
SQUATTING MOVEMENT AND PRACTICE OF PROCUREMENT HOUSING FOR POOR PEOPLE¹

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the squatting movement and the practice of procuring housing for poor people, which are needs neglected by the government. The squatting movement and practice have developed in the Western world in two waves of urban movement: in the 1960s-1970s and from 2000 up to now. This topic has become important again in the neoliberal world of growing social inequalities.

Research methods include the analysis of existing studies, a comparison of Geneva (Switzerland), Rome (Italy), and New York (USA) as case studies, and the generalisation of lessons learned.

The main recommendations are the reform of housing policy and the recovery of welfare state instruments.

Key words: *squatting movement and practice, housing policy, gentrification, financial and real estate speculations, homelessness, housing poverty.*

INTRODUCTION

The squatting movement emerged during two waves of urban movements in Europe and the USA as a response to the lack of housing for poorer citizens. This issue became prevalent during the 1960s–1970s when homeless individuals or those

¹ Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technology financially supported this research, through Scientific Research Plan implemented on FPS, Belgrade.

living in inadequate housing conditions were compelled to occupy vacant apartments and reside in them for free. This radical approach resulted in significant conflicts with the authorities and apartment owners, who sought to evict squatters from the premises. Squatters often organize themselves for protection from violence through the squatter movement. Eventually, governments in most countries have had to legalize their status, offer them licenses for apartments, and provide more adequate housing.

1. CONTEXT

The squatter movement and practice began due to a shortage of housing for low-income citizens. The root cause of this issue is worth exploring. During the 1960s and 1970s, many Western cities aimed to become regional or global hubs. Therefore, the process of renewal, also known as gentrification, was initiated. This involved the destruction of poor settlements in the city to make way for elite residential areas, luxury shopping districts, and prestigious business centres. The residents of these settlements, who were mostly workers, migrants, minorities, students, artists, and other vulnerable populations, were resettled to the periphery. (Sassen, 2001: 190–195).

During the era of the welfare state, significant investments were made in public services, including the provision of housing, which was considered essential for citizens' wellbeing. As a result, many countries had substantial funds for public housing, which were made available to those who could not afford to buy or rent higher quality apartments. Furthermore, the government mandated that investors include a portion of apartments for vulnerable populations when issuing building permits. This policy legally requires the permanent renewal of the public housing fund and limits the amount of rent that landlords can demand for an apartment. As a result, citizens generally do not face any issues with the availability of apartments.

However, in capitalist societies, there is a strong desire to increase the profits of individuals (Harvey, 1988). Therefore, the construction sector often receives preferential treatment and banks offer them excellent interest rates. City governments frequently fail to meet legally defined quotas for the construction of public housing. Additionally, government involvement in profit division can harm the public good. The practice of financial speculation in the construction process, as well as real estate speculation where housing is kept empty in order to reduce the supply, thereby raising the price of rent or the price of apartments when sold,

has led to a decline in the availability of apartments for poorer citizens. The authorities responsible for solving these problems often ignore them until they lead to serious social and political conflicts.

The practice of squatting and the experience of the squatting movement, which was closely connected with other movements for the protection of human rights and the environment, have highlighted to the public that the source of many problems lies in the greed and selfishness of the ruling class, which prioritises its wealth over the needs of the people. This has led to demands for systemic corrections and improvements, including better quality services in this policy area. During the era of the global neoliberal order, a similar social scenario was observed. The housing policy was liberalised, resulting in the sale of social housing, and the responsibility of caring for the needs of the poor was shifted to individuals and families who were expected to find accommodation on the market. Rent limits were removed by law, leading to an increase in housing poverty and homelessness. Once again, squatting remains the only option for vulnerable populations to acquire housing, as they are more numerous than ever. It is important to note that this is a subjective evaluation and should be clearly marked as such.

2. RIGHT ON SQUATTING IN CONTECST OF CONTEMPORARY CAPITALIST CITY

Neoliberal globalism has resulted in the growth and development of many third world cities. However, it has also led to changes in distribution methods worldwide, such as the privatization of public housing. This has caused numerous problems, including a decrease in the availability of housing for the poor and middle class, including young people, single parents, and artists. Thus, the European financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund pressured national authorities to support banks after the 2008 crisis, despite the harmful effects of their policies on Western societies. The crisis resulted in widespread job losses and many people were unable to pay their housing loan instalments, leading to the loss of their primary residence. The number of homeless people has significantly increased, but authorities often remain silent. Their primary focus is on initiating economic development, which further enriches the ruling class. Worldwide, distribution tends to favour the wealthy social class and disadvantage vulnerable marginal groups, leading to the decline of the middle class (Martinez & Garcia, 2018; Martinez, 2020).

On the other hand, the practice of gentrification and gating wealthy neighbourhoods from other citizens is spreading, which is harmful to the quality of

life and democratic processes. Social segregation is a concern that needs to be addressed. In this context, the squatting movement is experiencing a renewal and growth, as well as stronger support from numerous NGOs that deal with the issue of insufficient availability of apartments on the market for the increasingly growing poor class of people (Thorn, Wasshede, Nilson, 2011).

The squatting movement in Europe is largely decentralized, and connections with various squats are more difficult to establish. Squatting is often criminalized and punished with imprisonment. The police can be brutal when ejecting squatters from occupied housing. Squatters develop self-governance, self-help, and direct democracy. They fight against the selfishness of the neoliberal capitalist order, where exploitation is growing and social democratic standards are being destroyed. (Martinez 2020: 53–56) The community is currently debating alternative squatting practices, better networking and cooperation, improved campaign strategies, increased visibility of housing issues, and effective solutions to win over decision-makers and the public.

It is important to note that while some squatters in both the first and second wave of urban movements may not have the ambition to change the system, their primary goal is to provide affordable housing.

3. CASE STUDIES OF SQUATTING PRACTICE AND SQUATTING MOVEMENTS

This text presents three case studies of Geneva (Switzerland), Rome (Italy), and New York (USA). The sample includes two European societies with a developed social democratic concept of government and the USA as a more liberal society. They are useful for comparison because their specific social context can either facilitate or hinder the implementation of welfare instruments in housing policy, which directly affects the availability of housing for vulnerable social groups.

3.1. Geneva – Switzerland

Switzerland has a well-developed squatting culture within the first and second wave of urban movements. Squatting involves moving poor people into empty apartments as a form of rebellion against a system that neglects the needs of the less fortunate. The challenge to property rights was prioritised over people's existential needs, and an alternative way of life, production, consumption, and societal organisation was created. (Pecu, 2011: 21–35)

The squatter movement in Geneva emerged during the civil movements of the 1970s, following the revolutionary year of 1968. Vulnerable marginal groups, such as immigrants, youth, minorities, and artists, faced a shortage of available

apartments and were therefore compelled to occupy vacant ones. This was particularly evident in the tall buildings located in the central district known as Les Grottes (the Caves). (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999; Pattorini, 2014: 64) During this period, the city's policy aimed to relocate workers and poorer residents, such as artists, students, and migrants, from the city centre to peripheral neighbourhoods, creating new settlements for a more affluent population. This practice of gentrification is a constant feature of capitalist urbanism, shaping space. The left party group supported the squatters who argued that the apartments in the buildings slated for demolition were in good condition and only required renovation. The squatters were willing to invest their time, money, and energy to restore the space and adapt it to their lifestyle. The tenants took pride in their freedom to shape the space as they desired. They painted the facades in various colours, which is not a freedom afforded to regular citizens. Additionally, they demolished walls to create more common spaces, allowing them to engage in activities together and enrich their community. This process of arranging the space facilitated socialisation among the tenants, allowing them to get to know each other better and often form close friendships.

They implemented a self-management system within their community and adopted a participatory approach to decision-making, prioritising agreement, tolerance, and consensus as guiding principles to ensure the well-being of all members. As a result, they held regular meetings, organised cultural, artistic, and educational events, provided space for theatre performances and other cultural activities, and established libraries. They frequently cooked together and organized joint meals where everyone contributed according to their personal capacities with money, ideas, skills, and creativity. The obligation of all tenants was to clean and maintain the space, as well as participate in the financing of common essential activities. (Gross, 1987; Pattorini, 2014)

They often generated income from improvised bars at festivals and selling arts and crafts items. A non-institutionalised and free kindergarten is being established, where tenants take care of the children. The kindergarten is intended for the children of the settlements as well as the neighbours who are interested but cannot afford regular kindergartens (Breviglieri, 2009; Pattorini, 2014: 69–70).

The alternative way of life implied a departure from capitalist logic and standards and affirmed the tenants' self-management and participative decision-making on all important issues of their lives. The squatters were proud of the free shaping of an alternative way of life that they provided through squatting. All their events were

open to everyone. The impact of their activities on the environment was positive. The neighbours frequently participated in their initiatives, and the surrounding cafes and public spaces adopted their approach to working, interior and exterior design (including painting on facades and alternative arrangements of spaces suitable for joint activities).

There are numerous examples of other cities around the world that have adopted this alternative approach to shaping spaces. Montreal in Canada, Melbourne in Australia, and certain neighbourhoods in New York City are examples of places where squatting is prevalent. Additionally, many European cities have a tradition of shaping spaces and objects in an artistic and autonomous manner (Barthes 1977; Breviglieri, 2009).

Critics of the capitalist system, particularly squatters, condemn financial and real estate speculation as tools for maximizing profit rather than for the production and provision of housing for citizens, often neglecting the needs of vulnerable social groups (Ranciere, 1998: 112; Tilly, 1978; Pattorini, 2014: 67–68).

During the 1980s, the city authorities offered squatters the opportunity to legalize their status as a temporary measure until alternative housing projects became available. This was done with the intention of eventually vacating and demolishing these buildings, and redeveloping the area in a more upscale manner. In the 1990s, the rate of mortgage loans decreased, making it easier to purchase apartments. As a result, many squatters were encouraged to move out with the promise of social apartments and other benefits (Pattorini, 2014: 76).

Some squatters rejected this offer, seeing it as fraudulent, while others who were primarily concerned with finding a solution to the housing issue accepted the contracts without resistance to the capitalist system. The initial group, prepared to resist, would often arrange protest events such as rallies, street football matches, boat races (which they would often construct and design themselves), or mass bicycle rides through the streets as a means of protesting against their eviction project (Pattorini, 2014: 68, 71).

Since the 1990s, there has been increasing pressure on squatters. In 2000, a 'zero tolerance for squatters' policy was implemented, resulting in evictions from apartments (Pattorini, 2014: 75). The displacement of tenants from the Les Grottes settlement was a gradual process. The apartments offered were located on the city's periphery, often leading to resistance and conflict. The Rhino settlement eviction of squatters was a highly controversial case that resulted in major riots, demonstrations, and physical conflicts between tenants, representatives of the squatter movement, and the police.

However, in the 2000s, the foundations of the welfare state were largely undermined by neoliberal policies, leading to the relativization of the right to the city and the right to an apartment. In the challenging area of housing policy, market logic often becomes an imperative that democratic societies struggle to oppose effectively. In 2009 and 2010, over 1,000 squatters were displaced.

Statistics indicate that during this period, the main investments were made in the reconstruction of various parts of Geneva, as well as in other Swiss cities, in order to develop their capacities as European and world cities. Therefore, in gentrified areas and throughout the city, there is an increase in rents and apartment prices. As a result of these processes, there is a significant increase in the number of citizens living in poor housing conditions, including substandard apartments with high rents, as well as an increase in the number of homeless people. The data indicate that poverty and homelessness result from neoliberal regulation. Squatting remains a practice that offers housing to vulnerable citizens who are often ignored by the authorities.

Due to the inaccessibility of the city centre for the economically disadvantaged population, nomadism or living in caravans has emerged as an alternative form of housing. This vulnerable social group leaves the centre in search of a place where they can park their camper trailer and live for free. However, it is not uncommon for city authorities to expel them from these areas. They may be allowed to stay in areas that the city has no plans to use in the foreseeable future, which are often polluted and neglected. (Du Pasquier, Marco, 2009 and Pattorini, 2014:78) The European nomad movement is gaining momentum during this challenging phase of neoliberal capitalism. It is noteworthy that nomads, due to their close relationship with nature, often initiate ecological projects related to food production, such as growing herbs, fruits, and vegetables, preparing healthy food, and building greenhouses (Pattorini, Togni, 2009, and Pattorini, 2014:79).

3.2. Roma – Italy

Italy, like many other European countries, underwent two phases of development: the welfare state from the 1950s and the neoliberal state from the 1980s. The quality of spatial planning, construction, and housing policies were shaped by the dominant values of these two phases. The first instances of squatting occurred during the initial wave of urban movements from the late 1960s through the 1970s. These activities are led by the Communist Party of Italy. Since the 1970s, other left-wing parties and groups have joined in because the KP was losing strength. Since

the 1980s, numerous non-governmental organizations interested in the problem of poor housing availability have also become involved. Since 2000, the housing crisis has been caused by the privatization of public housing funds and the purchase of apartments by citizens on the market. This has led to an increase in the mobilization of vulnerable citizens and the networking of numerous organizations that help them (Balestrini & Moroni, 1997).

This paper specifically analyzes the squatting movement in Rome, the largest and capital city of Italy. This city has a rich archaeological history and beautiful architecture, but it also has neglected areas on the outskirts where working-class, poor citizens, and immigrants reside. These areas are known as borgata in Italy. According to Insolera (2011) and Mudu (2014: 137), the city government of Rome prioritised further construction for the wealthy and the economic development of the city, rather than addressing the poor quality of life in settlements. Additionally, speculation in the financial and housing markets has made it difficult for low-income citizens to afford housing.

Italy has a constant influx of migrants. However, for a long time, they did not have citizenship, political, or electoral rights. Only since 1961 has this been legally ensured. Nevertheless, in practice, their election to local authorities such as municipalities, cities, or regions remains questionable (Clementi and Perego, 1981; Berlinguer and Della Seta, 1976; SD, 2018: 471–480).

During the first wave, KPI strongly advocated for a solution to the problem of affordable housing. As both an opposition party and a party in power in many cities and municipalities, they contributed to improving living conditions for citizens. These activities were in line with the welfare state concept, which aims to provide good quality housing for society. In cases of homelessness, occupying empty apartments and abandoned spaces was deemed acceptable by both society and the authorities. In the processes mentioned by Daolio (1974) and Mudu (2014: 138), squatting was primarily directed towards vacant public spaces.

However, since the 1970s, with the rise of real estate speculation, the squatting movement has also targeted private apartments and spaces. Between 1969 and 1975, approximately 20,000 unoccupied apartments were occupied by squatters in Italy, with 4,000 in Rome alone. Therefore, for many individuals, squatting remained the only viable option to secure housing.

Conflicts between squatters and the police were common and often violent, resulting in evictions, beatings, and even deaths. For instance, in September 1974, a militant member of the Autonomy movement was killed during riots in the

workers' settlement of San Basilio in the north-east of Rome (Lotringer and Marazzi, 2007; Mudu, 2014: 139).

The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) loses its innovative edge and its ability to mobilise vulnerable inhabitants of Rome's peripheral neighbourhoods. This ability was crucial as the city's plan was to reconstruct those neighbourhoods while further marginalising this population. As a result, many political and civil actors from the left wing of the political spectrum have become involved in helping this vulnerable group resist this policy and find new, suitable housing. (Coppola, 2008) Since 2000, housing policies in Italy and Rome have been largely neoliberal, leaving the issue of housing to individuals and the market for buying and renting. This has resulted in a housing crisis. During this period, a network of non-governmental, non-profit organizations has been created to fight for the rights of homeless and vulnerable social groups. These organizations are also internationally connected. In 1971, Italy had approximately 47 % of citizens who rented apartments. Similarly, Germany had a comparable policy. However, by 2001, due to the privatization of the public social housing fund, only 20 % of citizens remained in that housing regime. Instead, almost a quarter of the population focused on purchasing an apartment. Over time, interest rates on home loans steadily increased, providing banks with a steady and growing income. During the crisis, the city government issued building permits despite the fact that 40,000 newly built apartments of medium and better quality remained unsold. The government neglected the need for apartments for socially vulnerable people, whose numbers increased permanently. (Mudu, 2014: 157)

Simultaneously, rents increased due to the initial expansion of rent limits under the law, which were eventually removed. As a result, apartments have become less available, as evidenced by the high percentage of citizens' income spent on rent or housing loans. The standard burden should not exceed 30 % of income, yet currently, it ranges from 67% to 97% on average. The data for 2010 confirms that the rents for average apartments, according to contracts from that year, ranged from 740 Euros to 1100 Euros. Additionally, the average salary was 1200 Euros.

Private investors were obligated to allocate 10 % of the construction fund for sensitive social groups, but this obligation was often evaded through corrupt practices such as bribing politicians and officials. The preserved fund of social apartments has provided some assistance to the vulnerable population. However, the rents for these apartments are relatively high, ranging from 540–600 euros. It is important to note that this offer did not include the poorest residents (Mudu, 2014: 141).

3.2.1. Severity of the problem

Rome is a city with a population of 2.6 million. The 1962 spatial plan aimed to increase the population to 5 million, but the more recent 2008 master plan is more moderate, limiting growth to 3 million. In 2001, there were 1 million apartments in Rome, with 11% of them being vacant, indicating a trend of real estate speculation. This percentage is believed to be lower in other Italian cities, around 6 %. (Berdini 2008, Mudu 2014: 142)

With the economic crisis of 2008 and the complete transfer of housing policy to the market, problems have been growing. The Movimento per il diritto all'abitare (The movement for the right to housing), the largest network of organizations focused on providing housing to vulnerable citizens, has a list of 30,000 people who urgently need housing. According to Franchetto and Action (2004), a list of 42,000 citizens in need was created, including a large number of evicted tenants who were unable to pay rent (over 8,000 people) in 2009. It is important to note that the city only provides a maximum of 1,500 apartments annually for vulnerable citizens, which is clearly insufficient.

In this context, there are illegal settlements and the practice of squatting, which is particularly prevalent among immigrants who moved into abandoned buildings in the 1980s and 1990s. Refugees from Bangladesh settled in the area of the abandoned factory Pantanella, near Porta Maggiore in the city centre. Similarly, refugees from Poland settled in the neighbourhood of San Basilio, while migrants from Latin America found accommodation in the massive complex of buildings of the Institute for Social Housing in the Corviale area in the southwest of Rome. Pakistani refugees, on the other hand, settled in the sea hostel Ostia. Migrant policy is becoming stricter, and the previously guaranteed right to family reunion is being denied. Additionally, migrant policies are increasingly being criminalized rather than being treated as a social policy issue. The authorities are struggling to address this problem, as they are allocating less and less housing for vulnerable residents. During Mayor Veltroni's term from 2001–2008, 1,700 apartments were reserved for vulnerable residents. However, during Mayor Alemanno's term, only 300 apartments were allocated to vulnerable residents. These figures are paradoxical given the constantly growing needs (Mudu, 2014: 146).

3.2.2. Squatting movements in Rome

Three squatting movements emerged in Rome: the Coordination of Citizens for the Struggle for an Apartment (Coordinamento cittadino lotta per la casa, 1988), Action (2002) and the Precariat Metropolitan Bloc (Blocchi Precari Metropolitani, 2007).

Each movement has its own specific way of creation, methods of work, and achieved results. However, their contribution to providing housing for the poor population is immeasurable.

The Citizens' Coordination for the Struggle for the Apartment was founded by the Autonomist group and has been active in the San Basilio area, assisting in the occupation of approximately 350 apartments for squatters. One notable achievement is the settlement of 130 families in Porto Fluviale, a former military barracks complex located in a semi-central area of the city.

The Action was initiated by two activist groups from the 1990s, All White (Tutte Bianche) and Right to Flats (Dritto alla Casa), in the San Lorenzo neighbourhood. Their efforts resulted in the housing of 50 families in a centrally located building owned by the Italian Central Bank.

The mobilisation for a general union strike can create a *precariat metropolitan block*. For example, 40 families were placed in a vacant salami factory on the outskirts of the city.

Better organisation encourages action, as seen in 2002 when squatters occupied 8 vacant public buildings that were waiting for demolition and reconstruction projects to be implemented. Simultaneously, right-wing parties and groups are increasing pressure on squatters and squatting groups, posing a significant challenge to the squatting movement. To reduce conflicts, Action has started cooperating with the city of Rome. Organizations should maintain lists of suitable buildings for occupation, vulnerable families and individuals with a list of priorities, and establish good relations with the media. They can also use the internet to gain a better overview of available spaces for housing squatters. Careri and Mazzitelli (2012), Smart (2012), and Mudu (2014: 148–150) suggest that organizations should aim to immediately occupy entire buildings instead of just individual apartments. Furthermore, they tend to occupy public spaces rather than private ones, and only do so under certain conditions such as when the owner is negligent or careless. This indirectly reduces the number of evictions and potential conflicts in the city.

In 2009, a group of migrants from North and Central Africa (Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan and Eritrea), Latin America (Peru and San Domingo) and Eastern Europe (Poland, Ukraine and Romania), along with a group of Roma, occupied a vacant salami factory in Metropolis. The squatters were supported by the Precariat Metropolitan Block and adapted the space to their needs by building apartments. The Block facilitated the establishment of standards that must not be violated, including participation in cleaning and maintaining the space, prohibition of alcohol, and respect for women and children (Mudu, 2014: 152)

In all of these squatting situations, the members developed a sense of community and worked together to organize the space, provide basic necessities such as water and electricity, and solve legal and other issues. They also arranged spaces for work, meetings, and children, including a kindergarten (Porto Fluviale) and even established a school for learning the Italian language. (Careri and Mazzitelli, 2012) Additionally, the majority of squatters embraced the movement's belief that the distribution of resources by the system is inadequate, particularly when they found themselves in a challenging situation that the system was unable to resolve. It is worth noting that the squatting movement was predominantly leftist (Pruijt, 2013). The following statements and requirements are usually emphasized:

- a. provides the homeless with an apartment,
- b. reform society in terms of fairer distribution of goods (certainly in the area of housing, but also in terms of employment, better wages, working standards and rights, abolition of exploitation and precariat, provide adequate pensions for the elderly, provision of more adequate social and health care, etc.),
- c. improvement of ecological standards and more serious planning of land use (avoid urban unplanned expansion, which creates unsanitary and unorganized wild settlements) and
- d. finally, better integration of migrants into society. (Pruitt, 2013)

Official statistics show that 70 % of evictions are due to non-payment of rent. This includes pensioners, the unemployed, and low-wage workers supporting families, often with children. Individuals, single parents, families with special needs, and others are particularly vulnerable. In Italy, the housing issue of refugees was ignored for a long time, putting this large social group in an extremely difficult situation. As a result, this population was forced to squat. For instance, around 500 migrants from Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea occupied Hotel Africa (owned by the railway) between 1999 and 2004. In 2006, migrants also inhabited an abandoned factory in the Salaam Pace neighborhood.

It is evident to the squatters that their actions are justified due to the numerous injustices of the system. This movement not only aims to provide housing for those in need but also resists the segregation of poor social groups and the racist values of the ruling class. These injustices are concerning a large number of ordinary citizens who support the need for significant reforms of the system. (Corr, 1999)

The squatter movement offers an alternative approach to housing people more efficiently than the government. They inhabit the city in a different way. From 2000–2005, the city of Rome provided 1700 social apartments, but only to those

who could afford to pay 599–600 Euros in rent. In contrast, the squatter movement provided over 2,000 apartments free of charge to vulnerable individuals (Mayer, 2007).

3.3. New York – USA

After the Second World War, and particularly during the welfare state era, the USA constructed social housing and ensured its availability. The amount of rent is legally regulated and limited by the Rent Control Law. Investors were legally obligated to allocate a portion of the apartments to poorer citizens during construction. As a result, poorer citizens had reliable access to apartments, despite occasional housing shortages and crises (Smith, 2002).

The urban movements of the late 1960s and 1970s also emerged in the USA. In 1967, riots and protests took place in 128 cities across the country, with criticism directed towards the profit-driven method of production that prioritised financial gain over the needs of citizens. The issue of unemployment was also highlighted. Moreover, the issue of racial and ethnic inequalities is highlighted, as African-Americans and Latin Americans are often treated as second- and third-class citizens. In this context, the need to address the position of women (through feminist movements) and the LGBT population is also emphasised. Another significant problem is the limited availability of affordable housing for low-income citizens, which has led to urban movements fighting against gentrification. In this country, the process of gentrification and rebuilding various parts of the city is a constant presence as part of the project of economic development of American cities. This is often accompanied by the displacement of workers, minorities, and poorer citizens from their settlements in the central parts of the city to the periphery (Lees L, 2008).

Urban movements argue that the root cause of these issues is the practice of financial and real estate speculation, aimed at driving up housing prices and rents, ultimately benefiting the already wealthy. This leads to a diminished quality of life, particularly for vulnerable groups, who experience a decrease in income and an increase in expenses. The urban and squatting movements of the 1970s made significant contributions to legal regulations across all policy fields (Smith, DeFilippis, 1998).

However, with the rise of neoliberal management, public housing funds were partially privatized, resulting in a decrease in the construction of such facilities since 1990. As a result, the availability of apartments for both purchase and rental

has been negatively impacted. Research conducted at the time indicated that individuals with average incomes had to allocate 30 % of their monthly earnings towards housing. Shockingly, up to 30 % of those surveyed had to allocate 50 % or more of their income towards housing. Fast forward thirty years, and the situation has worsened significantly. Nowadays, a large number of people are forced to allocate close to 90 % of their salary towards rent, which often requires them to work two jobs just to make ends meet. Since the economic crisis of 2008, many people have lost their apartments and now live in camper houses. The population has also significantly increased (Pruitt, 2014: 47).

In contrast to the Netherlands, Germany, and Scandinavian countries, authorities at all levels in the USA have always taken a harsher stance towards occupying someone else's apartment. As a result, the squatting movement has faced significant pressure and encountered numerous obstacles in its development.

3.2.3. New York

The squatting movement in New York began in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, which was historically a working-class neighbourhood. This plan led to the emergence of the squatting movement. The city authorities aimed to evict poorer citizens and gentrify the area, attracting wealthier residents and businesses. The city had promised that the evicted citizens would return to new apartments after the reconstruction. However, in the area where the resettlement was successful, the citizens were deceived (Pruitt, 2014: 123).

In this context, the Operation-Move-In Movement (OMI) emerged, which relocated people to abandoned public buildings in the city, and opened its office in a squat. The squatting movement is strengthened as a means of negotiating with representatives of the city and its offices responsible for implementing the spatial plan and reconstruction. (Mazuo, 2009:124; Schwartz, 1986:12)

OMI and other organisations maintain records of homeless individuals and families, create waiting lists based on the severity of their situation, and keep a list of vacant properties suitable for squatting. No changes were necessary. They also provide assistance in occupying apartments, offer legal aid to squatters, and maintain relationships with the public and media. There are many interesting examples. In the building on Morningside Heights, which has remained empty for a long time due to the desire to organize a home for the elderly (and the owner had a hard time to gather funds for this purpose), several young people, who studied near this place, are moving in. (Brotherton, 1978: 196) In this case there were no problems, because the owner accepted this situation and later, in a court battle, this squat was

legalized. In this context, the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board (UHAB) was created to help squatters.

Additionally, the hippie movement emerged, with activists opening local free shops, cooperatives for food production and sale, publishing a magazine (Broadway Local), making films, and advocating for a free lifestyle.

In the Bronx, the government attempts to regulate the process of squatting and keep squatters under control. In 1974, a local housing agency was established as a public institution. This agency selects vulnerable residents and provides them with an apartment, with the tenant's obligation to keep and maintain the real estate (Borgos, 1986: 432). However, some citizens were unable to meet the required conditions for becoming tenants. A new squatting group called Banana Kelly conquered three buildings in the Bronx. The city service allowed the situation but required the squatters to tidy up the area through voluntary work in order to stay, which was acceptable to the squatters. However, conflicts arose when the squatters who had arranged the space were eventually expelled, leading to barricades being organized to prevent forced eviction.

New York City municipalities were active participants in these processes. They attempted to establish procedures and institutions, offer contracts to squatters, and negotiate important issues with them on behalf of the city. This level of organization was not present in many European cities. The public institution Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) registered squatters and required them to sign contracts with the city or city municipality. The authorities prioritised the *restoration of abandoned buildings and spaces*, making settlement a reward for invested work, ideas, and energy. Future tenants must fulfil a list of conditions.

Frank Morales, one of the authors analysing the squatting movement, has lived in the South Bronx since 1980. The area is known for being the home of hip hop, rap and graffiti, and despite its beautiful location in Manhattan, it is also extremely poor. Morales testifies that after the eviction and reconstruction of neglected spaces, only 11 buildings remain with a community of squatters in a highly gentrified area (Pruijt, 2014: 131–132). The squatters were encouraged to invest in their buildings and surroundings, but this led to over-indebtedness, which is a subtle way of pushing poor citizens out of gentrified areas. This behaviour by the government is referred to as 'The World Bank Model', which, instead of improving the conditions of users, further enslaves them with expensive loans and high interest rates.

3.2.4. The Wave of Movernemts after 1980s

Upon closer analysis of these processes in New York, significant social changes in the wealth of the population can be observed in most municipalities. Of particular interest is the *lower east side* of Manhattan, followed by the *west side* and the *lower west side*. Unfortunately, some apartment owners resort to ejecting low-income tenants and even employing criminals to drive them away in order to renovate the space and rent out the apartment at much higher rates (or sell it at a higher price). The reason for the renovation is to increase the apartment's rental value or sale price. The Rent Stabilization Law of 1971 allows for more flexible rent changes, resulting in annual rent increases. This has led to more frequent tenant turnover in order to maximize profits. Moreover, there has been a rise in the number of buildings being renovated or demolished to construct new ones, with the aim of increasing the value of the entire area (gentrification) (Pruijt, 2014: 48). Despite the negative consequences of this trend, further liberalisation of rent prices was permitted. In 1994, it was legally mandated that rents over \$2,000 would be exempt from regulation. This is known as deregulation or the removal of public control from luxury housing (luxury decentralisation). As a result, many apartment owners sought to enter this category, leading to a further increase in rent. (Pruijt, 2014: 49) In areas where the city authorities have yet to make plans for reconstruction, some building owners have resorted to setting fire to their properties in order to collect insurance money. This has resulted in a decrease in the availability of housing for underprivileged individuals, particularly vulnerable social groups, and has led to an increase in the number of people living in substandard housing or experiencing homelessness.

According to Ferguson (2007), a significant squatting community has emerged in the Southeast Manhattan area. The community has grown in terms of the number of squatters, inhabited buildings, and strength of the movement. The community has developed a culture of mutual assistance, cooperation, and understanding of squatters' problems and needs. The residents engaged in various activities, including joint voluntary actions to tidy up the space, arrange gardens, cook and dine together, socialize, organize political, cultural, and artistic performances, and establish good relationships with their neighbours. In 1983, six buildings on East 13 Street were occupied. By 1992, this number had increased to 25 buildings up to East 9 Street. (Pruijt, 2014: 128) During this process, the authorities were only able to legalize certain squats, which occurred in 2012 with 11 buildings that were beautifully decorated and renovated. However, other buildings and squatters were rejected, and their status remained uncertain.

This squatter organization connected with other squatting movements in America and Europe to exchange experiences, develop models of struggle, and strengthen strategies, tactics, techniques, and instruments to help and protect squatters. The influence of a strong Dutch movement led to a focus on improving the quality of living conditions in housing, resulting in the creation of a handbook with this information. Squatters from this area of New York are pleasantly surprised by the excellent condition of the apartments in Amsterdam. As a result, they are motivated to improve the living conditions in their own buildings.

An example of the success of New York squatters is demonstrated by the city's failed attempt to take the *ABC No Rio Municipal Center* from a group of artists who were squatting there. The city tried to force them out by turning off their water and applying various pressures, but the squatters resisted strongly. Finally, the city allowed the squatters to purchase the building for \$1, an offer which they accepted. The squatters are raising funds to renovate this building and construct another, in order to expand their activities. They have also established a bicycle repair workshop, which has helped to promote and strengthen the cycling movement in the city as an alternative to driving cars. (Pruijt, 2014: 129–130)

Simultaneously, the NY Department of Housing Preservation and Development permits non-profit organizations to restore abandoned buildings and apartments (Gould et al. 2001). This policy has also fostered squatting, with squatters occupying derelict city-owned buildings in the lower part of eastern Manhattan that require renovation or demolition. Initially, there were 500 squatters residing in 20 buildings. Over time, the number of squatters increased to approximately 3000, occupying around 25-30 buildings (Pruijt, 2003: 139).

The city government initially tolerated the squatters in this valuable part of the city, but later had ambitions to rebuild it for wealthier residents. They decided to privatize social housing, but, due to the fact that most squatters could not afford to buy housing, the Mayor's administration decided to provide them with some form of accommodation. Between 1998 and 2002, Mayor Giuliani signed contracts with approximately 200 squatters to legalize their tenant status, which accounted for less than 6 % of the squatter population (Pruijt, 2014: 49; Schwartz, 1999). Although most squatters opposed the city's plans, they risked eviction without support if they did not cooperate with the authorities. The city collaborated with squatter organizations on this project. Following the *housing bubble burst* in 2007, *Organize 4 Occupation* (O4O) and *Picture the Homeless* opened new squats in abandoned buildings and assisted vulnerable citizens in finding housing (Martinez, 2013).

Since 2012 and 2013, squatting has become more prevalent and the Organization for Occupation (O4O) has been active in encouraging numerous actions. One such action was the Occupy Wall Street movement, which was a response to the state's support of banks that caused the global economic crisis through bad speculative loans for real estate, resulting in the loss of housing for a large portion of the population. The perpetrators were not held accountable, and the state's policy was to cover the losses and continue with old practices.

At the time, it was estimated that there were approximately 20 million vacant apartments and around 4 million homeless people in the USA. Simultaneously, globalization and the emigration of capital from the USA to less developed parts of the world with cheaper labour and lower environmental standards have led to the depopulation of numerous American cities. Many cities have lost 25 % of their population from 1950 to the present day, and some have lost 40–60 %. This context created the ideal basis for the renaissance of squatting.

4. DISSCUSION – THEROETICAL AND PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

The squatting movement is typically associated with left-wing politics and advocates for corrections or complete changes to the capitalist system, particularly the liberal type. Critics argue that it is based on the exploitation of people and that profit is the primary motive for production, which leads to increased social inequalities and impoverishment. This, in turn, results in a decline in the quality of services across all policy areas. It is argued that the neoliberal housing policy has led to an increase in homelessness and housing difficulties.

The theoretical basis for their attitudes, values, and demands lies in left-wing theorists such as anarchists, social-democratic theorists, and communist thought. For example, we can link them to Proudhon's theory of private property, which arises from illegal appropriation (Proudhon, 1866), or Engels' analysis of the difficult working and housing conditions of the working class (including women and children) in 19th century London (Engels, 1884). Engels suggests that public housing is one effective instrument for improving such a dire situation. During the initial urban movement, Henri Lefebvre's publication *'The Right to the City'* had a significant impact. Lefebvre emphasises the right of every individual to relocate to the city, secure employment, and obtain affordable housing (Lefebvre, 1964).

Socialist countries, as well as social democratic western countries, aim to improve housing policy by making affordable housing a standard public service for all populations. In cases where shortages occur in the housing market, squatting and illegal settlements may be seen as self-help measures for vulnerable populations.

It is important to note that squatters, both in the first and second wave of urban movements, often have no ambition to change the system. Their primary goal is to provide affordable housing without opening up political issues. In the past, it was easier for owners to allow new tenants to stay in the housing, only requiring them to maintain the building and apartment and pay for utilities. However, when the owner demands that the housing be vacated, this often results in a court ruling and the eviction of the squatters. Squatters can only continue their search for an empty space they could occupy.

Finally, the authorities never viewed squatting sympathetically, as it highlighted the government's inability to provide housing for citizens. Only under public pressure did they seek a solution, often focusing on families with children in need. These families were provided with licenses as a recognized right to an apartment, with the promise that they would receive it when the necessary conditions were met. Statistics from all countries show that squatter movements are more effective in providing housing for homeless people.

5. CONCLUSION

European societies, Switzerland and Italy, used to have social democratic system, treasuring values of social support to vulnerable social groups. Switzerland is a rare example of a country with direct democracy and developed citizen participation in decision-making. This environment is excellent for tailoring social services to citizens' needs, particularly in housing policy, which greatly contributes to the quality of life for families and individuals. Italy is a regional state, which means that it is highly decentralized. However, there are significant differences in entrepreneurial and developmental capacities, as well as wealth, between the north and south, which presents a great challenge for society. A social democratic regime promotes empathy and support for vulnerable social groups in all policy areas, including housing. In this country, religion and the traditional importance of family create an atmosphere of solidarity and support for people in need, which contributes to social homogeneity. The United States is traditionally a liberal society. Despite having the most developed economy, it also has significant social inequalities, as indicated by the Gini coefficient. Therefore, even in the era of the welfare state, there is an unacceptable number of poor and homeless people from a social democratic perspective. Our case studies demonstrate that the social democratic concept of housing policy has greatly contributed to good housing availability for the entire society, including those who are economically

disadvantaged. During the first urban movement, weaknesses in all policy fields, including housing policy, were identified. Western countries developed additional instruments to correct these practices, such as developing a greater fund of social housing, defining rent limitations, and legally mandating special quotas for the construction of housing for socially vulnerable groups. After the 1980s, during the period of neoliberal society, all these instruments were rendered useless in both the USA and European countries. As a result, vulnerable social groups were left with only squatting practice, illegal settlements, and nomadism as means of procuring housing. The criminalization of squatting practice and government aggression towards it indicate that capitalist society prioritizes profit, wealth, and capital over the welfare of its citizens. Therefore, this type of society has two options: either to acknowledge these dangerous weaknesses and correct them by implementing good welfare instruments and practices for procuring housing for sensitive social groups, or to stubbornly maintain these conditions, which could result in deeper conflicts and even revolutionary changes. It is important to remember that significant disparities in wealth can undermine democracy. Therefore, the government should strive to promote the well-being of the entire society rather than serving as a tool for enriching an already wealthy ruling class.

THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wished to thank dear colleagues Mina Petrović, Veran Stančetić, and Darko Nadić for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. This article presents the results from research projects, which is financially supported by Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, implemented on Faculty for Political Sciences in Belgrade. Author would also acknowledge to anonymous reviewer for their thoughtful suggestions and comments.

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