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### **The role of alliances and brokerage for collective political struggle: the case of Polish tenants' movement**

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# The role of alliances and brokerage for collective political struggle: the case of Polish tenants' movement

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## **ABSTRACT**

There are both gaps and misinterpretations in the literature on civil society and urban activism in post-socialist settings. The ambition of this paper is to partly fill in the gap on the state of post-socialist civil society by focusing on the activity of tenants' organizations in Poland. Since the fall of socialism socioeconomic inequalities have increased in the country and neoliberal policies have dominated the fields of housing policy and spatial planning. Tenants' mobilizations have emerged as reaction to this development and formed new solidarities on the basis of social backgrounds that according to previous studies should as such stay inactive. The objective of this paper is to understand the role of alliances and brokerage for the outcomes of contentious politics by studying tenants' organizations in post-socialist Poland. Three tenants' organizations located in Warsaw are focused on in the study. In this paper the theory on contentious politics and the role of brokerage and alliance formation is used to study internal and external relations between tenants' organizations and other important actors in their field of activity with a focus on the achievements and failures. The empirical material for the study consists of 28 semi-structured interviews with representatives of tenants' organizations and other activists working in the field of tenants' rights, housing and the built environment. The paper shows that the most successful actions of the tenants' organizations were all a result of either alliance building or brokerage. Tenants' organizations have successfully initiated cooperation both with other interest groups along with representatives of politicians and young influential individuals and groups who sympathize with their claims. These allies have contributed to the most significant successes in the activity of the organizations. The tenants' organizations have despite ideological differences built alliances, when the threats from outside either jeopardized their existence as tenants (rents' increases or re-privatization processes) or as interest organizations (lack of response from authorities).

**Keywords:** Post-socialism, housing movements, brokerage, mediators, alliance building, relationships, tenants organizations

## Introduction

Scientific literature on the activity of civil society in post-socialist countries present often a very pessimistic picture. Post-socialist civil society is described as weak and passive. As explanation to this weakness the lack of grassroots connections, dependence on foreign support, increasing professionalization of civil society organizations and socialist legacies are emphasized. In the few housing studies concerning post-socialist societies the authors conclude that collective action in the sphere of housing is rather unusual due to the preference of individual action in overcoming difficulties related to housing and the inability among the ones with the weakest social positions to act on the matter (Pickvance, 2001). In the case of Poland literature on housing mobilizations is limited to small number of studies on housing cooperatives, district councils, common holds, right to the city-mobilizations or urban civil societies (Maczak, 2008; Sagan & Grabkowska, 2012; Peisert, 2009; Pluciński, 2012; Grubbauer & Kusiak, 2012; Zagała, 2008), where mobilizations on housing issues are examined more or less indirectly. However I would like to argue that the lack of literature on the topic of housing mobilizations in the case of Poland is not a result of the lack of such mobilizations. As I will try to show in the following text these kinds of mobilizations exist and have achieved some considerable successes in recent years. The very first organization was founded in 1989 and today there are about 40 organizations working with tenants' issues in the whole country. They are still quite small, partly due to the low political opportunity structure in the country, partly due to the negative neoliberal discourse on tenants as “bums”, “lazy”, “pathological”, and “to blame for their own situation”. The activity of tenants is for these obvious reasons limited to smaller groups of people active in the field.

What I am most interested in explaining in this paper is the role of alliances and brokers for the outcomes of these mobilizations. I am interested in examining the relationships that characterize tenants' organizations and focus on some of the achievements they have reached given the ‘unfavorable’ setting of a post-socialist society that has been so negatively described by previous literature on civil society development in Poland and other post-socialist countries. Another important reason for studying the tenants' organizations is the fact that it to a great degree comprises of people with weak social positions lacking economic and other resources, that

should according to previous literature on the topic stay inactive or try to solve their problem individually (see Pickvance, 2001; Vihavainen, 2009).

Polish tenants' organizations are also opposing the assumption that organizational life of post-socialist societies is dependent on foreign support (Mendelson & Glenn, 2002; Sundstrom, 2003; Henderson, 2002; McMahan, 2001). The field is slowly professionalizing as housing problems are bit by bit rising and getting more attention, but they are still in no way dependent on foreign models or economic support coming from abroad. Most of the mobilizations are in that matter resource-less, solely depending on their members' individual resources and engagement. So the explanations provided by previous studies on the passivity and economic deprivation among population as determining factor behind organizations preference for grant seeking at the national and international levels, do not seem to correspond with the reality of tenants' mobilizations in Poland and are therefore important to study (Mendelson & Glenn, 2002).

The aim of this paper is first and foremost to understand the role of alliances and brokerage for the outcomes of contentious politics by studying tenants' organizations in post-socialist Poland. The ambition is to focus on the relationships and cooperation between three tenants' organizations<sup>1</sup> and other important actors in their field of activity, all located in Warsaw. The objective is to discuss these organizations' successes and failures in the light of the internal and external relationships they present. The main claims and strategies and how they correspond with other actors claims and strategies will be described accordingly.

Warsaw holds a specific position in the field of tenants' organizations, as the largest, most numerous and most active tenants' mobilizations are located here, whereof the three largest have been chosen as a case study in this paper. Moreover Warsaw is also interesting as the central parts of the city were in 1945 nationalized by the Bierut Decree Law (mainly land but also buildings) and no systemic re-privatization has taken place after 1989, which resulted in very complicated ownership verification processes. Without exaggeration one might classify Warsaw as the city with most complicated re-privatization processes in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> The three organizations are the largest and most active ones located in Warsaw and have been chosen according to these criteria (activity assessed on the basis of media coverage and activists' statements).

The main method of investigation is qualitative and the study is based on **28 semi-structured interviews** (that lasted between one and three hours) with representatives of tenants' organizations (large and small, not only leaders but regular members/activists as well), squatters<sup>2</sup> (Przychodnia, Syrena, Elba/Wagenburg, Czarna Smierć), representatives of real estate owners (ZWN), and other activists connected to the tenants' activity (who described themselves as working close to tenants' organizations but without a formal status as members). The interviews were conducted in spring 2013 in Warsaw and interview questions were more or less the same for activists in organizations and squatters. The participants were given the interview guide (see Appendix) beforehand and the interviewees were encouraged to speak at length about the most engaging topics. Additional information on the research topic was gathered through statistical data, official documents and reports, documents and data produced by the organizations and last but not least academic literature.

The paper begins with a presentation of the theoretical framework and central concepts of the study. It then presents previous research on the topic of civil society activity and mobilizations on housing issues in post-socialist societies and in Poland in particular and proceeds with a description of the emergence and main internal dynamics within tenants' organizations. It then continues to describe the role of alliances and brokers in the field of tenants' struggle and finishes with a conclusion on the importance of alliance formation and brokerage for the Polish tenants' movement.

## **Alliance building and brokerage in contentious politics**

The theoretical perspective of this paper draws inspiration from the framework presented by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) on the dynamics of contentious action and especially on the relational mechanisms that arise in social interaction. Contentious action or contentious politics is described by the authors as collective political struggle that "is episodic rather than continuous, occurs in public, involves interaction between makers of claims and others, is recognized by those others as bearing on their interests, and brings in government as mediator,

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<sup>2</sup> Squatting- taking over of vacant property with long history in Western Europe and North and South America but since the 1990s even present in Central and Eastern Europe (Piotrowski, 2011) often defined as "living in or using a dwelling without the consent of the owner" (Mayer, 2013).

target or claimant” (2001:5). The relational mechanisms stand in the fore of the analysis and the approach in the paper is, in accordance with this perspective, **relational** by examining the relationships between tenants’ organizations and other important actors in their field of contentious struggle for tenants’ rights.

In the relational approach presented by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly brokerage and coalition formation play an important role. The authors define **brokerage** as “ the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relation with one another and/or with yet other sites” (2001: 26). Brokerage/coalition is one of the two (sometimes linked) pathways to scale shift in contentious action. The authors argue that contention “that spreads primarily through diffusion will almost always remain narrower in its geographic and /or institutional scale than contention that spreads through brokerage” (2001: 333). Brokerage transcends differences and draws together different segments of actors which contributes to its geographic and institutional scale capacity.

An important reason to study relational mechanisms is the result of previous studies on social movements where a greater level of success is often associated with alliance building processes (Gamson, 1990; Van Dyke, 2003; Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009). The crucial role of collaboration and formation of alliances is stressed in studies on social movement dynamics. The ability to engage in joint action despite differences in claims and strategies is here seen as **alliance building**. Whether these actions are called cooperation, alliances or coalitions they might all contribute to the greater level of achievement in social movements and can last for shorter or longer periods of time. Alliances develop between two or more social sites, but are not always linked by a mediating unit, like in the case of brokerage. In brokerage the unit that brings two or more social sites together is often an (more or less) independent agent. In alliance building these agents belong to respective groups or organizations.

When applying the relational analysis it is equally important to focus on **conflicts** of interest that often have the capacity of wearing down of contentious action (Gamson, 1990; Staggenborg, 1986; Lichterman, 1996) and are an important part of the relational approach. Different conflicts within mobilizations or movements or between them pose important challenges to the ability to work together or even exist. The alliances with other actors often uncover the taken for granted-

issues within a mobilization and uncomfortable comparisons arise. Some things must then be explained and these explanations could become quite costly to the mobilizations.

Earlier research point to some important conditions that increase the likelihood of coalition formation of which heightened levels of threat or opportunity, the access to abundant resources and high levels of identity alignment among the actors, are pointed out as decisive (Van Dyke, 2003; Beamish & Luebbers, 2009). Moreover the role of movement structure, ideology, resources and culture is accentuated as likewise significant for the understanding of collaboration and alliance formation. The level of success of alliance building is in other words highly dependent on the internal organizational structures of movements or organizations, differences in the way decisions are made, ideological differences, differences in strategies and goals, political opportunity structures, access to resources (high/low competition), prevalent cultural frames and movements' compliance with these frames (where public opinion plays an important role), and the level of reflexivity within movements/organizations (Obach, 2004; Lichterman 1995; Jasper, 1997; Rochon & Meyer, 1997; Staggenborg, 1986).

Tenants' organizations are in the paper regarded as contentious actors whose relations to each other, the local authorities, other organizations, the media and the squatting scene are in focus. As alliance formation and brokerage seems to favor the level of success<sup>3</sup> of social movements and social movement organizations the ambition is to examine these in the paper and draw on the ideologies, identities, resources and political opportunities along with the internal and external conflicts and disagreements. Nevertheless, before the empirical part of the paper is presented previous studies on the research field of housing mobilizations will be described.

## **Previous studies on housing mobilizations**

There are many gaps in the scientific literature on housing mobilizations and movements during socialism and after the regime change. Existent studies on civil society mobilizations in the post-

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<sup>3</sup> As the approach of the study is relational, success is not seen as tenants' organizations' achievement of predetermined goals, but as their ability to initiate, involve in and maintain relations with the outside world, that directly or indirectly favor their objectives. Failures on the other hand, relate to inability to cooperate and transcend differences in relation to other important actors in one's field of activity.

socialist context are pointing out weaknesses (Howard, 2003; White & McAlister, 2004, Mendelson & Glenn, 2002; Tymowski, 1993; Gill, 2002; Kolarska-Bobińska, 1990; Kotkin, 2010) in the functioning of the civil society organizations. Specific factors behind this weak functioning that are emphasized are the dependency of foreign support and the lack of grassroots connections (Mendelson & Glenn, 2002; Sundstrom 2003; Henderson, 2002; McMahon, 2001), the growing professionalization of organizations (Henderson, 2003; Howard, 2003; Wedel, 1998) and the dominance of family and friendship networks in the collective action field as a result of the socialist system legacies (Sztompka, 2004; Sidorenko, 2008; Tarkowska & Tarkowski, 1991).

Some of the few existent studies on post-socialist societies and housing protest were generated under the project “Environmental and Housing Movements in Hungary, Estonia and Russia” lead by Chris Pickvance with following publications on the movements of the 1980s and early 1990s (1996; 1997; 1999; 2001). Pickvance’s *et al* (1997) study show that higher levels of housing activism corresponded with high levels of housing shortage in the respective post-socialistic country. Moreover, activists and leaders of the studied movements had high cultural and material capital and clear prospects behind their actions of improving their housing and material conditions. The authors claim furthermore that prevalent political structure has major effect on movements, but is not the only factor behind collective action in these cases (Pickvance, 1997: 16). In another study Pickvance (2001) found that collective action in the housing sphere in the 1980s was an unusual phenomenon in Hungary and the Soviet Union and the study’s result show that the respondents preferred individual action before collective action in overcoming housing difficulties and that those in weakest social positions were more likely to stay inactive.

When it comes to Poland’s civil society scholars have observed a “boom” of citizens’ initiatives in the country after 1989 as different organizations became driving forces behind political, economic and social reforms in the country (Les *et al* 2000). Protest activity after the fall of communism was thriving in Poland and the country had in comparison with other East European countries a higher frequency of protest in the years 1989-1993 (Ekiert & Kubik, 1999). However, some groups were more likely to protest than others and these were in the case of Poland not members of marginal groups, but more typical social groups such as industrial workers and public sector employees, but also students, peasants and youth. Ekiert and Kubik characterized



the protest activity in the first four years after the regime change as “contentious reformism” or an acceptance of the existing order with the ambition of correcting governmental policies (with primarily economic demands) (1999: 184). The status of civil activity of Poles in the recent years is one of the topics described in the annual report “Diagnoza społeczna” and in 2011 the authors conclude that well educated strata of the population tend to organize and play an active role as members, with the exception of protests and strikes, where broader parts of the population tend to participate (Czapiński & Panek, 2011).

There are still many gaps in the scientific literature on housing mobilizations and movements in the 1980s and 1990s and above all in the first decade of the 2000s. There is at this point in time a very limited number of studies on housing mobilizations in the post-socialist Poland. Mobilizations on housing are solely touched upon in studies on urban civil societies (Zagała, 2008), right to the city- mobilizations (Płuciński, 2012; Grubbauer & Kusiak, 2012) or studies on more formal organizations such as district councils, commonholds or housing cooperatives (Matczak, 2008; Sagan & Grabkowska, 2012; Peisert, 2009). Housing mobilizations fighting for tenants’ rights are missing in the scientific studies in the Polish context and few have been published on other post-socialistic countries in the 2000s (for instance Pickvance, 2001). Not to mention tenants’ organizations and the role of brokerage and alliance building in post-socialist settings that is completely missing.

### **The very beginning of tenants’ mobilizations: early 2000s**

The first housing mobilizations after the fall of state socialism emerged in Poland in the 1990s in response to the restructuring of the labor market in the late 1990s and the shutdown of several enterprises (founded during socialism) that were large providers of job opportunities along with the re-definition of employment contracts in Polish cities. Many of these enterprises provided housing to their employees, but the housing infrastructure was privatized and their residents either offered to buy their apartments or to move (often to social housing). The act on the protection of tenants’ rights was amended in 1994 and evictions of tenants to the streets facilitated. Representatives from the Polish Socialist Party were by that time working mainly with blockades of evictions, but were shortly accompanied by anarchists’ organizations, leftist

organizations and trade unions. As one of the interviewees described his actions within the Polish Socialist Party in the early 2000s:

Of course our actions for tenants' rights were then very much spontaneous and I would say not very professional. We were rather directed by heart outbursts, than a broader understanding of the whole problem. We were all learning by that time (PI).

The very first tenants' organization was founded already in 1989, the Polish Association of tenants and the next in 1994, the Polish Union of Tenants, working mainly with legal activism before direct actions. The organizations were (and still are) quite small and work as service providers to the tenants. The worsening living conditions of tenants and escalating conflicts between tenants and municipalities (as responsible for the management of the housing stock) materialized as a result of the legal act from 2001 that regulated the protection of the rights of tenants and the management of the communal housing stock that significantly worsened the rights of tenants (Ustawa o ochronie praw lokatorów, mieszkaniowym zasobie gminy i o zmianie Kodeksu cywilnego, Dz.U. z 2001r. Nr 71, poz. 733). The spontaneous protests became more organized over time and were triggered by the legal regulation or its often arbitrary implementation by the municipalities. The situation on the housing market in the country contributed considerably to the mobilizations on housing issues. According to an official report generated by the Supreme Audit Office as many as 6,5 million Poles lived in 2012 in substandard conditions, and there was a shortage of 1,5 million dwellings in the country and 200 thousand would within few years be classified as out of use (NIK, 2012). Municipalities hold the responsibility for the management and supply of housing in Poland but strapped budgets and withdrawal from the field of housing construction (or giving it away to private investors, as some might say) have resulted in even greater shortage of municipal (and affordable) dwellings for rent. Another complication in the field of housing is the re-privatization of during socialism nationalized buildings and land. If these re-privatization processes are completed they are subsequently followed by rent increases and cause moving out of the old tenants and gentrification and/or form the fire sparks for widespread protest actions and the emergence of different formal and informal tenants' mobilizations.

The dissatisfaction with the legal amendments and housing situation was in 2004 channeled into a Campaign “Mieszkanie Prawem nie Towarem” (Housing as a right not a commodity) that was launched by leftist and anarchist groups in Warsaw and has worked as an inspirational ground for the emergence of many of these mobilizations all over the country. The campaign is a network of social and political organizations, associations and individuals who share the same objective of fighting for tenants’ rights and the development of public housing construction as well as opposing the national and local social politics along with the privatization of the housing sector in the country. It became an inspiration point for many tenants to organize on these issues. At the present point of time about 40 associations working with tenants’ issues in the whole country are known to the tenants’ organizations I have interviewed and the vast majority are working in Warsaw, but cities like Kraków, Poznań, Łódź, Gdańsk, Radom, Mińsk Mazowiecki and Białystok are frequently mentioned as well.

### Focus on Warsaw: internal dynamics

There are three large and widely known associations working with tenants issues located in the capital city. Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości Społecznej (Social Justice Office, hence KSS) founded in 2006, Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów (Warsaw Tenants Association, hence WSL) founded in 2007 and Komitet Obrony Lokatorów (Committee for the Defense of Tenants, hence KOL) founded in 2008. Nevertheless, the largest number of tenants’ associations are those who work locally on the basis of a neighborhood or even a housing building. Tenants’ associations’ main activities encompass: providing legal counseling for tenants, organizing protests, demonstrations, meetings, campaigns and eviction blockades, dissemination of information on housing issues (to the media, to the authorities, to the tenants, and so on), writing of petitions and legal act amendments.

<b>Name</b>	<b>WSL-Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów</b>	<b>KOL-Komitet Obrony Lokatorów</b>	<b>KSS- Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości Społecznej</b>
<b>Year of foundation</b>	2007	2008	2006
<b>Target group</b>	Mostly tenants from re-privatized stock, but	Mostly tenants from municipal housing	All types of tenants and poor households

	also other tenants	stock, but also other tenants	
<b>No. of active members, taking part in decision-making</b>	Less than 10	Less than 10	20
<b>Reasons for emergence</b>	Increased re-privatization of municipal housing stock	Raised rents within the municipal housing stock in 2008, lack of transparency in decision making at the municipal and district level	Precedent leftist political activism reformulated in a more systematic activism for tenants rights
<b>Main activities</b>	Legal help to tenants, organization of demonstrations and protests, eviction blockades, monitoring of housing politics	Organization of demonstrations and protests, eviction blockades, petition signing	Legal help to tenants, amendments of laws, widespread alliances, organization of eviction blockades, management of a shelter for homeless
<b>Economic resources</b>	None, based on members' fees	None, no members' fees	Some support from a political party and individuals+ members' fees
<b>Tenants as leaders of the organizations</b>	Founder and former leader was a tenant, not the present leader.	Yes.	No.
<b>Distinguishing features</b>	Closely co-working with squatters, anarchists, leftist and trade unions	Radical stand towards officials and local authorities	Strong emphasis on legal activism and alliances with anybody helpful to the cause

Table 1. Main characteristics of three largest tenants associations in Warsaw

However, some internal divisions between these tenants' associations are important to distinguish when discussing **their relations with each other and other actors in their field of activity** and Table 1 is a simplified illustration of the main characteristics and divisions between them. Firstly, the three largest above mentioned associations mirror these **internal divisions** on their point of view on the privatization of municipal property. Some of these associations emphasize the importance of a large municipal housing stock and pointing out privatization processes (together with the lack of new construction of municipal housing) as harmful to the tenants, while others accentuate the possibility of owning your dwelling as a solution to tenants' problems. This division has its origin in the different types of tenants' problems that the three associations have specialized in and their leaders' ideological stands. Secondly, there is also a disagreement on the strategies, the activities' political scope and appropriate means that should

be used in the fight for tenants' rights. KOL is pointed out as the most radical when it comes to protest actions, campaigns and attitudes towards officials using disruptive actions and personal actions against certain politicians. KSS prioritizes legal counseling and legal activism and put emphasis on the importance of reaching out into politics. WSL helps mainly tenants from re-privatized housing stock by helping them "in the very first phase, in the contact with the new owner, and contacts with the city" (JB) and accuse local authorities and officials for lack of transparency in decision making and corruptive behavior.

The leader of KSS criticized WSL in the interview for holding on to ideologies and political stands too in-flexible to see the interests of the tenants. According to him the immediate help that a tenants organization should provide includes pragmatic solutions and ideological deceit. He stated:

I don't need to do grand politics or revolution, but to help people. The fact that I will in the future try to change the system on the basis of helping people, and I will always try, it is a separate matter. And you should not mistake the one for the other because the human that came to us and suffers, he did not come to do a revolution. He came for help. An you should not manipulate him. Are we suppose to bring these dead bodies with the banners? (PI).

In the interviews the representatives of the three associations, WSL, KOL, and KSS, all stressed that they **collaborate with each other** and united their actions whenever needed. Even everyday activities are described as characterized by contacts with other tenants' associations.

When we look for answers by scanning the Internet, by contacting people from various other associations we catch next threads. When we think that we know the case good enough to see that there is nothing more to be done, it appears that someone gives us an idea and in fact we could try to do this yet another way. To try to seek another solution (JB).

The majority of the interviewees define their struggle as a part of a **tenants movement** and the term is also widely used by other activists, squatters and the media. The main point of collaboration within the tenants movement mentioned in the interviews is the unification of tenants associations in 2009 and 2010 with the aim of initiating a formal dialogue with local authorities. The unification was temporary and took place under the banner of a "loose" union of associations and NGOs working with issues concerning Warsaw and its residents and was called

“Social Side” and resulted in extraordinary meetings at the City Council that later on lead to the establishment of Warsaw’s Housing Meetings organized by the City Council.

There is a clear conflict of interest and tension in the case of the three tenants’ associations KSS, KOL and WSL where the disagreement on the privatization of municipal stock, strategies, means and political scope of actions divides and impedes collective action and collaboration between different tenants’ organizations. The conflicts are mostly ideological and the disagreements on strategies and means are closely connected to the ideological stands of the associations. Studies of coalition formation in organizations have found that ideological similarities between organizations increased likelihood of cooperation. Furthermore competition for scarce resources played an important role for the probability of bridging of ideological differences and collaboration and the higher it was the lower the probability of collaboration between organizations (Staggenborg, 1986). In the case of the three tenants’ organizations both limited resources and ideological differences are obstacles that have substantially affected cooperation capacity of the organizations.

Tenants organizations have despite these obstacles succeeded in bridging these at a few times by joining their actions in situations when a mutual enemy was identified and joint action did not require the reassessment of the ideological bases. Another success to be mentioned is the commonly recurring representation of tenants activity as a tenants’ movement. Framing tenants’ claims as a movement would not be possible without the actors described above. By doing so they have (together and apart) been active in producing and maintaining meaning “in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford, 1988: 198).

## Strategic external relationships

### Squatters

One of the most important alliances tenants’ organizations have built, apart from the temporary ones tenants’ associations have formed, also called the tenants movement, is the alliance with the **squatting environment** in the city. Warsaw squatters’ activity and claims are seen as closely

connected to the claims of the tenants' organizations and by some even considered as functioning in an organic way, as essential parts of a whole. Here illustrated by one of the interviewed squatters:

I think it naturally becomes a part of urban movements which I think last year got a second wind. And these are urban movements that are not even strictly activist, but these are simply people who want some changes. I think they are mostly disappointed in the fossilized character of this city and they want some other forms. So on one hand we have the tenants movement and people who directly experience the shitty housing policy of the city. On the other hand there are people who create food cooperatives, who want to shop in a different manner that is offered to them. We have squats, people who want to live differently and do something differently than it is offered to them in this urban space. And in this context I think we are a part of an organic whole. Organic also because these are the same people that are engaged in different things, are active in diverse fields (Squat 6).

Tenants' movement have since its beginning had close connection to the anarchist and squatting scene in the city. Many anarchist groups have helped tenants' organizations both when gathering material resources for publication of information, providing them with meeting premises or disseminating information on the Internet. Squats function as centers where anarchists and tenants have met and joined forces. Squats are per se an informal form of mobilization on housing issues and squatting of vacant buildings can take collective form of action, but also individual. Many of the squats gather individuals who either lost their dwellings due to the ongoing re-privatization or degradation of municipal housing stock or are likeminded and of ideological matters have joined the squatting collective and sympathize with the tenants' demands (the vast majority). The connection between squatters and tenants' claims were described in the following way:

The squatters movement and the tenants' movement are interconnected. There are figures that connect them by standing with one leg in one movement and with the other within the other. However the greatest close-up between the two took place when Przychodnia [squat] emerged. Suddenly we began to have common purposes, as Przychodnia stated its postulates: that we will move out when there will be another place to move to provided by the city, and that there will be a Tenants' Round Table. And as the round table was our demand, our and tenants' needs met even though these environments, I think, have different needs and understandings of the city and what they require from the city (Squat2).

Squatters have through their demands and successful dialogues with city authorities put forward the claims of tenants and contributed to the activity of tenants' organizations in Warsaw by helping in different matters. Especially one of the squats existent in Warsaw, Syrena, is mentioned as specialized in tenants' issues and called by the interviewees as a bridging place between tenants and local authorities. Syrena's representatives express their role in following quotation:

Syrena usually helps the tenants in two ways. First, by physically blocking evictions, through participation in activities aiming at preventing eviction, and also by becoming an intermediary for the media, because so it happens that us – as a place that has a certain character – we are in touch with the media and we use it in such situations. And it is much more effective than when Mr. Kowalski or Ms. Kowalska will call TVN [one of the biggest private TV stations in Poland ] when they are being evicted (Squat10).

The interviewed tenants have validated this picture and in their descriptions squatters have indisputable dedication and the tenants can always count on their support when it comes to joining forces in matters that correspond with squatters' principles. Squatters are even given credit for the success of opening up of a dialogue with the city and the initiation of the Round Table.

Warsaw Tenants Association owes the squatters these talks. It is true, because when the squat on Elblaska, Elba, was totally unrightfully terminated there was a manifestation in Warsaw. It was quite big and I think that the authorities are afraid of exactly that. And I think that there was none like that before. Indeed it was quite numerous and I even saw some social workers joining it. On this big square with good location. To do a demonstration or a piquet over there that would be visible is quite hard, but a lot of people came actually. I think this was the reason why Warsaw authorities decided to have these talks. Because squatters gave a postulate on this Round Table and it is why it is taking place, it is why it exists, you know (ANI).

As it is discussed in the quotation above a decisive moment in the activity of tenants associations in Warsaw came with the shutdown of a squat (Elba) in March 2012. It caused a demonstration where about 2000 people participated and walked through central parts of Warsaw. A day after the demonstration a new squat was opened in the city, Przychodnia, which partly gathered squatters from Elba and this squat became the mouthpiece of the squatters and tenants' interests



when an initial dialogue was set off with the city authorities. One of the conditions imposed by the squatters was the organization of a Tenants Round Table where tenants and representatives of the city (City Council and City Hall) would meet regularly and the tenants would obtain influence on the decision making process regarding housing politics in the city. Tenants associations have two years earlier (2010) joined forces under the banner of “Social Side” and successfully demanded extraordinary meetings with the City Council where the matter of a Round Table was discussed. Unfortunately the outcome of the two extraordinary meetings that were held was the Warsaw Housing Meetings organized by the city and criticized by tenants’ organizations for its advisory nature, not giving tenants the possibility of participation in decision making. The resumption of the demands for a Round Table proved successful in 2012 when the squatters brought the issue into the negotiations and its outcomes remain to be seen in the foreseeable future. A squatter that participated actively in the negotiations with the city described the specific demands brought forward by squatters in the following way:

So we [Elba, Przychodnia, Syrena and others connected to squatting] developed this stand, through very long and emotional debates, that we issue the city an ultimatum: that we would give the building away on the condition that we would agree on, where we could be active, and that the talks of the Tenants Round Table would be resumed (because they were stopped a while earlier). These were talks about the housing policy of the city between the tenants movement and the city authorities. Well, not only the talks were to be resumed, but also consultations were to take place in order to discuss or accept a municipal resolution... a project of a new law was to be developed together with persons from the tenants movement, that would concern handing over these unoccupied buildings for a definite time to persons that didn’t have a place to live (Squat 5).

Squatters’ and tenants’ claims are portrayed in the interviews as going hand in hand by both tenants and squatters. Some ideological and other differences are recognized, but these are underplayed when the common opponent is the city and its housing politics. Tenants’ activity and squatting are seen as organic where they complement and strengthen each other’s claims. There is also some overlapping when it comes to particular activists who are seen as parts of both the squatting scene and the tenants movement. The turning point in the framing of common claims between squatters and tenants is identified to the eviction of Elba, the unexpected mobilization of a large number of supporters and the emergence of Przychodnia that all resulted in the establishment of a dialogue with city authorities by squatters. What earlier proved to be

impossible became possible when squatters stated their claims and the resumption of Tenants' Round Table became a fact. An alliance was formed, that together stood up to the local authorities, and succeeded in its claims.

Throughout the interviews with the tenants when talking about squatters in the city they are consistently referring to them as “young people” (JB) “children from good homes” (PI) or “the first generation born in the new reality, without being brainwashed with some ideology” (ANI). Squatters are in general described as the younger generation that are free from the shackle of communism. This freedom is expressed in their relations to other groups and they are generally described as ready to help and protect other people that are in difficult situations. Their form of commitment is therefore significantly different from the one of tenants' (cf. Lichterman, 1995), who often explain the inability to attract active members by the lack of understanding of collective action among older parts of the population. Squatters' relationship to the authorities is also described as significantly different from the one of tenants. Squatters have more challenging attitude towards authorities and hold a view of officials and the role of the city as servants to the people (cf. Kovacheva, 2002). There is a cultural difference in the expectations and demands that the older tenants (the majority in their late 50ies or 60ies) and the younger squatters (the majority in their 20ies or 30ies) hold and it is also reflected in the way they collaborate and form alliances (Beamish & Luebbbers, 2009).

## **Media**

The tenants' organizations highlight consistently the importance of media for their exposure to the public and in the long run for being part of their success. The relationship to the media is however not only positive. Many of the interviewees perceive the media as politically and ideologically different and not always trustworthy in their presentations of reality. When asked if the tenants' organizations had some specific contacts among journalists the answers were often:

We have a bank of such media which we send notifications to. We always do it and the response varies, but usually somebody turns up. [...] We have journalists that we cooperate with that are interested in housing questions. And above all, we have the local media: the portal TVN Warszawa, Radio dla Ciebie [Radio for You], Warsaw's part in the Gazeta Wyborcza [largest national newspaper]. A number of times

we were on the television. For instance: Superstacja [thematic television], and TVN Warsaw [local version of TVN], when it was still functioning. So we do have a group of journalists, they are not many, but there are not many people familiar with the subject (PC).

Even though media and journalists are not perceived as completely reliable the presence of the media at demonstrations or other public actions and the exposure in the media is recognized as important part of the activity and works as a confirmation of the reasonableness of the claims and of the very existence of the tenants organizations. The role of the media is seen as important as the representations given by the media mould public opinion and can contribute to the success. The interviewed tenants agree on this point with Gamson and Wolfsfeld's words: "Conversely, a demonstration with no media coverage at all is a nonevent, unlikely to have any positive influence either on mobilizing followers or influencing the target. No news is bad news" (1993:116) (cf. Hryciuk & Korolczuk 2013). Even if the presentations of the media are not always well-matched with the views of the tenants they stress that the exposure in media often leads to public debates and illumination of the subject, which they argue is needed in the ideological environment that is very harsh against tenants and poorer parts of the population (cf. Buchowski, 2006). One of the interviewed activists described her organization's strategic approach to the media. She explained that reaching the media was always a matter to be weight up carefully, taking in variables like the way that the given media functions into consideration.

There is politics in these media. That is true. The politics of the owner, the politics of the editor. It is obvious that it is not lead from the point of view of the people and the ordinary man. There is a conflict that at one hand the media must be read, must be sold and from time to time they must present something that will catch the attention of people. And at the other hand, they must also care for the status quo. To care for the people who earn money so they can continue to earn money and pay their taxes. And that is why we continually try to estimate when we can get through things and when it is impossible (ANI).

Tenants' organizations are aware of the way the media work and are strategically careful when using media in disseminating information. Studies have shown that social movements need to frame their statements in a culturally acceptable way in order to gain public acceptance and support (Alexander & Smith, 1993; Gamson, 1992). Undemocratic or what might be perceived as illegitimate claims by the wider public might become a great hinder in the activity of the movement (cf. Jasper 1997). Moreover as other scholars have pointed out the relationship

between the media and social movements, or tenants' movement in this case, is asymmetric where "movements are generally much more dependent on media than the reverse" (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993: 116). The relationship between them is therefore better described in terms of "competitive symbiosis" than collaboration or even alliance (Wolfsfeld, 1991).

### **Politics and local authorities**

The relationship between tenants and local decision makers is surely not to be described in terms of alliances or mutual trust. Despite this, it is important to note that the relationship between those two have changed considerably since 2010 when new officials entered City Council. The new officials, and especially the vice-president are described as the best moment in the relations between tenants and public administration in Warsaw. The vice-president is among others responsible for the management of the municipal housing stock and he is described as courteous, amiable and even "as one in a kind in the whole Poland" (JE). In general the interviewed representatives of tenants' organizations found the latest city authorities as more genuine and friendly and more open for discussion, or at least for listening to their claims than their predecessors.

However, in the interviews tenants expressed stark criticism against local authorities, but also against the Polish government. Both local government and national government were the targets of claims and grievances (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001). Both were seen as corrupted and exclusively serving the interests of elites. Among the three organizations KSS showed by far most interest in reaching out into national politics. KSS' leader has before the foundation of the organization been involved in politics in the country and stressed the importance of politicizing the movement. In 2011 the organization joined the political party Ruch Palikota as advisors. Ruch Palikota is described by the KSS activists as a strategic alliance where the organization can reach a possibility to influence legislation as some of the MP's have showed interest in the tenants' issues. In April 2013 KSS organized a press conference together with two MP's presenting an amendment of the legal act protecting the rights of tenants. The amendment was created by KSS with the support of Ruch Palikota where a drafted bill of the amendment was presented. When asked on the relationship with the political party the leader of KSS answered:

I deal with these people firstly because when I go to eviction blockades and I can have a member of parliament (MP) that the police won't touch, than it is okay. If thanks to the MP I can, from day to day, meet the Ombudsperson for Children in order to make him join the case and defend a child, that I need to have, you know (PI).

It appears that the alliance with the party is deliberate and strategic. It gives the organization some significant tools in its activity. The leaders mentioned also other type of alliance building with politicians and other famous persons where the goal is to attract financiers for their activity. Through these alliances the organization is not only receiving access to political and symbolic resources, even access to economic resources is on the agenda.

I am right now in the process of forming a council where various famous persons are belonging. And the more famous people the better the chance. Maybe I am naïve, but I know that banks have great profits and they finance different large charitable endeavors. We hope that a bank will give us, as a part of its promotion, a rope that we will hang it on (PI).

Another attempt to politicize the subject of tenants and poverty was the organization of exhibition about poverty in Poland in 2012 at the European Parliament by the KSS in cooperation with a MEP. The exhibition was made possible after years of trying and much of the success the organization attributes to the alliance with the German MEP and Chair for the Confederal Group of the European United Left.

The tenants' organizations are consistently emphasizing the sensible character of their claims and pointing to the unwillingness of both politicians and scientists to support their aim (cf. Mandic, 2003). A strategic approach, especially in the case of KSS, is to either recruit public persons to support their cause, cooperate with politicians from abroad or frame their actions as charity. Public acceptance of the claims is often the key to success of social movements and tenants display particular awareness of it (Gamson, 1992). Even though tenants' organizations often portrayed themselves in an antagonistic position against local decisions makers and politicians, they all admitted the friendlier attitude that local authorities have had since 2010. The importance of a dialogue with local authorities was emphasized even amongst the most radical ones. For KSS reaching out into national and even European politics was even more important as they believed that the problem could be changed from there and the resources they needed could be found in national and European politics and politicians.

## Brokerage within the movement

The brokers working with tenants' organizations in Warsaw are typically highly educated persons in their late 20ies or 30ies with good communication skills, often very engaged in the topic, but equally often not belonging to the category of tenants. These brokers are also active in fields of higher education, non-governmental organizations, social or administrative work. In other words, persons who would easily pass for ordinary (middle-class) citizens if not for their engagement in housing and tenants' issues. They are often pointing out the need for the tenants' organizations to unite and use their resources more efficiently. They are frequently mediators between city authorities and tenants' organizations, Warsaw tenants' organizations and organizations of tenants in other Polish cities, other organizations active in the field of housing and tenants, but have even functioned as mediators between squatters and city authorities. Their high education and communication skills have proved useful and they use different channels to distribute the message (mostly through journalistic writing and social media). Brokerage within tenants' movement has had the ambition to make tenants' organizations unite and reach the national level, "to network between the organizations and exchange of experiences, but also to professionalize, but in the more positive sense of the term" (KK). Brokers point out the lack of gate-keeping organizations in the Polish context and argue that the aspirations should be to become a partner for the public administration.

The interviewed activists functioning as brokers for the tenants had frequent contacts with city officials and politicians and could easily distance themselves to the situation in their home city by calling on housing situation and tenants' mobilizations activity in other Polish cities and criticize both local authorities and the state. Despite their open critique towards local authorities they often experienced exclusion and suspicion from the tenants' organizations. Their motifs and intentions were recurrently questioned and rumors of acting for their own benefit were widespread among the tenants (which was confirmed in the interviews both by the tenants and the brokers).

In spite of the distrustful attitude towards the brokers some of them are mentioning more personal and trustful relations to some of the activists within tenants' organizations that facilitate exchange of experiences and cooperation on diverse issues. As one of the brokers put it:

After the workshops we exchanged experiences for a long time. NN from the tenants perspective, with a clear cut against owners (as they are not allowed to purchase their apartments). Me from the owners' perspective [apartment owner] with different adventures that this causes in the house we live. After a year or so NN asked if I wanted to join Social Side. At that time the longstanding program on management of housing stock was discussed there and I helped from the more technical side. The tenants have intuition on what is wrong so I tried to help in solving issues on the rent... or strictly technical stuff related to the management of real estate (JM).

The very same broker expressed no surprise with the fact that tenants could treat outsiders with suspicion and argued that the matter was not to refuse help from outside, but to secure their survival as “both the tenants and the squatters are often active on the edge of the law and it is not strange at all that they give thought to where to speak up. This suspicion is included, it is no surprise to me. They have been through too much to allow themselves an unconditional trust” (JM).

One broker for the tenants organizations have become the face for the tenants' actions in the media and has recently figured in the Saturday Edition of *Gazeta Wyborcza* (January 2013) where she revealed her role as broker or mediator for the tenants:

They [tenants] are in the first line, on the blockades, I mediate, I talk to the officials, I crave for housing round tables. I argue that the lack of a meaningful housing politics in Polish cities reverberates negatively on the lives of many people (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, Wysokie Obcasy 2013-01-28).

In the article the broker is not trying to conceal the fact that she belongs to “the middle-class, hold high cultural capital and have access to speaking out in the media, in order to do something on housing issues” (*Gazeta Wyborcza* 2013-01-28). The role of the engagement of the representatives of the middle class cannot be underestimated in the case of Polish tenants' organizations as previous studies (in the West) show that the involvement of the broader middle class in struggles was crucial for the success of the social movement (Offe, 1985; Bagguley, 1992). The absence of the middle class in the Polish civil society has been pointed out as a weakness in previous studies done by Polish sociologists (Sowa, 2012). The activity and involvement of brokers or mediators coming from other strata of the Polish society could become a turning point in the activity of tenants' organizations in Warsaw and Poland. The difficulty to overcome would be the distrust. Some initial initiatives have been undertaken and have worked

as bridging platforms where different activists, groups and organizations could meet. Some of these are described below.

One of the most evident successes of brokerage for the tenants' interests was the Congress of Urban Movements as an initiative for cooperation between organizations working with urban issues on national level and is since 2011 held annually. The first time the Congress was held in Poznan in 2011, 48 different organizations, mobilizations, individuals and other active groups in Polish cities working with issues concerning a balanced urban development, right to the city and urban democracy participated and discussed questions on local transport, revitalization, spatial planning, social issues, participatory budget, state's de-concentration, metropolitan problems, residents' participation in governance, and so on. The next Congress was held in Łódź in 2012 whereas contributions were formulated to the Guidelines for the National Urban Policy. The main aim of the Congress was to gather different actors and initiate a debate on the problems of Polish cities that should be emphasized in national politics. The Congress was widely covered by local and national media, including *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Rzeczpospolita* and *Polska Agencja Prasowa*, portraying the events in a favorable light. The outcomes of the Congress so far have been the formation of a coordinating group which aim was to institutionalize the Congress and to prepare it for the parliamentary elections in the fall of 2011 by developing an "election scanner" for the candidates to answer on questions concerning local democracy, urban revitalization and spatial order. The Congress is an indication that brokerage and the interest in tenants' issues coming from the outside could have bridging potential. Initiatives such as the Congress create platforms on which tenants and other parts interested in housing politics, housing problems and democracy could meet and exchange experiences and initiate cooperation.

Warszawa w budowie (Warsaw under construction) has functioned as an initiative to disseminate the information on housing politics, housing situation and tenants' rights to the wider public by involving artists and art.<sup>4</sup> Warszawa w budowie is a festival organized by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw focusing on the issues of housing, spatial planning, land use and participation and has until 2012 been arranged four times. The workshops organized within the festival have gathered various groups of people interested in or working with housing issues and functioned as meeting place where different experiences and opinions could be vented. Some of

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<sup>4</sup> [www.warszawawbudowie.pl](http://www.warszawawbudowie.pl)



the interviewees have mentioned the participation in the festival and its outcomes in the form of new acquaintanceships.

Previous research on social movements' coalition formation have highlighted the importance of reflexivity among movement brokers. The ability to be reflexive proved to be a prerequisite for the ability to transcend differences and create bridging platforms among movement activists (Lichterman, 1995). Moreover in Obach (2004) and Rose's (2000) studies the authors found that persons acting as brokers between movements held outstanding reflexive qualities and cultural knowledge. The brokers for the tenants' movement in Poland show similar characteristics in their ability to mediate and hold distance to the situation. Their reflexivity is most explicitly expressed in their understanding of tenants' suspicious attitudes towards them. Their access to cultural resources gives them access and knowledge to efficient communication channels that facilitate their role as brokers for the tenants. Moreover their freedom from affiliation in any organization and reflexive qualities result in different attitude towards authorities, seeing them as partners and not opponents. They are also representing the voice and attitude of younger generations of Poles whose attitude towards democracy and participation are quite different to those of older parts of populations (Kovacheva, 2002). Maybe the position of these young people, squatters as well as the brokers, could be understood in the light of a generational shift going on in the Polish cities, where the new generations of city residents do not remember socialist legacies and have developed a new identity on the basis of the city, slowly replacing the two traditional forms of identification; national identity and family identity (Kubicki, 2011). The new form of identification is according to Kubicki of a more civil nature, creating a more open society with its point of departure in the city (2011: 4).

## **Conclusion**

The ambition of this paper has been to examine the role of brokerage and alliances formation for the outcomes of tenants' organizations in Poland. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly distinguish between environmental, cognitive and relational mechanisms within contentious politics (2001). They argue that relational mechanisms are causal mechanisms that alter connections between individuals, groups and interpersonal networks, but they combine with environmental and cognitive mechanisms. Brokerage and alliance building are relational mechanisms that have

much wider effect for contentious action than for instance diffusion. In the case of Polish tenants' organizations and their brokers the effects of their relations were in a high degree influenced by environmental and cognitive mechanisms. Cognitive mechanisms "operate through alterations of individual and collective perception" (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001: 26) and cultural frames, but also generational differences and the ability to reflexivity are at work here. The argument here is that relational mechanisms cannot solely be explained without taking the interaction with the other two mechanisms into account.

Political opportunity structures are often highlighted in the social movement literature as significantly affecting the way that social movements function and the level of success they can achieve in a society (Kitschelt, 1998). Political opportunity structures would in McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly's theory fall under the category of environmental mechanisms that are externally generated and affect the conditions of social life significantly (2001:25). In the case of tenants' movement the political conditions or environmental mechanisms are not as much as a question of access to the political decision making power, but rather to the political decision makers at the local level, even though some serious attempts have been made by one of the studied organizations. Tenants' movement, as illustrated by the three tenants' organizations, have successfully initiated cooperation both with other interest groups along with representatives of politicians and young influential individuals and groups who sympathize with their claims. These allies have contributed to the most significant successes in the activity of the tenants. The tenants' organizations have despite ideological differences succeeded in building alliances, often when the threats from outside either jeopardized their existence as tenants (rents' increases or re-privatization processes) or as interest organizations (lack of response from authorities).

Another crucial environmental mechanism in the case of Polish tenants' organizations has been the shortage of affordable housing, which corresponds well with earlier studies on housing mobilizations in post-socialist settings (Pickvance, 1997). The very same study argued that the leaders of the housing movements held both high cultural and material capital, which in the case of tenants' movement in Poland has not proved correct and might be the reason why the movement needed to attract brokers. Moreover, the activity of tenants' organizations, even if their achievements have been moderate, contradicts the findings of Ekiert and Kubik's (1999) study that point out marginal groups as unlikely to protest in Poland and Czapinski and Panek's

(2011) report stating that membership and active engagement in organizational life in Poland lies in the hands of people with high educational capital.

Tenants' relations with the media were characterized with strategic considerations on the framing of claims in order to attract support and public acceptance. Here the organizations showed a consciousness on the role and function of what McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) call cognitive mechanisms. Overall, the most successful actions of the tenants' movement, represented by the three organizations from Warsaw, were all a result of either alliance building or brokerage. The challenge in the future will be to overcome the ideological differences that impede tenants' organizations from forming a more permanent alliance in a time when local authorities are listening, media is spreading the word and brokers are interested in cooperation.

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#### Internet:

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NIK,(2012) Report "Realizacja zadań w zakresie gospodarki mieszkaniowej przez organy administracji rządowej i jednostki samorządu terytorialnego", retrieved from: [http://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,3581\\_vp,4565.pdf](http://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,3581_vp,4565.pdf)

## Appendix

### Interview guide

1. General information on the respondent: age, sex, education, occupation, how long within the organization.
2. Focus on the individual:
  - \* Individual motives for collective action?
  - \* previous experience of collective action?
  - \* kind of activities at the organization/position?
  - \* rights and obligations?

\* active/part in other organizations/associations/groups?

3. Is there a tenants' movement? Why?
4. How is squatting connected to the tenants' movement?
5. Which problems are there in the field of activity? (conditions and barriers)
6. What is the financial condition of your organization (economic means and knowledge on attracting means)?
7. Weak and strong sides of your organization?
8. Level of knowledge on tenants' rights and problems in the society?
9. How is your organization described in the media? Is there a detectable difference in these presentations over time?
10. Describe the relationship to the media. Do you cooperate with somebody? How? Why?
11. What media do you use to communicate with each other? With others? Why?
12. How could you describe cooperation with other organizations/ associations? Who do you cooperate with? With whom not? (local, regional, national, international) Solidarity?
13. Where do you look for inspiration when it comes to fields and modes of activity?
14. Describe your relationship to the neighbors in the area (only for squats).
15. Describe your relationship with the local authorities. With the state?
16. What are the political/ideological stands of the organization?
17. What successes have you achieved during your existence?
18. What failures have you encountered?
19. How is the present situation in the city? What plans/hopes do you hold for the future?
20. Did I miss any important question/issue you would like to add?