

# Squatting in Berlin 1970-2014

## The first Squat

The first occupation, in the aftermath of the 1968 revolt, took place, symbolically on May 1st 1970, in the working class area of *Märkisches Viertel* by students and young workers.

## Composition of squatters :

As a brief overview of the squatters, often affiliated with diverse social movements, we find people with different class backgrounds and political tendencies (anarchists, anti-authoritarians, anti-imperialists, autonomous, anti-fascists, environmentalists) as well as people of color, people who have been migrated, inter- and trans-nationalists, refugees, creative artists, workers and more, but also, autonomist wimmin and dykes, radical queer and trans people, gays and drag queens/kings, seniors and homeless people.

## West-Berlin and East-Berlin:

This leads us to the extraordinary situation of the existence of two Germany's, West-Berlin and East-Berlin. In East-Berlin thousands of flats were occupied, mostly in a silent way and scarcely having to do with explicit political or economic reasons. The rent in East-Berlin was very cheap, due to rent control, which froze rents from 1936 and therefore it contained between 5% and 15 % of the average income (i.e. with rents of 24.90 or 42.75 marks for one flat). In East-Berlin until the fall of the wall 1989, we counted only 11 squatted political houses or entities. When the wall finally came down, squatting erupted suddenly in East-Berlin and until the 3rd of October 1990, the number of squats has risen to 114 out of 129 during this period, or 88.4 % in just these 11 months and 18.7% of all squats from 1970 to 2014..

## Some important Squats:

**1. Georg von Rauch-Haus**, squatted 1971, legalized and has a lease until the year 2053; **2. Schokofabrik** (chocolate factory) Women's Centre, occupied 1981, legalized; **3. Kottbuserstraße 8**, squat by migrated women from Turkey/Kurdistan, 1981, now legalized; **4. Tantenhaus Bülowstraße 55**, first Drag Queen/radical gay-squat, occupied 1981, evicted 1983; **5. Kukuck (Centre of Art- and Culture)** Anhalter Straße , 1981, evicted 1984, famous murals. ; **6. Mainzerstraße** (13 squats), evicted 1990 by 3000 cops after militant resistance, 417 arrests; **7. Köpi**, occupied 1990, legalized one year later; **8. Wagonplace East-Side**, on the former death-strip/borderland, occupied 1991, evicted 1996; **9. New Yorck im Bethanien**, occupied 2005, legalized 2009. Social Centre with living space; **10. Queer Wagonplace Schwarzer Kanal**; **11. Refugee Strike House**, Ohlauerstraße 12, occupied since 2012 by Refugees

## Analysis of the Data Base by *azozomox*

## Results / Facts:

### 610 Squats (100%)

1970-1979: 21      **1980-1981: 255 (42%)**      1982-1988: 40  
**1989-1990: 183 (30%)**      1991-1999: 50      2000-2009: 27  
2010-2014: 21

### Legalizations: ca. 200 (30%)

At least 35 bought by the squatters themselves (17,5 % of all legalizations)

Since 1991 only 16 entities have been legalized (8% of all legalizations)

### Use and shape of occupied places and spaces:

Living places or as place of housing with a public sphere : 89.3%

Social centers or as social centers with a limited number living spaces : 10.7% (65 places)  
487 residential buildings (80%), 81 former factories, schools, hospitals, one police-station, etc. (13%), and finally 40 free spaces, vacant land (6.6%), and two public squares (0.33%).  
25 occupied wagonplaces, which is 4.1% of all. Eleven wagonplaces occupied former border land, either on the former death strip or directly alongside the wall

### Ownership:

In only 374 cases (61%) was ownership found, in 236 cases (39%) not.

214 public or state-owned owners (57%)

160 private owners (43%) at the moment, the property was taken.

But the ownership often changed.

## Conclusions

\* The large number of legalizations within those mass squatting movements leads to the assumption that the movements strength, power and steady gaining of influence within society forced the Berlin senate and local district governments, along with the private owner, to negotiations, round-tables and legal agreements.

\* The government of Berlin had adopted legal and political measures to stop and neutralize squatting as a wider social phenomenon, succeeded at preventing another wave of squatting.

\* The so called "*Berliner Linie*" that was introduced in 1981, that allows the police to evict within days under the precondition that the owner of a property brings criminal charges against the occupants. Example: the relative high number of evictions – 56 out of 100 - from 1991-2014, which occurred on the same day or within the first 4 days of an occupation. This numbers are causally related to the new regulation.

## Last information:

The majority of all legalized (ex) squatters in the overall of the last 45 years are white, german passholders, middle class and therefore privileged in any sense. But especially in the early seventies, at the beginning of squatting in West-Berlin, a very high number of working class youth and trainees initiated, joined and participated in those first squats and lately we have seen migrant persons, refugees, homeless people and empowered street kids who do squat. The still occupied *Refugee Strike-House* (opened December 2012), the 1.5 year existing *Refugee Protest Camp* on Oranienplatz (evicted April 2014), the *Eisfabrik*, occupied by homeless people from Bulgaria (evicted in December 2013), the *Tee Pee* or *Cuvry Brache*, still occupied by homeless people and migrants/foreigners or the *Protest Camp Kotti und Co*, organized by migrated tenants from Turkey offers to us a perfect overview of the empowering strength in recent years.

## Repression

1. Berliner Linie: eviction within 24 hours

2. Evictions with massive police units:

Mainzerstraße (1990) 3000 cops, Liebigstraße 14 (2011) 2500 cops.

But the most fierce repression took place in the 1980/81 movement. The West-Berlin-senate and the prosecutors used several different laws, including the anti-terrorist law §129 (forming a criminal organisation) to punish and crack down on the movement. From December 12th 1980 to October 20th 1982 7.809 preliminary proceedings were carried out, and there were 1409 arrests, 172 arrest warrants, 93 prison sentences and 18 prison sentences without parole. And on september 21th 1981, **Klaus-Jürgen Ratfey** was chased by the cops, after street-protests against several evictions, under a service bus where he died immediatly.