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COUNTER-HEGEMONIC APPROPRIATIONS OF SPACE: URBAN SQUATS AS COUNTER-SPACES

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DIPLOMARBEIT

*Counter-hegemonic appropriations of space:
Urban squats as counter-spaces
– on the example of an occupation in Brussels-Capital Region*

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ENGLISH

Counter-hegemonic appropriations of space: Urban Squats as counter-spaces – on the example of an occupation in Brussels-Capital Region

Hegemony [greek: Hegemonía] denotes the dominance of a powerful few over a large mass. The theory of hegemony explains how the ruling class retains their power without coercion and despite their capital advantages mainly by generalising values, norms, and objectives as a collective will (Vey, 2015, p. 44). The hegemonic order hereby becomes a mainstream ideology, reproduced and legitimised through everyday actions. There are signs indicating that neoliberalism, less as a pure economic mode, and more as a network of policies, values and ideologies, is becoming increasingly hegemonic. In that case, it is, rather than a state, specific markets, or the general organisation of society through the market as a free agent who assume a position of hegemony. Because a hegemonic order is reproduced and legitimised in day-to-day life, counter-hegemonic practices that aim to break with hegemonic discourses and rewrite socio-political narratives, have to likewise find a place in everyday life. Occupying

empty houses in urban spaces allows the creation of arenas that enable and support counter-hegemony. They function as experimental spaces for anti-systemic radicalism, social solidarity and civic self-empowerment and therefore play an increasingly important role in shifting power and influence from the state and market to civil society. Through sharing space and resources – material and immaterial – the residents and activists in urban squats are constantly negotiating with each other and their environment. The associated ongoing scrutinising and re-conceptualising of collective will oppose the hegemonic order. This work approaches the idea of counter-hegemony on a theoretical, conceptual, and practical level and illustrates how squatted houses reveal counter-hegemonic potential. Using the example of a squatted industrial area in the Brussels-Capital Region, concrete opportunities and limitations of counter-hegemony in an urban context are demonstrated.

DEUTSCH

Gegenhegemoniale Raumaneignungen: urbane Hausbesetzungen als counter-spaces – am Beispiel einer Besetzung in der Hauptstadtregion Brüssel.

Hegemonie [griech: Hegemonía] beschreibt die Vorherrschaft einiger weniger über eine große Masse. Die Hegemonietheorie erklärt, wie die herrschende Klasse ihre Macht, unabhängig ihrer Kapitalvorteile, durch das Generalisieren von Zielen, Normen und Werten als kollektiven Willen durchsetzt (Vey, 2015, p. 44). Hegemoniale Systeme sind nicht leicht zu konterkarieren, weil ihre Funktionsweise zu einer durch alltägliche Handlungen reproduzierten und legitimierten Mehrheitsideologie wird. Heutzutage gibt es immer mehr Elemente, die darauf hinweisen, dass der Neoliberalismus – weniger als reine Wirtschaftsweise, sondern mehr als ein Netzwerk von Politiken, Werten und Ideologien – zunehmend hegemonial wird. Dabei nehmen statt einem Staat gewisse Marktakteur:innen und die generelle Organisation von Gesellschaft über den Markt eine hegemoniale Position ein. Weil hegemoniale Systeme im Alltag reproduziert und legitimiert werden, müssen sie unter anderem dort bekämpft werden. Gegen-hegemoniale Bewegungen brechen mit hegemonial gewordenen Diskursen und schreiben gesellschaftspolitische Narrative neu. Durch das Be-

setzen leerstehender Häuser [engl. squatting] im urbanen Raum können Arenen geschaffen werden, die Gegen-Hegemonie zulassen und unterstützen. Sie fungieren als Experimentier-räume für antisystemische Radikalität, soziale Solidarität und zivile Selbstermächtigung und spielen eine immer bedeutendere Rolle in der Umverteilung von Macht zwischen Staat, Markt und Gesellschaft. Die Bewohner:innen und Aktivist:innen in besetzten Häusern [engl. squats] befinden sich durch das Teilen von Raum und Ressourcen – materieller und immaterieller Natur – in einem ständigen Aushandlungsprozess untereinander und mit ihrer Umwelt. Durch das permanente Hinterfragen und Neukonzipieren von kollektivem Willen entsteht Gegen-Hegemonie. Diese Arbeit nähert sich dem Begriff der Gegen-Hegemonie auf theoretischer, konzeptioneller und praktischer Ebene und zeigt, in welcher Form besetzte Häuser gegen-hegemoniales Potential aufweisen. Am Beispiel eines besetzten Industrieareals in der Hauptstadtregion Brüssel werden konkrete Möglichkeiten, aber auch Grenzen von Gegen-Hegemonie im urbanen Kontext aufgezeigt.

FRANÇAIS

Les appropriations contre-hégémoniques de l'espace : Les squats urbains comme contre-espaces – l'exemple d'une occupation en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale

L'hégémonie [en grec : Hegemonía] décrit la domination de quelques-uns sur une grande masse. La théorie de l'hégémonie explique comment la classe dominante impose son pouvoir, indépendamment de ses avantages en termes de capital, en généralisant les objectifs, les normes et les valeurs comme une volonté collective (Vey, 2015, p. 44). Les systèmes hégémoniques ne sont pas faciles à contrecarrer, car leur fonctionnement devient une idéologie majoritaire reproduite et légitimée par les actions quotidiennes. Aujourd'hui, de plus en plus d'éléments indiquent que le néolibéralisme devient de plus en plus hégémonique, moins en tant que simple mode économique qu'en tant que réseau de politiques, de valeurs et d'idéologies. Au lieu de l'État, ce sont certains acteurs du marché et l'organisation générale de la société par le marché qui occupent une position hégémonique. Comme les systèmes hégémoniques sont reproduits et légitimés au quotidien, ils ne peuvent être combattus qu'à ce niveau. Les mouvements contre-hégémoniques rompent avec les discours devenus hégémoniques et réécrivent

les récits sociopolitiques. L'occupation de maisons vides dans l'espace urbain permet de créer des arènes qui autorisent et soutiennent la contre-hégémonie. Ils fonctionnent comme des espaces d'expérimentation pour la radicalité antisystémique, la solidarité sociale et l'autopromotion civile et jouent un rôle de plus en plus important dans la redistribution du pouvoir entre l'État, le marché et la société. En partageant l'espace et les ressources - matérielles et immatérielles - les habitants et les activistes des squats urbains se trouvent dans un processus de négociation permanent entre eux et avec leur environnement. La remise en question permanente et la reconception de la volonté collective donnent naissance à une contre-hégémonie. Ce travail aborde la notion de contre-hégémonie sur le plan théorique, conceptuel et pratique et montre sous quelle forme les squats présentent un potentiel contre-hégémonique. L'exemple d'un site industriel occupé dans la région de Bruxelles-Capitale permet de montrer les possibilités concrètes, mais aussi les limites de la contre-hégémonie dans un contexte urbain.

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01 PROLOGUE

Hegemony

[the hegemony, to be hegemonic, a hegemonic system]

Domination of a very few over a wide mass on the basis of consent and ideology.

> starting page 26

Counter-hegemony

[the counter-hegemony, to be counter-hegemonic, a counter-hegemonic structure]

The overall and everlasting struggle against the dominant hegemony by opposing consent and ideology

> starting page 36

Counter-spaces

[a counter-space]

Any kind of physical or non-physical space that serves to challenge the hegemonic order

> starting page 42

Urban squat

[to squat, squatting, the squat]

A piece of land which is unlawfully occupied/ to unlawfully occupy an uninhabited building or settle on a piece of land

> starting page 54

Zonneklopper asbl

A squatted industrial site in Brussels-Capital Region. Asbl is the legal entity behind the occupation. It stands for *association sans but lucratif* [french] meaning 'association without lucrative goal'.

> starting page 84

1.1 Introduction and issue statement

Since the beginning of civilisation history, the organisation and structuring of communities have been essential for the persistence of humankind. Even before, when the term civilisation was not yet established, groups of people gathered, shared land and resources and organised themselves in order to survive. This organisation was always and still is fundamentally based on hierarchical principles. Since the rise of the division of labour in industrialisation, hierarchy got even more differentiated and is now tangible in almost every life domain. As a result, humanity has been characterised by oppression, exploitation and class struggles. In an ongoing construction and deconstruction of politics, unequal distribution and concentration of power have been part of social cohabitation throughout times. Hannah Arendt (1970, p. 39) sees a link between the concept of power and state forms as they have been defined since Greek antiquity. In monarchies or aristocracies, power centres around the nobility; in dictatorships, it is forcibly appropriated by a tyrant leading a violent network. With democracy, a state form was created, which, in its basic idea, deconcentrates power. Democracy [ancient Greek: *dēmokratía*] stands for government by the people. Power and influence are supposed to be distributed among a large mass of people through direct or indirect participation. Democracy became established as a political system in large parts of the world after the end of the cold war and the fall of the Soviet Union and continues to enjoy great recognition today. However, with the free democracy that emerged in the USA during the cold war, simultaneously, an economic system triumphed that, in contrast to the power-sharing of democracy, is designed in its very function to concentrate capital, i.e.

power. Due to its power *distribution*, the political order has a weaker basis than the growing economic system and can no longer withstand the power *concentration* in capitalism. The latest since the replacement of welfare capitalism by neoliberalism, politicians have become increasingly incapable to act against the market. Miraftab (2009, p. 45) sees neoliberalism, which as the pure capitalism, has been established as an economic and societal model over the last several decades, as the new paradigm, following the era of apartheid and colonialism, that leads to an unequal distribution of power and therefore of space and resources. I argue that the neoliberal economy became the mainstream ideology and thus hegemonic [see chapter 2.2]

Hegemony is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci and later by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. It describes the domination of a few over a large mass. In this context, the ruling class achieves its power not only through violence but, above all, through the daily actions of all, which legitimises a system of oppressors and oppressed. Behavioural patterns that support an unjust system are internalised and generalised. In this thesis, I state that neoliberalism has become hegemonic, as it is a mainstream ideology that is infiltrating our daily thoughts and actions. Since the rise of the neoliberal project in the 80s, therefore not only the welfare state is being pushed back, but there is also an increasing acceptance and support for neoliberal practices among civil society. Because of its hegemony, acceptance and support happen in day-to-day life, and there is a lack of serious alternatives. A hegemonic neoliberalism survives because it is reproduced by all people daily and is rarely questioned. It manifests itself in space that, according to Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, is fundamentally shaped by social actions. Consequently, the fight against hegemonic neoliberalism must happen in the daily actions and the production of space.

One profound effect of the neoliberal agenda is specifically visible in space. Due to investments and speculations, the housing and real estate market is in a state of crisis. The state, which has given up its function as a compensatory institution, can no longer intervene sufficiently in this development, which leads to many cities in Europe having little affordable housing and the simultaneous existence of vacancies. This development is particularly problematic for low-income and marginalised social groups and, as a result, hinders spatial justice. The latter is an expression introduced by Edward Soja (2009) and describes how deeply the question of fairness and equitability among humans is rooted in the production and reproduction of space. It refers to the distribution of land and resources and the opportunity to use them.

Due to its concentration of power, the neoliberal economy produces intense injustices. Therefore, with regard to a more equitable world, it must be fought against. Moreover, since the system has become hegemonic, it requires counter-hegemony to do so, which likewise manifests in space. In the struggle for a more equitable world and spatial justice, it is left in the hand of the civil community to fight for and claim their spaces.

In the following work, I speak of counter-hegemonic appropriations of space as processes of reconquering territory with the simultaneous political claim of placing oneself in complete opposition to the prevailing system. Space appropriation is initially often caused by actual demand for housing and cultural and recreational spaces, still there is a significant by-product. By claiming spaces without the permission and support of powerful forces, respectively, by squatting empty land, a certain autonomy evolves, which in itself bears a counter-hegemonic potential.

This work hypothesises that squats, due to their system-non-conformist nature, have the ideal conditions to become counter-spaces and to evolve and maintain counter-hegemonic practices. A counter-space is any physical or non-physical space where people meet, exchange and take action with the purpose of reconfiguring society and politics in an anti-capitalist way. Squats, or in some cases, temporary occupations, serve as experimental environments primarily for an alternative, politically left, progressive, anti-racist, feminist, and socialist scene. The activists operating there are often associated with *punk, hippie, and eco movements*. Although not every Squat shares the same values, and there are differences in their insurgency and level of counter-hegemony, they all hold a certain potential. On the concept of urban squatting, I will focus in PART II.

In Part III of this thesis, I will analyse one squat in the Brussels-Capital Region on its counter-hegemonic potential. Due to different political frameworks, Brussels-Capital Region is an area where counter-hegemony can emerge better than in other European cities. Within the last years, a solid informal solidarity network has been established, unique for Europe. By squatting vacant buildings, around 1.000 unofficially organised people appropriate spaces for multiple activities. Either to host people without a proper home, to do cultural events, to create artist spaces, to make informal meeting points, or to offer any other type of recreational space. Brussels counts around 25 active squats, but the number constantly changes due to expulsions and new appropriations. This shows how unbalanced the squats are between eviction and support. By analysing one squat named Zonneklopper, I will show how counter-hegemony can or also cannot be implemented in practice. It will become clear that counter-hegemony is extremely necessary but has some controversies that make it almost impossible to achieve.

1.2 Research interest

In the following work, I will analyse the causes and effects of counter-hegemonic appropriations of space and conclude theoretical assumptions, conceptual experiences and practical trials. In doing so, I will show connections between theory and practice as well as the opportunities and limitations of urban squatting as a counter-hegemonic practice. In order to show a logical derivation of the phenomenon of counter-hegemonic squats, the paper is divided into three parts. Part I describes the theoretical background of counter-hegemony, Part II the historical and present concept of urban squatting and Part III pictures a case study and transfers the insights from Part I and II to a practical example.

Urban squats are particularly important for creating structures diametrically opposed to the prevailing regime. They are experimental spaces where economic and societal counter-models can be tested, and their existence brings more balance to a hegemonic system. Squats are places where hegemonic discourses can be broken, and socio-political narratives are rewritten. They are, therefore, essential civic spaces regarding the deconcentration of power and the path to a more just world. [Hypothesis]

Through this work, this hypothesis will be examined. The derived research question is:

What potential do urban squats have for creating counter-hegemonic structures and the following deconstruction of hegemonic socio-political structures?

To answer this question, the paper is divided into three parts. The first deals with the notion and theory of hegemony, the second with the concept of urban squatting, and the third

combines the two considerations in a practical example.

PART I – THEORY – WHAT WE WANT¹ **Counter-hegemonic appropriations of space**

What is counter-hegemony and why do we seek it?

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony broadly describes how a dominant, hierarchical social system is reproduced through the consent of subaltern groups, i.e. those dominated individuals. The system is thus generalised and perceived as the only possible sphere of political order. In order to prevent power structures from continuing and intensifying in this way, a constant situation of conflict is needed - a perpetual cycle of hegemony and counter-hegemony. Because a hegemonic system does everything it can to generalise, it needs a strong counter-component that resists generalisation and constantly questions ways of thinking and acting. It demands antagonisms and disorder, debate and discourse, mistakes and errors. Hegemony and counter-hegemony as socio-political processes manifest themselves in space and shape it. Henri Lefebvre's theory on the production of space deals with the conception of physical space as social space. The intersection of these theories shows how counter-hegemonic structures can manifest themselves in space.

PART II – CONCEPTS – WHERE TO LOOK¹ **Urban squats as counter-spaces**

How can urban squats contribute to the establishment of counter-hegemony?

The construction of society is so closely linked to the construction of space, which also means that by reframing both space and society together, it is possible to intervene in the cur-

rent hegemonic system. Counter-spaces are – physical and non-physical – spaces where people meet, exchange, and take action with the purpose of reconfiguring society and politics in an anti-capitalist way. Urban squats are a type of counter-spaces offering a unique framework for establishing counter-hegemonic structures because they are, by their very nature, resistant to the ordering class. They create a framework for autonomous action and life and must be closely examined regarding the fight for a more equitable future and a redistribution of space in favour of civil society.

PART III – PRACTICE – HOW TO DO IT¹ **Case Study: Zonneklopper asbl**

What are the chances and limits of counter-hegemonic practice in an urban squat like Zonneklopper?

In a squatted industrial area in the south of the Brussels-Capital Region, a micro-context for anti-capitalist and anti-hierarchical coexistence is being created using alternative – I would argue counter-hegemonic – methods. This serves as an experimental laboratory and creative space, on the one hand, to actively fight grievances of the prevailing political system and, on the other hand, to try out alternatives of social coexistence. The temporary, open and autonomous character creates specific challenges and unique opportunities for activist practice. Counter-hegemonic social spaces like this are needed to redistribute power and, accordingly, a more just society.

¹ The phrases 'WHAT WE WANT', 'WHERE TO LOOK' AND 'HOW TO DO IT' are an analogy to political activism. They send a message, call for action and show how one would proceed in activism. To start a political movement, firstly, the goal must be clearly defined [here Part I: what we want], secondly, space for action must be identified [here Part II: where to look], and thirdly action must be taken [here Part III, practice: how to do it].

1.3 Methodology

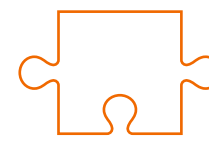
Considering that this research consists of three parts that all have a different approach to counter-hegemony in urban squats, the methods I used to gain information vary throughout the thesis. While Part I and Part II are mainly composed of literature and desk research, Part III uses a mix of methods, which I will devote special attention to here and in Chapter 4.3.

Part I was developed on the basis of primary and secondary literature. While I relied on analyses and secondary works for describing the Gramscian theory of hegemony, the theory of agonistic pluralism and Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, by contrast, were based on primary literature.

In the second part, which describes a spatial concept embedded in a social movement, desk research was increasingly used. The development of squatting in Europe and how it is treated today is thoroughly documented in academic papers. Nevertheless, newspaper and internet articles and discussions of internal structures contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of squatting as a practice. For the coherent elaboration of this chapter and especially for understanding the phenomenon, my participation in the movement, both as an observer and activist, has already influenced my writings.

In Part III, my participation became particularly relevant though. Urban squats are neither a closed structure nor a clearly measurable field. Due to their fundamentally horizontal character and the often-loose structure, there is, partly consciously, no clear inside and outside. So, from the beginning to the end of the work, I saw myself neither as a full part of the network nor as an outsider. I was 'inside'

RESEARCH QUESTION: What potential do urban squats have for the creation of counter-hegemonic structures and the following deconstruction of hegemonic socio-political structures?

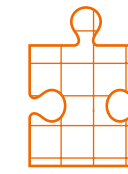


PART I: Theory
WHAT WE WANT

Counter-hegemonic appropriations of space

The overlap between Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which deals with the constitution of a dominant political system, and Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, which explains space is entirely social and therefore political, shows the ways in which counter-hegemonic structures can manifest themselves in space.

Research Question PART I: What is counter-hegemony and why do we seek it?



PART II: Concepts
WHERE TO LOOK

Urban squats as counter-spaces

Urban squats, as one type of counter-spaces, offer a unique framework for the establishment of counter-hegemonic structures because they resist the ordering class by their very nature. Nevertheless it depends on a variety of factors to what extent counter-hegemony can emerge in a squat.

Research Question PART II: How can urban squats contribute to the establishment of counter-hegemony?



PART III: Practice
HOW TO DO IT

Case Study: Zonneklopper asbl

In a squatted industrial area in the south of the Brussels-Capital Region, a micro-context for anti-capitalist and anti-hierarchical coexistence is being created using alternative - I would argue to a certain extent counter-hegemonic - methods. Zonneklopper was meant to be a city in the city offering a entirely different framework to the hegemonic order.

Research Question PART III: What are the chances and limits of counter-hegemonic practice in an urban squat like Zonneklopper?

Fig.01 Concept and structure of the work

in some situations and 'outside' in others. In describing my approach, however, I want to draw attention to two methodological aspects.

1st: Scholar activism, activist ethnography

In order to comprehend the complexity of urban phenomena and to embed social movements in an overall societal context, it is imperative to constantly re-evaluate the prevailing methods with which researchers approach their research field. Particularly in the study of political spaces, the concern for objectivity

» *Activist ethnography relies on and contributes to developing consciousness about the researcher's political subjectivity.* «

Deschner, & Dorion, 2019, p. 205

between the researcher and the researched increasingly arises since the researcher always enters the field with a political motive, albeit a personal one. Classical methods of ethnographic fieldwork can thus be consciously extended in particular political contexts to include a component that legitimises the political subjectivity of the researchers and regards it as an elementary part of the work. One method that Margherita Grazioli (2021), for example, used in her research on post-crisis Rome is activist ethnography. In my empirical research, I will use a similar approach regarding my position in the field.

Activist field research is very similar to classical participant observation or participant

ethnography, with the difference that the researcher positions him/herself as an activist and pursues a political goal alongside the movement in parallel to the research (Deschner & Dorion, 2019, p. 208). Thereby, it is also about questioning colonialist relationships between researchers and research subjects and decolonising research dynamics by trying to align oneself with the research subjects (Deschner & Dorion, 2019). From a research ethics perspective, it is increasingly regarded as problematic to do research about other people from the outside as it generates a differentiation and, thus, automatic hierarchisation between the knower and the known (ibid). In order to avoid adopting a look-down position as a researcher, a feminist, decolonial perspective is adopted in *activist ethnography*. Hale (2006) describes activist research, respectively activist ethnography or scholar activism, as a »*method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organised group of people in struggle and allow dialogue with them to shape each phase of the process, from the conception of the research topic to data collection to verification and dissemination of results.*«

By taking an advocacy role towards the researched, who, in most cases where activist ethnography is conducted, are part of an underrepresented, marginalised minority or a group that advocates itself for those same minorities, the researcher develops the content of the activist ethnographic fieldwork jointly with the researched. Deschner & Dorion (2019, p. 205) write, »*Activist ethnography is an ethnographic engagement with social movement organisations as anti-authoritarian, anarchist, feminist and/or anti-racist collectives.*« The ethnographic field researcher thus prioritises grassroots initiatives by the socially oppressed and vulnerable groups who often receive little or no attention in academia (Grazioli, 2021, p. 42) and allows them to play

an active role in the investigation, the process and the results. Through this precise positioning on the side of the politically oppressed, the ethnographic field researcher also breaks with the assumption that research should always be objective and value-neutral (Grazioli, 2021, p. 42). Not at least because of the assumption that, in any case, research cannot be without values since the researcher automatically, at a minimum subconsciously, allows his or her background and underlying values to enter the research on ethical, social or political phenomena. Given this aspect, it gives researchers greater added value to consciously bring subjectivity to the foreground and thus also be able to interrogate it critically. Another aspect of activist ethnography is translating political field experience into academically accepted knowledge (Deschner & Dorion, 2019). However, this also requires constant reflection and questioning of one's position and subjectivity in the field (Grazioli, 2021, p. 43), along with the relationship to other research subjects, which, in the case of active participation, is shaped by personal relationships and behaviours. I will go into detail about my personal position in the research in chapter 4.3.

2nd: methodological triangulation: between-method

Within the framework of scholar activism or activist ethnography, I used different methods to conduct my research and to gather the information needed to answer my research questions properly. For this, I used the concept and idea of methodological triangulation, which was introduced into qualitative research by Denzin in 1970 (Denzin, 1970 cited in Flick, 2014, p. 418). According to a between-methods approach (ibid), the following methods are combined in my particular case: First, I see this as the primary method, *participant observation*. I triangulated this with a *personal guide-based interview* [2] and a *questionnaire* filled out properly by two of the participants

of the collective [3]. Triangulation serves to reveal contradictions and commonalities that would not be visible through a simple method (Flick, 2014, p. 419).

Since there is no clear inside and outside of my field, access cannot be defined so easily. Participant observation can only take place with gained access and the consent of all persons involved (Thierbach et al., 2014, p. 858). Because there is also no clear demarcation in a squatting collective, this consent had to be constantly obtained newly. During the research, I had to take great care not to overstep personal boundaries and to position myself as a legitimate part of the collective. Regarding the method of participant observation, I would like to note, as mentioned earlier, that in some situations, I positioned myself more as an observer and, in others, more as a participant. Especially when participating in activities such as NoJavel, bicycle workshop, Chantier etc. [see Part III], I refrained from taking detailed notes to concentrate on getting to know the people and focusing on personal conversations. In other situations, for example, at the Agora or other informal meetings, I positioned myself more as an observer and documented what I experienced in detail via field notes. I gained much information by simply being on the ground for a more extended period, following discussions via chat channels and the forum, and by listening intensively to the conversations of others.

To get engaged in a more intensive and academically recognised way, I triangulated participant observation with spot interviews [one face-to-face and two in the form of a questionnaire]. The qualitative face-to-face interview was conducted on 28.11.2022 from 11:00-12:00, recorded and subsequently transcribed and analysed using the *content analysis method*, according to Mayring. Qualitative content analysis is used to conduct a rule-guided in-

terpretation (Mayring & Fenzl, 2014, p. 546). For the coding of the interview in this paper, I proceeded inductively, i.e. I, therefore, conducted a summarising content analysis (ibid, p. 547) [original German 'zusammenfassende Inhaltsanalyse']. In the first step, I established categories based on the responses of the interview partner and then assigned one or more categories to each of the paraphrased statements. An interview guideline (Appendix 1A) that person X and I went through together supported the interview. As a reaction of person X to the complexity of the interview questions, I changed the interview guide into a more straightforward and tangible questionnaire, which two persons of the collective filled out in December.

Interacting directly with people from the collective about my work has proved somewhat challenging. My interpretation is that, on the one hand, this topic is very theoretical and requires quite a lot of prior knowledge. On the other hand, my language and cultural barriers have slowed down more substantial exchanges. Nevertheless, the combination of methods led to an intense exchange between me and the collective. In the end, my research is composed of many small aspects that together shape my image of the collective. As I have already described in the context of activist ethnography and will explain in more detail in chapter 4.3, I would like to emphasise my subjectivity again upfront. While Part I and II are objective findings based on scientific literature, Part III is a product of my own interpretation. It is not possible for a researcher to observe in a completely neutral way. By including many different thoughts and various methods, I have nevertheless tried to provide a picture that is as value-free as possible.

Remark on Anonymisation: Zonneklopper is an official association and has a contract with the place's owner. I, therefore, did not anonymise the name of the collective. The people, on the contrary, are fully anonymised. The person I did the Interview with is named here, person X, and the questionnaires were filled out by persons 1 and 2. The gender will not be revealed. If there are people in the pictures, their faces are blurred due to privacy reasons.

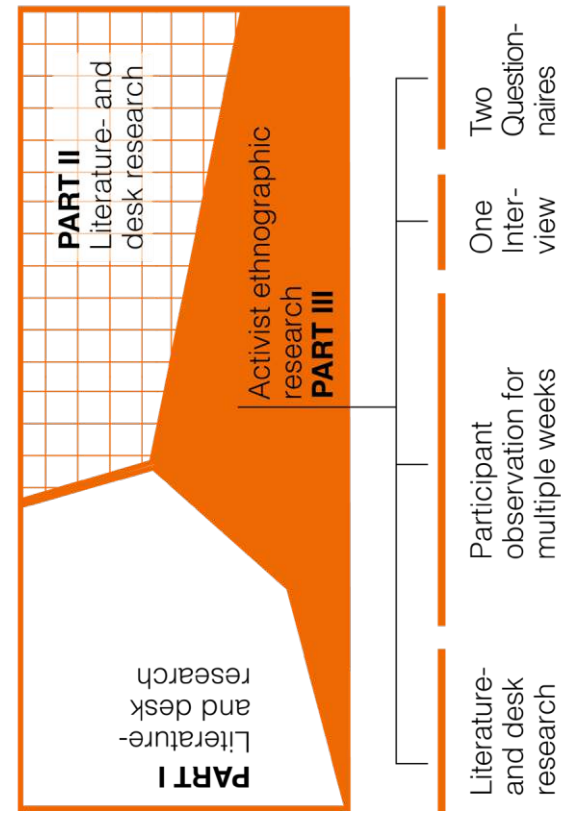


Fig.02 Methodological triangulation



PART II



Counter-hegemonic appropriations of space

Fig.03 people occupying open space
© Paul Menu [photographer]





THEORY WHAT WE WANT

02 PART I

Counter-hegemonic appropriations of space

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 The theory of hegemony
- 2.2 Hegemony and neoliberalism
- 2.3 Searching for [spatial-] justice
- 2.4 Counter-hegemony and
agonism
- 2.5 Agonistic planning theory
- 2.6 Counter-spaces
- 2.7 Conclusion Part I

2.0 Introduction

In PART I, I will focus on the theory of hegemony and discourse, shaped by Antonio Gramsci, Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, and its application in space, based on Henri Lefebvre's theory of space. I will approach terms and theories such as hegemony, counter-hegemony, discourse, neoliberalism and individualism, justice, agonism and agonistic planning, radical democracy and finally, counter-spaces. We live in a world increasingly dominated by capitalism, where the notion of a serious alternative is either diminishing or labelled utopian. Today's prevailing political systems are almost inherently based on hegemonic principles. Hegemony means that a ruling class has power and control over subaltern groups who legitimise the ruling class simply through their everyday practices. Because neoliberal hegemony has infiltrated just about every area of life, from modes of work, housing, and leisure, to consumption and the choices of productivity to deeply emotional sensibilities, the struggle against it will also have to take place increasingly in these situations. The battle against capitalism is conducted through ideology and discourses. To make alternatives to the capitalist mode of production visible again, there is a need for spaces well away from the institutionalised and standardised environment. Spaces where counter-narratives are told, and hegemonic discourses are disrupted. I describe these spaces as counter-spaces, of which some have a particularly high potential to create counter-hegemony, as I define it in the context of this work.

In approximating the socio-political concept of counter-hegemony, its manifestation in space [PART II], and its practical

implementation [PART III], it is essential to emphasise the origin and contextualisation of hegemony in capitalism and modern neoliberalism. Hegemony derives from the Greek word '*hegemonía*', which means to lead. As a noun, it is often translated as dominance or supremacy. The reason for the small groups' supremacy can be of political, economic, religious, military, or even cultural nature, but what unites is that it is mainly based on the power of some and the oppression of others.

2.1 The theory of hegemony

The term hegemony, as it is used now, is based on a philosophical and socio-political school of thought that gained popularity through Antonio Gramsci's prison diaries, which he wrote in Mussolini's Captivity 1929 – 1935. It gained even more importance around sixty years later through the post-structuralist turn of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Vey, 2015, p. 41). In the broad sense, hegemony- and later discourse theory, describe how ruling elites retain their power without coercion and despite their capital advantages. It shows how civil society is fundamentally usurped and how domination is established through the invisible yet extremely effective power of consensus and inherent ideology (ibid.).

Antonio Gramsci was a neo-Marxist journalist, author and philosopher who was arrested in 1926, at the age of 35, by the fascists in Italy and spent the following 11 years, almost until he died in prison (Langemeyer, 2009, p. 72). Before and during this time, he wrote adaptations of Marxist theories by adding decisive components to them. Karl Marx initially describes society as a composition of an economic base and an ideological superstructure. The base includes everything related to

production, and the superstructure consists of matters like culture, political institutions, laws, media, religion, etc., all circling production (Singh, 2013). While Marx exclusively locates the scope of action for social change within the base, the theory of cultural hegemony emphasises an interplay between the base and the superstructure (Mathur, 2017). More precisely, in Marxism, the political sphere is always associated with the economic one, respectively, with the presence or absence of capital. This essentialises the economy (Weber, 2013, p. 49) and makes it the most crucial element for the emergence of social classes and, consequently, for the liberation from an unjust social system. Antonio Gramsci, as well as later Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, depart from this idea. In their understanding, the scope of action is located both in the economic basis and in the ideological superstructure. In this sense, the superstructure is composed of civil- and political society. It operates solely if civil society consents to the political system and therefore legitimises it through its everyday practices. This is happening because a certain ideology, predominant in a hegemonic system, is deeply anchored in our daily productions and almost welded into flesh and blood. The superstructure, therefore, protects the base in everyday life. This is also how they explain why the prediction of Karl Marx that capitalism would inevitably lead to a revolution of the working class did not yet, almost 150 years after the publication of the communist manifesto not happen. The prevailing economic system, let us say capitalism or, in its purer version, neoliberalism, determines the modes of work and education, leisure and consumption, legislation and execution, media, music, art, culture, etc. – quite simply, it determines the way each individual in our society is thinking. In short, as David Harvey (2005a, p. 9) puts it, »Neoliberalism has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to

the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.« In accepting this common sense, we legitimise and maintain this economic system and hinder an effective revolution against capitalist production. In practising this worldview, according to Gramsci, in almost all our activities, we give consent, or as William K Carroll (2009, p. 12) puts it, '*consent without consensus*' to the prevailing system and, therefore, to the leading class. The process of consent through daily actions can also be termed *generalisation* or *totalisation* (Demirović, 2008, p. 18). The system of the ruling class is generalised through the consent of the ruled. Michel Foucault uses the term Normalisation to describe a similar societal phenomenon (Stavrides, 2015, p. 9). Hegemony is thus the ability of the ruling class to impose its goals as a collective will (Weber, 2013, p. 57). Even though the ruling class has violence and power to enforce its goals, the crucial aspect of maintaining its position is sharing values and norms with the

» What is called public opinion is most closely linked to political hegemony, being the point of contact between civil society and political society, between consensus and violence. «

subaltern classes. Noam Chomsky (1994, p. 81) says: »*Ultimately the governors, the rulers, can only rule if they control opinion – no matter how many guns they have. [...] If the general population won't accept things, the rulers are finished.*« And Alex Demirović (2008, p. 17, translated) describes the phenomenon as follows: »*Hegemony means, in general terms, a cultural and intellectual organisation through which the world view and the order of things, as they match the lifestyle of the bourgeois class, are extended, i.e. generalised, to other, especially subaltern classes, so that they themselves are shared and respected by those who are dominated precisely by it.*« As a result, power relations appear natural and are no longer questioned (Weber, 2013, p. 57).

According to this philosophy, civil society not only lacks insurgency against the system but supports and strengthens it without even noticing. The perspectives and visions of a different hegemony, a changed social system, become smaller and move closer to the existing one. In this process, the ruling class's interest is articulated in a way that it is perceived as the interest of society as a whole (Vey, 2015, p. 47), and minor improvements become satisfactory. This endows neoliberalism with an ostensible implicitness on a material level and in people's minds (Buntenbach, 2008, p. 9). Slowly but surely, we come closer to the well-known paradigm of Margaret Thatcher that there is no alternative to neoliberalism. In this respect, Gramsci also describes a fundamental phenomenon of why again revolutions and uprisings of the working class, contrary to what Marx foresaw, rarely occur, often fail, and why they have increasingly declined in the last decades. It is because the Western, most civilly advanced societies have developed a »*civil society through which the liberal capitalist system is protected and safeguarded*« (Vey, 2015, p. 43, translated). Gramsci, therefore, also uses the term '*ethical state*' for

civil society (Gramsci, 1991, p. 783, cited in Vey, 2015, p. 43). He was the first to coin the term hegemony and cultural hegemony by recognising the importance of ideology and consensus for maintaining a political system. Around 60 years later, in the 1980s, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe published a book called '*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.*' They merge Gramsci's theory of hegemony with prevailing structuralist and post-structuralist

**Margret Thatcher's
» there is no other
way« is burnt into our
minds, but Laclau and
Mouffe see it
differently, they say
» it doesn't have to be
that way «**

approaches, creating their own theory of political identity and hegemony (Weber, 2013, p. 44), which they later call Discourse theory. They agree with Antonio Gramsci on placing the scope of action in the superstructure, but they explicitly emphasise the relevance of communication, language, and discourse in the debate. With the structuralist background, they particularly highlight the impossibility of a fixation of meaning (Weber, 2013, p. 50). They thus also break away from an adherence to classes and a single hegemonic centre. More simply, discourse theory applies the principles of hegemony to smaller social phenomena in which a particular discourse, as opposed to a socio-political system, achieves hegemony.

In this context, hegemony implies that certain discourses gain dominance and appear '*natural*' (ibid. p. 58). To make it even more precise, I will demonstrate, as Weber (2013, p. 58) does, using the paradigm of security discourse as an example. The term '*security*', just like, for example, '*freedom*' or '*democracy*', is an empty signifier; it has no determination, no fixation of meaning. In another hegemonic order, security could be interpreted entirely differently. Only through the association of the term with order, tidiness, police, and surveillance a generalised image of security emerges. This is also how for example, neoliberalism uses political ideals such as human dignity and individual freedom and presents them in its own defined interpretation as '*central values of civilisation*' (Harvey, 2005a, p. 12). Thus, since the ruling class can decide and lead this discourse, it shapes the image of security of the entire population. This phenomenon can be applied to many other topics. Since the ruling class has the loudest voice and power over the media, they rule the discourses. In his book '*Rebel Cities*' David Harvey also states, »*The right to the city is an empty signifier*« (Harvey, 2012, p. XVI)

Another theory, based on Michael Foucault, regarding security, intersects with hegemony and discourse theory and appears highly interesting. It is the idea and, later, the effect of a panopticon as a symbol of social control. The panopticon itself goes back to Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher and social theorist, who sought to control as many prisoners as possible with relatively few guards. He recognised that it was sufficient to simply convince each prisoner of the possible observation at any time to achieve obedience. By placing a tower in the middle of the prisoners, into which they cannot see, whilst their cells are covered with glass panes, the possibility of constant observation cannot be precluded. This mere possibility of surveillance and, ac-

ordingly, the chance of sanction is enough for the prisoners to obey. The panopticon is about training people to police themselves and further convince urbanites to participate in their own policing. Michael Foucault was the first to extend this idea to society, showing how authoritarian control mechanisms have become increasingly internalised over the centuries and are now accepted unquestioningly.

For Foucault, this internalisation of norms and institutions, which he also calls this normalisation process, is a primary source of power. He thus uses obedience to describe virtually the same phenomenon as '*generalisation*' in the theory of hegemony. The power that the dominant system, and thus the capitalist class, has over the rest of the population is therefore not only of a material nature but also of an ideological, psychological origin. The internalisation of certain behaviour patterns helps to ensure that rules are followed, and norms persist. Michel Foucault describes the basic principles of social control in our society through this '*internalised coercion*' (Mason, 2022). In chapter 3.4.3, I will discuss aspects of power, knowledge, and discourse in more detail.

However, regarding the definition of hegemony, I will keep to Antonio Gramsci's version, which describes hegemony as the dominance of a political system. In this understanding, in a hegemonic reality always rests the exclusion of another (Vey, 2015, p. 4), which means that to minimise repression and exclusions of some minorities in society, the existing hegemonies have to be permanently challenged and criticised. The interrogation of, and interference in the existing system, aiming at a reorientation on the part of subaltern classes, is then referred to as a counter-hegemony. These practices, which I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 2.4, are essential for creating a more equitable reality.

Nevertheless, discourse theory and the existence of 'minor' hegemonies that define how discourses are shaped and defined in the ruling class's interest are still relevant in this work. The existence of a generalised and normalised hegemonic political system is based on several discourses normalised in the interest of the ruling elite. Breaking with them will become essential for the struggle against the hegemonic system and for achieving social change. The debate on cultural hegemony is particularly relevant today because, with the particularisation of society, escaping from certain structures seems more challenging than ever. We, therefore, need to revise our theories and concepts and adapt them to this advanced phase of capitalism and its complementation by technological progress and social developments. One approach is to apply the concept of hegemony to the neoliberal project to demonstrate how we, as civil society, are legitimising a system that oppresses us. It can also be shown that a crucial aspect of the shift towards a more just world lies in dealing with predominant discourses, narratives, and ideologies.

2.2 Hegemony and neo-liberalism

While in the original understanding of hegemony, it was associated mainly with the supremacy of states, i.e. the power of one social institution over others, more recent studies (Löscher, 2008; Demirović, 2008; Atkin, 2022) increasingly speak of so-called neoliberal hegemony. However, the question of whether neoliberalism is hegemonic is still disputed among scholars (Demirović, 2008, p. 17). Suppose development today is an expression of neoliberal hegemony. In that case, it is, rather than a state, specific markets, or the general organi-

sation of society through the market as a free agent who assume a position of hegemony. Respectively one can argue that with the gaining importance of global economies and the power of private actors, the economic system has taken precedence over the political one. Previously, I have discussed how hegemony under Gramsci and other philosophers is to be understood; in the following, I will explain which elements of neoliberalism indicate that it is becoming hegemonic.

Market liberalisation and the consequent birth of the neoliberal project date back to the 1970s. After the crisis of Keynesian capitalism¹, strongly incentivised austerity policies brought the market as a political actor to prominence. Countries throughout the world, regardless of their political alignments, opened up to the idea of neoliberalism (Thurnher, 2014). While Great Britain under Margaret Thatcher, for example, took a straightforward, rather aggressive course, neoliberalisation in other countries has taken place more insidiously or, as Buntgenbach (2008, p. 9) puts it, 'through the back door'. Still, the development is ubiquitous. Not least, the existence of oligarchs in ex-communist countries demonstrates the project's triumph (Thurnher, 2014). Neoliberalism, as pure capitalism, replaced post-war welfare capitalism and is understood as an economical mode in which the free market can operate effectively without restrictions. However, today it is much more than a composition of economic measures that generate surplus capital. Under neoliberalism, even formerly civic rights, from healthcare to education and housing, become marketable goods

¹ *Keynesian Capitalism*, or more frequently used Keynesian economics, is based on a macroeconomic theory of the British economist John Maynard Keynes which gained high popularity in the post-war era. It describes the regulation of capitalism through State interventions. Building up a welfare state became a political philosophy in western states in the 50s and 60s.

and services (Bärnthaler et al., 2020, p. 7). It became »a network of policies, ideologies, values, and rationalities that work together to achieve capital's hegemonic power« (Miraftab, 2009, p. 34). Here Faranak Miraftab already uses the term hegemonic in relation to capital. I will emphasise this later in this chapter.

Capitalism also highly influences space. Grazioli (2021) and other scholars (Mayer, 2013; Peck, 2015) use the term austerity urbanism to describe how economic policies, especially in times of financial crises, infiltrate the way we organise and live in space. Indicative of the intervention of neoliberal ideology in everyday patterns and actions is likewise the omnipresence of adverts and commercials, which place consumption and, thus, economic activity at the centre of our experiential horizon. Work, education, politics, consumption, tourism as well as emotions, and interpersonal relations are increasingly shaped by capitalism.

Generally, the triumph of neoliberalism in the 1980s, which paradoxically intensified after the global economic crisis in 2008, led to a paradigm shift with an influence on the following three modes of thought and action (Bärnthaler et al., 2020, p. 6). First, economic orientation shifted from internal to external. An externally orientated urban policy means that international competition and success in global markets are the top priority. Second, a mixed economy became a market economy, meaning that public investors were subsequently pushed away from the economy. And third, overall social objectives gave way to individual desires.

This economic reorientation of the last five decades consequently changes the role of states. Whereas previously, in a social market economy, public actors took on a compensatory role, in neoliberalism, they are given a

protective role (Carroll, 2009, p. 14). Protective in terms of protecting free market development. Thus, if a democratic system has more protective elements than compensatory ones, the economic and political spheres are disconnected. It also means that the economic sphere follows a market orientation, and the political one is merely concerned with creating a framework in which the practice of economics is frictionless (ibid.). Michael Foucault (2004, p. 170) states that the free market has become a societal and governmental regulation principle in neoliberalism. In classical liberalism, it is merely a restricted and limited space of free economic activity. In this, meanwhile commonly accepted, protective democracy, in which the government is the protector of specific interests rather than the balancing agent, the state abdicates its responsibility for the losers of capitalism. According to William K. Carroll (2009, p. 15), this is one of neoliberalism's two crucial strategic advantages.

Meanwhile, neoliberalism has created a mindset in which it reproduces itself. The market has become the centre of life and the ultimate embodiment of freedom - especially in the eyes of the bourgeoisie. Carroll (2009, p. 15) writes in this context, »possessive individualism² becomes a hegemonic code of life«, with which he states the second strategic advantage of neoliberalism. And again, Individualism which is strongly related to capitalism, is being put together with the term hegemonic.

With the focus on individualism, neoliberal

² *Possessive Individualism* is a theory coined by C. B. Macpherson (2016, p. 3). He says possessive individualism is a »conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. In relation to capitalism, Daniel W. Bromley (2019) argues that through »untethered individually driven consumption and managerial capitalism«, we have the feeling that we owe nothing to society.

storytelling is also based on individual failure and personal fault (Laimer, 2020, p. 5). This is particularly dangerous because the belief in personal guilt weakens the insurgent spirit of civil society and simultaneously makes people retry their failures in a better, even more, system-compliant way. Good management in Neoliberalism means (self-) optimisation of the capital market (Bärnthaler et al., 2020, p. 7), which means that everyone, from infants to pensioners, from school to work and leisure, is expected to behave in an entrepreneurial way. The goal is to win the competition and to be the best (Demirović, 2008, p. 19). In neoliberalism, personal evaluation according to performance is one of the basic paradigms, but performance can be seen as a bottomless pit. There is always more to be gained. However, when success is followed by burnout and bills cannot be paid despite a heavy workload, ultimately, one does not have a good life despite the performance, it is since the ethos of *the American Dream* only attributed to the personal lack of strength or will (Laimer, 2020, p. 5). Through this narrative, the individual will try to perform better the next time to be successful, thus giving legitimacy to the basic paradigm of evaluation by performance. Going even further Byung-Chul Han (2020, p. 9, translated) says, »*The neoliberal ideology of resilience turns traumatic experiences into catalysts for performance enhancement.*«

In individualism also lies the narrative of personal accountability and responsabilisation, which means emancipating oneself from collective security systems (Bärnthaler et al., 2020, p. 7). Investing in one's human capital, private health insurance or pension provision, and homeownership are ways to secure one's security and are declared a success in capitalism. It perhaps does not come surprising that these are the same elements that keep capitalism alive. In this development, values such as autonomy, individualism, self-govern-

ance, enjoyment, and creativity do not add up to personal success and ultimately lose their status as critical counter-models (Lösch, 2017, p. 246).

In neoliberalism also, time is becoming a commodity. The expression '*time is money*' is more accurate than ever. On the one hand, time is money if it is invested in work; on the other hand, through the omnipresence of advertisement, time is also unwillingly turned into capital. In market-orientated competitions, the one with the most significant reach and, therefore, with the highest possibility to accumulate capital succeeds. In the classical sense having a high outreach means convincing as many people as possible to buy or consume a product or a service for as long as possible. To attain this, the time and attention of users and customers are competed for, often through advertising. Buying and selling, as well as competing for time and attention, also means that there will ultimately be a lack of time for something else. This often results in the inexistence of time for insurgent thinking, political participation or resistance, critical questioning, and *counter-hegemonic practices*, which I will discuss later.

Coming back to the discussion on neoliberal hegemony. Whether neoliberalism is hegemonic in a Gramscian understanding preoccupies many scholars. While for instance, Alex Demirović (2004) strongly argues that neoliberalism cannot be perceived as a hegemonic system, even considering it as a strategy directed against hegemony (Demirović, 2004, p. 19), others (Walpen, 2004; Lösch, 2017; Goldschmidt, 2000) discuss the existence and the increasing threat of neoliberal hegemony. Demirović makes it abundantly clear why the neoliberal programme does not go hand in hand with the hegemonic way of thinking. His arguments appear plausible and thus also legitimise the discourse. Hegemony, as men-

tioned previously, is meant as a generalisation of values and norms. A ruling class puts its principles in a perspective in which it is accepted by all ruled classes and has a generalisation of values and norms as the primary goal. Demirović argues that Neoliberalism does not seek approval from the ruled classes. For him, it is an ideology of the bourgeoisie for the bourgeoisie. He says, »*Neoliberalism is a declaration of war on all those who do not have ownership of the means of production, an ideology of impositions on the dominated, aiming at renunciation, impoverishment, exploitation, etc., in all aspects of life*« (2004, p. 22). To dispute neoliberalism's hegemony through this argumentation is reasonable for me. Nevertheless, in the following, I will discuss which elements of neoliberalism can be considered hegemonic and further how counter-hegemonic processes can undermine them.

First, I argue that neoliberalism's ubiquitous characteristic is a mark of hegemony. As described earlier, neoliberalism in the 21st century is much more than an economic system designed to increase individual capital. Starting with economic austerity policies, the idea of the free market has infiltrated virtually every sphere of life. It has thus evolved from an economic reform policy into a global ideology. The spillover into various other spheres of life ranges from our perceptions of achievement, health, education, work, and community down to deeply emotional issues, equally infiltrated by the capitalist ideology. According to Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, this is a typical form of superstructure in a hegemonic system. The omnipresence of capitalist ideology in everyday life can remain because capital gets along well with other power-favouring structures. Tetzlaff (1991, p. 22, cited in Scannell et al., 1992, p. 61) writes, »*The genius of capitalism is its simplicity of motive. As long as profit can be accumulated and maximised, other considerations are secondary.*

This gives capital great flexibility, allowing it to form alliances of convenience with other centres of power.« The alliances with other power poles is also a sign of hegemony. In this context, even Demirović (2004, p. 21), who mainly argues against neoliberalism as a hegemonic system, points out that the overdetermination of other ideologies or ideological elements is a sign of neoliberal hegemony.

Second, considering that a hegemonic system gains its legitimacy primarily through the consent of subaltern groups and Gramsci's view that hegemonic systems produce consent without coercion, I argue that neoliberalism is hegemonic in a way that all social classes are practising it without direct force. Although neoliberalism serves and represents only the powerful and wealthy elite class, it is reproduced in everyday life by all classes. For this to happen, neoliberalism uses ideology and narratives of freedom and democracy. It is not autocratic because no physical violence is used on people to guarantee its continuity. The violence of neoliberalism is more hidden, not meaning that it is any less brutal. In the neoliberal meritocracy, negatives such as prohibitions or punishments give way to positives such as motivation, self-optimization or self-realisation (Byung-Chul Han, 2020, p. 17). Byung-Chul Han (2022, p. 94) also says that in neoliberalism we tend to »*fatally interpret the subtle compulsion to perform as an increase in freedom.*« Yet the reproduction of neoliberalist action is unwillingly but voluntarily. It is not without reason that it often adorns itself with the arguments of freedom, performance, and opportunity justice. The state and other ruling class players in a neoliberal era work to achieve their legitimacy either with various incentives and promises or by making life under resistance impossible, still not by using direct force (Lösch, 2017, p. 203). This is equally necessary because, precisely in democratic countries, where neoliberalism

has found its roots, the representatives have to create the base for a broad social consensus (Lösch, 2017, p. 202). Faranak Miraftab also describes that neoliberalism is a strongly ideological project which is dependent on »*legitimation and citizens' perception of inclusion to achieve hegemonic power*« (Miraftab, 2009, p. 33)

Third, I also consider the narrative of the inevitable to be a sign of hegemony. Nowadays, the conception of a system outside capitalism is regarded so unthinkable that the general public often dismisses it as a simple utopia. Minor changes are sought, but they do not in any way counteract the whole system. One hegemony is so dominant that it supersedes all other worldviews. At this point, one can argue that socialism still exists in some states, but the decline of other social and economic systems and the triumph of capitalism is

WHY NEOLIBERALISM IS HEGEMONIC

1st

Neoliberalism is ubiquitous in the way that it defines our fundamental modes of work and think. The mainstream ideology is shaped by neoliberal thoughts and actions.

2nd

Neoliberalism works with incentives and positive narratives, it doesn't gain its power and legitimacy through direct force.

3rd

Capitalism and later neoliberalism became successful almost worldwide. The absence of a credible counter-system is a sign of hegemony.

undisputed. Even communist countries, like China as a prime example, use capitalism to maintain or increase their power. New neoliberal discourses constantly emerge within a fundamentally economic way of thinking and acting, often not even recognised as such. The dominance of one mindset, which is applied worldwide, is a sign of hegemony.

The '*hegemonically orientated neoliberalism*' (Walpen, 2004), as understood here and as described by Butterwegge (2017, p. 200) as the '*public opinion leadership of market radicalism*' exacerbates social asymmetry and is a threat to democracy (ibid.). It produces its own form of totalitarianism, in which the restriction of democratic and social rights and political freedoms are legitimised, while the restrictions on economic freedoms allegedly lead to a lack of freedom for society as a whole (Lösch, 2017, p. 248). I argue, thus, that a crucial first step in overcoming neoliberalism is to recognise its hegemonic power. Only when we understand how deeply the capitalist mode of production is enmeshed in our daily practices we can start to rewrite specific narratives. As Laclau and Mouffe have described, we can assign new attributes to empty signifiers according to contemporary notions of equality and sufficiency and thus adapt the discourse to the demands of the 21st century. First, however, it is necessary to clarify what these new aspirations are because the definition of justice or oppression is certainly not determined. Therefore, we must look at the overall goal of societal change, the right to decide on that, and its change depending on time and context. Finding and articulating an overall goal can be challenging in an increasingly pluralistic world. I would still say that despite the diversity of political streams and their socio-political goals, the often-propagated economic freedom of neoliberalism can, in the end, be contrasted with the paradigm of equality and equity, more commonly known as the notion of justice.

2.3 Searching for [spatial-] justice

As demonstrated in the previous section, current socio-political practices are market-driven and orientated towards economics, which is profitable only for a relatively small minority of people. They exclusively serve a *thin hegemony* (Carroll, 2009, p. 9). This, ultimately, provides a fragile foundation for the social cohesion of society (ibid.). The same can be said for market liberalisation itself. David Harvey (2005a, p. 144) writes in this context, on the ideas of Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, »*[market liberalisation] will not produce a harmonious state in which everyone is better off. It will instead produce even greater levels of social inequality.*« With this in mind, we now approach the question of justice.

If justice in the judicial sense means that everyone follows the law, then justice is legality (Moroni, 2019). However, as the term is used in social sciences and humanities, justice goes beyond state right, not least because the law can never fully satisfy the notion of justice. Even if, according to legal philosophy approaches, the concept of right corresponds to justice and is often only inaccurately reduced to legality (Köhler, 2017, p. 2), in the following, I will speak of right and law as normative specifications and of justice as the overall idea of equity. For talking specifically about the justice of the law, the term *judicial justice* can be used.

Besides judicial justice, the most common notion of justice is social justice, which describes the fairness that manifests in society. The term social justice originates in the late 18th century. In the sense it is used today, it gained popularity in relation to the social contract by John Rawls in '*A Theory of Justice*'. In the code of

ethics and professional conduct from 2005, it says:

»*We shall seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons recognising a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration. We shall urge the alteration of policies, institutions, and decisions that oppose such needs.*«

(AICP, 2005, cited in Moroni, 2019, p. 252).

The reversion, social injustice, exists on many levels. It originates mainly in discrimination against marginalised groups such as cultural or ethnical minorities, people of colour, disabled or sick people, women, people being part of the LGBTQ+ community, sometimes minors, migrants, foreigners, etc. Injustice can then manifest in the income distribution, in verbal or physical violence, it can include inequities in the labour market, in the freedom of choices, or, as I will further emphasise, the unequal distribution of space. The latter can be widely subsumed by spatial injustice or reversely if aimed to be more equitable in spatial justice. *Spatial Justice*, as a relatively new term, describes how deeply the question of fairness and equitability among humans is rooted in the production and reproduction of space. It refers to the distribution of land and resources and the opportunity to use and shape them. Scholars like Edward Soja (2009: 2), who was also one of the first to use and define the term, frame spatial justice as a certain perspective on the spatial manifestations of injustice rather than as an alternative to social, economic, or judicial justice. We, therefore, use the term spatial justice to discuss how social justice happens in urban space.

One of the most dominant and evident impacts of social injustice, with far-reaching consequences on the equitable distribution of space and resources, is the speculation with

Fig.04 Why neoliberalism is hegemonic

real estate prevalent in neoliberalism. Home-ownership, as an investment initially for the upper class but increasingly being made accessible for middle-class households, results in a highly inequitable distribution of space. As a result of the push-back of the welfare state, the institution's ability to compensate for this development is lacking. Spatial Justice is therefore also, according to Moroni (2019, p. 255), »*not a sub-category of the general idea of social justice*« but rather a shorthand formula to describe wanted or unwanted spatial situations that arise from targeted control by primary urban institutions (ibid.). And although the government, through increasing privatisation and the liberation of municipal property, is increasingly relinquishing the decision on the distribution of space, it should not be underestimated that the state as a political institution still has a decisive role in changing the direction of impact (Moroni, 2019, p. 253). In the course of this work though, I focus strongly on the influence of civil society for achieving social change, the still existing power of state agents can be kept in mind. Holloway (2005, p. 40) says that either way, most of us have to engage with the state in some ways, but we can decide how and where.

Spatial Justice can also be seen as today's interpretation of the *right to the city* (Soja, 2008), which is, according to Henri Lefebvre (1968), a '*right to inhabitation, appropriation, and participation*'. It is both the right to inhabit and be in the city and the right to redefine and produce the city in terms that challenge the routinising demands of capitalist accumulation. The right to redefine and shape the city is now aligned with the ruling class. By claiming and appropriating spaces, people not only fight for these lands but also for actively participating in the configuration of a city. In this context, Alexander Vasudevan (2015, p. 318) asks about the relationship between the figure of occupation and the '*affirmation of an alternative right*

to the city', which I think is a reasonable question, as I will elaborate in 2.4 and Part II of this thesis.

However, as already indicated, notions of justice are variable and must be constantly questioned and adapted. More and more often, for example, justice is also spoken of within neoliberal practices. Laclau and Mouffe have again put forward an essential paradigm in the struggle for social change. They argue that we must first agree on who gets to decide what oppression and exploitation mean and how justice should be interpreted. For instance, while for one individual, the introduction of a wealth tax is perceived as deeply unjust, others think that the redistribution of capital leads to a more equitable world. So again, it is a question of how the discourse is conducted and, above all, by whom. In current policy projects, there is increasing talk of inclusion, participation, and governance. Depending on the framework in which these values are carried out, they serve to legitimise the hegemonic system further or actually combat injustice. In many projects, the latter, i.e. the translation of participation into redistributive equity, is done inadequately (Miraftab, 2009, p. 41). In this context, we need to realise that even in debates about inclusiveness, the superiority and inferiority of oppressor and oppressed persists (ibid, p. 45). Even the supposedly participatory or critical actions are often neoliberally shaped and infiltrated with control mechanisms of the groups who are in power. Within neoliberalism, there is an effort to allow participation and civic input, but often only in a very limited setting, led by the most articulate groups.

In the end, reaching justice and fostering diversity starts inevitably with the critical analysis and challenging of power and dominance. Firstly, as the power of some individuals over others and secondly, as institutionalised dom-

ination based on laws, political systems, and orders. These two spheres are interdependent and intertwined, and although they contain the potential for change, they are not easy to disrupt (Czollek et al., 2019). In his book '*Changing the world without taking power*', John Holloway discusses the need to question and oppose prevailing power structures. I will emphasise the notion of power in more detail later, but the overall idea is about detaching '*power to*' from the omnipresent notion of '*power over*'. As long as existing power situations remain unchanged, also hegemonic systems

» *The question of justice is the question of power: this is the original, political meaning of social justice* «

Moroni, 2019, p. 254

remain in place. Carroll (1009, p. 19) writes: »*as long as power-over is sustained through an effective blending of persuasion and coercion, hegemony remains intact.*« If we manage to detach ourselves from current notions of power as something bound to individuals and unequally distributed, it no longer has to appear as destructive. If it is not linked to a relationship of domination, it can be something productive, something that makes social progress possible in the first place (Vey, 2015, p. 67). Consequently, social conflict, power, and antagonism are not disruptive factors to be abolished, but rather conditions of possibility of social reality (ibid.).

2.4 Counter-hegemony & agonism

In exploring alternatives and methods to oppose neoliberal hegemony, attention must again be paid to how entrenched it already is in economic-, governmental- and societal structures and mindsets. Consequently, we need to find out which mechanisms break down these deep-rooted power relations and achieve social change. Laclau and Mouffe stated three principles regarding the general concept of social change and the countering of the prevailing system, described by Carolien van Ham (2018) as the following.

First, they say that social change is not inevitable, meaning that a revolution, if it comes, will depend on multiple factors. This is where they counter Marx's thinking of an inevitable social revolution emerging from capitalism. Having a dependency on factors also means we can study factors leading to the success of a movement. For Laclau and Mouffe, it is about analysing and redefining these parameters depending on the power system that has to be fought against. Second, they argue that for social change it needs multiple actors. It is not on behalf of the working class to start a revolution but on the contribution of many different actors. And third, they state that social change needs a discourse that empowers activists to frame power inequality as oppression. In this sense, they argue that for social change it helps to create antagonism because through acknowledging and supporting conflict, people mobilise and wake up from the post-political neutralisation of politics (Roskamm, 2015).

But this is not the only reason why antagonism must be recognised in the political³. The now prevailing pluralistic democracy is based on antagonisms. Having different opinions, re-

spectively various political parties is the core of democracy. The ongoing pluralisation of society is particularly visible in the emergence of numerous small political streams, protests, initiatives and minor parliamentarian parties. It is also noticeable, for example, in increasing disenchantment with politics, declining voter turnout and general dissatisfaction with a democratic system based on categorising and consolidating interests (Franta, 2020, p. 38). This particularisation of society, which is primarily caused by new media, also has a high potential for conflict. Eliminating the conflict means though eliminating democracy itself. Chantal Mouffe (2009) describes this as the *democratic paradox* insofar as the attempt to achieve consensus in governance undermines pluralism which is the essence of democracy.

Out of this irresolvable logic, she introduced the term and theory of agonism, describing the positive turn of antagonism. Whereas antagonism describes the insoluble conflict that slows down developments, Chantal Mouffe uses the term agonism as the productive form of conflict in which solutions can be found based on competition between opponents within a particular set of rules (Kühn, 2021, p. 3). Agonism derives from the Greek *agon*, meaning struggle, conflict, or contest. In ancient Greece, the term was used for sporting or musical competitions. In its origin, it, therefore, also describes conflict as something related to contestation rather than war. Whereas a consensus orientation subsequently eliminates any idea that cannot gain a majority, Agonism creates space for radical thinking within a democracy. Nevertheless, there is

³ Chantal Mouffe distinguished between politics and the political. In contrast, the first describes the simple process of governance and the sphere of diplomacy and democracy. The second, the political, is a ubiquitous negotiation within society, where antagonism is the essence.

» What is important is that conflict does not take the form of an 'antagonism' [struggle between enemies], but the form of an 'agonism' [struggle between adversaries]. «

Mouffe, 2013, p. 7 cited in Kühn, 2021

still a constant discourse among scholars (Roskamm, 2015; Bond, 2011; Hilier, 2003; Purcell, 2009) about the applicability and feasibility of Mouffe's agonistic theory. Roskamm (2015), for example, offers a critique regarding the taming of antagonism to agonism. He says that antagonism is partially sacrificed by creating agonism, and because *»antagonism is the crucial substance of the political«*, an entire transformation cannot work. He also uses the term *'post-antagonism'* to describe how the application of agonism removes radicality from the political. It remains open which theories and concepts should be applied in a given context and to what extent. For me, it is clear, though, that radicality and conflict are necessary to counter a hegemonic system and that the pursuit of agreement and consensus stands in the way of building an anti-capitalist society.

Chantal Mouffe particularly raises the idea and objective of a *'radical democracy'* in this context. In radical democratic theory, the goal is not consensus because it acknowledges that there will always be fundamental differences

between groups and parties. The goal is to recognise and appreciate differences and interests and to learn how to deal with conflict. Mouffe also rejects the idea of a perfectly harmonious society and calls for the contradictions, differences and controversies of social reality to be recognised and utilised (Glasze & Mattissek, 2009, p. 168). Radicalism is not a threat to democracy but a natural outcome of democratic principles. The agonistic democratic model is about transforming the *other*, as Mouffe (2013) calls the actor someone is in contestation with, from an enemy to an adversary (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 965). Because in radical democracy, every attempt to fix discourses is immediately countered, the clear separation between civil society and politics can also be successively abolished. Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 185) argue that *»the distinction public/private, civil society/political society is only the result of a specific type of hegemonic articulation.«* This insight into radical democracy is especially interesting when approaching and developing radical projects such as the one I will describe in Part III.

However, agonism helps to challenge prevailing hegemonic narratives and generate pro-

» If every order is a hegemonic order, this implies that there is always an outside [...], so there is no consensus without exclusion. «

Carpentier, & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 967

foundly different ones. In order to unite different social movements and create a counter-narrative to the neoliberal agenda, a common frontier and a shared advisory are essential. (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 971). It is necessary to allow differences and prevent the neutralisation of political streams while simultaneously uniting various movements such as feminist, anti-racist or class struggle activists. The latter happens mainly by creating a new umbrella that unites social movements in a common narrative. Neoliberal hegemony can function as a common frontier, and the shared narrative can be found in countering it. Resistance and system criticism, instead of system conformity, is a way to tackle hegemony. For the narrative of a radical, insurgent countermovement which is fighting current power relations, *counter-hegemony* as a term can be useful. Gramsci did not specifically mention counter-hegemony as a term, but it is closely interwoven with his theory. According to today's conception, it can be interpreted in two ways:

The first approach describes the concept of counter-hegemony as the rejection of any form of hegemony and, thus, the attempt to establish a societal relationship that excludes domination and power as far as possible. Counter-hegemony would then be equivalent to *anti-hegemony* (Vey, 2015, p. 78).

The second definition, which follows Laclau and Mouffe's theory, where a social reality always comes along with the exclusion of others, understands counter-hegemony not as eliminating hegemony itself but as a struggle against the currently dominant hegemony highlighting the importance of the existence of both a governing system and strong opponents. In this assumption, there will always be hegemony. Getting rid of hegemony is respectively not the goal. The aim is instead to fight the hegemony of the *'Imperialist White-Su-*

premacist Capitalist Patriarchy, as Bell Hooks and many others label it, which leads to highly oppressive and unjust societal structures. To make this clearer, we can try to picture, for example, an hypothetical, anarchistic society where there is no state and no huge power concentration. Power is distributed relatively equally among the citizens, and everyone can take on tasks of their free will. One could argue that this society has no hegemony, as there is no oppression structure. I argue, though, that with Laclau and Mouffe's observation that one social reality always excludes another, even this anarchist society would be, to some extent, hegemonic. The big difference between the hegemony of this society and reality is the simultaneous existence of counter-hegemony. A framework where anyone can and will stand up and make it different at any time. However, suppose we assume that future systems will also be hegemonic, i.e. based on exclusion. In that case, this does not mean that all exclusions are legitimate or that every social relationship must be antagonistic (Vey, 2015, p. 68). It simply means that we acknowledge differences and learn to deal with them instead of trying to eliminate them. In this sense, we cannot always strive for agreement because even the most non-hierarchical decision will never be in the best interest of all. We must therefore learn to deal with conflict. By doing so, we can also recognise the positive aspects of this conflict. In this second definition of counter-hegemony, which I foreground for this work, one's self and the ruling ideology are permanently questioned. In the process, hegemony and counter-hegemony are placed in an everlasting state of negotiation [see fig. 05].

In my conception, counter-hegemony is also the antonym of the sedated palliative society described by the philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2020) in his book *'Palliative Society - Pain Today'* [original: Palliativgesellschaft:

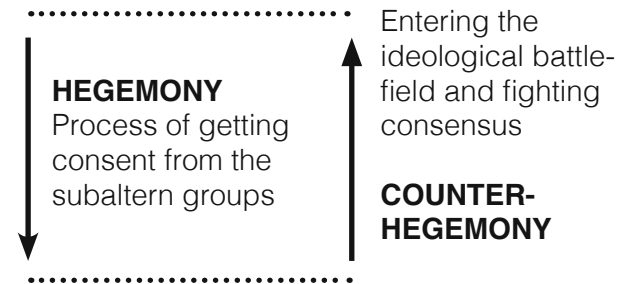


Fig.05 Ongoing struggle between hegemony and counter-heg.

Schmerz heute], where he emphasises how human beings become obedient, docile and willing in a hegemonic system that does not allow one to stand out of the line. The generalised fear of pain and painful struggles leads both on a personal and a political level to an increasing avoidance of conflicts and, therefore, a virtual compulsion to be content, ultimately leading to general discontent. In a pluralised and largely digitalised world, everyone can construct a reality that exists free of conflict, enforcing the anguish of sorrow. Byung-Chul Han (2020) describes this fear of painful conflict as *algophobia*. System conformity is the new watchword; anything that falls outside the norm is fundamentally disruptive and destructive. He in this context speaks of *'survival of the most adapted'*. Through the compulsion to conform and the pressure to reach a consensus, as pursued in neoliberalism, conflicts with distress are also being pushed into the private and thus invisible sphere. Because the fallacy is that conflict cannot be eliminated, it can only be displaced. It exists nowadays, probably more than ever, but there is no public arena to express it. An essential aspect of counter-hegemony is also to regain the courage to be insurgent, resistant, and rebellious – the courage to be radical. Differences of opinion should not be the failure of a political debate but the beginning. The more established a hegemonic system is, the quieter and less significant resistance becomes, the more crucial counter-hegemony is.

While the concept of counter-hegemony can itself have an umbrella function, at the same time, in order to carry out counter-hegemonic practices, a more detailed umbrella narrative is needed, meaning that to ensure counter-hegemony, there has to be an *'organic link'* (Harvey (2005a, p. 203) between different autonomous left-wing movements. The forces that thrive for local powers and any form of *autogestion*⁴ have to unite against the *'divide and rule politics of ruling-class elites'* (ibid.). When looking at the last decades and the development of political activism and sociocultural movements, one can see that unifying has its challenges among left-wing ideologists. Again and again, subcultural discourses emerge within politically left groups, through which it becomes almost impossible to create and maintain a common narrative (Caroll, 2009, p. 13). With ideological diversification, the focus is directed towards differences, and solidarities are lost. But it is important to highlight that, especially in a solidarity framework, it is crucial to find a common language (Spyropoulou, 2020, p. 29). By recognising conflict as a productive element, as something invigorating, synergies can emerge from the different political subcultures. Activist movements should not fight against each other but discuss with each other. Subcultural discourses, such as queer or black feminism within the overarching field of feminism, are extremely important for the development and progressiveness of a movement, not least because they can create agonism. Nevertheless, proper conduction of the debates is crucial. It is about finding a balance between common goals and encouraging subcultural conflicts to build a strong unity

⁴ L'Autogestion (français) is the french word for workers-self-management. It implies social criticism and refers to the control of projects and enterprises by grassroots or council-democratically organised groups, usually collectives. With its socio-critical notion it specifies the more broad meaning of the English word self-management.

opposing populist right-wing developments. I would say it is still open to finding a precise story to write a tangible narrative that constructs agonism, creates new discourses and mobilises multiple groups under one umbrella. I argue that squats are the arenas where we can find this balance because they create a space for all grassroots responses against neoliberal structures (Grazioli, 2021, p. 23). Allowing counter-hegemony to rise in squats is a start to achieving social change and the overall goal of *»transforming both state and economy while enriching civil society«* (Caroll, 2009, p. 29). I will discuss this matter in more detail in Part II of this thesis.

2.5 Agonistic planning theory

Before intersecting the previous thoughts on hegemony, justice, counter-hegemony and agonism with the matter of space, I want to remark on the discipline of spatial planning and the embedding of an agonistic approach to planning theory. Following Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism, a consensus-oriented approach to planning, as it has been pursued in planning theory since the communicative turn, has lately been increasingly questioned (Kühn, 2021; Hillier, 2003; Bond, 2011; Heindl, 2023). So far, within the scope of communicative planning and research on governance, the focus of planning theory has been on solving spatial development matters with consensus and cooperation. This approach has been under critique, mainly because collaborative planning also often contributes to legitimising neoliberal practices (Purcell, 2009; Miraftab, 2009). In a historical and theoretical regard, Manfred Kühn (2021) emphasises three general approaches to conflict and urban planning's responses to it. Ac-

According to him, there is [a] the *avoidance of conflict*, which refers to how conflict was perceived in rational or first-generation planning. This paradigm gave planners high authority for spatial development and prevailed until the 1960s/ 70s. [b] The *consensual resolution of conflict*, which came hand in hand with communicative planning, can be considered the most dominant picture in the last 50 years. And [c] in opposition to avoidance of conflict, the *acceptance of conflict*, which agonistic planning engages with [see fig. 06] The task of public planning hereby is to deal with conflict in society and cities. Agonistic planning thus breaks with a culture of planning and participation based on consensus and the search for compromise (Hamedinger, 2020, p. 10) and increasingly attempts to allow conflict in spatial planning. Some researchers like Roskamm (2009) and Mäntysalo (2011) say that agonistic planning theory is already substituting the Habermasian theory of communicative planning as the 'hegemonic paradigm in the field' (Roskamm, 2009, p. 396)

» We need to think about theory without agreements rather than agreements without theory. «

Hillier, 2003, p. 52

One of the main reasons why communicative planning⁵ is under critique is because the current participation practices, even if carried out with a claim to inclusivity, tend to benefit articulation- and capital-rich groups (Hamedinger, 2020, p. 6). Moreover, legitimisation through participation and communication leads to the

PLANNING APPROACH	RELATION TO CONFLICT
rational planning	avoidance of conflict
communicative planning	eliminating conflict
agonistic planning	dealing with conflict

Fig.06 Approach to conflict in planning theories

co-optation of resisting groups and 'neutralises their counter-hegemonic potential through inclusion' (ibid). Thus, communicative planning virtually undermines its own goals by simultaneously restricting movements from below through institutional support of civil society. Faranak Miraftab (2009, p. 39) writes, »*Planning practices that celebrate inclusive planning through citizens' participation yet remain uncritical of the complexities of inclusion and resistance in the contemporary neoliberal era are complicit in the binary misconception of civil society and public action.*« In planning practice, it must therefore be recognised that stakeholder values are never rational but always dependent on identity, personal history and the context of socialisation (Hillier, 2003, p. 38)

In an agonistic planning and politics approach, the idea is to transform the relationship between actors from enemies to adversaries. According to this view, disagreements between participants of the discourse can never be entirely resolved, but they can be negotiated in an ongoing process of discussion (Ha-

⁵ Communicative planning theory is » broadly based on the premise that debate between all the relevant stakeholders oriented towards agreement is the most appropriate and democratic means of decision-making in planning and urban governance. « (Bond, 2011). Communicative turn describes the switch from the previous rational approach to planning to a communicative one.

medinger, 2020, p. 9). However, it is precisely the latter that also leads to the criticism of agonistic planning. The main point of concern or the element that still needs to be researched is the transfer of theory into practice. Since spatial planning, as well as politics in general (Roskamm, 2015), at the latest in the stage of implementation, are dependent on consensus, the translation in planning practice can prove challenging. This is where agonistic planning still reaches its limits regarding the scholarly discourse. In that sense, there is an ongoing debate among scholars (Roskamm, 2015; Gualini, 2015; Hillier, 2003) regarding the use of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism approach for planning theory and practice. Hillier (2003, p. 42) suggests that planners should be aware that complete consensus cannot be achieved, as it always excludes a constitutive outside. In regard to planning practice, she says:

»*Rather, the implication is that we could rethink the notions of consensus-formation and agreement differently, incorporating both collaboration and competition, both striving to understand and engage with consensus-formation while at the same time respecting differences of values and areas of disagreement.*« (ibid, p. 54)

In this work, I will not focus on the applicability of agonistic planning; instead, I want to emphasise the importance of antagonism and its transformation to agonism for evolving into a vibrant, insurgent, and more radical society. I will focus on its productive use for counter-hegemonic practices and new narratives about the co-existence between humans and nature.

2.6 Counter-spaces

In the previous sections, we discussed how hegemonic systems emerge, what their impact is, and how they can be combated. In the following, I will discuss how hegemony theory relates to space and the importance of establishing counter-hegemonic spaces as distinct from - or in support of - counter-hegemonic structures. In order to argue that autonomous spaces in which counter-hegemonic structures can emerge and grow are needed to achieve social change, we look at a spatial theory that tries to establish a connection between physical space and social processes. 'The production of space' is one of the most important publications by one of the most influential philosophers of the last century. Henri Lefebvre is a humanist, Marxist sociologist and philosopher from France who is widely known for his critique of modern cities and their capitalist mode of production. His work gives us a crucial insight into understanding different layers of space. In his later writings, he intensively explores the composition of space and society. He tries to unite his philosophical theories [mental space] with a real urban practice [social and physical space]. For him, as indicated in the text about *the production of space*, space is not a passive constitution of our physical environment, but rather an altering and human activity regarding element of active production and reproduction. Space is, in his view, not a passive constant of our environment but an element of active influence that alters and relates to human activity. Thus, when we talk about space, says Lefebvre, we must immediately discuss how this space is used and occupied (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 12). This leads me to the intersections with the corresponding reflections on hegemony. In the introduction of his book *the production of space*, Henri Lefebvre clearly states that space will never be untouched by the exercise

of hegemony. In the same turn, he says that the one 'clearly defined capitalist space thoroughly purged of contradictions' (1991, p. 11) will never exist, meaning that the hegemonic spaces will constantly change and never exist without counterparts.

If we assume that every space is defined by how it is used, for example, if space was constituted differently in the Middle Ages than in the Renaissance, differently under the influence of monarchs than in dictatorships and democracies, differently in communism than in capitalism, then we can claim that every hegemonic system has its specific use of space. Consequently, regarding the expression of human behaviours in space, also hegemony always expresses itself fundamentally in space. Lefebvre (1991, p. 31) writes, »*Every society - and hence every mode of production - produces a space, its own space*«, arguing that space is fundamentally social. Finally, if society always produces space, this implies that space is necessary for the manifestation of a social system and that we can initiate social change depending on the use of space. By redesigning space and redistributing spatial resources, we also change how humans coexist. According to Ernesto Laclau (1990), space, as well as discourse, identity and society, never has a constant meaning. He uses the term '*spatialisation*' to describe the attempt to stabilise a system as it is done in a hierarchical structure. But he also argues, as Roskamm (2015, p. 393) puts it, that: '*Space is fragile and cannot be stabilised completely*'. Space is subject to a constant process of change closely linked to social and technological developments [see fig. 07].

Consider, for example, the development from a pre-industrial society to an industrialised one. In the beginning, technical achievements made production and work more efficient. This gave rise to new labour models and, along

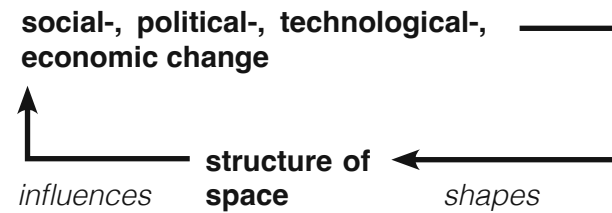


Fig.07 Reciprocal influence of society and space

with them, new leisure models. It gradually changed the social structure of a community. This new social structure began to make new demands on space which over time was redistributed. Small farms were bought up in favour of large industries; their fields were converted, and partly because there was no work left for individuals in the countryside, a great wave of urbanisation emerged that continues to this day. Political, social, technical and economic changes always result in spatial change, and the structure of space shapes socio-political processes. Like in this example: Because of urbanisation, knowledge got more and more concentrated and therefore, technological progress, which in the beginning led to urbanisation, advanced even faster. This interaction between society and space, however, does not happen from one day to the next; it is a long, complex process involving a series of successive events. In neo-capitalism, the transformation and reconstruction of urban space can be described in four phases that are crucial to how we perceive and govern space today (Darling, 2017) [see fig. 08].

It started with deindustrialisation and the globalisation of markets in the 1970s. [phase 1] Because production was cheaper in less developed countries, profit-oriented companies increasingly relocated their production centres to the global south. This exacerbated spatial disparities and dependencies between developed and developing countries. It also increased international movements,



Fig.08 Phases/ steps to the hegemony of capitalism, source: Darling, 2017

both physically through increasing international mobility but also through non-physical actions like transnational trade relations. The economic reorientation followed in the 1980s, with the widespread narrative of neoliberalism becoming a prevailing ideology. [phase 2] The dismantling of the welfare state and the favourisation of private investors was ideologically legitimised and promoted. This changed above all the power relations regarding the configuration of space. In the 1990s, more and more policies were introduced, allowing, promoting and strengthening the preceding developments. [phase 3] This enabled the private sector to act without legislative constraints and to carry out the neoliberal project with the consent of the state. Along with this, there is a decline of public spaces and a restriction of uses, or rather a stipulation of uses by the private sector. Here, one can ask how a public place is defined and which aspects of it are declining due to the introduction of neoliberal policies. According to Darling (2017), public space is something where the public claims ownership, use, access, participation or regulation, or a combination of these. Since the 2000s, this can be marked as the fourth and final phase of incorporating neo-capitalism; we also see an increasing cultural adaptation.

[phase 4] Fear has become an omnipresent emotion in the discourse and everyday living. The entrenchment of capitalism in culture becomes evident in space, especially through increased security measures, defensive architecture or the omnipresence of commercials. In each of the four phases of the last 50 years, space has been transformed along with society. Today, capitalism is everywhere in space, sometimes so fused with space that we no longer even notice it.

One of the most apparent manifestations of urban capitalism is land and real estate speculation. The privatisation of housing to secure capital on the one hand and for investment reasons on the other is a deeply capitalist process that has fundamentally shaped cities in recent decades. Previously, the ownership structure in almost all European countries has changed in favour of private investors. The spatial effects of capitalism, however, go far beyond the privatisation of housing. The list of physical influences of a hegemonic capitalist economy is long. Starting with the commercialisation of public space, the displacement of consumption-free places, the increasing number of shopping centres and commercial zones, and the omnipresence of advertising. The latter is also particularly problematic because urban forms of advertising cannot be escaped. They influence people subconsciously and involuntarily and are thus actually diametrically opposed to the neoliberal image of free will. The way in which road space is designed has capitalist origins as well. The private car, which is the most capital-intensive form of transport due to the high costs of purchase and maintenance that each individual must bear, dominates the streets. New mobility providers and delivery services that occupy the street space also emerge from capitalist motivation. Anti-capitalist means of transport, such as the bicycle, have been increasingly displaced and must now painstakingly reclaim

the streets. Finally, one can spin urban capitalism further to surveillance systems in the city, which seems necessary because the crime that capitalism's inequality has produced must allegedly be fought through surveillance. The long list of examples of how a dominant economic mode shapes the physical environment confirms once again the hegemony of capitalism or modern neoliberalism. Based on spatial adjustments, capitalism also initiates socio-spatial processes such as gentrification or segregation. I will talk more about this in chapter 3.5, in the context of urban squats.

Besides the classical understanding of capitalism and its impact on the distribution of space in the form of real estate speculation, privatisation of housing, commercialisation of public space, etc., the mere existence of one leading class being in charge of organising space has an impact itself (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 10). The ruling elites control and form the lived and the mental spaces. Lefebvre (1991, p. 10) also says that, therefore, to understand the actions and impact of the bourgeoisie in space; it helps to use the concept of hegemony.

All these spatial adaptations to the capitalist economy and neoliberal ideology have taken place at different junctures. Together, they have led to a profoundly inequitable distribution of space that we find today. Due to the privatisation of the countryside and inflation in the cities, subaltern classes can often neither return to the privatised periphery nor afford the rising housing costs in the city. This makes them financially, mentally, and spatially dependent on the hegemonic system.

But if the construction of space is so closely linked to the construction of society, it also means that by reframing both space and society together, it is possible to intervene spatially and activistically in the current system. While it is difficult for grassroots movements

to provoke change at the level of economy or policies, creating new narratives in autonomous spaces can change ideology and culture and subsequently counter neoliberal hegemony. Glasze and Mattissek (2009, p. 170, translated) say, »*Spaces are the result of hegemonic discourses and at the same time contribute to the naturalisation and thus stabilisation of hegemonic discourses.*« Consequently, the destabilisation and disruption of hegemonic discourses can happen through the reconstruction of spaces. To sum up, the reconstructed spaces which serve this destabilisation and disruption, I will make use of the term counter-spaces.

Also, Henri Lefebvre (1991) uses the term counter-spaces for localities [physical, social or mental] that oppose hegemonic spaces. He describes the hegemonic spaces as mainstream spaces, where »*homogenisation is favoured over appropriation, interchangeability over difference, repetitiveness over lived time; visual over sensual experience*« (Altun, 2018). Lefebvre also describes the world of commodities with every institution and strategy that comes along as abstract space. He talks of counter-spaces, therefore, as the negative of mainstream and abstract spaces, as everything which stands apart. »*Counter-space [are] an initially utopian alternative to actually existing 'real' space.*« (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 349). Likewise, he mentions *counter-plans* and *counter-projects* (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 381) as the actions and strategies happening to oppose abstraction and mainstreaming.

Sirma Altun (2018) describes counter-spaces as »*those that run counter against the grain of established strategies of power.*« She also says, based on Lefebvre's analysis, that counter-spaces target the state, which is the institution primarily in charge of organising space and that the fight between state-dominated

spaces and the opposing counter-spaces happens in the urban sphere (Altun, 2018). Lefebvre argues in this regard: »*Pressure from below must therefore also confront the state in its role as organiser of buildings and spatial planning in general.*« (Henri Lefebvre, 1991, p. 383)

In counter-spaces, social exchange, solidarity, and socio-political alteration dominate the generation of capital and power. The factors described by Altun (2018) are switched in such spaces. Appropriation dominates over standardisation, the difference is wanted, and habituation is disliked. In this work, I use the term counter-spaces as an overarching term for all physical and non-physical spaces whose social and ideological constitution is in opposition to capitalist and neo-capitalist spaces of production. They can occur when a particular space is used or appropriated for activist or rebellious purposes. However, places can also 'unintentionally' become counter-spaces through the appropriation of a class that is 'unable to survive' under capitalism. In certain contexts, a train station hall chosen by punks

Def. counter-space:
 »*A space where people meet, exchange and take action with the purpose of re-configuring society and politics in an anti-capitalist way.*«

author's definition

and homeless people as a place to sleep can become a counter-space, as can a squatted university building, a self-managed green space, the weekly meeting place of a grassroots initiative, a solidarity café, or an Internet platform for interconnecting left-wing activist structures. Physical places can also temporarily become counter-spaces, for example, during a demonstration or any other political action. When counter-spaces give up their material nature or extend to virtual space, supra-regional or international networks emerge that usually connect several physical locations. Counter-spaces have different objectives and functions, and they sometimes operate closer to the hegemonic capitalist system and sometimes further away. Ideologically, they nevertheless unite under the guise of anti-capitalism and the struggle against concentrations of power by the market and the state, as well as the simultaneous empowerment of civil society. Activist counter-spaces are always, in their basic idea, anti-racist, feminist, ecological, and class struggle, even if the implementation of these goals can vary greatly and have different degrees of success. This is not necessarily the case when we speak of counter-spaces that are non-activist but instead appropriated out of necessity, for example, from people in precarious living situations. Nevertheless, even their mere presence carries a critique of capitalism. It is, therefore, not surprising why these 'undesirable uses' are increasingly pushed out of the scene by state institutions. Since a homeless person is a clear sign of the failure of state capitalism, he/she is in its very existence anti-capitalist, and his/her visibility undermines the legitimacy of the state.

While all counter-spaces are somewhat in opposition to capitalism, they differ significantly in their counter-hegemonic potential and will. I advance the hypothesis that urban squats, in their definition as vacant buildings in a city

appropriated without the owner's consent, have the largest counter-hegemonic potential compared to other counter-spaces, and I will therefore focus in the following on the category of urban squats as counter-spaces. In this paper, I define ten factors by which counter-hegemony can be identified in urban squats [see 2.7 and 3.6]. I would also like to point out here that the parameters refer exclusively to alternative structures and are an ideal-typical classification. I assume that counter-hegemony, as I describe it in this work, can only grow out of counter-spaces. Figure 09 gives a selection of counter-spaces, which is intended to represent the scope of these. Whether a structure, a place or an action becomes a counter-space depends, above all, on how much it aims to change the existing system. The extent to which these structures, places or actions have counter-hegemonic potential depends on the degree to which they fulfil the factors I define in the following work.

2.7 Conclusion Part I

There are many indications that we live in an increasingly hegemonic system in which the ruling class's ideology is imposed on all other subordinated classes. In this process, values and norms that are neither righteous nor just, but support the existing unequally distributed power and capital structures, are perceived as universally valid and unchangeable. Through the generalisation of lifestyle and economy, it is not easy to establish long-term and tangible counter-movements. A sign of hegemony is that even progressive, socially oriented organisations and associations somehow support and legitimise the system. This is especially evident in the discussion about 'Big Society', in which NGOs and socially engaged actors take over state services and thus indirectly support the decline of the public sector (Spyropoulou, 2020, p. 29) Counter-hegemony describes the attempt to undermine the prevailing system in its foundations to achieve

long-term social change. In doing so, actors of counter-hegemonic structures operate largely outside the state and the private sector system in order not to be occupied by the ideology of the dominant few. By perceiving and accepting conflicts instead of permanently striving for agreement and consensus and by allowing radicality, an activity – as opposed to passivity – is sought, which resists the ruling class physically and mentally. Because the constitution of space and society cannot be separated, every hegemonic mode of society has an impact on the physical space that surrounds it, and conversely, the design of space also shapes the perception and formation of society. While mainstream or abstract spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) are spaces taken over by neoliberal modes of production today, counter-spaces serve to oppose the capitalist worldview and to think of space and socio-politics apart from the increase of capital. In the following, I will define certain parameters whose fulfilment results in a movement, a space, a structure or generally a societal construct to be counter-hegemonic. The parameters concern the approach to the hegemonic system, the negotiation of space, resources, knowledge and power; the internal norms and values; and the intended goals. Using these parameters, I raise the claim to evaluate a counter-space by its counter-hegemonic potential. It should be said that counter-hegemony hereby is not always entirely desirable. It depends on the structure's meaning which parameters are applied and which are probably consciously executed differently. In the last part of this thesis, precisely in chapter 5.2, I will describe each parameter's limits and controversies again.

ented institutions, companies, organisations and individuals. Any contact with the hegemonic system weakens radicalism and brings the danger of system conformist resistance. At the same time, cooperations bear the risk of getting co-opted and instrumentalised for other capitalist purposes.

Second, counter-hegemonic structures cannot be determinate [*continuous*]. They must remain open to internal and external changes. Because the hegemonic system can constantly change, counterparts must also be flexible. In this sense, the structure does not seek overall consensus because that always results in the formation of a new hegemony. The movement itself must be the goal, and there must be a general understanding of the continuity. However, this does not mean that no decisions can be made; it only means that developments must not be perceived as determined and unchangeable and prevailing discourses are ongoingly questioned.

Third, counter-hegemony means insurgency [*insurgent*]. In this context, insurgency relates to the openness to dispute, conflict and argument. A counter-hegemonic structure cannot back down from painful confrontations, experiences and critical discourses. It must actively provoke temporarily closed and, therefore, hegemonic narratives and discourses. By doing this, it counters the passivity of a hegemonic society.

Fourth, within a counter-hegemonic structure, hierarchy is ultimately rejected [*heterarchica*]. This can become difficult since the prevailing hegemonic system is fundamentally based on hierarchies. In an ideal-typical counter-hegemonic structure, heterarchy is not about the rejection of power but the equal distribution of power and the change of the notion from 'power of' to 'power to'. For reaching horizontal co-existing and managing, decisions

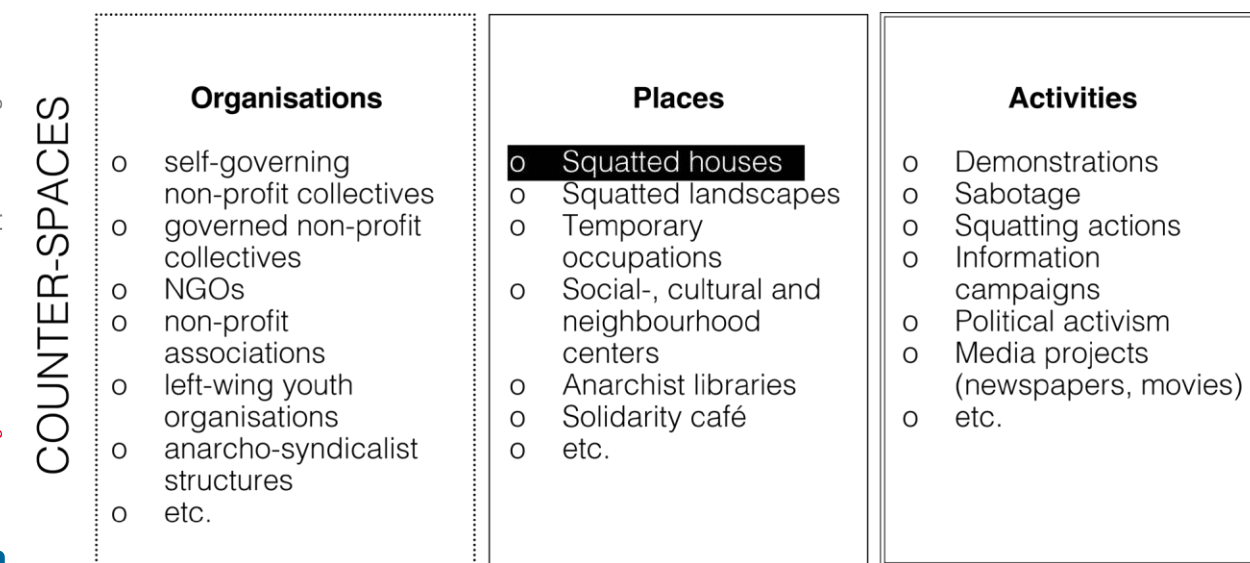


Fig.09 Landscape of counter-spaces

and mandates that carry a concentration of responsibilities and power are always imperative, meaning that they are always bound to tasks and can be changed all the time.

Fifth, all participants in a counter-hegemonic structure are always critical of their own values and those of the collective [*critical*]. Especially in the beginning, the norms, values and patterns of behaviour internalised in a hegemonic system are fundamentally questioned. When new norms emerge, people are already critical in the process of emergence. All individuals are willing to adapt themselves and the collective constantly.

Sixth, counter-hegemony aims to profoundly counter the dominant world narrative and construct a fundamentally new one [*holistic*]. This means there is a general disagreement with capitalist production, and people are expanding this discontent to all life domains. There is no satisfaction with minor changes but a wish for a fundamental reorganisation.

Outlook Part II

Counter-hegemonic movements need spaces to emerge and unfold. These are counter-spaces as more than physical entities, opposing the capitalist system in some way or another. Another term Alexander Vasudevan (2015) uses for alternative spaces that establish anti-systemic structures is *autonomous geographies*. Part II looks at these counter-spaces or autonomous geographies using the example of urban squatting as a concept for the re-appropriation of space and the simultaneous establishment of new models of society. Urban Squatting can be seen as one concept forming the landscape of counter-spaces together with many others. In the following, I will emphasise urban squatting's means for a counter-hegemonic movement. The hypothesis is that squats, due to their property-less and institution-independent po-

sition, are the counter-spaces with the greatest counter-hegemonic potential and are thus essential for long-term social change.

External	It [the counter-hegemonic structure] is positioned outside the system. Any form of cooperation with profit orientated or public actors are refused.
Continuous	It is not determined. In that sense there is no aspiration for the fixation of meaning and for reaching consensus. The journey is the destination.
Insurgent	It is not afraid of painful confrontations, on the contrary, it encourages controversy, conflict and radicalism. This makes it overcome passivity.
Heterarchic	It rejects any form of hierarchy. All positions and mandates related to the accumulation of power are imperative.
Critical	Individual and collective values and norms are constantly questioned and adapted if necessary.
Holistic	It aims to change the prevailing world narrative and to generate a profoundly different one.



Fig.10 First six parameters of counter-hegemony

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Urban squats as counter-spaces

Fig.11 AfterSquat Rue Rivoli, Paris
© Anne Kalthöner [photographer]

LEADER





CONCEPTS WHERE TO LOOK

03 PART II

Urban squats as counter-spaces

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Squatting as an urban movement
- 3.2 International mobilisation
- 3.3 Collective autonomy & social anarchism
- 3.4 Principles of squatting
 - 3.4.1 Between creation and resistance
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 - 3.5.1 Squatting and gentrification
 - 3.5.2 Institutionalisation and anti-squatting
 - 3.5.3 From squatting to commons
- 3.6 Conclusion Part II

3.0 Introduction

Deriving from hegemony and discourse theory and their relation to neoliberalism and the production of social space, I argue that urban squatting holds a high potential for counter-hegemonic structures to establish, transforming discourses and stimulating social change. Urban squats are seen hereby as one of many counter-spaces that aim to change the world to a more equitable place towards people and the environment. In various proportions, squats create a space for individual parents, young people from shattered families, homeless people, students, artists, the unemployed, undocumented workers, contract workers, welfare recipients, pensioners, social workers, ex-prisoners or people from psychiatric institutions (Dawance, 2008). Simply, all people for whom the internalisation of the hegemonic system does not run so smoothly. Squatting is, however, a broad term ranging from university occupations to climate camps to squatted houses. It is, therefore, rarely sufficient to speak of squatting as a self-contained action. In Part II, I approach the practice of squatting, particularly as a social movement in all its dimensions. Starting from the origins of the movement and its spread in the international context until today, I further focus on principles of squatting, political attitudes, as well as similarities and differences between the different forms of squatting. A question that will bring me back to theory at this point is the question of power and its concentration, which is a recurring concern in all forms of squatting. Finally, I will embed squatting in a larger political and social context, whereby it inevitably also faces risks such as anti-squatting, gentrification, and institutionalisation. I will conclude Part II by distinguishing urban squatting from ur-

ban commons, which allows me to extract the distinctiveness of urban squatting as I foreground it in this paper. Even though squatting is a broad term, this work focuses on squats in its definition as urban spaces that have been appropriated by a group of people without the owner's permission and have become open, self-managed occupations over time. To include the specific elements of these kinds of squats, I will expand the parameters of counter-hegemony at the end of Part II.

3.1 Squatting as an urban movement

Squatting as a form of resistance against grievances in the real estate market and the unjust distribution of spatial resources has a long tradition in Europe and elsewhere. In its definition as the simple occupation of a physical area without the owner's consent (Pruijt, 2013, p. 1), squatting dates back to the early centuries (Ward, 1980). In the 16th century, for instance, a widespread law in Europe allowed people to occupy land for living when appropriated between sunset and sunrise (Ward, 1980, p. 105). By lighting a fire and erecting a dwelling, occupiers could not be evicted regarding the law (ibid.). Still, when talking about squatting, most people refer to the squatting movement, which evolved in the 20th century. There is no clear evidence of the occupation of houses as part of a broader social movement before that. This could simply be because there is no earlier proof of the intentional vacancy of property owned by public authorities or private investors (Ward, 1980, p. 109). Friend (1980, p. 110) marks the beginning of squatting in the years following the second world war. In his article on 'post-war squatters', he describes the rapid growth of a squatting

movement in the UK between 1945 and 1947. Also, Don Watson (2017) published a book where he reviews this part of the UK's history, which has so far received very little scholarly attention (Reeve, 2017). The first wave started in May 1945 in Scotland and was rapidly spreading along the coast, only to then, after a bit of oppression, come back in 1946 through a massive takeover of service camps. In August 1946, tens of thousands of homeless or inadequate housed people took over empty military camps (Webber, 2012). This series continued over the following weeks, reaching its greatest fame on September 8 when 1.500 people squatted flats in relatively rich areas of London (ibid.). This day became known as the 'Great Sunday Squat' (Vasudevan, 2017, p. 45). In the autumn of 1946 estimated 45.000 people were squatting at 1.000 sites in the UK (Friend, 1980). However, by the end of the year, the communist party got the occupation movement under control, and as quickly as the movement appeared, it vanished again. A considerable part of the squatters stayed in the occupied buildings in the following years, partly with tolerations or semi-legitimate status (Reeve, 2017), but the movement disappeared without a blink. It was a 'sudden affair' (Friend, 1980, p. 119) compared to the larger international squatting movement that originated approximately two decades later. Nevertheless, it probably took this failure to spark the movement of the 1960s in the first place (ibid.).

Squatting as a social movement, as it is discussed in this thesis, has developed only over the last five to six decades (López, 2012, original: 'four to five'). It shaped and evolved itself in various ways with different backgrounds and goals, with local and national differences so significant that it is difficult to speak of squatting as a self-contained action, but with some common principles united in the social movement. When talking about a movement,

I will discuss squatting like López (2012) as more than the sum of single actions.

Squatting manifested in its resurrection in the 1970s, mainly in cities, where density forced people to live under unbearable conditions. Since it, therefore, became a primarily urban phenomenon, scholars talk in this context about urban squatting (Brueckner & Selod, 2009; Pruijt, 2013; Vasudevan, 2015). Just as Amanda Huron (2015) emphasises in her article 'Working with Strangers in Saturated Space: Reclaiming and Maintaining the Urban Commons', also urban squatting, which is likewise characterised by density and anonymity, is facing specific challenges. Therefore, similar observations as for urban commons in saturated spaces can apply. Huron (2015) mentions specific challenges like first, the density in cities, which forces people to either share or compete for resources and second, anonymity, leading to strangers sharing the space. She names the challenges as 'saturated space' and 'encountering of strangers'. These are two of the many challenges urban squats face, which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 3.5.

However, according to Pruijt (2007, p. 5115), social movements, like squatting in this case, where citizens aim to take control over any kind of urban space, can also be described as urban movements. Many scholars, like López or Pruijt, write about a 'new urban movement' which is marked by the attempt to achieve collective self-determination (Vasudevan, 2015, p. 324).

» Cities for people, not for profit!«

Mikkelsen & Karpentschoff (2001) distinguish the recent squatting history between the first

wave of squats which evolved between the late 60s and early 70s in developing countries and western urban districts, and the second wave, which was raised in Amsterdam at the beginning of the 1980s and spread out all over Europe in the following years. Even though squatting has something thoroughly local in its definition as appropriating a physical space embedded in a rather specific local context and despite its independent evolving in different countries, the underlying movement increasingly picks up supralocal and transnational strategies. In the 1980s, the squatting movement started detaching itself from its hyperlocal protest milieu and formed itself into an international movement (López, 2012). While housing shortages were the main motivator for squatting at first, it has become a much more holistic attempt to live an alternative life diametrically opposed to capitalism, which is why it is becoming interesting for thoughts on *counter-hegemony*. Dikovic (2019) says that the main characteristic of the squatting movement, besides illegality, the subcultural character, the political view, and lifestyle, is organisational strength. This is also visible in how well-coordinated the movement is on a transnational level.

The *BZ-Movement*, for example, which is one of the most significant youth movements in Denmark circling the occupation of buildings in downtown Copenhagen (Mikkelsen & Karpentschoff, 2001, p. 609), emerged as a prolongation of neighbourhood countries movements and based on international role models (ibid., p. 613). Not only were the results based on transnational experiences, but also the causes and tensions have a supralocal origin. Deprived housing situations, for example, originate not only in areas where people suffer extreme homelessness; they result from global real estate speculation. Most often, negative impacts do not manifest in the places of cause. It is even the contrary. Due to relocation pro-

cesses, the negative consequences are often felt most strongly in structurally weak countries. This again legitimises a growing global squatting community whose common political goal must be pursued across borders.

Ultimately, it is about finding a way to overcome the '*local-good, global-bad dichotomy*' (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006, p. 736) by acknowledging that change firstly has to happen on multiple spatial scales and, secondly, that these scales do not work independently. Squatting a local building can bring greater awareness to the global property speculation issue (ibid.), and global information campaigns can empower and give the tools to local citizens to take action. The locality is not necessarily the solution if global development leads in the wrong direction. Internationalisation becomes more and more a foundational part of the squatting network, which is crucial and beneficial for driving the movement ahead.

3.2 International mobilisation

Connectivity, as the principle of interconnection based on digital infrastructures and as one of the main trends of the 21st century, has also enabled the squatting movement to share experiences, pursue goals and communicate beyond physical borders. The possibility of reaching bigger goals and developing visions of society outside capitalism aroused through social media, platforms, international meetings and action days.

In 1997, for example, the website *squat.net* was founded, on which news of local squatting scenes have been disseminated worldwide ever since (López, 2012, p. 4). This and similar platforms, where news can be spread, groups formed, and events entered, primarily serve

to make forms of resistance visible, which are often deliberately kept low in the public press. *CrimethInc* is a relatively famous example of a platform spreading literature, blogs and news of the radical left movement that would usually be hidden. They describe themselves as an '*alliance of rebels*' who try to '*escape from the prisons of our time*'. A recent example of the Germanophone area is the website and underlying collective *anarchismus.de*. It aims to connect Germany, Austria and Switzerland's autonomous and radical left scenes. The members of the collective promote each other and share information, for example, where events take place or how to support structures that are in urgent need.

» *Worldwide, more than one billion people occupy vacant houses and properties.* «

Dawance, 2008

With the possibility of global communication, also activist networks and conferences spread across national borders. The *European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City*, which is a link between movements from many cities in Europe, hosts an international *Housing Action Day* each year. In every city, activist actions take place on the same day. At the *Intersquat festival*, which took place in Berlin in 2010, activists from all over Europe met to discuss issues such as gentrification and the privatisation of public space. In a similar period, there was the *No-Border Camp* in Brussels, which was also an international summit on similar issues, focusing on opening national borders and freedom of movement (NoBorder Berlin & International legal

team, 2010). There are many more examples of international conferences, such as the first *London Intersquat, the international squatter's convergence in Dublin or the European squat meeting in Barcelona*. In Brussels – I will talk more about this in Part III – each year in autumn, there is an *Inter-occupation* festival called *coucoupouissant*. Over one month, various squats and occupations open their doors, on the one hand, to inspire new people with their ideas and, on the other hand, to network and exchange knowledge within the existing structure. Especially the latter is essential for self-managed, autonomous collectives. Mutual aid, knowledge production and collective learning are within the highest principles of *autogestion*. Within *coucoupouissant*, there are lectures, exhibitions and workshops on socio-political topics such as sexism, feminism, racism, classism, etc., but also craft courses or instructions on, for example, how to pick a lock.

Compared to the local squatter's movement of the 20th century, nowadays, activism happens more and more in digital space. Information technology and social media are essential to establish a global movement. Especially in the last 15 years – marked by the founding of Facebook – not only regular telecommunication but precisely social media started to significantly contribute to spreading ideas and concepts of alternative, system-critical cohabitation. With social media, individuals reach out internationally, creating nodes of the squatting movement. Therefore, they manage to unite and decentralise at the same time. Paul Mason (2015) even came up with the theory that precisely the decentralisation and connectivity through information technology will, in the end, lead to a post-capitalist society. However, the movement happens in digital and physical spheres today, and both can benefit each other reciprocally. I will continue to focus on the physical one.

3.3 Collective autonomy and social anarchism

Squatting is, by its principle of being as far as possible independent of the governing system, often associated with the autonomous movement. Pickerill and Chatterton (2006, p. 730), as well as Alexander Vasudevan (2015), describe squats functioning as testbeds for alternative, collective and anti-capitalist co-habitation as '*autonomous geographies*'. Although many autonomous structures share a common narrative, their implementation often varies strongly. There are so many ways to approach a political goal that I will not focus on this here. Instead, I want to highlight that there is also one fundamental differentiation regarding autonomy, which guides someone's ideology. For simplicity's sake, I will picture the differences as relatively binary here. We can remember that social reality is never entirely either or. However, it is important to be precise with terms to properly intersect squatting and counter-hegemony later.

Autonomous movements, as squatting is mainly categorised, are often, not always associated with radical left-wing ideas, more precisely with anarchism. Anarchy stands for a domination-free society and shares ideologically with communism and socialism the idea of a classless and egalitarian system. However, anarchism goes beyond this and strives for a society that is also free of needless institutional superstructures (Diefenbacher, 1996, p. 10). Anarchism is a historically heavily shaped and, in everyday understanding, strongly disputed or often negatively coined term. While it is commonly associated with chaos and disorder, representatives of this movement contrarily describe it as the '*highest form of order*' (Proudhon, 1840). The idea is that only the abolition of authority and oppression can lead

to the most natural form of order. This interpretation goes back to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who, at the beginning of the 19th century, positively reinterpreted the term anarchism by giving it a revolutionary political position, namely the order without power.

»*L'anarchie, c'est l'ordre sans le pouvoir.*«

Proudhon, 1840 [translation: Anarchy is order without power]

Nowadays, autonomous movements, which are put together with anarchism, are nevertheless often accused of aiming for chaos and disorder while supporting senseless violence and organised crime. Anarchists are described as individualistic, violent and irrational. The striving for personal freedom and the supposedly desired chaos is often the centre of critique from more conservative quarters. This roots back to times of social repression when individualist anarchists dominated left-wing activity. Through acts of terrorism and crime, anarchists became the reputation as a '*violently sinister conspiracy*' (Bookchin, 1995, p. 8). Many individualist anarchists consider society's failures in civilisation rather than capital and hierarchy and find the solution in rejecting technological achievements and progress (ibid, p. 2). In his work '*Social or lifestyle anarchism*', Bookchin describes in detail how the terms *freedom* and *autonomy* are interpreted differently within the scope of anarchism. Depending on the aims of particular sub-groups, the striving for one of the two terms divides the anarchist ideology. Individualist anarchism, which, in its bourgeois manifestation, he also calls '*lifestyle anarchism*', is characterised by a desire for individual freedom and a complete detachment from society

and collectivism. In this context, people are sympathising with the theories of early economists such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill on the freedom of the market, building on Margret Thatcher's denial of the existence of society and rejecting the theory of social constructivism (Bookchin, 1995, p. 9). Within this perspective, we also speak of the notion of *anarcho-capitalism*. This conception of progression stands diametrically opposed to the aspirations of the squatting movement as described in this thesis. *Anarcho-individualism* is juxtaposed with *anarcho-communism* or *social anarchism*. Bookchin (1995, p. 4) writes in this regard: »*for many centuries, anarchism developed in the tension between two basically contradictory tendencies: a personalistic commitment to individual autonomy and a collectivist commitment to social freedom*«. In this context, when speaking of anarchism, I specifically talk about the stream of social- or collaborative anarchism.

A similar definition problem occurs with the term autonomy. It can be traced back to early anarchists such as Kropotkin or Proudhon in its notion of collectivism and mutual aid; however, on the other hand, in its terminology, it is also claimed by nationalist groups (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006, p. 733). Castells (1983, p. 322, cited in Lopez, 2012, p. 5) defines autonomy as a clear demarcation of activists from the political and economic institutions, giving no information on individuality or collectivity. Still, over time, the term autonomy has been predominantly claimed as a description of the status of a self-sovereign-individual. Therefore, scholars like Bookchin (1995) or Vasudevan (2015), as well as earlier philosophers like Peter Kropotkin or Michail Bakunin, lean towards more precise descriptions as collective autonomy or social freedom. Collective autonomy, for instance, distinguishes itself from the individualistic one by not trying to maximise one's freedom of choice but by enabling

the freedom of a group or a collective and by guaranteeing an egalitarian participation in this collective (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006, p. 734)

With this collectivist mindset, striving for an egalitarian society and living on shared resources and mutual aid, people in the squatting movement tend to reject nationalism and local patriotism. The place of occupation represents a site of '*collective world making*' (Vasudevan, 2015, p. 318). The dialectic between the two streams of autonomy and anarchism also defines the understanding of globalisation. In a social anarchist view, a form of globalisation that works apart from the neoliberal idea of a global economy is advocated. The term alter-globalization describes a worldview based on anti-capitalism and social justice while advocating transnationality and global solidarity (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006, p. 731). Whereas anarcho-individualists systematically reject globalisation, social anarchists reject only capitalist globalisation. Hence, when talking about autonomous structures and the anarchist ideology, it is essential to be aware of its meaning beyond the independence from the state and the market. [see fig. 12]

individualist anarchism	social anarchism
autonomy	collective autonomy
individual freedom	group-freedom
anarcho-capitalism	anarcho communism
anti-globalisation	alter-globalisation

Fig. 12 Two streams of anarchism

3.4 Principles of squatting

Squatting is inherently political (Wates, 1976, p. 160), but it is not always equally activist and insurgent. A joint aspiration is to find escape routes from the capitalist system (Gibson-Graham, 1996) and to live as independently as possible from the state and the market (Pruijt, 2013, p. 9). In general, disobedience from institutional and political actors, private investors, state bureaucracies, and many other system-related entities (Castells, 1983 cited in López, 2012), autonomous movements where

» The squat represented, in this context, a place of collective world-making – a place to imagine alternative worlds, to express anger and solidarity, to explore new identities and different intimacies, to experience and share new feelings, and to defy authority and live autonomously. «

squatting is part of subsume. In this attempt, every squatting movement has a political interface and – albeit subconsciously – a political goal. López (2012) describes squatting as a 'left-liberarian' movement because it criticises real estate speculation, housing inequities, and the capitalist's production in urban space and demands a legitimisation of radical democratisation (López, 2012, p. 5, 16). Dawance (2008, p. 32) also describes the squat as a convergence of different social universes, ranging from the poorest [e.g. homeless] to political or artistic activists closer to the middle class. He refers to the latter as *» militants certes en état de précarité, mais dont le 'capital culturel' les protège de la chute«* [activists who are certainly in a precarious state, but whose 'cultural capital' protects them from falling.] These two groups, which have very different backgrounds but share a common interest in reclaiming the city, are also described by Peter Marcuse (2010) in his article 'From critical urban theory to the right to the city'. He distinguishes between social classes in terms of material interest and terms of culture. In the first distinction, he assigns the demand for the right to the city to a group he describes as deprived. This group is composed of working-class people who are materially exploited and excluded, who operate at society's margins. In the second distinction, he sees an aspiration for the right to the city from a group he describes as alienated. Members of this group can come from different economic backgrounds but are mostly 'youth, artists, intelligentsia and activists'. In squats, it happens that these two groups are thrown together. Peter Marcuse (2010, p. 192) writes: *» The battle thus becomes ever more a battle of ideology, understanding, grounded in material oppression but not limited to it, combining the demands of the oppressed with the aspirations of the alienated. «*

3.4.1 Between creation and resistance

The occupation of houses generally offers a promising foundation for activists who fight oppression in the political regime and associate themselves with revolutionary approaches (Pruijt, 2013, p. 20). Each social movement eventually needs physical places to plan, prepare and carry out common actions. The squatted houses provide a crucial public resource for holding meetings, organising and executing events, and pushing information campaigns, giving activists from different backgrounds space for their social movements to unfold (ibid, p. 12ff). Lopez, for that reason, argues that squats are places that can *turn dwellers into activists* and push activists to be more active and radical.

Despite some aspirations for activism, according to the squatters' notions, the squatted house should be left undisturbed, if only because of its illegal nature. By having self-governance and an autonomous existence from institutional politics often as the ultimate goal, squats aim to create small, independent entities. Still, they are constantly confronted with governing political conflict along the way. The struggle for empowerment can never be detached from the political discourse. This means that particularly urban squats can indeed come close to autonomy and independence. However, they can never fully function independently merely because of shared urban infrastructure and limited possibilities for resource self-sufficiency. This remaining and ever-prevalent dependency on the institutional framework also means that squats cannot keep themselves out of the political context in which they are embedded.

However, depending on the initial circum-

» Nonetheless, I contend that squatted houses just for living were also basic resources for many activists or turned dwellers into activists, thus establishing political networks able to assemble the different configurations of squatting. «

López, 2012, p. 3

stances, the activists' background and the development of the movement, concrete reasons for the formation of a squatting collective and, thus, the political orientation of its implementation can differ. While in some cases, such as in Pruijt's (2013) configuration named '*deprivation-based squatting*', space as a means to have a roof over one's head is the primary goal, others are more interested in far-reaching political upheavals and social transformations. In the general conception of squatting, however, these two targets cannot be considered separately. Pickerill and Chatterton (2006, p. 738) refer to autonomy as the omnipresence of protest and political activism but, simultaneously, the attempt to build an alternative life beyond the capitalist production mode. The latter evolves from more ground-

housing situations. Even if it is to escape a toxic family- or relationship environment, it often appears to be a free choice while resulting from hidden constraints. However, the aim of creating an existence which is more than living in a house without rent is still persistent. The desire for an alternative life (Pruijt, 2013, p. 9) and an anti-capitalist production mode means that the collective experience usually exceeds the temporary sharing of space. Resources and services are often shared, and there is a demand for joint activities. Because of this aspect, *squatting as an alternative housing strategy* is often realised by ideologically driven individuals who chose this lifestyle out of a political and societal mindset.

Squatting does not necessarily have to be undertaken for housing purposes. On the contrary, there is a growing number of examples where squatting is conducted for non-residential uses. Pruijt (2013) describes squatting to develop social centres or free spaces as *entrepreneurial squatting*. He lists some examples of uses that would fall into this category, like artists' workspaces, storage rooms, theatres and cinemas, tool lending services, bookshops, bike repair shops, workshops for skill-sharing, daycare centres etc. They all share the idea of self-organisation and non-profit orientation based on common values, which I will discuss in more detail in the following pages. They are often collectively described as neighbourhood or social centres, and with different institutional frameworks and frequencies, they exist in most European cities. An example is the *L200 building in Zurich*, a self-managed community centre used as a shop, event location and co-working space (Antoniadis et al., 2020, p. 25) or the neighbourly organised *Navarinou-Park* in the quartier Exarchia in Athen (Spyropoulou, 2020, p. 29). *Entrepreneurial squats* are generally most likely to give up their self-managed status in favour of legalisation or institutionalisation.

More on this in chapter 3.5, '*risks and limitations*'.

The fourth category, which Pruijt (2013) describes as *conservational squatting*, is on the scale already very close to resistance and visibility. He describes it as squatting to »*prevent a transformation, in many cases a planned transformation, and to promote a development in a different direction.*« (Pruijt, 2013, p. 16). A particularly accurate example of conservational squatting are the ZADs [zone à défendre], which describe a politically motivated, usually radically ecological form of squatting that usually opposes an environmentally harmful planning project (Legrand, 2014). The term is a neologism used only in French-speaking countries, i.e. mainly in France, Belgium and Switzerland, mostly in militant circles to describe such conservational squats. Generally, this kind of outdoor occupation is gaining more and more importance in the course of climate activism. So-called climate camps originated in the early 2000s with the protest against the expansion of Heathrow Airport in London, and by now, one-time or annual climate camps have been held in numerous countries. They became particularly popular when 2020 *Fridays for Future* introduced it as part of their protest actions. Only recently [early 2023] has an occupation action, which falls under the category of *conservational squatting* against the eviction of Lützerath in Germany, made it into the international media.

Lastly, *political squatting*, as I have already indicated before, aims to fight actively against a certain political grievance by drawing as much attention as possible to the process of occupation. This category includes most individuals who have the greatest demand for political autonomy and social change (Pruijt, 2013, p. 19). Squatting serves thereby as a means to build up a counter-power towards the state (ibid.). This kind of squatting may lead

to violent confrontations with the executives and thus to a quasi-trial of strength with the political institutions. There was a wave of political squatting in Germany in the early 1970s in reaction to the rising speculations with buildings and land. As Pruijt (2013) makes clear in his configuration description, I would also like to emphasise here that a separate category of *political squatting* does not mean that other forms are not or less political.

The examples shown here are several, but certainly not all, reasons for squatting vacant houses or areas temporarily or permanently. Although the motivation, duration, goals, visibility and number of actors vary enormously, it is not without reason that squatting is called a movement. As differentiated as it is, the scene still has a common anti-capitalist basis, which I will investigate further now.

3.4.2 Shared ideologies

Despite their visibility and aim for creation or resistance, there are some principles that go hand in hand with the squatting scene. These include, in most cases, women empowerment, critique of capitalism, collective learning, sharing of goods, horizontality, and many more. In their political and societal existence, squatters do not rediscover the wheel. They draw on past and present social movements, unite with them or adapt them depending on their local context. Examples of former movements associated with the squatting movement in the broadest sense are *hippies, punks, anarchists or environmentalists* (López, 2012, p. 10). Recent movements that have emerged in this context are sub-cultural movements like queer-, trans- and black feminism, speciesism [animal rights], hacktivism etc. (ibid.). Squats provide spaces where activists with different origins can meet. In this occupational co-ex-

istence, they follow principles of »*horizontal and direct democracy, self-management, non-bureaucratic regulations or state control*« (Lopez, 2012, p. 14). This is executed by sharing instead of owning, giving instead of selling or learning instead of outsourcing.

Certain ideologies can be carried out through a basic circle of action, which can be initiated by living in a squat. Earlier, I talked about rising housing costs and increasing housing overburden rates. When, through squatting, these expenses are reduced or even eliminated, the person who squats will need a lot less income and can respectively reduce working hours. This creates a lot of extra time and gains resources, which can be used for various things, including money-saving measurements. It enables citizens to become more independent of the state and the market. Repairing and recycling goods, growing food or exchanging services with others saves money and strengthens one's skills. Rather than having a specialist for each task, providing services in return for payment, the general approach is to promote self-empowerment by exchanging

» Squatting is, above all, direct action aimed to satisfy a collective need through social disobedience against the oppressive protection of property rights. «

López, 2002

ing knowledge and experience. Moan (1980) also writes in this context, »*Because we spend less time at jobs, we can spend more time taking care of our own needs, which in turn saves a great deal of money*«. According to this logic, many squatters manage to survive financially despite the absence of traditional wage employment and simultaneously carry out activities for their self-fulfilment. Political opponents often express the fear that gained leisure time will only be converted into a lazy or hedonistic lifestyle. However, it turns out that a large number of people who have consciously chosen unemployment find very fulfilling and socially valuable ways to organise their day-to-day lives. Often these people use the extra time they have gained to help others, educate themselves, or do voluntary work. However, rejecting wage labour for a long time is impossible in the individualistic way of life propagated by neoliberalism. The more society becomes particularised and the more we get indoctrinated by a hegemonic economy to put our own interests above everything else and to see our survival in the free market as the ultimate goal, the more dependent we become on this same system. Only through collective learning and mutual aid¹ can individuals break free from the capitalist wage labour system and pursue a daily life that is less monotonous and more varied and diverse. The specialists brought about by neoliberalism can then be turned back into generalists.

This principle of learning to learn and self-em-

¹ *Mutual aid* as a term was gaining popularity with the well-known anarchist and naturalist Peter Kropotkin (Russian: Pjotr Alexejewitsch Kropotkin) through his work '*Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*' (1902). In this work, he discusses the evolutionary advantages of mutual aid and thus introduces a counterpart to the Darwinian theory of the *survival of the fittest*. Today, however, mutual aid is primarily known as an ethical principle of conduct that describes solidary behaviour among people.

ployment can be described with the following simplified example:

The capitalist system is built on the premise that production and services are carried out as efficiently as possible, and efficiency comes with increasing specialisation. Someone who, for example, irons clothes for many people every day [person A] will end up much faster and more efficiently than someone who irons their clothes only once a week [person B]. However, person B, who irons to satisfy their own needs, respectively to get their own clothes properly, will certainly get more pleasure and fulfilment out of it than person A, who does it 40 hours per week in exchange for essential wages. Because person A spends a large part of their time on this activity, there is no time to take care of, for example, the faulty boiler and help is needed from an electrician who has, just like person A, specialised in fixing boilers. Now person A has to work even more to get the electrician paid. Person C lives in a collective and spends one day a week ironing for the community. Because other people take care of the remaining domestic activities, he/she can devote the rest of their time to things that interest them and, for example, learn how to fix a faulty boiler.

This example explains the idea of shifting away from efficiency in favour of variety, freedom and multiple skills. It is about putting self-empowerment above the capitalist division of labour. In squatting collectives, these principles are applied. With the time gained, there is also a greater capacity to take care of and aid people in vulnerable positions. Pruijt (2013) also emphasises that squatting as an alternative housing strategy provides an open and safe space for the most deprived and vulnerable groups. In this climate, skills are easily and joyously passed along (Moan, 1980, p. 181). At the same time, prevailing patterns of cohabitation, such as the performance of

» Rather than pursue careers and create patriarchal families participants in autonomous movements live in groups to negate the isolation of individuals imposed by consumerism. They seek to decolonize everyday life. «

Katsiaficas, 2006, p. 14

domestic tasks primarily by women or decision-making by assertive men, are constantly questioned (Lopez, 2012, p. 15). Regarding tackling these challenges, Katsiaficas (2006) discusses the '*decolonisation of everyday life*'.

This brings me to the role of women and the potential benefit of female emancipation in squats. In the prevailing patriarchal system, women are experiencing even less freedom than men, which is why squatting, as a method to gain freedom, for women often becomes a very intensive possibility of empowerment (Moan, 1980, p. 183). In this possibility, they are equally challenged to overcome their socialised habits and break out of oppressive patterns. Out of the refused notion of efficiency, women no longer have to do the jobs they were raised to do. They can become engineers, doctors or physicists; they can be loud,

stubborn and strong. If women are not as equipped to do something due to, for example, their body strength, they seek help from other women. Lugging heavy boxes does not always have to be done by the two most muscular men. Four women can do it instead. This is again a matter of shifting away from efficiency in support of equality and variety.

Tackling gender relations becomes more complicated when it comes to complex tasks like managing and decision-making. Since the prevalent approach in squatting circles is to allow people to live together as free of hierarchy as possible, internal hierarchies must also be constantly questioned. Patriarchal dominance is often challenging to overcome, even in progressive feminist circles. Through basic democratic decision-making and non-violent communication, people try to break down normative group dynamics and prevailing role models. In September 2011, the *Occupy movement*² also introduced '*occupy movement hand signals*' to facilitate inclusive decision-making. These approaches hope to challenge internalised power structures and patterns of domination. Pat Moan (1980) writes, »*For me too, squatting has been about women, about power, about independence and breaking a deadening pattern of passivity.*«

There is one last principle that I would like to point out because it is very deeply rooted in the idea of squatting. It regards the sharing of goods and resources. In examining the concept of sharing, which in the meantime has also been taken up numerous times in the hegemonic capitalist system, one cannot get past a brief discussion on ownership. For me, the first and seemingly most trivial question is

² The *Occupy Movement* was an international movement between 2011 and 2012, initiated by a significant protest under the name '*occupy wall street*', where thousands of people protested against economic inequality and political corruption.

whether shared goods and resources belong to everyone or no one. I would like to say that they belong to no one and that the concept of sharing is in opposition to the concept of owning. However, the reality is somewhat different because shared goods and resources can only belong to no one if absolutely everyone can use them. In this case, they are common goods. In everyday life, however, shared resources rarely belong to the general public but mostly to a closed group which, because the resources were also acquired by them, claims ownership. Thus, in this case, property is not abolished but merely extended. Even common goods are, in the vast majority of cases, at least owned by the state. In the neoliberal understanding of sharing, the concept moves even further away from the original idea of non-property. For instance, in shared mobility, where a central provider rents out means of transport for a short period of time in exchange for a payment, the question of ownership is left virtually untouched. This is also why a shared economy, although it leads to environmental savings and possibly brings social or economic benefits, does not solve the ownership problem at all. Nevertheless, civil sharing, i.e. sharing goods and resources in the neighbourhood, in a housing project or a squat, can have a sensitising effect. Moving away from individual property in favour of communal property is a first step towards rejecting property as a whole.

In squatting, sharing starts with the principle. It is rarely just one person who appropriates a vacant space. Usually, a group or a collective occupies and shares the empty site. The fact that an urban squat, compared to an urban common, for example [I will discuss the difference in more detail in chapter 3.5.3], does not belong to any of the people living or creating there builds a more neutral basis. Goods and resources are often acquired second-hand with little or no financial outlay.

They are, therefore, likewise ownerless, just as the space itself is. Squats are, in addition, the places where we can most likely change the ownership narrative.

By my experience and research, I would subsume the ideology of the activist squatting scene by six predominant principles:

- o Escaping capitalism by refusing extensive wage labour
- o Generalism instead of specialism
- o Decolonisation of everyday life
- o Fostering gender equality in its broadest sense
- o Anti-hierarchical decision making
- o Refusal of individual ownership and property in favour of collective goods

3.4.3 Co-living in a squat: dealing with power

Before I approach the risks and limitations of urban squatting, I would like to take a step back and begin to integrate the concept of urban squats with the previously explained hegemony and discourse theory. To understand the distribution and negotiation of power and knowledge in self-managed spaces like urban squats, it is helpful to have these theories in mind. To recap: hegemony theory explains how a dominant system, including its values and norms, is generalised and internalised to such an extent that even subaltern classes unquestioningly reproduce and thus legitimise it in their everyday lives. Hegemonic systems remain in place because they have acquired general legitimacy. If we think of discourse theory as a shift from structural hegemony to the hegemony of individual discourses, it quickly becomes apparent that breaking with current discourses and narratives is indeed essential

for combating [*neoliberal*] hegemony. Here, it should again be emphasised that according to Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, the particular realities shaping a discourse are not homogeneous but are characterised by ambivalences and heterogeneities (Glasze & Matissek, 2009, p. 154) and that they are also not self-contained, but transformable and influenced by political realities. The hegemony of a particular discourse describes its temporary closure.

Discourses shape every societal and political reality, from identity attributions by gender, skin colour and religion, to notions of political order such as democracy or communism, to perceptions of achievement, intelligence, property, and work. Every idea of reality is part of a discourse that is either open or temporarily closed, i.e. hegemonic. The overall intention is to break the temporarily closed discourses through counter-hegemonic practices. For example, patriarchy, or male supremacy, can be considered a temporarily closed discourse since it is deeply rooted, omnipresent and perceived as universal. Together with many sub-discourses on feminism, gender identities, role attribution and dominance, it [patriarchy] is questioned and challenged but remains the dominant system. In connection with this discourse, we have internalised patterns of behaviour, norms and values, which in turn to the general idea of male supremacy, are often not questioned. This can be applied to just about every aspect of socialisation, from our notions of exclusion and inclusion, empathy and encroachment, achievement and intelligence. All these pre-dominant ideas lead to the constitution of society and power within society. This also means that the discourse as it is shaped always favours some people over others, giving a specific group more power. Consequently, for a more equitable society, it is crucial to change the discourse. However, here, we end up in a para-

doxical situation because the ones who shape and define discourses are the ones in power with no interest in changing them. Countering and subsequently reinterpreting power plays one, if not the most, central role in fighting the prevailing system.

Power, in the sense of domination, can take place on three levels:

1. institutions over group/individual
2. group over group
3. individual over individual

First, the structural, systemic expression of power, for example, through state bodies such as the police or the judiciary. In a constitutional state, monopolies of power and authority are transferred to them. Giant private sector players, such as Google, Facebook and co., since their power reaches so far that it has systemic effects, are increasingly taking on similar roles as political institutions. Economic enterprises became very strong and legitimate; they have enormous power and benefit from an increasing dependency on them. Secondly, the power of one group over others. Based on structural advantages, this refers to any form of social privilege or dependency. For example, the power of men over women [patriarchy], white people over people of colour [white supremacy], or educated people over non-educated ones. These variations of power and domination have deep historical roots and are very internalised in how we think and act. And thirdly, the power of one person over another, as in parent-child or employer-employee relationships.

Michael Foucault, as already referred to in Part I [chapter 2.1], uses the panopticon as a metaphor to describe social surveillance and the use of power in a society. He thereby describes a form of structural, systemic power. The internalisation of norms, or as he

calls it, the *normalisation*, is seen by him as a way for the ruling class to hold power over society. He argues that power becomes more efficient through the mechanisms of observation and that knowledge is central to the concentration of this power (Foucault, 1977). Oppression is especially possible when a certain group has a lot of knowledge. Nowadays, knowledge is generated very rapidly based on data and information. With the rise of information and communication technologies, knowledge is no longer passed on from generation to generation via personal communication but is created everywhere at any time. The boundaries between knowledge and belief are blurred because everyone can construct their own belief and knowledge reality individually. Meanwhile, knowledge production is based on data, which becomes information. The relationship between data, information and knowledge can be explained as follows: Usefully combined data produces information. When people arrange information in the proper context, knowledge emerges. In any case, data ultimately leads to power. It is, therefore, often referred to as the new currency, the *new capital*. The state and large economic corporations have access to a great deal of data and thus strengthen the power which is already concentrated in them through authority and legitimacy. The latter is of particular relevance for maintaining the power of a person, group or institution. For example, in the legal state, the police are given a monopoly of power and thus a power that is protected by the legitimacy of authority. Hannah Arendt (1970) quotes Max Weber in this context; she says, »Max Weber goes one step further: the specific characteristic of the state is 'the monopoly of legitimate physical violence'«.

In the following, and especially in Part III, I will focus more on power and the struggle for power by one group over another [2] because it is crucial for counter-hegemonic coexistence

in urban squats. By their very nature, Squats oppose structural concentrations of power [1] and try to break them by their simple existence. However, within a squatting collective, it is a matter of changing 'smaller' discourses that lead to power and domination. Also, concerning knowledge and the influence of information property on power structures, squats can be spaces of experimentation. Questions arise, such as: *How do you create uniform access to information? Which data leads to meaningful use of power, and which to abuse of power? Which people benefit most from the availability of power? How do you deal with educational differences within a collective?*

Addressing the issue of power is not only relevant from a counter-hegemonic and discourse-theoretical perspective. Power is also necessary for our daily actions, now and in a desired future. »There can only be power where there is at least a minimum of capacity to act.« (Göhler et al., 2010, p. 695), which conversely also means that power is needed to preserve the capacity to act. The goal can respectively not be to abolish power but rather to eliminate oppressive abuse of power from a structural to a personal level and to find a productive way of dealing with the distribution and temporary concentration of power. For Hannah Arendt (1970, p. 52), power, in principle, is a purpose in itself, just like peace. It is something absolute that needs no justification but legitimacy (ibid). According to Laclau and Mouffe, power is also always a result of political negotiation processes and is thus changeable.

First and foremost, it is relevant how to define power anyway. Broadly speaking, it can be said that exercising power means structuring individuals' options for action (Göhler et al., 2010, p. 694), which is not negative per se. Hannah Arendt (1970, p. 45) gives power the attribute of group property: »Power is never

possessed by an individual; it is possessed by a group and remains in existence only as long as the group holds together.« Pansardi & Bindi (2021) distinguish between three different notions in relation to the use of power. When they talk of 'power over', they refer to the »asymmetrical relation between two or more actors or group of actors« (Pansardi & Bindi, 2021, p. 2). This asymmetry is usually what we associate with the negative connotation of power as something entirely oppressive, dominant and coercive and thus as the ability to control and influence other people and decisions (ibid., p. 11). However, this is contrasted with 'power-to' and 'power-with', the former describing the empowerment to carry out a certain activity, i.e. *being able to*, and the latter describing the ability of a group to act together (ibid). While *power-over* is interpreted as domination, *power-to* and *power-with* have an emancipatory and empowering connotation.

Hannah Arendt (1970) describes this almost dialectical differentiation through power and violence. In her case, the latter refers to the oppressive aspect of power and the »actual patriarchal and illegitimate distribution of power« (Pansardi & Bindi, 2021, p. 3) that every hierarchical system has. For her, power only deserves its name if it also has legitimacy (Arendt, 1970). However, scholars (Pierce & Williams, 2016; Pansardi & Bindi, 2021) disagree about the dialectic of power and violence or *power-over* and *power-to*, because in some interpretations, *power-to* always goes hand in hand with *power-over* and thus, a dichotomy does not seem logical. In her book *on violence* [German: *Macht und Gewalt*] (1970), Hannah Arendt comprehensively analyses which early and contemporary philosophers define violence and power, but also strength, force and authority, how and in what way they relate to each other. She emphasises that historically all these terms were often used synonymously because they have been understood as a

means to rule over others. However, if one stops reducing the political to domination, each of these terms has its specific meaning, says Arendt.

For this paper, I would like to focus on how *power-to* can emerge and persist without being transferred from the situation to the subject, thus creating *power-over*. In other words, according to Hannah Arendt's definition of how power can be extracted from violence and used without coercion. In doing so, however, one again encounters a contradiction. Because as Tiernan & O'Conner (2020) show using the example of women's empowerment, *power-to* can lead to a goal more quickly in the short term and accordingly has an emancipatory character but does not attack the dominant power structures on a long-term basis. They describe that women are likelier to feel empowered when they have the power to carry something out than when they rule over someone else because they are much more likely to achieve their desired outcomes. In doing so, however, they indirectly legitimise and reproduce the existing *power-over* structures (Pansardi & Bindi, 2021, p. 14). Especially for the struggle against patriarchy and internalised power structures, a fourth description of power becomes relevant. '*Power-within*' (Galie & Farnworth, 2019; Whalley & Venzryk, 2020; Rowlands, 1997) describes an individual transformation that subsequently entails confidence in one's own actions and thus empowerment. This form of power is essential to break the foundations of existing structural conditions based on dominance, such as the patriarchal man-woman relationship.

A form of decision-making and process design that opposes the hierarchical exercise of power and thus tries to separate *power-over* from *power-to* is *soft governance* [original German: *weiche Steuerung*]. Göhler et al. (2010) use this term to describe how power can be

»All forms of control involve power, namely the intentional exercise of power. Soft governance is the exercise of power on a horizontal level.«

Göhler et al., 2010, p. 716

exercised horizontally through discursive practices, questions, arguments, and symbols. In this context, horizontality can exist mainly when three characteristics exist. First, governance occurs in spaces without clear *top* and *bottom*. As soon as hierarchies exist between the participants in the discourse, i.e. some participants have a higher legitimacy than others, soft governance can no longer function successfully. Secondly, the relationships between the people participating in the discourse are not permanently fixed but are re-established in each situation and roles are redistributed. One can therefore imagine that there is, for example, a moderator or a time-keeper in a discussion, but they are assigned this role exclusively for the one discussion round. The formation of permanent alliances between discussion participants must be prohibited. It can also help to change the arrangement of the tables or the setting in general. And thirdly, the control actions are not institutionalised, which means there is no institutionally secured sanction potential and fixed procedures to rely on (Göhler et al., 2010, p. 694). The latter also describes why forms of soft governance have, above all, a chance in spaces where institutionalised governance

plays a subordinate role (ibid, p. 716), i.e. in squats. Squats are a safer space for horizontal governance due to their generally aspired autonomy from the market and state. They are also largely non-violent in that they attempt to free themselves from oppressive, institutionalised, and structural violence. This is, above all, necessary because in *»violent spaces, it can be assumed that soft governance cannot prevail«*. (Göhler et al., 2010, p. 716, translated). However, this does not mean squats are internally free of violence or power. Especially the second level of power, that of a group over a group, persists in such settings. On the contrary, a common concern of rejecting and successfully eliminating institutionalised, legitimised power is the increased emergence of subconscious relations of dominance. Special attention must be paid to this within such structures.

Given that neoliberal hegemony and the consequences of social injustice can be countered by breaking with current discourses and that the reinterpretation of discourses can take place, above all, in non-violent, horizontal places operating outside the system, I would like to point out once again the relevance of squats for counter-hegemonic actions. Power and knowledge can be experimented with in squats, and anti-capitalist coexistence can be tried out by sharing goods, resources, and spaces.

3.5 Risks and limitations

However, urban squatting often has long-term unintended side effects. This is because autonomous structures are often characterised by instability and, due to their horizontal character, also carry a certain conflictuality. It is also because, to a certain extent, they always stand in relation with public authorities, which also holds potential for conflict. These conflicts, hence, can be internal and external; they can be obstructive or productive - as described in Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonism in Part I - but in most cases, they entail social and spatial consequences which take place on different levels and affect various social groups. Paradoxically, in many cases, it is precisely the achievement of the overarching goals that leads to an undesirable side effect.

3.5.1 Squatting and gentrification

Urban squats, because of their political orientation, usually have a redistribution of capital and property as their overall goal. In the appropriation of space, they fight for a fairer distribution of space. In order to realise this, capital and resources, which are brought in by structurally stronger members, are also demanded. Thus, for the successful maintenance of an autonomous group, ideologically driven activists who are structurally better off are essential. Frequently they come from an alternative, artistic and often student milieu. A political movement such as squatting mostly unites groups that feel materially threatened [unemployed, homeless, asylum seekers etc.] with those who feel ideologically threatened [socio-economically less deprived groups who are part of an alternative scene] (Franta, 2020, p. 39). Although this is an essential aspect of successful counter-hegemonic

structures, young, privileged, and progressive people are nevertheless often followed by a mainstream that structurally weak people can no longer hold up with. It is because of this mainstream that rising rents often occur where artists and subcultures settle (Spyropoulou, 2020, p. 30).

At the same time, due to their financially limited nature, autonomous structures are also dependent on financial resources from outside. Hosting events or concerts with admission and selling alcoholic beverages is one of the most secure, short-term sources of income. The bigger the event, the larger the number of people from outside, the higher the earnings and the more possibilities for the maintenance and further development of the squat. However, it is precisely this event culture that can lead to a formerly cheap residential area being taken over by a bourgeois middle class within a short time. Left movements that fight against displacement thus indirectly contribute to gentrification. Gentrification describes the structural displacement of financially weak groups from certain physical spaces. Vasudevan (2017) says: *»Gentrification, in some ways, followed squatters [...] They were taking over run-down, dangerous buildings, conferring an edge and social capital, which eventually brought in more capital and investment.«* And Pruijt (2013, p. 19) mentions, *»squatters can be spearheading preservation, which may be a precondition for gentrification.«* Gentrification happens mainly when a neighbourhood is particularly attractive to investors. Indicators for this are low real-estate prices and a growing middle class. Hence, if autonomous structures become active in precarious places, they have to find the fine line that distinguishes between a solidary structure that benefits the people in need and being a driver for gentrification by attracting investors. Vasudevan (2015, p. 326) also says, *»what often began as an insurgent form of self-help [...] in many*

cases, also became a major mechanism in the commodification of urban space as tactics of informal urban living have been appropriated and transformed into new strategies for neo-liberal urban renewal.« The priority with which a collective tries to stop this development and where they position themselves between neighbourhood centre and event venue differs from squat to squat.

Though the extent to which squats actually contribute to gentrification depends on many different factors, must be assessed locally and still needs to be researched more intensely. Andrej Holm and Armin Kuhn (2016), for example, have found that squatting has no significant impact on otherwise prevailing gentrification processes. They may contribute to it, but other processes are much more dominant and decisive, and the impact of squats is thus negligible.

3.5.2 Institutionalisation and anti-squatting

Another ideological question in this context is whether, apart from contributing to gentrification processes, they further legitimise them. This brings a particular divide between the various occupation strategies. For example, if occupations are institutionalised or managed through a central agency in cooperation with public actors, it opens up a field of tension with the entirely autonomous and self-managed squats. When squats take on the character of a temporary occupation in order to occupy an area before the public administration implements a gentrifying project, they legitimise gentrification. This is often the result of close cooperation with political authorities. The occupations supported by public authorities and private actors tend to blur the boundaries and

invisibilise squats and related struggles. For urban institutions and state structures, autonomy and occupation have become governance techniques (Vollmer, 2020, p. 18). Miraftab (2009, p. 35) also mentions in this regard: »By virtue of their illegality, squatter settlements that provide affordable shelter for the majority poor are the state's opportunity for political manipulation in exchange for much needed services.« If former autonomous occupations operate in an institutionalised framework, they do not threaten the political authorities, yet they take on tasks such as civil society engagement and community empowerment and thereby legitimise the withdrawal of the welfare state (Mayer, 2013).

There are two ways in which an occupation can cooperate with public institutions. It can be tolerated as a temporary occupation and either be managed by itself [*auto-géré*] or by an agency [*gestionnaire*]. In the case of the latter, especially when the *gestionnaires* reach a certain size or cooperate too closely with the institutions, there is a danger of legitimising urban projects that lead to gentrification, of being instrumentalised for their purposes and of further losing the counter-hegemonic potential. The other way is that after a certain period, the former occupation becomes entirely institutionalised. This often concerns the configuration of *entrepreneurial squatters* because their necessity for the general public is most easily arguable to authorities. In general, it is rarely the insurrectionary, social and militant elements of squatting that are of interest to urban institutions. Legalising or institutionalising squats comes along with benefits but also with risks. Although it gives former squatters a lot of visibility and legitimacy, legalisation is usually accompanied by renewal and rising costs, which in turn often pushes the most vulnerable and financially poorest out of the few places left for them. (Pruijt, 2013, p. 11). In the case of outright institutionalisation,

the former squats then directly contribute to gentrification. By transforming into a legal and subsidised utilisation, squats also lose their autonomy and radicality (López, 2012, p. 5). Not least because protection to the outside means strengthening the inside. For instance, the continuous confrontation with the police also strengthens the network inwards (Mikkelsen & Karpentschoff, 1981, p. 622) because a sense of shared injustice and common enemy increases the common identity (ibid.). If this outward protection is no longer needed reversely, it weakens the movement.

It is in this context that the term *anti-squatting* emerges. Originally, anti-squatting described the »allocation of renters who pay a low price but lack the conventional rights of renters so that they are forced to leave at any moment, whenever the owner requests«. (Lopez, 2012, p. 9) Anti-squatting as a legislation policy emerged in the Netherlands in the 1990s. It is understood as an agreement with an agency granting permission to temporarily take care of a vacant space (Kadir, 2014, p. 40). In doing so, the occupant renounces the classic tenant rights but has temporary permission to occupy a place free of charge. Kadir (2014, p. 49) describes anti-squatting as one of the greatest threats to the squatting movement in Amsterdam at the end of the 20th century. She says: »anti-squatting undermines squatting [and is a] middle-class lifestyle.« Alexander Vasudevan (2017) sees the new wave of anti-squatting legislation as an attempt to protect the commodification of housing. As the desire for housing alternatives intensifies, it is a capitalist adaptation to it.

The boundaries between squatting and anti-squatting, neighbourhood help and gentrification, endurance and institutionalisation are narrow and do not always run straight. While in some cases, cooperations with governmental institutions are essential and effective, in other

cases, they are diametrically opposed to the initial goals. The approach of institutions and more formal actors to the movement is similarly uncertain. Sometimes the commitment and motivation to support informal structures are well-intentioned and implemented, but the actions of players embedded in the hegemonic system are often driven by capital interests. Ultimately, squats have a »*fraught relationship to the logics of urban renewal and regeneration*« (Vasudevan, 2017, p. 12).

3.5.3 From squatting to commons

Self-organised, collectively governed and utilised spaces that provide opportunities for bottom-up organising as an alternative to state and market are emerging worldwide (Antoniadis et al., 2020, p. 26). In such spaces, alternative culture emerges, creating conditions for grassroots initiatives, participatory practice and political struggles to rise (ibid). I have subsumed such spaces in Part I as counter-spaces. Urban squats are examples of counter-spaces where alternative forms of living together can be tried out. *Commons*, or *urban commons*, are another form which has gained importance in urban development and civic practice in recent years. It is a form of self-organised cohabitation, far less autonomous and radical, yet with a stronger focus on continuity, which receives increased attention in academia and practice. In comparison to the institutionalised and legalised forms of squatting described above, urban commons have a residential character, long-term perspectives and a legal basis. The term commons is used to describe the communal management of goods and resources, including land as a resource. *Urban commons* specifically refer to this practice on city space.

More and more progressive cities across Europe are engaged in the development of urban commons as a basis for *Public Civic Partnerships* (Laimer, 2020, p. 6), i.e. agreements between the public sector and civil society. The aim is a »*cooperation between urban policy and urban society at eye level*« (ibid). Such collaborations with public authorities are deeply anchored in the concept of the urban commons. Elinor Ostroms (1999, p. 117), one of the most important commons researchers, sees as a principle for the recognition of the commons that they are not questioned by any external authority. In order to ensure recognition and thus durability, the organisation behind the commons must be recognised at least once (Ostrom, 1999). For the commons practitioners themselves, the goal is usually to fight for a more just urban policy and remove land or houses from the real estate market to secure affordable housing (Huron, 2015, p. 964). A meanwhile well-known example of the so-called housing commons is the 'syndicate model', which is operated in Austria on behalf of the umbrella organisation *HabitAT* and in Germany by the *Mietshäusersyndikat*. Within the commons, land as a resource is seen as a common good – if in practice only for a certain group – and therefore, they also ideologically oppose the privatisation of land and a general capitalist mode of production. Generally, self-organised initiatives and projects rarely appear without a critique of neoliberal, corporate-led development. Commons have existed for a long time; however, in the past, they always became particularly relevant after major economic and political crises. Commons develop differently in cities than in the countryside and face different challenges. According to Huron (2015), the unique features of urban commons are, on the one hand, the *saturation of the urban* and, on the other hand, the *contact with strangers* in an urban environment. These factors are also essential to understand the complexity of urban squats. In some de-

bates, urban squats are described more as a sub-form of urban commons (Grazioli, 2021). In the following, however, I would like to focus on the substantial differences between the two concepts of self-organised coexistence to ultimately show what makes urban squats unique in the counter-space landscape. These differences I would categorise as follows:

1. Encapsulation
2. Temporality
3. Insurgency

[1] A key difference is the enclosed nature of urban commons and the fundamental openness of urban squats. Clearly, there are urban commons that are somewhat open and squats that are more self-contained, but by definition, squats and commons vary in this respect. Participation in squats is rarely binding, and fluctuations of participants are not unusual. According to Helfrich (2012), an essential requirement to protect a commons is a clear demarcation between users and non-users. So, while this is a condition for urban commons, for squats, since they have no owner, this line cannot be drawn completely. As a result, the

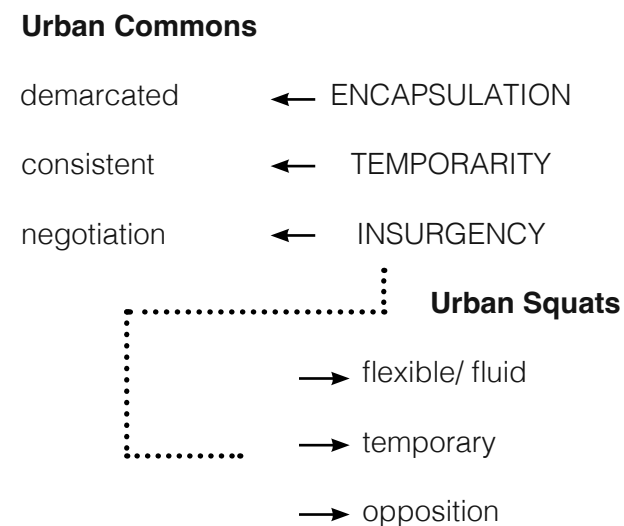


Fig. 14 Difference between urban commons and urban squats

preservation of squats is also more complex than that of commons. It should be mentioned, though, that this is also not a condition of squatting. Commons have a more exclusive character and are more strongly characterised by an *inside* and an *outside* (Ostrom, 1999), which is not least due to their necessary legitimisation by state institutions. This proximity and consequent recognition of public actors also bring another central difference between the two forms of self-governance.

[2] The durability or temporality varies greatly from squat to squat, according to visibility and degree of institutionalisation. Nevertheless, due to their illegal nature, squats do not have a high degree of durability and thus always have a temporary character. Although long-term preservation of a squat is desired in most cases, it can often not be guaranteed because contracts with state authorities are usually undesirable and, above all, the economic acquisition of land is not possible. Urban commons are defined to exist over a long period. They strive for legitimacy from the beginning, protecting them from evictions or other unpleasant confrontations with public actors. The gained legitimacy comes with a loss of autonomy and self-reliance. The commons thereby renounce their potential for resistance. Here is the third significant difference between the concept of urban commons and that of urban squats.

[3] Squats have a more insurgent and rebellious nature than commons. They cooperate little or not at all with public or economic actors. They do not access an institutional set of rules and thus place themselves more in opposition and resistance to the prevailing system. This also makes them particularly interesting for the debate on counter-hegemony in the urban context. Commons have a more adaptive nature. The practice of commoning, carried out by participants in both urban commons and urban squats, is anti-capitalist and

opposes the market and the state in its application. However, when the land is purchased, the practice loses its potential for protest and insurrection. In this sense, it is important to distinguish between urban commons and the practice of commoning. Stavrides (2015, p. 12), for example, says that commoning as a process has to be open to 'newcomers' and has to constantly overstep its own boundaries, and Huron (2015, p. 966) argues reversely that the commons itself are regulated by a closed group of users.

Kratzwald (2012, p. 54) writes that the struggles for commons, i.e. the practice of commoning, are struggles for »*autonomy and human dignity, which are directed against any kind of relations of domination and thus question the ruling system as a whole*«. This practice of commoning, as a social relationship between a group and a common good that opposes a market logic, is applied in squats. In that respect, one can indeed see the practice of squatting as a form of commoning. However, major differences exist between the conceptual configuration of urban commons as self-contained, long-term and more adaptive housing projects and urban squats as open, short-term and insurrectionary occupations.

3.6 Conclusion Part II

Part I of this thesis has examined the idea and concept of counter-hegemony and its application in so-called counter-spaces on a more theoretical level. The six parameters defined at last are an ideal-typical description of counter-hegemony in hegemonic neoliberalism. Even though a complete implementation of counter-hegemony is neither possible nor desirable, it must be promoted in many places and various ways to achieve a more equitable world. Urban squats are physical spaces

that have great potential to experiment with counter-hegemonic practices and to change temporarily closed, respectively, hegemonic discourses. Urban squatting as a movement emerged in the 1970s and has spread worldwide ever since. However, squatting can by no means be spoken of as a self-contained action. The term squatting is solely understood as the appropriation of a physical space without the owner's consent. According to Pruijt (2013), there is deprivation-based squatting, squatting as an alternative housing strategy, entrepreneurial squatting, conservational squatting and political squatting. In reality, not every squat can be clearly assigned to a category, but the internal goals of squatters can be guided by this distinction. The mindset and political purpose are somewhat comparable in most squats. The logic of appropriating space is always accompanied by a certain critique of capitalism and a challenge of the current distribution of space. Because squats, in some cases, offer essential living space for marginalised people while being an experimental space for political activists, two very different social groups meet and work together in the context of squatting.

Compared to other alternative forms of housing and space use, urban squats are characterised by their short-term nature, their anonymity and informality, and their radicality. These are all elements that give squats a counter-hegemonic potential, yet at the same time, create challenging conditions. For instance, strong fluctuations, non-bindingness and uncertainty lead to a lack of responsibility on the part of the participants. It is also particularly challenging to always include newcomers without immersing them in a fixed set of rules (Stavrides, 2015, p. 14).

Although most examples of squatting are not permanent, the logic of occupation has already survived for half a century. In their di-

verse forms, occupations from public to private, visible to invisible and self-managed to externally managed offer a »*landscape of protest and resistance, autonomy and self-determination*« (Vasudevan, 2015, p. 332).

In the following, I will expand the parameters of counter-hegemony defined in Part I with the insights gained from the discussion of the concept of urban squatting. I will recapitulate why urban squats, particularly, have counter-hegemonic potential, how this is characterised and where it reaches its limits. The parameters I discussed at the end of PART I are: 1. external, 2. continuous, 3. insurgent, 4. heterarchical, 5. critical, 6. holistic. In addition, a counter-hegemonic structure should be 7. collective, 8. autarkic, 9. persistent and 10. receptive.

Seventh, in a counter-hegemonic system, the collective is principally above the individual [*collective*]. In the context of a social anarchist and collective autonomy approach, freedom of the collective and equity among individuals are pursued goals. The individual's freedom is subordinated to the freedom of the collective or even society as a whole. This is achieved primarily through the sharing of goods and resources, the common production of knowledge and experience, and collective decision-making.

Eighth, counter-hegemonic spaces and structures claim to break away from dependency relationships in order to form a strong opposition. Accordingly, they strive for economic independence [*autarkic*]. Autarky, in this case, mainly concerns food and energy self-sufficiency. In selected cases, even basic services and other goods that are not essential for survival can be provided by the group itself.

Ninth, in counter-hegemonic structures, there must be an awareness of the constant danger of co-option and instrumentalisation. There-

fore, participants have to be critical towards institutionalisations and anti-squatting measures and remain steadfast in their autonomous role [*persistent*]. In doing so, the people of the collective also actively examine their impact on gentrification and spatial segregation and include these risks in decision-making.

Tenth, a counter-hegemonic collective is never closed to the outside world. It is always open to new people from different social classes as well as different social movements [*receptive*]. The focus is to find a common narrative in the fight against the hegemonic order and to contest the social struggle with united forces. In doing so, the narrative of counter-hegemony primarily unites different groups that want to stand up against prevailing norms. Squats are spaces where people unite and mobilise.

Outlook Part III and moving forward
Together, these ten parameters allow and support counter-hegemony as the oppositional model of the current dominant hegemony. In the following [Part III], I will examine an occupation in the capital region of Brussels along these parameters to determine the strength of the operating structure's counter-hegemonic potential. It will be evident that translating these parameters into lived activist practice does not work smoothly and that they are partly mutually exclusive in their implementation. I will go into detail about the specific challenges and limits of counter-hegemony in the last chapter [moving forward].

External It [the counter-hegemonic structure] is positioned outside the system. Any form of Cooperation with profit orientated or public actors are refused.

Continuous It is not determined. In that sense there is no aspiration for the fixation of meaning and for reaching consensus. The journey is the destination.

Insurgent It is not afraid of painful confrontations, on the contrary, it encourages controversy, conflict and radicalism. This makes it overcome passivity.

Heterarchical It rejects any form of hierarchy. All positions and mandates related to the accumulation of power are imperative.

Critical Individual and collective values and norms are constantly questioned and adapted if necessary.

Holistic It aims to change the prevailing world narrative and to generate a profoundly different one.

Collective It follows the approach of social anarchism in trying to maximize the freedom of the collective.

Autarkic It maximizes its self-sufficiency to be the most independent and autonomous from the state and private actors, as possible.

Persistent It is aware of processes of Gentrification, Institutionalisation and Anti-Squatting and tries with all its power to prevent them.

Receptive It is receptive for various social classes and unites social movements. At the same time it stays open for newcomers and people from the outside who want to join the structure.

Fig.15 Four further parameters of counter-hegemony



Fig.16 Zonneklopper: insight grande halle
© Emma Gisinger [photographer]

Case Study: Zonneklopper asbl



PART III



PRACTICE HOW TO DO IT

04 PART III

Case Study: Zonneklopper asbl

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- 4.1 Brussels-Capital Region
 - 4.1.1 Geography, politics and urban planning
 - 4.1.2 The homeless-vacancy paradox
 - 4.1.3 Squatting in Brussels
 - 4.1.4 Brussels: multilingual, multicultural and insurgent
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 - Photo insert:**
 - Zonneklopper in portrait**
- 4.3 My experience as a scholar activist
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4.0 Introduction

In the south of the Brussels-Capital Region, almost on the outskirts of the Commune Forest, there is a former steel factory with around 7000m² of land marked by an eventful history and will most certainly have a long-lasting future. While in former times, the industrial utilisation of the area attracted great attention and a long-term social housing project will guarantee its future frequency, it now, in a phase of *in-between*, seems almost inconspicuous from the outside. When passing by, one could almost overlook it. However, if you take a second look at the entrance gate on the 'Avenue de la Verriere', stickers and posters can hint at what is happening inside the doors. If you walk past the gate more often, you might notice that it opens once a week, and bicycles are pushed in and out. You might also notice that occasionally many young people flock to this place, and loud music is played. Or that children run around in front of the house. Often you also see small trucks and people carrying furniture in. Occasionally, you see particularly unusual things, like people in costumes being lowered from windows. However, you can never see from the outside what is really happening on this site.

The former factory is currently occupied by an association called *Zonneklopper asbl*. It is a collective that has temporarily settled in this area and is experimenting with alternative forms of collective living and constructing a society in solidarity through a mixture of living, creating and hosting diverse activities. 'Asbl' stands for *association sans but lucratif* [association without lucrative goal/ non-profit organisation] and is the administrative unit behind the occupation of this industrial site. *Zonneklopper*

was founded in 2019, and by now, around 50 people are regularly active in the association; the number fluctuates. Several other collectives and asbls are partners or complete parts of *Zonneklopper*.

In Part III of this master's thesis, I will transfer the detailed theoretical and conceptual considerations to *Zonneklopper* and make statements about how extensive the counter-hegemonic potential of this structure is. After a contextualisation and description of the setting in the Brussels-Capital Region and the introduction of the collective, I will focus on the counter-hegemonic potential and the ambivalences that arise within the collective. I will also critically examine specific aspects of counter-hegemony and describe the downsides, such as, for example, a loss of capacity to act due to a lack of capital. The parameters I have defined in Parts I and II are by no means free of contradictions. They describe an ideal-typical counter-hegemonic structure. Through the discussion of *Zonneklopper*, it becomes particularly evident that this theory cannot be flawlessly transferred into practice.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the collective and all the people I was able to get to know through this work. The occupation of the area is temporary, but what is and has been created there, and above all, what each individual, including myself, has learned, remains permanent.

4.1 Brussels-Capital Region

Before we enter the case study, I would like to embed it in the political-administrative system in which *Zonneklopper* has emerged and continues to operate. Particularly in a political undertaking like this, it is important to understand which underlying circumstances were and are conducive to the emergence of this project and, conversely, which conditions make its continued existence specifically difficult. I also need to highlight why certain counter-hegemonic structures work better in some parts of the world than others and what political circumstances allow or suppress an insurgent population. I argue here that in the BCR – I will further also say the City of Brussels, although it is administratively not entirely true – many aspects converge that favour the emergence of autonomous, anti-capitalist and counter-hegemonic structures.

4.1.1 Geography, politics and urban planning

The political and geographical landscape of Belgium is considered to be very complex. Not at least because of the ongoing Flemish-Walloon conflict, its geographical position along important European axes and the multilingual nature of the nation. Belgium is a federal state divided into three main administrative units: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital Region, whereby the latter only resulted from the third state reform and the process of federalisation in 1989 (Ryckewaert et al., 2021, p. 336). The regions obtain all territorial competencies, including housing policy and spatial planning (ibid). Thereby, all three Regions operate equally, meaning that Belgium has three independent spatial planning systems

(European Commission, 1997, p. 21). For the BCR, this also means that urban development policies relate only to a minimal territorial space, while the socio-spatial challenges extend much further into the metropolitan area (Ryckewaert et al., 2021, p. 337). In Belgium, there are additionally three national languages [french, dutch and german], each represented by a language community. These culture-linguistic communities were established within the first state reform in 1970 (Vermeulen, 2009, p. 1182) as a response to the Flemish call for cultural autonomy. They were given more power in the second state reform ten years later. Since then, the communities have decided on individual matters, like education, health, and social welfare (ibid). Consequently, in Belgium, there are three entities deciding on things happening in space, which are different from the three entities deciding on space development. In Brussels-Capital Region, this complex federalisation leads to a very particular administrative structure. Sofie Vermeulen (2009, p. 1182) points out, »*In the BCR, this [the federalisation] leads to a profound institutional complexity and fragmented political competences since several institutions are in charge: the Brussels Government, both the Flemish- and the French-speaking community, and the 19 municipalities.*« The latter refers to the fact that the Brussels-Capital Region, with an area of 162.4 square kilometres and a population of about 1.2 million people, despite its urban character, is administratively not a city but an association of 19 municipalities with separate political competencies. Additionally, in Belgium, there are ten provinces which, however, play a subordinate role in the focus on the BCR as, in this case, the province coincides with the administrative unit of the Region. All in all, the federal state of Belgium consists of

- o 3 regions [Wallonia, BCR, Flanders]
- o 3 linguistic communities

[French-, Flemish-, & German-speaking community]

- o 10 provinces [5 in Wallonia and 5 in Flanders]
- o 589 municipalities [262 in Wallonia, 19 in the Brussels region, 308 in Flanders]

While in Flanders and Wallonia, since the region's territory and the related linguistic community more or less overlap, the distribution of tasks and decision-making is relatively straightforward, the BCR has a specifically wide range of actors in charge of administering the space. Here the competencies of the French and the Flemish language communities overlap. To protect the Flemish minority in Brussels, a complex system of institutions was set up. Neither the French nor the Flemish community can claim full power and decision authority for the whole Region. Additionally there is now a fourth community commission for all institutions in the BCR which are neither french nor flemish. In the territory of Brussels and especially in relation to social welfare, public health and housing, the distribution of competencies is a complex multi-level governance (Malherbe et al., 2019, p. 5). The 19 municipalities each have their PCSW [Public centre for social welfare, French: CPAS] taking

care of individual matters like financial aid or local residency. On a communal level, where in Brussels, three community commissions [French, Flemish and Common] operate, the competencies regard 'assistance for persons' (Malherbe et al., 2019, p. 5). The government of the BCR is responsible for housing and the federal state for health, asylum and migration, as well as the supervision of the PCSWs (ibid.). BCR has a government composed of a Prime Minister and four Ministers [two French-speaking and two Dutch-speaking] elected by the Brussels Parliament. They must be in constant dialogue with the 19 mayors of the municipalities that constitute Brussels. Likewise, have the French and the Flemish community a council [their government] and a parliament, partly operating on the territory of Brussels. In total, therefore, on the territory of Brussels, the Regional Government, the COCOF [French Community], the VGC [Dutch Community], the COCOM [a joint community for the organisations that are neither French nor Flemish], the 19 municipalities, as well as the federal government, have their say (Malherbe et al., 2019, p. 19).

The political-party landscape of Belgium has adjusted to the small-scale nature of the country. There are hardly any larger national parties but, again, due to the Flemish-Walloon conflict, many small splinter parties of once united national ones. Belgium is a parliamentary monarchy where the king hardly exercises any governmental activities but has a representative function. Like most modern democracies, Belgium's democracy is characterised by the rule of law, free elections and the separation of powers. The system's fragmentation is also evident when one looks at the federal government of Belgium. Currently, in the legislative period 2019-2024, seven different parties govern the state. The press often refers to the 'Vivaldi' coalition because of the four seasons, reminiscent of the four colours of the different

BELGIUM [FEDERAL STATE]

2nd State Reform: 1980
building of flanders and wallonia
3rd State Reform: 1989
building of BCR

Territorial federalisation

Institutions: the King, the federal Parliament, the national government and a civil service

Competences: taxation, internal & foreign policy, research, railroads, defence and social security

1st State Reform: 1970
establishing the cultural communities
2nd State Reform: 1980: More power to the communities

Cultural/ Linguistic federalisation

FLANDERS

WALLONIA

GERMAN

COCOM *

BCR

FRENCH

FLEMISH

Institutions: each has a parliamentary assembly (called a 'Council'), a government (called an 'Executive') and a civil service

Competences: The Regions are competent for area-specific matters, such as economic policy, employment, environmental planning, housing, public works and conservation.

Competences: Communities have jurisdictional competence over personal matters such as education, culture, health care, social policy and family

* Additional community for all facilities and institutions in brussels which are neither flemish nor french.

Fig. 18 Federal structure of Belgium. In orange for Brussels-Capital-Region, sources: De Decker, 2008; Hanocq, 2011

parties (Chini, 2022). The government consists of two socialist parties [red], two liberal [blue], two ecological [green] and one Christian democratic [orange]. After the elections in May 2019, the government needed 494 days to come together in this coalition.

This federalisation creates a framework of many different instruments, which are sometimes only valid for a very small territory. The division of responsibilities and decision-making authorities is particularly demanding when dealing with social challenges. For example, the municipalities are closest to the residents and thus also to their daily needs. They are in charge of daily administrative procedures such as registrations or residence permits, as well as for public services such as street cleaning, park design,

building permits, etcetera. People who do not have a stable affiliation to one community due to their place of residence, because they are either homeless or forced to move because of unstable living conditions, often slip through the radar since no community feels responsible for them. This mainly affects the most vulnerable groups of the population, who would have the greatest need for social assistance. Regarding this, Malherbe et al. (2019, p. 19) also say,

»They [neoliberal tactics through which responsibilities are shifted back and forth between institutions] aim to evict the most vulnerable populations from certain neighbourhoods by not allowing services that would ensure minimum security of existence for such populations to be located there.«

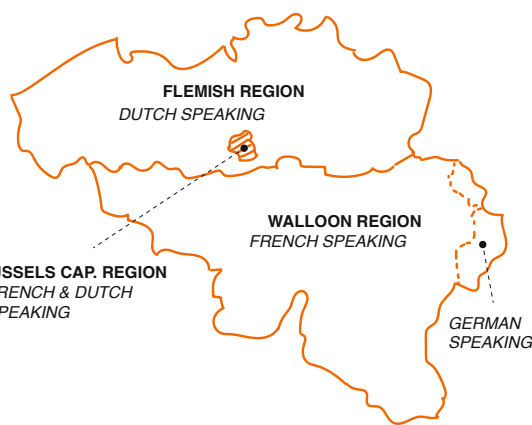


Fig. 17 Regions and language communities in Belgium

For social regards, each municipality has its own *Centre Public d'Action Sociale* [CPAS, English: PSCW], which has its independent legal personality, administration, and management powers. However, it is partly funded from the municipality's budget, and there are links between the political bodies of the two institutions (Region de Bruxelles Capitale, 2022). When it was acknowledged that the CPAS could not take care of adequate structures for people in need and that a shared vision of the 19 communes was not feasible, six of the 19 communes finally joined forces to form an additional structure: *Samusocial* (Malherbe et al., 2019, p. 8). This organisation tackles social issues on a supra-communal level. After long negotiations, an agreement was finally reached in 2007 that social guidance will remain a general task of CPAS. In addition, however, there is *samusocial* for emergency tasks and *bruss.help* for long-term care of socially vulnerable people. According to a survey by the Brussels social site, 130 private and public structures offer support for people living in extreme poverty (Malherbe et al., 2019, p. 13). On the one hand, federalisation allows challenges to be addressed more directly in their local environment. Still, on the other hand, the small-scale responsibilities also lead to an isolation of problems. Social grievances are addressed at most with local measures, regardless of their impact on other municipalities (ibid., p. 5), which often leads only to a displacement of the problem.

At the same time, Brussels, as Europe's capital, has a unique geographical and structural position. The headquarters of EU and NATO, the location between global cities like London, Amsterdam, and Paris, and the intensive history of occupation and colonisation make Brussels one of the most diverse cities in the world. Because of this geographical position, many transmigrants spend an indefinite amount of time in the city trying to cross the borders to

the UK. These highly diverse migrant flows from, on the one hand, high, income western world residents through the EU and NATO and, on the other hand, the most marginalised and low-income ones through the position on the Mediterranean Sea and other strategically important points, such as the proximity to London, create significant disparities (Costa et al., 2021, p. 271). In addition to these two migrant flows, there is also a large number of international students as well as a growing number of French citizens who, on the one hand, have easier access to studies (Lanneau, 2019) and, on the other hand, benefit from a broad education system.

With the decision to make Brussels the headquarters of the EU and the 1958 World's Fair, Brussels began to position itself more and more as the centre of Europe and as an important transnational player. The term '*Brusselization*', which is now widely used to describe the arbitrary destruction of existing buildings in favour of new building blocks that usually stand out from the landscape, also originates in this period (State, 2004). At that time, especially in the former Leopold Quarter, now known as the EU Quarter, against the call of several architectural associations, new buildings were erected, which even today are both visually and functionally disconnected from their surroundings. *Brusselization* is a term

» *Brusselization is a term that became synonymous with haphazard urban development.* «

State, 2004

that became synonymous with 'haphazard urban development' (State, 2004) and the introduction of modern high-rise buildings into gentrified neighbourhoods. This phenomenon arises from a laissez-faire approach to urban planning, where the wishes of the public sector or private investors are followed without recourse to plans and regulations (ibid., p. 52). A classic, more recent example of brusselization is the world trade centre in the north district of the BCR (ibid., p. 352).

With the arrival of the EU and, a little later, the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], an almost parallel city developed in Brussels, where diplomats, heads of government, presidents, and public prosecutors come and go. Moreover, the EU and NATO were followed by several lobbying associations, journalists, financial companies and NGOs, which, together with the transnational alliances, play a dominant role in the Brussels-Capital Region. The international character of the EU and NATO and the subsequent disconnect between them and the rest of the city is visible in the cityscape and architecture, as much as it affects the economics and power relations in the city.

The financially powerful international institutions have a huge impact and can easily influence urban decisions. At the same time, they are very gated in their daily operations, and their economic power hardly benefits other parts of Brussels. On the contrary, the concentration of power and capital at the seat of the European Union and the NATO alliance leads to an even more significant disparity with the other inhabitants. Thus, while Brussels is, in terms of GDP per capita, the fourth richest region in the European Union (The Brussels Times, 2020), it also has a very high poverty rate. In 2022 38,8% of the population of the Brussels-Capital Region was at risk of poverty or social exclusion according to the European poverty indicators of the Europe 2030 strate-

gy (STATBEL, 2023). This is more than double the percentage of the whole country [18,7%] (ibid.). It is because around half of the people working in the BCR commute daily from places outside, increasing the GDP per capita where they work and spending their money in the place they live. This leaves Brussels as a hotspot of social disparities behind. As a result, Brussels has higher income inequality than other cities, regardless of national income regulations and trade unions (Costa & Valk, 2021, p. 275).

How the Brussels-Capital Region is governed and developed is specifically influenced by the country's federal nature, meaning that instruments and policies also vary within the Region. The municipalities, for example, take part in spatial planning, but they cannot act as policymakers and in defining legislative rules (European Commission, 1997). The existence of international and European institutions adds further degrees of complexity, even if these instances do not intervene independently in the decision-making processes (Levy, 2015, p. 19). It is generally assumed that this particular role of the Belgian capital significantly impacts spatial planning policy, especially because the fragmentation of competencies prevents a common development and farsighted vision (ibid.). In addition, urban planning in Brussels has a recent history, as there was hardly any coordinated planning after the Second World War. Not until 1962 was a national law on regional planning enacted (Vermeulen, 2009), and it was only with the creation of BCR in 1989 that urban planning began to be taken seriously (State, 2004, p. 319). With these two historical milestones, there are now also two stages of Brussels urban planning described (Vermeulen, 2009; Levy, 2015; Comhaire, 2012). The first, described by urbanist Jacques Aron as '*technocratic urbanism*', refers to the many large-scale development projects that *»later turned out to be fiascos.«* (Vermeulen, 2009, p.

1188). Urban planner Benoit Moritz describes the second wave as 'consultancy urbanism' or 'participatory urbanism', which became the dominant planning paradigm after the emergence of the Brussels-Capital Region and the urban struggles of the 70s. Since then, spatial planning has been organised on the regional and municipal levels (State, 2004, p. 319). Today, the regional land-use plan [RLP, French acronym: PRD] is the most important and hierarchically supreme plan for the development of Brussels. It has an indicative and non-regulatory character but must be respected by all lower-ranking plans (perspective.brussels, n.d.). The first plan was prepared in 1995 and updated in 2002. The PRDD [Plan Régional de Développement Durable] was adopted on 12 July 2018 as the latest plan, incorporating the Global Sustainability Goals. A large number of subordinate plans are being prepared at the municipal and sectoral levels.

4.1.2 The homeless-vacancy paradox: migration & housing

With the societal diversity of Brussels, coming mainly from the two opposing migrant flows and the promise of many to have a better life in this multinational city, comes along an increasing amount of social challenges. In 2020, 5313 people were considered homeless in Brussels-Capital Region (Horvat, 2020). Additionally, more than 45.000 households are on the waiting list for social housing, and those receiving it sometimes have to wait 15 years (bral, 2021). This is also because asylum seekers and students or young professionals coming for short-term internships, which are both making a large amount of the migration flows, are equally pushing into the low-cost housing market (State, 2004). Paradoxically to the number of people living in precarious con-

» The fact that homelessness can exist even with a large stock of vacant dwellings is the central point on which the morality of illegal occupation rests on. «

Dawance, 2008, p. 33

ditions in Brussels, there are also many empty buildings. Approximately 6.8 million square meters are estimated as vacant, which cumulated would cover the size of Ixelles, one of the 19 communes of the BCR (Galindo, 2020). In housing activism discourses, people often speak of the 20th commune, describing the cumulated empty buildings. The fictive commune even got a name. 'Saint-Vide-Leegbeek' is a mix of the word empty in French and Dutch together with the widespread prefix Saint (ibid.). Even among the social houses, which so many people are waiting for, around 10% are empty (Bral, 2021). The combination of empty buildings and people without a roof over their heads can be described as the homeless-vacancy paradox and goes back to the neoliberalisation of housing policy that prevails worldwide. I have already discussed the social effects of widespread neoliberalisation in chapter 2.2, but I would like to take a closer look at Brussels's specific housing policy and real estate situation.

The privatisation of the housing market and the consequent real estate speculation are

integral to the neoliberalist framework and have obvious negative effects on equitable access to housing. Buying a house and leaving it empty is an investment, apart from the maintenance and possible renovation costs. Property values are rising steadily in Belgium, as in most other countries worldwide. Since around 1973, the real estate index has been characterised by permanent growth, except for a very short phase after the economic crisis in 2008 (Statista, 2021), and the average price of flats per average income increased in Brussels between 2000 and 2013 by almost 100% (Dessouroux, 2016, p. 10). For this reason, even without rental income, owning a building in Brussels is lucrative for the owner and, in most cases, leads to asset growth, especially over a longer period. This makes real estate property a desirable investment and a commodity that is highly competitive on the free market. Since everyone needs a dwelling and population figures are rising, the demand and the pressure on affordable real estate are also increasing. In a market economy, much demand but little supply leads to higher prices, making investing in real estate even more attractive. Of course, this is a very simplified description. Still, it shows the fundamental problem of why, since homeownership has gained dominance, the housing market has become increasingly precarious and inaccessible, especially for socially disadvantaged groups. Most countries around the world are experiencing this development, yet there are national policies that differ in the way they deal with it.

In Belgium, as well as in Brussels, two aspects lead to a particular housing situation. The first one regards the very diverse migrant flows, including candidate-citizens, people in temporary or double residence situations and students (Dessouroux et al., 2016, p. 4) who all push for the affordable housing market. Second, Belgium is known for having developed

homeownership before and independently of the first wave of neoliberalisation (De Decker, 2008, p. 156). With the absence of spatial planning regulations for a relatively long time in the 20th century and the simultaneous promotion of ownership models, Belgium is now characterised by urban sprawl, i.e. the distribution of urban landscapes over the whole area instead of concentrating them at well-located nodes. De Decker (2008, p. 159) writes: *»In Belgium, there have always been instruments, subsidies and organisations promoting homeownership«*, referring to the broad consensus on individual homeownership as the dominant housing solution at the end of the 19th century. In the 1960s, half of Belgium's houses were already privately owned (ibid.). De Decker (2008) also writes that Belgium people are 'dwelling wild', explaining this as *»the urge to build what and where they want, thereby ignoring the societal and environmental consequences«*. Because of this positive exposure to homeownership, social or public housing was never a considered alternative in Belgium or Brussels. Between 2003 and 2012, housing created by or with public support in Brussels reached an average of 13.5%, according to Dessouroux et al. (2016, p. 8). Yet, only 15% of that is considered social housing (ibid.). Despite emerging efforts to establish social housing in Brussels, it still only covers about 8% of the housing market, although about one-third would meet the criteria (Costa & Valk, 2021, p. 272). According to De Decker (2008, p. 157), the Flemish housing minister of 2008 compared access to social housing in Belgium with winning the lottery.

This is particularly visible in Brussels' current architecture and ownership structure, which is very diverse and fragmented, meaning that there are many individual homeowners. While, on the one hand, the overabundance and small-scale private ownership in the housing market restricts social and subsidised housing, it also has the advantage that

large investment projects cannot always be implemented so quickly. The involvement of many actors slows down modernisation that involves displacement. The public authorities claim to intervene and plan strategically at one point or another, but their influence is relatively small compared to the cumulative private actors. Nevertheless, after two previous plans, a housing plan for 2019-2024 was drawn up in cooperation between the regional property management agency and the CPAS of the City of Brussels [Public Welfare Centre]. It promised the construction of 750 flats, of which about one-third will be built by the CPAS for the socially deprived. Their explicitly stated target groups are homeless people, women and families, older people, students, and people with reduced mobility (CPAS de la Ville de Bruxelles, 2019). I would like to mention that migrants and asylum seekers, who face extreme difficulties in the housing market due to racism and financial hardship, have not been given a category of their own, even though they are often among the most deprived groups.

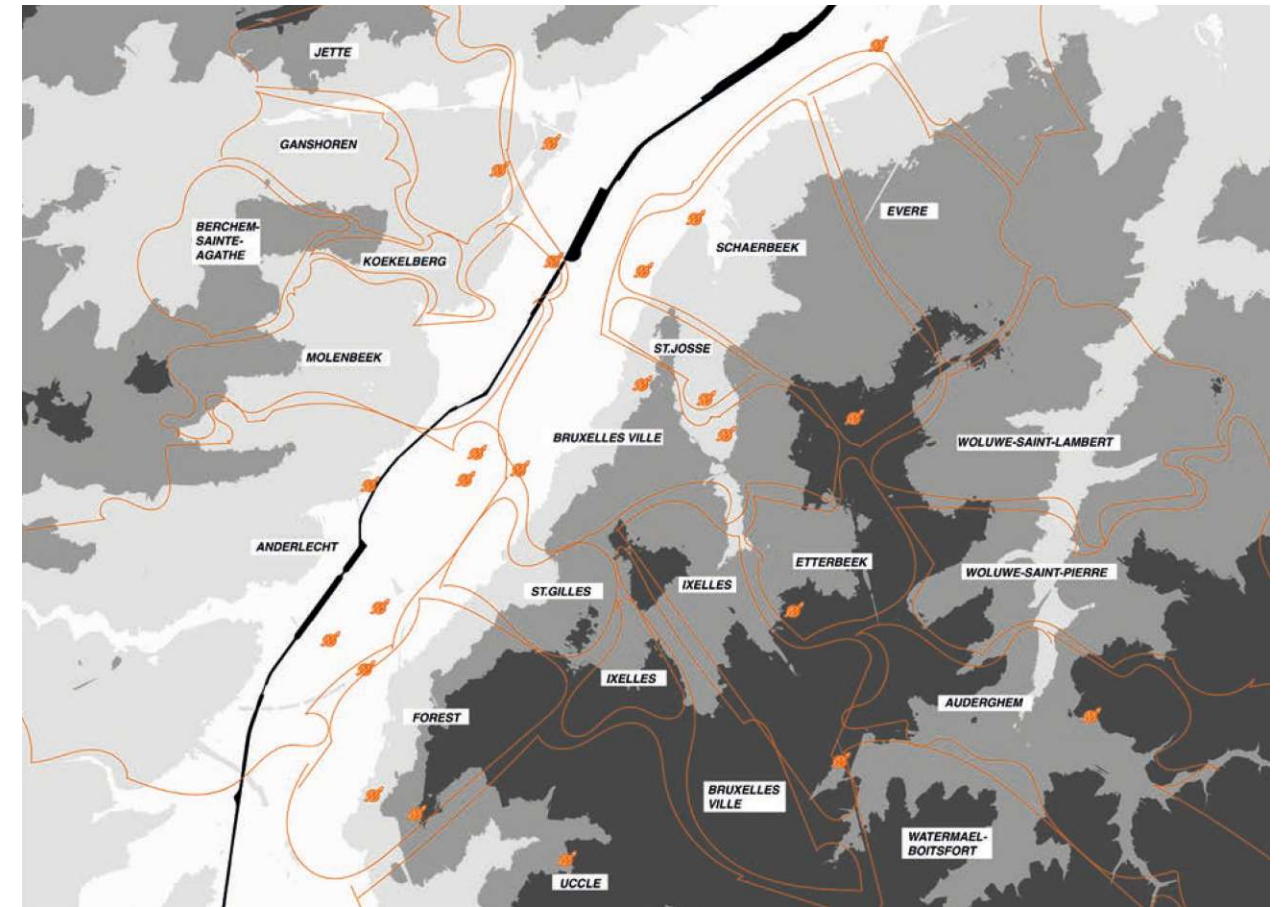
As a reaction to the housing crisis and the neoliberalisation of city and housing policy, 21 non-profit associations and social organisations, among others, signed an open letter in spring 2021 explicitly calling for the prioritisation of housing over other functions and the mobilisation of vacant houses. This was due to an open call for the Pacheco Institute, also known as the Grand Hospice, in the centre of Brussels, which asked for interim use projects that are explicitly not designed for housing. We are talking about an area in municipal hands of about 12,000m² that, at the time of the call, had already been more or less empty for four years (bral, 2021). The Pacheco Institute Call is exemplary for the preference of the Brussels authorities for art and culture in favour of a bourgeois middle class over the basic needs of the most vulnerable people.

This very tangible preference is one major critique of the self-managed squatting scene in the Brussels-Capital Region.

4.1.3 Squatting in Brussels

Social urgencies and insufficient answers from the formal, institutional framework generally awaken the informal movement. Within the last years in Brussels, a strong informal solidarity network has been established, which is unique for Europe. A significant part of this solidarity network consists of non-profit associations [asbls], which are fully or at least partially concerned with socially vulnerable and marginalised population groups. Often these associations, consisting of activists and people in precarious situations, look for empty houses as a cooperative base and subsequently occupy them. Finding an empty building is due to the high vacancy in Brussels, not the biggest challenge for the solidarity asbls. The challenge comes afterwards in maintaining the building without aid and enduring under strong legal pressure.

In Europe, the legal status of squatting in society changes according to national law. The sanctions of squatting are differentiated by Lopez (2012, p. 9) into strong and light criminal persecution and occasional permissions with legal requirements. If the former applies, it is a high priority of the authorities to prevent squatting. Accordingly, strong executive power is used to prevent squatting in the first place or to evict squatted houses as quickly as possible. In most European countries, squatting is criminalised and, thus, in terms of penalty, falls into the first category. Squatting hostile laws are gaining prominence again in many European countries. Through various anti-squatting measures, either the occupation of vacant houses is made more difficult in the first place,



Municipalities & Squats in Brussels

There are approximately 25 active squats in BCR. The number is constantly changing due to evictions and new appropriations. The map shows the main players in solidarity housing, public, independent and self-managed cultural centers in BCR along with the Brussels Communes. For protecting the squats I have eliminated their names from the map.

Fig.19 Map of Brussels-Capital Region, including the 19 communes and a localisation of squats
Source: Coucoupuissant, 2022

or the executive is provided with more instruments and regulations that facilitate eviction. In the Netherlands, for example, squatting has been legal since 1971 as a measure against the housing shortage (Taylor, 2010). In 2010, however, a new anti-squatting law was enacted that threatens squatters with up to two years in prison after an eviction. Only in the first four years after introducing the law more than 500 people were arrested at the cause of squatting a vacant building. In Belgium, the situation is similar. Although squatting was never legal per se, before 2017, a legal eviction was an intense procedure for the public authorities. Moreover, before the anti-squatting reform in Belgium, passed on 17 October 2017, only the act of breaking in, for example, picking a lock, was illegal. So technically, squatting was not illegal if the door was already open. However, the new law also makes the mere occupation with the wording »*entering of a house, flat, room or dwelling inhabited by another person, or their outbuildings, by means of threats or violence against persons, by breaking and entering, by climbing or by using false keys, or occupying the property or staying there without the permission of the inhabitants*« illegal. In Belgium, the right to housing was included in the constitution in 1993, but unlike, for example, the right to health, it cannot be applied as easily if only because it conflicts with the right to property (Dawance, 2008, p. 33).

The government's response to squatting is not only to introduce anti-squat legislation but also to increasingly cooperate with actors who approach squatting in a less risky way for public

authorities and owners. Due to their collaborative ethos, so-called '*gestionnaires*' [managers for temporary occupations] are gladly seen. They negotiate precarious leases, which are also on the rise in Brussels. These leases maintain buildings and quickly revitalise the social fabric, but they delegitimise more insurgent actors and thus weaken the critique of general housing policy. The *gestionnaires* hereby specialise in a very particular kind of management and act as intermediaries between owners and tenants. This sounds like a good deal for everyone involved in the first place, but in the long run, it prevents counter-hegemony and radical change. For the public authorities, temporary occupations are a good deal. Central inter-use agencies [gestionnaires] such as in Brussels Communa, Pali Pali or Entrakt cooperate very closely with the public authorities, occupy vacant spaces and take on a social function. Thus, they play an essential role in the fight against vacancy and in supporting people in need. However, they also tend to blur the boundaries with self-management squatting and the struggles associated with it invisible. As I have already described in Part II, the proximity of different kinds of occupations is a good way to approach the social struggle from different angles, but at the same time, it creates a field of tension.

Brussels has a long and eventful history of squatting. The situation of housing shortage and vacancy described above has been prevalent in Belgium for decades. Parallel to other European cities, especially with Dutch influence, the first large wave of squatters also emerged in Belgium, especially Brussels, in the 1980s. Towards the end of the 20th century and especially with the law of 1993 that legalised squatting, if confirmed by the mayor and owner, that form emerged on which I put a particular focus in this work: *originally illegally appropriated, then legalised, and*

therefore tolerated, but self-organised squats. These squats can open themselves more to the public through their contracts and have always been integral to the Brussels art, culture and activism scene. Well-known names from the first decades of the squatting movement are, for example, 'Le Kaputt' [evicted in 2000], 'Le 89' [evicted in 2000], 'L'îlot Soleil' [evicted in 2003], (Dawance, 2008, p. 31) or Recyclart [institutionalised in 2019]. The latter has a particularly long history in Brussels. In the late 1990s, a non-profit arts and culture organisation occupied part of a train station, negotiated a temporary contract, achieved great success among the civic population, and became a firmly established art and music venue about two decades later (Galindo, 2020).

Today, in addition to Recyclart, there are several other important art and cultural venues that are not only tolerated by the city but are also, to some extent, fostered by it. The most established ones are often managed by a central organisation [gestionnaire]. In addition, there are a number of public squats that are tolerated but self-managed [auto-gere]. Zonneklopper, which I will present in the following, is part of the latter. Although an exact quantification of informally organised squatting collectives is almost impossible, it can be assumed that today a group of thousands of unofficially organised people (Dawance, 2008) maintain and visit around 25 active squats. The number of squats in Brussels constantly changes due to expulsions and new appropriations. This again shows how unbalanced the squats are between eviction and support. Fig. 19 shows a snapshot of some self-managed public squats in the Brussels-Capital Region. An informally compiled table lists 21 self-managed squats, of which 13 provide housing. There is data on currently 44 other temporary occupations in the BCR managed by a *gestionnaire* such as Entrakt, CityDev, Pali Pali or Communa. The activities for which these squats and tempo-

rary occupations are intended vary considerably from hosting people without a proper home to participating in cultural events, creating artist spaces, making informal meeting points or offering recreational spaces. Once a year, the Coucoupuissant intersquat festival takes place in Brussels, focusing on connecting actors of the squatting scene and finding new activists. A particular focus lies on self-managed squats [auto-gere], which usually have difficulties networking due to their autonomous nature. On the website, it says, »*Coucoupuissant [the powerful cuckoo] is a festival that unites self-managed collective settlements and cultural, social centres in the form of squats or conventional occupations engaged in combat*.« (Coucoupuissant, 2022, translated). This year the festival took place from the 20th of October till the 20th of November 2022. There were multiple activities related to the festival ranging from concerts to workshops, ateliers and exhibitions.

4.1.4 Brussels: multilingual, multicultural and insurgent

Brussels combines several factors that give the city more counter-hegemonic potential than other European cities. Brussels has been characterised by political, social, linguistic-cultural and legislative, architectural/urban planning and infrastructural fragmentation throughout its history and present. This small-scale structure leads to an individualism that is not characterised by competition, as in strongly neoliberal systems, but rather by co-existence. I am in no way arguing that political decisions and spatial developments are more or less legitimate in the Brussels-Capital Region than in any other city. I am merely suggesting, as State (2004) also argues, that the complexity of the city has led to a cul-

¹ Original legal phrase: »*soit aura pénétré dans une maison, un appartement, une chambre ou un logement habités par autrui, ou leurs dépendances, à l'aide de menaces ou de violences contre des personnes, au moyen d'effraction, d'escalade ou de fausses clés, soit occupera ce bien, soit y séjournera sans autorisation des habitants*.« [article 74, chapitre 2] (etaamb. openjustice.be, 2017)

ture of compromise and negotiation that has been evident in Belgium for more than a century. In addition, or perhaps because of this, Brussels civil society has long carried a certain rebelliousness. As Paul State (2004) also describes, 'hearty individualism' and 'defiant stubbornness in defence of local liberties' are trademarks of the inhabitants of Brussels. The quest for self-government fought through recurrent uprisings, strikes, rebellions and revolutions, runs through the history of the Capital Region. Autonomy has long been a primary civic goal of Brussels residents (State, 2004). In Dutch, there is the saying 'ja zeggen, nee doen' [say yes, do no]. This is coherent with a statement I heard here recently about cultural access to regulations in Belgium. While in some countries, such as Germany and Austria, rules tend to be followed and in other countries, such as Spain, there is a strong culture of rule defiance, Belgium was described as a country where citizens tacitly obey rules formally but allow their free will to run in the background.

The complex federalisation structure, a multilingual nature, the liberal housing policies, and a deregulated rental market with a focus on homeownership (De decker, 2008) with the simultaneous long absence of spatial planning and highly diverse migrant flows all lead to a very specific socio-cultural and territorial situation in the Brussels-Capital Region and further to a colourful occupation landscape. From silent squats, which I hardly talk about in this work, to self-organised public squats, of which Zonneklopper is one, to managed temporary occupations, they are an integral part of the history and present of Brussels.

4.2 Zonneklopper asbl

Zonneklopper is a non-profit association founded in early 2020 by a few individuals in collaboration with several existing structures as the basis for an occupation project. The charta, written at the beginning (Zonneklopper, 2020), explicitly states that the participants' need is to re-appropriate the city, help people in precarious situations, and challenge the capitalist mode of reproduction of space and resources. The association sees itself as a non-profit organisation that unites many individuals, collectives and other non-profit organisations to realise a project for the temporary occupation of a building. The selected site is an old factory complex in the municipality *Forest*, in the south of Brussels. The administration of the territory is based on the principles of self-management and autonomy, contributing to an increasingly inclusive and united city through collective intelligence and the sharing of resources. The project addresses people within the collective as well as directly influenced neighbours and visitors of all kinds. Thus, it is an interim use that advances any interest in reclaiming civic space and agency by uniting different stakeholders. Zonneklopper means 'the sun beaters' in *Brusseleir*² and refers to mischievous and imaginative characters. This expression goes back to 19th-century workers whose job was to clean the carpets by beating them out on the land. Instead, the workers rested on the carpets in the sun.

Zonneklopper negotiated a three-year contract with the owner in 2020, which legitimises

² Brusseleir, brusselair or brusseleer is the name of a language that used to be widely spoken in the territory of brussels. It is a language with a germanophonic base but which included many words and idiomatic phrases of the French language. The language is increasingly dying out in the 21st century.

» Born from the need to reappropriate the city and to fight against the vacancy of buildings in Brussels as well as the real estate speculation that is going on, Zonneklopper is an association that [...] aims to participate in building an increasingly inclusive and united city where space is affordable and accessible to all. «

Zonneklopper, 2020

the use and operation of the area during this period, with an option to extend it for up to 9 more years. Zonneklopper is self-managed [*auto-gere*], which means that no one has supremacy over the use of the area, and all decisions are made by the collective.

The collective, and later the occupation, was started by a small group in the early 2020s to help young migrants, especially transmigrants,

who want to continue their journey to the UK via Brussels. The occupation of the building complex became concrete when this group of migrants was unexpectedly evicted from their previous accommodation and needed a new place to stay. They found refuge in the former industrial area in *Forest*. The site had been vacant for several years, and the owner, *Foyer du Sud*, a building company dedicated to social housing, favoured the collective's occupation. It is a site of former industrial production. Most recently, the company 'Van Atelier Products', an ironmongery dealer, was active on the site. In the first weeks after the occupation, a contract was negotiated that allowed the collective to occupy the site free of charge for a temporary period. Next to the industrial area is a two-apartment house, which was subsequently given to the Zonneklopper association for temporary use. The site, excluding the apartment building, has a 10750m² gross floor area, of which approximately 6000m² is on the ground floor, 3300m² on the first floor and 1450m² on the second floor. The basement is hardly used due to insufficient insulation. The owner *Foyer du Sud*, and the architectural firm *Atelier V.* have already planned and approved a follow-up project for the site. According to this plan, part of the building will be kept instantaneous, and another part will be demolished and rebuilt. In the current situation, there is merely about 350m² of outdoor space in the area, which is about 5% for this property. The official document from the architects' office states that 97% of the area is built. Accordingly, the natural light supply is relatively limited. In the follow-up project, some building parts will be removed [see Fig 20]. The first demolition phase will begin next year while the Zonneklopper collective continues to operate on-site.

Under the roof of the non-profit association [asbl] Zonneklopper, there are numerous collectives and individuals who contribute in dif-

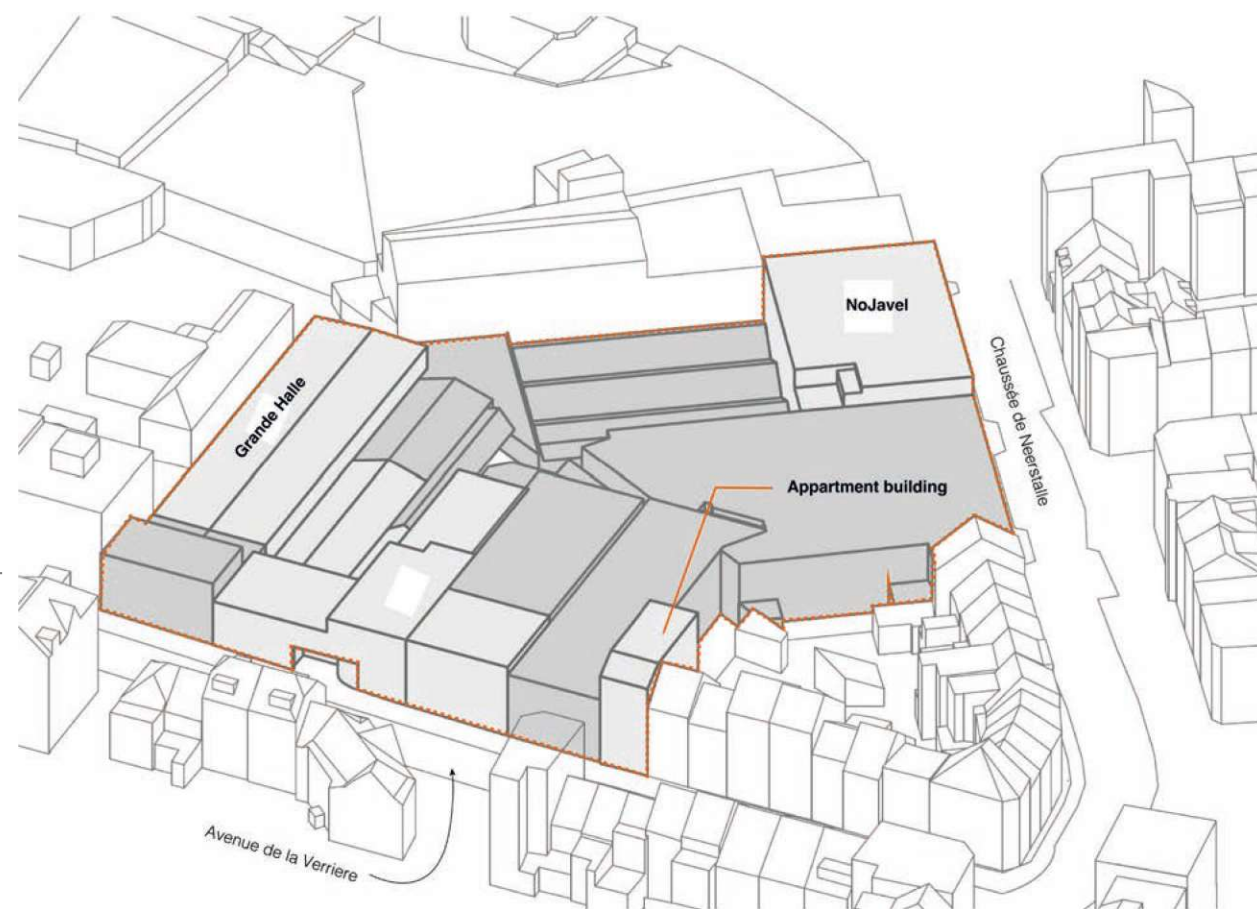


Fig.20 Current building site 23 Avenue de la Verriere
Source: ATELIER V. : BAUMANS DEFFET - A2O
ARCHITECTEN - LABORATOIRE in collaboration with
Foyer du Sud, 2022

Zonneklopper building

This is an illustration of the current building of the industrial site that Zonneklopper is occupying. In the plan in grey are the building parts that will be demolished for the follow up project of Foyer du Sud.

ferent ways to the use of the area. Currently, 25 Oromos migrants [Ethiopians] live in Zonneklopper, together with about 20 members of the collective. In 2022, the collective had about 50 active people, but the number varies constantly. The multitude of actors with a specific interest in the area makes organisation and decision-making highly complex. Zonneklopper is organised horizontally by using working groups. Once a week, there is a general assembly [*the agora*] where members meet and discuss daily agendas. This is also the place for newcomers to present themselves and a central point for any questions or concerns. Usually, the active members of the collective are involved in one or more of the working groups. The number of members enrolled in the working groups can give a sense of the priority with which tasks are undertaken in Zonneklopper. There is also a newsletter distribution group of about 250 people. The following is an overview of some of the essential working groups.

CT Occupation Strategy: Deals with the strategy of the occupation of the building. This group communicates especially with the public authorities and the owner. They are mainly architects who exchange technical information and plan the further structuring of the facilities. [currently 14 members], *weekly meetings*

CT Hebergement: This group takes care of the accommodation at Zonneklopper. It includes communication with the migrants and decisions on who can access the living units. If new applicants arrive, this group decides whether they can be housed in Zonneklopper. [currently 42 members], *weekly meetings*

CT Habitants: This group brings together all ZK members who live in Zonneklopper on a long-term basis and not in the spaces dedicated to people without Belgian legal status. [currently 22 members]

CT Club Bisous: They are the moderators in Zonneklopper; they handle conflicts and mediation issues. They look after the other members intensively in person and on the platform. Members usually are elected every three months. [currently 12 members], *meetings if needed*

CT FIFI_Finance: Focuses on the financing of the collective: payment plan, investment in equipment, subsidies, etc. [currently 8 members]

CT PoleDance: A group that takes care of celebrations, parties, concerts and other evening events [currently 48 members], *irregular meetings*

CT Voisinage: A working group for the exchange and involvement of the neighbourhood [currently 21 members].

CT Zonnesafer: It is a working group that talks about how to make ZK safe for everyone. How to prevent aggression like sexism, racism, harassment, violence, etc. [currently 12 members]

CT Kids: A group that considers welcoming children to Zonneklopper, whether by organising childcare at meetings or activities for the children of members or the neighbourhood. [currently 11 members]

CT Will-to-change: This is a relatively new group, named after the book by Bell Hooks (2004). It is a group for men who want to fight against patriarchy and to learn how [currently 35 members], *weekly meetings*

CT Valeurs: This group brings together people who work to present Zonneklopper's values and ensure that it is open, inclusive and caring. [currently 35 members]

Talking about 'valeurs': When Zonneklopper was created, it was decided what the internal values would be and which new members should orient themselves. The definition of values is critical in a collective like Zonneklopper, as access is not limited by anything else. The only requirement to be part of the collective is that participants share the values and work towards a similar future vision. The 'CT Valeurs' is concerned with evaluating and prioritising the values, but above all, with their implementation in the collective. Thereby, they constantly attempt to point out discrepancies between the values as they have been defined for the collective and their actual implementation. However, the values defined at the beginning of the Charta (Zonneklopper, 2020) provide information about the basic approach to economic, social, political and environmental issues. Economically, since it is also a non-profit association, they explicitly do not aim for profit. They promote activities that serve the common good. In addition, resources are shared whenever possible, and the circular economy is fostered if feasible. The values related to the social system are based on solidarity, collective learning through the exchange of knowledge and skills, and support for the most precarious and vulnerable people in society. Zonneklopper also positions itself politically through its values. The charta states that »[political values are] to manage oneself, to strive for autonomy, to fight for inclusivity and against discrimination, to be transparent and to choose horizontality as a way of governance.« And in order to largely promote an existence in harmony with the environment, it is defined that excessive and wasteful consumption should be combated and resources pooled.

Zonneklopper is a nodal point for the Network of Solidarity in Brussels. It serves as a contact base for many people, not least because of its size and openness. There are often requests

from individuals or collectives looking for a place to live, work or organise an event in Zonneklopper. In figure 21, I outlined the network of actors involved in Zonneklopper. I do not claim to be complete. It should also be noted here that the focus of the use between different actors has changed over time and will undoubtedly change in the future. Concerning the counter-hegemonic potential, for example, the balance between neighbourhood work and their position as a cultural centre has shifted in the last two years. Thus, with these reorientations also, the landscape of actors fundamentally changes. However, to describe the actor's network, as I perceive it now, I will start in the very middle with the collective Zonneklopper. The collective is composed of the active members. If someone is present on behalf of an association, they are still individuals in the collective. It comprises people who actively participate in weekly meetings, get involved in working groups, follow the forum and the Telegram groups, and are on-site when needed. Often, members of the collective are only present on a seasonal basis or are involved according to their personal situation and the availability of resources. Overall, I would say there is a permanent group of about 20 very active people and about 50 participating in the collective but only occasionally. Most of the very active people reside in Zonneklopper. In communication and handling, the people living in Zonneklopper are divided into the group of migrants or socially needy people and the members of the collective. This clear differentiation is very debatable. In any case, a third group of residents is more fluctuated and mixed. In the 'grande hall' [see Fig. 25], there is space for people who want to stay with their caravans temporarily or for a more extended period. Difficulties often arise in negotiating space, especially between the various groups of residents. Especially with different cultural backgrounds, there are also other concepts of cleanliness, order and leisure activities. In

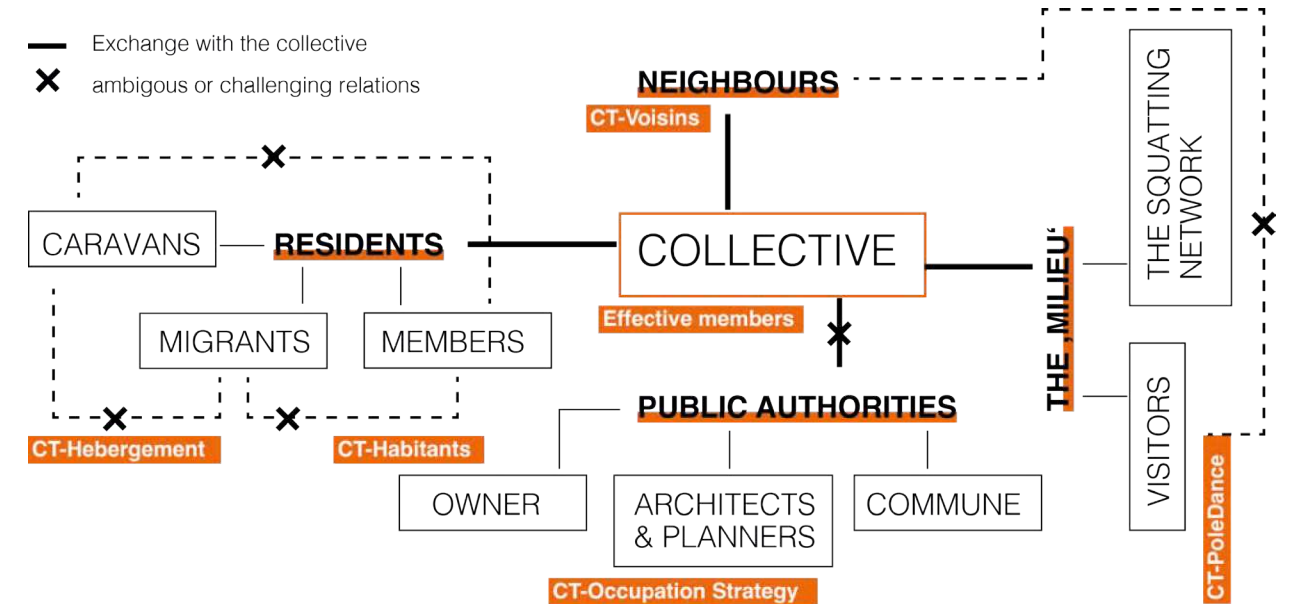


Fig. 21 Network of actors involved in or engaging with the collective Zonneklopper asbl

addition, the capacities to take care of each other and work on someone's development differ, due to incomparable circumstances, enormously, which is why sometimes complex interpersonal relationships arise. Not all residents, especially those from socially vulnerable to intolerable situations, can easily share the values of the collective. Therefore, they are considered to be kept out of the collective, leading to even more significant discrepancies.

Under certain circumstances, the collective can also be defined more broadly. In the Forum, there is a group for the distribution of newsletters about day and night activities in which about 150 and 250 people are enlisted. So there is a significant number of people who want to be made aware of and participate in events. The number of people who know about Zonneklopper and would participate in public events like concerts or parties is even higher. This makes it difficult to estimate how exten-

sive the reach is when an event is made public. I would still divide the 'milieu' into people from the squatting network, i.e. those who are active in other squats and can be mobilised if necessary, and visitors who only perceive Zonneklopper as an event location. Of course, the boundaries between these two groups are very blurred.

In addition, there is the category of neighbours and the category of sovereign actors, i.e. owners, experts and public authorities. The neighbours are involved in Zonneklopper through various activities. In particular, the food distribution by NoJavel is very beneficial to the neighbourhood, as the community of Forest did not have a solidarity food retailer before (Zonneklopper, 2020, p. 13). The neighbourhood lacks social and recreational facilities, so Zonneklopper can be a good place. The charta states that Zonneklopper wants to contribute to the neighbourhood's revitalisation. However, the focus on the neighbourhood

and the activation of the neighbourhood is opposed to the inclusion of the visitors. In most cases, an extensive outreach comes at the expense of the neighbourhood – more on this in the next chapter.

The relationship with sovereign actors, at least during the period of permitted use, is still the easiest in terms of negotiating space. Communication before and after that can be challenging, though, since there is a natural power imbalance, and the owners, as well as the municipality, have higher decision-making power. Their consent and support for the project are a prerequisite for everything else. Therefore, negotiations about the use are often conflictual, and ideological contradictions mark the relationship. The architects and urban planners involved in the follow-up project also communicate with the collective. Through this communication, both the planners of the sovereign planning and the planners in the collective can benefit and learn from each other and incorporate the respective objections into the planning.

»» *Here is a place and a project that develops around a common horizon and a shared will, a place of living, hospitality, building and creating, tending towards self-management.*

Numerous collectives, individuals or groups live and work here. We are inventing a hive of cultural, artistic and social activity where we explore other ways of operating and looking in consciousness, collective intelligence and benevolence.

Decisions are made collectively in the General Assembly, the Agora. Everyone is invited to participate, as well as in the various working groups.

We want to turn away from the prevailing economic models that tempt personal profit in spite of the general welfare. We implement the principles of cooperation, mutual aid and pooling of knowledge and resources. We refuse in all circumstances to develop activities that serve profit, competition or growth.

In practice, this principle is based on listening to everyone and engaging in dialogue without pushing or harassing, respecting different forms of expression, giving space to people or forms of expression that are normally suppressed, accepting the functioning of private and shared spaces as they are labelled, including spaces with chosen mixes.

It is important to us that everyone - visitors, users, members - act independently and responsibly, taking care of the place, themselves and others. We fight against any form of oppression, especially that of vulnerable people or minority groups. We all collectively take care to reject systemic injustices such as racism, sexism, fascism, homophobia, transphobia, etc., as well as any form of sexual attention that is not wanted.

You are here in "Zonneklopper", which in Brussels means "the sunbats" and is used to refer to mischievous and imaginative characters.

You are WELCOME HERE!



Fig.22 Translation of Zonnekloppers Mini-Charta
Source: Zonneklopper, 2022



Fig.23 Photo insert: Entrance

- DONNERIE
- BAR
- PETITE ZALLE
- CYKLOPPER
- GRANDE HALLE
- CHILL Room



Photo insert: *Archiestra*





Fig.24 Photo insert: Zonnestraat

01 ZONNESTRAAT

The '*Zonnestraat*' is the entrance area. It is the place where many people meet by chance. Announcements are placed here. The idea of the Zonnestraat was to connect the two entrances at the north-east and south end and to create a transition from the public space to the collective.



Fig.25 Photo insert: Grande Halle

02 GRANDE HALLE

The large hall is reserved for the caravans of individuals or collectives who are temporarily accommodated in Zonneklopper. Last year, a collective that was evicted from their old location found space here.



Fig.26 Photo insert: Chill

03 CHILL

An intermediate space which can be used for small gatherings or as a retreat. It is the extension of the Zonnestraat during bad weather. This space also leads to the 'Petit Zalle' and is therefore usually well used for events.



Fig.27 Photo insert: ZKids

04 ZKIDS

There is a self-built playground for the children of the collective and the neighbourhood. On individual initiative, the playground opens occasionally and parents and children meet to exchange activities and thoughts.



Fig.28 Photo insert: Atelier Vélo: Cyklopper

05 ATELIER VÉLO

Every Thursday from 16:00-20:00 the bicycle repair shop Cyklopper opens. It is an 'atelier vélo participatif', meaning that there are people present to help you, but the actual repairs are largely done by yourself.



Fig.29 Photo insert: Kitchen/ Bar

06 KITCHEN/ BAR

On the ground floor is the main bar and kitchen with the beverage storage behind it. There are several other kitchens in the building. This one is most likely to be frequented by a larger audience.



Fig.30 Photo insert: Grande Zalle

07 GRANDE ZALLE

The Large Hall, or Zalle de Concert, as the name suggests, is designed for events with a larger scope. Recently renovated, it has a stage, a bar, technical equipment and isolation facilities.



Fig.31 Photo insert: Ateliers

08 ATELIERS

Especially on the first floor of the building, many collectives and individuals have settled and created there over the years. There is a lot of visual art, but also, for example, a music room and a hairdressing salon.



Fig.32 Photo insert: NoJavel

09 NOJAVEL

Accessible via its own entrance and therefore operating relatively independently is the organisation NoJavel. It is a solidarity-based food and clothing organisation. Food boxes are distributed three times a week. There is also a clothing and book flea market.

4.3 My experience as a scholar activist

As I was already mentioning in the prologue, I will highlight here in more detail how I conducted the research and what insights the examination gave me in regard to general research in a field like this. I will describe how I immersed myself in the field, how the research took shape and, above all, what the most significant challenges were for me. In retrospect, the approach has also changed a lot over time. The dynamics in the collective change with the seasons so while in the first weeks [September/ October], there was still a lot going on, it later became more quiet for me and the other participants. Research in such an informal setting with large intersections between personal aspirations and research goals runs the risk of getting lost between the two goals. Ultimately, I still came up with very interesting and research-relevant results.

Entering the field

By describing my experience with the collective and especially my role in the movement, I would like to begin by emphasising how subjective and personal these experiences are. How I perceived my environment and vice versa largely depended on me as a person rather than on how the collective organises itself. In this context, it is also worth emphasising that the underlying motivation to become part of a collective varies significantly between individuals and is highly influential for the role one takes in the movement. I, as a white, cis, European woman, enter the field strongly ideologically driven, with the choice to take a different path at any time. Others, for example, people with low financial and educational background, have a more dependent attachment to the squat and the collective. Awareness of one's privileges or discriminations is essential to understand-

ing the dynamics between single actors and the collective. Therefore, for this research and especially for reflecting on my position as a researcher, I find it highly interesting and important to document my personal entry into the field and my further development precisely.

Entering the field and getting to know the collective proved more challenging than assumed. Being a loose association without clearly assigned tasks and positions makes it difficult for novices to find the right approach immediately. The participants of Zonneklopper generally operate through a platform [the forum], which is divided into several sub-units, with each user having limited access to posts, groups, and discussions, depending on their status. A public area is visible to any visitor, but as its definition states, it excludes any internal communication. Relevant information about meeting places, news and responsibilities are thus denied to public visitors. Therefore, it was also clear that my first act to get a foot into the collective would have to be to step into the forum. As far as I understand the organisation of the forum, there are two ways to access information: Firstly, by joining certain working groups respectively, by requesting to join and then having selective access to the information of this group. Secondly, by becoming a full member [membre effectif] through one of the forum administrators. This is usually linked to a little financial contribution per year to indicate interest in the project. I went for the second option and requested one of the administrators to classify me as a full member and thus give me access to the forum. After a few days and a one-time personal enquiry, I was granted this access. Unfortunately, however, some content that was very relevant to me was still blocked, and I could only access it about two weeks later. Alongside the forum, more informal groups are used to share daily information. Fortunately for me, just as I arrived, it was decided to switch from the messenger service WhatsApp to Telegram to allow mem-

bers without smartphones to use it too. Since I was involved in creating the new groups, I also had access to the information in the new Telegram groups without much effort. *Et Voila*. The first step of receiving information was done after about two weeks.

Now the next step for me was to get to know the collective and, above all, perhaps even more importantly, to make myself known to the collective. I had to be particularly persistent here because my language barrier has often been a burden. I started going to NoJavel, the food organisation, fixing a bike in the bike workshop, attending the agora simply to listen, going to parties, etc., and through this, I got to know more and more people. This step is an ongoing process; by then, it was far from being finished. Finding your place in the collective is essential; for that, one must be familiar with the other members, especially on an interpersonal level. The more people know you, the more they trust you, the more legitimacy your actions have, the more relevant you become for the continuity of the collective. When I started this research, I had very few interpersonal relations. Luckily, I had a very significant key figure who took on the role of a gatekeeper (Grazioli, 2021, p. 45) for me in this research. I already knew this person when I started my fieldwork. He was there from the beginning when Zonneklopper was founded, and the space was occupied. Thus, he knows many people and enjoys a high level of legitimacy. My entry into the field, therefore, mainly went through him. Diving into a completely new structure often takes a person like that. In the 'outside' world, there are always people with responsibilities. There are contact persons who explain the structure to newcomers. In a collective like Zonneklopper, these people do not officially exist; you have to find them for yourself.

Although I was very much guided by my gatekeeper, from the beginning, it was very impor-

tant to me to find and consolidate my position, which is not necessarily attached to his role in the collective. It turned out well that I could occupy a room in the collective for around ten days of his absence. I would also like to reflect on my experience of living there. As described in the previous chapter, Zonneklopper is divided into two units. One is the actual collective consisting of a large industrial area, and the other is the residential building next to it, which can be accessed separately and is divided into two shared flats [see Fig 20]. The room I lived in for over a week is in the apartment building and spatially separated from the events in Zonneklopper. Hence, there was hardly any coincidental interaction with the people who were active in the collective. By parking my bike in the grand foyer, I found a way to generate some incidental interactions. Nevertheless, my week in Zonneklopper turned out to be much quieter than expected. I did not make any noticeable progress in my research. However, it had a decisive effect that will also be important to me later. Through this week in the field, I was able to create my own place. I was more capable of being perceived as a member in my own right than before. I also became more familiar with daily routines. I knew my way around better, was more self-determined and gained more legitimacy just by having a key. After this week and almost four weeks in Brussels, it was time to start my project.

Starting the project

The project I initially came up with for Zonneklopper is the 'ZK Journal', which later turned into the 'Gazette'. In short, it is a small one-off journal that aims to show what Zonneklopper is, how it is organised, what happens there and what the vision is. It is meant to be a collective product in which everyone who wants to can have a place and a voice. It is also meant to strengthen the collective from the inside and show the potential of projects like this. I had already given it a lot of thought beforehand be-

cause I knew that a similar project existed once before, but it was not implemented due to time constraints. Therefore I had no doubts about the magazine's acceptance. Nevertheless, the project is not primarily necessary to preserve the collective. It has no urgency, no necessity. For reasons I will discuss in more detail at a later stage, the members of the collective are often under high resource pressure. There is not enough time, money and people to take care of pending day-to-day tasks. Time, in particular, is a precious asset, as it is also ideologically handled as a more valuable resource than money. So, in the beginning, I encountered a bit of scepticism about the feasibility of the ZK Journal. Finding the right way to spread the word, ask for permission, or get opinions without annoying members with irrelevant questions in a busy daily routine was difficult for me. In the end, two more familiar people advised me to simply post the project in the forum and then present it in the Agora, which I did. Deschner & Dorion (2019, p. 210) describe activist ethnography by taking tests. In entering a political framework, you must pass some tests to be recognised and perceived as someone from the inside. Only by doing this you can fully make your observations as part of the organisation and leave behind your role as a mere observer. Presenting my project in the Agora was somehow passing the first test.

This turned out to be a good start, as almost everyone in the group agreed to the creation of a gazette using the 'occupy hand signals' sign for agreement [see page 69]. What I did not think about, though, is that everyone liked the idea, but no one had the time and energy to get involved. In the following weeks, I tried to contact different people and ask them if they would like to contribute to the magazine. In very few cases, I received an answer, and if I did, it ultimately came to nothing. I concluded that a magazine is not the right entry point to a collective like Zonneklopper. It is too dependent on

information, which you only get after you have been part of the collective for a while and have a certain legitimacy. Above all, to get the information, you must know people and understand the system, which was even more difficult because of my language barrier. In the following time, I moved further and further away from the idea of producing a journal as part of this Master's thesis. Consequently, I still want to do it, but it will no longer be linked to the thesis.

Finding Alternatives

The journal was meant to be a boundary object that would help me enter the collective, get to know people and thus intensify my observations. When I decided to detach the production of a journal from this thesis, I had to find new ways of interacting with people. I realised relatively soon that the easiest way is to participate in existing activities. Consequently, I started participating in various initiatives such as Occupation Strategy, NoJavel, Chantier, Atelier Velo, etcetera. In addition, I often worked on my masters-thesis on site, and that way came into contact with some people. I exchanged views with people individually about my project and asked for opinions on selected topics. This all added up to my participant observation. I also took part in joint dinners and events. I actively followed the discourse of the Telegram and forum groups, on the one hand, to stay informed and, on the other hand, to gain greater legitimacy in conversations. On the 28th of November I finally conducted an interview with person X, which was very much aligned with my work. Afterwards, I created a questionnaire, which again gave me the opportunity to talk to people about the topic of my work. All in all, my participation in the collective was and is a conglomeration of different attempts, initiatives and activities that have sometimes more and sometimes less successfully contributed to my anchoring in the collective but have ultimately led to me gaining an in-depth picture of the project and the people.

4.4 Counter-Hegemony in Zonneklopper

In the context of this paper, I would like to examine Zonneklopper's counter-hegemonic potential in more detail. I will use the ten factors I have defined in Parts I and II and discuss the position of Zonneklopper about each factor. To begin with, I would like to emphasise that counter-hegemony has until now been considered a theory whose implementation in practice can never be complete but rather translated only to a certain extent. In the realisation of counter-hegemonic practice, this is not least due to the fact that some of the parameters even contradict each other. In the last chapter, where all three parts are brought together, I will discuss these contradictions and controversies between theory, concepts and practice. Moreover, some of the parameters refer to the mindset of the individual members. In these cases, at maximum an assessment can be made and never a universal statement. The collective consists of individuals who do not always share the same approach to the project. My statements in these cases refer to the estimation of the basic philosophy. For each parameter, I give a rating between one and five regarding the extent of counter-hegemonic potential [see fig. 34]. This rating is not meant as a quantification of counter-hegemony, rather it is a personal assessment for making it comparable. It should be noted that the radius of counter-hegemony, as described in Part II, corresponds to the scope of the counter-spaces. Thus, the assessment between one and five is exclusively about Zonneklopper's position within the set of counter-spaces. For the first factor, *external*, for example, the value 1 could be a non-governmental organisation and 5 a self-sufficient commune in the countryside. Zonneklopper is more or less in between and therefore gets a rating of 3.

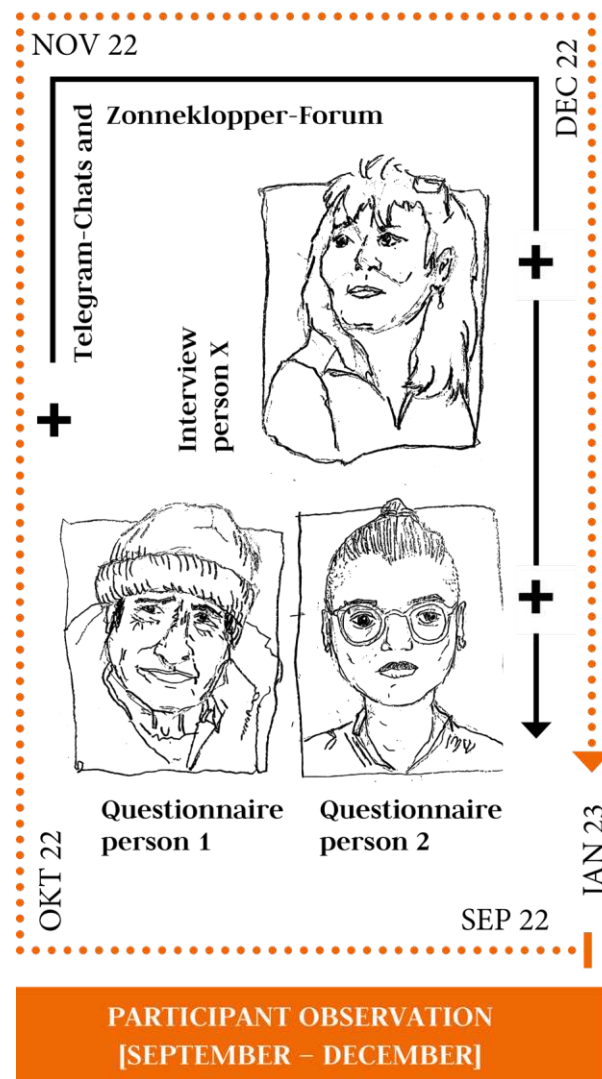


Fig.33 Information gathering through participant observation, telegram groups, the forum, one interview and two questionnaires, sketches of fictional people © Aurelie de Mol

To analyse Zonneklopper's counter-hegemonic potential, I have drawn up a list of different sources of data and information. The basis for my findings is my participant observation in Zonneklopper over several weeks to months, during which I have gained, through intensive listening, observing and exchanging, a meaningful picture of how things work there.

The observation and personal experiences are complemented by a qualitative Interview which I conducted with person X (Appendix 1 & 1A), and the two completed questionnaires of person 1 and person 2 (Appendix 2 & 2A). In addition, being a member of several chat groups and the forum used for general communication also served as a primary information source. Any information from the *forum*, the *Telegram groups*, the *interview* or the *questionnaire* is marked accordingly in the following. Everything else is derived from my active and passive participation in the collective.

Finally, a short note on methodology. After finding the content-related insights from Part I and II, they had to be translated into a practical language. During the interview, I still adhered to the parameters that had emerged from the theory. Following feedback from my interview partner that the parameters were very theoretical and not particularly tangible, I transformed each parameter into more rhetorically understandable questions which were closer to day-to-day matters. On 28/11/2022, from 11:00-12:00, I interviewed person X about the ten parameters. Based on the information that emerged from the interview, I created the questionnaire that was completed by persons 1 and 2 in December 2022. I will also indicate this translation process for each parameter in the following.

External

It [the counter-hegemonic structure/ ZK] is positioned outside the 'system'. Any Form of cooperation with profit-orientated or public actors is refused.

Questionnaire:

1. *ZK has an agreement with Foyer du Sud (the owner) and is in multiple ways cooperating with 'the outside'. What do you think of that?*

2. *Do you think ZK should cooperate more with external actors, or should it be more independent?*

** I like the cooperations, I think there should be more. Why?*

** I think cooperations are a barrier, we should be more independent. Why?*

** Leave it the way it is*

The first parameter concerns cooperation with capitalist structures. When I speak of capitalist structures, I refer to all structures that reproduce the capitalist system in one way or another. Accordingly, NGOs that indirectly take responsibility for state failure through their voluntary services as well as social welfare state agents that, for example, promote affordable housing but have nevertheless been co-opted by a capitalist system, also fall into the category of capitalist actors. The ideal type of counter-hegemonic structures are those that do not engage with the capitalist system at all.

In the case of Zonneklopper, this does not apply. After the occupation in June 2020, Zonneklopper negotiated a contract with the owner, *Foyer du Sud*, a public service real estate company. They do social housing in the municipalities of Saint-Gilles and Forest. Zonneklopper is now basically a self-managed [auto-gere] temporary occupation, legally run in consultation with the commune [public administration] and *Foyer du Sud* [the owner]. Regarding the cooperation with *Foyer du Sud* and the decision with whom to cooperate, person X says: *»It depends on the reputation, what they are doing. Foyer du Sud, they work within the capitalist system, but they are doing social housing, and for me, that is not the solution because I do not think it is radical enough, but it is one solution.«* (Appendix 1B, line 35) The cooperation with *Foyer du Sud* is a reality for all participants and is accepted and supported. Through this, the collective also has access to all building plans for the follow-up

project. There are regular meetings between the architects of the collective and the architects on behalf of Foyer du Sud. Within Zonneklopper, the working group called 'Occupation Strategy' takes care of this collaboration. According to the plan, the first demolition phase will start in the spring of 2024. Zonneklopper could exist parallel to the construction work for a few more years. NoJavel, the food organisation located in the Zonneklopper building, is already included in the future project. (Information from the forum and the interview with Person X).

The cooperation with the public administration [the Commune] takes place on different levels and is sometimes discussed more controversially within the collective. Person 1 is happy about the interest of the Commune to cooperate because it shows that this *social utopia* touches the actors. Nevertheless, it is important for person 1 to remain completely independent in decisions and actions. One example of this kind of cooperation is that the *Commune Forest*, the public actor responsible for this area, has supported the bicycle repair shop with several thousand euros. In addition, professional bicycle training was financed for some people. This *Atelier Vélo* is now open to the neighbourhood once a week and has become an integral part of the collective. There are also negotiations to include the bicycle repair shop in the follow-up project. The controversies regarding cooperation with the municipality are particularly evident in a forum discussion in November 2022. The starting point was an email from the Commune asking for accommodation for two households due to the end of a temporary occupation. These were two families, each with 3-4 children, who had not found new accommodation following the closure of the interim uses. The e-mail was posted in the forum with a request for a political decision. From the discussion, it became clear that while some wanted to use this op-

portunity to exert political pressure, for example, to demand the opening of other buildings, others simply wanted to refuse because the capacities in Zonneklopper are no longer given. Two e-mails were written in response, one more open to further discussion, the other relatively dismissive.

In addition, Zonneklopper cooperates with numerous associations and organisations, some of which are self-organised, others are state-recognised and subsidised. In the initial charta, cooperation with other associations in the neighbourhood is clearly described as desirable, and profit orientation is fundamentally rejected, as person X mentioned. The founding paper [charta] mentions several cooperations that were entered into from the beginning. These include LA COMPILOTHÈQUE ASBL, which takes care of the management and operation of multi-purpose centres; NO-JAVEL, which fights against all forms of waste, overconsumption and insecurity in the Brussels region by taking back and redistributing unsold items; or the artists' collective BOITE À CLOUS ASBL, which is still rented in the building. Collaborations with other squats, temporary occupations, asbls, etcetera, constantly change but are generally met with openness. Person 2, for example, would like to cooperate with an organisation that specialises in taking care of migrants.

Zonneklopper is, therefore, by no means completely external. However, the collective attaches great importance to finding a balance between entering into cooperations that guarantee the existence and are helpful for fulfilling the goals and avoiding ideologically incompatible cooperations.

Continuous

It is not determined. In that sense there is no aspiration for the fixation of meaning;

for finding one single solution. People are aware that there will be a constant negotiation.

Questionnaire:

1. What is your final goal in Zonneklopper? What happens if when you reached this goal?

2. Make a cross if you agree:

** ZK has certain goals. They may be far in the future, but when they are achieved, the project is complete*

** Goals change over time, ZK will never be fully completed. I live in the moment.*

This parameter refers to the position regarding the goals of the project. In an ideal counter-hegemonic structure, there is no final goal. The participants do not expect to ever complete their project but have the simple continuation and development as an objective, both on a personal and collective level. This also means that the overall concern is not to align and agree but to find ways to deal with discourse and conflict meaningfully. Since 'continuous' is a parameter that does not regard the attitude of the whole collective but rather that of individuals towards the project, the answer is very subjective and varies from person to person. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent when looking at the charta (Zonneklopper, 2020), which was jointly written at the beginning, that Zonneklopper is a project whose effect is in the moment and not at a certain and final point in time. Unlike a political action or artistic intervention, there is not only preparation until a final result is achieved. Instead, the whole process is the achievement. A current example that shows the desire for constant change in Zonneklopper is the working group *will-to-change*, which is dedicated to the male approach to patriarchy and whose name already confirms it. Person X says: »We are changing all the time. We are trying to ask a lot of ques-

tions about ourselves, about if what we do is right or not. We make mistakes. And then we stop. As long as we do this, the project is going on.« (Appendix 1B, line 48) The statements in the questionnaire are also consistent with this. Person 1 says: »The final objective is to meet, to search together, to create a resort, to occupy the empty space and to evolve both together and as individuals.« And person 2 agrees with the statement, »Goals change over time; ZK will never be fully completed.« (Appendix 2B)

I conclude that Zonneklopper is continuous. Most agree that the idea from the beginning was to create a place to experiment, live and express oneself. To have fun and do good. That this is the goal, and it never stops.

Insurgent

It does not back down from painful confrontations, on the contrary it encourages controversy, conflict and radicalism. This makes it overcome numbness and passivity.

Questionnaire:

1. Do you like to mediate in conflicts?

** yes * no*

2. What do you think is true for conflicts in Zonneklopper? (more than one is possible)

** Conflicts are avoided as much as possible*

** Conflicts are addressed and solved quickly*

** Conflicts are negotiated until everyone is satisfied with the solution*

** Club Bisous takes care of conflicts*

** Conflicts are actively provoked*

** Conflicts are not negative, they are a sign of empowerment*

** Conflicts will never stop*

Insurgency in this context, as a parameter of

counter-hegemony, means that the approach to conflict is active and positive rather than passive and dismissive. It means that temporary non-harmony is not seen as inherently negative but as productive and essential for the survival of the collective. Insurgency, here, does not necessarily mean struggle and loud resistance but the striving for debate. In doing so, controversy, otherness and radicality should be supported. From my experience, in Zonneklopper, conflict is not avoided but actively acted out, which is a sign of insurgency. At the same time, disagreement is still perceived as a problem to be solved. General agreement and consensus among members are sought, which would mean it is less insurgent in this sense. The question arises whether anything else is not fatal for the survival of the collective. A 100% insurgency would mean that agreement is rejected. This would make decision-making as a collective impossible and lead to the collective rather becoming a loose grouping of individuals. In order to see the group as a separate entity that is more than the sum of its parts, there needs to be common ground and a striving for agreement. For successful and non-ideal-typical counter-hegemony, it is much more a question of what price is paid for the agreement. Zonneklopper, in my estimation, is not willing to pay a high price just for the purpose of unification, which is why I see it as having great counter-hegemonic potential concerning insurgency. The statements from the interview and the questionnaire also agree with this. Person 1 and 2 see conflict not as something negative but as a sign of empowerment; they also know that conflict will never stop (Appendix 2B). Person X answers the question about dealing with conflict: »An example is again what we are doing now. We have a problem with a few guys having all the power. So we stop and talk until we find a solution, Even if it means painful confrontations. Conflict is not something negative, but it depends a lot on how it is done.« (Appendix 1B, line 66)

Heterarchic

It rejects any form of hierarchy; the system is horizontal. All positions and mandates related to the accumulation of power are imperative, meaning that they are bound to tasks and can be recalled at any time.

Questionnaire:

1. *If you disagree with a decision that was made by someone who had the power to make this decision, what do you do?*

** I don't do anything, I trust the person in charge*

** I contact the person directly*

** I post in the forum and address it in a meeting*

** I talk to my friends in ZK*

** I go to club bisous*

2. *Do you have the feeling that power is distributed equally among the members in ZK?*

** yes * no*

Heterarchy appears in popular science often as a complementary descriptive category to the term *hierarchy*, although its true meaning has received little attention until today (Goldammer, 2003, p. 25). Heterarchy comes from the Greek and means 'domination of the other' and was coined by the neuroscientist Warren McCulloch in 1954. Although McCulloch attributes a very precise topological meaning to it (ibid., p. 1), the term is nowadays mainly used to describe network-like structures instead of the pyramid-like structures of hierarchy. I also use heterarchy in this context. As a parameter of counter-hegemony, it describes a central form of organisation based on the idea that each part of a network has the same horizontal power and authority positions. To achieve this, there must be a shift from *power over to power to*, and mandates that hold a specific power and responsibility must be imperative, i.e. bound to tasks.

In Zonneklopper, the topic of power is discussed controversially. Power is not, without reason, the foundation of a hegemonic system. It is very complex and, above all very, essential for the architecture of a system. Accordingly, dealing with power is one of the greatest challenges in a self-governing, aspirational horizontal collective embedded in a highly power-concentrated context [the capitalist-hegemonic system]. The charta of Zonneklopper literally states, »We have conceived this project together using methods of horizontal communication and collective management.« (Zonneklopper, 2020, p. 3). Heterarchy and the redistribution or equal distribution of power, authority, and decision-making capacity were and are among its top goals, but implementation proved to be much more difficult. The members of the collective are still products of their socialisation, and accordingly, the collective also internally tends to reproduce colonialist and capitalist inequalities of power. Accordingly, financially strong members of the collective are still products of their socialisation, and the collective also internally reproduces colonialist and capitalist power inequalities. Consequently, financially stronger, highly educated men from western countries are likewise the most powerful group, with the greatest decision-making power. Person X says: »In theory, we are completely anti-hierarchical, but in fact, some people have a lot of power. They take more space because they can.« (Appendix 1B, line 85) There is also a big power gap between the activists with a structurally strong background and the migrants who come from the most vulnerable situations.

However, as mentioned, the basic idea follows a very horizontal logic. Once a week, there is a public agora where everyone can participate. In this agora, the tasks for the respective session are distributed each time anew. Thus, it is not always the same person who is the mod-

erator, for example. The agora also serves to distribute and restructure general tasks in the collective. I had the impression that it was a very open space for communication and that care was taken to ensure that not always the same had their say. In some meetings, speaking times were compared between cis men and people from the Flinta-community to draw attention to an imbalance. Tasks such as bookkeeping or external communication are usually assigned to a person for a limited period and then evaluated. Once a year, there is a plenary meeting at which certain issues are put to the vote. Each effective member has one vote and can give a proxy if absent. However, each member can only be given one proxy (information from the forum, January 2023).

The organisational structure thus has very clear heterarchical elements. In reality, the members are still marked by a long history of oppressors and oppressed, which is why the power distribution within the collective is often a mirror of the outside society.

Critical

Individual and collective values, norms, behavioural patterns and habits are constantly questioned and adapted if necessary.

Questionnaire:

1. *Did your personal values, norms, behavioural patterns change since then? If yes, how? What has changed?*

** yes * no*

This is, again, a parameter that is highly subjective and dependent on individual attitudes. It is about how much the individuals of a collective are willing to question and change their values and norms. If many individuals are willing to do so, this leads to the whole collective positioning itself critically towards itself and the environment. However, to find

out adequately, one would have to find a way to measure the individual reflectiveness of the participants. Since this can neither be measured quantitatively nor has the same meaning from person to person, a general statement here is almost impossible. Still, one can feel the degree to which the collective positions itself critically towards itself by looking at various examples. For instance, during my observation, I followed several situations in which participants in the collective were highly critical of their role in the collective or the general positioning of the group. Person 1 also commented on personal development as follows: »I find a sense of purpose, the confidence to expose my fragilities too and the space to unfold my strengths.« (Appendix 2B) With this, the person says there is a space where one can also change personally. That means that the framework has been created to be critical. Person X thinks that the people in the collective are critical of themselves but not enough and that some participants do not see the connection between their actions and the effects on their environment (Appendix 1B, line 115). This would be a sign of an insufficiently critical attitude towards oneself. Again, it is impossible to make a general statement about this with the data sources. However, my subjective assessment is 4/5 because most people I have met reflect extensively on themselves and their place in this world.

Holistic

It is not contented with minor changes. It aims to change the prevailing world narrative and to generate a profoundly different one.

Questionnaire:

1. *If you could change one thing for society, what would it be?*

Holistic in this context refers to the attitude of the collective towards social change. This parameter is effective when most individuals and thus the basic atmosphere in the collective wish for a fundamentally different world and work towards it. For example, a women's shelter could also be a counter-space, but one that is very specialised and, therefore, not particularly holistic.

Concerning Zonneklopper, this aspect is particularly interesting. As a founding member of the collective once said, the original idea was to build a city within the city. If you read the charta (Zonneklopper, 2020), you get a similar impression. Zonneklopper is meant to offer everything. This idea is very holistic and is also reflected to a large extent in the current project [2 years later]. In Zonneklopper, you can live, work, play, shop, party, repair your bike, do sports, create art, etc. In addition, this offer should be accessible to everyone, regardless of origin, age or gender. Thus, Zonneklopper has a very high potential for counter-hegemony with regard to the parameter holistic because new narratives can be created in such spaces. However, there is again a conflict between theory and practice. What works very well, in theory, proves to be extremely difficult when embedded in practice in a capitalist system. A lack of specialisation also runs the risk that, because resources are scarce, you end up not achieving real change in any of the areas. It is, therefore, often necessary to consciously renounce certain things. Especially the inclusion of migrants has been criticised repeatedly in this context. Including people from the most vulnerable and precarious situations also comes with a certain responsibility that demands time and resources. This can only be done adequately if other things lose priority.

Collective

Collective is above individual. With a social anarchist approach, the freedom of the collective and equity among individuals are positioned as the top priority.

Questionnaire:

1. *How do you see the relation between your own needs and the needs of the collective?*

**The collective is more important to me than my personal needs*

** My personal needs stand on top of the collective*

**They are equally important to me*

Another factor for the emergence of counter-hegemony is an orientation towards the collective as a counterpart to the individualism increasingly emerging from neoliberalism. As I have mentioned in the first two parts, a characteristic of capitalism and especially neoliberalism is the profit maximisation of individuals. Magnus Marsdal (2005, p. 1) says, »[In neoliberalism] we are all individuals and nothing but individuals«, describing the same logic as Margret Thatcher with her famous quote »there is no such thing as society«. The common good or the maximisation of profit for a community is not only secondary but, according to the neoliberal idea, not even possible. This ideology has already crept far into our patterns of thought and action, which today have an excessively narcissistic and self-centred character. It starts with the Darwinian narrative of 'survival of the fittest' and ends with the quest for unique selling points by every person and company. The self-optimisation obsession fuelled by social media is also a sign of capitalist individualism. Even the keyword self-fulfilment, which in recent decades has become synonymous with contentment and life balance (Hecht, 2021), has a profoundly individualistic tenor. This devel-

opment endangers social cohesion. Even in acts of solidarity, there must ultimately be an outward profit. Individualism and hegemonic capitalism are so closely intertwined that common good orientation and collectivism are central factors for establishing a counter-hegemonic structure.

Nevertheless, individuals and collectives are very closely related. As Person X said in the interview: »Collectivism is Individualism«, meaning that a collective is only a composition of individuals who shape it. For this parameter to be fulfilled, however, the freedom of the collective and the equality of the individuals in the collective must be more important to the members than individual freedom. All three persons [X, 1, 2] have answered the question about the relationship between individual and collective needs by saying they are equally important. Person X points out that you can only do well in a collective if you do well yourself (Appendix 1A, line 178). Accordingly, one's own well-being must come first.

Another aspect that is particularly relevant in this respect is the commitment and sense of belonging of the actors to the collective. Zonneklopper exists in an urban context; it is embedded in an urban infrastructure that satisfies the needs of all people also outside the four walls of Zonneklopper. Person X says in this regard: »[...] we are in the middle of a capitalist society. If we were somewhere in the nature with no one around, it would be A LOT easier. Because we would live more together. [...] I think it is particularly hard in such an urban environment.« (Appendix 1B, line 140) The placement of Zonneklopper in a city like Brussels first leads to the fact that people, especially if they do not live in the collective, are often confronted with the hegemonic system in everyday life and are accordingly susceptible to the internalisation of given norms. Secondly, most people act between the collective

and the outside world, or once there and once there. Few people have official responsibility for the collective; most come and go as it is compatible with their private lives. On the one hand, this is difficult for the continuation of the collective; on the other hand, it also hinders the development of a community structure in which the freedom of the collective stands above the freedom of the individual. Nevertheless, people in Zonneklopper support each other. For example, someone with no income pays nothing, while others with a stable financial background pay more. (Appendix 1B, line 188)

Because of these factors, I rank Zonneklopper in terms of collectivism with relatively low counter-hegemonic potential. The structure, as it exists, fights less against the increasing individualisation. Due to its size, anonymity and fluctuation of members, it is challenging to generate a sense of community. Nevertheless, a core of people has been very active for a long time. This makes community spirit evident. Person 1, who has been part of Zonneklopper from the beginning, says: »*There is a sense of identity, a joy of being part of it, that I have not experienced for many years. I love the relationships that are built around this impossible mission.*« (Appendix, 2B)

Autarkic

It seeks independence from the resources and services owned by the hegemonic system. Food and energy self-sufficiency are therefore aspirational goals.

Questionnaire:

1. How important do you think economic independence is for a place like ZK? In terms of food, energy, re-sources self-sufficiency
 * It is extremely important, I would like to invest more time in becoming self-sufficient
 * It is important but other things are more

important

* *It doesn't work in a place like ZK*

* *It's not important*

Autarky, in a political and economic sense, refers to a country's self-sufficiency and economic independence. Here, the same definition is applied to the collective. To be self-sufficient means to be not dependent on money or other resources such as food or energy from actors from the outside. For complete self-sufficiency, all goods and services consumed must be produced and offered within the collective. This is not 100% feasible in an urban squat. Due to its volatility alone, many investments in its infrastructure do not pay off. In most cases, squats remain economically dependent on their environment. However, the priority given to achieving at least partial self-sufficiency varies from situation to situation.

In Zonneklopper, the charta (Zonneklopper, 2020, p. 45) explicitly states: »*The technical and constructive strategy envisaged by the collective is to move as far as possible towards autonomy, both in terms of the expertise and standardisation of the building, the layout and design of the spaces, as well as the need for resources. The aim is to achieve this autonomy by mobilising the diversity of profiles, skills, energies and experience accumulated within Zonneklopper.*« Furthermore, they write later that the building will become energy self-sufficient in a second construction phase and that an internal material recycling network will be established. They also announced their intention to use parts of the 5000m² roof area for the production of vegetables and aromatic plants.

This shows that autonomy or even autarky was indeed an aspirational goal at the beginning. Looking at the situation two years later, Zonneklopper is, however, still dependent on other actors, especially with regard to energy. In

terms of food, the association NoJavel, which is part of the collective, contributes a lot to independence, yet Zonneklopper does not have its own food production. Person X explains the situation with the fact that housing was needed from the very beginning, especially for the migrants whose relocation was the reason for the occupation. As a result, things had to be done quickly and under enormous pressure. If more time had been taken, solutions could have been found that would have brought greater autonomy. Person X said: »*If we would have taken more time to build things and to think more about how to do things, but there were already people living, who needed a washing machine and electricity, so everything was done urgently.*« (Appendix 1B, line 195)

Persistent

It is resistant to the attempts of co-optation by the hegemonic system, e.g. in-stitutionalisation and anti-squatting measures.

Questionnaire:

1. There is a general discussion about the relationship between squats and gentrification. Do you think ZK contributes to the gentrification of the Forest Commune? If so, how do you want to fight against it?

The term persistent could be somewhat misleading in this case. In the context of a counter-hegemonic parameter, it means to be persistent against the temptation to be co-opted by the hegemonic system and thus to support and reproduce a system one originally wanted to fight against. Increasing attempts by state or private sector actors to instrumentalise the informal scene for their own purposes, and simultaneously the constant scarcity of resources, makes it often difficult for autonomous structures to resist. This also applies to Zonneklopper and its contract with the owner. For the collective, it is the only way to act with a

level of certainty. Many things could not even come into being without this agreement.

Centrally managed temporary occupations, as there is a growing number of examples in Brussels, have greater legitimacy and more resources for implementing their projects. The existence of these occupations means that more radical forms of squatting lose legitimacy, and the struggles linked to them are made invisible. The more the public administration allows or supports temporary occupations, the more norm-compliant these occupations become and the less space there is for self-managed, autonomous and thus counter-hegemonic squats. Such developments are described with the term anti-squatting and, in some cases, lead to the gentrification of a neighbourhood.

Zonneklopper is persistent in that they are still a self-managed collective trying to seek autonomy. Though, especially in the first year, in addition to the collaborations that took away their autonomous character, there were also hosting many parties which brought in an audience that did not fit into the local neighbourhood. The former can contribute to anti-squatting, the latter to gentrification. Thus, these would both be signs that Zonneklopper is not persistent. In June 2020, however, an incident in Zonneklopper seriously changed the attitude towards parties and the neighbourhood in particular. For a few months now, the focus has been much more on activating the neighbourhood and creating opportunities for a greater diversity of people and, thus, fighting gentrification.

Person X says: »*I do not think this place contributes so much to gentrification. Not as much as other institutionalised places. We completely stopped the parties because we realised that it was bringing the wrong public into such a neighbourhood. We are trying to do more*

things in connection with the neighbourhood.« (Appendix 1B, line 242) Person 1 agrees: »I do not think there would be any more or less gentrification if we were not here.« Person 2 is more critical, proposing more activities with the neighbourhood, but rather something they choose and not something the members of the collective like to do. (Appendix 2B)

Receptive

It builds an umbrella narrative that unites various social movements and different social classes.

Questionnaire:

1. Do you think the other people in ZK are similar to you?

* yes * no

2. Do you wish for a greater variety of people, mindsets, lifestyles in ZK?

* yes * no

Note: This parameter was modified belatedly. Originally it was called 'uniting' and referred exclusively to bringing together people from different backgrounds and with different goals. The interview and questionnaire were still conducted with the initial definition.

The image of an entirely new world is constructed in an ideal-typical counter-hegemonic structure. Because this structure encompasses all areas of life and starts from the present moment, different social classes and realities of life must also be included in this construction. This proves difficult in an increasingly particularised society because there is often even a great deal of disagreement between similar sub-movements. Nevertheless, a structure needs to remain open to the outside. Encapsulation and demarcation from the outside can lead to the structure becoming homoge-

neous in itself on the one hand and no longer having any influence on the hegemonic system on the other. Once again, this parameter can only be implemented to a limited extent in practice. The unification of social classes is certainly possible and desirable. However, the unification of wildly divergent social movements and political opponents can also be a hindrance. Person X says: »I would like social movements to mix, but I do not have so much to say to someone who thinks completely differently.« (Appendix 1B, line 277)

In Zonneklopper, the members are a relatively homogeneous group. There are an above-average number of Western Europeans with an educational background from an artistic, activist to militant milieu. Occasionally there are exceptions, but the majority fit into this category. When I ask whether there are differences of opinion on the major political issues, person X answers that they all remain pretty much among themselves. Nevertheless, Zonneklopper is open to newcomers and people from the outside joining the project. This can sometimes be a challenge for the people who are already operating there, but the attempt to integrate new people into the collective remains. On the website, it says, »In this place, you are welcome to propose projects and participate in the activities offered«. Moreover, the mini-charter [see Fig.22] explicitly addresses newcomers by highlighting the phrase »You are welcome here.«

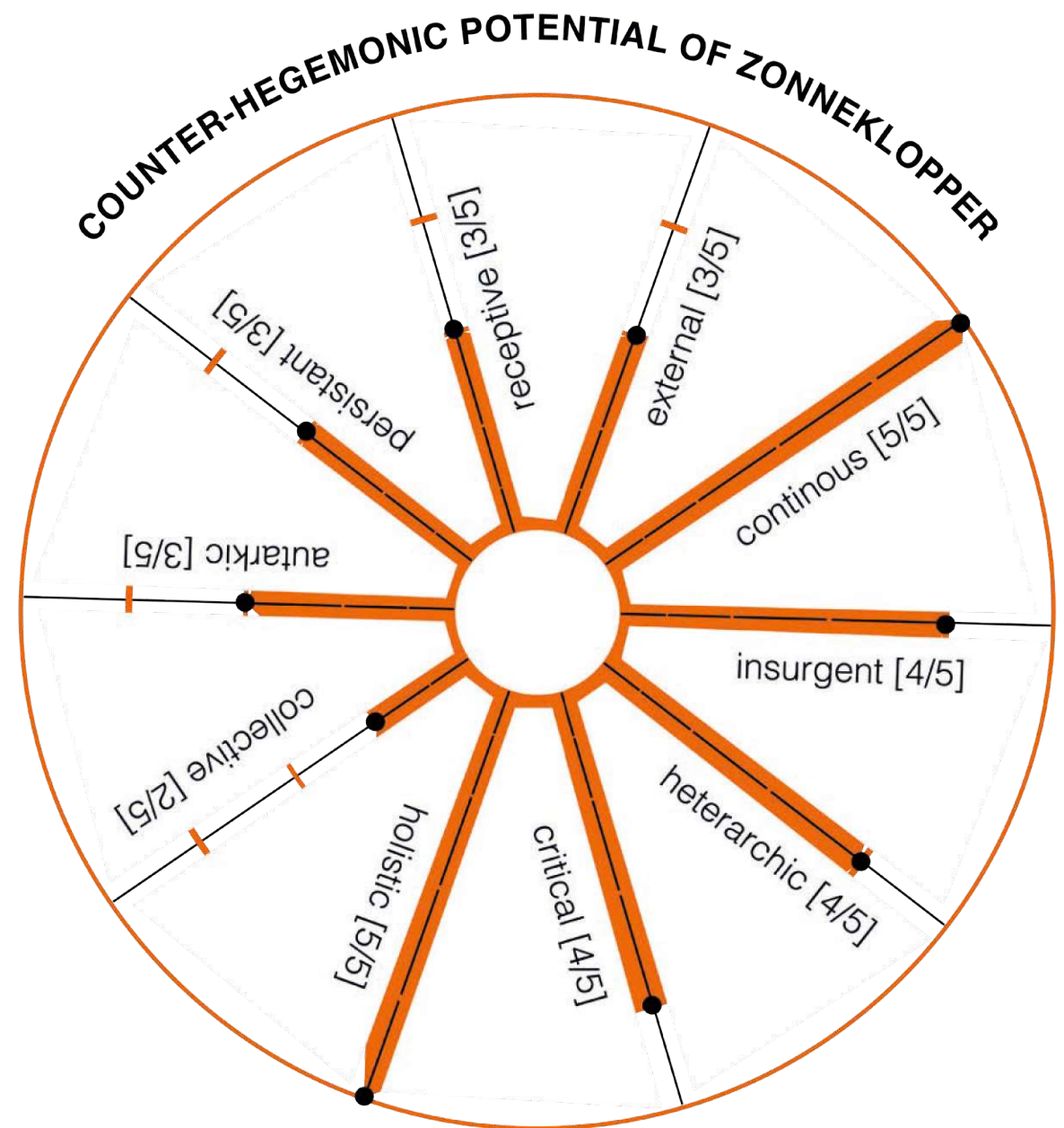


Fig.34 Final assessment of the counter-hegemonic potential of Zonneklopper along the 10 factors defined in Parts I and II on a scale of one to five, with one being the lowest and five the highest value

4.5 Conclusion PART III

Brussels is a city which, compared to other European cities, has good preconditions for allowing the emergence of counter-hegemonic structures. Squats within a city are places where counter-hegemonic structures have the chance to grow and gain influence. Zonneklopper is an urban squat in the Brussels-Capital Region and has unique possibilities in establishing and implementing counter-hegemonic practices, i.e. in creating narratives outside of capitalism and breaking with discourses that have become hegemonic. As emerged from Parts I and II, counter-hegemony in an urban squat means to be *external, continuous, insurgent, heterarchical, critical, holistic, collective, autarkic, persistent* and *receptive* in the way described in figure 10 and 15. However, nothing, no place, no structure, no activity can fulfil all these parameters at its maximum. It is, therefore, the first task in establishing counter-hegemony to be conscious of this and, above all, to deliberately decide which aspects to aim for with higher and which with lower priority.

Zonneklopper has several strongly counter-hegemonic features, which have great potential to break with the prevailing discourses and narratives and create and realise an image of a changed world. Conversely, it also has elements that do not contribute to counter-hegemony or even hinder it. For instance, it is not ideal-typically counter-hegemonic because it lacks self-sufficiency or independence from authorities. It enters into cooperative ventures. However, in reality, there cannot be complete counter-hegemony according to the ten factors because they are partly mutually exclusive. For example, complete autarky and independence cannot happen in an urban environment without having the guarantee to exist for a certain time. For this certainty,

one needs the authority's agreement, which contradicts the first aspiration of being external. These two factors [autarkic and external] can, for example, be achieved at maximum in a rural settlement, where in reality, insurgent or receptive factors will come shorter. Zonneklopper is generally significantly influenced by its urban environment. The position within an urban context brings specific challenges but also opportunities, which Zonneklopper has had to deal with from the beginning. Especially influential for the collective is the high fluctuation that arises from the anonymity and lack of commitment in a city context. A strong sense of belonging and cohesion is often difficult to reconcile with openness and lack of cohesion. Thus, for example, these parameters are in a paradoxical relationship. A complete counter-hegemony is by no means the goal. Suppose one compares Zonneklopper with other counter-spaces such as NGOs, feminist reading circles, a demonstration or a construction site occupation to prevent a major project. In that case, it nevertheless has disproportionately high scores and, accordingly, a very high counter-hegemonic potential. In Zonneklopper, no parameter falls below the value of two because all factors are considered, at least in theory and aspiration. This brings me to the major controversy in Zonneklopper.

Zonneklopper faces challenges and is marked by contradictions, often arising from its greatest strengths. The idea of creating within the walls of Zonneklopper a city within the city built entirely on values of solidarity and togetherness, as well as justice and equality, would not only be the epitome of counter-hegemony but is also a very effective way to try out and then show what alternatives look like. Looking at the charta drawn up at the beginning, the goals of Zonneklopper are very ambitious and include almost all realms of life. Zonneklopper is a place where refugees and socially disadvantaged people are accommodated. At the

same time, a bicycle workshop is in operation, boxing courses are offered, children are looked after, and parties are thrown. However, in practice, it has become clear that many of these goals cannot be realised and that, in reality, it is a much stronger reflection of the hegemonic structure than initially expected. The holism and ambition of Zonneklopper leave less capacity for community building and interpersonal caring. Many in the collective suffer from the isolation and lack of tangibility of the project.

Looking at the squatting categories of Pruijt (2013) that I extensively described in Part II, Zonneklopper can be assigned to almost every category. By hosting migrants, it fits into the category of *deprivation-based squatting*; with the diverse activities, concerts and parties for the neighbourhood and the whole city, it has strong elements of *entrepreneurial squatting*, and at the same time, the political and protest culture is very prominent, which is why it fits into the category of *political squatting*. And yet, I would best put it in the category of *squatting as an alternative housing strategy*, which is already very broadly conceived in that it ties housing strategy to a complete lifestyle change. Only the configuration *conservation-al squatting* does not apply to Zonneklopper. In my opinion, this is very indicative of the number of goals of the collective. Assigning squats to one configuration at a time also has the reason that it can then become powerful in this range. At the same time, a collective can never equally change the world and itself. In an ideal typical sense, counter-hegemony would mean fighting actively against hegemony while simultaneously being in a constant internal struggle where questions, norms and behaviours are challenged. On a long-term horizon, it is complicated to maintain both approaches simultaneously and be successful both in one's own reflection and in convincing others. In general, it is debatable to what

extent a narrowly focused or a generalist approach is helpful in such a context. Zonneklopper has chosen a generalist approach which inevitably leads to a high counter-hegemonic potential because it builds new narratives and opposes hegemonic reality. So, what has become the most significant challenge for Zonneklopper, and possibly the greatest point of criticism from the outside, is precisely what gives it its high counter-hegemonic potential.

» *There is one big positive thing about Zonneklopper: We have realized so many things; we have learned so much.* «

Person X, appendix 1B, line 228

Concluding...

1st Due to its large scale, diversity and ambition, Zonneklopper has a great potential to test and spread alternative anti-capitalist narratives while simultaneously breaking with current discourses. Though, Zonneklopper's ambition to connect to a diverse range of fields also leads to a loss of quality in fulfilling its goals, as well as to the isolation of individuals and a lack of team spirit.

2nd Zonneklopper's position in a city like Brussels is crucial for the development of the collective: the urban space brings anonymity and an absence of responsibility towards the collective, but also openness, diversity and a certain outreach.

3rd Zonneklopper is neither independent nor self-sufficient due to its urban setting. Nevertheless, it has some room for manoeuvre and decides what dependency relationships it wants to enter into.

4th Zonneklopper is a long-term project. It is not bound to this one occupation of the building and strives to continue for a long time.

5th The divergence between aspired goals and implemented practice is often enormous. In Zonneklopper, much more is desired than can be realised.

6th The individuals in Zonneklopper shape the collective; they have to question their values and norms before the collective can change as a whole. Though not all, many have an insurgent, critical and persistent mindset and are positively disposed to conflict, debate, and continuous change.

05 MOVING FORWARD

To complete this work, in the following chapter, I will briefly recapitulate the core statements of the first three parts and relate them to each other and the corresponding research questions. Part I and Part II, in particular, function very independently from one another. Part I approaches the concept of counter-hegemony and counter-spaces in theory; Part II describes the phenomenon and practice of squatting. The two parts are already brought together in Part III, where counter-hegemony is applied to a squat. In the following, I will additionally combine the two parts and the findings

from the case study on a theoretical and conceptual basis. In addition, I will make statements about the general evaluation of counter-hegemony in an urban context and give an overview of controversies, conflicts and debates in a socio-political and urban planning discourse. Hereby I highlight how the discipline of spatial planning has to be adapted regarding the notion of counter-hegemony and its significance for a more equitable world. I will conclude this paper with a discussion and remaining questions that can be addressed by further research on counter-hegemony in urban space.

5.1 Recap/ Executive

summary

Summary Part I – counter-hegemonic appropriations of space

We are living in a class society. Power and wealth are unequally distributed between various groups of people. This inequality intensifies with the increasing privatisation of goods and services and the individual maximisation of profits as propagated by neoliberalism. In 2021, 1.2% of the world's population owned 47.8% of the world's total wealth (Statista, 2023), and because in capitalism, money is equivalent to power and influence, there is a striking gap between the rich and the poor. A powerful few, described as the ruling class, get to decide and rule over a large number of people. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels describe this condition primarily due to the existence and unequal distribution of capital. For them, there is an economic basis, which encompasses all forces of production and is responsible for the formation of class society, and a superstructure, which covers all other areas of social life and reproduces and legitimises class society. The scope of action for them lies entirely in the economic base since this will influence the superstructure and result in social change (Singh, 2013, p. 75). The journalist, author and philosopher Antonio Gramsci, who gained popularity through his prison diaries in Mussolini's captivity in 1929-1935, has a different view on the relation between base and superstructure. With the theory of hegemony, he describes how a ruling class, additionally to their capital, gains and maintains their power through everyday practices of the subaltern classes. For him, the scope of action lies both in the economic base and the ideological superstructure. *Hegemony* thus describes the ability of some powerful few to impose their interests as a collective will (We-

ber, 2013, p. 57). As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, around 60 years later, elaborate, this happens through daily discourses shaped by the ruling class. They hereby emphasise the role of communication, language and narratives as essential parts that keep a hegemonic system alive. Since the ruling class has power over media and communication, they likewise decide on mainstream discourses and narratives. Beginning in the 1970s, with the replacement of *Keynesian welfare capitalism* by modern neoliberalism, the narratives of efficiency, optimisation and individual success are becoming stronger and stronger. Thus neoliberalism, less as a mere economic system and more as a network of policies, values and ideologies, is becoming increasingly hegemonic. Instead of particular state actors, market actors are now becoming the ruling class, and their ideology is internalised and reproduced by a large part of the population. Since a strong hegemony inevitably leads to social inequality, it must be combated within the broader social justice lens.

Because neoliberal hegemony has infiltrated almost every area of life, from modes of work, housing and leisure, to consumption and the choices of productivity to deeply emotional sensibilities, the struggle against it will also have to take place increasingly in these situations. Counter-hegemony broadly describes the contestation of a hegemonic system by questioning internalised norms, values, mindsets and behaviours and consequently transforming them. In doing so, counter-hegemony, as described in the discourse theory according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), increasingly relies on changing discourses and narratives and has, thereby inevitably, a benevolent approach to conflict and disputes. Ultimately, the goal is to remove the ruling class ideology's legitimacy and create a greater balance of power through a sufficiently strong counter-hegemony.

Counter-hegemony has many different manifestations. It can take place on a small, individual scale, such as when a group of friends begins to reflect on their socialisation. However, it can also find itself in radical activism. Counter-hegemony is thus rather a theory than a practical application. Its margins are unclear, and since it is linked to discourses and narratives, it often takes place on a hidden or personal level. Nevertheless, there are spaces, not exclusively as physical entities but as networks and arenas of action, in which counter-hegemony is increasingly located. I describe all these spaces jointly as *counter-spaces*. As counter-hegemony, counter-spaces are likewise not demarcated clearly. Whether a space, an organisation or an action temporarily or permanently becomes a counter-space depends on the participants' subjective perception and its internal and external influence. Counter-spaces can take various forms, from non-governmental-, non-profit associations and autonomous collectives to social centres, self-sufficient communities, demonstrations and information campaigns. One kind of counter-spaces that can itself be differentiated a thousandfold is *urban squatting*, to which I generally assign the most significant counter-hegemonic potential within this work.

Recap: Research Question 1

» *What is counter-hegemony, and why do we seek it?*«

1st Counter-hegemony describes any form of resistance against the current capitalist hegemony by deconstructing discourses that have become hegemonic and creating a narrative based on solidarity and mutual aid rather than competition and exploitation.

2nd Because hegemony, if not sufficiently challenged, leads to concentration of power and this results in injustice, every hegemonic sys-

tem must be in a permanent process of negotiation with other oppositional, i.e. counter-hegemonic systems.

3rd Against the background of an equitable, enlightened and liberated society, counter-spaces, as spaces in which counter-hegemony can emerge and grow, must be allowed and supported with the highest priority.

Summary PART II

– urban squats as counter spaces

Urban squats, as we perceive them nowadays, have their origins in the squatting movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and quickly spread throughout Europe. Born out of the early waves of privatisation, the central demand of the squatting movement from the very start was the reclamation of space for civil society, especially against the backdrop of increasingly unjust and capitalist distribution of space. Over the last 50 years, the movement has experienced ups and downs, alternating between governmental support and oppression. However, there has been a fundamental tightening of laws against squatting in Europe and, thus, a weakening of the movement compared to its heyday in the 1980s. Today, in addition to its local context, squatting happens increasingly on a supralocal level through virtual networking and information sharing. This also gives the movement a chance to succeed and achieve change both on a micro level in combating personal and 'smaller' discourses and on a global level. Squatting is not in any way a self-contained action. It merely means the appropriation of a house or a plot of land by civil society without the consent of the owner (Pruijt, 2013, p. 1). The definition does not indicate the place, the purpose, the means or the duration of the occupation. Pruijt (2013) distinguishes between five configurations, categorising squatting according to purpose, target group and type of occupation. The five configurations are *deprivation-based squat-*

ting, squatting as an alternative housing strategy, entrepreneurial squatting, conservational squatting and political squatting. Even though these categories are profoundly different, there are some commonalities, mainly related to the anti-capitalist way of life and the struggle against an unjust distribution of space. The former is implemented, sometimes for ideological reasons, sometimes out of necessity, through the sharing of goods, resources, services and knowledge, through horizontal decision-making and primarily by refusing wage labour. The basic morality of squatting as an illegal occupation is based on the simple existence of homelessness with simultaneous housing vacancy (Dawance, 2008, p. 33). Real estate speculation, especially in recent decades, has pushed the already precarious housing market to the brink of precarity. This is why we now speak of a housing crisis across Europe. The right to housing is increasingly a right reserved exclusively for the wealthy. Squats can be seen as a reaction to the failure of the hegemonic system that has allowed and even initiated this situation, and they legitimise themselves by fighting against it. A squat often creates, in various proportions, a space for individual parents, young people from shattered families, homeless people, students, artists, the unemployed, undocumented workers, contract workers, welfare recipients, pensioners, social workers, ex-prisoners or people from psychiatric institutions etc. (Dawance, 2008). Simply, all people for whom the internalisation of the hegemonic system does not run so smoothly.

Sometimes squats are only fighting against the precarisation of the housing market. However, in most cases, they are fighting more generally against concentrations of capital and power among the state and powerful private actors. Accordingly, how power is dealt with in squats is questioned and often placed at the centre of the negotiation over space and resources.

The extent to which the rejection or attempted redistribution of concentrations of power finds its way into the everyday life of squatters varies from situation to situation. It also depends on where exactly a squat positions itself politically and how 'close' it acts to the hegemonic system, respectively, respectively how far it cooperates with it. While a squat, in its definition, has an illegal nature, i.e. the occupation took place without the owner's consent, in practice, contracts are often negotiated afterwards that legitimise the use. In this context, one increasingly speaks of temporary occupation. Generally, the occupation landscape is diverse and ranges from state-authorised temporary occupations, occupation camps and university occupations to silent squats. For the classification of an occupation, I distinguish between *public/ visible* or *private/invisible* as well as *self-managed* [autogéré] or *externally managed* [géré en externe]. Depending on their orientation, public squats sometimes bear the risk of contributing to gentrification processes, which they initially intended to prevent. Especially when public occupations are externally managed, the boundaries between autonomous civic practices and neoliberally instrumentalised projects become blurred. In some cases, this also leads to the self-managed squats being stripped of their legitimacy and their struggles being made invisible. The case study I described and analysed in Part III is a self-organised public squat. This category is, therefore, also a focus of this work in relation to the search for counter-hegemonic potential.

Recap: Research Question 2

»How can urban squats contribute to the establishment of counter-hegemony?«

1st Urban squats are physical entities where counter-hegemony can best be practised because of their nature as places which oppose the current system.

2nd To what extent a specific squat is counter-hegemonic depends strongly on the goal, the composition and the context in which it arises and sustains. It also depends on the people who are active in the squat and can change over time.

3rd Squatting as a movement can provide a foundation for counter-hegemony worldwide. Only when squats and other resistant movements connect a sufficiently strong counter-power can emerge.

Summary Part III – Case Study: Zonneklopper asbl

In Part III, the theoretical considerations of Part I have been applied to a specific urban squat, as among others described in Part II. 'Zonneklopper' is an occupied industrial area in the south of the Brussels Capital Region. Due to its embeddedness in the federal and multilingual country of Belgium and its long, conflict-ridden history, Brussels is a politically and socially complex city. As the geographical and political centre of both Belgium and the EU, with a location on major European axes and a long history of colonisation, Brussels today has become a multicultural and diverse city. This is also accompanied by a culture of compromise and negotiation that has been noticeable for over a century (State, 2004). In addition, or perhaps because of this, Brussels civil society has long carried a certain rebelliousness. Brussels' urban and suburban landscape has changed considerably, especially since the emergence of social movements in the 1980s, including the squatting movement (Costa et al., 2021, p. 271). Because Belgium is also particularly known for having developed homeownership before and independently of the first wave of neoliberalisation (De Decker, 2008, p. 156), the city of Brussels is now, in particular, characterised by urban and architectural fragmentation and the surrounding countryside by urban sprawl.

This ownership structure also means there is little social housing, and the housing crisis is currently severely hitting the city. The housing policy context, together with the specific and highly diverse migrant flows, leads to a significant housing shortage to which the formal structures cannot respond. These urgencies meet a civic need for autonomy which, according to State (2004), has long been a major goal of Brussels residents.

Brussels, like other European cities, has a squatting history that originates in the movement's emergence in the 70s. Nowadays, there is a diverse squatting landscape in Brussels. Currently, according to informal sources, the city counts about 25 self-managed public squats and about 40 externally managed temporary occupations.

Zonneklopper is a self-managed public squat that has a contract with the owner of the land that stipulates the legal and unrestricted use and occupation of the area for a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 9 years. Zonneklopper asbl is the association/collective that was founded before the occupation and now takes care of the management of the squat. 'Asbl' stands for *Association sans but lucratif* which means 'association without lucrative goal' or non-profit organisation. Currently, Zonneklopper asbl has about 50 full members, but the number and the individuals vary considerably. The area that was squatted in 2020 is a former industrial site and covers about 7000m² of floor space. In spring 2024, demolition work will begin on the follow-up project, which has already been approved. The collective Zonneklopper is organised horizontally by using working groups. Once a week, there is a general assembly [the agora] where members meet and discuss daily agendas. Zonneklopper is a place where about 25 people from the collective and 20 Ethiopian migrants have their homes. Twice a week, there is a boxing class; once a week, a

bicycle workshop; three times a week, a solidarity food distribution; and there is generally something going on day in and day out.

In order to analyse Zonneklopper for its counter-hegemonic potential, I chose an empirical approach. As a participant observer, I was active in the field for several weeks, taking part in events, following the discourses and exchanging ideas with the members of the collective. In addition, I have completed an interview and two questionnaires, which have strengthened my impression of the collective. Based on this information, I was able to transfer each parameter of counter-hegemony as defined in Parts I and II to Zonneklopper and make conclusions about its applicability.

Zonneklopper has several strongly counter-hegemonic features, which have a great potential to break with the prevailing discourses and narratives and create and realise an image of a changed world. Conversely, it also has elements that do not contribute to counter-hegemony or even hinder it. Zonneklopper is particularly counter-hegemonic or has particular potential to be so in terms of the factors *continuous* and *holistic*. The former means that the project is not assigned a conclusion or an end goal but that the goal is to exist and develop. The second means that the will for social change is fundamental and not superficial, i.e. that there is a means to change the system profoundly. Since Zonneklopper's ambition from the early days was simply to exist and to build a common alternative to the capitalist system, these two parameters fully apply. To be *external* means to be independent of actors outside the collective. This does not apply to Zonneklopper, for example, as it has a contract with the owner and cooperates with the municipality in certain situations. Nevertheless, the collective is self-governed and decides internally which cooperation to enter. It rejects profit orientation altogether. Regarding

internal processes, Zonneklopper is relatively *insurgent* and *critical* because most members question their norms, values and patterns of action [*critical*] and positively confront conflict and debate in exchange with others [*insurgent*]. The urban context within which Zonneklopper is in gives it a good chance of being *receptive* to integrating new people into the collective and bringing together various people. At the same time, the urban environment prevents complete autarky and the collective spirit. To be *autarkic* in an urban environment is difficult without having the guarantee to exist for a long time, which is contradictory to being a squat. To be *collective* demands a high amount of commitment and interpersonal relations, which suffers in an anonymous and fluctuating urban environment.

Overall, Zonneklopper faces challenges and is marked by contradictions often arising from its greatest strengths. The idea of creating a city within the city, built entirely on values of solidarity and togetherness, as well as justice and equality, would not only be the epitome of counter-hegemony but is also a very effective way to try out and then show what alternatives look like. At the same time, in practice, it becomes clear that not everything can be achieved with the same quality. The holism and ambition of Zonneklopper have left less capacity for community building and interpersonal caring. Many in the collective suffer from the isolation and lack of tangibility of the project. What has become the most significant challenge for Zonneklopper, and possibly the greatest point of criticism from the outside, is precisely what gives it its high counter-hegemonic potential.

Recap: Research Question 3

»*What are the chances and limits of counter-hegemonic practice in an urban squat like Zonneklopper?*«

1st As a single entity, urban, self-managed squats like Zonneklopper have an extremely high counter-hegemonic potential since they present a profoundly different image of the world.

2nd For effective social change and an overarching strong counter-hegemony, the sum of many counter-movements is needed. Squats like Zonneklopper can become pivot points where counter-movements and experiences from individual counter-projects are brought together and bigger narratives are written.

3rd Precisely what gives Zonneklopper its strongest counter-hegemonic potential has also become its most significant challenge. By wanting to change the world profoundly in certain actions the quality and intensity is compromised.

5.2 From theory over concepts to practice

In the following, I will highlight the relevance of linking theory and practice in urban planning and science in general. As Marcuse (2009, p. 194) says, it is essential that the group privileged enough to engage with theory creates a link between theory and practice that is tangible and productive. In terms of urban planning and spatial theory, he asks: »*How do we go from critical urban theory to radical urban practice?*« This is a question that has to be answered anew in each context. There is no universal way to translate theoretical ideas into concrete practice reliably. However, to achieve critical planning, which Marcuse sees as the link between the two, space theorists and planners – often one is involved at both ends - must take a clear political stance. I would like to refer back to the methodology of

activist ethnography or scholar activism. This research approach describes the deliberate rejection of supposed neutrality. Especially in translating theory via concepts into practice, planners cannot be objective at all. On the contrary, it is their task to actively advocate on behalf of population groups that have no voice in the planning of space.

On the basis of this, what is the role of theory in planning practice? First and foremost, theory, apart from its theoretical self-purpose, makes connections visible and generates a supralocal and transdisciplinary picture of a certain matter. It also allows us to scale up the present and locality and to show the overall goals. In relation to counter-hegemony, such scaling is crucial. Above all, it describes why the struggle has to take place in our everyday life and can provide support not to lose sight of the broader picture. The theory is an attempt to describe the world in which practice is carried out (Marcuse, 2009, p. 185). Concepts can help to apply theory theoretically, or so to speak, to play with the theory; to test its steadfastness. *Does the theory really describe reality?* By dealing with the concept of urban squatting, I was already able to check whether the theory of counter-hegemony would find points of contact in reality. However, now the question arises of how the transformation of theories and concepts into practice can happen when they are fundamentally different, if only in terms of the recipients (Marcuse, 2009, p. 193).

Marcuse (2009, p. 194) uses the terms *expose*, *propose* and *politicise*. *Expose* serves to find and point out the roots of a problem. The hegemony of capitalism, or nowadays neoliberalism, as a generalised ideology, leads to an increasingly unjust world. Theoretical arguments about this can serve to prove and argue why this development is recognisable and why it is essential to stop it. *Propose*, Mar-

cause describes as involving those affected by the problem and creating common concepts and strategies. In my work, the concept of urban squatting plays this role. By networking the actors, a movement could be created that unites both materially and ideologically threatened groups (Franta, 2020, p. 39) and develops proposals for the reappropriation of space and the struggle against capitalism. *Politiscise* refers to the concrete action, in my case, a project like that of the collective Zonklopper. The occupation and use of a vacant space in the struggle against the capitalist mode of reproduction is a concrete political practice legitimised by theories and concepts and incorporates them in its implementation.

Nevertheless, one must know that the translation process can never occur one-to-one. As I will discuss in the next chapter, counter-hegemony, as described in theory, can by no means be fully implemented in practice, nor would it be purposeful and consequently not desirable. It can give an overall picture of what the sum of all practical implementations can lead to. However, an activist practice can extract parts of the theory for its implementation.

5.3 Counter-hegemony

Counter-hegemony, as understood in this work, defines itself by opposing neoliberal hegemony. It is not about the general elimination of hegemony but the struggle against the dominant capitalist hegemony based on oppression, exploitation, and concentration of power through new narratives and changed discourses. It is therefore defined as a struggle against the currently dominant hegemony highlighting the importance of the existence of both a governing system and strong opponents. In this definition, counter-hegemony always sees itself as a negative of hegemony

and arises through the dissociation from it. If hegemonic structures change, counter-hegemonic approaches must also develop. This negative definition can become a hindrance when it leaves the theoretical framework. For a social movement to be effective in the long term, it must find an end in itself and cannot be defined only through demarcation from something else. This alone is where counter-hegemony comes up against a limit. In the beginning, however, let us go back to the opportunities. Counter-hegemony can, above all, draw attention to how important opponents are in a social system. A democracy only works because there are governing parties AND an opposition. If the opposition is weak, the whole democracy suffers, and if it is too weak, it ends in totalitarianism. A hegemonic order that becomes too strong inevitably leads to an unequal distribution of power, which will always lead to abuse and exploitation. Thus, counter-hegemony is not only a chance to fight the current hegemony but a fundamental prerequisite for a liberated society and a just world. The current task of counter-hegemony on a superordinate level is to bring the idea of a reality apart from capitalism back into ideological reach, respectively, into people's minds.

However, the implementation of this is not necessarily, always and undoubtful purposeful. The categorical rejection of everything that the hegemonic system possibly co-opts brings an inability to act. Some discourses, even those already hegemonically ordered, can be accepted consciously, temporarily or even in the long term. It is important to be critical, but criticising by principle will harm the movement. Something productive must be found in counter-hegemony. In practice, it must see itself as something other than the purely negative definition of hegemony. Otherwise, no new image of the future will emerge from this permanently defensive attitude. Moreover, the people who

act counter-hegemonically will be drained after a while. Political activism cannot only position itself against governing politics. Alternatives must be worked out, and visions must be created simultaneously. So while countering existing narratives, new ones must be written.

Even if the parameters of counter-hegemony, which I defined in the end of Part I and II [page 49 and 79] are considered individually, they do not always contribute to the success of a social movement. Every single parameter reaches its limits somewhere in this hegemonic system. This is not surprising because the whole system, including internalised values and norms, is designed to suppress the fulfilment of these parameters. In the following, I will briefly describe the possible attainability of each parameter within a counter-space and the respective limits to show up to which point the factor leads to successful counter-hegemony.

External & persistent: To be completely external, there must be no more points of contact with the hegemonic system, but this also means that the influence on it disappears completely. A 100% fulfilment of this parameter stands in the way of fulfilling the general goal of counter-hegemony, namely the establishment of a strong opposition because completely external structures do not attack the existing power. They are invisible to the hegemonic system if they do not reach a very large scale. And as a matter of principle, a structure can only be persistent if it is as external as possible. Otherwise, it always risks being co-opted and instrumentalised by the hegemonic system.

Continuous: The limits of this parameter are found internally in the personal development of character and learning processes. In principle, a structure can be 100% continuous, i.e. it can never stop and continue to change its goals according to the current problems. How-

ever, the individuals in a collective can only be continuous to a certain degree. Because of neo-liberal socialisation, the existence of a goal has become part of our fundamental for our perception of success. Complete continuity in this sense would also mean personally not striving for final goals but being content with the process. I argue that only the fewest succeed in the long run, considering growing up in a neoliberal world where personal, measurable success is the most crucial character confirmation.

Insurgent & Critical: Similar to the previous parameter, insurgent and critical come up against individual limits. To describe this more precisely, one would have to take a deeper look into the human psyche. Yet, I contend that personal criticism and the active management of conflict are only purposeful to a limited extent. The goal should be to perceive conflict actively and not to try to avoid it, but also not to glorify it and to be critical of oneself and others, but only to a certain extent.

Heterarchic: This parameter can be fulfilled within a collective partly but embedded in the hegemonic system from which all individuals come and which is very hierarchic, never completely. The power structures and privileges, respectively, the patterns of oppression from the outside, are always partly transferred to the collective. Heterarchy can be achieved, but it takes time and commitment from everyone involved.

Holistic: The parameter holistic has a certain contradiction in itself. The definition provides that to be 100% holistic, a structure must counter the whole system. It is thus an essential parameter for ideal-typical counter-hegemony. However, a structure can never be entirely opposed to something it ultimately wants to influence and change. In reality, compromises must be made to stay in touch with the hegemonic order. Ho-

listic can therefore be aspired to as a value but never actually implemented in practice.

Collective: This parameter also has a clear limit. It stipulates that the freedom and well-being of the collective should take precedence over one's own needs. And that collective freedom and individual equality should be the primary goals of every individual in a collective. However, the fallacy is that the collective comprises individuals, so if the individuals cannot meet their needs for freedom, neither can the collective.

Autarkic: In principle, autarky has no limit; with sufficient resources invested, it can certainly be achieved at 100%. However, this works for commune-like structures in the countryside, where enough space is available, and durability is guaranteed. In an urban environment where a counter-hegemonic structure certainly has the greatest effect, I argue that it easily reaches its limits.

Receptive: The more diverse the movement, i.e. the more different people are included, the more resources are needed to deal with these differences. A narrative of an alternative world cannot be constructively built if fundamentally different conceptions of that world exist. Uniting social classes, no matter how desirable, is also often a hindrance to the emergence of counter-hegemony because bringing together different social classes requires many of the already limited resources, which can therefore not be used for building a common counter-narrative. The same applies to the uniting of social movements and the inclusion of newcomers at any point.

Overall, it can be said that each collective, structure and individual has only a limited amount of resources and, accordingly, can never address all factors of counter-hegemony equally. Moreover, there is a paradox in the fulfilment of complete counter-hegemony.

A hegemonic system is, by definition, mentally anchored in the great masses, meaning that virtually everyone is in contact with the system, and everyone who is influenced by it can no longer be in 100% opposition. And even if structures manage to effectively challenge all areas of social organisation and successfully build counter-hegemony, they are most at risk of danger and oppression (Dawance, 1999). Ultimately, it is a matter of taking counter-hegemonic elements into social struggles in different proportions and thus building a strong counter-hegemony through the composition of many individual structures.

For the course of this work, I put the following research question at the centre of interest:

»*What potential do urban squats have for the creation of counter-hegemonic structures and the following deconstruction of hegemonic socio-political structures?*«

I would briefly answer this question with the following observations:

1st Counter-hegemony in theory and practice: In this work, I have primarily figured that counter-hegemony on a socio-political, theoretical level does not mean the same thing as in lived activist practice. Counter-hegemony, as presented in this paper, is a theoretical concept that can be fulfilled on a societal level if a large enough number of different pieces carry it out to a certain degree. According to this principle, a single organisation, project or indeed urban squat cannot be purely counter-hegemonic but must rather incorporate distinct elements of counter-hegemony into its everyday life and activist practice. In reality, every structure, every counter-space, together with the people who occupy it, has only a limited amount of resources at its disposal and thus decides for itself which goals are in the foreground and with which priorities. Coun-

ter-hegemony is an aspect that has to be considered in the execution of these goals. Thus, it also takes the theory of counter-hegemony to situate individual activist and resistance practices in the larger context of the struggle for a more just world. Many local elements, for instance, many local squats, can unite together in a counter-hegemonic vision.

2nd Urban squats as pivot points: Nevertheless, urban squats also have a particular role in constructing a civic counter-power. Together with a diverse occupation landscape, they are the physical units where counter-hegemony can be experimented with. They can be the spatial projection surfaces for isolated, partly invisible, counter-hegemonic projects. Because urban squats, in their illegal nature, resist the system more than other physical places, they are spatial hubs for all people who, either out of material or ideological demand, find no place in the 'outside' system. Not least because squats are places for all people for whom the internalisation of the hegemonic system does not run so smoothly, counter-hegemony accumulates in them. They are essential civic counterparts to the mainstream spaces co-opted by the hegemonic system.

3rd New narratives internally and externally: To deconstruct hegemonic socio-political structures, discourses must be dismantled, narratives altered, power structures destabilised, and values and norms questioned. Because hegemony is reproduced and legitimised in everyday life, it must also be fought in everyday life. Urban, self-managed, public squats, like Zonneklopper, are the structures that are most likely to unite everyday life and political practice. More than other places, they can form new narratives while simultaneously transmitting them to the outside world. An

important contribution of urban squats to the construction of counter-hegemony is, therefore, precisely the confrontation with discourses and narratives internally and externally. This is also possible because the logic of squatting as a clear measure against neoliberal real estate speculation and for a just distribution of space has given rise to an international movement that has lasted for half a century. The argumentation and mobilisation about the right to the city, especially the right to housing, have a substantial impact that can preserve counter-hegemony in the long term.

5.4 Conclusion: Society and urban planning

In the following, I would like to outline the most important insights from examining counter-hegemony and urban squatting regarding the future negotiation of space and the discipline of spatial planning. In this thesis, I have pointed out in several sections [chapters 2.2, 2.5, 3.5] that besides the fundamental reproduction of hegemonic, capitalist ideals in everyday life, even autonomous, counter-hegemonic movements and general attempts of anti-systemic action are not infrequently exposed to the danger of being co-opted and even instrumentalised by the capitalist system. The neoliberal approach is already deeply anchored in urban politics, to the point that even supposedly oppositional, solidarity-based and anti-capitalist demands for the reorganisation and reclamation of space have underlying exclusionary, neoliberal elements. The emergence of temporary occupations that are managed by a central agency and thus undermine the legitimacy of self-organised squats or the negotiation of 'precarious tenancy agreements' ¹, which promise a win-win situation but ultimately exploit people's lack of alternatives for the

benefit of the rich project developers are two examples of this. The dreadful thing about neoliberal hegemony is that it can quickly react to change. As a reaction to the climate crisis, for instance, a sustainable consumption movement emerged very rapidly, which instead of questioning the environmentally harmful neoliberal ideals of growth and consumption, simply adapted them to the current discourse [catchword green capitalism]. The capitalist system is just as quickly reacting to, in their origins, anti-capitalist demands for *free* spaces. Creative milieus and alternative scenes, as I have also described them by the squatting scene, are gaining increasing interest from the urban policy. Original counter-spaces are thus absorbed into the hegemonic system. »*Clubs, buildings and other biotopes occupied by 'anarchists', used by precarious artists and made cool by young 'creatives' are now easily marketable.*« says the political scientist and urban researcher Margit Meyer (2013, p. 69, translated). Thus, the existence of such places becomes a location-specific advantage, and with this, the marketing of the entire scene begins. At this point, a once rebellious, insurgent site loses its counter-hegemonic potential and can no longer be a place where the rights of the most vulnerable are successfully fought for. This is why many urban struggles can hardly influence neoliberal urban development at large. Rather, their work involves saving small urbanities and creating alternative but still privileged microcosms (Meyer, 2013, p. 69). Andreas Blechschmidt (1988) sums up the

conflict of the 'creative' milieu movements. He says: »*It can be only those people who lose their homes through luxury modernisation who have one at all and are not driven through the city as homeless people with expulsions*«, describing how social movements that become embedded in neoliberalism rarely benefit those who in the long run really need it.

With the notion and theory of counter-hegemony, I aimed to draw attention to precisely this conflict and demonstrate the elements a civil movement needs to resist neoliberal temptation. The nature of counter-hegemony lies in the unauthorised and anti-authoritarian. Operating in political and legal grey zones is inevitable in the struggle against a system that has become hegemonic. Considering this position, the question arises as to what role spatial planning and urban policy can play in promoting a fully anti-capitalist, inclusive and just development. Manuel Castell (cited in Dawance, 2008, p. 40) says that at the end of the day, »*urban social movements, not planning institutions, are the real groups of change and innovation in the city.*« Given this statement, however, what tasks and functions are left to spatial planning and its institutions?

Urban planning is a relatively new field that is highly dependent on the prevailing socio-political system and is, therefore, itself as a discipline subject to permanent change. During the last century, the planning theory paradigms have changed several times. In chapter 2.5 of this thesis, I have already explained that agonistic planning theory is also beginning to break with current notions of communicative planning by considering conflict as a more active element in negotiating space. Current practices of communication and participation, as they are carried out in spatial planning, even if they aim for inclusivity, tend to benefit articulation- and capital-rich groups (Hamedinger, 2020). By »*neutralising the counter-hegemon-*

¹ In Belgium, for example, a new tenants' law was passed in 2017, which also includes a new category of rental agreement. The purpose of 'floating leases' [gleitende Mietverträge] is to temporarily sublet vacant flats that will be renovated at a later stage to people in precarious situations in the least bureaucratic way possible (Seeber, 2019). However, the criticism is that in practice these rental contracts have very few tenants' rights and the properties are sometimes rented out in poor condition without any responsibility on the part of the owner.

ic potential through inclusion« (ibid.), communicative planning virtually undermines its own goals of giving power to civil society. Faranak Miraftab (2009) also draws attention to this with her concept of insurgent planning as a further development of insurgent citizenship. She emphasises that hegemonic neoliberalism gets its legitimacy through governance and formal inclusion and that current communicative planning practices play a decisive role in encouraging this. Likewise, permission and legitimacy from sovereign stakeholders weakens social movements, not least because sharing the specific problems and dangers associated with illegal activities is inherently a powerful vehicle for social cohesion among individuals (Dawance, 2008, p. 38).

Communicative planning also reaches its limits when considering that consensus always carries exclusion, and in most cases, exclusion of those who would most urgently need advocacy through spatial planning actors. Since planners, by their disciplinary nature, seek agreement and consensus, this is a weakness that cannot only be remedied by changing the approach to conflict [agonistic planning] but rather by changing the whole attitude to planning practices and by repositioning the planner as a person. Insurgent planning in radical democracy, as described by Miraftab, refers to a set of planning practices rather than a specific actor because the planner, in its nature, governs the »*contested field of interacting activities through multiple actors*« (Miraftab, 2009, p. 41). However, regarding an inclusive distribution of space and the struggle against an oppressive system that distributes space unjustly on the basis of capital and class advantages, the planner, in his function as an expert on spatial coexistence, must always maintain a political stance. Spatial planning as a neutral, balancing discipline cannot exist in a hegemonic system; accordingly, if the planner does not explicitly side with civil society, he or she always acts

»From the counter-hegemonic perspective and in support of it, spatial planners would have to become activists: legitimised, in their experience and knowledge, influential activists.«

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in favour of the capitalist system. The right to the city can only be reclaimed on the side of those who currently do not have this right. This requires spatial planning to detach itself from its role as an executor of policies and to position itself as a counterforce to politics. From the counter-hegemonic perspective and in support of it, spatial planners would have to become activists: legitimised, in their experience and knowledge, influential activists.

This is one of the reasons I drew attention to the method of activist field research earlier in this work. In a socio-political context, it is neither possible nor useful for a researcher to take a neutral position. Accordingly, it gives more credibility to research if the researcher takes a clear position, just as it gives more credibility to planning if the planner takes a strong stand. With the affirmation of radical democracy, planning practices must be counter-hegemonic, and the planner must be a political activist.

However, when planners position themselves as activists, this entails specific challenges for the discipline. Mediating between different interests, balancing and accordingly positioning oneself as a neutral centre has been the cornerstone of the planning discipline for about 50 years. In doing so, the planner consciously makes use of standards and regulations. Spatial planning instruments such as zoning plans or strategic development concepts seek to fundamentally order the space, which argues against the necessity of disorder, diversity and spontaneity. Thus, for counter-hegemonic planning practices and activist planners, not only the tactics but also the instruments and tools need to be revised. Allowing cities to be places of civil society with a colourful cast of characters also means accepting the surprising, the unplanned and the spontaneous. It also means letting the idea of efficiency give way to the idea of diversity. If spatial planners become activists, they also have to say goodbye to the role of providing order and clarity and learn to be free again. Something that has been increasingly banished from spatial planning over the last 100 years. For the long term, not only spatial planning but all disciplines must learn to see the beauty of chaos, radicality and disorder anew. Because structure and order ultimately lead to hegemony, which inevitably leads to exclusion and oppression.

In regard to a radical democracy approach planning practices have to be insurgent and counter-hegemonic.

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Appendix 1A: INTERVIEW-Guide

COUNTER-HEGEMONY IN ZK/ CONTRE-HÉGÉMONIQUE DE ZK

EN: These are 10 parameters that define how high the counter-hegemonic potential of a space is. Make a cross on the line if you think the statement is true for Zonneklopper.

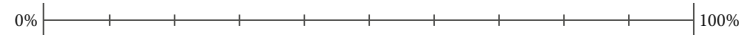
FR: Ce sont 10 paramètres qui définissent l'importance du potentiel contre-hégémonique d'un espace. Faites une croix sur la ligne si vous pensez que l'affirmation est vraie pour Zonneklopper.



1. external/ extérieur

EN: It [the counter-hegemonic structure/ ZK] is positioned outside the system. Any form of Cooperation with profit orientated or public actors are refused.

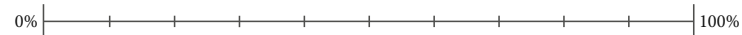
FR: Il [le structure contre-hégémonique/ ZK] est positionnée en dehors du système. Toute forme de coopération avec des acteurs à but lucratif ou publics est refusée.



2. continous/ continu

EN: It is not determined. In that sense there is no aspiration for the fixation of meaning; for finding one single solution. People are aware that there will be a constant negotiation.

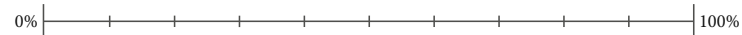
FR: Elle n'est pas déterminée. En ce sens, il n'y a pas d'aspiration à la fixation du sens; à la recherche d'une solution unique. Les gens sont conscients qu'il y aura une négociation constante.



3. insurgent/ insurgé

EN: It does not back down from painful confrontations, on the contrary, it encourages controversy, conflict, and radicalism. This makes it overcome numbness and passivity.

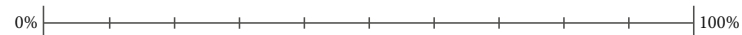
FR: Il ne recule pas devant les confrontations douloureuses, au contraire, il encourage la controverse, le conflit et le radicalisme. Cela lui permet de surmonter l'engourdissement et la passivité.



4. heterarchical/ hétérarchique

EN: It rejects any form of hierarchy; the system is horizontal. All positions and mandates related to the accumulation of power are imperative, meaning that they are bound to tasks and can be recalled at any time.

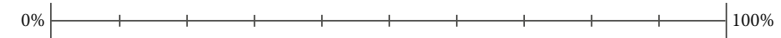
FR: Il rejette toute forme de hiérarchie ; le système est horizontal. Tous les postes et mandats liés à l'accumulation du pouvoir sont impératifs, c'est-à-dire qu'ils sont liés à des tâches et peuvent être rappelés à tout moment.



5. critcial/ critique

EN: Individual and collective values, norms, behavioral patterns, and habits are constantly questioned and adapted if necessary.

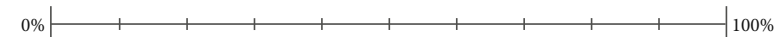
FR: Les valeurs, normes, comportements et habitudes individuels et collectifs sont constamment remis en question et adaptés si nécessaire.



6. holistic/ holistique

EN: It is not contented with minor changes. It aims to change the prevailing world narrative and to generate a profoundly different one.

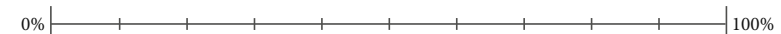
FR: Elle ne se contente pas de changements mineurs. Elle vise à modifier le récit mondial dominant et à en générer un autre, profondément différent.



7. collective/ collectif

EN: Collective is above individual. With a social anarchist approach, the freedom of the collective and equity among individuals are positioned as the top priority.

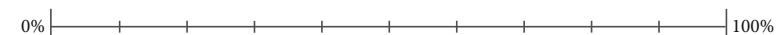
FR: Le collectif est au-dessus de l'individuel. Avec une approche sociale anarchiste, la liberté du collectif et l'équité entre les individus sont placées en tête des priorités.



8. autarkic/ autarcique

EN: It seeks independence from the resources and services owned by the hegemonic system. Food and energy self-sufficiency are therefore aspirational goals.

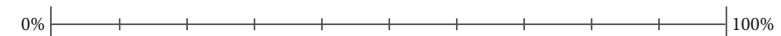
FR: Elle recherche l'indépendance vis-à-vis des ressources et des services détenus par le système hégémonique. L'autosuffisance alimentaire et énergétique est donc un objectif à atteindre.



9. persistent/ persistant

EN: It is resistant to the attempts of co-optation by the hegemonic system, e.g. institutionalisation and anti-squatting measures.

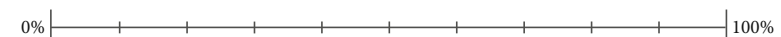
FR: Elle résiste aux tentatives de cooptation par le système hégémonique, par exemple l'institutionnalisation et les mesures anti-squat.



10. uniting/ unissant

EN: It builds an umbrella narrative that unites various social movements and different social classes.

FR: Il construit un récit général qui unit divers mouvements sociaux et différentes classes sociales.



Appendix 1B: INTERVIEW analysis

Interview between E (me) und X (person x)
29. november 2022 - 11:00
Duration: 50:14 min

1 **E:** I am going to start by explaining to you really quickly what I
2 am trying to find out within my thesis. What I am trying to find out
3 is how high the counter-hegemonic potential of Zonneklopper
4 is. What I mean be counter-hegemony is a structures ability to
5 push against a prevailing capitalist system. For this I defined
6 ten parameters and the idea is to see if they are true. If all of
7 them are 100% true it means that the structure is ideal-typical
8 counter-hegemonic, on 0% it means that there is no counter-he-
9 gemonic potential at all. Now I want to talk to you about what
10 your opinion is, that also has to be clear from the beginning. I
11 am not seeing this as something neutral or objective, it is rather
12 your way of perceiving things, so don't worry if its subjective. I
13 am also interested to find out controversial things. So if we talk
14 about these 10 parameters, you just tell me the ideas that come
15 to mind and in the end you can make a cross on where you
16 would position ZK on a scale from 0 to 100%.
17 Do you have questions?
18 **X:** No. The first question.
19 **E:** The first one is about cooperations that ZK has with public
20 and private authorities. In theory it is the most counter-hegem-
21 onic if it is completely refusing cooperations. The first one is
22 probably also an easy one to start with because because Zon-
23 neklopper has a contract with the owner...
24 **X:** *Bah Oui, Voila.* [reads the first statement on the sheet]. Ah
25 no, depends. Profit orientated actors are always refused. *At-*
26 *tend. Ah Oui,* then yes 100%. Because we refuse every cooper-
27 ation with profit orientated actors.
28 **E:** But what about the public actors?
29 **X:** Ahh. Profit-orientated or public actors. No, no, no then 50% I
30 guess. It depends also what kind of public actors. Maybe a bit
31 more, like 60-70%. *Allé* 65%. We have an agreement with the
32 owner.
33 **E:** How do you decide when you would cooperate? Is it just a
34 feeling?
35 **X:** It depends on their reputation. What they are doing. For
36 example Foyer du Sud, the owner. I don't think they are bad
37 people. They just are inside the capitalist structure but they are
38 doing housing for, *comment on dit?*
39 **E:** Social Housing
40 **X:** Yeah, social housing. So ok. But this is one solution. For me
41 I don't think it's radical enough, but it's one solution and I live
42 here so I am kind of happy with the result. [reads statement
43 two] The future of the building? Or the collective?
44 **E:** The collective. It's always about the structure.
45 **X:** Ah, d'accord. The structure is intended to stay. So when
46 we are done with this building we would like to go somewhere
47 else you know. That's the point and *voila* that's it. And also, I
48 don't know we are trying to change a lot of things all the time.

CATEGORIES

- C-1 Sign for counter-hegemony**
- C-2 Sign against counter-hegemony**
- C-3 general statement**
- C-4 challenges**
- C-5 controversies**

*The collective refuses
cooperations with profit
orientated actors* **C-1**

*For a cooperation it de-
pends on what kind of
public actor. The collec-
tive has an agreement
with the owner.* **C-2**

*With public actors it de-
pends on the reputation.*

*This is one out of many
solutions.* **C-3**

*The structure is meant
to stay. It goes beyond
the building.* **C-1**

49 We are asking a lot of questions about ourselves. If what we
50 are doing is right or not. We make mistakes and then we stop.
51 That's whats happening now. We stopped everything. We re-
52 alized there is a problem, so we stopped and now we are
53 meeting and we are talking about it. And I think as long as we
54 are doing this it goes on.
55 **E:** Yes, that's also my impression. The mindset is changing.
56 **X:** It is very theoretical [laughs]
57 **E:** Maybe I need to work on it to be more accessible. This is
58 good to see. Afterwards, I think I will adapt it.
59 **X:** Insurgent. [reads statement three] The counter-hegemonic
60 structure?
61 **E:** Yes.
62 **X:** Oh god. [laughs]
63 **E:** The counter-hegemonic structure is ZK.
64 **X:** *Ah Oui. D'accord.* [reads statement in French] Yes.
65 **E:** Can you think of an example?
66 **X:** Again what we are doing now. We have a problem with a
67 few guys having all the power. So everyone says stop stop
68 stop. Its more or less the same reason as before. We stop and
69 talk until we have the solution. Even if it means confrontation.
70 Painful confrontation. We try to avoid conflict as much as pos-
71 sible, no maybe not. That's personal. I try to do that.
72 **E:** Is conflict something negative in the collective?
73 **X:** No, no. It depends on how it's done. ... [reads statement
74 four]
75 **E:** The idea is to find out whether it there are some people with
76 a lot of power or if power is something bound to tasks.
77 **X:** That's exacly our problem now. That a few people took the
78 power, not on purpose but that's the whole problem of patri-
79 archy. Because the guys do more things, take more space
80 because they can, its not all the guys but some of them and
81 some are enough to fuck the whole collective. So we are try-
82 ing but it is hard. Because the system is how it is and we
83 haven't been careful enough I think. Careful I don't know '*At-*
84 *tentive*' is what I want to say. So yeah now I am going to say
85 50% because in theory we are completely anti-hierarchical
86 but in fact some people have a lot of power.
87 **E:** And is it now difficult to take it away from them?
88 **X:** I don't think so. But that's probably because I am someone
89 who could take a lot of power and I have also some but I am
90 trying not to use it as much as possible. Which is why I am not
91 going to reunions for example. Or I am not going to chantiers.
92 I try to do things that I normally wouldn't do. Like to cook or
93 just to help a bit. I am trying to shut up as much as possible.
94 But I know if the problem is bigger than this I could just stand
95 up and go to the guy who is problematic and tell him he. But
96 that's because I am like him. I am white, I am not poor, I am
97 a men. I have potentially a lot of power. I am just trying not to
98 use it. But I am not giving it up either. I mean I cannot do any-
99 thing. I could even give all my money but still my background
100 stays. I have been educated to overcome a lot of problems.
101 A white men, cis, hetero, educated. I am born to rule [laughs]
102 **E:** For example, you are doing the bar and the '*Comptabilité*'

*When we realize there is
a problem we stop and
rethink. We ask a lot of
questions* **C-1**

*When we have a prob-
lem we talk until we find
the solution* **C-1**

*I don't think conflict is
something negative,
it depends on how it's
done.* **C-1**

*A few people took a lot
of power. If some peo-
ple take a lot of space
it weakens the whole
collective* **C-4**

*In theory we are com-
pletely anti-hierarchical
but in fact some people
have a lot of power.* **C-5**

*I am trying not to use
my power. Which is
why I am not going to
reunions or chanties. I
want to leave space for
other people and step
back myself.* **C-3**

103 [Accounting] now. Technically if anyone wouldn't be happy
 104 about you doing how. What would happen? That's meant with
 105 the imperative mandate. That you have the right to do some-
 106 thing as long as everyone is happy with you doing it. What
 107 would someone do if he/she doesn't like you doing the job?
 108 **X:** Just tell me. And I'll leave the keys and you do it then. I
 109 don't know. I do this because someone has to. It's not that its
 110 super interesting. If someone is not happy. There is one thing
 111 less to worry. Then I'll do something else. Or nothing. I can
 112 just read books. I'm just doing it because no one else wants
 113 to do it. Right now its ok because there are no partys. If there
 114 would be partys there would be a lot more work.
 115 **X:** *Alors*, critical. [reads statement five] Yes. But not enough.
 116 We are noticing right now that this is not enough. So I'd say
 117 something between 70 and 80, lets say 77 because I like 77.
 118 Its been happening all the year since the fire. Before the fire
 119 we were partying a lot. I said all the time that its wrong. You
 120 can not party so much when there are people dying in the
 121 building. When there are people without paper, without the
 122 right paper, '*sans papier*', how do you say in English? So not
 123 enough. But that's personal.
 124 [writes 'not enough' on the paper]
 125 **X:** [reads statement 6] This is very subjective. I would say
 126 yes 100% for me. But this is only me. The collective. There
 127 are many people. Some have big discourses about what they
 128 want to change and then they just come here and do their
 129 shit.
 130 **E:** That's also something good to reflect about. You cannot
 131 always talk about the collective, it depends of the people.
 132 **X:** Its also when we made the first Charta. It was very clear
 133 that we want to change everything, but in reality. Some peo-
 134 ple really change things and some people say they want but
 135 in the end they don't care at all. Or they don't see the relation
 136 between their actions and of whats wrong.
 137 **E:** It is also interesting that the idea in the beginning, when
 138 ZK was founded was somehow different to how it turned out
 139 in the end.
 140 **X:** That's also because we are in the middle of a capitalist
 141 society. We are surrounded by a very hostile world. I think. It
 142 is also very hard to do differently. If we were somewhere in the
 143 nature with no one around, it would be A LOT easier. Because
 144 we would live more together, we wouldn't be confronted all
 145 the time with so much shit. I think it is particularly hard in such
 146 an urban environment. *Et voila* we are in Forest we are not in
 147 the middle of the city but we are in a big European capital.
 148 **E:** I read something about that it is a huge challenge for struc-
 149 tures like Zonneklopper if it is not clear who is part of it and
 150 who is not. Of course there is a core of ZK but in the end it
 151 is very fluctual. People come and go and its still a bit anony-
 152 mous, compared to if you for example go to the countryside
 153 with 20 people. Here people maybe don't feel so responsible
 154 because they can really leave at any time.
 155 So you personally say yes?

Not every task is bound to power. I am doing it because someone has to do it. With most tasks it is like that. I would give it up immediatly if someone is not happy. **C-3**

We are not critical enough because you cannot combine doing partys and hosting people without paper. **C-5**

In the collective are many people. Some things depend a lot on who you are talking about. **C-3**

Some people want real change and others have wrong aspirations **C-5**

It would be easier to make this project in the nature. The urban environment makes it more difficult. Because outside of the city you can live more together **C-4**

156 **X:** Even the collective says yes. But in the end no one wants
 157 to change. Which is also normal, because no one wants to
 158 give up their priviledges. I also don't give them up.
 159 **E:** What do you think it means to give them up?
 160 **X:** What I do is a start I think. To not use them and actually I
 161 also think you cant give them up. So that the balance can be
 162 balanced again. But you can leave space for others. You can
 163 lean back. But I will always walk in the streets without being
 164 afraid. And this is a priviledge. Right now I try to make space
 165 so that others can take the space. And I don't think I am giv-
 166 ing up privileges because I am still living completely ok.
 167 So I would say yes [reads French statement] yes a lot but it
 168 doesn't achieve it. The idea is to create a bubble where piori-
 169 ties are different we are not centered on money, we are more
 170 centered on solidarity. On the gender issue. That everyone
 171 can be fine. But still, I saw rassism and sexism, but not only
 172 this also transphobia.
 173 **E:** Because the people here also come from the outside
 174 **X:** Oui c'est ça. But it is also not easy because the place is
 175 really big and a lot of people.
 176 **E:** We can go to seven. It is about how much you prioritise the
 177 wellbeing of the collective to the wellbeing of yourself?
 178 **X:** I don't. It's on exactly the same level. If I am not happy I can
 179 not help anyone. But it depends, I know on days I am really
 180 happy, I can spend the day helping other people in the col-
 181 lective, but when I am sad, I need to take care of myself until
 182 I am satisfied. I don't know if it answers the question. [reads
 183 statement seven] The collective is not on top of the individual-
 184 ism. They are on the same level. There is no collective without
 185 individuals. Collectivism is individualism. If all individuals are
 186 feeling good, you get a great collective. I don't know exactly
 187 how to answer this. *Et encore no, quoi, ça depend.* [reads
 188 statement again] Equity yes. Someone who has a higher in-
 189 come will pay less than someone who has no income.
 190 **X:** [reads statement 8] Yes. But its only aspirational. It is
 191 the same thing. It was the goal at the beginning but its not
 192 impossible to achieve but it depends on the philosophy of
 193 each individual. I see people who need to work who need to
 194 build this. And they need electricity now. And also if you live
 195 here you need electricity. If we would have taken more time
 196 to build more wood stocks or to think a bit more how to do
 197 things. But we are in this system where everything has to go
 198 fast. And I do not agreed with this. I always asked why are we
 199 going so fast but that was because people were already living
 200 here. Like the migrants. They lived here and they needed a
 201 washing mashine. And they need heat so they need electrici-
 202 ty so everything was done urgently. And again I did not agree
 203 with a lot of things but I am not alone and me on top of my
 204 priviledges I know how to find things elsewhere. I need some-
 205 thing and it costs me no money, or like 10€ but 10€ is a lot for
 206 someone who has no income. *Mais*, so yes. Food and energy
 207 self-sufficiency are aspirational goals but here surrounded by
 208 a city like this, it is super hard. In theory 100%. *Mais c'est*
 209 *impossible.*

Also the collective aspires fundamental changes, but it ends with small changes **C-5**

By trying to make space for others I am not giving up priviledges but I am not using them as much. **C-3**

Yes, I would say we want to change the world profoundly but we don't achieve it. There is still secism, racism etc. **C-1**
C-5

One difficulty is that the place is big and there are a lot of people **C-4**

I put my own needs and the ones from the collective on the same level. Although I have to feel good first, otherwise I cannot help anyone **C-2**

A collective is a sum of individuals. **C-3**

There is again a difference between what we want and what we do. It depends on the person. **C-5**

Especially in the beginning everything had to go fast. Everything was done urgently. **C-3**

Yes, Food and Energy self-sufficiency are aspirational goals but in a situation like this it's hard. **C-1**
C-4

210 **E:** Maybe if there would have been more time from the be-
 211 ginning...

212 **X:** All the problems come from the guys living here. Because
 213 they urgently need this and this and we had to quickly react
 214 to this and this and that's not bad because we were trying to
 215 help but that's again the same problem with patriarchy and
 216 paternity. When we think oh we can save everyone but in the
 217 end we are doing shit again. Because we are reproducing
 218 the whole system which is around us. But we are using saving
 219 people as an excuse although we are the reason why these
 220 people are in the shit. Maybe not us as individuals but the sys-
 221 tem we are part of and that we are reproducing is the reason
 222 these people are in the shit. So we really just make ourselves
 223 feel better by saying we save people. And it's just du vent
 224 quoi, wind. The intention is good. Well, I am not even sure.
 225 [laughs] Because it's also the intention of big white guys.

226 **E:** So maybe in the beginning the intention was already differ-
 227 ently than what was said.

228 **X:** Yes, maybe. But it was unconscious. I am happy about all
 229 this only because I realised this. Even if everything was for
 230 nothing at least I realised so many things. I understand so
 231 many things better now.

232 **E:** Let's say if everyone goes out a little bit smarter that's al-
 233 ready something.

234 **X:** I don't think we did any harm also. So we didn't make the
 235 situation worse. Of course there was sexism and racism, but
 236 still less than in a normal place where some people couldn't
 237 even go in. *C'est comme meme positif.*

238 **E:** Ok the last two.

239 **X:** [reads statement nine in French] No, because we are in-
 240 stitutionalised.

241 **E:** Do you think this place is contributing to gentrification?

242 **X:** Not so much I think. Not as much as other institutionalised
 243 places. Because we are also radical I think. We completely
 244 stopped the partys, because we realised that its shit to do so
 245 many partys with the public that it brings in such a neighbour-
 246 hood. We are trying to do more things in connection with the
 247 neighbourhood. But its really hard because we are a bunch of
 248 bobos saying "Ohh we are doing rap concerts for you guys"
 249 C'est encore hyper paternalist quoi. I think we need to think
 250 more. The guys need to shut up. Most of the guys should
 251 shut up and read books and leave the decision to the women.
 252 And maybe a few guys with a very ... you know what I mean.
 253 Who are very cautious. But yeah so we are persistent but still
 254 we are cooperating, we are working with the owner. And you
 255 know they are starting to work while we are still here. I'd say
 256 70%, because we are nothing compared to communa or city
 257 gate. I don't think they are so bad. The way to hell is paved
 258 with good intentions. It is like this. We are helping migrants
 259 and in the end we are not helping anyone.

260 **E:** Well, you are helping to a certain extent. Would you like it
 261 to be more radical?

262 **X:** Yes. Well I am saying this but I also don't want to fight all
 263 day long. I want to read, I want to have time to read. But I

*By paternalising others
 we think we do good
 but we are reproducing
 the same oppressive
 system.* **C-3**

*We are reproducing a
 system that we normally
 want to fight against. So
 what we do is a bit like
 hot air.* **C-2**

*There is one big posi-
 tive thing: We learned
 so much through this.* **C-3**

*And I don't think we
 made the situation
 worse.* **C-3**

*We are institutionalised
 by having a contract
 with the owner but we
 are also radical.* **C-2**

*We are persistent
 although we are cooper-
 ating with the owner.* **C-1**

264 cannot close the door and say no. And radical is for me also
 265 to not do anything. To not work, to not pay rent, not producing
 266 anything, to not do anything. Like this is a very hard capital-
 267 ism critic. This is the worst for capitalism. People who don't
 268 work and who don't produce anything. Steal money where
 269 the money is. Pay your bills and read books. *Voilà.* That's the
 270 most radical you can be. I don't want to fight. Maybe that's
 271 the problem.

272 **E:** Why not, a really quiet revolution. Where everyone strikes
 273 everything.

274 **X:** *Oui c'est ça.* Let's see what happens. Well, we'd still have
 275 to eat.

276 **E:** Ok, last one.

277 **X:** [reads last statement] The social classes don't mix so
 278 much. We are trying but it doesn't really work. I don't have
 279 so many things to say to someone I am completely different.

280 **E:** Are there differences in major political topics?

281 **X:** No actually we are really staying amongst people like our-
 282 selves.

283 **E:** *D'accord.* I think we have enough. Thank you so much!

*I want to be more radi-
 cal. But Radicality also
 means doing nothing.
 Not producing and do-
 ing nothing is the worst
 for capitalism.* **C-3**

*There is not a great mix
 of social classes. It is
 also because you don't
 have so much to talk
 about with people with
 other political mindsets.* **C-2**

QUESTIONNAIRE ZONNEKLOPPER

Bonjour à tous. Je m'appelle Emma et j'écris mon mémoire de master sur les « appropriations contre-hégémoniques de l'espace ». J'analyse en théorie et en pratique le potentiel de structures autonomes comme Zonneklopper, pour s'opposer à la base au système capitaliste dominant. Sur la base de considérations théoriques, j'ai défini 10 facteurs, dont la réalisation complète conduirait à une structure idéale-typique dite contre-hégémonique. Avec ce questionnaire, je voudrais savoir

comment vous, les membres de Zonneklopper, percevez le collectif et quelle est votre opinion sur certains sujets.

Cela ne vous prendra que quelques minutes. Si vous ne pouvez pas répondre à une question, vous pouvez évidemment passer votre tour.

Je partagerai les résultats avec vous à la fin. **Merci d'avance !**

Pour commencer...

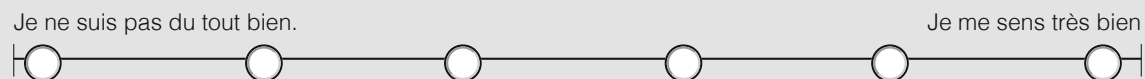
Vous habitez à Zonneklopper ?

- oui
- no

Combien de fois par semaine êtes-vous à ZK ?

- Moins d'une fois par semaine
- 1 à 2 fois
- 2-3 fois
- 4-5 fois
- Plus de 5 fois par semaine

Comment vous sentez-vous aujourd'hui ? (faites une croix)



Participez-vous à des réunions régulières ?

- none
- Occupation Strategy
- autre chose: _____
- Agora
- WTC

Participez-vous à des activités régulières ?

- none
- Atelier Vélo
- NoJavel
- autre chose: _____
- Boxing
- Chantier

PARTIE I : La relation entre ZK et « l'extérieur »

ZK a un arrangement avec le Foyer du Sud (le propriétaire) et coopère d'une certaine manière avec „l'extérieur“. Que pensez-vous de cela ?

Pensez-vous que le ZK devrait coopérer davantage avec des acteurs externes (commune, foyer du sud,...) ou qu'il devrait être plus indépendant ?

- J'aime les coopérations, je pense qu'il devrait y en avoir plus. Pourquoi ?

- Je pense que les coopérations sont une barrière, nous devrions être plus indépendants. Pourquoi ?

- Je veux laisser les choses telles qu'elles sont.

Quelle importance accordez-vous à l'indépendance économique d'un endroit comme ZK ? En termes d'autosuffisance en nourriture, en énergie et en ressources. (produire sa propre énergie, cultiver des aliments,...)

- C'est extrêmement important, j'aimerais investir plus de temps pour devenir autonome.
- C'est important mais d'autres choses sont plus importantes
- Cela ne fonctionne pas dans un endroit comme ZK.
- Ce n'est pas important

Il y a une discussion générale sur les squats et la gentrification¹. Pensez-vous que ZK contribue à la gentrification de la Commune de Forest ? Si oui, comment voulez-vous lutter contre ce phénomène ?

¹La gentrification est un processus dans lequel un ancien quartier pauvre est de plus en plus dominé par des personnes de classe moyenne ou aisée, ce qui entraîne des processus de rénovation, des investissements, une augmentation du coût du logement et, en fin de compte, le déplacement des personnes pauvres.

PARTIE II : Organisation : conflits et pouvoir

Vous aimez faire de la médiation dans les conflits ?

- oui
- no

A votre avis, qu'est-ce qui est vrai pour les conflits dans Zonneklopper ? (plus d'une possibilité)

- Les conflits sont évités autant que possible
- Les conflits sont abordés et résolus rapidement
- Les conflits sont négociés jusqu'à ce que chacun soit satisfait de la solution.
- Le Club Bisous s'occupe des conflits
- Les conflits sont activement provoqués
- Les conflits ne sont pas négatifs, ils sont un signe de responsabilisation.
- Les conflits ne s'arrêteront jamais
- autres : _____

Si vous n'êtes pas d'accord avec une décision prise par une personne qui avait le pouvoir de prendre cette décision, que faites-vous ?

- Je ne fais rien, je fais confiance à la personne responsable
- Je contacte directement la personne
- Je poste dans le forum et j'aborde le sujet en réunion
- Je parle à mes amis de ZK
- Je vais au Club Bisous

Avez-vous l'impression que le pouvoir est réparti équitablement entre les membres de ZK ? Pourquoi ?

- oui
- no

PARTIE III : Zonneklopper et vous

Quel âge avez-vous ? _____

Quel est le sexe que vous avez choisi ? _____

Depuis quand êtes-vous membre de ZK ? _____

Vos valeurs personnelles, normes, modèles de comportement ont-ils changé depuis lors ? Si oui, comment ? Qu'est-ce qui a changé ?

- oui
- no

Comment voyez-vous la relation entre vos propres besoins et les besoins du collectif ?

- Le collectif est plus important pour moi que mes besoins personnels.
- Mes besoins personnels priment sur le collectif
- Ils sont tout aussi importants pour moi

Pensez-vous que les autres personnes du ZK sont semblables à vous ?

- oui
- no

Souhaitez-vous une plus grande variété de personnes, de mentalités, de styles de vie dans le ZK ?

- oui
- no

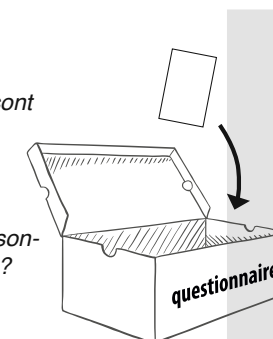
PARTIE IV : L'avenir de ZK et de la société

Quel est votre objectif final dans Zonneklopper ? Que se passe-t-il si vous avez atteint cet objectif ?

Faites une croix si vous êtes d'accord :

- ZK a certains objectifs. Ils peuvent être loin dans le futur, mais lorsqu'ils sont atteints, le projet est complet.
- Les objectifs changent avec le temps, ZK ne sera jamais complètement achevé. Je vis dans l'instant présent.

Quel est votre souhait personnel pour l'avenir de la société ?



Merci beaucoup d'avoir répondu! J'ai placé une boîte dans la salle du bar, où vous pouvez la jeter ou vous pouvez le télécharger ici.

Si vous avez des questions, mon numéro : +43 650 60 20 334 & email: emma.gisinger@gmail.com

Appendix 2B: Questionnaire Analysis

The questionnaire was filled out in french and afterwards translated back to english

person 1

person 2

ZK has an agreement with Foyer du Sud (the owner) and is in multiple ways cooperating with ,the outside' What do you think of that?

It's an interesting maneuver to see how we can take advantage of the support of those people who work within a system that we are looking for alternatives to. It's nice to see how our revised Utopia touches the people we meet from the municipality, the OCMW, the FdS. everyone would like to believe in it, in fact. I'm a big fan of the idea that we can contaminate a maximum of imaginations at all levels of society. It is important to keep total independence of decision and action. Certain strategies may be necessary for negotiations with neighbours, the police, etc.

Do you think ZK should cooperate more with external actors, or should it be more independent?

Leave it the way it is

I think that a cooperation with collectives that work with migrants would be good.

How important do you think economic independency is for a place like ZK? In terms of food, energy, resources self-sufficiency

It is important but other things are more important

It is important but other things are more important

There is a general discussion about the relationship between squats and gentrification. Do you think ZK contributes to the gentrification of the Forest Commune? If so, how do you want to fight against it?

I think we're just us and we're bringing a nice potential to the neighbourhood. I think things are changing outside of our area anyway and the best we can do is try to seed the idea of alternatives. I don't think there would be any more or less gentrification if we weren't here.

Yes. More activities with the neighbourhood (but activities that they choose and not what the members like to do)

What do you think is true for conflicts in Zonneklopper? (more than one is possible)

Conflicts are not negative, they are a sign of empowerment

Conflicts will never stop

I think conflicts are inevitable in any research dynamic

Conflicts are avoided as much as possible

Conflicts are addressed and solved quickly

Club Bisous takes care of conflicts

Conflicts are not negative, they are a sign of empowerment

Conflicts will never stop

If you disagree with a decision that was made by someone who had the power to make this decision, what do you do?

I don't do anything, I trust the person in charge

I contact the person directly

I post in the forum and address it in a meeting

I talk to my friends in ZK

I go to club bisous

I don't do anything, I trust the person in charge

I contact the person directly

I talk to my friends in ZK

Do you have the feeling that power is distributed equally among the members in ZK?

I find it hard to understand the notion of power in this context, because here power is more of a responsibility and often belongs to those who are there to do it, because everyone is invited to contribute on many occasions. I think that's the only way it can work, fortunately the project is too big for one person to take it all over... so I'm happy if those who have the skills/motivation/affinity take the lead on certain actions, always without undermining the project...

No, because there are always people who want to do everything the way they experience it and think it is right. Sadly

But we do our best

Did your personal values, norms, behavioral patterns change since then? If yes, how? What has changed?

I am fuelled by the project, I find a sense of purpose that has taken up a lot of space, the confidence to expose my fragilities too and the space to unfold my strengths. There is a sense of identity, a joy of being part of it, that I haven't experienced for many years. I love the relationships that are built around this impossible mission. I have found a place to take initiatives and to have opinions, a place to discuss and share with so many different people...

Oui

How do you see the relation between your own needs and the needs of the collective?

They are equally important to me

They are equally important to me

What is your final goal in Zonneklopper? What happens if when you reached this goal?

The final objective is to meet, during these 4 years, to search together, to create a resort, to occupy the empty space, to evolve both together and as individuals. As the Zapatistas say: "When you come one step closer, Utopia goes two steps further, it's not a goal to be reached but a direction that moves us forward.

Open to all people who want to join a political group

Make a cross if you agree:

Goals change over time, ZK will never be fully completed. I live in the moment.

If you could change one thing for society, what would it be?

Amouramouramour, that's all we have left according to this top ecologist I heard on the radio saying that it was too late to save humanity...

EAT THE RICH, after TAXING THEM. My hope is that people will feel better mentally and find meaning in life



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