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RESEARCH ARTICLE

City-level action in a city-wide urban commons. Amsterdam, 1977 - 1983

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ABSTRACT: In the late 1970s, Amsterdam's squatted domain grew to comprise hundreds of buildings, and a city wide network of workspaces, bars, cultural venues and other infrastructure. The squatted domain, as it developed at the time, can be viewed as an urban commons. For a section of the squatting community, the whole was far greater than merely the sum of its parts, which led to the creation of a horizontal, city level organization. Commoning strategies applied at the city level were organizing squatting days, setting up a collective process for legalization, and promoting alternative urban development. However, evictions prompted confrontational action and a number of groups adopted a confrontational identity. Operating outside the city-level organization, autonomous action teams formed. They perfected the skills involved in the defense of squats, and had informal leaders. Nevertheless, groups with both prefigurative and confrontational collective identities worked together, despite the cooperation being tenuous. The upshot was that a large number of squatter collectives were never evicted, but that squats were legalized instead.

KEYWORDS: city level action, collective identity, protest, resistance, self-management, squatters, squatting, urban commons, urban movement, urban planning

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1. Introduction

An urban commons, boosted by city-level action, can grow to become city-wide. It is synergistic and offers citizens opportunities to get involved anywhere in the city, regardless of their place of residence. An example of such an urban commons is that of the squatted domain in Amsterdam. This case study will focus on the variety of methods that squatters used to organize at the city level, as well as the methods used to promote, extend and defend the squatted domain.

In Amsterdam, active squatters viewed the maintenance and expansion of the squatted domain as a collective endeavor. Huijsman (1989) characterized the prevailing perception among squatters at the time as "the city was ours", and as the squatted domain expanded, the city opened up and became a space of opportunity. The combination of those circumstances prompted city-level efforts by the squatting community to make squatting accessible through the provision of manuals, advice and assistance. In addition, city-wide integration was facilitated by interaction between neighborhood squatters' groups whose members threw parties, lent support, or met in collective actions and meetings.

This study examines how and why city-level actions contributed to the promotion, preservation and expansion of the squatted domain in Amsterdam from 1977 through 1983. By focusing on city-level action, the paper ignores relatively simple and straightforward issues such as how to organize squatting activities and how to run squats.

The theoretical contribution to the literature lies in the conceptualization of a city-wide commons boosted by city-level action. The case offers insight into an urban commons' potential complexity (Harvey, 2012), its radical potential (McGuirk, 2015), and the cooperation between social movement groups with diverging identities.

2. Method

The method primarily entailed the analysis of written, historical sources. The first step was selecting source materials pertaining to city-level action and organization. An important criterion in the selection of such materials was the presence of a link to debates within the movement. The set ultimately analyzed included four sources containing interview transcripts, one source containing radio live coverage transcripts, one audio recording of a radio show, a report and two manuals produced by movement-related organizations, internal communications such as reports, memos and newsletters and internal pamphlets, two movement-produced books containing contributions to internal debates, and one movement newspaper produced for the citizens of Amsterdam.

I analyzed the interviews in a grounded theory fashion i.e. by open coding and the writing of memos containing observations and emerging questions for further exploration. To facilitate this, I used the program InterviewStreamliner (Pruijt, 2012). Then, I constructed the case study using the other sources while employing a strategy of explanation building (Yin, 2009). I tried to explain events using social movement theory as outlined below, and took analyses provided by other authors (Adilkno, 1994; Duivenvoorden, 2000; Huijsman, 1989; Noort, 1988; Wietsma, Vonk et al., 1982) into account. Personal observations during my participation served as background knowledge. Throughout the paper, I have referenced squatters' statements by real names if the original published source has done so. A limitation is the reliance on written sources, however I discussed the findings with a participant in many of the events. In addition, compared to the 63 meter Staatsarchief collection on squatting held by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, my documentation was very limited.

3. Theoretical exploration

The aim of this section is to present a theoretical exploration of the concept of a city-wide urban commons that is boosted by city-level action. The creation of such a commons, or "commoning", involves a social movement. Feliciantonio (2017) notes that commoning is a practice and a goal at the same time, which indicates that it is part of the movement's collective identity (Pruijt and Roggeband, 2014). Stavrides (2016: 266) suggests that the experience of commoning affects identity: "common space [..] keeps on producing those who produce it". We can theorize what this identity entails by realizing that commoning emerges from squatting groups (Martinez, 2019; Martinez, 2020), alternative projects such as social centers and neighborhood collectives, that trace their roots to the "new social movements". Such movements embody a cultural identity (Melucci, 1989; Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Part of the "new social movement" identity is characterized by an emphasis on horizontal organization, consensus-based decision-making and "prefigurative politics", i.e. trying to realize some of the ideal visions for society in the present, rather than projecting them into the future (Breines, 1980). Stavrides (2016: 266) describes commoning as prefiguring an emancipated society.

Within the movement itself, there is no expectation nor desire for the movement to function as a unitary actor that is completely organized and controls its participants. Rather it is a space for a variety of initiatives (Bakker et al., 2017) and experimentation with cultural and political meanings and norms (Yates, 2015). Nevertheless, there is some coordination of action, and organized exclusion of persons considered deviant or dangerous does occur (Jasper, 2004). Furthermore, there is an informal system of property rights, such as the right to have access, the right to determine who has access, and the right to manage the use of the resources (cf. Ostrom, 2010). However, no single individual is allowed to speak on behalf of the movement (Freeman, 1972).

Arguably, a large-scale urban commons needs wide support, which requires effective framing, in such a way that it connects, on the one hand, the interests and goals of the campaigners and movement groups and, on the other hand, the interests and goals of potential supporters (Snow, 2007). Social centers, and the occasional theater that squatters saved from redevelopment, can be seen as benefitting the quality of urban life, and thus can generate support (Quarta and Ferrando, 2015; Bauwens and Niaros, 2017). Squatting projects fit in with visions for the collaborative governance of urban resources (Foster and Iaione, 2016; Kimmel, Gentzsch and Bloemen, 2018). Thus, an underlying characteristic of commoning seems to be that it is a cooperation-based strategy that eschews conflict and struggle (Quarta and Ferrando, 2015).

However, the larger the scale of an urban commons, at least when it is based on squatting or precarious tenancy, the larger the chance that somewhere, the threat of an eviction will arise. Activists can choose to react with a friendly approach based on generating sympathy. However, there can be reasons for adopting a more militant approach (Jasper, 2004). The literature suggests that a confrontational strategy can be effective, especially when it causes uncertainty for the authorities. However, the general proviso is that the public more or less accepts the disruption (Tarrow, 1994; Piven and Cloward, 1977; Gamson, 1975; Giugni, 1998; Taylor and v. Dyke, 2007). Militant action can lead to increased repression, defection of non-violent sympathizers (Tarrow, 1994) and it can cause such anger among the authorities that they no longer want to speak to activists (Piazza and Genovese, 2016). Conversely, there seems to be a "radical flank effect" (Koopmans, 2007: 27): pressure from a movement's radical wing enabling a moderate wing to push demands. Overall, one can conclude that the effect of resistance seems fairly unpredictable.

There is the possibility that a movement group starts deriving its collective identity from confrontations (Kriesi et al., 1995). This entails that confrontation is not only a means, but also becomes an end in itself. A

confrontational collective identity can lead to isolation from the general public but it can attract people that have a preference for militant action (Tarrow, 1994). What underpins a confrontational identity is the fact that establishing a city-wide urban commons is likely to be a fight against commodification, gentrification and real estate speculation.

Thus, while it seems impossible to have an urban commons without commoning and a prefigurative identity, a city-wide urban commons seems capable of driving additional confrontational strategies as well. The following discussion will elaborate on these themes within the context of the Amsterdam case study.

4. Organizing at the city level

In Amsterdam, organization at the city level grew out of an emerging organization at the neighborhood level. Neighborhood organization generally consisted of a squatters advisory service and a neighborhood squatting group. Such groups held regular meetings, frequented a squatters' bar, distributed a newsletter and raised money for a neighborhood squatting fund. Neighborhood telephone trees were connected to form a city-wide telephone tree that was used to mobilize squatters in case of an eviction attempt. Those wishing to respond to an alarm rushed to the scene on their bicycles individually or in small groups, hoping that their appearance in numbers, although uncoordinated, would make a difference.

Squatters were not always well informed about what was going on. This depended on whether a pamphlet about the squat had been distributed beforehand, or the squat had been discussed during a neighborhood meeting. Moreover it was often not clear whether the plan was to put up active or passive resistance, while the former exposed anyone coming to help to greater personal risks.

For squatters facing an imminent eviction, the network of neighborhood squatting groups was an effective way to reach out for support. Pamphlets for example, sometimes with extensive information, could quickly be distributed to active squatters throughout the city. In this way, squatters could learn about opportunities to contribute, such as joining a PR group to publicize, among others, details about the building's owner, including the web of financial and political ties. Occupants of threatened buildings often welcomed squatters from other neighborhoods to stay overnight, to stand guard against a possible night-time eviction. Squats could aim to involve more squatters from other neighborhoods by starting a campaign to elevate themselves to city level significance.

In 1976, in the wake of the Nieuwmarktbuurt struggle (Pruijt, 2013a) squatters in Amsterdam started discussing the future of squatting and developed the idea of organizing a squatter's movement at the city level. They created workgroups or collectives with tasks such as finding empty buildings, defending squats, investigating real estate speculation and producing a bi-weekly newsletter (the "Kraakkrant"). Regular city-level meetings were arranged, the main assembly being the Stedelijk Overleg Kraakgroepen or SOK, ("City-level Conference of Squatting Groups"). At a SOK meeting, representatives from each neighborhood as well as all other interested parties would attend. However, the SOK struggled to define its role, uncertain as to whether it was a representative body or simply a platform for exchanging information and ideas (Duivenvoorden, 2000). Nevertheless, the designers of the organizational structure stressed that taking the initiative to squat, making repairs and preventing eviction were to remain the responsibility of the home-seekers themselves.

Alongside the deliberative meetings and the various workgroups or collectives, action oriented groups formed. The group members worked together as a team, and the groups had leaders. Action teams (my own term, not used by the squatters themselves) could provide organization and expertise, as well as some

secrecy so that the police would not find out about plans or preparations. There were several types of activities for which action teams were especially suited:

- Squatting actions that carried a high risk of immediate eviction. Among these was re-squatting a building after an eviction.
- Providing coordinated help to squatters who faced eviction and wanted to mount resistance.

Action teams developed resistance against eviction as an area of expertise, and as such an oppositional identity tended to be important for the action teams.

Action teams had a core of people that knew each other well. They conducted strategic deliberations among themselves, and used the SOK assembly only as a channel for mobilization (Duivenvoorden, 2000).

Reflecting on horizontal organization theory, this case shows that a combination of radically different organizational models is possible. A formally designed structure functioned alongside completely autonomous teams. It is likely that what made the two systems compatible was the absence of any kind of formally sanctioned, or admitted, authority.

5. City-level commoning

Squatting in Amsterdam presents a complex history, with hundreds of squats and groups in approximately twenty neighborhoods (Gezamenlijke Kraakgroepen, 1979). When focusing on the city level, however, we can distinguish three strategies that can be described as city-level commoning: the organization of a squatting day to open up squatting to those who are interested, institutional engagement for the preservation of squats, and the promotion of alternative urban development. These strategies are non-confrontational and represent a friendly approach at the city level.

One of the ideas for city-level action was to invite a large number of people to join in a festive squatting action. This was a way to minimize the risk of a violent confrontation and to help make squatting more open and accessible. Implementing this idea, the formal city-wide organization was successful in staging squatting days. Squatting days were primarily national and sometimes local initiatives, a tradition that had already started in 1970. The pre-announced squatting days generated publicity and tended to be effective.

A squatting day proceeded as follows: Activists squatted large buildings openly and collectively, while putting this in the context of protesting against impending anti-squatting legislation. Often covert pre-squatting of the building occurred in order to prepare for the event. The organizers distributed an invitation to squatters to come to a meeting place where they would hear at the last moment which building was the target.

Generally, preservation is central to the management of common resources (Ostrom, 2010). A way to preserve squats is consolidation by means of institutional engagement. An opportunity for the consolidation of squats opened up in 1975 when the central government launched a policy to convert old commercial and office buildings into affordable housing for young people, and offered municipalities subsidies for this purpose. In 1978, squatters from several large buildings created an action group in cooperation with legal tenants in buildings that were being neglected by their owners (Geen Beschouwing maar Verbouwing, 1979). They drafted and submitted to the city council detailed proposals on how to deal with the myriad of bureaucratic and financial obstacles in the way of buying the properties, turning these over to housing organizations or the squatters themselves, repairing and/or converting them if necessary. This had to be done in a way that conformed to the official rules and suited the occupants' requirements. The group of building collectives in the legalization process founded a more formal body, the Pandenoverleg (Buildings Conference), ensured it was subsidized, and hired a consultant. Rules and procedures for feasibility studies

crystallized, and a manual was published (Slokker, 1981). In this way, participants collectively built up knowledge and experience.

Negotiations about conversion of squatted commercial buildings into rules-conforming housing could take eight years, for example in the case of the NRC complex. Issues of contention included construction work which had already been done by the squatters, arrangements for communal living which clashed with housing regulations, allocation of space for workshops and public cultural functions and decisions regarding whether or not rent should be paid before repairs were made. Coordination in the Pandenoverleg helped prevent the city government from playing buildings off against each other. Young political aides and officials from the PvdA (labor party), having contacts in the squatting scene, stimulated and facilitated the negotiations (Rijken, 2018).

It seems that owners of squatted buildings had an incentive to sell to the city, because, at that time, their possibilities to get an eviction order were limited by the fact that it was not (yet) possible to sue people anonymously (cf. Pruijt, 2013b). By the mid-1980s, the city had acquired 78 squatted buildings for legalization.

The legalizations continued through the next decade and increasingly included buildings that apart from housing had social/cultural functions. Some buildings, especially when the lease pertained to the entire building, remained under the control of the former squatters and survived as part of the countercultural domain; other buildings were externally managed while the occupants got individual leases (Breek and de Graad, 2001). A cooperative association of Vrijplaatsen (Free Spaces) formed to unite various legalized squats.

Entering the wider debate about urban planning, squatters developed an empowerment-based vision about a city for everybody. This informed non-confrontational strategies that can be summarized as alternative urban development. Examples are the Anti City Circus Festivals organized in 1978 and 1979. The location was the Waterlooplein, the site of the former daily flea market which the municipality had cleared for the construction of the new town hall and Opera. Squatters organized the festival to show how the square could work as a park for meeting people, playing, performing and enjoying cultural events.

A prime example in a squatted building was Wijers, a 16.000 square meters large, centrally located squat with housing, work spaces, concert hall, a restaurant, squatters' bar, espresso bar and an evening shop. Wijers was squatted in 1981. It was slated to make place for a Holiday Inn hotel, and in reaction to this plan the squatters organized a wide debate and campaigned about the future of the inner city. They promoted the idea that a mix of affordable housing, cultural functions and small businesses was more desirable than an expansion of the hotel industry. In the case of Wijers, framing focused not on the housing shortage, but on culture, specifically on creating a vibrant mix of home-making and working. There was frame alignment with the frame of job creation which was popular during the economic crisis of the early 1980s.

When the city government pushed through the plan for the hotel, squatters missed an opportunity to get an alternative building. The city had offered this, but squatters turned it down after a city-wide debate. Although the squatters were evicted from Wijers, they moved on and created new free spaces (Duivenvoorden, 2000), of which the Binnenpret and Wilhelmina Gasthuis were legalized and still exist today.

6. Confrontational action I

Although a portion of the squatting was intended to be only temporary because it took place on sites destined for the construction of social housing (Pruijt, 2003), an equally important part of the squatting was done with the intention of the squatters remaining in the buildings indefinitely. The latter involved squatting

commercial buildings and upmarket housing such as townhouses and canal houses. Squatting without the intention of leaving implied dealing with the likelihood of evictions. As such, there was the question how confrontational the response to an eviction should be, which is very much in line with social movement theory. This was not only a matter for wider debate, but also affected personal decisions.

Compared to commoning, confrontational action created more complications, and therefore requires more in depth discussion. First, I will describe how a confrontational strategy could lead to a chain of events that created uncertainty for the city government. In 1978, the Staatsliedenbuurt-based action team was looking for an opportunity, anywhere in the city, to get a "confrontation building". Such an opportunity arose when a group from the Kinkerbuurt approached them for help with an impending eviction, expected for the next day. They were in a conflict with the city over a partially demolished building and while they had unsuccessfully gone through legal proceedings, they had successfully mobilized support in their neighborhood.

Theo, member/leader of this action team explained, "This building was chosen by us as a confrontation building. The police had to be kept outside for a long time, and we had to show that it was completely wrong for the municipality to empty the building. It was in our interest that the police needed to go into a lot of trouble, thus would use a lot of violence [..]. The group organizing it was mentally well prepared and knew very well what would happen" (De stad was van ons, 1998).

Apparently, the radicalization attempt worked: "Without having discussed this, it was clear for the people in the group [the action team] that, if we would have it our way, there would be reasonably serious fighting. But at that time, we had an understanding that we would respect the occupants, they should really have a say. While we were collecting materials to throw [at the police] we tried to radicalize the folks a bit. In our opinion one can't just shout at an overwhelming police force. There has to be some atmosphere. And every hour the occupants radicalized and, more or less, went along in this." (De stad was van ons, 1998:67).

A city-wide mobilization via the telephone tree brought about a hundred squatters to the scene, who joined in a nonviolent blockade in front of the building. The reason for their presence was largely blind solidarity, because there was no information about the merits of the case, nor were they likely to know about it because they were not from the neighborhood. The police attacked immediately and many of the squatters were severely beaten up, resulting in injuries.

Theo continues his explanation: "Only the group that was mobilized [..] was not prepared, because they lacked the experience or the capability to realize what could happen if you stayed put." (De stad was van ons, 1998).

The squatters that had assembled in front of the building had expected to find respect for their non-violent civil disobedience (cf. Bedau, 1961) but they were met with violence. The police brutality was filmed by a squatter/film maker. The footage, screened across the city provoked a wide debate on the means used to protest, the main conclusion being that putting up passive resistance, on the street at least, was dangerous and useless. Further points debated were how to be prepared for police violence, for example by using helmets and leather coats, and thinking about active resistance.

Another elaborate application of the confrontation strategy occurred a year after the eviction in the Kinkerbuurt. The Groote Keijser was a row of six squatted canal houses. The owner was a speculator who had managed to get an eviction notice from the court, based on information gathered by an infiltrator. The events at the Groote Keijser were linked to the earlier eviction in the Kinkerbuurt. A squatter explains,"We had a lawsuit and would have to move out of the building. At that time already buildings were being evicted in the city and it had always been the case that the squatters did not use any violence. There was always a human barricade which was dragged away by the police and the squatters were evicted from the building. But at one point it escalated. There was a nonviolent blockade of people, the police hit them hard. This got to me enormously. I felt that this was not right. We stand for a good cause, for housing, which is very

legitimate, and it is ridiculous that the state takes it away from you with violence. Luckily there were more people within my house who felt the same way. [..] We had a meeting and it turned out that from all the people who had ever lived in the building, eleven would remain. We had the standpoint ‘we are not leaving’. What was to be done? In any case, we were not going to leave.” (De stad was van ons, 1998: 66).

The same action team as in the Kinkerbuurt joined them. “We saw potential in the building. A tough defense could lead to a lot of spectacle in a positive sense. Again, a clear picture of the housing shortage would be created, a housing shortage for low-income people, not for the rich. Areas in the city were being reserved for people with money. We were dealing with speculators such as OGEM and a host of other small and big speculators around it. And the area served as an example, lots of squats were in the same position. Lots of people were willing to fight for this [..]. Plus, in OGEM ex-cabinet ministers and [current] ministers were involved, thus one could attack virtually half of Dutch politics. In fact, the situation was ideal” (De stad was van ons, 1998: 126).

At the Groote Keijser, there was plenty of time for preparation; squatters from all over the city, and later from other cities, came over to help. Using steel plates, beams and support struts, all taken from construction sites, the building was welded shut.

A free squatter radio broadcast from the building, and support came in from many sides, including a support demonstration of about a thousand people. Older people approached the squatters saying “we should have done this already in the 1930s” (personal observation, 1979). The housing shortage that had existed since WWII, but had a tendency to be downplayed in the political discourse, was reinvigorated as an important issue.

The city government got nervous and subsequently scrambled to discuss the affordable housing shortage. Squatters demanded that the city should requisition buildings rather than buy them through normal procedure and pay a premium. The police handled the situation around the Groote Keijser with care, which meant largely ignoring it for a period of time.

The Groote Keijser group geared up for a confrontation, and tension mounted. A desire to gain the initiative led them to raid the Town Hall and occupy the City Council Chamber while the City Council was in session. The authorities, in turn, also contributed to the tension: two fighter jets flew over the Groote Keijser at low altitude. The buildings had been turned not only into a fortress, but also into a potential death trap, the external fire escape at the back was removed. Despite there being an agreement that the only defensive "weapons" to be used in the confrontation would be paint and rotten potatoes loaded with firecrackers, there were rumors about Molotov cocktails. Confusion reigned and even from the inside, it was hard to know exactly what was going on. At the last moment, the mayor called off the planned eviction, because he feared that there might be casualties.

While the authorities reacted by exercising restraint around the Groote Keijser, the police cracked down on new squats that were being opened. One of these instances involved a house in the Vondelstraat, at which the police evicted immediately because the owner claimed that he had signed a lease with a tenant. This claim, however, turned out to be false. Re-squatting the Vondelstraat building was organized at the city level. A decoy march to the mayor’s residence kept the police occupied while the re-squatting took place. When a police force appeared in the Vondelstraat, Rooie Pietje from the Nieuwmarktbuurt, an action team member, saw an opportunity to attack them. “Then I jumped with a number of men from the balcony to a traffic light pole, two meters or so away, then down. [..] I grabbed someone’s stick, one of these fence posts, and within five minutes we had cleared the police from the entire square. The cops were on the run. We really smashed them back into their vans.” (De stad was van ons, 1998: 27). Squatters then barricaded the square and held it for three days, until the army moved in with tanks (equipped with dozer blades instead of guns). Nevertheless, the police did not evict the squatters because there was no legal basis. This begs the question

why the military intervention occurred at all. I will address this question while discussing the issue of cooperation between groups with different identities.

The military intervention at the Vondelstraat created opportunities for organizing protests at the upcoming coronation on April 30, 1980, which made 1980 the most riotous year since 1934. Shortly before the coronation, the city bought three large squats, including the NRC-Handelsblad complex next to the Royal Palace. This legalization process had been under way already, but now the city rushed to complete it, even before subsidies from the central government had come through.

Behind the scenes, squatters and officials had started negotiations about the Groote Keijser. The result was that the city bought the Groote Keijser for use as social housing, while the squatters had a say in the allocation.

The switch by the informal action team leaders to an institutional strategy for the Groote Keijser led to a division between the action team and a group of rank and file squatters. This latter group, left outside the loop in the decision making, had become so entrenched in the Groote Keijser as a confrontation project that they revolted. They broke into the infocenter that was in the Groote Keijser and destroyed it. The action team dragged them from their homes to the Groote Keijser, threatened them and presented them with a bill for the materials that they had destroyed.

Thus, it seems that the confrontational actions described above allowed the squatters to keep the canal houses of the Groote Keijser, and the squat in the Vondelstraat, and sped up the legalization of three squats. Duivenvoorden (2000) suggests that the confrontation strategy helped secure many more squats. Van Noort (1988: 190), however, claims that the city government was, quietly, much more responsive to friendly actions than the squatters realized.

7. Cooperation between groups with different identities

Hundreds of squatters participated in the actions described above. One might hypothesize that this was enabled by a strong, common collective identity, but this does not seem to be the case. Instead, there was a division in terms of collective identity. A woman commenting on its development explained the situation from her perspective: “I didn’t like the entire identity formation, balaclavas and that sort of thing. I noticed that some people in my house completely identified with it and did not want to see what was happening” (Wietsma et al., 1982: 21). A distinction crystallized between the “heffos”, those with a more confrontational identity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the “softies” (Arjen et al, 1983a). Both groups were able to work together in a confrontational strategy, but for the softies, militant resistance was merely a possible means. They worried about the cost and hoped to restrict resistance to a symbolic performance. Softies tended to be sensitive to public opinion. They took notice when people from outside the squatter scene told them that, in their view, squatters had become excessively destructive.

Some softies reluctantly felt that at some point they should engage in active resistance. A woman describes one such experience, “We went to the Vondelstraat. I was so angry that I had two stones in my hand and I was ready to throw them. Exactly at that moment one of the men in the riot police platoon started to talk to me: ‘throw, throw’. It upset me, it is so strange when you suddenly hear a voice like this. All the other riot cops were coldly gazing into the distance and this dude started to talk to me. This made it virtually impossible to throw the stones, because I had contact. Suddenly I felt utterly ridiculous having the stones in my hand, and I threw them to the ground.” (Wietsma, Vonk and Van de Burght, 1982: 13). Softies started debates on violence that touched on the moral side and on personal risks and fear. There were frequent

complaints that (a small number of) men tended to dominate meetings, causing a pro-violence bias. Subsequently, women started forming their own groups.

In contrast, the heffos brought more enthusiasm to the confrontations. A clear illustration of this difference can be found in the reactions after the mayor cancelled the eviction of the Groote Keijser squatters. While some squatters were disappointed that the confrontation did not happen (De stad was van ons, 1998), others felt relieved and were happy.

A hint of problems inherent in the cooperation of streams with different identities can be seen in the failure to prevent the military intervention in the Vondelstraat. There were negotiations between the squatters assembled on the occupied square and the city government. They seemed to run fairly smoothly and the squatters started to clear away the barricades from the tram rails. The city government indicated that they were willing to call off the eviction, and attempted to finalize the negotiations by asking for a delegation of five squatters to come to the town hall. The squatters on the occupied square declined and just reiterated their demands (Blom et al., 1980). These demands entailed no eviction of squatters from the Vondelstraat squat (for which the city had already lost interest because there was no legal basis), withdrawal of the police (a logical consequence of not carrying out an eviction), and the release of a young woman arrested for spray-painting a slogan (which is normal for a minor offense).

Crucial in the course of events is that sending out a squatter delegation to the town hall to nail the final points did not happen. This situation may be seen as a fatal combination of identity characteristics. Many participants espoused horizontal organization, which caused a reluctance to negotiate with a small delegation on behalf of a large number of people. Informal leaders, who had the ability to break the deadlock, did not have a strong incentive to do so. To the extent that they had a confrontational identity, this implied that, to them, a successful negotiation was not of the utmost importance, because the confrontation resulting from a failed negotiation would have value in itself.

8. Confrontational action II

A twist within the confrontational strategy was to make it indirect, by raising the adversary’s cost. This was a solution to the problem that, in the confrontations, predictability had set in (Arjen et al., 1983a). The police developed a strategy and routine that diminished the uncertainty in large scale evictions. It involved using cranes to hoist containers with police officers onto the roof, who could then circumvent barricades by cutting holes in the roof. The police seemed to get more prepared for stone-throwing demonstrators and barricades. Operating separate from the formations of officers in riot gear, small groups of plain clothes officers made arrests or assaulted demonstrators. Apart from throwing stones at riot police equipped with shields, helmets and batons, and breathing tear gas, there was not much that demonstrators in front of the squat could do. The notion occurred to them that it could be a good idea to make evictions expensive. And do this in a coordinated, efficient way by attacking targets elsewhere in the city. Logically, such targets would be directly connected to the evictions, such as banks that were financing speculators. This facilitated an important aspect of framing: assigning blame. However, organizations with only indirect links to speculators or the housing crisis were also hit. There was no way to prevent people from smashing windows of small businesses.

Coordination was a problem. This became evident at the eviction of the squatters from luxury apartments on the Prins Hendrikkade that had been squatted on the April 2nd 1980 Squatting Day. At first, the squatters planned an active defense from the inside. They got so little support from the neighborhoods that they abandoned the plan, staged a fake preparation for defense, evacuated secretly from the building via a tunnel,

and left only one squatter plus journalists in the building to greet an overwhelming police and military force. The idea was that, at the moment of eviction, there would be protest actions at other locations in the city. However, squatters and sympathizers that came to the scene did not know what was going on, got misinformed by the squatter radio, there was chaos and many were beaten up by the police.

In 1982, the confrontation strategy led to disastrous outcomes. This was the case of the Lucky Luijk squat, a big house in the upper income Vondelpark/Concertgebouw neighborhood . A speculator, Bertus Lüske, with ties to known criminals (and eventually murdered), bought the squat at auction and employed a gang of thugs to evict the squatters. In a meticulously planned military-style operation, squatters retook the house, allowing Lüske's guards to leave unscathed. The original squatters did not want to return, therefore activists from the neighborhood occupied it. There were partially successful attempts to find or assemble a group that was willing to make it a permanent home. In the neighborhood an "action center" was set up.

The usual legalization procedure was initiated. Then, the owner obtained an eviction order from the court but the city bought the house. Various organizations, including the communist party, a significant force in local politics, supported the squatters. The squatters, in cooperation with the consultant from the pandenoverleg, wrote to the municipal government indicating that they would opt for a "social solution" regarding the house.

Despite earlier indications that the squatters would be successful, the city government decided to deviate from the expected path by choosing to convert the house into three affordable apartments. The social housing distribution agency was to allocate these to prospective tenants from their waiting list. The squatters were not satisfied, but they were unable to explain why they wanted more than what they had originally committed themselves to in writing. Nevertheless, squatters did not consider the option of simply giving up the building. Instead, they continued barricading the building, which was already at an advanced stage because the squatters had been bracing for an attack by thugs,. Softies walked away, leaving heffos more in control.

While squatters engaged in political lobbying, a group calling themselves Militant Autonomen Front (MAF) set off small bombs at the housing distribution office and the office of the local PvdA (Labor Party). Decision making at the Lucky Luyk was chaotic: "Time and again it was unclear where decisions were being made, by the occupants, the neighborhood or the few people that were active at the city level" (Arjen et al., 1983a: 259). At times, participants treated negotiation and militant action as conflicting rather than complementary strategies (Arjen et al., 1983b). On October 11, 1982, the police evicted the Lucky Luyk squatters. A riot ensued, during which a tram was burned. Media coverage was markedly more negative than before, public support for the squatters declined – although eventually it bounced back. (Van Noort, 1988; Duivenvoorden, 2000; Pruijt, 2013b). As an attempt at damage control, twenty squatters, emphatically not speaking on behalf of the movement, presented a special, dedicated newspaper consisting of four full-spread pages, its circulation 120.000 copies. The paper provided context about the building's owner, speculation, evictions by gangs of thugs, and riots and why people engaged in them. They blamed the riot on the city government, which had decided to press on with the conversion of the building into apartments in order to show that they were in control of the city. The only self-criticism included in this newspaper was about having inadequately informed the public (Twintigtal Kraaksters en Krakers, 1982).

In 1988, it turned out that city level action could lead to city level internal conflict. Action team members adopted the label Political Wing of the Squatter's Movement, and started branding other squatters as traitors. The main gripe against the alleged traitors was that they had failed to remain silent when being interrogated by the police. The stated objective of the Political Wing was to destroy the movement, which they considered to be degenerated, and replace it with a new city level squatters' movement. In 1988 they resorted to violence when fighting for the control over an infocenter. In a counter reaction, other squatters forced their exit from the movement (Adilkno, 1994).

9. Conclusions

The case study highlights a number of mechanisms that can function within the context of an urban commons. If there is ample empty space available, an urban commons can grow to become city-wide. The perspective of an urban transformation and a prefigurative social movement identity can inspire horizontal organization at the city level. Opportunities arise for commoning projects such as squatting days, events designed to express the vision of a city for everybody, and cooperative efforts to promote consolidation, among others by way of legalization of squats.

In case the commons develops beyond the confines of permitted, or tolerated, space usage, a problem of eviction threats emerges. Resistance is possible, but as suggested by social movement theory, activists face considerable uncertainty and dilemmas when deciding on the most effective strategy. Action teams, operating outside horizontally organized city-level structures, can seek out opportunities for active resistance. In some groups, state repression and the experience of resisting can breed a confrontational identity, implying that for them, confrontation becomes not only a means, but also a goal in itself. Because of the city-wide scale of the commons, there is ample room for identity differentiation between groups. Cooperation between groups with different identities is possible, but tenuous.

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