



# Struggling within illegality against housing crisis in Paris

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**Struggling within illegality against housing  
crisis in Paris.**  
*Squats and slums as a challenge to urban policies*

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## Résumé :

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### Abstract:

In this paper I propose three hypotheses. First, I assume that the struggle within illegality presents some features that influence the result of the mobilization and the treatment by public actors. Some actors without any legal resources can use "negative resources" by disturbing public order (*mass challenge*) and get some considerations from public actors: welfare and houses. Second, I assume that the level of institutionalization and of social, economic and political capital of the dwellers impacts on the mode of action used. I will show that some squatters have legal resources and use it in order to conserve alternative spaces in the city. But most of slum inhabitants are not able to develop a large network of resources. Third, I assume that the radicalism of such occupations drives decision makers and officials to implement specific urban policies at the local level. In the first part of the paper, I present my methodological approach and the databases. Second, I present a theoretical point of view of what is an illegal occupation. Finally, I address the conditions of mobilization within illegality and the different configurations of squats and slums in the Ile-de-France Region.

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## “Struggling within illegality against housing crisis in Paris. Squats and slums as a challenge to urban policies.”<sup>1</sup>

The European cities experience an important housing shortage and the recent global crisis has reinforced this trend. In France, the last national survey on housing (Annual Report of Fondation Abbé Pierre, 2011) shows that more than 3.6 millions of people live in precarious housing conditions. Among them, more than 600 000 people don't have a roof. Paris is one of the densest European capitals and space is a scarce resource. However, paradoxically, we estimate that 9% of the housing in Paris is vacant<sup>2</sup> (more than 120 000 free housing)<sup>3</sup>. Public actors are not able to provide housing to all citizens because of a lack of funding, of space and sometimes of political decisions. This deficiency and this *governing failure* generate and reinforce the development of *sub-systems* (Mayntz, 1993) of self-organization to get a place to live with the minimal vital services. Legality is too expensive (De Soto, 2000) and actors survive by developing alternative strategies beyond the logic of property ownership and beyond public control of space.

More than one billion people in the world could be considered as “squatters”, living in squats and slums (United Nations, 2003; Neuwirth, 2004; Davis, 2006). Literature usually focuses on unruly places like slums in the suburbs of the global cities in the South (Fernandez and Varley, 1998; Aldrich and Sandhu, 1995; Varley, 1995; Huchzermeyer, 2008; Tayyab, 2010) or illegal settlements in exponential and uncontrolled growing metropolitan areas in emerging countries (Smart, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2006; Chui et Smart, 2006; Berner, 2000, 2002; Mangin, 1967). Western societies however also know these types of urban poverty and informality. The settlements and the squats are considered as targets of public policies and particularly of large scale regularization programs. These studies are absent in Europe. Sociologists interested in “marginality” address the problems of *ghettos* or “*quartiers sensibles*” (Wacquant, 2006; Avenel, 2007; Lapeyronnie, 2008; Kokoreff, 2009), but the question of illegality is often put aside. Slums are approached by sociologists and geographers who analyze the Roma and Sinti situation at the margin of European metropolises (Legros, 2010; Vitale, 2010). Finally, some French scholars try to understand the logics of “refugees’ camps” (Agier, 2002, 2008; Bernardot, 2008).

Yet, there are many illegal settlements persisting at the doors of big cities in different forms: squats in buildings or illegal occupations of land. I propose here to address these two kinds of occupations. The

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> CEU Conference in Social Sciences: “What Follows after the Crisis? Approaches to global Transformations”, Central European University, Budapest, May 27-29, 2011. Panel Title: “Crisis and emergence: radicalization, institutionalization, and generation of social movements”. I thank Albin Lazare and Julie Seghers for their input on the first draft of the paper and the editors of the Working paper series for their valuable help.

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, these vacant housings are not only vacant during long period but are mainly the results of “turn over”, relocations or renovation programs. Thus, we cannot estimate precisely how many houses are vacant for a long period (Driant, 2009).

<sup>3</sup>Insee-Local Datas, Paris, datas from *Insee, RP1968 à 1990 dénombremments – RP 1999 and RP 2006 exploitations principales*: [http://www.statistiqueslocales.insee.fr/FICHES/DL/DEP/75/COM/DL\\_COM75056.pdf](http://www.statistiqueslocales.insee.fr/FICHES/DL/DEP/75/COM/DL_COM75056.pdf)

example of Paris at the metropolitan scale is quite relevant to underline the persistence of spaces of illegality and extreme precariousness in European countries. Squats and slums could appear as two different practices but they are both illegal occupations of space in view to get a house and a place to live or survive. Many differences can be underlined: forms of mobilizations, locations, populations living in, temporalities and spaces (the squat is the occupation of buildings, the slums is an occupation of land). However, here, I wish to integrate these two kinds of occupations in the same analysis in order to understand the features of an illegal occupation of space as well as the underlying logic.

The European literature on squats is very significant. Squats are usually studied from a sociological and anthropological point of view. Squatting is seen as a deviant occupation of the urban space and a reaction to the housing shortage. Many scholars study squatters and the strategies used to build an alternative place and way of life, at the margin of norms and legality. The squat is considered as a shelter which permits homeless people to find a house and, above all, as a community that builds a new social link (Bouillon, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2009 and Coutant, 2000). This work, based on qualitative interviews and participative observations, usually needs a monographic approach and the studies are often limited to case studies (Bailey, 1973; Berthaut, 2008). Besides, a wide literature is dedicated to describing squatting as a collective action. These scholars are more interested in studying “political” squats: alter-globalization and counter-culture dynamics (Martinez, 2007; Adell and Martinez, 2004; Vivant, 2008) or housing right protestations (Péchu, 2001, 2006, 2009, 2010). The main issue of all these studies is to analyze the organization of squatting, their stories and the discourses of squatters in order to understand this urban practice. The squatters have many resources to mobilize and occupy new spaces. Some authors consider the squat as an element of “urban fragmentation” (Pattaroni, 2007). A series of works focus on the processes of *institutionalization* and *cooptation* - asking if these processes are inevitable for the movement to survive and to preserve its identity - in order to understand the impact of the different squatting strategies on their political treatment (Pruijt, 2003; Uitermark, 2004; Martinez and Lorenzi, 2010).

In fact, illegal settlements like squats and slums host precarious inhabitants who try to organize themselves to face housing shortages, discrimination in the access to social housing and housing policies unable to give a roof to all citizens. Squats and slums are both problems and solutions (Aguilera, 2010; Bouillon, 2011): a solution to get a house, a problem for public actors and in terms of security, public health and poverty. Sometimes, these occupations are accompanied by movements of collective action (cases of squatters who claims or develop alternative ways of life and political actions) but not necessarily. For instance, many inhabitants in slums don't have the resources to mobilize themselves. Nevertheless, I am precisely interested in understanding the different forms of struggles to get the *right to the city* (Lefebvre, 1968) or sometimes the absence of active struggle and rather “passive occupations” subject to public policies.

In this paper I propose three hypotheses. First, I assume that the struggle within illegality presents some features that influence the result of the mobilization and the treatment by public actors. Some actors without any legal resources can use “negative resources” (Wilson, 1961; Fillieule, 1993) by disturbing public order (*mass challenge*) and get some considerations from public actors: welfare and houses. Second, I assume that the level of institutionalization and of social, economic and political capital of the dwellers impacts on the mode of action used. I will show that some squatters have legal resources and use it in

order to conserve alternative spaces in the city. But most of slum inhabitants are not able to develop a large network of resources. Third, I assume that the radicalism of such occupations drives decision makers and officials to implement specific urban policies at the local level. In the first part of the paper, I present my methodological approach and the databases. Second, I present a theoretical point of view of what is an illegal occupation. Finally, I address the conditions of mobilization within illegality and the different configurations of squats and slums in the Ile-de-France Region.

## **1. Methodology and data: an attempt to approach shadow occupations**

By definition, we are interested in invisible occupations. Illegal occupations are transitional, sometimes unknown by public actors and urban planners and we don't have any available data base dispositive to list all the squats and slums in France while for example Alan Smart uses the data base from the "Squatter Control and Clearance Division of the Hong Kong Department" (Smart, 2003) or Ann Varley from the "Dirección General de Regularización Territorial" in Mexico (Varley, 1998). The first step of my work is precisely to collect data in order to give an exhaustive landscape at the metropolitan scale in Paris.

### **1.1. Qualitative, quantitative and geographical analysis**

As I said, I try to present an exhaustive view of squats and slums in the Ile de France Region. Nevertheless, these occupations are too temporary and sometimes unknown by the actors and the investigators. Thus, we cannot reach this goal. Three points must be underlined here. The first remark concerns the basis itself. What are the means to list all squats and slums? Nobody is able to give a complete and updated data base on squat neither on slums in Paris. Each actor has his own view of the situation, which is very limited at the metropolitan scale. In order to build my own database, I had to lead qualitative interviews to get information on the past and present time<sup>4</sup>. The local officials know some cases on their territory. The police can give some data depending on the cases in which policemen had to intervene for eviction or incidents. The NGOs represent a considerable resource since the volunteers know very well the fieldwork and let me enter in some places where I couldn't go alone. The owners (private, social housing developers, private investors) have data when they are squatted in their own buildings. What's more I carried out many interviews with the inhabitants themselves. The goal is to gather all the data and consolidate it to build one unique, complete and updated data base. The second point is the question of temporality. Squats and slums open and close and it is impossible to have a clear view in real time of what is actually happening. Thus, I chose to present in this paper the situation at the end of 2010. However, a look at the recent past allows us to understand some logics and systematize hypothesis, particularly in terms of mediatization and agenda building. The third point is the scale of analysis. In this paper, I generally

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<sup>4</sup> At that time of my investigation I made 59 interviews in the Ile-de-France Region with squatters, activists, members of associations and NGOs, officials from the municipalities and the State, policemen, lawyers, housing developers.

speak of the metropolitan scale of Paris, however I will focus on Paris and the department of Seine Saint-Denis (93) while analyzing slums. Thus, my approach is qualitative (interviews and ethnographic observation) and quantitative. Moreover, I assume that some geographical logics are at work and I try to describe them with maps.

## 1.2. Squats in Paris and IDF: the poorest parts of the territory?

At this moment, my data base is still fragmented between squats and slums, and between the territories. I present in this paper the cases of squats in Paris City only. Most of the squats are in the north and east of Paris on the right side of the Seine: a clear geographical correlation appears between location of squats and local income levels. The 18<sup>th</sup> district is the poorest of Paris. A process of pauperization left vacant shelters and squatters (precarious families, drug addicts, immigrants but also artists) found these spaces to live in. This district is the drug market of Paris and attracts many drug addicts. The renovation program implemented by social developers generated the eviction of squatters and their transfer in the north of Paris (Porte de la Chapelle). We find also many squats in the 19<sup>th</sup> district. There are many vacant spaces and Brownfield sites. Squatters can easily settle there. Many artists live in this district and there is a vibrant and active cultural life (the local city council sometimes support them). The 13<sup>th</sup> district hosted many squats during the 2000's (les Frigos, l'Atoll 13, la Glacière, le Barbizon) but the renovation program and the intense surveillance device built around the social housings prevent squats nowadays.

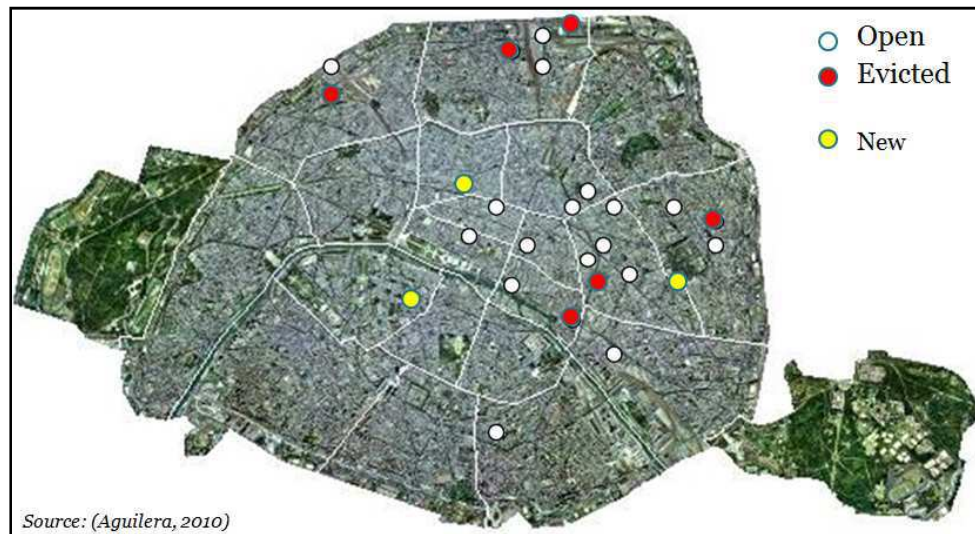
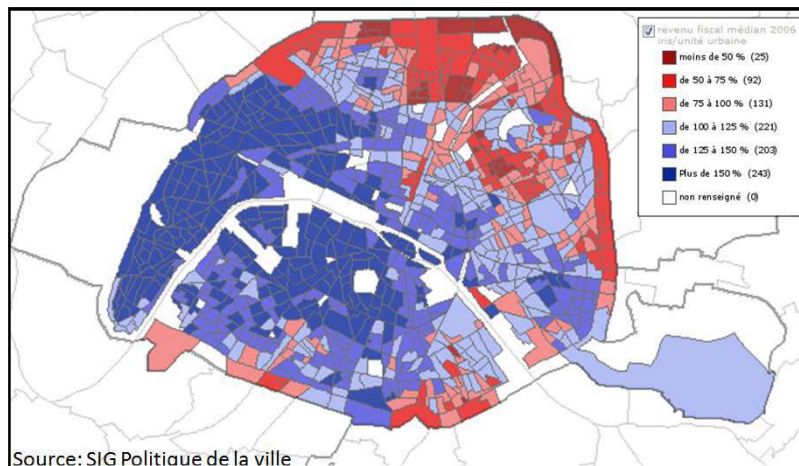


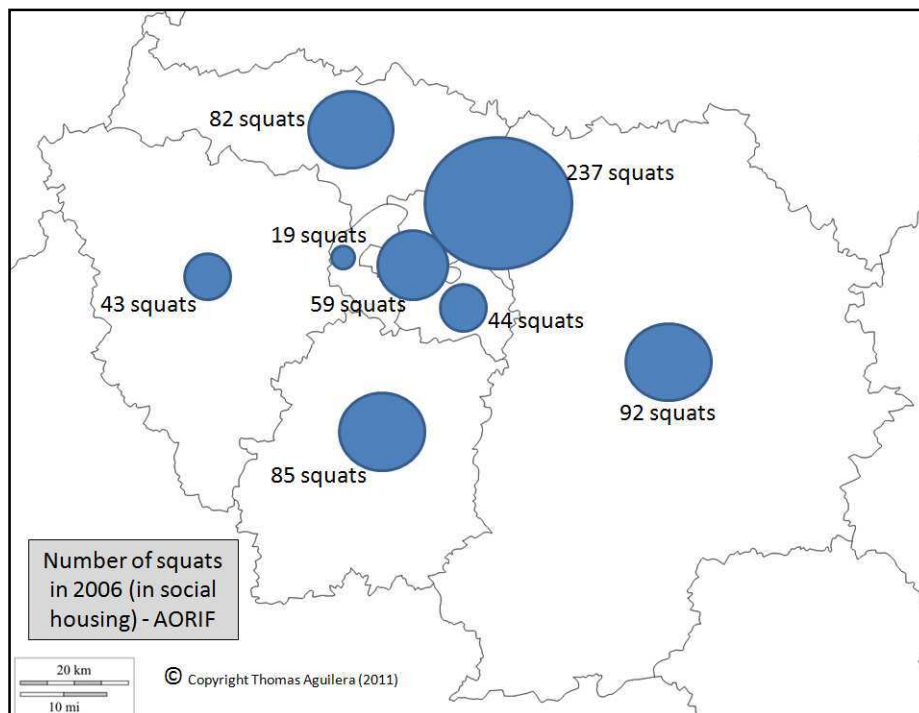
Figure 1 - Geography of squats in Paris (January 2010-December 2010)



Source: SIG Politique de la ville

**Figure 2 - Incomes (median) in Paris / INSEE, 2008**

However, the squats in Paris are more what I call squats of “activity” which mainly shelter social centers and artists. They represent up to 80% of the squats in Paris City. The rest of the occupations are composed of “emergency and precarious” (10%) and of “political squats” (10%). In order to broaden the perspective, I found an official database at the regional scale from the association in charge of coordinating all the social housing developers (AORIF, 2006). This database only concerns the squats of social housings (owners are social housing developers) (N=661) and we estimate that there are 1800 squats in the whole region (1 200 squats are in private buildings) if we follow the unique survey on squats in Ile-de-France (Quercy, 2002).



**Figure 3 - Squats in social housing Ile de France Region / Data from AORIF, march 2006**



At the regional scale, the squats are spread according to the income distribution and the quality of the buildings. Some observations and interviews with housing developers allows me to assume that they a stronger capacity to protect themselves in the richer departments (south and west). The department of Seine-Saint-Denis is deeply impacted because of the co-presence of a precarious population, illegal immigrants who cannot legally afford a house and a very vulnerable precarious housing stock. The general geography seems to be almost the same concerning the illegal occupation of land.

### 1.3. Slums in Seine-Saint-Denis (93): from the Roma question to shantytowns

In France, the issue of slums is deeply linked to the Roma question even if all the slum dwellers are not Roma. Indeed, we estimate the Roma population to 15 000 people living in France (legally or illegally) and 3 000 among them living in the Ile-de-France Region. Most of them live in precarious situations and particularly in slums and shantytowns. Paradoxically, the data is more easily available on slums that on squats because many NGOs and associations are involved in social programs towards Roma people. The databases are still fragmented because each actor acts at a small scale. Again, it is very difficult to update the database because of the frequent evictions but the local associations can help us to follow the slum dwellers on the territory. Again, the department of Seine-Saint-Denis hosts most of the slums in Ile-de-France. In this paper, I focus on this part of the regional territory. We estimate the slum dwellers to be 1790 in December 2010 in Seine-Saint-Denis (more than the half in IDF). Again, we observe a link between local income levels and location of slums.

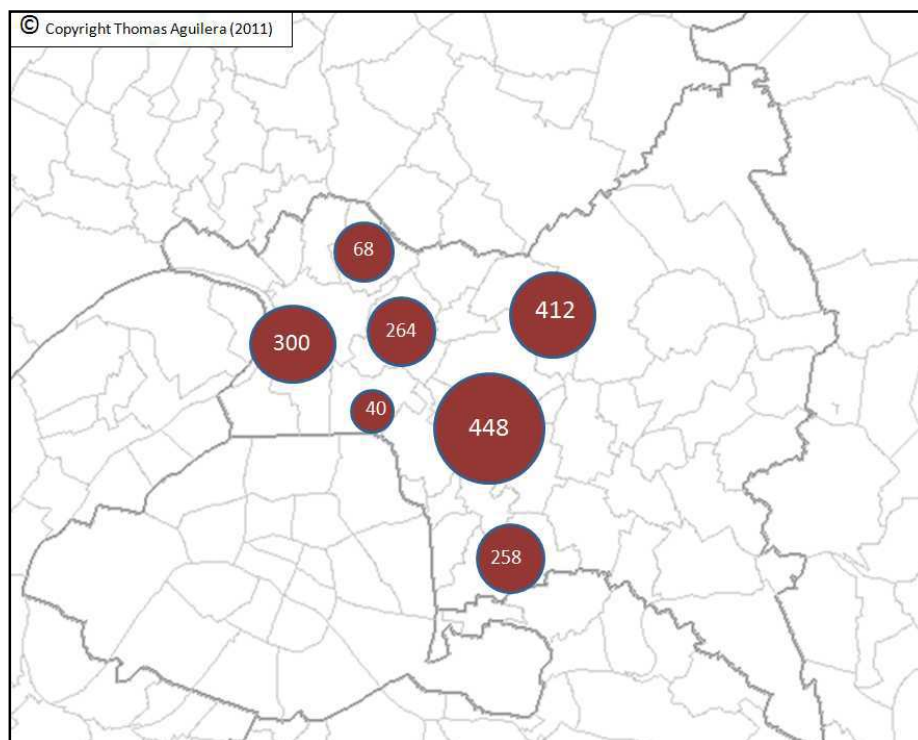


Figure 4 - Slums and slum dwellers in Seine-Saint-Denis (per city) in December 2010/ Data from CAM (Health Assistance Committee)

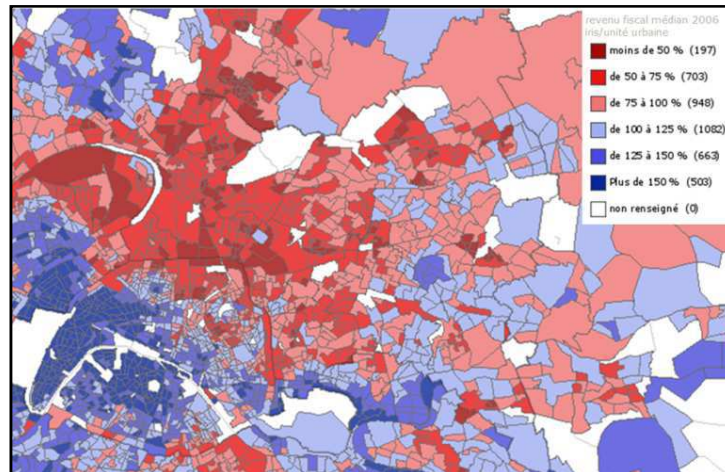


Figure 5 - Incomes (median) in Seine-Saint-Denis (INSEE, 2006)

This brief presentation of the illegal places in the Parisian metropolis allows us to know what we are talking about. I insist on the importance of carrying out this quantitative and geographical work prior to the analysis in order to avoid being limited to case studies or to the micro analysis which prevents us to draw general and macro conclusions. After this empirical presentation, I present the need to gather the analysis of squats and slums and then, I address the different configurations of illegally occupying urban space to live, survive, and/or develop activities.

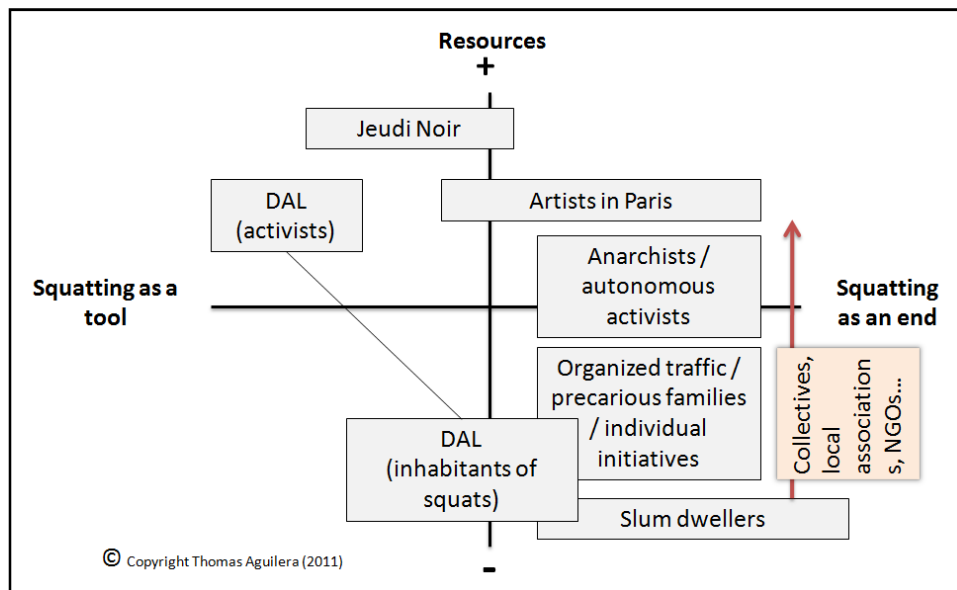
## 2. Illegal occupations as a challenge to urban policies

Squats and slums could appear as two different modes of occupying space. Nevertheless, as I suggested in the introduction, I think it is relevant to analyze them in parallel for three main reasons. First, from a juridical point of view, squats and slums both correspond to illegal occupations of the urban space (buildings or land). Furthermore, more than simple occupations, the illegal occupation is a mode of action to resist, contest and claim while being a first response to this claim and a survival strategy. If we follow Cécile Péchu, we are dealing with “sectorial illegalisms” (Péchu, 2010: 10): “an illegal spot for the immediate realization of the claim. The squat is at the same time a negotiation tool and a response to the request that it supports”. This definition enables us to understand that the squatters and slum dwellers build their own place while claiming (more) spaces to live or survive. Three main features appear here. The first is that squatters *short-circuit* and *hack* the urban housing and cultural policies (Aguilera, 2010). Indeed, they are *out of* the legal and traditional frame for resource allocation of spaces provided by the city council and public and private developers. For example, they usually don’t subscribe for a social housing or a workshop, and this for many reasons: sometimes by choice because they refuse to wait for institutional allocations but more usually because they don’t have access to the “official channels”. They are in a situation of “*non recours*” (Warin, 2008, 2009, and 2010). They don’t have the social resources, nor the “administrative and legal knowledge”. This can be because they live in an illegal situation or, concerning Roma people, because

of transitional status imposed by the law, and of course because they cannot pay a rent and legally afford housing. Thus, they find the ways to obtain these resources: « the urban poor often have to step outside the law in order to gain access to housing » (Azuela et Duhau, 1998:157). Legality is too expensive so people self-organize in order to find the means to survive.

The second remark is that these spaces of illegality are, in general spaces of *precariousness*. Some squats in the core center of Paris have nothing to do with slums in Seine-Saint-Denis, but the general trend is that people occupy places because they cannot afford houses. Moreover, this financial fragility assures the transition to a legal fragility: “The very fact that a city is divided into « legal » and « illegal » areas has profound implications for society as a whole, since a truly public order, in the sense of social norms to which all members of society must adhere, does not exist. As long as a substantial part of the population gains access to land by a different set of process from the rest of society, it is clear that not all individuals are subject to the same rules, regardless of whether or not those rules can be formally classified as “law” ”(Azuela et Dubau, 1998:157). Squats and slums constitute the dark side of metropolization: a parallel building of the city.

The third feature is that squats and slums appear at the same time as a *critique* of the urban policies, a *tool* to ask for a roof and a *strategy* to survive without public support. The squat as a mode of action (Péchu, 2010) combines a radical political discourse against housing policies (DAL, Jeudi Noir) or the political order in general (for example for the anarchists’ squats of Montreuil, East-Paris), with claims for welfare, housings (from the State or the municipalities) and shelter for homeless people. The most striking example seems to be in 2009 in the Parisian squat of “Rue Baudelique” (18<sup>th</sup> district of Paris) which hosted during one year more than 2000 undocumented immigrants coming from 25 different nationalities and claiming for regularization. They inhabited illegally a place to get into the legality. Furthermore, we can interpret this mode of action as *anti-free rider* (Olson, 1987), in the sense that to get benefice from the squat (a roof and the relocation) people have to be squatters (Péchu, 2010). Concerning slums, we observe the same logic. Occupying a land is the only way to get a place to live, to be visible and request houses from the local authorities. Thus, we understand that we come back to an old debate concerning squats. Is it used as a tool or as an end? Even if we can show that illegal occupations combine both dimensions (Merklen, 2009), I try here to distinguish them in order to understand the differences between various configurations and, especially between squats and slums. I propose a factorial analysis with two axes: one concerning the tool/end cleavage, the other one representing the level of resources of the dwellers. I call “resources” the social (networks), economic (financial resources) and political (links with officials, representatives, lawyers and police) capitals held by the squatters and slum dwellers. In the two next sections I will present each configuration. I will distinguish squats and slums and try to expose in the conclusion the minimum basic common points.



**Figure 6 - Configurations of illegal occupations**

Hans Puijt exposes the phenomena of institutionalization of squats wondering if “institutionalization of urban movement is inevitable”? (Pruijt, 2003). He defines three configurations. The first one is the *terminal* institutionalization. It “implies that, in the repertoire of action, convention replaces disruption. The second is *flexible* institutionalization, when conventional tactics complement disruptive ones” (Pruijt, 2003:136). The third is the *cooptation* whereby one part of the squatters, usually the less radical or the leaders, is absorbed into leadership. This analysis is linked to the resources/goals question as according to the logic of occupying the process of institutionalization would be very different. For Hans Pruijt, the squat as an aim is more vulnerable to repression from public actors and is less likely to persist while the squat as a mean, as a tactic to get other resources (mainly a house) allows some positive results. Thus, he distinguishes the squatting movement and the housing movement. In Paris we have both kinds.

### **3. The configurations of illegal occupations and the conditions of mobilization**

The features of illegal occupations vary depending on each kind of occupation. I present here the different configurations and the conditions in which the mobilization is possible. Squatters have more resources and knowledge than slum dwellers for whom resources come “from the outside”. The squat is both an end and a mean whereas the slum is a place of survival strategies.

#### **3.1. Squatting with internal resources?**

In this section, I am only interested in the squat: an illegal, collective or individual, occupation of a building in order to live or develop activities in it without the consent of the owner. Different types of squats

exist and each scholar working on squats gives his own typology: Cécile Péchu (Péchu, 2010)<sup>5</sup>, Florence Bouillon (Bouillon, 2009)<sup>6</sup> and Hans Pruijt (Pruijt, 2004)<sup>7</sup> all have one. In my research, I address all kind of squats precisely in order to understand the different configurations of illegal settlements. Thus, on the top of the resources axis, we observe one kind of squat particularly used by the Jeudi Noir collective, who is dedicated to the media logic, and the association DAL (Droit Au Logement – *Housing Right*). These two collectives use the squat as a tool and a mode of action. But the squat is also an end itself for artists, anarchist activists and precarious families who are looking for a roof to survive.

### 3.1.1. Jeudi Noir: the media logic, building agendas and cooptation

This collective was founded in 2006 to denounce the high prices of housing in France. Its first action was to invite journalists in flat visits to show the extremely high prices of housing for students and precarious families. Then, it entered into another repertoire of collective action with squatting in 2007. The activists have since opened 13 squats. They seek and find vacant buildings to squat and draw the attention on the inefficient housing policy of the municipality and of the State. Two main claims are highlighted by the collective: the application of the DALO<sup>8</sup> and of the requisition law of 1945<sup>9</sup>. One of the specificities of the action group compared to the other Parisian squatters is the massive use of Media: “we don’t want more activists but more Media” (Collectif Jeudi Noir, 2009). The media logic is the central dimension of their action. The squat is only a tool to draw the attention of the media and thus of national and local representatives. I call them “agenda builders” because they are able to create two kinds of “cycles of attention” (Baumgartner and Jones, 2005). The first agenda concerns squats. Each occupation of Jeudi Noir increases the number of articles about squats in newspapers and television. The second agenda is Housing policies. Each occupation represents the opportunity to challenge politics. I represent below the change in the number of newspaper articles (from the local newspaper *Le ParisienAujourd’hui en France*) depending on the opening of squats by Jeudi Noir. I mention also the period when evictions are prohibited (“winter truce”). This law only concerns legal renters and not squatters but the squatters and lawyers use it to defend themselves because the State often avoids evicting during this period to prevent a delegitimization its action.

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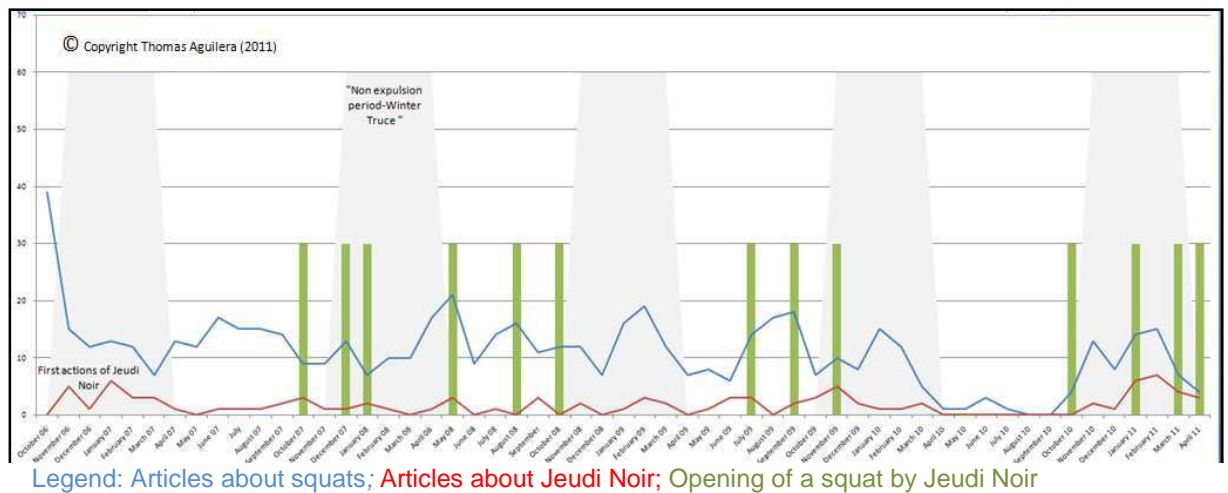
<sup>5</sup> Cécile Péchu defines two types of squats. The first type of squats is the “classist squats”: squats to obtain housing rights structured by speeches centered on the right of workers and poor, especially in the post-war and during the 1970’s. The squat is a tool amongst many others. The second type is “the counter-culture” squat: they aim at changing people’s life and occupying vacant places. The squat is an end itself and not only a means to get something.

<sup>6</sup> Florence Bouillon defines two types of squats. The first type is the squat of “activities” where artists, activists live. Sometimes, they provide social assistance. The second type is the squat of “poverty” where clandestine immigrants, poor people or drug addicts live.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Pruijt prefers to give different “configurations” of squats and not a static typology. The first configuration is the occupation due to poverty, “deprivation based squatting”. Then, he defines the occupation as an “alternative housing strategy”. The third configuration is the “entrepreneurial” squat which hosts social centers or bars. The fourth is the “conservationist” squat, which aims at preserving the living framework in the city. Finally, the “political” squat.

<sup>8</sup> The DALO (Droit Au Logement Opposable- Rights to Housing Law) was voted in 2007. The aim is to increase the right of people waiting for a social housing to attack the State during a juridical procedure. This law has been inefficient because the queue to get a house in Paris is too large.

<sup>9</sup> The Law of Requisition was voted in 1945. It allows the State to requisition housings in shortage period to rent social housings. It was used during the 1950s during the reconstruction post-war period, during the 1990 and the 2000 but it seems that it was not very efficient because the owners succeeded in finding alternatives.



**Figure 7 - Evolution (per month) of newspaper articles on squats and Jeudi Noir squats (2006-2011)/ Press review of *Le Parisien***

A brief sociology of the members of the group shows that they are students, artists but also activists (ecologists, socialists, and extreme-left activists) who don't necessarily need to squat. During the juridical procedure one of the leaders *selected* the more precarious people to the official list of squatters in order to prevent the risk of a bigger fine because of the solvency of some of them. I analyze here a "professionalization of the precariousness": the aim is to build a precarious movement with no precarious people. As I will expose it in conclusion, precariousness becomes a resource to legitimacy in a social conflict.

What is very interesting in this squatting movement is the relationship between the leaders, who don't live in the squat, and the local officials. Indeed, the leaders are often officials themselves (one is a representative in the regional assembly, another is a member of the Socialist Party, and another is a representative in a local municipality of Paris...). They have a strong political capital and thus, strong social resources. They build quasi-friendly relationships with the representatives of the municipality of Paris, with the head of the housing department and with the policemen in charge of controlling them. Thus, they accept the rules of the political game, of the representative democracy, while some of the squatters denounce it. Moreover, although they squat, they respect the rules of the public order. They don't really want to disturb the neighborhood and their presence is not disruptive. Usually, city officials come to support them in their action, and take advantage of this public tribune to criticize the national government. For example, the mayor Bertrand Delanoë came to the squat "The Marquise" at Place des Vosges. The President of the Region, Jean-Paul Huchon always assists them during juridical procedures. Just before the night of the eviction of the last squat "avenue de Matignon", a communist member of the National Assembly slept in the street in front of the squat to block policemen. Jeudi Noir is partly radicalized in its claims and partly co-opted by the officials who are the targets of their claims.

### **3.1.2. Droit Au Logement (DAL)<sup>10</sup>: a housing movement using squat as a means**

The DAL movement was born in 1990 from a division with the CML (Comité des Mal-Logés). The CML used the squat in a “classist” way if we follow the typology of Cécile Péchu (Péchu, 2006, 2010). They squatted social housings to denounce the logic of their affectation by the State. The occupations were carried out during the electoral campaigns to draw the attention of the candidates and of the media. However, the creation of the DAL represents a change in the repertoire of action. At the very beginning the DAL refused to use squatting as a mode of action to avoid too disruptive and illegal action. But in 1993, they squatted again in Avenue René Coty and in the “rue du Dragon” in 1994. This last occupation made the DAL enter into the public sphere thanks to a massive use of the media and had three main results. First, each squatter was relocated by the State and the squat was evicted. Second, the State accepted to use the Requisition Law of 1945. Third, the Housing Right was declared “constitutional”. By radically disturbing public order DAL achieved positive results. For Cécile Péchu “this is a cover of the squat that lies between the spectacular action intended to put pressure on authorities and real action to resolve the housing problem of squatters” (Péchu, 2006). The squat of DAL is “efficient”: each occupation is followed by the relocation of 90% of the squatting families (mainly African precarious families). In the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> districts of Paris (the most squatted districts), they rehoused almost 700 families with 15 squats. In the Seine-Saint-Denis department, almost 100 squats have accommodated 1000 families. In the 19<sup>th</sup> district of Paris, 6 squats organized by the DAL were evicted since June 2002. After each eviction, the activists succeeded in getting relocation of all the families from the State, the City Council or the SIEMP (Société Immobilière d'économie Mixte de Paris)<sup>11</sup>. This is the result of many negotiations between leaders, officials and families. It shows us that the DAL has a considerable political and social capital, which is used by the activists during these conflictual bargains.

Nevertheless, the squat is only one mode of action among others for this housing movement. The DAL combines different kinds of action which are, sometimes led in the same place: demonstrations, sit-ins, real squats, symbolic squats, hunger strike, camps, office occupation, illegal accommodation, and concerts. This combination enables the activists to target different actors and not only public and national actors: the State, municipalities, private owners, housing developers. The “efficiency” of the movement is partly due to this strategy. Cécile Péchu presents the evolution of the modes of action:

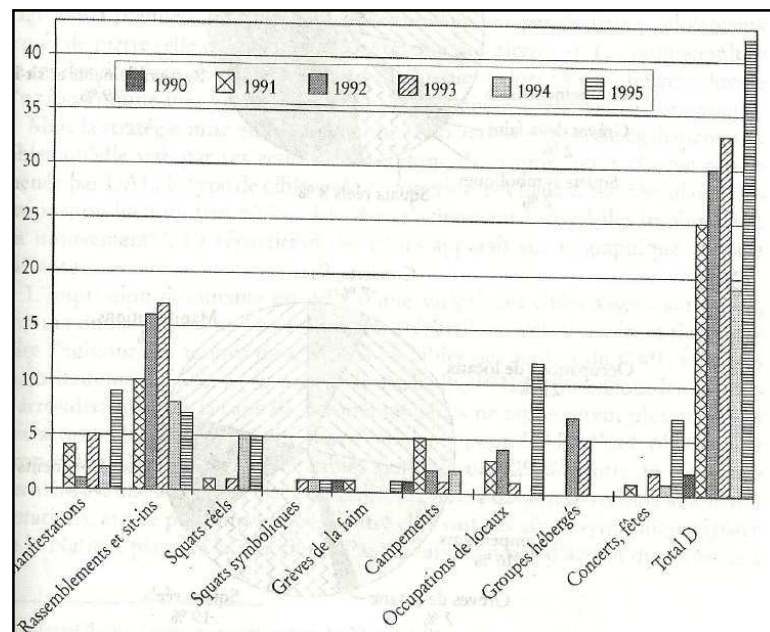
#### **Figure 8: The Modes of action of the DAL between 1990 and 1995**

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<sup>10</sup> To get more information about the DAL we recommend reading Cécile Péchu (2006). She conducted an important work over 10 years and this book is excerpted from her PhD dissertation. She mainly works on the period going from 1990 to 2002.

<sup>11</sup> The SIEMP is a public-private company directed by the Housing Deputy Mayor of Paris. It is the most important public real estate developer in Paris (mainly responsible for social housing).





Source :Péchu, 2006:461

The total of actions and the proportion of squats increased even if the squat only represents 8% of the action while it represented 20% of the action of the CML (Péchu, 2006:462). The DAL is less radical in that sense but has a stronger use of the media to bring the housing problem into the public sphere. Cécile Péchu distinguishes two types of squats: the “real” squat and the “symbolic” one. The real one is used both as a house and as a mode of claiming. The symbolic one is only used to publicize a message. The temporality is the similar to the one of the Jeudi Noir: the squats emerge during electoral campaigns and “non-expulsion periods”. However, nowadays, since the creation of Jeudi Noir, the DAL has received less attention in the media than the former. This is due to the fact that the DAL has less social and political networks than Jeudi Noir and is therefore a less institutionalized movement. Indeed, as I showed the activists of Jeudi Noir are closed to the political sphere while those from DAL prefer to build a “rapport de force”, an open conflict with officials and representative in order to put them under pressure to obtain the relocation of the families. DAL is closer to the “squat of deprivation” of Hans Pruijt and the “classist” type of Cécile Péchu. The leaders nevertheless maintain relations with officials but they use them in a very different way. They call them to request more houses rather than to require help against eviction. The permanent activists of the association are no more than 20. The decisions are very centralized. The DAL movement corresponds to a *flexible* institutionalization.

### 3.1.3. Artists and social centers

The squat appears as a mode of action. The two cases above show that it can be used as a means to obtain more than the simple fact to live illegally in a building. It is the “housing side” of the issue squats. Nevertheless, the squat can also be an individual and collective occupation aiming at living alternatively in the city. People can chose to organize themselves to follow a different lifestyle and to struggle against an individualist society based on the private property rights. In France, the word “squat” includes all the meanings we present in this paper, but in other countries the specific configuration I am evoking in this



section is the “social center”. People wishing to create new human relations as well as social and cultural activities, enter illegally in a building and appropriate the place. Of course the squatters also use the building as a house but the main goal is to turn into a place of meetings, festivals, concerts, theater plays, art classes, kinder-garden, or bicycle workshops. All these activities are linked to the daily life of the neighborhood which usually accepts the presence of the squatters and defend them (Aguilera, 2010). Most of the Parisian social centers are animated by artists. I classified squats in Paris in three categories: 18 social centers/artistic squats, 3 *political* squats, 3 *emergency and precariousness* squats in 2010. I observed that all these social centers and artistic squats are more or less tolerated by the City Council.

#### *Artists in Paris: squatting under agreement*

There is a deep problem concerning cultural spaces in Paris. Some surveys show that an artist has to wait more than 30 years to get a workshop and that the city council only attributes 6 workshops per year (Langlois-Mallet, 2008; Lextrait, 2001). As I presented before the squat can be both a problem and a solution. For artists it is a solution in the sense that illegally occupying a building has enabled them to create and exhibit alternative art inside Paris: “*we need more space to live and create. In Paris, some spaces are unoccupied so we enter and use the place*” (Mathilde, squatter). Since the election of the socialist mayor in 2001, Bertrand Delanoë, local public actors are rather tolerant towards these kinds of squats because the officials became aware that Parisian voters like these cultural places and that they develop interesting projects.

Indeed, sometimes squatters provide local and social services to face the inefficiencies of the public and legal system. Squats reveal problems in the city, compensate for a lack of local activities and inspire the city council. Many squats in Paris (the “Jardind’Alice”, the “59 Rivoli”, “La Générale”, “TDV”, the “Petite Rockette”...) provide art classes and exhibitions in places where the municipality is not able to. Sometimes, officials prefer to build strong relationships of confidence with the squatters rather than to repress them. I would like to present the case of a specific association: MACAQ (Mouvement d’Animation Culturelle et Artistique de Quartier). This association, which was born in the 17<sup>th</sup> district of Paris, has a very special relation with the left wing of the city council. MACAQ organizes the carnival of Paris, many cultural events, bric-a-brac sales. The municipality externalizes the management of these social and cultural activities. The logic is the same concerning vacant housing. The housing department director told me that he gives “concessions”<sup>12</sup> to MACAQ to squat building if they are empty and too expensive to renovate. He calls them “professional squatters”. Thus, nowadays they squat the 123 rue Tocqueville in the 17<sup>th</sup> district, where they host many associations:

*“It’s a good deal for all of us. The municipality doesn’t have to pay repairs and surveillance. For the squatters, it is an opportunity to get a building legally for some time. When we have a building where we don’t have any project we call them and they squat”* (Housing Department director of the Municipality of Paris).

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<sup>12</sup> I refer to a “precarious lease” I describe after in the paper as a policy instrument.

Furthermore, some squats provide social services. Since 2005, the artists who squat in the “Petite Rockette” host 14 homeless people with the help of the NGO “Médecins du Monde”. Thus, social centers challenge and “serve” the municipality at the same time.

Thus, the City Council adopted two political instruments,<sup>13</sup> which allow it to control and govern the squats in Paris (Aguilera, 2010, 2011). The first is the project and the call for project. When the City Council wants to retrieve the management of a building for a specific project, the Housing or the Cultural department launches a call for project and sometimes squatters are welcomed to participate in imagining the future of this building. Squatters have to enter the legal sphere and accept the status of urban planners or experts. They have to present a file to apply like the squatters of the “Petite Rockette” did with the help of the NGO “Médecins du Monde”, or the artists of the “Forge de Belleville” in 2009. This process forces squatters to respect administrative norms: budgets, security norms, public order. They have to determine the allocation of the place (artistic place with workshops, living place with bed rooms...). They have to accept the ground rules of the urban planning.

The second instrument is a juridical contract between squatters and the owner, the precarious lease, which allows the squatters to stay in the building for a determined and limited period (3 years generally) and for a small rent (between 200 and 300 Euros per month). It is an instrument of normalization of the relationship between squatters and owners. Thus, it is a first step to reduce the tension between property right and housing right. Moreover, it is a mean for the municipality to legally control illegal spaces. The squatters and the owners are both winners in this process and they usually accept it<sup>14</sup>. The squatters can stay and the owner avoids a juridical procedure of eviction, which is quite a burden. From illegal to contractual, squatters change their status but they stay in the same location and keep, more or less, the same activities. On the one hand, squatters have to accept some ground rules to stay. We can conclude to a *flexible institutionalization* for these kinds of squats. On the other hand, as squatters are innovators in terms of social and cultural practices, they urge public actors to innovate. Parisian representatives, who have adopted these two instruments as vectors of public policy innovation, were inspired by squatters for the last two years: they created new festive and cultural places: the 104, the “100 rue de Charenton”, the new project “Alexander III”...

However, although this is not the mainstream opinion, some squatters (mainly anarchists one) refuse to deal with the municipality and criticize squatters who accept it denouncing an “institutionalization”. Some of them told me that the squat loses its identity and its own value if it is legalized:

*“We are legal now. We lost the freedom of illegality...When we were illegal we were not allowed to do anything so we were able to do everything! Nowadays we cannot do anything with the law”* (Pablo, squatter).

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<sup>13</sup> Political instruments are dispositive device of government: “both technical and social systems which organize particular social relationships between political power and people governed, functions of the representations and the meanings it supports” (Lascombes and Le Galès, 2004:13).

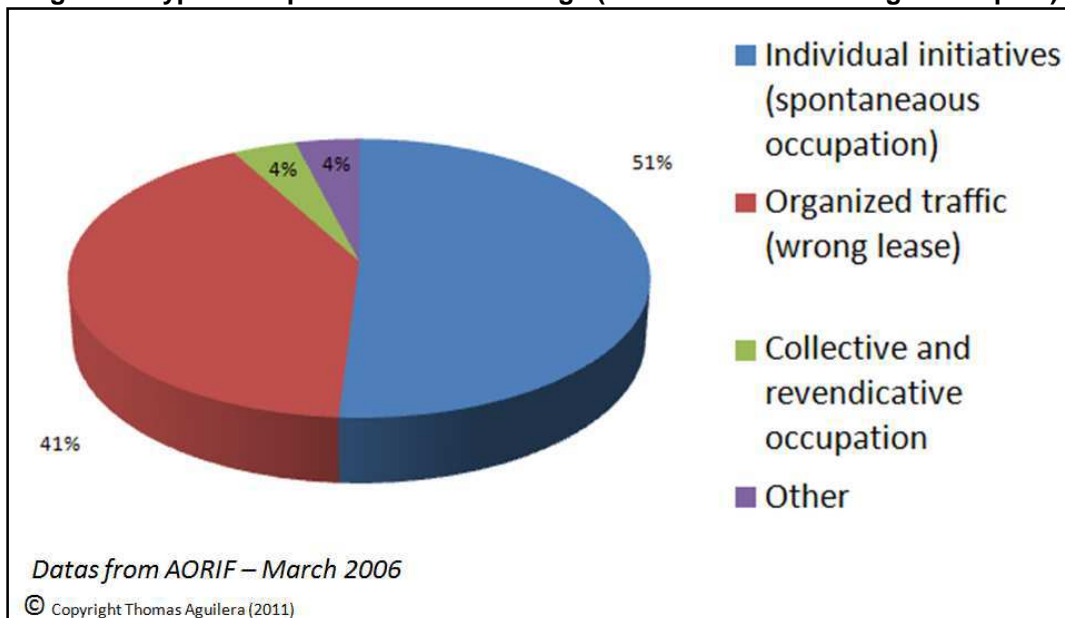
<sup>14</sup> In March 2010, 18 squats were under this kind of agreement with the City Council.

In Paris, the radical and non-institutionalized squats are absent. We can find some in the periphery like in Montreuil with some anarchist groups who refuse to deal with public actors. The consequence is that the squats are more ephemeral. A larger European comparative work should show that Parisian squats are less radicalized and less politicized than in Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, Geneva, and Amsterdam. A last group of squats are the *invisible* squats.

### 3.1.4 “Invisible squats”

As I have already mentioned it, we estimate that there are 2000 squats in the Ile-de-France Region. The problem is that most of them are invisible: we can observe them when the owner becomes aware of the situation and wants to evict the squatter. Some interviews let me think that the Prefecture (decentralized local State) would have built up a database but at the moment I am not able to have access to the files. The only exhaustive database I can use is the one presented in the first section of this paper. It only concerns squats in buildings owned by social housing developers. We observed 661 squats at the regional scale in 2006.

**Figure 9: Types of squats in social housings (owners: social housing developers)**



The Housing Developers are frequently victims of squat for three reasons and during three particular moments. First, when developers renovate buildings the flats are empty and vulnerable; second, during relocation of renters and “turn over”; third, during the construction. 51% of the squats presented here are small squats of flats. Homeless people or precarious people enter in a flat when they know that it is empty. In 41% of the cases, some networks of people have a good knowledge of the situation of relocations and renovations. During interviews, some actors told me that these organized traffic corrupt the doormen and some security officers of developers to get the addresses of empty flats. They enter a flat, change the lock, write a wrong lease and sell it to precarious and immigrant families unable to check the veracity of the situation. The region hosts also some cases of drug addicts squats. The last one in the north of Paris hosted hundreds of drug consumers. It was evicted in March 2010. The inhabitants of these squats consider the occupation as a primary goal because they want a roof and nothing else. The aim of squatting

is to live in worthy conditions and to avoid sleeping in the street. There is not any process of institutionalization and the inhabitants benefit from staying invisible. They don't have many resources but have the skills to open a squat.

In this section I have analyzed, I have analyzed above the different configurations of squatting in Paris, specifically according to two main cleavages: resources of squatters and their goals. The process of institutionalization takes two main forms: cooptation with Jeudi Noir, flexible with DAL and artists. The invisible squats escape from this classification but are closer to slums.

### **3.2. The difficult mobilization of slums dwellers: a possible mobilization from outside**

We are not only interested in illegal occupations of buildings but also of land. Precarious people and poor immigrants are compelled to illegally find a place to survive and host their families. This strategy implies some features but the slum dwellers usually are not able to mobilize them. The resources to struggle come from the outside.

#### **3.2.1. Genesis of French slums: birth, eradication, renaissance...**

The question of slums is at the crossroads of the housing and immigration ones. During the 1930s, the French State opened the border and tried to attract new labor. Spanish, Italian, Polish and after the decolonization workers from Maghreb came massively. However, the State didn't want to endorse their permanent presence and let them live and settle in the periphery of the cities, illegally and without any property right or official rent. The slums in France were born with this new marginality. The historians have shown that each immigration waves in every country implies creation of slums as a result of an insufficient public housing offer (Paquot, 1996). Until the 1960s, public actors refused to officially recognize this situation, which was denied. The logic was to avoid the problem because nothing could be done. Yet, in 1965, half of the clandestine immigrants lived in slums<sup>15</sup>. 62% of French slums were located in the Ile de France Region which hosted 115 slums, 47 000 inhabitants and 4 100 families. The biggest slums in France were settled in Nanterre and in the north of Paris (Spanish, Portuguese, Algerian and French dwellers) (Pétonnet, 1979). An eradication policy has been implemented but the more the State destroyed the slums the more evicted people concentrated in other slums and the number of slum dwellers didn't decrease. Step by step the inhabitants were relocated in the "Grands Ensembles" in the suburbs of Paris (Gastaut, 2004) and the common idea is that the last slum was eradicated in 1976. Nevertheless, some small hotbeds have never disappeared and the new immigration waves after the 1990 from eastern European countries have filled new slums in the suburbs.

#### **3.2.2. Survival strategies and mobilization from the outside**

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<sup>15</sup> Ministère de l'Équipement et du Logement, *Études sur la résorption des bidonvilles*, rapport 771142C3569, 1966.

During the 1960s, slums dwellers were victims of a strong discrimination and physical attacks from the police, the FLN (Algerian Separatist National Front), which obliged some Algerian inhabitants to manifest, and inhabitants of the districts. Colette Pétonnet shows that they were the scapegoat of the French post-war society (Pétonnet, 1979). To defend them, the antiracist movement and syndicates found a good opportunity to implement and practice their theories. During “Mai 68”, the students of the University of Nanterre invaded the slums to invite dwellers to participate to the movement. Then, some catholic associations and NGOs intervened for humanitarian and health reasons. The political mobilization came from the outside: the inhabitants themselves didn’t have any resources to impulse a collective action against public actors.

Nowadays, the situation is extremely similar. People don’t have the means to create a movement itself. Slums are fragmented on the territory and the actions of resistance of the dwellers are very rare. If we follow Cécile Péchu in considering the squat as a mode of action between contestation and resistance, slums dwellers just try to survive. The slum is an illegal invasion and occupation of land. It also supposes a strategy of action but the mode of self-organization is not chosen. It is the only way to have a place to live at the margin of the cities, which cannot host them. The struggle takes place in the daily life in order to find money to eat<sup>16</sup>. They don’t have the resources to claim, to resist to the police, to attract journalists and to negotiate with officials. We could consider that the only resources they get are “negative resources”: resources they must “take” because the State does not give anything (Wilson, 1961; Piven and Cloward, 1977; Fillieule, 1993). These resources correspond to “the creation of a situation which disturbs the normal functioning of the society and antithetic to the interests of the group opposed” (McAdam, 1982). They disturb public order and receive resources from the outside. However, they have some skills as Florence Bouillon showed concerning squats (Bouillon, 2009). Inhabitants have to detect a free land, settle and build houses and then have to build social relations with the neighborhood, with policemen and local officials.

Slums are obstacles to urbanization and to the process of metropolization. Slums are also the spatial results of a strong exclusion process (Legros, 2010). Each eviction from one squat or one slum creates one or several other slums on another territory. In the last few years, the slum question has become a public problem (Legros, 2011). Some accidents and events (fires, Saturnism, police violence as well as stigmatization and acts of racisms) brought the question into the public sphere and public actors began to consider the reality: slums still exist in France. This process also came partially through an increasing mobilization around slums coming from the outside: associations, NGOs, neighborhoods and some local officials. The work of nongovernmental organizations is visible at different scales. At the local scale, local support committees sustain and support inhabitants in getting documents, in seeking a job, schooling children, distributing food and social or health assistance (*Rues et Cités (Montreuil), Cimade, Parada, Coup de poing, ALJ 93*). At a larger scale, big organizations have the same missions like *Médecins du Monde*, or specialized in the defense of Roma people *RomEurope, La Voix des Roms*.

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<sup>16</sup> Concerning the Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants, some legislation prevent them to work (“transient regime”) and the procedure to legally get a job is long and complex. Many inhabitants are scrap dealers or they panhandle.

These associations from the civil society have helped in showing the situation of slums dwellers to public actors and to the media. On Figure 6, I mention this work of collectives and associations, which allows inhabitants to access resources and to impact urban policies. Concerning slums, the squatting debate on tool/end cleavage doesn't exist. The main goal is to survive and enter the legality. The illegality is never a primary goal and the associations work to avoid this situation of marginal precariousness. However, the comparison with squats is relevant because we can examine the different means to get resources through a radical occupation (because illegality is radical for Modern legal societies). Moreover, in 2010, squatters opened a squat with Roma people in Montreuil. The logic was to help Roma people to live in a building. Squatters offer their "technical" skills to open the squat. Nowadays, Roma people live in the squat framed by the MOUS of Montreuil (*Maîtrised'OeuvreUrbaine et Sociale*<sup>17</sup>). This is a good example of an experience of collaboration between squatters and slum dwellers.

As in the case of squats, the agendas building follow "cycles of attention", usually after accidents in slums or spectacular evictions. Nevertheless, we have to distinguish the national and the local agendas. On the one hand, the national agenda for squats and slums is "dead" and "empty". The French President's speech about Roma people last summer was an exception. On the other hand, the local agenda is very active. Since 2007, municipalities implement active integration and upgrading public policies, helped by the civil society dynamism. The national State is only responsible for the Law enforcement, municipalities, who are closer to their citizens, implement policies to counteract this legalistic action.

## 4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined different configurations of illegal occupations of urban space. Some squatters use illegality as a tool to draw the attention of the media and politics; others to survive in a place because they cannot legally afford a house; others for both of these reasons. Whether for squats or slums, three main factors determine an illegal occupation. First, the fact that legality is too expensive or not affordable; second, to choosing radicalism is a way to disturb public order and to get resources from the public authorities by challenging them; third, it enables to live beyond the norms and out of the Modern State Law system and to build an alternative way of life. The social conflict with illegalisms has to be seen as a radical action. But the illegalisms also imply a strong dimension of precariousness. The absence of resources drives people to short-circuit the traditional affectation mechanism and find alternative ways to survive without the State's help.

As Daniel Mouchard suggested (Mouchard, 2002), the groups we describe depend on the State, which decides to allocate resources or chooses not to. This relationship is politicized because the main issue for groups, which try to mobilize themselves (from inside or outside), is to go beyond this link of

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<sup>17</sup> The MOUS is a specific device built up by the City Council for welfare and housing. It is financed by the City Council, the State, the Ile-de-France Region and European Funds. The MOUS of Montreuil is the biggest in France and helps 365 Roma people to obtain a house, a job and to educate children in municipal schools.

dependence by building the State as an enemy. Daniel Mouchard talks about “conflictualization” of this link. The choice of the repertoire of the “sectorial illegalisms results from specific constraints due to the weak resources of the group as the unavailability of more institutionalized means (the strike for example), and the impossibility to act under the central political system” (Mouchard, 2002: 433). Moreover, I observed that squatters and associations helping slum dwellers use the Law to defend themselves and claim. Law is at the same time their enemy and their main instrument to struggle. It becomes a positive resource (Israel, 2009). The illegalisms build a dialectic situation between illegality and legitimacy: “the choice is: dying within legality or living within illegality. People are forced to live within illegality and claim strongly the housing right and the right to live”<sup>18</sup>. Poverty and illegality become resources to struggle by disturbing public order, by denying private property right, by *fragmenting* urban order (Pattaroni, 2007). These radical occupations force public actors to react and to find other responses than repression. It has been ten years since the municipalities of the Ile-de-France Region have innovated by finding some ways of normalization and integration of the population in the legal framework (Breviglieri and Pattaroni, 2011; Aguilera, 2011).

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<sup>18</sup> Jean-Claude Amara, activist from DAL, 1994, quoted by Daniel Mouchard (2002: 435).

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