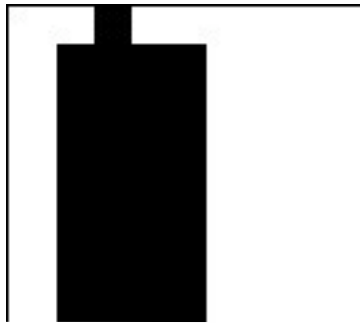


using space



mujinga xi.2006



social centres
squats
and
alternative modes of living

Scream if you wanna go faster ...

scattered beginnings

Um im not entirely sure how to begin, so i will just pile in i guess.... most of mentioned places have links at the end, normally internet coz it's just the easiest way nowadays ... yes i broke them broadly into countries, no i don't believe in countries, it was just the simplest categorical tool i had at my societally condemned fingertips....

tools for hope

What guide to european social centres could be complete without reference to the examples in italy and spain? Well, this one im afraid. I have been to Barcelona twice and i would probably endorse its claim to be squatting capital of europe, but i don't really like it as a city and whilst i did visit some nice squats – a free internet cafe, some free food cafes (they can afford to be free because dumpster diving is BIG there ... and with the tacit support of the supermarkets, which makes me jealous). i must say i found the “scene” in barcelona a bit cliquey and trendy. And that's just my own, honest opinion. I did have a sheet with all the activities and addresses on it – they flypost it on all the squats every week, listing all the activities, but i gave it away. Um .. Can mas deu is a “famous” sustainable living project in an old leper hospital but i didn't go there. Italy? Never went there (well i drove through it once on the way to a teknival but) i did meet some indymedia peeps from the fort in roma which sounds absolutely supercool, but yeah, check the link, on this i have no more to say.

No squats no more in germoney?

In Berlin it seems like nowadays there arent really any true squats left except Tacheles and KOPI. I could be wrong coz i have only been there for a few days a few years back, but it seems that a combination of police repression and canny cheap leasing policies mean most ppl live in a kind of antisquat arrangement (see the dutch bit for an explanation of that). KOPI is cool and fairly active for gigs and political stuff.

Social Centres in the UK

Birmingham
Cottage Social Centre
<http://www.brumsc.org.uk>

Bradford
1 in 12
<http://www.1in12.go-legend.net>

Brighton
Cowley Club
<http://www.cowleyclub.org.uk/>

Bristol
Kebele
<http://www.kebele.org/>

Coventry Peace House
Coventry
<http://covpeacehouse.org.uk/>

Leeds
The Common Place
Sat 12.00 – 17.00
<http://www.thecommonplace.org.uk/>

London
LARC
<http://www.londonarc.org>

London
56a Crampton St.
www.56a.org.uk

London
Ramparts
<http://www.rampart.co.nr/>

London
Dalston Lane Theatre
(evicted)

London
Square
(evicted)

London
Institute for Autonomy
(evicted)

London
Freedom Bookshop
Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street

Northampton
Blackcurrent Centre
<http://www.ofek.com/bca/>

Nottingham
Sumac Centre
<http://www.veggies.org.uk/rainbow/>

Nottingham
ASBO
<http://asbo.squat.net>

Manchester
The Basement
Tuesday–Saturday 12pm–6pm
<http://thebasement.clearerchannel.org/>

Sheffield
Matilda Street (evicted)

U S I N G S P A C E

INTRO

This is the first in perhaps a series of zines about social centres in Europe. In this one, you get a profile of the poortgebouw in rotterdam and a fairly random collection of thoughts about mainly contemporary social centres (the term being used in a pretty broad sense to describe free spaces) which i have either heard of or visited, with a bit of a diversion halfway through to discuss the notion of an antisquat. Enjoy!

IMPORTANT WARNING

DONT EXPECT TO GET A NICE RECEPTION IF YOU JUST TURN UP TO SOME OF THESE PLACES. IF I GIVE THE ADDRESS THEY DO TAKE VISITORS, BUT EVERYTHING CHANGES. SOME OF THESE CENTRES ARE NOT NOW SOCIAL CENTRES ANYMORE (EG SLAAK), SOME ARE ONLY OPEN AT STATED TIMES (EG ASCII), WHICH YOU ARE PROBABLY BEST OFF CHECKING ONLINE ... I WILL GIVE A WEBSITE WHERE POSSIBLE. Also, if things arent always hyphenated or capitalised, who cares? i dont really believe in these things any more but i wrote this with a few different text editors and some of them do.

CONTACT

For the last year I have been moving house every three months ... somehow I've brought the normal English lifespan for a squat to the Netherlands with me. Therefore, altho i do love writing letters and trading zines, contact is first advised by email – spaceman@mujinga.net

back in 2003, milada was busy with a dying infoshop, food not bombs who cooked there every sunday, lots of punk/ska/grind gigs and occasional benefits. Prase, just round the corner (and sort of part of the milada autonomous zone) had and still appears to have a nice permaculture project going on in this weird madmax zone between a hill and the river and the motorway. There's a dump there where the guys come and deposit all the stuff they take out of houses before they get demolished (or something like this). Then they go home and come back the next day to separate it all out. So we the squatters used to hop the fence and pick up all kinds of weird shit which most of the time was just what we needed (although half the time we didn't know we needed it until we found it) ... fresh toilet roll, ties, paintings, microshit office, furniture and of course the famous boxes of baby food.

a few guys from milada have moved on to turbova, another villa which is really nice .. its a building up behind smichov i used to cycle past and dream about doing stuff in. They are paying the owner a little rent and doing art exhibitions and gigs there. I wish them every success and hope to get there next time i pass thru, altho perhaps its not lasting that much longer.

Im a bit more ambivalent about Krtkova Kolona, the anarchist infoshop in Letna. It was set up through using the overspill money from the IMF protests and funded by EU fraud. I was involved with it for a bit but sheesh the politix and inaction wear you out pretty fast. As a guy from the London Social Centre Network said to me once, it's always a learning process doing a social centre. Truer words probably have been spoken, but not to me. At KK, there was lots of hidden hierarchy – i guess thats normal. But we had meetings where nothing happened. People agreed things must be done, but the only handy guy in the collective left after getting fed up with people who promised to help and never showed up. And our public face was a joke. It was the sort of place where when you walk in the person behind the bar looks at you as if to say 'What the fuck are you coming in here for?'. Just my opinion, but believe me lots of my friends coming to visit said that to me too. I mean if you wanna do a club for a private clique, then cool, do that but then don't call it an anarchist infoshop ... anyways. I havent been back and i hope things have improved. Me and a friend installed some computers in a backroom and maybe more positive stuff is happening there now, a few years on. From their website, it appears that there is.

De Groene Voltage

is het op Vrijdag 13 Oktober door Woonstrijd! en KrakendRotterdam gekraakte pandje dat nu als sociaal centrum in gebruik genomen is, verschillende avonden in de week zullen er activiteiten zijn.

Dinsdags - Gratis film avond! Aanvang 19.00

Donderdags - Volkskeuken 'BraakSmaak'

Aanvang 19.00 ++++++ Activiteit 21.00:

9.11 - presentatie over vrijplaats plakken

16.11 - sticker en collage workshop!

23.11 - T-shirts maken

30.11 - 'how to reduce your ecological footprint' a talk by mischa from earthship brighton

Dinsdags & Woensdags 13.00 - 18.00

Infowinkel 'Doe Nix' + Weggeefwinkel:

schieweg 61, rotterdam, 3038AG

braaksmak braaksmak



voku vegan eten 19.00
sticker workshop 21.00



voku vegan eten 19.00
sticker workshop 21.00

braaksmak braaksmak



voku vegan eten 19.00
sticker workshop 21.00



voku vegan eten 19.00
sticker workshop 21.00

We love eastern europe!

OK, moving to somewhere i actually lived for a while, in Prague there was of course the famous Ladronka, which got shut down after the IMF riots in 2000. It was a villa off on its own in a park and was apparently pretty cool. Tekno kids, anarchists and punks all united for a while (although in czech if you are alternative they will call you a punk anyway). Cibulka sounded good as well, there were lots of parties there a few years back and as a matter of fact it is still standing there, empty. Other squatted villas are tucked away on the quiet (and good luck to 'em!). Stare Stresovice was squatted by a bunch of artists in a cool place (it had a garden with a cliff, in which there was a cave) but they got evicted for some dumb reason.



Squat Milada continues to this day and is a fucking cool horror house squat – see fotos above. It has been active at points but when i went there in summer (2006), there was absolutely no-one there for two days... i mean sometimes you had to knock real hard to get someone to answer the door, but this was deserted ... a few ppl i knew from the time i lived in the squat round the corner have apparently moved on and others have moved out to apartments in Prague .. well, it is a crumbling squat with no electricity, wood stoves and no running water.

most western squatters wouldnt stay there long either!!

Holland.

Well, Holland (the Netherlands i probably should say) has some very very fat squats.

Vrankrijk in central Amsterdam has a massive mural painted on its front. It is currently shut for reconstruction but normally there's a bar there most nights, and a kraakspreekuur (this is a weekly meeting time for people to get info and help about squatting local buildings). ASCII is an inspiring cafe which has existed for years in various locations, providing free internet access and acting as a hacklab. Overtoom 301 is a great project with lots going on including a printer's, a concert venue and office space for Green Pepper magazine and EYFA (European Youth For Action)



OCCI, ADM, NSDM are other initials worth investigating perhaps. The latter (pictured) is an old ship building zone first squatted and now in an arrangement with the local council. The first Robodock was there.

links to stuff mentioned in article

espana

can masdeu

http://www.nodo50.org/x-files/can_masdeu/

italia

forte prenestino

<http://www.ecn.org/forte/>

germoney

KOPI

<http://www.koepi.squat.net/>

tacheles

<http://super.tacheles.de/cms/>

czech republic

prague

milada

<http://milada.s.cz/>

kk

<http://kk.czechcore.cz/>

utopia

street behleradska, prague

popovice

interkultura.org (occasionally updated)

netherlands

amsterdam

vrankrijk
<http://www.vrankrijk.org/>

occii
<http://www.occii.org/>

ascii
<http://scii.nl/>

overtoom301
<http://squat.net/overtoom301/>

groningen

orkz
http://www.orkz.net/tiki-view_articles.php

rotterdam
poortgebouw
<http://www.poortgebouw.nl>

england

see the list of social centres which follows for details of 56A, LARC and Rampart

random artists
<http://randomartists.org>

radical dairy (evicted)
<http://radical-dairy.tripod.com/>

square (evicted)
<http://www.londonsocialcentre.org.uk/>

Cafe Utopia was for me a better project. Although they also always had lots of internal problems with their group dynamix, they stayed on it for a long time and nowadays it still opens but only something like thursday, friday and saturday evenings, which probably makes sense coz all the ppl are volunteers. They do small gigs and film nites. It is a relaxed comfortable space to have a drink and pick up some flyers. We used to have Indymedia Prague meets there every week.

When it first got going, it had a bookshop in the room next door, which sadly shut down. Then the anti-authoritaian cafe had a skinhead rec shop beside it, which they all seemed terribly proud of. I always found it a bit weird. Yeah, fair enough if antifascist czech skinheads want to dress up like Western fascist skinhead wankers in lonsdale and ben sherman and so on but i would rather not see it. I think they got off on the contradiction somehow.

Is that it for Prague? Oh well, there's also Cross Club which is a fairly cool place in idea at least. I don't know the ppl behind it and it is a commercial venture but its only semi-legal and last time i was there (summer06) they had plans to start a lecture evening, a shop, a cafe a cinema etc etc as well as just using the space as a bar and club. The idea being to educate the kids as well as entertaining them! They could do all that and much more coz they rent a chunk of a whole fucking apartment building, all that is left from the entire block which i guess got demolished or bombed out in WW2. Its 6 stories high and although they aren't really allowed to use the upper levels at the moment, if they could it might become like KOPI or Vrankrijk or something which would be very cool for Prague.

And outside Prague there is Popovice, a small village near Benesov (unlike the 14 other Popovices in the Czech Rep) where a friend owns a castle. Its a beautiful place next to a lake where you feel time stopped a few score years ago. It is a wonderful space which is used for occasional events and one-day festivals.

Jaroslav, the owner of the castle, is slowly restoring it with EU money and loves travellers to stop by and share their news of different cultures. He speaks more languages than he can count and says meeting travellers is better than watching the news on satellite TV. You should see his mammoth sprawling library of books.

I am planning to organise a work camp there in the summer of 2007.

ACU in Utrecht has been going a long time and now is basically a legalised venue/bar/cafe, but still with that radical edge we know and love. I saw Citizen Fish there a few years ago.

Eurodusnie in Leiden are seriously fucking onit. They hosted a PGA (People's Global Action) conference in the early 2000s and when i went there i was well impressed both with their organisation and with their spaces. Its an anarchist collective of 20-30 ppl (with hidden leaders naturally) which gets funded by the EU (European Union) to protest against the EU. They live in an old skool and in the centre of Leiden have a few buildings next to each other where they have a bar/cafe, a give away shop, a karate school and probably more. The thing that impressed me is that the cafe is open every day, with monthly organised events. That is very very inspiring. None of this lackadaisical sometimes open bollix but proper commitment. Very nice. There were some problems with the police recently but i think they closed the Koppenhinksteeg buildings for a bit and then reopened again.

Veggie cafes are quite normal for Dutch squats. In Rotterdam there is Braaksmaak, a nomadic veggie eetcafe which goes to a different squat every two weeks although now it has settled down for winter (there aren't that many places in Rdam to go and we just squatted a place we hope to use as a social centre for winter and beyond). Basically the cafe gets ppl together and that's a good thing. That's what it's all about. There's food at seven and then often an activity at nine – badge making, political films, what do if you get arrested etc etc

I have lived in Rdam for 1.5 years and i have to say currently there isn't that much good stuff going on, but there will be more soon, we're in a bit of a lean patch .. and we realize that and it then in turn is the motivates people to sort it out. Ebb and flow i guess. Rdam is not Adam. There aren't so many active squatters and the "scene" is pretty fractured especially between north and south. But that's how it goes.

And since i wrote the above paragraph, things have got better! We have enough going on in Rotterdam to consider making a weekly flyer. The Groene Voltage, the social centre, is slowly coming together. We still need to connect to the electricity and kickstart the internet cafe, but we have a small active gruppe running tings and the cafe is doing ok, we have a weekly political film night, an infoshop and a free shop. (see flyer later on)

I mean. That's what happens sometimes .. people are people, they can't always be nice although my credo is that people should be nice to other people .. it would sort the world out a bit (if we don't dwell too much on the concept of being cruel to be kind i guess). I can afford to be philosophical because i am regarding all my visits and experiences of social centres as part of a learning process (thanks again to that anonymous bloke who said that when i met him at the antiNATO planning meet). The thing for me (as i get older?) is that a lot of people are stuck in their own reality tunnels which are preprogrammed by this sick society we live in, so if they take the time to come to a social centre i want to make their time there as enjoyable for them as possible, so that the impact is maximised.

And the best we can do in setting up a social centre here in Rotterdam is to establish some sort of social context for revolutionary thinking where now pretty much zilch exists.

Things can't go on for ever, but i do think a centre which does a film nite every week for years is better than one which does two weeks of activity then get burnt out. But then every case is different. Anyway, i didnt get much out of ramparts. Perhaps another time.

Oh, I nearly forgot to mention two wicked groups of squatters. One was Section6, they did some very cool stuff a few years ago such as a week long radical event called Cultures of Resistance (which went so well they did another one called Cultures of Persistence) and a squat cinema in an old school in Vauxhall, where they showed Clockwork Orange.

The other group is of course my pals Random Artists, most of whom are living at the moment in an old people's home in Crouch End (Nov 06 evicted for the second time!!). Its a nice chunky building with big communal lounges and enough rooms for 20-30 people. The idea a few years ago (... 2000 perhaps?) was to harness the latent creativity of the tekno scene by doing a week long, non-curated art event, literally the plan was to just allow anyone to turn up and stick their stuff up. We did a pub in Farringdon twice, a place in Stokey (and then i left), the Flowers east gallery ... the list grows over time. I came back for the one in Goswell Road in Farringdon and it had all got massive ... we filled four floors of a freaking office block with arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrt!

There was a thursday film note, karaoke and a fashion show friday, bands and Djs saturday. Like all good memes, the virus is spreading organically now. There have been TAA events in Bristle, Manchester and also outside the UK. We did a pretty funky event at Milada in Prague after Czechtek in 2003 and the next year some people went out to Romania also. Check the website at the end for more details.

I think that concludes my roundup of English social centres, altho there are certainly more things I could mention such as the Blackcurrent Centre in Northampton, A-spire in Leeds and SPOR in Brighton.

See the following list for places mentioned in the article and I have also included a list of social centres in England here in the zine in case it is of interest.

Ending notes

Despite the shitness of the western world, some people are resisting, in their own beautiful and multifarious ways. I am not sure how well i have conveyed the warm inner glow i get when i go to these places, or how inspiring they can be. Nevertheless, here is my small contribution to the cause. I am happy that all these places have existed and overjoyed that many of them STILL exist. I dedicate this zine to them.

And to Arjan, coz its his birthday tomorrow and he lives at the Poortgebouw.

Social centres are necessary more than ever, so please get involved, help out and resist, resist, resist.

mujinga rotterdam 2006

The old school in Groningen sounds wikid and i spent a lovely weekend at an old brick factory, since evicted.

The fort in Nijmegen is a really fucking fort and actually a fucking monument too!! It was supposed to be really nice, but i never made it there. Which shows you have to make the effort becuase now (Nov 06) it got evicted by the Dutch army in a remarkably short time – only 2 days! The squatters made a museum and gave weekly tours. They were evicted so that the local council can make a museum and give weekly tours. Echt stom!



sense, and at least the buildings are being used, but there a few buildings in rdam (an old eye hospital, an old theatre, some commercial buildings) which would otherwise definitely be standing empty for years and it's a bit of a shame that they can't be squatted. The more realistic option is for squatters to take a building and armed with that massive bargainig chip, to negotiate a "good deal" with an owner. Sounds unlikely perhaps but it can be done. We squatted an empty warehouse on a industrial estate in north west rdam (where there are still lots of empties and only some antisquat) and the owner sent a suave middleman from Adam to set up a deal where we lived there for free ie they paid heating, electricity, water etc and we looked after the building for him ie no big parties and we allowed estate agents to come in with 24 hours' notice. The deal worked OK but yes, it was actually only for 6 months in the end, because then the building got sold .. which was good of course, but not for us!! Even so it wasnt so bad, we simply found another warehouse 5 minutes away.

Back to it

Anyway that was a bit of a diversion, back to what's happening in Rdam. Well, there is the Slaakhuis which is a fat building pretty near the centre, where quite a lot happened for 2 years but it seems to have imploded. Now its over 3 years old and perhaps stuff will happen again. I hope so but I also hear that they're probably getting kicked out soon to make way for a arts college.

Waterfront and Nighttown both came out of the squat scene but now theyre both fairly dull commercial venues (that's what i see anyway) so i don't even know why im mentioning them here.

The Fabriek is a project in Delfshaven, next to a river (the Delfshavense Schie). It is an old factory (hence the name) and is a building which has been crumbling away for years. It has been previously squatted back in the 90s and since those squatters got evicted it has been standing empty, which is a shame since i hear those squatters did really nice things there, such as eetcafes for 80 people. The group living there now have put in a lot of work to make it liveable. There's maybe 8 ppl living there and other ppl using it as atelier/workshop space. They're not yet doing much activities, except a free weekly film nite on Wednesdays and there was a party there this month (11.06) with live bands and tekno, which was really busy.

Talking of rugs, Jamex was a cool place down in Eindhoven. It was an ex-military base on the edge of an industrial zone. I only went there for two tekno parties, in 2001 and 2005 but boy, you could see that in those four years a lot of rugs had been consumed onsite. It was a collection of buildings with a lake and a small bit of woodland and the woods were full of bizarre half-finished drug-addled art experiments. The site got evicted and bulldozed before NYE 2005. It was a refreshingly free place to be for a party.

Engerlund

While Ive been away from England, there have been some social centres in London and elsewhere. Here i will concentrate on the ones in London. There was the Radical Dairy in Stoke Newington, the Insitute for Autonomy in Euston and the London Social Centre in Russell Square, all now evicted. Before that there were places like the church in Stokey, which got bulldozed for being used as a convergence centre for June18 and the Button Factory which got bulldozed for being a convergence centre for something else. Yes, political squats in England often get shut down. Still it could be worse, in Poland they get firebombed. For a long time (but mainly before my time!) there were Cooltan and 121 in Brixton. I didnt really go to either very much. Actually both places i only visited for parties – i was such a hedonistic youth. Oh no, also one meeting at 121, near the end, when it seemed as if the only people living there were clueless Italian mohawks who didn't speak a word of English. There was a place called the Spire too (and maybe still is), but i never went there.

Just recently when i was back in londres i thought i would tour round the centres which are still going. 56A Crampton Street was started up 20 or more years ago and now its legalised somehow, i dunno the precise details, i think they took a ten year lease for a nominal fee. The long running Fare Shares organic food co-op has become a bone fide shop which is cool i guess and there is also a bike repair workshop and a library. The library was great, loads of zines (badly categorised through their sheer number!), a really interesting squatting archive and loads of stuff on all your favourite issues .. composting, radical feminism, road protests etc etc. If i was in the area i would love to help out there, it's really nice that places like that exist. No really.

It gives me hope.

I found a copy of Slug and Lettuce and it was great reading that again, such a fabulous zine. I think that's why im bothering to do this actually, i had the idea for a long time to make a zine about social centres and now im inspired to get of my arse and sort it out ...

The London Action and Resource Centre in Aldgate was bought by some people involved with radical direct action to provide a permanent space for people to meet and organise. I went there a while ago for a meeting and it was just an empty shell so it was fantastic to go back and find a cosy place with a roof garden, office, library and action room. Vive la resistance!

After two hits, there had to be a miss and sadly that was to be the Ramparts Centre. I was (of course) excited to be heading there, they seem to be quite busy with a lot of stuff and i had re-jigged their wikipedia article to make it an acceptable article rather than sheer propaganda, so i was interested to see the space itself. But no. On their website it said every Thursday was community film nite and at Crampton Street i saw a sign saying they were open every day but i felt like these announcements might be out of date and some guys at LARC were talking about how the group is currently "experiencing difficulties" so i wasn't expecting much.

So i buzzed the buzzer and got let in on the second attempt. I entered a dark room with lots of crap everywhere. I was planning to visit the library so i went up to the first floor, where it was supposed to be, but everything was locked. I went back downstairs and tried to get out to talk to the person who buzzed me in to ask where she was.

But I couldn't get out. The door was for some reason covered in carpet, probably for a good reason, although several weeks on i still haven't figured that out. I got that irrational sort of paranoia one tends to get in new social encounters... i started to think "what happens if i can get out for days, i might starve, no-one in aldgate can hear me scream!!" Then I found a light switch and a toilet, but no library. Minutes passed and i wondered what to do. Then i heard the woman who let me in pottering about up on the second floor, so i asked her what was going on. She said didn't know and she certainly seemed like didn't care.

She locked her door behind her again and after i while i managed to get the door open, soi went off to get my dinner, happy in a way to have got my negative social centre experience out of the way.

A Turkish group also does things there sometimes and i hope we can be there a few months at least and get some positivity flowing in what is otherwise a grey subdued urban area in north Rotterdam.

The illusory freedom of antisquat

Antisquat makes things more difficult for social centres. That's a peculiarly Dutch problem for the moment although squatters in other countries better take note coz its coming to England for example and probably elsewhere too (as I mentioned earlier there seems to be a German version too). In Holland you have companies such as 'Ad Hoc' and 'HOD' who get paid by the owner of a building to find someone to live in the building, because if a building is occupied then it can't be squatted (legally and pragmatically). Now this in theory may sound quite good, but of course the reality is more twisted ... it means that you all these fucken lovely MASSIVE office buildings in central Rdam which are just begging to be used as social centres but they have one fucken "alternative type" living there and thus can't be done. Very nice for that arty student to live in a peachy place for comparatively cheap rent (something like 200euro/ month) but not so good for the culture of Rotterdam generally.

And if you try to do stuff legally, then it's a long and painful process. The Locus people squatted a building above a pedestrianised shopping street and tried to set up a legal alternative arts centre with a gig venue and ateliers etc. They did do some events there (which were quite lame and had expensive beer) until they got shut down for only having one set of stairs which is apparently a fire hazard nowadays (funny I've been to squat parties for ten years and been in environments where everyone is quite clearly on the verge of losing their sanity for good, but in all that time i have only ever seen a few incidents, all involving one fuckup fucking up).

But yeah, antisquat is not good for the society, yet people only care about themselves. Still, the joke is on them a bit coz theyre paying rent and also the antikraak companies suck .. they have big waiting lists and so they can afford to treat their renters like shit (.. and they're getting money from both sides of the equation remember!!). moreover, the restrictions they put on people are pretty bad. They include: one month's notice to leave; they have a key so they can always come in "to check the place"; no pets; no parties; no extra people sleeping over. i mean, for people who dont like to squat, antisquat may make

Het Poortgebouw, Rotterdam

This profile of the Poortgebouw is based on the wikipedia entry which i wrote, which in turn was mainly based on the poort's own website. Seeing as this zine is limited circulation, i have added in some more biased thoughts of my own devising than you will find online.

The Poortgebouw is a national monument located by the River Maas in the Kop van Zuid area of Rotterdam, which is just south of the River Maas. The Poort actually stands next to the river. Prime real estate! It was built in 1879 and experienced a range of uses until it was squatted October 3, 1980. It had been standing empty for 2 years and was squatted as a protest intended to highlight the lack of affordable residential housing in Rotterdam. The action also saved it from being turned into an erotic centrum. It is a city landmark and since being kraaked has been heavily involved in the underground culture of Rdam. Moreover, the Kop van Zuid has been transformed in the last 10 years or so into a yuppie haven and the Poort continues to be an isolated point of resistance.

The Poortgebouw was originally planned as one of two identical buildings separated by water and guarding the narrow entrance to the Binnenhaven, part of the original port of Rotterdam. It was intended to be the administrative headquarters of Rotterdamsche Handelsvereniging, but when the owner went bankrupt and fled to the United States of America the second building was not built. Later a smaller version was constructed, only to be demolished in 1937. When the Poortgebouw was squatted, the intention was to use the building as living space and a youth centre. After much negotiation with the city council, it was agreed in 1982 that the squatters could stay as a housing association (the Vereniging Poortgebouw). They would pay a low rent to the city and undertook to maintain the inside of the building, with the city pledging to care for the outside of the building. The first rent contract was signed in May 1984. The Poortgebouw became home to a group of international artists, musicians and activists. Many grassroots, not-for-profit activities were held or planned at the Poortgebouw. It was used for music concerts (punk, ska, rock, acoustic), comedy nights, spoken word events, discussions and film nights.

Now

Currently (2006) the Poortgebouw has a twice weekly vegetarian cafe on Wednesdays and Sundays. There are a free shop and a voko selling organic foodstuffs at wholesale prices, both of which are open to the public during the cafe from 18:00 – 21:00. There are a regular open days. Also the Poortgebouw hosts occasional free concerts, discussions and film nights. These have been in a bit of a lull recently for two reasons. One, gigs cant go past 12 now because of new yuppie neighbours who like to complain and two, the court proceedings have taken a lot of energy from the collective, which is also going through a phase of adjustment (lots of people left, there is at least one huge internal rift since living in a group of 30 is never easy and also some people living there seem to think it is a place to live only).

Now i hope things are getting moving again and there will be more events going on. We organised a 9/11 film night in the beautiful attic space which went quite well, despite some of the poortpeople being unhelpful. Dont get the wrong impression though, some people who live there are great! And i hope to work with those ones more.

Court proceedings

In July 2001 the Poortgebouw was sold by Woning Bedrijf Rotterdam (WBR), a semi-privatized company maintaining council-owned buildings, to de Groene Groep, a development company. The building was sold for 350,000 euro, which is approximately the price of a large single-family home. It was sold without the consultation of the Vereniging Poortgebouw (the Poortgebouw housing association). Since October 2004, the Vereniging Poortgebouw has been fighting in court the decision by de Groene Groep to cancel the rental contract, evict the tenants and renovate the Poortgebouw for office space. On February 17, 2006 the Rotterdam Court of Justice gave the verdict that the rental contract is ended and no alternative housing should be offered. The judge agreed with de Groene Groep that the only means to renovate the Poortgebouw building would be by redeveloping it as office space, supporting the contention of the developers that the outside of the building needs much work.

The Vereniging Poortgebouw had argued that this work was needed because both Woning Bedrijf Rotterdam and de Groene Groep had neglected their contractual obligations to ensure the outside of the building was in a good condition. The Vereniging Poortgebouw will appeal this decision at a higher court in Den Haag. This will take some time.

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Elsewhere in Holland, there's Ecotribe Teuge, between Deventer and Appeldoorn, where i lived for 1.5 years. It's a nice project in that the space gives a good feeling and it's a friendly bunch of people, but 20 people living together should have some sort of shared communication and some sort of idea where they are going. Or you could just smoke more weed.



Last i heard they're trying to get on a more legal footing which would obviously mean they could commit to doing more stuff.

Its an interesting case in point because doing it illegal is fucking hard, but doing it legal ain't that easy either. Health and safety and fire regulations and a typical Dutch adherence to “the rules” mean that planning for a social centre in central Rdam can be difficult – for music events anyway. i hope the Fabriek goes well altho they certainly wont be able to make much noise no matter what happens. – they have lots of neighbours. But it is definitely another node in the growing net of interesting things happening in Rotterdam. Others would include the Villa Vitrine, the Wolphaertsraat, the Lincke Zwaard and the Poortgebouw, which is pictured below and dubject of a subarticle on the following page...

