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CHAPTER 3

Legitimizing and Enacting Contradictory Ideals: Squatting in Sweden in the 1980s

Dominika V. Polanska

SQUATTING IN SWEDEN

Previous research has shown that respectability and contentious and conflictual approaches have been present in the Swedish history of popular struggles. This chapter examines squatting in Sweden in the 1980s and analyzes how the ideals of respectability and confrontative repertoires of direct action were negotiated and communicated through specific types of interactions by the Swedish squatters during this decade. Departing from

1 Ronny Ambjörnsson, Den skötsamme arbetaren (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1988).

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the approach to squatting as a political practice, a form of contentious repertoire, or a “set of performances available to any given actor within a regime”, rather than a social movement, I intend to analyze how the squatters negotiated and legitimized their actions, and in relation to different opponents. Special attention is paid to the contradictions caused by different, and sometimes contradictory, ideals in the communication of the significance of squatting.

The history of urban squatting in Sweden started toward the end of the 1960s and followed a similar trajectory to other European countries where squatting was observed in the same period. During the 1980s, squatting in Europe was lively and advanced to considerable success, for example, in the creation of youth houses in Copenhagen (Ungdomshuset 1982), Oslo (Blitz 1982), and Zürich (Jugendzentrum 1981) and strong squatting movements in some cities in Germany and the Netherlands. The rise of squatting movements was met with attempts at criminalization, repression, and the growth of the extreme-right wing across Europe, not least in Sweden.
During the 1980s the occupation of buildings peaked in Sweden. It is therefore a period in the history of squatting ripe for further study. This decade was also qualitatively different from previous and following periods of squatting in Sweden due to what has been described by Pries and Zackari as more “militant” character of the actions undertaken in the following decade.

Influences from squatting movements expanding in other European cities at the time: social movements, music, and literature, played an important part in the dissemination of direct-action repertoires and specific ideals among the Swedish squatters. Punk music, militant ideals of the BZ-movement in Copenhagen or the radicalizing squatting scene in Amsterdam or Hamburg, and the squatting symbol introduced by the Dutch *Kraakers*, were all adopted and played an important role in the formation of squatting in Sweden by this period. The growth of the punk scene, as described by Lundström in this volume, revitalized groups to the left and to the right. The connection of squats in different locations across Western Europe was facilitated by a network of independent book shops, “a kind of combined information office, counseling center and alternative bookstore, which opened in many occupied houses” and frequent visits. These connections have by social movement scholars been conceptualized in terms of translocal networks or translocal assemblages stressing social movements’ spatiality and exchange of ideas, knowledge, and resources between sites.


Jämte and Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here?” 3.


Egefur discusses in this volume the ideals of respectability that emerged among the popular and working-class movements in Sweden in the early twentieth century. These ideals were also internalized by squatters in different degrees in Sweden from the 1960s until today. Respectability was expressed in a mentality that encouraged self-discipline, cultivation, rational arguments, peacefulness, and schooling (bildning) and in practice it could mean that squatters established strict rules and norms in the squatted spaces guiding behaviors, how the squatted spaces should be run, who should be granted access, who to cooperate/negotiate with, among other things. These ideals were put to the test when squatters encountered the authorities where negotiation was often dependent on the approach of the local authorities, ranging from permissive to repressive.

Based on materials produced by squatters and previous literature on the topic, this chapter explores the way that squatters described their objectives and actions, focusing on the tensions caused by contradicting ideals. The anarchist magazine *Brand*, which functioned as the main outlet for the autonomous movement in the country in the 1980s, and other movement-produced publications from this period are the primary material for this study. This includes texts written by squatters and published in national and local newspapers, books published by squatters about particular squats, along with pamphlets, folders, and flyers. The method used is a historical synthesis of previous studies and reports that is of interpretative character. It is a qualitative systematic review of all found forms of information on the topic of squatting in Sweden in the 1980s, using thematic analysis focusing on conflict lines where ideals are articulated. Since these conflicts are often identified in previous studies, but not analyzed and conceptualized in depth, the ambition is to contribute to the understanding of how ideas of peacefulness and orderliness can be

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14 Ambjörnsson, *Den skötsamme arbetaren*.
16 Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State*.
17 Jämte, *Antirasimens många ansikten*, 244.
18 One possible shortcoming is that the texts published in *Brand* are not always written by the squatters themselves, but sometimes by supporters sharing perspectives with squatters. Another potential shortcoming is the observable bias in the material in the greater number of texts written by squatters taking part in occupations that have lasted longer or had a recurrent character.
combined with those of disobedience and skepticism to authorities and different forms of hierarchies in squatting during this period. The analysis poses new questions and re-interprets past findings.\textsuperscript{19}

The chapter introduces the reader to the general topic of squatting in Sweden and then focuses on 1980s. In the review of previous studies and publications, ideals and the balancing of contradictory principles are in focus. It is argued that there are several arenas of interaction where squatters communicate their claims reflecting the questions: why, who, how, and what if, used to legitimize squatting and addressing the public, local authorities, local communities, local politicians, landlords/housing companies, and the police. It is when the squatters are explaining why they are squatting, who they are, how they organize, and what can happen in the encounter with power holders or the police, that different ideals are negotiated, communicated, and enacted.

**Squatting in the 1980s: Locations and Different Ideals**

The ambition of this chapter is to cover the decade of the 1980s in a way more systematic than has hitherto been managed in research and to include squatting attempts outside of Stockholm and Gothenburg, thus painting a more nuanced picture of how squatting developed, and which ideals guided squatters during this period.

Three clear peaks in squatting attempts occurred during the 1980s.\textsuperscript{20} The first came in 1982 in Jönköping (recurring attempts), Västerås (recurring attempts), Gothenburg, Malmö, Rimbo, Stockholm, and Umeå.\textsuperscript{21} The second and third peak came in 1986 and 1988 mainly in Stockholm and Gothenburg. Only open and officially announced occupations, organized collectively, are included in Fig. 3.1 and Table 3.1. Hidden

\textsuperscript{19} The use of analyzed data creates both opportunities and problems and has been focused on (1) recontextualization of the squatting cases studied, and on (2) a systematic approach to analyzing and re-interpreting data including specific codes (ideals, conflicts, cooperation, antagonists, etc.) and points of comparison between the included events and above all how they have been described by the squatters.

\textsuperscript{20} See Table 1.

\textsuperscript{21} See Table 2.
occupations are not included due to the difficulties in tracing them. Gothenburg and Stockholm were the epicenters of squatting during the 1980s. The significant difference between them was the durability of the squats. In Stockholm, a squat at Skaraborgsgatan lasted three months at most, whereas occupations in Gothenburg lasted for years, such as Kvarteret Sabeln that lasted almost two years.

**The Struggle for Self-Managed Social and Cultural Spaces**

The Swedish cities of Helsingborg, Hässleholm, Jönköping, Malmö, Landskrona, Lund, Ronneby, Sollefteå, Umeå, Uppsala, and Västerås also experienced squatting in the 1980s. In Jönköping, a fire station was

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23 See Table 3.1.
Table 3.1  Squatting in Sweden in the 1980s, locations and year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1980 | Bellmansgatan, Stockholm  
       | Götgatan, Stockholm  
       | Stora Södergatan, Lund  
       | Local church, Ronneby  
       | Slottskällans badhus, Uppsala |
| 1981 | Heidenstamsskolan, Uppsala  
       | Stenhammarskolan, Uppsala  
       | Eisers fabrik, Sollefteå |
| 1982 | Husargatan, Gothenburg  
       | Haga Nygata, Gothenburg  
       | Violen/Midsommarkransen, Stockholm  
       | Nygatan, Umeå  
       | Brandstationen/Kyrkogatan, Jönköping (4)  
       | Föreningsgatan, Malmö  
       | School building, Rimbo  
       | Knutsgatan, Västerås (3) |
| 1983 | Gula Villan/Vasagatan, Umeå  
       | Villa Skalet, Helsingborg  
       | Österportskolan, Landskrona |
| 1984 | Gamla mejeriet/Stora Södergatan, Lund |
| 1985 | Skaraborgsgatan, Stockholm  
       | Drottninggatan, Stockholm  
       | Socialstyrelsen, Stockholm |
| 1986 | Drottninggatan, Stockholm  
       | Borgarskäpets Enkehus/Norrtullsgatan, Stockholm  
       | Bromstensvillan/Sundbyvägen, Stockholm  
       | Luntmakargatan, Stockholm |
|       | Gula Villan, Gothenburg  
       | Järntorget, Gothenburg  
       | Mellangatan, Gothenburg  
       | Kv. Sabeln/Prängkullsgatan/Haga Östergata, Gothenburg  
       | Kv. Kruttornet/Prängkullsgatan, Gothenburg  
       | Nygatan, Örebro |
| 1987 | Tavastgatan, Stockholm  
       | Centralhotellet/Vasagatan, Stockholm  
       | Kv. Furiren, Gothenburg |
| 1988 | Klevgränd, Stockholm (2)  
       | Ultrahuset/Handen/Källvägen, Stockholm  
       | Handen/Häggvägen, Stockholm  
       | Kindstugatan, Stockholm  
       | Prängkullsgatan, Gothenburg  
       | Unknown address, Helsingborg  
       | School building, Norrtälje  
       | Bäverns gränd, Uppsala |

(continued)

24 Calculations are based on an analysis of previous research, movement-produced publications, media coverage, and information from activists and researchers interested in the topic (see Polanska, *Contentious Politics and the Welfare State* for further details).
Table 3.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1989 | Centralhotellet/Vasagatan, Stockholm  
Markan/Wendesvägen, Hässleholm  
Gillberska huset, Uppsala  
Bondegatan, Västerås |

*If the same address has been recurrently occupied the number of attempts is stated in parenthesis.

occupied several times in 1982. Ericsson’s study portrays a conflict between squatters and local politicians, where the politicians demanded the squatters formalize their activity in an association in order to be treated as respectable and legitimate counterparts. The recurrent squatting attempts and demands of the activists in Jönköping for a self-managed space for social and cultural activities resulted in the opening of a cultural space in the city run by local organizations and some representatives of the municipality in 1983. In a publication made by the squatters in 1982, the process was described chronologically, informing readers about the drug-free policy at the fire station and the negotiations, and conflicts (sometimes violent), between the activists and the city representatives and the police that were played out during this period. Lodalen, who took part in the mobilization for a self-managed space, describes the activity:

The summer continued in the same energetic and tireless style. With attentions, new occupations of the fire station, City Hall and the occasional illegal intrusion into pinball and bingo halls. But we also had more quiet activities. We wrote music, printed newspapers and T-shirts, started theater groups that played in the streets and squares, and we performed a twelve-hour support concert...

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27 Järhult, *Elden är lös*.

Both confrontative repertoires, including direct-action activities and cultural and more conventional political activities like demonstrations, signature collections, distribution of flyers, arranging cultural activities, or reaching out to media, were included in the repertoire of the local activists. Ericsson argues that this case of squatting should be conceptualized as translocal and transnational, referring to Thörn and international studies of squatting during the same period and to the Jönköping activists’ use of symbols, demands, and references to the squatting scenes in the rest of Europe. Squatting in Jönköping was characterized by the ideals of non-violence and passive resistance in the meetings with the police, and the explicit statement that the police were not considered an enemy, as opposed to local politicians. Negotiations with the municipality resulted in offers of alternative spaces, which in turn caused internal conflicts of whether to accept or decline the offer resulting in “disarming the more radical demands for direct democracy and self-management” among the activists.

The demands for spaces where the activists could play music in Malmö and Lund are addressed by Håkansson and Lundin. The story here was similar to that in Jönköping: squatting and youth riots in the city centers forced local politicians to consider the need for cultural spaces in both cities leading to the establishment of institutionally run cultural spaces. Similarly, in Landskrona in 1983, a school that was to be demolished was occupied and demands for self-managed cultural spaces were made, and in Västerås, local politicians and the public housing company negotiated with the activists who squatted a building several times with the banner “Live music for a living house.”

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29 Ericsson, “Ockuperat område”.
33 Peter Håkansson and Johan Lundin, “Rock för ett hus,” in *Populärmusik, uppror och samhälle*, eds. Lars Berggren, Mats Greiff and Björn Horgby (Malmö: Malmö högskola, 2009).
Nilsson has analyzed the squatting event in Landskrona with the focus on the respectability of the actors involved.\textsuperscript{35} The author argues that an “identity-political drama” was staged and that the activists, similar to those in Jönköping, initially used traditional methods (demonstration, meetings, and the collection of signatures) emphasizing their objectivity, orderliness and the group being “unspoiled by popular culture”.\textsuperscript{36} They pleaded with the local politicians to turn the school building into a space with a “café homework corner, women’s shelter and rehearsal studios for orchestras”\textsuperscript{37}. The responsible character of the activists was articulated in the demands for homework activity and the choice of wording to call rehearsal spaces for rock and punk bands “rehearsal studios for orchestras”. When these efforts failed, the activists squatted the building and presented their attempt as drug-free and aiming to promote activity among the passive youth. Similar once again to Jönköping, in Landskrona the activists explained in a statement on 12 July 1982, “For ten years we have done what we could, with the help of public opinion, to change the attitude of politicians”.\textsuperscript{38} Even in Jönköping the activists claimed in a manifesto that their “Culture house” could achieve social cohesion between different social groups in the city, equality, activation of the unemployed, and drug addicts to find social community.\textsuperscript{39}

Uppsala’s squatting history is reminiscent of that in Jönköping and Landskrona, except that squatting events here were also strategically used to protest the expulsion of school pupils. Squatting in the city started in 1979, flourished in the 1980s, and declined in the 1990s, to return in the 2000s. Spross' study covers four squatting events between 1979 and 1989, demanding the municipality provide housing and cultural spaces and protesting the expulsion of school pupils (from elementary schools).\textsuperscript{40} These events were non-violent, and their purpose was to make


\textsuperscript{36} Nilsson, “Skötsamma punkare,” 135.

\textsuperscript{37} Nilsson, “Skötsamma punkare,” 135.

\textsuperscript{38} Järhult, \textit{Elden är lös}, 47.

\textsuperscript{39} Järhult, \textit{Elden är lös}, 11.

local politicians react to the housing shortage, the need for spaces for cultural activities and solidarity with immigrant families. Even Umeå’s squatting history in the 1980s revolved around issues of cultural spaces and to lesser extent housing issues. The first attempt followed an occupation of a local green area at the end of the 1970s and was described by Persson as a balance between militant and popular (folkliga) ideals. During the 1980s Umeå was, like Stockholm, experiencing urban renewal and the demolition of its central districts to give way to offices, parking spaces, and housing. The squatters were partly protesting the demolition but the main driving factor, according to Persson, was to create free spaces for punks and the subcultural youth that were to be run according to direct democratic principles and open to “ punks, the new left and other alternative groups”. The space was open to others, such as drug addicts and vulnerable groups “as long as alcohol and drugs are not used in the premises”, a statement expressing ideals of respectability. The occupation ended after three months when the negotiations with the municipality were concluded and the squatters were offered another space. In 1983, the local feminist movement organized a symbolic separatist weekend occupation of a building, Gula villan, which lasted longer than initially planned. On a flyer to the public the activists explained:

The Women’s House Association in Umeå has for several years worked to get a house, collected names, written petitions, courted politicians in municipalities and county councils.

The event caused a media debate focusing on the morality and illegality of squatting. The flyer ended with the statement “It is not immoral to occupy - It is immoral to demolish the beautiful house and garden - It is immoral that the Women’s House Association does not get

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44 Norlander and Larsson, *Kvinnohus nu!,* 203.
The squat was evicted after 10 months by police from outside of the city, as local police refused to intervene. It was replaced by an “institutionalized” version that is still in operation today.

**Calmness and Openness in Negotiations**

The extent of non-militancy of squatters in the district of Haga in Gothenburg was mixed according to Thörn and influenced from outside of the city and from abroad. In this case, Freetown Christiania (founded in 1971 in Denmark) was an important connection along with the squat of Mullvaden (in Stockholm in 1977–1978). In the 1970s and 80s, Christiania and Haga were hubs for social movements, alternative culture, and music movements. Haga was a working-class residential district in central Gothenburg set for demolition, where the activists had found cheap or free meeting spaces. Activists’ claims included criticism of the planned demolition and their actions contributed to the preservation of the area, but they were unable to prevent gentrification later on, Thörn argues. The movement active in the area was divided in the 1970s between those who wanted to carry out direct actions and those who worked with “opinion formation, mobilization and dialogue”.

Over time the squatters in Haga encountered changing attitudes from the local established societal institutions, shifting from negative to positive between the 1970s and 80s and inviting squatters to the “conversation table of the Swedish consensus culture”. Attitudes shifted again in the 1990s to more repressive tactics. Thörn claims that squatters in Haga did not take part in violent clashes with the police, partly due to their order and calmness and partly due to the national tactic to heavily repress squatting initiated later in 1990.

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45 Norlander and Larsson, *Kvinnohus nu!*, 203.
47 Thörn, “In Between Social...”.
50 Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 349.
Ighe described the purpose of following occupations in Haga as claiming spaces for social and cultural activities and demanding preservation of the area. The mix of ideas coming from alternative movements (anarchist and libertarian, punk music movements) and the critique of demolitions was quite common during this period and could also be observed in other cities, such as Landskrona, Stockholm, Örebro, or Helsingborg.

The squatters in Gothenburg were by this time referred to as Husnallarna, a name that also reflected plans to throw teddy bears at the police instead of fighting and was a word play including words “House” (Hus) and “snatchers”/“bears” (nallarna), and Ighe compared this “silly” name to the more militant Dutch Kraakers or Danish BZ. Thörn remarked on the ambiguity and humorous character of the name Husnallarna that the third generation of squatters took on in the city. Thörn, Stad i rörelse, 350–352.

Between Well-Behaved Working Class and Anti-elitism

Husnallarna were recognized by the local politicians as a counterpart and the squatters took part in debates with politicians and in public discussions on housing policy. Ighe described how the squatters started a renovation fund of sorts, through monthly fees, and the necessity for electricity contracts, telephone subscriptions, and home insurance for the occupied apartments. In one of the squatted buildings, the squatters tried to buy the building from the owner and formed a cooperative to gain control and be able to stay in the building. The history of squatting in Haga

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51 Ighe, “Husen” i bestämd form pluralis,” 129–130.
52 Hem & Hyra, 17 August 2020.
53 Ighe, “Empty Space”.
54 Thörn, Stad i rörelse, 350–352.
56 Ighe, “Husen” i bestämd form pluralis”.
ended in 1990 when Tullen was occupied in protest of its planned demolition. The squatters evacuated the building without the involvement of the police (Picture 3.2).

The ideals that punk brought on, anti-elitism and the critique of the principles guiding the working-class, encountered ideals of legitimate political/parliamentary or associational work to achieve change. Martins Holmberg has described a contested picture of ideals among the activists in Haga, where one group represented what the author called “the parliamentary way”, while another, inspired by the squatters in Christiania, wanted to occupy and refused to move.57

Despite internal contestations, the peaceful and non-violent ideals were strong among the squatters in Gothenburg in the 1980s, strengthened by the permissive approach of the local authorities. Non-violence was practiced in passive resistance strategies and peaceful sit-ins. Also, the local police seemed to have shared the same ideal, condemning more violent

57 Ingrid Martins Holmberg, På stadens yta: Om historiseringen av Haga (Göteborg: Makadam förlag, 2006), 301–302.
police actions in other cities.\textsuperscript{58} It was in the 1990s that a more violent tactic came to be used and, among others, culminated in violent clashes in 2001, during an EU summit in the city.\textsuperscript{59}

**Escalating Violence by the Mid-1980s**

The history of squatting in Stockholm in the 1980s is best described in the material produced by the activists.\textsuperscript{60} There is a clear link between squatting in Swedish cities by that time and the squatting scenes of other European cities. By the end of the 1970s, three important squats had opened in Stockholm, *Mullvaden*, *Oasen*, and *Järnet*, and these were classified by Polanska and Wåg as part of an international wave of squatting that peaked in 1980–1981 with youth houses in Copenhagen, Zürich, and Oslo and flourishing squatting movements in Berlin.

\textsuperscript{58} Thörn, *Stad i rörelse*, 357.


\textsuperscript{60} See for instance Avanti Framät, *Vårt 80-tal* or texts published in *Brand*.
and Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{61} Swedish squatting in 1985–1986 was according to the authors clearly influenced by anarchism and autonomous ideas, inspired by the Danish BZ-movement, and squatting in Hamburg, Berlin, and Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{62} and the issues of fighting racism, neo-Nazism, and fascism were guiding the squatters.\textsuperscript{63}

In Stockholm, the case of \textit{Oasen} was especially influenced by the punk music movement spreading throughout the rest of Europe at the time.\textsuperscript{64} Also, the squatting of \textit{Ultrahuset} in 1988 demanded self-managed spaces for music activities with a special connection to punk.\textsuperscript{65} Stockholm’s squatting scene flourished again by 1985–1986 after a break of several years, but the durability of squatting by this time varied locally.\textsuperscript{66}

The repression of squatting in Stockholm intensified from 1986. The more numerous the attempts, the quicker the evacuations became. In 1986, at Luntmakargatan, the encounter with the police was prepared for by the squatters in collecting “egg cartons, one-penny rattlesnakes and balloons filled with water on the windowsills”.\textsuperscript{67} Even in this case the combination of varying ideals was clear, through the use of playful and rather harmless, more symbolic, “weapons”. The squatters were surprised by the use of teargas by police to make them leave the building despite their self-proclaimed decency and obedience:

Is it really us they are going to shoot at? About 30 decent young people between the ages of 15 and 20 and a middle-aged photographer who obediently pays his rent. Then it suddenly breaks loose. There is banging and bashing, windows are crashing and people are screaming.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{61} Polanska and Wåg, \textit{Ockuperat}!
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{63} Jan Jämte, \textit{Antirasismens många ansikten} (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 2013), 244.
\textsuperscript{64} Wåg, “Från allaktivitetshus till sociala center,” 35.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Brand} 1988.
\textsuperscript{68} Wahlberg, “Motstånd på Luntmakargatan,” 78.
The squatters were surprised by the level of violence displayed towards them by the police in light of their actions, stressing their obedience in other fields of life and their age and decency. The use of teargas seemed disproportionate to them, expecting a negotiation with the authorities first. The end of the decade was even more dramatic with the eviction of Borgen in Malmö in 1990 (Picture 3.3).

The squat of Borgen lasted six months and was followed by a decline in squatting attempts in the country due to more heavy-handed repression, nationally and internationally. It was evicted in a more violent, and military, way functioning as a scare tactic (borrowed from Denmark) to discourage squatting. The violent eviction of a squat on Folkungagatan in Stockholm in the same year has also been pointed out by Thörn as a clear shift in the police methods used to repress squatting in the country. The squat of Borgen was well connected to the squatting scene in Copenhagen, but the local context was also characterized by the non-violent repertoire of local anarchists, further calmed by the presence of a legal meeting space that satisfied the needs of the group.

**Negotiating and Communicating Ideals Through Repertoires of Contention**

In the following I shall focus on the *arenas of interactions*, or fields where contentious actors interact within their own group or movement, with authorities or police forces, that squatters have used to communicate on the significance of their action and, in particular, to which public they have directed their claims. The arenas distinguished here reflect the questions: *why*, *who*, *how*, and *what if* and are used to legitimize squatting and are directed to the general public, local authorities, local communities, local politicians, landlords/housing companies, and the police. It is when the squatters are explaining why they are squatting, an unauthorized action, that legitimization of the action is balanced with arguments

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The development of a new repertoire, squatting, needs an explanation. The other arena of interaction is activated when squatters are describing themselves to the outside world emphasizing that squatted spaces are run according to a set of principles, in this way justifying their existence.
Lastly, the possibility of an encounter with politicians, housing companies, or the police is anticipated and dealt with by the squatters developing routinized tactics\textsuperscript{72} to avoid violence and facilitate negotiation.

It has been common among squatters to claim that squatting is legitimate and reasonable when the activists have followed all the formal rules available. There are several examples where squatters have formed associations and used conventional repertoires to influence public opinion on the issue and put pressure on local politicians. Among these examples we have Jönköping, Landskrona,\textsuperscript{73} Kulturmejeriet in Lund and Gula villan in Umeå where the activists formed associations to claim spaces for their activities.

The conventional repertoires among squatters in this period have included: demonstrations, signature collections, distribution of flyers to the public, arrangement of cultural activities, presence at city council meetings, or reaching out to the media. To follow “the parliamentary way” of doing politics was one of the strong ideals, or a sort of strategy (see Egefur's Chapter 5), found among the squatting activists, side by side with the more confrontative repertoire of direct action by appropriating spaces without authorization. The repertoires of direct action were disseminated through punk music and anarchism prevalent among the social movements in this period,\textsuperscript{74} as shown by Lundström in this volume, and direct (through visits) and indirect contacts (through media) with squatting movements abroad.

Several examples have been mentioned in this chapter illustrating the orderliness, respectability, and peacefulness of the squatters in Swedish cities. One such example is the name Husnallarna and the multiple other ways squatters communicated their peaceful character to the outside world. Many squatters declared the action as improving the situation for vulnerable groups: youths, unemployed or drug addicts, by helping these groups find meaningful activities or become drug-free. According to, for instance, the activists in Jönköping their work “begins to yield results. Our cries for a drug-free and more vibrant Jönköping have now even


\textsuperscript{73}Nilsson, “Skötsamma punkare,” 133.

\textsuperscript{74}Jämte and Sörbom, “Why Did It Not Happen Here?”; Piotrowski and Wennerhag, “Always Against the State?”
penetrated the politicians’ wax plugs”.

The peacefulness of the squatters was often reiterated, either in descriptions of the squatters being inexperienced, afraid, or young, or in their surprise over the violent response of the police to squatting.

The willingness to talk to politicians and negotiate a solution has also been common and used to express the readiness to compromise. Several of the actions covered here show that the squatters worked to disprove the misheld assumption that they wanted spaces for free by paying electricity bills, rent, or taking out insurance policies. In Örebro, for instance, the squatters offered to pay rent for the six days they squatted the building after they were evicted.

Most of the squatted spaces in the 1980s were organized according to the principles of drug-free spaces where everybody contributes according to their ability. Other principles that were connected to the self-management of such spaces were tolerance and prohibition of racism, sexism, and homophobia, among other things. These principles were not always explicit, compared to the rules that prohibited the consumption of alcohol and drugs on the premises.

In Jönköping, the activists claimed that their work could result in the uniting and disciplining of various youth groups in the city through “constructive actions and the belief in the future”. The squatters in Jönköping distanced themselves from the “senseless violence” of other youths stressing their non-violent character and struggle for the unification of youth groups in the city. The politicians were warned about the severe social consequences that would follow if the activities at the squat could not continue. The activists argued that if the municipality could provide spaces for the youth to use, they could break the “passivity and drug-addiction” among their participants. A common slogan among community organizers was claiming that meaningful activities and the sense of community created responsible individuals and community members. The distancing from violence and the prohibition of alcohol and drugs that might destroy the orderliness and respectability of the

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75 Järhult, Elden är lös, 53.
76 Hem & Hyra, 17 August 2020.
77 Järhult, Elden är lös, 62.
78 Ibid., 62.
79 Ibid., 63.
participants were used as tools to demonstrate the readiness and maturity of the youths claiming the right to run self-managed spaces. Their claims demonstrated an ability to import arguments from social work and civil society organizations, used to convince the authorities and a wider audience.

The likelihood of an encounter with the politicians, housing companies, or the police was anticipated and handled by the squatters developing tactics to avoid violence and facilitate negotiation. Even if these tactics were contested among the community of squatters, the willingness to negotiate and not stage violent confrontations was prevalent during this period. Clear tactics of meeting with the police were developed and passive and non-violent resistance was encouraged in the encounters with police and in case of eviction. The squats could be barricaded or open, but in case of the police entering the building, the squatters were guided by passive resistance when meeting with the police officers face to face. Some resistance was still staged, however, but most often using playful and harmless objects thrown at the police (teddy bears, water balloons, water, or eggs) along with blocked entrances to the building. When the squatters of Kvarteret Sabeln staged a traffic blockade outside of the squat, and the police arrived, the situation was described by one of the participants:

If we were to leave the house, the exit would be grand; the fireworks, the headlights and the Fate Symphony at full volume made the police appear small and less dangerous. When the street was empty, we waited for the police to start with us.\(^{80}\)

Music and fireworks were meant to subdue the police and render them less dangerous. By the end of the 1980s, this repertoire was changing, bricks were thrown at the police and the squatters started to use masks to cover their faces.\(^{81}\) This repertoire developed in parallel to the escalation in violence by the police during this period,\(^{82}\) to a larger extent using tear gas, beatings, and riot gear when evicting squatters by the late 1980s.

There are several cases where squatters evicted themselves or moved voluntarily (Haga, for example), having reached an agreement or a point

\(^{80}\) TotalBrand 1988/17.

\(^{81}\) Avanti Framât, Vårt 80-tal, 157 & 184.

\(^{82}\) Peterson, Thörn and Wahlström, “Sweden 1950–2015”.
where their message has been heard by the local planners or other stakeholders. During this period some symbolic occupations of buildings have also been staged by activists wanting to make a political statement, but at the same time avoiding the possibility of violent encounters, by dropping a banner on the building and leaving.\(^\text{83}\) Even if most squatters collectively agreed on passive resistance, encounters with the police were always risky as individual activists could ignore the established rules, resulting in violence causing damage to the reputation of the squatters.

**Conclusions**

In the history of squatting in Sweden, the period of the 1980s is a fascinating time when various influences and ideals were combined in squatting actions. While squatters in Sweden were inspired by the squatting movements growing in other European cities, they were developing a contentious repertoire\(^\text{84}\) where they deliberately avoided violence and often described themselves as peaceful and orderly. During the 1980s there is a great diversity in how the ideals of peacefulness, respectability, non-violence, popular (folkliga) issues, militancy, resistance, anti-authoritarianism, anti-elitism, were negotiated, enacted, and communicated by squatters to the outside world.

Even if squatting in this period could be conceptualized as translocal and transnational,\(^\text{85}\) it also had traditional expressions originating from peaceful negotiation, inherited from the labor movement and the repertoires developed by the Swedish popular movements in the democratization of the country in the twentieth century. By combining action repertoires previously developed by social movements and civil society with direct-action repertoires, squatters in Sweden in the 1980s developed a specific form of contentious repertoire through arenas of interaction focusing on avoiding violence and facilitating negotiation.

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\(^{83}\) For instance, *Centralhotellet* in Stockholm 1987, see more in Avanti Framåt, *Vårt 80-tal*, 183.

\(^{84}\) Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*; Tilly, *The Politics*.

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References


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