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RESEARCH ARTICLE

URBAN SQUATS AS ECO-SOCIAL RESISTANCE TO AND RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF CAPITALIST RELATIONS

Case Studies from Barcelona and Rome

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ABSTRACT: Urban squats represent a major form of resistance to capitalist relations generally and to more recent attacks on people's livelihoods and their lived urban ecosystems. At the same time, by putting into practice and even setting precedents for ecologically sustainable and socially egalitarian ways of living in a city, squatters also furnish ways of enabling resilience in the face of socially and environmentally devastating policies. Urban squats thereby exemplify an alternative, practical eco-social response and counter to the capitalist city. Borrowing from ecofeminist and non-market socialist insights, we discuss case studies from Barcelona and Rome demonstrating how urban squatters engage in subsistence oikonomic practices and balance forms of sometimes confrontational resistance with adaptive resilience.

KEYWORDS: Barcelona, Capitalism, Cities, Oikonomia, Rome, Subsistence Economy, Urban Squatting

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1. Introduction

As in most industrialised regions, the European Union (EU) has reached unprecedented urbanisation levels, such that roughly 60 percent of people in the EU live in cities (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2012). These have been built by radically altering if not obliterating pre-existing societies and ecosystems, relying upon vast quantities of resources from surrounding areas and from most of the rest of the world, often at the expense of people whose subsistence depends on those resources. Such cities have also become permanent health hazards, centres of elevated pollutant concentration in water, air, and whatever remains or is introduced of soils and vegetation (Detwyler and Marcus 1972; Engel-Di Mauro 2012; Pickett et al. 2011). They have been, or tend to be, loci causally linked to social upheaval and environmental degradation elsewhere, at the same time that they are in themselves ecological and social disasters, typified by highly unequal power relations and increasingly popular reactions against degradation (Cronon 1991; Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006; Lefebvre, 1968; Smith 1984).

Over the past three or more decades, as in many other areas of the world, such urban contexts have been deeply affected by continuous cuts in basic state services and the privatisation or attempted privatisation of some key government functions of both social and environmental consequence (water distribution, parks management, healthcare, etc.). These, together with widening socio-economic inequalities, rising unemployment, precarisation of jobs, and the implementation of policies generally favouring the wealthy have led to a further erosion of state finances and delegitimation crises in the bourgeois political system. Such problems, caused by the ruling classes themselves, have been tackled by imposing austerity measures, increasing state control over civil liberties, curtailing formal democratic rights, and suppressing dissent, often violently.

With intensifying economic inequality and repression, reaching hitherto more privileged people, a mixture of revolts and non-violent forms of resistance (e.g., mass protests, strikes) has ensued. Occasionally, however, alternatives have been initiated and developed, largely confined to the small scale and within whatever manoeuvring spaces exist for popular grassroots action. These often involve environmental concerns, such as protecting green spaces from land speculators, promoting less polluting forms of transport, and producing food organically. These proactive and overwhelmingly non-violent forms of resistance, knowingly or not, enhance local resilience in the face of policies of mass deprivation by acting on and combining questions of capitalist oppression and environmental issues, as overtly done by environmental justice movements within and beyond urban settings (Bryant and Callewaert 2003; Bullard 2005).

Urban squatting is among such proactive and largely non-violent movements. However, it offers a specifically anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist outlook by focusing on avoiding, as much as possible, any engagement with consumerism-promoting capitalist mechanisms and with property laws governing abandoned buildings and urban lots (whether private or public). Hence, urban squatting recognises state institutions as part of capitalist relations and therefore as equally problematic. It is also a movement predicated on the development of alternative practices fostering the opening up and use of urban areas to build a different kind of society, by experimenting with alternative ways of living and by putting into practice egalitarian ideals (Squatting Europe Kollektive 2013).

We argue that urban squats, understood as expressly political projects aiming to establish egalitarian alternatives (Pruijt 2012), intertwine, perhaps more than any other form of urban anti-capitalist resistance, often separated kinds of social and environmental concerns. Yet unlike environmental justice movements, urban squats are by definition anti-capitalist and anti-statist in character and focus on appropriating urban space for self-management. Moreover, urban squatting purposefully develops the infrastructure for alternative ways of living that contribute to making neighbourhoods resilient in the face of capitalist devastation. We aim to show how urban squatting constitutes resistance to capitalist relations and enables the development of simultaneously ecological and social resilience to counter the impacts of bourgeois maldevelopment in urban areas (Squatting Europe Kollektive 2014).

2. Urban Squatting as Subsistence-Oriented *Oikonomia*

Actions and policies have recently proliferated that contribute to a massive redistribution of wealth to the wealthiest, who continue to be rewarded for financial speculation through bail-outs or other means of national state support for capitalists. Another, corollary tendency has been the ever greater capitalist encroachment into controlling most people's means to live (e.g., shelter and access to potable water and less toxic air) alongside their lived environments (e.g., accessibility to a healthy river ecosystem, the number and size of parks nearby). Such government actions and policies and business responses conform to capital accumulation practices based on expanding privatisation and eliminating most socially redistributive measures (e.g., welfare). Ideologically, they are, among other things, informed by a reductionist understanding of the economic.

As a contrast to such reductionism, where only capital accumulation processes and market values are recognised, a subsistence *oikonomic* perspective helps uncover the

development of counter currents of economic practice, involving both resistance and resilience, including urban squatting. This alternative perspective is inspired by ecofeminist and non-market socialism paradigms. Drawing from the insights and practices of many women farmers of modest means (largely in low-GDP, but ecologically more advanced communities), ecofeminists have developed subsistence or eco-sufficiency approaches that point to social reproduction and ecosystems as the basis of an economy. To render such foundations more obvious, one can start by considering (1) reality as understood from below, (2) issues of control over the means of subsistence (relative autonomy from outside social forces), and (3) the reproduction of life as having primacy (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999; Salleh 2009). This overall perspective intersects with much feminist work, such as standpoint theory (Harding, 2009), and with the original meaning of *oikonomia*, the management of the house/community, with the concept of community expanded to include physical environments and other organisms. It is a perspective that coheres to some extent with Aristotle's distinction between *oikonomia* and *chrematistics*, where the former is an art of living, a creative process (rather than a dismal science), and the latter is about wealth accumulation (Martinez-Alier and Roca 2001; Cattaneo 2008). This is therefore a broad understanding of economy, beyond approaches that define it in terms of remunerated labour or monetary exchange. It is a non-market socialist view of the economic as endeavouring "to satisfy everyone's needs while power and resources are shared in just and 'equal' ways" (Nelson and Timmerman 2011, 3). In practice, the orientation is, among other facets, towards realising a creative enterprise of self-realisation. Hence, subsistence *oikonomic* processes oppose, in practice and principle, the maximisation of financial means or capital accumulation.

Urban squatting is arguably a diverse, innovative, and poly-functional subsistence *oikonomic* process operating through conflictual or adaptive resistance and promoting resilience, both ecological and social, hence eco-social. Urban squatting proceeds from the margins, from below, and the primary aim is to achieve autonomy as much as possible, aside from securing a means of social reproduction (shelter) that is denied to the many through the imposition of treating land, housing, and associated infrastructure as commodities. In this light, the role of urban squatters' movements can be crucial to activism more broadly and should be understood as eco-social egalitarian alternatives to capitalist relations. Specifically, urban squatting provides a lived, practical alternative to the capitalist city.

By way of case studies from Barcelona and Rome, we discuss how squatters movements not only subvert existing urban infrastructure by using it to egalitarian ends, but also develop practices challenging the reigning political despotism of the capitalist city,

with its largely plutocratically elected officials, technocratic planners, and virtually unaccountable business class, including developers and land speculators (as a synecdoche, 'the market'). The selection of case studies is guided by the similarity of situations reflected in Barcelona and Rome, as part of the EU. Both cities are heavily affected by real-estate speculation and are two of the three most important cities for squatting in Europe (Guzman-Concha 2015). We also have direct experience with and knowledge of these cities and their social movements, through close contact with local activists and, to a certain extent, personal involvement as activists in these cities.

3. Urban Squatting Projects

The focus herein is on three kinds of squatting projects that creatively engage with life-reproducing and ecologically sound well-being in the spheres of urban mobility, food provisioning and household and community management. There are many other eco-social processes that are not covered here and that squatters are involved in, such as promoting greater biodiversity, as well as recycling clothes, electrical tools, abandoned buildings, thrown-out food (e.g., dumpster diving), and much else.

One crucial project, childcare provision, testifies to the difficulties faced by squats internally as well as through external pressures. Childcare is often missing or tough to furnish and maintain, often because the squats are not residential, but also because of continuing problems with patriarchal assumptions (e.g., differential work-type expectations relative to gender; see also Mudu 2004). In squats like Forte Prenestino, for example, there was much struggle involved in setting up a children's playground partly because of difficulty in finding salubrious and safe enough areas, as such squats often host hundreds of visitors for parties, concerts, alternative markets, among many other overwhelmingly well-attended events. The eX-Snia squat is unique in running a summer camp for children and in having nearby a playground and structures, all belonging to the municipality, to run children's programmes. Casale Podere Rosa (an initially squatted abandoned farm house) is a rare example of an operation predominantly run by women. They offer childcare and children-oriented activities, but they are also an NGO (*associazione*) managing the space on behalf of what initially was a squat.

As this is not an exhaustive study of all such dynamics, we will point to additional eco-social dimensions of squatting as appropriate, in connection with the specific projects discussed. After discussing each type of project, we address how urban squats (1) constitute subsistence oikonomic practices (what are the innovative, diverse and creative processes and to what extent they are different from the hegemonic interpreta-

tion of economic issues) and (2) balance forms of sometimes confrontational resistance with adaptive resilience.

3.1 Mobility

One way of subverting and challenging capitalist modes is through promoting and developing infrastructure for alternative means of transport. For instance, since 1992, the use of bicycles to call into question the marriage of urban planning to cars and oil has been the focus of what has come to be known as Critical Mass, which, in Spain and elsewhere, has been linked to squatters movements as part of efforts to demonstrate the practical potential of much less environmentally impacting modes of transport (Lorenzi, 2010). In Rome there have developed since 2004 large Critical Mass events, much larger than those organised on a monthly or weekly basis. These large events, under the name *Massa Critica Interplanetaria* or *Ciemmona* ('big CM'), have spread to several other EU cities since 2009. They attract thousands of cyclists from all over the country and abroad. The events last a few days and give visibility to the bicycle subculture. They are enlivened by bicycle workshops hosted in squats, such as *eX-Snia* and *Forte Prenestino* in Rome, *Patio Maravillas* in Madrid, *Kukutza* in Bilbao, and *Biciosxs* in Barcelona.

In Barcelona, *Biciosxs* is comprised of a collective that since 2006 has squatted abandoned or empty properties in *Nou Barris*, a working-class neighbourhood in the north of the city. Beginning with a plot from a demolished small house, the bicycle workshop has been evicted twice and has moved to the 150 building, an emblematic example of an unfinished block of flats left abandoned after the blowout of the Spanish real-estate crisis. The building is divided into a residential section and the *La Rampa* social centre, where the bicycle workshop is located. Beyond the workshop, the collective has promoted a bicycle culture among youngsters in the neighbourhood, who suffer from a lack of public infrastructure and social services. Local Critical Mass events have also been promoted on special occasions, such as to celebrate the workshop's anniversary and to welcome the visit to Barcelona of bike collectives from other cities. A strong relationship has also been built with other cultural groups in *Nou Barris*, manifested in *Biciosxs*' participation, particularly in the early years, in neighbourhood celebrations and open-air cultural events. In more recent years, since the move into the 150 building, the workshop is less visible from the street (it is located in the building's basement) and contributes to the punk culture of the *La Rampa* social centre which occupies the ground floor and the garage underground and is named after the garage ramp that goes two floors down. Both are in the early stages, where a visible open air

place was squatted, and since its recent underground phase *biciosxs* has not changed its main functions.

In Rome two similar bicycle workshops (*ciclofficine*) are located in Forte Prenestino and in eX-Snia. Forte Prenestino is located in an abandoned, sprawling nineteenth century military fort rescued from oblivion in 1986. The eX-Snia squat instead is part of a large industrial complex established in 1917 for the production of viscose. It includes a park and another walled area filled with dilapidated manufacturing establishments and office buildings, alongside an artificial lake produced by a land speculator firm's drilling into the aquifer. In 1995, a small part of the industrial complex was occupied to prevent the realisation of a series of large luxury blocks of flats and, more recently, the squat played a prominent role in forcing the municipality to declare the artificial lake and remaining complex as public property (McKaye 2014). It is noteworthy that in Forte Prenestino only a few people actually live on the premises, while at eX-Snia there are no residential areas.

The bicycle workshops in these two squats manage a small section of these two large squats. There is storage area for tools and materials and some workspace available. Similar to *Biciosxs* and the other workshops in Barcelona, those from Rome are also based on either a non-monetary principle (any exchange is welcome, but tools or spare parts in particular are sought as a contribution to workshop maintenance) or on a non-commercial principle (monetary donations are also accepted). In both bicycle workshops the approach towards bicycle culture goes beyond simple reparation or assembly. The bicycle collective of Forte Prenestino favours training and education in bicycle mechanic skills, with attention to and pedagogical approach shown towards the users, who can avail themselves of explanations regarding all sorts of details and particularities of bicycle mechanics. In eX-Snia, there is, in addition to a workspace, an adjacent warehouse hosting tens of used bicycles and hundreds of spare parts. The focus of the bicycle workshop (*Ciclofficina popolare Donchisciotte*), founded in 2003, is additionally on promoting bicycle culture through visibility in street activity, such as the organization of large Critical Mass events. One of the organisers was even interviewed, along with Carl Carlsson (author of *Nowtopia!*), by the national state radio station, Rai Radio1, on occasion of the 2014 Critical Mass gathering (*La Radio Ne Parla* 2014).

Such squatters' day-to-day activity promotes the use of the bicycle by offering free tools and by providing spare parts that are recycled or donated. Self-help with repairs and learning by doing are the norm, and occur through mutual help among participants. The process 'you see, you do it, you teach' ensures continuity in the transmission of technical information and grounding of activities in ways that are self-organised and self-replicating. Otherwise, the workspace is not only a site of learning about,

building, and fixing bicycles, but also a locus of sociability (including making new friends) and exchange of information, goods, and help well beyond the bicycle world. Opportunities to diffuse information at national levels through state radio and other media speaks to the possibility of contributing to scaling up the movement for alternative transport, though not necessarily self-organising principles and egalitarian practices behind the ideas about which squatters may be interviewed and positively received.

3.2 Food Production

The purposive combination of food production with squatting done in urban gardens presents a direct response to capitalist social and environmental degradation all at once and exemplifies a case for resilience through adaptation stemming from social movements. The promotion of urban gardening is hardly new and it served, in many industrialised countries, as a temporary instrument to attenuate widespread economic hardship.

In Spain, urban gardening has largely been the province of the elderly (sometimes to overcome income shortfalls) and it continues to be marginalised in urban settings. Under the Franco dictatorship, there was an imposition of gardening for the poor but mostly in rural areas. In Italy, similarly, urban gardening was introduced as an obligatory after-work activity by the Fascist regime. Otherwise it has been a marginal endeavour largely confined to poverty-stricken immigrants from Southern Italy and the elderly. As in Spain, urban gardening has remained unacknowledged by official institutions until recently. In both Spain and Italy, urban gardens may have long histories in some cities, like Barcelona, but they have been often annihilated by built environment expansion and pushed to city peripheries (Cioni 2012; Domene and Saurí 2007).

The current popularisation of urban gardening involves much greater initiative and planning from below, explicitly community-oriented aims, much environmental sensibility behind establishing urban gardens, and increasing official recognition of urban gardening as a positive development, rather than a setback or throwback. Urban gardening is increasingly viewed across different social contexts as a way of improving urban environments and public health while mitigating social instability and/or meeting sustainability targets (Ajmone-Marsan and Biasioli 2010; FAO 2010; Lichtfouse 2010). However, as Domene and Saurí (2007) point out for the case of Barcelona, the urban gardens of the wealthy and from officially sanctioned planning are privileged by the authorities (hence more protected from speculators' pressures) over those organised by the poor and from below.

In this context of rising official recognition and even promotion of urban gardening, urban squatters have often also taken up food production, whenever feasible. Unlike top-down understandings of gardening, squatters aims are radically different, involving production for non-market purposes and showcasing for autonomy potential, when gardening conditions are not conducive to satisfying needs. These characteristics also set urban squat gardens apart from private or community gardens, where the aims are decidedly not anti-capitalist, nor oriented towards promoting eco-sufficiency or oikonomia.

3.2.1 Squatting in Barcelona and Urban Gardening

Built between the Mediterranean Sea and the hills of the Collserola Natural Park and with one of the highest population densities in Europe, Barcelona is a metropolis which suffers from a serious lack of green space. Moreover, the possibility of interaction between people and the urban (green) environment goes beyond the production of public parks, where the rights of use and management of the open environment are very limited. Urban gardens contribute to an understanding of interactive cities in which their inhabitants can make active use of outdoor space. In Barcelona, these types of garden flourish wherever possible, and most of them are on squatted land. Despite the fact that green urban spaces and often organic produce contribute to greening the city in general, mainstream urban policies often discriminate against these areas (Domene and Sauri 2007), instead promoting bourgeois 'nature' conservation. Institutional promotion of public green space, such as urban parks, has little relative use for food security, and contrasts with the vision of a post-capitalist interactive city. In spite of the risk of eviction, many gardeners continue to spread an environmentalist message across the city which takes a community perspective based on collective grassroots organisation.

The Can Masdeu community gardens promote participants' self-organisation among a mix of retired and younger adults, long-term or recent immigrants and locals. There are monthly assemblies and working committees to carry out communal tasks, such as water management redistribution of compost and manure, organisation of social events, and management of communal allotments. There are also some individual or family allotments. In contrast, at Can Piella, another rurban squat situated in La Llagosta, a village 15 km from Barcelona and evicted in May 2013 after three years of autonomous life, the community garden project was shared by all participants.

Often on previously constructed open-air allotments or in the few remaining vacant lots, community urban gardens are common, such as Hort del Chino, in the old town,

or the two Hort Indignat, in Poble Nou, which emerged from a branch of the 15M movement. The food produced is largely symbolic, particularly if soil quality is poor. Establishing urban gardens on vacant lots represents an opportunity to green the city and promotes agro-ecological culture. Perhaps, given the poor soil quality and the often limited access to sunlight, particularly evident in compact cities with high buildings surrounding the gardens, the value of these experiments of 'squatting under the sun' does not depend on the amount of food produced.

3.2.2 Squats and urban gardens in Rome

In Rome, over the last decade, there has been a rising interest in and spread of community gardens, partly spurred by public sensitivity to environmental issues and partly by rising food insecurity (Formisani 2011; Pinto et al. 2010; UAP 2010). As Barcelona, Rome has a long history of human settlement and impact, including anthropogenic materials out of which soils have developed; however, large tracts still exist of unpaved soils. Many of these tracts are also under pressure by land speculators. The eX-Snia squatters, as noted above, were instrumental in preventing speculators from taking over a large abandoned industrial park, including the artificial lake, the largest in Rome proper, formed as a result of the Pulcini firm drilling into the local aquifer and inundating part of the site, which over a decade or so has become lush with vegetation and teems with aquatic and terrestrial life-forms. In the process of defending this large area from speculators, eX-Snia squatters opened up the possibility for some of the land to be transformed into urban gardens for local inhabitants, who have divided the lot into individual parcels. A garden plot has also been established within the squat itself, but it remains largely inchoate.

In Forte Prenestino, through an internal collective's initiative, a synergistic garden was set up in the early 2000s in a higher-elevated parcel, not far from residential spaces and an apiary. In the late 1990s, another collective inventoried the composition of local flora and put together a permanent display and guide. Yet another founded an herbalist's shop. Thanks to the assembly-based decision-making processes typical of urban squats (Mudu 2004), all these initiatives have been integrated so that the inventory and garden, for example, furnish data and herbs for the herbalists, who in turn produce medicines and cosmetics for squatters' use as well as for sale to help maintain the shop. This is an example of the sort of ecologically sensible synergy that squats can promote.

In contrast, Orto Insorto (Insurgent Garden) involves several collectives of activists with divergent agendas who converged on saving an abandoned green space from

speculator encroachment. They took over the area in 2011 by setting up a synergistic and organic garden and composting area, eventually building an oven and other amenities. Unlike most squats, Orto Insorto was subjected to soil and vegetable sampling with the help of technically knowledgeable squatters or friends thereof. Results were discouraging with respect to extremely high levels of lead, but the issue has been turned into an opportunity to alert the public of the terrible, enduring aftermath of capitalist urban development (more on this below) and to experiment with grassroots scientific research and land reclamation through, for example, phytoremediation. These constitute the sort of prefigurative practices necessary to imagine an egalitarian and liveable post-capitalist urban future.

3.3 Rurban Communes

Unlike in Rome and most other known cases of explicitly political squatting, there are squats in Barcelona that explode the capitalist differentiation of lived areas into town and country. Three remarkable social spaces—Kan Pasqual, Can Masdeu and Can Piella—constitute inspirational cases for understanding oikonomic practices. The first two are located on the Collserola hills, recently protected as a natural park whose zone reaches the city limits, and which constitutes a unique example of a large green area in the middle of the Barcelona metropolitan area. The remains of an agricultural past are often visible in the city. One of its peripheral district neighbourhoods, for example, is called Horta (orchard, in Catalan) after the many farmhouses found there (Diez i Quijano 2003).

High up in the Collserola hills, isolated from public transport, is Kan Pasqual, squatted in late 1996. Its commune—consisting of about 12–15 people—has set up an integrated management project that covers geographical, social and natural aspects characterising the local territory. The objectives are to rehabilitate and maintain the building by using, as far as possible, uncontaminated materials derived from renewable sources and not based on social exploitation. The new infrastructure built by squatters highlights sustainability by implementing permaculture designs. The area is accordingly divided into different resource use zones. Renewable energy sources are preferred, and there are photovoltaic panels, solar ovens, hot water solar panels, a self-assembled wind turbine and an experimental methane digester. Waste management aims at closing the material cycling loop, where the organic fraction is composted and the use of non-renewable or non-recyclable goods is highly reduced. Waste water is treated through biological processing involving local riparian species and the water is

then reused. Social activities are oriented to popular education over the environmental crisis.

Finally, a library has been established that specialises in social and economic issues and serves as a point of counter-information with respect to socially and environmentally unsustainable behaviours and practices. The direct action tactics of the Kan Pasqual collective are famous. Right after the initial occupation, they cut the electricity connection to the main grid and in its place they lit candles, which were slowly replaced by second-hand and later new solar photovoltaic panels. Subsequently, the solar panels were integrated with a windmill the collective made and mounted on an 18 metre steel pole. The windmill construction has been refurbished to accommodate public workshops, attended sometimes by more than 40 people.

Can Masdeu features a slightly different social-ecological strategy, but it is still oriented towards strengthening rural-urban connections and striving for a drastically reduced dependence on waged employment. Since its founding, the commune has focused on opening a social centre dedicated to community gardens and environmental education. The location is closer to public transport and the immigrant neighbourhood of Nou Barris, where a highly frequented social centre was established without too much difficulty. It promotes Sunday activities and workshops also related to environmental issues and local environmental management.

Can Piella, on the other hand, was set in a more rural and less hilly landscape, where primary activities such as cereal growth and sheep farming are still performed by some neighbours. The commune consisted of a stable group of around 12 people throughout the duration of the Can Piella experience. The house was part of a large property where land is still cultivated, but it required much restoration work. Proximity to the city made it possible to recycle and access construction material as well as attract people to come and help or participate in the many events that the Can Piella social centre offered, activities that included practical self-organisation and training towards the achievement of material autonomy. Beer brewing and, to a minor extent, fruits from the orchards provided the main sources of the collective's income.

The people who squatted at Can Piella had imagined the possibility of pooling their personal savings, aiming for a total communal economy. The group's main collective financial project was brewing beer, which later shifted to the safer (at that time) premises of Can Masdeu. This is an interesting example of mutual aid between squats. Can Masdeu has the lowest level of communal economy of the three rural communes discussed here, but it still provides members with basic food, shelter, internet access, construction materials, tools and basic training in exchange for money (€55 per month) and labour time. Members must contribute to the two collective working mornings per

week -since 2015 the option for a single 6 hour weekly shift is been tested- and do two kitchen shifts per month, three two- day working shifts per year for the opening of the Sunday bar/restaurant of the social centre, plus the work necessary to manage the house and various projects (such as the garden, collective work-day organisation, finances, food purchases, events and environmental education). Each person has their own income, on average €300/400 per month, of which €55 goes to the house project and the rest is for extra personal costs. This is a powerful example of how a material alternative to capitalism can be reached in a squat that is empowered by food production, with many workshops and tools, and collective self-management. The squatting practice is both a necessary and sufficient condition for delinking from the capitalist economy. The amount of money saved by not paying rent and the collective running of a house enables a completely different relation to the labour market. This in turn frees up time that, if collectively organised, can be dedicated to household production of goods and services that contribute to the direct satisfaction of most needs. Moreover, when tools and space are available (in the form of rooms for setting up workshops and for storing materials, or land for direct cultivation), a higher degree of autonomy is reached. The space can be used for growing fresh vegetables or to raise chickens that supply fresh eggs and some meat. It can be used for workshops and the storage of materials, among many other uses, such as the social kitchen for the Sunday bar/restaurant in Can Masdeu, and the bakery and brewery of Kan Pasqual and Can Piella (Cattaneo and Gavalda 2010).

4. Subsistence Oikonomy, Resistance, and Resilience

The above-described bicycle workshop, food production, and urban projects demonstrate the subsistence oikonomic nature of urban squatting and their contribution to resisting capitalist impositions and developing eco-social resilience. In itself, squatting entails the right of use preceding that of property. In case of public property, the survival of these experiments remains difficult because large municipalities such as those of Barcelona or Rome administer public property as assets for capitalist speculation, and conceive them in terms of monetary real-estate value. This is the case, for instance, of the *Muy Ilustrísima Administración*, a foundation of the Sant Pau Hospital which is in charge of administering the patrimonial assets of Sant Pau and that is not constituted as a public but as a private entity with its own properties. The resistance

which is enacted in these corrupted¹ public spaces therefore requires stronger participation and involvement by actors. In spite of this, they can be considered as uncivil actors, acting against the constituted social order of private property, but whose value has degenerated into financial assets (D'Alisa et al. 2013).

Bicycle workshops and the activities that are socially promoted through them constitute subsistence oikonomic practices insofar as they contribute to satisfy the need for urban mobility. They are artistic and creative not only because recycling or assembling bicycle parts often require a certain dose of ingenuity, but also because the very essence of the collective enterprise is set up in a way where the initial investment is modest enough to allow for the day-to-day practice to begin immediately. This is also crucial for squatters in general because of their often precarious position. To help thwart eviction proceedings, squatters are compelled to organise and offer activities as soon as the squat is established so as to help in legitimising a squat by pointing to its social usefulness or even necessity. In a certain way the essence of these oikonomic practices that stem from an immediate need of survival contributes to a form of resistance of the larger social space: the service provided in the urban mobility sector contributes to justify the right of use of a space over and above private property. Similarly, critical mass events are a form of resistance that disobey traffic rules set up in benefit of private cars and their social and environmental costs, while the repair and assembly work done in the workshops, and in particular the educational, are a form of resilience to the rising costs of urban modes of transportation. The Aristotelian idea of oikonomic being an art is also visible through more creative expressions such as the building of tall bikes (by welding two or more frames on top of each other) or of the many visually distinctive products squatters make, including screen-printed T-shirts, patches, banners and other such materials for street events. It is not surprise that the bicycle subcultures emerging around workshops and their collectives have been an inspiration for *Nowtopia* (Carlsson 2008; Carlsson and Manning 2010) which refer to such activities as a form of strategic exodus from paid work –hence from the working class and capitalism in general.

Urban gardening, whether spearheaded by squatters or not, has yet to develop to such an extent as to be able to meet even elementary nutritional necessities without

¹ For corrupted we intend here the process through which a public good degenerates into private property. Nonetheless, it is likely that the public administration of these properties is also corrupt. For the Sant Pau case: <http://www.lavanguardia.com/salud/20130607/54375440987/justicia-recomienda-hospital-sant-pau-pida-concurso-acreedores.html>

compromising health by way of bioaccumulation of toxins. As long as cheap fossil fuels keep supplying abundant energy-intensive inputs to the agro-industrial process, most experiments in urban agriculture are not worth the effort in terms of produce. Much of the value of these experiences rests on the promotion of agricultural alternatives, such as low-input, do-it-yourself, non-commercial food production, and of different ways of organising production, consumption, and land management. Because of their urban location, these examples offer greater visibility to food production, a process that the capitalist model of agriculture has largely severed from most people's lives. In the Can Masdeu example, one of the 30 garden allotments is dedicated to hands-on school group visits. The Forte Prenestino synergistic garden also serves didactic purposes, hosting tens of school outings each year. In the case of Orto Insorto, a side effect of open-air squatting of no mean importance is the visibility that these gardening experiments receive. While what goes on inside a squatted building can only be witnessed by those participating in squat events, urban community gardens—particularly those that are not hidden behind walls or high fences—offer anyone passing by the possibility of seeing without having to physically enter the space. In this way the grassroots practices become evident to the population at large. Social experiment visibility is probably the factor that most easily can be scaled-up.

Rurban examples offer the best potential for oikonomic development among the cases shown here. First, they realise the literal meaning of oikonomia since their functioning relies highly on successful management of communal life, through decision-making mechanisms which, traditionally in a horizontal manner, refer to the satisfaction of the most basic material needs—shelter, food and reproduction—in order to achieve a greater quality of life. Collective decision-making, combined with collective self-organization and communal work is therefore understood as the art of living well. This process, rather than a dismal science which is replicable by definition, is an art, and by definition is different each time. The collective processes, organisation and working routines of Kan Pasqual are different from those of Can Masdeu or those that were established in Can Piella, and reflect the heterogeneous necessities constituting these projects.

Secondly, the small amount of monetary means required in rurban experiments to achieve well-being exemplifies how the financial dimension is not of great relevance, that there is something important beyond the economy, which is here understood as the eco-sufficient oikonomic realm. In this way, collective labour time and specific communal tasks represent the eco-sufficient oikonomic means that allow for healthy food grown in the garden, a well-maintained basic domestic infrastructure (water, elec-

tricity, heating, transportation, communication, etc.) and most reproductive tasks being provided with no or very little need for money.

Third, the resilience capacity of rurban projects is a characteristic that goes beyond their financial needs and includes the physical infrastructure and materials that they, as squatting experiences, can access without money. In a comparison with rural squats and neo-rural cases it has been shown that urban squatters and, to a smaller extent rurban squatters, rely on the existence of a capitalist system based on constant production of waste that squatters succeed in re-using to their, and to a certain extent societal benefit (Cattaneo 2008). In the hypothetical case of a systemic collapse urban squatters might see to a certain degree their livelihoods affected by a contraction in the availability of materials dissipated by the capitalist system. Rural squatters' and neo-rurals' livelihoods, on the other hand, depend to a larger extent on the environment that surrounds their projects so that their resilience to a situation of extreme crisis would be higher than in any urban or rurban context. However, resilience in rurban and urban squatting does not depend only on availability of waste materials and infrastructure. Their very ability to do things without money, and to self-organise the way their needs are satisfied, in a non-financial and non-conventional manner, facilitates the development of know-how, social capabilities, and learning experience that are, ultimately, the real engine of resilience.

5. Overcoming the Capitalist City.

The major challenge that these experiences face is that of being capable of scaling up to society overall. It is beyond the scope of this work to fully explain the reasons why this does not occur or the extent to which it does. We can limit ourselves to a few observations. Squats face barriers and challenges as any alternative movement, above all the limited amount of resources available to them. Suffice it to say that the World Social Forum itself, which might represent to date the most comprehensive and inclusive example of alternatives economic practices, faces a similar difficulty in scaling up its efforts.

The limited availability of resources (limited by capital and the state, certainly not by environmental constraints) highlights the other side of the eco-sufficient oikonomic characteristic of squatting. On the one hand, squatters accomplish things with little money, using alternative means, recycling materials, and urban infrastructure and land, contributing to these projects in other than monetary terms. On the other hand, not treating labour-time as a commodity implies that, to a certain extent, an individual cannot be fully dedicated to the above-discussed practices. Squatters still must channel some of their en-

ergies to satisfying personal and social reproduction needs and, as anyone living in a capitalist society, this is often accomplished by selling one's labour-power. Hence, it is not possible to be fully dedicated to resistance and resilience practices. It is really hard, in fact, to implement, if not maintain alternative projects with so few resources and, in many cases, with the law against them.

Issues around legality are specific to squatting practices and present an especially important challenge to generalising squatting practices. On the one hand there are legal threats, with often criminal consequences, which over the past decades have been intensified. For instance, the Spanish government have criminalised squatting in 1995 and many Italian municipalities have recently engaged in sometimes violent seizure of squats, as well as adjudicated abandoned property to private interests, even when they are illegitimate according to bourgeois legal frameworks. Similar legislation has been introduced in The Netherlands in 2010 and England and Wales in 2012 (Dadusc and Dee 2014) that so far serve more as deterrent against squatting. All such state actions necessitate the diversion of already exiguous resources to countering an increasingly inimical legal framework, through legal defence, efforts to extricate squatters from prison, and other activities that could be devoted to building and diffusing squats instead. This is a common problem to anti-systemic social movements, but the matter is exacerbated by criminalisation, which is also a form of direct state repression.

There are also obstacles related to cultural processes. The style, discourse, and aesthetics associated with squatters might not be compelling to most people and this limits the possibility of popularising squatting. Although one need not necessarily identify with counter-cultural practices in order to make use of abandoned property, it is true that images associated with squatters, which mass media also construct through negative stereotyping, is that of anti-system criminals characterised by dirty appearance and anti-social behaviour. Squatters themselves tend not to be concerned with such stereotypes and so fail to engage in the production of a counter-stereotypical image. Again, their limited time is often employed towards developing alternative practices rather than contributing to changing a negative social image. This is also because they often cultivate a positive reputation among people in the neighbourhoods in which they are involved, and this in turn provides less incentive to organise in waging campaigns to educate the public more widely about squatters as people.

What is striking is that, in spite of such enormous obstacles, squatters have managed to scale up alternative, arguably facilitated by an enduring economic hardship for most people. This is especially the case in countries like Italy and Spain, where there have sprouted sizeable movements for the right to housing in response to a spike in evictions. This has contributed to raising the legitimacy of squatting in the eyes of more people. However,

squatting becomes here the *extrema ratio*, a tool for overcoming the denial of a basic human need for shelter. Squatting is used as a tactic to force local governments to intervene on behalf of the evicted or to save historical sites from speculator depredation. The cases of Can Battló or Ateneu Flor de Maig in Barcelona, or Teatro Valle or Nuovo Cinema Palazzo in Rome are emblematic in this sense. There is hence a convergence with squatters movements and squatters often get involved in these movements (at times they are part of such movements from the start) for the right to housing or for the preservation of historical sites. Rather than a divergence emerging between squatters and housing rights and site-preservation movements once negotiations with local authorities lead to more stable situations, the spaces that are secured for housing or otherwise saved from speculation remains available for radical activism, for developing a solidarity economy, cooperative enterprises, low-budget activities, and community services.

Rurban practices, on the other hand, open up even more possibilities for diffusing eco-sufficient oikonomic relations by achieving a degree of material autonomy from the capitalist mode of production. At the same time, like urban squats, they contribute to urban struggles with their periurban location. In particular, the focus of their urban struggles goes towards greening the city and stopping sprawl. To this extent, while it would be difficult to scale up their strategies within the limits of the capitalist city, their re-conceptualisation of the city–environment relationship can be useful in greening the city from the below through self-organised neighbourhood actions (rather than the self-organisation of capitalist market actors or top-down government policies). For example, Can Masdeu has been influential in spreading the idea of freeing land with neighbours in need of cultivation space, thereby extending the notion of squatting to what is beyond the walls of a building and beyond the imagination of young counter-cultural activists. The social dimension of ‘squatting under the sun’ and its reach to hundreds of monthly visitors since its establishment in 2002 have contributed to shaping public understanding of the city. In their public campaigns, the rurban communes and the social movements related to Collserola have joined forces in protecting the Park of Collserola—and the (neo)rural practices present there—from urban sprawl (http://www.collserola.org/manifest_Solana.html). The Can Masdeu collective and its team of architects have recently succeeded, aided by the financial and building sector crisis, in convincing the municipality to improve the connectivity between Barcelona and its natural park through establishing green corridors and encouraging urban agriculture (<http://w1.bcn.cat/portesdecollserola/>). Even the local government recognises that the squat, though illegal, contributes cutting-edge ideas and practices to a reformulation of the relationship between the city and its biophysical environment.

It could be argued that environmental degradation problems, especially those of the persistent (e.g., radioactive waste) and world-scale (e.g., global warming) variety, severely constrain the potential that squatting offers for overcoming capitalist relations in ecologically sustainable ways. But it is precisely because of these problems that the squatters movement can lead to a social and ecological antidote to the current depoliticisation of the urban ecosystem (Swyngedouw 2009). The bicycle, the community garden, and the collapse of the rural-urban divide are not just elements of alternative techniques of living. They are also means by which to forge communal relations which cannot allow for social exclusion or for the imposition of health hazards. Bicycles are a much less environmentally destructive mode of transport than motorised vehicles, and their reuse and collective maintenance extends their lifespan and reduces the demand for new models, with the environmental impact that implies including mining of raw materials. When there are problems of long-term soil contamination (Engel-Di Mauro 2012), social relations of the kinds established by squatters enable a community to confront the environmental problems or hazards in democratic ways, instead of expediently dumping them on the least empowered. The development of rural living contributes to bridging the city—and its rampant individualism—with the rural environment, which provides the material basis necessary for sustaining life. Not surprisingly, eco-social experiments flourish by combining the communalism typical of rural life with the greater political visibility of nearby cities. These are only some of the many socio-ecological benefits urban squatters contribute to shaping the way a city relates to its natural environment, and if we accept the underlying hypothesis of a natural resource-based crisis of capitalism, the basis is set for building up greener post-capitalist experiences, as Carlsson (2008) also highlights.

The core questions are how to avoid people being detrimentally affected and how to devise ecologically sustainable ways to overcome the problem of ecologically disastrous cities. By insisting on the collective re-appropriation of urban space and on the development of ecologically alternative and autonomous ways of life, the squatters movement connects what are usually disparate issues, such as shelter, transport and food, and offers practical ways of overcoming, if not replacing, the capitalist city with a form of human settlement that is both socially and ecologically constructive. Destructive processes such as warfare, large-scale mining and global warming cannot be addressed directly by localised urban struggles alone, but they can be curbed by undermining authoritarian structures, liberating urban spaces and putting alternative ways of living into practice. Many of the decision-making processes that induce world-scale devastation and reinforce global authoritarian mechanisms are centralised in institu-

tions located in large industrialised cities. The squatters movement has a crucial role to play here in displacing if not replacing these decision-making institutions.

Democratising the city is one important step towards democratising the world and ending the social and ecological devastation brought about by the capitalist mode of production. Squats, as a form of anti-capitalist political organisation, are much more than efforts at securing housing and much wider than struggles for democratising cities. They are ways to develop radical forms of autonomy, with self-management in the reproduction of life as the primary exit strategy from the capitalist mode of production.

6. Conclusions

Together with bicycle workshops or urban gardening, rurban experiments constitute possibilities for carrying on projects almost without money and with ecologically beneficial repercussions. Capitalist relations are undermined by refusing to sell labour-power and by practising egalitarian organising and communal economies. Especially in the case of rurban versions, squats are lifestyle alternatives that demonstrate the possibility of developing autonomy, through access to physical resources (implying less reliance on capitalist institutions), promoting individual self-fulfilment, establishing egalitarian redistributive practices, and at the same time reducing harmful environmental impact, if not bringing about ecological and human health benefits. It is likely that, given their self-organising capacity, such efforts will enable the resolution of problems more than conventional counterparts during worst-case scenarios, including the catastrophes generated by capitalist development in general.

Urban squats exemplify resilience in the face of apathy and slowness of local political institutions in responding to the need for access to land. Land distribution and use is instead accomplished in an affordable way, whereby time counts not for the hours sacrificed to commodity production and sale or as a quantity to be minimised as a cost. Rather, time is incorporated into creative processes of activism in the open air. As in any grassroots initiative, the equivalent wage-value of working hours behind these activities is not quantified and reduced to money equivalence. If it were, the monetary cost of the symbolic food produced in urban and rurban squat gardens would be extremely high. Further, these experiments are not only about food. They involve diverse activities, where one element (gardening) is often an opportunity for achieving social or personal well-being (see also Squatting Europe Kollektive 2013 2014).

The resistance to the neoliberal economic order that squats' projects represent is, in itself, the factor that contributes to the creation of grassroots economic projects that

are here described as subsistence oikonomies. That is, in the urban practices that we have considered oikonomies take shape as an act of resistance. The form is a case of resistance. However, the substance of these practices, as in the original understanding of an economic system, is centred about the satisfaction of human well-being. In this light, they can be understood as a form of creative adaptation, hence resilience, to the degenerating status quo.

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