



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Without Shelter and Without Papers: on housing, resistance,
and horizons in urban squats

verfasst von | submitted by
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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 664

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium DDP Urban Studies

Betreut von | Supervisor:

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Zusammenfassung

In dieser Arbeit werden Hausbesetzungen im Kontext der globalen Wohnungskrise untersucht. Dabei werden die wichtigsten Faktoren, die eine größere Dauerhaftigkeit ermöglichen, und politische Forderungen, die auf zukünftige Möglichkeiten in einem Szenario nach der Besetzung drängen, erforscht. Eine vergleichende Studie wurde in São Paulo und Brüssel durchgeführt, wobei zwei von der Bewegung für den Kampf in Stadtvierteln, Dörfern und Slums (MLB) bzw. La Voix Des Sans Papiers (VSP) selbstverwaltete Hausbesetzungen untersucht wurden. Die Analyse betrachtet Widerstandsprozesse und Kämpfe im unmittelbaren und weiteren zeitlichen Umfeld, wobei die Untersuchung mehrere Monate lang Beobachtungen vor Ort, Tiefeninterviews und Kodierungen umfasste. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Gründe für das Gedeihen von Hausbesetzungen multifaktoriell und kontextabhängig sind, wobei die Schlüsselaspekte mit dem Organisationsgrad der Bewegungen, ihren Verbindungen und ihrer Handlungsfähigkeit während eines Zeitfensters (z. B. einer Krise) zusammenhängen. Die Fälle werfen ein Licht auf das Potenzial und die Grenzen von Hausbesetzungen und zeigen, dass beide Erfahrungen angesichts der aktuellen Bedingungen auf dem Wohnungsmarkt in beiden Städten in einem angemessenen Maße für Wohnstabilität sorgen. Es gibt jedoch einen diskursiven Unterschied in den Forderungen der sozialen Bewegungen, der ihre Kampfhorizonte unterschiedlich gestaltet. Diese Erfahrungen sind nicht frei von den Widersprüchen, die durch die kapitalistische Urbanisierung entstehen. Weitere Untersuchungen sollten durchgeführt werden, um die Auswirkungen des „Erfolgs“ auf den Zusammenhalt der sozialen Bewegungen auf lange Sicht zu verstehen. Diese Studie leistet einen Beitrag zur wachsenden Literatur über das Recht auf Wohnen und Staatsbürgerschaft sowie über urbane Kämpfe und bietet Einblicke in das Potenzial von Hausbesetzungen als konkrete Praktiken für den unmittelbaren Schutz und als Taktik in einem breiteren Kampf des Widerstands gegen die kapitalistische Urbanisierung.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Hausbesetzungen, Wohnungskrise, Soziale Bewegungen, Brüssel, São Paulo

**"No one frees anyone, no one frees themselves.
People free themselves in communion.**

(...) Only when the oppressed clearly discover the oppressor and engage in an organized struggle for their liberation do they begin to believe in themselves, thus overcoming their 'connivance' with the oppressive regime. If this discovery cannot be made on a purely intellectual level, but through action, what seems fundamental is that this is not limited to mere activism, but is associated with a serious commitment to reflection, so that it can be praxis." – Paulo Freire (1974:33).

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Preface

From where our feet tread: positionality and shared struggles across the globe

Cidade Tiradentes, a district in the East End of São Paulo, is a place I consider home regardless of where I live. I draw the main experiences that have built who I am from its landscape, its people and colors – it was there that I learned with the social movements that *we think from where our feet tread*, words by Frei Betto spread by social movements, very much inspired by the argument that the struggle for a fair world doesn't happen without “dirtying the shoes” where people live, struggle and rejoice. As a 'peripheral' citizen, during my undergraduate and further degrees, I became deeply involved in social movements that organized and advocated for public policies, striving to allocate resources for self-management experiences, all in pursuit of the fundamental right to housing.

In 2017, I entered a squat for the first time – not as a visitor, but as someone actively opening and occupying the space with the other twenty people from Olga Benário's Women's Movement. We aimed to transform a historic house that had been abandoned for thirty years, into a safe and welcoming environment for women and children escaping domestic violence. A few weeks later we decided to move to a safer place, establishing the Helenira Preta Reference House for Women, which is thriving at the time of writing. This episode sparked my genuine interest in squats as a strategy to access housing going beyond the institutionalized struggle I had known until then. Since then, I have made a point of looking out for various housing squat experiences in the cities where I could “tread my feet”, remaining attentive to urban struggles around the world.

Brussels was the first European city that I had the opportunity to live in. From my perspective, coming from the São Paulo context, I found myself immersed in a distinctly privileged environment. As everything was new, the contrast was stark. Every detail of wealthy Brussels fascinated me in a mix of delight and some sort of anger. I saw myself as a temporary migrant, experiencing a privileged space (and position!) I had never seen before. I found myself mentally revisiting questions I asked when I first stepped on the iconic Paulista Avenue in São Paulo: How can so much wealth be concentrated in just one space? What hole was drilled somewhere else in the world to make this place what it is today? For there to be this excess here, there is sure to be a deep lack elsewhere.

I cannot describe how surprised I was when, on being asked for one word to describe Brussels in one of my first classes here, I heard adjectives like “inconvenient,” “smelly,” and “messy”. My immediate thought was, these people wouldn't be able to survive in central São Paulo. Not even for a day.

The word I chose was “rich”. After living in Brussels for several months, and experiencing the city in a more in depth way, ‘rich’ would not necessarily be the first adjective I would use. At first glance however, for someone born and raised in one of São Paulo's poorest peripheries, Brussels was just this: a *very rich* city.

I noticed this wealth right from the start – especially during the first excursion with the professors, which, among other places, took us past the European Parliament. I began to

connect the dots and understand some of the dynamics in this city. Undoubtedly, the 'heart of Europe' would also hold contradictions within its urbanization process. I kept asking myself: where are the working people? I was clearly not referring to those working in the parliament, or the 'expats' but the ones who literally build the city, who make it function every single day, without whose work the city would stop – where are they? Are they Belgians? Or are they mainly migrants? Do they squat? Do people even *need* to squat here? All these questions marked the beginning of a 'search for them'.

A few hours later, we left the glass office buildings where the 'expats' were working for a neighborhood characterized as the main arrival space for people migrating from different African countries. We were in Matonge, and everything there was simply different from the polished and sterilized Brussels we had seen so far. Today, I see that my curiosity about the everyday people of Brussels led me to the desire to better understand the dynamics of the city. After the walk, some of my classmates and I attended a screening of a film that was followed by a debate. *Chez Jolie Coiffure*, directed by Rosine Mfetgo Mbakam, centered on the story of a black woman, an undocumented migrant, running a hairdressing salon in a gallery in Matonge. I was shocked by her daily struggles just to exist in Brussels, from the constant invasive gaze of tourists through the saloon vitrine while she struggles to make a living, to the threat of being caught and deported. When the police patrolled the building where her salon was located, she had to turn off the lights and hide. One can only imagine the apprehension and anger that come with being in such a position in this city. This movie infuriated me by showing that some of the dynamics of today's world can be even crueler in specific geographies, and this city was in the middle of it.

Given these early experiences, I decided to use the space of this thesis to document and engage with the struggles I was seeing in Brussels, drawing parallels with what I experienced back in São Paulo. I started interacting with colleagues and professors, and became connected to a network of researchers and activists working for the Anti-Expulsion Front in Brussels. This was the entry point for contact with a variety of collectives working on housing rights, and organizing cultural-led squats. This opened up possibilities for me to start studying the specificities of the local context. The entire process eventually led me to some of my early fieldwork and observations, which happened fairly organically while living in Brussels from September 2022 to January 2023.

During this time, I was able to become acquainted with key activists and visit cultural squats, mainly in Ixelles. It was enriching to exchange ideas with Belgian squatters and share our struggles, plans, and dreams. However, everything in Brussels was different: not only was I struck by the quality of the squatted spaces, but also, I was impressed by how perfectly possible it was to negotiate with building owners. Certain municipalities even helped them with this process, and their strategies were distinct from other types of squats. As I had already researched *housing*-led squats, I asked one of the squatters about the building at Avenue Louise. To my surprise, one of them was there to open the place a few years ago. They generously shared their story and explained some of the complexities of this case.

Led by undocumented people, mainly from West Africa, they have managed to stay in the building for 3 years and a half so far. By Belgian standards, a nation with a very tough

legal tradition against squatters and particularly hard on undocumented migrants, this means a lot. That's when I understood there was something special about these spaces, the occupants, and the people supporting this movement. The fact that they were simultaneously fighting for their right to stay in the squatted building and also have their legal status regularized raised important questions when I compared them with the experiences of those I know in São Paulo.

While our strategies, plans, and experiences in housing-led squats may be similar, our dreams and perspectives regarding future goals and prospects seemed to be different. Although the struggles are very similar, the contexts in which these experiences take place lead to different responses.

While the question "Why do people squat?" is quite simple to answer (to have shelter, however precarious, however "temporary"), the questions pertaining to *permanence* and "what is next?" remain, and have different possible answers. Understanding the horizon of their struggle sparked my interest in carrying out this research. I started a few years ago from where *my* feet trod with the social housing movements in São Paulo, and I will now continue: to where the feet of those on the margins, on the other side of the world, tread.



1. Introduction

Neoliberal urban policies significantly changed the preexisting spatial configurations in the world at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s. The process of neoliberalism is context specific and impacts various parts of the planet differently, where generally state institutions are actively mobilized to promote market-based regulatory arrangements (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Roughly speaking, it has created, among other things, a global crisis of access to housing and security of tenure that has affected the urban poor more violently during recent decades (Rolnik, 2019). In this context, forms of resistance arise, and urban social movements contest injustices using diverse strategies, resources, and contextual opportunities, mobilizing different kinds of activism. Squatting vacant buildings is but one of these strategies. They are essential transgressions in the broader anti-capitalist struggle.

As social movements are not a monolith, the urban squatting scene is quite diverse, and people occupy vacant buildings for different reasons. Scholars have extensively written on many forms of urban squatting that have emerged from a wide variety of motivations, producing a rich literature on squatters' movements in different geographies, forms of mobilization – e.g., producing alternative forms of living, engaging with anti-systemic politics, defending causes and protesting projects, or occupying due to necessity – therefore mobilizing different resistance strategies and approaches to their particular struggle (Martínez, 2019; Pruijt, 2013; Tatagiba et al., 2012; Ferrara, L. et al., 2019). However, what remains unclear is the extent to which these experiences can provide housing stability, and how the social movement's claims for specific horizons can push for long-term opportunities, thereby shaping future housing possibilities. With an exploratory approach to the socio-spatial dynamics of recent housing-led squats, the purpose of this study is to explore this context and address these questions in two different geographies: São Paulo and Brussels.

In São Paulo, the shortage of affordable housing and the rising cost of living help to explain the new wave of organized occupations in the city (Rolnik, 2019), which became more visible downtown after the COVID-19 pandemic. In Brussels, in addition to these factors, the current asylum crisis could also explain the rise in housing-led squats, as suggested by the biannual report *Dénombrement des personnes sans-abri et mal logées en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale* (2022). The particular context of these cities complements other practical and empirical reasons that, together, drove me to carry out this comparative study.

Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to existing literature investigating how the social movements' claims can push for long-term occupation opportunities and shape future possibilities in the access of housing, going further than defining occupants as "badly housed" urban inhabitants. Following a critical paradigm through the lens of urban political economy, the research questions (RQ) guiding this thesis are:

- RQ1: To what extent do housing-led squats provide housing stability for the occupants, and what are the main factors enabling it? (Immediate temporality);
- RQ2: What are the horizons of the social movements' struggle concerning future possibilities of accessing housing in a post-occupation scenario? (Wide temporality).

To operationalize the answer, alongside existing literature, I conduct a comparative analysis of two current housing-led squats in Brussels and São Paulo, mapping the convergences and divergences in both scenarios. The framework of the *double horizon of political temporality* (Gutiérrez-Cueli et al., 2023) was adopted to operationalize the research questions, thus aiming to cover the analysis of *immediate temporality* and *wide temporality* in the housing-led squats.

The following research begins by addressing the relevant literature, establishing the basis for developing a theoretical framework and further contextualizing the cases. It begins by mobilizing debates on global capitalism (Santos, 2006), the advance of neoliberalism (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) and the processes of accumulation by dispossession around the world (Harvey, 2017), addressing more deeply the global housing crisis (Rolnik, 2019) that has exacerbated inequalities across borders, but also establishing a context for the emergence of critical processes of resistance – and therefore urban squatting.

I articulate this context with the literature on urban citizenship (Holston, 2008; Earle, 2012), social movements' agency, and the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968), covering the context of analysis of both cities and their shared struggles. It introduces two main actors and the selected case studies: *La Voix des Sans-papier* (The Voice of the Undocumented) and their housing-led squat in Avenue Louise, Brussels, Belgium; and the Movement for Struggle in Neighborhoods, Villages, and Favelas, and their housing-led squat Jean Jacques Dessalines in São Paulo, Brazil. Qualitative data collection involved multi-sited field notes and observations, semi-structured interviews, and several rounds of coding.

The findings bring to light three axes that are key to understanding the main factors impacting the permanence of a housing-led squat and its future possibilities: 1) *Subjects and places*, revealing aspects of collective organization and the building's structure; 2) *The agency*, related to the capacity to negotiate with different actors, networks, and other connections that are entangled with the capacity to mobilize; and 3) *The claims*, which explores perspectives on the future and potential outcomes claimed in a post-squat scenario. The results establish the basis for the discussion chapter, illuminating aspects that foster housing stability and possible developments, covering the overlaps and discrepancies of both contexts. I conclude by shedding light on the limitations and potential of both experiences, considering the ongoing debates surrounding their current situation, and pointing to additional questions for future research.

As I align with Paulo Freire's (1992) ideas, there is always space to hope to envision alternative horizons and strive to cultivate new possibilities. *Hope* is a central verb to start talking about social movements' horizons of struggle – in the Freirean approach, unlike passively *waiting* for things to change, *to hope* is to dream while taking action, to get up and

go for it, to organize with others and push towards emancipatory horizons. Self-managed experiences such as housing-led squats are glimpses of what the collective force can do. We must continue to mobilize other relationships among people that are based on solidarity and sharing of common wealth – it is, indeed, the main task of our times.

2. Literature review

This section provides an overview of the main theories and concepts used in this thesis. As a theoretical basis, the research will follow a critical paradigm, considering the contradictions of capitalist urbanization and the "political possibilities on a variety of spatio-temporal scales" (Harvey 2000:240) that emerge as processes of resistance in the context of urban struggles. In this sense, the chosen approach seeks to understand the experiences of housing-led squats, their results and limitations, contemplating discussions in their local dimensions and nuances, without losing essential global context and its contradictions, considering potential emergences of political changes and new disputes in their contexts. In order to contemplate a multi-scalar analysis, the following literature review has two subsections and then presents the context of the analysis in São Paulo and Brussels.

The first subsection approaches the structural debate on the advanced stage of global capitalism and the overall rise in austerity measures with the worldwide spread of neoliberal ideology – as the contradictions of capitalist urbanization are unquestionable, they should always be the background of any contemporary discussion about the production of space. This process has accentuated the process of *accumulation by dispossession* (Harvey, 2017) and increased hindrance to attempts to create a common good (through privatization of resources and reduction of public services in all areas) provoking, among other destructive outcomes, a global housing crisis (Rolnik, 2019).

The second subsection scales in, focusing on the material conditions currently faced by dispossessed masses, the political organization of urban social movements and the processes through which they build their agency around a common claim – being the right to housing one of the most powerful ones. In this context, I analyze urban squatting as a form of anti-capitalist struggle and experience of radical democracy, also bringing into discussion the issues of criminalization and regularization. I conclude this section mobilizing arguments on the process of city-citizen-making in the construction of the agency of urban social movements.

Finally, I explain how I connect the concepts mobilized in the literature review to my research questions. By maintaining a sociopolitical multi-scalar perspective, I aim to shed light on complementary focuses on social movements and urban squatting – understanding their actions as they are, without exaggerating their outcomes or minimizing their potential.

2.1 Flows of things, flows of people and the place of housing in a globalized world

“Today, mobility has practically become the norm. Movement takes precedence over rest. (...) People move from place to place, like tourists or migrants. But so do products, goods, images and ideas. Everything flies.”
(Santos, 2006:222)

What most scholars refer to as globalization has existed for a while in one form or another. Despite extensive and saturated debates, the phenomenon is still difficult to date – for centuries world trade routes have carried new products and eventually technologies over long distances and to different geographies around the globe, influencing each other in different aspects, as summarized by Zukin (2009). Milton Santos (2002) elaborates on three senses of globalization: the world as we are made to see it (*globalization as fable*); the world as it is (*globalization as perversity*); and the third, the world as it can be (*another possible globalization*). In the world as it is today, undoubtedly, contradictions and tensions concerning its dynamics arise, creating asymmetries of power with global reach and unfolding conflicts and violence of all ranges (Harvey, 2000; Santos, 2006; Osterhammel, 2011).

Economic shifts are inherent in the restructuring of capitalism, thus also not new. The previous structural shift concerned how governments and economists from advanced capitalist countries kept sustaining the system: from the 1970s to the 1990s, the shift from manufacturing to product design announced a new global division of labor. In that context, the narrative was that all job losses would be compensated by the creation of new ones linked to the new economy. Roughly speaking, the series of policies implemented by states following the crisis of Fordist development is broadly referred to as *neoliberalism* (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Similarly, Santos (2006) would refer to these shifts as 'economic adjustment plans', which in principle cater to demands for "rationality", but end up accentuating the process of creation of monopolies by prioritizing the development of certain geographies at the cost of others. He would argue that, driven by the imperative of competitiveness, this process results in what he called 'irrational use' of social resources, starting with the 'commons', as scholars would conceptualize nowadays within urban studies.

The process of urbanization is inherently tied to geographic aspects and, within global capitalism, it plays a crucial role in perpetuating irrationalities in urban environments (Santos, 2006). Santos summarizes that cities have historically generated their own excluded populations through the irrational use of social resources – a trend that globalization has only intensified. As globalization advances, creating spaces dedicated to extraction, monopolistic practices become essential for maintaining capital accumulation and perpetuating the current economic order. This follows the widespread promotion of consumption and the liberalization of trade, which have taken on various forms over time (Harvey, 2013). Aligning with Santos, Harvey (2012) further notes that recent neoliberal trends have exacerbated the concentration of capital – Oxfam's latest report (2024) on global inequality shows that after the COVID-19 pandemic, the wealth of the world's five wealthiest individuals has more than doubled, while

that of 5 billion people has decreased, accentuating disparities that are celebrated in the rhetoric of free market competition.

This trend has long been recognized as an inherent feature of capitalist dynamics, wherein the system creates its own crises. In essence, the protections for monopolies that were previously established have been reduced due to the current stage of globalization – capitalism then mutates, finding other ways to reestablish its monopoly dynamics (Ibid.). Consequently, we now witness an intensification of the 'production of irrationality' for the majority, which exacerbates the creation of monopolies and further concentrates wealth. While the underlying mechanisms of this process remain consistent, it had its definition contemporized by Harvey (2017:74) from "primitive/original accumulation" to *accumulation by dispossession*, highlighting that it is an ongoing process in which the main germ of its functioning nature has not changed, only mutated, and is now manifesting in new forms. Accumulation by dispossession encapsulates a wide range of multiscaled processes: the superexploitation of labor, the commodification of land, the expulsion and mass violence against racialized bodies, the suppression of rights to the commons, and more recently, the development of new debt and credit technologies (Ibid.). These technologies are deeply connected to the financialization of housing (Rolnik, 2019), further intensifying the dynamics of dispossession and wealth concentration.

In summary, the current global scenario reflects the violent advance of neoliberalism over the past decades, which has significantly escalated social inequalities within and across borders (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Rolnik, 2019). This escalation has further intensified the process of accumulation by dispossession. However, this process is homogeneous; it manifests differently across various geographies. In the countries at the center of global capitalism, the welfare state (at least what remains of it) is being dismantled. Meanwhile, in the Global South, the historical processes of dispossession are deepening, aggravating long-standing exploitation and continuing to tear at the already open veins of these geographies.

In this context, the real estate business and housing development, in particular, have become the new front for financial capital expansion (Rolnik, 2019), solidifying its most powerful pillar due to its speculative nature. As the neoliberal ideology has at its core the extension of market-based principles within the sphere of governance, it is no surprise that urban public policies are nowadays designed to provide a highly suitable environment for business, seeking to enhance competitiveness instead of putting effort into providing basic human needs. On this note, Rolnik (2019:18) states that the expansion of financial capital (the financialization process) in housing has two main components, those being: the general belief that the market can effectively manage the distribution of urban land and, therefore, housing (neoliberal approach to urban policies); and development of experimental financial products in cities. The confluence of these two components has led policymakers to largely abandon the notion of housing as a social good – the core narrative that enhances, if not generates, today's global housing crisis.

This process has initiated a profound shift towards "opening" cities to investors – or, in short, putting cities up for sale – rather than striving to redistribute wealth. Consequently, housing is no longer perceived as a common good that States should provide and manage for

all, particularly for those who cannot afford it at market rates and conditions. Instead, housing has become a mechanism for private rent extraction and accumulation, systematically dispossessing poor urban populations, subjecting them to different debt mechanisms, intensifying segregation processes, and, therefore, deepening uneven development worldwide (Ibid.).

It is also well known that urbanization and migration are deeply entwined. The intersection between these areas of study has generated fascinating literature around the idea of citizenship – *urban* citizenship, *insurgent* citizenship, *transgressive* citizenship, to mention a few elaborations. They are the result of the contesting action of the mass of peripheral subjects who have radically challenged the traditional concepts and ideas of *what it means to be a citizen* – debate that I will cover when contextualizing São Paulo and Brussels within the contexts of analysis.

All these debates constitute the current *urban warfare*, which Rolnik (2019) discusses, raising questions on the Right to the City worldwide, right to decent housing, and who benefits or is disenfranchised under financial power. These provocations set the stage for the emergence of rebel cities (Harvey, 2012), where urban social movements in both the Global South and the Global North contest the outcomes of neoliberal urbanization through both direct action and political debates that have the potential to move towards *another possible globalization*.

2.2 "Who occupies doesn't have the fault"

The contemporary situation of housing-led squats

Furthermore, the right to the city is an empty signifier. Everything depends on who gets to fill it with meaning. The financiers and developers can claim it, and have every right to do so. But then so can the homeless and the sans-papiers. We inevitably have to confront the question of whose rights are being identified, while recognizing, as Marx puts it in Capital, that "between equal rights force decides." The definition of the right is itself an object of struggle, and that struggle has to proceed concomitantly with the struggle to materialize it. (Harvey, 2013:15)

One of the slogans of the movements fighting for housing in Sao Paulo is "*quem ocupa não tem culpa*" – meaning "who occupies doesn't have the fault". These watchwords accurately summarize the starting point of this thesis: people who are occupying because they need a place to live, and for various reasons, are denied from having this fundamental right attended to. The working class, bound by the financial dynamics that define the possibilities of access to decent housing in the cities, always find a way to find a place to call home – and

it is not their fault that, sometimes, the best possibility they found was an empty building. They are, overall, giving it a social use while reclaiming their right to the city.

Overall, it can be said that squats are illegal occupations of buildings or land (Campos, C., & Martinez, M. 2020) generally guided by a radical critique of private property, the scarcity of social and affordable housing, the commodification of land and culture, and the authoritarian nature of bourgeois representative democracy (Martínez, 2019). In other words, squatted spaces represent one facet of the inherent inequalities generated by capitalist production of space, now deepened by neoliberal urban policies (Pruijt, 2003; Rubio-Pueyo, 2016). They can also be considered what Miraftab calls "counter-hegemonic" practices, "in that they destabilize the normalized order of things" (2009:33).

The scene between different geographies is also quite diverse (Aguilera and Smart, 2016). Martínez (2019; 2020) provides a comprehensive understanding of the current European squat scenario, with extensive research addressing diverse topics around squats in general and covering different aspects – such as squatters' motivations, legal regulations in different countries, layers of criminalization and repression, resistance strategies and some controversies around legalization processes. While there is plenty of literature connecting these topics to social centers and autonomous zones organized by anarchist movements and cultural-led collectives, there is still room to debate some particularities on housing-led squats – encompassing, among other subjects, how their political claims for specific horizons can push for long-term opportunities of occupation and, therefore, shape both current and future possibilities. Simply put, when led by urban social movements that organize people who occupy out of necessity, the convergence between their claims (right to decent housing) and the act of squatting (right to immediate shelter) has other nuances within governmental spheres. I want to spend a moment addressing critical related discussions within the contemporary scenario: criminalization and legalization processes in urban squats.

2.2.1 The crossroads of criminalization and legalization processes in urban squats

Contemporary housing-led squats mainly fall between criminalization and legalization routes. On the one hand, the state apparatus defends private property and aggressively strengthens the process of criminalizing squatters (Martínez, 2019) and, on the other hand, sometimes, there is the possibility of negotiating a legalization process. Although contradictory, legalization processes seek to avoid (or minimize) the excessive, violent reaction of the state against squatters (Ibid.).

Martínez (2019) elaborates on the anti-squat laws and top-down strategies for legalization that aim to 'formalize' the relationship between squats, local government, and the owners of the occupied buildings. These strategies are often presented as attempts to 'integrate' and 'regularize' squatters into a legal framework with a positive narrative, but the outcomes frequently show that these legal maneuvers end up undermining the autonomy of squatters. This discussion closely relates to Pruijt's (2003) earlier debates on the process of

institutionalization of urban social movements, where he examines how it can both open or hinder possibilities for squatters. Ferreri (2024) contemporised the debate by elaborating on the concept of 'precarious institutionalization' to illustrate institutionalization processes' evolving, non-sequential, and incomplete nature. This dynamic nature of institutionalization processes, which depend on localized power dynamics within housing movements, as well as their relationships with municipal and national authorities, is a crucial aspect of the debate. Other aspects are added to this context, as anti-migration and anti-squat ideas have been gaining strength and eventually consolidating with different layers of governance (Martínez, 2019).

The argument on institutionalization goes on and on, elaborating on how this process tends to co-opt social movements and reshape their agendas, reducing their capacity to challenge (or even question) structural inequalities (Ibid.). However, I align with Harvey (2012:137) when he says that "there is no point in complaining at the attempt to co-opt. The left should take it as a compliment and battle to sustain its own distinctive immanent meaning." Furthermore, we have to consider that the perspectives and arguments on openness to negotiation also vary greatly between social movements' according to their approaches and necessities. In simple words, one should consider the collective judgment of whether it is worth negotiating with landlords and governments. This process is particularly pertinent in the case of migrants' housing-led squats, where the difference in stakes is not only about the political narratives and demands of the day but also about the immediate necessity and lack of other options. While I do not intend to create a false dichotomy among squatter groups, it is important to recognize that some individuals are more at risk than others when it comes to what they are risking.

If not criminalized and evicted, some form of institutionalization occurs – whether it is 'institutional tolerance' of existence, followed by some level of surveillance, or the establishment of formal agreements. However, it is crucial to note that the diverse potential outcomes vary significantly and should be understood on a case-by-case basis. Martínez (2019) offers a detailed analysis of the specific cases of Madrid and Berlin. He notes that in Madrid, 'after-squats' are typically transformed into social centers, while in Berlin, most squats are used for housing purposes, with residents paying an 'affordable rent' for their rooms.

In São Paulo, legalization processes do not exist – only creation of proper social housing, which is deeply institutionalized by the nature of this process. There are ongoing experiments with retrofitting buildings that were previously squatted by housing movements¹. The former squat Cambridge is perhaps the best known and most studied, with its early history of occupation and specific context described in interesting publications, such as by Briers, Cattoor, Meulder, et al. (2016), and even a film². In short, these buildings were

¹ These are empirical observations from my previous experience working as an architect in Sao Paulo. The context of the mentioned experiences and further details were explored through interviews with architects involved in the projects. Some examples can be seen at: [Residential Cambridge](#), [Residential Elza Soares](#), [former Lord Palace Hotel](#), and [Prestes Maia](#).

² The trailer of the film *Era o Hotel Cambridge* can be watched in [this link](#).

reintegrated by the municipal government through a forced purchase from private owners, converting them into municipal property. After the renovation work, the families who squatted the buildings can now (or will be able to) live there in a decent arrangement. However, this process contradicts the collective struggle by essentially resulting in the creation of individual private property, opening another avenue for debate on contradictions that I aim to address in the discussion chapter (6.3).

2.2.2 Articulating housing rights and urban squatting: a possible basis for the claim for citizenship?

The right to adequate housing has been widely debated among scholars worldwide, as housing constitutes the most basic fabric of cities. Raquel Rolnik (2019) is one of the principal authors from the Global South, covering the issue in different geographical contexts and conducting transnational comparisons in the context of the 2008 global financial crash. There is also quite extensive literature that addresses the different ways that the immediate need for housing occurs, mainly related to urban informality and self-construction processes (Roy, 2005; Piqui, 2023) that eventually hold the potential to lead to insurgent planning practices (Miraftab, 2009). All these processes comprise a very complex mosaic of dispossessed people who, on the margins, juggle to get a roof over their heads to call home – from the occupation of land and self-construction in risky areas (the little space left in highly dense cities), building a little shack at the back of the yard, or even a slab on top of their parent's house, to the occupation of empty buildings. People then join together and organize to claim their individual and collective rights, enhancing their struggle for social justice within the broader urban context. Through this mobilization, the collective seeks to secure basic necessities, challenge systemic inequalities, and advocate for the right to the city (Martínez, 2019), be it explicit or not.

At the heart of the issue, housing-led squats are a global reality and a direct outcome of systemic failures in providing one of the most fundamental human needs. As people grapple with homelessness, abusive rent, or debt due to mortgages, empty buildings stand abandoned while surrounded by urban infrastructure. This situation is worsened by austerity measures, neoliberal urban policies, and general urban speculation that causes a shortage of affordable and social housing (Rolnik, 2019). The convergence of all these factors has given rise to a scenario where housing-led squats are both a denouncement of, and a response to, the housing crisis. Another essential aspect is observed by Martínez (2019): in the last few decades, the rise of migrant-led squats has become more common – this observation is mainly developed by the author in the case of Madrid but visible in other cities like São Paulo and Brussels. Their situation generally goes beyond precarity, where groups are predominantly composed of marginalized and racialized groups, mainly undocumented – therefore, the "unwanted migrants", who have systematically been targets of state violence through various instruments of exclusion (Loftsdóttir, 2016; Lietaert, I. et. at.; 2017) while fighting for the right to be considered citizens with rights.

On the idea of citizenship, it can be said that it is traditionally understood as a legal status granted by the state that bestows rights and responsibilities on individuals, heavily associated with national borders and states' legal frameworks. Saltiel (2021:205) would add a layer of complexity to this traditional understating, summarizing it by saying that "the selective logic of the nation-state border creates and maintains difference" by classifying people not only as 'citizens' and 'non-citizens,' but further identifying them as "(next to desired tourists and expatriates), 'worthy refugees' and 'illegal immigrants'".

Drawing parallels, Blokland et al. (2015) summarize the debate by observing that these and other forms of claiming citizenship and the right to the city have specific characteristics in certain contexts but are not unique occurrences. Acts of claiming recognition as citizens represent a strategy employed by movements to change regimes of exclusion or discrimination, and this also includes undocumented immigrants. In the case of this group, according to Bauböck (2003) apud Blokland et al. (2015), the notion of citizenship aims to inspire hope by transcending the imperatives of national sovereignty and homogeneity. Although, in the European context, urban citizenship remains a topic of national debate about migration, cities are perceived and considered spaces for the realization of these universal rights (Ibid.). This emphasizes the implication of urban citizenship claims and self-managed processes in urban occupations in the search for resistance to neoliberalism and its different forms of austerity.

In this context, urban citizenship literature emerges to question the traditional understandings. It is the result of collective claims of dispossessed masses that assert themselves as political subjects and workers who contribute to the construction and development of the very state that excludes them (Holston, 2008). By engaging in acts of demand, these masses not only seek recognition but also aim to reshape the limits of citizenship, pushing for a more inclusive and democratized understanding of belonging in urban spaces.

2.2.3 Construction of agency in city-and-citizen-making process

In this neoliberal moment, tangible citizenship does not arrive through the state's legislative institutions. It rather grows under the skin of the city, that is as an invisible city, through the insurgent practices of marginalized communities – be it disenfranchised immigrants; ethnicized, racialized and gendered minorities of the industrialized world; or the squatter citizens of the global South. (Miraftab, 2009:40)

In general terms, the concept of agency concerns the human capacity to act, intervening causally in a chain of events (Giddens, 1979, apud Arboleya, 2013). The *ability to act* also implies the possibility to *act differently* – there is therefore a 'power' of choice, the actor's ability to intervene in the course of events and change them (Ibid.). Through this concept social actors are seen as knowledgeable and capable, even in the face of numerous

constraints and strong coercion. In this sense, agency has to do with the ability to effect change, indicating that all actors have some degree of power (Ibid.). Freire (1974) would refer to this process as “critical consciousness” or “conscientization” (from the Portuguese, *conscientização*), refuting the dichotomy between *action* and *reflection*. Freire (1974:33) argues that “in advocating a permanent effort by the oppressed to reflect on their concrete conditions (...) we are convinced that reflection, if it is really reflection, leads to practice.” In the context of social movements' agency, this implies the need to reflect on its potential to change things collectively.

The Brazilian scenario is quite interesting to explore the city-and-citizen-making process and consequent strengthening of political agency, as citizenship there was “universally inclusive in membership but massively inequalitarian in distribution” (Holston, 2008:6). The author elaborates on the concept of insurgent citizenship by understanding that the basis of its working-class struggles was insufficient for organization in the world of *work* due to its late industrialization process – however, not in the *urban* struggle. Simply put, the main working class struggles did not happen only on the “factory floor”, but mainly on the streets of the city, in the process of building this *insurgent citizenship*, very much linked with the struggle for the *right to the city* (Lefebvre, 1968) through the 1970s in São Paulo. The working class on the periphery of capitalism have ‘become’ new citizens through urban struggles, organizing into social movements to address urban inequalities of all sorts – from housing to public health care to debates about famine, access to daycare, and the right to work (Holston, 2008; Sader, 1988).

In just a few decades, the urban working class developed the strength to question hegemonic power – as this mobilization went beyond the urban issue alone and was a decisive force for the re-democratization of the country, overcoming the military dictatorship (1964-1985) and establishing the minimum bases to expand struggles. In this process, they assumed the identity of city builders and, therefore, of contributing citizens (Holston, 2008). This change in subjectivity played a fundamental role in the urban working class's demand for rights, mobilizing the politics of local areas and empowering these social movements. In this context, power refers to *community power*. It can be understood as “a window of city politics” (Stone, 2012:11), where a collective body acts as a political agent with enough *agency* to interfere with decision-making processes.

In summary, São Paulo became the principal urban stage where urban social movements would mobilize, take action, and become active actors in local governance for the first time – no doubt why Arantes (2018) called this historical moment ‘Red São Paulo’ (in an apparent reference to ‘Red Vienna’) where there was also an alliance formed between traditional intellectuals from academia, organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 2007) and policymakers. Fix and Arantes (2022) point out that this coalition worked towards trialing a radical municipal approach to governance in São Paulo, and, instead of the growth of centralized structures of political parties, the city experienced the growth of radical community organizations³. The articulation between critical theory and practice was

³ These organizations, it is worth remembering, emerged from the bottom up and formed a strong network with collectivist and fraternal relationships at their core, also very much linked with the land pastorals

intensified through this process, enhancing the praxis of the collective and repercussions as well as informing the practice of social housing movements to this day on different levels – we could highlight that their agency was strong enough to make possible the elaboration of the City Statute, inserted in the Brazilian Constitution in 2001, including the collective right to the city (Rolnik et al. et al., 2012; Rodrigues, 2013).

From Holston's theory, Earle (2012) elaborates on the idea of *transgressive citizenship*, working on a rhetoric of *rights* – and, as Holston, the 'right to have rights' referring to Arendtian conceptualizations. While there is no intention to cover the whole debate on the *rights turn*, the author will argue that the actions of social movements would also reflect a claim for recognition as urban citizens deserving of *constitutional* rights – as the struggle to secure the rights guaranteed by the Constitution remains unresolved for many. On this note, Miraftab (2009:41) sharply reminds that even if abstract formal rights have generally expanded in the Global South, at the same time, "their economic exploitation and the abdication of public responsibility for basic services continue, and their livelihood erodes. In societies that have emerged from a colonized legacy, 'citizens have gained rights they cannot eat!'". Then, what is even possible to do with this "citizenship-on-paper"?

For now, urban social movements have demonstrated that, despite numerous limitations, some actions can still be effective. Urban squatting is an excellent example of how operating on the margins through direct actions and rights claims can push the discussion beyond theoretical debates. In São Paulo, for instance, housing struggles and the demand for the 'right to live downtown' challenge the speculative market dynamics (that have historically displaced them) since the 1990s (Stevens, 2019; Velloso & Martínez, 2019). This also encompasses the right to be recognized as citizens who contribute to the construction of the city by cleaning up abandoned buildings left by speculating landlords – often without paying vacancy taxes. Through transgressive collective actions guided by self-managed practices, these movements are now giving vacant buildings a social function. Additionally, they have been able to redirect blame and attribute criminality to the state (Earle, 2012), positioning themselves in an ambiguous space between legality and illegality – thus both transgressing and claiming the law in a single movement.

Arantes (2015), through Usina Group, reminds us of a self-evident but essential thing: *all these experiences do not happen in a vacuum*. He argues that, even though part of the capitalist production of space, it is distinct from this same production by constructing a radical imagination in its process, largely in a praxis of informing and being informed by critical urban theory – to some extent, it is what Lefebvre (1996) would call *transduction*. In summary, this process seeks to put into practice (albeit on a small scale) a new form of production and construction of the city, mobilizing other relationships among people that are not based on exploitation and creation of exchange value but solidarity and sharing of the commonwealth (use value). It is about experimenting today with things that are still not

guided by Liberation Theologists, a progressivist faction of the catholic church that emphasized the *freedom of the oppressed* as their main core (Fix and Arantes, 2022; Rodrigues, 2013; Sader, 1988).

possible in their entirety because the current system oppresses them, but it is something we want to see in our society in the future when it is radically transformed.

In other words, self-management processes can be seen as a radical democratic exercise that increases the agency of social movements, albeit limited in the current global context. Mayer (2009) would point out that, in an increasingly volatile world, we could potentially widen a window of opportunity to achieve the Lefebvrian “right to the city” demand, which gives more importance to these self-managed experiences that also mobilize the claim for citizenship.

2.2.4 Literature review conclusion

The literature demonstrates that global capitalism and the advance of neoliberalism are dictating contemporary urban policies, redirecting state actions in favor of financial capital and reducing or suppressing the rights of access to basic human needs. In the context of the current global housing crisis, housing-led squats represent a response to these forces, being a concrete counter-hegemonic answer for immediate shelter and a tactic of a broader struggle to resist neoliberalism and its various forms of austerity. However, these experiences often find themselves between criminalization and legalization processes. What pushes for one thing or another is a complex composition of multifactorial elements, including the agency of social movements and their capacity to address their claims and negotiate. In this context, the claim to be recognized as a citizen aims to alter regimes of exclusion or discrimination, which is a crucial element in enhancing a social movement's agency. The relationship between urban citizenship claims and the building of agency through their self-managed experiences in housing-led squats is very significant for this research, along with the understanding that global crises can be windows of opportunity for local action. All these elements must be taken into account when investigating how social movements can concurrently exert pressure for short-term solutions and demand future possibilities in a post-speculation scenario, extending their horizons of struggle.

3. Contexts of analysis

When Professor Rolnik (2019:246) interviewed Guilherme Boulos in 2018, he sharply summarized the contemporary housing situation in all Brazilian metropolises: "What wages have given with one hand, rental and housing prices have taken with the other." It might also be faithful to the Western European context, as the cost of living is rising exponentially while wages are not following this rise, although the housing crisis is especially evident through dismantling the welfare state and selling off social housing stocks. Both are under the umbrella of austerity policies of the neoliberal manuscript, where private debt-taking became the primary strategy to access housing – ruled, of course, by market strategies (Ibid.). In summary, this context reflects broader global trends where rising living costs, low wages, and shortage of affordable housing increase housing insecurity and, therefore, fuel a new wave of organized housing-led squats as a form of necessity and resistance. This section presents a brief overview of São Paulo and Brussels, positioning both cities in this debate.

3.1 São Paulo: "The platypus metropolis"

The fact is that we are no longer facing an underdeveloped metropolis. (...) Sociologist Francisco de Oliveira – one of the last representatives of the Brazilian critical tradition – recently compared Brazilian society to a platypus: an incongruous animal, stranded at the crossroads of an evolution that has moved on. The zoomorphic metaphor suggests a society that has lost its capacity for choice and has therefore become the embodiment of a "truncated evolution". (Arantes, P; Fix, M; 2024, p.35)

Standing as one of the most accentuated examples of what globalization means in the Global South, São Paulo embodies the contradictions of contemporary Brazil more than any other city (Arantes, P; Fix, M; 2024). The city has a particular configuration due to its history that transits from colonial origins to its status today as the central economic hub in Latin America. Within its urban fabric, deep inequalities are normalized: glass-façade skyscrapers side by side with favelas; fortified high-end condominiums surrounded by self-constructed and precarious neighborhoods; militia activity on the basis of informal urban developments and so on – a metropolis-ornithorhynchus not only in its evolutionary history but also in its current landscape morphology. The "truncated evolution" is sharply visible, where the even more accentuated process of accumulation by dispossession that shapes this particular geography reveals the deep contradictions of urbanization in the peripheries of capitalism (Ibid.).

São Paulo is today the most populated city in the Americas, anticipating the 'urban profile' of Brazil: in a span of twenty years (from 1970 to 1990), the city absorbed the same population growth as during its previous 500 years of history. Currently, it has 11.4 million people, with 21 million people in its metropolitan region (IBGE, 2022). Roughly speaking, it experienced different waves of migration, periods of intense growth and uneven urbanization, as it is historically in a position of subordination and dependency within global capitalism (Arantes, P; Fix, M; 2024).

Within its history, Fix and Arantes' (2022) observe that combination of the intense migratory process and late industrialization did not correspond to the modernization of productive forces experienced by the center of capitalist societies. It would shape São Paulo's built environment in a very particular way: While mimicking European urbanism in its planned portion (or, to use Maricato's (2000) concept, in the *legal* city) it incorporates all forms of precarious settlements for the dispossessed mass of immigrants, mainly improvised and self-built, outside official planning law – constituting the *real* city (Maricato, 2000). The historically known result is "urban planning for some, the market for some, law for some, modernity for some, *citizenship for some...*" (Maricato, 2000, p.125, emphasis added). Thus, the history of São Paulo, like many other Global South cities, started as a clash between hyper-urbanization and underdevelopment due to colonial legacies.

On this note, Clóvis Moura (1994) reminds us that Brazil's capitalist development stems from over 300 years of a colonial slave regime, where the transition to capitalism was marked by, in short, *independence without abolition and abolition without agrarian reform*. This process resulted in what the author conceptualized as 'modernization without changes,' a characteristic of the Brazilian "transition" period where archaic relations from the colonial period were not overcome (Ibid.).

This process is crucial for understanding the development of Brazilian cities⁴. Today, those living in the city center and 'developed' areas (the 'legal city') and those in the self-constructed peripheries (the 'real city') profoundly influenced the notions of citizenship, as previously discussed (Holston, 2008). This is the root of urban social movements that fight for the right to the city today: the dispossessed masses, to affirm "we are also citizens!" claimed it by self-constructing the peripheries, therefore understanding themselves as builders of the city, contributors to society, honest workers deserving rights (Holston, 2008, 2009; Earle, 2012).

⁴ Prior to the Land Tenure Law of 1850, land occupation was free and its use was determined by cultivation (Rolnik, 1997). The law prohibited the acquisition of land through any means other than purchase, restricting access to land for newly freed enslaved people and poor European migrants, forcing them into a pool of cheap labor. This process established a clear distinction between *public* and *private* land for the first time, influencing urban land acquisition and marking the origin of urban regulations (Maricato, 1997) – historically shaped by hygienist and segregationist approaches that sought to protect elite interests and marginalize the dispossessed masses to areas like hillsides in Rio de Janeiro or the peripheries of São Paulo. This is the genesis of São Paulo's urban development – designed to maintain the dominance of those in power since the Portuguese invasion in 1500, inheriting and reproducing socio-spatial segregation up to today.

3.1.2 Current housing and squatting situation in São Paulo

In its contemporary moment, São Paulo is a territory of intense real estate speculation activity, experiencing a scenario in which direct and indirect forms of removal and expulsion of the impoverished population are the reality, even during the pandemic⁵ (LabCidade; 2024); The last IBGE census (2022) indicates that 12% of private properties in the city of São Paulo are unoccupied – while there are almost 590,000 units without residents, the housing deficit is around 400,000 units (indeed, there are more houses without people than people without a decent place to live).

The current scenario regarding housing is complex. In one way or another, public policies for housing end up being designed in such a way as to intensify further the activity of sectors that drive the financial real estate machine (Rolnik, 2019). As a result, everything that is "undesirable" or does not "fit" urban intervention project plans immediately becomes a target for extermination – including all forms of popular housing with some degree of vulnerability, be it self-built neighborhoods, favelas, or squats.

It is essential to recognize that urban social movements have historically been a driving force⁶, albeit against the tide, in demanding the right to housing and the right to the city. Despite the historical agency of housing social movements in São Paulo, a disastrous event marked the squat scene in the city: On May 1, 2020, the Wilton Paes de Almeida building, then occupied by several families, caught fire and collapsed downtown, creating tension in the squatting scene (Santos et al., 2020; Helene et al. 2020). Officially, seven people died and two remain missing – these figures are believed to be underestimations, highlighting a significant blind spot in understanding the overall situation of housing squats in the city. An operation was initiated by the local police, leading to the arrest of housing movement leaders in the city center, escalating the tension between public authorities and social movements and further intensifying the processes of criminalization against squatters in the city.

There was only one important outcome from this episode: For the first time, the municipal government focused on conducting an extensive census of the squats in the city. This work resulted in a report⁷, built from technical visits that identified occupied properties, assessed their legal status, physical condition, and the demographics of the residents. This is the first official data the city has produced about housing-led squats so far.

The official numbers we have for the year of 2018 are as follows: approximately 10,500 people, or about 3,500 families, are living in 75 occupied properties – 35 private and 16 public. Notably, 87% of the people have been in the occupation for more than a year, and 43% are not organized or affiliated with a social movement. Regarding specific populations, 86% have elderly residents, 61% have disabled residents, and 58% have migrant populations. During all property inspections, no critical pathologies were found to affect structural

⁵ For more information, see [this link](#).

⁶ In Brazil, the right to housing is guaranteed in the [Constitution](#) of 1988 (article 6) and the right to the city through the [Cities Statute](#) law.

⁷ The Report of Occupations in the City of São Paulo (2018) was presented at meetings with working groups, academics, and social movements. It is available in Brazilian Portuguese at [this link](#).

function of the buildings which are occupied today⁸, which does not ignore the fact that it is necessary to address precarious installations. On this note, in addition to the working group held in the city hall, the Brazilian Council of Architecture and Urbanism has organized calls for tenders focused on technical advice for improvements in housing-led squats, engaging both young and experienced architects in the process. Since there is no quantitative data on the current situation of squats in 2024, I find it relevant to bring empirical observation⁹ to this context section: qualitative data suggests an expressive increase in the number of squats in the post-pandemic period.

To solve the real problem (the shortage of social and affordable housing), effective public housing policies still need to be designed and implemented. They must be oriented towards guaranteeing the supply of decent housing and living conditions in the long term, seeking to overcome the ideology of “single-family homeownership” by redirecting the debate towards *true* social and public housing provision -- recovering the understanding of housing as a right, not as a commodity.

⁸ In the evaluation of urbanists that research and accompany diverse struggles for the right to the city in Sao Paulo, the housing-led squats are in better condition than the local government imagined. The opinion article by urban planners and scholars Rolnik, Gonsales and Comaru (2018) is available at [this link](#).

⁹ These observations come mainly from interviews with architects and researchers (table 1, item 4.4) who have been working and monitoring squats in the city for decades, as well as from field observations carried out in central São Paulo neighborhoods (Bela Vista, República and Liberdade) between December 2023 and January 2024.

3.2 Brussels: "The heart of Europe"

Brussels has held the status of a global city since the late 1950s – not primarily attributed to the influx of companies mobilizing international capital but to establishing the European Union's (EU) administrative core within the city (Criekingen, 2009). Since the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, Brussels has been the official seat of the Council, the Commission itself, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, and related entities (European Commission, 2009).

The manifestation of the EU's presence is not only evident within the Leopold quarter (and adjacent areas such as West Auderghem) but also due to the entire economic chain that has developed since the EU's establishment in the city. This situates Brussels within a distinctive context characterized by 'non-traditional' trends in migration flows and gentrification patterns, which, in part, deviate from the well-established processes observed in other global cities (Criekingen, 2009).

The demographics of the 1.2 million inhabitants form an impressive mosaic: in 2023, using nationality of birth as a reference, over around 60% of Brussels' residents were born outside Belgium, with 25% coming from European Union countries and 35% from other non-EU nations (IBSA & Statbel, 2023). This demographic composition highlights how massive migratory movements are in Brussels, placing migration processes (inherently linked to housing issues) as the central questions of order today.

3.2.2 Current housing and squatting situation in Brussels

There is also a strong link between migration and gentrification in the current housing scenario in Brussels. Criekingen (2009) identifies three distinct groups forming the big picture: the elite expat community, attracted to Brussels because of EU-related employment; highly educated professionals with modest incomes; and private renters who, together with the insufficient provision of public-owned social housing, close the gap and make room for gentrification to take place. In contrast, situated on the opposite spectrum and presumably suffering the effects of this process, there is a mass of workers (both documented and undocumented) who are currently struggling to afford to live in Brussels.

Considering the few figures available and the limitations related to incomplete data, it can be said that, in 2018, Brussels saw approximately 13 eviction orders per 1,000 tenant households, averaging 11 orders daily (Godart, Swyngedouw, Van Criekingen, Van Heur, 2023). Notably, 70% of those evicted were foreign-born, with 40% from African countries, 20% from EU countries, and 10% from other regions, indicating a significant over-representation of foreign-born tenants being evicted (Ibid.). This suggests that the particularities faced by undocumented migrants are even more accentuated, where they are more likely to struggle to access stable housing. Struggling to afford the accommodations in the private rental housing market (or even accessing formal contracts due to lack of documentation), they are now in a joint struggle for housing and citizenship.

Taking all these different aspects and the broad context, one of the ways for these groups of people to fulfill the immediate need for housing is through squatting – in this sense, squatting is also an act that challenges social segregation in the face of real estate speculation (Dawance, 2008). Within a more institutionalized vocabulary, the biennial report "Dénombrement des personnes sans-abri et mal logées en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale" (coordinated by Nicolas Horvat in 2020 and Louise Paquot in 2022) categorizes squatting as inadequate housing that takes place through illegal occupation of empty homes or offices over a long period of time. The same report refers to the ETHOS category¹⁰ "people in non-conventional housing", encompassing all individuals residing in "temporary" living arrangements – which includes those living in negotiated occupations (with a formal contract signed with the owner) and squats.

Regarding quantitative data, the report mentioned is the best material on homelessness or poorly housed people in the Brussels-Capital region. They have been conducting a longitudinal study on the issue since 2008, thereby accumulating good figures that allow comparison over time. The last two editions were marked by several crises: the health emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic, the reception of refugees from the war in Ukraine in 2022, combined with the asylum crisis. On the last one, it is important to note that the lack of reception structures is a situation that has not been addressed until now (Ibid). I would like to spend time sharing some figures from the last report published in 2022.

The last count of the survey revealed that 7,134 people were homeless or poorly housed in Brussels. Of these, 2,435 people (34%) were in non-conventional accommodation, which is divided into three categories: unapproved accommodation, negotiated occupation, or squats. The universe of people living in squats and negotiated occupations is 2045 in 2022, and the known number of occupied places consists of 62 buildings – 44 squats and 18 negotiated occupations. Considering the historical series between 2008 and 2022; people housed in temporary occupations rose by +421%, and people housed in squats rose by +1432%.

¹⁰ The report adopts the ETHOS (European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion) framework on typologies of social exclusion linked to housing. The categories utilized were: Homeless (rough sleepers, people in emergency accommodation); Houseless (people in hostels for the homeless, people in hostels for women, people in accommodation for immigrants, people receiving longer-term housing support); Insecure housing (people living in insecure housing, people threatened with eviction, people threatened with domestic violence); and inadequate housing (people living in temporary/non-conventional structures, people in substandard/non-decent housing, severe overcrowding in housing).

Evolution of the number of people living in negotiated occupations and squats in Brussels (2008-2022)

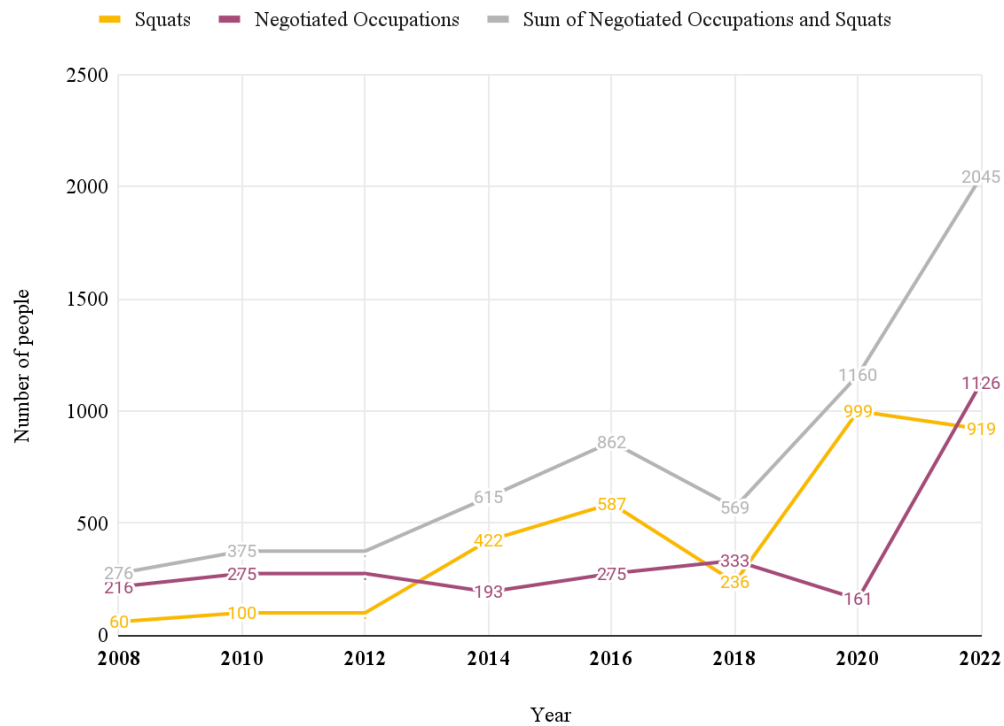


Figure x: Graph elaborated by the author based on data from the bruss'help report *Dénombrement des personnes sanschez-soi en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*, 2020 and 2022 editions.

Two highlights are worth mentioning: the decrease in earlier figures is mainly attributed to the anti-squatting legislation enacted in 2017, which led to increased criminalization and expedited evictions of squatters. The scenario has forced squatters back underground and, as they were seeking discretion to reduce the risk of eviction, squatters would rather avoid contact with organizations which probably impacted the counting of 2018. This also probably resulted in more movement among those who jump from one squat to the next, making monitoring quite challenging. However, overall numbers started to rise again after covid-19 pandemic, reflecting increased squatting due to the generalized crisis (economic, social, and health) – on a methodological note, it is also possible that the quality of the data collection could have improved due to the relationship built with squatters in the moment of the crisis, revealing previously hidden individuals. Needless to say, the number of homeless and poorly housed people more than doubled in 10 years in the Brussels Capital Region (Ibid.)

Regarding negotiated occupations, the current number is the highest number ever recorded since the first count in 2008: In only two years, between 2020 and 2022, the number of individuals in temporary occupations increased by 599.4%. This increase is partly attributed to recent funding provided by the Brussels-Capital Region and the Common Community Commission (Cocom) to regulate these occupations, but also related to improved

knowledge and contact with these experiences (Ibid.). If we overlay the report's conclusion with the data on evictions, we come to the conclusion that those who are now homeless, poorly housed or evicted the most in Brussels are predominantly “foreign-born”, “with precarious jobs” and “without a residence permit” – namely, the *sans-papiers*.

In this context, the occupation of vacant buildings clearly arises as a necessity. It also materializes as a form of protest against the growing number of empty buildings at the same time as there is a shortage of affordable housing options. It goes without saying that although since 1993 the Belgian Constitution has theoretically guaranteed the right to decent accommodation (article 23:3¹¹), this right is not enforceable and should be “balanced” with property rights. In this sense, while organized movements claim the right to housing through squatting, the judicial decisions historically favor property rights (Dawance, 2008), a pattern also observed in São Paulo.

Historically, Dawance (2008) is one of the few researchers who captured the local scene in Brussels. The author noted that some occupations involved complex collective organization¹², housing more than fifty inhabitants for several months or years. Although they faced systematic eviction, these experiences fostered the continuation and development of squatting practice in Brussels, leading to the occupation of 123 Rue Royale – a very interesting case that remained active for 11 years until 2018¹³.

The prolonged resistance of 123 Rue Royale pioneered a pilot experiment involving a precarious occupation agreement with the Walloon Region (Dawance, 2008) paving the way for other squats to use the same instrument – a legal tool of today's squat scene in Brussels. Within the scene that preceded (or coexisted with) this particular experience, Dawance highlighted important aspects of squatting in Brussels: demographic diversity, self-management processes as a way of organizing, and interaction with the neighborhood as a resistance strategy – these generally align with Western European patterns of urban squatting analyzed by Martínez (2019).

Firstly, the diversity of squatters in a single building encompassed a wide range of backgrounds, genders, cultures, family structures, and professions, creating a convergence of distinct social worlds. These included the most disadvantaged and deprived, such as the homeless, unemployed or *sans-papier* (Dawance, 2008: 32). However, today's scenario points to a more homogeneous configuration, indicating a possible shift within the general demographics. Secondly, the squatters were mainly organized into one or more associations – ranging from cooperatives to non-profit organizations or informal collectives, but always with a self-management approach. This organization was crucial for defending¹⁴ their living space, enhancing their agency through assemblies, collective financial management, and mutual aid efforts – the dna of most squatting experiences. Finally, the interaction with the neighborhood

¹¹ The full article of the constitution can be consulted at [this link](#).

¹² Significant examples of former projects mentioned by the Dawance (2008) include Kaputt, Le 89, L’îlot Soleil, Les drapiers, Le Tagawa, La comète, and Le 103.

¹³ For more information, see [Woningen 123 Logement](#).

¹⁴ Other key networks in supporting the squatters' resistance efforts are mentioned by the author, such as the Brussels Assembly for the Right to Housing, Tenants' Union, and anti-homelessness associations.

was important for fostering a sense of community and belonging, manifesting through different open activities. This is an important aspect, although there might be more nuances depending on the location of the squat and its neighboring dynamics.

It is important to note that the housing-led squatting scene is not static. In Brussels, it seems to have changed in some aspects, especially regarding key actors and demographics. Due to the lack of updated literature, some of these aspects will be further discussed based on empirical findings in the Findings and Discussion chapters.

3.3 From "the platypus metropole" to "the heart of Europe": Shared struggles across the globe

In this thesis, the social movements mobilized in the case studies organize oppressed and dispossessed masses, highlighting the universal struggle of overcoming systems of oppression. In Europe, movements like La Voix des Sans Papiers (VSP) have emerged as critical voices for regularization and decent living conditions for undocumented migrants, constituting today the main force managing to occupy buildings for over five years in Brussels. Similarly, the Movement for Struggle in Neighborhoods, Villages, and Favelas (MLB) in Brazil addresses inequality by mobilizing thousands of families to demand housing and urban reform, having squatting as one of their main political strategies. Both movements correlate to a broader, transnational pattern of activism in which housing struggles are central, demonstrating how localized actions reverberate within and from global scales of struggles for social justice and fundamental rights – including the right to the city.

3.3.1 La Voix des Sans-papiers (VSP) - Brussels, Belgium

La Voix des Sans-papiers is a social movement organized by undocumented migrants in Belgium, being one of the outcomes of earlier organization of undocumented migrants seeking integration and freedom of mobility in European territories. In 2014, a migrant's march crossed Europe – the "European Migrant Caravan". When arriving in Brussels, in June 2014, a group of undocumented people decided to organize and form the VSP collective. The collective then organized its first occupation of a building in Ribaucourt, which was violently evicted by the police in 2016¹⁵. After 25 occupations and subsequent evictions, today the movement coordinates 7 housing-led squats with some level of stability. Their current experiences are:

- 101 Avenue Henri Jaspar, Saint Gilles;
- 47 Rue Fritz Toussaint, Ixelles;
- 350-356 Avenue de la Couronne, Ixelles;

¹⁵ Information taken from the autonomous publication "VSP, l'odyssée des sans-papiers" (2024), printed version.

- 116 Rue de Intendant, Molenbeek;
- 654 Chaussée de Gand, Van Zande, Molenbeek;
- 143 Avenue Louise x 1 Rue Defacqz x 80 Rue de Livourne, Ixelles;
- 101 Boulevard Brand Whitlock (Hôtel Monty), Wolluwe Saint Lambert.

Nowadays, around 300 undocumented people are housed in VSP housing-led-squats, strengthening the struggle for regularization and for a decent living condition in Belgium.

3.3.2 Movement for Struggle in Neighborhoods, Villages and Favelas (MLB) - São Paulo, Brazil

The Movement for Struggle in Neighborhoods, Villages and Favelas is a nationwide housing movement in Brazil. It emerged in 1999 and is now present in 20 out of 26 states across the country, organizing people poorly housed in cities. The movement defends urban reform as one of the most fundamental processes of achieving, in the context of a larger struggle, an emancipated society. Within their strategy, the struggle for housing is the main engine that fuels the mobilization of the urban working class (Menezes, 2016). For MLB, all housing-led squats they have established are fundamental instruments for the spatialization of this organization – it means that they aim to create spaces that not only provide shelter (the most immediate need of people, therefore the main reason people get involved) but also for political awareness where workers understand, through organization, the importance of their collective struggle. This implies that the movement is also strongly networked, with associated movements acting on parallel agendas – here, highlighting the Olga Benário Women's Movement, which also squats, but with different objectives. In the city of São Paulo, MLB's current experiences are:

- Jean Jacque Dessalines (or The Immigrant's Occupation) – 109 Carlos Gomes Square, Liberdade neighborhood, central São Paulo;
- Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns – 103 Carlos Gomes Square, Liberdade neighborhood, central São Paulo.

4. Methodology

This section presents the methodological approach, qualitative methods and strategies I used to conduct this research. I focus on two housing-led squats, both ongoing experiences in São Paulo and Brussels, as the main entry points for the investigation. Before presenting the cases, I will briefly note the semantic choices I had to make to develop this research further.

4.1 Semantic choices and limitations: squats x occupations x trespassing

The insertion of this brief section on semantic choices became necessary after the fieldwork began. It was during the first interviews that the importance of discerning between *occupation* and *squat*, in French; and *ocupação* and *invasão* (invasion or trespassing) in Brazilian Portuguese was raised. The differentiations do not mean exactly the same thing in the two scenarios but were stressed by key interviewees in both cases. A more detailed analysis of this differentiation will be made in the Findings chapter of this thesis, but which we can summarize in general terms now to explain some of the semantic choices in the research.

On the Brazilian scene, there is no direct assimilation with the English word *squat* among social housing movements. Within this context, in Brazilian Portuguese, *occupation* is the legitimate act of giving use to something that has been abandoned or has not been used due to speculative purposes, which is different from simply *invading* (one can only 'invade' something that is being used). Therefore, the action of *occupying* denounces the idleness of buildings in the city and reiterates the importance of fulfilling the social function of property. On the Belgian scene, *squats* are more associated with cultural collectives and anarchist groups, generally organized by European people whose transgressive practices do not necessarily start with the claim 'we squat because we have nowhere to live'. This is the reason why movements like VSP reclaim this differentiation quite often, highlighting that their political purpose of *occupation* is fundamentally different from the ones who *squat*.

As the semantic debate is very marked and also takes into account the interviewees' native languages in the context of the cities in which the fieldwork was carried out, some decisions had to be taken during the writing process of this thesis. It is important to notice that much of the literature in English refers to this phenomenon as simply *squats*, differentiating some types and sub variations already addressed in the literature review. Therefore, I decided to ensure the accessibility of this research, taking into account the current search tools and familiarity with the term in the language I am writing, while maintaining the key differentiation of the experiences addressed in this thesis. I will then be using the term *housing-led squats*, thus marking the specificity of this experience and leaving no room for confusion as to the objectives of this form of occupation.

4.2 Methodological approach

Within the methodological approach, I take as a reference Brandão's (2006) work as a starting point. He argues that participant research considers "the social, political and ideological commitment of the researcher to the community, people, and popular human groups, as well as their social causes" (Brandão, 2016:55). Therefore, the researcher should uphold political purposes aligned with their struggles. This approach disrupts the researcher-object relationship, making it a more of a dialogical subject-subject interaction, where mutual experiences and exchanges based on the concrete reality experienced in the territory can take place – the author refers to this as *popular science*, and here assuming a subjectivist epistemology as one cannot separate themselves from what they know as reality.

On this note, as part of my positionality, it is important to mention my previous experience in the field of production of social housing through self-management processes led by urban social movements, as well advising and collaborating with housing-led, cultural, and feminist squats in São Paulo. This experience has allowed me to directly interact with diverse scenarios within urban squatting, which has substantially contributed to my understanding of their struggle, entailing immersion not only as a researcher but also as an activist – in other words, particularly in the case located in São Paulo, I consider myself to be undertaking participant research (Brandão, 2006) since I am an active actor in the urban squat scene and very comfortable navigating its networks. This position undoubtedly assumes interaction and mutual influence as a key part of the fieldwork of this research, nurturing the praxis of research-action (Ibid.) therefore avoiding positivist approaches or claiming any type of "impartiality" within the conduction of this work.

To understand *how* these movements organize and mobilize people, as well as *why* the horizons and outcomes can be so different, I choose to approach the investigation through the lens of *comparative urbanism* (Robinson, 2023), zoning in on the two particular housing-led squats by framing their outcomes within a *double horizon of political temporality* (Gutiérrez-Cueli et al; 2023), therefore analyzing both; *immediate temporality* and *wide temporality* on housing-led squatting, related to stability (RQ1) and horizon of struggle (RQ2).

Before presenting the cases, it is important to mention that I do not take these particular experiences as, in weberian terms, *ideal types* of squatting in these cities – it is well known that outcomes vary substantially and it should mainly be understood on a case-by-case basis (Martínez, 2020). However, these particular cases illustrate very well that housing-led squats, both a result of and a contestation of capitalist urbanization, are also spaces for elaborating answers to the immediate contradictions and proposing future alternatives – therefore, experiences that are very worthy of being narrated and documented.

Taking into consideration a variety of forces and actors, I focus on investigating two local dynamics (similar emergencies in distinct geographies), taking a *genetic* approach as a starting point – what Jacobs (2006) would refer to as *repeated instances*, as cited by Robinson (2023). The basis of this comparative analysis is the understanding of the emergence of specific urban outcomes in different contexts – in this case, housing-led squats

in Sao Paulo and Brussels. In other words, I aim to analyze how fundamentally different geographies, now interconnected within their role in global capitalism, generate very similar outcomes that are deeply connected through a shared genesis of the capitalist production of space. It is, to some extent, about "tracing the interconnected genesis of repeated, related but distinctive, urban outcomes" (Robinson, 2023, p. 128). In summary, the starting point is that both urban outcomes (here, the housing-led-squats) are the result of a system that is producing and deepening inequalities and accentuating the stripping away of basic human rights across the globe, lack of access to housing being just one of them. Therefore, the aim is to answer how these (related) outcomes that share the same systemic roots also share strategies and discourses within their political practices, while their (distinct) horizons and future possibilities of unfolding can substantially diverge depending on the political-spatial context of the geographies in which they are inserted. What I hope to achieve with this comparison is a good understanding of what these movements are elaborating in terms of political practices, immediate responses and horizons of struggle, as well as understanding what we can learn from both cases.

4.3 Cases selection

I selected two specific housing-led-squats to ground the analysis. Although the nature of the social movements cited is not fundamentally the same, the housing-led squats that are self-managed by them share key similarities that ground the genetic comparison in relation to the research question raised, justifying why I choose these particular cases. Four key aspects can be mentioned: 1) the buildings were both squatted during the COVID-19 pandemic; 2) they are both occupying private properties; 3) the majority of squatters in both buildings are undocumented migrants; and 4) despite adverse conditions, they have managed to resist eviction for around three years and a half to the present moment.

First, the fact that both buildings were occupied during the pandemic of COVID-19 meant the social movements benefited from legal resolutions that were adopted during the pandemic on an extraordinary basis, avoiding or postponing eviction proceedings in both contexts. Both buildings being private properties has a quite particular understanding to each case, and the perception of how much "easier" or "more difficult" the negotiation process is varies depending on each scenario – an interesting aspect for discussing the different strategies mobilized by social movements. Furthermore, the fact that they are occupied and self-organized by a majority of immigrants – in the case of Brussels, completely organized by migrants – highlights the importance of understanding their protagonism in somehow conquering a place to call home, as well as limitations of this experience under the current legal regime. This aspect also opens the way to discussing the questions of autonomy of undocumented people and specific issues related to their legal status, shedding light not only on their needs but also their capacity for political organization and claiming rights.

Besides the presented aspects, alongside practical and empirical reasons, I also chose these cases taking into account that, in São Paulo, squatting can be a real way to access proper housing. In Brussels, as long-term squatting situations are quite exceptional, it is

worth documenting the ongoing experience on Avenue Louise. Furthermore, although the claims and final objectives of these occupations may be different, the way these spaces function at the present moment already suggests that there is a “stretch” or “expansion” of the possibilities of stability in the medium term. Therefore, the selected cases are good choices to explore two areas: practical aspects, strategies and direct actions that elucidate the organization and agency of the social movement, avoiding immediate evictions and leading to stability of housing in the medium term (RQ1); as well as the horizons of struggle that are being imagined, claimed and eventually achieved in the two scenarios (RQ2). Finally, the cases are listed below:

- **Louise** building, located on 143 Avenue Louise with 80 Rue de Livourne, Ixelles, Brussels, squatted on 28th March 2021 by *La Voix Des Sans Papiers* (VSP);
- **Jean-Jacques Dessalines**, or 'The Migrants' Occupation', located at 109 Carlos Gomes Square, Liberdade neighborhood, central São Paulo, squatted on 13th June 2021 by Movement of Struggle in Neighborhoods, Vilas and Favelas (MLB).



Figure 1. Louise housing-led squat, by VSP.
Photo by the author, 2022.



Figure 2. Jean Jacques Dessalines housing-led squat,
by MLB. Picture by Amanda Alves, 2021.



Figure 3. Satellite image, highlighting the Jean Jacque building.
Prepared by the author, cartographic base: Google Earth, 2024.



Figure 4. Satellite image, highlighting the Louise building.
Prepared by the author, cartographic base: Google Earth, 2024.

4.4 Data collection

This subsection presents the strategies and methods used in this investigation to conduct data collection. This investigation is purely qualitative and took a more ethnographic approach, where multi-site observations and in-depth interviews are the primary methods which informed the main findings and discussions developed in the final chapters.

- **Multi-sited field notes and observations**

A brief note is important about the access to the subjects that has contributed to the elaboration of this thesis. In São Paulo, as already stated, the access to the social movement and housing-led squat was facilitated due to previous networks and no main issues were faced during the fieldwork. Several visits took place in December 2023 and January 2024, where I carried out ethnographies in the neighborhood and inside of Jean-Jacques Dessalines housing-led squat.

In Brussels, as a temporary resident, my access to the collectives took a different path. Although there was a language barrier, I started to approach different actors in October 2022, basically moved by a genuine desire to connect with collectives in the city. Through activation of the academic network in Brussels and research on the *squat.net* website, I came to know Louise's squat and VSP movement and some informal visits to the site were done in December 2022. I started to conduct structured fieldwork in July 2023 when I had access to key actors and could access the interior of the building, conducting the major part of the ethnographic work. The last visit was in May 2024, marking the conclusion of the fieldwork. The findings section heavily relies on these observations.

- **Semi-structured interviews**

The topics and main questions were previously prepared and organized in three main blocks: The first block focused on a brief personal history of the interviewees up to their arrival and involvement in the social movement, with the aim of understanding the motivations and circumstances that led them to become part of the movement and live in the housing-led squat – here, I aim to understand the relationship between social movements and their settlements as possible 'arrival places' settlements, mapping the struggles and expectations around stability (RQ1). The second block focused on the current situation of the housing-led squat, including conflicts involving different actors, strategies for setting agreements, and the key aspects that have allowed the permanence of the squat as well as the occupiers' strategies for finding new potential buildings (RQ1). The third block of questions related to the organization of the social movements, their aims and horizon of struggle, including both concrete objectives and broader issues related to fighting for their fundamental rights – these being access to housing and the legalization process centrality in this context (RQ2). The complete questionnaire can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

This structure of questions was designed to allow flexibility and to explore related topics, covering possible blind spots in the research and therefore allowing room for cross-cutting topics to emerge, which proved valuable. All interviewees were informed about the aims of this research, as well as how the information they shared will be used. Participation was voluntary and a verbal consent was given and recorded. In total, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted in Sao Paulo and Brussels, with an average length of 60 minutes with social movements' coordinators, journalists and architects; and 20 minutes with squatters. The interviews mainly followed a snowball sampling strategy, where in São Paulo it started from the social movement's coordinators and in Brussels with a journalist working with alternative media. A summary of the interviewees is provided below:

Table 1. Interviewees

City	Movement/Organization	Interviewee*	
BXL	Louise Squat VSP	Squat coordinator	Helena, Congolese
BXL	Louise Squat VSP	Movement coordinator	Marcelo, Senegalese
BXL	Louise Squat VSP	Squatter	Tom, Ghanaian
BXL	Louise Squat Tout va bien Youtube channel	Alternative media journalist	Pierre, Belgian
BLX	Belgian collective Squatter in Brussels	Squatter	Marco, Belgian
SP	Jean Jacque MLB	Squat coordinator	Tin, Brazilian
SP	Jean Jacque MLB	Movement coordinator	Otavio, Brazilian
SP	Jean Jacque <i>A Verdade</i> (The Truth) Newspaper	Alternative media	Guilherme, Brazilian
SP	Jean Jacque MLB	Squatter	Claudio, Dominican
SP	Jean Jacque MLB	Squatter	Isac, Haitian
SP	Jean Jacque MLB	Squatter	Sandra, Angolese
SP	Jean Jacque MLB	Squatter	Margareth, Bolivian
SP	Peabiru Technical Advisory for housing social movements - housing squats retrofit	Architects and Researchers	Alex and Noa, Brazilians

*Names are anonymized.

The interviews were transcribed with a little editing work to increase clarity – mainly related to removal of pauses or filler words, editing run-on sentences and summarizing questions that were made. Two interviews were conducted in French and facilitated by a third

person, who was translating from French to Portuguese or French to English – particularly in this last case, the transcription and translation was done by a native French-English speaker.

- **Coding**

After transcription, I conducted data coding, combining both deductive and inductive approaches to facilitate the analysis of data collected through interviews. The initial set of codes were directed by the research question (deductive approach) and also based on a first reading of the interviews done during the first part of field work (inductive approach). The main groups were set based on the first set of coding, then reorganized once the fieldwork was completed. During the process of coding, a variety of sub groups were set according to the data found.

As the research questions pertain to housing stability (understood here as the provision of shelter in the medium-term) and potential outcomes in a post-squat scenario, they inherently mobilize both material possibilities and narratives of social movements – ranging from official claims from the social movement to the aspirations and dreams of those who squat. Various units of comparison could be used: the occupied buildings, the social actors, the narratives and discourses, the resistance strategies, even the legal traditions, etc. But since the primary interest is centered on the question of permanence/stability and the possible unfoldings in a post-squat scenario, the comparison focuses on the *horizon of struggle* itself.

This horizon comprises several elements – in short, a combination of who/when/where/how: *who* is occupying and with *whom* they are connected, the timing of the event (*when*), the geography in which it is occurring (*where*), and the circumstances of the phenomenon (*how*). Without combining these elements and understanding the cases within their context, it is not possible to constitute the unit *horizon*, nor answer the question "what's next?". In other words, multiple elements of analysis were needed to comprehend these horizons, as well as compare if they diverge and why. This range of elements and their articulation could be better visualized during the process of coding where, using NVivo software, I could organize thematic categories from the interviews' content. In short, I coded all the interviews using five primary themes, following sub-codes:

Table 2. Codes

Axial codes	Codes	Description	Interviews	References (number of codes)
Physical structure and collective organization	Demographics	Information on number of occupants, nationality, ethnicity, religion and other demographic data.	4	13
	First contacts	How the squatters came to know and eventually organize themselves into the social movements that occupy and self-manage the housing-led squats.	5	13
	Organization	Information on how the organization takes place in the collective and in the physical space of the building occupied, taking into account uses for activities necessary for this organization.	6	16
	Physical structure	Physical condition of the building and aspects of safety and habitability, such as the general structure, the quality of the hydraulic, electrical and heating installations, natural lighting and ventilation, free circulation and functioning emergency exits, among other related aspects.	2	2
Agency	Impact	Visibility and reputation of the movement, as well as their impact within the housing-led squat context.	2	6
	Interlocution with landlords	Information on negotiation processes with landlords and strategies related to public pressure.	4	8
	Interlocution with the government	Information on negotiation processes with municipalities and federal spheres.	3	7
	Networks	Connections with other collectives, movements, associations, and building interpersonal relationships.	9	35
Tactics and limitations	Anti-squat policies	Advancement of anti-squat policies, the anti-squat scene, and debates on squatters' rights.	4	7
	Finding and occupying	How the movements find the building, how they ascertain the vacancy and organize the occupation.	4	8

	Limitations	Power imbalance; gaps between political action and structural changes; the difficulty of mapping empty buildings; failed attempts to open empty buildings; lack of autonomy; threat of illegal evictions; high turnover of occupants that makes it difficult to understand the political struggle.	8	49
	Squat vs occupation	Semantic debates, differentiations in terms of the collective's organization and objectives, and the current formal arrangement (e.g. negotiated occupations and squats).	3	4
	Strategies	Information on how they pull the balance of power in favor of the movement, the constitution of the movement as a collective protection layer, different ways of pressuring those in power, evaluating the methods that work and those that do not.	7	44
Horizons	Perspectives about the future	Outcomes pursued and narratives about the future (both personal, related to the movement and to the housing-led squat), and narratives about changes in general politics.	10	23
	Possible outcomes	Feasible or likely outcomes that could be possible in a post-squat situation.	5	14
Migration	Migration debate	Institutional approaches to migration, local crises in relation to asylum seekers and refugees, as well as how migrants are perceived in each context.	5	27
	Personal story	Information on personal trajectories, tracing the paths taken by individuals until they reached the housing-led squat.	6	49

In addition, an extra layer of coding was carried out encompassing personal trajectories related to migration, closely linked to how people access the social movements. This new code was needed because their first contact is not necessarily related to the layer of agency and networks addressed earlier – actually happening by word of mouth through friends or family members.

- **Secondary Sources**

Additional information from media sources – such as opinion articles, reports and independent publications, be them published online or printed – was also gathered mainly from MLB and VSP platforms and urban observatories associated with the urban social movements struggles. The data collected from these sources was mainly used to complement the contextualization of the social movements involved and the cases selected in this thesis – from accessing digital booklets on the movements' political principles and their organizational methods to double-checking addresses and other general information; these materials were assessed on an ad hoc basis. Documents formally published were used as sources in the general analysis based on the sets of codes previously defined – particularly regarding collective organization, agency, networks, and perspective on the future. All secondary sources are cited throughout the body of this thesis and can also be found listed in the references.

5. Findings

Based on a review of existing literature, multi-sited observations, and semi-structured interviews that have been coded for further systematic analysis, this finding section is divided into three main groups: 1) SUBJECTS AND PLACES: Demographics and organization, a building's structure, and its surroundings; 2) THE AGENCY: Interlocutions, negotiation capacity and networks, and 3) THE CLAIMS: Perceptions about the future and possible outcomes. In essence, the actors, timeline, squat aims, and strategies are very similar. However, when it comes to physical structure: the "what's next?" question (which I am calling the *horizon of struggle*) different aims and possibility of outcomes were observed.

5.1 SUBJECTS AND PLACES: Demographics, organization, building's structure, and its surroundings

The content within this subsection is primarily derived from field observations and interviews conducted on-site, and is therefore heavily descriptive. In summary, both buildings are occupied by migrant families, mainly undocumented, from different parts of the African and American continents. Both buildings share a very privileged location in the city in their particular context, with specificities related to the dynamics of the neighborhoods where they are located. A disparity emerges when assessing infrastructure quality across different aspects, such as physical safety, natural light and ventilation, as well as water and electricity provision. Overall, the Louise squat presents a good and safe situation, starkly contrasting with the conditions seen in the Jean Jacques squat. Main observations are listed below.

5.1.1 Louise

Demographics

At Louise housing-led squat, there are around 100 occupiers today, the majority coming from different African countries – Senegal, Gana, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Algeria, Congo, Morocco, and Guinea were cited by the interviewees. The majority of them are men and the prevailing religion is Islam, followed by christian religions.

As *La Voix des Sans Papier* (VSP) advocates for the regularization of undocumented people, being undocumented is the main criteria to be part of the collective and therefore live in the housing-led squat. This specifically means that everyone currently living at Louise is undocumented or has just got their papers and is still there until they find another place to go – mainly trying to find something affordable in the regular rental market. During the ethnographic work conducted in the building, I noticed that I was the only non-black person there – all the people passed through the main lobby were men, and I could only see a few women once the semi-structured interview was finished and the interviewee and I started a walkthrough of the building, along the corridors and common areas. There are few kids in the building today – the former coordinator mentioned there are around 15, as some families with

kids recently moved out after getting their papers. In general, the group of occupants seemed quite homogeneous and this was confirmed by some interviewees, emphasizing that this helps in the organizing process since the occupants share many aspects culturally.

So, it's pretty homogenic. Pretty much, culturally. They come from the same part of Africa, so they share languages, religions (...). And it avoids a lot of cultural conflicts. There are some Maghrebians for example (...) or Argelian, but it's an exception. – Pierre, 2024

Organization

The Louise building was opened during the *Campagne de Réquisition Solidaire*, where activists found this particular building on a circulating list of empty buildings among different social movements and collectives. According to interviewees, it was not the first attempt to occupy the building, and the fact that they not only succeeded but are still there today is a reason for celebration. The majority of the people currently occupying the building today came from other evicted squats, including one group from Berchem and a second from Molenbeek. At that time, a third group from another collective that helped VSP open the building also participated and occupied, but were asked to leave shortly afterwards due to disagreements with the VSP vision on occupying and organizing. This conflict concerned the debate on 'squatting vs. occupying,' briefly introduced in the methodology section of this thesis.

In the context of Louise building, it was pointed out that this third collective shared a different organizational approach and strategy from VSP as they came from experiences more related to cultural-led squats than did VSP. In this specific case, there was a disagreement on how many people both collectives could accommodate in the building, where the culture-led collective wanted to use all the space available and make their best effort to welcome as many people as possible. On the other hand, VSP wanted to guarantee a coordinated number of people and abide by the contract they signed with the owners of the building, ensuring that agreements were followed – which included a limitation on the number of people occupying. This situation is well summarized in the former coordinator's words below:

But the difficulty with having a huge building like this one, it's difficult to manage, but also people from outside don't quite understand why we can just not have as many people as we can. (...) We didn't have the same vision of this occupation. The ones that began to deviate from what we presented for, was the [third group]. They didn't understand why we had to limit and (...) couldn't view things from our point of view. We went to a hundred people and, [as the] coordinator of the place I had to... battle a little bit. Just to make sure that the owner of the

place stayed understanding, (...) and stick to the contract and to each point and each detail. – Helena, 2023.

This particular event brings into discussion the level of radicality one can practice and the risks they are willing to take, as well as potential conflicts with different actors. It is not uncommon to observe that the degree of risk individuals are willing to undertake correlates with their level of privilege – in this particular context, understood simply as being Belgian citizens, often highly educated and part of the middle class. There exists a significant distinction between those who occupy out of necessity and those who might be engaged in squatting as a form of protest against neoliberal urban projects, to make a political statement, or even to experiment with alternative communal living. While these two main groups may share political views (and, in this case, even share the space of the squat), their primary motivations and levels of vulnerability are substantially different – essentially, one group finds themselves in a profoundly vulnerable position and thus unprotected in various respects, whereas the other group likely faces fewer concerns about basic needs or the assurance of their fundamental human rights in the event of issues arising at the squat – though this remains a separate debate. In other words, in the context of Brussels, Belgian squatters can take more significant risks because they have comparatively less to lose when contrasted with undocumented migrants who are also squatting.

Connected to this question, a human rights activist interviewee mentioned that VSP is not radical in their *method*, sharing the opinion that the movement has a moderate approach to organizing people and occupying empty buildings. The main argument to support this way of organization is that, by being moderate in their *method* of squatting, they have been able to develop an approach that enhances their chances of negotiating with landlords and public authorities. In this sense, contrasting collectives that have a more radical attitude on squatting (generally cultural-focused) VSP does not claim to be "horizontal" or fully "self-governed".

To avoid misunderstandings, I would clarify that I align with Harvey (2013) when he discusses the concept of horizontality – although he was commenting on the debates about the commons, it is possible to mobilize horizontality simply as an organizational concept to this discussion. He upholds that striving for horizontal organization is commendable and we should, indeed, draw lessons from the organizational strategies of small-scale collective experiences as much as we can. This is not the problem. However, having directly engaged with some of these experiences, I argue that achieving a fully horizontal organizational model is very challenging. This is true even at a small scale (what one might term "local"), and even within a collective comprising only a few dozen people – let alone when scaling up regionally or globally, the main point of debate made by the author on horizontality.

Nevertheless, Harvey's subsequent assertion could not be more precise: we must acknowledge the limits of horizontality as a hegemonic principle for organizing people and making movements, this being key to preparing to go beyond this principle when needed (2013:70). In this sense, what I observed is that VSP managed to comprehend the limitations of a fully horizontal way of organization that put an extended level of solidarity on top of assuring safety in what they already have. Contrastingly, within the scale of a squat, the

collective would defend that "everyone has the same responsibilities", but highlights that they have to have a clear organization: assembly, coordinators, a clear political vision and, therefore, a straightforward way to organize people in the collective and assure them that they can prolong their permanence by negotiating.

The neighborhood

"Do you like the finer things? Then the Louise neighbourhood is the place for you. It is known for its high-end fashion boutiques, gourmet restaurants and chic hotels" – Visit Brussels website¹⁶, 2024.



Figure 5. The building's surroundings. To the right of the Louise occupation, a new “Grade A+” office building in the final stages of construction. Prepared by the author, cartographic base: Google Earth, 2024.

When considering the neighborhood demographics, a brief observation in front of the Louise building on a Sunday morning readily reveals the contrast between residents of the housing-led squat and others. Given the flow of people and the building's specific location – the most high-end avenue in Brussels – these differences are strikingly evident, highlighting some of the most normalized dynamics at play. Besides being undocumented, it is a fact that racialized bodies in Europe are subjugated to the most precarious and poorly paid jobs, being therefore super-exploited – construction sites, cleaning, and care work are the main areas where they can find a way to have some income, mostly informal.

The scene is no different for those living in the Louise building. During the ethnographic work, a Sunday morning seemed quite interesting for understanding the local dynamics of this place: Within less than an hour, dozens of young black men came out of the

¹⁶ Excerpt taken from "[Louise – Brussels' chic and high-end neighbourhood](#)" article from July 2024.

building with their bicycles and delivery bags, contrasting with white people with their carbon bicycles and high-performance training clothes. As the day went on and the number of people circulating started to increase, a particular scene caught my eye: two families walking on the sidewalk. The first a black family comprising a mother, toddler, and two bigger kids – a girl and a boy, the latter carrying a suitcase. They were walking in the direction of Avenue Louise. In the opposite direction, there was a white family composed of a couple, a kid riding a scooter, a toddler on a tiny little bike and a baby in a stroller. The amount of objects they were carrying was overwhelming, and I assumed they lived nearby or had a huge car to be able to accommodate everything and circulate. When these families crossed, the black girl looked behind. She seemed delighted with the scooter. Her mother calls her scoldingly, and she walks back with the others.

Almost every black person in this place on a Sunday morning seems to be busy working or doing some other activity that has to be done, never resting or in their leisure time. All those who are enjoying their leisure time with their families or doing some exercise – whether running or riding their expensive bikes – are white people. I could not help but remember the very questionable "neighborhood diversity index" that was presented to me at some point. To some extent, the "diversity quota" of this entire neighborhood is basically the existence of this housing-led squat – and it changes absolutely nothing in the material condition and living experience of racialized bodies in that place.



Figure 6. Façade of the entrance used by the occupants at Rue de Livourne. Photo by the author, 2024.

Building's physical structure

When it comes to the physical structure of the building itself, it is very well looked after and presents no issues. It is a well maintained building from the outside, and even graffiti and *pixos* had been cleaned the first time I saw it. Apart from four small posters stuck to the glass façade on Avenue Louise or the makeshift names left on the letter box at the main entrance used by the occupiers on Livourne Street, there is nothing clearly indicating that undocumented people organized at the VSP movement occupy the building today. There are no flags anymore, no graffiti, and even peering through the glass blocks into the main hall, nothing obviously political is noticed.



Figure 7. Windows at façade Rue Defacq. Photo by the author, 2024.



Figure 8. Façade Rue de Livourne. Photo by the author, 2024.



Figure 9. Façade Rue Defacq. Photo by the author, 2024.

Inside, everything seems well-maintained as well. The structures are healthy, and the internal patio guarantees good natural lighting and ventilation in the main common areas and corridors. The windows are in good condition, so thermal insulation does not seem to be an issue.



Figure 10. Main corridor on the ground floor, connecting the building's lobby (Avenue Louise entrance) to the staircase. Photo by the author, 2023.

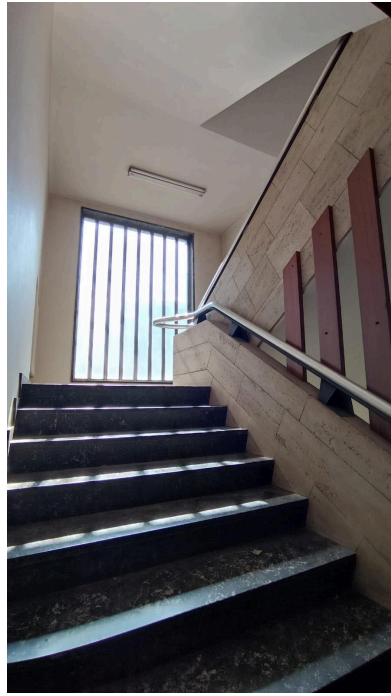


Figure 11. Main staircases used by the occupants (elevators do not work). Photo by the author, 2023.



Figure 12. Rooms for collective use. Photo by the author, 2023.

All the water and electricity facilities are decent, although there is some level of improvisation and adaptation in some of the bathrooms. In the rare cases where humidity is an issue, there are paper reminders to keep the windows open to properly ventilate the room. To preserve the families' privacy, I did not ask to see the rooms where they sleep. However, I assume that they might not have significant issues on the upper floors as they have big windows which seem in good condition when seen from outside – the façade of Rue Defacqz.



Figure 13. Shared kitchen.
Photo by the author, 2023.



Figure 14. Female bathroom and
laundry room.
Photo by the author, 2023.



Figure 15. Female shower.
Photo by the author,
2023.

Nevertheless, after interviews with other occupants, I noticed that there are also people living on the street level floor, which has tiny windows at the top of a gap filled with glass blocks, sometimes obstructed by pieces of cardboard or other materials in an attempt at some privacy. In this case, although I could not analyze it from the inside (as it was not an area of the building I was invited to visit), there are strong indications of precariousness in terms of ventilation and insulation.



Figure 16. Façade Defacqz. MDF and other materials are visible through the glass bricks. Photo by the author, 2024.



Figure 17. Façade Defacqz. All tilting windows are obstructed by some reused materials. Photo by the author, 2024.



Figure 18. Façade Defacqz. Cardboard is used to block the view, probably for privacy reasons. Photo by the author, 2024.

The residents who were interviewed did not mention any issues with physical space. They appear accepting of the building's physical state given that they do not pay rent or other fees and have access to everything they need to keep living there, including heat, power, water, and gas. The common spaces are collectively maintained, but the interviewee did not share any details on how the families organize it. However, there is a tone of exhaustion about living in a housing-led squat, usually related to interpersonal relationships with the other occupants in their day-to-day life.

5.1.2 Jean Jacque Dessalines

Demographics

Around 30 adult occupants live at Jean Jacque building today. Besides some Brazilians, the majority come from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Bolívia and Angola. There is a balance when it comes to gender, and most consider themselves Christians. Regarding their legal status, for most of the nationalities present in that building, the administrative procedures and bureaucracies involved in obtaining a temporary residence permit are not too demanding – all of the interviewees have their status regularized in the Federal Police of Brazil and did not encounter significant difficulties (or fears) in doing so. The sole exception is related to migrants arriving from Haiti, primarily due to the inconvenience of traveling to Brasília to the Haitian Embassy – for some Haitian migrants, it is financially unfeasible to travel from Sao Paulo to Brasília, so the process of regularization is typically more lengthy than for migrants of other nationalities.

The majority of occupants become involved in the social movement and learn about the housing-led squat through word of mouth, mainly facilitated by relatives and friends who are already members. The way newcomers arrive and engage in the social movement varies based on individual backgrounds, where those with higher education often join via university collectives or social media platforms. In contrast, migrants in urgent need of shelter typically connect through friends and family networks already organized in the movement. It is also common to find cases where people find housing-led squats by passing by or participating in open activities at other squats led by the other movements. In this particular case, one of the interviewees got to know about the MLB housing social movement through a feminist squat organized by Olga Benario Women's Movement, a collective that shares the same roots as MLB, but whose objective on squatting is to create safe spaces for female victims of domestic violence – the so called 'Reference House for Women', temporarily welcoming victims but also hosting events open to the public.

I saw an open house. I saw some people, Bolivians, Peruvians, and I went in, but I had no money, nothing, nothing. [I thought] 'Oh, are they selling those clothes? Those things? How beautiful'. I asked a girl (...) 'is it to sell or to give to people?' (...) [She said] 'in those boxes there's something for donation'. (...) I thought I needed to pay. 'No, you can take it' [she said]. (...) The girl was sitting with these little pamphlets. I'm curious about these things (...) And I took them to read. On one of the leaflets I saw: MLB. Then I read it all and asked the girl. What is this MLB? Where is it? (...) It was in Canindé, at Casa Laudelina. - Margareth, 2024

Organization

To understand how organization takes place in the building, we need to understand how the movement is generally organized. The MLB has three main pillars of organization: the first is the *basis nuclei* of families who self-manage the occupations and who broaden the struggle in their neighborhoods; the second is the *struggle nuclei* that bring together any other person who is not necessarily homeless but would like to organize (students, researchers, supporters in general); and the third is the Eliane Silva National School, understood as a necessity of the MLB, where political training courses take place, taking advantage of the knowledge of the people who already comprise the movement. Jean Jacque housing-led squat, besides shelter, functions as a *basis nuclei*, being the meeting point and main place for organizing associated families and expanding the movement's struggle.

Due to its presence in the city center, Jean Jacque building is a key space, hosting various activities of the movement and other partner movements – not only the Olga Benário Women's Movement, the feminist arm of this political group, but also university collectives (Rebellion Youth Union) and the *Unidade Popular* (Popular Unity), a political party that grew out of the MLB. These are only the main other collectives that share the same vision on organizing activists, there are a few others that are not directly interconnected with them but are welcome to use the space – mainly due to the fact that they support the same agendas and share similar approaches.

The dynamic of use brings life to the space not only due to the presence of people, but also in terms of how they use and change the space: various flags, leaflets and newspapers related to the movement are present – either stored in piles or on display at the entrance of the building, marking part of the political 'decoration' of the main room. Even before entering the building, a huge banner with the name of the social movement and the housing squat is stretched across the façade – there's no doubt that you're entering a housing occupation of a movement that is, above all, political.

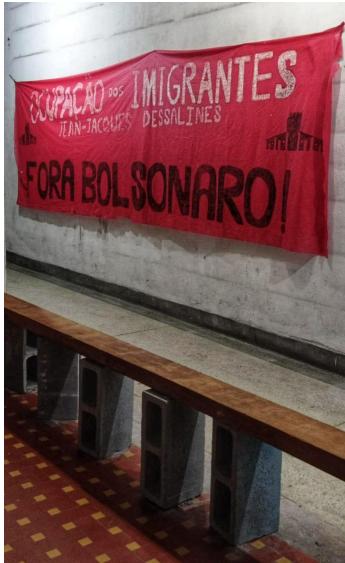


Figure 19. Flag at the main entrance of the building.
Photo by the author, 2024.



Figure 20. Façade Carlos Gomes Square.
Photo by the author, 2024.

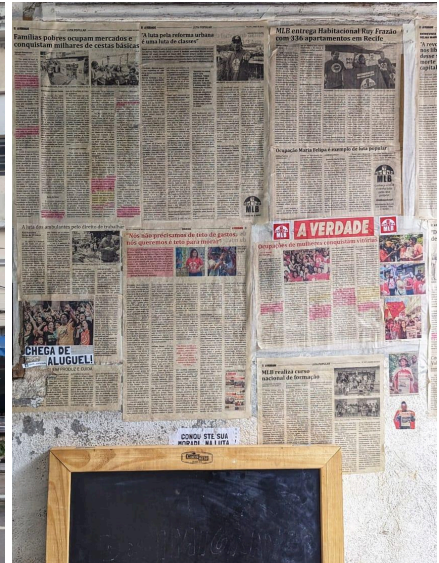


Figure 21. Poster-bomber from past editions of the newspaper *A Verdade*, built by members of the movement.
Photo by the author, 2024.

In relation to the case in Brussels, this housing-led squat has a stronger claim to being shared – not necessarily as an open *urban common*, but as a shared dynamic space created and maintained by those who collaborate for its existence, feeding a relationship of mutual benefit.

The neighborhood

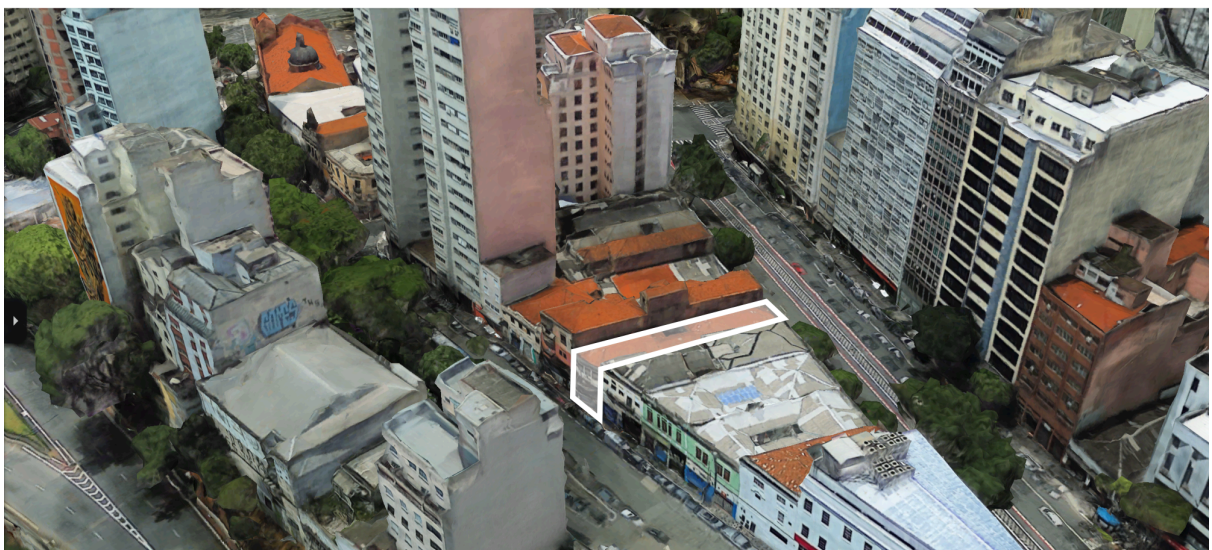


Figure 22. The building's surroundings. Prepared by the author, cartographic base: Google Earth, 2024.

Regardless of the frequency with which I visit the *Liberdade* neighborhood in the historic center of São Paulo, the persistent emphasis on a "Japanese identity" at the expense of the history of enslaved people in this area of the city is striking. *Liberdade* – 'freedom' – is not only where enslaved people were commercialized in the past, but also the location of the gallows that executed them in public square. This story is hidden today as the process of erasement keeps going.

Recently, the former mayor even altered the name of the subway station from 'Liberdade' to 'Japão-Liberdade' – a clear sign of the advancement of the plans to consolidate São Paulo's gentrified "asian town", systematically erasing the past black history of this territory. In response to this, MLB decided to name this occupation after Jean Jacques Dessalines, the leader of the Haitian revolution. This is, in part, an effort to reaffirm the exalted names of black leaders and connect them to the history of this neighborhood, and also a call to unite the numerous immigrant occupants in the city center.

Among supporters, this housing-led squat has become known as the 'Immigrant Occupation'. Perhaps that is why the occupants have also experienced intolerance from passers-by regarding the use of the building today. One of the interviewees commented on the occasional swear words from random people when passing in front of the building ("bums", "trespassers" and similar insults), indicating that the relationship with the surroundings is not the friendliest, unlike experiences of the movement in other parts of the city.

Building's physical structure

When it comes to infrastructure, the building is precarious in all senses. The rains and strong winds have blown off part of the roof, there are leaks and drips everywhere, the electricity installations are improvised and there are exposed wires on all floors. The wooden floorboards are loose and there are holes in the floor everywhere. On the top floor, the entire wooden floor structure is compromised and people avoid walking on it because of the risk of collapse. There are water facilities but they are quite poorly improvised, so leaks and mold are normalized. Natural light is precarious, ventilation almost non-existent.



Figure 23. One of the common rooms where the interviews took place.

Photo by the author, 2024.

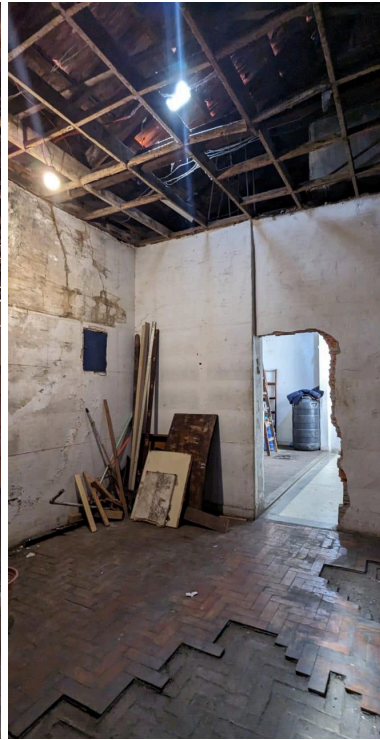


Figure 24. Access between the common room and the communal kitchen.

Photo by the author, 2024.

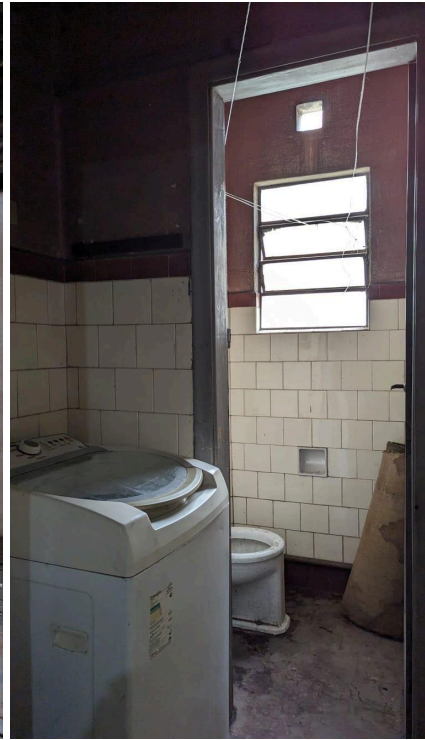


Figure 25. Shared laundry and bathroom.

Photo by the author, 2024.

Besides the poor general structure, there are problems with urban pests as well. Furthermore, makeshift partitions between the rooms are made of wood and locked with an improvised lock-and-chain. The most notable problem for residents today is the roof, with which one of the occupants shared his struggle during the summer storms:

Regarding the occupation, it would be good if the changes happened quickly. Fixing the roof... Because it leaks a lot when it rains... I could show you the video. I think we had ten or fifteen pots on the floor. We couldn't lie down [because we had] five pots on the bed. And then I said: we can't stay like this... Especially during this time, January, when it rains a lot here in São Paulo. So I climbed onto the roof and put a tarp over it, which helped a little. – Claudio, 2024.

Although the structure is in very poor condition, the families organize themselves to maintain a cleaning schedule for the common areas – which used to be more respected in the beginning according to the interviewees. They have a squatters assembly and coordinators meeting twice a month and host different activities related not only to the movement, but also

to other collectives (student union, feminist movement, political party etc) to guarantee that there's always something happening in that space.

There's a lot of cinema-debate here, fairs, the sewing studio and a store in front. All of this helps to show the region that there's something going on here. That, despite the prejudice that exists (how many times have I been in front of someone who passes by and says 'bunch of bums') but I think all this helps us to still be here. (...) I think the real strength is that there's always something going on. – Tin, 2024



Figure 26. A collage of photos published on the occupation's Instagram page (@ocupacaodosimigrantes.mlb) recording the Immigrants' Fair that regularly takes place in the space.

There is also a sewing workshop upstairs in the building, where the space is full of scraps of fabric, threads of all colors and a few old sewing machines. The space guarantees some income for a few occupants who sew for small orders, also keeping a small shop on the ground floor of the building.

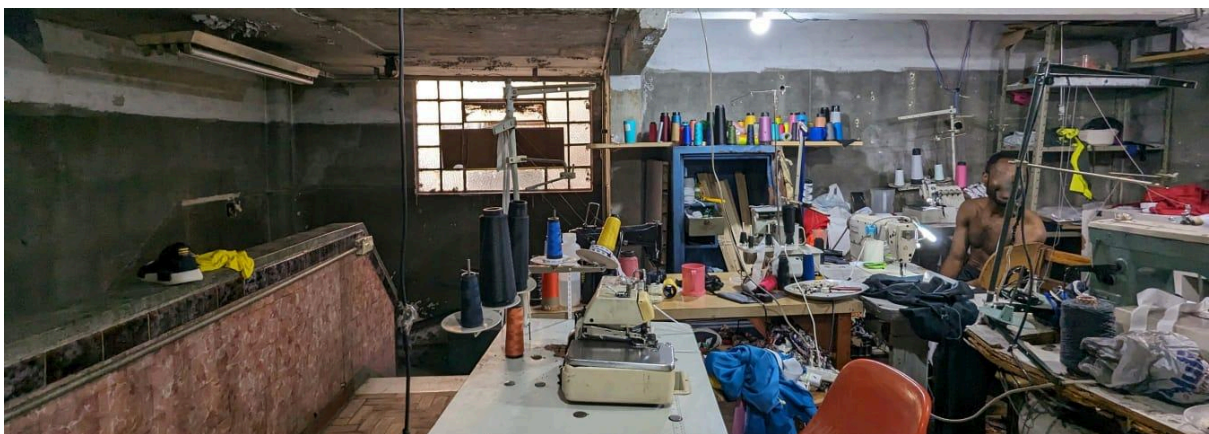


Figure 27. Sewing workshop. Photo by the author, 2024

5.2 THE AGENCY: Interlocutions, resistance and networks

This subsection analyzes interlocutions with other actors and capacity of negotiation in both cases, as well as their immediate outcomes, generally influenced by the social movements' network which, among other things, enhances their agency. The main categories used here refers to Martínez (2020) on different types of negotiations that squatters are typically involved in, where they can be classified as: high-level (aiming to formalize relations or legalize the squat), transactional (aiming to obtain state subsidies or benefits), survival (aiming to avoid or delay eviction), or forced (aiming to mitigate repression and protect squatters). All of these categories are related to the *immediate temporality* (Gutiérrez-Cueli et al; 2023) and therefore mainly related to the question of stability (RQ1), but it has also been observed that they can create a favorable scenario for boosting demand for future opportunities (RQ2). Main observations are listed below.

5.2.2 Louise

In terms of institutional interlocution, the movement today has high-level negotiation with owners and local government, with an outcome of a temporary housing situation. Overall, the Louise squat presents a stable situation, with formal contracts signed (*convention d'occupation précaire*) with the owners and relative safety in regards to stability.

Interlocution with landlords

According to the former coordinator, the interlocution with the first private owner's representative was key to succeeding in staying for so long, as they had a contract with the first landlords and managed to renew it with the current owner. This, however, only happened due to the capacity for mobilization of the movements with the support of other collectives which pushed for the opening up of ways to negotiate with the owners. When asked what was key for them to continue for so long even in the most adverse scenarios, the former coordinator of this housing-led squat affirms:

The mobilization. We had, by the time we got in here, the media campaign. And, also, I think we went to a point where we confronted those elite owners. (...) That allowed us to have that long contract. (...) The strength of the movement, but also the one that was representing the family owners got to know, to personally know, the leaders of the group, of the collective. And I guess that was key because misconception was what led to that desire for the owner to kick us out. – Helena, 2023.

In line with her argument, another interviewee highlights that besides enhancing the visibility of VSP actions, their strategy also includes demonstrations, protests and even production of content in the alternative media to push the balance of power to their side.

The Spoelberch family is pretty famous in Belgium. (...) And the owner doesn't want publicity, that we talk about them because they have a lot of investments in buildings, in companies... (...). So, if you make bad publicity about the family, it is an economic thing [for them] (...) so it is a good thing for your balance of power. – Pierre, 2024.

The bad publicity the interviewee mentioned was efficient enough to even push the discussion towards the possibility of changing the purpose of the occupied building, even though in a quite 'theatrical' way. In her words:

Initially, they were supposed (...) to demolish this and build another one, for commercial purposes. (...) But when we got here and we had the campaign, (...) I went on the radio, we really went into the media, we had a little strike in front of the home of one of the owners... And since we made some noise they changed the purpose they had for the building and told us that it was in line with social work. (...) If it really was in line with social work, having undocumented people in this place would have benefited them. There are huge, strong links between the causes. But they got tired, they got disgusted. *Disgusted*. That's the word. The representative [of the family] told us that they were *disgusted* and they could just not keep up with the building, so they sold it. – Helena, 2023, original emphasis in the interviewee's speech.

The event she mentions is related to the moment when the Spoelberch family sold the building to a real estate company, which is now constructing *The Louise* building, an "iconic Brussels office landmark"¹⁷ of 17 floors and 30,000m² of built space next door – in fact, two floors of the housing-led squat have been used as an extension of the construction site, housing the office space. The agency of the movement was strong enough to keep the negotiation with the new owner and guaranteed the signature of a new contract. Despite the current, relatively favorable, situation, this formality limits their autonomy, especially nowadays as the company uses part of the building on a daily basis.

¹⁷ More information about the project can be found at <<https://thelouise.be/>>.

If I'm honest, we had more autonomy with the previous owners. More than with the current ones, because they have guards, they come to surveil the place every day. They come early in the morning, then late in the evening, to make sure that everything is respected, to make sure that there's nothing wrong. – Helena, 2023.

Still, it's worth noting that although housing is not the movement's ultimate goal or broad horizon of struggle, they do share a more elevated level of autonomy when compared to "temporary occupations", an institutionalized and commodified modality of squats that takes place in Brussels today, considered by some interviewees as "anti squat" practices, point raised by one Belgian squatter originally from the Flemish Region:

You have organizations that we call 'anti-squat'. And what they do is: they go to municipalities, Regional owners, and they say 'hey, you want your building to be protected [from squatters]? We will protect it for you! And we will put temporary use in it. We will put artists... artistic workshops... cultural stuff (...). You will ask for rent (...) and we will also ask from you a percentage of investment.' That's anti squat. (...) They mostly get the buildings from the municipality. They get some financials from the Region (...) to create cultural hubs, temporary social hubs, sometimes from redevelopments. – Marco, 2024.

Interviewees raised this point to assert that for the experience to be considered a "legitimate" squat, it should prioritize claiming the right to housing instead of negotiating the squatting process beforehand – in summary, these experiences could "look like" squats in their material form, but not in their ethics. This is a whole other discussion that I do not intend to expand upon further in this thesis, but it is important to note that, in this context, VSP remains a prominent voice, having the agency to sustain an attitude of contestation compared to other collectives.

An important point of attention was the difficulty for undocumented people to have an official address and access state benefits, even though they hold agreements with the landlords. The former squat coordinator mentioned the *logement partagé* twice as a possibility to address these problems, but because they are undocumented and illegally occupying a building, they cannot access such an arrangement. The VSP networks, so far, have not been able to succeed in addressing this.

The information regarding their right to be domiciled that I heard from interviews differs from what I found when consulting the practical guide on occupying empty buildings in Brussels produced by the United Brussels Federation for Housing (FéBUL) in partnership with other entities, including the Brussels Rassemblement for the Right to Habitat (RBDH) in

2019. The guide presents the legal framework for occupations in Brussels, explaining the legal intricacies related to identifying an empty building, occupying it, contacting the landlord, and seeking a contract. It explains squatting in both senses: how it is written in the law and how it works in practice, with the intention of giving squatters tools to enhance their political actions. In this document, when discussing domiciliation and social benefits, it explains that the current regulatory framework should allow a person to claim residency in a place regardless of the building's situation – in theory, this could include a housing-led squat.

According to the guide, if the municipality refuses to domicile a squatter on the grounds that they don't have a contract, violated planning regulations, or due to 'unsanitary' conditions, the person can file an appeal with the Court of First Instance. However, it is known that undocumented people are unlikely to escalate the situation to this level, which leads us to understand that despite the efforts of entities and organizations closely connected to VSP, the material limitations are still very much present when it comes to advocating for squatters rights.

Interlocution with governmental spheres

Although this particular housing-led squat is private property and does not involve direct negotiation with local government agents when it comes to contracts, VSP also organizes other housing-led squats, some of which are public buildings. Additionally, interlocution with different spheres of government happens when it comes to verifying safety aspects of the building and therefore, keeping a good relationship with municipalities is also key. Interviewees also highlighted that the fact they opened the building through COVID gave them the possibility of staying legally for longer. In summary, this was because people could not be immediately evicted due to the public health crisis, which introduced an institutional layer of emergency policies that, inherently, stemmed from governmental decisions. While not constituting a formal interlocution, the discussion significantly influenced their particular case. Moreover, there was an emphasis on how politicians would avoid potential image crises, with consideration given to the avoidance of mass evictions from public buildings – in other words, people in positions of authority would seek to distance themselves from being associated with the eviction of vulnerable families.

Regarding the municipalities specifically, it is important to note that both undocumented migrant occupants and native Belgian squatters share a common understanding regarding interactions with local government authorities. People from three different collectives currently squatting or occupying empty buildings in Brussels shared that certain municipalities exhibit greater tolerance towards squats and occupations than others. For instance, Ixelles is frequently mentioned as a 'more friendly' municipality, in contrast to Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, despite the latter's administration being regarded (with a certain level of irony) as progressive by the interviewees.

This means that being aware of the municipalities' approach to squatting influences the decisions of the collectives to concentrate their networks and efforts in locations where interactions with municipal authorities are more likely to be successful. Although this

interlocution is crucial, the overall strategy remains heavily dependent on the property owner. Securing an agreement and obtaining a proper contract are not only essential but also constitute the primary objective during negotiations.

It means making sure that all the commitments are respected, which was also the condition behind the safety commitments to manage the building. It is not that it is a problem for one or the other, but what we have done since 2019 up to now is, from time to time, [is that] the municipality schedules a visit to come and see the building and discuss with the occupants how things are going. – Marcelo, 2024

According to the former coordinator of VSP, another important element is the relationship between the positionality of the occupants in relation to the local government's (lack of) actions. He emphasizes that the social movement, when organizing a housing-led squat, fulfills a social function in the city by providing a 'service' that neither the government nor the market were willing to undertake. In short, his understanding is that the collective somehow ends up assuming responsibilities that were not supposed to be addressed by them.

But, above all, it also solves one of their problems, because there will be visibly fewer homeless people on the streets, and they would not be the ones looking after them. The services will also be less full of undocumented migrants. (...) The fact that it is other people who provide this 'free service' suits them. So, they are tolerating it at the moment, and we have managed to negotiate in such a way that, if we sign a temporary contract, it is the reason that covers the costs. – Marcelo, 2024.

Other networks

As well as these high-level connections that are more institutionalized, and contact with people who work with alternative media, VSP also has connections with other collectives and initiatives. Some interviewees' reflections highlight the fundamental importance of networks in enhancing the agency and, therefore, the mobilization capacity of social movements. Solidarity networks demonstrate their power by creating a protective layer for the undocumented, who are particularly vulnerable to evictions and violence. In this sense, European activists (or militants) act as a "shield," a layer of protection that enables the collective to effectively pressure authorities.

There was a main campaign [*Requisicion Solidaire*] at the moment from a broad group of militants to open. (...) It was a group of socialists, communists, anarchists, squatters, reformists, ecologists... (laughs). (...) Three or four of them are still active. One of them is Louise. (...) Our strategy was to open it [with] the big group of Belgians, French and European people with papers (...) and we used this social network to put pressure, because we have contacts with reformist, political guys... So it was quite broad. I think it would never work (laughs). But it created that network. People could go and live there without taking the risk of opening it and being evicted. That's part of the strategies from the militance platform, to give this support and to ensure that they are not in the first line of police violence or juridical violence. – Marco, 2024

This also shows that VSP's organization, interlocution tactics with different actors and strong network are elements that significantly enhance the agency of the collective as a whole and, therefore, its capacity for mobilization. This, clearly, involves connecting the occupants to other collectives, researchers, supporters and allies in general – not by chance, all stakeholders interviewed emphasized that these networks are crucial and actively contribute to the resistance of the squat in many ways, which in turn prolongs its permanence. Overall, this is not only about having the connections but also nourishing and expanding them through time, where a broad range of networks can become solid enough to fulfill its purpose: improve the movement's capacity of mobilization, negotiation, and mutual help. Additionally, interpersonal connections like the one cited by Marco in the excerpt above are also important, highlighted by other interviewees.

They [VSP] are open, and they have links and relations with a lot of parts of civil society. (...) In politics, you need to have a relationship with a person who has power who has functions, (...) but interpersonal relations are also very important. (...) If you have a good relationship with the mayor, for example, and after a few years he's not mayor anymore, the relationship with this mayor is still important because he has contacts with a lot of other people. So, VSP can call people when they have a problem. But sometimes they are evicted from the buildings. It's not magical, but it's one of the points: good connections. – Pierre, 2024.

Apart from these fundamental networks, which are mostly activated during critical moments, a few other examples can be mentioned. During my visit, one interviewee mentioned that the artistic intervention in the main lobby was done by her together with some friends during a meeting with the afro-feminist Fania Noel and the collective Susu.



Figure 28. Paintings made by the occupants with collective Susu. Photo by the author, 2023.



Figure 29. Shared living room. Photo by the author, 2023.



Figure 30. Mural made by the occupants with collective Susu. Photo by the author, 2023.

Also, during one of the interviews at the movement's headquarters at 26 Rue de la Victoire in Saint Gilles, I noticed lots of magazines and small booklets produced with the participation of other movements, and even pamphlets from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) seeking undocumented participants to contribute to research that the university is carrying out. Another important initiative was mentioned by the former VSP coordinator as a strategy – not just a one-off specific activity or quick mobilization necessity, but as networks to help undocumented immigrants in the medium and long term when it comes to regularization – unfortunately, it is no surprise that undocumented migrants face significant difficulties in understanding legal procedures due to language barriers, complexity of legal instruments and terms, institutional violence, and structural racism.

In VSP, we have set up several projects, including one called *Y'en a Marre*. (...) At the same time, what we are doing is transforming the situation. For example, training Belgian and European people to help undocumented migrants with their administrative formalities, so that everyone can understand the difficulties these people face

and become more aware to better support the struggle. (...) We train them to explain to them what the procedures are here to obtain papers, what difficulties these people encounter, what institutional violence is, and from that when they have a base we also ask them to accompany undocumented migrants because they are all very stressed. – Marcelo, 2024

All these networks are a core part of the political action of the movement, where their ability to mobilize and connect remain an integral part of their ongoing struggles on squatter's and undocumented people's rights.

5.2.3 Jean Jacques Dessalines

Interlocution with landlords

In terms of formal interlocution, the movement has basically a survival negotiation, having as an outcome a temporary and, theoretically, very unstable housing situation. However, although very useful, the main categories mobilized by Martínez, et al (2020) on different types of negotiation and their outcomes do not perfectly translate to the reality of housing-led squats in Sao Paulo. Even though families are undertaking a survival negotiation, they are not constantly threatened with eviction in the short term, setting up a fairly stable situation when considering all elements together.

This situation is partially explained by the legal tradition in the city of Sao Paulo: since the families were not evicted by flagrant means, the legal process of expropriation can take several months and frequently years, depending on various elements and circumstances. In other words, some level of stability comes from the "slow pace of the law", since the case was referred directly to judicial court by the local police department – who could have evicted the families on the day they occupied the building – but did not manage to do so thanks to the mobilization of movement at that moment.

It is important to highlight that this squat, among others, benefited from the federal law nº 14.216/2021 which is an outcome of the movement known as Despejo Zero (Zero Evictions) that aims to minimize impacts of the COVID-19 crisis particularly among the urban poor. With this law, immediate displacements were prohibited, which was decisive for them to still be there. This also happened to some housing-led squats in Brussels, as cited by some interviewees. As this is not a thesis on the legal and juridical aspects of the act of squatting, I will limit this topic by saying that not only does the movement have a contract, like VSP, in all its buildings, but also all interlocution with the landlord has been done via judicial court and has been therefore mainly conflictual. In addition, the idea of establishing a contract with the owner of the property sounds strange and unfamiliar to all Brazilian social movements I have had interaction with so far. Like in Louise squat, the families never needed to pay rent or any bills, although they have tried to regularize the water and electricity situation.

Interlocution with governmental spheres

In the case of this particular housing-led squat, no direct negotiation takes place within any governmental sphere. When necessary, this task is undertaken through other networks with a more collective character, which is more explicitly addressed in the next sub-chapter. However, it is important to mention that, on the national scale, MLB has previous experience addressing housing projects that goes beyond the squatting strategy.

For example, besides occupying vacant buildings downtown, the movement has experience developing housing projects through federal programs with public funding, including *Minha Casa Minha Vida*, maybe the most important Brazilian federal social housing program. Furthermore, the occupation's current coordinator mentioned that the

MLB's most extensive occupations are in the state of Minas Gerais (bordering Sao Paulo) where they have occupied land and subsequently regularized it, benefiting hundreds of families and demonstrating that popular mobilization oriented towards an adaptive approach can produce real-world outcomes in guaranteeing the right to housing.

In summary, this adaptability when it comes to strategies has allowed the movement to address their struggle for housing through various means, from carrying out federal projects to collaborating with local governments to regularize occupied land without necessarily involving legal proceedings. In the case of the Jean Jacques housing-led squat, this means that any possible development considering the provision of adequate housing would involve more interlocution with the different spheres of government.

Other networks

In terms of other networks, MLB has a national scale, is well organized and connected to many different social actors, movements and collectives. On the scale of the housing-led squat, some networks are more relevant than others to the question of permanence and future possibilities. Without intending to cover the full range of agents, one important connection is worth highlighting since it was decisive to the extension of the occupation's permanence to today.

MLB is today affiliated with Popular Movements Center (*Central de Movimentos Populares* - CMP), and also very close to the Franciscan Social Action (SEFRAS), a religious association that supports homeless people in the center of São Paulo. Coming from the progressive wing of the catholic church, SEFRAS is the result of the historically influential Base Ecclesiastical Communities (Comunidades Eclesiais de Base - CEBS), whose long history is embedded in working class struggle in Brazil, especially regarding land and housing – a process that has generated vast literature elaborating on the impact of these communities on the organization of the working class and their demand for rights, as mentioned in the literature review when contextualizing Sao Paulo. Also worth mentioning, is SEFRAS' role as the one responsible for pushing the creation of the Immigrant Assistance Reference Center (CRAI) – which provides specialized and multilingual assistance to immigrants, regardless of their immigration status. The main idea is to provide provisional shelter and guidance on immigration regularization, access to social rights, general legal advice, and also referrals to social services or related public policies for migrants¹⁸.

In the context of the Jean Jacques occupation, it was through SEFRAS that the movement became aware of CRAI, enabling the coordinator to better give support to the occupants of the squat. Through this initiative, all migrants had access to legal advice, assistance in regularizing their legal status in Brazil, as well as all provisional documents necessary for job hunting. It is, therefore, a local government public policy whose existence was advocated for by a social movement and today benefits many migrants upon their arrival in the city, including those currently residing at the Jean Jacques housing-led squat.

¹⁸ More information available at [this link](#).

When the social movement received the first request for repossession by forced eviction in January 2024, CMP provided them with legal advice and guidance on the appropriate course of action. In other words, it was through the CMP that they were able to access the Gaspar Garcia Human Rights Center, where they obtained free legal advice and defense, essential for them to remain until today.

5.3 THE CLAIMS: Perceptions about the future and possible outcomes – what's next?

“Only when the oppressed clearly discover the oppressor and engage in an organized struggle for their liberation do they begin to believe in themselves, thus overcoming their 'connivance' with the oppressor regime. If this discovery cannot be made on a purely intellectual level, but through action, what seems fundamental to us is that this is not limited to mere activism, but is associated with a serious commitment to reflection, so that it is praxis.” (Freire, 1974:33)

This section aims to synthesize perceptions of future possibilities, addressing claims and outcomes for specific horizons in time – the most challenging aspect of this research, as it aims to map the real possibilities that are entangled in a complex web of subjectivity. The framework of the double *horizon of political temporality* (Gutiérrez-Cueli et al.; 2023) now addresses the *wide temporality* question on housing-led squatting related to the horizon of struggle (RQ2). Mainly based on the insights from interviews and analysis of previous experiences of some social movements that self-manage housing-led squats, I aim to discuss their claims over time and how the leading players see this debate today – it is also about the feeling of *hope* that will eventually guide their actions and build the basis of their claims.

Before going to the cases, Martinez (2014) reminds us that the level of stability of a housing squat situation can vary significantly, depending on factors like mobilization capacity, political agitation, and legal aspects, all of them already mentioned. These elements are crucial in understanding both the potential for squatting to serve as a "stable" dwelling – here understood as when occupants are not constantly threatened with eviction in the short term – and how squatting can pave the way for post-squat scenarios enabling further access to decent housing. Taking this into account, another layer is important to consider, as different actors may have different perceptions on this matter.

5.3.1 Louise

The main claim

I have covered the fact that, in the current context of squatting in Brussels, VSP leaders strive to secure stable formal contracts for all housing-led squats they self-manage in the city. At the Louise building, they managed to negotiate a two-year contract, renewing for one more until the company needed to start doing renovation work – then they will have to leave, which is an attitude the collective usually complies with to avoid conflict. According to the former occupation coordinator, achieving such an agreement is already considered a "huge victory", and should be a claim for further experiences. In her words:

"I'd be facing the rest of my journey, [based] on my experience from this place, in order to obtain more stable contracts. (...) And to impose a minimum time. Something like two years for me is reasonable because a year goes fast. And if you have two years somewhere, you can project yourself. And you can just breathe." – Helena, 2023.

Although not comparable to other Brussels' squats already mentioned (such as 123, which lasted 11 years), this is still an effort that reflects the agency of the movement – today, besides Louise, they have self-managed squats lasting for more than 5 years now. The link between the need for housing and the claim for regularization remains clear:

"[The squat] is like a window through which we expose our realities, the social political realities of undocumented people. And when we get in the place (...) the first thing people see is 'oh, in here the purpose was to give housing to people', but the indirect message is to obtain the regularization of people, to give people some stability, some longevity." – Helena, 2023.

This process can still be linked to the *immediate temporality* summarized by Gutiérrez-Cueli et al. (2023), which refers to the short-term outcomes undoubtedly presented at Louise's occupation. On the one hand, today's outcomes mainly address urgent, basic and short-term housing needs, allowing families to settle and organize their lives. But, on the other hand, the accumulation of experience forms the collective claim for specific horizons regarding the permanence of the occupation, opening the way to push for opportunities in the extended temporality. Although the key claim is still rooted in the question of regularization of their documents, the broader mobilization for housing remains fundamental – being the occupation's crucial pillars of La Voix des Sans-Papiers organization today.

"I've incorporated that element to the project I'm working on for the next occupation, to automatically obtain an official address for the people living there. Because without the address, you cannot go further with your procedure, your administrative procedure. (...) I've been picking all those elements and I hope it will strengthen the project I'm working on, and I really hope we obtain something official with it, (...) an official model for occupation conventions with a limit time that doesn't go under two years, because for me two years... It's the minimum, right?" – Helena, 2023.

However, even if attaining these two-year contracts seems minor, one needs to highlight that the most impressive takeaway is that *all* members are undocumented and somehow "illegal"; still, they are the ones managing to negotiate with different actors and providing a more secure and predictable living arrangement for people occupying, pushing new agreements forward. It is reasonable to acknowledge the limitations in claiming social housing within an institutionalized framework in their particular context. On this note, I highlight a conversation with one of the residents, Tom, an elderly man from Ghana. He emphasized that, during his long process full of intricacies in trying to be regularized, he sees the VSP squats as the only viable way to live now, even though he would like to move out and have his own home.

"Yes, it's difficult. But I think the house, maybe, we still have some time (...). A man came here to measure the house. (...) It's going to take two years or something like that. That's what he told us. (...)

[About where to go after that] We don't know (laughs). Maybe find another place. (...) It's too expensive, it's too expensive. You cannot rent a house here. (...) Nobody, the government, gives money. It's very hard (...) I'm [in Brussels] since 1988, I still don't have papers, this is not normal. They don't recognize. (...) And if you work they catch you. Big problem." – Tom, 2024

This understanding puts into question that, although occupying is today their main political tool and immediate need, their horizons go beyond the access to housing. This realization can instill a sense of optimism, as explained by the former VSP's coordinator, who sees regularization as a pre-step to access all other rights, suggesting potential for change.

In summary, the main outcome of VSP actions within the housing-led squat is the extension of their permanence, creating know-how on how to navigate and negotiate, pushing for further opportunities regarding stability, and reproducing these strategies in further experiences.

Possible paths in the post-squat scenario

"Our aim is that each person should have the right to choose their life, their housing, their work. Not what is imposed on us. (...) And, for us, that's our next flagship issue, how to get everyone regularized, perhaps to have the same rights as everyone else." – Marcelo, 2024.

When asked about their perceptions of the future and which housing arrangement people in VSP would aim for after the end of the contract, interviewees pointed out to two main paths: the first, still collective, concerns the maintenance of the collective struggle,

meaning opening another building in advance of the eviction date and initiating a new project. The second, more individual, options such as "moving into the regular rental housing market" or "getting married and moving out with the partner" were mentioned. This indicates two things: first, the crucial role of expertise accumulation that leads them to explore extended possibilities for extending the permanence of the housing-led squat or, if necessary, organizing new places to go in case of eviction; and second, the apparent tendency for people to demobilize once their goal of achieving regularization of documents is accomplished.

This thesis has extensively explored the first implication already, highlighting the importance of their organization, agency, and networks within their political aims and claims. On the second note, referring to the analysis of Matínez (2020), the movement's success can quickly turn into demobilization without removing the structural roots of the problem – here, "success" is understood as the legal regularization of undocumented immigrants, not access to housing per se as we are talking about VSP.

On a related note, it is important to mention that VSP does not employ radical *tactics* and therefore does not claim to address systemic issues by establishing housing-led squats – it would be naive to consider one single practice a means to change structures, even as a level of discourse. Regarding the "what's next?" question, one of the current VSP claims is the creation of a citizen's card ("*carte ardente*" in French), an identification document issued by the municipal government to all residents of the city, regardless of their administrative status. The idea is not new (see cities like Liege or Zurich) and is a tool that would make everyday life easier for undocumented immigrants in accessing public services and other practical things (signing contracts, opening bank accounts, etc). It reinforces that the VSP's horizons of struggle are focused on urban citizenship rather than housing. However, this does not detract from the fact that the occupations are the most fundamental elements in their struggle. Research points out that VSP has significant influence in Brussels squatting, having the capacity to sustain their experiences for a considerable duration despite the current legal scenario.

5.3.2 Jean Jacques Dessalines

The main claim

The MLB overarching goal is to enable the right to housing for all associated families, regardless of their legal status. During its existence, it is important to highlight that the social movement has previously succeeded in addressing housing issues, which mobilizes a general sense of *hope* among people who occupy today. The coordinators of the movement and the occupation stressed that the MLB has adapted its approaches to align with local contexts, where strategies are mobilized depending on the specific circumstances and struggles found in different locations – in other words, there is no unique "recipe" to be followed, and methods can vary widely. In this specific case of Jean Jacques, perceptions change between the coordinators (with a more 'agitprop' attitude) and the other occupants. In the words of the coordinator, for example, the building currently occupied, even if precarious, is still considered as a possibility for future permanent occupation:

"The idea is that all squatters can get their place to live. Either this could become a [proper housing] building, where everyone would have their own apartment, or the people who are here could be moved somewhere else. What we can't accept is for everyone to leave after three years and for us, the people, to have nowhere to stay. (...) The movement is here, the MLB is here. No one will be left behind." – Tin, 2024

"My dream [is that] it will become a building of our own. We're going to house these families, sooner or later, in a better, more built-up space, either in the building, or in another more structured occupation, but one that has a [better] structure. And put up a building of our own, which we can even usucaption. Regularize it and so on, or build housing somewhere else." – Otavio, 2024.

In contrast to this first discourse, one of the residents expresses constant anxiety about potential eviction, reflecting the uncertainty and instability of her living situation. In between, another resident conveys hope for the future despite his age, where he speaks about his dreams of a stable home in São Paulo and reuniting with his children from Haiti, wishing to provide them with a better life and share positive news about his improved circumstances.

"Hm... Not here. I'm always worried, I'm always on my guard, I know that at any moment we could be evicted. I think about it all the time. Here... I don't think so. Maybe yes, maybe not." – Margareth, 2024.

"For the future... I'm already of age, so I can't think about working or growing up in that sense. But I'd like to be stable, have a stable place to live with my wife and family. I have children in Haiti, I like São Paulo, I would be happy if I could tell them to come and live here with us. (...) For the time being, if there were better conditions here, I would like to stay. But (...) I'd like it to be better where I live. I talk to my family in Haiti about here. The family can have good news about me. Because in Haiti, when people travel, they go in search of a better life. That's my dream, that I can tell my family that my life is better. – Isac, 2024

In other words, the predominant feeling among the families residing in the building is instability, but paradoxically followed by hope. Despite this ever-present risk of being evicted, hope is rooted in the possibility of securing a more stable and decent living situation and the potential for eventual regularization. This duality of feelings – where uncertainty coexists with hope – reflects only one side of the complex emotional landscapes people face in precarious housing situations, especially among the ones who migrate.

Another interesting finding regarding discourse and claims is that a far more extended horizon of struggle was tracked in MLB movement, where it is possible to notice their organization and efforts towards urban reform from a revolutionary perspective, opposing a mere reformism approach:

"In fact, we fight for urban reform and understand that what we want in our country will only happen with a complete break with the capitalist system. Nationally, not locally or anything. So, we have this perspective and work fundamentally towards this. The movement, in addition to carrying out squats, in addition to establishing coordination, in addition to setting up 'Christmas Without Hunger' campaigns, we do political work. We are a political movement." – Otavio, 2024

It is a clear call for the “right to the city”, in which the affirmation does not emanate from an intellectual debate alone, but from an active response to face immediate needs and objectives within a process of critical awareness - thus strengthening the movement's praxis. This generates new research questions related to the extended horizon of struggle that transcends the delimitations of this thesis. It raises questions regarding a stage where, overcoming the phase of *community consciousness* (Harvey, 1982) through access to housing via squats, the movement could indicate new possibilities for the formation of *class consciousness* from this experience.

Possible paths in the post-squat scenario

"The future? The future for me is finding a home that I could never be evicted from. That's my dream for the future. And to set up my daughters, where they can work and study. That's my future dream. Fighting, fighting, that's how I'll continue." – Margareth, 2024.

Concerning the possible outcomes of this occupation today, there are two main paths. The first path, unfortunately the most common, is to maintain the occupation until the judicial process is finalized, followed by, in most cases, an eviction order. This process varies greatly and can take more than a decade in some cases. In a scenario where the eviction order is

processed, the social movement usually complies, but with some tactics of resistance within the act of eviction – details are not relevant, but in general terms they involve certain power dynamics established between the state forces and the popular movement during the act of evictions. If this outcome becomes true, the movement opens new places to accommodate the families that were evicted – sometimes even before the eviction takes place, just like VSP does in Brussels.

The second path remains exceptional and is a critical focus of this research. Insights here are primarily drawn from interviews with architects and urbanists directly involved in retrofitting former housing-led squats in São Paulo, connecting with some of the previously discussed literature. In summary, since the squatted building is privately owned, there is a possibility of the local movement reintegrating¹⁹, converting the building into municipal property. With the help of public funding, renovations could be carried out, allowing families to move back into the building and finally have a decent home they can call their own.

The MLB, with its extended claims over time, advances an important debate on retrofitting and converting vacant buildings into social housing units in the city center. This opens up several discussions, notably regarding the interests involved in expropriating private buildings; the implications of non-self-management arrangements during the construction process and post-occupation; and whether or not a participatory process is involved. However, the primary critique concerning the nature of this solution remains unaddressed, and will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

The migrants' perceptions

In the context of individual perceptions, the sense of 'non-place' emerges as a prevalent feeling experienced by migrants. In conducting interviews with migrants residing at Jean Jacque, I realized that their answers were primarily about their personal 'horizon of struggle' instead of aims related to collective achievements. Three significant issues were observed: a pervasive sense of impermanence in their lives, a lack of certainty regarding São Paulo as a permanent destination, and their ineligibility for social housing programs.

Firstly, the majority of the non-Brazilian interviewees expressed a feeling of impermanence not only within the accommodation but also in their overall lives. When questioned about their future plans, their responses often emphasized a mindset of living "one day at a time," with statements such as "*so far*, we're here" and "we are *still* in São Paulo", indicating a lack of long-term plans and a prevailing sentiment of constant flux, likely attributable to the significant changes on their migration experiences.

Furthermore, I could not perceive a strong inclination to settle permanently in São Paulo among the majority of the interviewees, which reflects discussions regarding 'places of arrival' – meaning that it is likely that these migrants do not perceive São Paulo as their

¹⁹ There are instruments in the current master plan of São Paulo relating to expropriation by forced purchase or public auction if the property does not fulfill its social function. In the case of an auction, the sums go to the owner of the expropriated property and to the municipality itself for vacant taxes on the property. The building then becomes public property and calls for projects can finally take place.

ultimate destination, generating the notion of a lifetime permanence not really being feasible and showing how personal trajectories change the idea of 'horizon'. The flows related to this topic necessitate further investigation in both academic literature and empirical studies within the specific context of São Paulo.

Finally, for the few that sound convinced that Sao Paulo is their home destination, there is an extra layer of challenge. Even if legalized, as their situation is mainly temporary, they are not eligible for housing programs, which are exclusive to citizens of the country. Therefore, they mainly rely on public policies designed to assist them, which are more emergency support oriented, meaning they are focused on immediate needs – no medium or long term alternatives are really addressed, so these people tend to rely on the housing-led squat. On a positive note, comments about the solidarity and receptiveness of the Brazilian people ("they are good people" and "they like to help" being common quotes), added to the free access to public services – especially free universal health care and education systems – were seen as important reasons why they would choose to stay in the city.

6. Discussion:

The urgency of dwelling and the horizons of struggle

This discussion section summarizes the main findings of this thesis, being structured within the framework of temporalities, taking into account points of convergence and divergence of the cases here analyzed. It aims to explore some nuances of the debate, addressing the research questions and opening up debates to be further researched – it takes into account the immediate urgency of dwelling, the wide temporality of achieving the right to adequate housing, and further major mobilizations related to the horizons of struggle. This is also an attempt to use the space of this thesis to interact not only with the existing literature but also with content that can be used to support public policies that address the immediate housing situation of the urban underprivileged in both contexts.

6.1 *Immediate temporality*: Louise thrives, Jean Jacques strives

There are several points of convergence between both experiences, the most significant being that the establishment of housing-led squats is understood as a legitimate means of addressing immediate housing needs (RQ1), where networks increase which, in turn, is key to negotiation. Two main aspects can be highlighted: the current viability and relative stability occupiers can enjoy; and the level of tolerance from local governments.

First, the current viability of this experience that, compared to other arrangements, is not so temporary and unstable – it should not be misunderstood, of course squatting is not the most stable housing situation one could find oneself in. However, I would like to propose a quick exercise based on comments from interviews to clarify the argument: imagine a person is in rental accommodation in a regular private housing market. Then something unexpected happens preventing this person from continuing to pay rent. If you are in São Paulo, the landlord could legally evict you immediately after the first day of payment delay – luckily, the legal process can take up to two months, with a few exceptions. Gerull (2014) would observe that Belgium does not have a legally defined protection period for tenants and, compared to other western European countries, tenants theoretically have more layers of protection in law. As they can only be (legally) evicted after formal legal procedure, landlords take the matter to court and the entire process would take around three months (exceptionally around a year) to complete.

To conclude our brief exercise, in a very optimistic and exceptional scenario, this person would have a shelter for around two months in São Paulo or a year in Brussels (highlighting that this is for formal contracts – in the case of informal arrangements, the consequences of non-payment and eviction procedures are unknown). Taking into consideration the current reality of evictions, we can state that, for those who do not have formal, regular income for whatever reason or simply cannot afford rent in the city, housing-led squats can potentially provide more stability than trying to accommodate themselves in the regular housing market – not to mention that occupying with the movement

adds a layer of security intrinsically related to the collective unit, where negotiations take place on behalf of the movement and its spokesperson in both cases.

This leads to the second point: despite institutional frictions, it is a common understanding among the movements that maintaining their housing-led squats is also convenient for local governments. The main points cited by interviewees in both cases were the fact that having these spaces facilitates centralized communication, organizing the demands and coordinating necessary actions. Aspects related to the image crisis were also highlighted, taking into consideration that politicians would mainly avoid mass evictions of vulnerable families. The movements also generally point out that occupations help reduce the number of homeless people, a problem both cities face. According to them, the existence of housing-led squats is essentially good for the local government, which, in turn, has an attitude of tolerance – understanding that they are unable to provide what the movement is providing to an extent, paradoxically helping to address some of local government's most glaring problems.

In summary, considering the RQ1, Louise thrives in the immediate/mid term temporality, with legal security, decent accommodation, and overall good infrastructure. The housing-led squat meets an urgent demand for shelter that is addressed by neither the State nor the market. However, there is no prospect of future allocation to permanent housing – this is not just because the occupants are migrants, since the act of occupying vacant buildings also does not pave the way for Belgian squatters to access decent housing either.

In contrast, the Jean Jacques faces significant difficulties in the immediate and mid-term due to its exceedingly precarious infrastructure. In terms of legal security, they rely mainly on the "slow pace of the law" and "buying time" strategies, since there are no legal instruments for a formal agreement like in Brussels. This implies that the families face legal insecurity but this does not necessarily translate into short-term instability, as they have occupied the building for over three years now and formal eviction can only take place after legal procedures are finished. Furthermore, one of the movement's strategic axes of occupation is to squat abandoned and dilapidated buildings that do not fulfill the social function of property, as established by federal legislation. This helps them in their legal arguments.

In both cases, the main factors for short/mid-term outcomes are related to their strong networks and political agency, aspects discussed in depth in the literature and ratified during fieldwork.

6.2 *Wide temporality: Louise fizzles out, Jean Jacques dreams big*

The points of divergence between both experiences are mainly related to the wide temporality and their horizons of struggle, where future possibilities of accessing housing in a post-occupation scenario vary greatly between experiences and, also, between subjects. The arguments follow in two parts: some nuances in the perception of horizons within individuals (mainly regarding if migrants or not); and current possibilities of accessing housing in a post-occupation scenario (RQ2).

On the first aspect, I have observed that Brazilian squatters tend to see a real possibility of securing long-term housing by organizing themselves within social movements, more so than non-Brazilians. These observations are based on my previous work experience with diverse urban movements in São Paulo, and was confirmed in the case of Jean Jacques during the fieldwork for this thesis, as briefly discussed in the subchapter "the migrant's perceptions". The curiosity is that these same nuances do not apply in the Brussels case. While I initially expected to find a similar scenario (with migrants expecting less and locals somehow achieving more), I discovered that both locals and migrants in Brussels are equally hopeless about accessing proper housing through collective organization. This could be due to the fact that Belgium still maintains a fairly extensive social security system that addresses the basic needs of most of its population, reducing the need of masses to organize and fight for such rights. This is reflected in the struggle horizons of Belgian squatters – whether migrants or nationals – where they focus on obtaining medium-term contracts with landlords and “playing by the rules” from there. This process is very visible in the case of Louise, where the movement successfully negotiated formal contracts, ensuring their permanence – three years and a half by the time of writing.

As to the second aspect, I revisit the perceptions of Brazilian families about future outcomes from their experiences of self-managing housing-led squats. In the current scenario, they present quite an extended horizon of struggle, keeping up with the roots of insurgent citizenship that has generated urban social movements in São Paulo. Unlike the situation of VSP, MLB views the act of occupying as a way to enable access to decent housing in the future, in addition to attending the immediate need. Their claims consider various outcomes but, considering the particular Jean Jacques case, it mainly involves two possibilities: retrofitting the building they occupy (largely inspired by previous successful cases in the city center led by similar social movements) or having the families reallocated to another project elsewhere, preferably in the same central region. These demands reflect actions that the local government could realistically implement today if there were sufficient political will – there is not. This raises the question of whether such claims could also include advocating for the creation of a public stock of social housing, if there were a substantive public policy in this regard. However, due to the lack of such policies, the movements do not focus on this possibility as part of their claims or horizons of struggle, remaining confined to the "single-family private property" model.

In summary, housing-led squats are seen as an important instrument of struggle for both cases, but only in the case of MLB does it present long-term expectations within these experiences regarding definitive access to post-squat housing scenarios. In the case of VSP, although the ultimate goal of the movement is not housing, it is the need to have an immediate roof over their heads that unites the *sans-papiers* in the first place – a role that the case of Louise fulfills very well. In this context, pursuing stable mid-term contracts is a significant step toward achieving their main objective as a collective, since the experience of self-managing the place also leads them to unite, build networks and organize their struggles.

For the urban squatting scene, both cases indicate that their methods and practices are effective for their struggles and, therefore, must continue. The self-management practices within their housing-led squats enhance their skills, know-how and networks which, from their perspective, provide evidence that they are on the right path to achieve their collective goals.

6.3 The bitter wins of "successful" outcomes: learnings, limitations and possible paths

The self-managed process of a housing-led occupation is highly politically significant. As occupied buildings are spaces for organizing class struggles (whether explicitly identified as such or not), the *use* value of the space is a natural aspect. Within the São Paulo context, it is fascinating that there are means to transform former housing-led squats into adequate housing, paving the way for the achievement of other rights. However, the primary outcome of this process often results in the creation of more private property. Some former squats, now new *properties*, are mainly located in parts of the city with intense real estate development activity and, therefore, are likely to succumb to market pressures and re-enter the market swiftly – this is particularly true given the minimal restrictions on families selling the properties after paying off the heavily subsidized mortgages.

On the one hand, I agree with Martínez (2019:201) when he says that "the legalization of a given occupied building is a battle won against urban speculation" and also against socio-spatial exclusion, a particularly relevant point when we take into account that both buildings are in a very privileged area of the city – especially in the case of Brussels, but also in São Paulo since it is a central area and surrounded by infrastructure, something that is still lacking in the peripheries. However, São Paulo has nothing 'in between', meaning there is either tolerated illegality *or* the provision of adequate housing. Therefore, what we see today as a material outcome of the struggle for housing is actually the endorsement of the status quo; feeding the aim of people to become property owners. This is very much understandable, given that securing an asset in life provides some sort of security, especially in countries that have never experienced any level of welfare state. Understandable though it may be, this process is creating "consumers of the struggle", and despite good examples of possible alternatives (public housing, social renting, collective ownership, cooperative models, etc.) the public debate is still in its infancy in São Paulo.

To transform processes of an anti-capitalist nature into (literally) private property is to assimilate and be swallowed up by the capitalist order of *exchange* value (Lefebvre, 1968) at the expense of collective struggle. This scenario raises a critical question: Are we advocating for the *right to housing* or merely for the *right to own property*? With this question, I would like to bring into discussion a third possibility inspired by both, findings from Brussels and debates in the early stages between the social movements in São Paulo.

It can be argued that the formalization and legalization process can lead to the instrumentalization or, in Pruijt's words (2003), the "terminal institutionalization" of the collective and result in limitations to their autonomy. However, it is important to emphasize that we are addressing housing-led situations with many specific characteristics. People are not there as a "lifestyle" choice, to experiment with "new ways of living", or to fight gentrification *per se*. They are squatting because they have no other choice. In this context, a legalization process could be a positive step if it is linked to availability of means to improve

the infrastructure of housing-led squats, enhance safety for the families living there, and prevent disasters like, as discussed in the subchapter 3.1.2, the Wilton Paes de Almeida in São Paulo.

Preliminary studies of interviewees working with housing-led squat retrofits in São Paulo indicate that the funds allocated for retrofitting a single occupied building could cover the cost of emergency renovations and general improvements for *two* occupied buildings, on average. The ongoing discussion explores the possibility of the municipal government, in cases where it does not own the occupied building, expropriating the property and financing renovations while the families continue to reside there. This approach would avoid the need to open additional housing-led squats to accommodate the residents during renovation work. In this scenario, the social movement would self-manage the renovation process using public funds – a very familiar process within social housing production in Brazil. Upon completion of renovations, the units could be incorporated into a social rental arrangement, with symbolic rents for the families who remain in the now improved occupation. This arrangement would ensure the maintenance of the building and facilitate social work conducted by the movement with funding from the municipal government. This would address the legal security Louise has in Brussels, but now *extended* to the wide horizon of struggle. Questions remain as to whether the movement's agency would be strong enough to guarantee a balance of power between state intervention (which would finance the reforms and pay for the necessary work) and the movement's autonomy throughout the process.

While this idea is currently under discussion between movement leaders and technical advisors, it remains essential as an interesting concept to think about other extended horizons of struggle – as the families occupying Jean Jacque, for example, struggle with insalubrious conditions, this situation presents an opportunity to consider intermediate arrangements involving the local government to address the precarity of the situation by making basic improvements.

This debate is crucial and should be prioritized, especially since housing-led squats in São Paulo, as mentioned earlier, can persist for *many* years, sometimes extending beyond a decade. This longevity brings into debate the urgent need to address improvements in housing-led squats, often termed a 'temporary situation' but which, in reality, prove to be far from temporary. As an outcome, instead of generating more private property and not addressing the root of the problem, it seems more interesting to put energy into developing the necessary instruments and providing the resources to guarantee physical integrity and decent infrastructure for those who need it the most, while we collectively formulate how to address the root of the problem.

7. Further Research and Conclusion

7.1 For Further Research

Fully understanding housing-led squats implications as they unfold is very challenging due to their dynamic nature. Long-term research with a longitudinal approach to these experiences across different movements would help clarify their implications for the broader context of squatting movements, housing rights, and urban citizenship – an academic observatory could potentially take on this task in the future. Particularly in São Paulo, there is also a need for quantitative surveys that follow a single methodology, with periodic updates, making it possible to create a comparable database.

For now, what is possible to affirm is that both are important spaces of resistance that contribute by pointing out ways and practices that work, and are potential examples of experiences to be followed by movements that aim to follow a similar path. In São Paulo, squatting housing movements have a strong agency to claim – and eventually get – more long-term outcomes, given the established agency with roots in a long tradition that came from the process of insurgent citizenship, aspects deeply discussed in this thesis. In Brussels, VSP as a movement the way it exists today, is relatively young – even so, it has risen as an important force in the city. The intersection of data from reports on unemployment and undocumented migrants with the growing number of squats suggests that VSP represents a part of a renewed force in the squatting scene in Brussels. Further research is needed to confirm it and to understand the evolving dynamics of squatting movements in both contexts, considering: to what extent migrants constitute a new force within these contexts; the impacts of achieving "success" in the long-term cohesion of these social movements; and whether these movements have the potential to drive broader transformations towards a emancipatory horizon.

In terms of recommendations, it is extremely necessary to guarantee minimum conditions of habitability, understanding that these experiences are not so temporary – both cases being ongoing for around three and a half years at the time of writing. In this sense, Brussels is doing much better than São Paulo. Suggestions and the know-how of occupants can be valuable in guiding public policies for mitigating risks and ensuring safety in the buildings. While it is known that this process depends on the political will of local governments, in the case of a collaboration with occupiers, a balance should be found between these interventions and the autonomy of the movement.

7.2 Conclusion

Housing-led squats continue to occur and are even on the rise in São Paulo and Brussels, despite (and because of) increasing constraints imposed by neoliberal urban policies. This rise can be attributed to the overlapping crises – lack of affordable housing, the COVID-19 pandemic, and migration – that both contexts face to different extents, creating windows of opportunity for squatting. Through the case studies, I have shown that people at the forefront of the thriving experiences today are those who are excluded and deprived of their fundamental rights – they are the main actors claiming the right to the city and the right to citizenship, whether nationals or migrants. The scenarios are extremely dynamic and the tensions are many. What allows these experiences to thrive over time is a mix of multifactorial elements, including the agency of the movements, their networks, resistance strategies, local regulations, and, sometimes, luck. All these elements are part of the complex balance of power between squatters, landlords, and different levels of government that compose a context that directly impacts the way squats operate and their potential for providing stability. In other words, causality between claims and outcomes is heavily context-dependent and, therefore, not linear.

Within the immediate temporality, both movements use housing-led squats to address an urgent demand for shelter while establishing places of political organization. Although these experiences are meant to be temporary, they do last long enough and provide stability to the occupants – either through formal procedures such as negotiated occupancy contracts (as in the case of Brussels) or through the “slow pace of the law” in São Paulo. In both cases, although the risk of illegal eviction exists, the occupants are more assured of having a roof over their heads than if they were in the private rental market and failed to pay rent. In short, both housing-led squats have the potential to provide stability at a fairly reasonable level given the current housing crisis in both cities.

The divergences between cases become more pronounced when considering the long-term struggles, as the main objectives of both cases diverge and new nuances emerge. For the VSP, the claims are more closely tied to citizenship issues, with a focus on the goal of “perhaps having the same rights as everyone else.” Since this is the VSP’s ultimate aim, the narrative around the right to housing is very moderate compared to that of the MLB in São Paulo. Nevertheless, securing stable medium-term contracts is essential for achieving their main goal and provides immediate shelter and a space for the organization of the undocumented migrants. In this context, for them, the urban space becomes a battleground for the struggle to be recognized as “citizens with rights” and the housing occupations, such as Louise, are important barricades – a protected space where they can breathe.

In São Paulo, people organize and occupy with the hope that they will ultimately have a decent place to finally call home, a goal that they eventually achieve at “the end” of the struggle. Transforming a squat into social housing, while still a minor concession, presents an excellent opportunity to inform and develop a more comprehensive housing policy and legislation on one hand, and open new horizons of struggle on the other – as movements often claim, *housing is the gateway to all other rights*. MLB seems to be on a promising track, even

developing bottom-up proposals for urban reform with a dialogic approach, feeding the movement's praxis in a process of raising critical awareness among the occupiers while concretely achieving outcomes that address their immediate needs.

However, no “successful” cases are free from the contradictions inherent in capitalist urbanization and they should be questioned further. Housing-led squats are, by their very nature, a direct conflict with landlords and the State over the issue of private property. This should not change. In simple terms, reproducing the current logic of private property production based on exchange value is a trap, a fallacy that will take us back to square one very quickly. This extends to all social movements that have squatting as a strategy of struggle: The results are known to those who are active and attentive in the field, we cannot lose another opportunity to face these contradictions and structurally rethink our tactics.

Engaging in the creation of alternatives must always focus on the collective struggle. When people organize and self-manage occupied spaces to address a fundamental need, we get a glimpse of the strength and capacity of the collective – we must not lose sight of that. If the current rise of urban occupations consolidates into a renewed political force (perhaps led by immigrants), we may be facing a historic moment to formulate new horizons for urban struggles. As Harvey (2012:137) would remind us, "claiming back the right for everyone to live in a decent house in a decent living environment can be seen as the first step towards a more comprehensive revolutionary movement". Whether without shelter or without papers, it will be from the oppressed and dispossessed of the world that deep changes will emerge. It is also our task to make this moment dialogical and keep feeding our praxis – always full of hope, pointing to a transformative path towards a radically changed society.



Acknowledgments

As no achievement is ever truly individual, I dedicate this work to:

All the workers of the Movimento de Luta nos Bairros, Vilas e Favelas, and La Voix des Sans-Papiers – thank you for your exchanges, trust, and for welcoming me even in the midst of life's rush. It was an honor to dedicate this work to documenting the collective action of the people in our times.

Elizabeth and Francisco, for everything. This thesis would never have happened without the determination I learned from you, from the cradle up. You have always been my greatest reference in life.

My colleagues at 4Cities, for the two most intense years I've lived so far, filled with special moments – the first snowflake in Brussels, the first urban river bath in Vienna, the first fig in Symi, and so many other beautiful memories that I will carry with me for life. It's unbelievable how much you've all expanded my world.

My dear Krause, for sharing countless memorable moments over pizza and wine in so many corners of Europe (and perhaps many more around the world). I always feel inspired when you are around.

I am also grateful to the European Commission for awarding me the Erasmus Mundus scholarship, which allowed me to experience a master's degree in a way I never imagined possible. I extend my thanks to the faculty, especially my supervisor, Bas Van Heur, for the valuable guidance and necessary nudges throughout the writing process. Special thanks to my dear friend Sebastian, for hosting me in Brussels on so many occasions. Your support was crucial during my fieldwork, and even more so in facilitating an essential interview for this research. *Obrigada, viu!*

Luiza, for the adorable videos of our more than a dozen cats and dogs, and Anderson, for the iconic picture with Guilherme Boulos. You both cheer me up at the perfect moments.

Dani, Julia, Leo, and Pedro, for providing so many much-needed moments of connection from a distance, following all the dramas and joys of this experience.

To my comrades from Leste 1, Olga Benário, and all my dear organic intellectuals from the East End of São Paulo – I am because we are. *Tamo junto e é nós!*

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