

Framing Urban Injustices: The Case of the Amsterdam Squatter Movement

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Abstract. Every social movement is engaged in an on-going process of ‘framing’ to determine what goals are just and what means are legitimate. This paper provides an analysis of several frames that have been developed by the squatter movement in Amsterdam. This movement emerged in the 1970s as a major force that was able to put the shortage of affordable housing on the political agenda. The paper also gives attention to the contemporary squatter movement and asks to what extent a movement that has lost much of its former momentum is still able to address injustices. It is argued that the infrastructure that has been built up by previous generations of squatters provides contemporary participants with the opportunity to address certain issues quite effectively; there are now only a few activist squatters, but their actions are relatively effective due to the facilitating and catalysing role of the movement’s infrastructure. The paper stresses that the squatter movement is extremely heterogeneous. Changes in the local political opportunity structure that have taken place in the past couple of years have had a differentiated impact on the different segments of the movement. Specifically, segments of the movement which argue that they help to promote Amsterdam’s profile as a vibrant cultural city have recently gained a strong position in Amsterdam’s polity.

1. Introduction

The Amsterdam squatter movement has shown itself capable in the past of effecting important changes in the field of housing specifically and the urban fabric more generally. The accounts of foreign observers in particular underscore the importance of the squatter movement as a major social force that has made the city more just and egalitarian (Smith, 1996; Soja, 1996). This paper will analyse the specific combination of circumstances, decisions and events that

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shaped the squatter movement and that imbued it with such major political, social and cultural significance. However, the history of the Amsterdam squatter movement is well-documented and there is no need simply to restate here what already has been said elsewhere.¹ Instead, I want to discuss the Amsterdam squatter movement to investigate, in an admittedly tentative fashion, what happens when a movement is in place while the historical context in which it came into existence and flourished has disappeared. The Amsterdam case shows that changing contextual factors do not necessarily imply the end of a movement. Activities of previous generations of activists crystallise into relatively stable institutions that are reproduced even when the original impetus for their development has disappeared. In the case of the Amsterdam squatter movement, such institutions comprise friendship networks, restaurants, cafés, news magazines, an Internet newsgroup and so on. While these institutions most of the time serve mainly to cultivate a particular type of urban lifestyle, they can under the right circumstances become a springboard for new types of political activity. Thus, these territorially grounded institutions (see Nicholls and Beaumont, 2004)—I will refer to them as infrastructure in the rest of the paper—embody a critical potential that can be activated when changing circumstances make it possible or pertinent for the members of a movement to address new or resurfacing injustices.

When we want to study the ways in which social movements transform over time, we are immediately faced with some theoretical difficulties that have not been fully dealt with by the literature on social movements in general and urban movements in particular. This means that it is necessary to discuss briefly and, on occasion, amend the existing literature on social movements. Although I strongly adhere to the conception of social movements as ‘challengers with political demands’ that is favoured in the literature on political opportunity structures and resource mobilisation, I also find it necessary to make some critical remarks of this literature. In particular, I want to stress that the conception of social movements as unitary actors with coherent demands does not fit the Amsterdam squatter movement—in fact, the movement is extremely heterogeneous and decentred, which means that different segments pursue divergent goals with differing strategies and tactics. In the second section, I develop these points and argue that the framing perspective that has been developed in recent years provides some hints as to how we can do justice to the dynamism and heterogeneity that characterise the contemporary squatter movement.

In the third section, I discuss the emergence of the Amsterdam squatter movement. I also indicate when and how the squatter movement lost much of its former importance. In the fourth section, I show that important changes in the local political opportunity structure (POS), which themselves result in large part from structural changes at supra-local scales, confront different elements of the movement in different ways. Thus, changes in the POS make it easier for some segments to address injustices than for other segments. I conclude by suggesting that the existence of an infrastructure, which was in large part built up in the hey-day of the movement (see Pruijt, 2003, p. 139), can work as a catalyser; there may now be far fewer activists and squatters than before, but those who do want to use squatting as a means to address political issues can draw upon the movement’s infrastructure in order to maximise the impact and significance of their actions.

2. Studying Decentred Movements

As I will show below, the Amsterdam squatter movement represents a textbook example of social movement evolution as it has gone through three successive stages (della Porta and Diani, 1999, pp. 149–150). First, some core groups are created that provide a critique of existing institutions and produce a collective identity. Secondly, such collective identities are reinforced by confrontations with opponents. Thirdly, the movement and its environment adapt to each other, which limits occasions of severe conflict. In this stage, the movement decomposes and its constitutive institutions and networks integrate with other movements, become isolated or disappear altogether.

Nevertheless, some sense of collective identity and memory remains. In addition, the constitutive institutions of the movement generally retain some sort of coherence as they continue to orchestrate activities around a central theme—i.e. squatting. The fact that such cognitive as well as institutional ties are still present even when the original conditions that enabled the movement's emergence are not, makes it possible that at some point the elements of the movement may reinvigorate their activities (della Porta and Diani, 1999, p. 150). Thus, the role that relatively inert institutions actually or possibly play is of crucial importance. Basically, these are the questions: under what conditions will the latent potential for mobilisation that is present in the existing institutions be mobilised, what forms will this process take and what ends will the mobilisation serve?

Whether mobilisation will indeed occur, depends in large part on the political context in which the movement operates. To understand this context, the political process approach (see Kriesi *et al.*, 1995; MacAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1998), with its concern for the political opportunities that are specific to a certain polity, is very useful and I will refer frequently to the interrelationship between the movement's development and changes in the political context in which it operates. However, it is important at this stage to note that the political process approach as well as other popular approaches, such as the resource mobilisation approach (see McCarthy and Zald, 1977), suffer from a weakness that limits their potential for understanding the Amsterdam squatter movement: they rely very much on the conception of social movement organisations as coherent units whose behaviour can be explained as the result of respectively the strategic considerations of movement leaders or the features of a certain polity. Movement goals and participants' motivations are presumed constant—they function as ready-made material that is processed by leaders and circumstances. In this context, criticisms that social movement theory tends to underplay heterogeneity and disrespect the spontaneous and multifaceted nature of contentious politics have at least some validity (see, for example, Routledge, 1995). Even though I feel that such criticism can easily lead to passionate yet somewhat overromanticised accounts of movements, they do point our attention to the immense diversity of emotions, dispositions and intentions that are present within a movement at any moment in time. Especially where it concerns a movement so loosely organised as the squatter movement, heterogeneity should be at the centre of attention (see Kebede, 2001). In this paper, I will therefore emphasise the *differential* impact of changes in the POS on the organisation and discourse of the squatter movement. I will show that, whilst certain key elements are present throughout the movement's history, *changes in the political context impact*

on the movement in such a way that specific types of tactics, strategies and discourses can quite abruptly acquire more political importance or, in contrast, remain relatively insignificant. In other words, the movement consists of diverse elements that usually remain low-profile yet can suddenly acquire more importance as a consequence of the way in which participants respond to changes in the political context.

The framing perspective that has gained increasing popularity in recent decades may be most useful to investigate these interrelated organisational and discursive changes. The framing literature breaks with much of the social movement research tradition in as far as it does not focus exclusively on institutional variables but has an eye for the changes that may take place in a movement's discourse. This is crucially important for movement studies generally but for this Special Issue specifically, since it addresses our attention to the ways in which 'injustices' are framed and hence can be tackled

Movements actively engage in the construction of meaning, the portrayal of injustice, and the definition of pathways to change. ... [Movements] are involved in framing contests attempting to persuade authorities and by-standers of the rightness of their cause (Zald, 1996, p. 269).

What is and what is not considered as unjust are thus subject to processes of attribution, which are in turn subject to the strategic calculation of a movement's participants (Snow *et al.*, 1986; Benford and Snow, 2000). Participants within the movement do not share, contrary to the assumptions of—for example, the resource mobilisation approach, the same opinions with respect to the means or even the goals of a certain movement. The framing perspective opens up the possibility of investigating such differences within a movement or movement organisation (Gamson and Meyer, 1996). Since participants of the same movement may mobilise around different claims, there is a possibility of internal frame disputes (Benford, 1993). However, the decentred nature of the contemporary squatter movement makes it unlikely that individuals or groups engage in direct competition to achieve hegemony. In squatters' circles, it is considered highly inappropriate to speak on behalf of 'the' squatter movement because it is widely acknowledged that different agendas should co-exist. In general, there is a high degree of scepticism towards individuals who want to steer the movement in one direction or another.

Given the low frequency of internal disputes, the way in which squatting is framed by the media and the government is largely determined by the impact of outside forces on the respective frames within the movement (see also McCarthy *et al.*, 1996). So, my analysis of the squatter movement does not presuppose one single coherent ideology but rather highlights how certain forms of framing can acquire more importance as a result of the response of certain key elements within a movement to changing circumstances. As a working hypothesis, we may presume that frames that successfully dominate the political agenda will have a basis *both* in the movement and in the political context—i.e. those participants who frame their specific demands in terms that resonate with those of other key agents—most importantly, the local government—will have a relatively large impact on political discussions. This implies that structural changes at supra-local scales have an indirect impact on the squatter movement; they shape the preferences of local policy-makers and hence indirectly and

partially determine which frames within the squatter movement will resonate and lead to concrete achievements, in the form of legalised squats or other political concessions.

3. The Amsterdam Squatter Movement: its Emergence and Hey-day

The seeds for the contemporary squatter movement were sown in the late 1960s when growing dissatisfaction with the housing shortage and the rules for housing distribution were first addressed by more or less organised groups of squatters. For those who feel that a movement is only a movement when it undertakes large-scale collective action and acquires political relevance, the birth of the squatter movement might be dated to 1975, when squatting became a crucial element in the resistance against the demolition of large parts of the Nieuwmarktbuurt—a densely populated residential area that, according to the plans of the city council, had to be transformed into a kind of business district with major hotels, banks, a metro and a four-lane highway. Squatting in buildings that were to be demolished was one element of a more encompassing fight against high-modernist renewal plans. In other neighbourhoods where urban renewal plans were threatening the social fabric, squatters also moved in. Whilst many people continued to squat simply to get a house, the most politically significant actions took place because of widespread feelings of dissatisfaction with government plans to reduce the number of dwellings in the city, displace tenants and modernise streets and infrastructure. There was a very strong link between squatting and neighbourhood activism and the squatters who manifested themselves on the political scene were acutely aware that they had much to gain from a coalition with neighbourhood activists. Recalling urban renewal operations, one squatter remarks

It was like a bomb had exploded in the neighbourhood. Large parts of the neighbourhood were like ruins. ... The policy at that time was to demolish housing only when all the residents in a street had been displaced. This led to an enormous social disruption ... The neighbourhood residents supported the squatting ... We tried to involve the street as much as possible ... We built a podium and made a large playground for children (Harri, p. 59)²

Thus, actions were framed as attempts to conserve the social and physical fabric of neighbourhoods and the city generally; squatting took place within what we might call a 'save the city' frame. The links between squatting and neighbourhood activism would never disappear but they declined in importance when squatting became framed as a type of political action in its own right. For that shift to occur, the squatting movement first had to build its own identity through confrontations with opponents and, it may be added, by disassociating itself from neighbourhood activism. These conditions occurred more and more when individual squats were evicted. This was especially evident in the Kinkerstraat in Amsterdam West. The residents of a squat there had decided to pursue a non-violent protest but the riot police at some point started hitting the squatters. Even though some squatters did not adhere strictly to the line of non-violent protest, the general impression was that the riot police had used disproportionate violence. The confrontation between squatters and riot police had been recorded from beginning to end. The film raised discussions about the useful-

ness of non-violent protests when it was broadcast. Strong feelings of dissatisfaction arose and many squatters felt that it was futile simply to undergo the violence of the riot police during evictions. Such feelings might not have had important consequences, were it not for the fact that at this point a strong group of radical squatters had formed, which had its centre of gravity in the Staatsliedenbuurt.³ This group had always favoured a more confrontational approach and had occasionally put it into practice—for example, during the Nieuwmarkt riots. However, now that conditions had changed, this group could pursue its own agenda of confrontation more ambitiously. Partly as a consequence and partly as a result of these tendencies towards radicalisation, links with neighbourhood activism and residents became looser. Many residents would support resistance but few would subscribe to the vision that was promoted by the Staatsliedenbuurt squatters. In short, this vision was that confrontation was necessary because it raised awareness among the participants in the movement and the populace at large. The informal but undisputed leader of the Staatsliedenbuurt group, Theo van der Giessen, put it as follows

Squatting has always been a mode of confrontation. If you want to change something, you have to not only engage in confrontations but also provoke them (p. 121).

Recalling one confrontation in the Vondelstraat, he says that

It showed so clearly what the government was doing, that their violence only exacerbated the injustices instead of taking them away. That was very useful. Look, if a battle serves a purpose, and it did, then I think it contributes greatly to the common cause (p. 129).

After the Kinkerstraat events, the squatter movement clearly moved to a different stage; after the initial stage during which several of the movement's strongholds strengthened and had developed a discourse on urban change, now the movement took a more coherent shape through its confrontations with the opponent (see della Porta and Diani, 1999, pp. 149–151). During this stage, urban renewal moved to the background and the housing shortage *per se* became more important. Several reasons for this can be mentioned.

During this period, the confrontations themselves took on major significance and there was a strong polarisation between the authorities and the squatters—some even coined the term 'urban war' (Hofland, 1981). In this period, what we might call an 'uncompromising housing shortage' frame came into being. From the Kinkerstraat onwards, many confrontations took place that fit within this frame but I want to mention only two brief episodes in the history of squatting during which a number of developments combined in an explosive mix.

First, the events around the Groote Keyser. This was a huge squat along a canal in the historical centre consisting of six large buildings with spacious rooms. The buildings were owned by the investment company OGEM, which in the eyes of many epitomised (speculative) capitalism. The buildings acquired major political importance when it became clear that some of the residents wanted to resist the announced eviction. There were only a few residents left since most had decided to go elsewhere and not await the eviction. So, the people who stayed were confronted with the major logistical challenge of defending six huge buildings with about a dozen people. When they started to ask for help, many replied positively. At some point, the Staatsliedenbuurt

squatters knocked on the door. From that point onwards, the defence quickly professionalised. Barricades were put up and missiles were collected. A press team was formed so that the many journalists could be provided with information to strengthen the squatters' case. In the end, the buildings were so well defended that the authorities feared they could not be evicted without making fatal casualties. The buildings were bought from OGEM and they were designated for youth housing.

Secondly, the resquatting of the Lucky Luyck, a major building in the southern part of the city, just outside the city centre. The Luyck is quite special because it was owned by a notorious speculator, Lüske, who had the buildings evicted by his own strong-arm boys. The police refused to act, even though the squatters' legal rights had been violated. There was widespread agreement within the squatter movement that such actions could not be tolerated, in part because it created a precedent for owners of real estate who preferred violent and quick action over time-consuming court cases. After it became clear that Lüske's men would be removed by the squatters, a group, under the (informal) leadership of the Staatsliedenbuurt squatters, quickly organised itself to take care of the operation with the same professionalism that was shown in the case of the Groote Keyser: they trained in the dunes, made uniforms and formulated battle plans. The resistance of Lüske's men was not as severe as expected and the Luyck was reoccupied. Again there were negotiations with the city council. However, at this point, the council said it did not want to respond to the threat of violence and said that it would turn the squat into social housing but not for the people who occupied the building. Apart from the fact that Lüske would still get his money in this scenario, there was also dissatisfaction with the refusal to let the squatters live in the building and especially the refusal to create housing for youths instead of regular social housing. In the end, the Luyck was evicted after a violent clash.

These two examples are indicative of the strength of the squatter movement between 1978 and 1982. Many other examples could be mentioned, including the globally broadcast and unprecedented riots that broke out during the coronation of Queen Beatrix in 1980 under the slogan of 'no house, no coronation' (*geen woning, geen kroning*). These two examples will suffice, however, as illustrations of some general trends that were apparent during this period. One obvious trend is that squatters professionalised and started to mimic the riot police with respect to internal discipline, sophistication of their administration and their public relations policy. However, as I outlined in the previous section, I think it would be misguided to see these developments as typical of *the* movement. Rather, they were the trends that became publicly visible and politically salient as a consequence of the way in which the government dealt with squatters around that time. The local government recognised the problems the squatters were addressing, it applied major force during evictions and, when there was an approximate balance of forces, it heeded some of movement's demands—in short, its frame was roughly similar to that of the Staatsliedenbuurt squatters, thus reinforcing their strength and making their actions more salient than those of others. Yet it needs to be stressed that the strongly organised and professionalised radical squatters were only one group among many. These squatters were not typical but, through the features of their organisation and the way in which the government—somewhat paradoxically—reinforced their way of working, they could tap into the great diversity of feelings and attitudes in the different

squats. They had a major homogenising force as they applied the same strategy everywhere and largely ignored the specific demands of the occupants themselves or the neighbourhood residents.

However, such a homogenisation project only took place at a superficial level. Large segments of the squatter movement mobilised around frames that were at this point perhaps not as well-articulated as the 'uncompromising housing shortage' frame but that were perhaps more important for most of the participants. Apart from the 'save the city' frame that was still relevant in the 1980s in some cases, a strong mobilisation occurred around what might be called the 'free space' frame. Central to this frame is the feeling that squatting is about more than just housing and confrontation but involves an alternative way of living. Such a frame can of course be shaped only when a movement grows and stabilises so that it becomes possible to experiment on a number of sites with what is possible in a squat when there is not a direct threat of eviction. That many people adhered strongly to this ideal of an alternative lifestyle became clear when the plan to transform the Groote Keyser into youth housing was accepted. One condition for accepting this plan was that the squatter radio channel—the Vrije Keyser—would leave the buildings. There were no practical objections against this decision—the channel could easily be moved elsewhere—but many felt it was typical of the way in which the line of action suggested by the 'uncompromising housing shortage' frame could lead to rather dull results. In the end, when the government conceded and agreed to buy the buildings, it became apparent that the Keyser had been a symbol more than just housing issues

You had the feeling that you would lose something if the place would be emptied and turned over to the municipality; something that is an important part of your life is taken from you. That feeling was very strong. The displacement of the radio channel meant another concession. You not only gave away your free space but your activities were kind of banned as well (Harri, p. 61).

Around this time, in many other squats alternative household forms—living groups—had taken shape and many squatters adhered very strongly to the idea that squatting was a way of life that opened up new possibilities. This segment of the movement and the frame around which it organised received comparatively little attention from the media, even though some magazines and newspapers paid some attention to it. With reference to the group around Theo, one squatter remarks

I did not feel involved with such a group of though guys who primarily wanted power and political discussions. Many people were not involved with such a project. We wanted freedom, to do what we wanted to do. Theo was always busy with politics, power and violence and did not care much for the development of alternative ways to live your life (Gusta, p. 102).

There were also more rebellious versions of this type of alternative living; drug use, heavy drinking and an altogether dismissive stance towards the rest of society were quite common in some segments of the squatter movement. Such ideas were diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the Staatsliedenbuurt squatters. The conflict between those who prioritised the development of

alternative places and lifestyles over results that could only be obtained with the hierarchical organisations that were also common in mainstream society was already strongly apparent during the Groote Keyser and especially the Lucky Luyck. Many squatters were frightened by the militaristic nature of the resquat action and even more participants of the movement were angry about the way decisions had been made. They felt it was necessary first to debate at length with representatives from all neighbourhoods in open discussions about the course of action and criticised the way in which the Staatsliedenbuurt squatters had taken the initiative. The conflict would escalate and would ultimately lead to some form of gang war within the movement. The beginning of this episode is marked by the resquat of the Groote Keyser. To celebrate that the Groote Keyser had been occupied for two years, a group of squatters resquatted the (still empty) buildings and gave a party. During that party, it became apparent that there was major dissatisfaction with the type of action promoted by the Staatsliedenbuurt squatters. A symbol of that line of action—the press centre in the building's cellar—was demolished and slogans against Theo van der Giessen were sprayed on the walls. Theo and his companions responded furiously and punished (i.e. hit and/or humiliated) some of the people who were involved in the resquat. With hindsight, this incident can be considered as one of the first clear signs of a widening rift in the movement.

The goals of the squatters who favoured the line of the Staatsliedenbuurt were only to a limited extent compatible with the goals of those who wanted to create a space where alternative lifestyles could be pursued and where hierarchical relationships were resolutely rejected: a 'free space' of like-minded people. This also holds true for a related but distinct frame that was developed during the occupation of Wyers, which started in 1981. The residents of this building frequently had discussions about the way in which the huge spaces they had at their disposal should be appropriated. Many 'hard-liners' felt that parties and the like should serve a clear political purpose, whilst others felt that concerts and performances could also be programmed simply because they provided good entertainment. For the first time, supporters of the latter viewpoint, who had for some time held such views, were able to pursue their agenda—in other words, a frame that had been present for some time (albeit in an unarticulated form) gained more political salience. Wyers became a meeting-ground for a huge diversity of people, ranging from skaters (there was a skate hall in the building) to pop music lovers. It became, in other words, a 'breeding place'. Part of the reason the breeding place proponents could win the argument from the hard-liners, was that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the 'uncompromising housing shortage' frame within the movement. The escalating violence was increasingly regarded as undesirable, especially because of the hierarchical relationships that made it possible. It is also important to note that the repressive attitude of the government and its refusal to heed the squatters' demands increased the costs and decreased the possible gains of confrontations—a change in the POS thus reduced the mobilising force of the latter frame.

In the end, the negotiations with the local government failed and the squat was evicted. However, a new kind of frame—the 'breeding place' frame—had taken shape and it appeared that it had a considerable mobilising force. Thus, during the occupation of Wyers, the 'breeding place' frame was fully developed by a segment of the squatter movement yet did not have a maximum mobilising capacity. This is partly because the city council itself did not act fully within that

frame and did not yet have a comprehensive policy. It is also partly because many participants in the movement—and those with a strong voice—disagreed with the ‘breeding place’ idea and especially the fact that, within this frame, the squatter movement and the local government were making overtures to each other.

In sum, when Wyers was evicted, there were at least four fully developed frames that were distinct from each other. First, the ‘save the city’ frame that emphasises the detrimental effects of urban renewal operations on the social fabric of neighbourhoods and the city. Secondly, the ‘uncompromising housing shortage’ frame in which confrontations are of primary importance for focusing attention on the failure of government policies, especially in the field of housing. Thirdly, the ‘free place’ frame in which self-management and alternative lifestyles are central. Fourthly, the ‘breeding place’ frame which has similarities with the ‘save the city’ frame but is distinct in that it focused on the relationship between breeding places and the city as a whole—squats were not temporary sites of resistance but also potentially contributed to the socio-cultural development of the city as a whole. Around 1990, the four frames co-existed and each of them had considerable mobilising force. It is not the case that one replaced the other.

After 1980, the movement declined rapidly and stabilised around 1990. Only in the past two or three years can we discern some ways in which the movement may again gain momentum and acquire new political significance. It will be argued below that the fact that the fourth and later the second frame gained precedence in political discussions has more to do with changing circumstances than with attitudes and dispositions of squatters *per se*.

4. A Renewed Movement: Squatting in the New Millennium

As has become clear, the squatter movement seemed destined to melt away or, at best, occupy a marginal space within the political arena. Perhaps some would argue that this is indeed what happened; a couple of my informants indeed felt that it was an exaggeration to speak of ‘a movement’, arguing that the residues of the squatter movement amounted to no more than a small and incoherent collection of groups that have the activity of squatting as a rather incidental and insignificant commonality. There is certainly some truth in this, especially if the late 1970s and early 1980s are used as a point of reference. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to ascribe more meaning to the contemporary squatter movement. In my view, at least two of the frames that have been developed in the past and that have historically mobilised considerable support are now, perhaps in slightly modified forms, becoming more compatible with the political context in which the squatter movement operates. The most obvious example in this context is the ‘breeding place’ frame but more recently we are also seeing the re-emergence of a moderate version of the ‘uncompromising housing shortage’ frame (henceforth referred to as the housing shortage frame). I will discuss the re-emergence of each frame in turn and indicate in each case how changes in the POS played an activating and stimulating (but not generating) role.

4.1 Squatting Premises, Breeding Places

The kind of discourse that was created during Wyers by the squatters who adhered to the breeding place frame persisted during the late 1980s. A number of squatters had occupied former factories and schools and turned them into cultural centres or 'live and work buildings' (*woon-werkgebouwen*; henceforth referred to as mixed-use buildings), especially in the harbour district where deindustrialisation left empty many buildings that were subsequently occupied by squatters. A number of *ad hoc* policy measures were implemented to legalise such squats, primarily because it would have been difficult to put them to different use. However, the breeding place discourse, which had at its centre the idea that legalised squats could be of use to the city as a whole, also persisted. From the mid 1990s onwards, the discourse would gain increasing strength and would ultimately, around the turn of the century, resonate with the concerns of policy-makers. However, before I turn to the present, let me first indicate how the breeding place frame was initially developed and subsequently strategically employed by squatters. The first thing to note in this respect is that, throughout the 1990s, adherents to the breeding place frame continued to promote it, both within the movement but also amongst policy-makers.

One of the squatters of Wyers, a long-time proponent of the breeding place frame who was also involved in this address to the council, says that he and his associates repeatedly addressed the city council to voice his concerns about the eviction of land-mark squats in the city centre and the resulting deterioration of the city's cultural climate

In the 1990s, during the economic boom, everything that was alternative was killed, witness the many evictions. I was extremely surprised that in 1998 the council suddenly responded to our call. We had written such manifests and council addresses in 1994 and 1996 but only at this point in time did they see that squats are important for the cultural and economic climate.

These forms of support show that, for the first time, the breeding place frame that had been first in evidence during Wyers now resonated with the local government's ideas about the importance of culture for the socioeconomic development of the city. One reason might be that Amsterdam was indeed getting 'boring'. However, I think it is more important to take into account the shifts in the way in which local governments—not just that of Amsterdam—are reconsidering the importance of cultural services within the contemporary space economy.

Thus, in the wake of this memorandum, a so-called breeding place policy was created. It was recognised that some types of artistic and sub-cultural activities could only exist when a sufficiently large supply of relatively cheap space was available and that, in order to counterbalance spiralling land rents and prevent resulting processes of exclusion, the local government had to intervene actively in the housing/land market in order to guarantee the availability of such space. This policy itself had resulted in part from opposition by squatters and a select group of squatters now actively seized the opportunity to shape the policy in such a way that it could meet their own needs. So, it was clear that the POS had opened up to some segments of the squatter movement; those squatters who adhered to the breeding place frame in general and those residents of squatted

mixed-use buildings who were under threat of eviction in particular. However, far from providing a ready-made solution, the policy raised new difficulties.

The fact that the policy was created *in* response to the disappearance of mixed-use squats but was not *a* response to their disappearance created new tensions between the movement and the local government. These tensions were most acutely felt during the developments around the squatted Kalenderpanden and their subsequent eviction.

The squatters in the Kalenderpanden, a set of large warehouses at the edge of the city centre, had for years developed all kinds of cultural and social projects. When the first serious threats of eviction became apparent, the Kalenderpanden were turned into a symbol for the commercialisation and 'borification' of Amsterdam. Not only did they accommodate an extraordinary number and range of activities, they were also the last in a range of large squatted warehouses that were to be evicted and turned into offices or, in this case, luxury apartments. In addition, the occupants campaigned for months to save their squat from eviction and, under the slogan 'turning-point Kalenderpanden' actively made the Kalenderpanden into a symbol. Among other actions, they disturbed council meetings several times and organised a 1500-person demonstration against the eviction—not exactly actions that shook the entire political system but, after a long period of silence, these signs of organised activism were quite significant. The riots that took place before the eviction were also in many ways reminiscent of the 1980s, confirming the importance of the breeding place frame in this period. From now on, political concerns for squatting were framed primarily if not exclusively in terms of breeding places.

One example is the former Film academy, a building located just outside the city centre. The building was occupied by several dozens of squatters who had just been evicted from a former hospital. Under Dutch regulations, a building that is squatted within a year after it has last been used can be evicted immediately. However, the squatters argued that the Film academy provided a terrific potential breeding place for young artistic talent and persuaded the neighbourhood council and the administration of the breeding place policy to provide subsidies so that the building could be used by the group of squatters during the five years before the planned demolition. At the moment of writing (summer 2003), the building is officially a breeding place but almost all the public facilities provided by the residents (political meetings, exhibitions, a restaurant, parties) have now been cancelled because of fire safety regulations. Even though all the funds allocated to the breeding place policy have already been reserved for existing and prospective projects, several other buildings that have recently been squatted benefit from the policy because they can temporarily avoid eviction by pointing out that their value is officially recognised by the local government. One former squatter explains

The fact that there is something like a breeding place policy has stimulated squatting. Squatters who could have been evicted right away under existing regulations can now stay longer. The breeding place acknowledges the value of such places and therefore let's them be, even when there are legal grounds for evicting them.

In short, the breeding place frame now dominates the discussion about squatting in Amsterdam. The frame is so successful because it mediates between the concerns and demands of some segments of the movement *and* the policies of

the local government. The frame provides the movement with a welcome means to defend their social and physical infrastructure; all my respondents who mobilise around the breeding place frame confirm that they have developed their approach primarily to safeguard their squats and activities—the benefits for the city that might arise are of secondary concern. For the local government, the reverse is true. It is only interested in the possible benefits for the city and hardly cares for the occupants of individual squats. Despite these different motivations, squatters and the local government have now agreed on *the terms* of the discussion, which means that they can enter a public dialogue. In addition, the fact that the discussion revolves around large buildings and sizeable groups of persons, makes it more likely that individual cases can penetrate media accounts and raise controversy. All this implies that other frames have become of secondary importance in political discussions. However, this does not mean that there are no squatters who mobilise around such frames—i.e. policy preferences usually do *not* determine the agenda of squatters, they simply make some agendas more important than others.

4.2 The 'New' Housing Shortage

The previous paragraph has asserted that the breeding place has now taken centre stage for a variety of structural reasons. There is reason to view this development with some scepticism, since it could distract the movement from its original concerns (Uitermark, 2004). This would be worrying since the privatisation of the housing market has resulted in some developments that should be addressed by any movement that has even a remote concern for housing: the production of housing has come to a practical standstill in Amsterdam (as well as other major cities), exacerbating the (never resolved) housing shortage, and the recent plans to restructure the housing stock threaten to degrade what is probably the largest stock of social housing in the world (see Priemus, 1995, 1997). However, segments of the movement that have mobilised around different frames have traditionally operated relatively autonomously, which means that the movement does not address the housing shortage *or* the lack of breeding places but can do both these things at the same time. In fact, the intensification of the housing shortage in the past decade has very recently reactivated some parts of the movement. As in the case of the breeding place frame, appreciating the importance of the movement's infrastructure is crucial for understanding these new activities. When squatters were fighting the police, retreating to the privatised spaces of their legalised homes or debating with politicians about the cultural vibe in Amsterdam, regular squatting activity continued unabated. Apartments are still squatted on a regular basis. Such activity is facilitated by the squatting 'consulting-hours' (KSU—*Kraakspreekuur*) that provide legal advice to aspirant squatters. The KSUs also break open doors and replace locks for new squatters. All neighbourhoods in Amsterdam still have a KSU, which help people to squat houses on a weekly basis. In addition, squatters can obtain information from the so-called squat manual that is available in a number of languages; they can inform about landlords at a city-wide institution (SPOK); they can call upon the more radical segments of the squatter movement to help them in case of eviction or when the owner of a building threatens or harasses them; they can communicate through some new and old communication channels, such as the *Grachtenkrant* and the squatting Internet newsgroup; and they

can rely upon a number of lawyers who specialise in all issues relevant to squatting. This infrastructure has proved remarkably durable over time. Asked about the dynamics of the squatter movement, one of my respondents remarks

Well, two parts of the movement are interesting. The first part consists of the people who maintain the SPOK, the KSUs and so on. There are still people who do those things and I think they will continue to do so in the future. The second part consists of people who function relatively autonomously, such as the people on the ADM [a squatted shipyard that organises cultural activities on a regular basis] or others who have a new idea and want to make an effort. This latter group gives some dynamism to the movement, while the former makes it possible for the movement to continue.

Basically, these remarks confirm the working hypothesis developed in the second section; there is an infrastructure that can be activated if conditions are conducive and if a group of people is willing to make an effort. This is exactly what seems to be happening right now. A small but increasing number of activist squatters have recently mobilised squarely and publicly around the housing shortage frame. Two groups play a pivotal role in this respect.

First, a small number of students have established an KSU that is specifically meant for students (SKSU). The decision to establish this KSU was made at a city-wide meeting of squatters that was meant to bring together the wide variety of political visions and attitudes within the movement and to decide how the movement was to maintain or regain its relevance. This meeting itself is already a sign that at least some segments want to reinvigorate the movement and the SKSU is probably the most interesting outcome of that meeting. This KSU is interesting in part because it is an integral part of the infrastructure of the movement yet provides a window to outside influences. It is a part of the existing movement because it uses the expertise of experienced squatters and has its office hours in a bookstore that is located in a legalised squat.

The first squat action by the SKSU took place in an office in the southern part of the city. The SKSU purposefully looked for offices because of the huge vacancy rate and because they wanted to squat a building that was suitable for a collective housing project, a squatted variant of the traditional student accommodation. In the end, only a couple of students, all with an activist background, took part in the squat of a relatively small office. Nevertheless, this action generated enormous media attention. National television channels came to visit this and other squats. Local and national newspapers featured articles in which it was stated that squatting was back and that this action was only the beginning of a new wave of actions. The fact is that squat actions of this type and size occur very frequently and there is consensus in the movement that there is no reason to become overtly enthusiastic with such media attention. However, what makes this case interesting is that the squatters first decided on their political agenda and subsequently chose a building to squat. Usually, it is the other way around.⁴ Now the people of the SKSU made an effort to reach the press; they purposefully framed their action as arising from the continued lack of student housing in Amsterdam and other university cities.

Secondly, a group of squatters has reactivated ties with neighbourhood activists. In this context, the establishment of Sash-Amsterdam (*Stop afbraak sociale woningbouw*—Stop the abolishment of social housing) is significant. This

organisation, the local branch of (an embryonic) national organisation which originated, perhaps not entirely coincidentally, in the *Staatsliedenbuurt*, is now trying to put pressure on the government to halt the abolishment of social housing. The organisation consists of (former) squatters and neighbourhood activists and works with KSUs to mobilise support for their causes. The best example of such a group is the KSU *De Pijp*, a KSU that is based in the 19th-century neighbourhood *De Pijp* and squats in the whole of the Southern part of Amsterdam. This KSU has always maintained close relations with the neighbourhood committee but such relations acquire increased importance now that the local and neighbourhood councils have decided to 'restructure' dramatically the housing stock; inexpensive social housing has to make room for expensive and large owner-occupied apartments. *Sash-A* has already organised a demonstration and is now planning a second one. KSU *De Pijp* also squatted in 10 former social houses that were offered for sale by the housing corporation as a protest against the sale of council houses at a time when waiting-lists for social housing are getting longer and longer.

These are embryonic changes, to be sure. However, there are some reasons to believe they might evolve into a more structural movement. It is interesting to note that these new participants direct their attention at new targets. It is no coincidence that the SKSU has chosen to squat in an office instead of in an apartment as their first direct action. Whereas apartments that have been vacant for a year are a rarity, vacancy is a common phenomenon in the office market. In fact, whilst the municipality has structurally failed to reduce the tension on the housing market, it has very successfully promoted the development of office space. Even though an economic recession is evident, office development continues and so vacancy rates are likely to increase. It may not be comfortable to live in a squatted office—it is easier for owners to evict squatters and offices are often located in peripheral districts and lack sanitary services—but it does serve an obvious political purpose: the municipal policies are questioned and the local government is pressured to consider converting offices into residences (in contrast to Rotterdam, the municipality of Amsterdam has so far not considered policy measures to this end). And in addition, there is a large stock of 'squat-table' offices. In fact, the KSU *De Pijp* squatted a large office just before the student KSU undertook their first action.

In my view, and on the basis of the theoretical considerations formulated in section 2, these attempts will only be successful if at some point the local government recognises the squatters as political agents who are either legitimate or strong. Only then is there opportunity for a dialogue in which the squatters can systematically defend their case and confront the council with real choices.

5. Conclusion

The effort of the final battle is a crystal to be saved, from which a new crowd might someday form. If this fails to happen, the movement is in fact removed from history. If the crystallisation does succeed, then future movements will unavoidably have to do with this group, which tries to steer the events based on an impulse foreign to the new movement. For the crystal is no longer capable of changing shape, however, much circumstances alter themselves (Bilwet, 1990, pp. 226–227).

Throughout this paper, it has been emphasised that the properties of the POS determine which frames can gain prominence in political discussions. Thus, the clashes of the late 1970s and early 1980s should not be seen as a sign that the government was altogether insensitive to the demands of the squatters. On the contrary, the squatters could only effectively undertake their actions as long as there were prospects for legalisation and as long as the movement could legitimate its actions towards neighbourhood activists and the populace at large. The less violent but nevertheless tense relationship between the government and the movement over the issue of breeding places equally shows how shifting government priorities can lead to a situation in which a certain problem—the commercialisation of the (inner) city and all the disadvantages that this process entails—can become the centre of attention. The fact that structural changes in the economy and politics of the city determine which frames—and hence injustices—receive attention, raises some difficult problems for social movements. For example, it is now comparatively easy for the squatter movement to address the lack of cultural vibrancy in Amsterdam because the municipality is also worried about this issue. Breeding places are now very much the concern of the local government, especially because it conceives of Amsterdam as a creative city that competes with other cities by providing a special creative and vibrant atmosphere. Some squatters nicely fit into this ideal and hence might be co-opted in one way or another (Uitermark, 2004). In contrast, the housing shortage is not of prime concern to the government and demands to retain social housing are likely to be ignored. Since the municipality is now keen on attracting high-income households, social housing is now considered a burden rather than an asset. Besides, social housing is now, at least formally, the responsibility of privatised housing corporations, which are not accountable to the local government and have to sell dwellings to break even.

Thus, it might be tempting to conclude that urban movements can address injustices but will only have an influence if their priorities match those of the government. However, it is not unthinkable that urban movements use their influence in such a way that they force the government to rethink its priorities. Contemporary attempts to address the housing shortage should be seen in this light—they lament exactly the government's focus on supply-side economic policy and its neglect of the needs of its population.

Whether these attempts will be successful or not is as yet not clear. In the mean time, the infrastructure of the movement persists and functions, to use the words of Bilwet, as the crystallisation of past efforts around which new activities may form (see also della Porta and Diani, 1999, p. 150). This infrastructure will probably also persist in the future as long as participants in the movement have something to gain from their participation, such as temporary housing or the opportunity to develop projects on a non-commercial and collective basis. The infrastructure that has been established by past generations as well as relatively inert structural conditions, such as a persistent housing shortage, failing housing policies and the continuous inflow of potential new members, makes squatting an interesting 'lifestyle' or type of political protest for a small yet significant number of people. Occasionally participants do not merely use and reproduce the movement, but they also transform it. This means that, at the very least, the Amsterdam squatter movement should not simply be considered as an insignificant and waning political force.

Notes

1. The most comprehensive review of the movement is provided by Van Duivenvoorden (2000). Other extensive analyses are provided by Dijkstra (1986) and Mamadouh (1992). A good reflection that was not extensively used here but deserves mentioning is the only book-length text on squatting in Amsterdam in English: Bilwet (1990). Finally, I want to mention two articles in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* which give a broad impression of the movement to an international academic audience (Draaisma and van Hoogstraten, 1983; and Pruijt, 2003).
2. Citations from the interviews that were published in Snotneus (1998) are marked with the name of the interviewee and the page number. Citations that are not marked with page numbers and names are taken from interviews that I conducted myself.
3. In the remainder of this paper, I frequently talk about 'the' Staatsliedenbuurt squatters. This is simply shorthand to denote a heterogeneous group that did have its centre of gravity in the Staatsliedenbuurt but also had supporters in other neighbourhoods. Moreover, many squatters had ambiguous feelings about their agenda and thus only incidentally supported it.
4. As one of my more experienced informants said "I do want to say something about this opportunism. Squatters always deal only with individual squats. When they squat a vacant hotel, they turn it into a protest against the municipality's hotel policy. When they squat a monument, they talk about the historical value of the building. And so on. There should be other ways to do this".

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