

# The Ebb and Flow of Resistance: Analysis of the Squatters' Movement and Squatted Social Centres in Brighton

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## Abstract

This article analyses a database of 55 squatted social centres in Brighton. By virtue of their public nature, these projects provide a lens through which to examine the local political squatters' movement, which was often underground, private and hidden (residential squatting in contrast is not profiled). Several relevant non-squatted spaces are also included since they were used as organisational hubs by squatters. The data was gathered from a mixture of participant observation, reference to archive materials, conversations with squatters past and present, academic sources and activist websites. The projects are assessed in turn by time period, duration, type of building occupied and location (by ward). Significant individual projects are described and two boom periods identified, namely the late 1990s and recent years. Reasons for the two peaks in activity are suggested and criticised. It is argued that social centres bloomed in the 1990s as part of the larger anti-globalisation movement and more recently as a tool of resistance against the criminalisation of squatting. Tentative conclusions are reached concerning the cycles, contexts and institutionalisation of the squatters' movement. It is suggested that the movement exists in ebbs and flows, influenced by factors both internal (such as the small, transitory nature of the milieu) and external (such as frequent evictions). This research feeds into a larger research project (MOVOKEUR) analysing the various squatters' movement in cities across Western Europe.

**Keywords:** *Squatters, Social Centres, Autonomous Social Movements, Urban Squatting, Institutionalisation, Brighton*

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## Introduction

- 1.1 The MOVOKEUR project<sup>[1]</sup> aims to research the evolution of the political squatters' movement in cities across Western Europe, by comparing contexts, cycles, identities and institutionalisation processes. With this article, I will suggest conclusions regarding the contexts, cycles and institutionalisation of the squatter's movement in Brighton, through the lens of squatted social centres, which have existed in different forms since the 1970s.
- 1.2 The adjacent towns of Brighton and Hove merged to become a city in 2000 (henceforth referred to as Brighton). Together they form the United Kingdom's most populous seaside resort, located on the south coast of England, 60 miles to the south of London. Brighton has a population of around 270,000, based on the 2011 census and also forms part of the Brighton / Worthing / Littlehampton conurbation, which stretches along the coastline and contains almost 500,000 people. <sup>[2]</sup>
- 1.3 As the Needle Collective and the Bash Street Kids comment, Brighton has a 'long-standing reputation (deserved or undeserved), for being a "radical" place' (2014: 153). It is a summer holiday destination, with two universities, a large LGBTQI population and the UK's first Green MP. Regarding squatting, Brighton was one of the first places where groups requisitioned unused houses for returning servicemen and their families after both World Wars: 'Without any central command, people were taking direct action to house themselves. Many army

camps slated for demolition were repurposed into temporary housing; people lived in some of these well into the 1950s' writes the Needle Collective<sup>[3]</sup> in another piece ( 2014: web). However, these squatting movements were short-lived. A more recent wave began in the 1970s and continues to this day, although the number of squatters was highest in the late 1970s, when the generally accepted estimate is 50,000 squatters across the UK in total, with 30,000 in London (Franklin: 16, Platt: 40). There are no coherent figures for Brighton specifically, although one can form an idea of numbers from references to the number of squats in the city. For example in *Squatting: The Real Story*, Steve Platt suggests that there were 150 squats in Brighton in the mid-1970s (1980: 41). I would guesstimate there to be 10 squats in Brighton currently (end 2013) but all these squats are silent and residential rather than public social centres. If squats contain on average between 4 and 10 people, then in the mid-1970s there were perhaps 600-1500 squatters in Brighton and nowadays 40-100.

**1.4** When the recent wave began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ron Bailey described it as 'outside London, the longest and most determined squatting campaign' (1973: 124). Also, A.M. Prichard states that 'in the early days of the movement, Brighton and Bristol attracted the next most publicity and reported litigation [after London]' (1981: 12). However, whilst it is entirely possible that some squatters organised parties and cafes from their squats, the concept of social centres had not yet arrived in the UK and perhaps squats were seen more as places for living rather than spaces from which to organise public events. Regarding the 1980s, the Needle Collective and Bash Street Kids comment that 'squatting was less about establishing a political base, or even primarily about housing need. In many cases it was a lifestyle statement. Squatters would meet not in social centres but gang together at the right pubs and parties, a grubby cognoscenti' (2014: 158-9).

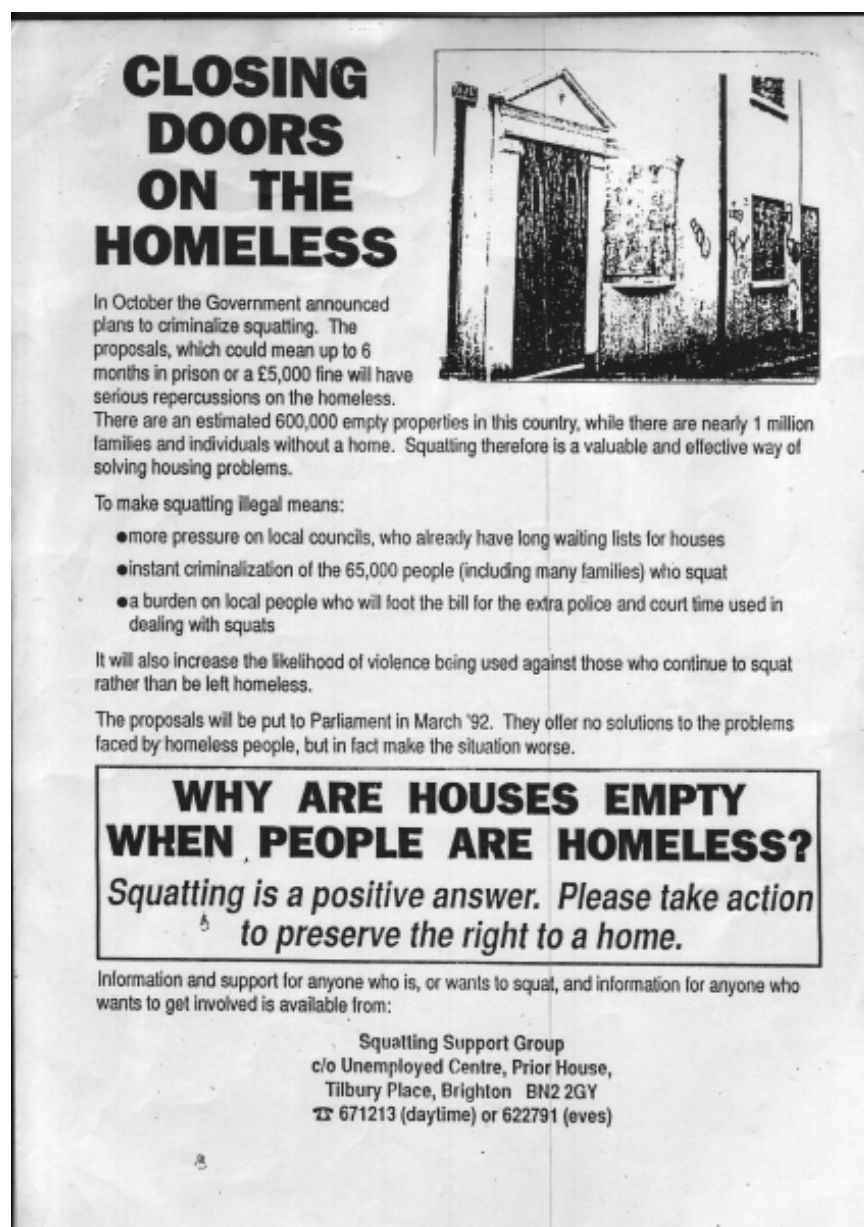
**1.5** Whilst there are of course precedents in the UK context such as the long tradition of working mens clubs and the punk autonomy centres of the 1980s, the squatted social centre as a radical left-wing organisational space owes much to the influence of the CSOAs (self-managed, occupied social centres) of Italy and also Spain (it was for example Spanish anarchists who squatted the influential Centro Iberico in London in the early 1980s). In 2000, Steve Wright declared regarding the CSOAs in Italy: 'From a few dozen spaces grouped at the beginning of the 1980s around the remnants of earlier radical circles, the centres have spread across Italy over the past decade, so that a recent 'unofficial' tally lists more than 130 of them all told, of which close to one-third are concentrated in Rome and Milan' (2000: 118). In the English context, social centres have become an established component in autonomous protest movements, despite their often very short existence and are linked through the UK Social Centre Network.<sup>[4]</sup> Writing about UK social centres (including the Anarchist Teapot, <sup>[5]</sup> a Brighton project which will be mentioned later on), Anita Lacey comments that 'these autonomous spaces are defined by varying degrees of temporality, and yet the goals of the activists who create and sustain these spaces confirm that these social centres are moments of subversion, in that they challenge capital and the dominant modes of being, of communicating and organising' (Lacey 2005: 293).

**1.6** Like elsewhere, in Brighton the recent squatting movement began when people took action to house themselves in derelict property and quickly became politicised, working to help other people find housing and campaigning about housing-related issues in the city (such as speculation, bad landlords and levels of emptiness in Council-owned property). One indication of this is the existence of various squatter groups such as the Brighton Squatters Association (set up in 1975, with 80 members), the Squatting Support Group in the 1990s and SNOB (AHA) (active in the early 2010s). The latter two are shown in images below. Whilst things were never perhaps never as formalised as the kraakspreekuren (squatting advice hours) in the Netherlands, these groups would have offered squatting assistance and used phone trees to organise support actions.



**\*Image 1:** . SNOB(AHA) march in 2012 against the criminalisation of squatting, Church Street, central Brighton\*

- 1.7** The Squatters Network of Brighton (and Hove actually) was set up in 2011 and is now defunct. The group was 'formed to resist evictions, to aid coordination among squatters and to respond to inaccurate media stories about squatting' (Dee 2014: 95). Therefore, amongst other things it contacted local media to dispute media coverage of squatting actions, organised a international squatters convergence and contested the criminalisation of squatting. On its website<sup>[6]</sup> it hosts a 'Brief and incomplete history of squatting in Brighton,' which is also published as a zine.



\*Image 2: . Squatting Support Group (1990s) poster 'Closing doors on the homeless'\*

## Methodology

- 2.1** The database was compiled from a range of sources which included the Brighton Voice newspaper, the Brighton Argus newspaper, the SchNews newsletter, participant observation, internet research about individual projects, informal conversations with squatters past and present, and academic sources. References are supplied at the end. The analysis in this article is based on the database hosted at <http://sqek.squat.net/database/>.<sup>[7]</sup>
- 2.2** Whilst I have made efforts to be as comprehensive as possible in constructing this database, it would be impossible to compile a list of all the projects which existed. This is in some ways frustrating but also useful, since this database can make no claim to be definitive or hegemonic (nor should it). Hopefully it will contribute to a multi-faceted history of squatting in the city and also a wider appreciation of the positive contributions squatters have made to Brighton. Obviously, the majority of squats are residential and silent, whereas the projects profiled here had a public presence in most cases demonstrated by events which were welcome to all.
- 2.3** The database was compiled according to the categories listed in Appendix 1. Drawing on the data gathered, the following categories were selected for analysis:
- Total number of projects.
  - Ownership.
  - Fascist assault.

- Housing.
- Negotiations.
- Legalisation.
- Time period of social centre.
- Life span of projects.
- Type of eviction.
- Location of social centre by ward.
- Type of building occupied.

## Data analysis

**3.1** Since the 1980s until the present day (end 2013), there were 55 social centre projects in Brighton which I have been able to profile in the database. Two squats from Worthing are included which were outside the Brighton and Hove city area (but within the larger conurbation). This may be confusing since I cannot claim to be including all the squats from Worthing or the greater conurbation, yet the two squats, namely the Anarchist Teapot spinoff and 23Topia certainly had links to the Brighton squatting scene. Also worth a mention is the Titnore Woods tree protest site in Durrington (2006-2010) (also within the greater conurbation), which successfully prevented ancient woodland being destroyed to make way for a supermarket and 500 new homes.

### *The social centre*

**3.2** What is a social centre? As we shall see, this is a term which has grown to become a recognised part of the contemporary squatters' movement in Western Europe, but taken in a looser sense, it is simply a squatted project which provided a public function in some way, in that it was open to everyone and/or produced publicity about its activities. As one public aspect of a multi-faceted social movement, the social centre can thus be tracked.

**3.3** Of the total figure of 55 projects, all but three were squatted, that is to say they took place in properties occupied without the permission of the legal owner. Of these three, the Open Cafe and the Vault were two places used by squatters as organisational spaces in the 1980s and the Cowley Club<sup>[8]</sup> is a social centre owned co-operatively by its members which was bought in the early 2000s and is still open (in 2014). Some of the founders of the Cowley Club had participated in the Anarchist Teapot squats of the 1990s and in an anonymous text published in Do or Die 10, a justification for following the legal route was given as follows: 'Before getting involved in a (hopefully) more permanent space, I'd been part of lots of squatted social centres which lasted an average of four to six weeks each' (2003: 189). The article concludes with a comment to the effect that 'if squats do become able to fulfil the same functions as more long-term centres, then I'll be the first to celebrate and throw the mortgage repayment forms in the bin!' (2003: 190). The Needle Collective and Bash Street Kids state that:

The usefulness of having a stable place from which to organise is clear and many groups use the Cowley Club to meet and fund-raise. However, the flipside of this is that the Cowley has become in some ways an anarchist ghetto, centralising everything in one space — which is not always open if there are not enough volunteers—and activists have their time taken up with management issues (Needle Collective 2014: 168).

**3.4** They also go on to make the point that whereas before squatters and alternative types might have met up in various pubs in the centre, the ongoing gentrification of Brighton means that it has become harder to find places in which both to feel comfortable and to organise, and thus the Cowley and squatted social centres now provide that option. Regarding gentrification, there does not appear to be much in the way of academic analysis of how it has occurred in Brighton, which I find surprising since it would seem to make an interesting case study. Certainly in recent decades Brighton has become a commuter satellite of London and the centre has changed irreparably, with supermarkets invading and local shops being replaced by boutique shops and trendy bars. These changes have been welcomed by the city council: 'Brighton and Hove on the south coast of Britain have been gentrified over the past decade or so, and indeed their authorities have been heavily involved in making these places where the 'urbane' middle classes would want to live' (Lees et al. 2007: 132).

### *Time period & Duration*

**3.5** The breakdown of the time period when each social centre began is as follows:

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**Table 1:** Social centres by time period

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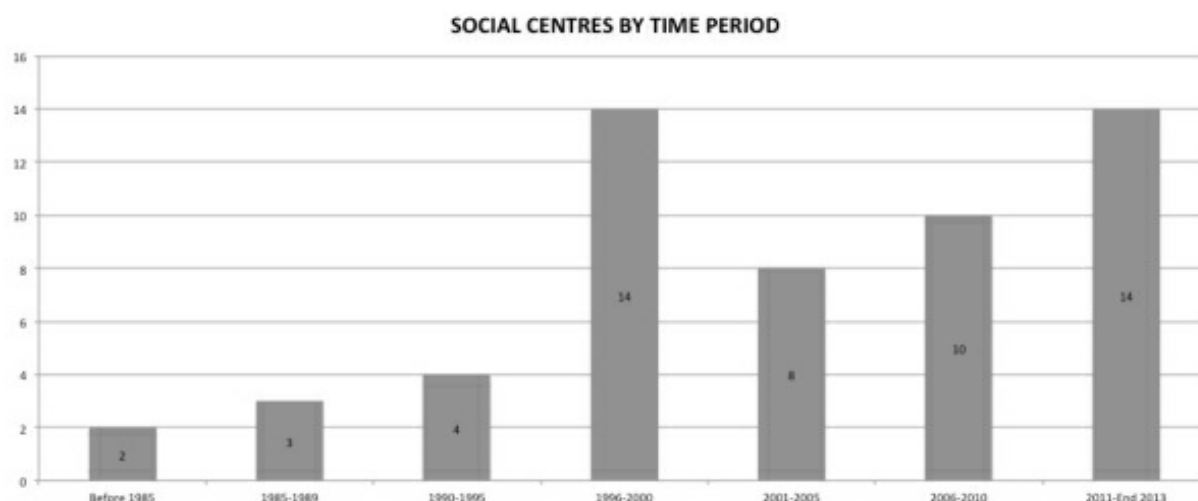
| TIME          | NUMBER |
|---------------|--------|
| BEFORE 1985   | 2      |
| 1985-1989     | 3      |
| 1990-1995     | 4      |
| 1996-2000     | 14     |
| 2001-2005     | 8      |
| 2006-2010     | 10     |
| 2011-END 2013 | 14     |
| TOTAL         | 55     |

Of these projects, 3 took place in publicly owned buildings, 34 in privately owned and for the rest (18) the ownership status could not be found. Two projects were known to have been attacked by fascists.

**3.6** Regarding housing, 14 were also used as housing as well as a having a social centre aspect, 20 were not, and for the remainder (21), the situation was unknown. The majority of these projects had a life span of months, if not weeks and few were legalised (negotiations were known to have happened in nine cases). However, there is the occasional success story, such as the Phoenix Gallery which is now legalised and still in existence (in 2014).

**3.7** The majority of projects (47) were occupied since 1996 and between 2011 and 2013, an impressive 14 projects were occupied in just three years. However, the traditionally accepted average lifespan of a squatted social centre is just three months, that being the rough time scale for an owner to take the occupiers to court and regain possession. The Needle Collective and Bash Street Kids put the time even lower, suggesting that 'from the 1990s onwards, the average lifespan of a squat has been six weeks' (2014: 174). Therefore it is clear that most of these projects are transitory events. Indeed, some projects, for example Temporary Autonomous Arts, have decided to only be open for two weeks, thus giving the short time span a positive twist, since it allows for an intense energy burst and guards against the disappointment of a fast eviction.

**3.8** In total, only two of the profiled projects were still open in some form at the end of 2013 (Cowley Club and Phoenix Gallery) and all 14 of the centres squatted since 2011 had been evicted already.



**\*Image 3: Social Centres by time period\***

**3.9** When looking at how long projects lasted, the further back in time one goes, the harder it is to come by precise information, but to take the most recent 14 projects, they range in length from a few days to one year. In fact, when one calculates the average life span in months of these 14 projects, the answer comes back as 3.1 months. This is a fairly accurate result since firm dates could be given for 11 of the 14 projects and viable estimates made for the other three.

**3.10** Whilst I know for certain that there were negotiations in at least nine cases, all but two projects were evicted by a legal court process. The two self-evictions were the CRAB project at Gloucester Place, which decided after meeting the owner to vacate the premises and the Squatters Convergence, which actually returned

the building to the owners despite an ongoing court case since the group had only ever planned to occupy the (huge) ex-department store for two weeks (and it is extremely unlikely that the result of the eventual court case would have resulted in anything but possession returned to the owner). Regarding projects losing in court, there are different situations entailed by that statement: some projects lost in court and left of their own accord (for example the Mound, Autonomous Homeless Shelter), some resisted eviction (which could take months, for example Blockbuster and the Methodist Church, both on London Road) and at least one, the Vegetable Shop, was evicted by a dubious legal process (they twice received a notice of eviction but never once received a summons to go to court, making the eviction technically illegal).

- 3.11** Looking at the overall picture, we can calculate an average duration of 4.97 months if we restrict the analysis to 31 projects and indeed, 2.34 months if we restrict the analysis to 30 projects, leaving out Medina House, which is quite unusual in that (like some undocumented residential squats) it lasted for years, rather than months. Excluded in any case are the 22 projects for which it is not possible to accurately estimate a time period and two outliers. These were the Cowley Club (owned) and the Phoenix Gallery (legalised), the only two projects ongoing at the end of 2013.
- 3.12** Thus in terms of one of our objectives of analysis, processes of institutionalisation, we can see that very few projects have institutionalised, whereas the majority of projects have been evicted in a matter of months or even weeks. It is interesting to note here that the database on Rome compiled for the MOVOKEUR project took as one of its starting points that it would only include projects which lasted three months or more, since there were so many long-term projects that profiling the ones which lasted less than 3 months was considered to be difficult and unnecessary.
- 3.13** The Cowley Club, a social centre which is co-operatively owned, is clearly a case of what Martinez would term anomalous institutionalisation, since which the former squatters have decided to use a legalised space as a tactical decision to provide infrastructure (Martinez 2013; Dee forthcoming). It is also part of the UK Social Centre Network. Thus the centre retains an antagonistic identity and provides infrastructure for radical activities, whilst itself being a legally-owned space. The Phoenix Gallery can also be taken as a rare success story concerning legalisation, although it worth noting that it is no longer a politically active space.

### *Type of space occupied*

- 3.14** Regarding the type of space occupied, a range of buildings were repurposed:

**Table 2:** Social centres by type of building

| TYPE OF SPACE                                        | NUMBER |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| OFFICES (COMMERCIAL)                                 | 23     |
| RESIDENTIAL                                          | 4      |
| CHURCH / RECTORY / CONVENT                           | 3      |
| INDUSTRIAL / FACTORY / WAREHOUSE                     | 3      |
| BATHS / SWIMMING POOL / LIDO                         | 2      |
| BUILDING LOT                                         | 2      |
| CAFE / RESTAURANT / SHOP                             | 2      |
| COURTHOUSE / MUNICIPAL OFFICES                       | 2      |
| HALL / NIGHTCLUB                                     | 2      |
| WORKSHOP                                             | 2      |
| BANK                                                 | 1      |
| BURIAL VAULT                                         | 1      |
| CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY / HOMELESS / ELDERLY / CHILDREN | 1      |
| FUNERAL PARLOUR / MORGUE                             | 1      |
| MILITARY                                             | 1      |
| PIER                                                 | 1      |

|             |    |
|-------------|----|
| POST OFFICE | 1  |
| UNKNOWN     | 3  |
| TOTAL       | 55 |

**3.15** The range of buildings occupied indicates the diversity of the projects, although it is worth noting also that by far the largest number (24) were categorised as commercial, that is to say shops and offices. As we shall see below, social centre projects most frequently occur in the centre of the city and thus it is unsurprising that many commercial buildings have been occupied.

**3.16** Since squatters are politically inclined to highlight dereliction, they will take any sort of empty structure which was suitable to be used, therefore nightclubs, churches, morgues, and various municipal buildings have all been squatted. Naturally, there have been housing protest actions, some of which have been high profile, such as the occupation of the West Pier and the Squatters Estate Agency in the 1990s, and also other site-specific squats such as the community gardens or actions against forthcoming supermarkets.



**\*Image 4.** The squatted pier\*

**3.17** The sort of activist social centre which has become representative of the alter-globalisation, radical left-wing movement across Western Europe has been well represented in Brighton from the late 1990s onwards, with projects such as Terra Audio, Old Redhill Motors, Gamer Heaven, various Wildkatz projects, Freebutt, North Road and the Methodist Church on London Road all offering varied events which tended to include workshops, talks, film nights, free shops and music. One of the more longer lasting and influential projects was the Courthouse squat in the mid-1990s. Projects like this provide a space and venue for various projects which otherwise would not find a home. The jump in the number of social centres from the mid-1990s onwards (there are only 8 before) indicates the changing, more outward-facing nature of the squatting movement.

### *Cycles*

**3.18** In this way we can identify one cycle of the movement, in that whilst the 1980s was probably the heyday for the squatters' movement in the UK in terms of numbers of people squatting, the late 1990s in Brighton was a highpoint for squatted social centres, with a total of 14 between 1996 and 2000 (25% of the total). What is also worth mentioning is that recently in just 3 years (2011 until end 2013), there were another 14 centres. This indicates another recent wave, in which the contestation of the criminalisation of squatting allied to a resurgent squatters network locally led to more squatting. Yet the waves move quickly, leading the Needle Collective and

Bash Street Kids to talk of the ebb and flow of squatting in Brighton (2014). Indeed, writing about the 1980s they refer to a 'scene of endless flux ... squats were typically small, domestic properties. Eviction would hit [...] then you would find somewhere else and move on' (2014: 157).

- 3.19** The Cowley Club also provides the functions of a squatted social centre listed above, but by nature of its more stable existence can provide in addition a bookshop, a library and home for the Migrant English Project, which provides free and informal English lessons for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. It is interesting to note here that although the MEP is a popular weekly happening which can attract up to 60 people, I am not aware of any squats for and/or in support of asylum-seekers along the lines of Refugee Strike in Berlin, or We Are Here in Amsterdam or Votivkirche in Vienna. Presumably one reason for would be that there are not sufficient numbers of asylum-seekers in Brighton, which is a substantially smaller city than the three capitals mentioned. Another reason might perhaps be that these squats exist but they are silent.
- 3.20** Squatted social centres have also been employed as focal points for single issue campaigns such as resistance to supermarkets. The Locomotive Works (2002) and Sabotaj (2011) were both occupations on the site of proposed Sainsbury supermarkets. These squats may have been unsuccessful in ultimately preventing the arrival of the supermarket itself but they certainly slowed down the process and perhaps most importantly provided both a voice for concerned local people and a catalyst for anti-supermarket campaigns which outlived the lifetime of the squats themselves. As an anonymous participant writes 'So what had Sabotaj achieved? Well like any short-lived project, it had been a burst of energy which both drained the participants most involved and inspired a huge amount of people who visited the activities at the squat or just read the publicity in the window' (2012: web).
- 3.21** The Needle Collective and Bash Street Kids note that 'Brighton simply never had the numbers of people necessary for building a movement' (2014: 153). Further, they state that 'just as the sea rises and falls against our stony beach, so too this radical scene has experienced ebbs and flows, affected by both local and national events' (2014: 153). Developing this thought, it would seem that when conditions are favourable for squatting the long-term existence of a few projects (for example the Courthouse in the 1990s or the Cowley Club in the 2000s) provides an infrastructure and an impetus for further projects to occur.
- 3.22** Thus, internal as well as external factors affect the cycles of the movement. In illustration, the anonymous report on Sabotaj records that 'It was amazing to have a large centrally located squatted project happen without any major problems. It certainly gave a boost to the squatting scene' (2012: web). These cycles can perhaps be said to boom when the opportunity window exists and when external factors such as criminalisation give a stimulus to action. Likewise, the bust occurs when all the squats are evicted and as seems to occur frequently, activists decide to travel or to move to London or Bristol (as a personal reflection, in five years in Brighton I have seen three almost completely separate iterations of the squatting scene come and go).
- 3.23** A factor here is that the scene itself is very small and subject to fragmentation very easily. It is clear then that longer term spaces are required from which to organise and to preserve a collective history so as to prevent the reinvention of the wheel every few years.

### *Individual Projects*

- 3.24** Since the cycles of the squatting movement seem to be encouraged by successful and/or long-term projects, it seems worthwhile then to move to examination of some selected individual projects and collectives:



\*Image 5. Another Space cover\*

- 3.25** \* There have been several groups such as Temporary Autonomous Arts, SPOR and CRAB which have put on art events in various venues. These were all profiled in the spoof housing supplement ([Another Space](#))<sup>[9]</sup> produced by the Brighton Photo Biennial. The introduction stated that it was focusing on 'political squats: empty buildings squatted to make political points and generally opened to the public as galleries, social centres, libraries and gardens' (2012: 3). Writing in the Guardian,<sup>[10]</sup> one of the curators of the Biennial stated that:

Sitting resolutely outside the art world, the squats I have been looking at are relational in their goals and interventionist in their methods. Their significance lies in the links forged between collaborative forms of creativity and the claim laid to what Henri Lefebvre memorably described as 'the right to the city' (Burbridge 2012).

- 3.26** \* The Anarchist Teapot cafes occurred in eight locations in central Brighton (some of which I have not been able to locate), with a spinoff group also squatting in nearby Worthing (also listed in the database). The Teapot collective still exists, but it has progressed into being a field kitchen. Its website ([Anarchist Teapot year unknown](#))<sup>[11]</sup> describes the squats as 'serving free tea, serving as our collective front room, and offering lots of literature including a library.' Lacey writes that that 'the activists who establish and maintain the Anarchist Teapots are effectively reaching out beyond any existing networks they are involved in and attempting to instigate further ones, broadening the reach of the rhizomes in which they are entangled' (2005: 296).

- 3.27** \* SPOR were another group squatting buildings in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but they came from a different milieu. The Needle Collective and Bash Street Kids write that

Dismissive of politics and seen by some 'traditionally radical' activists as drop-out lifestylists, SPOR came from a

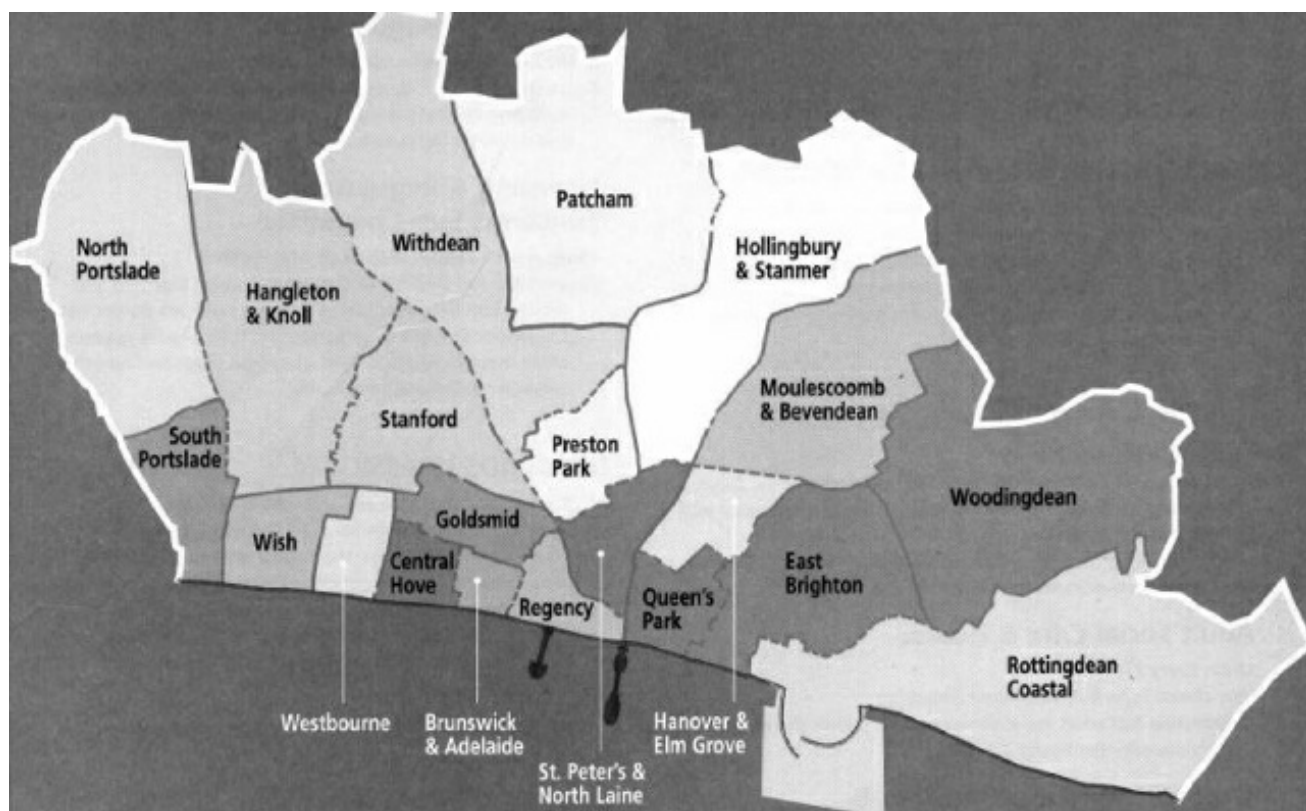
different strand of autonomy with roots in the travelling circuses of the free party scene (Spiral Tribe, the Mutoid Waste Company). However, SPOR did end up cross-breeding with more explicitly political groups, for example hosting activist meetings such as the Rebel Alliance and organising a one-day party/occupation—the May Bug Ball—of a town centre site earmarked for yet another supermarket (2014: 167).

The location of the May Bug Ball was later occupied for the Locomotive Works squat listed in the database.

- 3.28** \* The Autonomous Homeless Shelter was set up in 2012 in response to the closure by the Council of the only long-term homeless shelter in the city which did not enforce the procedure to qualify for a bed. In short, the Conservative-run local council required that people must have a local connection in order to receive accommodation - this was assessed by a points system which collated such factors as if the person had been previously housed in the Brighton area, had children in Brighton, was employed or studying in Brighton etc. Thus people who (for whatever reason) did not have enough points were then not able to find a bed for more than a single night, except in sub-zero temperatures when the restrictions are weakened. I have previously commented on the project that 'in its year-long lifespan it housed in the region of 60 individuals, giving a roof over their heads to those rough sleepers who wanted one, and allowing some of them, for whom the drug and alcohol-free space provided an address and a respite from the street, to gain temporary accommodation arrangements from the council' (2014: 97).
- 3.29** \* The Vegetable Shop in Kemptown came about when squatters living above an empty shop decided to distribute good quality local fruit and vegetables by donation. They occupied the shop and gave away fresh food which they picked up from a local wholesale company early each morning. The shop quickly became a hub for local people and provided an alternative to the many supermarkets on the same street (in one small area, there are Tesco, Sainsburys, Morrisons and Co-operative supermarkets). Unfortunately and despite the support of local Green councillors, the project was quickly evicted. As mentioned earlier, the eviction was illegal.
- 3.30** \* There have been two squatted community garden projects in Brighton, the Lewes Road Community Garden and the Mound. In an article recently published on the Crimethinc blog, the Needle Collective write that:
- The Lewes Road Community Garden lasted for a year and when it became known it was being evicted to make way for a Tesco, resistance increased, with the result that four years later, a building has been constructed on the site but no supermarket has yet appeared (and in fact the empty shop space under residential flats was squatted again in 2013) (2014: web).
- 3.31** \* As previously mentioned, in 2011, the Squatters Network of Brighton organised an 'International Squatters Convergence' which brought together squatters from different places in the UK and further afield both to socialise and to organise around such issues as the criminalisation of squatting.

### *Location*

- 3.32** Moving on, we can consider the location of the social centre projects. Brighton is currently composed of 21 wards (this has changed over time, but I have decided to plot the social centres according to the current breakdown, since it matters less which ward they are in necessarily and more where they are geographically, which the wards serve to indicate).
- 3.33** A map of the wards is below:



\*Image 6. Map of wards\*

**Table 3:** Social centres by ward

| WARD                    | NUMBER            |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Brunswick & Adelaide    | 0                 |
| Central Hove            | 0                 |
| East Brighton           | 0                 |
| Goldsmid                | 0                 |
| Hangleton & Knoll       | 0                 |
| Hanover & Elm Grove     | 2                 |
| Hollingdean & Stanmer   | 3                 |
| Hove Park               | 0                 |
| Mouslecoomb & Bevendean | 1                 |
| North Portslade         | 0                 |
| Patcham                 | 0                 |
| Preston Park            | 1                 |
| Regency                 | 9                 |
| Rottingdean Coastal     | 0                 |
| South Portslade         | 2                 |
| St.Peters & North Laine | 24                |
| Queens Park             | 4                 |
| Westbourne              | 1                 |
| Wish                    | 0                 |
| Withdean                | 0                 |
| Woodingdean             | 0                 |
| The sea                 | 1 (the West Pier) |
| Outside Brighton area   | 2                 |

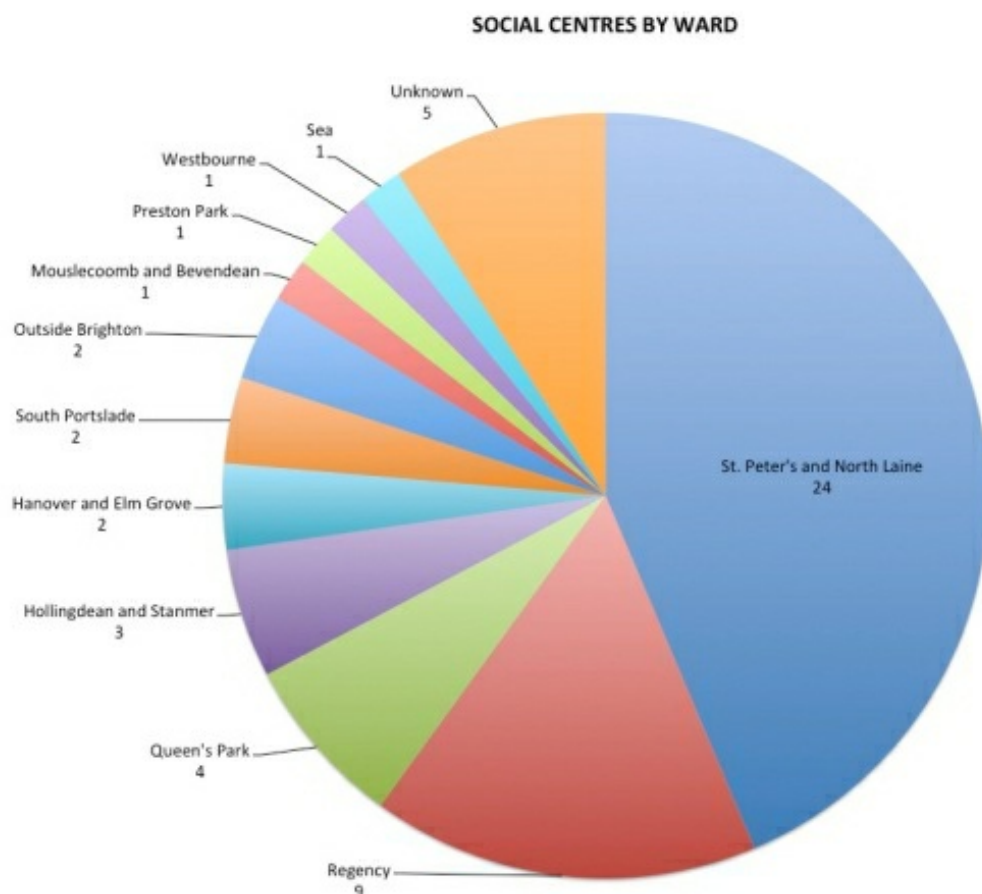
|         |    |
|---------|----|
| Unknown | 5  |
| TOTAL   | 55 |

**3.34** By far the largest number of social centre projects (24) have been located in the St.Peters and North Laine ward, which is at the heart of Brighton. Adjacent to it are the two wards with next highest numbers, namely Regency (9) and Queens Park (4). These three wards make up the centre of Brighton with many shops and offices, therefore it is not surprising that more social centres are located there than anywhere else, since squatters would want to be centrally located in order to attract people and also this area contains a greater mix of buildings which might become available to be squatted as opposed to mainly residential suburbs. The high proportion of disused commercial buildings makes sense in this light also.

**3.35** It is also worth noting that despite the gentrification of Brighton since the 1990s, which squatters have certainly played a key role in resisting, it is still possible to squat in the centre which has not yet become a policed no-go zone as it might have become in a larger city (such as London and the City of London, or Rotterdam).

**3.36** The wards on the periphery of Brighton (that is to say going clockwise South Portslade, North Portslade, Hangleton & Knoll, Withdean, Patcham, Hollingdean & Stanmer, Mouslecoomb & Bevendean, Woodingdean and Rottingdean Coastal) contain only 6 projects between them, since they are mainly residential suburbs, with some small industrial zones.

**3.37** The pie chart below serves to indicate the high percentage (44%) of projects located in the St. Peters and North Laine ward.



**\*Image 7.** Pie chart depicting social centres by ward\*

**3.38** Regarding local politics, currently (early 2014), Brighton has a minority-led Green Council and three Members of Parliament, two of which are Conservative and one Green (the UK's first Green MP, Caroline Lucas). I do not believe that the political composition of wards or areas has had much impact on squatting over time since the primary factor is certainly geographical location. If squatters want people to come to their social centre, they

are likely to position the project in the centre. However, there are of course other factors at play, such as site-specific protest squats (such as Locomotive Works and Sabotaj). Also the early Temporary Autonomous Art events required large industrial warehouses which are hard to find in the centre, so the first two events took place in South Portslade and Mouslecoomb, respectively.

## Conclusions

**4.1** In recent decades, there has been a small, persistent squatting movement in Brighton which has tended to cluster around significant and/or longer lasting projects (although as we have seen, very few squats last more than a few months, leading to the establishment of several owned or rented centres). It does not appear that the criminalisation of squatting in residential buildings will stop social centres being created in a diverse range of locations although it is true that there may be a smaller pool of squatters from which to organise if residential squatting declines.

**4.2** In terms of assessing contexts, cycles, identities and institutionalisation processes, I chose to concentrate on the first two since I was uncomfortable with making fieldwork, such as formal interviews with squatters to analyse identities (particularly at a time when squatters were being criminalised) and there is little to say about institutionalisation, since so few cases have successfully legalised (or even existed long enough to consider the process), even if the Cowley Club is an interesting example of anomalous institutionalisation.

**4.3** As regards the two criteria which I have addressed substantially, some factors external to the movement have been mentioned, such as gentrification, repression and juridical processes. Internal contexts have included the fight for housing justice, campaigns for the right to the city, struggles to resist supermarkets and attempts to create venues, galleries, meeting places and convivial spaces. In previous work I have asserted that:

Squatters in Brighton have affected social and urban policy in various ways, both by protesting and by taking affirmative action on political issues such as supermarket expansion, use of space, state legislation and local council housing policy [...] Squatters were also active in challenging the new law which has criminalised squatting in residential buildings (Dee 2014: 99).

**4.4** If we observe the small yet persistent milieu as one which experiences ebbs and flows, we can see that there have been cycles or waves of squatted social centres connected both to the increasing trend across the UK to found organisational spaces in the late 1990s and as a recent response to moves for criminalisation. However, as pointed out already, these waves are also dependent on a certain pattern of boom and bust endemic to the local situation.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://sqek.squat.net/database/>  
<http://movokeur.wordpress.com>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.crimethinc.com/blog/2014/05/13/squatting-in-england-heritage-prospects/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK\\_Social\\_Centre\\_Network](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_Social_Centre_Network)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.eco-action.org/teapot/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://network23.org/snob>

<sup>7</sup> <http://sqek.squat.net/database/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://cowleyclub.org.uk/>

<sup>9</sup> [http://issuu.com/photoworks\\_uk/docs/another\\_space\\_bpb12](http://issuu.com/photoworks_uk/docs/another_space_bpb12)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/sep/28/squatting-art-brighton-photo-biennial>

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## Image credits

- 1 SNOB(AHA) March - Eusta
- 2 Squatting Support Group - Flyer found at 56A Crampton Street Infoshop
- 3 Bar chart - Social Centres by time period - Author & BLUBS
- 4 The squatted West Pier by Mark Wordy - <http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/61798879%40N00/1762649932/>
- 5 'Another Space' cover - [http://issuu.com/photoworks\\_uk/docs/another\\_space\\_bpb12](http://issuu.com/photoworks_uk/docs/another_space_bpb12)
- 6 Map of wards of Brighton - <http://www.brightonbusiness.co.uk/htm/ni20030308.857150.htm>
- 7 Pie chart - Social centres by ward - Author & BLUBS

## Database Sources

Another Space - [http://issuu.com/photoworks\\_uk/docs/another\\_space\\_bpb12](http://issuu.com/photoworks_uk/docs/another_space_bpb12) (accessed May 2014).  
 Brighton Argus - <http://www.theargus.co.uk> (accessed May 2014).  
 Brighton Bomber (ten issues between 1984 and 1987)  
 Brighton Voice - Copies in Brighton Museum  
 SchNews - <http://www.schnews.org.uk> (accessed May 2014).  
 SNOB(AHA) Brief and Incomplete History of Squatting in Brighton (and Hove) <https://network23.org/snob/history/> (accessed May 2014).  
 SPORZINE 1, 3, 5  
 Squat!Net - <https://brighton.squat.net> & <https://en.squat.net> (both accessed May 2014).  
 UK Squatting Archive - <http://www.wussu.com/squatting/> (accessed May 2014).

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Appendix 1</b> | <b>Self-definition</b> □ How the social centre called itself, for example 'social centre,' 'community garden,' 'cafe,' 'free space' and so on (if known).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                   | <b>Name</b> - The name of the social centre as used in its publicity or by its users (if known).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                   | <b>Address &amp; Ward</b> of social centre                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                   | <b>Day / month / year of occupation</b> (if known)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                   | <b>Day / month / year of eviction</b> (if known)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                   | <b>Duration</b> of squat (if known)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                   | <b>Duration</b> in months (if known)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                   | <b>Time period</b> in which squat was occupied (from occupation until eviction) - This category was adapted to include different non-exclusive categories so that various degrees of precision could be permitted. For example, a squat occupied from 1983 until 1992 would be placed in the categories before 1985, 1985-1989, 1980s, 1990-1995 and 1990s, whereas regarding a squat for which the only mention in a zine suggested it was occupied in the 1980s, it would be put in the category 1980s alone. |
|                   | <b>Type of space</b> occupied - The types are listed in Appendix 2.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                   | <b>Time empty</b> before occupation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                   | <b>Ownership</b> and whether this owner was private or public.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                   | <b>Political network</b> and various categories of activism and activities - this was impossible to fill in except for □ projects I knew personally, since it was far too detailed (and in addition some categories only made sense in the Spanish context from which this database was originally drawn) so I did not use it for analysis.                                                                                                                                                                     |

**Type of eviction** - legal, self, illegal, police attack.

Whether negotiations occurred.

**Use of building** after eviction.

Was there ever an attack by **fascists**.

**Organised groups** using the space.

Did the project include **housing**.

Did the project have a **website**.

**Source(s)**

## Appendix

2:

## BUILDING

## TYPES

School / university  
Factory / warehouse  
Shop / restaurant/ cafe  
Hospital  
Hotel  
Military installations  
Commercial / offices ☐  
Residential building  
Cinema / theatre / bingo  
Town / street / area / block of flats ☐  
Empty building lot  
Health centre / doctor / dentist  
Cafe  
Burial vault  
Funeral parlour / morgue  
Post office ☐  
Pier  
Courthouse / municipal  
Police/ambulance/fire station ☐  
Baths / swimming pool / lido  
Bank  
Nightclub / hall  
Church or similar  
Community / shelter / kids / old  
Workshop  
Stables  
Wharf / terminal / shipyard  
Silo  
Farm  
Pub / bar  
Library  
Unknown

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