

City

analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action

ISSN: 1360-4813 (Print) 1470-3629 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccit20>

The transformative power of cooperation between social movements: Squatting and tenants' movements in Poland

Dominika V. Polanska & Grzegorz Piotrowski

To cite this article: Dominika V. Polanska & Grzegorz Piotrowski (2015) The transformative power of cooperation between social movements: Squatting and tenants' movements in Poland, *City*, 19:2-3, 274-296, DOI: [10.1080/13604813.2015.1015267](https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1015267)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1015267>



© 2015 The Author(s). Published by Taylor & Francis.



Published online: 01 Apr 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 762



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
<http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ccit20>

The transformative power of cooperation between social movements

Squatting and tenants' movements in Poland

Dominika V. Polanska and Grzegorz Piotrowski

Squatting, or the use of property without the owners' permission, and tenants' activism are under-researched areas, in particular, in the post-socialist context. Poland is pointed out as extraordinary on the map of squatting in post-socialist Europe and a considerable number of tenants' organizations are active in the country. What is most interesting is that squatters and tenants' activists are forming alliances, despite obvious differences in their organizational models, social composition, along with the specific motives and goals of their activism. The objective of this paper is to examine the relations between the tenants' and squatting movements in Poland by studying two cities where both movements are established and cooperating closely. In particular, we are interested in the transformative power of such cooperation, assuming that cooperation between social movements results in negotiations and transformations of the involved social movement actors. The empirical foundations for this paper are 50 interviews, of which 30 were conducted in Warsaw with squatters and tenants' movement activists and the remaining 20 with activists in Poznań. Warsaw and Poznań are, moreover, two Polish cities where the squatting movement is most vibrant and where squatters and tenants have achieved some considerable successes in their activities. The paper argues against previous studies emphasizing access to abundant resources and identity alignment as crucial for the mobilization of collective and collaborative action. Instead, it argues that the lack of resources might equally be driving social movements towards cooperation, as a kind of compensation. Further, our cases demonstrate that ideology and identity alignment in social movements create stagnation in regard to openness towards new allies. We therefore argue that a high degree of identity alignment and ideological consistency might discourage the formation of new alliances.

Key words: social movement, alliance building, cooperation, squatting, tenants, Poland

Introduction

Squatting—or living in or use of property without the consent of the owner (Mayer 2013)—has a long history as being the background for

autonomous social movements in Western Europe or the USA. However, in Poland—similarly to the rest of Central and Eastern Europe—the emergence of squatting coincided with the post-socialist transformation. Because of these different

circumstances, squatting in Poland is a relatively new and under-explored phenomenon, but has, despite its temporal character and the growing numbers of right-wing movements and right-wing rhetoric in the country (Ekiert and Kubik 2014), managed to spread to most large cities in the country (Poznań, Warsaw, Wrocław, Opole, Gdynia, Lublin, Łódź, Gdańsk, Gliwice, Biała Podlaska, Częstochowa, Kraków, Grudziądz, Ruda Śląska, Białystok and Sosnowiec) and intensified somewhat in the last 10 years. Recently, a number of Polish squats have broadened their activities to tenants' rights, offering shelter (when possible), opening up of vacant dwellings for individuals and families in need of housing, providing legal counseling to tenants and getting involved in issues concerning housing politics on the national and local level. This recent turn stands at the center of attention of this analysis, as we interpret it as an expansion of the activities of squatters, previously focused on the internal development of the squatting movement, expressed in the concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey 1991) to include tenants' issues that do not necessarily share the subcultural background of squatters and some of their most important ideological convictions.

Tenants' activism in Poland dates back to the beginning of the transformation in 1989 when the first tenants' organization was founded (*Polskie Zrzeszenie Lokatorów/Polish Association of Tenants*, hence PZL). For a long time, a limited number of organizations were working with tenants' issues in the country (PZL, *Polska Unia Lokatorów/Polish Union of Tenants* (1994), *Ogólnopolski Ruch Ochrony Interesów Lokatorów/All-Poland Movement for the Protection of Tenants' Interests* (1995), *Krajowy Związek Lokatorów i Spółdzielców/National Association for Tenants and Residents of Cooperatives*). In mid-2000, tenants' rights became highly relevant as the Act on the protection of tenants' rights was amended in 2001

(resulting in reduced rights of tenants), a 10-year-old rent-freeze that protected tenants from rent increases ended in 2004 (although it was regulated later), and re-privatization processes of formerly nationalized buildings and land gained new speed in the country. Similarly to the case of squatters, tenants' activism intensified in the last 10 years and there are more than 40 formal tenants' organizations registered in Poland today.

We consider squatters as a movement of a more radical nature, usually organizing horizontally and preferring direct methods of action, including civil disobedience and at times law-breaking (March and Mudde 2005). Squatters' activism is striving to be independent of existing institutions, organizations or other formal actors, and often challenges them. Squatting is motivated by ideological reasons and is seen as a goal in itself and at times could be understood as a politicized lifestyle (Portwood-Stacer 2013). Because of squatters' preference for direct action and squatting's illegality, such activism is often interpreted as 'uncivil' (Kopecky and Mudde 2003) and has difficulties in finding broader support in Poland as other radical social movements (cf. Cisař 2013). The Polish tenants represent a more moderate social movement in its claims that it is functioning within the politico-institutional system and is being organized formally in non-governmental organizations. Tenants' activism is a hybrid of transactional type of activism (Petrova and Tarrow 2007; Cisař 2013) and self-help activism. However, it does not show organizational or material support from abroad and is driven by a small group of dedicated members, who are motivated by pragmatic reasons like their housing and socioeconomic situation.

What is most interesting is that squatters and tenants' activists are forming alliances, despite their obvious differences like the differences in their organizational models (formal vs. informal and horizontal), the social composition ('pensioners' vs. young adults), along with the specific motives and goals of their activism (self-help vs. creation

of alternative space for socio-cultural purposes). The intersections and cooperation between these two movements are therefore the main focus of this paper. The objective is to examine the relations between the tenants' movement and the squatting movement in Poland by studying two cities where both movements are established and cooperating closely. In particular, we are interested in the transformative power of such cooperation, assuming that cooperation between social movements results in negotiations and transformations of the involved social movement actors. The research questions guiding our analysis are: (1) *How and under what conditions are alliances formed between squatters and tenants' movements?* (2) *What strategies characterize the alliances?* And (3) *What differences are there between the two studied cities in cooperation and its effects on the movements?*

The empirical foundations for this paper are 50 interviews, of which 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted in Warsaw in 2013 with squatters and tenants' movement activists, and 20 interviews were conducted with squatting activists in the years 2008–13 in Poznań. Warsaw and Poznań are two Polish cities where the squatting movement is most vibrant and where squatters and tenants have achieved some considerable successes in their activity (more on that later on in the analysis). Interviews were held either at squats or in neutral locations and lasted between 45 minutes and over two hours. All interviewees' names were anonymized and we use a numbering system in the quotations of the interviews. All interviews have been transcribed and coded systematically; however, the analysis of the empirical material for Warsaw and Poznań has been divided between the authors because of anonymity and consent-agreements with the interviewees. The information collected was cross-referenced with publications released by and about the activists, in official documents, newspapers and mass media, social media and on the Internet in the last five years.

Nearly all of the squatters we interviewed were young people, in their 20s and 30s, and many of them had a rather long story of squatting (also abroad). Many of them were university students, and made their living from part-time jobs, sometimes being entrepreneurs (owning their own, small and project-based businesses), and often being in temporary employment arrangements by choice. Their squatting activism intersected with other issues such as participation in anarchist/autonomist groups, anti-fascist initiatives, Food Not Bombs and so on. As most Polish squatters organize horizontally, without formal leaders, we tried to cover different perspectives on squatting in each city by choosing respondents with different experience in squatting (different squats, duration and so on). Interestingly not all squatting activists were living in the squatted buildings; many of them had other living arrangements and were involved in the squatting movement for ideological reasons.

The majority of the tenants' activists interviewed for this study were in their 50s and 60s and had been renting their apartments (public, social housing, formerly company managed) for most of their lives. Their occupational and educational background varied, nevertheless they all experienced financial difficulties related to their housing situation. All stated that they could not afford to become homeowners due to their economic situation (pensioners, presence of incomeless persons in the household, low wages, temporal employment and so on). The respondents were chosen according to their position in the tenants' organizations active in each city, and we covered leaders, members and loosely connected activists working with these organizations.

The paper begins with a description of previous studies of squatting and tenants' activism and their connections. The following section presents the theoretical framework of the study by concentrating on alliance-formation and relation-building aspects of squatters and tenants' activity. Then the two cities are presented, beginning with Poznań

and then Warsaw, and an analysis of the cooperation and its conditions is provided. The last section of the paper presents our main findings on the transformative power of cooperation between the squatting and the tenants' movement and the differences between the two local contexts studied.

Conceptual and empirical gaps in the field and the theoretical framework

The origin of the term 'squatting' comes from 19th-century America and the taking over of unused property by the Settlers (which also meant taking the land from Native American people), regulated in 1862 by the Homestead Act. The second wave of squatting that gave its present-day meaning took place in the 1970s, when it moved to the arena of big cities and became a political statement as well as an imminent part of the counterculture (Katsiaficas 1997; Van der Steen, Katzeff, and van Hoogenhuijze 2014). Since then squatting movements have been observed in the West in Europe: Italy, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, France and in the USA, mostly in large cities (Bieri 2002; Martinez-Lopez 2007; Pruijt 2003; Mudu 2013; Thörn, Wasshede, and Nilson 2011; Owens 2013; Corr 1999). Most of the writings on squatting either focused on historical analysis (describing the development of the phenomenon in particular cities) or were characterized by an activist orientation with academic reflection. The understanding of squatters as a social movement has not been as common. The explanations for why squatting occurs vary from: an example of middle-class counterculture (Clarke et al. 1976, 58); a manifestation of DIY¹ culture (McKay 1998); an 'important facet of the decentralized yet worldwide struggle to redistribute economic resources according to a more egalitarian and efficient pattern' (Corr 1999, 3); a post-modern, post-ideological, mass-media-influenced movement (Adilkno 1994); an utopian struggle (Kallenberg 2001); a self-

help movement (Katz and Mayer 1985); progenitors to, and later a wing of, the 'international Autonomes' (Katsiaficas 1997); to squatting as both a result of housing shortage and search for ideological alternatives (Karpantschov 2011). One more recent collection of essays on squatting, *Squatting in Europe* (Squatting Europe Kollektive 2013), concluded that squatting, although not always sharing the same goals, resources or backgrounds, was a reaction to housing crises, homelessness and lack of social space in contemporary cities. Nevertheless, similar to other studies in this field, squatting's emergence and development in the post-socialist part of Europe is missing in this collection. There are few published works on squatting in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 and we would like to suggest that this gap, that is both of conceptual and empirical nature, is a consequence of the conventional view of post-socialist civil society and political activism as 'weak' and lacking grassroots connections (Howard 2003; Kotkin 2010; Sztompka 2004). Our contribution is therefore twofold, firstly, we aim to question the 'weak' nature of post-socialist collective action and civil society by demonstrating the vibrant activity of squatters and tenants in our case studies and secondly, we aim to contribute to the field of literature on squatting in this under-researched part of Europe.

Squatting in post-socialist societies has, although indirectly, been presented in studies on the alter-globalist movement or alternative cultures (Piotrowski 2011a; Gagy 2013). Among the studies directly focusing on squatting there is the comparison of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic by Piotrowski (2011b) concluding on squatting's difficulties in finding broader support, due to the smaller size of left-wing movements and the phenomenon's novelty in the area. However, Poland is in previous studies pointed out as exceptional in its development of squatting among the post-socialist countries as it hosts one of the most stable and durable squatted social centers, Rozbrat, founded in 1994 (Piotrowski

2011b, 2014; Staniewicz 2011). The very beginning of the squatting movement in Poland is described in Żuk's (2001) study of new social movements in Poland in the 1990s. Żuk argues that squatting is a new phenomenon in Poland that can be dated to the post-1989 period, at the same time as it holds some connections with the development of alternative culture in the country in the 1980s. The author argues that squatting in Poland in the 1990s drew its inspiration mainly from Western examples. Squatting in Poland is also described as caused by the systemic changes in the 1990s and the rise of capitalism, along with socioeconomic changes and the very existence of vacant buildings. We would like to argue, moreover, that squatting is a response to the housing situation in the country, the lack of social space for the development of alternative culture and the strengthened neoliberal rhetoric in urban governance throughout the country (and in particular in large cities) since the accession to the European Union and the financial crisis of 2008 (Shields 2011). With this in mind, we analyze how the squatting movement forms alliances with other social movement actors, and in the Polish case these are most often the tenants.

Similarly to the case of squatting, the body of literature on what might be defined as tenants' activism in post-socialist societies is limited. Some of the few studies on post-socialist societies and housing protests were the studies of Hungary, Estonia and Russia by Pickvance (1996, 2001). Pickvance, Pickvance-Lang, and Manning (1997) show that higher levels of housing activism corresponded with high levels of housing shortage in post-socialist countries. The authors claim that a prevalent political structure has a major effect on movements, but is not the only factor behind collective action in these cases (Pickvance, Pickvance-Lang, and Manning 1997, 16). When studying responses to housing dissatisfaction in Budapest and Moscow at the beginning of the 1990s, Pickvance (2001) argues that collective action in

the housing sphere is an unusual phenomenon in the studied cases and the study's results show that the respondents preferred individual action before collective action in overcoming housing difficulties, with those in the weakest social positions most likely to stay inactive. The activism of tenants in post-socialist settings has been addressed in the work of Polanska (2015) who emphasizes the role of alliance formations and the attraction of influential brokers in the explanation of the outcomes of the Polish tenants' movement. The internal and external relationships of tenants' associations and their members are in focus, demonstrating that tenants despite their weak social positions and lack of resources have succeeded in their activity due to their relationships to others. Audycka-Zandberg (2014) studied the Polish tenants' movement and concluded that participation in the movement does not follow conventional models of political participation, as the majority of activists within the Polish tenants' movement are women and of relatively mature age. This conclusion goes against the conventional view of political participation in post-socialist societies and is another nuance of the post-socialist civil society that we interpret as hidden behind the labels of 'weakness' and 'passiveness'.

In the literature on squatting in contexts other than post-socialist Europe, activism among tenants is often mentioned and separated from the very definition of squatting. The development of the movements has been intertwined and is often mentioned in the literature on squatting in the West. Corr (1999) has described the development of a squatter organization closely connected to organizations of homeless people and tenants in the USA in the 1990s and concluded 'squatters and rent strikers have often supported each other because both resist eviction and because many of their arguments, tactics, and movement trajectories have similarities' (9). Katz and Mayer (1985) have studied the development of the tenant self-management movement in New York

City in the 1960s and 1970s and illustrate how this movement is intertwined with the squatters' tactics and repertoires of action. However, the connection between squatters and tenants is not exclusive to the North American context. Katz and Mayer (1985) analyze also the 'rehab-squatting' in West Berlin in the 1970s and describe squatting as a tactic for the tenants and community activists 'to stop the deterioration, forced vacancies and speculation carried on by private landlords and developers' (33). Also in Amsterdam the history of squatting was interwoven with the history of tenants' committees fighting for affordable housing already in the 1930s (Owens 2009). Owens (2009) emphasizes however, that the identities of tenants and squatters were separated as 'tenants used squatting as a tactic, however, they did not think of themselves as squatters, let alone as squatters' movement' (47). The clear division between the squatters and the tenants, and at the same time their interconnectedness throughout the history raises some interesting questions on the relationship of the two movements and the nature of their cooperation. The ambition of this study is to explore this interesting relationship, but in a different context that hitherto has been explored in previous studies.

We are interested in alliance formation between squatters and the tenants' movements in the post-socialist context, and define alliance formation as collaboration between two or more social movement organizations on the same task. It can take a variety of forms and be more or less long-lasting, however, the partners always maintain separate organizational structures (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). In the social movement literature there are several studies covering the factors facilitating cooperation and alliance building (Polletta 2002; Rochon and Meyer 1997; Lichterman 1995; Obach 2004; Rose 2000). For example, Van Dyke (2003) has found that heightened levels of threat or opportunity, the access to abundant resources and high levels of identity

alignment among the actors are influential factors to the probability of alliance building. In other words, social movement actors tend to build alliances and cooperate with others when they feel threatened, when they recognize an opportunity for reaching some of their goals, when the resources are plentiful and accessible, and when their identities are similar to the potential allies. In our examination of the conditions under which alliances were formed between squatters and tenants in the two cases, we particularly focus on the factors facilitating cooperation and alliance building between and within social movements.

Theoretically, we want to ground our study of alliance formation between social movements and what facilitates them, on Political Opportunity Structures (POS). The openness or closure of political systems (Tarrow 1998; Kitschfeld 1986) and the available opportunities or threats (Tarrow 2012) to activists might have facilitated the alliances between squatters and tenants. The openness and vulnerability of the political system, fragmentation of the elites and contingent opportunity structures are key factors shaping the movements, leading to their emergence and openness to cooperation (Passotti 2013). These opportunities often lead to different outcomes as rigid political systems might discourage activists from engagement but also might radicalize opposition and so forth. We want to stress the fact that the interpretation of POS should take local context into account: differences in city sizes, their location, political cultures, closeness to influential allies or position in the country that are undoubtedly important in understanding of the grievances in question.

Moreover, in previous works on social movements, access to abundant resources is considered crucial for the probability of cooperation between social movements (McCarthy and Zald 1987). Resources such as money, people, skills and technologies available to social movements in their organization and mobilization (Chesters and Welsh 2011) should help establishing

cooperation. We argue, contrary to resource mobilization theorists, that the lack of resources (economic resources in particular) might equally be driving social movements towards cooperation, compensating in other forms of capital (social, symbolic). When there are no financial resources to access for social movement actors, then the capital generated by individuals in connection with others becomes crucial for the survival and development of resource-less, in economic terms, social movements.

Furthermore, in understanding what inspires and facilitates cooperation and alliances across and within social movements, researchers have emphasized the role of movement structure, ideology and culture (Polletta 2002; Staggenborg 1986; Van Dyke 2003; Beamish and Luebbers 2009). The role of ideology and identity alignment is in focus in our analysis of the alliances formed between squatters and tenants in both cities. We will argue further on that our cases demonstrate that ideology and identity alignment create stagnation in regard to openness towards new allies. Of course, we are not opposing that alliances require some degree of identity alignment or ideological similarities between the allies. However, we argue that a high degree of identity alignment and ideological consistency discourages formation of new alliances. In this line of thought, we discuss the role of instability along with the differentiation of interests and identities as facilitators of alliance building and cooperation.

We also want to argue that the formation of alliances and cooperation is not always grounded on rational decisions. Instead, in many cases already existent social relations play a decisive role in individuals and organizations' choices of partners to cooperate or build alliances with. This could be explained by the (inter-personal and inter-organizational) trust built in already existing relations and the formation of strong social ties. New relations require investments on both parts in trust building, while it can be (to a great extent) avoided in already existent

relations. Corrigan-Brown and Meyer (2010) argue that personal networks of friends and acquaintances encourage participation and collaboration, and could make non-participation costly to the individual or the organization. Our ambition is to focus on the relationships between squatters and tenants and study the formation of alliances in two local contexts.

National and local housing and legal conditions

In order to understand the conditions of squatting and the claims put forward by squatters and tenants in Poland, one needs to consider the situation in the housing sphere, as it constitutes these movements' activism. According to an official report generated by the Supreme Audit Office, as many as 6.5 million Poles lived in substandard conditions in 2012, and there was a shortage of 1.5 million dwellings in the country and 200,000 dwellings would within a few years be classified as out of use (NIK 2012). Municipalities hold the responsibility for the management and supply of public housing in Poland but strapped budgets and withdrawal from the field of housing construction have resulted in an even greater shortage of municipal (and affordable) dwellings for rent. There is also another difficulty in the field of housing, the re-privatization of buildings and land nationalized during communism. After 1945, the communist authorities nationalized some of the remaining houses and land, and allocated new tenants in the remaining buildings. In many cases previous owners of buildings and land lost their lives during the war. These houses were until recent times under municipal management, however, re-privatization claims by former owners, their heirs and the buyers of these claims started to re-shape the situation. Because of lack of coherent legal regulations and lengthy legal procedures, lawyers or banks that employ lawyers skilled in property law, often buy these re-privatization

claims (making a profitable business out of it), subsequently resulting in rent increases, causing the old tenants to move out and subsequent gentrification. Sometimes the unclear ownership status of a building leads to it standing vacant for a long time, slowly falling apart. Often the value of the land plot is higher than the value of the building or the costs of its renovation, leading to deterioration. Squatters and tenants in Polish cities oppose these processes, given the housing shortage in the country and the fact that residential buildings are left to decline. They also oppose the gentrification processes, resulting from the business of re-privatization claims, and the shrinkage of affordable housing stock.

Structurally, squatting is not only conditioned by the availability of vacant houses in a useable condition, but also by the legal framework. On most occasions, Polish authorities are evicting squatters using regulations on trespassing that makes it a felony according to Polish law (article 193 of the penal code, up to one year in prison). In order to evict the squatters, a legal owner of the building must request it from the police, while in some cases the ownership of squatted buildings is not clear which is used as an opportunity to squat. In the last few years, the squatters have become rather effective in using legal procedures to defend their rights and avoid evictions. There are also some examples where squatters have used litigation and have taken legal actions beyond the Polish national framework (as in the case of Wrocław-based squatters who took their case to the European Court of Human Rights).

Poznań has a population of around 700,000 people with around 130,000 students (around half of them are estimated as coming to Poznań to study). Located in western Poland (until 1918 being a Prussian city), Poznań survived World War II in a rather good condition, with numerous old buildings in the city center and the districts surrounding it. In many cases, owners of these houses lost their lives during the war or fled, and since the mid-1990s the number of

re-privatization claims has been on the rise. In some cases, the new owners preferred not to wait for the three-year eviction notice for the tenants and tried to renovate the houses and sell the apartments earlier. The situation escalated when NeoBank, formerly the Cooperative Bank of Wielkopolska, began to set up and finance companies that were buying houses and re-privatization claims in the city. Some of these companies hired an external contractor—the Factory of Apartments and Land (hence FAL)—to ‘clear’ the newly bought houses of tenants. This company soon became notorious for their use of illegal methods in order to clear the houses from their current tenants, such as cutting off water supplies, demolishing common areas or roofs in the houses and using intimidation towards tenants. At the same time, according to the Central Statistical Office, no social housing was produced in Poznań in 2010–13, and the completed municipal dwellings amount to 0.7–7.6% of the total housing production in the same years, pointing towards the municipalities’ withdrawal from being active players in the housing market (CSO 2014). The Board of Municipal Stock of Units estimates that around 10% of their dwellings are vacant (around 1500, mostly due to their condition as it was stated by the director of the Public Housing Management Agency in a personal communication), however, the squatters estimated the number to 30,000, privately owned dwellings included (however, they refused to reveal their data sources or methodology used to estimate that number).

Warsaw has a population of 1.7 million residents and is the capital city of Poland. Warsaw has been destroyed and rebuilt throughout history and is today described as an ‘extraordinarily modern city’ (Grubbauer and Kusiak 2012, 11). Warsaw’s position as the capital city, with its relatively higher housing prices (rents and real estate), its position as a political center with high concentration of national decision-makers and media hub with high concentration of

national media, but also its position as a model city for the rest of the country, is mirrored in the housing politics and housing conflicts taking place in the city. Housing policies and conflicts regarding housing are specific in Warsaw as a result of a Decree issued in 1945 which let the municipality take over land and buildings in the city's central parts. After 1989, the former owners of buildings and land gained the right to get back their property or compensation from the municipality. This process involved tenants, as many of the city's tenants are living in the municipal housing stock and 'around a quarter of the city housing resources are located in buildings that may be subject to reprivatisation' (Evers, Ewert, and Brandsen 2014, 244). Additionally, as many of these buildings are located in attractive areas in the city center, the pressure from different interest groups (real estate owners, investors vs. tenants) is great and highly conflictual. Complicated ownership issues in the housing field and protracted legal processes have moreover left buildings empty and deteriorating in the city center, causing dissatisfaction among residents, tenants and activists, being interpreted as inefficient management of the housing stock in the light of lack of affordable public housing and the continually shrinking municipal housing stock in the city (according to the Central Statistical Office no social housing was produced in Warsaw in 2008–13, and the completed municipal dwellings amount to 1–2.8% of the total housing production in the same years [CSO 2014]).

Activist environment dominated by one squatting center: the case of Poznań

Poznań is home of one of the best-known squatted social centers in Poland—*Rozbrat*. The name in Polish means 'to come in peace with something or someone and carry on' and in the first squatters' assumptions, it reflected their attitude towards the newly developed capitalist reality in Poland.

Initially (since autumn 1994) serving as a home to a few activists, it opened to a broader public in 1995. Over the years, *Rozbrat* has evolved into a stable element in the city's landscape, both socially and (counter)culturally. As the authors of *Rozbrat*'s website claim:

'The original idea of *Rozbrat* was to set up a commune composed of the people who did not approve of the world based on "the rat race". Then it has evolved and developed: the place itself was changing, different people got involved in the formation. The goal has broadened from residing to carrying on cultural, social and political work.'²

When in 2009 a threat appeared that the grounds on which *Rozbrat* is located could be auctioned, a massive counter-campaign was launched that peaked during two demonstrations in March and May 2009, that gathered around 1500 and 900 participants, respectively (numbers rarely seen on the streets of Poznań). The aftermath of this campaign was the strengthening of the position of *Rozbrat* in the city's power structures and coining of the slogan 'city is not a company', commonly used by squatters and housing activists.

What is evident in the case of Poznań is that for a long time since the opening of *Rozbrat* in the mid-1990s, the squatting and anarchist/alternative culture environment in the city has been dominated by the collective active at *Rozbrat*. Only in recent years have there occurred some fractions of squatters that have looked for other spaces to occupy/other types of activities in the city (the punk-oriented *Magadan* in 2009, *Warsztat* in 2012). One of these has existed since April 2013 and called *Od:zysk* (*Odzysk* means 'recycle', *zysk* stands for 'profit' in Polish) and is located on the Old Town Market since its crew was evicted from another location (*Warsztat*) (see Figures 1 and 2).

Now *Od:zysk* occupies an old shop that was abandoned by its owners after mortgaging the building. Recently the building was sold to a newly established company,

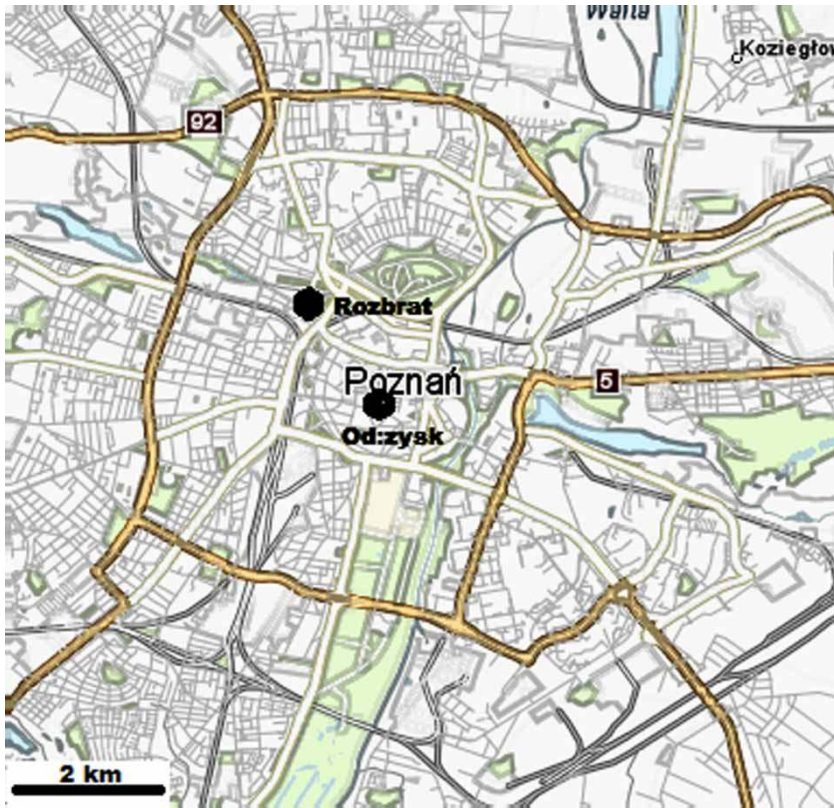


Figure 1 Squats in Poznań (August 2014)

however, the case seems to be open. Residents of Od:zysk have staged several protests against the plans to sell the building and a demonstration that ended up in occupying a bank and a police station. The group that squatted Od:zysk was not only younger, but also more focused on art and queer issues and are much more conflict-oriented than the residents of Rozbrat. Although they heavily criticize the housing policies of the municipality, they rarely cooperate with the tenants' organizations, although they use the notion of public housing in their criticisms of local authorities. As one of the 'older' squatters characterized:

'The last actions were a result of several things: on one hand that the crew has squatted the house. They were a movement so they were capable of squatting a house in the city

center. This house gave space to exhibit something; it is a very clear sign.' (10)

The majority of squatters in Poznań are either punk rockers or anarchists and many of the squatting activists are in fact not residents of squatted centers but they do get involved in squatting activities for ideological purposes (for more, see Piotrowski 2014). The membership in various groups connected to squatting (such as the Anarchist Federation) is to a large extent overlapping. Also other squatting attempts in Poznań (Magadan, Warsztat and Od:zysk) were done by people who were either involved in the Rozbrat collective or in the Anarchist Federation. Within the public discourse, the whole environment (of fewer than 100 people altogether) is considered as one ('anarchists from Rozbrat'). Because of this,



Figure 2 Squat Od:zysk in Poznań with banners stating ‘We are taking back 30,000 vacant buildings’ and ‘Vacant buildings in the hands of imagination’ (Photo: Author)

squatting and connected initiatives are highly politicized and ideologized in Poznań, with a heavy influence of anarchism.

Regarding the tenants’ movement in Poznań, one can observe its rapid development in the late 2000s. It was connected with the increasing number of re-privatization cases concerning old buildings, mostly in the city center and the actions of the ‘cleaners’. Following these changes in December 2011, a tenants’ association was established—*Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów* (Tenants’ Association of Great Poland, hence WSL)—that gathered not only the tenants, but also numerous other activists with the core group being squatters/anarchists. The legal framework of an association was used in order to gain legal rights (in particular when it comes to demanding public information) and occasionally to open up the opportunity of collecting material resources. Despite having a legal structure, the cooperation between

the tenants and the squatters remained informal and unstructured. In addition, a broader coalition was simultaneously established to support the evicted and harassed tenants and put pressure on the media and public opinion. The coalition was joined by local artists (from *Otwarte Forum Kultury*), academics (public BA thesis defenses were held in front of the building) and activists from *My Poznaniacy* (We the Poznań-residents), a local political and activist movement. Later the group got involved in and initiated more politicized campaigns for revitalization of public spaces and against gentrification.

The involvement of the groups in the tenants’ issues—squatters and anarchists in particular—has led to politicization of the claims and the conflict. This seems to be in line with the Polish anarchists’ strategy characterized by one of the activists as ‘getting involved into local conflicts, amplifying them and using them to show broader, more ideological conflicts and issues’ (5). Therefore, the squatters used the conflict between the tenants and the house owners to involve city authorities and in particular the city’s Public Housing Management Agency and protests were staged in front of its office (Rozbrat Raport 2014). The struggle was a continuation of a previous conflict with the agency blamed for promoting neoliberal policies in Poznań. Illegal practices connected with the privatization of municipal housing stock became the reason for shifting the criticisms from private owners to local and municipal policies and the lack of social housing. These issues were often brought up by the activists during public debates with the authorities, in public places, on television or in the press and the activists often used the example of the profitable business of claim-buyers of housing property when discussing the municipal housing policies. As one of the activists said:

‘Interpreting the housing and municipal relations in Poznań is not so fucking easy because suddenly it turns out, no one has interpreted, the journalist did not sit down

and say this guy is part of the system with this guy [...] and that he cleans these buildings and that they're renovating the buildings, and this one has 10 of these houses, the other one 20. This is a gigantic farce of what has been done in the context of housing.' (7)

Both squatters and tenants' activists could unite in the shift in the critique of owners' and private interests to the critique of municipal housing policies. The focus of both was at the same time broadened, for tenants the owners were no longer the only adversaries and for the squatters the local conflict was turned into an ideological one. What was also often criticized was the lack of response of the authorities (both city representatives and the police) to the actions of the 'cleaners' as they were interpreted as 'private issues' between the landlords and the tenants. Here, the squatters' radicalism has proved to be an input for the cooperation: squatters helped the residents of Stolarska St. 15 to barricade themselves inside their house and prevented the 'cleaners' from entering and also blocked with physical force an attempt to seal the entrance of another building. Besides providing logistic support for the tenants (for instance, connecting an electric generator after the 'cleaners' cut off the electricity supply), the main input of the squatters was making the conflict public. The 'cleaning' practices became a widely known and criticized issue and the whole media campaign was launched and, due to squatters' activities, local authorities and NeoBank became involved in the discourse and—partially—blamed for the situation. The bank had to change its strategy, withdrew from financing re-privatization of houses with municipal tenants and—what was crucial for the tenants—began to pay settlements to the previously evicted residents. As the tenants' activists mention in the report summarizing 2013:

'thanks to publicizing violations of the rights of tenants, a large part of public opinion already perceives today's tenants' issues differently, especially in terms of forced

displacement and "cleaning" of houses. This practice is now massively condemned and rarely justification of the right to freely dispose of property is sought.' (Rozbrat Report 2014)

The cooperation allowed the squatters to link their difficult position (threat of the sale the property they occupy and eviction) with the illegal activities of the 'cleaners' that sparked outrage in public opinion.

The case of Poznań demonstrates how an established squatting environment dominates the activities undertaken by local squatters and activists and also the willingness to form alliances with other groups not directly connected to the squatting environment, such as tenants. For a long time, there was no cooperation with tenants' activists as the squatters were in a safe position, being recognized as an established part of the city's social and cultural scene. The tenants' organization founded in 2011 in Poznań is, likewise, an initiative of the squatting environment and although the link between squatters and tenants is not revealed in the beginning, it becomes clear when a more formal coalition is announced. It seems that the skills of the squatters in organizing protests, but also their legal knowledge, are used to mobilize tenants and found an organization. At the same time the squatters get to push forward their critique of municipal housing policies and privatization processes going on in the city, threatening the squatters' existence (since the eviction threat in 2009). In addition, the Poznań squatters get to influence the action repertoires of the tenants, in actively taking part in the foundation of the very first tenants' organization in the city.

Moreover, the alliance formation with the tenants and broadening the scope of actions allowed the squatters (at least some of them) to overcome the limitations of squatting understood as a prefigurative politics performed in the frame of Temporary Autonomous Zones. This concept, developed by an anarchist poet Hakim Bey (1991) suggests that the best way to create a non-hierarchical

system of social relationships is to concentrate on the present and on releasing one's own mind from the controlling mechanisms that have been imposed on it. This sort of prefigurative politics has educational as well as political consequences for its participants and observers. In the case of the opening towards tenants' claims and issues, the squatting movement seems not only to push their political agenda onto new territories, but moves itself as an actor from its countercultural 'comfort zone' towards a civil society actor.

Dynamic activist environment: the case of Warsaw

The first squatting attempts occurred in the capital city in the second half of the 1990s (Zuk 2001). The number of squatters was limited at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, but over time it increased. In the first years after transformation, there were several squatting attempts in Warsaw, ranging from a few days to one or two years (*Smyczkowa* 1996, *Twierdza* 1998, *Czarna Żaba* 2002, *Furmania* 2003, *Okopowa* 2002, *Spokojna* 2002, *Spółdzielnia* 2005, *Czarna Śmierć* 2011). At the beginning of the 2000s, *Fabryka* was opened and the squat lasted until 2011. It was, together with *Elba* (founded in 2004 and closed in 2012), the longest lasting squatting attempt in the city. Both squats were influenced by anti-fascist, alter-globalist and anarchist (and sometimes feminist) ideologies and their main focus was on organizing cultural activities.

The squatting scene in Warsaw is more diverse than the one in Poznań. At the time of writing (August 2014), there are three squats known to the public existing in Warsaw and one social centre (see Figure 3). Among the known squats there are different teams of squatters and the squats have different 'profiles'. There is *Syrena* ('Mermaid', the symbol of Warsaw), active since 2010 and working with housing and tenants' issues, workers' rights, food cooperatives and the Street university: workshops covering

teaching of foreign languages, bowling, singing, yoga classes, bicycle reparations, massage instructions and so on. There is also *Przychodnia* ('Clinic', located in a former medical clinic), opened in 2012, mainly focused on cultural activities, but also on right-to-the-city activism. *Wagenburg* ('Trailer Camp' consisting of a camp of trailers) is a residential squat, existing since 2007–2008, mainly working with sustainable and ecological living. The fourth place is the newly opened social centre ADA ('Aktywny Dom Alternatywny/Active Alternative House') (April 2014), concentrating on alternative social and cultural activities. The interviewed squatters perceived the different profiles of squats in the city as dynamic and complementary:

'For many years now I've been noticing such tendencies that people ... and it's great, that is when there are many places like it's been in Warsaw for a while, that everything is profiled, and some will feel better in *Syrena*, others in *Elbląska*, yet others in *Czarna Śmierć* [existent until December 2013] or *Przychodnia*, and so on. And it's not that these places are in conflict, we've always been visiting each other, we could count on each other, which was showcased by the eviction and other matters, there is a flow of information between these places, everyone is open to one another, and that's that. [...] And everything complemented each other, this is how I see it.' (3)

In addition, the tenants' activist scene in Warsaw seems bigger and more diversified than the one in Poznań. There are four large and most active tenants' associations in Warsaw: *Polska Unia Lokatorów* (Polish Union of Tenants, hence PUL), *Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości Społecznej* (Social Justice Office, hence KSS), *Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów* (Warsaw Tenants Association, hence WSL) and *Komitet Obrony Lokatorów* (Committee for the Defense of Tenants, hence KOL). Squatters in the city cooperate closely with all of these associations; *Syrena* and *Przychodnia* are especially focused

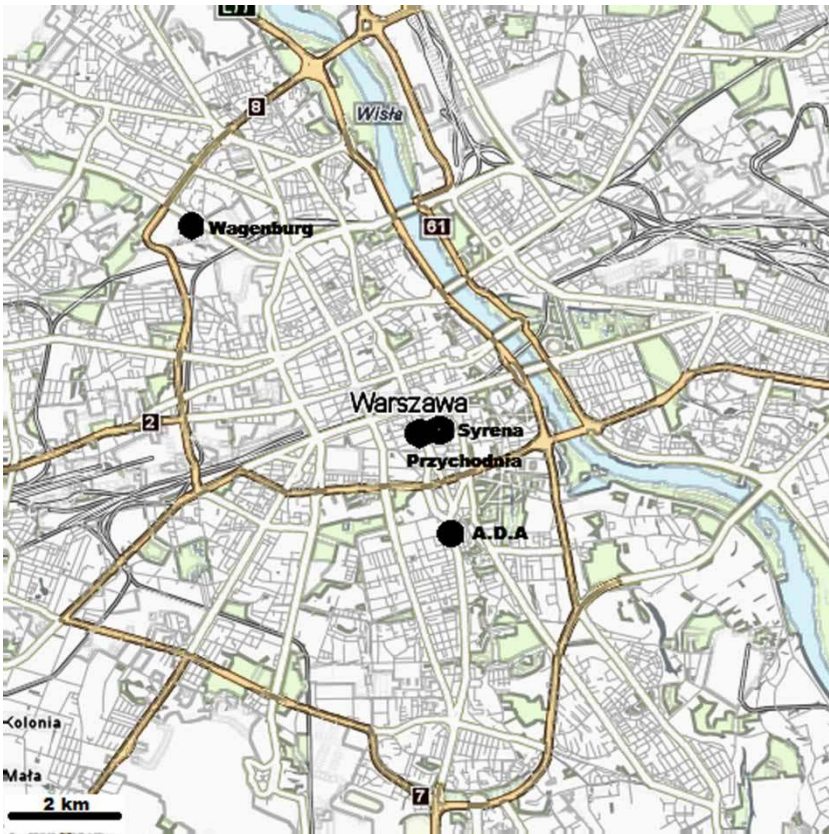


Figure 3 Squats in Warsaw (August 2014)

on tenants' and housing issues in their everyday activity. Cooperation between squatters and tenants was initiated rather recently when squat Syrena (Figure 4) was founded in 2010, and later also Przychodnia, as their activities concentrated on housing policies and the housing situation in the city. Earlier, common interests of squatters and tenants were articulated but the cooperation was more informal and based on personal networks of acquaintances, where some individuals within the squatting movement were occasionally in contact with the leaders of tenants' organizations (for instance, in the case of emergencies like evictions, direct actions or other activities in need of support by both squatters and tenants). However, these contacts between the groups were only mediated through some specific individuals,

before more formal cooperation was initiated. To begin with, WSL was invited to hold its weekly legal counseling sessions at Syrena and then different campaigns, demonstrations, celebration of the International Tenants' Day and eviction blockades were coordinated and supported by both squatters and tenants. Among the successes of alliances built between squatters and tenants' organizations in Warsaw there are: the initiation of the Tenants' Round Table in 2012, the opening of a dialogue with the minister on housing policies in 2013 (September, November) and the initiation of change in the public discourse on the phenomenon of squatting along with the initiation of the debate on the right to the city, according to which tenants and squatters' claims are portrayed as related and legitimate (Polanska 2015).



Figure 4 Syrena squat in Warsaw (Photo: Author)

Squatters and tenants initiated the Tenants' Round Table in 2012 following the eviction of a squat (Elba) in the city in March 2012 that was perceived by the activists as a threat and a pursuit of the authorities to extinguish the alternative scene in the city. Two factors put pressure on the local authorities to start a dialogue with squatters: the first was the gathering of a large number of supporters (2000 participants, quite a remarkable number for this kind of protest) at the demonstration following the closing down of Elba squat, and the second, the squatting of a municipal building (Przychodnia) (Figure 5), shortly after the closing down of Elba. For the first time since the first squat was opened in the city, local authorities were willing to start a dialogue/negotiation with squatters. The squatters' strategy, at the point of time when they perceived their position as favorable (an opportunity), was to form a formal alliance with tenants' organizations and represent both squatters and tenants' interests at the meetings with city authorities. Their claims covered specific

claims of squatters to keep or receive new premises, where they could continue their activity. Another claim was the initiation of the Tenants' Round Tables, where tenants would get influence over decisions taken in the sphere of housing in the city, that two years earlier were fought for by the tenants alone and resulted in the criticized Warsaw Housing meetings in 2011. As put by one of the squatters involved in the negotiations:

'However, the greatest close-up between the two [the tenants' movement and the squatters' movement] took place when Przychodnia [squat] emerged. Suddenly we began to have common purposes, as Przychodnia stated its postulates: that we will move out when there will be another place to move to provided by the city, and that there will be a Tenants' Round Table. And as the Round Table was our demand, our and tenants' needs met even though these environments, I think, have different needs and understandings of the city and what they require from the city.' (2)

The alliance between squatters and tenants has recently, September and November 2013, had some more successes, as there were meetings set up with the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Maritime Economy, where representatives of WSL, KSS, KOL and Syrena squat discussed housing politics and tenants' rights in Poland with the minister responsible for the housing in the country (Piotr Styczeń). The consequences of these meetings for the housing sphere and tenants' situation remain to be seen. These meetings demonstrate the reaction to the pressures put by the common struggles of squatters and tenants and slowly changing local political culture. They recognize both squatters and tenants as worthy discussion opponents when it comes to issues on policies at the national level. The interviewed tenants agreed that their struggles would not have the same effect without squatters on their side:



Figure 5 Przychodnia squat in Warsaw (Photo: Author)

‘Warsaw Tenants’ Association owes the squatters for these talks. It is true, because when the squat on Elblaska, Elba, was totally unrightfully terminated there was a manifestation in Warsaw. It was quite big and I think that the authorities are afraid of exactly that. And I think that there was none like that before. Indeed it was quite numerous and I even saw some social workers joining it. On this big square with good location. To do a demonstration over there that would be visible is quite hard, but a lot of people came actually. I think this was the reason why Warsaw authorities decided to have these talks. Because squatters gave a postulate on this round table and it is why it is taking place, it is why it exists, you know.’ (1)

In the case of Warsaw, squatters’ involvement in tenants’ issues came first around 2010, after the formation of the most active tenants’ associations in 2006–2008. In the interviews both squatters and tenants stress the similarity of claims posed by both movements, however, their emergence and structure is described as separate and independent of

each other. There are also significant differences between these environments that are recognized in the interviews such as the age of the participants, what triggers their activism, how committed they are and their ideological bases.

The different starting points of squatters and tenants’ activism imply different emphasis on ideological convictions and different types of commitment among the two groups. In the case of alliances between tenants and squatters in Warsaw there are different kinds of advantages that the two groups gain from working together. Squatters gain the influence over tenants’ ideological formation and get to sneak in issues close to the heart that radicalize tenants’ repertoires of action and self-understanding. Tenants gain—apart from material/physical help (premises, participation in blockades and demonstrations)—also emotional support in their fight for better living conditions. In a way, both squatters and tenants’ environments are influencing each other’s activism; at the same time strengthening both groups’



Figure 6 Jolanta Brzeska as a mural on one of Warsaw's squats with the text 'To the memory of Jola Brzeska, You will not burn us all' (Photo: Author)

positions vis-à-vis local authorities. As put by one of the squatters:

'It seems to me, that it was quite uncomfortable for them [local authorities] that we stood up together with tenants about the same issue and insistently connect these matters as pointing out flawed legal solutions, while they wanted to talk separately about culture and separately about dwellings, which they gave us to understand very clearly. So from the city's perspective it is probably uncomfortable, and for us it's cool because it is an alliance in which we can support each other.' (15)

Another successful strategy of the alliance between the squatters and the tenants in the city was the common framing of claims. A common iconic figure of both movements has become the founder of WSL Jolanta Brzeska, who was found dead (burned to death) in 2011. The death of Brzeska has

been interpreted by the tenants and squatters' activists as murder after a psychological profile of Brzeska was published, excluding suicidal behavior from her case. Since then Brzeska has become the symbol of a common struggle of the weak against an unjust system portrayed with slogans such as 'You will not burn us all' or 'She died fighting for the right to housing. The fight continues' (Figure 6).

The different nature of alliances in both cities

A brief overview of the two cases shows increase in vibrancy of tenants' movements and squatters in recent years and the alliances formed rather recently. The campaigns to defend Elba and Rozbrat squats and the campaigns against the practices of the 'cleaners' of the evicted houses in Warsaw and Poznań resonated strongly within public opinion in the two cities and also nationwide. In particular, in the case of Warsaw, the cooperation between squatters and tenants and their sustained independence in that cooperation opened up a bargaining position vis-à-vis the authorities and allowed the movements to use an opening in the emerging political opportunity structures. The most fruitful opening was the recent shift of municipal authorities towards more bottom-up forms of local governance in both cities (for instance, by introduction of participatory budgets). In Warsaw the authorities tried to settle with the squatters by pushing them into more formalized initiatives (semi-legal, also the squatters established an association—Skłot-Pol—in order to have legal foundation for cooperation with the municipality). The alliance formed resulted in pressures put on the authorities that heavily relied on mass media and the Internet, but also on demonstrations, campaigns and other forms of direct action, such as eviction blockades or meeting interruptions. The diversity in the movement scene in both cities has



Figure 7 Mural on Przychodnia squat in Warsaw depicting the founder of WSL Jolanta Brzeska (Photo: Author)

varied and so has the openness towards alliance formation by the movements and ultimately in their political outcomes. In Warsaw the success was to organize the Round Table and the creation of a platform for a dialogue between squatters, tenants and the authorities (on local, but also national level); in Poznań the local authorities claimed the conflict between the tenants and the new house owners was of a private nature and withdrew their participation from it.

The alliances formed between squatters and tenants in both cities were not entirely free of frictions, and these were particularly evident in the case of Warsaw, as the tenants' organizations were more independent from squatters' support there, than in the case of Poznań. In the interviews we were told that many of the Warsaw squatters considered squatting as purely a cultural and social activity and made their voices heard when the tenants' rights were discussed among the squatters in the beginning. However, the difference of opinion was solved in the city in the creation of the Syrena squat (and later on Przychodnia)

(Figure 7) that focused mainly on housing activism, and where squatters interested in housing/tenants' activism could join in. Warsaw squatters saw this solution as a process of 'profiling' and solving the tensions between different interests among squatters' activists in the city. In the case of Poznań, the cooperation with tenants was initiated quite recently and by securing the dominant position of squatters in the tenants' association founded, and thus avoiding internal conflict. When understanding the role of personal networks in the alliance formation between squatters and tenants' activists in both cities, it is evident that these networks of acquaintances were important in the very beginning of the contacts between these environments, and were over time broadened to more general trust shared by both groups. In this way inter-personal trust generated inter-organizational trust among the squatters and tenants in both cities, however, earlier and for a longer period of time in the case of Warsaw.

In terms of resource mobilization the tenants—usually older and with lower

economic capital—have successfully cooperated with the mostly younger and willing to help squatters. The latter used the conflicts to push forward their agenda and politicize the claims and conflicts but also possessed the know-how in terms of campaign organization, media contacts and organization of demonstrations or simple logistics. For the squatter activists the cooperation has given them a new tool and dimension for their conflict with the authorities by providing them with arguments for criticizing local housing and development policies. It also opened up the squatters to new tactics, in particular concerning legal tools: for instance, in Poznań new regulations about stalking were used against the ‘cleaners’. Tenants have gained a new, radical, skilled and experienced ally, which for instance helped to win compensations for illegal evictions in the courts (Rozbrat Raport 2014). Most importantly, tenants have gained a demanding partner that has broadened tenants’ claims (from affordable housing to right to the city) and encouraged tenants towards a more demanding and worthy attitude.

The main differences in the ways that cooperation between squatters and tenants have functioned in the two cities are to be looked for in the position and stability of the squatters in each city, the independence and influence of the tenants’ organizations, their diversity, but also in the internal dynamics and divergence/convergence of interests and ideologies of the squatters in the two cities. In Poznań, since the squat Rozbrat was established in 1994, its position as an independent and stable squatted center has become indisputable within the city. Its position has heavily affected the interactions with other social actors and the authorities. We would like to argue that ideological/identity alignment among the squatters and other social actors in the city affected the need of such interactions and the openness towards new allies. In Warsaw, on the other hand, the diversity and instability in the activists’ environment resulted in greater ideological

and tactical flexibility in coalitions with other social movement actors. Therefore, we would like to argue that a high degree of identity alignment and ideological consistency discourages formation of new alliances. Our cases show that the role of instability and differentiation of interests and identities among the actors involved facilitates the creation of alliances and willingness to cooperate. However, some degree of identity alignment must be kept as a common platform to build the alliances on.

In addition, the size of the two compared cities might play a role in the complexity of the activist scene prevalent. Warsaw is a far bigger city than Poznań and has, as we have argued here, a more dynamic, but also unstable and changeable, activist scene. In Poznań the number of potential allies for the tenants’ movement is limited. There is one squatting and one anarchist environment (that despite internal tensions and discussions is rather homogeneous), in Warsaw the picture is far more complex and dynamic. Not only are some squats not anarchist but there are also other radical leftist groups present in the environment that are potential allies. In Poznań activists from the anarchist environment are often the only group with the know-how and experience in organizing protests and campaigns, in the Warsaw case the already existing tenants’ organizations hold some experience in this regard.

Conclusions

The objective of this paper has been to answer the questions on how and under what conditions alliances are formed between squatters and tenants’ movements in two different Polish cities, Warsaw and Poznań, and what differences are to be observed in such alliances in these two local contexts. In both cases we argue that the squatters and the tenants’ activists have employed strategies to broaden their coalitions and have formed alliances with each other. In the alliances

formed with tenants, squatters have used and exacerbated already existing conflicts and drawn the attention of the public to their existence. These alliances have resulted in spill-over effects on behalf of the squatters, allowing them to link their claims and arguments to broader issues such as: anti-capitalism, critique of (local) authorities, defense of civil rights and liberties, criticisms of concepts of property, promotion of DIY culture, critique of gentrification and references to the 'right to the city'. Tenants on the other hand, have gained new allies who are dedicated, radical and demanding in their attitude towards the authorities. As a result of the alliance, tenants' claims have been sharpened and broadened into claims of a more general nature related to the right to housing of each individual and the collective claim of the right to the city. Together the squatters and the tenants have succeeded in putting pressure on the local authorities, even if the outcomes of this cooperation have varied in the two studied cities.

One of our most important conclusions is that the diversity of groups involved and instability of squatting, along with the independent functioning of the allied groups, result in an environment more prone to cooperate and form alliances. We would like to argue that our cases show that when the groups are too homogenous and enjoy stability in their local environments they might not be motivated towards alliance formation outside of the group. In the case of Poznań, the convergence of political ideologies and ambitions of a more traditional anarchist/autonomous group has hindered alliance building with groups and individuals of different ideological views. The convergence in ideology in the squatting environment has therefore paralyzed the attempts to reach out and form alliances with influential individuals and groups outside of the environment. In the case of alliances with tenants these have also been obstructed by the lack of formal tenants' organizations in the city.

In the case of Warsaw, the diversification in the field of ideologies, the existence of

shorter lived and more 'profiled' forms of squatting and the more independent existence of tenants' organizations have resulted in a dynamic in the environment/scene (including squatters and tenants but also other left-wing activist groups) that has pushed the activists towards an openness to alliances and cooperation with other actors outside of the movement and also towards more demanding political attitudes. We would furthermore like to argue that the temporality of squatting and its insecurity in the city has fostered a more determined and energetic form of political activism, more open to allies.

Moreover, we would like to stress that the rather successful alliances in Warsaw might also be an outcome of higher responsiveness of local authorities when compared to Poznań. When the political opportunity structures, and especially those on the local level, open up towards the claims of the social movements, the movements might build alliances with similar movements in order to create additional pressure on the authorities and strengthen their position vis-à-vis the authorities. The greater responsiveness of the Warsaw authorities (that was surely affected by their position as political models for the rest of the country and the closeness to the media channels in the city) and the invitation to a dialogue with the activists pushed the squatters and the tenants towards a formal alliance and negotiation of common claims. We would furthermore like to claim that the lack of economic support from outside in both squatters and tenants' movements and the nature of their claims, has guided them towards an alliance with each other, where people, skills and technologies are shared (Chesters and Welsh 2011) in order to maximize the organizational functioning of the two movements. However, we tend to believe that the divergence/convergence in the interests, identities and ideologies of the activists, along with the dynamics in the local movement environment played the decisive role for the alliance building in our cases and can explain the

differences in how the alliances unfolded (and put pressure on the authorities) in the two cities.

The contribution of this paper lies first and foremost in the analysis of two social movements and how they cooperate, in the light of their position as ‘uncivil’ and unconventional forms of action. The comparison of two local contexts contributes further to the under-explored field of housing movements in the post-socialist context that is not favorable to radical activism but is to protection of private ownership. Our overall ambition has been to fill the empirical and theoretical gap in the exclusionary and narrow definition of post-socialist civil society by studying two specific movements that in the last decade have been intensifying their activities in Poland, and have achieved some considerable successes by cooperating with each other. We see the development, functioning and cooperation of these two movements as contradictory to the picture of a civil society that is passive and paralyzed by the state’s socialist past. We are in this sense going against the assumption of post-socialist civil society as ‘weak’ (Howard 2003), ‘poor functioning’ (Mendelson and Glenn 2002) or even ‘uncivil’ (Kotkin 2010). Scholars have pointed out foreign interests and dependency of foreign support as dominating in the creation of local democracies and the lack of grassroots connections (Mendelson and Glenn 2002) as well as increasing professionalization of organizations and social movements (Howard 2003). Our cases show that the movements are deeply connected to grassroots and lack foreign financial support. Moreover, many of these previous studies are suggesting that the legacies of the state socialist system are still characterizing collective activities of post-socialist citizens stating that family and friendship networks are preferred before collective action with other ‘unknown’ individuals (Sztompka 2004). Our cases demonstrate that grassroots mobilization among ‘unknown’ individuals and cooperation occurs, and is more conditioned by the

ideological and homogenous/heterogeneous character of the social movements, than the legacies of the past. Additionally, we would like to argue that this kind of cross-movement alliance bears a promise about a prominent future of post-socialist civil societies and contentious urban politics and their capacity for social change in the times of austerity measures and financial crises. The joining of hands of social movements, despite their differing interests and identities, is an important step towards a more equal urban coexistence.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies [grant no. 2185/311/2014 and 1561/42/2011] and the Swedish Research Council [grant no. 2010–1706].

Notes

- 1 DIY—Do It Yourself—culture is linked to punk rock and hardcore scenes and the squatting movement. It is more than a fashion, trend or aesthetic orientation, the ‘true and pure’ underground has to rely on DIY ethics in terms of organization, publishing, record labels and so forth. The DIY culture is most visible in squatted social centers and their activities, but its impact can be observed all over the scene.
- 2 <http://www.rozbrat.org/rozbrat> (accessed 5 February 2014).

References

- Adilkno. 1994. *Cracking the Movement. Squatting beyond the Media*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Audycka-Zandberg, B. 2014. *Warunki i strategie mobilizacji najemców lokali mieszkalnych w stowarzyszeniach lokatorskich*. Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski.
- Beamish, T. D., & A. J. Luebbbers. 2009. “Alliance Building across Social Movements: Bridging Differences in a Peace and Justice Coalition.” *Social Problems* 56 (4): 647–676.

- Bey, H. 1991. *T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.
- Bieri, S. 2002. "Contested Places: Squatting and the Construction of 'the Urban' in Swiss Cities." *GeoJournal* 58 (2–3): 207–215.
- Chesters, G., and I. Welsh. 2011. *Social Movements, The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge.
- Cisař, O. 2013. "Post-Communism and Social Movements." In *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, edited by D. Snow, 994–999. London: Blackwell.
- Clarke, J., S. Hall, T. Jefferson, and B. Roberts. 1976. "Subcultures, Cultures and Class." In *Resistance through Rituals. Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, edited by S. Hall and T. Jefferson, 9–74. London: Hutchinson.
- Corr, A. 1999. *No trespassing. Squatting, Rent Strikes and Land Struggles Worldwide*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Corrigall-Brown, C., and D. S. Meyer. 2010. "The Pre-history of Coalition: The Role of Social Ties in Win Without War." In *Strategic Alliances. Coalition Building and Social Movements*, edited by N. Van Dyke and H. McCammon, 3–21. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- CSO (Central Statistical Office). 2014. "Housing Construction. Dwellings Completed 1995–2013." Accessed September 7, 2014. www.stat.gov.pl
- Ekiert, G., and J. Kubik. 2014. "Myths and Realities of Civil Society." *Journal of Democracy* 25 (1): 46–58.
- Evers, A., B. Ewert, and T. Brandsen, eds. 2014. *Social Innovations for Social Cohesion*. Liege: EMES European Research Network asbl.
- Gagyı, A. 2013. "The Shifting Meaning of 'Autonomy' in the East European Diffusion of the Alterglobalization Movement." In *Understanding European Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-austerity Protest*, edited by C. Flescher Fominaya and L. Cox, 143–157. New York: Routledge.
- Grubbauer, M., and J. Kusiak. 2012. *Chasing Warsaw: Material Dynamics of Urban Change Since 1990*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Howard, M. M. 2003. *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kallenberg, F. 2001. "Desire is Speaking. Utopian rhizomes." In *Contemporary Utopian Struggles. Communities between Modernism and Postmodernism*, edited by S. Poldervaart, H. Jansen, and B. Kesler, 91–99. Amsterdam: Aksant.
- Karpantschof, R. 2011. "Bargaining and Barricades- the Political Struggle over the Freetown Christiania 1971–2011." In *Space for Urban Alternatives?. Christiania 1971–2011*, edited by W. Thörn, and T. Nilson, 38–67. Vilnius: Gidlunds Förlag.
- Katsifacis, G. 1997. *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Katz, S., and M. Mayer. 1985. "Gimme Shelter: Self-help Housing Struggles within and against the State in New York City and West Berlin." *International Journal of Urban and regional research* 9 (1): 15–46.
- Kitschfeld, H. P. 1986. "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-nuclear Movements in Four Democracies." *British Journal of Political Science* 16: 57–85.
- Kopecky, P., and C. Mudde, eds. 2003. *Uncivil Society?. Contentious Politics in Post-communist Europe*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kotkin, S. 2010. *Uncivil Society. 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*. New York: The Modern Library.
- Lichterman, P. 1995. "Piecing Together Multicultural Community: Cultural Differences in Community Building among Grass-Roots Environmentalists." *Social Problems* 42: 513–534.
- March, L., and C. Mudde. 2005. "What's Left of the Radical Left?. The European Radical Left after 1989: Decline and Mutation." *Comparative European Politics* 3: 23–49.
- Martinez-Lopez, M. 2007. "The Squatter's Movement: Urban Counter Culture and Alter-globalization Dynamics." *South European Society and Politics* 12 (3): 379–398.
- Mayer, M. 2013. "Preface." In *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, edited by Squatting Europe Kollektive. Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions.
- McCarthy, J. D., and M. N. Zald. 1987. *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*. Oxford: Transaction Books.
- McKay, G. 1998. "DIY Culture: Notes Towards an Intro." In *DIY Culture. Party & Protest in Nineties Britain*, edited by G. McKay, 1–53. London: Verso.
- Mendelson, S., and J. E. Glenn, eds. 2002. *The Power and Limits of NGOs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mudu, P. 2013. "Resisting and Challenging Neoliberalism." In *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, edited by Squatting Europe Kollektive. New York: Minor Compositions.
- NIK, Najwyższa Izba Kontroli [Supreme Audit Office]. 2012. *Realizacja badan w zakresie gospodarki mieszkaniowej przez organy administracji rządowej i jednostki samorządu terytorialnego [Realisation of Research on Governmental Administrative Organs and Territorial Self-Governing Units in the Sphere of Housing]*. Warszawa.
- Obach, B. K. 2004. *Labor and the Environmental Movement: The Quest for Common Ground*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Owens, L. 2009. *Cracking under Pressure. Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Owens, L. 2013. "Have Squat, Will Travel." In *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, edited by

- Squatting Europe Kollektive. New York: Minor Compositions.
- Passotti, E. 2013. "Urban Movements." In *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, edited by D. Snow, 1–4. London: Blackwell.
- Petrova, T., and S. Tarrow. 2007. *Transactional and Participatory Activism in the Emerging European Polity: The Puzzle of East-Central Europe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Pickvance, C. 1996. "Local Government and Social Movements in Moscow and Budapest." *Home Rule and Civil Society* 7: 81–100.
- Pickvance, C. 2001. "Inaction, Individual Action and Collective Action Responses to Housing Dissatisfaction: A Comparative Study of Budapest and Moscow." *Political Opportunities, Social Movements and Democratization* 23: 179–206.
- Pickvance, C., K. Pickvance-Lang, and N. Manning. 1997. *Environmental and Housing Movements. Grassroots Experience in Hungary, Russia and Estonia*. Avebury: Aldershot.
- Piotrowski, G. 2011a. *Alterglobalism in Postsocialism. A Study of Central and Eastern European Activists*. European University Institute. Florence: Department of Political and Social Sciences.
- Piotrowski, G. 2011b. "Squatted Social Centers in Central and Eastern Europe." International Center for Research and Analysis, Working Paper.
- Piotrowski, G. 2014. "Squatting in the East—Rozbrat in Poland." In *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*, edited by B. van der Steen, A. Katzeff and L. van Hoogenhuijze, 233–254. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Polanska, D. V. 2015. "Alliance-building and Brokerage in Contentious Politics: A Case-Study of the Polish Tenants' Movement." In *Grassroots in the City: Urban Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by K. Jacobsson, chapter 8. Franham: Ashgate.
- Polletta, F. 2002. *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Portwood-Stacer, L. 2013. *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- 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): 133–157.
- Rochon, T. R., and D. S. Meyer. 1997. *Coalitions and Political Movements: The Lessons of the Nuclear Freeze*. Boulder, CO: L. Rienner.
- Rose, F. 2000. *Coalitions Across the Class Divide: Lessons from the Labor, Peace, and Environmental Movements*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Rozbrat Raport. 2014. Działania lokatorskie w 2013 r [Tenant Activities in 2013. Report]. Accessed April 14, 2014. <http://m.rozbrat.org/publicystyka/kontrola-spoeczna/4082-raport-dziaania-lokatorskie-w-2013-roku>
- Shields, S. 2011. "From the Washington Consensus to Brussels Consensus: Neoliberalisation by Depoliticalisation in Post-Communist Poland." *Socialism and Democracy* 25 (2): 81–103.
- Squatting Europe Kollektive. 2013. *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*. New York: Minor Compositions.
- Staggenborg, S. 1986. "Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement: Organizational and Environmental Opportunities and Obstacles." *Social Problems* 33: 374–390.
- Staniewicz, M. 2011. "El movimiento okupa como un actor político, social y cultural en una ciudad post-comunista. El caso del Centro Social-Casa Okupa Rozbrat en Poznan, Polonia." *Revista de Estudios de Juventud* 95: 123–144.
- Sztompka, P. 2004. "The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies." In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by C. J. Alexander, 155–195. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Tarrow, S. G. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tarrow, S. 2012. *Strangers at the Gates: Movements and States in Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thörn, H., C. Wasshede, and T. Nilson. 2011. *Space for Urban Alternatives? Christiania 1971–2011*. Vilnius: Gidlunds Förlag.
- Van der Steen, B., A. Katzeff and L. van Hoogenhuijze, eds. 2014. *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Van Dyke, N. 2003. "Crossing Movement Boundaries: Factors That Facilitate Coalition Protest by American College Students, 1930–1990." *Social Problems* 50: 226–250.
- Van Dyke, N., and H. McCammon. 2010. *Strategic Alliances. Coalition Building and Social Movements*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Żuk, P. 2001. *Społeczeństwo w działaniu: Ekolodzy, Feministki, Skłotarsi [Society in the Making: Ecologists, Feminists, Squatters]*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo naukowe scholar.

Dominika V. Polanska is based at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University. Email: dominika.polanska@sh.se

Grzegorz Piotrowski is based at the School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University. Email: grzegorz.piotrowski@sh.se