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From the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEEES), Södertörn University.

Surrogacy in  
post-socialist Europe

# BALTIC WORLDS

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Estonia and the Holocaust.  
**Clashes of victimhood**

Estonian Narva & identity.  
**Russian-speakers' reflections**

Early modern Estonia.  
**The rise of demesne lordship**

## Squatting in the East

Turning abandoned spaces  
into meaningful places

also in this issue

Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

LOCAL HEROES IN PERM / **SOCIAL DUMPING** / UKRAINIAN DIASPORA / **PHANTOM BORDERS** / ART AND PROTEST

## editorial

### “In-between” spaces

**P**hantom borders occupy an important place in Central and Eastern Europe’s mosaic of territories and identities. Phantom borders separate the Us from the Them and contribute to the Othering and Orientalization of the people living beyond them. This is a conclusion suggested in a review by Michael Gentile of an anthology on the complex legacies of former – now *phantom* – borders.

In a peer-reviewed article, David Trimbach explores the identities in today’s Narva in Estonia, and finds that Narva is understood by its various citizens as an “in-between” space: “The construction of Narva as an ‘in-between’ space builds upon a hybridity and a plurality of identity and the notion that borderland residents tend to live ‘in between’ social, political, cultural, and economic spaces.”

An “in-between” space is created as a consequence of the phantom borders. The sense of belonging to another country, or of living cut off and separated from the system, could then be part of the geographical expression of phantom pain. Russian-speaking Narvans feel that they form an Us with the inhabitants of Ivanogorod in nearby Russia. The legacy creates a certain belonging across the border.

**LEGACIES ARE PERSISTENT.** In a peer-reviewed article, Paul Oliver Stocker argues that Estonia suppresses the collective memory on the Holocaust, especially that generated from the bottom up by the experiences of individuals. The remembrance of the Holocaust is hardly ever mentioned without also bringing up the crimes committed by the Soviet Union against Estonian. Stocker has studied how three museums in Estonia have dealt with the remembrance of the crimes committed against Jews in Estonia. He identifies clashes in victimhood.

As usual in *Baltic Worlds*, we also allow contributing researchers to present their

ideas in other genres than the strictly peer-reviewed article. Julia Mannherz here writes an enchanting story of her acquaintance with the Russian author Dmitrii Dmitrievich Smyshliaev (1828–1893), who wrote essays on local history and numerous sketches of influential inhabitants of Perm. The contemporary role of the Ukrainian diaspora is discussed by Nataliia Godis in a commentary, and in another non-peer-reviewed article Mats Lindqvist explores social dumping in the Baltic Sea region.

**IN THE SPECIAL THEME** section “Squatting in the East” we present five peer-reviewed articles from five different countries. Squats seem to be a sort of urban “in-between” space. Squatters turn abandoned spaces into meaningful places for an Us, temporarily at least. Squatters contest property rights and the fundamental logic of capitalism, but squatting should not be understood solely as a Western phenomenon. The theme section presents squats in Prague, St. Petersburg, Vilnius, Warsaw and Budapest. The guest editors Dominika Polanska and Miguel Martínez note: “Squatting is or has been (due to its temporary character) present in several countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia since 1989, and in some cases even earlier.” ✕

Ninna Mörner

### In-house edition

Baltic Worlds’ in-house edition focuses on research conducted by scholars at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), and at Södertörn University as a whole, on the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe. It presents our broad perspectives on, and approaches to what has been our focus since early 1996. The occasion is Södertörn University’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Nine doctoral students have assisted the editor of *Baltic Worlds* by participating in an editorial board for this in-house edition. Contributions have also been made by professors, project researchers and other scholars at Södertörn University.

Download the in-house edition at: [www.sh.se/cbees](http://www.sh.se/cbees)

### Errata

A correction must be made to page 39 of the in-house edition. Kjetil Duvold does not intend to state that “calling for social action in the realm of human dignity can be combined with the academic duties of a university, but not action directed against the government or its policies”. Rather, he thinks that “every academic should try to separate her professional role from the private. And an academic institution obviously needs to apply even stricter boundaries between speaking out about humanitarian plights and giving specific partisan recommendations”.





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# UNDERSTANDING NARVA & IDENTITY

## LOCAL REFLECTIONS FROM NARVA'S RUSSIAN-SPEAKERS

by David J. Trimbach

Political and territorial shifts continue to alter Europe's geopolitical landscape. In March 2014, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, up to then a part of Ukraine, was annexed by the Russian Federation. This has spawned fears of wider Russian aggression and drawn attention to Russia's diasporic dilemma, which is intertwined with the millions of Russian-speakers scattered throughout the former Soviet territory.<sup>2</sup> While the Ukrainian crisis progresses, global media attention focuses on the Estonian-Russian borderland city of Narva because of its Crimeanesque demographic and regional characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

In Estonian geopolitical discourse, Narva is an "othered" regional borderland city and a spatial manifestation of Estonian-Russian relations, both external and internal.<sup>4</sup> Narva's separatist referendum of 1993 and its otherness continue to influence Estonian, European, Russian, and NATO concerns over Estonia's large Russian-speaking community and the potential for Russian incursion on Europe's eastern border.<sup>5</sup> In early 2015, Narva was the site of a much-discussed military parade in honor of Estonia's independence day, which involved

pomp by both Estonian and NATO (including US) armed forces just meters from the Russian-Estonian border. Although the parade drew a large turnout from the predominantly Russian-speaking population, it was controversial.<sup>6</sup> Within days of the parade, Narva and the surrounding Ida-Viru County both voted in favor of the pro-Russian *Keskerakond* (Center Party) in Estonia's parliamentary elections.<sup>7</sup> Both events illustrate the reemergence of Narva's importance in multiscale geopolitical practices and discourses in the former Soviet space. Although media comparisons of Crimea, eastern Ukraine, and Narva are often exaggerated and bound to anti-Russian geopolitics and politicized rhetoric, Narva does allow us to examine othered regions and spatial identity among non-titular Russian-speakers in a former Soviet context.

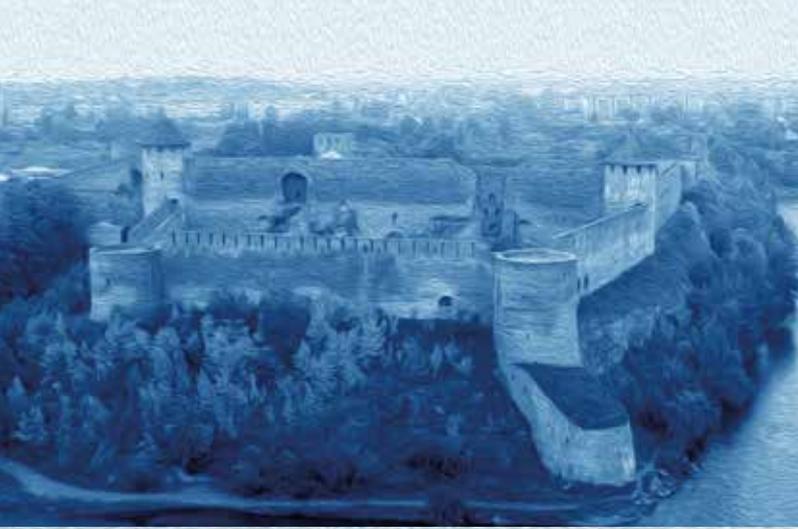
Interdisciplinary studies of borderlands and spatial identities

exploring the post-Soviet Russian-speaking community and the "near abroad" are nothing new. However, the analysis and methodology of previous scholarship tend to emphasize state geopolitical discourses and the national scale.<sup>8</sup> Such research typically ignores the plurality and the hybrid

### abstract

This article examines the construction of Narva and local spatial identity formation from the perspective of Russian-speaking Estonians in Narva, as elucidated in their own discourses and perceptions. A spatially-conscious approach allows us to examine how Russian-speaking Estonians discursively construct and understand the Russian-speaking borderland enclave of Narva, and how Russian-speaking Narvans construct their spatial identities.<sup>1</sup>

**KEYWORDS:** identity, space, border, minorities.



nature of borderland community construction, spatial identity formation, and broader nation-building processes.

## The spatial and demographic context

In this study I focus on the city of Narva, Estonia. Narva is the third most populous city in Estonia, after Tallinn and Tartu. Narva's current population is about 64,000, about 90% of whom are Russian-speakers.<sup>9</sup> Narva is a borderland community located in northeastern Ida-Viru County on the west bank of the Narva River, just opposite its Russian twin town of Ivangorod.<sup>10</sup>

A cadre of competing geopolitical powers and events has influenced Narva's historic trajectory and its current position within the larger constellation of Baltic cities. One of the most notable of these geopolitical events was the illegal Soviet annexation of Estonia during World War II. The Soviet occupation of Estonia significantly altered Narva's demographic structure by causing a heavy influx of Russian-speaking migrants who settled in and rebuilt the city. Although there were Russian-speaking minorities throughout independent Estonia, this demographic shift is spatially exacerbated in Narva.<sup>11</sup> As a direct consequence of Soviet occupation and incentivized labor migration, Narva emerged from Soviet occupation as a distinct Russian-speaking enclave in a predominantly Estonian and Estonian-speaking nation-state.<sup>12</sup> According to Kaiser and Nikiforova, "Narvan-ness, Estonian-ness, Russian-ness, European-ness, Western-ness, and

Eastern-ness are made, unmade, rank ordered, and rehierarchized" by competing multiscalar geopolitical discourses, actors, and practices in post-Soviet Narva.<sup>13</sup> Sovietization substantially erased Narva's "Estonianness" and replaced its Estonian population with Russian-speaking Soviet citizens.<sup>14</sup>

**SINCE THE RESTORATION** of Estonian independence, the Estonian nation-state has embarked on a process of nationalization and territorialization<sup>15</sup> in which Russian-speakers and Estonia's predominantly Russian-speaking northeast become "othered" in both geopolitical discourse and practice.<sup>16</sup> Examples of such "othering" abound in critical geopolitical and areas studies scholarship.<sup>17</sup> A prime example is Estonia's citizenship policy, which is seen as highly restrictive.<sup>18</sup> The policy has disproportionately affected Estonia's largest minority population, politically marginalized Russian-speakers in Estonia, and fostered challenging diplomatic relations between Estonia and Russia.<sup>19</sup> Estonia's nation-building process ebbs and flows side by side with Russia's, and Narva is situated on the periphery of both. The nationalizing processes of Estonia and Russia actively produce nationally and territorially bound identities like those of the respective homelands. Given its complex history, borderland location, and current demographic structure, Narva provides a unique geographic and geopolitical case study in which to analyze the construction of place and perceptions of spatial identity.

**Living in a shared space seems to alter the need to distinguish what keeps us apart.**



PHOTO: ESTONIA MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

Officers of the US Embassy in Tallinn and the Estonian Border Guard celebrated the completion of a new helicopter landing pad and refueling station in Narva with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on November 30, 2010.

While Narva has similarities with other predominantly Russian-speaking areas outside the Russian Federation, including Crimea and eastern Ukraine, its local distinctions matter and provide nuances in the current geopolitical fray.<sup>20</sup> Narva has emerged as a recurring regional flashpoint in scholarship, diplomacy, and international media coverage.<sup>21</sup> Much of the attention is related to Narva's past autonomy referendum, "Russianness," unemployment and emigration, social problems, oil shale deposits and industry, and overtures by the Russian state.<sup>22</sup> Increasingly, Narva and Narvans are placed in the foreground of Estonian, Russian, and international geopolitical discourses as potential sites of conflict and instability.<sup>23</sup> Such heated discourses necessitate an examination of place and identity on the local scale.

## Place and spatial identities

Regional borderlands and their associated communities are not fixed spatial givens, but rather socially constructed "processes, practices, discourses, symbols, institutions or networks through which power works."<sup>24</sup> Borderlands are historically and spatially contingent and fluctuate with territorial political power.<sup>25</sup> They are reflected in and enhanced by state geopolitical discourses and practices.<sup>26</sup> For the purposes of this study, Narva is understood as an illustrative example of a regional borderland city and spatial community that is bound to the multiscale processes, practices, and discourses in which it is constructed.

Discourse is commonly "understood as constituted by a collection of theories, writings, public speeches, and popular media broadcasts that create a specific context that dominates the interpretation of a given issue."<sup>27</sup> Geopolitical discourse in particular is typically shaped by geopolitical agents or institutions such as those comprising territorial nation-states.<sup>28</sup> Geopolitical agents or institutions guide border formation and conceptualization through discourse and thus in turn form a socially constructed spatial division between an "us" within and a "them"

outside.<sup>29</sup> Geopolitical discourse tends to be associated with nationalizing processes and national identity formation.<sup>30</sup>

Although much scholarly attention has been concentrated on state geopolitical discourses and how they construct regional borderlands, other studies have focused on the local discourses and conceptions of the borderland communities themselves.<sup>31</sup> Borderland communities actively engage and construct borderlands through their relational networks, activities, discourses, and spatially embedded everyday lives.<sup>32</sup> Borderlands are often subject to divisive politicized and nationalized geopolitical rhetoric and actions because of their proximity to an external national-territorial other (in Narva's case, Russia) and the frequency of their cross-border engagement.<sup>33</sup> Local borderland communities often respond to such geopolitical manifestations with resistance and challeng-

es.<sup>34</sup> In this article, I illustrate how the Estonian Russian-speaking community discursively produces and reproduces Narva and how these discourses are related to spatial identity formation.

**IDENTITIES ARE COMPLEX** constructed "categories of membership that are based on all sorts of typologies – gender, race, class, personality, caste," and on national and/or state territory.<sup>35</sup> National and state identities are connected to territory and are referred to as spatial identities.<sup>36</sup> Spatial identities are just one kind of identity and are not exclusive of others.<sup>37</sup> They exist simultaneously with other spatial and non-spatial identities. Since the present study is place-based, we emphasize spatial identities. A homeland is an example of a national and/or spatial state identity. Through national and nationalist constructs, a homeland represents a politicized, nationalized, mythologized, and emotionally charged territory that spatially embeds national and/or diasporic populations' identities.<sup>38</sup>

Homelands are spatial manifestations of national distinction that are reinforced by territorial boundaries and perceptions of national uniqueness and external otherness. Often homeland borders or boundaries blur and challenge this uniqueness, distinction, and otherness. National territorial homelands construct identities and are also constructed through identities.<sup>39</sup> Once nations, national territories and national identities are formed, populations become spatially socialized within those territories.<sup>40</sup> Spatial identities are also spatially differentiated and exist on multiple scales, but national spatial identities tend to be dominant.<sup>41</sup>

National identities and homelands are considered most problematic at national borders and in borderland regions. Borderland regions challenge nationalizing and territorializing processes because of their proximity to external others, their historical contingency, cross-border migration and interaction, and their spatial, social, and political distance from the national political core.<sup>42</sup> National borders and identities have a "mutu-

## “COGNITIVE MAPPING IS A METHODOLOGICAL TOOL AIMED AT UNDERSTANDING HOW INDIVIDUALS UNDERSTAND AND ENGAGE WITH SPACE.”

ally enforcing relationship” which can reinforce and/or weaken national identities.<sup>43</sup> Narva’s borderland location in relation to both the Estonian and Russian processes of nationalization and spatial identity formation is an intriguing context in which to examine the notion of homeland and spatial identity. Narva and its population are located at the spatial intersection between two simultaneous nationalizing, politicizing, and territorializing processes that competitively produce spatially embedded identities and homelands.

### Mixed-method approach

In order to examine how Estonian Russian-speakers construct Narva and understand spatial identity at the local scale, I utilized a mixed-method approach aimed at constructing narratives through multilingual surveys (in Russian and English) with accompanying cognitive mapping features and interviews. This methodological toolkit was intended to produce qualitatively rich and empirically supported narratives that addressed place construction and spatial identity.

My research and methods build upon the relational and narrative currents in the social sciences and in geographical research in particular.<sup>44</sup> These two currents highlight the emergence of alternative and critical methods that question positivist and traditional empiricist modes of understanding research and the researcher.<sup>45</sup> Like all alternative and critical approaches, this project has limitations from a positivist perspective and is subject to critique, particularly in regard to research design.

Narratives or stories are a novel form of inquiry and interpretation. There is no single definitive approach to narratives. However, narratives have emerged as an innovative form of inquiry that can provide nuanced local understandings and interpretations of social phenomena and the processes in which they are embedded.<sup>46</sup> Narratives can address “the relationship between personal experience and expression, and the broader contexts within which such experiences are ordered, performed, interpreted, and disciplined.”<sup>47</sup> I construct and incorporate narratives by means of descriptive interview data and complementary survey data. Such mixed-method approaches that intertwine descriptive narratives with survey data have been used in other citizenship and citizenship geography studies which illustrate the importance of collecting and using diverse data.<sup>48</sup>

**THE INTERVIEWS** and surveys were undertaken during my doctoral fieldwork in the autumn of 2013 in Narva and Tallinn, Estonia. The survey was distributed in both Tallinn and Narva, while the cognitive mapping feature was used only in Narva. Participants based in Narva were recruited by the snowball sampling method (SSM) with the assistance of Narva College, the Narva Central Library, the municipal government of Narva, and local non-governmental organizations. SSM is a sampling technique<sup>49</sup> whose strengths include targeting marginalized populations

and minority communities, addressing politically divisive or conflict-oriented topics, integrating a researcher into an unfamiliar population, building trust between researcher and target population, and gauging public perceptions.<sup>50</sup> These qualities of SSM were well suited to my project’s aims. SSM does suffer from certain limitations, including a population sample bias linked to the

undersampling of particular groups within a target population, and sample characteristic overrepresentation.<sup>51</sup>

The survey and interview questions mirrored one another to facilitate comparison and deeper articulation. While most of the survey and interview questions focused on citizenship, others concerned spatial construction and spatial identity.<sup>52</sup> The overarching research project used cluster analysis with an emphasis on residency groups and citizenship groups, but the present study project has a narrower focus on one particular residency group – residents of Narva – while including all citizenship groups.<sup>53</sup> All the survey and interview data was analyzed using Qualtrics and Dedoose qualitative analysis software.

**I ALSO INCORPORATED** a cognitive mapping feature into the overarching survey. Cognitive mapping is a methodological tool aimed at understanding how individuals understand and engage with space.<sup>54</sup> Cognitive mapping is triggered by a question or prompt to the respondent to draw a map of a place or to respond descriptively based on her own internal cognitive understanding. Cognitive maps can be productive tools because they elucidate how people represent and understand spaces, how they interact with spaces, and how understandings of spaces change. Cognitive maps also furnish implications that are applicable to planning and policy.<sup>55</sup>

Cognitive mapping has been utilized for a wide range of research endeavors: to convey differences in spatial understanding between people with and without visual impairments; to highlight how Israelis and Palestinians understand territorial conflict; and to understand spatial identity among Italians on a national scale.<sup>56</sup> In the present study, the participants were asked to draw their mental map of their perceived homeland. The mapping section was complemented by an additional prompt aimed at soliciting spatial identity perceptions. Respondents were asked to assess the degree of importance of the following places in relation to their identities: city, county, Estonia, Russia, European Union, world, and other.

### Borderland and homeland

Estonian state and media discourse tends to construct Estonia’s northeastern borderland and borderland city of Narva as a national security problem, rife with local crime, cross-border illegality, a landscape of industrial decline, and political instability.<sup>57</sup> Through this lens, Narva appears as a potential threat to Estonia’s nation-building and territorial integrity.<sup>58</sup> Estonian Russian-speakers’ discourse and perceptions conflict with and

challenge these negative discourses peppered with politicizing rhetoric and conceptions.

Estonian Russian speakers construct Narva with a diverse range of characteristics and descriptions. They also express an array of spatial identities and homeland perceptions. The total Narva-based sample includes 207 surveys and 11 interviewees. The sample size reflects persistent research challenges related to difficulties of homeland selection, geographic literacy, and eliciting interest. Some respondents stated that they had “no homeland”, referring to the disintegration of the former Soviet Union as the loss of a perceived homeland. As other scholars have noted, in 1989 the majority of Russian-speakers held onto a spatial identity or homeland associated with the Soviet Union.<sup>59</sup>

**WHEN ASKED WHETHER** they perceived Narva to be unique, the majority (78.6%) of Estonian Russian-speakers answered yes. Responses differed slightly by sex (men 64%; women 73%), educational level (upper secondary education 68%; academic higher education 74%), age group (respondents aged 30 to 39 were less likely to perceive Narva as unique), and occupation (lower and higher-tiered occupational groups tended to perceive Narva as unique, while middle-tiered occupational groups tended to be more balanced or less likely to call Narva unique).<sup>60</sup> Slight differences were also found between the responses of Estonian citizens (68.6%), Russian citizens (75.8%), and stateless residents (58.6%).

Similar response patterns were found among interviewees. The majority of interviewees perceived Narva as unique, and a descriptive pattern emerged. The most common explanations of Narva’s uniqueness included references to border location or proximity, Russianness, geographical location, history, and architecture. These descriptive rationales agreed well with the responses to an additional prompt related to how Narvan Russian speakers characterize or construct Narva. The common survey responses were also reflected and illustrated in the interviews.

One Narvan resident and NGO employee noted that Narva’s uniqueness is tied to its border proximity and the overlapping social, cultural, and political borders that the administrative border represents:

**This uniqueness consists in [the fact] that the border is ambiguous. The border has many different meanings. Narva is a border region between two different states. It is a border between two unions, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Europe. It is also a border between two religions, Eastern Orthodox and Catholicism.<sup>61</sup> It’s a border between two cultures, Western and Eastern. Many historical events have happened because of this border. This border has three means of travel: railways, motorways, and waterways. And this is where it is unique.**

Other Narvans shared this sentiment about the roles that different borders

and cross-border interactions play. One Narva resident and primary school teacher suggested that Narva’s uniqueness is tied to the border and the border’s history:

**Narva is a border city. A border city of the European Union. Therefore, any issues that concern the EU, Estonia and Russia are noticed here. Narva is a city that is located close to the cultural center of the second capital, that is, St. Petersburg. It is only 100 km away and you can visit this wonderful city. Economically, Narva as a part of Estonia has the opportunity to do business with Russia; it has economic ties with Russia. Narva is a city where the majority of people speak Russian, a compact settlement of Russian people. Therefore, the city is unique mostly because many of these political disagreements are about Narva. Naturally there is then a standoff between Narva and Tallinn. So you can say that Narva is a unique city, an interesting city, and if the government were smart, if they gave people citizenship, life in Narva could be interesting and good.**

Although most Narvans perceived Narva as unique, there was a minority who thought otherwise. One Narva resident and journalist suggested that Narva is not unique at all and that politicians attempting to divide the country perpetuated the myth of its “uniqueness”:

**It is always discussed at the different levels of politics and people are trying to define this region as unique, but it is not unique. It is a quite stable region. If you look at the whole country, we only have one unique region – it is the southern part of the country because you never know what is happening there. It is never covered in the news. [...] You know this region is industrial and mostly settled by Russians, okay it has historical aspects, but it is not unique.**

When the respondents were prompted to define Narva using a limited number of words, a distinct pattern emerged. The most common responses included: border location or proximity (26.5%); natural environment (24.2%); Russianness (23.1%); history (21.3%); and depression and regional isolation (each 15.6%). These characteristics were reflected and reiterated by the Narvan interviewees. While the interviewees reflected on Narva’s history, natural landscape, and Russian-speakers, some suggested that Narva has a strong sense of local community, illustrated by its friendliness, emphasis on education and family, and local identity. Interviewees also reflected on Narva’s border proximity and cross-border interactions as affecting how Narvans understand themselves, their community, Estonia, and Europe.

One young woman who co-owns a company with her husband suggested that Narva is “Russian, but Europe or

**“THE MAJORITY OF INTERVIEWEES PERCEIVED NARVA AS UNIQUE, AND A DESCRIPTIVE PATTERN EMERGED.”**



Figure 1. Homeland response "Estonia".

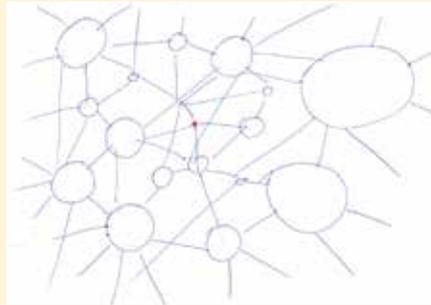


Figure 2. Non-spatial homeland response.

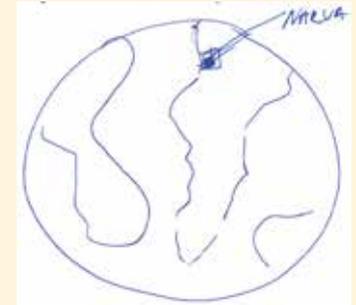


Figure 3. Homeland response "Narva".

something like this. Russian-European, something in between, because it is like an island in Estonia". This sense of being "in between", or being part of a spatial community that embodies multiple places or identities simultaneously, was shared by other interviewees. One said:

**It is a strange city which is mentally stuck between the Soviet Union and European Union – somewhat an independent part because people are still thinking about Russia, but living in Estonia. But Estonia is not here, it is somewhere else. It is a common expression if you are going somewhere like Viljandi – "oh come on I have some friends in Estonia or relatives in Estonia", because Narvans think they are in some special middle point between countries.**

Border proximity and location play a major role in how Narvan Russian-speakers perceptually and discursively construct their hometown and region. Although border proximity and cross-border activities are and used in state geopolitical discourses to construct Narva and its surrounding region, the discourses elicited in our research contrast with those produced by the Estonian state. While the Estonian state tends to marginalize or stigmatize Narva and its borderland region, Narvans themselves tend to place Narva's geographic, demographic, natural, and cultural uniqueness in the foreground through a positive discursive pattern and a local focus.

When prompted to draw their homelands, the Narvan respondents sketched an array of mental maps. The majority drew and/or defined their homeland (often writing legends on their maps) as follows: Estonia (40%; see Figure 1); non-spatial responses (26.6%; includes symbols or abstract images; see Figure 2); Narva (15.5%; see Figure 3); Russia (13.3%); or no homeland (4%). Such response patterns illustrate the cognitive plurality and variation of homeland perceptions among Narvans.

When asked to assess the degree of importance of various spaces in relation to their identities, patterns of spatial identification emerged. With responses of "very important" or "important", the majority of respondents indicated that city/town (Narva) is the most important spatial identity (21.7%), followed by Estonia (18.6%), the world (17%), the region or county of Ida-Viru (14.3%), the European Union (13.5%), Russia (11.6%), and

others (3%). The category "other" included countries of birth or residence such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Finland. This response pattern highlights the importance of the local scale and locality among Narvans and their spatial identities.

### Concluding remarks

Narvan Russian-speakers' discourses and perceptions of the borderland city of Narva and their spatial identities challenge and conflict with the often nationalized and politicized geopolitical discourses of the Estonian state and Estonian (and international) media.<sup>62</sup> As indicated by the survey and interview responses, Narva's Russian-speakers perceive their spatial community as unique within the broader Estonian and Russian national contexts. Narvan Russian-speakers tend to construct the borderland city of Narva as unique because of its border proximity, geographic location, natural environment, Russianness, and local history. Narvans also tend to describe and discursively construct Narva with those characteristics, in addition to its architecture, regional isolation, and depressing atmosphere.

Some respondents mentioned Narva's uniqueness or described Narva as an "in-between" space. This description highlights the liminality of Narvan spatial construction and of everyday life in this borderland. The construction of Narva as an "in-between" space builds upon a hybridity and a plurality of identity and the notion that borderland residents tend to live "in between" social, political, cultural, and economic spaces.<sup>63</sup> This sense of being "in between" highlights the transboundary relationships, experiences, and activities of Narva residents. It also highlights the historical, social, and economic connections between Narva and its twin town of Ivangorod.<sup>64</sup> Such sentiments illustrate how "borderlands are a distinctive kind of in-between space that allows their residents to carve out an existence and attachment against and across split and competing political boundaries."<sup>65</sup> As inhabitants of such a space, Narvans offer a distinctive local perspective and discourse on this geopolitical hotspot and its spatial construction.

Narva's Russian-speaking community also embodies multiple overlapping spatial identities. Although Narva's Russian-speaking community is culturally, linguistically, and geographically peripheral in the context of Estonian and Russian nationalizing and territorializing processes, the survey results indicate that these processes nonetheless have an impact. The results dem-

onstrate that Narva's Russian-speaking community has internalized Estonian national constructions of national territory and territorial identity. The results also indicate that Estonian and Russian nation-building and spatial identity formation processes may have resulted in a strong local identity that is emphatically Narvan rather than Estonian, Russian, or European. This localism corroborates other scholarship focused on Narva that has brought to light a distinct "Narvan" identity.<sup>66</sup> The survey and cognitive mapping responses illustrate the incongruences and complex intersectionality of territorializing and nationalizing processes. A comparison of the responses with demographic characteristics highlights these incongruences. The dominant spatial identities and homelands, Europe (86%), Estonia (75%), and Narva (76%), do not correspond perfectly with demographic characteristics such as place of birth (Estonia 73%, Russia 22%, other 5%), nationality (*natsionalnost*; Russian 84%, Estonian 8%, dual nationality 8%), primary language (Russian 98%, Estonian 2%), or formal citizenship status (*grazhdanstvo*; Estonian 70%, Russian 23%, stateless 7%).<sup>67</sup>

**THE INCONGRUENCES** between discursive constructions of Narva, spatial identity, and demographic indicators illustrate the challenges of analyzing spatial communities and identity among the non-titular Russian-speaking community in the former Soviet republics. Geopolitical discourses and state-focused approaches to borderland construction differ and are critically challenged by local borderland communities. Traditional identifying categories such as language, nationality, citizenship, or national territories alone cannot adequately express the complex territorial relations, local nuances of identity, or understandings of place. Spatial conceptual or methodological tools can contribute to identity and borderland community research and challenge the nationalized and politicized notions of borders and identity that continue to propel community marginalization, irredentism, and conflict. ✕

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ILLUSTRATION: MOA THELANDER

# GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH SMYSHLIAEV AND OTHER LOCAL HEROES FROM PERM

by **Julia Mannherz**

One of the many joys of doing historical research is that one encounters at times a person of the past whose life enables the researcher to get a profound sense of a bygone period. Sometimes, such an historical acquaintance even allows the historian to propose a new understanding of the society in which this person lived, and this is – of course – what the historian’s craft is all about. At times, the new acquaintance is such a charming person that getting to know him or her almost feels like making a new friend. Dmitrii Dmitrievich Smyshliaev (1828–1893) is a man who ticks all those boxes. His life reveals a great deal about nineteenth-century Russia, and I really wish that a time machine existed that would enable me to spend an evening by the fireside with him.

I first “met” Dmitrii Dmitrievich when I began researching Russian nineteenth-century provincial culture. Like a number of other historians, I believe that life in the provinces has a lot to teach us: not only is it more representative of contemporaries’ experience, as many more people lived outside of St. Petersburg and Moscow than in those two cities; but the history of the provinces also tells us about important aspects of nineteenth-century life which we are unlikely to see if we keep concentrating on the capitals.<sup>1</sup>

Smyshliaev lived most of his life in the city of Perm, located in the Ural mountains, about 1,400 km east of Moscow and roughly 1,900 km from St. Petersburg. Like a number of other provincial inhabitants, he became over the course of his life what Russians call a *kraeved*: a person who is knowledgeable about his hometown and region. We would call him a local historian and ethnographer, but Dmitrii Dmitrievich’s

love for his birthplace was not purely academic: he was also a local politician, a journalist and a cultural figure. His life and his writing reveal profound affection for his hometown, and he manages to endear the city of Perm to his readers. This is quite an achievement, given that Perm was much harder to sell than most other Russian towns: in the nineteenth century, Perm was still a young and rough place, characterized by heavy industry and life in barracks. Only a distant decision, taken in St. Petersburg as part of Catherine the Great’s administrative reforms in 1780, had turned the village-sized factory settlement of Perm into a provincial center. By 1804, the town had no more than 4,000 inhabitants. Some ninety years later, however, this figure had risen to 45,000, and by 1913 the population of Perm counted about 75,000.<sup>2</sup> This is a massive increase: within a century, Perm was transformed from a small factory village with a largely male population to an important provincial city, replete with parks, sidewalks, gas lanterns, schools, libraries, a local museum and a theater. Some differences to traditional Russian cities, however, remained. One of them was that Perm had very few noble inhabitants. Those who owned factories and land in the Urals continued to live in the more refined Western parts of the empire. In the absence of Russia’s traditional cultural elite, bureaucrats, merchants, and other members of non-noble estates took on the role of Perm’s cultural leaders.

**RAPID URBANIZATION** and the rise of the bourgeoisie are developments typical of nineteenth-century European history. Most historians, however, have argued that the tsarist Empire differed from Western and Central Europe in that there was no Russian bourgeoisie, and that middling estates played largely insig-

**Out of the shadows appear long bygone role models for a new Russian bourgeoisie.**

nificant roles in the country's history.<sup>3</sup> Perm may be a slightly unusual example if compared to other towns in European Russia, but I think that rather than being the exception that proves the rule, Smyshliaev's world and the vital role of ordinary local inhabitants in it is not unusual for the period. The contribution of merchants, traders, artisans, and low-ranking bureaucrats to local culture is merely more visible in a context where the nobility is not in the spotlight.<sup>4</sup> What we see in Perm, then, is the existence of an active Russian middle class that drove local policy and sociability: staffing local administrative bodies; funding local schools, hospitals, and libraries; driving cultural life; and running the local economy.<sup>5</sup> I'm following Jürgen Kocka's definition of middle class here, according to which that group is too diverse to be defined in strict Marxist terms that rely upon economic means of existence and production. Instead, members of the middle class were united by shared perceptions and values, such as a common sense of distance from both the nobility and the people, and a culture of achievement, education, and self-reliance, often combined with a secularized worldview.<sup>6</sup>

Smyshliaev, who wrote essays on local history and numerous sketches about influential inhabitants of Perm, describes these middling people. His heroes are – like the middle class in Kocka's definition – of various backgrounds: the daughter of a local bureaucrat, a state peasant who became an economist, a serf turned archaeologist, another peasant who became a painter. Smyshliaev also wrote about his father, a local merchant. Unlike other provincial historians then, Smyshliaev did not focus on the lives of those Permians who eventually achieved renown far away. Instead, he was interested in those who did not become household names in Russia's national history, but whose activities changed life in the Urals. Consequently, he published short biographies of all mayors of the city, wrote loving portraits of all secondary-school teachers, and published a list of men and women (!) who ran publishing houses in the city.<sup>7</sup> He reserved a special place, however, for Permians who became – like Smyshliaev himself – local intellectuals.

One of Smyshliaev's heroes was Aleksandr Nikiforovich Zyrianov, born in 1830 as a state serf in the district of Shadrinsk. Although Zyrianov only went to school for a few months, he was eager to learn and became a scribe for the local administration at the age of 16. He collected folklore, took part in archaeological digs at Iron Age burial mounds, and recorded meteorological data; but his real intellectual passion was the academic study of the artisanal economy which provided the livelihood of most of his ordinary contemporaries. Zyrianov published extensively in local and imperial journals on Perm folklore and small-scale economics. In addition, he taught at the school of his village Ivanishchevskoe, where he also established a library containing

8,000 volumes. Although Zyrianov was encouraged to engage in regional administration, he remained in his local district, where he died in 1884.<sup>8</sup>

Another of Smyshliaev's heroes, who also had to overcome social obstacles in her pursuit of learning, was the writer Ekaterina Aleksandrovna Slotsova (1838–1866). The daughter of a local official had to endure hostility from Permians who regarded an extensive education as undesirable in a young woman. Socialites

avoided her during parties, and numerous inhabitants made fun of the ink stains on her hands, or rumored that she wore blue stockings and engaged in orgies with unworthy men.<sup>9</sup> Slotsova, however, spent her nights reading extensively, and studied for a while at the university of Kazan where she impressed her teachers. When she returned to the Urals, she corresponded with leading intellectuals of the day such as the Slavophile Ivan Aksakov and the journalist Mikhail Katkov. She also lectured on the social standing of women, supported the founding of a Sunday

school for girls, and published fiction under the pen name Kamaskaia.<sup>10</sup> Slotsova-Kamaskaia died of consumption at the age of 28, and was celebrated by the St. Petersburg newspaper *Golos* as a martyr who had risked her health for women's learning.<sup>11</sup>

**SMYSHLIAEV'S OWN PATH** to learning was not as arduous as that of Zyrianov or Slotsova. He was the son of a highly educated merchant, Dmitrii Emel'ianovich. Alongside his trade, the elder Smyshliaev had an interest in geology – a very apt pursuit in Russia's foremost mining region – and a large collection of minerals. Dmitrii Emel'ianovich was also a bibliophile: he had acquired a fine library and possessed rare manuscripts. He was engaged in local politics and even served for a while as Perm's mayor. Throughout Russia, wealthy merchants often took on this role – not always entirely voluntarily, as it was time-consuming and costly.<sup>12</sup> We don't know whether the elder Smyshliaev regarded this office as a burden, but his political interests and liberal leanings are underlined by a friendship he struck with the disgraced statesman and reformer Mikhail Speranskii when the latter was exiled to Perm in 1812.<sup>13</sup> Dmitrii Emel'ianovich was no revolutionary, though. He was, like most of his contemporaries and the overwhelming majority of Russia's merchants, a deeply religious man, who donated the money needed to convert the wooden structure of Perm's All Saints' Church into a sturdier stone building. Nonetheless, Dmitrii Emel'ianovich's intellectual interests and political liberalism contradict the dominant view held by many historians that Russia's merchantry rejected rational learning and was politically conservative.<sup>14</sup>

Smyshliaev the younger thus grew up in a family in which learning was valued and commitment to the local community was a lived reality.<sup>15</sup> Dmitrii Dmitrievich continued this family

**“IN THE ABSENCE OF RUSSIA'S TRADITIONAL CULTURAL ELITE, BUREAUCRATS, MERCHANTS, AND OTHER MEMBERS OF NON-NOBLE ESTATES TOOK ON THE ROLE OF PERM'S CULTURAL FIGURES.”**

tradition with a breathtaking number of public-spirited activities: In the winter of 1859–1860 he organized musical and literary soirées together with the local gymnasium teacher N. A. Firsov, the proceeds of which they donated to fund a girls' gymnasium and girls' Sunday schools.<sup>16</sup> In the same year he teamed up with another high school teacher, a local official, and a ship owner to found a local library.<sup>17</sup> The years that followed saw Dmitrii Dmitrievich at his busiest, and this is no coincidence: this was the period of Russia's so-called Great Reforms, during which Alexander II's liberal policies changed Russian institutions profoundly and encouraged local grass-roots activities.<sup>18</sup> As part of these reforms, the *zemstva* (singular: *zemstvo*) were founded, bodies of local self-administration, and it is in this context that Smyshliaev found his calling. As a *zemstvo* activist and one-time head of his local *zemstvo* branch, Smyshliaev managed to see to the establishment a maternity ward in the *zemstvo* hospital. His initiative was also vital for the founding of a smallpox ward within the city hospital, an outpatient veterinary center, a *zemstvo* veterinary school, a local statistical bureau, a local educational board, a *zemstvo* publishing house, and local magistrates' courts. He furthermore oversaw road improvements and the beginnings of a *zemstvo*-run insurance system. In his capacity as a private citizen he managed to open a Perm branch of the Free Economic Society, Russia's oldest learned society and a prominent institution that was independent of the state.

All of these activities were accompanied by prolific publishing. Smyshliaev wrote numerous articles on the history and economy of the city of Perm and its region in the local newspaper *Permskie gubernskie vedomosti*. He also edited the *Sbornik Permskogo Zemstva* (Digest of the Perm *zemstvo*), and published an account of his journey to Jerusalem in 1865, a voyage he undertook after the death of his wife. Between 1885 and 1889 Smyshliaev returned to Palestine where he organized support for Russian pilgrims in the Holy Land.

**SMYSHLIAEV'S WRITINGS** about the history of Perm and its inhabitants are a labor of love. In them, he celebrates the achievements of peasants and of women who obtained learning, gained success and recognition against the odds, and applied their abilities in the service of others. Smyshliaev's sincere interest in and empathy for others make me wish I could interview him about his life in a nineteenth-century provincial Russian city. Yet even without that possibility, his tremendous energy and ceaseless efforts reveal much about his times and the society he found himself in. Smyshliaev's activities illustrate how local inhabitants engaged with municipal affairs, and what a significant difference they could make in provincial life. We see that those who were engaged in local affairs in Perm came from various backgrounds and pursued different professions. Their lives show that private

initiative and serving as a representative of the state by assuming official roles could at times coincide in one person. This is an important point, since historians have usually described Russian history as being defined by the antagonism between state and society. And indeed, this adversarial relationship did exist. Yet it is important to note that too clear an opposition between those two entities obscures more than it explains. Cooperation between the state and its people existed not only in the activities of individuals, but also institutionally, as Smyshliaev's *zemstvo* activities and his father's mayoral stint illustrate. Smyshliaev's activities furthermore underline how important regional identity was in driving local activism. This regional sense of belonging is another important point for Russian studies, as commentators have usually stressed the importance of the center. The activities of the Smyshliaevs suggest moreover that both the personal identification with a provincial region and public-spirited activities have a much longer history, predating the mid-century Great Reforms. Dmitrii Emel'ianovich Smyshliaev the elder already lived both these realities, which his son continued.



**THE RUSSIAN** nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, then, does not look so different from its Western counterpart. Even though we cannot grasp the Russian middle class in legal terms, since the Smyshliaevs would have been registered as merchants, Slotsova-Kamskaia most likely as a *raznochinka*, and Zyrianov as a peasant, their daily schedules – reading, lecturing, publishing, engaging in local affairs, socializing with like-minded contemporaries – would have been similar. Through these activities and their self-description as Permians, they developed a shared identity.

One difference, however, remains. According to Kocka, the Western European bourgeoisie was often secular. This is obviously not the case with these Permians: the Smyshliaevs, like most of Russia's merchants, were deeply religious. Likewise, Slotsova-Kamskaia's positive literary characters are naturally Orthodox believers. Yet this religious faith did not prevent the Smyshliaevs or Slotsova-Kamskaia from espousing liberal political views: working towards women's emancipation, establishing schools and hospitals, and shaping local politics.

I have only known Dmitrii Dmitrievich for a relatively short time, and there is much more I hope to learn about him and his contemporaries. As this research project about local sociability proceeds, I expect that he can teach me more about everyday life in a provincial town, about the interaction of men and women from various backgrounds, and the way they shaped their lives. ✖

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Survivors of the Klooga concentration camp.



Soviet soldiers examine the bodies of victims left by the retreating Germans. Klooga, Estonia, September 1944.



The short film "Best Friends Forever" by the Estonian journalist Anna Gavronski tells the story of four Jewish women who survived the war.



A warning sign in German, Russian, and Estonian posted at the entrance to the Klooga concentration camp that reads: "Stop! You will be shot without warning!"

# HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN CONTEMPORARY ESTONIA

# CLASHES OF VICTIMHOOD

by **Paul Oliver Stocker**

On Holocaust Remembrance Day, 2012, at the opening of the “Gallery of Memory”, a memorial to the 974 Estonian Jews killed on Estonian soil during the Holocaust, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip said, “I understand and share the grief and pain caused to your community by the Holocaust.” He went on to comment, “The crimes of totalitarian regimes are indelible and can never be justified,” referring to both the Nazi occupation and the brutal Soviet occupation of Estonia. The Soviet occupations of Estonia (1939–1941 and

1944–1991), and in particular the 1941 deportations in which over 50,000 Estonians were either killed, exiled to Gulags, or conscripted into the Red Army, are undoubtedly the most prominent traumas of contemporary Estonian history. They have contributed significantly to shaping post-Soviet Estonian identity as the “other”, in contradistinction to what democratic and independent Estonia represents. The shorter Nazi occupation, from 1941 to 1944, has received less attention in both public and scholarly discourse.

The same is certainly true of the Holocaust, an event which led to the massacre of 974 Estonian Jews and the absolute destruction of Jewish life in Estonia, yet did not interfere with the majority of the population in any meaningful sense.<sup>2</sup> The other 7,651 European Jews – mostly from Lithuania, Latvia, and Czechoslovakia – who were killed during the occupation died in remote concentration and labor camps, far from the public’s attention.<sup>3</sup>

The remoteness of the Holocaust

in Estonia contributed to the absence of any kind of “bottom-up” collective memory generated by the experiences of individuals. This absence, coupled with the Soviet Union’s complete suppression of the Holocaust as a subject of debate and scholarly inquiry, goes a long way towards explaining the absence of the Holocaust in national memory. Even after independence in 1991, the Holocaust did not become a subject debated by significant numbers of politicians or scholars until it was thrust onto the agenda shortly before and after Estonia’s accession to NATO and to the European Union in 2004. The effect of Estonia’s “return to the West” has been a mixture of apologizing for the crimes of local collaborators during the Nazi occupation and keeping a firm grip on Estonia’s victimhood status, and on Estonians’ view of themselves as the ultimate victims of the Second World War.

This paper will analyze public memory of the Holocaust in Estonia and highlight the conflict of memory between Estonian and Jewish victimhood by an examination of official speeches and museums. Neither of these areas have previously been addressed in works on Holocaust memory in Estonia, all of which acknowledge the prevalent tendency in Estonian memory politics to minimize the Holocaust in the shadow of the Soviet occupation.<sup>4</sup> The intent is not revisionist, but rather to add to the understanding of this dynamic in relation to new realms of memory. Furthermore, the implications of this paper extend beyond Estonia’s borders in a broader literature dealing with the remembrance of Communism and Nazism in countries that were occupied by both Germany and the Soviet Union – a literature which

## abstract

This article explores how several key museums discuss the Holocaust in the wider context of Estonian history, including Estonia’s traumatic past under Soviet occupation. It is argued that the Estonian narrative of victimhood still dominates collective memory as displayed in museums, and Jewish suffering in the Holocaust takes a much less prominent place despite an increase in Holocaust awareness among the Estonian political elite since the country’s “return to the West”. Three museums which present vastly different narratives are analyzed, the Estonian History Museum, the Museum of Occupations, and the Estonian Jewish Museum. The Estonian case is part of a wider and increasingly complex institutionalized European commemoration culture which has developed since the EU enlargement 2010.

**KEYWORDS:** the Holocaust, Estonia, memory, museology, East European studies.





The Estonian Jewish Museum also brings up the nature of local collaboration.

often descends into what Dan Stone calls “‘double genocide’ rhetoric”.<sup>5</sup> I will argue that, while the Estonian state has attempted in its political discourse to come to terms with Estonia’s role in the Holocaust, it has nevertheless simultaneously sought to maintain Estonia’s status as a victim of Soviet oppression. I will then juxtapose this “official” memory at an elite level with how the Holocaust is represented in three Estonian museums. Two of these museums, the Museum of Occupations and the Estonian National History Museum, are prominent spaces in the country’s capital Tallinn, and generally reflect the discourse of elite “official memory” which remembers Estonia solely as the victim of the Second World War. The third museum, the Estonian Jewish Museum, presents a different story, highlighting the suffering of the Jews in Estonia during the Second World War as well as the nature of local collaboration. Yet the Estonian Jewish Museum’s marginality, both geographically and in terms of size, is somewhat reflective of the overall climate in Estonia, which has yet to reconcile the atrocities committed against Estonians during the Second World War with those committed against Estonian Jews or indeed European Jewry on Estonian soil.

### Public Holocaust memory in Estonia

Public memory has been described by John Bodnar as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and by implication, its future”.<sup>6</sup> Bodnar argues that public memory is not a monolithic phenomenon, however, and is expressed in both “official” and “vernacular” forms – the vernacular reflecting more informal, “grassroots” commemorations, a public memory “from the bottom up”. This section will focus on public memory in its official form, memory which “originates in the concerns of cultural leaders or authorities at all levels of society” who “have an interest in social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo”.<sup>7</sup>

“Official” public memories of the Holocaust emerged as an important international issue during the 1980s, when the German chancellor Helmut Kohl attempted to shape a memory of the Nazi past on various anniversaries, such as the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1945.<sup>8</sup> Public memory, unlike private memory, is an elite-based construction of historical events which tends to serve a political purpose. It is utilized by political elites – that is, government officials and the state institutions they both fund and operate – as a form of socialization and means of creating a historical narrative to which national identity can relate. It must not be confused with private and individual memories, which can accumulate to form “collective memory”, and are likely to differ from the official state narrative.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there are often clashes between conflicting narratives of “bottom-up” and “top-down memories”. It is particularly important in the context of European integration and globalization to note that public memory can often be influenced by external international forces and “outsiders”, both state and non-state.<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Olick’s distinction between public and private memory is important: public memory is a construct and subject to change and operationalization, whereas individual private memories, those held by individuals of a given entity (social group or nation), do not necessarily cumulate to form a memory held by a wider society.<sup>11</sup> Timothy Snyder also recognizes the important difference between “mass personal memory” and public memory, which is the construct of elites.<sup>12</sup>

Tony Judt bluntly but accurately argued in his seminal *Post-war: A History of Europe Since 1945* that “Holocaust recognition” had become “our contemporary European entry ticket”.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, starting in the late 1990s, Estonian governments were put under pressure by international institutions in the period leading up to and following their accession to NATO and the EU in 2004 to improve public awareness in connection with the Holocaust. The governments responded to that pressure with a range of initiatives mainly related to commemoration and education. Yet the issue also spilled over into elite political discourse, and high-profile Estonian politicians often sought to demonstrate that Estonia was coming to terms with its past and, in line with other nations in the EU and NATO, unequivocally condemned its historic actions during the Holocaust. This new view is not seen merely as Estonia fulfilling its obligations as a member of the international organizations: it is a denationalization of memory, part of a wider “globalization” and “cosmopolitanization” of Holocaust memory, in which the public memory is no longer publicly influenced only by the nation state.<sup>14</sup> As a result, Estonia faced the profound dilemma of aligning the historical narrative of its own victimization, which had been dominant since 1991, with its new international commitments, which required coming to terms with the Holocaust, and more specifically, conforming to a more Europeanized memory of the Holocaust. Dan Diner has referred to the Holocaust in this context as “the foundation myth of Europe”.<sup>15</sup> Speeches by Estonian political elites can be analyzed with this new challenge in mind, and present a picture of this dilemma.

In 2005, the Estonian state demonstrated a willingness to

address the issue of local collaboration with the occupying Nazi regime through a series of public apologies. Apologies for historical injustice by heads of state have been witnessed on several occasions across Europe, particularly in relation to local collaboration in the Holocaust, including those of the French president Jacques Chirac in 1995 and the Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski in 2001. In the Estonian case, apologies were made by the president and the prime minister within a year of each other and shortly after Estonia's accession to NATO and the EU. On May 8, 2005, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip issued two apologies on behalf of the Republic of Estonia, as well as an official statement that Estonia "regrets the fact that, in cooperation with occupying powers, citizens of the Republic of Estonia also participated in the perpetration of crimes against humanity".<sup>16</sup> The other apology came on July 24, 2005, when President Arnold Rüütel also acknowledged and apologized for Estonian citizens who participated in Nazi crimes at the former site of the Klooga concentration camp.<sup>17</sup>

**THE APOLOGIES FOR** local participation in the Holocaust can be seen as significant landmarks in Estonia's coming to terms with the past. The apologies by the two politicians and the official state apology are "controlled" statements which were thoughtfully prepared and delivered at historically symbolic sites on symbolic dates. Ansip's "double apology", the more significant of the two, in which he apologized both for the fact that the Holocaust occurred on Estonian soil and for local participation, represents a clear attempt to come to terms with the Holocaust within a European memory framework. The speech was delivered on May 8, a significant day in the European context, marking victory over Nazi Germany. The date lacks a positive meaning in Estonia, given that there was no triumph for Estonians. It is therefore significant that Ansip was willing to admit and apologize for Estonian complicity in Nazi crimes on a historically significant date in Europe. Both Ansip's and Rüütel's speeches can be seen as attempts by the Estonian political elite to integrate Estonia into the broader, Europeanized Holocaust memory narrative. This is demonstrated by their willingness to minimize their own narrative of victimhood and to recognize their duty upon joining the Western community to address the issue of the Holocaust.

Evidently, however, the Estonian state was not prepared to apologize without mentioning the crimes of the Soviet Union against Estonians. Soviet crimes toward Estonians are recalled or mentioned during a discussion of the Holocaust either by specifically referring to the Soviet Union or by discussing the Holocaust under the umbrella of "totalitarian crimes and occupation", which, in a discussion about the Nazi occupation, effectively serves as a euphemism for Soviet crimes. At a speech in Israel, President Rüütel said:

We remember our past and we tell our children about it,

not only on the Holocaust Memorial Day, January 27. Neither should we forget the crimes committed by the Soviet regime, the victims of which were Estonians, Jews, as well as people from other nationalities.<sup>18</sup>

On Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2007, Ansip delivered his strongest condemnation of "totalitarian" crimes during a discussion of the Holocaust: "Estonia too suffered during and after the Second World War under totalitarian regimes and we paid for this with our independence. Their crimes will never expire and their perpetrators cannot be justified."<sup>19</sup> On Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2012, Ansip continued in this vein, stating that "the crimes of totalitarian regimes are indelible and can never be justified".<sup>20</sup>

Estonian politicians frequently condemn Soviet crimes in their speeches at various public events and commemorations. However, by doing so during speeches dealing with the Holocaust, often on Holocaust Remembrance Day, they send a clear message regarding the role of the Holocaust in Estonian memory: that it cannot be discussed without a reminder of the barbarity shown toward Estonians during the periods before and after the Holocaust. Given that International Holocaust Remembrance Day is a global event, the practice sends a clear message to the international community that the historical consequences of the Second World War in Estonia include the suffering of Estonians, which must be recognized in a discussion of "totalitarian crimes". The discussion of Soviet crimes is clearly self-defensive in nature. It does not explicitly seek to exonerate those who participated in crimes against humanity, but it does seek to place the Estonians who participated in the Holocaust's actions in the context of the immediate aftermath of the first Soviet occupation, when many undoubtedly experienced fear and were willing to exact retribution.

**UNLIKE THE APOLOGIES** cited, the discussion of Soviet crimes demonstrates a retreat into the national memory narrative of victimhood, away from addressing Estonian participation in the Holocaust. The reference to the "totalitarian regimes" of the Second World War presents Soviet and Nazi crimes without distinguishing them from one another. This practice can also be found in the broader "East vs. West" memory conflict in Europe which has emerged since the accession of post-Communist East European states to the EU, and represents an attempt by Estonian politicians to place themselves firmly in the "East" camp and push for a greater recognition of Soviet crimes by western Europe. Ultimately, speeches at commemorative events represent an attempt by the Estonian political elite to demonstrate a

willingness to come to terms with the Holocaust while conserving Estonia's victimhood status and reminding the international community of the historical details that are important in understanding Estonia's attitude toward the Holocaust. The following section examines

**"THE APOLOGIES FOR LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN THE HOLOCAUST CAN BE SEEN AS SIGNIFICANT LANDMARKS IN ESTONIA'S COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST."**

how museums in Estonia represent the Holocaust in the context of this elite-level discourse.

## The Holocaust and Estonian museums: the Estonian Jewish museum

While Bodnar's emphasis on the distinction between official and vernacular forms of public memory is important, he argues that the two nevertheless have meeting points. Public memory is "fashioned ideally in a public sphere in which various parts of the social structure exchange views".<sup>21</sup> These public spheres can be anything from cultural events, such as books, films, documentaries, and art, as well as memorials, monuments, and parades. One such site where official memory is reflected, but also contested, is the museum. Museums are important in the study of public memory as institutionalized sites of memory where we can witness a constructed narrative of history. Yet museums do not operate in a vacuum; they also reflect wider trends in historical remembrance beyond their walls. Thus museums are manifestations of official memory and at the same time play a part in building it. Aro Velmet, speaking of the three Baltic "occupation" museums in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, argues that

**The Baltic museums of occupations provide three attempts at writing [the] final chapter for the national narrative of their respective countries. Though purportedly academic institutions of critical inquiry, museums are also discursive establishments, conduits of power transmitting and shaping narratives of national identity through their scholarly and political authority.<sup>22</sup>**

The museums analyzed in the present study are the Estonian History Museum, the Museum of Occupations and the Estonian Jewish Museum, all in Tallinn. These three were chosen as the largest and most relevant – other smaller museums and memorials would also enrich the study, but cannot be included simply for reasons of space.<sup>23</sup> The analysis deals with the content of displays and exhibitions, pamphlets, historical guides, visual artifacts, architecture and design, and the funding and operations of the museums. The museums have been read as texts for their literal as well as their symbolic content, both of which can be seen as attempts to represent a particular narrative or version of history. That is, the museums can be seen as specific sites of memory which demonstrate their own interpretation of history, and as indicative of wider trends in Estonia's coming to terms with the Holocaust.

**THE JEWISH COMMUNITY** Center which houses the Estonian Jewish Museum and the Gallery of Memory is located on Karu Street, about a kilometer outside the Old Town. It is situated beside the relatively new \$2 million synagogue, which opened in 2007. The synagogue received international attention as the first to be built in Estonia since the Sec-

ond World War (the original was erected in 1883, but destroyed in a Soviet air raid in 1944).<sup>24</sup> The Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves, accompanied by the Israeli president Shimon Peres, marked the occasion with a speech praising Estonian-Jewish relations in which he said, "Estonia has been a good and safe home for the Jewish people",<sup>25</sup> and highlighted Estonia's progressive attitudes toward the Jews during the 1920s. It is in this small hub of Jewish life, in the corridor of the third floor of the modest community center building, that the Gallery of Memory can be found. The Gallery of Memory displays two glass tablets, both fractured in two, displaying the names of the 947 Estonian Jews who perished in Estonia during the Nazi Occupation, with their dates of birth and a Star of David next to each name. Also displayed are plaques which commemorate the 1942 Wannsee Conference where the Final Solution was discussed and Estonia was declared "judenfrei". The two Estonians who have been awarded the "Righteous Among the Nations" medal by the state of Israel, Uku and Eha Masing, are also commemorated. A plaque thanks the sponsors of the Gallery of Memory project, including the Government of Estonia, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, two prominent private donors, the Estonian Jewish Museum (which is funded entirely by private donors), and a list of 33 other individuals.

The pamphlet offered at the Gallery of Memory and at the entrance to the Estonian Jewish Museum is 34 pages long. On the front page are a map of Estonia which has been stamped "judenfrei" and the title "The Holocaust on the Territory of Nazi-Occupied Estonia 1941–1944" (the pamphlet is available in Estonian, English, Russian, and German). The introduction, titled "Blot on the Map", describes the publication as "a brief guide to the details associated with the national tragedy of the Jewish population on a tiny corner of Estonian land", and warns, "One should not expect revelations and sensations from our story. One shouldn't anticipate zealous accusations. We simply attempt to follow the history and background of the Holocaust in Estonian lands. But even that is enough".<sup>26</sup> The pamphlet summarizes in a brief but nuanced manner the history of Jews in Estonia; the initial stages of Nazi occupation, during which Estonian Jews were eradicated; the introduction and murder of European Jews; life in the concentration and labor camps; and a map displaying the locations of concentration camps and all sites where Estonian and European Jews were killed. The brochure does not shy away from discussing local collaboration, and includes information regarding the crimes of the Omakaitse, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company of the 287<sup>th</sup> Police Battalion, which was made up of Estonians, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Estonian SS Division.<sup>27</sup>

The pamphlet devotes a section to the memory of the Holocaust,<sup>28</sup> including the ruthless retributions against and prosecution of Nazi collaborators under the Soviet occupation, and to a discussion of the suppression of Holocaust memory during the Soviet occu-

**"THE DISPLAYS AND MUSEUM FOCUS MORE ON THE ESTONIAN JEWS AND LESS ON THE MAJORITY OF JEWS WHO DIED IN ESTONIA DURING THE HOLOCAUST."**

pation. It contains a list of memorials dedicated to the Holocaust located at the historic sites around Estonia. The pamphlet engages with much recent scholarship on the Holocaust in Estonia, and weaves the findings of the History Commission together with those of scholars such as Gurin-Loov, Elhonen, and Maripuu. Anton Weiss-Wendt, the author of *Murder without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (2009), is also credited with a contribution to the history of the Holocaust in Estonia, in spite of the controversy generated by his book, which described in detail the nature of local collaboration. The book led to a variety of verbal, mostly ad hominem attacks on Weiss-Wendt in the Estonian press and anti-Semitic abuse from members of the Estonian public writing in online forums.<sup>29</sup>

The modest Jewish Museum is situated in one room attended by one member of the staff. The Museum displays (in Estonian and Russian only) the history of Jews in Estonia. It devotes a considerable section to the Holocaust in Estonia, with a few objects seized from Estonian Jews, as well as detailed pictures, maps, tables, and text documenting the history of the Holocaust on Estonian territory, delivered in a similar style to the pamphlet. The rest of the museum focuses on Jewish life from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, including prominent Estonian Jews and the activities of the Jewish community today.

**THE OVERALL THEME** of both the Gallery of Memory and the Jewish Museum is the intention to portray the plight of Estonian Jews during the Nazi occupation in a realistic manner, based on scholarly research by prominent Estonian historians of the Holocaust. The displays and museum focus more on the Estonian Jews and less on the majority of Jews who died in Estonia during the Holocaust, who had been brought from outside the national borders. This focus demonstrates a reluctance to view the Holocaust in Estonia as part of a transnational genocide, a preference to portray it as a national tragedy and a “blip” in the otherwise solid Estonian-Jewish relations which are presented in national history. The location of the museum and memorial are also telling: located outside the center of Tallinn next to the synagogue, on the third floor of the Jewish Community Center, the museum is not given the prominence of other museums or memorials such as the Museum of Occupations, and is located far away from the grandiose sites of memory devoted to Estonian Independence in central Tallinn. If museums are representative of memory, the Jewish Museum plays the part of an outsider. The Government’s role in the opening of the synagogue, in the form of President Ilves’s statement in front of the president and the chief rabbi of Israel that “Estonia has been a good and safe home for the Jewish people”, can be looked back upon as ironic, given that the building located 50 meters away from where he spoke has since become the place in which the “uncomfortable” history of Estonian collaboration in the Holocaust is presented to anyone who cares to visit.



Museum of Occupations, Tallinn, Estonia.

PHOTO: TOMOMI HAYASHI

## The Estonian History Museum

The Estonian History Museum contains very little information on the Holocaust or World War II, but is nevertheless worthy of analysis as the best representative of the state narrative of Estonian history displayed in a museum. The Museum is located in the heart of Tallinn’s Old Town in the medieval Great Guild Hall, a Hanseatic building which has been a thriving center of economic and cultural activity for centuries. The permanent exhibition is given the title “Spirit of Survival” and seeks to present 11,000 years of Estonian history, from the first settlers to the reestablishment of Estonian independence in 1991. The exhibition gives an extremely broad overview of the Estonian people and nation, and mainly focuses on their interaction with and rule by foreigners. The overriding message is that the ten different occupations Estonians have experienced over the centuries have had a dangerous and negative impact on the native population. Yet the indefatigable Estonians have struggled through and maintained their language, culture, and customs despite attempts to suppress them, particularly through Germanization and Russification. They are ultimately “survivors”. Key aspects of the museum are the attempt to portray Estonians as a Nordic and European people, and the thesis that Russification was largely unsuccessful because it is completely alien to Estonians. The overriding narrative of the museum seeks to offer a triumphant picture of Estonian history in which the Estonian state has historical roots stretching back thousands of years, and foreign rule has failed in eliminating or, to an extent, even disrupting Estonian culture. The Estonians are portrayed as victims, but victims who have ultimately prevailed.

Pille Petersoo’s framework of identity is useful for a more nuanced analysis of the museum. Petersoo analyzes the role played by the “other” in Estonian identity, that is, how Estonians as a nation define themselves by comparing themselves to an opposite force. Petersoo states that there are four types of “other” in the Estonian case, all of which are components of Estonia’s identity construction: the internal positive, internal negative, external positive, and external negative. The internal positive other is a group that is defined as non-Estonian but present within Estonia, and having a positive influence in Estonian identity con-

**The Estonian remembrance of the Holocaust seems to be a largely top-down project.**

struction. This group is identified as the Baltic Germans, once seen as the ruling class and enemy of the Estonians, but now as a positive historical influence in many areas of Estonian culture and society. The internal negative other is a group that is non-Estonian and present in Estonia, but that has a negative influence in Estonian identity construction. Petersoo describes this group mainly as the ethnic Russian minority, especially those Russians who arrived during the Soviet occupation. There is a perception of the Russians living in Estonia as the antithesis of Estonians and the bearers of Russian imperialism and colonization. The external positive other is a group that exists outside Estonia and has a positive influence on Estonian identity construction. Major positive external influences on Estonia are Finland, Scandinavia, and continental Europe in general, all of which have many historical, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties with Estonia. The external negative other is a group that exists outside of Estonia and is viewed negatively in relation to Estonian identity. This group is identified as Russia, which is seen as an imperialist threat. The common theme in Petersoo's work is that Russians and Russia are viewed negatively in relation to Estonian identity, and are seen as a threatening "other" and everything the Estonian is not.<sup>30</sup>

The Estonian History Museum largely conforms to Petersoo's typology of Estonian identity. Russia is discussed in negative and menacing terms in the museum, taking the role of an "external negative other". The emphasis on Estonia's "Nordicness" and "Europeanness", and on the beneficial historical, cultural, and economic influences that Nordic and European cultures have had on Estonia, also confirms Petersoo's claim that Estonians see Europe, Scandinavia, and Finland as "external positive others". The Baltic Germans are given both positive and negative roles: they were oppressive land barons and reduced Estonians to a peasant-like status; however, they also brought cultural, economic, and linguistic benefits to the nation. Interestingly, the museum does not discuss the role of Russians in contemporary Estonia, so that Petersoo's claim that Russians are also "internal negative others" is neither confirmed nor refuted, although this absence in itself could indicate that Russians are not viewed entirely favorably in the context of contemporary Estonian identity.

The majority of the museum displays are dedicated to the Middle Ages, and extol Estonia's history as a thriving hub of Baltic trade. In one room, which shows how various wars have affected Estonia, the Second World War is discussed in a brief passage. The brutal first Soviet occupation is discussed before a brief mention of the German occupation. Estonian support for the Nazi occupation is described as "lukewarm", in contrast to total opposition to the Soviet occupation. Throughout the entire museum, no mention is made of the Holocaust on Estonian soil, with the exception of a brief snapshot of the entrance to the Klooga concentration camp in a video display. Clearly, this relatively small museum does not aspire to give nuanced accounts of Estonian history, but rather provides broad overviews for foreign visitors. It is therefore not surprising that the complexities of the Second World War, important as they are, are not discussed in any detail. However, what the museum does show is the overriding themes which are contextually important for un-



Minister of Education and Research Mr. Jaak Aaviksoo at the Tallinn Jewish Cemetery on Holocaust Remembrance Day 2013.



Ceremony at the Tallinn Synagogue in 2013.

derstanding the nuances: first, Estonia is a nation with deep historical roots in Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea region. Second, Estonia has been the victim of many foreign occupations and repressions throughout its history (the worst of which were domination by the Baltic Germans, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union), but has maintained, against all odds, its culture, language, and traditions. The most prominent state museum in Estonia thus paints a triumphant and in many ways positive picture of Estonian history, while also maintaining a narrative of victimhood. This is in contrast to the partly state-funded, but privately operated Museum of Occupations.

## The Museum of Occupations

The Okupatsioonide Muuseum or Museum of Occupations in Tallinn was established in 1998 by Olga Kristler-Ritso at the request of the Estonian government.<sup>31</sup> Kristler-Ritso is an expatriate Estonian who fled the Second World War to the United States. She is the head of the Kristler-Ritso Foundation, which oversees the long-term development of the museum, while its day-to-day operations are administered by Executive Director Heiki Ahonen (until 2012). Approximately 25,000 visitors per year are welcomed at the museum, many of whom are international tourists. Ticket sales account for a third of the museum's revenue, and the rest is subsidized by the Estonian state through the Ministry of Culture. State funding in 2009 amounted to about €190,000.<sup>32</sup> The museum describes its objectives as follows:

**Our task is to document the catastrophes and cataclysms which took place during the last fifty years and to find detailed proof about the past based on facts and analysis. We are interested in how the generation which reestablished Estonia's independence in 1991 was formed and want to learn which obstacles they had to overcome. We are interested in the life of Estonians, and also of Russians, Germans, Jews, Swedes and other minorities under the totalitarian regime of the second half of the XX century.<sup>33</sup> We have no reason to be ashamed of our history, rather the reverse. At the same**



Chief Rabbi of Estonia Efraim Shmuel Kot during the Klooga concentration camp commemoration on September 19, 2014.

time, we should not forget our experiences and keep silent. On the contrary, we must prevent the dreadful offences from being forgotten.<sup>34</sup>

The museum is located just outside Tallinn's Old Town, a mere 300 meters from the Riigikogu, the Estonian parliament. The short walk down the hill from the Riigikogu to the museum is symbolic in itself, and contains monuments and memorials dedicated to Estonian independence, including a stone with the inscription "20. VIII 1991". There are also busts of Rear Admiral John Pitka (1872–1944), who founded the Defense League which fought successfully in the war of independence, and Major General Orasmaa (1890–1943), the leader of the Home Guard who was arrested by the Soviets in 1940 and died in captivity.<sup>35</sup>

The Museum is housed in a modern, irregularly-shaped building made predominantly of glass supported by concrete. Upon entering the museum, the visitor is at first confronted by souvenirs and books, mostly dedicated to Estonia's occupation and independence. The booklets offered as history guides in several different languages at the beginning of the museum tour mark the first formal attempt to educate the visitor about Estonia's plight between 1939 and 1991. They are written by Mart Laar, a historian and prominent politician who has been Prime Minister on two occasions since 1991. The short guides are divided into four booklets: *Red Terror: Repressions of Soviet Occupation Authorities in Estonia*, *Estonia in World War II*, *The Forgotten War: 1944–1956*; and *A Bird's Eye View of Estonian History*.

Three of the four guides focus heavily on the negative role of the Soviet Union in Estonia, particularly during the first occupation of 1940–1941. The booklet on Estonia's experiences in World War II devotes a single section to Nazi occupation. The Holocaust is dealt with in one short paragraph, which gives a brief overview of the plight of Estonian and European Jews on Estonian soil during the German occupation. One statement in the guide which can be seen as misleading is the sentence

**“AT SOME MOMENTS, THE VIDEO EVEN ATTEMPTS TO RATIONALIZE ESTONIAN SUPPORT FOR THE NAZI OCCUPATION.”**

“Nazis did not succeed in instigating Estonians ... to exterminate other ethnic groups or carry out pogroms”.<sup>36</sup> Given that the museum guide, written in English, is for visitors who are probably not experts in Estonian history, the sentence may appear to absolve Estonia of any guilt whatsoever of complicity in the Holocaust. The guide also confusingly states, after implying that Estonians were not collaborators in the Holocaust, that the Nazi occupation “does not release those citizens of the Estonian Republic who fulfilled orders of the Nazis, of liability for the crimes committed. But it cannot be the Estonian state or people who are to bear responsibility”.<sup>37</sup> The paragraph devoted to the Holocaust also refers to the peaceful relations between Estonians and Jews during the interwar period, and mentions the Estonians who rescued the few Jews who did survive. It is striking that, in a section devoted to the history of the Nazi occupation, the Holocaust, which was certainly one of the most brutal and shocking aspects, and what many would see as the defining aspect of the Second World War in Europe, is confined to a paragraph, half of which is devoted to a cautious stance on the issue of Estonian complicity. The two quotations above demonstrate an unclear public presentation of the role Estonia played in the Holocaust and the extent to which collaborators should be held responsible. Even if the first misleading statement can be attributed to poor translation or writing, it nonetheless represents a certain confusion over the nature of Estonian collaboration.

**THE VISUAL DISPLAY** of the museum, with its bland, grey walls and ceiling, seeks to recreate the totalitarian atmosphere of the Soviet Union and situate the visitor inside a prison, similar to the many KGB prisons located all over Estonia which are now museums aimed at shocking as well as informing foreign visitors. The scattered props, mostly suitcases and Soviet memorabilia, are intended to present the tragedy of the deportations of Estonians and the loss of the Estonian way of life. Unavoidably, the display on the Nazi occupation can only be observed in comparison to the two Soviet occupations. The exhibits include Nazi administrative documents ordering the execution of Estonians and a 28-minute video loop. The video, a short documentary of the Nazi occupation, demonstrates that the Soviet occupation was indeed far more brutal towards local Estonians than the German occupation. It shows German troops being greeted as liberators and scenes of jubilation as Nazi troops take control of Tallinn. Soviet terror and brutality are discussed by locals in graphic detail, apparently as a basis for explaining Estonian civilian and military collaboration with the Nazis and the Waffen SS. Several veterans tell of their motivation in the video. At some moments, the video even attempts to rationalize Estonian support for the Nazi occupation: the Nazis promised the Estonians autonomy, the possibility of a “Greater Estonia”, and most importantly, protection from the brutal Soviets. The film also discusses the West's betrayal of Estonia at the Tehran conference, where it was agreed that the 1941 borders would be maintained in the event of an Allied victory. Estonians

are shown fighting valiantly alongside the Nazis in 1944 in an attempt to prevent a second occupation. Estonia's declared independence after the Nazi retreat lasted two days before the Red Army crushed any hope of Estonian self-determination. The film ends solemnly with a discussion of the Holocaust in anecdotal form, with no nuances in regard to numbers or the specific nature of collaboration, as locals recall the smell of burning flesh and the grim scenes of corpses in the concentration and labor camps. The fact that the Holocaust is displayed as an afterthought to the whole Nazi occupation is extremely telling, particularly given the short film's intense focus on legitimizing and explaining Estonian-Nazi cooperation.

The remainder of the museum is devoted entirely to the decades-long post-war Soviet occupation. Historical agency is accorded to Estonians, in keeping with contemporary Estonian historiography on the Soviet years, and the ultimate fall of the USSR is represented in jubilant detail. During the time of the author's visits, there were two temporary displays devoted to Estonian "forest brothers", the Estonian guerillas who fled to the forests to resist Soviet occupation in the 1950s. Another particularly poignant display was the "letters in bark" exhibition, which portrayed the human tragedy of Soviet deportations through messages written on bark that were sent home by Baltic prisoners in Siberia. The downstairs area contains decrepit and mutilated Soviet statues, monuments which were torn out of their prominent settings in central Tallinn and removed to the museum's dingy basement.

**IN SUM, THE HOLOCAUST** is largely absent from the museum: there is neither a full factual presentation of the nature of the Holocaust in Estonia nor any display which shows the suffering of Estonian and European Jews as a negative aspect of Nazi occupation. In spite of the museum's mission statement claiming to be "interested in the life of Estonians, and also of Russians, Germans, Jews, Swedes and other minorities under the totalitarian regime of the second half of the XX century", victimhood status is accorded solely to the Estonian state and people in the context of both the Soviet and Nazi occupations. The museum's discussion of the Holocaust is more likely to mislead one of the 25,000 visitors who visit the Museum each year, whether a foreign tourist or indeed anyone not historically inquisitive, about local collaboration in the Holocaust in Estonia. The historical guide written by Mart Laar is particularly troubling as a purportedly historically and morally accurate picture of how and why Estonia was the setting for the destruction of Jewish life in Estonia and the murder of nearly 10,000 Jews from across Europe. The Holocaust is discussed in the context of Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism, in an attempt to externalize guilt either to the Nazis, whose orders the locals were following, or to the Soviets, who terrorized the Estonians to such a degree that they could not be held responsible for collaborating. The trend of highlighting Estonia's progressive attitudes toward the Jewish minority, also found in the speeches of elites, is also present in the museum guide, the only detailed educational resource in the museum.

## Conclusion

The use of the Holocaust in the three Estonian museums analyzed paints an opaque picture of its meaning in contemporary Estonia. What is abundantly clear is that, although the Holocaust is an issue of high importance since Estonia's accession to the EU and NATO, it remains on the periphery of Estonia's collective memory of the Second World War, which focuses predominantly on the suffering of Estonians at the hands of the Soviet Union. The official state museum portrays Estonian history as 11,000 years of struggle from which the nation has ultimately and triumphantly freed itself. The Museum of Occupations shows Estonia's darkest days under totalitarian occupation in the context of the same Estonian "struggle for survival" demonstrated in the state museum. The museum finds that Estonians were the victims of two totalitarian forces which were antithetical to Estonian values and traditions, and focuses on the pain inflicted on the indigenous population rather than the euphoria of independence and freedom. There is a distinct failure to acknowledge the broader context of suffering during the Second World War in Estonia, which extends to non-Estonians, predominantly Jews and Russians. This failure, while presenting a narrow picture of events, falls short of the museum's own stated mission. The Estonian Jewish Museum represents a certain attempt to come to terms with the Holocaust and Estonian collaboration, yet its location within the small and isolated Jewish community center of Tallinn and its distance from prominent sites of memory in the city center illustrate that confronting the Holocaust will remain an issue on the fringes of national collective memory.

Estonia's official memory of the Holocaust, while unique in the sense that it is almost purely elitist and transnational, with little or no "vernacular" memory, should be viewed in its regional context, which displays strong continuity. The Estonian case reflects a broader trend in the "Bloodlands" of the "New Europe" – the countries which experienced both Nazi and Soviet occupations, where local non-Jewish populations as well as Jews were the victims of untold suffering and have sought recognition of the importance of the crimes of communism. This pan-European conflict of memory, a conflict which has been institutionalized in the European Union, is reflected in a continuing struggle for national narratives and recognition of the importance of the two totalitarian occupations, typified by the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism in 2008. The dispute in Estonia was highlighted in 2005 at a state dinner in honor of the Israeli president Moshe Katsav. President Arnold Rüütel of Estonia said, "We remember our past and we tell our children about it, not only on the Holocaust Memorial Day, January 27<sup>th</sup>. Neither should we forget the crimes committed by the Soviet regime, the victims of which were Estonians, Jews, as well as people from other nationalities".<sup>38</sup> The conflict of memory, often crudely described as "East vs. West" or "Holocaust vs. Gulag", which Dan Stone rightly argues "need not be a zero-sum game", is likely to continue in the foreseeable future.<sup>39</sup> ✕

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## SOCIAL DUMPING IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

# THE LAVAL CONFLICT AND THE QUESTION OF SOLIDARITY

by **Mats Lindqvist**

The eastward expansion of the European Union is no different from previous enlargements, the Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt stated on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the 2004 EU enlargement in which eight Eastern European countries became members. He drew parallels with 1995, when Sweden was the subject of what turned out to be a successful EU enlargement. In particular, he emphasized that the initial fears of “old” member states about labor migration from the East had proved unfounded. This is supported by research and, furthermore, statistics confirm that enlarged membership has generally had positive effects on the GDP of all member states. Migration has proven to be beneficial to both sender and receiver.<sup>1</sup>

Other research does not give an equally positive picture of the implications of Eastern European labor migration, indicating that whether the overall consequences are positive or negative may be a matter of opinion.

*Social dumping* is a concept with negative connotations that appeared in public debate shortly after the 2004 accession. This term has been revived because economic globalization and structural changes in national and international economies have made capital increasingly mobile, allowing it to flow relatively freely across national borders, in turn increasing the fluidity of employment and labor. Step by step, national governments have lowered barriers that impeded the free reign of market forces.<sup>2</sup>

This process of globalization has occurred markedly in the EU, the legal regime of which is based on the four “freedoms”:

free movement of capital, goods, people, and services within the EU.<sup>3</sup> When the border crossings occur between states of nearly equal economic strength, there is little conflict. Problems arise, however, when countries from the former Eastern bloc become EU members, as in 2004. Then there is a distinction between high- and low-wage countries, which becomes the main reason for the emergence, at least rhetorically, of the phenomenon of *social dumping*. The long-awaited “return to Europe” was a re-entry with reservations. The formal political and economic division between Western and Eastern Europe disappeared, but the division between rich and poor EU states persisted, along the same geopolitical dividing lines as before.<sup>4</sup>

### The Laval conflict

In Sweden, shortly after the accession of the Eastern countries to the EU, a dispute started. It became known as the “Laval conflict”, and is still, a decade later, often debated in the media, at conferences, and in academic reports. Much has been written about this conflict and its consequences, both in the media and in scholarly books and articles. In this article, I will concentrate on the phenomenon of social dumping and discuss the complexity of the notion as it appears in the context of the Baltic Sea region.

On January 16, 2003, the government of Vaxholm, a municipality near Stockholm, decided to discuss the construction of a new school, Söderfjärdsskolan. On May 1, Latvia became an EU member. On May 22, Vaxholm decided to buy the staff premises



**Swedish trade union members blocked the entrance of Söderfjärdsskolan in Vaxholm so that the workers from the Latvian construction company Laval un Partneris could not enter.**

FOTO: CLAUD GERTSEN/TT BILD

of KA 4, a coastal artillery unit, for conversion into a school. Less than a month later, on May 27, the municipal government approved procurement. The contract went to the Latvian construction company Laval un Partneri Ltd. On June 9, the first negotiations were held between Local 1 of the Swedish Trade Union for Construction Workers 1 and Laval, but the participants failed to reach a collective agreement for the development of Söderfjärdsskolan.<sup>5</sup>

On November 2, Byggnads blocked the construction of the school in Vaxholm, because Laval refused to sign Swedish collective agreements for its workers. Instead, the firm signed an agreement with the Latvian employee organization LAC, citing the country-of-origin principle, which states that a company is allowed to sign contracts in another EU Member State on the basis of the laws and rules in force in the company's country of origin.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the construction workers from Latvia could work for wages far below the normal wages of their colleagues in Sweden. The Vaxholm case illustrates fairly well what *social dumping* is about: companies in countries with low levels of wages and social benefits exploiting their low-cost position to gain a competitive advantage in countries where labor costs are higher.<sup>7</sup> With reference to Giorgio Agamben,<sup>8</sup> the sociologist Nathan Lillie spoke of the creation of *spaces of exception* "in which certain people are stripped of their humanity, and deemed unworthy of what others are entitled to".<sup>9</sup> The schoolbuilding in Vaxholm could be seen as such a space, enclosed by invisible walls blocking out the sovereign state and normal order. The

trade union blockade accentuated the site's immurement by stopping all forms of labor-related contact with the world outside the gates. The construction work could not proceed without additional professional trades and material, in a situation that was exceptional compared with the usual order at building sites. It is important to note that people who were "stripped of their humanity" and resided in the *space of exception* in Sweden were Latvians and that those standing guard at the gates were Swedes. There was an ethnic/national dimension to the confrontation that strongly shaped the aftermath of the blockade.

## **An echo from the past**

Using industrial action to prevent social dumping is no novelty in the Swedish trade union movement. On the contrary, it has a long tradition in the history of the movement and it often targets the actions of non-organized workers who, in the event of a strike, act as strikebreakers – also called finks, scabs, knobsticks, or blacklegs.<sup>10</sup> Historically, the national or ethnic background of the offender has been of little significance.<sup>11</sup> The "crime" was so severe in the eyes of organized workers that it mattered little whether or not the wrongdoer was foreign. The misconduct was the same and so was the punishment. And no compassionate reasons could somehow excuse the offense.<sup>12</sup> It seemed as though Byggnads members in Vaxholm were once again fighting a battle with methods used frequently throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

However, foreign background has mattered on certain occa-

**Procurement. Following the guidelines can cause problems. So can not following them.**

sions when employers imported a whole work crew of cheap labor from a nearby low-wage country, thereby “ethnifying” the relationship between strikers and strikebreakers. This occurred, for instance, in 1904 in the southern county of Skåne when landlords brought in Galicians from the Habsburg Empire and Russia to combat the rural workers’ attempt to obtain better working conditions by organizing and striking.<sup>13</sup> There are apparent similarities to the contemporary Vaxholm case but also significant differences. The rule breakers in the modern (or postmodern) setting seldom act independently. On both sides, employers as sellers of personnel (such as Polish staffing agencies) and employers as buyers of personnel (such as Skanska) were closely involved in the appearance of an Eastern workforce at a Swedish construction workplace after EU enlargement in 2004. Moreover, a legal order backs up this kind of social dumping, in the form of the EU doctrine of the free movement of labor, the procurement law, the country-of-origin principle, the Posted Workers Directive, etc. These policies collide, as we have seen, with valid principles of the right to challenge social dumping and unfair competition. Here, in brief, we have the foundations of the Vaxholm conflict.

On one level, the blockade was a failure because Byggnads did not succeed in persuading Laval to sign a collective agreement with the Swedish construction trade union. From another perspective, the blockade was a success because Laval was finally forced to abandon the contract and the Latvian workers had to return home. This was a hard-won victory, however. Laval un Partneri left the stage in Vaxholm, but reappeared at the Swedish Labor Court, claiming that Byggnads, through its actions, had violated the EU rules regarding the free movement of capital and labor. The case was finally decided in the European Court of Justice in 2007 in favor of Laval’s claims. The verdict damaged not only Byggnads but the entire Swedish labor market model, which strongly defends the right to take industrial action in cases of social dumping. “Did the Swedish model die in Vaxholm?” was the telling title of an article in one of the debates that followed the verdict.<sup>14</sup>

Another intense debate that hit the trade union action particularly hard centered on whether the demand that the Latvian company sign a Swedish collective agreement in fact evidenced a lack of solidarity with less fortunate brothers from across the Baltic Sea or, even worse, expressed nationalistic self-interest and xenophobia. A leading figure on one side of this debate was the journalist Maciej Zaremba, author of the book *Den polske rörmokaren* [The Polish plumber],<sup>15</sup> a compilation of five articles on the subject from the Swedish national newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. His harsh criticism was backed by leading editorial writers, right-wing politicians, representatives of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Svenskt Näringsliv), etc. On the other side, we find the representatives of Byggnads and

other labor movement spokespeople defending Swedish collective wage agreements.<sup>16</sup>

This is not the place to present all the arguments and counter-arguments from this extensive media debate. A key point in Zaremba’s criticism was the claim that the picketers on one occasion shouted “Go home” at the Latvian workers (Byggnads contests this claim). This concisely illustrates Zaremba’s interpretation of the Vaxholm case. Despite all the trade union talk of a struggle for “equal pay for equal work”, Zaremba suggested that what the union really wanted to say was “Get lost!” As I understand his view, it was all about protecting Swedish privilege and, if this was the case, the famous Swedish model was allowing the worst kind of working-class bullying ever seen in the history of Europe.<sup>17</sup> Byggnads’s position, on the other hand, is that the Vaxholm case was about social dumping and the Swedish labor movement’s right (not to say duty) to fight it, as it is in all workers’ interests to ensure equal pay for equal work, regardless of national origin.

### An act of solidarity or hostility?

Unfortunately, the debate on the blockade in Vaxholm seemed to be stuck in a discursive battle with only two possible positions: “We want to help ‘them’ [i.e. the underpaid Latvian workers]” and “No, you want to get rid of ‘them’”. Both the critics and the defenders of Byggnads’s use of industrial action to stop social dumping relied on a common conception of a battle in which one national group opposes another. This was precisely the consequence of the ethnification of the labor controversy. This ethnification is unfortunate because it tends to exclude other possible interpretations. It may seem strange to scrutinize national identities in this way because they are usually seen as so natural, so inherent that they are not open to discussion. We are here dealing with conceptions that we commonly find indisputably true.

I touched on another possible perspective earlier when I mentioned the case of Galicians coming to Skåne to undercut wages and act as strikebreakers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Let us avoid the habitual way of looking at this, i.e. as a clash between Swedish and Galician workers, and instead ask ourselves what the difference is between “ordinary” strikebreakers and the ones in this example. The only difference between the cases is that the confrontation involving migrant Galician workers followed national lines. If we temporarily apply this

**“THE VERDICT DAMAGED NOT ONLY BYGGNADS BUT THE ENTIRE SWEDISH LABOR MARKET MODEL, WHICH STRONGLY DEFENDS THE RIGHT TO TAKE INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN CASES OF SOCIAL DUMPING.”**

reasoning to the contemporary case, the construction workers in Vaxholm were not doing wrong because they were Latvian citizens, but because they were undercutting wages and subsequently crossed a picket line. The basis was not specifically ethnic differences, but distinctions between those who show solidarity with the working class cause and those who do not. Likewise, it is not primarily ethnicity that determines Latvians’ wages in their home

country: Latvians are not underpaid because they are Latvian but because the wage levels are lower in Latvia.

There are several reasons why Latvian wages are much lower than Swedish ones. An obvious reason is that when Latvia was part of the Soviet Union, incomes were state-regulated, while in Sweden they were subject to negotiations between the two labor market parties, the employees and the employer organizations.<sup>18</sup> Another well-known reason I like to stress is the consequences of the neoliberal “shock therapy” the newly independent Baltic states were exposed to. All institutions that had belonged to the socialist system were removed and replaced with democratic and market economic institutions, which, it was claimed, would gradually lead to substantially higher incomes. Unfortunately, this was a big miscalculation.<sup>19</sup> Although the economy did recover to some extent, the large mass of the population was still not in a position to benefit from the transformation, but rather experienced growing inequality. This unfulfilled prognosis is the real problem when trying to come to terms with social dumping in the Baltic Sea region. It is mainly historical, political, and economic factors that are relevant to understanding the prime reasons for the Vaxholm conflict. The wage differences also reflect crucial differences in trade union power resources between Sweden and Latvia.

### Concealed class discourse

Accordingly, the dominance of the ethnic discourse has concealed the class discourse as an alternative way of understanding the conflict. From a class perspective, the opposition is not primarily between Swedish and Latvian workers. Rather, the opposition primarily stems from class-internal wage differences due to different power resources in relation to political and financial power elites. From this perspective, the dividing line does not follow that of ethnic/national belonging; rather, the main difference that matters is between workers with high and low incomes competing on the same labor market, regardless of their nationality. Considering class in a political sense, the main antagonism is not among workers with different occupations, earnings, and locations, but between two positions in society representing different interests: workers and employers.

A striking effect of the dominance of the ethnic discourse in this debate is the disappearance of business owners as relevant actors in the conflict. Laval un Partneri is the only exception, due to its position as a counterpart to Byggnads in the negotiating process and later as subject to the blockade. It seems hard to find acceptance for the position that Byggnads is fighting to defend hard-won wages and decent work standards, the outcome of decades of union struggle. When it comes to the essential conflict between workers and business owners, very little has changed, as the Laval case clearly shows. The case concerns working conditions in general, but above all how money should be distributed between two antagonistic classes.

The central question, although rarely addressed directly, is who is going to pay the costs of the *space of exception*, of having a low-paid Latvian workforce working on school-building in Vaxholm. From the viewpoint of Byggnads’ counterpart there is

only one alternative: in the future, Swedish construction workers will have to accept wages far below their normal level. That will certainly be the outcome, because domestic companies will otherwise lose contracts to foreign competitors. In his book, Zarembo cites the Latvian poet Knuts Skujenieks who “thinks that solidarity will return, but that first the rich must have it a little worse and the Latvians a little better”.<sup>20</sup> For the sake of clarity, when Skujenieks mentions the rich he is referring to Swedish construction workers. According to that logic, it seems as though Swedish workers would be showing solidarity if they agreed to reduce their wages.

The labor organizations of Central and Eastern Europe, however, did not want their fellow workers to take part in social dumping in the West, arguing that it would spoil their own chances of ever reaching Western European living standards.<sup>21</sup> Others think Swedish construction workers earn too much, a view probably shared not only by Laval, but also by most leaders of Swedish industry. Notably, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise funded Laval’s entire lawsuit, both in the Swedish Labor Court and when the case was heard in the European Court of Justice. The Confederation’s main interest in supporting the lawsuit, I assume, was as far as possible to put an end to the right of the working class to use industrial action to counteract social dumping.<sup>22</sup>

Byggnads is thus under great pressure to pay the long-term cost and accept considerably lower wages than are customary in Sweden. Remarkably, though, very few seem to put any demands on the ultra-rich in this context. The closest to any form of criticism leveled in the business owners’ direction comes from the Social Democratic member of parliament Anders Karlsson who, in a parliamentary debate on collective agreements, said “We want to use the EU’s enlargement to raise living standards in the new countries; they [i.e. the bourgeois] want to use it to lower wages in Sweden – that’s what it’s all about”.<sup>23</sup>

Corporate profits are not mentioned in this media debate. It is fully permissible to publicly discuss workers’ wage levels, and from this highly limited information to conclude that construction workers in Sweden earn too much. The readers of the debate, however, have no opportunity to assess whether corporate profits are reasonable in relation to what is paid in wages. No voices were raised to draw attention to the fact that Laval would earn too much by using low-paid workers.

### Spaces of exception

It is not difficult to see which party would win if Byggnads failed in its defense. But wage dumping is not the only thing that is profitable for business owners. Laval’s total victory was sure to lead to a considerable drop in union membership in Sweden, because the union’s loss would be a clear sign of weakness. A third severe consequence is the fomenting of division inside the working class, an old weapon in the hands of artful employers. When the landlords in Skåne invited Galicians to serve as a cheap and reliable workforce they were probably well aware that the resulting conflict would be fought between national groups of rural laborers. A further outcome of this ethnic dimension of the labor

conflict on the grassroots level is that it makes social dumping seem to be just an affair between workers of different national origins. That's why popular discourse treats foreign workers from poor countries as the ones "dumping" their low wages in rich states.<sup>24</sup> What is concealed is the fact that social dumping often occurs *inside* both low-wage and high-wage countries by domestic companies and fellow workers competing for market share. There is also a tendency to forget that local corporations take part in a dumping process by using subcontractors from Eastern European countries or by offshoring production to the same countries. Of course, this also applies to big, highly mobile transnational corporations where the "race-to-the-bottom" principle is a constant business strategy.<sup>25</sup>

The union side is not unaffected by the dominant ethnic/nationalistic discourse when thinking and talking in terms of "us" and "them". While Byggnads worries about low-paid Latvians in Vaxholm, it seems uninterested in their wage levels and working conditions in the Latvian labor market. The Latvian former foreign minister Artis Pabriks stated this well in a comment on the Vaxholm conflict: "Why don't they [Byggnads] then worry about the Latvian workers working in Swedish companies in Latvia and who earn much less than those in Vaxholm?"<sup>26</sup> This remark echoes Magdalena Bernaciak's observation, in her broad discussion of social dumping in the EU, that "antisocial dumping measures had a predominantly defensive character and were aimed at protecting high standards in the richer countries".<sup>27</sup>

I think Byggnads should worry, because it's not easy to gain support for protests against social dumping when Eastern European workers earn more than twice as much on construction sites in Western Europe than in the same jobs in their home countries. What is considered social dumping in one country can be seen as the opposite in another. We face the paradox that the Latvian workers appear to be treated more humanely when they are in a "space of exception" in Sweden than in Latvia. They are more "stripped of their humanity" when working in their home countries, irrespective of whether they are employed in domestic or foreign companies. That is also why many Eastern European trade unions, as mentioned earlier, did not oppose Byggnads' antisocial dumping action in Vaxholm.<sup>28</sup> Despite disagreements, the working classes on both sides of the Baltic are evidently aware that the losers in the long run would be the workers themselves. ✕

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# BALTIC WORLDS

Theme Squatting in the East



## Introduction.

# Exploring overlooked contexts

by **Dominika V. Polanska**  
& **Miguel A. Martínez**

**S**quatting refers to the act of unauthorized occupation of property. There are many motivations and needs behind the practice of squatting.<sup>1</sup> Those cases in which the need for shelter is the primary (and often the only) motivation often tend to remain invisible. However, this necessity-based squatting may adopt some political forms of self-organization and self-management, along with a consciousness of the housing question and intentions to protest about it. On the other hand, mass media are often more prone to report isolated cases of squatting, especially those that intentionally strive for visibility or are due to the cultural and political environment in which they become “news”. In general, by taking over dwellings or buildings, and by creating “free”, “alternative”, or “self-managed” spaces, squatters contest property rights and the fundamental logic of capitalism. Squatters’ activism is usually motivated by ideologi-

cal reasons, which may entail the broad, although controversial, characterization of squatting as a goal in itself.

**SQUATTERS’ PREFERENCES** of direct methods of action, including civil disobedience and lawbreaking, have led some scholars to either neglect squatters’ activism or place it in the field of “uncivil” forms of collective action, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Russia, where there are strong norms of nonviolence and “civility”, which is a generalization

that deserves to be critically challenged. Squatting in this part of Europe is still characterized by conventional and outdated understandings. Studies on social movements and civil society mobilizations in this geographical setting tend to use tools and metrics developed in Western contexts that result in somewhat misleading and outdated interpretations when applied to the “post-socialist societies”. These interpretations have resulted in a conventional view of civil society and social movement activity in CEE and Russian contexts as “weak”, “uncivil”, or suffering from “civilizational incompetence”.<sup>2</sup>

**SOME RECENT** attempts have been made to nuance the field of research on these civil societies and social movements by demonstrating the bluntness of past theoretical and methodological tools.<sup>3</sup> However, the focus on the specific features and contextual conditions of radical, noninstitutionalized, and nonformalized collective actors is still lacking in these studies.



This lack in no way implies the absence of such collective action in the area. Squatting is or has been (due to its temporary character) present in several countries in CEE and Russia since 1989, and in some cases even earlier.<sup>4</sup>

**THE DEVELOPMENT** of squatting in this part of the world is underresearched and few attempts have been made to explore and compare its evolution and outcomes. This is obviously related to the phenomenon's *late* emergence in CEE and Russia. According to the few existing studies on the topic, squatting attempts as an expression of counterculture were observed in some of these countries in the early 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, there are many aspects missing in the picture of squatting in CEE and Russia as this part of Europe has not been studied to the same extent as the Western part.<sup>6</sup>

In May 2015 we organized an international workshop on the topic at Södertörn University with participants from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Russia.<sup>7</sup> As far as we know, the initiative to gather researchers on squatting in this part of Europe is pioneering. The overall aim of the workshop was to discuss this topic and to encourage systematic analyses. Questions that were posed at the workshop, and that guide the work of the contributors to this special issue, include the following:

- How are the strategies developed by squatters in CEE and Russia similar to and different from those observed in Western Europe?
- Which specific structures (political, economic, cultural, or other) affect the emergence and development of squatting in the area?

## “SQUATTING IN THIS PART OF EUROPE IS STILL CHARACTERIZED BY CONVENTIONAL AND OUTDATED UNDERSTANDINGS.”

- How are squatters contesting the specific urban and political processes in the area?
- What differences and similarities are there between countries or cities?
- What causes these differences and similarities?
- How can squatting be conceptualized in this part of Europe?

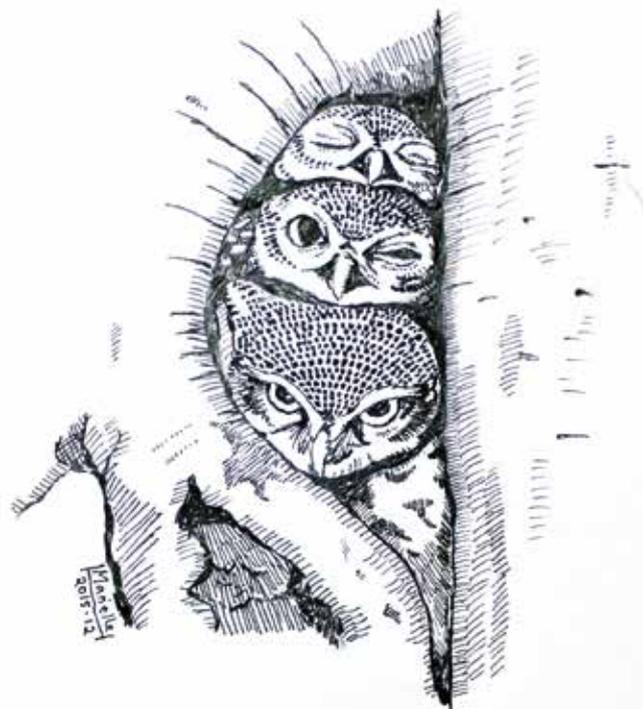
**THE ARTICLES PUBLISHED** in this issue of *Baltic Worlds* offer various responses to the above questions. We, the editors, have not forced the authors to adopt any common or specific theoretical framework. On the contrary, we respect their own choices in this regard and we have worked with them to clarify particular

aspects of their arguments before and after sending the articles out for peer review. What we would like to emphasize is that almost all the works are based on a firsthand contact with the experiences of squatting, and some authors were even engaged in the politics of squatting themselves. Both insiders' accounts of the main events, and grounded interpretations of the meaning of squatting in each national or urban context, may be considered as some of the most valuable insights of these works. In addition, these articles reveal significant findings regarding movements' organizations, networks, influence, and relationships with institutional actors. They challenge our previous assumptions and point out both similarities with and some significant differences from the cases we are familiar with from other contexts. The particular housing regime before 1989 in all of the presented cases (despite some variations) and the dramatic shift to a market economy and neoliberal policies during the 1990s are some of the common features affecting

the development of squatting in these countries.

Finally, the growth of right-wing mobilization is another development considerably influencing squatting and other left-wing movements that are worth exploring in future studies. This is the first attempt to produce sociological contributions that may enrich the knowledge of squatting in CEE and Russia, and we hope they can pave the way for further developments. ✕

Illustrations: Marielle Hasselblad, activist involved in squatting in Stockholm, Sweden. The illustrations depict her interpretation of squatting.



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## Creating meaningful spaces in Vilnius

“We lived in the squatted buildings like birds, having a bird’s rights. If the owner would have come and told us, fly away, we would have flown away.”

*Squatter from the Užupis squat*

## Prague

# Post-1989: Boom, decline and renaissance

by **Michaela Pixová & Arnošt Novák**

**A**lthough inspired by the squatting movement present in Western Europe since the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>1</sup> squatting in the Czech Republic did not appear until after the fall of the authoritative, really existing socialism in 1989. In the 1990s, mostly young people inclined towards the autonomous anarchist movement, punk and HC scene, as well as other alternative cultures, visited squats abroad, especially in Berlin and Amsterdam, and brought the praxis of occupying empty buildings to post-socialist Czechoslovakia, later Czech Republic.

Due to the emphasis laid by the post-socialist society on the right to private property, regained after four decades of authoritarian rule of the Communist Party, squatting in the Czech Republic has been predominantly a marginal phenomenon with a negative label, geographically more or less limited to Prague, and a rare expression of radical left politics. Most Czech squats have been short-lived and the number of simultaneously existing active squats has never been higher than two. With the exception of the “Golden Age” of squatting during the liberalized, fluid and unstable era of early post-socialist transformation in the first half of the 1990s, conditions for squatting in the Czech Republic have been rather unfavorable and repressive, confining a large part of local squatters’ agendas to mere “acts of occupation” and negotiations with the authorities, rather than to the actual practice of living in occupied buildings and systematically engaging in a particular political agenda.

## abstract

The predominantly unfavorable and restrictive socio-spatial conditions of squatting in Prague, have been shaped by the socialist past and post-socialist transformation. Temporarily facilitated by the fluid and liberalized nature of the early post-1989 era, the emergence of the first squats in Prague was inspired by the international squatters’ movement, and alienated from the enthusiastic acceptance of capitalism by Czech society. Progressing neoliberalization nevertheless contributed to the gradual decline of the local squatters’ scene, as well as to its consequent renaissance in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, demarked by the end of the 2000s. Gaining new legitimacy for their activities in the context of crisis, the local squatters’ scene started to engage in protest and an open, radical critique of the capitalist system. Societal support was gained for *Klinika*, a squatted autonomous center, which in turn opened a debate on the future of squatting in the Czech Republic.

**KEYWORDS:** squatting, postsocialism, transition, subculture, urban studies.

In Prague, there have nonetheless been several important exceptions to this rule, represented mainly by the squats *Ladronka* (1990s) and *Milada* (2000s), two relatively long-standing squats that predominantly served various subcultural activities, or most recently *Klinika*, an autonomous center with declaredly wider societal outreach and a structured political agenda. The existence of these squats has been an important manifestation of the presence of the international squatters’ movement in the Czech Republic, constituting a distinctive local scene composed of various people with counterhegemonic ideas and identities. In Prague, squatting is mostly associated with the local autonomous scene, which in the Czech context predominantly consists of people endorsing anarchism. In line with the account of Leach and Haunss on scenes and social movements,<sup>2</sup> the boundaries of the scene in Prague have been fluid, encompassing people with different degrees of involvement, and with different levels of

engagement in political struggles or subcultural lifestyles. Members and their agenda have been changing in time, defining the local scene and responding to, as well as influencing the context in which the scene has existed. While *Ladronka* and *Milada* were rather self-contained projects, relatively exclusive in relation to non-members of the scene, and engaging mostly in organizing cultural events and political activities without reference to a wider social struggle, the collective around *Klinika* has from the beginning endeavored to create coalitions and alliances with various groups and



PHOTO: ANNA LUKÁČOVÁ, SICRANET

After forced abandonment of Prague's last squat *Milada*.

individuals outside of the scene in order to achieve its goals, i.e. operating a non-commercial autonomous social center. *Klinika*'s openness, its tendency towards cooperation, and its new agenda, stem from the process of maturing and social learning integral to the local scene, and from the necessity to adapt to an antagonistic environment.

WITH THE EXCEPTION of a few attempts to study squatting in the Czech Republic<sup>3</sup> or selected aspects of it,<sup>4</sup> the topic so far has not attracted much attention from Czech academics. This paper attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the development and gradual transformation of squatting in Prague, the core of Czech squatters' activities. It pays special attention to the context of different phases of post-socialist societal transformation and urban restructuring, and analyzes this context from the perspective of the socio-spatial conditions which, according to Martínez,<sup>5</sup> make squatting possible. It maps the way the squatters' scene in Prague has been changing over the time in terms of strategies towards acquiring and retaining squatted spaces for their activities, and in terms of squatters agendas and relationships with the dominant society. These changes are contextualized by their interrelation with changing political opportunity structures and

their potential impact on urban politics. Snow's<sup>6</sup> frame alignment processes are used to analyze and explain the changing nature of Czech squatters' activities and strategies, paying special attention to mobilizations around *Klinika*.

### Observation and involvement

The methods used in our research mainly consist of qualitative research strategies, especially participative observation and participant observing. Other methods included analysis of the materials issued by squatters, analysis of anarchist and autonomous press material concerning squatting activities (*A-Kontra* has been published from 1991 to the present with some interruptions; *Autonomie* was published from 1991 to 1996, *Autonom* from 1997 to 1998, *Konfrontace* from 1998 to 2000 and *Existence* has been published from 1998 to the present with some interruptions), informal and semi-structured interviews. A total of 10 interviews focused on personal experience, motivations, opinions and memories were conducted with former and current members of the scene. Respondents were selected on the basis of the authors' knowledge of the milieu, and with the intention to cover all squatting events of importance in Prague, paying special attention to the most recent events.

Due to the long-term involvement of both co-authors in Prague's squatting scene, this paper significantly draws on insider research,<sup>7</sup> as well as partly on the unpublished data gathered in one of the co-authors' dissertation.<sup>8</sup> The paper admits to limited objectivity. In line with post-normal science,<sup>9</sup> its declaredly subjective position is used for mapping and analyzing the evolution of squatting in Prague, introducing it as a topic worthy of discussion. However, as suggested by Hodkinson,<sup>10</sup> the researchers balance their insider subjectivity with a reflexive approach and a more distant perspective, as well as by combining the different levels of their involvement in the squatters' scene and their different fields of academic expertise. As a core member of the autonomous center *Klinika*, and former member of the *Ladronka* collective, the sociologist Arnošt Novák is an insider, whose participation precedes observation, and therefore, rather than conducting participant observation, he engages in the so-called participant observing.<sup>11</sup> Michaela Pixová, a human geographer, is a less involved insider, and on the boundary between being a participant as observer and an observer as participant.<sup>12</sup>

## Socio-spatial conditions

Throughout the modern history of Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, and its changing regimes, oppositional movements have sought refuge from the control of the dominant groups in what Polleta<sup>13</sup> calls "free places", spatially anchored "autonomous zones" that allow counterhegemonic groups to nurture their alternative lifestyles and ideas, using cultural practices to express, sustain, and strengthen their oppositional identities and solidarities. In capitalist countries, free places established in squatted buildings are central to the existence of the squatters' movement and its struggle against capitalism and the commodification of the city. Squatted buildings not only provide the squatters' movement with spatial anchorage, but also with its core agenda. Squats established and used by the squatters' movement fall into Polleta's category of free places with a prefigurative structure, i.e. places that are explicitly political and oppositional, typically left-leaning, formed to prefigure the society the movement is seeking to build, and useful in sustaining its members' commitment to the cause.<sup>14</sup> By using buildings acquired by mechanisms that evade the capitalist real estate market, squatters challenge private ownership and a capitalist system of social redistribution, and prefigure a society where the right to housing precedes the commercial interests of the elites, and the use value of property overpowers the value of exchange.

In Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, squatting evolved under circumstances different from those in Western Europe. To date, it has been affected by many path-dependencies, most importantly the adoption of § 249a of the Czech Criminal Code in 1961, which has been continuously used to protect property owners' rights against unauthorized occupations and use, regardless of the purpose and circumstances of the occupation, or the property's utilization by its owner. However, throughout different regimes

and the country's transformation from one regime to another, and the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008, the conditions that make squatting possible (or impossible) have been changing, and so have squatters' practices in response to changing contexts.

In the following pages, we will analyze the changing socio-spatial conditions of possibility for squatting in Prague during different phases of a period demarcated by the first occurrence of the international squatters' movement in the 1970s to the present. The analysis will be based on conditions defined by Martínez,<sup>15</sup> according to whom squatting can be enabled by the following: the presence of empty/abandoned buildings, preferably neither too damaged nor too strongly defended, and ideally, not used for speculative purposes; ongoing urban renewal and restructuring, preferably not too fast, and in the best case scenario with neighbors as allies; a light or permissive legal framework, preferably not too restrictive nor repressive, and even better – where housing rights are defended; connections to other social movements, preferably those with local and global claims, multiple goals, and established alliances and legitimacy; and independent and not too aggressive mass media coverage.

The analysis of the predominantly external socio-spatial conditions outlined above will be further enriched by the analysis of internal factors, such as the development and character of the squatters' scene, its agenda and strategies, and its relationships with the authorities and the dominant society. For this purpose we use Snow's concept of "frame alignment processes",<sup>16</sup> noticing how squatters employ especially the processes of "frame amplification", i.e. "clarification and invigoration of an interpretative frame that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events";<sup>17</sup> "frame extension", i.e. the movement's attempt to attract new adherents by "portraying its objectives or activities as attending to or being congruent with the values or interests of potential adherents";<sup>18</sup> as well as "frame bridging", i.e. linkage with not yet mobilized groups that share common grievances or a common orientation regarding a particular issue,<sup>19</sup> which in our case overlaps with the process of frame extension.

On the basis of the analysis we will explain the non-existence of squatting during socialism, its consequent boom and decline during the post-socialist transformation, and its recent renaissance in the current "post-crisis" context.

## Non-existence

In the time of authoritarian socialism before 1989, the term "squatting" was unknown. Members of alternative cultures had their own "secret world",<sup>20</sup> but squatting as a practice existed only in what Pruijt calls the deprivation-based form, which involves people "suffering severe housing deprivation",<sup>21</sup> and was occasionally performed by members of alternative cultures without further reference to the international squatters' movement. Among conditions listed above, the only thing that might have favored squatting was the abundance of empty and abandoned

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Evening gathering at *Klinika*.

PHOTO: PETR ZEMLAK VRABEC

buildings, especially historic ones in the city center, which the regime neglected as it prioritized building huge housing estates on the periphery.<sup>22</sup> Typically not defended by security agents, abandoned buildings were quite accessible. However, most of them were underused due to their state of disrepair, and unsuitable for permanent living. Moreover, the legal framework was not permissive at all. Even though the provision of housing was administered by the state socialist housing system,<sup>23</sup> leading to a constant shortage of housing during the whole period of socialism, unauthorized occupations of empty buildings and alternative housing practices were repressed and seen as a threat to the dominant social order, or as an unwished indicator of the system's imperfections.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, homelessness was not tolerated either.

## The Golden Age

The end of the totalitarian regime demarked a short era of early post-socialist transformation, which initially provided conditions perfect for squatting. Amidst the post-revolutionary enthusiasm, civil society and its initiatives seemed to have become a legitimate constituent of liberalized urban life. Ongoing reforms characterized by "a multitude of uncoordinated processes of societal transformation, accompanied by impetuous urban restructuring consisting of property restitutions, privatizations, rent-deregulations, and spontaneous development on unused

land"<sup>25</sup> provided fluid and unstable circumstances favorable to spontaneous grassroots activities, mainly in terms of many legal loopholes and vacant properties with unclear ownership, potentially representing breeding ground for various new spatial practices and experiments.

The early 1990s are sometimes nicknamed the Golden Age of Czech squatting. Squatters' initiatives were mushrooming, counting about forty in the whole country, although most squatting took place in Prague. The boom was strongly related to the expansion of the anarchist movement and its accompanying punk and hard-core subculture. Due to the supremacy of private ownership in the young post-socialist society, squatters' initiatives almost exclusively focused on occupying public property, justifying their occupations by making these properties useful and open to the public. Squats were meant to serve as centers for politics and culture, and as an alternative form of living. Among the first squats we could list *Zlatá loď* in Prague's historic center, occupied from 1990 to 1994 by artists, migrants, and families with children for the purpose of alternative housing; the listed colony buildings *Budánka* occupied from 1991 to 1992; the Sochorka in Podplukovníka Sochora Street, squatted by anarchists in 1992; and several other squats, which were rather short-lived. Evictions occurred even during the Golden Age, however, initially they tended to be relatively peaceful, stemming partly from the authorities' inexperience with the new phenomenon.

During this era, squatters' relationships with the authorities developed further through negotiations concerning *Ladronka*, a municipally owned farm estate on the western outskirts of the city, which member of the Anarchist Federation turned into an autonomous socio-cultural center in September 1993. *Ladronka* had its own info-cafe, bar, gallery, concert and theater premises, and accommodations for visitors. It also held an annual festival and operated as a platform for political organizations and preparations for demonstrations. *Ladronka* was not only a regional center of anarchist activities and alternative DIY culture, but also became an internationally known Central European squat.<sup>26</sup>

**“At that time, *Ladronka* was one of the most popular of all squats in Europe. As regards the cultural front, it featured the best bands, and they had the best concerts there and kept coming back, and people from all of Europe used to go there, kind of randomly, with the intention to spend fourteen days there and then go somewhere else. I don't think *Ladronka* was different in any way. Actually, I know there used to be squats in the Netherlands that were even more political than *Ladronka*, and there were also squats that were more slick, more structured, kind of more tidy. *Ladronka* was quite wild.”** *Standa, squatter from Ladronka*

*Standa's* description shows that *Ladronka* was comparable with squats abroad, mainly due to its dense ties with the international squatters' movement. Its activities were political, but mainly focused on the environment of subcultural and countercultural youth. In the mid 1990s Czech society was still dominated by optimism that transformation would lead to catching up with living standards in Western European countries. Such an atmosphere not propitious to an open and radical anti-capitalist critique of the system. The scene therefore focused on framing squats as “Islands of Freedom.” The same motto also hung on *Ladronka's* façade. We conceptualize the display of this motto as being within the process of frame amplification, the scene's attempt to amplify its values, such as freedom and independence from state authorities and commerce, DIY principles, as well as certain self-containment, an orientation towards youth subculture and counterculture, and noncooperation with the rest of the society. During the given time and societal context, this frame seemed more relevant to the scene's existence, and suppressed other frames, such as those displayed by the “Housing is a Right” slogan.

*Ladronka's* independence was nonetheless relative and a subject of constant contestation. In order to retain its squat, part of the collective had to engage full time for years in negotiations with municipal authorities. *Ladronka* eventually became the first Czech squat that managed to gain the municipality's permission to legally use its property.<sup>27</sup> This is indicative of the initial

permissiveness of early post-socialist transformation, although there have also been cases of attempted evictions, hindered by *Ladronka's* extensive supporter group, including the squat's neighbors. Squatters also enjoyed media coverage that was not overly aggressive and allowed their voices to be heard, which is a factor Martínez<sup>28</sup> considers important for squatting's existence. This might partly explain why the Prague municipality did not evict *Ladronka* until shortly after the anti-globalization protests against the IMF and World Bank congress held in Prague in September 2000, which created a hitherto non-existent moral panic concerning anarchists among the public.

## Gradual decline

The so-called Golden Age described above lasted only a short time and with the approaching new millennium, the conditions for squatting started to change for the worse. A gradual decline was already apparent in the functioning of *Ladronka* in 1998, two years before the squat's definite end. Political activities were slowly disappearing from the squat, along with many activists from the original collective. The apolitical direction came to full light in 2000 when *Ladronka* refused to participate more actively in the preparations for the protests against the IMF and WB congress. As former squatters concluded,

**“It is simply because they were afraid they would get caught up in the repressive wave, and that Prague would use it as a pretext for eviction.”**

*Standa, squatter from Ladronka*

**“The squat became a music club that did not pay rent.”**

*Adam, squatter from Ladronka.*

The scene was also weakened by the general decline of radical left and anarchist activities between 2003 and 2009.<sup>29</sup> In the 2000s, it was surviving albeit surrounded by an antagonistic society whose disapproval of squatting stemmed from its lack of experience of capitalism's contradictions, rejection of a socialism delegitimized by the former regime, and inability to critically address the ongoing consolidation of capitalism in its neoliberal form, i.e. adopting a globalized system characterized by deregulation, liberalization, and flexibilization of markets and trade, pervasive privatization, strong private property rights, and the diminishing role of the state, especially its function in various areas of social provision.<sup>30</sup> According to Sýkora

and Bouzarovski, the application of the neoliberal ideology in the post-socialist Czech Republic has been driven by the government's perception of the free unregulated market as “the only resource allocation mechanism that can generate a wealthy, economically efficient and socially just society”,<sup>31</sup> due to which political arrangements addressing social regulation were underestimated.

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In this context, Prague kept undergoing a huge investment influx, and fast urban renewal and restructuring.<sup>32</sup> Although there were still many abandoned and underused properties, non-commercial spaces found it increasingly hard to operate in the upgraded parts of the city. Property prices, rents and protection of private ownership went up, while housing rights were becoming ever less important, leading to a rising rate of homelessness. Squatting became a marginal phenomenon in the media discourse. Eventually, these unfavorable circumstances affected even a non-anarchist squat project of the so-called *Medáci*, who pursued activities with indisputably positive societal and cultural value in three abandoned working-class residential buildings in the Střešovice neighborhood, Prague 6. They were evicted in 2002 despite extensive support and acknowledgement from various civil sector organizations, neighbors, and numerous people who benefited from the group's projects. Interestingly, according to Mertová,<sup>33</sup> the activities of *Medáci* were so popular that people tended to perceive them as outside the framework of squatting.

AS A RESULT, in the 2000s, the scene was no longer able to secure new squatted spaces. The only squat that remained was *Vila Milada*, a dilapidated house in the vicinity of the university dormitory *Koleje 17. listopadu* in a secluded part of the Trója neighborhood, Prague 8. *Vila Milada* was occupied in May 1998, and, resisting several eviction attempts, lasted until June 2009, mainly thanks to its official non-existence in the real estate cadaster, from which it had been removed due to its planned demolition. *Vila Milada* never gained the popularity of *Ladronka*, but had an important symbolic value for the scene due to the fact that it was the last squat in Prague. Unfortunately, after it was abandoned by the collective who initiated it, the squat gradually started to epitomize the decline of the whole scene, and never fully used the potential inherent in having the longest uninterrupted life-span in the history of Czech squatting.

**In my opinion, Milada worked somehow in waves.**

**There was always some new group of people who wanted to do interesting stuff, and then they were joined by other people, but those people kind of dragged it down with their behavior. I think that in the end it became evident in that the originally tactful relationship with students from the neighboring dormitory became strained, then their [the squatters'] dogs escaped a few times and attacked other dogs in the neighborhood or animals in the zoo, and that was enough for the opponents of squatting to turn it into a pretext for eviction.**

*Pavel, HC guitarist*

In his retrospective evaluation of *Vila Milada*, Pavel points to a problem that squats often deal with, that of squatters' differing levels of involvement in political activities and subcultural lifestyle, and internal conflicts regarding the squat's operation. In the case of *Vila Milada*, inner conflicts were aggravated by adverse external conditions, resulting in cumulating problems



Poster for the event *Obsaď a žij* (Squat and live) that took place in October 2013, in which a vacant building, owned by the Ministry of Justice, was strategically occupied a day before the national elections.

for the scene. Pavel also mentions *Vila Milada*'s neighbors, students from the neighboring dormitory, who initially acted as the squat's allies. In October 1998, during the first police attempt to evict the squat, students helped to construct a ropeway leading from the dormitory to the roof of *Vila Milada*, for the delivery of food, drinks, and sleeping bags to the squatters so their peers could pursue home defense while under a siege that had lasted for several days. This event, however, took place when the scene's decline was only beginning. In the 2000s, *Vila Milada* went downhill, increasingly focusing on subcultural events instead of political activism, and in the very end causing problems connected to lack of hygiene, noise, and dogs running loose.<sup>34</sup> Students stopped acting as the squatters' allies and some of them even complained about the squat. The squatted building was eventually re-registered in the real estate cadaster and the squatters were consequently evicted in 2009.

## Renaissance

After the events in the squatters' scene in 2009, circumstances for squatting in Prague started to change. Although there was no longer an autonomous zone in the form of a squatted property, conditions for nurturing the ideals of the squatters' movement were becoming more favorable due to a changing societal context in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Amidst the ongoing global

economic crisis, even the general public increasingly criticized the neoliberal policies of national governments and urban development under the neoliberal rule of the Prague municipality. The post-2010 era was also marked by a certain renaissance of radical left activities in the Czech Republic, as well as by critical voices from part of the right-wing electorate, both triggered by the results of the national and local elections in 2010, in which the discredited right-wing *Civic Democratic Party* managed to stay in power by creating coalitions with new right-wing and center-right parties, namely with *TOP 09*, on the municipal level, and with *TOP 09* and *Věci Veřejné* on the national level. The neoliberal policies of the coalition, austerity measures, suspected corruption, and the facilitation of dubious urban development projects – were given a mandate by part of the society, and simultaneously increasingly delegitimized in the eyes of growing masses of dissatisfied voters. In 2010, various new citizens' initiatives were formed in order to address multiple issues arising from the unfavorable political and economic situation. The most notable of these was the new left-wing initiative *ProAlt*, which focused on criticism of the right-wing national government, but there were also many smaller initiatives focused on more particular issues, including issues concerning urban development, social inequalities, etc.

“Recently, it has been going in a direction towards bigger activity, it has become more organized, more elaborate... Milada's eviction was crucial after that, things started to be done differently thanks to *Vzpomínky na budoucnost* [Memories of the Future initiative], that was kind of crucial, maybe also *Albertov* before that was the most repressive, with prosecution on top, and I also thought that spreading into other regions was crucial, *Vzpomínky na budoucnost* in Brno, or *Klinika* in Olomouc now. The society has changed, the crisis has advanced, as the social system is affecting people, there are more who are critical of the establishment. It



Memories of the Future, performed to commemorate the squat *Ladronka*.

is not such a problem to communicate some kind of values any more, the aversion is much smaller compared to back when anything left-wing stunk terribly, and you could count on encountering critique and opposition. The atmosphere in society has changed”.

*Renata, squatter from Cibulka*

Renata's evaluation of the current conditions for squatting in Prague clearly points to a gradual renaissance experienced by the squatters' scene, and to the concurrence of this renaissance with the general atmosphere, of widespread dissatisfaction with the official policies and their consequences. The context of awakening civil society in the Czech Republic, and in Prague in particular, mingled well with the reorientation of the squatters' scene towards issues of wider social struggle. Aggravated by the loss of the last squat and joined by new people, the scene started to mobilize and connect with other social groups, plotting and employing new strategies. Renata mentions *Albertov* and *Vzpomínky na budoucnost*, examples of protest events which squatters performed in response to their situation and which influenced the scene's further development. Determined to find a new squatted center, the scene was now focused on making its claims public through demonstrations, rallies, and demonstrative house occupations, which centered on the theme of loud criticism of private ownership and property speculations, and frequently resulted in the criminal prosecutions of squatters, lawsuits, and elevated media attention, mostly negative or biased.

The first protest event in this new context, commonly known as *Albertov*, took place in September 2009 in response to the eviction of *Vila Milada*, and consisted of a march concluded by a demonstrative occupation of a former historic steam spa near *Albertov* in Prague 2. Amplifying the motto “Housing is a Right”, the event embodied the scene's first significant attempt to legitimize its agenda by expanding the frameworks of its activities. The scene now started to focus on drawing the public's attention to the high number of empty and derelict buildings in Prague, including historic landmarks, and to the fact that housing was becoming increasingly unaffordable, thus attempting to give societal relevance and legitimacy to a hitherto subcultural and self-contained practice of squatting. The rally in front of the building was violently dispersed by the anti-riot police, more than 70 people were detained and subsequently released, and people who stayed inside the building overnight were evicted and charged with trespassing. The ensuing proceedings took one and a half years, with trials accompanied by small protest events. The city court finally decided that the squatters had not committed a criminal act, considering the neglect of the building by its owner.

*Albertov* was an important point of reference for the scene to embark on its new focus. However, it took more than two years to acquire a new squat, and no other significant protest events took place until 2013, more than two years after *Albertov*. In the meantime, squatters were spatially anchored in a variety of spaces, and under diverse circumstances, which further contributed to the scene's formation.

## **“THE CITY COURT FINALLY DECIDED THAT THE SQUATTERS HAD NOT COMMITTED A CRIMINAL ACT, CONSIDERING THE NEGLECT OF THE BUILDING BY ITS OWNER.”**

In the summer of 2009, in consequence of an unexpected intervention by the Minister of Human Rights, squatters evicted from *Vila Milada* were invited to a temporary refuge in a semi-vacant, privately owned residential building in the city center, supposedly due to the owner's hidden intention to banish the remaining tenants from his building and make way for commercial redevelopment.

Squatters therefore united with the tenants, assisting them in their struggle against the landlord. Their embarking on such unprecedented tactics, involving an alliance with people from outside of the scene, displays signs of a frame bridging process. The squatters' temporary refuge became known as *Truhla* and hosted many cultural and social events and activities until June 2010. Part of the scene then moved to a commercially rented warehouse in the old freight station *Nákladové nádraží Žižkov*, and established the, so called, *DIS Centrum*. The obligation to earn revenue in order to pay rent, mostly by organizing concerts, limited the collective's engagement in social and political activities. Increasingly frustrated by financial limitations, the collective eventually left the warehouse, and some of its members established a trailer park in an abandoned factory in Zličín, on Prague's south-western periphery, where they were unofficially tolerated by the agent of *Central Group*, the factory's owner. After three months, the squatters were evicted when they organized a big free techno party.

In April 2012, squatters joined up with *Oživte si barák* (Enliven your house) – a citizens' initiative aimed at raising public awareness around the issue of housing speculation and decaying historic buildings – and occupied *Cibulka*, a listed baroque mansion in a large park in the Košíře neighborhood, Prague 5, which had already been squatted several times in the past. *Cibulka's* dilapidated state was criticized by neighbors and the National Heritage Institute, which kept penalizing its owner, Oldřich Vaníček, a man with disreputable political ties who had purchased *Cibulka* under dubious circumstances in 1990. Vaníček therefore agreed to provide the mansion to the squatters and the initiative for cultural purposes in exchange for basic maintenance. For three years, *Cibulka* hosted various cultural and community events, and enjoyed its neighbors' support. However, as detailed below, after three years the relationship with the owner went sour, and squatters were evicted.

### **Addressing the public**

From 2013, part of the scene became determined to engage in further developing of the squatters' movement in the Czech Republic. From the perspective of frame alignment processes, the scene employed tactics over the following years that displayed characteristics of frame bridging and frame extension, such as cooperation with other social groups, manifesting ideas behind squatting that non-members of the scene with similar grievances could identify with, and eventually portraying squatting as a

legitimate citizens' initiative that deserves public support and sympathy.

In January 2013, several scene members engaged in defending poor people, mostly Romani, facing eviction from a dormitory in Kránsné Březno, a neighborhood in the Ústí nad Labem city. They organized a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and occupied the Ministry's offices. After

an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the eviction, they found substitute housing for evicted families, and attempted to draw the public's attention to these families' problems by amplifying the issue of social exclusion, racism, and poverty business. Later that year, the initiative “*Vzpomínky na budoucnost*” (*Memories of the Future*) took place on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of *Ladronka*, with the occupation of several empty houses in one day, including a listed palace in Pohořelec near Prague Castle, which at the time served as an official address for fictitious companies. The occupation of the palace was welcomed by neighboring residents, upset by the lack of residential life in the neighborhood. All the occupations were ended by quick evictions.

**IN SEPTEMBER 2013**, squatters were invited to an almost empty residential house in Neklanova Street, Prague 2, by Mr. Kubelík, the last tenant with a valid lease. Upon his request, several squatters moved into the house to protect it from the dubious and unlawful attempts of Italian speculative owners to banish Mr. Kubelík from his apartment, and for half a year operated a quiet residential squat. In February 2014, squatters were evicted, with a few facing arrest and criminal charges.

In the meantime, the initiative *Obsad' a žij* (*Squat and Live*) took place in October 2013, strategically occupying a vacant building owned by the Ministry of Justice, one day prior to the national elections. Around 150 people instantly started to operate a social center.

“By occupying the house and opening a social center the evening before parliamentary elections we want to warn of the dangerous illusion that real democracy lies in the polls, and that it is an act performed individually behind a screen, once every four years ... That is why we are opening an autonomous social center in this underused house, which could provide space for daily cultural, social, and political activities, and for participation. We do not rely on polls, we vote 365 days a year, we occupy and live”.

*Statement of the Obsad' a žij initiative*

Within three hours the squatters were evicted with the help of riot police and a helicopter, and more than thirty people were arrested. The tactic, which took advantage of the elections and amplified new topics, such as citizen participation, direct de-

mocracy as everyday politics, open critique of urban space commodification, and claims framed by the “right to the city” motto, can be interpreted as an extension of the way squatters frame their agenda. It also constituted the scene’s continuing shift from a previously exclusively subcultural and countercultural format towards bigger inclusivity and social relevance, aimed at reaching out to a wider group of sympathizers and supporters.

## Change of tactics

Conditions for squatting changed yet again after the parliamentary elections of 2013, which were won by the Social Democrats, who created a coalition with the Christian Democrats and a new populist movement, ANO (“yes” in Czech), led by the entrepreneur and businessman Andrej Babiš, the Czech Republic’s second richest man. The coalition attempted to regain the public’s trust by relaxing austerity measures and through other populist policies. Moreover, in the local elections in autumn 2014, ANO won the mayoral seat of Prague, and formed a coalition which also included a few members of the Green party. On the Prague borough level, the Green party gained unprecedented mandates and were joined by some of the newly formed citizen initiatives.

In terms of official politics, the political opportunity structure changed considerably. Evictions and police attempts to criminalize squatters nonetheless continued, and the scene, exhausted by constant failures, decided on a different tactic. It chose to squat an abandoned building of a former clinic owned by the state, perceived as a high risk location by the locals due to its function as a transit arena for drug-users, located in the Žižkov neighborhood, Prague 3, a municipal district with relatively active citizenry and a strong, albeit oppositional Green Party presence in the local government. Squatters elaborated a project of an autonomous center called *Klinika* and presented their intentions to the owner and to the Prague 3 municipality one day prior to the occupation. The project document was signed by five project initiators, who appealed to the credibility of their qualifications (university teacher, artist, social worker) in order to portray the project as a legitimate civic activity in a persuasive way. Approximately fifteen squatters dressed in orange working vests then occupied the house, and started to clean it. Police patrol that arrived at night was presented with officially stamped documents proving squatters’ preceding negotiations with the owner. As part of their tactic, the collective identified themselves as a citizens’ initiative, not as squatters, and framed their activity as of community/neighborhood work. They continued in doing so when communicating with the media. Confused by this tactic, the police patrol announced that the case would be forwarded to the owner. Due to the occupation starting on a Saturday morning, the squatters gained several days. The representatives of the state institution that owns the building, the Office of Government Representation in Property Affairs (UZSVM), gave the squatters two days to leave the building. The time was used to continue clearing the building and spreading information about

*Klinika*. New people joined the initiative, and up to seventy people attended its daily meetings. A neighborhood festival was held in *Klinika* on the day of the planned eviction. In the meantime, squatters contacted Matěj Stropnický, the Green deputy mayor of Prague and former deputy mayor of Prague 3, well known for his support of alternative culture and squatting. Stropnický arranged negotiations between squatters and UZSVM. Despite the failure to reach a consensus, the squatters gained eight days in which to hold a regular program, attended by a wide variety of people, including residents of the neighborhood. The squatters also managed to gain positive coverage in mainstream media, which initially avoided referring to them as squatters. The information about the *Autonomous Social Center Klinika* quickly went viral, benefiting from the establishment of a Facebook page and from the support expressed by publicly known figures, artists, academics, and other citizens’ initiatives, as well as the local Green Party and several unions.

DESPITE GROWING popularity, the riot police evacuated *Klinika* on December 9 and arrested three squatters. More than one hundred people gathered in front of *Klinika* and spontaneously marched to the borough hall during the council assembly. The Green Party managed to set the matter on the agenda and a few squatters and local residents held speeches at the assembly. *Klinika* won the council’s official support, which had a symbolic significance for further negotiations with the authorities. Five days later, almost one thousand people joined a demonstration in support of *Klinika*, and marched to the evacuated building. Several people symbolically re-occupied it. After the end of the demonstration, riot police arrived and attacked and arrested the squatters’ spokesman, attracting more media attention and further raising public support for *Klinika*.

During the first fourteen days of the *Klinika* initiative, squatters aspired to move beyond the previously narrow frame of exclusively subcultural squatting, and portrayed their current agenda as a beneficial practice, that is not exclusively accessible only to the members of the scene.

**“I have always understood squatting as a subcultural matter that has little to contribute to the radical left, but *Klinika* has shown me how huge the potential of squatting is. In its own way, to me *Klinika* is like a laboratory where ideals can be tested in practice”.**

*Karel, a student and left-wing activist, joined the *Klinika* collective after the occupation of the building*

In the meantime, the squatters led a campaign under the motto *Každé město potřebuje svoji kliniku* [Every city needs its own *Klinika*]. The campaign to reclaim *Klinika* attempted to address a wider spectrum of people, i.e. non-members of the scene who sympathize with the scene’s values and critique of capitalist society and urban space commodification. An event, called

**“DESPITE GROWING POPULARITY, THE RIOT POLICE EVACUATED KLINIKA ON DECEMBER 9 AND ARRESTED THREE SQUATTERS.”**

*Den pro Kliniku* [Klinika Day] was organized, consisting of a demonstration attended by six hundred, and evening solidarity events with a cultural program in more than fifteen places throughout Prague, as well as other Czech and even Slovak cities. The campaign's motto operated as a frame that exported the relevance of the topic outside of Prague, this time succeeding in getting positive reactions throughout much of Czech society, although not leading to much success in terms of starting similar autonomous centers in other cities.

In February 2015, the squatters accomplished political negotiations regarding the building. UZSVM was commanded by the Ministry of Finance, led by the populist ANO leader Andrej Babiš, to temporarily provide its building to the initiative. Babiš's tendency to manage state affairs in an entrepreneurial way conditioned the main argument for letting the *Klinika* collective utilize the building, by referencing high security costs for an empty building. In addition, Babiš decided to use the case to stage a populist manifestation of his sympathies for the youth. In March, the *Klinika* collective signed a contract for a one-year rent-free lease. However, rights to the building were also demanded by the general inspection of security forces (GIBS), and UZSVM attempted to transfer the building to GIBS only one month after signing the contract with *Klinika*, giving the initiative only one week to leave the building. After a quickly organized demonstration and negotiations with the Ministry of Finance, the squatters averted their displacement by negotiating a contract amendment that guarantees the one-year lease.

**SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THESE** events around *Klinika*, difficulties started to affect Prague's second squat, *Cibulka*. As the third anniversary of its initial occupation approached the squatters' relation with *Cibulka's* owner were going downhill. Towards the end of 2014, the owner started to complain about trailers parked in the yard and required their removal. In December 2014, he announced the termination of the contract with squatters effective at the end of March 2015, complaining that the squatters were impeding *Cibulka's* reconstruction, despite the fact that no plan for reconstruction had been approved. The squatters, whose profile was much more subcultural than that of the *Klinika* collective, also attempted to gain wider public support, which resonated among the surrounding residents. Lukáš Budín, the Green deputy mayor of Prague 5, asked the police to notify him in case of a potential intervention at *Cibulka*, arguing that *Cibulka* was a listed building. Despite the owner's disapproval, the squatters remained in *Cibulka* another month, expecting harassment. On May 5, Vaníček filed a complaint against the squatters, and on the following day dozens of riot police, evacuated the squat. Twelve persons were arrested, three injured. One squatter was charged with a suspended sentence for two months in an ac-



*Milada* after eviction in 2009.

celerated proceeding. On the day of the proceeding, a solidarity demonstration was held in front of the court building, and a protest demonstration took place in front of the Prague police headquarters in the evening, with photographs of the eviction screened on the wall of the building. The eviction of *Cibulka* conducted by a massive police operation raised a certain public critique, possibly having constituted an abuse of power according to some lawyers. The Minister of the Interior of the Czech Republic announced plans to commission an investigation of the intervention and especially of its financial cost. The squatters also considered filing a lawsuit for wrongful action by the police.

In the meantime, activities in *Klinika* continued. In 2015, squatting became a widely discussed topic, attracting media and public attention, and motivating other people to act. *Klinika* has become a functional, living, autonomous social center. Despite its legal status, it retains its antagonistic relationship to the state, and successfully cultivates local relationships. Its social potential came into full light in relation to the "migration crisis", during which *Klinika* became an important center of material support for migrants. In the context of the state's failure to deal with the crisis, *Klinika* operated as an important center linking citizens, groups, and organizations sharing common grievances concerning migrants, and became a symbol of solidarity and humanitarian help in the Czech Republic. In our view, this agenda embodies the process of frame bridging, which further contributed to the growth of *Klinika's* legitimacy.

### Concluding remarks

In the Czech context, squatting represents a marginal phenomenon predominantly concentrated in Prague, and surrounded by a constantly changing local scene with links to the Czech anarchist-autonomous scene. Its most active members have never counted more than a few dozen people surrounded around a

handful of “leaders,” but in times of tension the scene has demonstrated ability to mobilize bigger numbers of supporters and sympathizers. Activities of the small scene in Prague have played a central role in the formation of a Czech discourse on squatting, and in the perception of squatting in the dominant society.

During their twenty-five year existence, squatting and the squatters’ scene in Prague have evolved in the context of constantly changing conditions. The analysis of socio-spatial conditions, which according to Martínez make squatting possible, has shown, that post-socialist Prague has always disposed of a sufficient amount of vacant properties, including those suitable for residential purposes, and even in a later era of ongoing urban restructuring. However, with the exception of the early post-socialist transformation, spontaneous use of vacant property by grassroots groups has been limited by non-permissive legislation, society’s perception of the free market and private ownership as the cornerstones of people’s freedom,<sup>35</sup> as well as by pervasive real-estate speculations, an almost impermeable defense of abandoned houses against unauthorized occupations, and crumbling housing rights. Amidst these antagonistic conditions, other socio-spatial conditions, such as media coverage and support from neighbors, played a significant role only in the few cases of longer-lasting squats. While almost all squats enjoyed a certain degree of support from their neighbors, with the exception of *Milada* during its decline, their portrayal in the mass media has undergone considerable changes, from neutral and unbiased media coverage in the 1990s, to predominantly aggressive coverage of squatters’ activities after 2009, and finally the current positive coverage of *Klinika*, which is slightly misrepresented due to the squatters initial tactic of portraying their initiative under another label than squatting.

UNTIL AFTER the eviction of *Vila Milada*, squatters in Prague scarcely cooperated with people from outside of the scene. Meanwhile, alliances created around *Klinika* have been to a large extent responsible for the initiative’s success. By using Snow’s<sup>36</sup> concept of frame alignment processes, we identified a considerable shift of the frameworks that Prague squatters have employed in regard to their own conception of squatting, and in regard to the way they have communicated their activities to the public. In the 1990s, squats were mainly subcultural and countercultural centers detached from mainstream society, predominantly catering to young people alienated from society’s enthusiastic acceptance of capitalism as a symbol of freedom. The scene initially amplified its own ideas of freedom, expressed as independence, but which also resulted in a certain self-containment and isolation from the rest of society. With the progressing, neoliberalization of the country, and without links to the rest of society, the scene went through a period of decline from 1998 to 2009, focusing on subcultural events and fragmented political activities. This tendency was slackened by the onset of the

global economic crisis, since the ensuing pervasive atmosphere of a crisis of capitalism created an environment more favorable for the dissemination of radical-left ideas and open critique of the capitalist system. The new people who joined the scene were considerably more educated and sophisticated in pursuing their goals than their predecessors of the 1990s. In the context of capitalist crisis the scene, lacking a squatted center and unable to secure one due to harsh police repression and quick evictions, started to employ house occupations as a confrontational tactic to facilitate the dissemination of their critique of capitalism and make their claims heard. In order to address a wider public with similar concerns, the scene extended the frameworks of its activities by placing them into wider societal context. This was done by amplifying the critique of crumbling housing rights, historic heritage destruction, pervasive real-estate speculations, excessive protection of private property, and the general commodification of urban space and urban life, as well as by promoting direct democracy as part of everyday life. Squatters’ engagement in new activities and their creation of new coalitions and alliances, i.e. defending people threatened by homelessness, supporting groups subjected to discrimination, such as the Roma, or cooking for people in need, embodied both the process of frame extension and the process of frame bridging. In the dominant discourse, the prevailing conception of squatting as an antisocial illegitimate subcultural practice was partly shattered by amplifying social aspects of the squatting practice, and associated positive non-capitalist values, such as sharing, cooperation, and solidarity. The above mentioned frame alignment processes were further elaborated during the last struggles for the autonomous center *Klinika*, leading in turn, to attracting new allies and supporters, as well as initiation of new cooperation and mutual help. By expanding the previously narrow frameworks of squatting, squatters managed to gain time to present to society a viable citizens’ initiative that uses an abandoned public building for legitimate and highly needed societal purposes, and to establish a hitherto non-existing center of solidarity in Prague.

Even though *Klinika* does not feature the characteristics of political squatting as described by Pruijt, i.e. open confrontation with the system and a refusal to negotiate its own legal status,<sup>37</sup> the tactics employed by squatters in Prague must be understood in the context of the weak and vulnerable position of squatting in Czech society, which has always driven squatters to attempt to negotiate legalization, or semi-legality. Since the main incentive of these tactics has been a desire among squatters to enrich Prague’s urban environment with autonomous geographies,<sup>38</sup> that extricate themselves from the capitalist logic and enable fur-

ther political mobilizations, squatters in Prague have successfully avoided co-optation by the system and thus play an essential role in nurturing radical left ideas in the Czech public space. Thanks to the tactics of the *Klinika* initiative, squatting and radical left politics are now enjoying unprecedented attention in

**“WITH THE PROGRESSING NEOLIBERALIZATION OF THE COUNTRY, AND WITHOUT LINKS TO THE REST OF SOCIETY, THE SCENE WENT THROUGH A PERIOD OF DECLINE FROM 1998 TO 2009.”**

Czech society, and the idea of reusing empty buildings has finally become a legitimate topic of social relevance.

A last note: The situation of *Klinika* has changed since the article was submitted. Today the future of *Klinika* remains open and uncertain. ✖

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## Poland

# Local differences & the importance of cohesion

by **Dominika V. Polanska**  
& **Grzegorz Piotrowski**

The first squatting attempts in Poland were reported in 1991 in Wrocław<sup>1</sup> and squatting has spread to several Polish cities since.<sup>2</sup> As we will discuss further on in this article, squatting per se is not criminalized in the country and has been at times need-based, but mainly ideologically driven. Increasing attempts at re-privatization of the housing stock during the 2000s and complications in clarifying the ownership of buildings and land have contributed to the intensification of squatting in the country, by providing squatters with vacant buildings. Our ambition is to understand how the cohesion and durability of the squatting scene, that is, durability of relationships, their cohesiveness, and flexibility towards new members and influences, are affecting squatters' use of opportunity structures available to them in a particular setting. Opportunity structures are here defined as external structures that empower or constrain collective actors, and we are interested in how these are handled and used by squatters in two different settings. We hope to understand this by studying squatting in two Polish cities, Warsaw and Poznań, which are regarded as the most vibrant squatting environments.

The aim is to analyze opportunity structures that condition the emergence and development of squatting and how these opportunities are responded to and made use of by squatters. Our ambition is to understand why squatting has developed differently in the two cities by emphasizing the duration and cohesion of the squatting scene as pivotal for the different trajectories in squatting. With our cases we want to show that the

cohesion of the scene and its longevity mitigate and intensify some specific features of opportunity structures (political, legal, discursive, and economic) and result in somewhat diverse local developments of squatting.

The empirical foundations of this article consists of 40 interviews, of which 20 were conducted with squatting activists in Warsaw in 2013 and 20 in Poznań in the period of 2008–2013. Our interviews were semi-structured and conducted either at squats or in neutral locations, and lasted from 45 minutes to over two hours.<sup>3</sup> For the protection of our interviewees we use a numbering system in the quotations. In our analysis the empirical material was cross-referenced with publications and videos released by and about the activists, in official documents, mainstream mass-media, social media and other Internet sites.

**THE MAJORITY** OF the squatters interviewed were in their twenties and thirties and many of them had a relatively long experience of squatting, mostly in Poland, but also abroad. Many of them were students, worked part time or in temporary arrangements, or owned small and project-based businesses. Their squatting

activism intersected with participation in anarchist groups, antifascist initiatives, and other activities that could be labeled as belonging to the leftist-libertarian family. Our ambition in the selection of interviewees has been to cover different perspectives on squatting in each city by choosing respondents with different experiences in squatting (different squats, duration of activism, gender and so on).

We begin our paper by

### abstract

Two Polish cities, Warsaw and Poznań, are studied in the article to examine how external structures are handled and used by squatters in these two settings. The aim is to analyze opportunity structures that condition the emergence and development of squatting and how squatters respond to and utilize these opportunities. Our ambition is to understand why squatting has developed differently in the two cities by emphasizing the duration and cohesion of the squatting scene as pivotal for the different trajectories of squatting. It is argued in the article that the durability of the squatting environment abates tendencies to open the squatting scene to external coalitions and establish more institutionalized forms of political struggle.

**KEYWORDS:** squatting, Poland, opportunity structures, cohesion, durability.



The *Przychodnia* squat in Warsaw.

reviewing previous studies of squatting in post-socialist Europe and then get on to the topic of what conditions squatting in other parts of the world. We then present the theoretical framework guiding the analysis, by discussing the relations between the concepts of opportunity structures, along with the role of cohesion and durability for the use of opportunity structures by squatting activists. In the subsequent analysis, we argue that the stability and endurance of the squatting scene is crucial for more permanent squatting struggles. In the final section, we conclude that the durability of the squatting environment lessens the probability of opening to external coalitions and the use of more institutionalized forms of political struggle.

### **An under-researched part of Europe: Previous studies**

Squatting in post-socialist Europe is under-studied and has rarely been treated and analyzed as a research topic. It has rather been indirectly described together with other social movements, collective actions, or cultural expressions, for instance the Central and Eastern European alterglobalization movement.<sup>4</sup> There is, however, a steadily growing number of studies directly investigating the emergence and development of squatting in the region. Piotrowski<sup>5</sup> studied squatting in three different countries in the area, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, and concluded that the main challenge for the development of squatting is the small size of left-wing movements and the squatting movement in particular in the region. Among the three countries, Poland was singled out as the one with most stable and vibrant squatting scene, largely due to the *Rozbrat* squat, founded in Poznań in 1994.<sup>6</sup> Piotrowski argues that the relatively small scale (compared to their Western counterparts) of the Polish and Central and Eastern European squatting scenes was a result of the popular rejection of leftist ideology and radical politics.<sup>7</sup>

Both Żuk and Plucinski argue that squatting in Poland has been connected to the development of alternative culture in the

country during the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Its emergence during the 1990s and its novelty can partly be explained by the influences coming from the West after the systemic change. The structural conditions that Żuk distinguishes in his analysis of squatting's emergence in Poland are, the systemic change, the rise of capitalism, and the socio-economic changes that followed. A more recent glance at squatting is provided in our study<sup>9</sup> in which we argue that squatting in Poland should be analyzed as a response – among others – to the housing situation in Poland (shortage of affordable housing, vacant buildings, privatization of the housing stock), to the lack of space for the development of alternative culture, and to the neoliberal urban governance reinforced in particular during the 2000s.<sup>10</sup>

There are many more studies on squatting in Western contexts (and in Western Europe and North America in particular), but those focusing on the structural conditions and opportunity structures facilitating/constraining squatting in specific contexts are in the minority. Pruijt describes how Amsterdam authorities have developed strategies to eliminate squatting by legalizing it, by turning the “buildings to established housing associations that concluded lease contracts with individual squatters”.<sup>11</sup> Katsiaficas as claims that the strategy used in Berlin was aimed at pacifying the squatting environment by creating a cleavage between the radical and moderate fractions of the squatting movement.<sup>12</sup> The activists that agreed to turn their squats into legalized *Wohnprojekte* had lost touch with the radical fraction of the movement, which refused to compromise with the authorities. Moreover, Holm and Kuhn argue that the squatting movement in Berlin in the 1980s contributed to the urban renewal of the city in a context of severe housing shortage, and to the legitimization crisis of housing policy.<sup>13</sup> Guzman-Concha's quantitative study of squatting shows, furthermore, that the most common factors for the development of a strong squatting scene may be, youth unemployment, left-leaning environments, the presence of far-right groups and politics, and the degree of responsiveness of local authorities.<sup>14</sup>

Corr distinguishes various tactics used by squatters in different contexts. He mentions tactics in the spheres of legal regulations, media and cooperation, wider support, and so on.<sup>15</sup> He describes how activists use constitutional law and litigation as a tactic to gain their goals. He also analyzes cases of state repression and how squatting and other land and tenants' movements have responded, arguing that repression "can bring into stark focus a previously obscured adversary, cementing solidarity between activists and those previously uninvolved"<sup>16</sup> and in this way strengthen the movement. Martínez and Cattaneo describe on the basis of the Spanish case how the changing political climate has affected squatting and popularized this form of collective action, and see squatting as a reaction to structural inequalities, defining it as "an alternative way of living in the margins of the capitalist patterns, and a political experience of protesting and mobilizing through direct action".<sup>17</sup> However, it is not only the openings in the *political opportunity* structures that condition squatting, and several researchers have shown that legal structures and squatters' responses to them may be equally important.<sup>18</sup> A crucial factor in the cases described above has been, moreover, the wider support squatters could mobilize, including the support of local neighborhoods, wider society, and the media.

A majority of the aforementioned studies demonstrate how squatting and squatters respond to structural conditions. Most of them underline the economic vulnerability of squatters, the illegal nature of squatting, and the role of wider support (by the public and the media) in the success stories of squatting. Some show how squatters intervene in and help to change the structures of urban politics. Our ambition is to focus on the cohesion and longevity of the squatting environment and to investigate these characteristics' role in the development of squatting and the use of political, legal, economic, and discursive opportunity structures by squatters.

## Opportunity structures and the relational perspective

In order to understand the conditions for the development of squatting in Poland and its different local trajectories, we use a theoretical structure known in social sciences as opportunity structures, which enlarge and restrict the ways in which collective actors function and develop. We propose to analyze collective action through the concept of opportunity structures.

Opportunity structures are in our understanding not limited to political dimensions; we also distinguish between political, legal, economic, and discursive opportunity structures for collective struggles. In our paper we stress the importance of social cohesion and durability permeating these opportunity structures, sometimes facilitating and sometimes mitigating the way in which these opportunities can be made use of by collective actors.

The *political opportunity structures* are usually defined as the degree of openness/closedness of the institutionalized political system, the stability of elites in the political system, the availability of elite allies, and the degree of state repression.<sup>19</sup> They should also be understood as threats to which collective actors respond and react to. To this dimension, conditioning the work of social movements and other collective actors, we add the *legal opportunity structure*, which we treat as a separate type of opportunity structure, since collective actors can use it separately from the political opportunity structures in order to reach their goals.<sup>20</sup> *Economic opportunity structures* in our case refer to how collective actors use economic opportunities and strategies. The ability to mobilize resources can be regarded as crucial for the success or failure of collective actors to attain their goals of social/economic change.<sup>21</sup> Economic opportunities, as well as other types of opportunity structures, can be related to legal and political opportunity structures.<sup>22</sup> *Discursive opportunity structures* entail that which resonates as "reasonable" and "legitimate" among the wider public (or a specific target audience) in a specific context and have been used by researchers to analyze how "social movement frames are likely to have the greatest capacity to mobilize existing and new recruits, to convince the public of a movement's demands, and to persuade authorities to alter policy and practices in line with the movement's agenda".<sup>23</sup> Critics of the opportunity structures approach point out that the majority of research done using this approach is focused on organized groups aiming at political change and not on groups that are pushing for cultural change without identifying the state as its enemy (at least not explicitly).<sup>24</sup>

WE CONSIDER THE political and legal opportunity structures to be the most important, and often intertwined, for the development of squatting on a national level, and more important than economic or discursive opportunity structures. However, looking into differences on a local level focuses our attention on the character of the squatting scene in terms of durability/establishment, and cohesion. Our theoretical contribution to the analysis of opportunity structures is a relational perspective with a focus on cohesion that permeates all opportunities and strategies undertaken by collective actors. We will argue that the cohesion and durability of the squatting scene are pivotal for the different development trajectories of squatting we have observed in Warsaw and Poznań. We suggest further that the stability and

endurance of the scene is crucial for a more permanent solution to squatting struggles.

Social relations take some time to build up and many scholars of social capital have emphasized their role in individuals' and groups' achievement of goals.<sup>25</sup> Our goal in this study is not to examine the social capital of squatting activists; rather we want to analyze how cohesion was built within the squatting scenes in the two cities and

**“THE ABILITY TO MOBILIZE RESOURCES CAN BE REGARDED AS CRUCIAL FOR THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF COLLECTIVE ACTORS TO ATTAIN THEIR GOALS OF SOCIAL/ECONOMIC CHANGE.”**

how they conceived and made use of opportunity structures. We use the concept of cohesion, to indicate the quality of relationships characterizing social groups. A high degree of cohesion among group members inclines them to put time and effort in each other and the group, to share knowledge, trust, and emotional involvement and to form a perception of collective identity. The durability of a group provides it with the stability needed for creating cohesive relationships. The more durable the relationships within a group are, the stronger trust, willingness to assist others, efficiency of communication, and sharing of knowledge becomes. When examining cohesion, we look for membership stability as opposed to rotation and turnover, inflow of new members to the group, and perceptions of unity versus “profiling” or internal diversification among squatters. When studying durability, we mainly focus on the lifespan of particular squats in each city along with the emergence of new squats. We argue that the more long-lasting and cohesive the scene has been, the more comfortable and less energy-demanding the social relations become. We claim that the less long-lasting the stability of the scene is, the more dynamic it becomes both internally and in relation to others. There are probably fewer rules governing relations and a greater probability of cooperation and coalition-building in relationships whose rules are newly established, developed, and codified. We believe that different conflicts within or between groups and individuals within a scene and conflicts with other actors pose important challenges to the ability to cooperate and build alliances.<sup>26</sup>

## Opportunity structures and squatting in Poland

In this section we focus on introducing how the different political, legal, economic, and discursive opportunity structures have posed constraints and/or opportunities for squatting in Poland. The political opportunity structure for squatting in Poland has in recent years been relatively favorable compared to other countries.<sup>27</sup> Since 2013, meetings have been initiated with the Minister of Transport, Construction, and Maritime Economy, Piotr Styczeń in which squatters, tenants and state authorities have discussed housing policies in the country.<sup>28</sup> Although the results of these meetings have been mostly insignificant in regard to housing policies, interactions of this kind between activists and decision-makers, with the support of the Civil Rights Ombudsman and media coverage, have resulted in the change of the Polish penal law, so that the harassment of tenants (carried out by so called “cleaners”) was made a criminal act in 2015. We can conclude that the political opportunity structures have not been completely closed for squatters in Poland. Polish squatters’ ambitions to challenge policies at the state level have been quite low, as they usually focus on challenging the local level of government.

Nevertheless, the political climate in Poland should be perceived as a threat to squatting rather than an opportunity. After 1989, Poland – together with most of CEE countries – witnessed a combination of influences of neoliberalism (in particular in economic terms) and right-wing conservatism. Right-wing youth



The *Odzysk* squat in Poznań.

groups are more numerous and larger than the leftist ones, also the illegal occupation of property can be expected to receive little support from the general public.<sup>29</sup>

Political structure is tightly intertwined with the legal structure, and the question of legalization of squatting is ever recurrent in the Polish case. Nevertheless the issue is solved each time on the local level, depending on the willingness and attitude of the local authorities towards squatting, and on the squatters’ willingness to cooperate with institutionalized actors and to institutionalize their own activities. What is important is that squatting is not criminalized in Poland – there is no law stating that squatting per se is a criminal act. However, there is a law against trespassing, anyone who trespasses risks fines, custodial sentence or up to one year’s imprisonment.<sup>30</sup>

The *Act on the Protection of Tenants’ Rights* (2001/2010), the *Act on Housing Cooperatives* (2000) and the *Act on Property Rights* (1994) are important laws regulating the rights of tenants and use of property owned by others, and serve as substantial openings in the legal structure available to housing activists. The law on the protection of tenants gives the tenants the right to stay in a place, even if the owner wants to remove them, so that eviction must be preceded by a lawsuit. The owner is not allowed to enter the place unless the tenants let him in. However, in particular situations when the owner suspects an emergency or the destruction of property, she or he is legally allowed to enter the property, but only with the assistance of police. Squatters and tenants have often faced illegal practices by law enforcement and by private security companies and owners, however. At the same time the Polish squatters have become increasingly proficient in their use of litigation and knowledge of legal procedures.

As for economic opportunity structures, whenever economic support is needed, squatters use crowd-funding tools, benefit events, or loans within the squatting scene to cover their needs. Domestic economic opportunity structures were closed to Polish squatters, or more precisely: were not considered an important part of their struggles. Economic opportunity structures are

usually the field in which one of the key squatting principles – Do It Yourself (DIY) – is seen in action. DIY is not only a way to overcome budget restrictions, but also a form of prefigurative politics when politicized squatting understood is as an attempt to ‘decolonize everyday life’.<sup>31</sup>

The discursive opportunity structures for squatting in Poland have been for the most part negative towards squatting. In times of threats (evictions, attacks on squats, harassment of tenants by private landlords), media reports have been somewhat more sympathetic towards squatters. However, a common critique against mainstream media among squatters is their tendency to portray squatting as a “subcultural” phenomenon, depriving it its political meaning. Squatters testify that knowledge about squatting among the wider public is still limited and often associated with “uncivil” and “deviant” forms of collective action, interpreting squatting as unacceptable breach of property rights. In our specific case studies below, we will explain how squatters try to influence public opinion and strategically use the media in order to put pressure on the authorities. However, we will not give a systematic analysis of how media (or any other discourse) portray squatting, as that would require a separate study.

### Squatting in Warsaw: dynamic but inconstant

In this section we describe the case of Warsaw’s squatting scene and how it has evolved chronologically, by examining shifting opportunity structures and how these were used by squatters in the city. We focus in particular on the cohesion and durability of squatting in the city and how it has affected the use of opportunity structures.

Squatting in Warsaw began in the second half of the 1990s and intensified and gathered larger numbers of activists over time. The longevity of the occupation attempts varied from a few days to several years. The more long-lasting squats in the city were all opened in the 2000s, including *Fabryka* (2001/2002–2011) and *Elba* (2004–2012). At the time of writing (June 2015), there are two squatted spaces in Warsaw, *Syrena* (2011) and *Przychodnia* (2012), one example of collectively squatted land, *Wagenburg* (2007), and one legalized social center, *A.D.A.* (2014). All of them are quite young, and they gather different teams of squatters, provide different activities, and perceive themselves as having different “profiles”.

When the eviction of one of the most long-lasting local squats, *Elba*, took place in 2012, after over eight years of existence, it elicited great support in a demonstration following the eviction. Two thousand supporters gathering at a demonstration was an extraordinary number for this kind of radical left-wing movement in the Polish context. The remarkable support for the squat was followed by considerable local and national media attention and a willingness on the part of local politicians to start a dialogue with the squatters in

the city. The political situation was described by the squatters as “favourable: high interest from media; even the politicians reached out to somehow help this squatting movement”.<sup>32</sup>

What happened was that local district authorities of Śródmieście proposed to talk to squatters when the eviction was followed by the opening of a new squat, *Przychodnia*, in a municipal building in the central part of the city. These talks were shortly moved to the city level, where the Center for Social Communication took over the meetings. The squatters intentionally invited the media to the talks with local authorities that “turned it into quite a publicized event”.<sup>33</sup> Another strategy when the negotiations with the local authorities began was to bring representatives of different squatting teams in the city as well as representatives of the tenants’ organizations, to the meetings with authorities. In that way the claims of the squatters were not only publicized by the invited media, but also broadened to deal with housing policy and tenants’ rights. The squatters interviewed perceived the position of the local authorities as pressured by the positive media coverage. The authorities were also perceived as responsible in their position as capital city for setting a good example for other Polish cities and maintain a positive image. “They could have smashed us, because they had the force, but then their image would have been destroyed”,<sup>34</sup> one of the squatters concluded. As a result of these talks, a new social center, *Aktywny Dom Alternatywny* [Active Alternative House] (*A.D.A.*) was opened in April 2014, after long negotiations between the squatters and the local authorities. The new space was not a squat, but a legalized space; the requirement was that the activists founded an association in exchange for a lease. The stability of a legalized space attracted some of the Warsaw squatters, especially those with previous experiences of evictions, while others perceived *A.D.A.* as complementary (and not strictly comparable, as it could never become a residential space and was legally obtained) to the activity of other squats in the city.

The legal situation of the other squats was quite different. There are two squats located centrally in Warsaw that are part of the complicated re-privatization processes going on in the city (resulting from the nationalization of land and buildings during state socialism). One squatted space is privately owned, another is in a municipally owned building that stands on privately owned land. The opening of one of these places was accompanied by an awareness of the legal status of the building and of not breaking the law against trespassing, as the space was opened for anyone to enter; “We were easily able to get inside, we didn’t even break any locks or anything”.<sup>35</sup>

One of these squats initiated cooperation with tenants’ organizations in the city and legitimated its existence in the light of tenants’ rights. The rights of tenants have been invoked repeatedly by a group of squatters in Warsaw, and when the winter protection period<sup>36</sup> started, many of the city’s squatters let out a sigh of relief. Moreover, any attempts to trespass in

**“TWO THOUSAND SUPPORTERS GATHERING AT A DEMONSTRATION, WAS AN EXTRA-ORDINARY NUMBER FOR THIS KIND OF RADICAL LEFT-WING MOVEMENT IN THE POLISH CONTEXT.”**



The social center A.D.A., *Aktywny Dom Alternatywny* [Active Alternative House], in Warsaw.

the squats have been actively avoided by barricading the entrances and calling for media attention in cases of threats and for sympathizers and other activists to support the squats by acting as witnesses or by physically blocking access to the squats. Recently, in October 2014, a threat to auction off one of the squatted buildings came closer. The municipality wanted to put the building up for auction, as the owner is insolvent. But the auction was cancelled due to a blockade of the attempt to appraise the building and after the partial repayment of debts by the owner.

For the other squat, the legal situation looked different. Its official opening was moved forward from the originally scheduled date due to the positive media coverage of squatting at the time (2012). The legal aspect played an important role in the decision to open earlier, as the eviction of *Elba* was perceived as illegal and improperly handled by the police, presenting a favorable momentum for the squatters. The opening was a strategic move at a time when “it seemed to us that public opinion was on our side”.<sup>37</sup>

**THE ILLEGALITY OF** the police operations in the *Elba* eviction, as well as the positive public opinion, demonstrated how legal opportunity structures were used by the squatters at a time when the discursive opportunity structures were favorable. To squat the municipal building was also a tactical choice because of its complicated ownership status, with “the land belonging to private owners, in a building belonging to and managed by the Office of Property Management”.<sup>38</sup> It also shows how deliberately the discursive opportunity structures were treated and perceived by the squatters and the role of mainstream media for the more positive image of squatters. Media strategies were well developed among the squatters in Warsaw and there were rules on who was to represent the squatters in mainstream media, what was to be said, which topics should be avoided, which journalists were “trustworthy”, and so on, in order to retain control over the message that was sent to the public. The main concern was to avoid an exoticization of squatting, or as one of the activists put it, “writing about [a squat] as a zoo full of monkeys”,<sup>39</sup> which was perceived as a tactic of denying squatting its political meaning.

The trailer camp’s legal situation is different as the trailers are privately owned by the activists and stand on squatted municipal

land. An agreement is being negotiated with city authorities so the activists can lease the land legally, after a court case in which one of the residents was fined for the illegal occupation of land. The location is not as “attractive” as the centrally squatted buildings, as it is located on the outskirts of the city. The reason why activists living in the camp are included in the analysis is that a large part of the former *Elba* squat team is living there, and this milieu is an important link in the analysis of social cohesion and the dynamics of the squatting scene in the city. *A.D.A.* is also included for the same reason, although by definition it is not a squat, but gathers Warsaw’s squatters in its activities.

Different “profiles” among the squatted spaces and the legalized social center in Warsaw reflect the differences in the composition of the squatting movement in the city, and the differences in the goals of such activism in relation to the opportunities available on the local level. Over time, and especially since the eviction of the more long-lasting squats *Fabryka* and *Elba*, the rotation of squatters between the squats and the social center has been quite high. Earlier, *Elba* had a uniting effect as over time (and despite internal differences) it broadened its activities and member base. The “profiles” appeared clearly after the eviction of *Elba* in 2012 and were seen by the activists as a part of development, in which the activists attend to and cultivate their specific interests and relationships.

For many years now I’ve been noticing such tendencies among people ... and it’s great that when there are many places, as there have been in Warsaw for a while, everything is profiled. Some will feel better in *Syrena*, others in *Elbląska*, yet others in *Czarna Śmierć* or *Przychodnia*, and so on.<sup>40</sup>

The eviction did not only result in a more pragmatic attitude among squatters in Warsaw. It was also interpreted as an opportunity to start squatting again and change some of the “old” attitudes. One such critique of the old environment addresses its opacity to new members and ideas (described by one of the squatters as “suffocating in their own world”).<sup>41</sup> The eviction of 2012 and the opening of a new squat re-defined squatting rules. The opening of a legal space, *A.D.A.*, also contributed to broadening potential support for squatting in the city because

its activities were open to all interested persons, and because it targeted a broader audience of visitors than the squatted spaces. It provided a meeting space for squatters, former squatters, and anyone interested in visiting or on organizing an activity.

The main disputes in the squatting environment in the city concerned legalization and autonomy, and also the balance of political versus cultural activism. However, the attitude towards negotiations with local authorities was shared by most squatters in the city. When the negotiations were perceived as securing or prolonging squatting (by mutual agreements or legalization), or as giving it broader resonance, they were deemed positive. The pragmatic aspect of this attitude should be assessed in relation to the turbulent past of squatting in the city and the lack of stability. The instability in turn created a more dynamic and more flexible attitude, both among the squatters themselves and in their increasingly open relations to the authorities and other actors such as tenants.<sup>42</sup>

## The development of squatting in Poznań: Durable with static tendencies

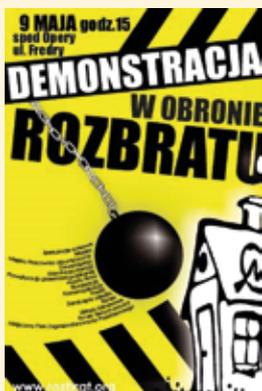
In this section the case of Poznań and its squatting scene is presented. It is structured chronologically and aimed at investigating the durability and cohesion of squatting in the city in relation to shifts in local opportunity structures and their use by squatters.

Poznań hosts one of the oldest still functioning squats in Poland and in Europe, *Rozbrat*. Its name can be translated as an attempt to peacefully disconnect from reality and make peace with it. As the authors of the website for the place claim, “The original idea of *Rozbrat* was to set up a commune composed of 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<sup>43</sup>. Established in 1994, it became a stable institution on the local cultural and political maps.<sup>44</sup> The old industrial buildings located in a green area of town close to the city center were

first occupied for residential purposes by a few activists upon returning from trips around Europe. It became open to the public in 1995 and has since hosted concerts (around 900 according to the squatters), talks, lectures, exhibitions, sports events, and much more. Over many years, being the only alternative space in town, it has become a home for a bike shop, a food-not-bombs collective, an anarchist social club and library, a publishing house, and recently the martial arts club “Freedom Fighters”. Since the beginning, *Rozbrat* has been closely connected to punk rock culture (becoming an important venue for punk gigs) and to anarchists (mainly the *Anarchist Federation* and for a short while some splinter groups also), who hold their meetings there and have thus defined the place politically.

Now, out of around 20 people living there, a majority belong to anarchist or anarcho-feminist groups who already were politically engaged before living at the squat. When threats were issued in 2009 to have the grounds on which *Rozbrat* is located auctioned off, a massive campaign was launched that culminated in two demonstrations, in March and May 2009, that gathered around 1500 and 900 participants respectively (numbers rarely seen in Poland for this kind of left-wing mobilization). In the end the place was not sold and legally remains an asset of a small cooperative bank, as there were no potential buyers for the lot during the auction. The activists claim this was to a large extent because of their strategy “scaring the potential investors”<sup>45</sup> away, but it also coincided with a decline in the real estate market in Poznań.

IN 2013, A YOUNG group of activists tried to occupy a building in Poznań and create a squat called *Warsztat* [Workshop] but were evicted a few days before the official opening by a counter-terror squad of the police.<sup>46</sup> Previous squatting attempts in Poznań (*Magadan*, *Żydowska*) were either short-lived or lacked an underlying political message. The same group of activists that founded *Warsztat* later occupied an abandoned commercial building in the Old Town market and founded *Od:zysk* in 2013 (the name is a play of words: *odzysk* in Polish denotes “recycling” or “recovery”, *zysk* means “profit”). Although the group was closely connected to the anarchist and *Rozbrat* environments, it differed: the average age was much lower (in the early twenties) and the group seemed to be more focused on cultural and identity issues rather than class and workers’ struggles. *Od:zysk* organized several LGBT film screenings, a queer-fest and a DIY sex toy workshop. For the anarchists and squatters belonging to the “older generation”, “queer topics are secondary and a distraction from class struggles and issues of capitalism”.<sup>47</sup> The building was sold to a company by the bank owning the mortgage at an auction in 2014. After the auction, the new owner announced that he wanted to make the squatters leave on peaceful terms and included a financial offer. As of September 2015, the two sides have reached an agreement and the new owner of the building has declared that he will donate 125,000 PLN (about 30 000 EUR) to the Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów and that the squatters will leave the building as it is. This turn of events has caused many heated debates, within the activists’ milieu and in the



Poster advertising a demonstration to defend Rozbrat in May 2009.



Mural at Rozbrat squat, Poznań.



Demonstration in defense of *Rozbrat* in Poznań on March 20, 2010.



PHOTO: KOLEKTYW ROZBRAT

mainstream media. At the same time, the city authorities began to look for vacant dwellings where the squatters could move, but none of the places offered met the squatters' requirements (due to unclear legal status, or the buildings' function). The emergence of the new squatted social center "became a strong sign to the authorities and to the people of Poznań. It showed that there is a movement in the city and that it's quite strong".<sup>48</sup> The local media have approached the new initiative rather sympathetically:

**The building was empty for many years and was decaying. A few months ago, in late autumn last year, a group entered the building who now call themselves *Kolektyw Od:zysk* – young anarchists, independent cultural animators, artists. Gradually they cleared the building and made necessary repairs, arranged the space for cultural and social activities, and settled down.**<sup>49</sup>

This quote illustrates the squatters' self-conception in their attempts to define their place in socio-cultural and political terms: as a location for alternative cultural activities and as a tool against gentrification, which is one of the topics of anarchist struggles in Poland.

In early 2013, another place joined the alternative environment of Poznań. A group of activists from both squats bought a space in the city center and opened an anarchist bookstore and café named *Zemsta* [Revenge]. Organized as a social cooperative, it is comprised of people from both squats and has taken over the role of an "open" space, hosting numerous art exhibitions, talks, book presentations, film screenings, etc. *Zemsta* is financed through selling books, fairtrade coffee, and lately vegan lunches. As one of the founders described it, "This is a social cooperative. We established it as a political response, but in an economic context, and we are using it for particular goals [...] We want to create economic conditions that will allow us to put something in the pot. People go to protests, put up posters, but between activities you also need to live somehow and for some of us this space provides such an opportunity".<sup>50</sup> *Zemsta* is

therefore not only an example of prefigurative leftist-libertarian politics, but also provides a purely economic function, supporting some of the members of the scene and occasionally providing a space for activities, in particular art shows, film screenings, discussions, and lectures.

The new developments on the map of social activism in Poznań lead to a division of labor between the spaces. *Rozbrat* remains a punk-rock party and concert venue and the gallery there has been transformed into a martial arts gym, while many art events are now taking place at *Zemsta*, as are open public discussions. All the places are self-sufficient, relying on benefit events and "membership dues". Anarchist press material and books are also circulated, and other income-generating events are held (such as the bike shop). However, despite (or perhaps thanks to) this internal division of labor, the emergence of the new spaces has strengthened the scene's relations, allowing it to reach wider audiences and disarming potential internal conflicts focused on the direction of development.

The city of Poznań is dominated by conservative public opinion and the 16 years in office (1998–2014) of the former mayor, Ryszard Grobelny. The conservatism dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Polish nationalist party – *Narodowa Demokracja* – had a stronghold in Poznań and prepared the successful Wielkopolska Uprising of 1918, that resulted in the reunification of the Wielkopolska region with the rest of the country in 1919. As a voice of dissent in the public discourse (directed mostly against the local authorities, but also the Catholic Church and conservative elites), squatters and anarchists have a strong position in Poznań's media and public opinion, which is unusual for Polish cities. They are not only positively portrayed by some media (in particular *Gazeta Wyborcza*), but are also supported by some of the academics who are looking for opposition to the conservative local Academic Civic Club. The radical right-wing movement consists of few groups, each ranging from a handful to two dozen activist members, often harassed by the local anti-fascist group. Though their actions are usually limited, *Rozbrat* has faced two neo-Nazi attacks in 1996 and 2013. In the first, a person was injured and the perpetrators received prison sen-

tences. The second, during a family picnic at the squat, was successfully repelled. Because of the threat of police intervention and attacks by right-wing groups or nationalists, the buildings have been fortified, with many windows boarded up and doors opened for short time slots during public events. On June 7, 2015, during the celebrations of the championship victory of the local football club, around 40 neo-Nazis attacked *Zemsta*, breaking the windows and throwing a flare inside. Later a crowd of around 350 people attacked *Od:zysk*. The attackers broke windows, tried to break in and set the place on fire, and later clashed with the police who arrived on the scene.<sup>51</sup> These acts were played down by the local authorities.

For years local authorities had a reputation of being largely unresponsive to grassroots mobilizations. With regard to squatting, the only exceptions were the actions of the former deputy mayor, Maciej Frankiewicz, who suggested negotiations with squatters and even visited *Rozbrat* once. However, these attempts ended with his tragic death in 2009. Relations with the police are a bit tenser as the squatters often complain about repression. Mostly, the detention of activists has resulted in court cases, and in the last 15 years all but one were won by the squatters, who not only have a sympathizing lawyer but have become more and more skilled in litigation and legal practice.

In December 2011, *Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów* (the Wielkopolska Tenants' Association, WSL) was established. It consisted not only of tenants, but also numerous other activists with squatters/anarchists comprising the core group. The legal framework of an association was used in order to gain legal rights (in particular, the right to request public information) and occasionally to collect material resources or put pressure on the media and public opinion. The creation of WSL has opened possibilities for alliance building between squatters and at the same time served as an attempt to position them as part of the civil society rather than a countercultural movement always opposing the authorities. It was also a part of a broader strategy described by one of the activists as follows: "We are looking for existing social conflicts, like that of tenants or some others, and we enter these conflicts as a player. Then we try to aggregate the conflict, make it more visible to the public. And we are trying to frame it in our way, so it is connected with our struggle".<sup>52</sup> Cooperation with tenants allowed a framing of the privatization of municipal housing in anti-capitalist and anti-gentrification terms familiar to the squatters and anarchists. Local media usually treats the actions of the squatters not only as tenants' issues but as a liberal and leftist voice in discussions on the local level, as a sort of counterbalance to the dominant neoliberal-conservative discourse.

## Conclusions

On the basis of our two cases, Warsaw and Poznań, we suggest that the stability and cohesion of the squatting scenes have resulted in squatters avoiding institutionalized channels to make use of political opportunity structures. They

demonstrate that when structural threats break the longevity of a scene the relations and attitudes between the activists and with others outside of the squatting scene, become more dynamic and open towards new members and towards profiling within the scene, legalization, and negotiation with representatives of the institutionalized political system. By comparing political opportunity structures in the two cities, we learned that cohesion and durability among collective actors affects the way they react to and use more institutionalized channels in their struggle. We observed that openness towards negotiations, cooperation, new members, and external influences characterized more unstable settings where the squatting scene was repeatedly threatened.

Legal opportunity structures are closely connected to political opportunities and were used somewhat differently by squatters in the cities studied. The more unstable situation in Warsaw forced squatters to look for legal solutions that could provide them with more stability (such as the negotiation of a legal space with the municipality, negotiation about lease on squatted land, and taking over a municipal building) and thus a more pragmatic attitude. This pragmatization of the scene in Warsaw was also reflected in more flexible demands on the cohesion of the scene. Discursive opportunity structures were used similarly by squatters in Warsaw and Poznań; however, the stability of the Poznań scene (along with some other factors such as the size of the counter-movement and, the size and history of the city) was reflected in more positive media coverage and media experience among the activists.

**IN THE CASE OF** Warsaw, we have argued that the re-configuration of the squatting scene after the closing of the squat *Elba* in 2012, resulted in several profiled squats (and one social center) opening up. Most of them set new rules, included new members, developed specific "profiles" among existing squats, and also opened up towards more institutionalized activity (in particular *A.D.A.*) which we interpret as a move towards a more flexible attitude among squatters in the city. In the case of Poznań, on the other hand, the stable existence of *Rozbrat* since 1994, the lesser threat posed by extreme right-wing movements, and the local acceptance (by some of the media as well as the public) of squatting in the city have created an established group of squatters with stable relationships, less prone to look for potential allies or influences from outside. In this way the position, ideology, and ability to cooperate among the squatters in Poznań were never overtly or repeatedly challenged, which further stabilized social cohesion within the local squatting environment over time.

We interpret the opening up towards new members and towards negotiations with local authorities in the case of Warsaw as a tactical move to make use of political opportunity structures available at a specific point in time. In the case of Poznań, we have observed that the durability of squatting resulted in an abated inclination of

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the scene to open to external coalitions, institutional activity or re-configuration. Re-configuration and more dynamic and flexible social relations tend to broaden the demands put forward, as well as their impact on, in particular, political opportunity structures available to squatters. ✘

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The remains of the Klizma squat.



Leningrad/St. Petersburg

# Squatting and the moral economy

## of public-private relations

by **Tatiana Golova**

If we define squatting as the unauthorized use of previously unoccupied dwellings or property, then it is obviously a widespread phenomenon, not restricted to movement-related cases in Western Europe. To interpret different forms and meanings of squatting practice fruitfully, specific historical contexts have to be explicated. The legal and cultural dimensions of property relations deserve special attention: the idea of “living in [...] a dwelling without the consent of the owner” implies an “owner” and institutionalized forms of “consent”. Both are historical products and should not be taken for granted. Squatting in late socialist and post-socialist Russia is a promising case due to the specifics of property relations: the modus of collective property was dominant not just for the means of production, but in the urban housing stock as well; here, squatting carried an aspect of privatization of public property, rather than collectivization of private property.<sup>2</sup> However, it cannot be reduced to this: whereas squatters, with very few exceptions, did not produce legitimizing discourse, squats were reaching out into alternative, non-official publics. The present article disentangles public-private relations in the case of squatting in Leningrad/St. Petersburg and shows how their specific configuration has influenced squatting.

Squats in the second-biggest Soviet city were not entirely the product of liberalization, even though the loosening of state control changed opportunity structures: squatting by nonconformist artists and musicians was reported as early as the 1970s. Between 1988 and 1992, according to my findings, more squatting took place, but the quantity declines from then on. The late 1980s and early 1990s was

the time of the fundamental restructuring of property relations, and squatting in Leningrad/St. Petersburg was one of the many forms of informal appropriation and exchange practices, though rather a marginal one. Only a few interviewees claim to have developed any distinctive self-identification as “squatters”; some even described themselves as “not real squatters”, despite their unauthorized use of dwellings for longer periods. Squatting took on a rather non-spectacular and non-ideological character: people occupying a room, a flat, or several flats in a building, were reluctant or hesitant to make a statement. By explaining “silent squatting”, this paper argues, we can better understand the moral economy of Soviet housing and public-private relations. The paper is intended to show, that the appropriation by squatters was not very different from the legitimate form of symbolic appropriation of state property by the Soviet people.

The empirical foundation of this contribution consists of 16 semi-structured interviews conducted between spring of 1998 and spring of 1999, with people who were involved in squatting in Leningrad during the 1980s and 90s. Most interviewees had been living and/or working at squats, sometimes at more than one. Some interviewees used such spaces regularly, being members of relevant subcultural networks, or were involved in similar informal housing practices like “black leasing” by local housing administrations in cooperation with the police. Interviews lasted from 20 to 90 minutes, most lasting about one hour, and combined a narrative segment on squatting experiences and a segment of questions and answers. A numbering system is used in the quotations to protect the interviewees. I also conducted

### abstract

The case of late Soviet and early post-Soviet squatting helps to elucidate how squatting is structured in regard to public-private relations and what the political component of squatting can be in a society not based on private property. The self-help occupying of vacant flats was not restricted to subcultures. With very few exceptions, the squatters were not trying to mobilize external support. Subcultural groups excluded from the official distribution of resources created their semipublic free spaces by squatting. By analyzing the moral economy of public-private relations, it is shown that the direct appropriation by squatters was similar to a common symbolic appropriation of state housing based on place-making practices, by Soviet urban dwellers. Squats as a form of practical “Eigen-Sinn”, or self-will, challenged the Soviet system of resources allocation.

**KEYWORDS:** squatting, Russia, property relations, moral economy, public-private relations.

two expert interviews: one about occupation by homeless people and one about housing relations in the context of privatization. Further research material included publications in local newspapers and subcultural periodicals. The interviews were conducted as part of my diploma thesis in sociology about squatters, parts of which were published in Russian.<sup>3</sup> However, the present article is an original work and is less influenced by a case of squatter movement in West Berlin in the 1980s.

The paper focuses on the time between the late 1980s and the late 1990s. This period is especially relevant in regard to the massive change in property relations in the (former) Soviet Union. In addition, some conditions in the housing sphere provided partially vacant houses as resources for squatting. After 1992, the quantity of squats declined, probably as a consequence of the opening opportunities for formerly “countercultural” youth, and the institutionalization and commodification of cultural activities. Further factors of decline were the development of rental relations and disappearance of squatting opportunities due to the increasing commercial use of dwellings in the historical center.

The next epoch of squatting documented in three cases was 2003 to 2005. Its protagonists were mainly (anarcho-) punks connected to the Punk Revival-network; some were activists of other left-wing subcultures and anarchists.<sup>4</sup> The most prominent squat was *Klizma/Pekarnia* near the Narvskaja metro station, which existed from 2003 to 2004 and was used as a place for concerts and parties, face-to-face communication, organizational activities, such as preparations for anarchist MayDay in 2004 and antifascist demonstrations, and as housing. An effort to create a dwelling place and cultural center in one house made it similar to both the artistic squats and the residential squat-communes of the aforementioned earlier period. However, the protagonists in this new wave were openly political and interpreted their squatting explicitly as a form of anti-capitalist action, as de-commodification of housing, and not merely as a form of living intended to offer an alternative to an alienated modernist way of life. Therefore, it can be viewed as a new type of squat for Russia, one which has stronger similarities with squats in Western Europe connected to left-wing movements. Between 2008 and 2011, another wave of squatting occurred. It seems to have been born by a different, loosely connected network of people identifying themselves as squatters, who combined elements of self-help, anti-capitalist ideas, and an orientation towards a do-it-yourself (DIY) culture and alternative lifestyle. Whereas these later series are interesting from a transnational comparative perspective, their reconstruction does not seem essential to answering the main question of the present investigation.

## Public-private relations

Explaining “Eastern European” squatting vis-à-vis the public-private-distinction, one of the “grand dichotomies” of Western thought,<sup>5</sup> implies certain risks. The idea of a deficiency, or even a complete absence of private and/or public spaces in the Soviet Union and Russia is widespread.<sup>6</sup> Soviet-type societies obviously did not develop independent political publics as communica-



New blocks on Prospekt Morisa Toreza, Leningrad, early 1970s.

tive spheres besieging the state in a Habermasian sense. Still, a wide range of spheres of public communication and action existed, most of them influenced by the regime.<sup>7</sup> The private and the public must be understood as multilayered categories, connected by a “dynamic, interactive tension”.<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of squatting, two such layers are of special importance: relations between state-controlled and informal public spheres, and the public-private dimension of property relations.

Instead of focusing on “non-Western” deficits, the study of public spheres in state socialist societies can direct its focus towards the *Eigen-Sinn* (self-will) of people: individuals in hierarchical relationships and regimes do not just reproduce imposed meanings and follow the rules, but develop plural interpretations and practices for dealing with those.<sup>9</sup> The interests and practices of *Eigen-Sinn* range from calculated collaboration to open resistance. *Eigen-Sinn* includes the use of “hidden transcripts”, i.e. discourses that take place “beyond direct observation by powerholders”.<sup>10</sup> They consist of “those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices, that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript”, or open interactions between the subordinate and the dominating actors.<sup>11</sup> Challenging the relations of symbolic power, hidden publics are implicitly political.

The performance of hidden transcripts constitutes alternative public spheres, hidden from the control institutions. “Hidden” and “public” are not opposing, but refer to two different public-private-dimensions: hidden vs. open and collective vs. individual.<sup>12</sup> In the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, specific spaces of communication on matters of everyday life were evolving out of



The Nevsky 25 squat in Leningrad existed from 1987 to 1990.

the (not entirely emancipated) private realm, and were sharply separated from the official public sphere.<sup>13</sup> It may be added, that the separation itself was regulated by the practical *Eigen-Sinn* of citizens. The small informal publics could be located physically in different kinds of places – in the kitchens of private apartments, in rooms of communal apartments, in cafes or in tourist bivouacs: rather than depending on certain kinds of places, the publics transformed these.<sup>14</sup> For the publics that were connected to the subcultural milieus, squatting was one way of creating communicative spaces in the tradition of *Eigen-Sinn*.

### The moral economy of Soviet property relations

Another layer of the public-private-distinction explains why the late- and post-Soviet squatters remained mostly silent about squatting practices, except for practical questions, and did not produce legitimization discourses – a public-private dimension of Soviet property relations in the housing domain. These relations should be studied as an interplay of cultural, economic, and legal aspects.<sup>15</sup>

The Soviet system of housing relations was a system of *allocation*.<sup>16</sup> The citizens typically got access to urban residential housing (separate apartments or rooms in communal apartments) without acquiring full property rights to it, including the rights of disposition. The alteration of physical structures within apartments was restricted as well.<sup>17</sup> Yet it was not renting in the sense of a

landlord-tenant relation, which is a contractual relation typical for market economies and based on ownership. A “contract” as a specific form of exchange must include “the freedom of parties to forge their agreement as they wish” and the ability to deviate from pre-existing prototypes.<sup>18</sup> Most Soviet citizens did not rent their apartments from other private agents on the market on such conditions. People considered themselves to have received housing free of charge after applying for improvements in housing conditions, and then waiting for several years or longer. In fact, the “free” housing was financed from the social consumption funds formed on the not-paid wages.<sup>19</sup> A further difference from a rental relation is, that the monthly payments (*kvartplata*) were standardized and subsidized, i.e. indirectly financed by the population in the same way. A life-long use right was created and then fixed by a registration at the given address (*propiska*, see below). Through the registration of children in the apartment, a use right for the next generation was established, without the possibility of formal inheritance. Soviet tenants did not correspond to the ideal type of tenants in market economies.

TO EXPLAIN HOW public goods, including housing, were provided in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, Sovietologists often used the idea of a social contract on the macro-level, between the society and the regime. An “implicit agreement dictated by the state and accepted by the workers”,<sup>20</sup> so the idea, promised state provision of basic social services, almost free of charge, in exchange for political consent.<sup>21</sup> When the contract failed, loyalty was revoked, leading to the failure of the system, prompted by protests and disrespect for public property. Indeed, according to the survey conducted in St. Petersburg in 1990, one third of the interviewees, and more than 60% of the school and vocational school students interviewed, justified the theft of state property.<sup>22</sup> Less than 20% of respondents justified thefts for private property. Against this background, squatting as the direct appropriation of state property appears quite logical.

However, the informal economy, including petty thefts and the illegal use of collective property, was common before the massive economic crisis.<sup>23</sup> Its persistence can be explained using a concept of moral economy, interpreted as a popular consensus about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of practices and relations in the economic sphere, connected to the significance of specific social goods.<sup>24</sup> Welfare transfers, Steffen Mau insists, can be interpreted as welfare exchanges, whose acceptance depends not just on the self-interest of actors, but also on moral plausibility.<sup>25</sup>

The moral economy of Soviet property relations was shaped by the Soviet system of resource allocation. The conception of social justice addressed exchange with state institutions. As benefactors, working individuals shared their work resources, as

beneficiaries, they received use rights in and access to the collective property and communal goods: housing, health provision, education, child-care, etc. The moral obligation to give resources and the moral right to use communal goods were, however, not

**“THE MORAL ECONOMY OF SOVIET PROPERTY RELATIONS WAS SHAPED BY THE SOVIET SYSTEM OF RESOURCE ALLOCATION.”**

conjugated in detail. In this context, the direct appropriation of communal goods became legitimate. “In contrast to the difficulties that many individuals presently encounter in extracting value from their property, under Soviet rule many people were able to benefit from use rights to those same objects”.<sup>26</sup> The direct appropriation of state housing did not have an illegal character. Rather, it was symbolic.<sup>27</sup> By improving and personalizing their rooms or apartments, the dwellers were appropriating it actively and developed a “de facto sense of ownership for the spaces they inhabited”.<sup>28</sup> Due to the underdevelopment of contractual relations, the moral economy of Soviet housing was based on the symbolic privatization of public property, rendering squatting marginal, but not unique.

### The legal framing of squatting

The legal framing of public-private property relations in the Soviet Union was contradictory: theft of “socialist property” was considered a crime (or, in less severe cases, an administrative violation). But the (Soviet) Russian legislation has been peculiar on similar phenomena, which cannot be classified as classic “theft”. It was only a relatively short phase, between 1994 and 1997, when the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation included an article (148.2) referring directly to urban squatting – “unlawful occupancy of another’s real estate, committed with a mercenary purpose, if attributes of larceny are absent”. Article 148.2 was part of the broader legal framework aimed at reflecting and regulating relationships involving private property in Russia during the post-Soviet transformation.<sup>29</sup> Private ownership of real estate was seen as a pillar of new economic relations and “market economy”, and was supposed to be protected by criminal law as well. Some articles of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR (and the later Code of 1996) could be used to punish squatting as well, mainly in the context of other relations besides property relations.<sup>30</sup> Still, legally speaking, there were no squatters in the Soviet Union.

**THE PRACTICE**, as reconstructed in the interviews, conformed to these legal conditions: squatting did not come with specific legal risks, even if the members of subcultural networks were subjected to other forms of legal persecution. “They [police] would not know what we actually did wrong”.<sup>31</sup> In the 1970s, most squats were evicted promptly, but later, in the 1980s and the 1990s, interactions with the police differed widely. In some cases, the squatters were beaten up, or windows were repeatedly smashed in order to make the dwellings inhabitable, but there was no legal prosecution. In other cases, the police officers just verified the identification and the residence permits of inhabitants and were satisfied when people proved to be not really homeless, nor criminal, and when there were no complaints from neighbors. The rare police raids were focused on

other topics, primarily drugs. The legal non-framing of squatting as an offence to property paralleled the specifics of state property in the housing sector.

### The housing system as a context of squatting practice

St. Petersburg was founded 1703 with the intention of creating an exceptional city; it was to become a new model capital for the Russian Empire. The utopian myth of well-regulated European beauty and the complementary anti-utopian myth of the cold, inhuman city saturated its symbolic space.<sup>32</sup> Later, the Soviet myth of “Leningrad, cradle of three revolutions” and the parallel identity of “an ordinary city” developed.<sup>33</sup> Even today, these myths influence the perception of the historical center, located inside the industrialization ring of factories, where most of the squatting took place.

Living in the symbolically rich historical setting has not provided a purely romantic experience for most of the inhabitants. The official housing statistics focus on variables that conceal social inequality; such as the average space in square meters per person.<sup>34</sup> The high percentage of people living in communal apartments (*kommunalka*) indicates absolute housing deprivation.<sup>35</sup> In communal apartments, each household, whether an individual or a family, has its own room (some families, more than one) and shares a kitchen, hallways, and facilities; they cannot choose their neighbors. The high levels of relative housing deprivation are stable, as indicated by the survey’s data.<sup>36</sup> Consistent to the findings of social movement studies, the constant absolute or relative deprivation has not been enough to fuel a large mobilization on social justice in the housing sphere. Housing and urban movements of the past 30 years have mobilized against local threats posed by construction projects to recreational zones or cultural heritage, for the self-management of residents, against price rises and the deterioration of communal services, or for the interests of small shareholders in housing construction who lost their money.<sup>37</sup> None of these were notably related to squatting.

**AN ASPECT OF DEPRIVATION**, which is directly relevant for squatting, was the bad condition of the housing stock. The development of Leningrad into an over-industrialized city in post-war Soviet Russia devaluated the historic center symbolically and aggravated a common real-socialist practice of disinvestment in historical centers.<sup>38</sup> In the mid-1990s, up to 15 million square

meters of housing stock in the city needed major reconstruction, two thirds of which was located in the historic city center. However, in the early 1990s, the city authorities had practically stopped the clearance and the renovation of dilapidated buildings. The city was badly affected by a radical drop in housing construction in Russia.<sup>39</sup> The citizens of St. Petersburg prac-

**“IN SOME CASES, THE SQUATTERS WERE BEATEN UP, OR THE WINDOWS WERE REPEATEDLY SMASHED IN ORDER TO MAKE THE DWELLINGS UNINHABITABLE, BUT THERE WAS NO LEGAL PROSECUTION.”**

tically lost every chance to improve their housing conditions by public means.

The most important resources for squatting were apartments in buildings, which were located in the historic city center and partially cleared of tenants by city authorities for capital repair. The majority of the squats the interviewees told me about were apartments (in some cases, rooms in communal apartments) located in such buildings. When a building was to be renovated, dwelling units could not be rented out any more. On paper, they ceased to exist as inhabitable dwellings. The tenants were resettled in other dwellings, mostly on the city periphery. The clearance of a communal apartment required several new apartments. This was costly and time consuming. Some apartments remained vacant in partly inhabited buildings. As the buildings were not cut off from utilities including electricity, water, and central heating, these were the most suitable for squatting.

**AS AN IMMEDIATE EFFECT** of freezing the capital renovation program in the 1990s, some buildings in the historic center were “lost in transition” and stood partly cleared for several years. In the short term, the partial clearing of houses for capital renovation supplied resources for squatting. In the long run, some of these houses were included in the informal system of black leasing. In the interviews, several such cases were described on Nevskiy Prospekt, near the Pushkinskaia metro station, and around Shkapina and Rozenshteina streets. This practice had been known since the 1970s; after prices rose at the end of the 1980s, it became more popular among artists to occupy an apartment for an atelier first and then negotiate with the housing administration (REU).<sup>40</sup> As another interviewee reported, concerning squats near the Baltiiskaia metro station, a local police officer “used to come and give us broad hints like ‘You know, you should really talk to the REU’”.<sup>41</sup> The inhabitants gave in and wrote a letter to the REU asking for the lease of a storeroom in the name of a non-existent firm, but considered it a bribe for being left alone, and not as rent.

The black leasing did not end in the 1990s: the complex of buildings between Shkapina and Rozenshteina streets, which I visited in 1999, was included in the system of black leasing until at least 2004; the unofficial tenants included migrants from former Soviet republics. Some of the buildings were demolished in 2009, after construction elements had repeatedly collapsed, and they were subsequently replaced by new housing complexes belonging to a private investor. Cleared *kommunalkas* became less available as resources for squatting: between 1992 and 1997, the number of *kommunalkas* declined by 20%,<sup>42</sup> but the vast majority were cleared by private investors and were practically inaccessible to squatters.

## Squatting practices

The unauthorized occupying of housing in the Soviet Union took on very different forms; far from all of them were interpreted by the actors and/or their counterparts as being specific squatting practices. In the following, I would like to give an overview of different forms of urban occupying in Leningrad between the



Inscription from Belarussian visitors to the former squat.

mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. Some of them – but not all – occurred in the context of subcultural networks. The forms of squatting have been defined according to the main activities and the motivations and interpretations of the squatters themselves, and classified empirically by the author. The four defined forms of squatting are:

**1** **IN EARLY 1990S**, Shomina observed “numerous accounts” of collective, organized *housing seizures in newly constructed buildings* by families with many children, construction workers, or refugees.<sup>43</sup> An abrupt decline in housing output in the context of the overall economic crisis led to worker’s dissatisfaction and desperation on the part of some people in the housing queue. Their deprivation was exacerbated by perceived injustice, corruption, and inefficiency in the distribution of available housing, as thousands of houses remained empty for considerable periods. In many cases, according to Shomina, local authorities were forced to legalize the use of occupied apartments and to issue appropriate papers. Shomina describes the squatting of new buildings from Moscow as different to St. Petersburg. However, in Moscow there were also some cases of squatting in houses partially or entirely cleared for capital repair (*Peturovskii* on Petrovka Street, which developed into an independent art-center and lasted for five years; *Bulgakovskii* a squat of hippies etc.).

**2** **UNLIKE SQUATTERS** of the first type, the inhabitants of what is called a residential squat (*zhiloi squat*) did not intend to legalize the use of the occupied space by acquiring a permanent residence permit and thereby become “normal” tenants. Still, they tried to create a home, at least temporarily – the occupation was not just a protest action. Below, I will describe this type of squatting in detail.

**3** **ARTISTIC SQUATS** are better known than other kinds (most prominent among them are *Pushkinskaya 10*, *Na Fontanke*



Pushkinskaya 10.

(No. 145), *Synovia doktora Peliia*, and several occupied by the *Rechniki* group).<sup>44</sup> Artists, writers and musicians are known to have been living in artistic squats as well. But, more importantly, they used these places for creative work and communication. The artistic squats comprised more than the coexistence of some isolated ateliers; rather, they constituted meeting points. Cultural events (parties, concerts, discussions, exhibitions) were integrated into everyday life. At the height of the artistic squats, between the mid-1980s and 1992, there were no comparable “official” art centers, and in the Soviet system of resource allocation there could not be. The self-identification as a “squat” was marginal, in comparison to that of “artistic community” or, later, the project of creating an art center.<sup>45</sup>

**4 ATELIERS AND BAND ROOMS:** Such places were occupied and used for rehearsals and socializing. This type of practice began to spread around the mid-1980s. People might stay there overnight regularly (a friend of the two musicians who occupied a place on Malyi Prospekt on Vasilevskii Island),<sup>46</sup> but the place did not change its main function. In some cases an artist would squat a place to use as an atelier. This form of occupation could be regarded as sharing features with the “artistic squat”, although only a small group or just one person. Such squats were rather closed to outsiders and did not constitute a public space. One painter I interviewed referred to the specific risks of squatting an atelier: when another artist offered to share a squatted apartment, she refused because of the fear of losing her works and materials in case of eviction.<sup>47</sup> She preferred to rent a small apartment informally from a housing committee (REU) instead.

**THESE FORMS ARE NOT** mutually exclusive, but may represent different stages of one and the same house: in some cases, an apartment was occupied by an individual artist, a hippie, or a group

of people, and then more and more parts of the same house were squatted, leading, to the development of a more public artistic squat. The forms of squatting characterized by Hans Pruijt as “alternative housing strategies” and “entrepreneurial squatting” look quite similar. However, his typology focuses on squatting that is “organized by, or at least supported and/or inspired by, a social movement”.<sup>48</sup> Most of the parameters he uses to identify different types are not applicable to the silent, small-scale, self-help squatting of apartments in Leningrad/St. Petersburg, where alternative identities were instrumental, but the identity as “squatters” remained marginal; no collective action system developed around squatting. Moreover, the distinction between an “artistic squat” and an “atelier or band room”, rather than describing a type of “entrepreneurial squatting”, permits emphasis on the artistic squat’s collective – and public – character.

Some forms of unauthorized use of dwellings would not qualify as squatting because of their episodic or short-term character, yet these still help to define a field of relevant practices and meanings. People from alternative artists’ networks or the hippie-oriented *Sistema*<sup>49</sup> would use certain vacant housing units for face-to-face communication/hanging out. Such “special places” were open to practically anyone who would adapt to the rules of the *tusovka*<sup>50</sup> as an informal public sphere,<sup>51</sup> albeit a short-lived and episodic one. One example from my study is a former caretaker’s lodge in a house on Pushkinskaya Street (though not in the well-known No. 10), where one interviewee recounted that she and her acquaintances “just hang out from time to time”.<sup>52</sup> The practice is akin to other forms of temporary appropriation of liminal spaces popular in the 1990s among St. Petersburg youth, such as visiting certain roofs.

**IN THE CONTEXT** of social movements in Russia, buildings were also briefly occupied buildings as a protest actions. In Leningrad, the movement for the defense of historical heritage developed in the mid-1980s and became a catalyst for a large-scale democratic movement, providing networks, activists, and shared protest know-how.<sup>53</sup> The groups involved emphasized the conservative orientation of mobilization – preserving historical buildings from demolition, and, more broadly, preserving the historical identity of the city as relevant for meaningful everyday life – which was a relatively safe field, in comparison with openly anti-Soviet rhetoric. The first action was conducted around the house of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet Anton Delvig, which was about to be demolished to make way for a new metro station. During the performance-like rally, the activists addressed the surprisingly large audience from the inside and from the roof of the cleared and emptied house.<sup>54</sup>

Another related phenomenon is the crack house (*priton*). In some cases, residential squats would end in this manner.<sup>55</sup> An oc-

cupied apartment was reduced to a place for the consumption of hard drugs, heavy drinking, and (in some cases, paid) sex. Such squats were open and their circle of users was not defined, nor expected to commit to any specific activity. This type of place was bound to attract the attention of police and neighbors.

In the following section, I concentrate on artistic squats and residential squats, because there the squatting was neither a means to acquire permanent residence permits, nor a short-term type of action. Thus, it stands out as a practice of its own. Furthermore, this practice should be understood as being connected to specific meanings of squatting: as a space for an alternative way of life, or as creative spaces. Here, the public-private relations were re-interpreted and negotiated, making squats a form of practical *Eigen-Sinn*.

## Residential squats: communes vs. kommunalkas

Residential squats were not necessarily inhabited by members of *Sistema*. In some cases, people far from such milieus experienced lack of resources and sought a free accommodation. Migrants from other regions of the (former) Soviet Union or Russia were especially vulnerable if they could not obtain a residence permit. The system of *propiska* restricted access to workplaces, and vice versa, to get a *propiska* in a given city, an individual had to have a job there. Furthermore, the rents in the free housing market were four to five times higher than the *kvartplata* for a state accommodation.<sup>56</sup> One interviewee described a squat at the end of Ligovskii Prospekt, on the outskirts of the historic center. The squat existed approximately between 1978 and 1984, and was occupied mainly by ordinary families with “baby strollers in the yard”.<sup>57</sup> One empirical case might show characteristics of different types of squats, where some subcultural actors were also migrants for example.

Two main interpretations of residential squats by former inhabitants were reconstructed from the interviews:

- a *commune-squat* of people who know each other, share interests, and are attracted by ideas of independent and collective living;
- a *kommunalka-squat*: a forced solution, in which inhabitants are pushed together mainly by their need for housing.

THESE INTERPRETATIONS are not mutually exclusive. The most striking case was a squat in 4-ia Sovetskaia, which was described, with reference to the same period, as a *commune* in one interview, and as *kommunalka* in another.

Whereas *commune* was a reference used by some, if not all interviewees, the concept of *kommunalka-squat* was produced during the research. Russia, and especially Leningrad/St. Petersburg, has had a long tradition of urban collective living. Communal apartments were habitats in which up to 40% of Leningraders lived (in the 1980s, up to

25%). In this world turned upside down most intimate functions were relegated to the public realm.<sup>58</sup> *Kommunalkas* as a form of collective living could not establish a tradition of self-regulated cohabitation and self-government of dwellers. “In the Soviet times, in the cases when the tenants could not come to an agreement, the order usually came from an outside authority such as housing administration”.<sup>59</sup> A possible explanation is that in the *kommunalkas*, people shared a flat not by choice nor could they influence who would become their co-dwellers. Neglected privacy leads to “oversensitivity to violations of privacy and its substitutes”.<sup>60</sup> Collective living in the *kommunalkas* did not foster the development of an independent public realm.

The “usual kind of *kommunalka* also presented another kind of stress – the need to share accommodation with people of radically different social background”.<sup>61</sup> Whereas this problem would not affect *commune-squats*, it certainly affected *kommunalka-squats*. An example: In a squatted apartment on Siezzhinskaiia Street, there were people “claiming to be something more, artists or musicians maybe, not without something special of a kind [...] but this bohemianism was a bit... stinking”. The space was shared with “strange pastry sellers” from Kiev.<sup>62</sup>

The poor living conditions in squats and the poverty-related lack of resources to improve these boosted the negative aspects of *kommunalka*. In many cases, the inhabitants shared not just the kitchen and the facilities, but rooms as well. The overcrowding was stressful. “It is very demanding, when there are so many people, when you do not have even a corner for yourself”.<sup>63</sup> In the context of overcrowding, lack of privacy, and heterogeneity, conflicts sparked off.<sup>64</sup>

The creation of (temporary) privacy in relation to the outside world was an easier task. This could be achieved by putting a new lock on the door (which was done not in all cases, however; see below). The clearing of debris and trash was a further step towards establishing a “home”. In some cases, the supply of electricity, water, and especially hot water had to be restored. The “home” would still be in a relatively bad condition.

Some self-help squats therefore reproduced the public/private structure of their predecessors – the cleared communal apartments. Still, the squatting was an (albeit small-scale) alternative to a state system of allocation of housing resources.

## Hidden publics

The inhabitants of the occupied apartments had more influence on the choice of co-habitants than dwellers of state-run *kommunalkas*. Sometimes the search for and invitation of new neighbors was very well reflected, and a candidate had to be approved by all dwellers. Still, sometimes, new people moved in step-by-step, staying overnight and so on: “Look, I know him, and he knows you. Could I stay here for a night? And then another night. And then he is visited by his friends from outside, and they stay overnight”.<sup>65</sup> I assume that squatting as

**“THE POOR LIVING CONDITIONS IN SQUATS AND POVERTY-RELATED LACK OF RESOURCES TO IMPROVE THESE BOOSTED THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF KOMMUNALKA.”**



Authentic graffiti on the wall of the former *Klizma* squat.

an act of appropriation engenders some degree of moral “obligations” to tolerate appropriation by others. Personal networks were central to the recruiting of new co-squatters; the so-called *tusovka* and its sub-scenes were especially important for the information flow and recruiting.

To return to the interviewees’ two main interpretations of residential squats, we can say that the *kommunalka-squats* were typically closed (*zakrytyi*), whereas a *commune-squat* could be closed or open (*otkrytyi*). The public-private structure of an open squat differed from the one described above: it functioned as a meeting point for all who knew about its existence, i.e. competent members of the communicative scene in question, or *tusovka*. This openness took different forms. Some occupied apartments were used as *vpiska* (an address for couch-surfing). Most *Vpiski* were actually not occupied apartments, but rather in some form possessed by members of *tusovka*, and allowed people from the subcultural *Sistema* to travel across the Soviet Union.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, open squats, or open houses, were centers of communication for subcultural youth from Leningrad/St. Petersburg as well. The door of one “open home” squat on Svechnoi, occupied by people connected to the *Sistema*, was not locked: “A squat is not your own apartment, its very idea is to be available for all people. So, if you install new locks and say, ‘Well, we live here now’, it would not be a squat anymore”.<sup>67</sup>

Some inhabitants lived in the city already and had an actual roof over their head and *propiska*, but they wished to try an independent, autonomous life and were restricted in resources to realize it in everyday life, aside from in the heterotopias of *Sistema*. One of the central ideas expressed by many interviewees is freedom – interpreted as independence from parental control<sup>68</sup> or other forms of control, as ability to discuss non-pragmatic things freely, or to create something of one’s own together with sympathetic people. Such freedom can be negatively associated with risks or inability to plan with a longer perspective (“a state

of slippery footing”).<sup>69</sup> The squats were rather short-lived indeed. Still, the “open squats” offered an alternative to the public spaces of socialist Leningrad; these were to a high degree controlled by state authorities and failed to develop a public character.<sup>70</sup> In this sense, some residential flats had much in common with artistic squats.

For an alternative art scene in Leningrad, getting access to legitimate galleries and concert venues was hard: “By the 1970s, a fully-fledged alternative art scene was starting to emerge. Scandalous successes were common, helped by intrusion of the police [...]. With the space in galleries and exhibition halls hard to get, one strategy was to hang pictures in a studio or private living space”.<sup>71</sup> Artists and musicians occupied what could be defined as “liminal spaces”, such as the clubs attached to palaces and houses of culture.<sup>72</sup> In this context, artistic squats provided individual artists with

places to work and to perform. On the collective level, the squats were well interconnected through personal links in Leningrad as well as between Leningrad and Moscow.<sup>73</sup>

As space resources, artistic squats were not committed to one form of cultural production: the desire to engage in creative work, in aesthetics different from Soviet academism, as well as the distance from official institutions, were common ground for the networks of “second culture” and their squats. “There were artistic and remarkable people”, who “suited each other because of the somewhat special inner sound”.<sup>74</sup> The combination of visual arts, music, literature, and performance was programmatic for the group centered around Timur Novikov, best known at the times as “Novye hudozhniki” [the “new artists”], which was connected to squats at Fontanka 145. In this context, the squats fostered new expressive practices and cultural communities. The most prominent case here is techno, whose introduction and development in Russia at the very beginning of the 1990s can be traced back to the parties in squats at Fontanka 145, Svechnoi Pereulok, and Obvodnyi Kanal.<sup>75</sup> The emergent character of squatted “free spaces” enabled the development of transformative spaces of electronic dance music.

**ANOTHER KIND** of liminal spaces appropriated and created by non-official publics can be described as “partly squatted”. Two cases are documented from the 1980s, where well-known artists and musicians got rooms in communal apartments in an official way, and then gradually started to use other, empty rooms. The apartments functioned as ateliers, galleries and meeting points, foci of communication for artists’ and musicians’ networks: the central figures were Boris Grebenshikov on Sofyi Perovskoi<sup>76</sup> and Timur Novikov on Voinova.<sup>77</sup> The continuity of legal and non-legal forms of appropriation of free spaces is obvious. Thus the central quality of these spaces was not their legality (or illegality), but their communicative function.

Artistic squats and some open residential squats were meeting points and offered an alternative to the coercive “public privacy” of communal living in a *kommunalka*.<sup>78</sup> They can be considered a form of a “private-public” sphere, an informal communication sphere guided by the norms of everyday interaction and different from the official public realm.<sup>79</sup>

## Soviet property relations and squatting

The way the squatters in Leningrad/St. Petersburg interacted with the built space by inhabiting it, returning it to sustainable conditions and re-creating it in accordance with their aesthetic choices, was not so different from the practices of squatters in other historic and national settings. What stands out is that their appropriation was at the same time not very different from the legitimate way of (symbolic) appropriation of state property by the Soviet people as described above. The squatters did not have institutionalized property rights – but the majority of Soviet citizens in urban areas did not have them either, and neither were they classic tenants.

How did this similarity influence the interactions and overall mobilization chances of the squatters? Judging by the interviews with squatters and publications in mass media, there was no negative or hostile perception of squatters on the part of non-official outsiders, i.e. neighbors or other inhabitants of St. Petersburg. The squatters were, in fact, not considered a problem. A survey of the perception of different forms of deviant behavior conducted in the mid-1990s in St. Petersburg suggests that 40% saw the seizing of empty buildings as “negative” or “very negative”.<sup>80</sup> This seemingly high level was, in comparison with drug consumption or prostitution, in fact one of the lowest, and comparable to attitudes towards freeriding on the public transportation system. One quarter of respondents could imagine seizing empty housing themselves.

**ON THE OTHER HAND**, the homeless people occupying the housing were considered a problem. As stated by Svetlana Stephenson, when homeless people (described pejoratively as *bomzhi*, derived from an official acronym) occupy empty housing, they find themselves quickly evicted. They are thought to turn the places into *bomzhatniki* (*bomzh*-nests).<sup>81</sup> Several squatters in my study reproduced this negative attitude. First, indirectly, in reference to tenants: other inhabitants of the building, they said, would prefer “more or less decent” squatters to homeless people otherwise living on the street. When asked about conflicts with the neighbors, interviewees 10 and 11 expressed this sentiment: “Quite the opposite, our neighbors were happy, that there were no *bomzhi* here”. Second, several interviewees described difficult relations with the homeless people occupying other parts of the building.<sup>82</sup> The homeless are perceived to cause trouble, by attracting the attention of the authorities, stealing, or breaking things and degrading

the places they occupy.<sup>83</sup> Therefore the squatters join in the mainstream tendency to disparage the street homeless because they do not want to be degraded by association.<sup>84</sup> It was not the occupation of the vacant flats in itself that became central to the self-identification of squatters and their perception in relation to other groups. What they were doing – their everyday practices in the occupied flats – was important. Did they inhabit or “disinhabit” the flat? Did they maintain it, make repairs, or reduce it to an uninhabitable condition? Did they live a quiet life and not disturb their neighbors?

To sum up, the gross of squatters in partially cleared houses of mixed habitation in Leningrad/St. Petersburg were able to merge quite well with their “civil” neighbors. This was possible due to the specific property relations in the housing sphere when the “appropriating by doing” was a dominating mode.

## Conclusion

What does it take in terms of social, political, and historical constellations for squatting to take place as it is typically defined – as living in or using a dwelling without the consent of the owner? “In a society, which is based on private property, this seemingly natural, simple form of appropriation, which does not care about property titles, is bound to be a rebellious form of resistance against these conditions.”<sup>85</sup> Even an “un-political” self-help occupation challenges the system of property ownership and needs to be legitimized to the public.<sup>86</sup>

The situation in the Soviet Union was different. The economic and legal systems were based not on private, but on state ownership of the means of production and the main communal social goods. The socialist principle “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs” was once propagated for the allocation of housing resources as well. However, the moral economy of Soviet housing was not based on detailed exchange with the state institutions. This fostered the moral legitimation of direct appropriation of state property.

Most squatters in houses of mixed habitation in Leningrad/St. Petersburg were able to merge quite well with their neighbors in spite of possible aesthetic differences because the appropriation of housing-by-doing was a dominant mode. The squatters did not need legitimation efforts, if the housing objects in question were not claimed by other private persons, i.e. belonged to “no one”. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, at the time of fundamental restructuring of property relations, squatting in Leningrad/St. Petersburg was a marginal practice. Still, several circumstances fostered squatting: partly emptied buildings in the historic center, cleared for renovation, but inhabitable; ambiguous and poorly legitimized property relations; political liberalization and the development of informal communicative milieus.

The political character of squatting was not based on the critique of the moral economy of private property and the commodification

**“THE SQUATTERS DID NOT HAVE INSTITUTIONALIZED PROPERTY RIGHTS — BUT THE GROSS OF SOVIET CITIZENS IN URBAN AREAS DID NOT HAVE THEM EITHER, NOT BEING CLASSIC TENANTS.”**

of housing. Instead, it challenged the Soviet allocation system, which was aimed at full state control of housing and human resources, in a way quite similar to “Schwarzwohnen” or unofficial occupancy in the GDR.<sup>87</sup> The silent squatting in Leningrad/St. Petersburg can be interpreted as Eigen-Sinn: it was a way of direct self-help beyond the state regulation of housing resources. The subversion was not completely private, even if self-help squats tended to reproduce the public-private structure of legal communal apartments. Some squatted apartments and houses (artistic squats or open residential squats) became meeting points and centers of informal public spheres of artistic and other informal milieus, fostering the development of free spaces. Being shaped decisively by the late Soviet situation, they constituted “private-public” spheres as an alternative to the official public realm. They were a form of practical Eigen-Sinn, which can be lived without being openly negotiated. ✖

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- 40 Interviews 8 and 14.
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- 43 Shomina, "Housing Movements", 149–50, Construction workers previously were prioritized in allocation of housing, if they had been working for a certain number of years.
- 44 Pushkinskaya 10 was, as the result of an exceptional struggle for the creation of an independent art center, legalized and is still in existence. The "Rechniki" group squatted several places. Their squat on Furmanova/Gagarinskaya Street existed until 2009.
- 45 According to an interview with one of the central actors of Pushkinskaya 10 (interview 8), the concept of "squat" was used by some in reference to a place of chaos and idleness, i.e. in perceived opposition to the art center the artists wished to create.
- 46 Interview 4.
- 47 Interview 15.
- 48 Pruijt, "Squatting in Europe", 17.
- 49 *Sistema* – an ironic self-description of communicative spheres of urban youth countercultures in late the Soviet Union, influenced by hippies, punks etc. See Tatiana Shchepanskaia, *Sistema: Teksty i traditsii subkultury* (Moscow: OGI, 2004).
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- 60 Utekhin, "Filling Dwelling Place with History", 90.
- 61 Kelly, *Shadows of the Past*, 68.
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- 64 "Later, it became really uncomfortable. Because when everyone has a room of his own, then if you are in a bad mood, you can always go to your room, and you have a circle of people who know you well and whom you understand. But when there were so many people, the atmosphere was tense. Because all people have ... their wishes and needs, – and when strangers start to dictate the rules, it gets annoying" (Interview 3).
- 65 Interview 3.
- 66 Shchepanskaia, *Sistema*; Alexander Zapesotsky and Alexander Fain, *Eta neponiatnaia molodezh* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1990).
- 67 Interview 3.
- 68 It was normal for students or working youth to live with their parents, at least until marriage if not longer.
- 69 Interview 8.
- 70 Gladarev, "Istoriko-kulturnoe nasledie".
- 71 Kelly, *Shadows of the Past*, 233; Iulia Valieva, ed., *Sumerki Saigona* (St. Petersburg: Zamizdat, 2009).
- 72 Kelly, *Shadows of the Past*; Valeriy Valran, *Leningradskii andegraund: Zhivopis, foto, rok-muzyka* (St. Petersburg: Novikova, 2003).
- 73 "Skvoty. Iz istorii skvotov i skvoterskogo dvizheniia", accessed June 25, 2015, www.kompost.ru/skvoty.
- 74 Interview 14.
- 75 Oleg Azelickii and Kirill Ivanov, *Ravoluciia: Kak eto bylo na samom dele* (St. Petersburg: Amfora, 2007).
- 76 Sergei Debizhev, "Format bytiia", in Valieva, *Sumerki Saigona*.
- 77 "Liudi i Skvoty. Pitserskie ugly", *Ptiuch* no. 11 (1996).
- 78 Gerasimova, "Public Spaces", 186.
- 79 Oswald and Voronkov, "The 'Public-Private' Sphere".
- 80 Viacheslav Afanasiev and Yakov Gilinskii, *Deviantnoe povedenie i socialnyi kontrol v usloviiah krizisa rossiiskogo obshchestva* (St. Petersburg: ISRAN, 1995), 94.
- 81 Svetlana Stephenson, *Crossing the Line: Vagrancy, Homelessness and Social Displacement in Russia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 150–151.
- 82 Interviews 7, 9, and 10/11.
- 83 Still, there are exceptions: "We tried to live in peace with them" (interview 4).
- 84 Stephenson, *Crossing the Line*, 151.
- 85 Roland Roth, "Leben scheuert am Beton: Streifzüge durch die Geschichte der Hausbesetzungen in der BRD", in *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer?* ed. Volkhard Brandes and Bernhard Schön (Bensheim: Päd.extra-Verlag, 1981), 37.
- 86 Roth, "Leben scheuert am Beton", 38.
- 87 Grashoff, *Schwarzwohnen*, 12–13.

# Post-Soviet Vilnius Giving meaning to abandoned buildings

by Jolanta Aidukaitė

**S**quatting, which is outlined as living in or using a house without the permission of the owner, is a unique form of protest that challenges private property – a core convention of capitalist society.<sup>1</sup> In Lithuanian society, squatting had a symbolic value in the sense that the transition from collectively owned property towards private property had started as early as 1990, when the first squatter settlements had begun to mushroom right in the heart of the Old Town of Vilnius. Squatting as a social phenomenon in Lithuania appeared as soon as the country's independence from the former Soviet Union was declared and the socialist planned economy was drastically replaced by a free market economy.

The chaos that followed – unclear rules and regulations for municipal property, frequent changes in legislation, financial mismanagement – also facilitated the emergence of squatting.

Squatting in the Central and East European (CEE) region has been little researched to date. It emerged in the mid-1990s as a response to abandoned and decaying vacant properties due to unclear ownership and an increasing need for housing or for space for countercultural activity.<sup>2</sup> Studies<sup>3</sup> show that the squatting movement has been a marginal phenomenon in many post-socialist countries, although surprisingly successful in Poland, where squatters have formed alliances with tenants' associations and become major players in the urban environment. In contrast, recent

literature on urban mobilizations in Lithuania provides evidence that squatting plays no role in that country's contemporary urban protests and mobilizations.<sup>4</sup>

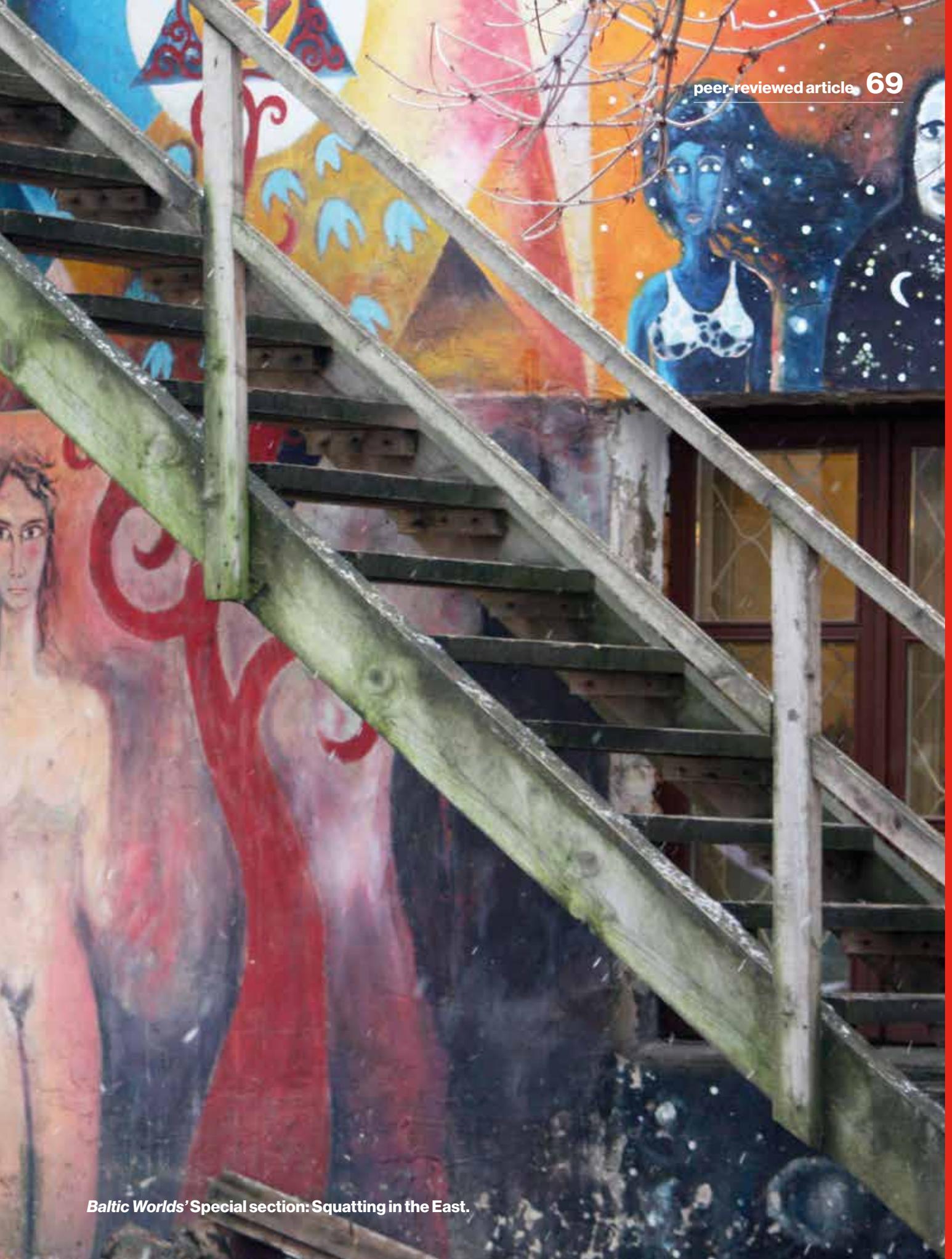
**SQUATTING HAS RECEIVED** surprisingly little or no attention in academic literature in Lithuania, despite the fact that there were squatters' settlements in various Lithuanian cities during the period 1990–2002. This may be explained by several factors. One of them is the invisibility of squatters in the public sphere: there were no massive protests organized by them, nor sufficient media coverage of their life and activities. Squatters promoted

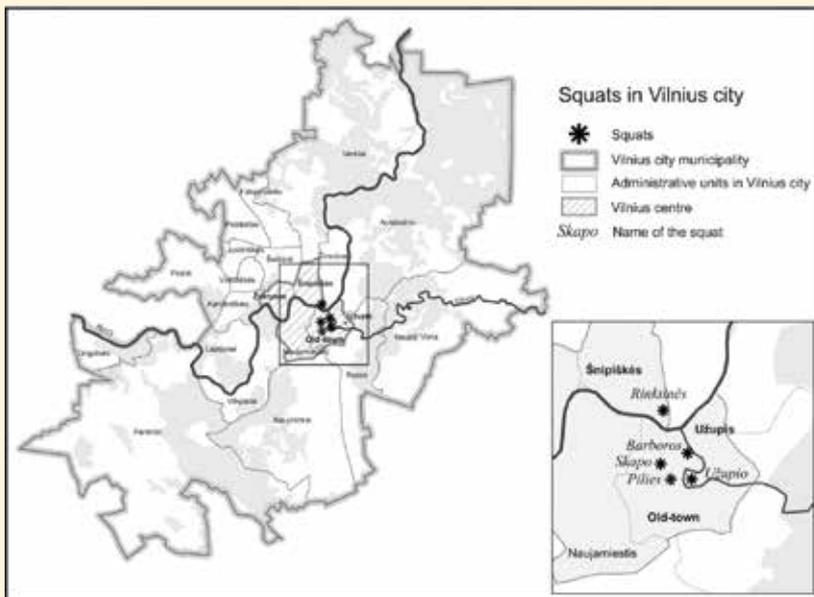
an alternative way of life, contributed to the preservation of the city, and fostered countercultural activities (performances, concerts, exhibits). Although the occupancy of empty buildings is characterized by some authors<sup>5</sup> as a political act in itself (since it involves civil and social disobedience), squatters in Vilnius never claimed the right to the city's space in such a way as to openly and deliberately challenge capitalist inequalities resulting from the unequal distribution of property and power; nor sought to dispute private property. Instead, they presented themselves as “good people” who were merely using the abandoned, decaying buildings for “good purposes”. This is not surprising, given the political and societal conditions in Lithuania during the first ten years of independence. Private prop-

## abstract

This paper explores the scope, causes, flourishing, and decline of squatting in Lithuanian society during the period of 1990–2002. Drawing on 16 in-depth interviews conducted with squatters in Vilnius, newspaper articles and legal documents, this paper shows that squatters made contributions to the city with their cultural capital, creating local subcultures and making the urban space more attractive. Squatters promoted an alternative way of life, contributed to the preservation of the city and fostered counter-cultural activities. They offered spaces for performances, exhibits, and concerts. These activities are still present up to this day in the Užupis neighborhood that hosted the most long-lived squat, which in turn was transformed into Art Incubator.

**KEY WORDS:** urban squatting, squatter settlements, Vilnius, housing policy, post-socialist, privatization, urban regime.





Location of the squatter settlements in Vilnius, 1990–2002.

erty and the market economy were praised as the only possible way to organize society, and everything that was associated with the socialist past was rejected and labelled as “inferior”. Studies<sup>6</sup> show that even today, the dominant discourse in Lithuania is neoliberal and is deeply rooted among the Lithuanian political and economic elite. The neoliberal discourse has been especially strong in housing and urban policy, resulting in massive housing privatization and state withdrawal from urban policy, leaving the main responsibility to private investors.

**THUS A SQUATTING** movement, in the sense of strong opposition to neoliberal policies and capitalist inequalities, as it is commonly configured in the West, has never been formed in Lithuania. As Pruijt states,<sup>7</sup> the appearance of squatting does not necessary mean that there is a squatters’ movement. There can be squatters’ settlements created for isolated self-help purposes or for the purpose of obtaining space for cultural activities. Nevertheless, the legacy of the squatters in Vilnius is a unique phenomenon which has been undeservingly neglected by social scientists. The Lithuanian situation was unique in the following ways:

- Squats lasted for a relatively long time, about ten to twelve years (1990–2002).
- Squats occurred during a dramatic socioeconomic and political transition in Lithuania: the reestablishment of the country’s independence from the Soviet Union, the implementation of market economy and democracy, a wide opening to the influence of globalization, and the Europeanization of Lithuanian society. The transformation that followed was accompanied by many problems, including a lack of transparency in privatization, unstable institutions, and a drop in the standard of living of large parts of the population.

- Squats suddenly became “extinct”. That is, existing squats were shut down before 2002 and never reopened again on a large scale in any way comparable to previous examples.

**THIS PAPER IS** a first attempt to uncover the dynamics (the extent, causes, flourishing, and decline) of squatting in Lithuanian society, focusing on the case of Vilnius. The capital of Lithuania, with a population of half a million, is not a haphazard choice: Vilnius hosted the largest and the most known squats in Lithuania.

The paper seeks answers to several questions: why is it that such a decommodified space as squatter settlements has existed in the city of Vilnius for a relatively long period? What was the social profile of squatters, and what was the reaction of the state? Which factors contributed to the “extinction” of squatters?

The paper employs a qualitative approach to study squatter settlements in Vilnius. It relies on 16 in-depth interviews conducted with the

squatters. The interviews were carried out in 2014; they provide rich material for understanding the conditions, the extent, and the causes of squatting. The thematic questions of the interviews were designed to elicit the reasons for squatting, experiences of living and living conditions in a squat, squatting activities; communication with the neighbors and the local authorities, internal rules of the squat, and the squatters’ communication with each other. The informants were recruited using a snowball or chain referral sampling, which is a method that has been widely used in qualitative sociological research. In this method, a researcher generates a study sample by relying on recommendations made by people who share or know of others who have characteristics that are of research concern. The method, as described by Bieracki and Waldorf,<sup>8</sup> is particularly applicable when the focus is on a group which has low social visibility. It is, for instance, easy to find nurses as a sample group, but to locate and contact ex-drug addicts would be difficult without insider knowledge. “The researcher, however, must actively and deliberately develop and control the sample’s initiation, progress, and termination”.<sup>9</sup> The snowball technique was especially rewarding as the majority of the squatters had or have poor social visibility as a target group in Vilnius. For the purpose of this study, the most active and/or long-term members of the squatters’ community in Vilnius were identified and interviewed. The paper also draws on newspaper articles and other available online sources, including conferences on squatters in Vilnius conducted by the Lithuanian Free University (LUNI), an online Facebook group page which connects former squatters, and a movie produced by Deivis Nutautas about squatters in Užupis.

In the introduction, I will offer some theoretical background on squatting. This will be followed by a short review of the housing and urban regime in Lithuania and Vilnius. Next, I will pres-

ent and analyze the four major squats of Vilnius, which were active during the period of 1990–2002. Finally, I will provide some discussion and concluding remarks. The major argument is that squatting in Vilnius was a unique phenomenon that was triggered by the dramatic changes in the political, economic, and societal settings of Lithuanian society. These changes were especially pronounced in the cities, resulting in an unregulated, transitional urban regime, which was favorable to squatting. A unique aspect of squatting in Lithuania involves squatters distancing themselves from political participation and presenting themselves as “apolitical people”, not interested in any political activity. The squatters’ movement in Vilnius, although “apolitical” in the sense that it never played an influential role in urban protests nor actively defended rights to vacant buildings, has made a significant contribution through its countercultural activities towards the revitalization, improvement, and “cautious” gentrification of the Užupis neighbourhood of Vilnius.

## Theoretical background

Urban social movements cannot be understood in isolation. Their characteristics and dynamics must be viewed against a broader background of social change in which they operate.<sup>10</sup> According to Martinez,<sup>11</sup> squatting has developed in Europe as an autonomous urban movement. However, some important sociospatial conditions need to be present for squatting to occur and develop. These conditions include: sufficient vacant and abandoned properties; a slow pace of urban restructuring and renewal; legislation creating “windows” for squatting to emerge; connections with other social movements; and mass media coverage that is not too critical.

**THUS, FOR SQUATTING** to emerge and develop in a city, a package of favorable conditions should be in place. If many of these conditions are encouraging, then a strong squatters’ movement can emerge. If we briefly look at the example of *Christiania* in Denmark, or the Dutch case of Amsterdam, we see in both cases that the positive political conditions (social-democratic government), emphasis on welfare rights (including housing) and redistribution, and positive media coverage made a flexible institutionalization of squatting possible.<sup>12</sup> Flexible institutionalization, according to Pruijt,<sup>13</sup> entails legalization in which squatters nonetheless maintain their identity and continue to defend buildings and to play a major role in urban protests. Conversely, a strong legal protection of private property and negative media coverage have led to the criminalization of squatting in England,<sup>14</sup> and its disappearance and cooptation (transformation into service providers) by local authorities in New York.<sup>15</sup>

Broader political and legal conditions are key matters in eliciting the emergence of urban movements. Nevertheless, in regard to the squatters’ movement, Holm and Kuhn<sup>16</sup> have observed that “first and foremost the broader urban political context [...] determined if and how squatter move-

ments arose.” Indeed, Holm and Kuhn have provided evidence that the squatters’ movement dynamics in Berlin were closely associated with the changing strategies of urban renewal policies. The squatters in West Berlin at the beginning of the 1980s contributed decisively to the implementation of a policy called “cautious urban renewal”, which rested on public transfers. It meant a slower pace for the “areal redevelopment” policy, which focused on the widespread demolition of housing stock in need of renewal and on new, modern housing developments. The “areal redevelopment” policy was criticized and opposed by local residents who were frightened by redevelopment. The government therefore took a more cautious approach towards redevelopment planning policy in “cautious urban renewal”, comprising the widespread involvement and participation of residents in renewal activities. Squats became objects and partners in the new “cautious” model of urban renewal. The large-scale squatting of the 1990s, however, constituted an alien element to neoliberal redevelopment policy in East Berlin, which rested on privatization, restitution, and private investments by property developers.<sup>17</sup>

**THE CASE STUDY** of Berlin by Holm and Kuhn thus provides evidence on how changes in the urban regime within one country over time result in different opportunities for squatting. Comparative studies, meanwhile, demonstrate how variance in urban regimes affects squatting opportunities in different countries. For instance, a careful comparison of the opportunities for squatting in Amsterdam and New York, conducted by Pruijt,<sup>18</sup> shows that a market-oriented regime with an emphasis on regulative commitment to low-income housing offers much fewer opportunities for squatting than a regime that is based on redistribution and planning. Amsterdam and New York represent different types of urban regimes, which are embedded into different types of welfare state regimes delineated by Esping-Andersen.<sup>19</sup> The Dutch welfare state regime, which is close to the ideal type of the social democratic welfare state, promotes equal access to high standards through redistribution. In Amsterdam, the state continues to use physical planning and social welfare expenditures to maintain equality, while in New York, the state has virtually abandoned physical planning and cut welfare expenditure.<sup>20</sup> New York is entrenched in the liberal welfare state regime of the US, which is characterized by the dominant position of the market and low decommodification. These conditions have created different opportunities for squatting. In Amsterdam, squatting has been thriving as a means and an end, while in New York it has been abandoned.<sup>21</sup>

To sum up, the theoretical discussion points to several explanations that may be useful in studying squatting settlements in Vilnius. Urban squatting does not exist in a vacuum; it is shaped by a variety of forces. Squatting should be studied as if embedded in the wider historical, political and social conditions of a given society. Media coverage can reinforce the movement’s

**“SQUATTING SHOULD BE STUDIED AS IF EMBEDDED INTO WIDER HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF A GIVEN SOCIETY.”**

success or contribute to its decline. Nevertheless, the urban regime or urban politics offer the most fruitful explanation to understand the rise and fall of squatting in European cities.

## The housing and urban regime in Lithuania and Vilnius

After the Second World War, Lithuania was incorporated into the Soviet Union and was subject to the same socialist housing and urban planning regulations as the rest of the USSR. The socialist housing system was characterized by large-scale construction implemented by the state and state-sponsored housing in high-rise buildings at low cost, heavily state-subsidized and uniform prices of dwellings, and a chronic housing shortage resulting in long waiting lists.<sup>22</sup> In Lithuania, housing shortage was a common feature and resulted in fast but poor quality housing construction in an effort to meet increasing housing demand.<sup>23</sup> One of the most important features of socialist housing and urban policies was rapid urbanization, which was accompanied by rapid industrialization and the transfer of labor force from rural to urban areas.<sup>24</sup> The intensity of Soviet urbanization is illustrated by the fact that, even today, more than two-thirds of all housing (71.5%) in Lithuania was built from 1946 to 1990, while only 13.4% of homes were built before 1945. From 1991 to 2000, 7% of the current housing stock was built. Dwellings built from 2001 to 2011 make up 6.2% of present-day housing.<sup>25</sup> Thus, even today, the construction of new housing estates lags behind the large-scale constructions of the Soviet era. The housing shortage, especially the shortage of affordable public housing, is still pronounced in Vilnius.<sup>26</sup>

In the socialist city model, the influence of market forces on urban development and housing was formally abolished. The land and property markets were nationalized. The central urban planning, based on the communist ideology which sought to equalize the differences between territorial units and classes, and which was followed by rapid industrialization, has left its mark on the urban structure of the postsocialist cities, most visibly in a neglected historic district and the formation of suburban zones with low-quality block housing, which never underwent any major rehabilitation. Vilnius had and still has to deal with all the problems of a postsocialist city. The negative features were particularly visible in the central part of the historic district, since many buildings were left to decay. The historic part of the city has been gradually rebuilt and revitalized since the 1990s. In the late 1990s, some parts of the Old Town of Vilnius have started to experience gentrification.<sup>27</sup>

**IN LITHUANIA**, urban squatting experienced its “golden age” from 1990 to 2002. This period was marked by significant changes in housing and urban policy. It was the Soviet state’s policy to resettle people living in old houses built in 1940 or earlier. The old and decaying buildings (built before 1945) were concentrated in the city center (the Old Town) of Vilnius; many of them had no bathrooms and toilets inside the dwellings; some had no running water. Before 1989, many of the inhabitants of these old houses were resettled; they were



Pilies Street 26, currently the House of Signatories.

PHOTO: CHARLIE/FUCKR

moved to newly built apartment blocks in the suburban zones of Vilnius. The state expected to reconstruct the old houses. However, the collapse of the Soviet regime had disrupted the plans. Yet the return to the market economy brought with it the implementation of large-scale housing privatization. In Lithuania, and more specifically in Vilnius, the mass privatization of housing was launched in 1991. Consequently, the proportion of publicly-owned dwellings on the housing market dropped from 82% to 1.4% between 1991 and 2001.<sup>28</sup> At present, 97.2% of dwellings in Lithuania are occupied by their owners, while only 2.8% are public or municipal property.<sup>29</sup> The proportion of owner-occupied dwellings in Lithuania is among the highest in the EU, alongside Romania and Hungary.<sup>30</sup>

Overall, the housing and urban regime in Lithuania and Vilnius since 1990 has undergone a dramatic transition. It moved away from the socialist model based on state control and long-term planning towards the market model based on private ownership and limited state control over the land, property, and housing markets.<sup>31</sup> At present, it incorporates many features of the liberal regime, which marginalizes social housing and allows market forces to dominate housing production, allocation, and price determination.<sup>32</sup> These conditions, according to Pruijt,<sup>33</sup> do not facilitate the emergence of organized squatting and offer the most powerful explanation as to why urban squatting has become “weak”, prone to cooptation and organizational difficulties.

Nevertheless, the period from 1990 to 2002 can be called transitional for the housing and urban regime in Lithuania. It was a period of massive privatization and severe housing shortage. But at the same time, due to financial constraints and unclear rules regarding municipal property; many buildings were left vacant, waiting for their former owners or the municipality to take responsibility for them. Thus it was a perfect time for squatters’ settlements to emerge.



Skapas Street 1.



Interior from the Skapainės squat.

## Urban squatting in Vilnius

There were four major squats in Vilnius, which deserve special attention. All of them started during the same period (around 1990–1992) and were located in the city's Old Town (see map on page 70).

One of them was located in Pilies Str. 26, where the House of Signatories currently stands. This is a historic building where the Act of Independence of the state of Lithuania was signed on February 16, 1918. At present it is a museum.<sup>34</sup> In 1991, half of the apartments in the historic building stood vacant and decaying; the other half were occupied by the sitting tenants. The City Council of Vilnius adopted a resolution in 1992 to establish the House of Signatories of Lithuanian Independence in this building. However, due to a lack of funding, the rebuilding started only in 1997.<sup>35</sup> The reconstruction has been funded from three sources: municipal and national funds and donations.<sup>36</sup> In 1998, the building was assigned to the Ministry of Culture, and in 2003 it became a branch of the National Museum of Lithuania.<sup>37</sup> The squatters, who were mainly young people with artistic backgrounds and other students (historians, philologists, philosophers) of Vilnius University, occupied the empty flats, cleaned them, and repaired broken doors and windows. The quote below provides a typical story of the young person squatting a house:

My first squat was “Pilies”, it was a historic building, currently it is the House of Signatories, but stood deserted and empty ... of course, there were a few people still living there ... so it was semi-abandoned ... interesting that one staircase of the building was populated, but the other one, with the entrance through the courtyard, was empty.... I had just finished secondary school and was looking for a job. I lived 15 kilometers

away from Vilnius, all my activities were in Vilnius: studies, courses ... My aim was to enter the Academy of Arts, so I was preparing myself for entrance to the Academy. I needed a space for a workshop, where I could paint... I found like-minded people who were already living in a squat, that is, one of my girlfriends invited me to live so that together it would be more fun and not so scary... It was a perfect place, Pilies Street, the heart of Vilnius, you know ... We came, we found an empty space, it was full of garbage and broken bottles, but no owners. So what we have done, we cleaned up the place and installed our own lock.... *Squatter of Pilies*

The squat was called “Pilies” and lasted from 1991 until 1997. Then the city received funding to renovate the building and to establish the museum there. Upon the request of the municipality to leave the building, the squatters abandoned it peacefully, some of them moving to other squats. There were about ten people squatting the building. This squat was “silent” in a way, as it did not host exhibitions, concerts or other cultural events, and was used mainly for housing purposes.

**THE OTHER SQUAT** was located in No. 1 Skapas Street. This squat was larger and lasted longer than Pilies. During Soviet times, the building had belonged to the city. From 1991 on, the house was transferred to the Vilnius Archbishops' Curia, as it had been the property of the Curia before the Second World War. Currently the building is owned by Vilnius University, and the Faculty of Philosophy is located there. Living conditions, i.e. the quality of the dwellings, were worse than in the other major squats. The building was much neglected, with broken windows; some flats were full of garbage. The first settlers therefore had to bear the respon-

**“WE CAME, WE FOUND AN EMPTY SPACE, IT WAS FULL OF GARBAGE AND BROKEN BOTTLES, BUT NO OWNERS.”**



Barboros Radvilaitės street 6.

sibility for a lot of cleaning and repair. The former squatters are proud of what they have done to preserve the house:

**The house was severely neglected; one staircase in the house had almost been made into a dump; there was so much garbage that it was impossible to open the door. Can you imagine how hard people had to work to clean up everything? They worked hard to remove the rubbish, transport it to another place ... Squatters' culture, traditions, have done a lot of good ... Can you imagine if it had caught fire? Fires were common in such abandoned and garbage-filled houses. But young people came, cleaned up the house, settled in it and preserved it ...**

*Squatter of Skapas*

Electricity and cold water were accessible, and that made the building habitable. The squat was called *Skapas* or *Skapainės*; it started in 1992 and ended in 2001. In that time, with rotation, it was occupied by about 30 people in all. The Curia knew about the occupiers and sometimes came to check up on them. There were also suggestions from the Curia to resettle the squatters to remote suburban areas of Vilnius. However, no one agreed to go. Electricity bills were sent to the squat, but no one reacted. The squat was much “louder” than the *Pilies* squat, and appeared on television once. The popular program *My Style* had filmed the squatters' flats and presented them in such a way as to show how nicely the young people had furnished their homes without much money or investment. The squat had its own flag, and

promoted a communal style of life in which everyone respected each other's privacy, but at the same time held everything in common. The squatters who occupied the building knew each other well; they were either students at the Academy of Arts or young people of other backgrounds, but with similar interests in arts, history, conservation, and music. It is the only former squat that shows pictures from past events on its Facebook page. Squatters organized parties and music evenings. One party with fireworks ended with squatters being escorted to the police station. However, they were soon released. That event also garnered short-lived media attention. Note that the media did not present them as squatters, but simply as young people who got in trouble. The squat was evicted by the city, and the entrance to the staircase where the squat was located was bricked up. The squatters who did not manage to remove their effects from the squat in time simply found them outside the building. The eviction was peaceful; no one protested.

**THE THIRD SQUAT** was located in No. 6 Barboros Radvilaitės Street and was called *Barboros*. The old building belonged to the city of Vilnius, but stood empty and neglected. Signs of vandalism were also visible. Someone had stolen a parquet floor, windows, and closets. A young student of the Academy of Arts who was looking for a suitable place for a studio spotted the vacant house and moved in in 1990; soon it was filled with other students – friends of friends – looking for housing and/or studio space. In this case, the squat did not start without the city's permission. The two pioneers went to the municipality and asked for permission to move in, arguing that the building had been vandalized and needed occupants to be preserved and protected. The municipality gave their informal permission. Unlike the other squats, this one hosted only students of the Academy of Arts. It was almost an unofficial dormitory of the Academy.

**The Barboros squat was inhabited only by students of the Academy of Arts. Painters, potters, and architects lived there. I myself lived there for seven years, five years during my studies and two years after graduation from the Academy. We had to quarrel with the city from time to time because there was a private investor who wanted to occupy the second floor of the house on which we were located ... he wanted to throw us out and do it legally ... it's funny.... But the Rector of the Academy at that time was my teacher, a professor, so I asked him for help ... it's funny, but we managed to get a fictitious letter from the Rector that confirmed that the house was a dorm branch of the Academy – to help us to defend ourselves from unwanted intruders or in case the police or the municipal officials came.**

*Squatter of Barboros*

The quotation shows that squatters were informally supported by individuals in public institutions, either in the municipality or in the Academy of Arts. That is why the squat lasted for almost ten years, until 2001, and housed at least 30 people, with rota-

tion. Conditions in *Barbora* were luxurious compared to other squats. Electricity, cold and hot water in toilets and bathrooms, and central heating were in place. The most interesting aspect was that the squatters were willing to pay for the communal facilities. The city, however, refused to receive payments. If the squatters had paid, then their status would have changed from squatters to tenants and eviction would have been legally impossible. The squat was evicted on short notice on order of the municipality. As in the case of the *Skapas* and *Pilies* squats, no one protested; the residents vacated peacefully. The city sold the building to a private investor. However, it was never repaired, and has deteriorated dramatically since the squatters were forced to leave it. At present, it stands as a haunted house with broken windows and shabby walls.

**THE FOURTH** and best-known squat was located in the old part of the city called Užupis, currently the “Republic of Užupis”. During Soviet times, the neighborhood was one of the most deprived places in Vilnius, although located right in the center. It is separated from the rest of the Old Town by the river Vilnia, which gives the place a special charm. The squat hosted offenders and other social outcasts. But a few artists, musicians, film directors, sculptors, painters – people who preferred a bohemian lifestyle and freedom – had already lived there before squatters moved into the neighborhood. The neighborhood’s bad reputation from Soviet times persisted during the first years of Lithuanian independence. It was not included with the rest of the Old Town in the UNESCO World Heritage program; the city did not allocate any funding for renovation or revitalization of the neighborhood. It stood alone with its problems and was left to decay. As soon as squatters moved into the neighbourhood, it began to experience a rebirth and revitalization. In 1993, a young musician and his friend (who had squatted in Barboros Street) went looking for a studio, spotted an empty house at No. 2 Užupis Street, and moved in. They cleaned and fixed the abandoned house.

We were looking for a studio in which to play with a friend, he played bass, I played the guitar. We wanted to find a place where you could play jazz. I had already lived in the Barboros squat, but I wanted a place where I could be more alone. We just walked around the old town and randomly got into this yard ... there was a woman, an old woman doing laundry, she was the only neighbor who lived in the abandoned house as she had refused to be resettled by the Soviet authorities. We told her honestly what we were looking for. She pointed towards the windows of the house in which I would be living for 16 years: “No one lives here, open the boarded up windows, put in new locks and live here ... all sorts of alcoholics are coming here, you look like nice men.” The same day we opened the boarded up windows and set-

tled in, inside there was a terrible mess, bottle shards were everywhere ... We cleaned up everything, put in new locks, brought some furniture, utensils, and began to live....  
*Squatter of Užupis*

Since then, life in *Užupis* has never been the same. Students of the Academy of Arts, the Musical Academy and the University of Vilnius who lived there have turned the neighborhood into a live art performance center. Various artistic performances took place spontaneously, using unconventional places. For instance, just on the way to a local supermarket the squatters might play a guitar and sing and engage the surrounding neighbors. Squatters hosted free concerts, assemblages, and art exhibitions; they built sculptures outside the squat; they organized fashion shows; they also organized festivals and celebrations to commemorate the major events of one year in the neighborhood.

Soon these events, especially the fashion shows that were organized among the ruins, attracted the attention of the media. Journalists covered some events and happenings in *Užupis*, but squatting as a phenomenon and the *Užupis* squat received no attention. This fact may be partly explained by the attitudes of the squatters, who did not want publicity:

Well, it was clear that the quieter we could be, the longer we could keep the squat.  
*Squatter of Užupis*

The squatters shaped their identity around being “apolitical”, not interested in any politics. On the one hand, they did not question or dispute private property, and viewed their act of squatting as a temporary and illegitimate act. On the other hand, they saw the abandoned and neglected property as an immoral and irresponsible act on part of the owner – in this case the city – and believed that, by taking abandoned buildings and preserving them, they served a “common good” of society. The squatters called themselves “birds”:

We lived in the squatted buildings like birds, having a bird’s rights. If the owner had come and told us fly away, we would have flown away.  
*Squatter of Užupis*

Since the squatters kept a low profile, attention was directed towards happenings in the neighborhood, and the activists used this opportunity to advertise the neighborhood and make it known for its artistic spirit. The movement “Republic of Užupis” (*Užupio Respublika*) started with the bohemian idea of creating an identity, a sense of community belonging, and in this

way improving the neighborhood’s well-being. The aim was also to stop gentrification and to preserve the bohemian charm of *Užupis*. Even if it was a decaying neighborhood, its location attracted investors. The neighborhood was in danger of losing its bohemian charm and changing forever.<sup>38</sup> On April 1, 1998, a group of artists proclaimed

**“WE LIVED IN THE SQUATTED BUILDINGS LIKE BIRDS, HAVING A BIRD’S RIGHTS. IF THE OWNER WOULD HAVE COME AND TOLD US FLY AWAY, WE WOULD HAVE FLOWN AWAY.”**

Užupis a separate republic with its own anthem, constitution, map, and flag. Even symbolic passports were issued.<sup>39</sup> Since then, each year on April 1, the Republic of Užupis celebrates its independence day. The celebrations are usually accompanied by extraordinary artistic performances (such as acrobatic performances on a tightrope stretched across the river) which last the whole night. The neighborhood's sense of belonging and identity was centered on the construction of the sculpture of an Angel, which was placed in the most visible part of the neighborhood. Today, Užupis is a unique place and a tourist attraction, often compared to Christiania in Copenhagen.

The identity of the Užupis Republic was built around artistic events happening in the neighborhood, and the center of it was the creative activities of the squatters. Local politicians have also used the opportunity to promote themselves, asking to give public speeches during the events. Thus the Mayor of Vilnius as well as some other politicians began appearing during the fashion shows and other events organized in the Užupis neighborhood. It was clear that the local authorities and politicians understood the benefit of the cultural capital that creative squatters' activities produced. At the same time, prices for real estate in Lithuania started to rise and gentrification of the neighborhood began. New people started to move in; old residents were no longer able to afford to live there and had to move out.

Thus squatters drew gentrification to the neighbourhood, while at the same time they contributed to the identity formation of Užupis. As one of the squatters stated:

**Our major achievement is not only the events which we organized, but we created the spirit from which the Republic of Užupis was born, the way she is today.**

*Squatter of Užupis*

Squatters' activities have made Užupis known for artistic performances and an alternative way of living. It must be noted that the events and celebrations in Užupis were organized by the united efforts of all squats, that is, squatters from *Barbora* and *Skapas* contributed to the happenings and events.

Unlike the other squats, the *Užupis* squat did not "die", but was institutionalized in the form of art gallery. In 1996, the squatters established an organization called "Alternative Art Center" and started negotiations with the city for its legalization. The process of negotiation lasted about five years. It coincided with the establishment of the Republic of Užupis, the revitalization and identity formation of the neighborhood, and the beginning of its gentrification process. Squatters used various tactics: they collected signatures, negotiated with the municipality, and appealed to the Mayor of Vilnius. In 2002, the squat was transformed into the *Alternative Art Center*, which provides a space for artist residencies, arts projects and exhibitions. The building still belongs to the city, but since 2002 the organization

**"OUR MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT IS NOT ONLY THE EVENTS WHICH WE ORGANIZED, BUT WE CREATED THE SPIRIT FROM WHICH THE REPUBLIC OF UŽUPIS WAS BORN."**

Alternative Art Centre has rented it from the municipality (under a signed operation agreement) and can use the building for its purposes, namely, performances, happenings, and exhibitions. Young and older artists can live in the building for a symbolic rent and use the space for art studios.

## Social background of squatters

Young people, mainly students of the Academy of Arts aged 18 to 22, squatted the empty, decaying houses. Among them were artists, musicians, philologists, philosophers, photographers, and architects, as well as some construction workers, electricians, and hairdressers. Many of them are currently successful and even renowned artists. Their individual squatting history ranged from three to as much as sixteen years. Some of them started families in the squats and even raised their children there. The majority of these young people wanted to find a place to escape their parents and find housing of their own, or to find a place for a studio and to live close to the city center. The typical story is presented below:

**"I have always dreamed of living in an old-town. I really love the old-town and I still live in an old-town. I lived with my parents in Soviet style built apartment block in a neighbourhood called Lazdynai. Every day I was travelling to the old-town where the Academy of Arts is located, every day I passed by a house, which was vandalized, it was tearing my heart apart ... So, it was the very beginning of the 1990s, I was a student, there was a great desire to leave my parents' house, the desire for freedom...."**

*Squatter of Barboros*

Squatting during the period of 1990–2002 cannot be classed as "deprivation-based squatting".<sup>40</sup> Many of the squatters were from middle-class families, none of them were homeless; all of them had other options for housing. Before moving to a squat, some of them rented a room or lived in a dormitory, but the majority lived in their parents' homes. Squatting in Vilnius during the period 1990–2002 can be classified, according to Pruijt's<sup>41</sup> typology, under "squatting as an alternative housing strategy". Squatting as an alternative housing strategy is attractive to middle-class people such as "students or downwardly mobile individuals who have chosen to dedicate themselves to activities that bring few financial rewards, e.g. visual artists and musicians".<sup>42</sup> In Vilnius during the period from 1990 until 2002, more than

100 people squatted. Their motives for squatting could be summarized as follows:

- The need to leave their parents' house;
- The attractive location of squatting – the Vilnius city centre (the squats are close to Vilnius University, Vilnius Academy of the Arts, the conservatory, cafés, parks, clubs, pubs, etc.);

- The need to find a workshop or studio;
- The eagerness to find like-minded, creative, freedom loving people;
- The need for countercultural expression.

FOR SOME, squatting was an individual housing solution, but for many, especially those who lived in squats for a long time (5 to 10 years or more), squatting became a collective project and an exciting life event. It was a way to trade uncomfortable living conditions for economic autonomy and a space for free countercultural expression.

## The reaction of the state

Those who started squatting in Vilnius had their roots in the youth movement called “Gediminaičiai”, which was founded by Stasys Urniežius, a controversial figure, a former member of the Vilnius city council, and the former head of the House of Signatories.<sup>43</sup> The name of the movement refers to the dynasty of grand dukes of Lithuania which ruled from the thirteenth century to the end of 1572. The movement or organization cherished Lithuanian folklore, traditions, and history. Nevertheless, one of the aims of the movement was also the preservation of the city of Vilnius. Young people carried out cleaning campaigns in the Old Town, and in this way, they explored the city and got to know which buildings stood vacant. The first pioneers who moved into the *Pilies*, *Skapas*, *Barboros*, and *Užupis* squats were members of the *Gediminaičiai* movement.

As Martinez states,<sup>44</sup> many squatters are helped by political activists and make use of informal ties that allow them to enter, stay, and oppose threats of eviction. In the case of Vilnius, the squatters had a backup. According to the interviewees, the founder of the organization *Gediminaičiai* has acted as an unofficial patron to the squatters, informing them about empty municipal buildings which were safe to squat, and encouraging squatters to occupy them. He also helped squatters to negotiate with the city and postpone evictions. This was possible since Urniežius sat on the Vilnius city council from 1991 to 1995.

NEVERTHELESS, SQUATTERS were and are quite vulnerable because of the strong protection of private property. Article 23 of the Lithuanian Constitution,<sup>45</sup> adopted in 1992, states that “property is inviolable, property rights are protected by law, and property may be taken only in accordance with the law for public needs and fairly compensated”. This means that juridical institutions cannot tolerate an illegal occupation, whether on private property or municipal property, if an owner complains. At the same time, housing is not listed as a social right alongside rights to medical care, social security, education, fair pay for work, and safe and healthy working conditions. Thus squatting can be viewed as unsanctioned activity, and legal norms facilitate its criminalization. However, legality is not the sole issue in regard to squatting: public values and morality are also involved.<sup>46</sup> Leaving buildings vacant while a severe shortage of housing persists can be viewed as an immoral and inexcusable act. This attitude might also explain why squatting was tolerated



The Užupis Republic.

by the local authorities of Vilnius and attracted the sympathy of neighbors and public figures.

The local authorities in Vilnius soon understood the benefits of squatting for abandoned municipal property. The buildings were preserved and protected from decay and vandalism. The squatters collaborated with the municipality; some of them even signed letters stating that they would move as soon as the municipality so desired, as was clearly the case with *Barboros* and *Skapas*. The communication between squatters and local authorities could be defined as an “informal institutionalization” until further notice. According to Pruijt,<sup>47</sup> “institutionalization means that a movement is channeled into a stable pattern based on formalized rules and laws. Expected behavior becomes clearly defined; sanctions are in place”. The most distinct form of institutionalization is legalization. Squats in Vilnius, however, were not legalized in any way, but tolerated. The rules were very clear: squatters would move out of the dwellings as soon as the city gave them notice. In 2001, a resolution on the rules for the management of municipal property was issued.<sup>48</sup> The resolution stated clear rules on the accounting and use of funds received from the sale of city property. As a result, from 2001 on, the municipality was finally able to sell its property. Before, even if the city did not have funds for the renovation of its dwellings, it was unable to sell its property due to unclear rules and regulations. Thus it comes as no surprise that squats were closed around 2001. The heating suppliers and the electrical utilities were also privatized around 2000, making it very difficult, almost impossible, to use their facilities free of charge.

The *Užupis* squat, however, was transformed into the Art Incubator. In this case, the local authorities presented themselves as receptive problem solvers and cooperation between squatters and the municipality took the form of cooptation, in which the coopting organization welcomes certain ideas from the movement while framing problems in such a way that resolving them does not compromise its own stability.<sup>49</sup> The city agreed to rent the building to squatters under certain rules. The special status

of the Užupis neighborhood and its favorable location facilitated its cooptation. The Art Incubator and the Galera, run by squatters, contribute to the “cool city” image, which draws investors and tourists.

## Discussion and conclusions

This paper has provided a first examination of squatters’ activities in Vilnius during the period of 1990–2002. Squatting in Vilnius was a unique phenomenon that was triggered by the dramatic changes in the political, economic and societal settings of Lithuanian society. The collapse of the Soviet regime in 1990 brought with it significant political changes, namely a return to a democratic, multiparty system and pluralism. The planned economy based on collective property was transformed into a market economy based on private property. Socialist values with an emphasis on collectivism and the common good were exchanged for individualist values based on self-reliance and self-sufficiency. However, all of these transformations did not happen overnight. The period of 1990–2002 marks the major turning point in a remarkable economic, political, and societal transition. These changes were especially pronounced in the cities, resulting in unregulated, transitional urban regime which was favorable to squatting. Four major factors made squatting possible during the period of 1990–2002. First, the abundance of vacant properties due to the Soviet resettlement policy, especially in the city’s Old Town. Second, the unclear rules and legislation regarding the management of municipally owned properties. Third, the slow pace of urban restructuring and renewal due to economic difficulties. Fourth, the squatters’ connection to other social movements, such as *Gedimainaičiai* and the Republic of *Užupis*, facilitated negotiation with the city and helped to postpone evictions. Overall, squatters were treated rather gently by public institutions and surrounding neighbors. However, the squatting phenomenon remained largely unknown and was almost never publicly discussed. The media occasionally covered the events organized by squatters in *Užupis*, but never the squatting phenomenon itself.

The deregulated urban regime at the very beginning of the twenty-first century was transformed into a liberal one in which market forces, such as private investors, construction companies, and landlords, have taken full responsibility for housing and urban policy, making housing and urban space highly commodified. Thus the extinction of squatting has been facilitated by the massive housing privatization, which reached its conclusive phase by 2001. The heating, electricity, and water utilities have been also privatized since 2001, making it almost impossible to use their facilities free of charge. The strong legal protection of private property, scares, and irregular media coverage have also contributed to the increased marginalization of squatting.

The findings of this study show that squatting in Lithuania was triggered by similar factors to those in many other European countries. However, in Lithuania squatting was unique in that it was built around an “apolitical” identity. The squatters of 1990–2002 never claimed rights to the city’s space, challenged capitalist inequalities, or disputed private property. This was

not surprising as private property was praised as the only alternative way to organize society after the collapse of the Soviet regime. Thus the squatters of 1990–2002 had distanced themselves from political participation and presented themselves as “apolitical people” not interested in any political activity. All the while, these “apolitical” squatters’ countercultural activities nevertheless contributed to the right-to-the-city movement: the “Republic of Užupis” can be defined as just such a movement. It demanded the right to an alternative way of life, the right to the city’s space for countercultural activities. Without directly saying so, the squatters protested against a conventional way of life, against consumerism, economization, and marketization, and created a free, bohemian spirit in the neighborhood. Thus squatting in Vilnius made a significant contribution towards the revitalization, improvement, and “cautious” gentrification of the Užupis neighborhood of Vilnius, if nothing else. Studies<sup>50</sup> show that the gentrification of Užupis has been a slow process thus far: the original architecture of low-rise buildings is still preserved; the newcomers to the neighborhood are still intellectuals and artists. ✕

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## Hungary

# The constitution of the “political” in squatting

by Ágnes Gagyi

The idea of political squatting has been codified in the practice and self-reflection of Western European radicalizing movements, which turned, following the downturn of the 1968 movement cycle, to conflictual strategies in urban settings, to voice problems of housing, youth unemployment, and various countercultural values. In defining political squatting, researchers rely on these historical backgrounds to grasp the political dimension that makes squatting more than simple occupation. In doing so, they tend to raise elements of the Western European historical context as evident corollaries of the phenomenon. For example, in a new comparative study on Western European squatters' movements in 52 large cities, Guzman<sup>1</sup> summarizes the literature on political squatting, identifying typical elements of the political context of squatting in phenomena such as support by the New Left and the Greens, squats serving as platforms for the extra-parliamentary left, involving Marxists, autonomists, anarchists, and a left-libertarian subculture, and being part of campaigns for affordable housing or minority rights, or against war, neo-Nazis, unemployment, precariousness, urban speculation and regeneration projects, gentrification, and displacement.<sup>2</sup> The present paper analyzes how the idea of political squatting that is codified in Western European contexts can be transferred to other contexts where many of the contextual elements integrated in the very definition of a political squat do not exist, but where, instead, the process of squatting feeds into different dynamics of local politics. It describes the political context of two cases of political squatting in Hungary after 1989,

pointing out the specifics of the local political context and the transnational processes that leave their mark on it.

The paper relies on a field study among global justice movement (GJM) groups in Hungary (2004–2009), including the instances of squatting by the Centrum group in 2004, 2005, and 2006. It also draws on a follow-up of the main events of both GJM and housing activism since 2004, including the 2014 and 2015 occupations by the housing activist group “The City is for All”. The descriptions of the two groups are based on interviews with activists, information material produced by the groups themselves, and news from national and social media. The paper is not aimed at attain a monographic description of the groups. It attempts to answer the question how the “political” in political squatting is constituted in the two cases.

## Squatting as politics

From a perspective open to non-Western European and non-political squatting practices, Hans Pruijt<sup>3</sup> differentiates between

types of squatting according to their aims. While a simpler method would be to differentiate between mere occupations and occupations with a political or protest aim,<sup>4</sup> Pruijt claims that, in fact, all forms of squatting have a political aspect.<sup>5</sup> I will take his approach as a base to define what I call “political squatting” in the three Hungarian cases described below.

In Pruijt's formulation, political squatting implies that “the involvement in squatting is driven by an ulterior anti-systemic political motive”.<sup>6</sup> What he codifies as antisystemic political motives in

## abstract

This paper presents the constitution of the “political” in two cases of political squatting in Hungary after 1989: the Centrum squatter group's occupations in 2004–2006, and the homeless advocacy group The City is for All's occupations in 2013–2014. In the case of the Centrum group, the political significance of squatting was defined by a position allocated to squatters within a larger global justice movement coalition. As soon as that allocated position changed, the political perception of the Centrum group vanished. In the case of The City is for All, the constitution of the politics of the occupations was kept under control by a conscious long-term strategy, which defined squatting as a tactical element. Drawing attention to the shifting political ontology, the paper argues for a context-sensitive definition of political squatting.

**KEYWORDS:** squatting, social activism, post-socialist countries, Hungary, urban studies.



PHOTO: GABRIELLA COSZÓ / FREEDOC A VÁROS

During 2014 occupation by the City is for All.

Western European environments is typically the political agenda of radical leftist, autonomist, or anarchist movements.

Because of the different historical constitution of Central and Eastern European (CEE) politics and movements, defining political squatting based on the political content of Western European movements poses some problems. One of the most evident would be the relative lack of movements that correspond to Western European ones. As Grzegorz Piotrowski notes in one of the few comparative studies on political squatting in postsocialist CEE,

**Squatted social centers in post-socialist countries are a sort of litmus paper for the condition of the whole alternative social movement. Their small number in my opinion reflects the weak vibrancy and condition of such groups in the region. [...] if one considers squatted social centers as part of a broader scene, it shows that the latter is not fully developed.<sup>7</sup>**

Asserting the weakness of local movements that correspond to Western European ones fits into a broader stream of social movement research on post-socialist CEE.<sup>8</sup> However, it could be argued that the impression of weakness does not necessarily come from the lack of social and political struggle locally, but is rather a result of optics focusing on phenomena similar to Western European cases. The history of social struggle over ownership of land or real estate throughout the modern history of CEE, and its living heritage in the dynamics of postsocialist politics and of the local history of Marxist or anarchist politics of real estate, may be lost when we focus on squatting only as small contemporary movements similar to West European models.<sup>9</sup> The very status of such “minority” movement scenes in local political dynamics may need to be defined according to the actual roles they play, instead of being confined to definitions from West European contexts and then indexed as weak or lacking. Therefore, to grasp the “political” in political squatting in CEE, I propose to

abstract the definition from the concrete forms of politics linked to squatting in the Western European contexts. If we are to grasp the “political” in political squatting without reducing it to the substantive qualities present in Western contexts, then we may reformulate the logical core of Pruijt’s definition thus: political squatting is the type of occupation in which the main aim of occupation, as conceived by squatters, is not contained in the direct consequences of the fact of occupation (such as access to space for living and various activities, or stopping the demolition or renovation of the building). This is not the same as stating that the act of occupying and the space occupied are not key elements of the political gesture, or that such acts do not have political implications and consequences by themselves. The distinguishing element, I claim, is whether the occupation is conceived by squatters to be a tool for aims that are not contained in the fact and the direct consequences of occupation. If it is so conceived, the focus on abstract aims is prone to open up the conception and the process of squatting to a broader sphere of relationships within the field of formal and informal (i.e., movement) politics. This paper started with the intervention that the field of formal and informal politics is not the same in different locations, and hence political abstractions at work in squatting practices can differ from those identified by research on Western European squats. What follows is an analysis of how the “political” is constituted within that broader sphere of political relationships in two cases of political squatting in Hungary after 1989.

**WHILE, IN SOCIAL TERMS,** deprivation-based squatting is a far more significant issue in postsocialist Hungary than squatting conceived in political terms and with political aims, the present paper concentrates only on explaining the context of the conception of the politics of political squatting, in order to contribute to a comparative understanding of political squatting without a bias towards Western European historical contexts. In the case of Hungary in the period after 1989, no occupation advertised publicly as having political goals was sustained over a

longer period. While social squatting (occupations for housing reasons, typically kept secret for the sake of sustainability) had been going on throughout the postsocialist period, only a few cases of occupation received publicity, and ever fewer for political reasons – while the rest were limited to temporary artistic projects, such as the 1991 occupation of a former transformer building by a French artist group, or the 2010 occupation of a gallery space by the artist group Boulevard and Brezhnev. While the lack or weakness of local movements similar to Western European examples that would connect housing, cultural, and political issues is an argument at hand, two additional contextual factors need to be mentioned in regard to the low levels of political squatting in Hungary. First, in formal politics, the coalition of Socialists and Liberals after 1994 explicitly became the locus of neoliberalism, leaving no space for support for alternative leftist projects from above – a kind of support that was common elsewhere. Second, as the privatization of apartments in the early 1990s reduced the number of state-owned apartments, and made apartments the most expensive asset of families across the country, any attack on real estate as private property resonated negatively. This was not the case in Poland, for example, where real property was restituted to its presocialist owners, so that a higher number of tenants remained tenants in buildings retroceded to their previous owners' heirs, a situation which allowed a strong tenants' movement and favored the overlap of interests between tenants and political squatters.<sup>10</sup> This means that in Hungary, the zone where the aim of physical occupation (for housing or a social center) overlaps with more abstract political aims (i.e., radical political ideologies), a zone to which most of what has been categorized as squatting in the West belongs did not evolve. Cases of political squatting were doomed to a short lifespan, which worked towards an even more marked separation of political aims and actual occupation in activist practice. The very idea of “squatting” as possessing a place for political reasons could only work when the political aim was abstracted from the actual occupation.

### The political nature of the global justice movement in the mid-2000s

With just one big stone upheld in his hand and intense eyes, he now moved slowly to the scene in a menacing fashion, with swift and commanding reactions to any movements around him, and with just me as his totally ineffective backup. From a three or four-meter proximity he ordered the officers back into their cars, all while holding the big stone above his head, pointing it now to this agent and then to another. [...] It was not a military victory but a moral one. It presupposed a history of increasingly rough fights around the legitimacy of prop-



City is for All activist speaks at 2014 occupation. Banner: Bad solution: selling out, good solution: renting.

erty speculation, around housing policy and urban politics. It also could not have happened without a clear left-right division in urban public culture, nor without the gradual tipping of the moral and physical balance of power in the bigger cities, and in particular in Amsterdam, against the rights of property and the state.<sup>11</sup>

The above vignette from an anthropological essay demonstrates how a broad political context is inscribed within the practical gesture of a squatter in 1980 Amsterdam, a context that builds up and constitutes the power of the gesture as much as the very fact of its physicality. Let us look at the context of the Centrum group's political squatting in a similar vein by tracing the relationships within the formal and informal political spheres that constitute the political nature of the occupation.

What was the “symbolic drama” set in motion by physical occupations in the case of the autonomist group called Centrum? In 2004, 2005, and 2006, Centrum organized three main occupations, the first being the Pioneer Mall, an emblematic location of socialist consumption on one of the main boulevards of central Budapest. The Pioneer Mall occupation was the first publicly advertised case of political occupation in postsocialist Hungary, and in the eyes of many activists, it represented the peak moment of the political movement which the Centrum group fed into: the global justice movement of the mid-2000s.

In social movement studies, the GJM has been conceptualized in relation to the issues of sovereignty, democracy, participation, and economic justice. It has been treated sympathetically by researchers as a legitimate critique of economic globalization and a promising experiment to construct global civil society as the democratic counterweight to the powers of global market.<sup>12</sup> Critics of these interpretations have argued that the activity of



Moment from 2014 occupation by the City is for All.

PHOTO: GABRIELLA CSOSZO/FREEDOC; A VAMOS MINDEINKÉ

bridging role between GJM frameworks and local realities, often by way of the simple gesture of delimiting “global” activists from “backward” local contexts. This gesture of the second group was fortified by an earlier historical form of the same gesture in the dissident history of the NGO base that GJM activists relied on for support.

GJM activism worked as an informal network comprised of NGO activists and employees and some independent activists – not members in any formal organization – working together to organize typical events of the GJM repertoire such as Food Not Bombs, Buy Nothing Day, Anti-War and Anti-WTO events. The informality of the network was emphasized by the ideology of NGOs and GJM activists alike, in which organizers are faceless examples of a coming upheaval of general global civil society activity. It was this overlapping ideal of civil autonomy, anonymity and prefigurative politics inscribed in both GJM and dissident traditions that worked to put the Centrum squatters’ group in the forefront of GJM activism. Most of the Centrum activists were new

civil society groups relies not only on the base of their own moral decisions, but is itself produced by the context of neoliberalization, a process that involves the creation of civil society.<sup>13</sup> This approach warned that an autonomous global network of civil society does not possess the tools to produce relevant change. Another line of criticism, coming from the classical left, claimed that the movement’s horizontal, networked, deliberative form of organization does not enable it to exert power over the forces of global capitalism.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the 2000s, the movement arrived at a phase of fatigue. Autonomous action and the use of the public space had not produced the desired effects. However, its members, values, and repertoires returned in the new movement cycle of the 2010s, demanding economic justice and horizontal participative democracy.

**REGARDING THE INTEGRATION** of other Hungarian movement groups into the GJM, Gagyí<sup>15</sup> argued that, beginning with the eastern enlargement programs of the European Social Forum, that integration took place in a hierarchical way, which made it impossible for Hungarian activists to address the problem of general GJM frameworks’ inherent inability to address post-socialist contexts in the agenda of European discussions. The practice of identifying Eastern partners for the movement established an environment of competition in which local fissures between ex-socialist, unionist groups and young, countercultural groups deepened, leading to two parallel institutional networks. At the same time, the idea of autonomy, central in GJM ideology, came to serve a

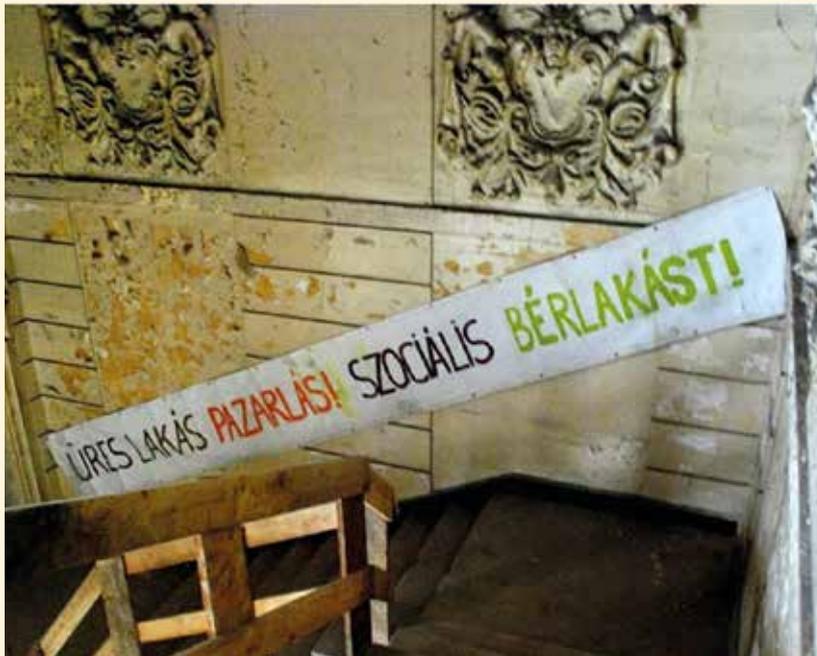
anarchists<sup>16</sup> not aligned with any NGO. Their autonomist norms of total politics and anonymity, as well as their helpful participation in various GJM campaigns, made them into models – or stars – of the anonymous civil society norm of the wider GJM group. Also, their focus on squatting was aligned with the importance of the prefigurative practice of “living between two worlds”<sup>17</sup> conditioned by the fissure between GJM norms and local reality. Squatting became the point where the stakes of that practice added up.

In interviews, activists spoke to me about the ontological experience of opening up a new, autonomous zone in the body of everyday reality, which has also been voiced by other activists and theorists.<sup>18</sup> The experience was less connected to the concrete outcomes of the occupations than to occupation as a symbol of the total politics in which Centrum activists believed. In interviews, squatting was recurrently described as a hub of other activity strains, all of which together constitute the promise of the global civil society ideal.

**What all this connects to, is the whole of the resistance movement, the methods of resistance against the power of capital. What one learns in a squat, she will use elsewhere, in other actions. In a country like Hungary,**

**“SQUATTING WAS RECURRENTLY DESCRIBED AS A HUB OF OTHER ACTIVITY STRAINS, ALL OF WHICH TOGETHER CONSTITUTE THE PROMISE OF THE GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY IDEAL.”**

**where radicalism converges to zero, it is very important that squatting educates those people who will have that experience, a field experience, which will show them how to deal with the system. [...] It is very important to have these synergies, this is the most important thing, in my opinion.”** *Centrum member, 2005*



Banner at 2014 occupation by the City is for All: Empty houses are a waste, we want social housing!

The Pioneer Mall occupation was advertised throughout the networks of the whole GJM group, including their more liberal-leaning allies, as the tipping point of the movement ideal. It also received massive support from journalists and commentators emphasizing the Western European origins of the practice. The liberal narrative of “catching up with Europe” blended together with the globalization-critical narrative of creating autonomous spaces for a general type of global activism. However, in the next few years, while recurrent attempts at occupations met fast evictions, the movement context which framed the Centrum squatters as heroes of a coming new world decomposed, leaving the group, with no objective institutional structure to rely on, to the deprecation of total politics, internal symbolic competition, and intragroup tensions.

From 2005 on, several attempts were made to channel the energies accumulated in the GJM network into political parties, the most successful of them bringing a new Green party into Parliament by 2008. Besides the tensions that arise from the conversion of civil society politics to party politics, the framework of anonymous global civil society suffered another blow in 2006. That year, a leaked speech by the Socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, in which, after many years of austerity, he claims to have lied to voters about the state of the public budget, resulted in violent street protests, met by police aggression. The years-long work of GJM activists, in the faith that their actions were but the anonymous premonitory signs of a coming wave of general civil activism, predestined them to think that, as people finally took to the streets, their ideals were going to gain power. In 2006, however, protesters tended to voice ideologically unclear

and, as the protests evolved, more and more nationalist right-wing slogans. For activists, especially the more radical ones in Centrum who had predicted violent street protests earlier, this came as a trauma. Contrary to the generalizing formula of GJM, “We are everywhere”, the 2006 events showed that it was not a “we”, or not the “we” they had intended, who came to the streets. The political frameworks they had believed in and worked for in the past few years proved to be a marginal discourse in the current political struggles, practically inaudible to the mass of protestors. As one activist put it:

After that, nothing happened, we were drowned in the aftermath of Ószöd [the leaked speech]; I think everyone on the left was. We felt like wet gunpowder. Had to take our self-assurance back, and rethink who we were. At first we were happy to see the riots. I wrote a speech to read in case we got inside the TV building. [...] And then it turned out that these people were those with Árpád stripes [widely understood as a neonationalist symbol], rather than people of our own, and then I got depressed for a long time. [...]

This was the effect of Ószöd. First, we couldn't converge on what we were to do; second, we didn't know whether it was better to distance ourselves from protestors, or join them. Third, we didn't have any idea of how to do either of those things. [...] They were marching for radical right ideas, and we were lost amongst them. We couldn't find ourselves, we had no weight.

*GJM activist, 2008*

As some NGO members of the GJM movement went on to organize a party on the basis of GJM and green organizations, while others stayed within classical NGO activity, the informal sector of the GJM network dispersed. Those activists who were not NGO members – identified to the maximum with the idea of autonomous total politics, and treated by the movement as the model of that political future – lost the external support of movement frameworks. As the movement's history stepped into the next phase, their role as a key pillar of the movement ceased to exist. This change left them a small group of extremely ideologically-minded people with no external reference to rely on. Confined within the group, their political ambitions played out as internal personal tensions, leading to the dissolution of the group.

A university occupation in 2013 showed similar dynamics to the Centrum story. Responding to the Orbán government's reforms in higher education, students occupied a venue in Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, with an aim not contained within the direct consequences of the occupation – in this case, a space for forums and further organizing, and a situation that could be used as a background for sustaining public attention for further

announcements. As a political gesture, it was constituted within a power field as an element in a constellation of the political sphere. The power field was set by the context of protests against the governing conservative party Fidesz's measures from 2011 on. In 2012, an alliance was formed between a previous Socialist prime minister and the largest civil opposition group of the 2011 protests, called Milla. Due to the low legitimacy of Socialists, and of party politics in general, the alliance alienated many protestors from Milla. That situation placed the organizing body of students' protests, the Students' Network, in the center of the oppositional civil movement. The Network was carried by principles of political neutrality, autonomy, and internal democracy, historically rooted in the new anarchist/GJM ideals of its early organizers. In order to attract new members, it set political neutrality and internal democracy in the foreground. In a situation defined by external pressure for political involvement and internal principles of political neutrality, the ideas of horizontality and autonomy, expressed in the action of occupation, gained political significance from the external context. That position soon dispersed, however, as external political pressure finally split the group along existing political lines. As in the Centrum group, once the support of the external context vanished, the ideology of horizontality and autonomy played out in internal symbolic conflicts, and led to the dispersal of the group.

### **The homeless advocacy group The City is for All**

The City is for All (A Város Mindenkié, or AVM) is a homeless advocacy and housing rights activism group founded in 2009 which is aimed at emancipatory, participative advocacy. While the initiative for setting up the group came from professional activists, inspired by models of homeless advocacy work in the US, the group itself aims to empower homeless people in Hungary to struggle for their interests, and today is composed predominantly of homeless activists. The group employs a well-articulated methodology of horizontality and empowerment between its homeless and middle-class activist members. Apart from methods of direct organizing and support, the group aims to raise consciousness about the consequences of inadequate housing policies and to establish legal guarantees of the right to housing, and also focuses on empowering homeless people to take part in decisions that affect them. At present, the group has two main working groups: one that deals primarily with issues of social housing tenants and evictions, and another that works to protect the rights and interests of homeless people living in homeless shelters or on the streets and in self-built housing in the forests surrounding the city. The group also operates a "street lawyer" program, providing free legal aid on a central square in Budapest, and a program called "The City is for All Academy", as an internal development tool for the members of the group. AVM has a broad media presence and

maintains strong relationships with other advocacy groups.<sup>19</sup>

The politics of AVM has roots in professional homeless rights advocacy, North American practices of social work in community development, and the intellectual and movement tradition of the GJM and the Right to the City movement. Some of its founders worked with a voluntary homeless advocacy network of professional activists before AVM. Much of the intellectual and political concept of AVM comes from two intellectual activists studying abroad, one of whom defended her PhD in 2013 at City University of New York. In conceiving AVM, one of the inspirations was David Harvey's reinterpretation of Lefebvre's iconic slogan "right to the city" in the context of Marxist critical geography.<sup>20</sup> Alongside the horizontal principles of GJM in activist practice, it was the English-speaking tradition of community development, and especially the example of the New York-based homeless advocacy group Picture the Homeless, that served as a base for the AVM founders to diverge from the tradition of professional social workers or middle-class activists working "on" homeless people and instead reorganize activist work through participation. Finally, concurrently with their activist commitment to participation and professional knowledge of homelessness and advocacy methods, AVM founders had the intellectual capacity to understand Hungarian housing problems in the global frameworks established by the main currents of critical social science allied with social movements, especially the GJM and its urban manifestations.<sup>21</sup> This provided a solid ground not only for international intellectual and activist support, but also for the stability of organizational politics against the vortex of local political tensions and the destabilizing effect of international movement principles not fitting postsocialist contexts, which GJM groups had experienced. At the same time, the very concrete and immediate nature of the issue of homelessness and evictions shielded activists against the sense of irrelevance of their political ideas in the local context, which had weighed upon the GJM.

**AVM DIFFERED FROM** formal and informal GJM groups, and from various waves of the Students' Network, in the professionalism of its intellectual and activist embodiment, the concreteness of its grievance and its assistance, and the conscious methodology of cross-class horizontal participation. The global framework of the group's understanding of their issue, the long-term fixity of their principles, and the concreteness of the issue provide a relative independence from the political context, making AVM both insensitive to invitations to alliance by political players and able to develop flexible tactics of alliance-building in its day-to-day

advocacy work. This characteristic of AVM makes it less vulnerable to changes in the political sphere: in the cases of the Centrum squatters and the Students' Network occupations, such changes had first provided the ground for political occupations, and then taken it away.

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"Take a place!" Banner at 2014 occupation by the City is for All.

PHOTO: GABRIELLA CSOSZÓ/FREEDOC. A VÁROS MINDENKÉ

In January 2013 and September 2014, AVM organized two occupations of empty houses in Budapest with the aim of raising consciousness about the existence of a large pool of empty flats in the city, contrasting it to a rising rate of housing poverty and homelessness.<sup>22</sup> The context of the occupations was strongly set by the prolonged activism and research work of AVM members. Aware of the short period which activists were likely to be able to spend inside the buildings, they conceived the occupations not as actions in themselves, but as communicative actions of AVM on the issue of housing poverty as defined by the organization and the general political debate on homelessness it had participated in during recent years. The immediate context was provided by supplying prepared public materials to mayors, decision makers and experts, by consultations and forums with local governments, ministries, and other state agencies, by requesting and working with official data, by strong media communication, by planning actions and demonstrations against housing policies, moves to criminalize homelessness, and evictions, and by an annual Vacant Buildings March beginning in 2011 around empty buildings in Budapest – a demonstration aimed at linking the issue of homelessness to wider issues of financial speculation and irresponsible housing policy.

In January 2013, AVM organized the occupation of a building classified as a historic monument, owned by District VII of Budapest, which had been vacant for years. The issue fed into a story of real estate speculation and gentrification in the district since the early 2000s. "Ruin pubs" settled in vacant buildings had made the district into an international nightlife hotspot, and served as a base for commercial gentrification throughout the decade.<sup>23</sup> Civil opposition against real estate speculation, said to be ruining the pool of monument buildings in the district, proliferated in the early 2000s. In 2009, the Socialist mayor of the district was arrested for fraud. The AVM occupation built on that story to reduce public revulsion against the illegal action.

The group used the occupation as a tool for consciousness-raising and pressuring: pitted against the decision-makers in local government, they drew attention to the pool of empty flats owned by the district and the possibility and lack of political will to make those flats available for housing purposes.

The District VII occupation thus pursued tactics of building on a well-known and very frequented place in Budapest, with a history of conflicts between real estate speculators, local government, and commercial interests in gentrification on one side, and various civil society and neighborhood initiatives on the other, to the district one of the most politicized spots in Hungary on real estate and housing issues in recent history. AVM directed its action towards formal politics and decision makers, putting pressure on one of the spots it considers relevant to short or medium-term results: local governments' policies on flats under

their ownership. Against the background of the government's new criminalization gestures towards the homeless, the occupation was used to communicate that, instead of policing and mass shelters, the solution to homelessness is a stable system of council flats and the institutionalization of the universal right to housing. Making use of the general upheaval of anti-government demonstrations, the AVM attracted several young activists from other sectors of the demonstration wave to participate in the nonviolent resistance organized for the defense of the house. Thus the occupation functioned as political squatting inasmuch as its essence was defined, not by the immediate consequences of the occupation of a physical space, but by a broader political agenda in which the occupation was used as a momentary and tactical mechanism. The political communication of the action was defined by a conscious scaling between the general, long-term agenda of the group, and the concrete possibilities of gains through such an action, in the context of the group's whole portfolio of activities.

**THE SECOND OCCUPATION, IN 2014**, concerned a building in District VI, the story of which also resonated with the history of real estate conflicts in Budapest. The building that was occupied had been a hospital, vacant for the last 20 years, and gone from the hands of the local government to the ownership of an offshore company. It served as an ideal example for a political narrative that summarized earlier real estate conflicts, in the context of the general decline of welfare functions, to put pressure on the local government. The occupation was organized at the time of local government elections, which enhanced its publicity. It also made use of the synergies built up by the quadrennial tradition of Vacant Buildings Marches. This time, the march ended with demonstrators entering the building. After the demonstrative squatting, activists marched to City Hall with a message to the Mayor of Budapest: "Wrong solution: selling out; right solution: renting".

The action met the organizers' aims: to share the experience of entering an occupied building with as many participants as possible, while reaching out to other social groups affected by housing problems. Emphasis was placed on the multiple effects of housing policy on various social groups, their collective interest in state responsibility for housing rights and welfare guarantees in general, and the collective experience of the occupation. Besides media presence immediately before local government elections, and the attention drawn to vacant apartments in the hands of local governments as a potential solution to housing problems, this occupation was also aimed at raising consciousness about the possibility of occupation as a political tool. The banner activists hung out from the windows of the occupied building read, "Take a place!" However, the aim was not to encourage squatting per se, but rather to publicize it as one possible tool to increase pressure on targets considered strategically advantageous. Pressure on local governments through squatting was accompanied by various techniques of consultation and cooperation – for example, at the same time as the 2013 and 2014 occupations in central Budapest, AVM and the Social Reconstruction Camp Association worked together with the District X local government on a pilot project utilizing vacant, municipally owned homes.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

We have examined the contextual constitution of the "political" in two cases of political squatting in Hungary. The 2004–2006 Centrum occupations were connected to the new anarchist and global justice movements in Western Europe, and to the concept and role of squatting in them. The City is for All (AVM) homeless advocacy group learned from the tradition of community organizing in the US. In both cases, squatters relied on examples, repertoires, and political ideas seen in Western European movements, and also used references to such models to legitimize their actions locally. At the same time, both cases differ in their constitution of the "political" in political squatting from the characteristics incorporated in the definition of political squatting in the literature on Western Europe. Guzman<sup>25</sup> identifies the basic traits through which political squatting in Western Europe connects to the broader political field as the presence of typical grievances and claims (housing shortage, youth unemployment, youth counterculture), and their relationship to two characteristic elements of the political field: the strength of the extreme right and political polarization, and the presence of left subcultures and organizations which can act as a background and institutional base. Similarly, in the Hungarian cases, the "political" in squatting was constituted by a complex field of political relations beyond the act of squatting. Yet the relationship to that broader field was not primarily defined by ties between squatters and more established leftist movements or their institutions, which are typical of other, Western

European cases. In the case of the more lively political squatters' scenes in CEE, such as in Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic, the literature details a stronger relationship in that direction, but it also points out the relative weakness of such movement backgrounds in comparison with Western European scenes.<sup>26</sup>

In the two Hungarian cases, the constitution of the "political" in political squatting could not rely on a broader movement which could sustain it within the larger public sphere on its own terms. Consequently, in the case of Centrum, the political constitution of squatting depended on a position assigned to squatters within a movement that did not necessarily imply the same new-anarchist politics as the Centrum group itself. As that position assigned by the GJM coalition changed, the external reference of Centrum members' politics vanished, and the group dissolved. In the case of AVM, the constitution of the "political" in the occupations was kept under control from the perspective of the group's conscious, long-term strategy of homeless advocacy activism. That meant a more utilitarian relation between the politics of squatting, the act of squatting, and its political framing. Because AVM aims over a longer perspective for a systemic change which would allow everyone a decent space to live in, in its political framing of squatting for tactical reasons the group limited its campaign to the topic of empty houses, corruption, and mismanagement by the state and local governments, and planned the occupation as a moment of that campaign. At the same time, however, it was precisely the simultaneous presence of a global, long-term framework of housing politics, and of immediate grievances to deal with, that allowed a more tactical approach and made it possible for the group to prevent alliances on the level of national politics affecting its own politics.

The case of AVM's "tactical" squatting for political reasons seems to fall further from the typical model of West European political squatting, while the Centrum occupations seem to be more similar, with a political framework taken mostly from new anarchism, partly overlapping with the dissident and GJM ideals of the movement that supported the squatters. However, in the case of Centrum too, it is worth pointing out that the ideas of new anarchism or GJM had a somewhat different value locally than in Western European contexts. Beyond noticing the mere lack of a strong movement and political base behind them, a closer look provides us with an additional element of these political ideas: the ambition to dissipate the hierarchical difference between more evolved Western and more "backward" East European contexts through emulating forms of Western activism. One activist, asked about her motivation for squatting, told me:

**“IN THE HUNGARIAN CASES THE ‘POLITICAL’ IN SQUATTING WAS CONSTITUTED BY A COMPLEX FIELD OF POLITICAL RELATIONS BEYOND THE ACT OF SQUATTING.”**

because it is a shame that we don't have a squat in Hungary.

*Centrum activist, 2005*

This local value of new anarchist and GJM ideas, and of the political gesture of squatting, is important to note in order to look beyond "deficiencies" perceived in com-

parison with Western European squatting scenes, and ask about the local function of political squatting.

The two Hungarian cases of political squatting described here seem to be so deeply inscribed in constellations of local formal and informal politics and transnational alliances that their politics hardly give us a basis for defining the political essence of squatting in postsocialist Hungary other than by pointing at its contextual constitution. Beyond signaling the lack of a broader alternative left movement scene which could provide such a context in a more stable way, I find that conclusion instructive in understanding the definition of political squatting in Western Europe too, inasmuch as it points to the necessity of a specific political context for the phenomenon coded as political squatting to emerge. ✖

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# The nuances of squatting in “the East”

by Timothy Weldon

In the summer of 2015 I attended “Squatting in the East”, the first known workshop solely on squatting in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia – and the catalyst for this special issue. The fact that this conference was needed belies the practical and ideological realities faced by activists and researchers working in the region, and the continuing divisions of European transformations into “East” and “West.” As the entire continent succumbs to neoliberal privatization, deregulation, marketization, and austerity policies, the responses seen in the two regions – as this issue shows – vary with their different histories and contexts. The historically capitalist countries in “the West”, with a history of capitalist material wealth and representative democratic political structures, make neoliberal reforms difficult to handle through their losses: the loss of jobs, housing, and stability, as well as the decline of social welfare systems, real wages, and living standards. The former Soviet and Yugoslav countries of “the East” on the other hand (with a history of less material means) have struggled through their gains. Increasing access to global markets and material goods, economic growth,



Demonstration of support for the squat *Klinika* in Prague. The banner says “Klinika, for a healthier city”.

upgraded housing stocks, increasing purchasing power, and “freedoms” to travel, purchase, and experience a broader world have also led to a sense of loss among many. People speak of losing their “economic freedom” to work and support their families, the loss of economic stability and security, rising individualism; fractured communities, struggles with inequality and marginalization, and new mindsets, experiences, and spaces of hierarchy and exclusion. Within these experiences, different historical trajectories and cultural understandings have been illuminated between East and West. Yet,

for all their differences, the two regions are meeting in a downsized, deregulated, marginalizing neoliberal middle, which has seen increasingly active groups in both regions fight to reclaim aspects of their pasts in order to imagine more inclusive and desirable futures.

Squatting is one tool that has been used in the West – and increasingly in the East – to contest this wholly consuming neoliberal agenda. This special issue is an attempt to bring these Eastern experiences with squatting into an academic and public discourse that has been largely centered on Western concept and

experiences of squatting. Throughout the socialist-influenced cultures of the East, there are shared experiences that afford different rationales, motivations, and understandings of squatting than those found in the West, and that make Western theoretical models of squatting difficult to apply in the East.

**THIS DOES NOT** mean that theories of squatting from the West are not helpful in analyzing those in the East, but rather that they should not be used as models for assessing and validating the East’s experiences with squatting or conceptualizing

squatting more generally. Measuring success using standards created by outsiders draws dangerous parallels to colonial and developmental narratives where peripheral countries measure(d) their legitimacy and accomplishments using external models and notions of “success” defined and developed by, for, and within a colonial or imperial overlord’s own unique trials with their development, rather than through a colony’s own specific experiences. And while postsocialism is not postcolonialism, there are parallels as research on squatting in the East has similarly been forced to use theoretical measures and frameworks of analysis for squatting that were produced elsewhere and under different social conditions. We must therefore create theories and understandings of squatting in the East that account for the different cultural experiences found there.

**FOR EXAMPLE,** I recently spent time at squats in Stockholm and Prague. And while activists in both places used a similar tool (in squatting) for direct political action, and are tied together through global activist networks, the nuances of the two occupations illuminated different contexts and cultural implementations of squatting. In Sweden, where the general public tends toward a positive view of the State, a squat in Stockholm occupying a *recently privatized* building decried neoliberal practices that weakened the welfare state, fracturing and commoditizing communities. Activists and community members used an antiprivatization and procommunity narrative (focusing on the *losses* seen in Swedish society) to fight *against* private interests eroding State power and gentrifying neighborhoods, and to build public rancor *against* the private owner of the building and *in support* of a non-commoditized community center.

In Prague, activists used the opposite approach to critique the same hypercommoditization of space, growing inequality, and the city’s growing housing crises. Squatters there occupied a derelict state owned building, and used a still

palpable communist era mistrust of the State to vilify its “deficiencies” in taking care of the building, and gain support for – and eventually a legitimization of – their occupation. In both cases, activists used squatting to illuminate larger issues surrounding property rights, privatization, housing shortages, and deficiencies in neoliberal democratic practices. They both used anti-capitalist and anarchist tactics, but employed different culturally specific rhetoric and strategies to claim and hold the space, while implementing culturally specific versions of prefigurative, non-commoditized, directly democratic practices within the space. The same tools, different cultural settings,

**“I ASK RESEARCHERS TO GO BEYOND INSTITUTIONS AND DELVE MORE DEEPLY INTO THE SOUL OF THESE SQUATS AND THEIR SURROUNDINGS, TO ANSWER DEEPER QUESTIONS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL MEANINGS.”**

different manifestations, comparable (yet nuanced) outcomes.

Still, while both groups created social centers based on inclusivity, equality, mutual aid, autonomy, and direct democracy, their imagining and enactment of alternative futures varied. Swedish squatters, having always lived within a market-based capitalist democratic society, imagine alternatives to capitalist surroundings using capitalist-oriented histories and world views, while those in Prague, steeped in communist pasts and neoliberal capitalist presents, know other ways of living beyond capitalist democracy. When they conceptualize changes in their surroundings and imagine alternative futures, it is from a systemically broader experience. Their responses to neoliberal deregulation, marginalization, and commoditization, are also responses

to socialist collectivization, conformity, and command structures. Meaning they might offer more diverse alternatives.

By further incorporating variances in places like Stockholm and Prague into our analysis of squatting and alternative futures, we not only afford comparative studies of squatting, but also broader understandings of experiences with neoliberal transformation. Squatting – the unauthorized use of a building or land – is the same tool no matter where it is used. Yet it manifests itself differently depending on the needs, interests, convictions, and contexts of the people using it. Therefore, by studying squatting in the East, scholars and activists can create theories of squatting that go beyond its Western European manifestations, and furnish comparative studies of squatting that not only illuminate the similarities, variances, and connections between activist communities in these regions, but also enhance our comparative understanding of neoliberal transformation more generally.

**TO DO THIS,** we must use all the tools of the social sciences and humanities to gain deeper understandings of the individual and collective meanings of (and to) the people occupying these spaces and creating alternative ways of living. I ask researchers to go beyond institutions and delve more deeply into the soul of these squats and their surroundings, to answer deeper questions of their sociopolitical and cultural meanings to both participant and community. To live in these spaces of hope. To seek out the day-to-day cultural meanings behind not only why people squat, but how they experience it daily and over time. And to build thick, interpretive, and analytical descriptions of these “other worlds” activists are building. For if we as a society are to move beyond capitalism’s own occupation of our lives, we must appreciate the intricacies of these other ways of living. ✕

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# The rise of early modern demesne lordship

## The case of western Estonia by Magnus Berencrutz

In agrarian history, the description of early modern manorial management and organization has long emphasized a difference between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> In Western Europe, the prevalent form of organization was *landbogodsdrift* (“husbandry lordship”), where the landowner’s own operation was modest in relation to the territory of the estate.<sup>3</sup> In Central and Eastern Europe, on the contrary, a manorial estate management form had arisen, usually referred to as “demesne lordship”. It is defined as agricultural production by the estate itself of a large area, targeting a particular market, with the estate owner having jurisdiction over the estate inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> The peasants were serfs with limited freedom in relation to the landlord. A peasant is defined as a member of a family running a farm for its livelihood. On an estate with demesne lordship management, the peasant would be obliged to work for the landlord.<sup>5</sup>

There is, however, an exception to this definition of manorial estate management within an area in coastal western Estonia.

One reason for the deviation consisted in the fact that manorial estate management developed on small-scale estates during an ongoing war situation in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century; another cause was that around half of the privately owned land in the Swedish province of Estland was dependent on the Swedish Crown’s right of possession, since the land had been disposed of by the Crown within districts formerly administered as military strongholds for Swedish fortresses. This took place in a time of warfare which offered few possibilities of finding outlets on the market. The Swedish Crown became involved in the area following the dissolution of the Teutonic Order and its allied bishoprics. Around half of all land in the Swedish province of Estland was

expropriated by the Swedish Crown, which started parceling it out to private persons.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this article is to test an explanation for the atypical nature of the development of demesne lordship in western Estonia in early modern times. My question is: What light does the different character of this phenomenon in western Estonia shed on current general explanations of the development of demesne lordship in the Baltic Sea region?<sup>7</sup>

### Explanations of the development of demesne lordship

I will start the discussion of the development of demesne lordship in western Estland with a review of existing literature. The different types of explanations have been categorized as follows:

(A) One category of explanations considers the dependence on grain exports to Western Europe to be decisive. This category has been promoted by a normative theoretical discourse

in works by Immanuel Wallerstein, Fernand Braudel and Hans-Jürgen Nitz from the 1970s onwards.<sup>8</sup> Wallerstein and Braudel took center-periphery reasoning as their starting point. They saw England and the Netherlands as the center of the early modern market economy. Other regions were peripheral in their dependence on imports from these countries.<sup>9</sup> In the 1990s Nitz developed this logic further by proposing as a theory Johann Heinrich von Thünen’s 1826 model about the market economic relations of the isolated state. It is based on the difference in transport costs of products to a point representing the market.<sup>10</sup> The model presupposes that agricultural products are transported by horse and carriage to an urban market. Transport costs

### abstract

The purpose of this article is to test an explanation for the atypical nature of the development of demesne lordship in western Estonia<sup>1</sup> in early modern times. My proposed hypothesis concerning the development of early modern demesne lordship in the Baltic Sea region takes as its starting point the impact on private land ownership in Europe caused by governments’ extension of their political powers and increasing conflicts. The twenty-first-century discourse about *raison d’état* has here been broadened with additional arguments about the role of the early modern military state in the development of demesne lordship in the Baltic Sea region, following the reasoning behind Braudel’s and Wallerstein’s center-periphery models.

**KEY WORDS:** demesne lordship, Estland, agrarian economy.



are assumed to be directly proportional to distance and paid by farmers producing for the market. This leads to a zone forming around markets with a comparative advantage for certain products, with the result that lower transport costs in the vicinity of the market increase the value of the land.<sup>11</sup>

(B) Another category of explanation starts with the situation in the agrarian landscapes in Central and Eastern Europe that had been damaged by warfare and epidemics. This type of explanation was introduced by Arnold Soom's work in the 1950s on demesne lordship in the Baltic provinces and has declined in importance since the late 1990s.<sup>12</sup>

(C) A third category of explanations finds its source in the transformative impact of the regulations and laws introduced by the expansion of early modern central power. Robert Brenner introduced the explanation that the weaker position of demesne lordship in Western Europe was determined by the stronger protection enjoyed by leaseholders and freeholder farmers, in legislation as well as in their own commons. This position gave a certain local autonomy to farmers in Western Europe. Tendencies towards autocracy could be broken. Legislation and the administration of justice were focused on tax enforcement and military conscription.<sup>13</sup> This category of explanation has gained strength in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The explanations will be dealt with in order in the following.

### Explanations relating to the West European early modern commodity market

This explanation has been formulated most distinctively by Markus Cerman in his *bull market* hypothesis, implying that the agrarian boom during the 16<sup>th</sup> century stimulated commerce and export much more than during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when warfare hampered development.<sup>14</sup> It has been confirmed that demesne lordship developed in Denmark and eastern Holstein in the 1530s and this innovation started spreading in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> Demesne lordship was adopted by more estate owners in their estate management planning in Schleswig-Holstein, Denmark, Poland-Lithuania and the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. In this connection, serfdom spread during the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the area.<sup>16</sup>

Nitz applied von Thünen's model for the localization of early modern agriculture to regions with demesne lordship. As described above, von Thünen's model consists of circular zones around the market. Localized dairy production and the cultivation of vegetables take place in the vicinity of the market. Further out in due order come zones of firewood, cultivation of grain without fallow periods, grain-fallow production, and grazing with emphasis on dairy cattle, production of grain in annual-rotating fields, and farthest out a zone of extensive production of slaughter cattle on grazing fields.<sup>17</sup>

Both Wallerstein and Nitz have tried to show that demesne lordship on the continent can be explained as a European zone around the market in Western Europe with grain production

in three rotating fields. Wallerstein saw this as an expression of the early modern peripheral regions in relation to the center in the Netherlands and England, and Nitz as a logical allocation of production in relation to the distance to demand. The explanation that conditions of sale would have contributed to demesne lordship during the 16<sup>th</sup> century has started a debate among agrarian historians in Estonia. Juhan Kahk asserts that demesne lordship contributed a 58% share of the profits from the agrarian sector before the outbreak of the Livonian War in northern Estonia. Because of war damage, the same share was not reached again until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> Enn Tarvel maintains the thesis that exports had a subordinate importance for the estate owners' revenues during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Anna Dunin-Wasowiczowa has been able to confirm that demesne lordship was established in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century in Poland along the rivers towards Danzig (Gdansk) via Warsaw: the Bug, Weichsel (Wisła), Pilica, San and Narew. She shows that

## “DEMESNE LORDSHIP MANAGEMENT REACHED ITS MATURE FORM IN THE LATE 17<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.”

this development towards demesne lordship intensified in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Labor rent in work days initially required three days a week, but had increased to six days by 1600.<sup>20</sup> It has however been confirmed that the estates in Poland during the 17<sup>th</sup> century were generally planned as *landbogods*, estates leasing holdings in exchange for products and cash. They most often consisted of separate villages in mixed ownership.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the demesne consisted of 60–90 hectares of fields and the total area of the estate had been extended, at least in the case of those under demesne lordship management.<sup>22</sup> Further north in Lithuania, demesnes cultivated half of the arable land on average, compared to around 25% in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> A similar tendency towards developing demesne lordship in the Baltic Sea region can be confirmed in Mecklenburg.<sup>24</sup>

Concerning the situation in Denmark, Gunnar Olsen has shown that demesne lordship was on the rise at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Demesne lordship management reached its mature form in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century. This Danish development was favored from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century in relation to increased grain and oxen exports. The same was true of the neighboring areas of Schleswig and Holstein<sup>25</sup>, as well as the duchies of Pomerania. The situation in Western Pomerania, first occupied by, then allocated to Sweden in 1648, was similar to that of contemporary Lithuania. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, there were already more estates in Western Pomerania with more than half of all arable land under demesne than anywhere else in Europe.<sup>26</sup>

In Sweden with Finland, *landbogods* were predominant up to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The area of infields was insignificant during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>27</sup> In the forest province of Småland, for example, field area in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was 10 hectares on average, while even in the central agrarian regions of Middle Sweden and Skåne it amounted to an average of only 40 hectares.<sup>28</sup>

### Explanations of the structure and genesis of the war-damaged landscape

It has been pointed out that the eastern coastal areas of the Baltic Sea were damaged by wars from the 1580s onwards and that this fact influenced estate management in favor of demesne lordship, leading in turn to a deterioration of the legal status of the peasants. As for Central Europe, Erich Landsteiner has used a negative argument implying that demesne lordship decreased – for security reasons – in regions neighboring the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup> Eric Fügedi has shown that war damage during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) had corresponding effects on how estate owners managed their estates. Demesne lordship was extended and spread into regions stricken by war damage, such as Hungary, Bohemia and Poland.<sup>30</sup> The effect on demesne lordship in Mecklenburg and what would become Swedish Pomerania during the Thirty Years' War is judged to be due to civil legislation.

Hermann Priebe and Emil Gohrband have explained the extension of demesnes in Swedish Pomerania as partly due to war damage, causing estate owners loss of income and forcing them into debt.<sup>31</sup>

### Explanations based on the regulatory and power-political impact

In the legislation enacted by early modern central powers, the civil status of peasants was subordinated to the estate owners' freedom of action in their planning. This freedom can be summarized in the concept of *raison d'état*.<sup>32</sup> The influence of the central power was also expressed in legislation favoring the returns of the demesne.<sup>33</sup>

A Swedish research tradition from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century interprets legislation and regulation as an expression of *raison d'état*. It has shown that since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Swedish central power gave nobility privileges favoring demesne both as an institution and as an ideal for the returns of the estates. The Crown used nobility privileges in order to secure the conscription of horses and mounted knights from the nobility's estates, and the Crown continued to favor demesnes in the same spirit.<sup>34</sup>

The Swedish Privileges of the Nobility of 1569 contains regulations exempting demesne owners and the estate's inhabitants within one Swedish mile (about 10 kilometers) of the manor from various obligations and charges. Further favorable regulations were successively introduced, such as a monopoly on exports for the nobility. After 1612, houses and palaces owned by the nobility in towns were exempted from duties. The most important reform was to permit the nobility to establish ironworks and mines on their estates.<sup>35</sup>

In constitutional law, the situation changed in 1611. The Swedish Crown changed the military recruitment methods from summons to arms and mercenaries to troop conscription. The nobility lost their previous immunity and were subject to taxation from 1612 onwards. Serfdom was illegal in Sweden with Finland. Peasants with taxation duties were entitled to the regional law and taxation diets, and from 1611 onwards, they were represented in the Swedish estate diet.

In the eastern and southern part of the Baltic Sea region the opposite was true: Legislation and court decisions in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century were increasingly accommodating to estate owners interested in applying serfdom in their relations with the peasants on their estates.

The influence of the central power on the private planning of early modern estate management in general and demesne lordship in particular has been elucidated from several angles. Aleksander Loit can be said to have introduced this upgraded view of *raison d'état* in his 1975 analysis of the Reduction (the resumption by the state of estates given to the nobility) in Estonia during the time of Swedish Great Power.<sup>36</sup> It was found that in medieval times husbandry lordship existed around the Baltic Sea and local jurisdictions, which would eventually be restructured into demesne lordship. That the acquisition of manpower was

intense in this period can be shown from Swedish Pomerania, where it has been proven that agricultural workers were already hired in the estate economy in the 1630s.<sup>37</sup>

With this evidence it has been emphasized that, in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, regulations had a dampening effect on the exploitation of peasants in Sweden-Finland, Denmark, Poland and German countries like Brandenburg/

Prussia. It has been argued that legislation in Poland and neighboring German countries made it easier for young teenagers to fulfill day labor duties to the manors instead of adults.<sup>38</sup> A similar regulation along the lines of *raison d'état* was the Danish government's decision to abolish serfdom on Sjælland in 1702.<sup>39</sup>

In order to evaluate the existing explanations of the growth of demesne lordship in the Baltic Sea region, I will now discuss my findings concerning the divergent pattern of demesne lordship in the Swedish Province of Estland. In the existing academic discourse, the question about *raison d'état* has focused on an ideological break between the Swedish monarchical concept of provincial administration and the Swedish noblemen's council aristocracy, which we may assume was favorably inclined towards the provincial aristocracy.<sup>40</sup>

### From territorial expansion to a source of income

The findings about the divergent structure of demesne lordship in western Estonia can be summarized in five stages. These stages have been formulated so as to be representative for the whole Swedish province of Estland, taking into consideration the amount of the Swedish Crown's land disposals.<sup>41</sup>

#### Husbandry lordship in the Swedish province of Estland (1561–1600)

Both the Crown and private estate owners pursued husbandry lordship because the estates were extensive and agriculture was based on cattle breeding. Measured in area, the demesnes made up a smaller part of the total cultivated land. Agricultural organi-

**“AFTER 1612, HOUSES AND PALACES OWNED BY THE NOBILITY IN TOWNS WERE EXEMPTED FROM DUTIES.”**

zation featured commons and collectivity among cattle-grazing peasants, both for the solution of local controversies and for the organization of cultivation: primarily care for grazing cattle, meadows and grazing lands. The demesne territories were most often organized in open fields used by the peasants. Cultivated land, consisting of meadows and infields, was consequently organized as open fields divided into allotments. The peasants used part of the yields from their farms for domestic trade. The Livonian War (1558–1583) brought war damage into the Swedish province of Estland with the loss of arable land, cattle and population. Fortress districts were particularly vulnerable as targets. Estates disposed of by the Crown in this period were *landbogods* with a demesne area of less than 50 hectares. Stipulations of possession were most often interimistic.

### Demesne lordship in the Swedish province of Estland (1600–1632)

Because of the Crown's land dispositions from its fortress districts, the number of private estate owners increased and the fortress territories were split into small private estates. With the Polish War (1600–1629), dispositions from the fortress districts escalated, the intention being to compensate for salaries and reward loyalty. All peasants in the fortress districts in Estland were thus transferred into a client relationship to a private landowner. All commons were deprived of self-government, also through lawsuits. During the Polish War, the Province of Estland suffered big losses of arable land, cattle and population. As a result of this devastation, the peasant farmsteads tended to be concentrated in the largest village of the estate together with the demesne, the area of which was less than 50 hectares. In comparison with the lands of the peasant farms, the demesne was less extensive and its land organised in open fields. Another type of estate was found where devastated land had been recultivated. A consciously selected dominant location for the village was formed with the best meadows and fields and the best supply of labor. These resources were jointly utilized by the peasants and the demesne of the estate in the capital village. Demesnes were proportionally large on estates disposed of with interimistic ownership stipulations.

Commons with fenced open fields were dissolved and the arable land of the demesnes increasingly concentrated apart from the farms of the peasants. Thus a type of estate emerged concentrated on demesne, where the focus of production was not entirely on grain. But the destruction of arable land was not a necessary condition. During this period, a type of estate appeared that would become the ideal for the next stages of demesne. On many such estates under demesne management, the peasants' stables were transformed to provide draft animals, as labor rent in the form of day work with plough teams was increased. This process had already been accomplished on many estates during the first decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

They most often received hereditary stipulations of possession. Such an ideal estate consisted of a demesne comprising more than 50 hectares, without any attached peasants located on the demesne.

Land that had been devastated was re-cultivated and new land was added through dowries, purchases and new enfeoffment. The demesne was organized around the cultivation of infields of the largest village. The peasants' farms were located in villages around the demesne and together, they cultivated more land than the demesne. In certain cases, annexes to the central demesne were formed. The land best suited to grain production was selected for the demesne, thereby increasing the need for peasant labor.

During this period, the Swedish Crown started to administer the Province of Estland by taxing estate owners and imposing duties on foreign trade, and to purchase agricultural products from Estland. This indicates that the demesne system concentrating on large-scale grain production had spread to several districts within Estland during this period.

### Demesne is extended in the Swedish province of Estland (1632–1681)

During this period, tensions decreased in Estland. Agriculture and living conditions for the population improved. The Westphalian Peace of 1648 resulted in a growing export market for grain. The demesnes on the estates were expected to gain a profit from exports of grain. For this reason different types of estates were standardized in the form of those ideal estates mentioned above. Demesnes specializing in grain production became most frequent. Their infields were extended through the reclamation of meadows and grazing lands and the eviction of peasant farmsteads from the demesne village. All open field-sharing between the demesne and peasants was abolished. The density of demesne increased, partly because intensifying annexes were added, and partly because the estates' area increased. Estates in Swedish Estland were also parts of estate holdings in other parts of the Swedish Empire.

The estate of Kurrifer as depicted in the 1689 plan shows how an estate of a type with a dominant large village organized the transformation towards intensified production on a grain-producing demesne. The land had been divided between manor and peasants and there were still remnants of the devastation from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in the open fields. According to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century survey document, most of the cultivated land consists of the land owned by the manor in the largest village of the estate, and the manor had taken up most of the land resources in the Kurrifer estate as a whole.

A few peasants with their farms belonging to the demesne village lay dispersed on its periphery on the boundary towards the neighboring village of Nurms. Nurms might have been formed when the demesne was divided



from the peasants' fields. This is suggested by the fact that both the peasants in the village with demesne and the peasants in the adjacent village of Nurms controlled a greater land area than in the peripheral village of Ragna (Figure 1).

### Reduction in the Swedish province of Estland (1681–1695)

The governmental reduction by the Swedish Empire that was initiated in Estland in 1681 included, as part of the strategy, reclaiming alienated crown land for lease. The reform was part of a European trend at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to increase revenues to the state treasury by leasing land.<sup>43</sup> It was accompanied by centralizing regulation of the judicial system, among other things. Through its regulations the Swedish Government created an internal market in its Baltic Sea provinces equal to the amount of export. The management of leasehold estates was regulated, formally freezing the organization of agriculture as well as the management of work on the estates now reclaimed by the crown, dating back to the time of extended demesne in the period 1632–1681.

### Crisis in agriculture in the Swedish province of Estland (1695–1710)

In the mid-1690s the rising cash boom had turned into a deep slump. In spite of this agrarian depression demesne management continued unimpeded. Production was often illegal. Demesne lordship where the demesne was concentrated on infields only had become arduous to the peasants on the estates. There are strong indications that this concentration on demesne management had contraproductive effects on yields.

To explain the process of demesne lordship in the Swedish province of Estland, it seems necessary to develop the analysis further. Early modern warfare had a destructive impact on the market. This first entailed the destruction of the Hanseatic League, the Teutonic Order and the papal bishoprics in the eastern Baltic area. This interpretation was offered by the Swedish scholars Magnus Roth and Johan Axel Almquist in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But the arguments for a new explanation of the development of demesne lordship in Swedish Estland must be discussed and this explanation should be formulated as a hypothesis.

### Discussion of a new explanation of the development of demesne lordship

Poland was the center of the Baltic Sea region's grain export. The breakthrough for grain export in the area came in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century at the time of the Livonian War and the outbreak of the Dutch War of Independence (1577–1648). Research on the subject has often pointed out that besides the regional devastation of the Baltic Sea region after the Livonian war, the Polish War and the Thirty Years' War undermined trade conditions in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> But the pressure for transformation towards extending the areas under demesne has been confirmed for the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in Lithuania, Swedish Pomerania, and western Estland. Common to all these territories was that they had been

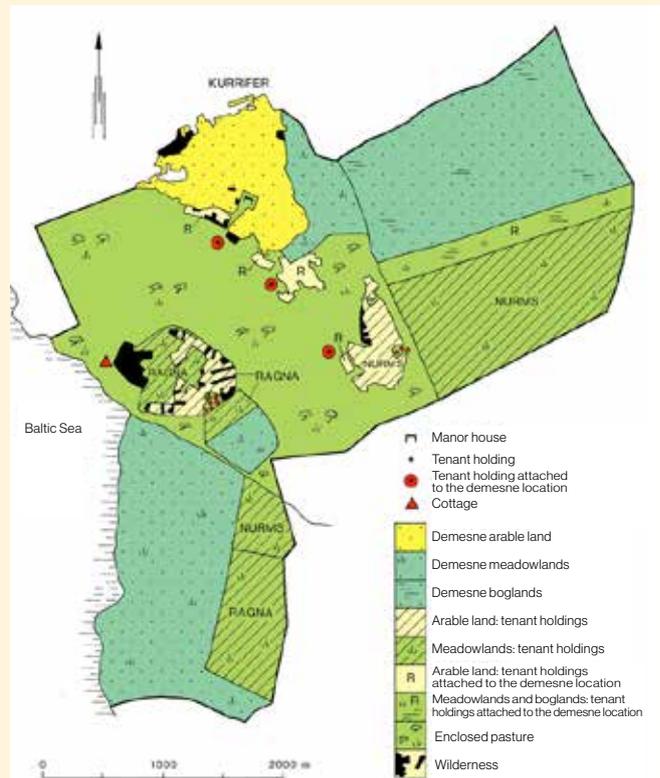


Figure 1. The estate of Kurrifer in 1689 in the parish of St. Martens outside Hapsal (Estonian Haapsalu) in western Estonia.

subject to war damage and occupation by troops of the Swedish Crown. But one aspect has been neglected as irrelevant, namely that the geopolitical balance and trade structure was disrupted by the English elimination of Dutch naval power in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, destroying Amsterdam and the Netherlands as a major importer of grain. The foundation of the Russian imperial capital St. Petersburg in the Bay of Finland in 1704 and the Russian conquest of all the Swedish Baltic provinces in 1710 further upset the balance.<sup>46</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the imperial powers of Russia and Prussia gradually occupied and annexed Poland-Lithuania.

My conclusion is that a new explanation should take into consideration war-based changes in the markets, structures of trade, and the central administration of the provinces of the Swedish Great Power. I argue that the discussion should start from the concept of the military state. According to Jan Lindegren, the military state emerged in early modern times; its aim was to finance the military sector of the central power through taxation and other duties.<sup>47</sup>

### The role of the Swedish military state

A typical feature of the Swedish military state was a policy of armament based on agrarian production and industries working with raw materials.<sup>48</sup> The Swedish nobility received privileges in return for producing provisions, iron ore, and metal products and were subject to taxes and conscription of the estate population.<sup>49</sup> The central government entered into alliances in order to deliver the best technology to the armament industry for the production of arms. From the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the Swedish Crown monopolized iron and grain exports and regulated flows

of trade through blockades and purchases.<sup>50</sup> For this reason, the armaments industry created new markets for provisions and other products such as beer and charcoal.<sup>51</sup> The Swedish Crown also arranged the transfer of lands as security to private persons, aiming to improve its financial situation; this was particularly applied in the provinces.<sup>52</sup>

In the contemporary early modern continental area, the military state has been confirmed as a reason for the development of demesne lordship in two cases, Mecklenburg and Hungary. It has been shown that purchases by the military state caused demesne lordship in Hungary from the turn of the century (around 1600), and that demesne lordship in Mecklenburg is partly explained by the fees levied for arming the military.<sup>53</sup>

Eli F. Heckscher approached the problem by arguing that the Reduction of 1681, which dedicated land to the maintenance of the Great Power's military, may have forced landowners into demesne lordship because of loss of income.<sup>54</sup>

In relation to the situation on the continent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it has been confirmed that demesne lordship reached its highest level of exploitation through labor rent.<sup>55</sup> In the same century, the Amsterdam market faded and the provincial territories of the Great Powers, both in the Baltic Sea region and on the continent, expanded to their greatest extent.<sup>56</sup> The *Stavnsbånd* maintained by the Danish Government between 1733 and 1788 is an example of how the estates were integrated with an organization for forced conscription in which male persons were tied to the estates by regulation.<sup>57</sup>

There are more clues to an explanation in confirmed cases of demesne lordship focused on urban areas in the Russian Baltic provinces and in Austria-Hungary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup> Part of the explanation is probably that the European capitals and many other towns were garrison towns and bases for the maintenance of the Great Powers' military forces.

In Denmark, Schleswig, and Holstein from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, estates mainly supplied dairy products to the market.<sup>59</sup> The fact that dairy products are heavy fresh goods indicates restructuring to supply domestic markets at short distances from the estates. Relations to urban centers have been proved to explain demesne lordship in Austria-Hungary. A similar example can be found in the Russian Baltic provinces, where, as Kahk has shown, estate owners switched to selling potatoes and vodka distilled from potatoes in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The target for this production was primarily St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire.<sup>60</sup> From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the potato was an important food for the military of the European Great Powers, for both direct consumption and the production of brandy. The war between Prussia and Austria-Hungary in 1778–1779 is called the Potato War because it was caused by the availability of provisions to the troops. On the continent, this was an eastern equivalent to the production of cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco on western colonial slave plantations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>61</sup>

## A hypothesis

My intention has been to discursively try to explain the anomalous appearance of demesne lordship in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in

western Estland in the Baltic Sea region. I have shown that the commodity markets in Western Europe were important factors in this development, especially during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and following the Thirty Years' War.

The war-stricken early modern agricultural landscape increased the effect in certain regions. But the causal links have been insufficiently disentangled and are empirically unsatisfactory.

I argue that effects of actions related to *raison d'état* have been confirmed in several regions in early modern Europe. The exceptional early modern demesne lordship in the Swedish province of Estland can be related to this category. The motive for applying this explanation has, in my opinion, gained credibility and relevance even if circumstances are still unclear. The key to the logic of this argument is that the years of warfare and calamity in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century extinguished the peacetime boom of grain exports to Amsterdam. It would thus be relevant to assume that the organization of the Swedish military state can explain the growth of demesne lordship in Swedish Estland from the turn of the century, 1600.

But how should it be interpreted; what was the initial factor that motivated the decision to introduce demesne lordship?<sup>62</sup> Were the decisions anchored in a political design for demesne lordship by the Swedish military state or were they an effect of its governance? Was the rule different in the provinces the Swedish Great Power had acquired from 1561 or was it valid for the whole realm? Was the policy concerning the alienation of land pursued in the Swedish province of Estland valid for all Baltic provinces? What were the motives behind the policy; was it a deliberate policy by the Swedish Crown aimed at disciplining the inhabitants of the province or at benefiting from the revenues of a lucrative agrarian sector?

One hypothesis proposed in this article concerning the development of the early modern demesne lordship in the Baltic Sea region takes as its starting point the impact on private land ownership in Europe of governments' extension of their political powers and increasing conflicts.<sup>63</sup> Immunities were abolished and taxation introduced.<sup>64</sup> The area of taxed land increased and the estates were divided into different categories of tax-levying large agricultural estates. The small scale of the estates was thus a side effect of the policy pursued. It led to the Swedish Crown treating the provinces as a separate state domain where a policy applied to the domestic conditions was pursued.<sup>65</sup> The Crown thus tended to determine internal conditions in its provinces by direct rule, aiming at discipline in accordance with the two most



important institutions of the early modern central power: the military state and the produce market.<sup>66</sup>

The image of the Swedish Crown as an institution with manifold properties is supported by Torbjörn Eng's hypothesis of an ideological break between royal power and provincial autocratic-minded council aristocracy in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, concerning the view of the provincial government of the Swedish province of Estland. Eng's interpretation is that the royal power saw the inhabitants of the Swedish province of Estland as constitutionally equal to those of Sweden proper.<sup>67</sup> That Swedish governance in the Baltic provinces changed focus, differentiating between the different areas, is shown by how the military state was organized in Livonia after the Westphalian Peace. Livonia was administered as a territory with a line of garrisons on the border with Poland, while only one infantry company was accommodated in the castle in Reval in Estland.<sup>68</sup>

I would suggest a working hypothesis in which the central power saw its policy as a center-periphery mechanism aimed at establishing discipline. The Swedish Crown saw this mechanism as having the most favorable effect on private estate owners' decisions concerning the running of the estate and peasants' freehold rights, permissions, and competences.<sup>69</sup> For this reason the estates were seen by the Swedish Crown as the foundation stones of early modern ownership conditions.<sup>70</sup> Its decisions were risk-minimizing in the Baltic as the provinces bordered on hostile, belligerent military superpowers. The effect was a repressive and autocratic provincial Swedish regime. Rights and duties in Sweden proper were not valid for the inhabitants of the Baltic provinces.

Concerning the motives for the rapidly implemented shift into demesne lordship in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century on the domains of private estate owners in Estland, I do not find any causal connection based on the premises discussed above. Lacking a sufficient explanation, I will suggest that one reason was the supply of provisions for the maintenance of the Swedish military state during the years of calamity in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Might there have been an agreement with the private persons who received land from the Crown's fortress districts about supplies of necessities from their private autocratic estates to the Swedish Crown? I hope to return to this question in a forthcoming study. In this article on the development of early modern demesne lordship in western Estonia in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the 21<sup>st</sup> century discourse about *raison d'état* has been broadened with additional arguments about the role of the early modern military state in the development of

demesne lordship in the Baltic Sea region, following Braudel's and Wallerstein's reasoning behind their center-periphery models. At this stage of research there are already reasons to assume that the early modern process based on *raison d'état* has resulted in two expressions, just like the contemporary emergence of demesne lordship in the Swedish province of Estland: one bellicose and autocratic, and one enlightened and prohibitive. The latter stage led to a mercantilist administration in Estland using the export harbor of Reval (Tallinn), while Livonia in the south was administered as a garrison province serving the fortress troops stationed along the border with Poland. 

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## The ambiguities and social capital of global Ukrainians

Ukrainians abroad have generally done well in assimilating into their new cultures, and rarely have they demanded alternative public spaces in their new homes. Maidan 2.0, however, affected the Ukrainian émigré in a new, unique way. To start with, it was the virtual spaces – which had become a frontline for advocacy and “kitchen politics” among forum members of post-Soviet countries – that caused many Ukrainians to unsubscribe as followers and censor previous “friendships”. Perhaps the most contested virtual spaces were many forums such as *Russians in [...]* or *Russian-speaking community in [...]* that have conveniently integrated Ukrainians abroad. In a rather short span of time, these lists had become a point of departure for the creation of borders between identities, between us and them, for those who for years had been aggregated under the common denominator *russkie*.

The demonstrations by the diaspora in European and North American cities in support of EuroMaidan in late 2013 and throughout 2014 confirmed this milestone in the awakening of many individuals of Ukrainian origin scattered around the European and the wider world economic landscape. The voices of many professional and educated Ukrainian expatriates the world over became stronger as they spoke of a homecoming. They seemed willing to give up their comfort zones outside Ukraine and become part of the change in the recovering country. Those who remained abroad placed high on their agenda the tasks of maintaining a link with conationals inside as well as outside the homeland, and of effectively using their skills and knowledge to advocate for Ukrainian interests throughout the world.

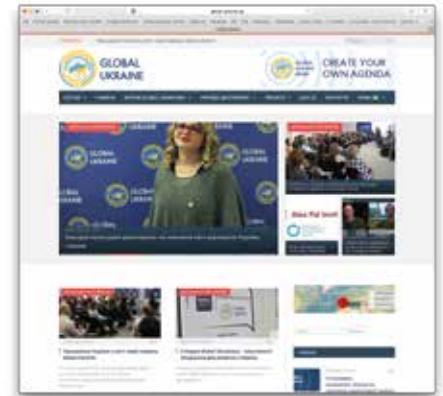


The website of InterNations ...

So who is this social group, Ukrainian expats: altruistic lone wolves, or a rising social class? To try to find an answer I visited the Global Ukraine expat forum held in Kyiv on October 31, 2015. The forum drew attention to the increasing social capital of Ukrainian expatriates who engage in public diplomacy and lobbying on behalf of Ukrainian interests worldwide.

**THE GLOBAL UKRAINE** forum in Kyiv in 2015 was the second gathering of Ukrainian expats that year. It was aimed at synchronizing the activities of Ukrainians at home and abroad, in order to “promote the Ukrainian identity, protect and advance Ukraine’s cultural and economic interests worldwide,” according to the program description of the event. Conceived during Maidan 2.0 and officially registered in early 2015 as an international nongovernmental organization, the platform united small-scale communities of Ukrainian expats and members of the Ukrainian diaspora worldwide in the goal of acting in the realm of public, cultural, and business diplomacy.

The one-day forum was filled with patriotic sentiments, lively discussions



... and that of Global Ukraine.

on possible additional strategies of Global Ukraine, and alarming trends around the world that ran counter to Ukrainian interests. The words of organizers and guest speakers alternated with Skype calls from Ukrainian community leaders in Mexico, the US, Great Britain, Australia, the Netherlands, India, China, and Belgium. The agenda contained the general injunctions to try to think globally and act locally, to fill the gap between Ukrainian diasporas and the nation-state; to act to reduce the outflow of Ukrainians from the homeland, to display ad hoc leadership in diasporic communities, to lobby European and Ukrainian decision makers, and, last but not least, to adopt benchmarks to measure the success or failure of these efforts.

As the day grew dark, the debate became more vigorous, addressing questions of leadership and control, funding, group cohesion, and task-setting. These developments over the course of the day reflected the natural process of institutionalization of a growing organization; simultaneously, they signaled that the group’s future remained mired in matters of power relations and identity politics.

A critically valuable type of human

capital – returning expats – could mean a recovery from a devastating outflow of workforce in Ukraine. Their duty-memory (to use Pierre Nora's term),<sup>1</sup> and a desire to secure their future with a place and a nation that expats themselves identify with, serve as the impetus for an eventual return to their place of origin – when the time is right. Like members of the diaspora, as well as sojourners, expats are a generation in cultural borderlands, in a state of in-betweenness, whose value systems spring from bilingualism and a deep understanding of different cultural settings.<sup>2</sup> In addition to generally higher educational and professional capital, they epitomize a rising *social capital*<sup>3</sup> and an informal think tank of sorts that the ruling political elite in Ukraine continuously invokes in its official rhetoric but fails to address in official state programs assisting returnees. More tellingly, the rallies for local election campaigns in October 2015 revealed that the participation of Ukrainian expats in vernacular politics remained opportunistic and stood in direct opposition to the corrupt system.

To be effective, expats form sodalities, such as Global Ukraine, of like-minded and action-driven individuals. Yet a bridge must be crossed from what Aihwa Ong has described as *flexible citizenship*,<sup>4</sup> which derives from living in multiple locations, to *effective citizenship*. In this way, any social group is likely to face inter and intragroup controversies that come about to a large extent as a result of cultural stereotypes, romantic sentiments, and the plural nature of the formulas that govern diasporic identity. For that matter, expat communities should be critically investigated as a separate research field, first, as a social group, and second, as a virtual social group.

As a subject of study, expatriates fall into a theoretical grid cutting across identity, citizenship, and geographic location. Like other migrants of identity, expats regularly deploy socially-based questions about who they are, and where they belong. Creating sodalities helps expatriates look for a shared answer and form unions among similar, self-reflective individuals. Facing “increasing inter-linkage between

globalizing influences and personal dispositions”,<sup>5</sup> expats dictate new models of global citizenship in a world that is hardly post-national in the way Arjun Appadurai would have us believe.<sup>6</sup> Rather, citizenship is now actualized through a mental frame of reference with a home (or diasporic *ontological moorings*, as suggested by Christopher Tilley),<sup>7</sup> and by the reiteration of bonds through return trips. Furthermore, creating sodalities leads to what Tilley calls cultural ecology,<sup>8</sup> referring to a space of intellectual transaction between multiple sites of and small-scale bonding and a large-scale confrontation. Similarly, David Harvey emphasized the importance of translating the particularities of grassroots struggles into struggles for a national or communal justice.<sup>9</sup>

Geographical and sociological imagination is constantly at work as expats *imagine* themselves belonging to one group, a phenomenon depicted quite accurately at the national level by Benedict Anderson.<sup>10</sup> Arjun Appadurai likewise assigns a significant role to the social practice of imagination as “a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility”.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the imagining component of virtual (in contrast to face-to-face) groups can jeopardize a group's lifespan. The fact that most global Ukrainians remain *invisible* to one another in the network (Diane Crane has observed this in scientific circles)<sup>12</sup> can lead to unforeseen intragroup controversies despite shared values, visions, and missions. Hirsch and Spitzer, in this vein, described the not-so-smooth transformation of a Jewish diaspora community from a web list into a real-life reunion in Czernowitz.<sup>13</sup>

**FOR THE LAST** couple of years, there has been a publicized and mediatised injunction using the locution a “united country” (*jedyna kraina*) in order to emphasize how we, Ukrainians, are alike. But with regard to the diaspora, there is a moment of estrangement of those who *remained* in a stagnant country towards those who *left* to find their fortune (or “look for pears on willows” as the popular song “Tylku wy Lwowi” goes). It is only recently that we have realized the extent of our igno-

rance about Ukrainians living abroad and have started – mainly due to significant support from the diasporic community during Maidan – to overcome this ignorance with documentaries on Ukrainian émigrés in the US and Canada, to listen to outspoken female workers in Italy and Poland who never spoke out before, and to laugh at our realities with the quasi-returnee journalist Michael Tschur. These moments confirm that we are still awkward in the subject–subject relation which is our relation with the Other of the Ukrainian self.

Ukrainians should, to cite one of the forum speakers, hold on to their *distrust* as an instrument to pressure authorities and demand transformations – like watchdogs of change. As a concluding comment, I wish to extend that and suggest that both distrust and trust should be among the many balls in the air for those Ukrainians who count on transformations at home. The investments in trust should also be directed toward conationals outside the national borders.

The proliferation of new social layers in Ukraine as another effect of the Maidan – civic journalists, bloggers, intellectuals, volunteers and NGO activists, the diaspora, and last but not least returning expats – finally signaled the arrival of a horizontal political culture. Trust is an important token of this civic formation in the process of replacing “the hierarchical politics and distrust with horizontal ties of mutual involvement and civic engagement”.<sup>14</sup> Yet a great deal of primordial affect,<sup>15</sup> national sentiments, illusions, and the phantasmagorias of virtual circles add to the exoticized idea of homecoming that upon realization may clash with inter and intra-group politics of identity, like a ground that chokes the good seeds and yields no harvest. ❌

natalia godis

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## On the frontlines of disinformation. Academic packaging of old stereotypes

**O**n November 30, 2015, two years had passed since a peaceful student demonstration at the Maidan in Kyiv was dispersed by the police, and the process referred to in Ukraine as "the revolution of dignity" began. Ukraine once again became a hot topic after an extended period of "Ukraine fatigue" among Western politicians and media. As the events escalated into street fighting in Kyiv and other cities, and with the Russian occupation of Crimea and armed intervention in Donbas, a host of writers offered their interpretations of the events.

Richard Sakwa, a professor of Russian and European history at Kent University in the UK, has been writing about the Soviet Union and Russia since the 1980s. His fifth book in as many years, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, was first published in the UK in the winter of 2014–2015. In September, it was released in Sweden in translation.

Sakwa takes great pains to present an alternative view to the established image of Russia as a belligerent and revisionist power that encroaches on the sovereignty of nonaligned neighbors, and that routinely threatens all neighboring countries, with the possible exception of the rather compliant Belarus. Ukraine is depicted as a failed state from the perspective of nation- and state-building. Although it is a conglomerate of cultures and traditions, the country has, Sakwa maintains, been run as an ethno-culturally homogeneous state since gaining independence in 1991. This supposed process has resulted in much damage and bitterness. The "February Revolution", which is what Sakwa calls the take-over of power by the opposition, was hijacked by the extreme right. Groups on the extreme right constituted an important element of the motley street opposition in Kyiv to President Yanukovich from the very first days of the protests.

This radicalized the people in Crimea and Donbas. It also compelled Russia to take steps – in accordance with its defense doctrine – to rescue the Russian and Russian-speaking population in Ukraine from the ill-treatment by the Ukrainian government set in motion by these dark forces. In Sakwa's interpretation, the Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea, as well as its aid to the separatists in Donbas, were improvised as the events unfolded, and were

**Richard Sakwa, Frontlinje Ukraina: Krisen i gränslandet mellan Ryssland och Europeiska unionen; Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands**

Karneval förlag; London: I. B. Tauris, 2015, 349 pages

## Continued. On the frontlines of disinformation

nothing more than a reasonable reaction to the events in Kyiv.

**THE AUTHOR IDENTIFIES** two main causes of the Ukrainian drama. The enlargement of the EU, and especially the expansion of NATO, together constitute the first cause. The European Union had been increasingly viewed by Russia as too bound up with transatlantic structures. These structures (above all NATO) have expanded right up to the borders of Russia, provoking much anxiety among its ruling class. A more equitable new security arrangement should have been on offer at the end of the Cold War, rather than one rooted in, as Sakwa sees it, Western triumphalism. Therefore, he writes, Russia was compelled to put its foot down in the case of Ukraine. The development of a Ukraine on a path towards the EU (Sakwa is not, however, talking about the country's prospects of becoming an actual member in the foreseeable future), and then towards NATO (an even more uncertain prospect) is depicted as inevitable. Ultimately, it is the US that stands behind these negative developments. Since the 1990s, it has enjoyed the comforts of a unipolar world order, celebrating it with a series of misguided armed interventions around the world. The other force, or perhaps culprit, behind the Ukrainian drama is the ethnic nationalism present in the country. According to Sakwa, it has exerted a disproportionate influence on Ukrainian politics and society, although its geographic and demographic core is confined to the country's western regions. Unless the West and the Kyiv government come to their senses, Europe may drift into war just as it did in 1914. In this fatal year, war rhetoric was whipped up by states already preprogrammed for war, as Sakwa worrisomely suggests in the book's dramatic opening.

**MOST OF THE INFORMATION** Sakwa presents strikes me as derived from the East, and reflects the Russian perspective as canalized by its media and the ruling class. There are a number of Russian stereotypes about Ukraine. The strongest of those is the view of the Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians as potential extremists, Ukrainian culture as systemically inferior to Russian culture, and Ukraine as predestined to failure as a state. In this interpretation, the terms

"monistic" and "pluralistic" symbolize the two main political orientations in Ukrainian politics. The former is based on ethnic nationalism, while the latter is more ethnically all-embracing. In Sakwa's book, "monists" are dubbed "orangists", while the "pluralists" are referred to as the "blues". The names refer to the two political camps that arose in connection with the Orange Revolution of 2004–2005 and became dormant more or less as soon as the revolution ended. The former presidents Yushchenko and Yanukovich represent the two camps: Yushchenko the orange; Yanukovich the blue. Those terms are a part of a Russian landscape of media and political language. In Ukraine, "the orange" died politically even before Yushchenko was pushed out of politics in the presidential election of autumn 2009.

Yanukovich and the former Party of Regions can by no means be depicted as defenders of pluralistic values with a sensitivity for cultural differences, I would argue. Few groups in power in post-independence Ukraine have been less interested in channeling cultural and regional differences through politics than the exiled former president and his closest allies. Instead, they cynically exploited the image of such sensitivity, as indicated by their very name, as well as by numerous official statements. They have also been depicted as heralds of freedom and cultural diversity by Russian media. Ukrainian nationalism is described as being ethnic and exclusive over a period of some eighty years. In the book, Ukrainian nationalism seems to have kept the same steady course since the interwar period, as Sakwa refuses to take into account the multi-ethnic Ukrainian state and the complicated language situation.

**CIVIC NATIONALISM** grew in strength during the fighting in Independence Square, and its was further accelerated by the war conducted against Ukraine by Russia. However, just like most Russian observers and authorities, along with many European leftist intellectuals, he exaggerates right-wing extremism in Ukraine. Sakwa admits that both elections were legitimate but still claims the presidential election in May 2014 did not really reflect the will of the people because voting did not take place in all of the electoral constituencies in Donbas. To Sakwa, the Ukrainian extreme right seems to be an ideologically homogeneous creation. However, Anton Shekhovtsov, a researcher and refugee from Crimea and an ethnic Russian, talks about ideologically heterogeneous extreme right-wing movements. Of these, only Svoboda' – no longer in the Ukrainian parliament since autumn of 2014 – can be said to represent traditional ethnic nationalism. Right Sector represents a kind of nationalism open to Ukrainians of different ethnic backgrounds. Some right-wing militants are involved in the volunteer battalion Azov, which seems to be ideologically close to contemporary European neo-Nazism. Unlike Svoboda, the Right Sector and Azov contain a strong Russophone element. All three did disastrously in both the presidential and parliamentary elections. Those who exaggerate the influence of right-wing extremism on Ukrainian politics must be

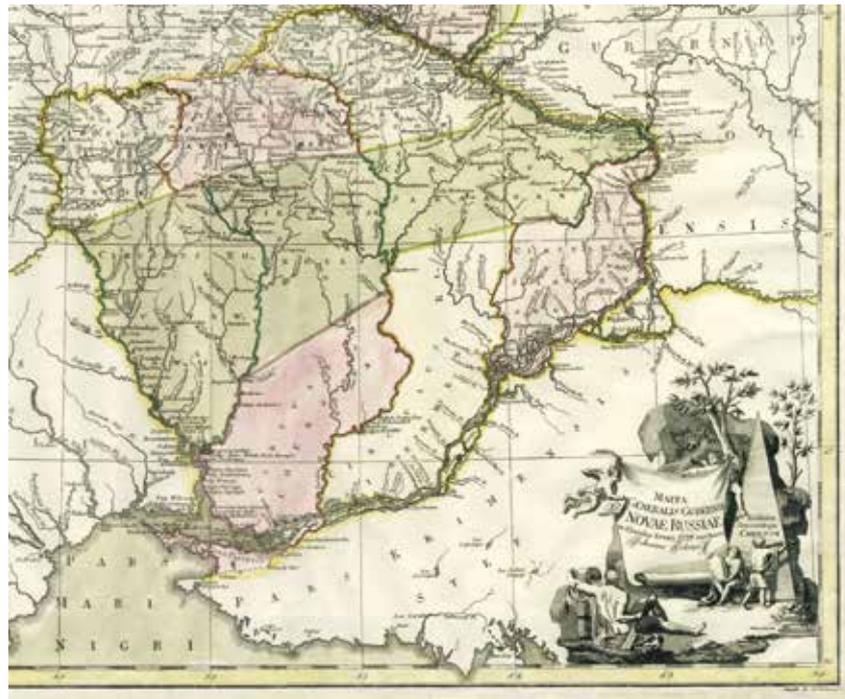
able to explain the parliamentary result.

Sakwa claims the concept “New Russia” (Novorossia) entered the popular discourse in 2014. But the name was implanted by Russian media and especially Vladimir Putin. However, the actual historical province of New Russia did not exist for 150 years, as Putin had claimed, but for a total of about twenty years spread out over a period of some 150 years. Its boundaries also shifted considerably over time and were never fixed, and in particular not to the territory claimed by Putin in his speech that Sakwa cites on page 194. The Russian president mentions Kharkiv as part of the province (which it never was), but “forgets” to mention the region and town of Dnipropetrovsk, probably because of

its Russian-speaking population’s general embrace of Ukrainian statehood, and its active part in the defense against Russian aggression in the east. Like several other historical concepts, New Russia is a term exhumed in order to be used in a campaign of revisionism. As proof of New Russia being on everyone’s lips in 2014, Sakwa employs the work “New Russia – resurrected from the ashes”, one of many pamphlets that, as if by coincidence, flooded the Russian book market in 2014, caricaturing Ukrainian state formation and culture.

Russian perceptions of neighboring countries, and the securitization thereof, are taken as objective, and are used as evidence of Western and Ukrainian politicians’ lack of responsibility. States between Russia and Germany are treated as a gray mass with limited sovereignty. Without question, we are led to believe, the right to choose political and economic unions, or military alliances, does not apply to the countries such as Poland or the Baltic states.

“FRONTLINE UKRAINE” appears to be a new front of information warfare on the situation in Ukraine. It has garnered good reviews in the leftist press, and was recently used by a Marxist author who claimed connections between European liberals and right-wing extremism. The claim that Ukraine is “a country that is in many respects a different side of Russia itself, while Russia is inevitably a part of the Ukrainian identity” has lost its meaning since the book’s publication. The new Ukrainian defense doc-



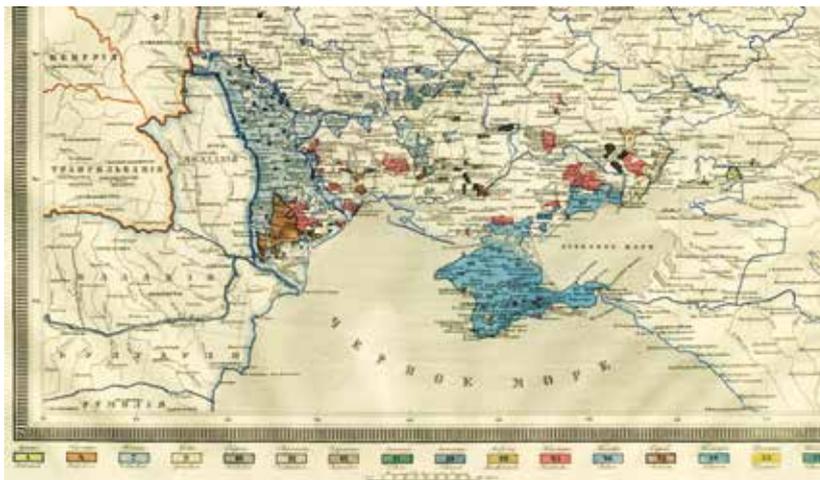
An embryonic province in recently annexed territory. *Mappa generalis gubernii Novae Russiae in circulos divisi 1779 tuctore*, Krigsarkivet 0403/33/020 1.

trine includes – not surprisingly – Russia as a central part of the threat against the Ukrainian state. If Russia is part of Ukrainian identity, as Sakwa claims, it is increasingly so as an enemy state – due to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Unfortunately, Ukraine is also a part of Russian identity. Only when Ukraine is viewed as a real state by the Russian political class and Russian citizens, and its culture and people are respected, will normalization be possible. As long as the phantom pains of the lost parts of the empire make themselves felt in Russia, Ukraine will need strong backing from the West to become a modern and democratic European state.

Lamentable consequences of careless handling of sources and footnotes in Sakwa’s book have already appeared. In a recent article in *Baltic Worlds*, Don Kalb presents a supposed alliance of bourgeoisie and rightist extremists in Ukraine. His knowledge of the recent developments in the country is largely shaped by Sakwa’s book, to which he makes eight references. Two references are ultimately to an article by Keith Giessen, who speculates as to the blood-thirstiness of Ukrainians from the western parts

of the country and the capital. When writing about the Odesa “massacre” (Kalb), Sakwa refers to official Russian government material. Giesen draws a conclusion (the famous “Why not kill them all”) after encounters with persons who are never mentioned by name. Employing the works of both gentlemen, Kalb spells out the well-known repertoire of statements about the Maidan and subsequent Ukrainian politics. Thus one finds omnipotent extreme nationalists, either Svoboda (out of parliament since October 2014) or the Right Sector (whose leader failed utterly in the presidential race), which is thoroughly outside mainstream politics. “They are the Jobbik of Western Ukraine”, one learns. They snatched the Maidan from the people, eliminating other forces. Still, Kalb suggests, echoing Sakwa’s difficulties in explaining the lack of right-wing electoral success throughout 2014, it was a people’s uprising.<sup>2</sup> However, Kyiv’s “middle classes and intelligentsia” allied themselves with the extremists, who, once the victory was snatched from other Maidan groups, “pointed their fists” against Russian speakers and Russia. This process was supposedly illustrated by the events in Odessa on May 2, 2014 (again, Russian speakers against Russian speakers).<sup>3</sup> Kalb does not dwell on why those urban “middle classes”, overwhelmingly Russian – speaking, would ally themselves with groups he describes as national-socialist, only to attack Russophones in other parts of Ukraine.

**SAKWA’S WORK** and Kalb’s article suggest there is not much that might influence the minds of those uncomfortable with the prevailing geopolitical, political, and financial order in Europe. Those self-fashioned freethinkers constitute a motley group. There are those who view themselves as alternative voices, and are frequently found among several Green, leftist, and populist parties of Western Europe. Then there are the scholars engaged in Eurasian and/or Slavic studies who nourish emotional and professional ties to Russia that often predate its re-creation in 1991.<sup>4</sup> Finally, there are various right-wing forces in Europe, with Marine Le Pen’s Front



An ethnic map of the northern Black Sea shores. The Crimean Tartars are assigned number 29 and the color blue; colonists from German lands number 23 and the color red. *Ethnographic map of Russian Empire, 1851. Krigsarkivet 043/033/027c.*

National or the Hungarian Jobbik at the forefront. With those parties the Kremlin is only too happy to retain cordial ties, a fact frequently missed by the critics of Maidan and post-Maidan developments in Ukraine. In addition, there are mainstream political parties and politicians who, although critical of Russia for its actions over the last years, look for ways to reestablish the lucrative relations of former times.<sup>5</sup>

I would like to emphasize the basic principles of historical enquiry. These include careful evaluation of source material, along with assigning it importance according to its analytic and explanatory value. This process, in turn, is determined by the spatial and chronological proximity of the documents to the events, and their dependence on other sources and agents outside the processes studied. Are the documents in front of me produced by deeply partisan groups or people? If so, how can they be used – if at all? These are a few of many questions that face a historian during the research process.

One is also, I presume, supposed to present the position of one’s adversaries, and not in a slipshod or parodic way, before presenting one’s own position. If the abovementioned principles are not followed, what is portrayed as an academic work will turn into a polemical endeavor at best, and disinformation at worst. ❌

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## One in a thousand. An ordinary extraordinary woman

In a Swedish film from 1948, *Främmande Hamn* [Foreign Harbor], shot partly in Gdynia, the role of an old Polish woman is played by Elsa Meyring, who was living in Stockholm at the time. The scene in which she appears was probably shot in a studio in Stockholm, but the plot, supposedly taking place in 1938 in a Baltic harbor, might not have been totally unknown to the actress.

Meyring was born Elsa Bauschwitz in Stettin, Germany, in 1883. She married Theodor Meyring in 1904, and during World War I she took an active part in the social welfare of invalids and widows. From 1919 to 1929 she was a member of the Stettin City Council, with responsibility for the welfare of the youth of the city, and was the first woman member of the council.

This seems like the beginning of a successful political and social career in Stettin and Germany. But things would turn out otherwise. Helmut Müssener and Wolfgang Wilhelmus, two scholars long dedicated to the study of exile in the unique triangle of German, Swedish, and Jewish relations, have compiled and written a book on the extraordinary life of this talented and humble woman. The book contains both her own life story as a “German non-Aryan woman in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” as well as many documents pertaining to her life and the political circumstances that shaped her life’s trajectory, plus a prologue explaining things taken for granted in her own account of her life.

In December 1939, a young woman of Baltic German descent arrives in Swinemünde, the outpost of Stettin, on a boat from Helsinki together with a large group of Baltic Germans. After some weeks, she and her mother are given an apartment in central Stettin, fully furnished, but deprived of all personal details.

**SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE JEWISH** population of Stettin is forced to leave their apartments on the night of February 12, 1940. One of the many interesting and terrifying documents in the book is a *Merkblatt* issued to select members of the Nazi Party with extremely detailed instructions on how, “with hardness, accuracy, and caution” [Härte, Sorgfalt und Umsicht], without any consideration of the Jews’ complaints, to evacuate all Stettin Jews. The population was moved to the freight station to wait in the stark cold. They were given old cement sacks filled with some food and then packed into fourth-class wagons without toilets, lighting, or heating. They were forbidden to open the windows but managed to get some snow to melt for drinking water. Elsa’s cup and saucer became a common treasure. After a journey of three days and nights, the train arrived in Lublin, chosen by the Nazi German administration to be a center of reception for expelled German Jews. They had to leave their few remaining belongings and walk in deep snow, the elderly frost-bitten people left to be taken care of by local Jews.

The brutal expulsion of the Stettin Jews was reported in the foreign press and induced the (in)famous pro-Hitler Swedish explorer Sven Hedin to protest to Heinrich Himmler against the treatment, but he was bluntly rebuffed, as reported in his mem-



Elsa Meyring had an extraordinary life. Above, the cover of the reviewed book. At right, the Swedish film in which she played an old Polish woman.

oirs of visits to Berlin. (His protest is not mentioned in the present book.)

The group was divided and directed to three villages populated by Orthodox Jews, who were to take care of the Stettin Jews at their own expense. Elsa’s elderly husband had a physical and mental breakdown, and was sent to an overcrowded Jewish hospital in Lublin, where he died. Elsa, with her background in the social services, volunteered as a cultural interpreter between the ordinary Germans and the impoverished, Orthodox Yiddishspeakers.

**THE DEPORTATION** is described in great detail in Elsa Meyring’s memoirs in the book. But Müssener and Wilhelmus also follow another trajectory: how the Swedish bureaucracy dealt with the attempts by people in Sweden to save the Meyring couple by allowing them entry into Sweden, a country that tried to stay isolated from the influx of refugees and job-seekers by means of a formal attitude by which political activity against authoritarian régimes was (reluctantly) seen a reason for asylum, while the evident oppression of Jews (and Roma) in Nazi Germany was not.<sup>1</sup> On October 3, 1939, three Swedish citizens of good repute applied to the Swedish Foreign Ministry for entry permits on behalf of the Meyring couple. Some months before, the former town councilor and former Swedish vice-consul of Stettin, Georg Manasse, now exiled in Sweden, had written a letter of recommendation concerning his former colleague that was attached to the several docu-

**Helmut Müssener, Wolfgang Wilhelmus: Stettin Lublin Stockholm. Elsa Meyring: Aus dem Leben einer deutschen Nichtarierin im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.**

Rostock: Ingo Koch Verlag, 2014.

## Continued. One in a thousand

ments in the application. However, on October 26, 1939, the National Social Welfare Board denied the application “for the time being”, but this decision was not transmitted to the Stockholm Mosaic Community (the Jewish community of Stockholm) until February 2, 1940. This refusal a few days later provoked the pro-Nazi professor at Stockholm University College, the ex-German Nobel Prize laureate Hans von Euler, whose Jewish docent Erich Adler had earlier tried to save the Meyring couple, to renew a request for their admission to Sweden. A week later, the request was dismissed. However, on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1940, after meetings with representatives of the Mosaic Community and other parties, the Swedish Foreign Ministry informed its legation in Berlin that the Meyring couple would be allowed entry into Sweden for a stay of three months. In the meantime, Elsa’s husband had died, and the visa allowance expired, but it was renewed and she was allowed to buy a passport issued by the governor general on June 14 and an entry visa for Sweden, allowing her to fly from Berlin to Stockholm.

This strange document is shown in the book: a passport of *Rzeczpospolita Polska* in Polish and French, but filled out in German and stamped by the Office of the General Government of All Occupied Polish Territories. The passport contains a visa stamp from the Swedish Legation in Berlin allowing entrance for a period of three months “under the condition that the passport holder does not engage in political propaganda”, and the exit stamp from Tempelhof Airport. The passport makes it possible (not without problems, sacrifices, and some good luck) for her to take a train to Berlin and fly to Stockholm on June 28, 1940. “*Das Wunder war geschehen*” [the miraculous had happened], she writes at the end of her report.

The surviving members of the deportation are forcibly moved again in the spring of 1942, and put to death in the camps the same year.

**WHILE IN SWEDEN**, Meyring works as a volunteer with the *Emigrantenselbsthilfe*, the Rescue Service for German-Jewish migrants. As her passport from a non-existent state is invalid, she applies for an alien’s passport, which is accepted, but it has to be renewed every six months. Until the end of the war, she reports intending to leave the country, but with the fate

of the German Jews, Stettin turning into Szczecin, her homeland and home town cease to exist. She now applies for a residence permit (p. 199: we read 1940, but the correct year is 1946!), intending to stay in Sweden, and in 1949 she applies for Swedish citizenship, enclosing her life story and recommendations from a number of prominent people. A very detailed report from the Stockholm police, based on the application and a personal inquiry, and containing only positive information, is sent to the Stockholm Governor’s Office for a decision which, in an “obedient pronouncement”, rejects the application, because she “enjoys financial support for her livelihood”. After a long bureaucratic delay, a new application is made, showing that the financial support is minimal and that she is living within very modest means.

She was finally granted Swedish citizenship by the Swedish Minister of Justice on March 9, 1951. She died on December 17, 1967, in Nytorp in the Jewish Home for the Aged in Southern Stockholm, and is buried in the Jewish section of the Southern Cemetery.

Elsa Meyring’s own story, the comments by Müssener and Wilhelmus about political conditions in Germany and Sweden, and the many bureaucratic documents give a moving and exciting account of the life of a minor figure yet an extraordinary person, and also of the circumstances surrounding her life in two countries during World War II. ✕

thomas lundén

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- 1 The official Swedish handling of Jewish immigration is treated in detail in a recent doctoral dissertation by Pontus Rudberg: *The Swedish Jews and the Victims of Nazi terror, 1933–1945* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis 2015), 253.

## Art as the venue for politics. The image of Rossiya 2

**A**rt and Protest in Putin's Russia, a treatise on politics in a society without politics, is based on an analysis of art as a venue for politics in Vladimir Putin's regime. The book, which takes the story to 2014, is the work of a seasoned observer. The author, the political scientist Lena Jonson, served as cultural counsellor at the Swedish embassy in Moscow from 2005 to 2009. Since 1992 she has been head of the Russia Program of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs. In her introduction, the author humbly declares that the book is neither an art historian's analysis of contemporary Russian art nor a contribution to "a theory of art history or political science". While Jonson is not a trained art historian, she certainly is a political scientist with a keen sense of humans as political animals.

The story about Russia which Jonson presents is ambiguous. It highlights the role of the arts in Putin's Russia against the background of the peculiar tsarist-Soviet-glasnost tradition in which works of art – literature, paintings, films, and installations – have been substituted for politics. The book also demonstrates that in the past three hundred years the arts in Russia have been part of European cultural trends in general, and especially so in the post-Soviet era. Russian writers, painters, film makers, composers, and musicians have influenced and been influenced by "national" cultures in the rest of Europe and North America. The soft power of Western European and North American culture and the promotion of Western art as a weapon to outshine Soviet socialist realism did have an impact among the intellectual classes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Jonson mentions the relative success of exhibitions with works of "abstract expressionism" and American jazz musicians in the Soviet bloc. These were clandestinely sponsored by the CIA. Their impact was real and enduring.

Some of the concepts that Jonson uses in her analysis are vague, which compels the reader to accept the tacit premise that art and protests stand for politics. The text is sometimes a bit esoteric in the sense that the author presupposes the reader has some familiarity with the tradition of doublespeak and doublethink in Russian society. But Jonson does manage to demonstrate how the visual arts – paintings, installations, and performances in public spaces



PHOTO: ARTARCHITECTUREPROJECT/BLOGSPOTISE

The Penultimate Day of Pompeii, 1997, Alexander Brodsky. (Image is not from the reviewed book.)

– filled a void in a society where politics never come to be exercised. She has charted how a substitute for politics developed in parallel to the suffocation of political life under Vladimir Putin. What she labels the "art community" became an arena for public actions for separate critical communities. Individual artists registered people's sentiments of fear, hope, and demands and chose to articulate them in works of art. In *Art and Protest in Putin's Russia* Jonson presents the political impact of works of art as demonstrated by their reception. Jonson bases her analysis not only on her interpretation of the artefacts but also on interviews with artists and on the reception of the works by art critics, agents of the state machinery, and the Patriarch and priests of the Russian Orthodox Church and some of its militant rank and file.

The book offers detailed descriptions of fifty-six photos of paintings, sculptures, and installations, which are reproduced in the book. In spite of their rather poor quality – all are in black and white and actually rather greyish – the illustrations are an essential aspect of the narration.

**THE FIRST ILLUSTRATION** (above) sets an apocalyptic tune. It is a photo of a video projection of an installation in unfired clay which was exhibited first in 1997 and then in 2008. It shows a grand building that is sinking into the mud. The artist is Alexander Brodskii. The title is "The Penultimate Day of Pompeii". Jonson's choice of this work as the empirical introduction to an analysis of political life in Putin's Russia is ingenious. It recalls the centuries-long tradition of satirical-cum-metaphorical political protest in Russia. The author notes that Brodskii's installation is "a paraphrase of one of the most famous Russian paintings of the nineteenth century, Karl Bryullov's 'the Last Day of Pompeii' (1830–1833)". She adds that the equally famous Russian thinker

**Lena Jonson,**  
**Art and**  
**Protest**  
**in Putin's**  
**Russia.**

London and  
New York:  
Routledge  
2015, 399  
pages.

## Continued. Art as the venue for politics

Alexander Herzen considered Bryullov's painting to illustrate the depressed political climate in tsarist Russia after the repression of the Decembrist movement in 1825.

Jonson argues that "Brodskii drew a parallel with the break-up of Soviet civilization". What's pertinent is that the installation can also draw attention to the political climate in contemporary Russia. This interpretation is borne out as reasonable if one ponders the titles and contents of three subsequent installations by Brodskii: "20 Garbage Bins", "The Night before the Attack", and "The Cell". The latter shows a room with the open sky as the ceiling and a black water pond as the floor. Fixed on the walls at different levels are kitchen furniture, a bed, a writing table, and a toilet. According to Jonson's interpretation, this installation can be viewed as a report on the political climate in Putin's Russia: "This was literally life on the edge, next to a void that created a claustrophobic feeling". The author anchors her analysis in the scholarly literature about postmodernist society. Zygmunt Bauman's metaphor of the liquid society turns out to offer a useful perspective in the attempt to come to terms with different emanations of the multifaceted art scene in Russia. Similarly fruitful is the application of the concept "the other gaze", which is taken from Jacques Rancière. Jonson defines "art of the other gaze" as "constituting a subtle form of dissensus" from the official political views. It may also be experienced and interpreted as a diversion from political orthodoxy (i.e. what Jonson vaguely defines as "the Putin consensus").

**THE CONCEPT OF THE OTHER** gaze is very relevant in the Russian context because one of the major protagonists in Jonson's story, Marat Gelman, consciously put it to use. After having served as a political consultant for the Yeltsin and the early Putin regimes, Gelman returned in 2004 to his role as a curator of art exhibitions. He curated *Rossiia 2* in the Central House of Artists in January 2005 as part of the first Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art.

That Moscow became the location of a biennale of contemporary art might create an impression of "normality", of an ordinary country that has art exhibitions as a matter of course. However, the title *Rossiia 2* was chosen to demonstrate that the exhibition was an antidote to

"*Rossiia 1*", Putin's Russia. Gelman declared that *Rossiia 2* was (more) democratic and international, and not "closed off within the boundaries of the 'officially' sanctioned".

In the book, Jonson cites Pussy Riot to provide a deep perspective on Russian art. Because the Pussy Riot affairs in 2012 and 2014 became the epitome of the clash between the art community and the powers in Russia, Jonson's book has become an illuminating story of the political role of art in Russia.

The Pussy Riot performance in Christ the Savior Cathedral in February 21, 2012, represented the culmination of the public manifestations of discontent. The subsequent trial and sentencing of two of the performers to imprisonment in a penal colony became the symbol of the increasing political oppression in Russia.

**PUSSY RIOT PRESENTED** the follow-up to their 2012 performance at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. As part of the Putin regime's international public relations campaign, they had been released early on the eve of opening of the Olympics and arrived in Sochi just in time for the opening. The last picture in Jonson's book is a photo that shows uniformed Cossacks whipping members of Pussy Riot to prevent them from performing. The women are wearing their usual balaclavas and bright neon dresses. This last picture makes the somber drama end in an atmosphere of despair – and with a flickering of spiteful protest.

In Moscow in 2012, Pussy Riot had chosen to perform in a cathedral, a non-political venue for a political action in a society where politics in an ordinary sense had come to a standstill. There they performed a punk prayer to the Virgin: "Mother of God, Put Putin Away". In Sochi in 2014 they chose a public space. They did not address heaven, but real society, shouting phrases such as "Fireworks for the bosses; Hail, Duce! Sochi is blocked, Olympus is under surveillance", and "Putin will teach you to love the Motherland. In Russia, spring can come suddenly."

Jonson argues that Pussy Riot's final words in the above quotation expressed a hope for change. The last words in her own book are a quotation from the Czech dissident who became President Václav Havel, a quotation often repeated in the literature on dissident culture under Communism: "... it is extremely short-sighted to believe that the face society happens to be presenting to you at a given moment is its true face. None of us knows all the potentialities that slumber in the spirit of the population".

In *Art and Protest in Putin's Russia*, Jonson has shown that, as in Germany in 1933–1945, where a few brave people came to represent "das andere Deutschland," there are in Putin's Russia people with an "other gaze" who represent another Russia, *Rossiia 2*. ✖

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kristian gerner

## Phantom borders in Europe. A fluid phenomenon

**“Phantom Borders in the Political Geography of East Central Europe”**

Erdkunde 69,  
no. 2 (2015),  
ed. Sabine von  
Löwis

Over the past century, East Central Europe has experienced the disappearance, appearance, expansion, shrinking, and shifting of nation states and of the borders defining their territories. The central theme of this special issue of *Erdkunde* relates to the complex legacies of former – *phantom* – borders, with a particular emphasis on the influence they continue to exert on the countries’ electoral geographies. The publication comprises seven interesting articles, including an extensive contextualizing introduction written by the guest editor, Sabine von Löwis. While von Löwis’s definition of the phantom border is rather straightforward – “political borders which politically and legally do not exist any more, but seem to appear in different forms and modes of social action and practices today” (p. 99) – it is evident from the issue’s contributions that the phenomenon can be understood more broadly. Baars and Schlottmann, for example, propose that phantom regions are discursively produced spatial entities that are “constantly changing and always in-becoming” (p. 184); this is a position that betrays an undeclared affinity to assemblage theory.

**INFORMED BY THE EXAMPLE** of Ukraine, von Löwis’s main point of departure is that phantom borders occupy an important place in the imagination of East Central Europe’s mosaic of territories and identities, and that they are complicit in the Othering and Orientalization of the people living beyond them. This is a legitimate concern, and Europe offers numerous examples of discrimination by region of provenance (against the Italian *mezzogiorno*, for example), with phantom or administrative borders separating the Us from the Them. However, the perpetrators of this Othering are apparently also found among leading students of the region, who are guilty of associating narratives of political backwardness and pro-Soviet or pro-Russian views with the “Easterners”, while ignoring the complexity and diversity of the multiple identities coexisting in the Donbas for example. Von Löwis’s main charge is as uncompromising as it is unsubstantiated: “Scientists [...] seem to be trapped in stereotypes of Eastness and Westness; they oversimplify data and explanations in the tradition of orientalization” (p. 102). Mykhnenko,<sup>1</sup> whose work von

Löwis cites as an example of such dubious scholarship, stresses that Orange vs. pro-Russian support is related to social class rather than to the “regional variable” – to my mind, this conclusion does not lend any support to the orientalizing allegations raised in von Löwis’s j’accuse. Moreover, von Löwis misjudges the vast scholarship that challenges the mainly mediatic notion of a clear-cut sociopolitical, regionally and ethnically determined division in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> As a result, she concludes that “what all these studies have in common is the strong effect of a regional variable” (p. 102, my emphasis), disregarding the scholars’ interpretations of that effect. Few scholars, if any, would be willing to ascribe major agency powers to the regions themselves, unless the regions are “empowered” through particular local discursive practices (cf. Baars and Schlottmann’s contribution to the issue). In short, the alleged Othering perpetrated by contemporary scholarship on Ukraine exists in a spectral dimension.

None of the contributors to this theme issue exhibit any particular concern with the Othering qualities of the phantom boundary, although both Zarycki’s and Janczak’s studies of the electoral geography of Poland show some lateral engagement, and this is particularly motivated in regard to Poland. Tomasz Zarycki’s work discusses voting patterns in the light of the heritage of the country’s 19<sup>th</sup> century partition into Prussian, Austrian, and Russian-controlled areas. Over time, these regions developed very different forms of economic, social, and cultural capital (in a Bourdieusian sense), and he argues that this resulted in durable voting geographies, reinforced by the urban-rural dimension, that can be traced along both the left-right and liberal-conservative axes.

Jaroslav Janczak’s contribution complements Zarycki’s article by carefully examining the idiosyncrasies of Polish voting in a “double-downscaled” context, meaning that the focus is redirected towards the subregional level and towards local elections. Using the regions of Pomorskie and Wielkopolskie as case studies, Janczak reveals differences in electoral behavior between those areas that were subject to post-1945 resettlement and those that were not – a tendency also noted by Zarycki. In Wielkopolskie, moreover, it appears that formerly Russian-controlled areas increasingly exhibit voting patterns that approach those prevalent in the region’s “non-Russian” parts – possibly indicating an eastward shift of the phantom border (and Othering front), towards the eastern administrative boundary of Wielkopolskie. The processes underlying this tendency are certainly fascinating and worth exploring more carefully, not least in view of the fact that a similar phenomenon appears to have been taking place in the electorally Ohioesque central regions of Ukraine well before the Euromaidan revolution (which thoroughly transformed the political divisions in the country).

Martin Šimon’s article looks for – and finds – phantom borders in the Czech Republic. The focus is on the Sudetes region on the one hand and on the long-lasting regional support for a Catholic party in the more rural southeastern parts of the country

## Continued. Phantom borders in Europe

on the other. While the latter – i.e., that regionally concentrated practicing Catholics are more prone to vote for a Catholic Party – is not particularly surprising, the case of the resettlement-targeted Sudetes region is interesting because, as in western Poland, civil society is found to be weaker (as measured by electoral turnout). The new settlers who replaced the expelled German population did not have any previous connections to the area and were often of lower social status than their predecessors. However, I would argue that this interpretation may underestimate the effect of decades of exposure to socialism on future electoral behavior, attributing excessive agency to the experiences and cultural baggage of an earlier generation of settlers. Places like Most and Chomutov were subject to massive industrialization and “proletarianization” under socialism: is it the historical fact of resettlement coupled with the settlers’ presumed lack of attachment to the new soil that explains the observed patterns, or is the region’s heightened exposure to socialist ideology (including enforced political apathy) more important? In other words, while it is easy to support Šimon’s conclusion that “people in ‘disrupted regions’ vote less than people in regions with ‘historical continuity’” (p. 143), I am not convinced that the source of this disruption is resettlement alone.

**HENRY RAMMELT’S** and Andreea Zamfira’s articles make no explicit mention of phantom borders. Even so, Rammelt’s study clearly identifies a phantom border running along the Carpathians by showing that social mobilization (measured through protest actions and protest requests) is far more likely in Bucharest and in Transylvania than elsewhere in Romania. This suggests the presence of precommunist legacies and continuities stemming from the time when Transylvania was part of the Habsburg Empire while Moldavia and Walachia were under Ottoman rule.

By focusing on non-ethnic voting for “ethnic” parties in Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia, as well as on inter-ethnic relations within these countries, Zamfira’s work destabilizes the assumption of the regularity of ethnic solidarity voting patterns. Her article does not present any rock-hard conclusions (nor does it intend to do so), but it raises our awareness about how different the roles of ethnicity may actually be within multiethnic societies. As an interesting example, she mentions the enormous success that the local German party has had in certain towns in Romania despite their very low proportions of German residents. This is attributed to the amicable German-Romanian inter-ethnic relations, in contrast to the tenuous relations between Hungarians and Romanians.

The issue’s final contribution, by Roger Baars and Antje Schlottmann, bases its rather straightforward message on a densely theory-packaged case study of the Central German Region (CGR): regions are the product of constantly changing, multiple, discourses – in all respects, they are spatial phantoms. Baars and Schlottmann single out three discourses for in-depth descriptive scrutiny: cultural heritage, cultural routes, and musi-

cal traditions. Each of these discourses has its own claims to territory, but these claims do not (yet) overlap in a way that would support the presence of a coherent CGR. Over time, they need the active and coordinated help of political and other stakeholders. Given the fuzziness of the CGR, Baars and Schlottmann steer away from the issue of phantom borders. In fact, the very nature of this phantom region, the *fluidity* of its configuration which is always in the making, precludes the existence of any real phantom borders.

**OVERALL, VON LÖWIS’S** theme issue on phantom borders deserves the attention of political scientists and geographers, in particular those who have a specific interest in electoral geography. As the notion of the phantom border is still at an embryonic stage of theoretical and conceptual development, it is not surprising that the contributors to this issue exhibit rather disparate conceptions of the phenomenon. While not all authors engage with it explicitly, each article offers useful vantage points, perspectives, and, not least, empirical documentation that may spur its theoretical refinement. In this respect, Zarycki’s, Janczak’s, and Baars and Schlottmann’s contributions are perhaps the most valuable. ✕

michael gentile

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Riga in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## Contradicting national narratives of Riga. A city through its streets

**Andreas Fülberth, Riga: Kleine Geschichte der Stadt**

Cologne:  
Böhlau Verlag,  
2014

**A**ndreas Fülberth divides his excellent “little history” of Riga into five parts: beginning with the medieval city, he passes on to the Riga of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, then (over a larger stretch of the narrative) to Tsarist Riga from its acquisition by Peter the Great in 1710 to the Revolution, following with Riga in the first Latvian republic and during the Second World War, and concluding with a chapter that describes the city through the period of Soviet rule as well as traces its fortunes “up to the present” in its renewed status as the capital of an independent Latvian state.

This is much ground to cover and in doing so Fülberth, currently a researcher at Leipzig University, has produced a compact historical study rather than a tourist guide, a potential use which his demanding writing style would hardly encourage. Other than the challenge of packing over eight hundred years into less than three hundred pages of text, there is the difficulty of distinguishing city history from that of the nation: can the two be told separately, or must Riga inevitably stand for an emerging or lost Latvian statehood? The author’s handling of the first challenge has obviously entailed some choices: of the various lenses through which one could look at the history of a city, he has given preference to the perspectives of urban architecture, city administration and prominent city personalities, trade and indus-

try, and inter-ethnic relations. While already this is a lot to account for, there is little in the book on art and literature, a lacuna somewhat made up for by the space given to theatre and music. As for the second challenge, Fülberth manages well to prevent the national narrative from dominating the story of Riga. He does this by zooming in on the Riga scene even in the midst of events – such as large-scale armed conflicts – that had an effect on much wider territory. So, for example, in chapter two we hear in some memorable detail about the “calendar riot” that erupted in the 1580s when the ruling Polish king briefly attempted to replace Riga’s Julian calendar with the Gregorian (and bring in the Jesuits at the same time).

**THE BOOK’S FIRST** chapters remind us of the numerous international connections that were essential to Riga from its very beginnings: to the Swedish island of Gotland, the German cities of Hamburg and Lübeck, and the Russian Pskov. Riga’s subsequent history was marked by the contending great powers of Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, Tsarist and Soviet Russia, and Nazi Germany. As Fülberth himself points out, his is the first comprehensive survey of Riga history to appear in German since the 1890s. One therefore feels called upon to comment on the German dimension. While the author is far from adopting any one of the contradicting national narratives of Riga history, he is particularly attentive to the legacy of the Riga Germans. This is natural and necessary for a city whose magnificent National Opera was originally called the German Theatre and where – among so many other contributions – German architects built, while German professors taught. Yet this component of Riga history has been all too often downplayed since Latvia’s first declaration of independence in 1918. In chapter four, the author offers some nuanced reflections on German-Latvian relations, as well as

## Continued. Contradicting national narratives of Riga

subtle changes in the urban landscape. In the last section of that chapter, he spares his readers nothing of the monstrosities of the mass annihilation of Jews in Riga under the Nazi occupation.

Fülberth has an effective way of relating the historical information he delivers to the topography of the city today: reading him, one wishes to walk again through the familiar streets so as to look at them with fresh eyes. Fully in control of the maze of Riga streets and their changing names under successive regimes, Fülberth is surely their ideal observer: the hypothetical “Betrachter” appearing on page 190 in the midst of a fine analysis of building and demolition policies in the 1930s is of course the author himself. Especially in the early chapters, he tends to present history less as fixed knowledge than as conclusions emerging from the sources and subsequent research. Throughout the book, such weighing of plausible explanations will often make readers feel that they are sifting through the layers of history together with the author. Besides making sure that we get the factual information – and this is a history of the kind that really tells you what happened – our author finds the right moment to highlight the suggestive detail, or the little-known biography of a favorite city landmark such as the Laima clock. In the closing chapter, Fülberth gives a colorful account of the cat-and-mouse games between the Soviet regime and the Latvian resistance movement in Riga in the years leading up to the dramatic events of 1991, and a frank one of the various problems that post-independence Riga has faced.

**THIS BOOK IS** part of an original series by Böhlau, the only disadvantage of which is the decision made against the use of footnotes. Helpful chronological tables, comprehensive indexes and many illustrations are nonetheless provided. The series makes an important contri-



Riga opera house.

bution in reintroducing readers of German to European cities that were cosmopolitan hubs in the age of empires, but are now little known outside national borders and striving to reestablish their international ties. The present reader has already had an opportunity to review a “little history” of Tallinn, and there is also one for Vilnius. Winners of the title European Capital of Culture, which Riga held in 2014, have had good chances of getting a monograph from Böhlau, the most recent addition being Breslau/Wrocław. Everyone interested in urban history in multicultural settings will be well advised to read Andreas Fülberth on Riga as well as check the list of this publisher’s other city histories. ❌

mark gamsa

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## THE FUTURE OF SURROGACY

One of the most notable developments in the field of assisted reproductive technologies is the increasing normalization and use of surrogacy, a process by which a woman carries a child often (but not always) conceived with eggs either from an intended mother or an egg donor. There is currently a lack of reliable statistics regarding surrogacy, but it is now well established that this phenomenon is rapidly growing on a global scale.

At the time of writing, surrogacy constitutes a dividing line both between countries within the European Union and between the EU and several nearby post-Soviet countries. Last year, the EU advised its member states against legalizing surrogacy on the grounds of human rights, and in Sweden, a recently published governmental final report *Olika vägar till föräldraskap* [Different paths to parenthood] (SOU 2016:11), advised against allowing either commercial or altruistic surrogacy. Other countries, such as Poland, lack regulation of surrogacy altogether, and are thereby becoming more common destinations for people seeking to reproduce with the help of a surrogate mother. Still others, such as the Czech Republic, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, and Russia, offer legal surrogacy both to domestic and foreign intended parents.

WHEN OTHER GLOBAL “hubs” of surrogacy located in the global south (in countries such as India and Thailand) are beginning to restrict surrogacy arrangements for nondomestic parents, the region of postsocialist Europe is becoming increasingly attractive to actors on the transnational surrogacy market. This, of course, raises a large number of ethical and political issues concerning fundamental rights related to gender equality, and human rights and reproductive justice. The organization Kvinna till kvinna [Woman to woman] recently reported that an accelerating number of women in Georgia are seeking legal help and psychological support from their sister organization Anti-Violence Network of Georgia (AVNG). According to the report, an increasing number of Georgian women are offering their services to carry a child for someone in a Western country. For many it is a way out of a violent relationship. If a woman needs to live in protected accommodation, her opportunities to work may be severely limited. In this situation, it is understandable that a \$10,000-dollar compensation for carrying a pregnancy to term seems like a viable way to support herself and children she may have. AVNG reports, however, that women generally receive less money than they have been promised in the end, and in case of a miscarriage, they may end up in financial debt instead.

For the intended parents, Georgia offers many advantages: it is both cheaper than many Western countries, and clinics provide pictures and more information about both egg donors and surrogates, which is not permitted in countries with stricter regulation. Neither does the surrogate mother have any right to change her mind. According to Kvinna till kvinna, one Swedish couple a month goes to Georgia for surrogacy. The example of Georgia sounds very similar to examples we have been hearing from India for several years, although it is obvious that the women with whom AVNG gets in contact will often be cases that have ended up in hardship.

**BUT, WE MAY ASK**, would the solution not then be to legalize altruistic surrogacy in countries such as Sweden, where the conditions for

good control and high-quality care for surrogate mothers may be better, and where financial and gender inequalities are not so stark? On the one hand, why should the right to make reproductive decisions not extend to the right of carrying a child for somebody else? On the other hand, some of the

issues raised in the aforementioned Swedish report cannot be ignored. Although altruistic domestic surrogacy will solve some dilemmas concerning the risk of exploitation, surrogacy as a phenomenon brings other issues concerning reproductive rights and autonomy to the fore. While it is possible to solve some dilemmas *legally*, that does not necessarily solve them ethically or emotionally. The right for a surrogate to change her mind, either to terminate the pregnancy by an abortion, or to keep the child she has been carrying, is a dilemma. A genetic link to one or both of the intended parents alters the dilemma: Can we “legislate away” the possible trauma for the intended parents if a surrogate mother chooses to abort a fetus conceived with their egg and/or sperm – or the risk of the surrogate bonding with the child during pregnancy and wanting to raise the child herself? I am not so sure. Although these cases may be exceptions to the rule, we will need to consider their possibility carefully.

While the EU and other countries in Baltic, Central, and Eastern Europe are still divided on the issue of surrogacy, and we know from experience in this region and elsewhere that legislation and markets can change swiftly, there is no denying that the region will play a crucial part in determining what the future of surrogacy will look like, in Europe and beyond. ✕

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