The Political Squatters' Movement and Its Social Centres in the Gentrifying City of Rotterdam

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WORD COUNT: 7600

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses a database of 44 squatted social centres in Rotterdam. The database provides a useful lens to examine the squatters' movement which in Rotterdam (as opposed to other larger cities such as Amsterdam or London) is underground and little studied. The database was produced through reference to a range of sources, including participant observation, archive materials, conversations with squatters past and present, academic sources and activist websites. The projects are analysed in terms of time period, duration, location and type of building occupied. A problem experienced and evaluated is the lack of both primary and secondary sources. Some significant individual projects are described and one area for which suitable information data is available, the district of Bospolder, is used as a case study regarding the issue of gentrification (which first necessitates a review of the relevant literature on gentrification). Conclusions are reached about the cycles, contexts and institutionalisation of the squatters' movement in Rotterdam.

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INTRODUCTION

The quotation above begins a handbook containing advice for squatting in Rotterdam (2004: 1). An updated version was published in 2009 (KSU Rotterdam) and going back in time the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam holds a copy of a squatting guide published in 1977-1978 by a group called Komitee Jongeren Huisvesting Rotterdam (KJHR - Youth Housing Committee Rotterdam).

Squatting, the use of space (buildings or land) which is otherwise derelict or left empty without the permission of the title holder, occurs all over the world. The MOVOKEUR project (of which this article is a part) aims to assess the political squatters' movement in Western Europe by comparing contexts, cycles, identities and institutionalisation processes in different cities. With this work, I will suggest conclusions regarding contexts, cycles and institutionalisation of the squatters' movement in Rotterdam, through the lens of squatted social centres. Since the squatting movement is itself hard to study both because of its underground, subcultural nature and because the sizeable majority of squats are privately residential, I analyse squatted social centres (which are by definition public and open to all).

Unlike Amsterdam, which has a long and celebrated history of squatting since the late 1970s, with many social centre projects, squatting (even political squatting) in Rotterdam has tended to be silent and under the surface (regarding Amsterdam, see Duivenvoorden, Owens). Today, there remain many squats and legalised places, but few public projects. The history of squatting in Rotterdam remains hidden and elusive but indications of it can still be discerned.

Aside from the squatters handbooks, there are a number of zines (hand-made pamphlets) produced over the years. From the 1980s onwards there have been publications such as the Bospolder Beerput, Buikloop, de 45, Peteroliehaven, Trammelant, Sientje and Rotzooi (all held in the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam). The first zine mentioned, the Bospolder Beerput, was produced in the Bospolder district west of the centre which had been heavily destroyed in WWII (in particular when the wind blew a firestorm over from the harbour area after an air-strike by US forces) and later contained many squats in the 1980s. According to a squatter from those times there were 500 squats around the area of Hudsonstraat, Spanjaardstraat, Beersmanstraat and de Bruinstraat. This area is now undergoing urban restructuring and we will return to it later when discussing gentrification.

In this article I will first explain my methodology and then examine in detail the statistics generated by the database. We shall see that the topic of institutionalisation is hard to address owing to the lack of examples. Cycles of squatting can only be addressed in very broad terms, but I examine some individual projects. Looking at contexts leads us to a discussion of gentrification. I will then make a brief case study on gentrification in the Bospolder district before reaching some conclusions regarding the cycles, contexts and institutionalisation of the squatters' movement in Rotterdam.

METHODOLOGY

The information was gathered for the database from a range of sources, listed at the end, which included conversations with squatters past and present, personal experiences from participant observation, academic sources, archive materials at the International Institute for Social History, activist websites and pamphlets. The database is hosted online at **http://sqek.squat.net/database/**. 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, in the case of Rotterdam even more so than the other databases I have worked on (Amsterdam, Brighton, London). This is in some ways frustrating but also useful, since this database can make no claim to be definitive or hegemonic (nor should it).

There were in total 48 projects, which can be taken as social centres in a very broad sense, since they were squats with a public function. This compares to 55 in Brighton, 115 in Amsterdam and 245 in London. Whilst there are other antecedents, 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. In an article written in 2000, Steve Wright commented that "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). If we were to take a stricter, more narrow definition of a social centre then only a few projects would qualify (such as Groene Voltage and Hang4). The database was compiled according to the categories listed in Appendix A.

Drawing on the data gathered, the following categories were selected for analysis:

Total number of projects.
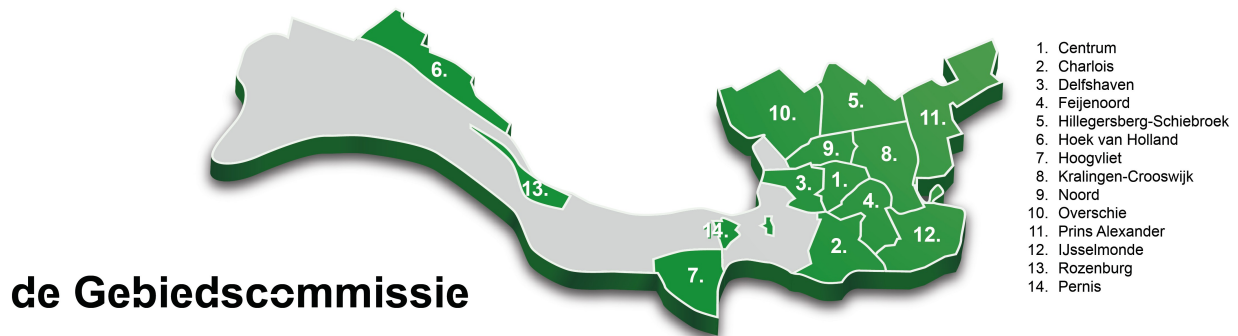Legalisation.
Time period of social centre.
Life span of projects.
Location of social centre by ward.
Type of building occupied (listed in Appendix B).

DATA ANALYSIS

Image 1: Boroughs of Rotterdam

The attentive reader will note that in the image above depicting the boroughs of Rotterdam, the city has a rather eccentric shape. This is explained by the city proper being the right-hand cluster, whilst other areas such as Hook of Holland are joined to it by historical quirk.

In making the data analysis, I located the projects by borough. There are 14 boroughs of Rotterdam: Centrum, Charlois, Delfshaven, Feijenoord, Hillegersberg-Schiebroek, Hoogvliet, Hook of Holland, IJsselmonde, Kralingen-Crooswijk, Noord, Overschie, Pernis, Prins Alexander and Rozenburg. The boroughs were until March 2014 known as deelgemeenten, but are now known as gebiedscommissies. The city of Rotterdam also owns the Port of Rotterdam, together with the Dutch Government. The port is huge, extending from the city centre all the way to the sea, mainly along the south side of the Nieuwe Maas and other water channels. It has grown over time, building out into the sea on reclaimed land known as the Maasvlaakte. A second Maasvlaakte is currently being built to allow even larger ships to dock. The port area is heavily industrialised (dealing with petrochemicals, containers, vehicles, iron ore and coal) and not of interest for our current purposes since it is not populated and contains no squats, although there have been squats in the older port areas nearer to the city itself. For example, in Heijplaat on the south bank of the river there is a squatted terrain which was previously a quarantine zone and there have been several squats in the industrial area where Rotterdam meets Schiedam.

Image 2: Social Centres by Borough

SOCIAL CENTRES BY BOROUGH
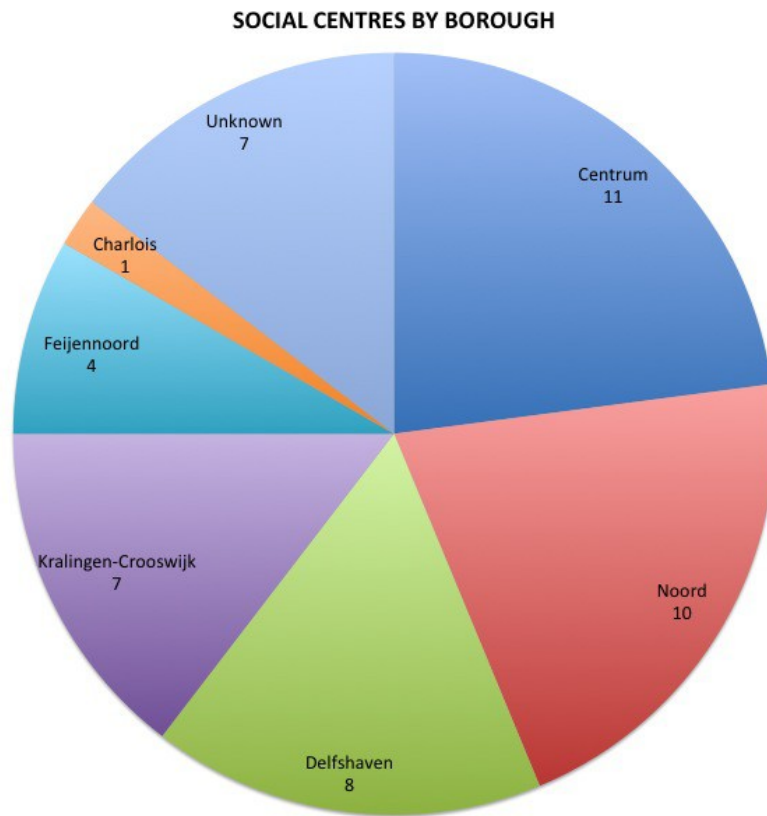
In the pie chart above we can see that the most squats have occurred in Centrum, Noord, Delfshaven and Kralingen-Crooswijk, the four central boroughs. It is not surprising that there have been no social centres in boroughs such as Hook of Holland (30km away from the centre, on the north side of the river, facing the port on the south side) or Hoogvliet, which is a newly developed area.

Image 3: Social centres by time period
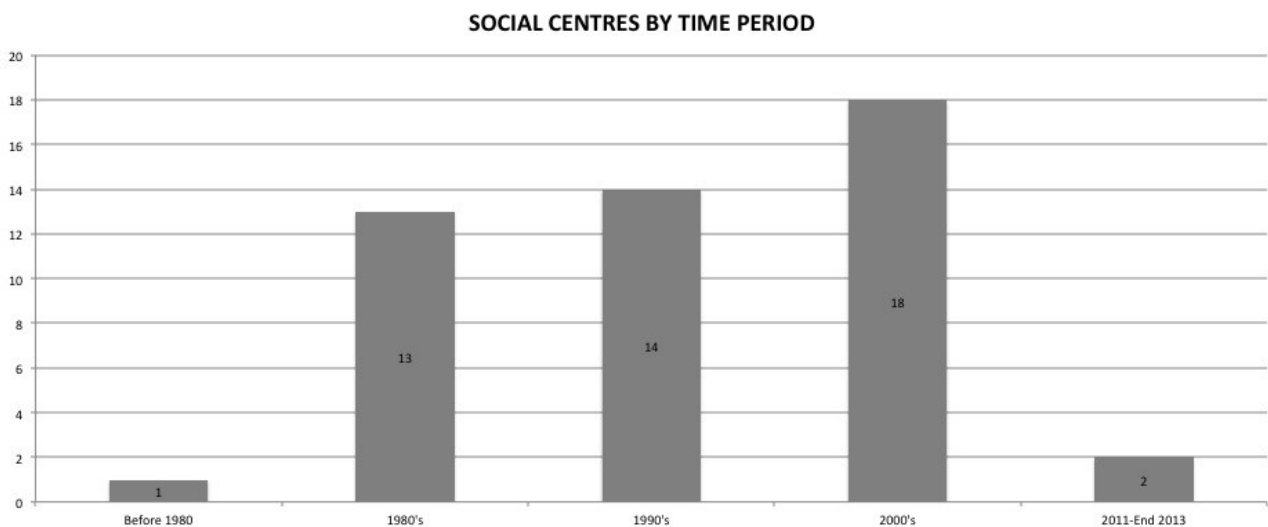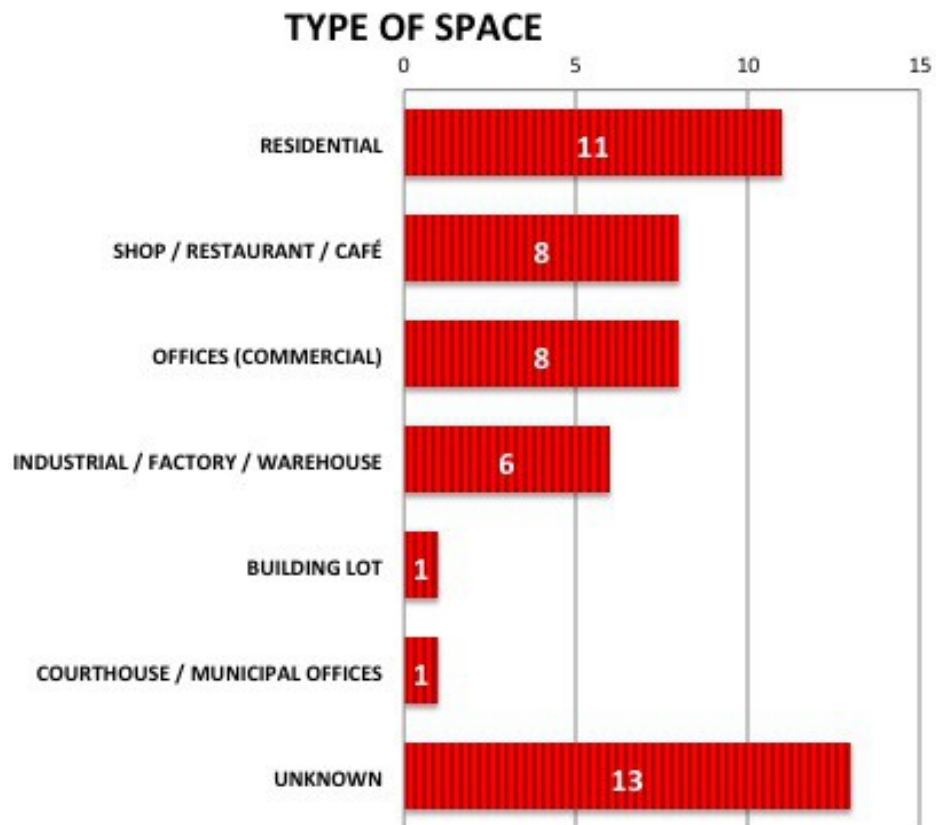

SOCIAL CENTRES BY TIME PERIOD

Image 3 above indicates that from the 1980s onwards there have been social centre projects in Rotterdam at a fairly consistent level. These projects tended to take the form of infoshops, bars, art galleries, cafes and music venues. One cultural group, WORM, occupied several buildings before negotiating contracts to use various spaces. Currently they are located in the basement of the old Nederlands Foto Museum on Witte de Withstraat (in the centre). The new Nederlands Foto Museum is located in Las Palmas on the Wilhelminapier in Kop van Zuid, where the city council is attempting to create a new cultural zone. The Wilhelminapier also features the (new) Luxor theatre (Oude Luxor is near the central train station), the Maastoren office building (the highest construction in the Netherlands), the city courts and the Montevideo and New Orleans residential skyscrapers. Worthy of a separate mention is the latest building to be constructed, a Rem Koolhaas creation called 'De Rotterdam,' the largest building in the country and one of the biggest in Europe. Writing in the Guardian about it, a critic claims Rotterdam has suffered "bombardment of two things: bombs and architects" (Wainwright). 'De Rotterdam' contains in its three connected towers a hotel, private residences, a fitness centre, offices, shops, restaurants and a car park. It is conceived as a 'vertical city,' to be used by 5,000 people every day, making it the most populated zone in the Netherlands. The website for the building claims that the Wilhelminapier is the "new Manhattan" (website).

Whilst Amsterdam has many long-term squatted projects which are now legalised, Rotterdam has only one which is still connected to the alternative scene, namely the Poortgebouw., a national monument standing on Kop van Zuid, dwarfed by the nearby skyscrapers. It hosts events and a weekly cafe. The Poortgebouw was squatted in 1980 (at first as a protest against being turned into an erotic centre). It was then legalised as a housing project in 1982 and later went through a long fight against eviction which was ultimately resolved in favour of the residents in 2010.

Image 4: Type of space squatted

TYPE OF SPACE

RESIDENTIAL	11
SHOP / RESTAURANT / CAFÉ	8
OFFICES (COMMERCIAL)	8
INDUSTRIAL / FACTORY / WAREHOUSE	6
BUILDING LOT	1
COURTHOUSE / MUNICIPAL OFFICES	1
UNKNOWN	13

The bar chart above indicates that the occupied buildings were of diverse types such as residential, commercial and industrial. Ownership data was hard to come by but it would seem that both privately owned and municipal buildings have been occupied.

Projects

Whilst it can certainly be argued that all of these squats were political, in the sense that they were making use of spaces which otherwise would be derelict, explicitly political projects are quite sparse. For infoshops there are the Infowinkel Phoenix and later Doenix. In terms of the specifically anarchist social centres which occur frequently in places like London and Amsterdam, there is only Hang4, the Groene Voltage and the Westersingel project which followed the Groene Voltage for a short time.

However, many of the cafes did have a radical edge and are from the countercultural movement, despite being not so easy to categorise as social centres in a narrow sense. These were often cafes attached to squatted streets (eg Lincke Zoep, Buik op Zuid, Paradijslaan) functioning as a social space for a large group of squatters in a similar fashion to the way that (formerly squatted) house projects in Berlin often have a cafe or bar on the ground floor of their building (Azozomox). This would explain why the largest known number of type of building was residential (11), a much higher percentage than in the other databases (23%).

The (archived) website for Hang4 states that it was "a large squat (about 500 square metres) right in the commercial centre of Rotterdam [...] located 2 minutes walking from the Blaak marketplace. Hang 4 is the address (there sometimes seems to be confusion about this)" (website). The listed activities were a cafe, infoshop, free shop, art gallery and karate lessons.

The Groene Voltage was a squatted shop (with six squatted apartments above it) in Noord. The Needle Collective write that "we wanted to provide a space for our small scene to meet and socialise. We already did a nomadic voku (people's kitchen) [..] and aimed to get people talking" (2012: 13). It had a bar, free internet, a free shop, an infoshop and organised a cafe and film nights (see flyer below).

Image 5: The Groene Voltage monthly activities for November 2006.

It is worth investigating why Rotterdam does not seem to have enjoyed many explicitly political projects. For example, Infoshop Phoenix existed in several locations and even experimented with renting a shop space on Zwaanshals for a year in 1992 (this street in Noord is now gentrified, with boutique shops selling kitchen accessories, ice cream and whisky), but gave up on renting for two reasons, namely not enough people came and the collective could not eventually afford the rent.

An ethnographic study of squatting in Rotterdam drawn up in 2010 by Tom van der Hor is extremely useful here in providing some analysis, where none really exists. Hor states that city officials "will tell you that there are almost no active squatters within the city limits of Rotterdam, while any squatter from Rotterdam will tell you that there are at least 400 active squatters, and possibly more." (2010: 42). He suggests that this discrepancy is at least in some part due to the fact that "squatting in Rotterdam is loosely-organized, extremely heterogeneous and no structure or

hierarchy seems to exist" (ibid). As Hor comments, this has sometimes led to criticisms from other cities but may also provide strengths for the Rotterdam scene, since the unstructured nature of the movement makes it harder to repress.

In illustration, following the criminalisation of squatting in October 2010, not very much changed in Rotterdam, although it is true that post-2011 only two projects are recorded, see below. Also a Metro article (Anon 2011) claims that there are less than twenty squats in the city, even if I would certainly dispute this assertion, since there were at least 30 squats in the Nieuw Crooswijk area of Kralingen-Crooswijk alone. This returns us to Hor's observation that the majority of squatting is chaotic and hidden. However, as a counterpoint, the general lack of organisation may have been a factor in the disintegration of collectives overseeing large buildings such as Slaak and Storm, both of which experienced many problems in their lifetime.

One might think that the small number of listed projects since 2011 (only the Paradijslaan cafe and the No Borders camp) might contradict the statement that not much has changed since criminalisation but actually there have been other projects, they were simply impossible to profile. Other projects may also have gone more underground, still occurring but intended more for the local squatters rather than reaching out to the general public. The fragmented and disparate nature of squatting in Rotterdam means that the database I have compiled is woefully incomplete. Again, the lack of information about squatting in Rotterdam means that it is hard to assess how much is not being profiled but I know from personal conversations that there have been other recent cafe projects for which I was unable to find much data, as an example one would be Palestinastraat.

One huge gap is that nobody really knows the extent of squatting in south Rotterdam (Zuid). As an example of this, after completing work on the database, I came across an internet blog for a place called Space Camp in Zuid. A blogpost, 'Memories of a squat,' records that "After March 2013 [...] Spacecamp is going to be demolished" and that "Spacecamp has been squatted a few times over the years. Every time the squatters moved out because the developer seemed to go ahead and demolish the place. However, every time they gave up on that idea and a new generation of squatters moved in" (2012: web). So this appears to have been a sort of artistic social centre in existence for a number of years in various iterations, featuring public events but this is the first time I had come across it.

One indication of the amount of squatting going on generally in Rotterdam is an open letter mentioned by Hor which was sent to the city council by a group of squatters who wanted to join the debate on criminalisation. They pointed out that the council really had not investigated the "problem" it was considering repressing and suggested that they were aware of 150 squats, populated by something like 400 people in the central boroughs of Rotterdam. Most importantly, they emphasised that this was for them the tip of the iceberg, since they had no way of knowing how much squatting was going on elsewhere in the city (2010: 112-113).

The Rotterdam kraakspreekuur (literally 'squatting advice hour') is reported as estimating that 30% of squatting went through its auspices, as opposed to almost all squatting in Amsterdam going through one of the kraakspreekuren there (ibid). A kraakspreekuur is a place to meet squatters and get help occupying a space. The existence of a KSU in Rotterdam again shows that the existence of a scene, even if it was autonomous and underground. In an interview with two KSU participants from Amsterdam, despite a mention of the Rotterdam squatting guide, one person remarks:

> Rotterdam, I don't know about it so much, but it's completely differently organised.
> They don't do Kraak Spreek Uur, they do what they call "wild squatting," which means that

you don't do it in an organized way, you just go and you squat with a group of friends, and always like that (2014).

However, a report on the Freibesetzt exhibition held in Austria states that "1979: The first Squatting Office Hour was held at the Bureau for Legal Aid on the Teilingerstraat. This Office Hour was organised by the Committee Housing for the Young. Later, Office Hours were held in Oude Noorden, Het Poortgebouw, Bospolder Tussendijken, Galerie Slaaphanger and in the corner shop on the Jan Kruyffstraat" (web). Presumably the 'Committee Housing for the Young' is the same group as the one mentioned at the beginning of this article (Komitee Jongeren Huisvesting Rotterdam - KJHR). So here we can see evidence that there has been a KSU at least at certain times in Rotterdam. However, the KSU no longer exists formally after criminalisation, since the youth organisation (JIP) which hosted it was pressured to not encourage the now illegal act of squatting by right-wing politicians.

In the zine Using Space 8, the view is offered that in Rotterdam "there are very few openly political squatters and only occasionally social centres or political cafes. Everyone else seems to squat fairly individualistically, using the free rent aspect as a way to facilitate an alternative lifestyle, whether that means doing graf or doing speed or doing sound systems or studying art or whatever" (2013).

Thus we can conclude that there is squatting going on, but in a less organised fashion than for example in Amsterdam. This does not necessarily mean that there are not public projects, more that they are hard to track.

As well as the many squats, there are also people living on 'om niet' contracts - this is when a housing corporation (in contravention of the standard policy of not dealing with squatters) offers squatters already occupying a property the chance to become effectively a zero cost renter, that is, to be treated as a normal renter without paying rent (but of course paying utilities and also service costs, which cover things like cleaning of halls and other community areas). These legalised squatters are quite common in areas of large-scale renovation such as Nieuw Crooswijk, often being placed alongside more traditional arrangements such as tenants and anti-squat clients. In case the latter term is unfamiliar, 'anti-squat' is when a company such as Camelot or Ad Hoc is paid by the owner, often a housing corporation, to find people to live in places as property guardians on a use agreement rather than a rental contract. This may seem attractive to all parties especially for the person given the opportunity to pay a low 'rent', but the property guardians often end up unhappy with the arrangement, since they have no tenancy rights and the anti-squat companies have stringent rules such as no holidays, no pets, no access to certain rooms, no option to move to another place and eviction on one month's notice. The company also holds a key to the property and can enter at any time to check on the client. Academic work on anti-squat is anything but plentiful (as noted by Huisman) but Priemus estimates there to be "tens of thousands of anti-squatters in the Netherlands" (2011).

Whilst anti-squat is quite common and results from the perceived need to protect properties from squatters (and such things as arson and vandalism), 'om niet' can be seen as a better deal for the people living in buildings, since they are treated like renters and often moved around by the owner to other properties. The owner also benefits since properties which are perfectly liveable but may need work to be brought up to standard for commercial renting can instead be occupied by people who do not mind that there is for example no carpet or no wallpaper. Some people have been living in Nieuw Crooswijk for fifteen years on such contracts. In this way squatters have themselves produced a situation which works for them in providing more stability than squatting and which works for the owners since properties about to be renovated or demolished can be occupied until the

last moment. As far as I am aware, this is a situation unique to Rotterdam, although it may well exist in other Dutch cities.

Cycles

Regarding cycles, the data does provide much to go on. Image 3, depicting social centres by time period, does however show that there have consistently been public projects from the 1980s onwards, some of which I have described individually. Criminalisation is most likely to be the factor which has caused the low number of visible projects but as I argue above this does not necessarily mean that these projects are no longer happening, more perhaps that they have gone more underground again.

It seems that in Rotterdam, in distinction to Amsterdam, squatters have always been more interested in other things than public social centres and providing informal services (although there are counter examples such as WORM and the DHZ Werkplaats, a bicycle repair workshop). Reasons for this would include the small nature of the political squatting scene in Rotterdam, inevitable "braindrain" to Amsterdam and repression. The latter claim is again hard to substantiate, but it seems clear from conversations with Rotterdam squatters that (again) as opposed to Amsterdam, where the squatters' movement had become an established actor in urban politics and could expect the police to abide by an informal code governing interactions and evictions, in Rotterdam it is and was common for squats to be illegally evicted by bailiffs or police.

To make one last point, as I observed above, not many projects have lasted very long, with the occasional success story which has managed to exist for an extended period and occasionally institutionalise.

Institutionalisation

Even though several cultural initiatives such as WORM (mentioned above), Waterfront and Nighttown all began in squatted locations, the broedplaats concept does not really seem to have taken off in Rotterdam as it did in Amsterdam. The Poortgebouw certainly did use the discourse in its long and eventually successful legal struggle to remain in the building as a live/work group, but it is interesting to note a comment made in a statement 'Broedplaats Taken Hostage' by some art-activists living in the Poortgebouw:

> Broedplaats has probably been abducted by cultural mutineers in the Rotterdam area. It is likely in danger to be assimilated into the commercial language of "club-sector" podia and other embedded networks. Observed rhetoric abuse include so far: (night) club, bar, venue-podia, start-up company in the AV and event-managment/marketing sector (web).

One other project which did legalise was the Fabriek project, which began in a squatted warehouse in Delfshaven (which had actually previously been squatted from 1988 to 1995 and then left derelict until 2006 when it was occupied again). When the Fabriek was evicted on grounds of fire safety in 2008, the group managed to secure a legalised occupation in Crooswijk and now have a place on an industrial estate.

Regarding institutionalisation, apart from the Fabriek, the Poortgebouw and WORM (mentioned earlier) there are not any other projects which have legalised successfully. Many projects are too short term and of course others may not have been interested to do so. Villa Krakelbont appears to have legalised successfully in the 1980s, but I could not confirm this.

The Poortgebouw and WORM would both appear to be good examples of what Martinez calls anomalous institutionalisation. He uses this term as means of "distinguishing the countercultural, experimental and mixed orientations of collective projects that had a significant duration and social recognition, although not enjoying all the benefits of being considered a mainstream cultural or subcultural institution" (2013: 667). Thus both projects have undergone long torturous legalisation processes which have resulted in institutionalisation without losing their separate radical identities. This process can be seen as anomalous since both cases are unique and do not fit to the standard pattern in which once antagonistic projects are absorbed into the mainstream and end up holding conservative values. In the case of WORM, this means it still hosts experimental music nights and hacker events, rather than converting into a more mainstream, although this is not to say compromises have not occurred (and naturally WORM is still criticised for things such as having too high entrance prices for events).

In terms of duration of project, it was impossible to ascertain a length of time for 37 projects (out of 48) and the Poortgebouw is still ongoing. Leaving aside two long-lasting projects from the past, the first-time squat of the Fabriek (84 months) and Huize Schonderloo (1974 - 1979), this give us information for 8 projects, which lasted for an average of 7.3 months in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. Whilst this is a longer figure than in the UK context, 7.3 months is still not a particularly impressive figure.

Contexts

Contexts for the squatters movement would of course include the heyday of squatting as a social movement in the 1980s and the issue of gentrification, which I shall examine in some detail below, with a focus on the Bospolder district. Squatting as a social movement was clearly much larger in the 1980s, with the most visible effects being in Amsterdam but large squatting communities existing in other Dutch cities such as Groningen, Nijmegen and Utrecht, as well as Rotterdam (see Duivenvoorden, Owens).

Gentrification

One way in which we can analyse the cycles and context of the squatting movement is by looking at the external factor of gentrification, but this is a complex issue which requires some introduction. Firstly, I will follow Glass in defining gentrification simply and broadly as an urban process which occurs in an area "until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed" (1964: xix).

To give a local context, Rotterdam is today the second largest city in the Netherlands, with a municipal population of 600,000 and a greater area (Rijnmond) of 1.3 million people. It sits at the southern end of the Ranstad zone which also includes Utrecht, Amsterdam and the Hague. During World War II Rotterdam was carpet-bombed by the Nazis. Almost the entire centre was destroyed by the ensuing fire storm and the Dutch resistance surrendered when the same threat was extended to Utrecht. The city's strategic importance later led to it being bombed numerous times by the Allied Forces. The port of Rotterdam is now the largest in Europe; the city sits on the Nieuwe Maas river, a distributary of the Rhine which flows down from the Ruhrgebied in Germany. Like many European cities, Rotterdam has followed the path identified by Shaw of disinvestment in the 1950s and 1960s, de-industrialisation in the 1970s and subsequent reinvestment in the inner city, but has its own specific story which still needs to be told (2008: 1).

As a beginning, in 'Gentrification as a governmental strategy: social control and social cohesion in Hoogvliet, Rotterdam' Uitermark, Duveyndak and Kleinhans discuss the policy of state-led gentrification which they argue is different to gentrification in the USA but similar to France and England, two countries which also have housing corporations and where, like the Netherlands, local government is funded by the national government. From the 1990s onwards, they observe both that "urban restructuring became a way to alter the social composition of neighbourhoods" and that "residents themselves by and large accepted the dominant discourse that equated gentrification with neighbourhood improvement" (2007: 138). They reference Hoogvliet in particular and apply their findings to the whole of the Netherlands, yet Rotterdam is in some senses a special case here.

In a subsequent paper, Uitermark and Duyvendak state that in 2000 the city council of Rotterdam decided to build no more social housing (2008: 1495). Furthermore, "Rotterdam has demolished more social housing than any other municipality and is the only city in the Netherlands where the housing stock has declined" (2008: 1496). An important political context here is the sudden ascendance of Pim Fortuyn (assassinated in 2002) and his Leefbaar Rotterdam party, which impacted on local politics with its curious mix of populist and racist policies and was a key factor in the general shift in Dutch politics towards the right-wing.

The take-away point regarding the squatting movement is that the imposition of urban restructuring would indicate that there were likely to be empty and derelict properties available to be squatted at the beginning of the process (ie before the 1990s) and not so many at the end (the present day). An added factor is that large-scale urban renewal projects (such as the one currently occurring in Nieuw Crooswijk) tend to stall and take longer to complete than predicted, again providing empty buildings which are then available to be squatted.

Bospolder

In the final part of this article, I want to focus in on one area, namely Bospolder in the borough of Delfshaven, for which some data is available. As I wrote above, a squatter from the early 1980s told me that there could easily have been 500 squats in that time. In 2011, Snel, Aussen, Berkhof and Renlo presented the work of three Masters dissertations at the RC21 conference in Amsterdam in a paper entitled 'Views of gentrification from below: How Rotterdam local residents experience gentrification?' Their work was based on extensive interviews with people living in three areas, namely Bospolder-Tussendjken, Katendrecht and Spangen. The 54 interviewees were either born in the area or had lived there for ten years and were therefore classed as 'indigenous' (2011: 3).

Snel et al record that most people were overall pleased that their neighbourhood had been gentrified yet also expressed some regrets about the top-down process. For example: "Time and again they refer to earlier days when the district was were plagued by neglected or even abandoned and boarded up houses where the drugs trade flourished and homeless people slept" (2011: 11); Yet "this is not to say that the interviewees only saw neighbourhood improvements. Some respondents underline the price they had to pay for the changes: the character of the area changed, it is not really 'their place' anymore" (2011: 12). This point is underlined when they conclude that "indigenous residents evidently benefit from improvements in the neighbourhood ('cleaner, wholer, safer'), but some of them do not feel at home anymore" (2011: 13). What concerns us here is that we can extract from these statements the idea that if there were empty, derelict buildings, then these would sometimes be occupied by squatters (as correlated by my source). We can also conclude that as emptiness declined, so too the numbers of squats declined. In this way, gentrification as a process, especially when imposed from above as part of urban restructuring, will reduce the number of squats eventually.

Snel et al do claim that "given available statistics, one cannot really call these districts gentrifying areas" (2011: 8), but I would argue that their analysis (which examines amount of rented housing, house price values, mean income per resident and percentage of low income households) is inadequate to demonstrate gentrification processes occurring, especially when we are examining imposed, top-down restructuring since it provides no means to analyse how many people are moving out of or into the area and also only very rough ways of assessing the changing class composition of a neighbourhood. Further, as Slater comments, "using government housing databases to measure displacement precludes the propitious role of the government in the phenomenon being measured" (2009: 299).

However, Snel et al do talk of 'gentripuncture' or islands of imposed gentrification created by houses being cheaply sold to young middle-class people who then self-renovated the insides of the buildings (and were required to live there a number of years to prevent gentrification) (2011: 8).

Boersma, in a thesis published 2013, analysed gentrification patterns in Rotterdam in a later time period, namely 200-2008. He observes that in Bospolder the total number of both buildings and inhabitants remains the same between 2000 and 2008, despite the existence of new projects such as Le Medi (700 new buildings) (2013: 38). This could then be a specific example of gentripuncture and indicates that intense restructuring is going on. An effect that the bare figures cannot show is that poorer long-term inhabitants are being moved out and new buildings are being built for new, richer residents. Boersma agrees with Uitermark et al. that gentrification in Rotterdam is associated with government intervention (2013: 46). He also asserts that it is occurring in three major clusters, with Bospolder being in one such cluster.

Gentrification also of course occurs in waves, with higher income earners repeatedly displacing those of lower income. Squatters themselves play an initial, marginal role in this process by tending to occupy empty properties in more run-down areas. It is then no surprise then that there are no longer 500-odd squats in Bospolder, since urban restructuring has been going on for years and there will no doubt be less available empty property. I realise this is a claim made by reading between the lines than based on hard data, but the data unfortunately does not exist (and it is hard to see how it could be gathered).

CONCLUSIONS

Finding 48 social centre projects stretching from the 1970s to the present day in Rotterdam demonstrates that the squatting movement has existed and persists in the city, despite official downplaying of the phenomenon by city authorities. The database shows that most of these places are cafes, bars, galleries and venues, things created in a self-organised fashion by the movement, for the movement. Most of these projects have occurred centrally, in a range of different buildings, although almost a quarter were in residential buildings and often attached to squatted streets or clusters of houses. Most do not last very long, although it was hard to find a clear duration for many projects (and other projects could not even be inserted into the database due to lack of knowledge about them).

Squatting in Rotterdam does not appear to follow specific cycles, since projects appear and disappear all the time, although having said that it is clear that the movement as a whole was much larger in the 1980s. The squatting milieu is disparate and scattered across the city and nobody knows exactly how many people are squatting and where.

In terms of contexts, anyone who has visited Rotterdam continually over the years would no doubt find it hard not to notice that the centre has gentrified enormously from the 1990s onwards. Starting at the standard point of arrival, the central train station has itself recently been redeveloped and now features a shopping mall in the passageway below the platforms. Many new blocks of flats for the urban middle classes have sprung up in the centre and actually the cultural centre has been forcibly moved into the old warehouses of the Wilhelmina Pier in Kop van Zuid, where the Poortgebow is located and which architects term 'new Manhattan.' Thus, some squats of the past would seem impossible now (for example Storm, an occupied cultural complex right in the centre which was later demolished and is now yuppie flats). The full story of Rotterdam's gentrification is another story waiting to be told, we have only been able to analyse one area in particular for which there is some data, namely Bospolder, where it is clear that gentripuncture led by city authorities has restructured the area for better or for worse and as a side result left less properties available to be squatted. Gentrification is a complex issue and it will be interesting to see the impact upon the squatters' movement if the gentrification process continues unabated in the four central boroughs - perhaps this will reduce the number of people squatting overall or perhaps it will merely concentrate squatters in pockets still awaiting gentrification, since as some areas go up, others go down. If the centre becomes completely gentrified, as is conceivable on some views, then squatters may migrate further our, perhaps even to areas when imposed gentrification has failed.

The local people interviewed in Bospolder and two other districts by Snel et al. appeared to have ambiguous reactions to gentrification, welcoming some aspects but also missing the neighbourhood as it was. This would seem to be the inevitable effect of gentrification, in what Neil Smith terms the "class remake of the central urban landscape" (1996: 39). On that note, I agree with Slater that "the task of critical urban studies is to reject the celebration of gentrification and the denial of displacement" and instead to work within an "analytical, political and moral framework which is rooted in housing as a question of social justice" (2009: 306). This dovetails well with slogans of the squatting movement such as 'housing is a right not a privilege.'

It is hard to say much on the topic of institutionalisation of squats, since so few squatted projects have lasted over time and legalised (only WORM, the Poortgebouw and the Fabriek in its second occupied incarnation). In contrast, many others seem to have been attached to squatted streets or large buildings, and when these were evicted, the projects disappeared with them. Openly political social centres are thin on the ground. This makes squatting in Rotterdam very different to other places such as Amsterdam, yet factors such as the continued existence of the kraakspreekuur (KSU) and the zines which have been produced over time show that a movement was in existence and continues to be, even if it is hard to trace.

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Appendix A

Self-definition – How the social centre called itself eg "social centre," "community garden," "cafe," "free space" etc (if known).
Name - The name of the social centre as used in its publicity or by its users (if known).
Address & Ward of social centre
Day / month / year of occupation (if known)
Day / month / year of eviction (if known)
Duration of squat (if known)
Duration in months (if known)
Time period 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.
Type of space occupied – The types are listed in Appendix B.

Time empty before occupation
Ownership and whether this owner was private or public.
Political network 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 B

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 / swiiming pool / lido
Bank
Nightclub / hall
Church or similar
Community / shelter / kids / old
Workshop
Stables
Wharf / terminal / shipyard
Silo
Farm
Pub / bar
Library
Unknown