Squatting in Europe

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What is squatting

Squatting is living in – or using otherwise – a dwelling without the consent of the owner. Squatters take buildings with the intention of relatively (> 1 year) long-term use.

Dutch squatters started to use the term "krakers" to designate people who aim at turning their squats into long-term homes. In Berlin, the term "instandbesetzen", a conflation of "instandsetzen" (i.e. renovating) and besetzen (i.e. occupying) was invented. One find uses of the term "squatting" in which its meaning is stretched. Newspaper reports sometimes use the term for people who just use buildings as crash places and who do not try to fix them. In the Netherlands it is sometimes used for people who inhabit an apartment with the consent of its owner but against the municipal low-income housing allocation rules (Priemus, 1983). In the UK, people who rent short-life property have been called "licensed squatters" (Platt, 1980).

Beyond matters of definition, interpretations of squatting vary. A few examples of interpretations of squatting:

- An archetype of a New Social Movement (Van Noort 1988);
- A "way to shape one's life and one's living environment in a way that breaks with imposed norms and laws" (Wietsma, Vonk et al. 1982);
- An example of middle class counter-culture (Clarke, Hall et al. 1976: 58);
- A manifestation of DiY culture (McKay 1998);
- An "important facet of the decentralized yet worldwide struggle to redistribute economic resources according to a more egalitarian and efficient pattern" (Corr, 1999: 3);
- A housing movement (Wates 1980);
- An urban social movement, in which young people try to assert a romantic 'small-is-beautiful' vision against the dominant functionalistic practice of city planning (Mamadouh 1992);
- A post-modern, post-ideological, mass media-influenced movement (Adilkno 1994);
- An utopian struggle (Kallenberg 2001);
- A self-help movement (Katz and Mayer 1985);
- An "opportunity for an extreme way of life" (Anon 1998: 20);
- Progenitors to, and later a wing of, the "international Autonomen" (Katsiaficas 1997).

- A reaction to an economic crisis of young people, who so far have only experienced prosperity (Mak 2000);
- A "last refuge before the onslaught of postmodern discipline" (Mak 2000: 1).

Interpretations diverge so much partly because observers tend to see squatting as a manifestation of some trend or another in society, projecting their various hopes or fears into it. It also reflects variety within squatting itself.

Often, a distinction is made between squatting as a way of meeting a housing need and squatting as a way of satisfying a need for counter cultural and/or political expression (Lowe 1986).

However, researchers who tried to establish why people were squatting found that unmet housing needs were an important motive for all squatters (Kinghan 1977; Van der Pennen, Bertram et al. 1983). Taking this into account, we can distinguish five basic configurations of squatting. Configurations are combinations of features that fit together well and are therefore effective (cf. Mintzberg 1983). In the case of squatting, configurations differ in the characteristics of the people involved, type of buildings, framing (they represent different paradigms), demands and mobilization and organization patterns. Each configuration also entails specific problems.

The five configurations are:

1 Deprivation based squatting

2 Squatting as an alternative housing strategy

3 Entrepreneurial squatting

4 Conservational squatting

5 Political squatting

If I had chosen to use a wider definition of squatting, I would have had to distinguish one more configuration: tourist or crash squatting. Since the early 1970s, there are tourists who spend a summer in Amsterdam in buildings that they occupy for this purpose. They take little responsibility for neither the building nor the neighborhood. Local squatters are uncomfortable with this, one of the reasons being that it undermines the viability of squatting in general. In the early 1970s, squatters in the Nieuwmarktbuurt protested by putting up posters telling that the neighborhood was not a campsite. In 2002, tourist squatters from southern Europe antagonized residents in the "Pijp" district in Amsterdam.

Deprivation based squatting

The oldest configuration may be called deprivation based squatting. This configuration involves poor people who are distressed because of severe housing deprivation.

Severe housing deprivation means more than having a housing need, it implies that they hardly have any other option than living in a homeless shelter. A further restriction is that their family status conforms to what is widely believed to be the criterion for deserving accommodation. In England, in the 1960s and 1970s only married people with children tended to be eligible for being defined as homeless; in the 1960 in the Netherlands, being a married couple (without children) was sufficient to be classified as needing (Duivenvoorden 2000). It is also very important that the squatters have no other serious problems (such as substance abuse, dealing or stealing, sexual or domestic violence) beyond homelessness. If not, the activists have to become a kind of unpaid social workers, who additionally have to face up to increased risks of repression. (cf. Grundmann et al. 1981: 49)

A prototypical example of deprivation based squatting is the "family squatters movement" in the UK in the late 1960s (Bailey 1973).

After the 1970s, deprivation based squatting generally declined. An important exception is squatting based on specific housing predicaments of migrants. This occurred already in the 1970s. An example: in 1974, 100 apartments in the Bijlmermeer (Amsterdam) were squatted by newly arrived immigrants from Surinam (Van Diepen and Bruijn-Muller 1977). Also in Frankfurt, in the early 1970s, there were activists who occupied buildings in order to provide housing for immigrants (Grundmann et al. 1981: 48). In the late 1990s, squatting for migrants it was still ongoing: in 1998, in Bologna, the "The Committee without Frontiers" and Rifondazione Comunista organized squatting for North African immigrants (Fekete 1998).

Organization and mobilization

An organizational pattern that has a clear distinction between activists and squatters fits well within his configuration. The activists open up buildings for the squatters and support them. This division of roles fits into the overall logic of the configuration, because it underlines the destitute position of the squatters: they are so wretched that they cannot help themselves. It also implies a protection against accusations of queue jumping: the activists do not take the initiative to organize squatting out of a selfish motive, but to help others.

A second possibility within his configuration is self-organization by squatters. An example is a UK squatting wave in 1945-46, in which ultimately 45000 squatters, ex-servicemen with their newly-formed families, squatted in ex-army camps. In this case, squatters were accused of queue-jumping (Friend 1980). In Italy in the late 1960s, home-seekers spontaneously occupied flats (Welschen 1996: 82-86).

Type of buildings

Most suitable empty buildings are those whose owners would be embarrassed to be seen evicting squatters, because they have a (moral) obligation to house the needy, such as the state and the Church. The ideal target for squatting is regular housing stock, left empty

for inexplicable or inexcusable reasons. The better the condition of the buildings, the more embarrassing it is that the owners left it empty.

Framing

In this configuration, framing is straightforward. The needs of homeless families, who ideally have become distressed for reasons outside their command, i.e. working poor, are pitted against the insensitivity of bureaucrats and politicians.

Squatters claim respectability. When evictions take place, a shock effect is produced by uncivilized or insensitive behavior of authorities or their agents. When bailiffs hired by Council officials in London violently evicted families from squatted houses, they created a public relations disaster for the Council (Bailey 1973).

Demands and embeddedness in political issues

Demands are modest; they do not involve structural change, but instead focus on helping the squatters by obtaining (temporary) leases or alternative accommodation. This type of squatting is not deeply embedded in politics; one may say that it constitutes a protest against government inefficiency and insensitivity.

A more radical political demand that was sometimes made was requisitioning of unused private property. An example is the campaign undertaken by a Brighton group who called themselves the "Vigilantes". In 1945 they occupied houses that were only rented during the holiday season. The result was a new law that made requisitioning possible. It was only implemented in Labour-run cities. (In the Netherlands, similar legislation came into effect in 1947, without the pressure of a squatting campaign behind it.)

In the UK, limitations of this configuration became apparent when in 1946, 1500 people squatted investor-owned apartments in London. Communists played an organizing and supporting role. In contrast to the generally positive coverage of the camp occupations, journalists now tended to turn hostile as the right of owners to do with property what they pleased was no under attack. Evictions and punishment ensued (Friend 1980: 116; Johnstone 2000).

Outcomes

This type of squatting is susceptible to cooptation, i.e. transformation into a form that is useful to state officials (Pruijt 2003). A salient example of cooptation can be found in the history of squatting in the UK. There, some squatters' organizations were transformed into management offices that rented out short-life public sector accommodation. This was called "licensed squatting" (Bailey, 1973; Pettitt 1980). The deals with local authorities, that made this possible, required squatters' organizations to give up organizing squatting. Lowe (1986: 148) called licensing "a classic example of the cooptation of a critical social movement."

A striking difference between the UK and the Netherlands is, that in the UK organizers had to fight to obtain short-life housing arrangements, while in the Netherlands social housing authorities tended to grant this spontaneously.

Specific problems of deprivation-based squatting

People whom authorities or the public do not recognize as having a genuine housing need, such as people without children or singles in this configuration cannot benefit from squatting. (ASS 1996: 31). Home seekers who have problems beyond homelessness, or people whose lifestyle ostensibly deviates from the mainstream, will have difficulty meeting the respectability requirement.

A further problem (to the extent that there is a division of roles between activists and squatters) is that the continuity of squatting is dependent on a small core of activists who may lose interest; self-organization is more robust.

Squatting as an alternative housing strategy

A newer configuration of squatting could be called squatting as an alternative housing strategy. Compared to the previous configuration, it involves a more varied range of people:

- People who fall outside the category of poor people suffering from severe housing deprivation, because they are unmarried, have no children, are young or are well-trained.
- Squatters who were not previously homeless, but lived in a rented room or a student dormitory, and wanted to move into an apartment.
- Others who want to live in a group and cannot find legal accommodation that makes this possible.
- Radical DiY enthusiasts, who would rather create housing for themselves than working long hours in a job in order to pay rent (Moan 1980).
- People, who may be middle class in origin (but now downwardly mobile), and have chosen to dedicate themselves to activities that bring few financial rewards, e.g. artists and musicians.
- Also people who may not meet the respectability standards implied in deprivation based squatting, for instance because they are vulnerable, or because of their lifestyle.
- Apart from the "new" (as compared to deprivation based squatting) categories of squatters, this configuration does not exclude people who have been experiencing severe housing deprivation.

That we are dealing with a different configuration is illustrated by the reflections of Pettitt (1980: 122) who had been involved in de London family squatting movement, on the transition to becoming a squatter herself:

"Somehow we accepted the reasoning which implied that if one wasn't in a 'family', then one didn't need a permanent home of one's own. My own train of thought went something like this: 'Me? But I've got a degree! How can I justify needing to squat? I don't look deserving enough. It'll make squatting look silly if people like me do it, with no cockney accents and no children.'"

Framing of squatting as an alternative housing strategy

Compared to deprivation based squatting, in this configuration deprivation is not central in framing. Squatters do not present themselves as unlucky souls who require assistance. The disempowering effect of being (self-) labeled as deprived is avoided. They do not stigmatize themselves as losers, instead they derive pride from a self-created housing solution.

In this configuration, their basic desire is not to get help but to be left alone and in peace. Demands are mainly tactical tools toward the goal of being left alone.

The squatters do not to assert a place among the deprived and needy; this has implications for the choice of buildings. The preferred type of building is one that allows squatting to be seen as adding to the affordable housing stock, rather than as fighting for a share of it. Suitable buildings include commercial spaces that were never intended to be used for housing, tenements that were officially taken off the market, for instance because of planned demolition, housing which is (far) below rentable standard, or alternatively, empty luxury accommodation. (Among these kinds of buildings, also suitable places for communal living can be found; for technical reasons, in some buildings communal living is the only way possible.)

In this way, squatting becomes a two-edged sword: squatters help themselves outside of the existing affordable housing stock and at the same time indirectly help other low-income home seekers by removing themselves from the waiting queues for authority-allocated housing.

Compared to deprivation based squatting, squatting as an alternative housing strategy involves less division between activists/organizers on the one hand, and squatters on the other hand. There is more self-organization in autonomous teams, and less top-down organizing. ("Less" is not "none", informal leadership exists.)

Logically, self-organization is a well-fitting concept in a movement that does not define squatters as needy.

Because in this configuration, demands are less important, and also because of the emphasis on self-organization rather than top-down management by specialized organizers, careful and clear framing is less necessary than is the case in deprivation based squatting. This allows considerable freedom in creating an ideology (e.g. "instant anarchism") around squatting as an alternative housing strategy.

In deprivation based squatting, on the other hand, clear communication alongside action, is vital. One reason is that the activists have to give clear instructions to the squatters and control them, the other reason is that making demands to authorities is important. In squatting as an alternative housing strategy, there is less need for clear communication alongside action: due to the more horizontal structure, there is no dependency on leaders' directives; demands are not very important.

Outcomes

The prime goal of squatting is by direct action meeting immediate housing needs, i.e. creating (often temporary) homes. According to a 1981 study (Van der Raad, 1981) Amsterdam housed around 9,000 squatters. Duivenvoorden (2000) estimated that in the Netherlands as a whole, between 1965 and 1999, 50.000 people lived in squats at one time or another.

Another variable is the longevity of the squats. There is a relation with quality because a longer life expectancy makes it possible to invest more in repairs, construction and maintenance. For the UK, Wates (1980) estimated an average of three months. For Amsterdam, I estimate an average of several years.

Some squats became permanent through legalization. The Municipality of Amsterdam bought two hundred of the buildings that were occupied by squatters (Duivenvoorden, 2000: 323), thereby legalizing them. Officials turned most of these buildings over to established housing associations, which concluded lease contracts with individual squatters (Draaisma and Hoogstraten, 1983). In this way, squatters could consolidate what they had achieved. The flip side is that legalization takes away the alternative edge (Bussemaker 1986). Because legalization entails repairs and sometimes conversion to the level required by the building code, it tends to increase cost, putting an end to the situation that money matters little. (Some people with very low incomes have to leave, or they become dependent on some arrangement by which they can substitute work for "rent").

Nevertheless, in the Netherlands few, if any, opportunities for legalization were missed. In Berlin, however, there were a sizeable proportion of squatters that refused to negotiate for legalization.

Finally, squatting can cause a housing shortage issue to gain prominence on the political agenda. This can even happen unintentionally, when journalists are making sense of squatting. This occurred in the case of the Vetterstraat in Amsterdam, 1965. The squatters were trying to help themselves, but a commentator in a newspaper wrote:

"A big riot might be useful. We risk forgetting that in this country there is a disgraceful housing shortage. The burden of this is passed almost exclusively onto a varying group of young people. The housing situation is a sick spot in our society. But we almost made this illness invisible". (Trouw, 7 jan. 1965)

In the Netherlands, it is especially the housing shortage among young people that squatting has put on the political agenda. In 1978 in Amsterdam, a twenty-year-old had to expect to wait more than seven years to be allocated a distribution apartment (one had to be 25 to be placed on the waiting list. From that point, one had to wait a few years to get to the top of the queue.)

Sometimes squatters explain their actions as a protest against a shortage of affordable housing. When mobilizing public support, squatters have often made reference to the housing shortage. An example is the "Groote Keijser" in Amsterdam (in 1980), a case in which squatters refused to give up a row of occupied canal houses. They explained their stand as a protest against the fact that the city counted 50,000 home seekers (on a population of 600,000).

Counter cultural and political embedding

Many squatters just lived in a squat just like they may have lived in a rented place (at least in the Netherlands). For others - a sizeable minority - squatting meant more.

For them, squatting was in various ways embedded in counter culture and politics.

1 Opportunities for subcultural expression as additional bonus

As an additional bonus, squatting offers individuals opportunities for gearing their housing situation to their chosen lifestyles. Examples: punks may chose to live with punks, feminists may start a women's building. Experimenting with communal living is easy. Squatted commercial spaces can be converted in creative ways. (An example: in Amsterdam, an artist built a small wooden house inside a large space in the former NRC newspaper building.) There are ample possibilities for creative interior and exterior decoration.

2 Empowerment

We can consider empowerment as a consequence of establishing squats. Squatting breaks through a certain attitude toward (not) being cared for by the state, at least in the area of housing. Squatters distance themselves from the bureaucratically regulated way of home making. By occupying a building and making it inhabitable squatters by themselves take care of their housing needs. They break the power exerted over them by means of city planning and waiting lists and by the norm of private property rights which requires that homeless people remain quietly homeless - while around them houses remain void.

One of the appeals of squatting is that it promises an immediate tangible result in the form of a realized squat. This is different from political participation through official channels. In these channels, division of labor, hierarchy and compromises make it difficult for participants to trace where their invested energies lead to.

3 The squatter scene

Some squatters (estimated around 10%) involve themselves deeper in squatting. They form a network or squatter scene. Spending time in the company of other squatters is rewarding because of the shared experience and because it offers the relaxation of not having to defend the fundamentals of squatting. The non-squatting environment tends to label squatters as different, which in itself helps forge a group identity. Know-how on technical matters, such as dealing with owners, locks, windows, broken floors, plumbing, heating, electricity, how to obtain what, is rapidly disseminated.

3 Movement building

We can distinguish different forms of organization in the squatting movement:

- General (mutual) assistance. This means that squatters make themselves available to other squatters or potential squatters to provide advice, help them out of problems or organize physical assistance (i.e. involve other people in turn) when new buildings are squatted. Part of this is reciprocally helping the neighbors. (Squatters who do not participate in these reciprocal arrangements face criticism.)
- Associations: very important is the establishment of squatter's groups, especially in districts in which squatting involves separate apartments or (small) apartment buildings. Squatter's groups tend to have meetings, some finance and some form of newsletter. In big buildings, house assemblies are common. They form an organizational building block in extended movement formation.
- Structured networks without division of labor: an example is a telephone tree for mobilizing support in case of an eviction threat.
- Organization based on a voluntary division of labor: the creation of (little) institutions that provide service to (would be) squatters. Examples: information services for potential squatters that maintain lists of empty property and provide advice in order to make squatting accessible and more likely to be successful; a bureau that investigates property speculators (SPOK, Amsterdam); collectives that write squatting manuals; squatters' media such as newsletters, magazines, radio, and television stations.
- Organized campaigns: decision making, mobilization, and action (such as squatting very big objects).
- Overarching citywide, regional or national organizations. Threats, such as proposed anti-squatting legislation stimulate squatters to call meetings and organize protests and committees.

4 Overlaps with other movements in protest waves

Squatters' movements are part of a "left-libertarian social movement family" (della Porta and Rucht, 1995), including for example the ecology movement and the new peace movement. The movements within this family have organizational overlaps. Taking with them the notion of applying direct action to troubled spots in society, some squatters branched out into other fields. A few examples are: blockading the road leading to the nuclear power plant in Dodewaard (Els, Geert et al. 1981) and blockade actions against transportation of nuclear waste on its way to be dumped in the sea (Els, Geert et al.

1982). Squatters blockaded the entrances to the Shell laboratory complex in Amsterdam as part of anti-apartheid protests. Direct action tactics, pioneered in the squatters' movement, were also transferred to anti-militaristic protest. Military command bunkers and one military office were raided, documents detailing contingency plans in case of a State of National Emergency stolen, displayed and published. A similar action occurred at a building used by a covert police observation unit. A raid to disrupt an extreme-rightwing party meeting in a hotel ended in a devastating fire caused by a smoke-bomb, leaving the party leaders' girlfriend mutilated. Squatters also played a major role in urban protests, for example against the construction of the new town hall – occupying the site with an "anti-City circus"- or ruining Amsterdam's campaign to attract the Olympic Games – by harassing the International Olympic Committee members assembled in Lausanne.

Entrepreneurial squatting: social centers, free spaces, breeding places

Squatting offers opportunities for setting up nearly any kind of establishment, without the need for large resources nor risking to get mired in bureaucracy. Examples are neighborhood centers, squatters' bars (proceeds of which going into actions and charity projects), bicycle repair shops, women's houses, restaurants, print shops, theaters and movie theaters, and tool lending services, alternative schools, daycare centers, party spaces, art galleries, book- and info shops, food shops, saunas, workshops (e.g. for bicycle repair or car or boat restoration). The scale varies from one small storefront to a large commercial center, a military complex, warehouse or shipyard.

Often social centers, free spaces or breeding places are established together with housing. In the Netherlands, squatters promoted combination of functions in one building as an asset in its own right (Duivenvoorden 2000: 252-253).

Although entrepreneurial squatting projects are practical and therefore not dependent on ideological framing, there is some ongoing debate that focuses on two issues.

The first issue is whether legalization results in the loss of the oppositional edge. However, it seems that this is only partly the case: an in-depth study on squatted "free spaces" in Amsterdam described the impact of legalization as: "What used to be an active free space with many links to various societal structures, stabilizes to become a housing/work space building with a more quiet and less dynamic nature. Ties with other free spaces, and explicit political engagement decline. " (Breek and Graad 2001: 77)

Other projects did originally have an oppositional identity and lost it completely and abruptly after legalization (Groote Keijser), or gradually (NRC-complex, Tetterode), sometimes retaining a role in alternative culture (such as the Poortgebouw in Rotterdam, that remained a punk rock venue). Legalization arrangements vary in terms of the level of control that occupants can retain (Breek and Graad 2001: 50).

Apart from legalization, an alternative explanation for a disappearing political edge is the general decline in protest (in the Netherlands) after the 1980 protest wave subsided. After

1980, resources for social movements in the Netherlands declined as well, as it became both easier and more necessary for young people to find paid employment, and as the state put pressure on students to complete their studies more swiftly.

However, there are also projects that retained an oppositional edge after legalization, such as the Mehringhof (Berlin), and Vrankrijk (Amsterdam, bought by the squatters themselves.)

Additionally, it is worth noting that various legalized projects, such as Kulturzentrum Lagerhaus in Bremen or the Fabrik in Berlin never had an oppositional identity; from the beginning they focused on (alternative) culture.

The second issue is whether it is possible to escape from the trade-off between, on the one hand, having a counter-cultural/political identity and because of this only attracting members of a highly exclusive "scene", for instance black-clad veganist anarchists, or on the other hand, attracting a wide range of people at the expense of becoming culturally mainstream and non-political.

Marco (2000), who worked in the Eurodusnie collective in leiden (Netherlands) criticized the Dutch squatter scene for being exclusive, and contrasted it to the large number of "Centri Sociali" in Italy, described as "t*h*e central gathering places for the "anti-capitalistic part of the population" while also appealing to a wide variety of people.

However, in terms of demographics the attraction of Italian social centers seems to be largely restricted to young people. A survey among visitors (N=1395) showed that only 4.9 per cent were older than 35 years (Consorzio Aaster 1996: 23).

In 1998, 150 squatted self-managed social centers in Italy offered opportunities to enjoy and develop social life in a non-commodified environment (Maggio 1998: 234).

Ruggiero (2000: 170) stated that important functions are reducing loneliness and repairing the gap in the opportunities for identity building that was caused by the decline of large workplaces, unions and political parties.). They also allow unemployed people to engage in productive activity (concerts, cd's, magazines, T-shirts; there are strong links with the alternative music scene). Some see this as meaningful work with a welcome degree of self-control, for others it represents self-exploitation (Wright 2000: 128). The centers provide contacts, access to resources and opportunities for acquiring skills that are relevant in the job market (Ruggiero 2000: 182-183).

Managing the centers entails walking a narrow line between "ghetto mentality" and "possible normalization as social enterprises." (Wright 2000: 132). Perhaps predictably, some criticized the Centri Sociali for having become commercial enterprises.

Several Centri Sociale drew up a plan, the Charter of Milan, to leave behind self-chosen isolation, confrontations with the police and "prejudice-ridden, anti-institutional discourse" and instead to develop a "more subtle infiltration of local institutions, a dialog

that is not subservient but attains a new quality of antagonistic practice." (Maffeis 2002: 134).

(Klein 2001). Some representatives of centri sociali tried to counter the threat posed by the Berlusconi ascendancy by – successfully – running for local office (Klein 2001).

Most of the visitors come to the centers for their social contacts and for concerts and art (Ruggiero 2000). However, the Social Centers are also "social and cultural hubs" in a network that supports mobilization against, for instance, capitalist globalization (Klein 2001). They spawned an innovation in the protest repertoire, the "Tute Bianche": a block of demonstrators dressed in white overalls symbolizing invisibility or ghostliness as a result of post-Fordist restructuring (Azzellini 2002). Some centers are more politically oriented and some are more oriented toward (counter)culture. Tensions along this distinction exist within centers as well. Between centers, there are differences between autonomistic and anarchistic centers (Wright 2000).

In the UK, the Exodus collective in Luton, that started by organizing raves and branched out into squatting, gained fame for cutting across ethnic barriers (Malyon 1998).

Conservational squatting

The fourth configuration, conservational squatting, involves squatting as a tactic used in the preservation of a cityscape or landscape, for example against the construction of roads or office blocks. Impending changes in land use tend to result in vacant buildings. Community groups against city development sometimes used organizing squatting as a tool. This is a way to increase resistance against function change by making sure that the hot spots of the function change - those places where original inhabitants and users have already been displaced - become populated again. Squatters are likely to take in interest in the planning process that determines the fate of their buildings. For them, fighting the proposed change of function means protecting their squats.

In Amsterdam, squatting played a role in most of the major protests in the 1970s that substantially thwarted the planners' program to modernize the old city (i.e. the center plus the 19e century ring; the planners basically only foresaw the preservation of the canals, canal houses and other first class monuments). In neighborhoods that are under threat of function change, opportunities exist for coalitions between squatters and "legal", traditional inhabitants that share the same interest in protecting their dwellings. These coalitions can be extended to cover the issue of quality of life in the neighborhood. Wider coalitions, across neighborhoods and across social groups, are possible as well. (When studying city planning in cities with many squatters, it is difficult to isolate squatting from other actions by community groups of interest groups.)

The 1979-1981 squatting wave in Berlin started as conservational squatting. In 1979 in Kreuzberg, the community action group "SO 36" occupied an empty fire station to prevent demolition. The activists proceeded to occupy houses that were slated for razing,

because they wanted to preserve both useable housing stock and the structure of the neighborhood.

Historically, squatters have also played an important role as initiators of community groups. An example is the neighborhood committee in Amsterdam's Bethaniën district, the first neighborhood group to resist city development.

Also, protesters against the destruction of a cityscape or landscape deliberately occupied houses that were in the way of a planned subway line (Amsterdam, Nieuwmarkt, 1972-1975), a motorway (UK, the No M11 Link Road campaign in the 1990s) or railway (Betuwelijn, Netherlands. 1998-99). Since the squatters moved into the area because of the opportunity to contribute to the environmental cause, they were not vulnerable to the critique of being NIMBY (e.g. keen motorists who suddenly become environmentalists when a road is planned through their backyards).

Political squatting

Squatting can be a promising field of action for those who are engaged in anti-systemic politics. (And who may, tacitly or explicitly, identify with revolutionary or "Autonomous" ideas.) For them, power - i.e. counter-power vis-à-vis the state - is important. In their organizational model there is distinction between a vanguard and followers.

Squatting is interesting for them because of the high potential for confrontations with the state.

The impetus for considering political squatting as a separate configuration was that in Amsterdam, one squatting group, the "Woongroep Staatsliedenbuurt", acted in ways that were not very understandable within the logical framework of the other configurations. The most salient way in which they were different was in organizing large-scale squatting of social (low-income) housing that was allocated by the municipal housing authority. For the other squatters in Amsterdam, this type of housing was off-limits. This is congruent with the dominant outlook that I described as "squatting as an alternative housing strategy" in which squatting is about adding to the low-income housing stock, not competing for a share of it.

The Woongroep Staatsliedenbuurt's main justification for squatting allocated low-income housing was, that the municipal housing queue system is a way of pacifying the tens of thousands of home-seekers (Duivenvoorden 2000: 151). In line with this argument, the municipal housing distribution office was attacked several times; files were destroyed.

In Amsterdam, political squatters took over the defense of several buildings whose occupants lost hope of being able to stave off eviction, and turned these into fortified focal points for confrontations with the state. They were especially interested in mobilization against the social democratic party that was in control of city politics.

Also they worked hard to create stable structures in the squatters' movement, with the ideal of building a coherent, prepared group of disciplined activists who were committed to confronting the state.

Many squatters who did not share the ideological background of the political squatters went along with this, on the basis of solidarity. The increased opportunities to win concessions, the empowerment as a result of stronger organization, the experience of being taken seriously by the local state and the media and a widespread feeling that antagonisms should remain concealed all played a role in this. However, a cleavage within the movement grew. Political squatters grew disappointed: they felt that a large number of squatters just acted without a clear political vision (i.e. squatting as an alternative housing strategy) or were only interested in their own small enterprises (i.e. entrepreneurial squatters). In turn, squatters in the latter two groups increasingly felt manipulated as "action-cattle" by the political squatters; centralized control and the almost paramilitary organization and style that surfaced in the large confrontations with the police turned them off.

A conflict emerged, following a small internal uprising against the leadership of the political squatters, and an attempt by the political squatters' leaders to reconstruct the movement that entailed branding some squatters as "traitors". It escalated in 1988, forcing the political squatters to withdraw from the Amsterdam scene (Adilkno 1994).

In Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, political groups such as Lotta Continua latched onto the occupations that had started spontaneously (Rising Free 1973; Welschen 1996: 82-86). In a later phase, Autonomen became involved, seeking confrontations "even if it did contribute little or nothing to the preservation of occupied houses" (Welschen 1996: 86).

The Autonomen consisted of different groups that partly fought against each other and partly complemented each other. They tended to join other groups, for example in mass demonstrations. In these demonstrations, they staged violent protest. The justification was, that they did not accept restrictions on violent behavior required by demonstration organizers. Also they tried to obtain hegemony over the entire countermovement (Welschen 1996).

Welschen (1996: 129-130) pointed out that Autonomist ideology was rooted in Leninist thought, adapted by Toni Negri and others to the reality that young people were getting less inclined to participate in top-down controlled movements; the ideological leaders thought that concentrating on concrete action practices - instead of building an organization - would lead to ever more severe confrontations with the state and the rulers. These confrontations, in turn, would stimulate centralization.

In Germany in the early 1970s, political groups that partly developed from the student movement, such as the "K-Kruppen" (Leninists known for their internal disputes about the "correct line") and especially "Spontis", representing a more anti-authoritarian strand launched squatting projects in various cities. This wave started after activists had become

disillusioned with the revolutionary strategy of trying – working within firms - to radicalize workers, and decided to focus their attention to the sphere of reproduction, i.e. to working class neighborhoods. Most activity was in Hamburg and Frankfurt, cities controlled by the social democrats (BetsetzerInnenkongress 1995).

During a radio debate, a Frankfurt activist explained:

"It was about exposing buildings and land speculation; we wanted to show that the Frankfurt social democrats were exceedingly reformist and to document that the so-called reformists tactically cooperate with financial capital" (Grundmann et al. 1981: 49)

and

"We really thought for some time that it should be possible to widen the housing struggle cycles - the occupations, evictions and mass organization in between - beyond the, at most, 5000 or 6000 people that participated, and that this could become an influential factor in changing the political landscape, at least in Frankfurt. I still recall how thrilled we were to read headlines in the Frankfurter Neuen Presse like "Double Power in Frankfurt". And for some moments, we were prepared to believe this; that there is a double structure of urban power: the formally institutionalized one, and us". (Grundmann et al. (1981: 51).

The political squatting campaign in Frankfurt and other cities ended in evictions. It did hardly have any influence on the next German squatting wave started in that 1979, which followed the pattern of squatting as an alternative housing strategy (Koopmans 1995: 170).

Eventually, taking their inspiration from Italy, a part of the squatters' movement in Berlin began to define themselves as Autonomen. This is the part of the movement that refused to negotiate about legalization. They were especially enraged about the repression directed against squatters and criticized the other squatters for only fighting to preserve their own free spaces and not against the system:

"Conquering 'free spaces' and making them secure ... this is classical reformism. That does not destabilize any system – the capitalist system also reacts very flexibly: free spaces can be integrated, resistance channeled into ghettos without explosive power: playgrounds." (Geronimo 1995, quoted in BetsetzerInnenkongress 1995: 16).

In Amsterdam, people calling themselves the "Autonomen" promoted the use of violence during the demonstrations at Queen Beatrice's coronation in april 30th 1980. A "Militant Autonomen Front" claimed a (light) bomb attack on the municipal housing distribution office. The media were eager to produce juicy stories about emerging terrorism in the Netherlands, with the possible effect of fuelling its further development. Editors from the squatters' movement based magazine "Bluf!" (i.e. "Bluff!") came up with a practical joke in order to try to pre-empt this. They contacted one of the most eager journalists from the mainstream press with the offer to arrange - in return for money - an exclusive interview

with the Militant Autonomen Front. The journalist was blindfolded, taken to a "secret location", and given the opportunity to interview three masked "members of the Militant Autonomen Front". These men were the Bluf! editors themselves, who had prepared for the interview by memorizing an extensive array of revolutionary clichés. The magazine "HP" published the scoop as its cover story, showing a photograph of the brave journalist in the company of the three masked men, that was supplied as part of the interview deal. Bluf!, in turn, published a picture of the blindfolded journalist surrounded by the three grinning Bluf! editors.

Table 1 Configurations of squatting

	Deprivation based squatting	Squatting as an alternative housing strategy	Entrepreneurial squatting	Conservational squatting	Political squatting
Activists' goal	Providing housing for needy people	Creating housing for themselves, while adding to the affordable housing stock	Setting up an establishment	Preserving a cityscape or landscape	Building up counter-power to the state
Class	Lower class squatters supported by middle class activists	Middle class (but not exclusively)	Middle class (but not exclusively)	Middle class (but not exclusively)	Middle class (but not exclusively)
Organization	Top-down, division between activists and beneficiaries	Horizontal	Mixed	Mixed	Top-down
Type of buildings	Regular low-income housing stock inexcusably left empty	Buildings that are either too bad or too good to be rented out as low income housing	Non-housing spaces	Buildings emptied because of a planned change in land use	Few restrictons

Framing	Clear message: insensitive bureaucrats ignore needs of homeless people	Focus on action, framing not very important.	Valuable role of the establishment in the community.	Against technocratic planning and destruction of the environment	Depicting social-democrats as traitors
Demands	Modest. Temporary housing or alternative accommodation. (Better) place on waiting list.	Being left alone	Being left alone	Reversal of planning	Confrontation is the essence, demands are at most supplementary
Cultural and political embedding	Sometimes a tenuous link with radical politics	Embedded in counter culture, ties with other movements	Embedded in counter culture, ties with other movements	Embedded in counter culture, ties with other movements	Links with Marxist organizations or movements
Outcomes	Cooptation likely	Repression and legalization	Repression and legalization	Sometimes concessions won	Makes squatting a more prominent target for repression. May also – in the short term - help squatters win concessions.
Specific problems	Does not work for people whose housing needs are not widely acknowledged. Top down organization limits movement spread and increases vulnerability	None	Preserving identity after legalization. Trade-off between alternative identity and wide appeal.	None	Conflicts with squatters in other configurations

The defense repertoire

Squatting is an inherently unstable condition. Although the "squatted" status may last for up to two decades (there are several examples of this in the Netherlands), it is bound to end sooner or later as a result of eviction, abandonment or legalization.

Many squatters abandoned their buildings when the rightful owners claimed them. In the Netherlands, this especially applied to tenements slated for replacement by new low-income housing. Squatters tended to leave such buildings voluntarily without protest in time for the scheduled demolition and construction work to start.

In Amsterdam, in 1981, slightly more than half of all squatters lived in the decaying working class neighborhoods that were built at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (Van der Raad, 1981: 37). Virtually all squats in these areas were eventually replaced by low-income housing. With very few exceptions, squatters in these areas left voluntarily (Pruijt 2003).

In the Netherlands, and outside of this specific section of social urban renewal, squatters tried to delay eviction, or to achieve legalization.

There is an extensive repertoire for defending squats, representing various angles of approach and various levels of disruptiveness. Table 1 presents an overview.

Table 2 Defense repertoire

	Conventional (soft)	*Disruptive*
Addressing the owner	Asking for lease.	Disrupting owners business and/or private life.
	Protest against owners' plan with the building.	
Securing the building	Barricading entrances (to prevent the owner from evicting by employing thugs).	Fortification.
Legal	Preventing criminal prosecution (trespassing).	
	Preventing the owner from winning eviction in a civil lawsuit.	
Getting support	Strengthening ties with fellow squatters, telephone trees, newsletter, meetings.	
	Getting support from organizations that matter in urban policy.	

	Inviting prominent citizens to adopt the building.	
Addressing the local state to use its decision making power to call off eviction	Petitioning and lobbying.	Disruption of meetings.
	Creating alternative plans.	Damaging state buildings or property.
	Demonstration.	Violent protest in the streets.
Defense from inside the building during eviction	Passive resistance.	Active resistance (throwing substances or objects).
Defense on the outside of the building during eviction	Playful protest in front of the building.	Fighting with the police with clubs and or stones.
	Passive resistance.	
Re-squatting after eviction	When the building is left unguarded: in way similar to ordinary squatting.	When the building is guarded: launching an assault on the building, threatening the guards with violence.
Retaliation after eviction	Conventional protest.	Pinpoint damage done to buildings of those held responsible.
		Violent street protest.

Two mayor questions remain: what determines the opportunities that squatters have to use this action repertoire in order to stave off eviction, and what is the effect of the various defense strategies.

Carving out a niche for squatting: opportunities

Whether squatters have any opportunity to act in the legal field depends on whether the law treats unlawful entry of a building as entry against the will of the owner *or* as entry against the will of the occupants. In the Netherlands, the latter is the case, which allows for some legal protection for squatters. In 1971, the Dutch Supreme Court decided that the "house right", which protects homes from being entered against the will of the occupants, applies to squatters. From that moment, it became illegal for landlords to evict squatters and squatting was no longer considered to be illegal, provided that the building was neither in use nor being worked on. The history of squatting in the Netherlands (Duivenvoorden, 2000) clearly shows the effect of legal protection. The 1971 Supreme Court decision that gave squatters protection meant a turnaround. Prior to that point, the police had evicted squatters swiftly and it proved impossible to establish long-living squats. This changed completely. Squatters were now even able to re-squat and finally

secure some buildings from which they previously had been evicted (Duivenvoorden, 2000: 69).

In the Netherlands, "acting in the legal field" involves more than appearing in court. Legally, there are two roads leading to possible eviction. One road is based on criminal law. Because criminal law only protects buildings that are in use, squatters would often invite the police into a newly squatted building to allow them to see that the owner had not been using it. This made it less likely that the owner would be successful when trying to press charges for trespassing. However, in many cases squatters did not receive the protection they were entitled to; there have been illegal evictions. In 1994 a change in the law made it illegal to squat a building that had been standing empty for less than one year. Squatters often try to prove this to the police. Also, the squatters can start a civil lawsuit to prevent the Justice Department from prosecution for trespassing.

The second road to possible eviction is based on civil law. When eviction on the basis of trespassing was impossible, the only legal way for owners to evict squatters was to take them to court in a civil case. For years, squatters used to prevent this by the trick of keeping their family names secret until a change in law made it possible to sue anonymous occupants.

Still, squatters retain the possibility to contest in court the owner's need for a swift eviction.

In the UK, there is also some legal protection for squatters. Like in the Netherlands, it has been eroding (Watkinson 1980). In Germany and Italy there is no legal protection for squatters. In those countries, opportunities to stave off eviction mainly exist when the building is state-owned, and are restricted to trying to influence political decision-making.

In Germany, opportunities for legal defense arise once squatters have secured - temporary - leases. This happened in the Hafenstrasse in Hamburg (Lehne 1994; Mallet 2000).

Carving out a niche for squatting: strategy

In the Netherlands, both within and outside of the squatters' movement, many feel that the use of disruptive tactics was instrumental in obtaining concessions in the form of legalizations. The shift to more disruptive tactics that took place between 1978 and 1980, partly happened because the political group of squatters had promoted this. Also, there was a decisive incident in 1978 in which scores on non-violent protesters were severely beaten by the police. However, the shift to disruptive tactics produced a backlash. Public support declined. This was not essential, but still demoralizing. And many squatters who were unhappy with the top-down pseudo paramilitary turn moved on to pursue other interests.

In Germany, squatters were hardly able to carve out a niche for squatting. It seems that in Germany, squatting can start when state policy is in disarray, for example in the case of

the housing rehabilitation crisis in Berlin in 1979-1980, and again in Berlin and Potsdam after the collapse of the DDR in 1989. After each squatting wave, the German authorities tend to deliberately wipe out squatting completely through a combination of repression and legalization. The literature does not offer indications that in Germany disruptive tactics were anything but counterproductive.

In Italy too, negotiation seems more important than disruption. A key strategy for activists involved in the Italian Centro Sociali, in those cases in which the local government is receptive, is to demonstrate the value that these projects have for the city (Romano 1998).

An Italian strategic innovation to mitigate the effect of eviction of a social center is to squat another building, but to continue using the same name. In Milan, the Centro Sociale Leoncavallo, which started in the 1970s, was evicted and reopened in other buildings several times.

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