

– PRACTICING OPENNESS: Investigating the Role of Everyday Decision Making in the Production of Squatted Space

JOOST DE MOOR

Abstract

By means of illegal occupation, squatters produce (urban) space. Previous studies have predominantly focused on the external dimensions of this process (e.g. squatters' negotiations with authorities), while the few studies that have analyzed the internal processes of producing squatted space have mainly focused on formal and explicit decision-making processes. The effect of everyday practices and improvised decision making on the production of squatted space, however, has been overlooked. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature. It draws on five months of ethnographic fieldwork in two 'entrepreneurial squats' (in the Netherlands and France) to analyze how, on an everyday practical level, squatters seek to reconcile a frame that advocates 'open space' with contradictory practical or emotional needs. It finds that squatters regulate the openness of the spaces they occupy by putting into place spatial, temporal and social boundaries that define who and what is more or less in place. Based on a level of personal or ideological identification, then, the squatters establish a sense of community, distinguish between desirable and undesirable activities and create spatial meaning.

Introduction

People employ various strategies to secure access to increasingly scarce urban space. One strategy that has received growing attention in the literature is squatting. Squatters, 'living in—or otherwise using—a dwelling without the consent of the owner' (Pruijt, 2013: 19), engage in what has been defined as 'the production of space' (Lefebvre, 1991; Thörn, 2012). That is, through their occupations, they negotiate the meaning of (urban) spaces. This study focuses on the production of space in so-called 'entrepreneurial squats' (Pruijt, 2013). Through entrepreneurial squatting, activists seek to transform unused private or state property into 'open spaces' like social centers or cultural free zones, which they often use as their dwellings as well (Duivenvoorden, 2000; Thörn, 2012). This article explores the everyday practices through which this type of squatted space is produced.

Studies that have aimed to explain how squatted spaces are produced have almost exclusively focused on the external processes that squatters use to negotiate their projects in relation to authorities (e.g. Bouillon, 2010; Martínez, 2014). The few studies that have focused on the internal dynamics of squatted space have mainly analyzed (the outcomes of) explicit decision-making processes (Piazza, 2013; Yates, 2015). The everyday improvised decisions that produce squatted space remain largely unstudied, although they are likely to be a crucial part of this process.

In particular, the definition of who or what squats are open to is a crucial aspect of the production of squatted space that is likely to be the subject of everyday practices rather than explicit or formalized decision making. As various authors have observed, openness is a key strategic and ideological element of the framing and use of squatted space (Uitermark, 2004a; Thörn, 2012; Aguilera, 2013). Yet, for practical and emotional

I am grateful to the inhabitants of Het Landbouwbelaang and Maison Mimir for their hospitality; and to Joris Boonen, Eva Falk Pedersen, Elise Garand, Marc Hooghe, Sofie Marien, Steven Van Wolputte, Soetkin Verhaegen, the members of the Squatting Europe Collective, and the anonymous IJURR reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

reasons, squatters often cannot operate spaces without restrictions. Rather than making rigid rules for who or what can (or cannot) enter the squat, however, squatters are likely to restrict openness on an everyday, practical level. By implementing spatial, temporal and social boundaries, squatters produce a notion of community, distinguish between desirable and undesirable activities and produce spatial meaning.

To analyze this process, this article reports on a period of five months of ethnographic fieldwork in two similar entrepreneurial squats that combine a dwelling and a public function: one in the Netherlands and one in France. In what follows, I further outline the theoretical framework, as well as the selection of cases and methodology. After analyzing the Dutch and French cases individually, I compare them and discuss the theoretical implications of the findings.

Everyday practice and the production of squatted space

Squatters produce space. According to Henri Lefebvre (1968; 1991), space can be understood as the product of social processes by which physical space is signified through continuous negotiations. To define spatial meaning, social actors—such as authorities, companies or citizens—negotiate who or what is in place in a certain area. For instance, while the state may denote a certain area as industrial or commercial, citizens may instead demand that residential or recreational needs are served. Previous research has demonstrated that understanding space as the outcome of social negotiations offers a useful framework for analyzing squatted space (e.g. Thörn, 2012). By illegally occupying an area, squatters claim their part in the process of producing space. They oppose legal or bureaucratic demarcations of space in terms of function or property, and seek to create alternative meanings by setting up subversive spaces—thereby claiming their ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1968; Mayer, 2009; Martínez, 2014).

In analyzing the production of squatted space, most empirical research has focused on squatting projects’ external negotiations with authorities (Uitermark, 2004a; Thörn, 2012; Martínez, 2014). Because squats are by definition illegal, and because they often take an explicit counter-cultural or anti-authoritarian position, confrontations with authorities play a crucial role in their emergence, development and survival. However, the production of squatted space also involves internal processes. Analyzing such internal processes is, therefore, key to our understanding of squatted space. Nonetheless, empirical research in this field is still scarce.

Some recent publications present interesting exceptions to this predominant outward focus. In line with the growing scholarly interest in decision-making processes in social movements (for an overview, see Haug, 2013), some authors have begun to analyze decision-making processes in squatted spaces. In particular, Yates (2015) and Piazza (2013) describe how squats’ consensual decision-making processes are part of their prefigurative strategies for developing a more egalitarian society. These processes ensure that the operation of squatted space reflects the consensus of the community. The resulting decisions presumably guide the internal dynamics of squatted spaces through the establishment of ‘collective codes of conduct’ (Yates, 2015: 14).

Though these studies convincingly describe the importance of explicit decision-making processes in squats, they underestimate the importance of the implicit decision making that occurs throughout the everyday use of squatted space. There are several reasons why it is unlikely that the use of squatted space can be determined entirely through meetings and formal decision making. First, squats are often explicitly opposed to authoritarian, hierarchical structures. Though well-organized consensual decision-making processes might support squatters’ egalitarian principles (Maeckelbergh, 2011; Piazza, 2013), squats are likely to be hesitant about making holistic and rigid frameworks to govern the spaces they occupy (Kadir, 2010). Second, it is rather impractical (if not impossible) to set up a regulatory framework that covers any aspect of daily life in squatted space, and while explicit decisions may serve as a guiding code of conduct,

there is always room for creativity and interpretation in the implementation of rules. Finally, as we will see, some topics are particularly unlikely to become the subject of explicit decision making, and might have to be dealt with on a day-to-day basis. Hence, notwithstanding the importance of explicit, discursive decision-making processes, a significant part of squats' decision making has to happen on a daily, practical and improvised level. As we will see, this is particularly likely to be the case with regard to defining the openness of squatted space.

– Framing entrepreneurial squatting as open space

Existing studies have often stressed the importance of strategic framing for the survival of squats (Uitermark, 2004a; Aguilera, 2013; Martínez, 2014). In order to decrease the likelihood of repression and eviction, squatters need to frame their activities so as to convince local authorities of their positive impact on the development of the urban sociocultural fabric, while increasing public support may encourage authorities to condone squatters' illegal activities (Pruijt, 2003; Holm and Kuhn, 2011). Thus, to develop successful strategic frames, activists need to perform several 'core framing tasks' (Benford and Snow, 2000). Through diagnostic framing, activists must identify the problem of a particular social situation, thereby articulating the need for action. Through prognostic framing, they outline a scenario that would remedy the problem.

Diagnostic framing of entrepreneurial squatting typically consists of two related elements. On the one hand, squatters point out that urban space is becoming increasingly commercialized and gentrified, thereby restricting access to the city for noncommercial activities, and for more destitute parts of the population. On the other hand, squatters observe and condemn the fact that many urban spaces are in disuse (Uitermark, 2004a; Thörn, 2012; Pruijt, 2013).

In their prognostic framing, entrepreneurial squatters advocate the revitalization of such disused urban spaces to facilitate access to the city for destitute individuals and noncommercial activities (Uitermark, 2004a; Pruijt, 2013). As squatters oppose the disuse of private or state-owned urban property, it follows logically that their solution involves ending the restrictions that ownership imposes on those spaces. Creative occupation should instead generate room for social and cultural needs that generally do not find access to the urban framework by means of ownership. In order to underscore the common societal value of such places, they must present them as 'open spaces', with no formal restrictions on who or what has access to them (Thörn, 2012).

The frame of openness is expected to strongly affect the production of space. According to Benford and Snow (2000: 614, italics added), 'frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that *inspire* and *legitimate* the activities and campaigns of social movement organizations'. Following this logic, the frame of openness will strongly determine squatters' actions, inhibiting their ability to make explicit and rigid exceptions to the openness of their space (Thörn, 2012). Making exceptions would contradict the ideological motivation of the frame of openness, and could compromise the strategic legitimization of the notion of giving back unused property to society.

Although strategic frames that promote open space provide important guiding principles for the production of squatted space, this does not imply that squatters would, could or should not implement any boundaries or regulations on the spaces they occupy. Rather, it promotes an idea of space that is *relatively* open in comparison to the disuse of spaces protected by property laws, and in comparison to the limits that bureaucracy imposes on grassroots entrepreneurialism. Indeed, totally unrestricted openness is likely unattainable, given the practical and emotional needs to limit the production of open space. The need for such restrictions falls into two main categories.

First, while the notion of open space underscores squats' societal value, unrestricted openness will likely result in an undesirable and compromising (over)use of the space: too many people might want to use it too often, and in ways that cause

disturbances or compromise safety. Although squatters may successfully generate public and political support by demonstrating that they give back to society the space they occupy, overuse would have the opposite effect (Pruijt, 2013: 29). Hence, squatters must impose some restrictions on open spaces.

Second, strategic frames do not determine action in an unmediated fashion, but rather interact with the emotional experience of action (Benford, 1997; Benford and Snow, 2000). This study focuses on entrepreneurial squatters who reside in the spaces they occupy where the public use of open space is likely to conflict with a need to establish a sense of serenity in one's home. While housing provides various basic human needs, like shelter or safety, a sense of serenity is particularly likely to be compromised by the imperatives of openness and the constant presence and demands of outsiders. Consequently, in addition to a more strategic or tactical need to manage and restrict openness, squatters may also feel an emotional need to do so.

In sum, although squatters are ideologically and strategically limited in making explicit, formal restrictions on the openness of their squats, certain practical and emotional needs may force them to do so nonetheless. It is unsurprising that squatters need to restrict openness, yet it is to be expected that this tension created around a frame of openness strongly affects the production of squatted space. It forces squatters to improvise on a daily basis how to manage the openness of the space they occupy. This process will be informed by their own familiarity with whomever or whatever is aiming to acquire access, and by their convictions about what the urban framework would benefit from. In other words, a certain degree of personal or ideological identification with groups of people or activities serves as a crucial filter for allowing access to the squat. This filter prevents overuse of the squat, and excludes activities that would contradict the squatters' notion of societal value or cause a sense of alienation. In so doing, it helps to define the practical and emotional limits of openness.

– The implications of limiting openness

The outcomes of limiting openness are substantial. By implementing boundaries, squatters outline behavioral standards, create in- and out-groups and establish spatial meaning (Cohen, 1985; Lefebvre, 1991; May, 2004). The work of Elias on community and social space (Elias and Scotson, 1965; Elias, 1991) and the body of literature building on his work (O'Connor and Goodwin, 2012; Meier, 2013) provide a particularly useful theoretical starting point for understanding the effects of such processes at the scale of urban developments such as squatting.

First, this work stresses that, although individual actions that lead to the distinction between in- and out-groups may be strategic, these distinctions are not the outcome of a single master plan (Elias, 1991; O'Connor and Goodwin, 2012). According to Elias (1991, 62), 'each "I" is irrevocably embedded in a "we", ... [which] makes it clear why the intermeshing of the actions, plans and purposes of many "I"s constantly gives rise to something which has not been planned, intended or created by any individual ... This is true of the simplest forms of relationships between people'. Following this logic, squatters' everyday attempts to regulate space could create certain notions of belonging and desirable behavior.

Secondly, the Eliasian sociology of community underlines that, although these social outcomes are not the result of a single master plan, there are significant power differences between insiders and outsiders in defining access and behavioral standards. Insiders (like squatters) often have the power to set behavioral standards and to establish who has what degree of access to the space, thereby defining their respective outsiders (Elias and Scotson, 1965; Meier, 2013). In the case of entrepreneurial squatting, these behavioral standards serve as general guidelines of acceptable activities rather than entailing the micromanagement of people's actions, as this would contradict many squatters' advocacy of freedom.

Finally, in line with Lefebvre's (1991) understanding of social space, the Eliasian understanding of community highlights that establishing a sense of community and desirable behavior is often spatially inscribed (Elias and Scotson, 1965; May, 2004). Spatial and temporal boundaries overlap with social boundaries, meaning that access to particular spaces becomes restricted to certain groups and activities. As argued above, squatters are likely to generate notions of belonging and correct behavior, which, through the implementation of spatial and temporal boundaries, could become spatially inscribed as well.

In sum, squatters are faced with a number of practical and emotional reasons for managing the openness of their spaces, which, in turn, creates a notion of community and desirable behavior and produces spatial meaning on an everyday level. Research until now has focused mainly on the external negotiation of squatted space (i.e. confrontations between squatters, owners and authorities), while the small number of studies concerned with internal processes have focused mainly on explicit decision-making processes. The production of space through everyday practice has remained undeservedly overlooked.

Study design

Knowledge about the everyday use of (squatted) space is ideally obtained through intensive ethnographic fieldwork, which necessarily limits the number of cases that can be studied (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). Yet multiple cases allow us to assess whether similar processes drive the production of space in comparable squats, which significantly increases the robustness of the findings. To incorporate the merits of both in-depth and comparative research, this study makes use of a multiple-case design of two cases (Yin, 2009). This section describes the selection of cases and methods of data gathering.

This study analyzes everyday processes in two comparable typical entrepreneurial squats (Pruijt, 2013). By virtue of representing a larger set of cases, typical cases are most suited for explorative research. Variations between the two cases are kept to a minimum to allow for a controlled comparison (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2009). After contacting various squats throughout Europe, two squats that fitted the research design agreed to participate in the study:¹ Het Landbouwbelaag, located in Maastricht in the southeast of the Netherlands, and Maison Mimir, a squat in Strasbourg in the northeast of France.

As typical entrepreneurial squats, both projects are characterized by the many social and cultural enterprises that they organize and accommodate, and both are also used as dwellings. They also share some important similarities in terms of their urban political embedding. Both squats clearly constitute the largest and most visible projects in their respective urban contexts, which means that they play an important role in their cities' sociocultural framework. The municipality, which in both cases owns the squatted property, acknowledges their value and therefore condones the illegal activities. As a result, both squats have managed to establish a quite stable (local) political embedding that, compared to other types of squatting, is relatively common with entrepreneurial squats (Pruijt, 2003; Uitermark, 2004b; Aguilera, 2013). This stability allows squatters to focus on internal rather than external negotiations of spatial meaning. Authorities do affect the production of space—for instance, by putting into place certain regulations (e.g. regarding safety) as a precondition for their support. Yet compared to squats that are continuously confronted with the threat of eviction, the production of space in 'stable' squats is much more internally oriented.

1 To get an initial idea of the nature of the projects and their urban, political embedding, I initially built on information provided by the squatters in our first contacts. Throughout the fieldwork, these impressions were largely confirmed. Furthermore, interviews with (former) responsible government representatives confirmed the squatters' description of their 'stable' political embedding.

While the essential similarities allow for a fruitful comparison between these two typical entrepreneurial squats, there are more differences between the Dutch and the French cases than a two-case study can systematically control for. For example, we will see that the size, age and national context of the two squats vary significantly. The implications of these variations and the limits of control in a two-case design will be discussed in the conclusions.

Participant observation was conducted between February and September 2011. Both as a volunteer and as a cohabitant, I engaged in daily events and conversations and recorded them using field notes. Volunteering in these places offered a natural vantage point for experiencing and observing the use of the space, and it helped strengthen my *rappport* (Robben and Sluka, 2007). I volunteered at events such as concerts and soup kitchens, but also for maintenance or construction work. I also resided as a cohabitant in both places, which provided additional insight into the everyday experience of living in these places. Finally, I observed official meetings that occurred during the study period (one at Het Landbouwbelang and two in Maison Mimir). To some extent this allowed me to assess how everyday decision making relates to more formal decision making. My role as a volunteer and a cohabitant implied that more emphasis was put on participation than on observation. Observing (and recording) had to be done whenever the situation allowed me to naturally step back from the action, without disturbing the situation. Journal entries were made several times a day. In Het Landbouwbelang, between February and April 2011, I volunteered at six different events, and between April and July I resided in the squat for a total of 38 days, while continuing to work as a volunteer. At Maison Mimir, I combined my roles as a resident and volunteer from the beginning, staying in the squat for 24 days in August and September 2011.

The advantages of this methodological approach also come with certain pitfalls. To limit my impact on the social situation, clarification questions often could not be posed during observations (Robben and Sluka, 2007). Insights regarding the motivations or emotions driving squatters' actions therefore relied on observations of 'real' situations, rather than on systematically triggered psychological evidence. To still be able to pose certain questions of clarification, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted at the end of each fieldwork; three with squatters of Het Landbouwbelang, and four with squatters at Maison Mimir (see Appendix for details). The interviews were conducted with the squatters who had become my key informants, and who I expected to be the most willing and able to answer my questions. The interviews were conducted in the informants' native language, but were translated into English for the purpose of this article. Data were finally organized using both closed and open coding (Lichterman, 2002).

The everyday production of squatted space in the Netherlands and France

This section first discusses the Dutch case and then the French. In line with the theory, the main focus will be on how these spaces are used on an everyday basis, how this use reflects a frame of open space, how and why boundaries are used to restrict this openness, and how a sense of community and desirable activities emerging from this process comes to determine the production of space. Afterwards, I compare both cases to identify the main differences and similarities.

– Het Landbouwbelang

Het Landbouwbelang (squatted in 2001) is a large industrial building (a former granary) measuring approximately 50 by 60 meters, and is up to nine stories high. Located on the margins of the city center, it is Maastricht's largest squat, offering shelter to around 16, predominantly male, inhabitants (only three female squatters resided there during the study period). The residents are mainly young adults (aged 20–35),

although, at 80 years of age, one of the inhabitants is the Netherlands' acclaimed oldest squatter. Most of them are students, artists and social workers.

Entering the squat from the street side one passes through a garden, where there are three entrances to the building. One entrance leads up to the restaurant on the second floor, where there is a weekly soup kitchen. Next to it is a door that leads to the second-largest room in the building. This large hall is mainly used for exhibitions and performances. The last door leads to the largest room, where concerts and parties are organized. In the basement under this room there is a give-away shop and a bar, both of which can be entered from the back of the building. A large, improvised door leads from the largest room to the building's private quarters. Here, at ground level, is the communal kitchen, which functions as a meeting room as well. Up a winding staircase, the first floor features workshops and the office of a resident's nonprofit organization. Most residents' rooms are located on the floor above. These rooms are often self-made units that fence off a person's private space from the large, bare, concrete spaces that comprise this building. Back in the garden, there is finally a second two-story building, called *Het Landhuis*, which accommodates other activities such as meetings and a repair café.

The squatters describe the project as a 'cultural free zone'. Squatting, they argue, is not an end in itself. Instead, it is a means to a certain amount of freedom to develop noncommercial sociocultural projects. Although the squat also offers housing to its occupants, its main goal is to develop a sociocultural establishment. Therefore, this case represents a typical entrepreneurial squat (Pruijt, 2013), and this is also reflected in the diagnostic and prognostic framing of the project. The squatters legitimize their occupation of the space by arguing that the building's vacancy nullified its societal use, and even made it into a source of urban decay, and that Maastricht's urban fabric offered little space to noncommercial sociocultural enterprises. They assure listeners that the place will serve the common good by being used as open space. One of the squatters argues: 'We have, from the beginning, always had the idea that, well ... we use, yes we claim this space from society, and in exchange for that, we offer it for free to that same society, and yes, one can at any time make use of it' (interview with a squatter in Maastricht, 31 October 2011).

This frame of open space is reflected in the everyday use of the space. By offering free space to cultural events and social activities, the squatters claim they truly 'give the space back to society', and so re-establish its social value. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that their attempts to open up the space also involve establishing certain boundaries that limit such openness.

The first boundary one notices is that the squat is not always open to visitors. Often only residents or their private guests have access, while the general public can only enter during public events. During public events physical boundaries constitute an internal division of space. Fences are put in place to prevent visitors from wandering around the building, the stairs that connect the concert hall with the work spaces on the first floor are blocked by a trapdoor, and the normally open door between the concert hall and the communal kitchen is barricaded. All spaces delimited in this way carry alternative meanings and levels of accessibility depending on the time or the occasion. Most obviously, all events are delimited by closing hours.

These spatial and temporal boundaries have a social dimension, and create distinct spaces with distinct meanings by distinguishing who or what is (or is not) in place. An excerpt from my field notes illustrates the multiplicity of social roles and their relation to the boundaries in the squat:

I am sitting in the kitchen, eating, when somebody rings the doorbell It is a French guy, here to pick up his bag. Apparently P (resident) gave him

permission to store it here. At the same time another guy comes walking up from the garden who asks me whether he can come in. I ask him what his business is, and he answers he's a friend of H (resident) and that he had an appointment with N (resident). I tell him I saw N inside and give him his phone number so that he can call him ... The French guy ... now asks me whether he can practice here with some sort of juggling equipment that he sets on fire ... I am not sure what to say and ask N, who has arrived in the meantime. N says that the hall in which such activities normally take place is occupied by a theater group ... N adds that if he wants to make use of the place for practicing in the future, he will have to send an email in advance (Maastricht, 4 April 2011).

This excerpt illustrates two essential points. First, it demonstrates the spatial meaning and social roles (inhabitants, familiar and unfamiliar outsiders) that are produced through the everyday use of space. Second, it demonstrates that each of these roles is signified by varying amounts of access and power. In contrast to outsiders, the squatters have full access and the power to determine the amount of access others have. Hence, the squat is inundated with spatial, temporal and social boundaries that determine the inclusion or exclusion of particular groups, individuals or activities. Some more detailed examples will show that the production of space takes place at precisely those times and those places.

During the study period, the squatters experienced a serious challenge: too many people were trying to access the squat's events. Often, within two hours the maximum number of 500 visitors would be reached, leaving large queues outside the building. Faced with such popularity, the squatters feared that their activities were causing too much disturbance in the surrounding neighborhood, leading to a decrease in public and political support for the squat. Another result was that regular visitors often did not manage to get in due to the quota having been already reached. Moreover, there was a strong feeling that the increasing pressure on the inhabitants and volunteers made it less fun to participate. Finally, the continuing increase in the number of visitors resulted in a perceived shift in the crowd in terms of its age and lifestyle towards people from whom the squatters felt alienated. These factors made some squatters want to discontinue their full engagement.

As disturbances and feelings of exhaustion or alienation loomed, the practical and emotional limits of opening up the space were being reached and the squatters felt that regulation was needed. They posted a message on their website informing future visitors of several new regulations, such as strictly observing the 500-person maximum occupancy, and instructions on how to enter the building from the dockside, where the least disturbance would be made. Around and within the squat, more barricades were put up to make sure visitors used only those spaces where disturbances could be kept to a minimum. Moreover, in reaction to the feeling of exhaustion and alienation from the crowd, the squatters decided to predistribute tickets to people they knew personally. Those with tickets had exclusive entry to the party during the first hour, thus ensuring that they got in. Finally, they discussed banning certain music genres that attracted the 'wrong' audience in terms of age and subculture, which increased squatters' ability to identify with the crowds they were hosting.

On other occasions squatters made similar decisions. In the give-away shop, they made efforts to target another, 'more suitable' audience, because, while they intended to attract students, the people who came were mainly middle-aged women. They also refused to host a counter-rightwing demonstration on the basis that politics creates opposition, which conflicted with their intention to create a free space open to everyone. Thus, in reaction to their fears of overuse and a sense of distress, the squatters regulated access to their space by welcoming some groups or individuals more than others.

By filtering access based on identity, the squatters gave back the space they occupied to society *on their terms*, reflecting their own artistic background. In addition to addressing certain practical limits, using identification as a filter for granting access to the squat also helped squatters deal with the emotional limits that squatting entails. Living in the squat can be so all-encompassing that some inhabitants speak of an ‘island syndrome’. Most fundamental aspects of their lives happen within the squat, from sleeping and meeting friends to working and consuming, which further intensifies their squatters’ relation with what goes on in the squat. Moreover, there is continuous peer pressure to participate in the public exploitation of the squat. Two former cohabitants were even expelled from the squat after they were supposedly no longer supporting its public use. Consequently, the squatters often say that living in the squat is highly demanding, and that they can deal with this stress only if they can identify with what happens there. Thus boundaries are put into place in order to establish a level of identification that is practically and emotionally attainable.

Hence, openness constitutes an important ideological guideline for the production of this squat, yet fully practicing openness appears to be unattainable. Squatters experience an urge to imagine how this openness should be restricted in order for them to be able to identify with what goes on in the squat. Loosely defined groups and types of activities are given varying levels of access. The production of squatted space is thus a matter of social organization through the construction of boundaries to produce a sense of community and define desirable activities. Although there is rarely any explicit or absolute inclusion or exclusion of any specific group, using these boundaries in the everyday operation of squatted space does create an implicit sense of community, and distinguishes between desirable and undesirable behavior.

It is important to note though, that this divide is not permanent. For instance, outsiders sometimes become insiders. At the monthly central meeting, every individual is allowed to request permission to become a resident. To gain permission, however, they must convince all current residents that their presence will represent a desirable contribution to the community and the space, to be tested in a three-month trial period. Hence, we see again that squatters establish specific boundaries that define who is in place on condition of what sort of behavior.

The decisions described above, which provided more access to certain groups or individuals, or excluded certain activities, were not taken in the squat’s monthly central meeting, but came about in the organization or execution of specific events, and were improvised in everyday situations. Thus, although important decisions are made in the official meetings, decisions taken in the everyday use of squatted space are essential to its production.

– Maison Mimir

Maison Mimir is located on the edge of Strasbourg’s central area, occupying an old hotel that measures approximately 10 by 15 meters. The property includes one main four-story building, a two-story building, a large garage and a courtyard. It was initially squatted in 2009, expanding to host eight inhabitants and many social and cultural activities. The inhabitants are predominantly male (six men and two women), all of whom are in their twenties. Although some are unemployed, most inhabitants are social workers.

Entering the terrain, one first encounters the garage that houses *la Bagagerie*: a free service where homeless people can store personal belongings. Next, there is the second-largest building, *le Poutsch*, which hosts guestrooms, room for parties, exhibitions and a public kitchen. In the main building, on the ground floor we find *le Barakawa* (their alcohol-free bar that is open daily), a food bank and a room for miscellaneous activities such as exhibitions. All rooms are connected to one central corridor with a staircase that leads up to the first floor. Here we find a library, two meeting rooms

and a guest room. All these rooms are considered the ‘public’ part of the building. The ‘private’ part of the building is located on the second floor, which includes the inhabitants’ kitchen, bathroom, a common living room, an office and three bedrooms. The third floor has the five remaining bedrooms.

The large proportion of the space that is public, and the many activities organized in them, qualifies Maison Mimir as a typical entrepreneurial squat—which is further reflected in the way the project is framed. The squatters describe Maison Mimir as a nonpolitical and therefore subversive, free and open space. Though not all squatters agree on the exact definition of politics (some use more inclusive concepts than others), they all agree that their main goal is to offer an alternative space to society that is open to anyone, for anything—and is therefore free of the politics that divides and restricts the world outside. This view of open space is further reflected in Maison Mimir’s strategic framing. The squatters’ diagnostic frame stresses that the building had long been vacant, and condemns the limited access that precarious people or noncommercial activities have to the gentrified city center of Strasbourg. As a prognostic frame, they advocate the reappropriation of the space through squatting, which allows it to re-establish its common value through the organization and facilitation of social and cultural events, opening up the space to society.

Though the notion of open space is an essential feature of the use of the space and the framing of the project, a more detailed look shows that this openness is limited. As one squatter stated:

I can’t just come walking in saying that we are from now on a social center and that no one can live here anymore. Nor can I say, I live here and so I demand that the activities stop, because I’m trying to sleep: the house is too open for that ... But, on the other hand ... we can’t have activities all the time, because it would be too much, we would still need some serenity sometimes (interview with a squatter, Strasbourg, 22 September 2011).

This quote illustrates the difficulties squatters experience in producing open space, and hence their need to regulate. Again, it is not my aim to argue that this is hypocritical, contradictory or even surprising. Instead I argue that, as at *Het Landbouwbelang*, boundaries create a sense of community and a code of conduct, thereby determining the everyday production of squatted space. In what follows I will discuss in more detail which spatial, temporal and social boundaries are used to manage the space, why squatters feel the need to regulate openness on certain occasions, how they make certain decisions in these instances and the outcomes of this process.

The first obvious spatial boundary is the gate one passes when entering from the street. This gate largely determines whether the squat is open. Normally it is open from morning, when the first inhabitant has opened it to go in or out, until 11 pm, when *le Barakawa* closes. During this period, visitors walk in and out freely. The doors that lead from the courtyard into the other buildings cannot be locked, and thus anyone who can get into the courtyard can wander around the entire premises. However, sometimes a door is put into place blocking the stairs to the second floor where the private part of the squat is located. Finally, there are the doors that close off the squatters’ bedrooms. As a result of the limited space available and the close proximity of private and public areas, however, even these private spaces experience almost continuous public use.

The boundaries described above are only meaningful in relation to a social dimension that determines who or what they include or exclude. For example, there are different closing hours for different people. One day, after shutting down *le Barakawa* at 11 pm, one of the inhabitants and I were guiding out one last visitor. Once we got him out, my informant yelled: ‘Now it’s time to party!’ Somewhat surprised, I followed him up the stairs into the attic of *le Poutsch*, where about 15 visitors were sitting amidst the

mess of our construction work there. The group had been hiding so that some visitors could leave without knowing that others were staying. This incident suggests that there are different roles in this context with different levels of (power to determine) access.

The squatters not only determine who, but also what, is in place in the squat. An example of this was a conflict over the cancellation of a planned movie screening. A group of young political activists requested access to show a movie about 9/11 and to organize a political debate afterwards. Although the group was initially granted access, the squatters ultimately decided to cancel the event, resulting in days of internal discussion about how the squat should manage its openness. Some argued that the movie and the discussion planned for afterwards were too 'political'. They pointed out that they were dealing with a group with strong (right-wing) political affiliations—of which they were initially unaware—and that the screening could color the squat politically. Others argued instead that deciding to keep the group out was a political choice, and that offering unlimited openness to everything and everyone was the only nonpolitical thing to do. In the end, the inhabitants collectively decided to refuse access, stressing both the value of openness and the need to protect the place from potential misuse: 'The ideal, of course, would be for the house to always be open, and to say that always anyone could come in to do something here, but the reality is ... that there are always people who ... well, who don't necessarily have the intention of doing something bad, but which is still harmful for the place' (interview with a squatter in Strasbourg, 22 September 2011). Hence, as a result of producing open space, the squatters were forced to imagine what type of activity it should be open for in order to achieve its societal value.

Interacting with a strategic frame advocating open space, we thus see that certain regulations are applied during the squat's everyday operation. Some individuals have less access to the place than others, and activities that the squatters consider harmful to its societal value are kept out. In each of these cases, then, the squatters use their own familiarity with people or their own ideology or professional background to distinguish between what is desirable and undesirable. Whoever or whatever they identify with (more) is most likely to be granted access; in line with their social work background, they prioritized activities aimed at social wellbeing.

As in the Dutch case, this need for identification can be explained mainly by two limits to openness: the practical and the emotional. The practical limits to openness stem from a concern about disturbance and public and political support, and from squatters' desire to give the space they occupy back to society in the way that they believe is most valuable. Large activities, like concerts, are generally not organized in the squat out of concern for the direct urban environment. Moreover, during the week no alcohol is sold and the place closes early for the same reasons. In terms of how they believe they should give the space back to society, the banning of 'political' activities is a clear example. The squatters believe that the city needs a space where people can be free, and that overt politics contradicts this need.

The emotional limits of openness are reached in particular when the ongoing public use of the space constrains the squatters from experiencing a certain degree of security or serenity in their dwellings. Such a sense of stress is further increased by their deep, permanent involvement in the place. Many basic elements of their lives, like working, eating, meeting friends and sleeping, take place within the squat. Moreover, the squatters strongly encourage each other to continuously contribute to the public use of the space, which can be exhausting. As one squatter put it: 'Personally I am still looking for a form of serenity, which doesn't exist here yet. It is not a place that is physically healthy' (interview with a squatter in Strasbourg, 20 September 2011). In reaction, the squatters implement specific boundaries that aim to regain this sense of serenity. For instance, they build doors that fence off private spaces and implement closing hours that vary according to their familiarity with the individuals concerned.

However, as is apparent from this quote, the experience of squatting remains stressful despite such efforts to limit openness.

These boundaries define a sense of community and correct behavior. In no way is this discursively explicated; the squatters continue to argue that their space is open to anything and everyone. Nonetheless, these regulations implicitly produce loosely defined groups; the ones that belong more to the squat have more access. Similarly, a common sense of desirable activities emerges as well. If the production of space is about negotiating its meaning (Lefebvre, 1968; 1991), then the processes that loosely define who or what belongs are crucial, and underline the importance of everyday practices and decision making. Sometimes decisions about the openness of the space are made in planning meetings attended by squatters and regular visitors, but in many other cases they are made on an everyday, implicit and improvised basis. Explicitly differential treatments concerning who can stay after closing hours cannot be formalized, as this would undermine a frame of open space, thus compromising the strategic value of this frame and contradicting the squatters' ideological motivations. Decisions such as those regarding the banned movie screening had to be improvised for the same reason. Each of these cases thus demonstrated the importance of improvised decisions.

– A comparison

Het Landbouwbelaag and Maison Mimir display similar dynamics with regard to opening and regulating space, and present similar outcomes of this process. Both cases use similar strategic frames of open space to legitimize their activities. This frame offers important guidelines for the everyday use of these spaces, as both offer free access to a large variety of activities and audiences. Yet, in practice, various spatial, temporal and social boundaries limit this openness. Although this is not surprising, it has important implications for the everyday production of squatted space. On an everyday basis, squatters decide who or what belongs, and articulate who or what has access, and when. Producing open space by implementing such boundaries creates a sense of community and a notion of desirable activities, which significantly defines the meaning of space. Driven by purposeful intent, but absent any grand master plan, these processes strongly reflect the Eliasian notion of community and social space (Elias and Scotson, 1965; Elias, 1991; May, 2004). In both cases, this tension between a discourse of openness and a practice of boundaries can be explained by the restrictions that practical and emotional needs place on the implementation of squatters' frame of open space. On an everyday basis, squatters use a sense of identification to define who and what belongs (or not), thereby creating spatial meaning and producing squatted space.

This conclusion has important consequences for the collectivity of decision making. Communal decision-making processes are necessarily collective, and often aim to ascertain a degree of consensus and egalitarianism (Maeckelbergh, 2011; Haug, 2013; Piazza, 2013; Yates, 2015). In everyday, improvised decision making, such a degree of collectivity is hard to imagine. As I have shown throughout this article, squatters certainly draw on the collective ideology of the squat in the everyday operation of space. Nonetheless, the improvised nature of many everyday decisions inevitably creates space for individual imagination.

Despite several important similarities, there is also significant variation between the squats. In particular, the physical qualities of both buildings appear to affect how successful the squatters are in establishing spaces of serenity, and thus how well they manage to deal with the emotional limits of producing open space. In contrast to Maison Mimir, at Het Landbouwbelaag space is relatively abundant. As a result, the Dutch squatters can more easily distance themselves from public events. Due to its smaller size and the proximity of public and private quarters, such opportunities are less available at Maison Mimir. As a result, the emotional experience of the two groups of

squatters is very different. Both define squatting as demanding, but the squatters at Het Landbouwbelang are much more successful in coping with this by creating spaces that provide serenity. This is not to say that the material qualities of the squats determine how the respective projects unfold. Squatters are, in general, particularly skillful at adjusting their material environments to their needs. Nevertheless, the relative size of the squats seems to constrict their ability to do this.

There are a number of additional variations between the squats that are generally considered likely to affect the production of squatted space, but that did not fundamentally alter the findings in the cases observed. For instance, the age of the projects differed significantly, with Het Landbouwbelang having been in existence for 10 years already and Maison Mimir for only two. Het Landbouwbelang might therefore have had a stronger routine for regulating openness than Maison Mimir, where squatters indicated that they had yet to find the right balance between the residential and public use of space. Despite these differences, however, practical decision making clearly plays a key role in both cases. Furthermore, the national contexts of France and the Netherlands are very different, yet due to a relatively stable local political embedding, this context appears to be rather intangible throughout the everyday use of these spaces. Clearly, these conclusions can only be provisional, since a two-case study cannot systematically control for more than one explanatory variable (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2009).

Conclusions

The findings in this article are, to a large extent, in line with the existing squatting literature. In particular, this study, too, finds that framing, and a frame that promotes open space in particular, is important for the production of entrepreneurial squats (e.g. Uitermark, 2004a; Pruijt, 2013; Martínez, 2014). However, the analytical shift from the external to the internal processes of producing squatted space, and from a focus on explicit decision making to decisions made in everyday practice, offers a number of important additional insights.

First, while previous studies have mainly stressed the role of framing in the interaction between squatters, audiences and authorities, this study shows that those frames also offer important ideological guidelines for the everyday use of those spaces. At the same time, however, it shows that framing does not affect the everyday production of squatted space in an unmediated fashion. When an ideology of open space conflicts with practical and emotional needs, squatters are forced to restrict the space's openness. Here, the meaning of squatted space becomes determined by boundaries that, based on a degree of personal or ideological identification, determine who or what does, or does not, belong.

Second, and in line with the first conclusion, these findings underscore the importance of an analytical shift toward everyday practices and improvisation in the study of squatted space. In line with the Eliasian perspective on community and social space (Elias and Scotson, 1965; Elias, 1991; May, 2004), the findings in this study suggest that the definition of communities and a code of conduct are often not the intended result of a well-executed master plan. Rather, they are the result of the everyday management of spatial, temporal and social boundaries, through which insiders determine the role and access of others, produce a sense of desirable activities and ultimately create spatial meaning. This insight underlines both the usefulness and the limitations of Lefebvre's (1968) dialectic understanding of social space for the analysis of squatted space. Squatting can indeed be thought of as the negotiation of spatial meaning and a claim to the right to the city (Mayer, 2009; Thörn, 2012). However, when taking into account the everyday use of space, Lefebvre's approach could overestimate the instrumentality of this process. The way in which individuals negotiate spatial meaning certainly suggests

a certain instrumentality, but, as Elias rightly suggests, this does not mean that the process of producing space, let alone its outcomes, can be explained by strategic motivations alone. Emotional and practical constraints mediate how squatters realize their ideology of open space, which stresses the importance of everyday improvisation in addition to tactical planning.

Again, these findings do not contradict the existing squatting literature. Rather, they underline the importance of an analytical shift toward the thus far understudied aspect of everyday practices and decision making. This study provides some important insights into how this process affects the production of squatted space, yet it also hints at the necessity of further research. First, given the small number of cases included in this study, future research will have to reveal to what extent the mechanisms described above can be generalized to all entrepreneurial squats or other types of squatting. In particular, this study has shown the important implications of combining a residential and public use of space. Future research should examine how a frame of openness is exercised in social centers where this combination is absent. As expected, the emotional limits imposed by squatters' need for serenity are less relevant in here, while the practical limits described in this article are still likely to apply. Because in non-entrepreneurial types of squatting the frame of open space is less relevant (Pruijt, 2013), it remains to be investigated how the everyday use of space defines spatial meaning in this context. Second, since the fieldwork was primarily focused on everyday practices, this study provides limited empirical evidence with which to compare the role of everyday internal practices and explicit decision-making processes, or external negotiations. Although the findings suggest that these processes are complementary rather than contradictory, a more holistic study that examines how these processes interact in more detail could strengthen these conclusions.

Joost de Moor, Faculty of Social Sciences, M²P (Media, Movements and Politics), University of Antwerp, Sint-Jacobsstraat 2, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium, joost.demoor@uantwerpen.be

References

- Aguilera, T. (2013) Configurations of squats in Paris and the Ile-de-France Region. In SQEK (ed.), *Squatting in Europe: radical spaces, urban struggles*, Minor Compositions, Wivenhoe.
- Benford, R.D. (1997) An insider's critique of the social movement framing perspective. *Sociological Inquiry* 67.4, 409-30.
- Benford, R.D. and D.A. Snow (2000) Framing processes and social movements: an overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, 11-39.
- Bouillon, F. (2010) Le squatteur, le policier, le juge et le préfet: procédures en actes et classements ad hoc [The squatter, the police officer, the judge and the prefect: procedures in ad hoc acts and classifications]. *Déviante et Société* 34.2, 175-88.
- Cohen, A.P. (1985) *The symbolic construction of community*. Routledge, London.
- Duivenvoorden, E. (2000) *Een voet tussen de deur. Geschiedenis van de kraakbeweging 1964-1999* [A foot in the door. History of the squatter movement 1964-1999]. Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam.
- Elias, N. (1991) *The society of individuals*. Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford.
- Elias, N. and J.L. Scotson (1965) *The established and the outsiders*. Frank Cass & Co, London.
- Gerring, J. (2007) *Case study research: principles and practices*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Haug, C. (2013) Organizing spaces: meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure between organization, network, and institution. *Organization Studies* 34.5/6, 705-32.
- Holm, A. and A. Kuhn (2011) Squatting and urban renewal: the interaction of squatter movements and strategies of urban restructuring in Berlin. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35.3, 644-58.
- Kadir, N. (2010) *The autonomous life? Paradoxes of hierarchy, authority, and urban identity in the Amsterdam squatters movement*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Lefebvre, H. (1968) *Le droit à la ville* [The right to the city]. Anthropos, Paris.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The production of space*. Blackwell, Malden, MA.
- Lichterman, P. (2002) Seeing structure happen: theory-driven participant observation. In B. Klandermans and S. Staggenborg (eds), *Methods of social movement research*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Low, S. and D. Lawrence-Zúñiga (eds.) (2003) *The anthropology of space and place. locating culture*. Blackwell, Malden, MA.
- Maeckelbergh, M. (2011) Doing is believing: prefiguration as strategic practice in the alterglobalization movement. *Social Movement Studies* 10.1, 1-20.
- Martínez, M.A. (2013) How do squatters deal with the state? Legalization and anomalous institutionalization in Madrid. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38.2, 646-74.
- May, D. (2004) The interplay of three established-outsider figurations in a deprived inner-city neighbourhood. *Urban Studies* 41.11, 2159-79.
- Mayer, M. (2009) The 'Right to the City' in the context of shifting mottos of urban social movements. *City* 13.2/3, 362-74.

- Meier, L. (2013) Everyone knew everyone: diversity, community memory and a new established-outsider figuration. *Identities* 20.4, 455-70.
- O'Connor, H. and J. Goodwin (2012) Revisiting Norbert Elias's sociology of community: learning from the Leicester re-studies. *The Sociological Review* 60.3, 476-97.
- Piazza, G. (2013) How do activists make decisions within Social Centres? In SQEK (ed.), *Squatting in Europe: radical spaces, urban struggles*, Minor Compositions, Wivenhoe.
- Pruijt, H. (2003) Is the institutionalization of urban movements inevitable? A comparison of the opportunities for sustained squatting in New York City and Amsterdam. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27.1, 133-57.
- Pruijt, H. (2013) The logic of urban squatting. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.1, 19-45.
- Robben, A.C.G.M. and J.A. Sluka (eds.) (2007) *Ethnographic fieldwork. An anthropological reader*. Blackwell, Malden, MA.
- Thörn, H. (2012) In between social engineering and gentrification: urban restructuring, social movements, and the place politics of open space. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 34.2, 153-68.
- Uitermark, J. (2004a) Framing urban injustices: the case of the Amsterdam squatter movement. *Space and Polity* 8.2, 227-44.
- Uitermark, J. (2004b) The co-optation of squatters in Amsterdam and the emergence of a movement meritocracy: a critical reply to Pruijt. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28.3, 687-98.
- Yates, L. (2015) Rethinking prefiguration: alternatives, micropolitics and goals in social movements. *Social Movement Studies* 14.1, 1-21.
- Yin, R.K. (2009) *Case study research. Design and methods*. Fourth edition, Sage, Thousand Oaks.