

Squatting, a SWOT analysis

Submitted for publication. Pruijt, H. (2023) Squatting, a SWOT analysis. In Anna Domaradzka and Pierre Hamel (Eds.) *The Elgar Handbook On Urban Social Movements*. Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 185-198.

Introduction

Urban squatting is living in, or using in a different way, a building without the consent of the owner. Squatters take buildings with the intention of relatively long-term use. Organizing squatting is, together with the rent strike and developing alternative spatial plans, one of the few action repertoire elements that are specific to urban social movements. The main contention in this chapter is that squatting can be a powerful element in the action repertoire, to the extent that it can be considered problematic for urban social movements when squatting is non-existent or not available as an option. A possible analogy for the latter would be a labour movement deprived of the option of organizing a strike. This chapter presents an exploration of urban squatting seen as part of an urban social movement repertoire, and rendered in the format of a SWOT (Strengths–Weaknesses–Opportunities–Threats) analysis. A SWOT analysis focuses on effectiveness, and involves identifying factors that are either positive and internal (strengths), negative and internal (weaknesses), positive and external (opportunities) or negative and external (threats). Cases illustrating each of the four combinations were predominantly drawn from the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, Italy and the US.

Strengths

Squatting is multifunctional. It can express a protest against issues such as real estate speculation, misallocation of housing stock, planned destruction of a city-scape or landscape, gentrification, a housing shortage, neglect by the authorities of certain categories of home-seekers or a lack of temporary accommodation for recently arrived migrants or fugitives. Furthermore, squatting always serves a practical purpose, having as a practical benefit the securing of housing and/or space for activities such as cultural production or community building. Thus, engaging in squatting carries the promise of an immediate tangible result, which can motivate, and boost persistence and resilience. Moreover, squatting is empowering. Most dramatically, squatting provides the power to use buildings that are not even offered for sale or rent. Ideas can come to fruition without the need for large resources nor the risk of getting bogged down in bureaucracy. A further strength of squatting is that it is less ephemeral than a demonstration or even an occupation. An occupation tends to become harder to sustain when it lasts longer, while squatters are often able to increase the comfort level over time.

In addition, squatting offers self-sufficiency, because its success is not dependent on the authorities taking notice and responding to demands. Instead, being left alone can already be a fine outcome of a squatting action. Furthermore, in contrast to, for example, demonstrations, squatting tends to obviate the need for a critical mass of participants.

Squatting is a form of direct action that has disruptive qualities in the form of getting in the way of a buildings' planned demolition, conversion, redevelopment or sale. This, in turn, can cause institutional disruption, which can be seen as a condition that helps movements to achieve transformative results (Piven and Cloward, 1977). Moreover, squatting can prevent an empty

building from deteriorating. Letting a building deteriorate can be an owner's strategy, for example to make it easier to get planning permission for demolition.

A final strength is that squatting can spawn its own movement, a squatters' movement, that can support and propel it. Squatters' movements articulate demands - for affordable housing, a right to the city, and urban commons (Martínez, 2020), while simultaneously enacting a countercultural identity. This duality implies that squatting can attract people with a range of interests.

Weaknesses

It needs to be mentioned that squatting potentially involves personal risk. Owners can seek retaliation. In an overview of squatting around the world, Corr (1999) reports that squatters have been killed. To be safe, squatters sometimes need to organize protection against eviction attempts by thugs. A famous case occurred at the squatted ADM shipyard in Amsterdam in 1998. The owner, Bertus Lüske, personally drove up in an excavator, together with a crew of twenty, and started demolishing one of the buildings while there were squatters inside. The police intervened and Lüske received a criminal conviction (Kaulingfreks et al., 2009).

In the absence of any form of agreement, when in a civil dispute with the owner, squatters have, in principle, a very weak legal position. Primarily the speed at which an owner can obtain an eviction order, and see it carried out, is the variable of interest. The Dutch legal system, for example, offers a specific procedure that is quick and efficient, the *kort geding*. A judge can block this option if an owner is unable to demonstrate the need for a quick eviction. In other countries, such as Spain, customary long delays in judicial proceedings can work in the squatters' favour. Furthermore, exploiting technicalities can possibly make the squatters' position slightly less weak. An example of such a technicality is that from 1971 up to 1981 in the Netherlands, it was impossible to file lawsuits against anonymous people. Squatters adopted the habit of keeping their names secret, which tended to be effective, although some owners employed detectives or used a legal trick involving a fictional sales contract. When a lawsuit ends with an eviction order, it is up to the local authorities to determine when it will be carried out, and they can decide to hold off if there is a public order or safety issue.

A further weakness of squatting is that, because it clashes with property rights, it potentially attracts repression, which is especially problematic for squatters because they are like sitting ducks. Concerning repressive measures against squatting, two basic models can be distinguished. The first model features a measure of tolerance. In this context, tolerance can be conceptualized as responding to unwanted behaviour without the ambition to eliminate it (Kearns and Bannister, 2009; Bannister and Kearns, 2009). In this model, the response takes the shape of *pragmatic tolerance*, which entails specifying conditions in advance under which there will be no punishment (Gordijn, 2001). Pragmatic tolerance characterized the response to squatting in the Netherlands from 1994 to 2010: squatting was not punishable by law if the building had been empty for more than one year.

The second repression model is *zero tolerance*. The Netherlands moved to this model in 2010. In Germany, the model is known as the *Berliner Linie*, instituted in 1981, which stipulated that all new squats were to be cleared within 24 hours (azomoz, 2018). In the UK, zero tolerance for squatting in residential buildings exists since 2012.

Still, zero tolerance does not necessarily imply that squatting is completely impossible. In the Netherlands, the Justice Department, the police and the city administration set priorities, and evicting squatters on behalf of a dubious owner without a clear plan may not be at the top of the list.

For squatters expecting an eviction, appealing to a court is also a possibility. A basis for this lies in the legal principle that any resident should be allowed to be heard by a court before an eviction is carried out. This principle is supported by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (Kraker Koert, 2015). Such an appeal can be (at least temporarily) successful in the case of an owner who is in disarray and unwilling or unable to carry any plan through, apart from buying properties and letting them rot. An example is the “Slumlord of the Netherlands” Ronnie van de Putte, the owner of various squatted buildings among which the listed monument *Huize Ivicke* in Wassenaar.

The weaknesses outlined above only apply when owners and the authorities care about buildings being squatted, which historically has not always been the case. In the Netherlands, the main examples of this have been in urban renewal areas. It can be estimated that during the Dutch squatting boom of the late 1970s, at least half of the squatting took place in these areas (Van der Raad, 1981). The abandoned tenements on New York’s *Lower East Side*, squatted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, constitute a further example of buildings that neither the owners nor the authorities cared about. These buildings had become City property (*in rem*) as an effect of tax delinquency (Pruijt, 2003).

Opportunities

The opportunities that squatting offers are manifold. This section covers four main categories of opportunities, taken from a previously published typology (Pruijt, 2013a): helping poor people to housing, self-help housing, establishing a space for activities, or preservation of a building, function or neighbourhood. The pursuit of an opportunity from any of these four categories can lead to the opening up of additional opportunities which are discussed below as well.

helping poor people to housing

Squatting can provide opportunities for activists to assert housing rights for groups suffering from exclusion or neglect. Such attempts tend to include the following. Activists decide to start a squatting campaign to house members of a clearly defined excluded group. They locate empty housing or at least a suitable empty building. Ideal is to find housing inexcusably left empty, preferably owned by an entity that has some moral obligation to be sensitive to poor people’s needs. An example is Church property (Bailey, 1973). Through appropriate networks, activists recruit participants, and set up an organization where home-seekers can register their interest. Activists select participants and organize the squatting actions, which take place in a tightly controlled fashion. Because of the newsworthiness of the squatting events, the campaign can generate publicity that pressures the authorities into addressing the housing needs of the group in question. Activists engage in careful framing that emphasises deprivation. Framing benefits from the fact that the organizers are immune to accusations of queue-jumping, because they are not squatting to cater for their own housing needs. A few examples that illustrate how the same logic has remained consistent regardless of the context: squatting to house homeless families in London around 1970 (Bailey, 1973), displaced and badly housed families in New York in 1970 (Pruijt and Roggeband, 2014); opening up squats for recently arrived migrants in New York (Brotherton, 1978), France (Bouillon, 2017), Italy (Montagna and Grazioli, 2019), Greece (Lafazani, 2017); supporting migrants that have been denied the right to stay in the country (Dadusc, 2017).

self-help housing

Quite distinct from the previous type of project, people can also squat to house themselves. Possible outcomes range from being evicted right away, or even arrested, to being able to live comfortably in a place, entering into an agreement to rent or eventually being able to buy the house. In rare cases in the UK, it turned out to be possible for squatters to claim ownership on the basis of adverse possession. D-I-Y squatting provides opportunities for communal living that cannot be easily be accommodated by the regular housing market. Moreover, it makes affordable communal living possible for self-assembled groups based on a shared identity, be it, for example gender, LBGTQI, art, or an interest in an ecological degrowth lifestyle (Cattaneo, 2013). When a housing shortage or crisis exists, this can open up an opportunity for activists to systematically promote squatting. The proviso is that it must be worthwhile for the individual squatters. The experience in the Netherlands suggests that a squatting wave can become so powerful that eventually every suitable nook and cranny in the city will be squatted.

In the beginning of organized squatting in the Netherlands, when home-seekers were not generally aware of the opportunities, leveraging the media was important. Getting organizations involved was also helpful. Notable in the Netherlands at the early stages of squatting was the *Kabouterpartij (Gnome Party)*, which was organized by anarchists. It looks paradoxical that anarchists might found a political party, but this was consistent with the use of irony and humour that was the hallmark of the anarchist movement that started with the Provo group in 1970 (Pruijt, 2017b).

Activists produced a manual explaining how to expediently break into houses and change the lock quickly (during TV prime time), repair floors and windows, hook up utilities and install heaters, dealing with the police, how to find information about the owner and how to negotiate if desired. The manual also laid down a norm that can be described as respectable residency: inviting the neighbours over for coffee, keeping the windows clean, painting window and door frames and - jambs (Federatie, 1969). Subsidized organizations, especially in the field of social work, were also involved, and marketing expertise was applied. For example, activists set up a desk for a squatter's advisory service on the sidewalk in front of the office in which all applicants for social housing had to register (Duivenvoorden, 2000).

In general, when squatting actions are undertaken by people who do it for themselves, there is the potential problem of queue-jumping. Squatters avoid this problem when they choose houses that are either too bad, or too expensive to be let as affordable housing. The former can imply spectacular construction work, such as in various squatting projects in New York (Thayer, 2015) and Berlin (Krei, 2017).

In the Netherlands, legal interventions proved to be essential for a large-scale adoption of squatting. In 1971, lawyers obtained a Supreme Court ruling that gave squats the same protection against unwanted entry as any other home (Pruijt, 2017b). The success of self-help housing, undertaken in an organized fashion, led to a partial institutionalization of squatting in the Netherlands. However, this is not institutionalization in the sense of integration in the political system. Hence, it may be appropriate to use the term *social institutionalization*. Socially institutionalized squatting can crowd out the use of empty buildings by substance abusers who create a nuisance or cause danger (squatters have even evicted other squatters for causing fire hazards), or by swindlers pretending to be landlords in order to collect "rent" from unaware, vulnerable home-seekers.

A further opportunity is developing DIY squatting into a squatters' movement proper. In such a movement, squatting is seen as something that is valuable in its own right, it becomes means and goal at the same time. In the Netherlands, activists set up a network of advisory services with regular office hours, with the objective to supply prospective squatters with information and guidance, and mobilize supporters for squatting actions, while emphasizing that the squatting has to be DIY. Activists involved in squatting advisory services tended to discourage prospective squatters deemed likely to become a nuisance to neighbours. The movement spawned teams working on tasks such as updating manuals, producing newsletters, organizing city-level actions, and a network that crucially has included lawyers.

Cementing the status of squatting as a movement in its own right has been the nearly ubiquitous squatting symbol consisting of a circle pierced by an arrow, the hobo sign language symbol for "continue on", which appeared in 1979 in the Amsterdam *Kraakkrant* #28. In 1980, the arrow in the symbol became lightning-shaped. By internationalizing, the squatter's movement has made itself relatively independent from local contexts, and timeless, because opportunities rise and decline at different moments in different countries (Owens, 2013; Pruijt, 2017a).

Living in a squat, or helping squatters, can offer opportunities to engage in a fight about speculation. Thus, when a real estate speculator moves against a squat, this presents an occasion for launching an investigation into his or her activities, and the financial capital behind these. This is a way to assign blame and pit the interests of home-seekers against the interests of profiteers, which is likely to attract attention from the media and trigger political debate.

We can consider squatting for housing as an opportunity to help secure the existence of affordable housing in desirable locations. Such opportunities are the strongest when it involves squatting buildings for which there are no definitive plans for demolition or conversion. This condition allows the buildings' future to be seen as open-ended, allows the imagination to run wild and substantial investments to be justified. Examples are the already mentioned squatting of abandoned buildings on New York's Lower East Side. It was logical for the squatters to adopt an open-ended perspective because there was no demolition plan. Later, non-profit developers turned up with plans to create affordable housing in the squatted buildings or on the sites. Squatters saw these plans as debatable and tenuous, which allowed them to mount a successful campaign to hold on to their buildings (Prujt, 2003).

In the case of the squats on New York's Lower East Side, and in Dutch cities and in Berlin, it eventually became possible to create opportunities for legalization. Successful attempts at legalization led to the long-term presence of affordable housing on expensive locations. This contradiction requires safeguards against the eventual sale of the formerly squatted properties for a profit, or a possible conversion into market rate housing. Examples of arrangements used for this purpose are the community land trust (Starecheski, 2016), agreements with non-profit organizations to acquire legalized squats to manage them, long-term (around 25 years) leases of buildings or land, or transfer of ownership to the former squatters. As long as the contradiction of affordable spaces on expensive land persists, however, it gives rise to challenges, disputes and conflicts. Former squats that have been sheltered from the capitalist spatial dynamic can turn into foci of contestation after decades of quiet, and can see their occupants evicted as occurred in Berlin (azozomox, 2018; Lennert, 2018). Furthermore, squatter resistance can, with careful framing, cause a housing crisis to become more prominent on the political agenda (Prujt, 2020).

When people squat houses of which they expect and accept that these will be demolished, influence on housing policy and urban planning seems still possible, albeit in a more indirect way. Such was, for

example, the case in various working class neighbourhoods in the Netherlands, in which the – justified - expectation was that many housing blocks would eventually be replaced with social housing. Squatters moved in, made the necessary investments, and tended to relinquish their houses in time to allow for undisturbed demolition directly followed by construction of new housing (Pruijt, 2003). The vibrant squatters' communities in such neighbourhoods eventually vanished without leaving much of a trace. However, the squatters made their neighbourhoods more resilient, indirectly assisting tenants and owner-occupants in staving off wholesale transformation of the street grid, and thereby destruction of the neighbourhoods.

establishing a space for activities

A building squatted for housing may contain spaces that are not very suitable for living, but that suggest other uses. A storefront or some other ground level space can be eminently suitable for (semi)public functions, such as a squatters' bar. In such a bar, there can be meetings, food can be served. The bar can connect the squat to the wider squatters' network and make it possible for non-squatters to integrate in it.

People engaged in space-hungry activities, such as artists, can find in squatting a way to fulfil their workspace dreams. Further examples of entrepreneurial squatting projects include the brewery, cinema, garage, sauna, bike workshop, printshop, book- or infoshop, give-away shop, greengrocer, kindergarten and art gallery. Furthermore, upon squatting a building featuring a huge hall, squatters face the question how to make use of it. If the location with respect to the neighbours permits it, using the space as a concert venue is one of the logical options.

Apart from *entrepreneurial squatting* as a bonus opportunity derived from squatting for housing, as discussed above, it can also be the main ambition, with housing not included or at least not the primary objective. An example is a neighbourhood group establishing a neighbourhood centre or meeting space. At least one form has institutionalized into a model: the *occupied self-managed social centre*, which originated in Italy. In 2013 in Italy, there were around a hundred social centres open as venues for social, political and cultural events. Self-managed social centres tend to offer a range of activities and services. Generally, the various collectives that organize these activities and services all gather in regular plenary meetings to decide the centre's overall direction. Social centres have been opened by a variety of grassroots left-wing organizations and collectives, some having an autonomist and others having an anarchist political orientation. A key challenge is organizing the collective, cooperative action needed to refurbish the building to allow it to be open to the public (Mudu, 2004; 2013). There is considerable variation in size, for example Leoncavallo in Milan drew around 20.000 visitors per month while others are small; attitude towards legalization, as of 2013, half of the existing centres had an agreement with the city or private owner; acceptance of commercial sponsorship for performances; level of openness towards the neighbourhood. Social centres can be organizations that are not completely tied to a particular building and can move on to a new building.

Diffusion of the social centre concept took place to other European countries, but also to Mexico (González, de Santiago and Rodríguez, 2020) and Turkey. The social centre model has also spread outside the realm of squatting, social centres have been organized in rented spaces or buildings made available by the owners. An example is *Bolsjefabrikken* in Copenhagen (Steiger, 2015).

Social centres function as hubs in countercultural and anarchist or autonomist networks, and provide a movement infrastructure for future mobilizations. Although commonly social centres espouse some form of left-libertarian politics, in Italy far-right social centres exist, in particular *Casa Pound*.

Conserving a building, cityscape or function

Squatting can offer opportunities to contribute to the preservation of threatened buildings, neighbourhoods, landscapes, or functions such as social housing. There are two main mechanisms that activists can exploit. The first is using the physical presence of squatters in the building(s) to stop further dilapidation and prevent demolition. The second is the ability to mount a preservation campaign that keeps being rooted in the neighbourhood, despite the authorities' policy to hollow out resistance by rehousing the tenants outside the neighbourhood. Such a campaign requires selecting prospective new squatters on the basis of commitment, which can be done expediently if activists obtain advance knowledge of housing becoming empty. Well-documented examples that pertain to entire neighbourhoods follow below. In the early 1970s, three architecture students squatted in London's *Tolmers Square* neighbourhood. They found out that there was a redevelopment plan for the area that implied razing. Subsequently, they organized a neighbourhood meeting, which was the start of the Tolmers Village Association, the development of an alternative plan, and systematic organized squatting by people willing to join in the fight for preservation. In the end, the mobilization saved the surrounding streets, but not the square itself. In his insider account, Wates (1976, p. 81) concluded that: "the only effective way of preventing the physical fabric from deteriorating proved to be the squatting of empty buildings."

Also in the early 1970s, the *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood in Amsterdam was on the verge of being demolished for the construction of a subway line with an urban highway on top, and office blocks and hotels. Activists took up an interest in the issue. A key protagonist came from the circle of Amsterdam's squatting pioneers, and ended up in the neighbourhood because the municipality had made seven empty buildings available to a subsidized foundation set up to facilitate creative activities of children, artists and DIY-enthusiasts. Activists and tenants mobilized against the planned razing, with systematic squatting of all buildings that became empty as a key strategy. It turned out to be impossible to prevent the demolition of the buildings on the planned construction site for the subway. This site stretched all across the neighbourhood, because the construction method involved building concrete sections at ground level, and then making them sink into the soft soil. However, an important result was that the municipality decided to plan new housing instead of the planned hotels and office buildings (the City Council had already dropped the highway plan in 1970) (Nijenhuis, 1984).

A third classic case concerns *Kreuzberg* in Berlin. In the 1970s, transformation plans for the neighbourhood included an urban highway and the demolition of buildings comprising 2200 apartments. In 1979, the community action group *SO 36* squatted an empty fire station in an attempt to preserve the building, and subsequently organized further squatting of houses. The squatters called this *instandbesetzen*, a neologism combining occupying and renovating. As a result of the mobilizations, the policy changed to 'cautious urban renewal' and restricted demolition to side wings and backhouses (Feye, 1987; Holm and Kuhn, 2011). More recent examples of successful conservation by squatting tend to be of a smaller scale, such as twelve buildings in the *Gängeviertel* neighbourhood in Hamburg that squatters saved from demolition in 2009 (Ziehl, 2020).

Note on favourable circumstances

Even in places and eras in which squatters tend to experience a quick eviction, successes or trend reversals can occur, when aided by special circumstances. An example is the *Zülpicher Straße 290* project in Cologne, which involved dilapidating buildings that the owner refused to fix.

Another factor that can be beneficial to squatters is the existence of a dispute between different parties claiming ownership. An example is the squatted military fortress *Forte Prenestino* in Rome. A large scale example concerns properties in East Berlin after the end of communism in 1989 that were caught up in the transition of the legal system (azomoz, 2018). Financing problems for the owner can also be helpful for squatters, as in the case of the already mentioned Gängeviertel in Hamburg (Ziehl, 2020). A corruption scandal can do the same as in the case of the *Neue Heimat* housing non-profit in Berlin in 1981 (Sontheimer, 2021). Finally, there are cases in which the owner does not seek an eviction. An example is the autonomous cultural centre *Rote Flora* in Hamburg, squatted in 1989 and, as of 2022, still squatted. Its owner is on record with a declaration that he was not interested in a possible eviction.

Threats

A key systemic threat is, as Watkinson (1980) called it, the erosion of squatters rights, which involves criminalization. Such an erosion can be a slow process, both in the UK and in the Netherlands, it started in the early 1970s. The most recent step in the Netherlands was a law, passed in 2021, that was designed to streamline evictions based on a criminal complaint. The mechanism underlying the criminalization of squatting in the Netherlands is the following. It has always been the case that a (however not overwhelming) majority of the members of parliament had negative opinions about squatting, often with the nuance that they deemed squatting not acceptable but that they also felt that the problem of empty housing needed to be addressed. Still, banning squatting tended not to be a top priority for the successive governments. At two occasions, however, negative publicity-generating incidents provided members of parliament with the opportunity to get themselves noted by submitting proposals for anti-squatting legislation. These incidents involved leaving contraptions in two evacuated squats that the police described as “booby traps”, and in front of a TV camera, dismissing a small business owner who came to tell the squatters that he needed the space that they had just squatted. Although squatters have generally been careful to avoid such incidents, this small number of public relations disasters proved to be sufficient to trigger a deterioration of the legal conditions affecting all future prospective squatters in the country (Pruijt, 2013b).

The criminalization of squatting in the Netherlands has been contested by squatters and supporters, including lawyers, from the beginning. It turned out that proposed anti-squatting legislation could unite squatters and supporters, not only for protest, but in a campaign to showcase the contributions of squatting to housing and urban development (Kaulingfreks et al., 2009). This campaign generated wide support, including all left-wing parties. However, because of the right-wing majority in parliament, the proposal for the anti-squatting law was passed. Meanwhile, it seems doubtful whether the criminalization of squatting can be reversible.

In England and Wales, squatting in residential buildings was made punishable by law in 2012. Subsequently, proposals appeared to extend criminalization to squatters in commercial buildings (needle collective, 2018). In Italy, in 2014 a law came into being that blocks squatters from access to facilities (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018). Activists can adapt to an increased risk of quick eviction and criminal prosecution by more strongly incorporating resilience and resistance into their collective identity. The corollary is that the increased risks seem likely to give pause to prospective squatters who are not hard core activists.

The legitimacy of squatting has always been controversial. A 2018 survey showed that in the Netherlands, slightly less than half of the populations supported squatting (Pruijt, 2013b). Such a

figure seems consistent with the notion that, at least in the Netherlands, squatting had become socially institutionalized. However, it seems theoretically plausible that when an anti-squatting law portrays squatting as a serious crime worthy of a prison sentence, this may have to some extent the effect of de-legitimizing squatting. Such de-legitimation can weaken the social institutionalization of squatting. An indication that this is the case is that, referring to the passing of the 2010 anti-squatting law, the municipality of Rotterdam ended the hosting of the squatters' advisory service in the *JIP*, the subsidized Youth Information Point. In order to cognitively resist the delegitimizing effect, one would have to realize that the designation of squatting as a crime is not a fact-like statement such as, for example, in the case of theft, but rather a political tool (Pruijt, 2013b).

Repression is not the only factor threatening to curtail squatting. The squatting scene gets competition from the *anti-squat* industry. Anti-squat companies offer landlords protection for their vacant buildings by means of temporary residents as guardians without tenants' rights. Simultaneously, the anti-squat companies charge monthly fees to their "guardians". The oldest anti-squat company, *Zwerfkei Beheer*, started in Amsterdam in 1980, thus in an era in which widespread squatting was taking place in buildings owned by speculators and real estate developers. They recruited anti-squat guardians from the student population. In order to apply anti-squat protection to a large building, just installing a handful of people suffices. An option left for squatters is to reach for buildings that are in such a problematic condition that anti-squat guardians cannot be installed, for example because of a missing sewer connection, or missing floors.

In terms of sheer numbers, anti-squat has become much more successful in the Netherlands than squatting. Dutch anti-squat companies started to spread their wings across Europe. One of these companies, *Camelot*, had, as of 2022, offices in seven countries.

The threats covered above are concrete and clear, at least when compared to the following issues that surface in the literature. These issues have in common that they can be seen as involving co-optation, or assimilation by the capitalist economic logic and by state actors. One of these issues is legalization, which above was discussed as an opportunity. However, legalization has been problematized by a part of the squatter community and analysts alike as a form of institutionalization that can squash contentious politics (Martínez, 2020). Nevertheless, it seems that never a squatter's movement has been stopped by legalization. Where squatter's movements have been stopped, as in Copenhagen and Berlin, this has been due to repression. In a squatters' movement, it turns out that cooperating with authorities and squatting new buildings can proceed in parallel, a pattern that can be termed *flexible institutionalization* (Pruijt, 2003). Carrying through a legalization process, and fulfilling all the bureaucratic conditions for making it a lasting success, clashes with a confrontational identity; even so, activists who are not comfortable with such a development can choose to move on to other projects (Fraeser, 2015).

A further issue, that is sometimes framed as a threat, concerns the relatively positive treatment that artists, or art squats, tend to experience when dealing with the authorities (Bouillon, 2010). This can be seen as a way to divide the squatters' movement, allowing the authorities to concentrate repression on the part of the movement that is fighting for the preservation of affordable housing while using the artists as providers of cultural services (Uitermark, 2004). The art squats can also serve to bolster a creative class-oriented economic development (Buchholtz, 2015). Nevertheless, it does not seem very clear how this mechanism can, in the real world, weaken a squatter's movement. In contrast, positive stories about art squats can enhance the legitimacy of the principle of squatting, and artists can connect to the housing struggle. An example of the latter is *Metropoliz* in Rome, which is an art squat and simultaneously a home for Romani people (Aureli and Mudu, 2017).

Concluding note

Squatting can be seen as an *immediatist* response to oppressing conditions (Martínez, 2020) which implies an approach that focuses on opportunities. While this is clearly important, including strengths, weaknesses and threats can lead to a more dynamic perspective. Such a perspective is conducive to shedding light on (possible) initiatives that bolster the movement, repair or work around weaknesses, and mitigate threats.

Conversely, considering weaknesses and threats may draw attention to possible unintended consequences such as accelerating the erosion of squatter's rights, or a shift from pragmatic tolerance towards zero-tolerance.

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