented towards the needs of the most affluent and elite participants, since they are the ones who can most easily travel” (Owens, 2013, p. 192).

In the cases addressed, however, connections between squats and other initiatives were more frequent when they were active or located in the same neighborhood, city, or region. Additionally, mobility by traveling is certainly more frequent in the European context (to which the authors above refer) for different reasons—as for example, the better economic situation of some squatters, improved access to different modes of transportation and others. Nonetheless, while in the Basque Country several interviewees mentioned visits to *gaztetxes* in different cities, this was not the case in Madrid. This may be related to the large difference in scale and population between the city of Madrid (over three million inhabitants)¹⁹¹, and the municipalities visited in the Basque Country (ranging from just over 20,000 in Zarautz to around 250,000 in Vitoria)¹⁹²—and in a correlated manner to a higher number of social centers in Madrid in comparison to the number of *gaztetxes* per city in the Basque Country. In the RMBH, only one interviewee from a land occupation for housing (BH6/*Vitória* occupation) mentioned the possibility of raising funds for traveling. The other example was provided by a squatter from *Kasa Invisível*:

our idea is to have even more contacts. When we travel, everybody here among us, when we leave the city or when we go around the city, we try to strengthen bridges between other autonomous spaces, mainly occupations. For us to support each other and to know: "what solutions have we come up with in this situation?" So, we have to create this accumulation and make it circulate so that other people can do that [too], right? Unlike a capitalist logic, a liberal logic, we have no competition. We win more, the more other people win, right? (Zenite).

Occasional international interactions were also mentioned during the interviews, but in a punctual manner and most of the time referring to visits received and not to travels made—and also when referring to supporting migrants, as previously mentioned in this study. Two isolated but curious examples of international references found in squats occurred during my visit to *Errekaleor*, in Vitoria, Basque Country, where there was an

¹⁹¹ Retrieved from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* online <https://www.ine.es/index.htm> on 19 Jun. 2020.

¹⁹² Retrieved from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* online <https://www.ine.es/index.htm> on 19 Jun. 2020.

MST flag loosely placed on a chair; and in *Kasa Invisível*, in the RMBH. In the latter, in some pamphlets and on a few walls of the building can be found references to the squatting symbol composed of a circle with a broken arrow (Figure 21)—which while very common in the European context, was observed only in this case in the RMBH. Additionally, the letter “K” instead of “C” in the word *Kasa* (in Portuguese, the official spelling is with “C”) suggests the same distinctive use of language that is very usual in the squatting movements in Madrid and the Basque Country.

In this sense, while it can be said that some international references and interconnections were identified, and while this study does not exclude the possibility of further international ties, in the cases addressed, local and/or regional bonds were more frequent and stronger. Similarly, in general, the smaller or more local the scale, the more networking seemed to be part of squatters' everyday life. This study also suggests that squatters' networks are flexible, permeable, and changeable, formed by more or less stable bonds based mainly on affinity, exchange, solidarity, and mutual aid. In addition to being based on collective interests, the individual (and sometimes provisional) initiatives of squatters who participate and propose activities in different spaces, participate in collectives, social movements and other groups have also proved valuable. Furthermore, although the commitment or engagement among certain actors may sometimes be only occasional, broader networks are often activated in cases such as eviction threats or actions, police violence, or even to give visibility to specific demands, and others.

Thus, although some of the interviewees have expressed a desire for greater organization or structuring of network relationships, at the same time as more flexible and provisional ties have proved more frequent, there is still a strong networking character in squatting movements. However different the squatters' views on interactions with other actors may be, in the cases addressed, networking itself was widely perceived as desirable and beneficial. On the other hand, in the specific case of land occupations for housing in the RMBH, some of the interviewees identified important contradictions in their relations with supportive collectives, groups and/or other social movements. These included actions that disregarded local dynamics, or failed to establish knowledge exchanges that contributed to the empowerment and greater autonomy of squatters. In Madrid and the Basque Country diverging opinions

were more frequently associated with failed attempts of further organization of local and regional networks of squatters. In this sense, as in the case of self-management, networking does not come unchallenged by conflicting issues. Nonetheless, it is also clear that it is an important tool of knowledge exchange between squatters and other activists, strengthening and legitimization of their initiatives. While individual squats may not endure, networking practices can contribute to the transmission of past experiences over time, and to the survival of unfulfilled ideals for the future.

Finally, this study also suggests that squatters do not see their initiatives as independent or isolated, but as part of a whole—one that includes many different views, but that also shares important common interests, features and modes of action, fundamentally opposing the status quo. In this sense, we follow the understanding of several authors that consider squatting not as restricted forms of activism, but as social movements in themselves (as for example Babic, 2015; Martínez, 2020; Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández, 2012; Owens, 2013; M. L. de Souza, 2010 and others). Following what M.L. de Souza (2006) proposes (when he affirms that every movement is an activism, but the reciprocal is not true) at the same time as they are conformed by site-specific experiences, squatters' movements are particularly ambitious and critical, committed to more general, universal ethical values and broader political goals. Nonetheless, important contextual differences and other particularities, as illustrated in the course of the present research, added to a marked variation in terms of integration on different scales, indicate that if we can talk about squatting movements, it would be inaccurate to consider squatting as a single movement on a global scale.

7. CRIMINALIZATION, CONTRADICTIONS AND A FEW CROSSROADS, OR: AGAINST THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF EMPTY WORDS, EMANCIPATION AND MEANING

From the creation and nurturing of underground spaces and circuits of musical, cultural and other artistic activities, specialized libraries and documentation centers, communication infrastructures by means of the internet, and non-profit community cooperatives and projects (M. A. Martínez López, 2015b); and by creating spaces for the convergence of social movements and collectives, and putting into practice alternatives for an infinitude of demands and struggles, squatting practices have proven their potency as socially articulated movements. On the other hand, it is important to note that squatting movements are also fast-changing, and frequently influenced by the political context (Lledin, 2015). Constant evictions and displacements may also lead to a high degree of nomadism in squatting movements and also contribute to a rapid turnover of activists, who may choose not to continue in conditions of great instability such as these (M. A. Martínez López, 2015b).

Furthermore, although they share important features and principles, squatting movements are immersed in different historical, social, cultural, and economic contexts that directly influence their struggles. Similarly, as much as squatters come from different backgrounds and have different interests, squats may also include different political views, modes of organization and strategies, in order to meet certain ends. In other words, while it may be more noticeable that squatting movements have important differences between them due to their historical conformation, and also to the contexts in which they are inserted, there are also differences within the squatting movements themselves, which can lead to quite challenging issues.

Notable examples are legal issues, criminalization, and the formalization of agreements. A first and general contradiction in the contexts addressed comes from the fact that although both Brazil and Spain have well-established constitutional regulations that institute housing as a fundamental right and bind the right to private property to the fulfillment of its social function, the levels of housing and social-spatial injustice in both countries are still alarming, and constitute key reasons for squatting. At the same time as instruments for curbing real estate speculation prove insufficient,

squatters are increasingly criminalized and suffer with eviction threats and actions, not to mention the recurrent episodes of state and police violence. The rights of private owners are customarily prioritized, even when they fail to fulfill their legal obligation to assure the social function of private properties.

Another controversial issue relates to the legal status of squats. For different reasons, squatters from all three addressed contexts sometimes seek to negotiate agreements and/or use cessions with governmental institutions and formal owners, not without being challenged by the effects of achieving a more “stable” situation. Thus, in a double relation of homogenization-obliteration, the possibility of reaching agreements may result in less autonomy of the squatters, or even in the weakening of collective projects and community ties—in the direction of homogenization. On the other hand, if an agreement is not possible or desirable, in their choice to remain disobedient, squatters often become targets of eviction and further criminalization—having as a final objective the obliteration of their initiatives.

7.1. *Enquanto morar for um privilégio, ocupar será um direito!*¹⁹³ The right to housing in Brazil and related issues in the RMBH

As previously mentioned, after 21 years of military dictatorship (1964-85), during the re-democratization period, a new Constitution was written and became effective in Brazil. In addition to enumerating democratic fundamental rights, the Constitution of 1988 also provided instruments to prevent these rights from being disrespected. One of the important changes expressed in the new Constitution was the binding of the right to private property to the fulfillment of its social function.¹⁹⁴ This notion refers to prioritizing the interests of the collectiveness instead of those of individuals, in a fair

¹⁹³ For as long as housing remains a privilege, to occupy will be a right! This tagline (and its variations) is often mentioned in the speeches of social movements for housing and activists in Brazil. On one occasion, during an interview in the Basque Country (BC17), another similar motto was mentioned: *casa sin gente, gente sin casa, la okupación es legítima!* [houses without people, people without a house, squatting is legitimate!]. It resembles yet another catchphrase often repeated in the Brazilian context, which reads: *tanta casa sem gente, tanta gente sem casa...* [so many houses without people, so many people without houses...].

¹⁹⁴ Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988, Oct. 5, 1988. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Qhkpl1> on 27 Mar. 2020.

way. This implies that unproductive lands or abandoned buildings, especially for ends of speculation, may not be fulfilling their social function. Furthermore, the right to housing was included as a fundamental social right in the constitution by a constitutional amendment in the year 2000.¹⁹⁵

In this context, the National Forum of Urban Reform (see footnote 32 in chapter 3) proposed a public fund for low-income Brazilians to purchase and reform homes, buy construction materials and equipment, urbanize informal settlements and conduct landholding regularization processes—as a result, after years of advocating, the *Fundo Nacional de Habitação de Interesse Social* [National Fund for Social Interest Housing] (FNHIS), was created in 2005 (Osborn, 2013). Moreover, in 2001 the instruments of urban policy listed in the Constitution were formally regulated by the Brazilian law n. 10.257/2001, the *Estatuto da Cidade* [City Statute], as already mentioned in chapter 4. This law has as some of its general guidelines the right to sustainable cities (Art. 2), the democratic and participative management of urban projects and policies (especially Art. 2, 4, 40, 43, 44 and 45), and the fulfillment of the social function of properties, while at the same time regulating instruments aimed at avoiding real estate speculation (see for example Art. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 39).¹⁹⁶

More recently, in 2019, a revised version of the *Plano Diretor* [Master Plan] of Belo Horizonte, municipal law n. 11.181/2019, was approved. It is the main urban policy instrument of this municipality, which regulates the city planning and has, as one of its bases, the fulfillment of the social function of urban property, in accordance with the City Statute. In its Art. 15, this law asserts that for its purposes, *housing* is considered decent housing inserted in the urban context, provided with infrastructure of urban services and community facilities.¹⁹⁷ In this sense, both the right to decent housing and the fulfillment of the social function as a condition for the right to private property have

¹⁹⁵ Constitutional Amendment n. 26, Feb. 14, 2000. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3dsjvLk> on Jun. 22, 2020.

¹⁹⁶ Brazilian law 10.257, Jul. 10, 2001. City Statute. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2WdF4Ky> on 27 Mar. 2020.

¹⁹⁷ Municipal law 11.181, Aug. 08, 2019. Master Plan of Belo Horizonte. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2R1Tt9f> on 01 Apr. 2020.

been constituted as national and municipal legislation over at least three decades in Brazil.

Furthermore, in 2009 a large-scale public housing construction program was launched nationwide by the federal government: the *Programa Minha Casa Minha Vida* [My House My Life Program] (PMCMV). Operationalized by *Caixa Econômica Federal*, a government-owned bank, its objective was to provide (in its first phase) improved housing for an estimated 7 million Brazilians (or one million homes) residing in sub-optimal living conditions (Healy, 2014). To a large extent, the PMCMV aimed to address the housing deficit still existing in the country, despite all the guarantees of housing access already established by the existing legislation. In 2009 the estimated housing deficit corresponded to 5,998 million households, of which 84,8% were located in urban areas (Fundação João Pinheiro & Centro de Estatística e Informações, 2012). Contradictorily, the number of vacant dwellings reached 7,517 million unities, 72% of which in urban areas—of the total, 6,307 million were in conditions of being inhabited, 894 thousand were under construction or renovation, and 340 thousand were considered to be in a state of ruin (Fundação João Pinheiro & Centro de Estatística e Informações, 2012).

The most recent data on the estimated housing deficit in Brazil are for 2015. That year, it corresponded to 6,355 million households, 87.7% of which located in urban areas (Fundação João Pinheiro & Diretoria de Estatística e Informações, 2018). At the same time, the number of vacant dwellings reached 7,906 million, 80.3% in urban areas—of the total, 6,893 million were in conditions to be inhabited, and 1,012 million were under construction or renovation (Fundação João Pinheiro & Diretoria de Estatística e Informações, 2018). A number of reasons could begin to explain why with so many empty housing units (which exceeded in number the housing deficit in both years), there are still so many people without adequate housing conditions. The most obvious of them is real estate speculation. As most of the empty units constitute the market stock, they are not intended as part of the solution of a social problem or as a possibility to lowest income families. Instead, they are commodities that must secure the greatest possible profit.

Moreover, if we compare the housing deficit data from 2009 and 2015, it is also possible to say that the main objective of the PMCMV, that is, to reduce the housing deficit, is yet to be accomplished.¹⁹⁸ In fact, the PMCMV has been consistently criticized over the years for several reasons. The most frequently found criticism since the first units were built is that many of the dwellings are built in areas far from the city centers—some reports point to six hours per day in transit—without proper transportation or infrastructure (Douglas, 2015; Duarte & Benevides, 2013; Robertson, 2016). When under such conditions, people usually do not have adequate access to schools, healthcare facilities, recreational spaces, job supplies, and sometimes they even have problems keeping their employment positions. Not to mention the many psychological consequences that can result from such a situation, from the most basic elements of dignified housing to the more embracing conditions for a full and participative life, their right to the city is clearly compromised.

Additionally, there have been cases of PMCMV complexes built in territories controlled by militia groups that extort “taxes” from residents in return for basic services and security—those who do not pay may suffer retaliation, eventually losing access to services or even being evicted from their own apartments (Douglas, 2015; Healy, 2014; Marinatto & Soares, 2015; Robertson, 2016). Another complaint frequently found in reports and interviews is the higher price residents have to pay for utilities and other costs they were not counting on or just did not know about, such as electricity, water or condominium fees (Douglas, 2015; Robertson, 2016). There have also been criticisms regarding the quality of PMCMV buildings, encompassing both the size of the units, often too small for the large families that usually move in, and their technical-constructive characteristics. As examples can be mentioned two unfinished buildings in a housing complex in Niterói (Rio’s sister city across the bay) that needed to be demolished and rebuilt due to severe structural problems (Carvalho, 2013).

Furthermore, as the housing complexes are usually built by private construction companies, it is known that the PMCMV also came as an attempt to boost the national construction industry, offering the possibility of attractive profit rates. This is why, as

¹⁹⁸ Contributes to these numbers the fact that a significant portion of the PMCMV units have been destined to people evicted from their homes in *favelas*—caused, for example, by the urban renovations for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro—which do not necessarily count in the calculations of the housing deficit (Healy, 2014; Robertson, 2016).

Rolnik (2018) suggests, in addition to the fact that Brazil does not really have a historical model of housing policy, the PMCMV is more similar to a housing financing system. In the author's opinion, what is called a housing policy, in practice, becomes a discussion about the financing conditions for builders, or individuals and families in order to buy their houses, in a total capture by a financial and perverse logic (Rolnik, 2018). Another important aspect of this perverse logic would be, however, the negative impacts from the point of view of employment generation and production of housing units—as limited and criticized as they may be—accessible to different economic groups,¹⁹⁹ if the PMCMV were to be simply discontinued. According to the *Sindicato da Indústria da Construção Civil* [Civil Construction Industry Union], SindusCon-SP, between 2009 and 2019 more than 5 million homes were under contracts via PMCMV, and over 1 million jobs were created (Barbará, 2019).

Nonetheless, in recent years, there have been significant cuts to social programs, among them the PMCMV. As an example, according to Fenizola (2018), in addition to what was already a rather severe context, only 0.5% of the available resources were used between January and October 2018 for Category 1 (the lowest-income group of PMCMV). According to the author, this happened because it is the category that costs the federal government the most, with subsidies up to 90% of the building price. It is also unknown what the future of the PMCMV will be. After the 2018 presidential elections and at least since the beginning of 2019, although there have been rumors of possible reformulations of the Program, it is practically paralyzed. According to Rolnik (2019), by 2019, there were already no new contract offers in Category 1, and there was a considerable delay in releasing the resources for contracts already signed. On top of that, the author observes, those who were able to access the program were having more and more difficulties to honor the payments owed (Rolnik, 2019).

From the above, it is unavoidable to infer that the possibilities of so-called well-intentioned proposals formalized on paper are nearly exhausted in Brazil. For decades now, the country has had laws that “guarantee” access to decent housing, democratic

¹⁹⁹ The PMCMV in the modality “urban housing” contemplates the following income bands: category 1, families with income up to R\$ 1,800.00 (approx. 300 Euros); category 2, family income up to R\$ 2,600.00 (approx. 430 Euros); category 3, family income up to R\$ 4,000.00 (approx. 670 Euros); category 4, families with income up to R\$ 7,000.00 (approx. 1,170 Euros). Retrieved from *Caixa Econômica Federal* online <https://bit.ly/3exBUrn> on 25 Jun. 2020.

participation in the life of the cities, and the curbing of predatory practices of real estate speculation. A large-scale house construction program that was intended to address at least some of those issues has been in operation for over a decade. Nonetheless, in practice, what remains is a context of serious housing (and general socio-spatial) injustice, which is the main reason for squatting in the country. But *against the ineffectiveness of empty words, the emancipatory and meaningful practices of social movements*.

In the RMBH alone, as mentioned in chapter 5, over 20 thousand houses were built in land occupations in the last ten years. The actions of social movements that struggle for housing are not geared to profit, but instead to give meaningful uses to previously abandoned lands and buildings. Squatters and other activists formulate urban and environmental parameters, in addition to defining, reviewing, and discussing rules for self-management that regulate their organizational and decision-making processes. In their continued struggles, they aim to have greater participation in the life of cities, not limiting themselves to immediate and urgent housing needs. In their historical struggles, they have contributed to the formalization of rights (including those mentioned throughout this session) in the form of laws that, although of limited practical scope, as discussed, still contribute to the formulation of arguments and demands, as well as to legitimize their actions. In this sense, and while admitting the existence of contradictions and challenges, this study contends that *these* are the main agents that promote the conditions for decent housing in the country—and not the “benevolence” of government and state policies.

7.1.1. *Criminalization, repression, and related repercussions*

The *Eliana Silva 1* occupation was evicted three weeks later. We resisted for 36 hours, two days and one night. We were surrounded by 500 policemen of the Military Police of Minas Gerais [PM] who for the first time, used the armored car to intimidate the people who were bravely resisting. Besides the siege of the PM with a strong war apparatus, PM helicopters with rifles aimed at the people were making low flights. I will never forget those moments, as well as seeing children crying in terror, holding their mothers' legs, and crying out: "they will kill us, mom!" (BH7).

As previously discussed and exemplified in preceding chapters, this study argues that as a general assertion, squatters seek to find solutions for immediate or urgent needs, such as housing, but also to promote broader changes in life, including social, cultural, and economic aspects. Importantly, they do so in an indissoluble and mutually compelling way to the appropriation, adaptation, and production of their own specific spaces. This study also suggests that the spaces appropriated and reshaped in the context of squatting movements correspond or reflect as much as possible the changes aimed by squatters, their collective practices, their ideals for the future. At the same time, their socio-spatial practices ideally oppose the power imbalances squatters struggle against. Thus, squats may be considered, at least *in potentia*, spaces produced under a different logic from that imposed by neoliberal urban policies, and the commodification of everything. Other spaces, to evoke Foucault's (2008a) term.

In the course of the theoretical framing proposed in chapter 4, this study suggested that Foucault's (2008a) concept of *heterotopias* and Lefebvre's (1991) notion of *differential spaces* are possible spatial approaches to squats. However, in Foucault's view, heterotopias would be *absolutely* other spaces, *effectively realized* utopias that exist in a *completely different* logic than the logic that has been naturalized. On the other hand, Lefebvre's differential space is a space that *essentially subverts* the logics of abstract space—an instrumental and repressive space, dominated by the ruling classes, and a commodity in itself. Although the objective here is not to establish which theory fits best the squatting movements—or vice-versa—we suggest that both present compelling aspects that are certainly present in the socio-spatial practices of squatters. Squatter's practices and the spaces they create, on the other hand, demonstrate that it is definitively not an easy task to effectively realize utopias, neither to completely subvert the repressive logic of abstract space.

In part, this is related to the many challenges that squatters find in putting into practice self-management related precepts such as autonomy and horizontality, and also in the construction and maintenance of networks, as presented in chapter 6—all processes that require maturing, reformulation, time availability, and a myriad of social and political skills. Additionally, there are other contextual aspects and external actors (or, as Bastos et al., 2017 suggest, conforming agents of abstract space) that represent important obstacles to squatters' emancipatory practices and the conformation of their

spaces as *other spaces*. As a first and crucial conjunctural aspect, despite what social movements advocate, the arguments of activists and/or squatters, and the results of their struggles, their actions are mostly *criminalized, constantly stigmatized, and are often the target of evictions and other forms of violent repression by the state*.

In the case of Brazil, notwithstanding all the advances in terms of formalizing rights since the re-democratization period, in recent years, there has been an increasing hostility towards the actions of social movements and popular demands in the country. This can be exemplified by the sanction in 2016 of Law 13.260—also known as the Anti-Terrorism Law—and the discussions that followed it. Connected to the Olympic Games that took place in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff ratified it nearly five months before she was impeached. The anti-terrorism law regulates part of the 1988 Constitution by disciplining and defining terrorist acts and organizations—including the sabotage or the seizure of control of means of communication, transportation, public and private spaces.²⁰⁰

Even though it contains a clause directly related to the actions of social movements, apparently creating an exception,²⁰¹ according to Marques & Penteado (2017), from the political point of view, there is a fear that this law will be used to frame social movements and activists, notably since some precedents have already been registered—for example, in August 2016 four members of the MST were convicted of forming a *criminal organization*, setting the first time that this typification was legally used against the movement. Furthermore, there are currently several bills that propose changes in the anti-terrorism law, attempting to classify the act of occupying public and private spaces (by social movements) as a crime of terrorism. This is the case of the Bill 5065/2016, that proposes to suppress part of the text of the anti-terrorism law—precisely the paragraph translated on note 201—ironically calling it a "safe-conduct", the "shielding clause of social movements", or even a "legal authorization to good

²⁰⁰ Brazilian law 13.260, Mar. 16, 2016. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2QQ6t1C> on 28 Mar. 2020.

²⁰¹ The acts defined as terrorism *do not apply to the individual or collective conduct of persons in political manifestations, social movements, trade unions, religious, class or professional movements, directed by social or reclamation purposes, aiming to contest, criticize, protest or support, with the purpose of defending rights, constitutional freedoms and guaranties, without prejudice to the penal classification contained in law*. Law 13.260, Mar. 16, 2016. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2QQ6t1C> on 28 Mar. 2020.

terror, virtuous terrorism or inclusive terror."²⁰² Bill 9604/2018 suggests that the right of articulation of social movements is abusive, and serves to "disguise the nature of acts of terrorism, such as those involving the occupation of urban or rural property."²⁰³ Bill 9858/2018, in turn, clearly refers to a "terrorist activity of social movements" in the case of "invasion" of public buildings, private property, or the blocking of public roads.²⁰⁴ The latter, in its justification refers to activists as

vandals, thugs, and idlers, packed with stultifying slogans, [who] deprecate public and private property without shame in the name of the most diverse claims. It is not acceptable that ends justify anarchy, disorder, and acts against the right of private property and life.²⁰⁵

Finally, very recently, and explicitly related to demonstrations by anti-fascist groups that have been held in Brazil in opposition to the current federal government, Bill 3019/2020 was proposed. Although not directly related to the occupation of abandoned lands and buildings, this Bill proposes to amend the Anti-Terrorism Law in order to typify *antifa* groups (as textually written in the proposal) and other organizations *with similar ideologies* as terrorist groups.²⁰⁶ It is worth remembering that antifascism, as Bray (2019) proposes, was historically conformed as a method of political action and thinking, a locus of individual and group self-identification, adapting itself to mostly socialist, anarchist and communist pre-existing trends to a sudden need to react to the fascist threat (after the First World War).²⁰⁷ Contemporarily, the author suggests, the antifas oppose the extreme right and not only the literal fascists. Moreover, some antifa groups are more Marxist, while others are more anarchist and anti-authoritarian; some antifas may focus on destroying fascist organizations, and others may focus on building popular community power; depending on local contexts and politics, Antifa can be described as a type of ideology, a trend, environment, or a self-defense activity (Bray, 2019). From this brief contextualization, it is possible to note how broad, plural

²⁰² Bill 5065/2016, Apr. 04, 2016. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Nqp7eq> on 24 Sep. 2018.

²⁰³ Bill 9604/2018, Feb. 21, 2018. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2NI5sq7> on 24 Sep. 2018.

²⁰⁴ Bill 9858/2018, Mar. 22, 2018. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Yp44PL> on 24 Sep. 2018.

²⁰⁵ Bill 9858/2018, Mar. 22, 2018. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Yp44PL> on 24 Sep. 2018.

²⁰⁶ Bill 3019/2020, Mar. 22, 2018. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Z5keqX> on 23 Jun. 2020.

²⁰⁷ The first militant anti-fascist organization to resist Mussolini's squads in Italy was *Arditi del Popolo* [Daring of the People], founded in Rome by the anarchist Argo Secondari at the end of June 1921 (Bray, 2019).

and embracing the term *antifa* can be—and especially when adding the expression *similar ideologies* to the writing of this Bill, it becomes clear that once more, the intention is to criminalize social movements in general.

Although the aforementioned bills have not yet been passed, in the specific case of squatting movements, according to Franzoni (2018), squatters tend to be held responsible for criminal practices such as *esbulho possessório* [trespass, wrongful possession],²⁰⁸ and to infringe on owners' rights. As occupations are considered illegal, they are usually under constant risk of eviction—here including both land and buildings, for housing or other uses. Police violence is also frequently reported since the first moments after an occupation has taken place, when the police presence can be ostentatious and threatening, but also during evictions, demonstrations, and other situations. In such cases, in addition to several arbitrary arrests, physical violence can be especially severe. Reports of people present during police actions and registers in social media show the use of tear gas bombs, "non-lethal" weapons such as those of rubber bullets, and assaults with batons, among others. As illustrated by the following accounts, the presence of children and elderly people also does not seem to prevent the excessive and disproportionate use of force in some situations, as well as the methods of dispersion used may go far beyond what can be expected as a limit for police action.

For example, on July 24, 2014, we were blocking traffic on the *Linha Verde* [express route that connects downtown Belo Horizonte to Tancredo Neves International Airport, in the city of Confins], in front of the *Cidade Administrativa* [headquarters of the Minas Gerais State government]. Colonel S.N., commander of the Cavalry of the Shock Troop, was very upset because he was following orders from the Governor to clear the *Linha Verde*, because many people were missing their flights at Confins Airport. This was why Colonel S.N. authorized the Cavalry to rush past, trampling on the Homeless People of the Occupations who were blocking the *Linha Verde*. It was a very tough scene. [...] Anyway, after the order of Colonel S.N., the Cavalry ran over a lot of people. A cavalry soldier, when running over the people, put down the sword at the neck of E.J., of the *Eliana Silva* Occupation, from Barreiro. He did not kill him by a miracle. E.J. got his face carved by the sword. If it had struck his neck, it would have killed him on the

²⁰⁸ According to the Brazilian Penal Code (Decree-Law 2,848, Dec. 7, 1940), *esbulho possessório* [trespass, wrongful possession] is considered a crime of usurpation, which consists of *invading, with violence or serious threat, or with the participation of more than two people, land or buildings of others, to acquire possession*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2AxyUfF> on 15 May 2020.

spot. The sword hit E.J. in the face, leaving a tear. Barely not the artery in his neck. With refinements of cruelty, the Cavalry ran over the people who were blocking the road. E.J. fell to the ground, bleeding, and the Cavalry came back running, trampling again. Horses, in a humane posture, do not step on people. So, on the way back the horse did not step on E.J., who was passed out on the road (BH7).²⁰⁹

On the morning of June 19, 2015, we were facing the imminent eviction of the Izidora occupations, and we were organizing to march from Izidora to the *Cidade Administrativa*. [...] [Some of the] leaders of the Izidora occupations, called me: "G.H., we are marching, but when we arrived at the *Cidade Administrativa*, the Shock Troop attacked and injured many people. They arrested about 40, and there are more than 100 wounded. And it looks like they killed a child too." Later we learned that B.F., seven months old, from *Esperança* Occupation, was with her mother marching in a stroller. The PM's helicopter was making low flights and throwing [tear gas] bombs. A [tear gas] bomb fell on B.F.'s lap, seven months old. The mother, desperate, took the child and pulled her out of the stroller. The bomb that had fallen on the lap of the child fell to the ground and exploded. The mother ran out with the child suffocated in the middle of the cloud of tear gas. Thus, for very little, the military police of MG [Minas Gerais] did not kill a seven-month-old child who, together with her mother, was fighting for housing, a basic and fundamental human right (BH7).²¹⁰

This scenery of criminalization and insecurity is part of the reason why squatters in the RMBH are generally *prone to negotiate agreements* with the government (municipal, state and/or federal) and/or formal owners (when it comes to dealing with private properties)—a second aspect this study aims to emphasize. Not only this is a consequence of repressive policies, but also a reflection of squatters' need for stability, as they frequently mentioned during interviews. Housing as an extreme necessity in this context is deeply connected to a desire to stay in one place, to have a durable basis from which to fight for other rights and a fulfilling life. However, this study also suggests that achieving legal agreements or other forms of stability is quite challenging, for two main reasons. First, agreements have proven not only hard to achieve (fully implemented ones are, in fact, quite rare), they are usually rather fragile. Second, as will also be exemplified ahead, and at least as far as the cases addressed allowed to understand, these may imply losses in autonomy and losses in a "companion essence" or "identity of occupation, of community" as observed by some

²⁰⁹ The people mentioned by the interviewee were replaced with initials that *do not* correspond to their real names.

²¹⁰ The people mentioned by the interviewee were replaced with initials that *do not* correspond to their real names.

of the interviewees. Furthermore, agreements are usually based on existing legal parameters and urban policies, which, as we have seen, form the basis for the production of space in the traditional sense—that is, heteronomous, controlled by the state, and primarily based on the predominance of private property. All conforming aspects of the abstract space, all instrumental for the normalization and homogenization of the different, the insurgent.

Nevertheless, before engaging in this discussion, some contextual information is called for. Although the tendency to seek to negotiate agreements for use, permanence and/or regularization of occupied spaces is a predominant feature among squats in the RMBH, there is no model or standard procedure to be followed. In most cases, activist lawyers, organized in different collectives, give support to the occupations by fighting repossession orders or eviction threats. In some situations, however, it has been possible to arrange longer-lasting agreements. In this context, the *Mesa de Diálogo e Negociação Permanente* [Permanent Dialogue and Negotiation Table],²¹¹ from here on only *Negotiation Table*, is an important space for dialogue, contention and occasionally for reaching agreements with important results for the occupations in the RMBH.

According to Franzoni (2018), when the first eviction warrant was issued against *Izidora* in July 2013, there was no formal land conflict mediation office in the state of Minas Gerais. The negotiations, the author affirms, were carried out in a pulverized manner, involving different governmental agencies and private entities. Nonetheless, in the course of the conflict involving these occupations, in 2015, in response to the pressure exercised by resistance networks, a specific institutional space was created to mediate and negotiate conflicts—that was the beginning of the Negotiation Table (Franzoni, 2018). However, not only land and/or housing conflicts are negotiated in this institutional space. As indicated by an interviewee from *Tina Martins* (BH9), the negotiation process, which resulted in their two-year use agreement (although it was never renewed), took around 66 *Negotiation Tables*, as she called the encounters. *Carolina Maria de Jesus* (BH1), *Pátria Livre* (BH3) and *Vicentão* (BH14) are other

²¹¹ Although the Permanent Dialogue and Negotiation Table contains in its name an indication of permanence and continuity, its operation may present interruptions and discontinuities. As an example, Franzoni (2018) reports that in the case of *Izidora* it was overthrown on numerous occasions and resumed thanks to popular pressure from the resistance network.

examples. Furthermore, as noted by another interviewee who participated in the process of forming the Negotiating Table and followed some of its dialogues (BH1), cases from other municipalities in the state of Minas Gerais are also brought into this forum of negotiation, including other actors and issues such as indigenous communities, *quilombola* communities²¹² and many others.

Apart from the Negotiation Table, as one of the interviewees (BH5, activist lawyer and member of the Popular Brigades) opined, over the years, legal advisory collectives have been able to build important precedents in their work in defense of the occupations. In addition to having been able to avoid numerous evictions, supporting lawyers create and improve strategies, arguments, and further legal strategies, inserted in a dynamic context of knowledge sharing. Furthermore, and in part due to the limited number of professionals dedicating time to legal advisory services to occupations in the RMBH—there are not many activist lawyers, they often know each other and give support to more than one squat at the same time—it is not unusual for strategies and ideas that have been successful in one place to inspire other initiatives or to be adapted and used as references.

As an example, as mentioned in chapter 5, in the case of *Kasa Invisível*, the squatters opted to pursue an extrajudicial negotiation with the owners (a local family that had not used the houses in about 20 years) as one of their legal strategies to guarantee their permanence on the site. Their main arguments were based on the recognition of the houses as historical heritage (which was recently formalized) and on the importance of promoting the collective use of a property that did not fulfill its social function. In exchange for the formal possession of the three houses that compose *Kasa Invisível*, the squatters committed themselves to plan and carry out the necessary restoration work for their maintenance, and to give up the constructive potential of the properties

²¹² *Quilombola* communities are ethnic groups—predominantly constituted by rural or urban black population—that define themselves on the basis of specific relations with the land, kinship, territory, ancestry, traditions, and cultural practices. The lands occupied by remnants of *quilombo* communities are those used to guarantee their physical, social, economic, and cultural reproduction. As part of a historical reparation, the policy of land regularization of *Quilombola* Territories is of the highest importance for the dignity and continuity of these ethnic groups. Estimates are that there are over 3,000 *quilombola* communities in Brazil. Retrieved from INCRA online <http://www.incra.gov.br/pt/quilombolas> on 24 Jun. 2020.

in favor of the original owners.²¹³ This strategy of negotiation was preceded (and in great part inspired) by *Espaço Comum Luiz Estrela* [Luiz Estrela Common Space]. As explained by one of the interviewees who participated in *Luiz Estrela* since the initial planning processes (BH5), this cultural squat (existing in Belo Horizonte since 2013) was initially organized by a group of theatre artists, with the participation of the Popular Brigades (see Figure 31 and Table 6 in Appendix C). The building, formally protected by the Board of Cultural Heritage since 1994 and property of the state government, had been abandoned for 19 years.²¹⁴ According to the interviewee (BH5), during the first months of occupation, they were able to obtain an agreement with the government, according to which they could use the building for the next 20 years, and in return, they would carry out the necessary restoration works, which are in progress.

It is important to note, however, that at least in principle, the legalization of squats is *not a conflictive issue among squatters and activists* in the RMBH; quite the contrary. In all visited venues, including building occupations with uses other than housing, all interviewees included, the possibility of agreements and other forms of legal arrangements that might provide better stability and security for squatters were seen as positive and/or desirable. When asked about the nature of the agreements, no interviewees mentioned rules imposed by local authorities or formal owners. Furthermore, in some of the cases, the agreements included financial aid for squatters. On the other hand, in cases where agreements have been made, they were mostly temporary, sometimes only partially implemented, or had not been renewed. Finally, while the title of possession or other instruments that formalize use and/or property rights appear as important aspirations, concerns about the consequences of a more individualized life as well as possibilities of alternative property forms have also been mentioned.

²¹³ Constructive potential is the total buildable area on a plot of land, defined by law. That is, it is the maximum area that a building can have, by law, relative to the size of the plot, its location in the city and other urban parameters. In other words, it is how much an owner has the right to build on his plot. This right to build can be exercised elsewhere, or alienated by the property owner, provided that the conditions established by the City Statute and other pertinent laws are met.

²¹⁴ Retrieved from <https://espacocomumluizestrela.org/nossa-historia/> on 26 Jun. 2020.

7.1.2. *The struggle is for property, but...²¹⁵ Property rights and the other side of "stability"*

The possession title alone does not solve it. What is the point of having a possession title, but not having basic sanitation, not having [access to] a school? We want to be recognized, we want this to be a real neighborhood and to have all the rights that any other neighborhood has. And that people understand that we are not thieves, we are not lazy. The police even, at many moments, come here and say: "here there are only bandits, thieves, lazy people, who want to claim the house, the land of others." [...] We are not bandits, we are not thieves, we are not lazy, we want to work. We want to pay our taxes, we want to pay for our water [supply], pay for our electricity [supply]. And we are fighting for a right that is ours. We occupied a land that had no social function [...], and we turned it into housing units for over 5 thousand families who had nowhere to live, who lived on rent. And I was one of those people, you know? (BH10/*Vitória* occupation).

*Is a title of possession what you want most?*²¹⁶ This was the final question proposed for the semi-structured interviews conducted in the RMBH. Whenever this question was posed, the answer was either positive or included possession, dominion, or other legal instruments for acquiring use and/or property rights as one of the important goals in an occupation. In general, these were related to security and stability, that is, to making sure that once the squatters had settled in one place, they would be able to remain there, free of the constant concerns caused by the possibility of eviction. Furthermore, none of the interviewees cited the possibility to sell or to make profit as a reason for formalizing possession or ownership. On the other hand, it is also true, as already mentioned in this study, that some of the interviewees acknowledged the

²¹⁵ Excerpt from the interview with BH3, from *Pátria Livre* occupation in Belo Horizonte.

²¹⁶ The title of possession is one of the instruments formalized by Brazilian law n. 13.465/2017, that regulates urban land regularization—or the legal, urbanistic, environmental and social measures aimed at the integration of informal urban settlements into the formal urban territorial planning and the titling of their occupants. In the terms of this law (Art. 25), *the legitimization of possession, instrument of exclusive use for the purpose of land regularization (Reurb), constitutes an act of the public power destined to confer title, through which the possession of the property object of Reurb is recognized, with the identification of its occupants, the time of occupation and the nature of possession, which is conversable into real property rights.* Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2BEFI18> on 26 Jun. 2020.

There were some variations in the content of this question, depending on each case. In building occupations, for example, respondents tended to report specific details of their agreements and future expectations. Additionally, other instruments may apply to the regularization of building occupations for housing, as is the case of adverse possession, regulated by the City Statute, which may result in the petitioner acquiring the domain of the property. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Nu3utM> on 26 Jun. 2020.

possibility of sales of plots and/or houses in land occupations. While in some cases, these were seen as problematic, in others, especially when the occupations were considered to be more stable, they were considered fairly acceptable. It is important to note, however, that holding space as a commodity and/or becoming agents of real estate speculation should definitely not be considered as principles of squatting movements, including the case of the RMBH.

Possession and/or property rights mean more stability for squatters in the RMBH. And especially when discussing occupations for housing, stability means that the families will not be forced back into the extremely precarious situations that led them to squat in the first place. Furthermore, the self-construction of houses and the necessary urban infrastructure for their permanence on the terrains involve very costly investments. Thus, the possibility of unexpected evictions, with the demolition of houses and expulsion of families, entails the risk of significant financial losses for a population that thrives on keeping to a minimum for their subsistence. Not to mention the emotional effects that living in a situation of complete instability can generate. In this sense, while a number of interviewees signaled that their struggles go far beyond a title of possession and/or property rights, their urgent need for housing and stability is still a primary necessity. Once again, *people must survive before they can start living*.

The possession title, it brings a little more security. And what we need is that you know? To have the security that I am going to sleep tonight and tomorrow this will still be mine (BH2/*Dandara* occupation).

Once we have the possession title [...], we will feel more like owners. Because today we do not own anything. I tell my husband [referring to the fact that they have already made substantial investments in the construction of their house]: "[...] can you imagine if there is an eviction order?" [...] So we live, we sleep, and we wake up with this thought, and it is awful (BH6/*Paulo Freire* occupation).

In fact, the possibility of future land regularization may even lead to the stipulation of urban parameters in land occupations, compatible with those of the "formal" city. While *Dandara* is an exemplary case in the RMBH—their urban plan also related to an ideal of collective life, the preservation of the natural environment and others, as described in chapter 5—in *Vitoria* occupation, to name another example, parameters such as minimum width of streets and sidewalks, the absence of alleys and the preservation of green areas and watercourses were also established as urban parameters. As the

interviewee in Vitoria (BH10) noted, while such parameters were usually not imposed and the squatters had the autonomy to build their own houses according to their preferences, coordinators advised them to follow the internally defined rules, at the risk of having their fences and/or houses demolished by the local government in the future, in case they proceed with regularization procedures.²¹⁷ In her opinion, she told me, by doing so, they are anticipating a work that is the government's responsibility.

It should also be noted that the possibilities for acquiring use, possession and/or ownership rights in Brazil are usually based on the notion of *individual private property*. On many occasions, however, interviewees pointed to discussions within social movements concerning alternative forms of property, constituted under a logic other than that of strict individualism—and in accordance with their own practices and ideals. As an example, the squatters from *Kasa Invisível* also mentioned pursuing their permanence on the site based on a process of adverse possession, in addition to the aforementioned extrajudicial negotiation with the original owners. On the other hand, as one of the interviewees (BH12) observed, they wished to think a new form of legal object, a space that would be neither public nor private property, but something else: one that could be collectively built and reinvented. In another case, one of the interviewees from *Pátria Livre* (BH3) affirmed that *the struggle is for property, but collective property*, perhaps in the form of a residents' association.

In practical terms, however, there are important obstacles to putting alternative forms of property into effect. First, it is necessary to take into consideration that due to the rampant criminalization of squatting movements, as previously mentioned, any form of agreement is usually hard to achieve. Second, alternative and new forms of property relations require time to discuss and mature, and equally important, institutionalization/formalization (that is if what is aimed is to formalize rights within the political, social and economic frameworks by which we currently live)—something that as we know, is also not easy to achieve. Add to this the structural consecration of

²¹⁷ Demolition of external walls or fences, reduction of plots or even demolition of houses can occur in the case of urban infrastructure works by the government, with compensation payments.

individual private property as a symbol of security and status, which is also present in the imaginary of the most deprived social classes, reflecting in their hopes and dreams.

In this sense, in reference to the cases addressed, among the few that were able to accomplish any form of agreement with local authorities, none were formalized as collective or other alternative forms of property.²¹⁸ In only one example, it was possible to use the resources obtained from an agreement collectively, although they were managed by a social movement and not by the squatters themselves. It was the case of *Carolina Maria de Jesus*, as mentioned in chapter 5, where part of the pecuniary aid provided for the families was being managed by the MLB. In this sense, the financial aid conceded for each family, separately, as an allowance to rent housing units, was converted (with their previous consent) into a collective fund to pay for the necessary maintenance work and rent of their new building. A similar attempt was made in the case of *Vicentão*, as explained by one of the interviewees (BH14), but as they were not able to find a building with enough unities to house all the families in time, it was not possible.

Finally, some of the interviewees also showed concern about the possibility that solutions focused on the logic of individual private property could result in losses of "organicity" (BH3/*Pátria Livre*), of a "companion essence" (BH10/*Vitória*), or of an "identity of occupation, of community" (BH2/*Dandara*), as they put it, referring, in general, to the engagement of squatters in matters of the collectivity. Other two interviewees (BH2 and BH11), both from *Dandara* occupation, opined that with time, as *Dandara* acquired a more stable status, people began to focus more on their individual lives and their private relationships, to the detriment of collective interests. BH11 has lived in *Dandara* since its initial occupation in 2009. At first, he told me, there was only a small area occupied near the main access, by about 100 families who built canvas tents on a temporary basis. It was the "*Dandarinha*" [diminutive for *Dandara*], he told me, which lasted about four months. Despite the precariousness, vulnerability,

²¹⁸ As mentioned in chapter 5, at the time of the visits only in the cases of *Carolina Maria de Jesus* and the occupations in the *Izidora* region there were agreements with the state government, though not completely implemented; in the case of *Dandara*, although to some extent recognized as a neighborhood by the municipality, with some services provided, the residents did not have any possession or property title of their houses. Finally, from all 66 identified occupations in the RMBH (see Figure 31 and Table 6 in Appendix C) in only 11 cases it was possible to identify any form of agreement.

and uncertainty of the first months, they were remembered with nostalgia by the interviewee, whose impression was that during that period, the residents of Dandara were much closer and united than in more recent times. Similarly, BH2 opined that the more *Dandara* became stable, recognized, legitimized as a neighborhood, the more people lost an “idea of community” and collectivity:

I note that from the moment the community grows stronger, [...] it is recognized by political circles, by the city, as a neighborhood, it begins to have the appearance of a neighborhood. And then the houses begin to be walled, which is something that I find very sad too. [...] And then people turn more into their own lives, into their own little world and lose this idea of community, that we need to get together to discuss our issues, to think about strategies in order to achieve our [collective] goals (BH2).

The same interviewee also mentioned that gains in legitimization also meant losses in autonomy. According to her, an important consequence of a more significant presence of the state (in terms of public policies and services) was that the local coordinators and the collectivity lost control to a control by the state. As an example, she mentioned that in the case of violence against women, in the past, the perpetrator would be expelled from the occupation by a collective decision of the community, allowing the woman to remain there safely. Nowadays, she told me, “if there is a case of this kind of violence, we have to take it to the Public Prosecutor's Office” (BH2).

A real crossroads then, with its four constitutive sides: 1) in the RMBH, most of the times, squatters occupy due to an extreme necessity for housing, which is strongly connected to a desire to change life. The spaces they appropriate, adapt and create not only are instrumental for the achievement of their goals, but in their collective construction, communal areas, and in all the daily activities they shelter, they reflect their struggles against unjust urban policies and repressive state practices. Additionally, squatters occupy to stay, at least as far as their intentions are concerned—not to sell. It is about use value, not the exchange value; 2) legal agreements were usually considered important, desirable, or even necessary by the interviewees, which reflects a critical tendency to seek greater stability—which is considerably related to the squatters being able to stay in their homes without having to return to even more precarious situations, or lose the large personal investments they made to build them; 3) not only agreements have proven hard to achieve and consolidate, but there is also a strong predominance of models based on the notion of

individual private property and traditional models of urban planning, which may influence the parameters squatters adopt to produce their own spaces. Thus, greater conditions of stability (or their existence as a possibility), at the same time as they may be considered desirable, may however emerge as homogenizing forces in the sense of bringing social-spatial relations in occupations closer to the same repressive forms against which they struggle in the first place; and 4) on many occasions, however, interviewees recognized this contradiction, not only pointing to what they considered as negative sides of stability (especially related to lower general engagement with collective projects and demands, and a higher degree of withdrawal into personal and private spheres), but also to alternative forms of property.

What will come out of this crossroads, once the ongoing agreements are implemented or not, whether or not alternative forms of ownership will be achieved, and to what extent, only in the future will it be possible to know with certainty. At this point, however, I will allow myself some optimism. This work bets on the uneasiness of squatters and other activists who, although recognizing the legitimacy of the pursuit of better and more stable living conditions, continue to discuss, propose and experiment in their practices, other models and possibilities, more in accordance with their own ideals.

7.1.3. The right to the city or the right to the city center: self-construction of an ideal

As already observed in chapter 5, while land occupations for housing represent 68% of the total of occupations identified in the RMBH (see Table 6 and Figure 31 in Appendix C), most of which located in peripheral neighborhoods of Belo Horizonte, occupations of abandoned buildings, their vast majority also for housing, totalized an important share of 32% of the total. Different from land occupations, with very few exceptions, building occupations are in central and economically privileged areas of the city. Moreover, while only three cases of squatted buildings were identified between

1961 and 1998,²¹⁹ from 2006 (but especially since 2013), their number increased significantly, reaching a total of 18 cases in 12 years. In general, the choice to squat the city center was related to better conditions of urban infrastructure, public transportation, job opportunities, greater access to public services, such as healthcare facilities and schools, recreational areas, and others—and also to an expectation that occupying buildings would be less costly (in terms of time, money and other factors) since, although it would certainly involve maintenance work, it would not imply self-construction of houses and urban infrastructure.

Over ten years of occupying the city center, on the other hand, allowed squatters, social movements, and collectives to better understand and reflect on its positive aspects, but also on the important challenges that could only be experienced through practice. Firstly, still concerning some of the agreements that have been negotiated, sometimes they seem to refer (at least in part) squatters back to more peripheral locations, rather than contributing to their further integration in the city center. Similar to what was the case of *Carolina Maria de Jesus*, the interviewee from *Vicentão* (BH14) reported that their agreement (started in January 2019) included financial aid for two years, followed by the inclusion of the squatters either in housing units or in lands for self-construction, in more peripheral areas. It is of great importance to note, however, that at least in part, this shift back to self-construction out of central areas also reflects a preference expressed by part of the squatters, *after experiencing living in the city center* (as exemplified in chapter 5, when discussing the case of *Carolina Maria de Jesus*). However, as both cited agreements have not yet been fully implemented—especially with regard to the terrains, which have not been made available—as well as being the only examples identified in this format, it is not yet possible to make further analysis of their outcomes.

Furthermore, some of the interviewees also identified other issues that arose from their experiences of squatting long-abandoned buildings in central areas. These included

²¹⁹ 1961: *Associação Casa do Estudante de Minas Gerais* [Student House Association of Minas Gerais] (still existing, but the property has been object of a legal dispute against UFMG since 2013); 1996: *Torres Gêmeas* [Twin Towers] (evicted in 2013); 1998: *Navantino Alves 1* (also evicted in 2013). For more information, see Table 6 and Figure 31 in Appendix C. While admitting that there may have been other squats in the RMBH not identified by this study, the data collected points to a clear trend of rapid increase in the number of occupations of buildings in the central areas of Belo Horizonte, especially in the last 10 to 12 years.

time and resource-demanding maintenance processes (as mentioned by BH1/*Carolina Maria de Jesus* and BH3/*Pátria Livre*), also implying physical and psychological distress of residents—to the point that some squatters gave up staying in the buildings, as exemplified by BH3; difficulties in identifying suitable buildings with sufficient area to adequately house the large number of homeless families organized in social movements, as pointed by BH1 and BH14/*Vicentão*; and a sometimes overwhelming collectivization of life within the limited area of buildings which, according to some of the interviewees (BH1, BH3 and BH5), may be much more intense than in lands for self-construction, leading to eventual conflicting situations.

As an example, BH3 observed that *Pátria Livre* was located in a former commercial building in which not all floors were equipped with bathrooms; therefore, the available ones needed to be shared by more than one family. “This is a learning process; this is a difficulty, but little by little, we adapt. [...] you have to deal with the noise of your neighbor because [the units are divided] by a *tapume*.²²⁰ You have to share the bathroom; you have to share tasks. [...] I think it generates another perspective” (BH3). Nevertheless, while BH3 argued for their permanence in the building, two of the interviewees opined that although land occupations include their own contradictions, demanding and sometimes conflictive processes, they may, however, offer better conditions for sociability and collective life (BH5).

Being cold, [...] I do not think it is more advantageous to occupy a building than a piece of land. I think we would have a megastructure on a terrain today [referring to all the investment of time, work, and money in *Carolina Maria de Jesus*] (BH1).

A more comprehensive analysis of the positive results and challenges of squatting long-abandoned buildings in central areas of cities in the RMBH would certainly require further investigation of specific cases and a larger number of focused interviews, in order to better understand the views and impressions of squatters and other activists, as well as to build a solid basis of field observations. Nonetheless, from the cases addressed a few remarks can be made. First, in the case of occupations for housing, the information shared during interviews substantiates one of the arguments presented in this study that the right to housing is not complete if further conditions of socio-spatial

²²⁰ Low-cost chipboard normally used in construction work.

justice are not adequately met. Squatting actions in central areas of the city openly oppose the exclusion of less privileged social groups from the urban core, as well as the retention of empty buildings for real estate speculation—which is also emphasized by the more recent presence of occupations for other purposes, including cultural, artistic, mutual support and other projects. On the other hand, the participation of large numbers of families—frequently in their hundreds or even thousands—make the previous operation of finding suitable buildings a somewhat complex process, reducing the available possibilities, or even resulting in the squatting of buildings that require overly demanding maintenance works, exceeding the expectations or even the capacity of the people involved. As a consequence, in some cases, squatters have given up remaining in the buildings, or when given the alternative, have demonstrated a preference for occupying lands for self-construction.

Finally, from all the cases addressed, this study contends that the struggles for the right to the city in the broader sense should not be limited to struggles for the permanence in the city center. On the contrary, as much as central and well-serviced areas are spaces of dispute in the direction of the right to the city, the appropriation and creation of new spaces in the peripheries, added to the squatters' demands and initiatives for inclusion, visibility, legitimization, and to be recognized as political beings—that is, to truly participate in the life of the city—are also remarkable forms of claiming and constructing their own right to the city.

7.2. Constitutional rights in Europe and Spain, and related conflicts in Madrid and the Basque Country

Squatting is illegal, no matter the purpose, whether it be simply for living or to make public provision for non-commercial activity, to “commons” a vacant and disused building or patch of land. As this securitized century of endless asymmetric war against non-state actors has begun, squatting has been repressed ever more energetically. In Europe, important long-lived centers of social, political and cultural life have recently been strongly attacked (Moore, 2015, p. 12).

According to Vasudevan (2017b), squatting has been criminalized in European countries such as Spain, the Netherlands, England and Wales, in recent years. Squatting a residential building became a criminal offense in the UK in 2012

(Vasudevan, 2017b; x-Chris, 2015). Squatting was also criminalized in Amsterdam in 2010 (Vasudevan, 2017b) and was outlawed in the same year in Holland (Waalwijk, 2015). “In Italy, the occupation of a property of others (even if dilapidated) is an illegal act ruled by the article 633 of the penal code: invasion of land or buildings (*invasione di terreni o immobili*). Squatters are also charged with theft of energy (gas or electricity)” (Fucolti, 2015, p. 197).

Furthermore, the degree of criminalization or illegality, and even the enforcement mechanisms may vary depending on the country, squats’ configurations or purposes, and others. In Berlin, for example, a decree (the “*Berliner Linie*”) allows “for the eviction of newly squatted properties within 24 hours” (Morawski, 2015, p. 184). In France, on the other hand, squatters “who remain in a space for more than 48 hours cannot be immediately evicted but must be removed through a lawsuit” and due to the law known as the “winter truce” evictions are forbidden between November 1 and March 15—“the truce technically does not apply to squatters but makes their wintertime eviction impolitic and rare” (Feldman, 2015, pp. 242–243).

In this context of criminalization, in some countries, a number of *Anti-Squat* legal mechanisms may also be applied. As Buchholtz (2015) observes, Anti-Squat means property protection plus vacancy management, performed by temporary users or *live-in guardians*, who are considered to be more effective and cheaper than, say, guard patrols. Once the main objective of this instrument is to maintain and secure the buildings, “affordable housing [for the care takers] is a temporary side effect” (Buchholtz, 2015, p. 45). Anti-Squat, thus, does not correspond to dignified housing, representing instead just another form of exploitation. Besides the fact that it cannot be considered by far a housing policy, for the ones who manage to apply and be accepted for such a position, there are barely any rights guaranteed. According to Buchholtz (2015), the Anti-Squat situation in the Netherlands can be described as follows:

While Dutch Anti-Squat guardians were paid for their services 30 years ago, today the agencies have capitalized on the shortage of affordable space in contested housing markets. They ask for rent-like payments but refuse to call it rent. This legal twist is crucial, as the Anti-Squat offers its temporary users, or ‘live-in guardians’, no tenant protections or legal rights to stay put. [...] The conditions of use are heavily restrictive—no pets, no kids, no parties, no smoking, no candles,

permission required to go on vacation etc.—and can be cancelled within four weeks. Anti-Squatters are caretakers, cleaners, and security guardians but not tenants. While prior to the squatting ban in 2010 Dutch squatters enjoyed housing rights close to tenant protection Anti-Squat is more of a job, which conflicts with privacy and housing rights (Buchholtz, 2015, pp. 45–46).

Finally, in Spain, criminal persecution of squatting (usurpation) came into force in 1995 (Campos & Martínez, 2020). Nonetheless, while squatting for housing in Spain is considered a crime, implying a more likely punishment in the event of a court trial, this is not usually the case of squatting to create social centers, where people may be involved without making them permanent residences (González et al., 2018; Lledin, 2015). That being said, it is important to point out a few contextual elements. In his article on the squatting community, specifically referring to the Spanish context, Cattaneo (2013) points to dignified housing as a democratic right. In fact, the European Social Charter²²¹ states as follows:

Part I

The Parties accept as the aim of their policy, to be pursued by all appropriate means both national and international in character, the attainment of conditions in which the following rights and principles may be effectively realised:

[...] 31. Everyone has the right to housing.

Part II

The Parties undertake, as provided for in Part III, to consider themselves bound by the obligations laid down in the following articles and paragraphs.

[...] Article 31

The right to housing

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing, the Parties undertake to take measures designed:

1. to promote access to housing of an adequate standard;
2. to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination;
3. to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources (Council of Europe, 1996, p. 3,5 & 18).

²²¹ “[...] in the European Social Charter opened for signature in Turin on 18 October 1961 and the protocols thereto, the member States of the Council of Europe agreed to secure to their populations the social rights specified therein in order to improve their standard of living and their social well-being” (Council of Europe, 1996, p. 1). “Today, the Charter treaty system is one of the most widely accepted human rights set of standards within the Council of Europe. The widespread support for social rights is assured by the fact that 43 out of the 47 member States of the Council of Europe are parties to either the 1961 Charter or the Revised Charter. Only Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino and Switzerland have not ratified either of these treaties.” Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3d96Qhx> on 18 Mar. 2020.

Moreover, the Spanish Constitution of 1978 granted both the right to decent and adequate housing (Art. 47) and the right to private property, provided it fulfilled its social function (Art. 33), additionally to explicitly stating “that further laws and the regulation of land use should make effective the right to housing, ‘avoid speculation’ (Art. 47) and promote the general interest” (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 116). As is the case in Brazil, the right to adverse possession is provided for by Spanish legislation (Civil Code, Art. 1940–42) “and could facilitate property titles for squatters if they dwelled for more than 10 (standard procedure) or 30 years (extraordinary procedure), although it is rarely applicable” (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 116).

Nonetheless, as pointed by M. A. Martínez López (2015b), although speculative practices in urban land and housing are forbidden by the Constitution, they are, however, a common method of profiting in Spain. Additionally, the author continues, although greatly varying between cities, house prices “have grown at an average rate of 18% per year since the end of the ‘80s” becoming unaffordable for young people and renters, at the same time as public housing resources became insufficient (M. A. Martínez López, 2015b). Furthermore, Spanish social housing programs mostly consist of financial subsidies for purchasing a home, at the same time as they “have hardly promoted state-owned and affordable rental options at all” (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 117). Concerning the housing deficit in Spain,

no official figure for ‘housing exclusion’ is provided by the government, but some studies have concluded that 1.7 per cent out of the Spanish population (46.5 million) were subject to ‘severe housing deprivation’, 5.4 per cent lived in overcrowded households, and 5.2 per cent were in mortgage or rent arrears by 2016 (FEANTSA & Abbé Pierre Foundation, 2018, as cited in Campos & Martínez, 2020).²²² These data encompass a current housing deficit affecting at least 2.5 million people (or 1 million households) in Spain (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 118).

Remarkably, speculative vacancy affects not only old houses but also new ones, which are mainly bought by transnational investors. The vacancy rate in Spain is currently estimated (based on 2011 figures) at between 14 per cent and 28 per cent; absolute numbers are between

²²² FEANTSA & Abbé Pierre Foundation (2018). *Third Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe*. <https://bit.ly/2C5hZle>.

3.5 and 7.1 million dwellings (Ministerio de Fomento, Gobierno de España, 2018, as cited in Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 117).²²³

Housing evictions, in particular, amounted to a yearly average of 80,000 between 2009 and 2015. Most people on a low income—who are usually young, immigrants (non-European Union citizens), female single parents, workers with casual or badly paid jobs and unemployed people—cannot make ends meet. Housing prices are higher in cities and demand more than 40 per cent of people's income to cover rentals or mortgage loans (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 117). 'Housing overburden costs' representing more than 40 per cent of the disposable income applied, at least, to 10 per cent of the Spanish population by 2016 (Eurostat, as cited in Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 117).²²⁴

Thus, as is the case in Brazil—while acknowledging differences in terms of population, legislation, and housing policies in each context—informal housing in Spain takes place against a scenery of lack of sufficient social housing, ineffective housing policies, and unaffordable housing prices (either for rent or financing). Also, in the case of Spain, the available data indicates that the number of empty housing unities far exceeds the housing deficit in the country. Once again, constitutional prerogatives and legal regulations that guarantee, on paper, universal access to decent housing, while curbing practices of real estate speculation are rendered meaningless if they are not reflected in reality.

In more recent years, according to Fricaudet (2019), the *Indignados*²²⁵ took the 15-M movement into neighborhood assemblies, which also reflected in the 2014 municipal elections in 60 Spanish cities, where local coalitions, connected to different movements and supported by left-wing parties, organized themselves to take back the city. In their ideal, the author suggests, cities were a possibility to change life, from mutualist and

²²³ In particular, 3.5 million completely vacant houses (13.6 per cent out of the total stock) was the last official figure provided by the government in 2011. The rate was even higher in 1991 (15.4 per cent). However, if we add 'secondary homes' (only partially used, if occupied at all) to the statistics, we end up with a striking figure of 7.1 million of dwellings (28.3 per cent out of the total stock) in 2011, which has slightly decreased to 6.6 million (25.5 per cent) by the end of 2016. More than 2.7 million are estimated to be under construction since 2011, which would add to the 'selling stock' of new houses (also vacant) (Ministerio de Fomento, Gobierno de España, 2018, as cited in Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 117). Ministerio de Fomento, Gobierno de España, Observatorio de vivienda y suelo. (2018). *Boletín Anual 2017 [Annual Bulletin 2017]*, p. 90. <https://bit.ly/2NVkYzn>.

²²⁴ Eurostat. *Estadísticas sobre Vivienda [Housing statistics]*. <https://bit.ly/2C58hzc>.

²²⁵ Name referring to the 15-M movement, started in 2011 during the demonstrations in *Puerta del Sol* Square in Madrid.

community-based solutions, in contrast to relations based on private interests: “Spanish municipalism relies on the commons as a necessary alternative to the market” (Fricaudet, 2019, p. 66). However, after over three years it is possible to affirm that the impact of policies contrary to the effects of financialized economy has also been limited, in part due to the administrative structure based on strict hierarchies and limited decentralization, reducing their capacity for action (Fricaudet, 2019).

According to M. A. Martínez López (2015b), legal and police repression against the squatting movements in Spain have intensified since the late ‘90s. On the other hand, the author observes, laws have not been homogeneous, neither consistently applied, at the same time as a number of “intellectuals, lawyers, judges, and political leaders have even supported squatters’ demands and projects” (M. A. Martínez López, 2015b, p. 254). In a recent publication, Martínez (2020, p. 55) suggests that the increasing criminalization of squatting should also be seen as indicative of their ability to uncover “crucial mechanisms of social injustice in the capitalist city.”

Precisely because squatting generally does not serve neoliberal mechanisms and interests well, its illegality is such a central aspect—be it a radical tactic of counter-power within the movement itself or a means of state control and repression. When a squat is formed, the latter often translates into the practice of evictions. In the specific case of the Basque Country, Padrones Gil (2017) points to three main tendencies on the part of the public administration: negotiation, silence or repression. The author suggests that policies differ when it comes to *gaztetxes*, and when it comes to housing—while in the former, either repression or the tendency to negotiate prevails, a policy of silence is more applied to the case of housing.

7.2.1. *“An agreement that says that you can’t, you can’t, you can’t, you can’t”²²⁶: legal status of squats in Madrid and the Basque Country and related repercussions*

Although, as in the context of the RMBH, there are also cases of agreements that result in more stable situations for squatters in both Madrid and the Basque Country, as exemplified in chapter 5, these, however, present us with other issues and sometimes

²²⁶ Of BC15, referring to agreements offered to *gaztetxes* by local governments.

even controversy within the squatting movements. Most times, these are related to losses of autonomy, as agreements often include rules to be followed in squats, sometimes implying adaptations in the occupied spaces, or even reducing their scope of action or combativeness.²²⁷ As an example, as Pruijt (2013) observes, in the case of “entrepreneurial” squatting, as presented before, a regularly debated issue is precisely the possible loss of oppositional edge due to legalization and the level of control that occupants retain once they attain legal status. In fact, once autonomy is a defining condition for squatting, it seems essential that the consequences of the current forms of legalization be politicized within the movement.

These matters seem even more critical when practical effects on squatters’ daily lives are taken into consideration. For instance, the many legalization requirements and/or necessary standardizations can present high costs, which may even turn “the free cultural space into an unfree one based on consumption” (Waalwijk, 2015, p. 77). The need for economic survival may also imply the risk of co-optation by neoliberal urban policies and increase the loss of political autonomy of squatters as they become more dependent. Despite all these issues, from a pragmatic point of view, in case of imminent threats of eviction, Owens (2013, p. 185) observes, squatters will resort to almost any possible tactic to remain in the building, including “going through legal channels to increase their claims over the property.”

Negotiating with political authorities is a contentious issue in the squatting movement in Madrid (Lledin, 2015), something that had as one of its consequences some internal splits in the movement during the 2000s (Martínez & Lorenzi Fernández, 2012). There is, however, a significant differentiation to be made between the long-standing squatting practices focused on the self-management of social centers, and the post-crisis housing movement led by the PAH (Campos & Martínez, 2020). While “the former rarely made agreements with the local authorities or the private owners to remain in the buildings”, the PAH, on the other hand, “took a clear stance in favour of

²²⁷ A number of authors have also pointed to such conflictive issues in other European countries. As examples, in Italy and in France, there may be a separation between squats that accept certain forms of relationship with institutions, and those that oppose such contacts as a political strategy (Mudu, 2013; Verdier, 2015).

legalisation of squats from the very beginning” (Campos & Martínez, 2020, pp. 120–121).

It called for affordable rental accommodation provided by either state institutions or bailed-out financial firms, even if this involved moving out from the squat. [...] Affordability means here a rental cost of up to 30 per cent of the household income, which is close to zero for those homeless and unemployed. Therefore, PAH activists became regularly engaged in negotiations with banks, private owners and politicians to find housing solutions for each individual or family at risk of eviction. Meanwhile, squatting represented a tool to immediately house those in need but also to empower people during the negotiations to secure legal agreements and political concessions (Campos & Martínez, 2020, p. 121).

Although the PAH sometimes succeeded when it negotiated ‘social rentals’ across Spain, these were seldom achieved in the metropolitan area of Madrid. Therefore, squatting activism was a self-help last resort for those evicted from their previous homes and experiencing the combined hardships of housing exclusion, unemployment, precariousness and poverty (Campos & Martínez, 2020, pp. 124–125).

The interviews conducted in Madrid and the Basque Country were mainly restricted to squatters participating in social centers and *gaztetxes*, respectively. From the information shared, it was possible to note that the possibilities of reaching agreements with local authorities and/or private owners, and their consequences, remain as quite challenging issues. Even in cases where squatters shared strong political perspectives, including the explicit choice not to seek formal agreements with local authorities, opinions could vary. As an example, the interviewee from EKO (M7)—where the majority of people are not interested in any forms of agreements—opined that diversity is a positive aspect. In addition to allowing people with different political views to have their own spaces, he told us, when there are both legal and occupied venues, taken together, the possibilities for action increase, since depending on the status of each location, their possibilities are different. Furthermore, social centers that hold agreements also offer the possibility of giving coverage for others, in case of difficult situations:

It seems to me that it enriches the movement, that it gives us more power, and also prepares us for eventualities in a way. Well, if things get too bad, then I want to have some places, some legalized places that give us coverage for other moves (M7).

Difficult or urgent situations were also mentioned by the interviewee from *La Salamandra* (M9), who recalled that when they were a squatted social center (*Salamanquesa*), though it was lively and well attended, they were under constant threats of eviction; and this eventually led to an overload of the young people who were most engaged with organizational processes and security issues. On the other side, however, most interviewees related the formalization of agreements to negative aspects, usually leading to losses in autonomy and combativeness, and reductions in their scope of action, due to the imposition of rules to be followed in squats. In the case of *La Salamandra*, for example, the same interviewee opined that after reaching an agreement, although they were in a more comfortable and relatively stable situation, there was no longer as much freedom as before.

In *La Bankarrota*, by the time of the interview, there did not seem to be a consensual position among squatters on whether or not to negotiate an agreement with the formal owner of the building (a Spanish bank), nor was there any process underway in this regard. From their connections with *La Salamandra*, however, some of the interviewees opined that in their case, having an agreement meant, to some extent, institutional tutelage, resulting in less freedom of action (M11, M12). Another interviewee (M10), differently, suggested that even though there was a certain degree of self-censorship and a time limitation²²⁸, there was not much interference or significant constraints; in this sense, he was not against the legalization of squats. While some were against any forms of agreements—as mentioned by M13, “[...] if we define ourselves as an anti-capitalist collective, and the system is capitalist, well... I prefer to fight outside, no?”—others found it beneficial to have various types of social centers, including legally recognized ones.

This plurality of opinions, tending to criticisms towards losses of autonomy in general, was also present in other spaces. In EVA, where there was an agreement to use part of the building for four years, while some of the interviewees opined that they did not notice much interference from the municipality (M3), others (M5, M6) pointed to contractual clauses that required activity reports and/or allowed the agreement to be

²²⁸ As mentioned in chapter 5, as part of their agreement, the building where *La Salamandra* was located would be co-managed, and its use shared by municipality/district council in the mornings, and *La Salamandra*, starting at 5 pm.

undone in the interest of the municipality, at any time. One of the interviewees (M6) even referred to a relationship of domination, according to which the municipality had given them something on the one hand (relative stability) and taken away on the other (in terms of autonomy). For this reason, in his opinion, at the same time as there was no more disobedience, they became subject to other forms of oppression. In the words of the interviewee,

we are concerned about whether an inspection will come and remove us because we demolished a partition due to the need for an extension. Anyway... here it is all as white as a hospital since it cannot be painted because many comrades are afraid that they will take away our cession because of a violation of rules, of contractual clauses (M6).

As the example above, other interviewees also expressed concern due to a clear fragility in agreements with local authorities, resulting in somewhat unreliable “stability” conditions, as their effects could be interrupted at any time, even in legally formalized cases. As examples, M6/EVA also suggested that however formal the agreement, if the rules are not respected, or if it is in the interest of the local authorities, it can be terminated almost immediately; similarly, M11/*La Bankarrota* and M9/*La Salamandra* both opined that agreements might be undone in case of changes in the municipal government.

Regarding necessary adaptations and standardizations in occupied spaces to which certain agreements might be conditioned, two different situations were mentioned. In *La Salamandra*, during negotiations and after an agreement was reached, conditioning, heating and insulation works were carried out in the building by the local government, among others.²²⁹ In the case of *Eskalera Karakola*, as recalled by M10/*La Bankarrota*, however, when they reached an agreement, squatters themselves had to provide high-cost soundproofing of the place. The impacts of possible agreements on the attendance of people in social centers, when mentioned, also reflected different points of view. M9/*La Salamandra*, for example, mentioned that in her opinion, when they obtained their use cession, most young people went to other spaces, such as *La Bankarrota*. At the same time, however, one of *La Bankarrota's* interviewees suggested that in some cases people do not participate in activities in squats and/or

²²⁹ M. A. Martínez. Personal communication, e-mail, November 13, 2018. Message forwarded from another participant in *La Salamandra*.

have a negative impression of occupations precisely because they are illegal—and therefore the existence of both squatted and legalized social centers might be a way of filling this gap.

According to Padrones Gil (2017), in the context of the squatting movement in the Basque Country too, there is a great level of ambiguity regarding the views and practices of squatters concerning legal agreements. As the author observes, while there are those who refuse to negotiate under any circumstances, there are also those who accept to negotiate when they consider it to be necessary. At the same time, even in the case of squatters who reject negotiation in the first place, they do not always respond in this way when the opportunity arises, especially when the risk of eviction becomes apparent (Padrones Gil, 2017). Even those who started the movement in its most radical form in the 1980s, the author continues, have more recently reshaped their thinking: not only has the movement become de-radicalized, but so has society as a whole, adapting to new times and new social forms, and developing new strategies to do so (Padrones Gil, 2017).

Furthermore, the cases are diverse, and the relations maintained depend on both the political party in power, the owner of the building and the group of people who participate in the assemblies at the time of making a decision (Padrones Gil, 2017). On the other hand, as is the case with almost all social movements, Padrones Gil (2017) observes, institutionalization tends to lead to losses in autonomy, as maintaining self-management is usually not compatible with the cession of a space by the municipality. In the case of squatting for housing, however, the recent tendency in most cases is to negotiate, using squatting as a temporary resource (Padrones Gil, 2017).

Furthermore, as reported by a local activist lawyer from Bilbao (BC15) during an interview, there are important differences, from the legal point of view, between squatting to form a *gaztetxe* and squatting for housing. According to him, it is “easier to avoid complications” if you participate in a *gaztetxe*. When a person lives in an occupied space, however, she/he cannot claim not to be part of the movement, to attend the place only sporadically, or others. “You live there, so you are ‘guilty’” (BC15). In general, he observed, no matter what the reason for squatting, lawsuits can go on for many years, include charges related to public disorder or fighting the police, and

even result in arrests. Other two activist lawyers from the Basque Country (BC6 and BC7, both from San Sebastian) gave a similar statement. In their opinion, the most acute legal problems do not actually come from squatting, but from conflicts with the police, whether during evictions or other types of mobilizations. Furthermore, all three lawyers mentioned arbitrary, abusive, or violent actions by the police, including giving false statements or presenting false proof in order to incriminate squatters, activists and/or demonstrators, as well as physical violence, with the use of batons.

As in the case of Madrid, also in the Basque Country, activists who participate in the same squat sometimes have quite different views on agreements and possibilities of legalization. As observed by the interviewee from *Lakaxita* (BC2) after the house where they are located was bought by the municipality, an internal debate was raised among the squatters about what they should do in case of a possible eviction and demolition of *Lakaxita*. At that time, as she recalled, there was a rather polarized divide of opinions in the squat: while some of the people (especially those who had their livelihood located in *Lakaxita*) were in favor of negotiating a use cession of another space, others preferred to resist as much as possible and, if finally evicted, squat another space. However, as the plans to replace *Lakaxita* by a garden were not to be carried out until the year 2030 (as mentioned in chapter 5), according to BC2, they finally chose to put this decision on hold, and leave it to the people who will be participating in the assembly of *Lakaxita* when the time comes.

As was the case of BC2, who was against negotiating an agreement, other interviewees also argued against them based on the possibility of losing autonomy and having to comply with regulations externally determined and imposed. The interviewee from *Putzuzulo*²³⁰ (BC12), opined that agreements are intended to neutralize their actions. In relation to the fact that they know that eventually, they will have to leave (due to the existing plans for the construction of new housing units on the site), the interviewee mentioned an internal divide in opinions among squatters. While some think they should resist, others, BC12 included, believe that they need to start

²³⁰ As mentioned in chapter 5, the squatters from *Putzuzulo* held an agreement according to which they could use part of the building where they were located.

discussing strategies for getting more support, in addition to choosing a new place to squat when the time comes.

In other cases, interviewees argued in favor of negotiating agreements when necessary. As an example, BC3/*Maravillas*, opined that squatting as a political tool also means not always remaining in a contentious situation. That sometimes it is necessary to at least dialogue with local authorities—although, the interviewee evaluated, there is a danger that institutionalization and bureaucracies will interfere in the dynamics of squatting. In other cases, squatters referred to a strategic approach to agreements, according to which, through a disobedient posture in relation to the imposed rules, they might appropriate or adjust them, in a way that they better fit their practices and political views.

In one of such cases, *Txantxarreka*, the interviewee (BC1) stated that during the time when they had an agreement (a four-year use cession that, as mentioned in chapter 5, ended in 2017), even though the local government tried to enforce several rules, they decided not to obey. According to him, as they feel that regulations should be discussed with the neighborhood and not with institutions, the only rules that they accepted and followed were decided collectively, by the participants of *Txantxarreka*, in dialogue with the neighborhood. As examples, he mentioned a limited number of concerts per month and a time limit for festivities and other events.

Similarly, the interviewees from *Errekaleor* (BC9, BC10, BC11) mentioned that even though it is eventually necessary to dialogue with local authorities, when squatters attend meetings with the municipality, they told me, and participate in negotiations, they do not necessarily have the intention of actually following all the imposed rules. In their opinion, as was also mentioned by BC15, local authorities only offer agreements when, for some reason, they are not able to carry out evictions. When they see that they cannot evict a squat, they try to control it by imposing rules: "*an agreement that says that you can't, you can't, you can't, you can't*" (BC15). Finally, in terms of possible adaptations and standardizations required as part of agreements, in the Basque Country only in the case of *Putzuzulo* it was mentioned by one of the interviewees (BC12) that while the squatters agreed to make some security adjustments to their building (such as the installation of fire extinguishers and

emergency signs), the municipality also provided and paid for their water and electricity supplies, in addition to having installed new windows in the building.

Differently from the cases addressed in the RMBH, pursuing legalization or any forms of agreements for squats was far from being a consensual issue among squatters and other activists interviewed in Madrid and the Basque Country. At the same time, it is important to note that, as mentioned earlier in this session, when squatting for housing, there is a clear and recent tendency towards negotiation. There is, however, an important difference between occupying exclusively for living in the three territorial areas on which this study focused. While in Madrid and the Basque Country, squats for housing frequently occur in relative secrecy, as temporary resources both to guarantee shelter and to leverage agreements, in the RMBH squatters occupy to stay. In addition to claiming patches of land and/or previously abandoned buildings for housing, they usually do not conceal their actions, also seeking to further engage with a diverse range of actors in collective activities.

Concerning the legalization of social centers in Madrid and *gaztetxes* in the Basque Country, although there was a significant plurality of opinions among squatters, no severe ruptures were observed between squats with different approaches—it should be noted, however, that interviews and visits were carried out in a limited number of squats, and so this conclusion can hardly be generalized. At the same time, while some activists opined that diversity (in terms of the legal status of squats) is desirable, in certain cases (as *La Salamandra* and *La Dragona* in Madrid) disagreements concerning the realization of legal agreements led to the departure or exclusion of some participants.

While also in the cases of Madrid and the Basque Country agreements and/or legalization may result in more stability for squatters, and to a certain point mitigate the overwhelming effects of constant state repression and eviction threats, as was the case in the RMBH, agreements with local governments and private owners were quite fragile, even when formalized in the form of contracts. Additionally, as in the case of RMBH, no model of agreements was identified, although some of the interviewees mentioned that the parameters previously adopted in other cases could influence, inspire, or serve as a basis for discussion elsewhere.

Moreover, losses of autonomy, freedom of action, and institutional tutelage were among the most mentioned criticisms and concerns expressed by interviewees. Some of them even opined that agreements are instrumental for local governments to neutralize squats and their oppositional, insurgent practices. Thus, once more, this study suggests the presence and/or interaction with certain agents who exercise a power that is contrary to the conformation of occupations as other spaces, which in their collectively constructed character, based on self-management practices, autonomy and the formation of mutual support networks, reflect the ideals defended and pursued by squatting movements.

Nonetheless, if on the one hand state repression and violence, criminalization and even the formalization of certain agreements—aiming at controlling or even at eliminating squatters' initiatives—may result in losses of autonomy, the cases addressed in Madrid and the Basque Country also indicate that these certainly do not result in the complete alienation of the principles and ideals of squatting. The spaces they appropriate and transform are destined to provide housing, a basis for alternative forms of economy, for work, for cultural and artistic initiatives, and several other types of political activities. From their socio-spatial interactions, squatters are able to give more visibility to their struggles and achieve greater legitimization of their demands. In their oppositional struggles, and differently from the “solutions” proposed and put to practice by governmental spheres, in this case too squatters far exceed the juridical scope of the right to housing, inserting themselves in broader struggles in direction to the right to the city.

Furthermore, and in general, if it is important to understand and discuss contradictory or conflictual aspects of squatting movements, it is just as important to note that as a basic principle, occupations, social centers and *gatzetxes* are not commodities nor tools for the generation of profit; they do not serve the commodification of life, nor are they instrumental for oppressive relations of production—quite the contrary. Similar to what Foucault (2008a) proposed for the notion of heterotopias, squats are fundamentally meant to overturn established orders, to subvert language and signification, to contrast sameness—as spaces of emancipation, subversion and resistance; but also spaces where both power and counter-power operate. Thus, squats *may be seen through the lens of heterotopia*, even if, in their peculiar nature of

being changing spaces with changing populations, they do not entirely fit Foucault's theoretical frame.

On the other hand, as the examples presented in this study corroborate, constant attention is necessary to Lefebvre's (1991) reminder that there is always the risk that counter-spaces or counter-projects—in referring to the possibilities of differential spaces—might be absorbed or destroyed by the forces of homogenization, and that they may include, to varying degrees, the quantitative and the homogeneous of the abstract space. Neither public nor private spaces, squats are constantly tensioned, in a dialectical relation between the individual and the collective, the private and... the alternative in the making. However, in their ideal (and also in their challenging realities), squats are essentially about use value, not exchange value.

Finally, squatters' movements are constituted by grassroots initiatives and collective experiences that, albeit permeated by normalizing forces that may even annihilate their most local experiences, are able to endure as a whole, in their networks, pluralities, and from the knowledge acquired from other initiatives that may have even ceased to exist. From all the above, the potencies identified as much as the challenges faced, even if contentiously, this study argues that: 1) as previously suggested by Bastos et al. (2017), squats are dialectically tensioned between the abstract and the differential. Although the authors refer specifically to the context of the RMBH, this theoretical correlation may also be inferred from the cases addressed in Madrid and the Basque Country; 2) squatters, on the other hand, may be looked at as *agents of the differential space* as long as they are activists in the squatting movements, that is, while continuing to be actively engaged in processes of self-management, and in the collective construction of more just socio-spatial relations, based on the struggles, demands and ideals advocated by these movements in each specific context.²³¹

²³¹ This study does not consider right-wing squatting or squatters, racially motivated and linked to extreme right-wing tendencies, as mentioned in chapter 5, as geared at producing forms of differential space.

8. CONCLUSIONS

From a methodological point of view, this work was mostly based on a qualitative and comparative approach with case studies. In suggesting a critical use of Lefebvre's notions of *differential spaces* as opposed to *abstract spaces*, and the *right to the city*; and Foucault's concept of *heterotopias* as key theoretical lenses, this research mainly focused on understanding and discussing 1) different forms of appropriation, transformation and use of space in the context of squatting movements; 2) some of the causes, finalities, methods, and discourses contained in squatters' practices, or in a word, their nature; 3) some of the repercussions and challenging issues decurrent from different forms, types and contexts of squatting, especially concerning self-management processes, networking, criminalization and legal issues, in a correlated manner to the proposed theoretical framework.

Hence, in a first moment it is also worth noting that due to limitations of scope and time, a number of issues relevant to the study of squatting movements that arose from the many readings, interviews and informal conversations that were held in the course of this research were not further investigated. Among these, the following were particularly noteworthy and could be included as topics for future research: 1) the interactions, potencies and conflictive issues in activist research or militant investigation; 2) the specific connections and challenging issues between supportive actors and squatters, especially focusing on representatives from institutions—such as local universities, as mentioned by some of the interviewees from both the RMBH and the Basque Country, and/or political parties, as seems to occur on all three addressed contexts, among others; and 3) the recent tendency towards institutionalization of certain urban social movements and organizations in the direction of greater participation in governmental spheres. This can be exemplified by the closer alignment of the Popular Brigades with the *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* [Socialism and Freedom Party] (PSOL), including the launching of candidacies, and the creation of the *Unidade Popular pelo Socialismo* [Popular Unity for Socialism] (UP), a political party, with the participation of the MLB and other social movements and collectives in Brazil. As previously mentioned in this study, a similar tendency arose in Spain after the onset of the 15-M movement, when local coalitions organized themselves and participated in the municipal elections in different Spanish cities.

Furthermore, in the scope of the present study, fieldwork was conducted in three specific contexts, namely the RMBH in Brazil, the city of Madrid, in Spain, and in six municipalities of the Basque Country, within Spanish territorial limits. Therefore, at the same time as it included cases from both the global South and North, expanding the possibilities contained in a comparative approach, the previously mentioned lines of investigation were nonetheless restricted to three specific socio-economic and territorial contexts. Thus, the discussions presented throughout this work, and its results should not be considered as general guidelines to be applied to all other cases—unless accompanied by a critical analysis that takes into consideration the peculiarities of each new case to be addressed.

Additionally, participant observation and the conduction of semi-structured interviews were circumscribed to the visited venues and to the views of squatters and other activists who agreed to share information and impressions. Especially in the case of the RMBH, mention should be made to the fact that most interviewees were either members of social movements and/or collectives or were considered leadership figures in the communities addressed. As some of the issues discussed in this work suggest—such as the different levels of engagement of the large numbers of people residing in occupations for housing, and their different interests, to cite a few—more extensive interviews including other actors would certainly expand the types and numbers of topics to be addressed. Thus, the proposed methodological tools, in addition to representing strategies to address and think the suggested theme, also constitute a delimitation of what has been possible to achieve throughout this research. With this in mind, some general thematic conclusions will be presented below.

The choice for a comparative approach allowed the assessment of distinctive characteristics and also several important common principles among the different cases addressed. Thus, different socio-economic and historical contexts, including the existence of specific legal frameworks and public policies, led to different forms and types of squats, responding to local demands, possibilities, and opportunities. At the same time, however, the worldwide character of neoliberalism and correlated austerity policies, also connected to recent global-scale economic crisis, had as some of their consequences several forms of socio-spatial oppression. Among them, the interconnected issues of housing injustice, predatory practices of real estate

speculation and their effects on the lives of people can be considered as the most recurrent reasons for squatting in all three concerned contexts.

Although neoliberal policies have historically prioritized speculative and financial interests to the detriment of the collectiveness, in the last decades both in Spain and Brazil social movements, supportive institutions and other actors have contributed to the emergence of legal frameworks that aim, if not to solve, at least to mitigate this scenario. Such is the case of a number of guaranties contained in the post-dictatorship constitutions and further legislation of both countries. Thus, in Brazil, as in Spain, housing is considered a universal right, and in both cases, the right to private property is legally bound to the fulfillment of its social function—on paper, a means to restrain real estate speculation.

Nonetheless, constitutional determinations and other legal dispositions have not sufficed to guarantee access to dignified housing, socio-spatial justice and, ultimately, the right to the city to all. In practice, the interests of the most privileged continue to be prioritized over the needs of the poorest. In both countries, data related to the housing deficit (especially when compared to the even higher numbers of empty dwellings kept for speculation) shows just how much the construction of housing units is not necessarily geared at fulfilling a fundamental constitutional right. Not only is such a scenario frequently mentioned in the speeches of members of squatting movements, but also in their practices they oppose and challenge the unjust and heteronomous forms of spatial control in cities, often resorting to existing legislation as a means to justify and legitimize their demands—even when the prerogatives contained on paper are of limited practical enforcement.

Thus, squatting movements—considering the cases in the Basque Country, Madrid and the RMBH—may be looked at as grassroots initiatives that act to ensure that already existing legal guarantees are, in fact, implemented, when the action of local governments is not sufficient. But not only that. Squatters' struggles go beyond providing housing for those who are in need of shelter and demanding institutionally regulated rights. Their struggles include and engage with a broad range of other locally constituted dimensions equally important and necessary to accomplish real changes

in life and society, reflecting their different views on what it means to have a right to the city.

In the RMBH, squatters demand that large land occupations for housing in the outskirts of the cities are recognized as legitimate, cease to be made invisible, and that the hundreds or thousands of families enjoy full and politically active living conditions, with adequate conditions of access and participation. Others choose to occupy long-abandoned buildings in central areas, opposing their exclusion from the city center and its many benefits—which is also evidenced by the most recent examples of occupations for other uses. *A right to the city that is also to produce and integrate the city.*

In Madrid and the Basque Country, on the other hand, social centers and *gatzetxes* located in central areas—or other well-serviced neighborhoods—not only frequently share close ties with squats for housing and housing movements, but also aim at becoming open, collectively created spaces to be appropriated by the people from local neighborhoods and the cities (a feature that was also identified in many occupations in the RMBH). Not only do these places offer shelter for diverse social movements and collectives, the possibilities for organizing collective and accessible activities are endless, depending on the interests of the participants. In the choices and opportunities for their locations, they frequently oppose processes of displacement, privatization, real estate speculation and others, taking a clear stance in favor of collective projects instead of profitable private endeavors. *A right to the city that is also to take over the city.*

In this sense, different from spaces as commodities and more than the mere basis for private activities, in their collective and oppositional character, in a broad sense, squats in all three contexts can be seen as *spaces for social transformation*. Thus, although not usually present in their speeches (as is the case of the right to the city), this study contends that as long as squatters collectively appropriate, adapt, build and use their spaces; having as some of their prerogatives self-management and autonomy; while at the same time engaged with other actors and in different scales; and involved in plural struggles for socio-spatial justice and other collective interests, they are oriented towards the production of differential spaces. On the other hand, in their daily practices

and identified hardships, and in the challenging and sometimes conflictive issues that they face, squatters show us that actually producing forms of differential spaces is certainly not an easy task.

In great part, this is related to the action of external actors traditionally connected to the production of abstract spaces that seek to neutralize, destroy, or even profit from squatters' initiatives—and sometimes also to squatters' needs and moves towards greater stability and security. Not to mention the increasing criminalization of their initiatives, constant eviction threats and the violent actions against squatters that also contribute to this challenging scenario in all three contexts. This can be illustrated, for example, by the externally regulated agreements offered by local governments, or aimed at and achieved by some of the social centers in Madrid and *gaztetxes* in the Basque Country, and the related losses of autonomy and combativity reported by a number of squatters and other activists.

Similarly, the decreases in levels of engagement in collective dynamics, and further control by the state in occupations that achieve greater recognition and stability in RMBH, as mentioned by some of the interviewees, also point to a movement (or a pressure) towards a rather homogenized or normalized production of their spaces. Processes such as these can start to take shape even before agreements are effectively made, as in the case of adopting urban plans that follow many of the precepts of the so-called “formal” city. In the specific case of the RMBH, the eventual presence of conservative representatives of the church, and the disturbing action of drug trafficking agents also add to this complex scenario, especially in land occupations.

The aforementioned factors should also be taken into consideration when discussing the possibility of looking at squats through the lens of heterotopias. On the one side, squats may be viewed as specific types of heterotopias when we consider them as other spaces, different and separated from the spaces controlled and regulated by the normalizing powers acting in relation to society; spaces that at the same time share connections with all the other spaces they either reflect or oppose; that are collective, shared spaces, open to reinterpretation and invention; and, especially when connected

to Foucault's concept of counter-conducts, if we consider them as spaces meant to overturn established orders.

On the other, at least in their ideal, heterotopias are effectively realized utopias, and just as Lefebvre emphasized when discussing the possibilities of differential spaces, real utopias are too fundamentally endowed with contradictory relations, which may result in their absorption, integration, or even destruction by the forces of normalization. Thus, when squats assume legally accepted parameters and adjust to externally imposed rules in order to be formally included as part of the norm, while this study recognizes their demands for stability and security as legitim, it is also necessary to be aware that these may represent a movement towards their neutralization.

Nonetheless, the very fact that squatting practices are the target of great criminalization and state violence is also an important indicative of the potency contained in their actions and speeches to promote real changes in life and society. Furthermore, in their essentially prefigurative character, squatters show us that different, fairer, collective, and more autonomous forms of social-spatial relations are possible. By changing the here and now and by putting historically debated theoretical notions such as self-management and networking into practice, squatters contribute to our understanding of their limits and the many contradictions they may imply.

Even when difficult crossroads may pose questions regarding the future of their plans and projects, in their critical positioning and their ideals of alternative forms of consumption, work and property relations—in their debates and disagreements, in their different forms of experimenting and maturing—squatters constantly create and share new forms of knowledge. In the intersectionality of their struggles, as conflictive as different interests may be, and in their capacity to articulate with each other, with other actors, and in a great diversity of scales, squatters constantly find creative forms to strengthen and further legitimate their initiatives. Challenging issues and contradictions are not only an inherent part of squatting—it is also in dealing with conflictive situations, imagining, and experimenting with new solutions that change resides.

It is for all these reasons that, as previously stated, this study contends that the production of space in urban squats, a space that is at the same time a product and conditioner of the alternative forms of social relations they entail, greatly contributes to

changes in how the people involved relate to each other. In a broader sense, in the spaces they produce, and also by overcoming their physical limits, reaching the streets of the cities and other forums of political debate, by publicizing their actions and many others, squatting movements carry a potency of influencing and reverberating in other spheres, scales and times. Whether short or long-lived, squatters' actions may secure the collective use of spaces instead of their private exploitation, avoid unjust evictions of people in need for shelter, provide housing for large numbers of people, contribute to the strengthening of several social movements, collectives, and initiatives, and engage in embracing networks of mutual care. Combined, their actions may draw attention to the need to curb real estate speculation, to unfair processes of displacement and many other forms of socio-spatial injustices, at the same time as they propose fairer and more inclusive ways of living in cities.

Finally, the emancipatory and transformative potency contained in the squatting movements does not cease to exist with the end of a squat. Even if it resists only for a moment. Even in a glimpse. Be it by oscillating like the tiny lights of fireflies or by engaging in the constant, resilient and combative construction of ants; their struggles continue in time. In the next squat. And in different degrees, also in the minds and actions of many of those who once knew them.

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APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW KEY QUESTIONS

Introduction:

- a) I am studying about the squatting movements for my doctorate. I would like to have a broad view that could help me understand their reasons for existing, objectives, daily lives, their relationships with other occupations, collectives of activists and institutions, with which rights their struggles relate and other points of view of residents, activists and supporters.
- b) Can I record our conversation? [If authorized, turn on the recorder].
- c) If you do not want any information to be published, now or in the future, please tell me and it will be treated confidentially.
- d) I will not publicize your name unless you prefer to be identified.

Questions:

1. Tell me about your experiences in the occupation [collective, movement—specify depending on the interviewee], from when you started until the present.
2. Tell me about the history of the occupation [collective, movement] from its beginning, or the beginning of your participation, until the present.
3. How are the processes of self-management in the occupation [collective, movement] in which you live [participate]?
 - If necessary, ask:
 - 3.1. How are decisions made? [In assemblies, by voting and/or consensus, by coordination, working groups, etc.].
 - 3.2. How are collective activities organized and financed?
 - 3.3. How is the communication in the occupation [collective, movement] and between this and other occupations, collectives, movements?
 - 3.4. Do you see positive and/or negative aspects?
4. Do you see contacts and/or interactions between different occupations, collectives, movements?
 - If necessary, ask:
 - 4.1. How do these contacts and/or interactions occur?
 - 4.2. Do you think it is important? Why?

- 4.3. Do you see positive and/or negative aspects?
5. What do you think about the involvement of political platforms in occupations?
If necessary, ask:
- 5.1. Do you see positive and/or negative aspects?
- 5.2. Is there any hierarchical relationship?
6. To what rights do the struggles of the squatting movements relate?
Depending on the case, ask:
- 6.1. What has changed in your life now that you have a house [or no longer need to pay rent]?
- 6.2. What do you think changes in people's lives when they have a house [or no longer need to pay rent?]
7. How do you perceive the negotiations and/or agreements with owners and/or government?
Depending on the case, ask:
- 7.1. Is a title of possession what you want most?
- 7.2. Do you think what people want most is a title of possession?

Observation:

Questions 6.1, 6.2, 7.1 and 7.2 were used for the interviews conducted in Brazil.

APPENDIX B – CONSENT TO USE AUDIO RECORDING

The undersigned (hereinafter, the "interviewee") confirms that she/he has given consent for her/his voice to be recorded and transcribed by Clarissa Cordeiro de Campos (later as the "researcher") for use in her doctoral research and related studies, and agrees that the rights over the recorded words are shared between the researcher and the interviewee.

The interviewee gives the researcher, without any form of limitation and format, the right to use the transcribed words for the purpose of developing her research. However, the written consent of the interviewee will be required for third parties other than the researcher to use this information in other projects. In addition, the researcher will protect the confidentiality of the interviewee when her/his words are cited and publicly distributed.

If you have any questions about this research and this consent form, you may contact Clarissa Cordeiro de Campos at clarissa.cordeiro@ufsj.edu.br, *Departamento de Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Artes Aplicadas* [Department of Architecture, Urbanism and Applied Arts], *Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei* [Federal University of São João del-Rei] (Brazil), or by phone at [...].

Date:

Full name and signature of the interviewee:

Researcher's signature:

APPENDIX C – OCCUPATIONS IN THE METROPOLITAN REGION OF BELO HORIZONTE (RMBH)

The map presented in Figure 31 and the information in Table 6 include all 66 occupations identified in the RMBH during this research. Of the total of 66 identified occupations, 82% (54) are in Belo Horizonte—from which three are in the border of Belo Horizonte and Santa Luzia. The other 12 cases are located in Nova Lima (2), São José da Lapa (1), Contagem (2), Ribeirão das Neves (2), Betim (3), Ibité (1) and Mário Campos (1), cities that are part of the RMBH. If, on the one hand, a majority of occupations, 68% (45), are in lands for self-construction, a significant percentage, 32% (21), are in previously abandoned and unused buildings.

Additionally, while the survey allowed to identify occupations for cultural uses, support for women in situations of violence, and other political purposes, 95% (63) of all occupations are primarily for housing or include housing as one of their main objectives. As far as it was possible to check, although 20% (13) of the total were evicted, some of them have been resisting for many decades. In relation to their current situation (or status), when occupations are identified as "illegal", this means that no agreements, formal regularizations, or similar have been identified. When identified as "legal", the existence of agreements, formal regularizations or similar has been mentioned in the documents consulted or in the reports of interviewees, but without further details. When available, additional information was included in the table.

From the data presented in the table it is also possible to verify that 73% (48) of all identified occupations started in the last ten years—of the total of building occupations, 67% (14) occurred in the last ten years, mostly in central and economically privileged areas of Belo Horizonte. When the number of families living in each occupation was mentioned in the sources consulted, the most recent data was included in the table. Finally, whenever available, information on the movements and/or collectives that participated in the initial organizational processes of each occupation, and information on the formal ownership of each place were also provided.²³²

²³² When consulting the table also note that the symbol “_” means that “the data does not apply” and the symbol “...” means “unknown data”.

The map in Figure 31 was elaborated and edited by the author, and for its composition were used: 1) data provided by Professor Denise Morado, from the PRAXIS research group of the School of Architecture, UFMG²³³; 2) shapefile database retrieved from *Plano Metropolitano RMBH, Macrozoneamento da Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte*, UFMG, 2014 <https://bit.ly/3eHF4t>, last accessed on 04 May 2020; 3) Shapefile database retrieved from *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*, IBGE census sectors directory for the 2010 census <https://bit.ly/3bzIY6t>, last accessed on 04 May 2020; 4) Information provided by residents of occupations in the RMBH, members of social movements and activists, in addition to field observations between 2018 and 2020. The numbering on the map corresponds to the numbering of the occupations in the table.

To see footage made by drone of various occupations in municipalities of RMBH, including some of those mentioned in this study, see the YouTube channel "*Drone Salvador*."²³⁴ For Madrid (and other European cities), the Squatting Everywhere Kollektive (SqEK) provides a map and other information (such as type, status, and period of occupation) of various squats.²³⁵ Another interesting project, the *Vivero de Iniciativas Ciudadanas* [Greenhouse for Citizens' Initiatives], provides a mapping of several initiatives, including social centers. The digital platform²³⁶ that hosts the project includes other cities in Europe and Latin America (also in Brazil, although not in the RMBH). Finally, for the Basque Country, Padrones (2017) provides a mapping of the squatting movement from 1980 to 2016. Complementarily, the author presents a temporal relation of the occupations, with information on location, status, types, and duration.

²³³ D. Morado. Personal communication, e-mail, October 17, 2019. G. Cruz. Personal communication, e-mail, October 18, 2019.

²³⁴ All footage taken and made available by Tiago Castelo Branco. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8JvCpuv5CojlvHWfCt1EVw/videos>. Last access on 24 May 2020.

²³⁵ Available at <https://maps.squat.net/en/cities>. Last access on 24 May 2020.

²³⁶ Available at <https://civics.cc/pt/#!/iniciativas>. Last access on 24 May 2020.

Figure 31

Land and Building Occupations in the RMBH, 2020

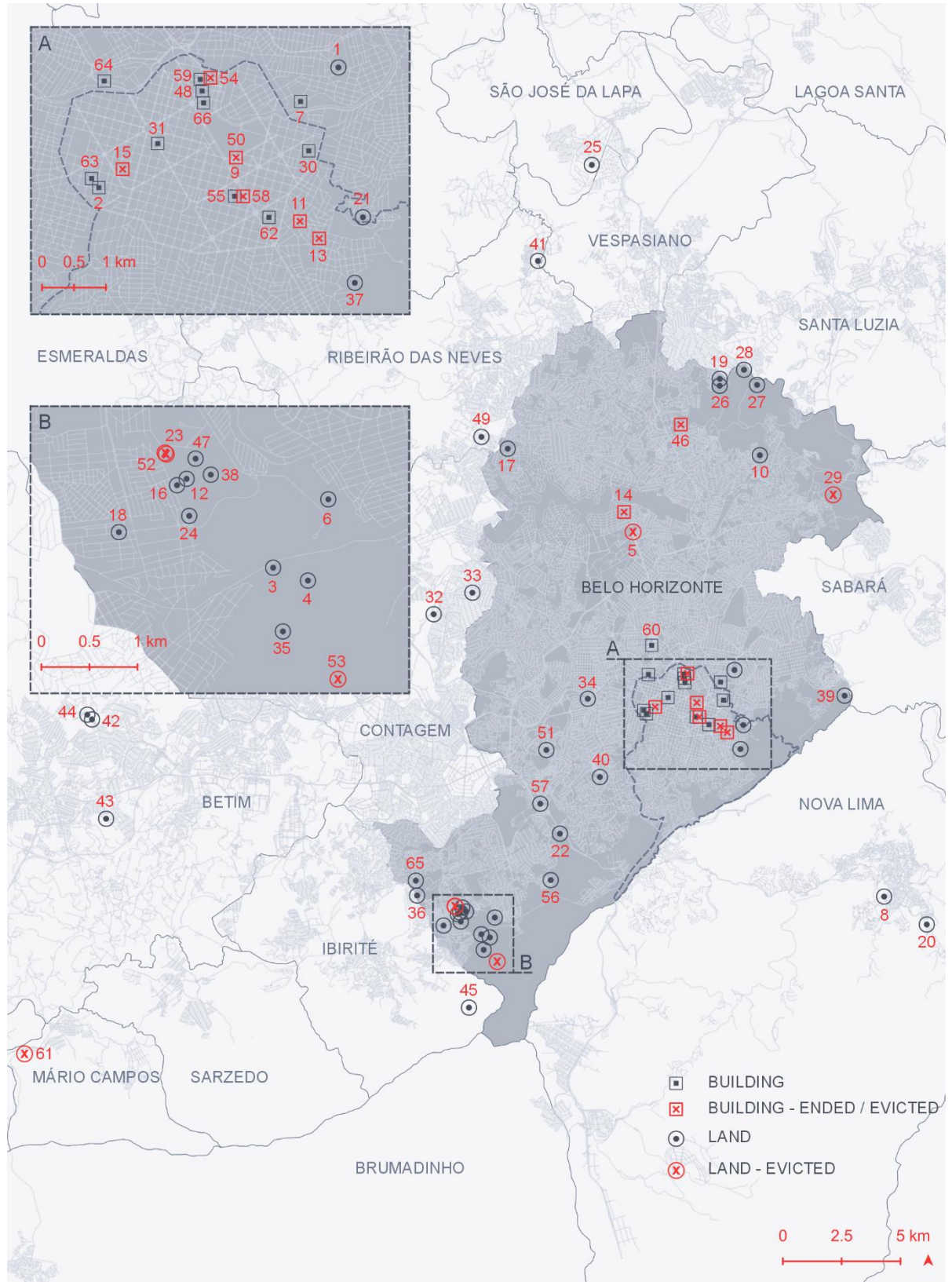


Table 6

Identified occupations in the RMBH, 2020

(Continues)

#	Name	City (District/location)	Main reason	Type	Start	End	Number of families	Status	Initially organized by	Formal property
1	Vila Teixeira/Quilombo Souza ^{(1) (2) (3)}	Belo Horizonte (Santa Tereza)	Housing	Land	1920's	–	15	Certified as a quilombo remnant by Fundação Cultural Palmares; repossession order suspended in Jul. 2019.	Local community	...
2	Associação Casa do Estudante de Minas Gerais ^{(7) (48)}	Belo Horizonte (Santo Agostinho)	Temporary housing for low-income students; academic, cultural, environment-related activities	Building	1961	–	...	The property has been object of a legal dispute against UFMG since 2013.	Collective of students	Public (UFMG)
3	Horta 1 ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	1990	–	...	Illegal	...	...
4	Horta 2 ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	1990	–	...	Illegal	...	...
5	Vila Recanto UFMG ⁽⁴⁾	Belo Horizonte (Pampulha / Ventosa)	Housing	Land	Mid 1990's	May 2011	90	Ended. A negotiation process led to legal compensations either in money or relocations (to social housing in the RMBH)	Local community	Private (BH Imóveis)
6	Vila Corumbiara ^{(5) (25)}	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	1996	–	379	Legal	Liga Operária & MLB	...
7	Torres Gêmeas ^{(2) (44)}	Belo Horizonte (Santa Tereza)	Housing	Building	1996	2013	180	Evicted	Local community	Private (ICC Ltda; Jet Construções Ltda)

Table 6

Identified occupations in the RMBH, 2020

(Continues)

#	Name	City (District/location)	Main reason	Type	Start	End	Number of families	Status	Initially organized by	Formal property
8	Canto do Rio ⁽⁶⁾	Nova Lima (Oswaldo Barbosa Pena)	Housing	Land	1996	–	19	Illegal	...	...
9	Navantino Alves 1 ⁽⁷⁾ (46) (47)	Belo Horizonte (Santa Efigênia)	Housing	Building	1998	Jul. 2013	25	Evicted. Some residents filed for adverse possessions, but without success	...	Public (Fund. Navantino Alves)
10	Novo Lajedo ⁽⁶⁾	Belo Horizonte (MG-020)	Housing	Land	2002	–	3500	Illegal	...	...
11	Caracol ^{(5) (7)}	Belo Horizonte (Serra)	Housing	Building	2006	2007	6	Evicted (lasted three months)	Local community & Brigadas Populares	...
12	Irmã Dorothy 1 ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	2007	...	...	...	...	...
13	João de Barro 1 ^{(2) (7)}	Belo Horizonte (Serra)	Housing	Building	2007	6 months after	Over 100	Evicted	Brigadas Populares & Fórum de	...
14	João de Barro 2 ^{(2) (7)}	Belo Horizonte (Pampulha)	Housing	Building	2007	2007	...	Left the building due to internal conflicts	Moradia do	...
15	João de Barro 3 ^{(2) (7)}	Belo Horizonte (Santo Agostinho)	Housing	Building	2007	...	...	Evicted	Barreiro	...
16	Camilo Torres ^{(5) (6) (7)}	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	Feb. 2008	–	142	Recognized by the municipality as Area of Special Social Interest 2 (AEIS-2) in 2014	Brigadas Populares	...

Table 6

Identified occupations in the RMBH, 2020

(Continues)

#	Name	City (District/location)	Main reason	Type	Start	End	Number of families	Status	Initially organized by	Formal property
17	Dandara ^{(5) (6) (7) (8) (9) (10)}	Belo Horizonte (Céu Azul)	Housing	Land	Apr. 2009	–	At least 2500	Recognized by the municipality as Area of Special Social Interest 2 (AEIS-2) in 2014. They do not possess title of ownership.	Brigadas Populares, MST, Fórum de Moradia do Barreiro	Private (Construtora Modelo)
18	Irmã Dorothy 2 ^{(5) (6) (7) (10)}	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	Feb. 2010	–	223	Recognized by the municipality as Area of Special Social Interest 2 (AEIS-2) in 2014	MLB; Brigadas Populares	...
19	Zilah Sposito-Helena Greco ^{(5) (6) (45)}	Belo Horizonte (Izidora)	Housing	Land	Sep. 2011	–	*see occupations 26, 27 and 28	Illegal	...	...
20	Canaã ⁽⁶⁾	Nova Lima (Nova Suíça)	Housing	Land	2011	–	12	Illegal	...	...
21	Vila Pomar do Cafezal ⁽⁶⁾	Belo Horizonte (Aglomerado da Serra)	Housing	Land	2012	–	120	Illegal	...	...
22	Novo Paraíso ⁽⁶⁾	Belo Horizonte (Palmeiras)	Housing	Land	2012	–	350	Illegal	...	...
23	Eliana Silva 1 ^{(5) (6) (7) (10) (11)}	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	Apr. 2012	2012	150	Evicted three weeks after the occupation	MLB	...
24	Eliana Silva 2 ^{(5) (6) (7) (11)}	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	2012	–	350	Recognized by the municipality as Area of Special Social Interest 2 (AEIS-2) in 2014	MLB	...
25	Nova Cachoeira ⁽⁶⁾	São José da Lapa (Cachoeira)	Housing	Land	2012	–	60	Illegal	...	...

Table 6

Identified occupations in the RMBH, 2020

(Continues)

#	Name	City (District/location)	Main reason	Type	Start	End	Number of families	Status	Initially organized by	Formal property
26	Rosa Leão ^{(5) (6) (10) (12) (13) (45)}	Belo Horizonte / Santa Luzia (Izidora)	Housing	Land	May 2013	–	Together, the occupations in the Izidora Region house about 9000 families	Barter agreement (state/municipal governments and landowner) in late 2018. The current state government does not recognize the agreement.	Local community	Private (Granja Werneck S.A.)
27	Esperança ^{(5) (6) (10) (13) (14) (15) (45)}	Belo Horizonte / Santa Luzia (Izidora)	Housing	Land	Jun. 2013	–				
28	Vitória ^{(1) (5) (6) (10) (13) (14) (15) (45)}	Belo Horizonte / Santa Luzia (Izidora)	Housing	Land	Jun. 2013	–				
29	Jardim Vitória ^{(5) (16)}	Belo Horizonte (Jardim Vitória)	Housing	Land	Jul. 2013	Jan. 2014	...	Evicted	...	...
30	Espaço Comum Luiz Estrela ^{(5) (7) (17)}	Belo Horizonte (Santa Efigênia)	Cultural & Political	Building	Oct. 2013	–	–	Has a 20-year agreement for use of the building. In counterpart, the collective is restoring the construction.	Theater artists collective & Brigadas Populares	Public (State of Minas Gerais)
31	Kasa Invisível ^{(18) (19)}	Belo Horizonte (Lourdes/Centro)	Housing Cultural Political	Building	2013	–	4	In negotiation with the owners & adverse possession process	Collective Kasa Invisível	Private (local family)
32	William Rosa ^{(5) (6) (20) (21)}	Contagem (Laguna)	Housing	Land	Oct. 2013	Jun. 2017	600	Agreement: inclusion of families in housing programs and rent assistance until the units are ready	...	Public (Centrais de Abast. de Minas Gerais S.A.)
33	Guarani Kaiowá ^{(5) (6) (22)}	Contagem (Ressaca)	Housing	Land	2013	–	150	Illegal	...	...

Table 6

Identified occupations in the RMBH, 2020

(Continues)

#	Name	City (District/location)	Main reason	Type	Start	End	Number of families	Status	Initially organized by	Formal property
34	Vila Esperança do Calafate ⁽⁶⁾	Belo Horizonte (Calafate)	Housing	Land	2014	–	70	Illegal	...	...
35	Olaria ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	2014	–	...	Illegal	...	...
36	Professor Fábio Alves 1 ⁽⁵⁾ (23)	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro / Marilândia)	Housing	Land	2014	–	...	Illegal	...	...
37	Nelson Mandela ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Serra)	Housing	Land	2014	...	...	...	Local community	...
38	Nelson Mandela ⁽⁵⁾ (6)	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	2014	–	310	Illegal	...	...
39	Terra Nossa ⁽⁶⁾ (10)	Belo Horizonte (Taquaril)	Housing	Land	2014	–	800	Illegal	Local community	...
40	Vila da Conquista ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Ventosa)	Housing	Land	2014	–	...	Legal	Local community	...
41	Dom Tomás Balduino 1 ⁽⁶⁾	Ribeirão das Neves (Areias)	Housing	Land	2014	–	280	Illegal	...	...
42	Primeiro de Maio ⁽⁶⁾	Betim (Sítio Poções)	Housing	Land	2014	–	78	Illegal	...	...
43	Dom Tomás Balduino 2 ⁽⁶⁾	Betim (Jardim Petrópolis)	Housing	Land	2014	–	110	Legal	...	...
44	Shekinah ⁽⁶⁾	Betim (Sítio Poções)	Housing	Land	2014	–	160	Legal	...	...
45	Barreirinho ⁽²⁾	Ibirité (Barreirinho)	Housing	Land	2014	...	54	...	Local community	...
46	Chico Xavier ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Xodó Marise)	Housing	Building	2015	...	...	Evicted	...	...

Table 6

Identified occupations in the RMBH, 2020

(Continues)

#	Name	City (District/location)	Main reason	Type	Start	End	Number of families	Status	Initially organized by	Formal property
47	Paulo Freire ^{(5) (6) (24) (25)} (49)	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	May 2015	–	Over 300	Illegal	MLB	Private (Bus company)
48	Zezeu Ribeiro e Norma Lúcia ^{(5) (26) (27)}	Belo Horizonte (Centro)	Housing	Building	2015	–	150	Illegal	...	...
49	Novo Horizonte ^{(5) (28)}	Ribeirão das Neves (Tancredo)	Housing	Land	2015	–	100	Illegal	...	...
50	Navantino Alves 2 ^{(7) (46)}	Belo Horizonte (Santa Efigênia)	Housing	Building	2016	2018	70 people	Evicted	Popular Brigades	Public (Santa Casa BH)
51	Candeeiro ^{(29) (30)}	Belo Horizonte (Nova Gameleira)	Housing	Land	2016	–	60	Illegal	...	...
52	Temer Jamais ^{(31) (32)}	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	Sep. 2016	Sep. 2016	300	Evicted	...	...
53	Fidel Castro ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	2016	...	...	Evicted	...	...
54	Casa de Referência da Mulher Tina Martins 1 ⁽⁵⁾ (33) (34)	Belo Horizonte (Centro)	Reference house for women	Building	Mar. 2016	Jun. 2016	–	Illegal: After three months of the first occupation, an agreement was made with the state government, which granted the use of another building, for two years, in the Funcionários neighborhood (2016-2018). It was not renewed.	Movimento de Mulheres Olga Benário & MLB	Public property (UFMG)
55	Casa de Referência da Mulher Tina Martins 2 ⁽⁵⁾ (33) (34)	Belo Horizonte (Funcionários)	Reference house for women	Building	Jun. 2016	–	Public property (State of Minas Gerais)			

Table 6

Identified occupations in the RMBH, 2020

(Continues)

56	Marielle Franco ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Vila Cemig / Barreiro)	Housing	Land	2016	–	52	Illegal	...	...
57	Vila Esperança ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Anel / Betânia)	Housing	Land	2017	...	...	...	Local community	...
58	Carolina Maria de Jesus 1 ^{(25) (35) (36)}	Belo Horizonte (Funcionários)	Housing	Building	Sep. 2017	Jul. 2018		Legal (agreement with the state government in 2018) - part of the families opted to receive two terrains with adequate infrastructure in Barreiro, Belo Horizonte, as well as pecuniary assistance for self-construction (still waiting implementation). The families wishing to remain in the city center were able to rent another building with collective monetary help from the government.	MLB	Private (Fundação Sistel de Seguridade Social)
59	Carolina Maria de Jesus 2 ^{(25) (35) (36)}	Belo Horizonte (Centro)	Housing	Building	Jul. 2018	–	200			Private
60	Pátria Livre ^{(37) (38) (39)}	Belo Horizonte (Santo André / Ped. Prado Lópes)	Housing	Building	Sep. 2017	–	14	Illegal - negotiation pendent with the state government and the owner.	MTD, MST	Private individual
61	Manoel Aleixo ⁽⁴⁰⁾	Mário Campos	Housing	Land	Apr. 2017	May 2017	Over 150	Evicted	...	...
62	Casa Azul ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Funcionários)	Housing	Building	2018	...	...	...	...	...
63	Padre Piggj ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Santo Agostinho)	Housing	Building	2018	...	...	...	...	...
64	Anita Santos ⁽²⁾	Belo Horizonte (Carlos Prates)	Housing	Land /building	2018	–	...	...	Street Population Movement	...

Table 6

Identified occupations in the RMBH, 2020

#	Name	City (District/location)	Main reason	Type	Start	End	Number of families	Status	Initially organized by	Formal property
65	Professor Fábio Alves 2 ⁽²⁾ (41)	Belo Horizonte (Barreiro)	Housing	Land	Oct. 2018	...	700	...	...	...
66	Vicentão ⁽⁵⁾ (42) (43)	Belo Horizonte (Centro)	Housing	Building	Jan. 2018	Feb. 2019	80	Legal (agreement with the state government in Jan. 2019): 2 years of pecuniary help to pay rent and the guarantee of housing units or plots for self-construction (waiting implementation)	Brigadas Populares, Núcleo de sem-teto Barreiro, Street Vendors Collective	Private (Banco Hércules)

(¹) O TEMPO online <https://bit.ly/2RnPIAZ> (²) Workshop 10 Anos de Ocupações na RMBH (³) ESTADO DE MINAS online <https://bit.ly/2vkzyup> (⁴) Nogueira (2019) (⁵) Bastos et al. (2017) (⁶) Nascimento & Libânio (2016) (⁷) Interview: BH5 (⁸) Leis (2016) (⁹) Interview: BH2 (¹⁰) Interview: BH7 (¹¹) Corporação de Ofício de Arquitetura e Urbanismo website <https://bit.ly/2X1PjAx> (¹²) Talk 1: Moradia/Cidade/Mundo Seminar, Esperança Occupation, 25 Sep. 2019 (¹³) Interview: BH10 (¹⁴) Esperança occupation website <https://bit.ly/3bB0R2P> (¹⁵) Talk 2: Moradia/Cidade/Mundo Seminar, Esperança Occupation, 25 Sep. 2019 (¹⁶) G1 online <https://glo.bo/2LAb5Gd> (¹⁷) Espaço Comum Luiz Estrela occupation website <https://bit.ly/3fVyUGr> (¹⁸) Kasa Invisível website <https://bit.ly/2Ze6Bx1> (¹⁹) Interview: Zenite, BH12, BH13 (²⁰) William Rosa occupation website <https://bit.ly/2X2EDSf> (²¹) HOJE EM DIA online <https://bit.ly/3aLgVAb> (²²) Guarani Kaiowá occupation website <https://bit.ly/2Z5pJxg> (²³) Professor Fábio Alves occupation website <https://bit.ly/30QSfBz> (²⁴) Paulo Freire occupation website <https://bit.ly/3dXVXiH> (²⁵) Interview: BH1 (²⁶) Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil website <https://bit.ly/2T9yAdC> (²⁷) Zezeu Ribeiro e Norma Lúcia occupation website <https://bit.ly/3bEhgn6> (²⁸) Frei Gilvander, video on Youtube 1 <https://bit.ly/2Lyx2FR> (²⁹) Frei Gilvander, video on Youtube 2 <https://bit.ly/3dSA8AC> (³⁰) Brigadas Populares website <https://bit.ly/3dVmn4b> (³¹) Consciência net online <https://bit.ly/2WC3htL> (³²) Jornalistas Livres video <https://bit.ly/364KIBK> (³³) Tina Martins website <https://bit.ly/2TcZWit> (³⁴) Interview: BH9 (³⁵) Carolina Maria de Jesus occupation website <https://bit.ly/3dUsaGS> (³⁶) UFMG website <https://bit.ly/2TbLmlt> (³⁷) Brasil de Fato online <https://bit.ly/3dTghRO> (³⁸) Interview: BH4 (³⁹) Interview: BH3 (⁴⁰) G1 online <https://glo.bo/2zMy5it> (⁴¹) Comissão Pastoral da Terra website <https://bit.ly/3dWmHj7> (⁴²) Vicentão occupation website <https://bit.ly/2WZUXDe> (⁴³) Interview: BH14 (⁴⁴) Santos (2003)* (⁴⁵) Clark (2019)** (⁴⁶) ESTADO DE MINAS online <https://bit.ly/2T9ZgdW> (⁴⁷) O TEMPO online <https://bit.ly/3cd8Ttn> (⁴⁸) Associação Casa do Estudante de Minas Gerais website <https://bit.ly/3ekGHwz> (⁴⁹) ESTADO DE MINAS online <https://bit.ly/3bB7271>. Last access for all websites: 16 May 2020.

*Santos, F. A. (2003) *Breve relato sobre os prédios de Santa Tereza [Brief report on the buildings of Santa Tereza]*. PUC Minas. Núcleo de Prática Jurídica. Serviço de Assistência Judiciária "Desembargador Lopes da Costa". [Manuscript] M. Sanders. Personal communication, message, October 22, 2019.

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