

## **Cognitive dimension in cross-movement alliances: the case of squatting and tenants' movements in Warsaw**

**Dominika V. Polanska**

### **Abstract**

*Squatting has been present in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of state socialism and Poland is pointed out as exceptional in the development of squatting in the area. However, looking closer at the squatting environment in Warsaw reveals that the movements' successes are a result of a cross-movement alliance with the tenants' movement. The cooperation between squatters and tenants have in a short period of time gained a strong negotiating position vis-à-vis local authorities in Warsaw. The objective of this article is to analyse the mechanisms behind the cooperation of squatters' and the tenants' movements and in particular the cognitive processes behind the formation of an alliance. Specific research questions posed in the article cover how the cooperation between the squatting movement and the tenants' movement emerge in the city, and what cognitive processes characterize the cooperation. The empirical material for the study consists of altogether 40 semi-structured interviews with squatters and activists in the tenants' movement in the city. It is argued in the article that the development of alliance formation includes processes of defining common goals, underplaying of differences, and recognizing common strength. Moreover, in order to reach the point when the alliance is formed the process of recognition of common strength needs to be successful in both movements resulting in a shared perception of empowerment.*

### **Keywords**

Squatting, tenants' movement, collective action, alliance formation, social movements, Warsaw, Poland, Central and Eastern Europe

### **Introduction**

Alliance building within social movements has been documented extensively among social scientists (i.e. Benford 1993; McAdam 1982; Polletta 2002; Rochon and Meyer 1997), however cooperative attempts and alliance creation across social movements has not been studied to the same extent (Beamish and Luebbers 2009; Lichterman 1995; Obach 2004; Rose 2000; Van Dyke 2003). Within-movements alliances might be smoother, as the actors involved often share common goals and repertoires of action. Cross-movement alliances, on the other hand, are associated with some fundamental negotiations running the risk of conflicts between different groups and competing interests. Moreover,

the process of alliance formation between social movements involves often an articulation of taken-for-granted issues within the movement that must be articulated and defended (Lichterman 1995). Beamish and Luebbbers conclude that “cross-movement coalitions pose special problems for collaboration that cannot be sufficiently addressed through within-movement studies” (2009: 648) as they must merge divergent explanations and solutions to the issues they pursue.

The process of negotiating and reconciling distinctive explanations and answers to problems by social movements’ coalition work is interesting to examine further as it involves cognitive processes that can become crucial for the creation of an alliance. Cognitive elements in coalition work of social movements are, however, closely interrelated with structural and relational factors, and by revealing their interconnectedness we can start to understand the complexity of mobilization and cooperation processes. Cognitive processes are still an under-studied part of coalition work within and between social movements (dominated by studies on external conditions such as resource mobilization or political opportunity structures) and are given particular focus in this study. The cognitive process of dealing with differences is a field that needs scholarly attention, despite the fact that many social movement studies already cover conflicts within social movements on such issues as organizational structures, decision making, ideology, collective identity or cultural differences. Two social movements’ cognitive work when forming cross-movement alliances are in the focus of the study: the Polish tenants’ movement and the squatting movement.

Squatting, is often defined as “living in or using a dwelling without the consent of the owner” (Mayer 2013; Prujit 2003) and has been an important part of Western history since the 1960s. However, squatting has not been studied to the same extent in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). This is obviously related to the phenomenon’s delayed emergence in post-socialist milieus (1990s). Squatting in CEE occurred as a response to the developing alternative culture in the area, but also as an answer to the worsening of housing conditions (shortage and decay) along with privatization processes introduced in the ‘new’ economic system (Zuk 2001). The squatting environment in the Polish capital city, Warsaw, will stand in focus of this study, along with squatters’ coalition work with the tenants’ movement in the city. The squatters in Warsaw define themselves as a radical kind of movement and strive to be independent of existing institutions, organizations, or other formal actors and are motivated by ideological reasons. They organize according to decentralized models of networking and prefer direct action, as their main action repertoire. The tenants’ activists in Warsaw, on the other hand, are usually organized in the form of associations. The vast majority of the most active associations in the city were founded between 2006 and 2008, however there are also older and smaller organizations working with tenants’ issues. Tenants’ associations under study lack any financial assistance from abroad and are driven by a small group of most dedicated members. As it will be shown further on, tenants’ activism has

been motivated, not so much by ideology, but more by pragmatic reasons like their housing and socio-economic situation.

Looking at the development of squatting and tenants' movements in other settings we can observe the interconnectedness of these movements in their emergence (Castells 1983; Corr 1999; Katz and Mayer 1985; Owens 2009). In the Polish case the movements emerge and develop separately after the fall of state socialism and initiate cooperation first in recent years. What is most interesting about this cooperation is why it is taking place now and how it unfolds and is interpreted by both movements.

The objective of this article is to analyse the role of different mechanisms behind alliance formation between squatters' and tenants' movements and add to literature on alliance building in social movements, and in particular on cognitive mechanisms' role for alliance formation. By studying the process of alliance formation and its cognitive elements, I develop three important aspects in the cognitive process behind alliance formation and illustrate how these aspects are perceived, processed, negotiated by the involved actors, and how differences are handled.

The article begins with a presentation of previous studies on the topic of squatting including its links to the tenants' activism, both international and in the post-socialist context, where the development of the squatting movement and the tenants' movement in Poland and Warsaw is depicted. Next, the theoretical approach of the study is presented and described in relation to the aim of this article. The empirical material and methodological considerations are presented next. The analysis of the empirical material follows with the focus on the history of squatting and tenants' activism in Warsaw, and focusing on the processes behind the emergence of an alliance between squatters' and tenants' movements. I conclude that relational, cognitive and environmental mechanisms interplay in the mobilization of collective action and cooperation between social movements. However, the cognitive mechanisms are emphasized and it will be argued that in order to reach the point where the alliance is formed, the cognitive process of recognizing common strength needs to be successful in both movements. To reach such recognition the actors need to identify common threats and potential outcomes, but one of the most crucial components is the collective perception of empowerment.

### **Previous studies on squatting and its connection to tenants' activism**

Squatting movements have been observed in the West in Europe: Italy, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, France and in the US since the 1970s and 1980s (Bieri 2002; Martinez-Lopez 2007; Pruijt, 2003; Mudu 2013; Thörn et al. 2011; Owens et al. 2013; Corr, 1999). Squatting movements' goals have been described as utterly different from case to case and researchers have portrayed squatting as aiming at distributing economic resources in a society in a more egalitarian way (Corr 1999), squatting

as enabling and providing self-help (Katz and Mayer, 1985), squatting as counter-cultural and political alternatives (Lowe, 1986), squatting as providing housing alternatives (Wates 1980), squatting as an expression of Do-It-Yourself culture (McKay, 1998), squatting as a struggle for a better society (Kallenberg 2001), or squatting as a manifestation of political/ideological activism (Della Porta and Rucht 1995; Katsiaficas 1997; Ward 2002), squatting as counter-cultural expression of the middle classes (Clarke et al. 1976) or squatting as both a result of housing shortage and search for ideological alternatives (Karpantschhof 2011). Even if these mentioned studies are far from exhaustive for the research field of squatting (especially as they cover only Western contexts), they give implications for the variety of explanations (that vary with their specific contexts and over time) used in order to understand the squatting movement in the West.

In the literature on squatting the activism among tenants is often mentioned and separated from the very definition of squatting. Tenants' activism is defined as self-help activity, where squatting or occupying a dwelling might be inevitable, but is not the very goal in itself, as it is in squatting (Pruijt 2013). The development of the movements has however been intertwined and is often mentioned in the literature on squatting. For instance Corr (1999) has described the development of a squatter organization closely connected to organizations of homeless people and tenants in the US in the 1990s and concluded "squatters and rent strikers have often supported each other because both resist eviction and because many of their arguments, tactics, and movement trajectories have similarities" (1999: 9). Katz and Mayer (1985) have studied the development of the tenant self-management movement in New York City in the 60s and 70s and illustrate how this movement is intertwined with the squatters' tactics and repertoires of action. Tenants' movements' interests are here encompassing organization of squatting that is considered as a self-help tactic.

However, the connection between squatters and tenants is not exclusive to the North American context. Katz and Mayer (1985) analyse also the 'rehab-squatting' in West Berlin in the 70s and describe squatting as a tactic for the tenants and community activists 'to stop the deterioration, forced vacancies and speculation carried on by private landlords and developers' (1985: 33). In the case of squatter settlements in Latin America the squatters took over land informally and over time their activity was organized as tenants' communities (Castells 1983; Ward 2002). One of the largest European squatters' communities is located in Amsterdam. There the history of squatting was interwoven with the history of tenants' committees fighting for affordable housing already in the 1930s (Owens 2009). Owens emphasizes, however, that the identities of tenants and squatters were separated as "tenants used squatting as a tactic, however, they did not think of themselves as squatters, let alone as squatters' movement" (2009:47). The clear division between the squatters and the tenants, and at the same time their interconnectedness throughout the history raises some interesting questions on the relationship of the two movements and the nature of their cooperation. The ambition is to focus on this

relationship in this study, but in a different context that hitherto has been explored in previous studies.

Looking at the Central and Eastern Europe, the emergence of squatting centres since the fall of state socialism has been characterized by a moderate scale, however it has intensified in the last ten years. What is an evident difference to the cooperation between tenants' and squatting movements described above, in the Polish case the cooperation comes about long after the movements' emergence in 1989. In the other cases in Northern America, Western Europe or Latin America, the squatting and the tenants' movements cooperate closely almost from the beginning of their existence but develop separate movement identities. In the Polish case this rapprochement between both movements is of more recent date, and previous studies, although scarce, reflect it clearly. In Żuk's (2001) study of new social movements in Poland in the 1990s he describes the origins of squatting in Poland and states that squatting should be interpreted as a new phenomenon in the Polish context that is connected with the development of an alternative culture in the country in the 1980s. Żuk argues furthermore that Polish squatting is drawing its inspiration mainly from its Western counterparts, as it lacks a tradition in Poland. Piotrowski's (2011a) study of Polish, Czech and Hungarian squatted social centres demonstrate that squatting in CEE is both need-based, in other words caused by the need for housing (also the presence of vacant buildings), but also politically motivated. However, the squatting movement is described in both studies as grounded in a subcultural identity and from the beginning not interested in tenants' issues, only in its own development and consolidation. Among the few who have studied squatting in Central and Eastern Europe we find Holm and Kuhn (2013) who have examined squatting in East (and West) Berlin in the 1980s and 1990s. Squatting has also been touched upon in studies on the alter-globalist movement or alternative cultures in post-socialist societies (Piotrowski 2011b; Schwell 2005; Gagyí 2013). Still, all of these studies treat squatting as a movement on its own, not including the tenants' movement or cooperation between the movements in the analysis.

The same case is evident in studies of tenants' activism in Central and Eastern Europe, where tenants' activism is treated separately from the squatting movement. There are studies from the 1980s and the first years of transformation on housing and environmental movements in Hungary, Estonia and Russia (see Pickvance 1996; 1997; 2001) that show that housing activism has been driven by severe housing shortages, and the activists leading it have had access to significant cultural and material resources with clear goals of improvement of their living situation. Their activism is in other words caused by their living/housing situation, and not ideological beliefs, like in the case of squatters. Nothing is said about the squatting movement here either. However, something changes in the field of housing activism in the area in the last ten years and is reflected in the research on the situation in Poland. New studies are published where both squatters' and tenants' claims are presented, however not explicitly as squatting and tenants' movements, but under other labels such as urban civil societies (Zagała, 2008), right-to-the-city mobilizations (Płuciński,

2012; Grubbauer and Kusiak, 2012) or studies on more formal organizations such as district councils, common-holds or housing cooperatives (Matczak, 2008; Peisert, 2009; Sagan and Grabkowska, 2012). The aim of this article is to add to this scarce literature and shed light on the cooperation between the tenants' and the squatting movements.

### **Mechanisms altering collective action and alliance formation**

In this article the theoretical approach is inspired by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly's distinction between environmental, cognitive and relational mechanisms constituting collective action (2001). This approach combines the now classic theoretical explanations in social movement studies; the resource mobilization approach, the political opportunity structure approach and the approaches focusing on social relations, identity and culture as main explanations behind collective action. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly argue that relational mechanisms are causal mechanisms that alter connections between individuals, groups and interpersonal networks, but they combine this with environmental and cognitive mechanisms. Environmental mechanisms are externally generated and affect the conditions of social life. They include such important factors as the political opportunity structures, possibility of resource mobilization or other conditions or threats in the environment of the collective actors. Cognitive mechanisms are defined as individual and collective perceptions, where culture plays an important role and collective actors' perceptions, attitudes, decision making and dynamics are in focus. These three mechanisms are overlapping in processes of collective action and are all parts of multidimensional context of collective and collaborative action. This analysis focuses on how cognitive elements are working in conjunction with the relational and environmental mechanisms and its starting point is the crucial role that cognitive mechanisms can play in alliance formation processes.

Thus, the specific interest of this study is alliance formation and cooperation between collective actors and how these are affected by cognitive mechanisms. In previous studies on social movements the alliance building process *within* social movements has been examined extensively, however there are still considerable gaps in the empirical and theoretical literature on alliance building processes *across* social movements. Alliances across movements differ as cooperating or forming alliances within the same movement, but between different groups is qualitatively different from forming alliances between different social movements, whose goals might be shared, but whose causes are often different. The aim and contribution of this article is to illuminate the field of research of cross-movement alliances further and the case of cooperation between the squatting and the tenants' movement in Warsaw is used in order to illustrate the mechanisms behind alliance building in social movements.

Moreover, the ambition is to present a detailed study of the alliance building formation and, in contrast to previous studies that tend to emphasize what might be categorized as environmental mechanisms: external conditions

affecting collective action (Staggenborg 1986, Van Dyke 2003), to concentrate on the cognitive level and highlight cognitive mechanisms involved in alliance building distinguishing perceptions, along with the strategies and choices made by collective actors involved in cooperation in relation to these perceptions. Among the cognitive mechanisms that will be presented in the study three aspects of the social processes will be identified behind the formation of an alliance: *defining common goals*, *underplaying of differences*, and *recognizing common strength*. These aspects will be analyzed in order to examine the formation of an alliance between squatters' and tenants' movements in Warsaw. It will be argued that these aspects of alliance formation processes are idealtypical and sometimes their boundaries are fluent. Defining common goals and underplaying of differences often take place simultaneously. However, it will be argued, in order to reach the point when the alliance is formed that the process of recognizing of common strength needs to be successful in both movements. To reach such recognition the actors need to identify common threats and potential outcomes, but the most crucial component is the collective perception of empowerment. Empowerment, or the awareness of collective power among the collective actors, mobilizes them to act collectively and collaborate in order to reach their goals. I argue that the calculation of costs and benefits of potential outcomes of an alliance can be difficult to assess to movements at a given point in time, however, the sharing of a perception of empowerment, the recognition of the power of collective action, is crucial in the decision to form an alliance and ultimately reach social change. One important question to be asked here, apart from the question on *how* alliances are formed, is also the question of *why* the alliance is taking place now and how it is explained at a cognitive level by the movements.

In the case presented, the threats causing mobilization among the squatting and the tenants' activists will be presented and the cognitive processes behind an alliance between the movements will be outlined. Moreover, as we have seen in previous studies, cooperation between squatters and tenants is not uncommon, but has been in previous cases initiated much earlier in both movements' existence in other settings, often gradually resulting in separate movement development.

The definition of alliance formation in this article covers collaboration between two or more social movement organizations on the same task. According to Van Dyke and McCammon (2010) alliances can take a variety of forms and be more or less long-lasting, however, the partners always keep separate organizational structures. Alliance building, furthermore, is often in social movement literature associated with greater levels of success of social movements and higher probability of bringing about social change (Van Dyke 2003).

Social movement researchers have diligently exposed the factors facilitating cooperation and alliance building (to mention some; Polletta 2002; Rochon and Meyer 1997; Van Dyke 2003; Lichterman 1995; Obach 2004; Rose 2000). Among facilitators of alliance formation and cooperation there are both environmental and cognitive mechanisms to be observed. Van Dyke's study

(2003) point out heightened levels of threat or opportunity, the access to abundant resources and high levels of identity alignment among the actors as influential factors to the probability of alliance building. Additionally, in the interpretation of inspiration and facilitators behind cooperation and alliance formation scholars have highlighted the role of movement structure, ideology, resources and culture (Polletta 2002; Staggenborg 1986; Van Dyke 2003; Beamish and Luebbers 2009). Cultural expectations and their role, along with repertoires of organization and styles of commitment are underlined in the study of Beamish and Luebbers' (2009) for the understanding of collaborations within and between social movements. Others stress the presence of brokers as decisive for the initiation of collaboration across social movements (Obach 2004; Rose 2000). Brokers function as spiders in the web by connecting already existent social relations and forming new ones. Brokerage's function is to transcend differences, and it can therefore lead to scale shift in collective action.

Social relations create and shape identities that determine participation in collective action (Passy, 2003). Studies of participation in collective action have shown that identification is a prerequisite for collective action and it is formed by shared norms and values created in social relations (Melucci 1996; Corrigan-Brown and Meyer 2010; McAdam 1982; Diani and McAdam 2003). The presence of shared norms and identities is unquestionable in the case of squatters and tenants. Squatters' often sub-cultural orientation and clear views of anti-systemic character function as a common denominator and starting point for collective action. Tenants, on the other hand, share a common identity based in their economic and housing situation (often facing eviction). Even if their incentives for collective action can vary, their common picture of the causes and position vis-à-vis the authorities (both politicians and civil servants) function as common denominators for mobilization and collective action. Nevertheless, it is no surprise that there are some considerable differences in the squatters' and tenants' shared norms and identities (Owens 2009). The goals of their activism may also differ, even if studies have shown that parts of their repertoires of action and some tactics are shared (Katz and Mayer 1985; Corr 1999). What is interesting is how they negotiate differences and similarities between the movements and how this process is interpreted.

Even if it is tempting to draw parallels between the mechanisms behind collective action and alliance formation and their outcomes in the case of alliance building between squatters and tenants in Warsaw, for analytical purposes the mechanisms facilitating collaboration and the very results of such collaboration will be separated in the study. The achievements of the alliances will be referred to when the development of both movements is described, but it is the mechanisms linking the mobilization of collective action and its outcomes that will be focused on here, and in particular their cognitive dimension. Mechanisms are defined in the study as basic causal components of social processes altering 'relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007:29). Moreover, in the description of the cognitive, relational and environmental mechanisms no analytical distinction will be made between threats and



opportunities, as these are overlapping and interacting with each other when facilitating (or constraining) collective or collaborative action (Tilly 1978).

## **Methodology and empirical material**

The empirical material for the study consists of altogether 40 semi-structured interviews, 20 conducted with squatters and 20 with activists in the tenants' movement in Warsaw. Interviews were conducted with members of different Warsaw-based squats (Przychodnia, Syrena, Czarna Śmierć (no longer existing), Elba (no longer existing), Wagenburg, Czarna Żaba (no longer existing), Okopowa (no longer existing), Fabryka (no longer existing)<sup>1</sup>) and with activists of the three biggest and most active tenants' organizations (Warsaw Tenants' Association, Committee for the Defense of Tenants, and Social Justice Office) along with tenants' activists in smaller tenants' associations or "un-associated" tenants' activists (see more explanations below) in the city in Spring and Autumn 2013.

The criteria for choosing squatting activists for interviews were three: 1) the first was that they would identify themselves as squatters, 2) the second was that they should also have been a part of a squatting collective (recognized by others as squatters) living at a squat in the city at some point in time and 3) thirdly that they at the point in time of the interview still were active in the squatting scene in the city (not necessarily living on a squat), in order to be able to reflect upon the recent developments within the movement. Squatting is not the easiest social milieu to access for a researcher, not being a part of the movement. Having interviewed representatives in the tenants' movement first I have over time gained some important contacts and gate-keepers (that were used strategically in order to gain access to the field). Most of the interviewed squatters were in their late 20s or 30s with the youngest respondent in the age of 26 years and the oldest of 44 years and a mean age of 30.7 years (see Appendix for more information). The length of their squatting activism (defined as living or being active at a squat) varied from 6 months to 14 years (mean 6.55 years). The choice of covering interviewees with different experience and length of squatting in the city was strategic and aimed at including as many nuances/perspectives of this kind of activism as possible. Six of the respondents had the experience of being active at only one squat and the rest had at least the experience of more than one squat in the city or beyond it (also abroad). Nine men and eleven women were interviewed.

In the interviews with tenants' activists the majority of the respondents were involved in the three biggest and most active tenants' organizations (*Warsaw Tenants' Association, Committee for the Defense of Tenants, and Social Justice Office*). In the selection of interviewees I have covered the leaders of the associations, but also other activists involved, in order to cover different

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<sup>1</sup> As squatting is a temporal phenomenon, squats emerge and disappear over time from the map of a given city. For that reason even squats that no longer exist are included in the material.

perspectives coming from different positions within these organizations. Moreover 8 of my in total 20 interviews were conducted with representatives from other, much smaller associations active in the city along with tenants' activists not affiliated with one specific association, but rather identified by themselves and others as important actors in the tenants' movement (categorized in the Appendix as "un-associated", without any formal membership in any of the associations). Thirteen men and seven women were interviewed and the average age of the interviewees was 45.2 years, with the youngest interviewee being 27 years old and the oldest 65. The length of their engagement in tenants' issues (defined quite broad as formal and informal activism related to tenants' issues) varied from 2 years to 20 years (mean 8.25 years). The respondents were mainly involved in tenants' issues, however a few of them were active members of political organizations and trade unions.

The respondents among tenants were contacted by e-mail, and informed about the aim of my study. Some were recruited by snowballing technique. The squatters were recruited either by a snowballing technique or with the help of a gate-keeper. An interview guide was distributed to the respondents beforehand and they were encouraged to speak at length about the most engaging topics. Interview questions were formulated similarly to both groups and encompassed information on both individual motives, experiences with squatting/tenants' issues and collective strategies, practices, internal and external relations within a specific squat/organization, alliance formation and general characteristics of a given squat/organization. When it was possible the questions even covered respondents' interpretations of changes over time (depending on the length of their activism) in for instance practices, relations, attitudes and so on. All respondents are anonymous in the material and the quotations used are designed not to reveal any sensitive data about the respondents (numbers are used instead of names, with no correspondence with the list of interviewees in the Appendix).

Interview data was chosen as the aim was to cover activists' perceptions of their engagement, on how they perceive the activity of their squats/organizations, but also to cover the more informal or personal features of their engagement and social relations. The interviews have been transcribed and systematically coded by the author (content analysis) developing themes. Some of the themes found in the material reflected the questions posed to the respondents, however also other themes appeared. The main themes found were: *definition of activism, identification of main problems, solutions to the problems, emotional work, decision-making, cultural and historical context, relations and cooperations, conflicts, media/public opinion/dominant discourses*. These themes have been divided in sub-categories, and the theme of interest for this study is the one on the relations and cooperations, however not excluding features of the other themes as they are interconnected, in particular the theme of *conflicts*. Sub-categories were derived from the theme on *relations*: internal relations, external relations, conditions, tensions and conflicts, strategies, adversaries, and others. The theme of *cooperation* includes categories of: alliances formed and possible alliances, non-thinkable alliances, decision making, strategies,

goals of alliances, brokers, dealing with differences, dealing with emotions, threats and opportunities. The analysis presented here is based on this theme and in particular in the description of the three aspects of alliance formation process.

The choice of interviewing activists in the capital city can be justified with two arguments. The first is on the specific movements at study and the aim to study alliance formation. Warsaw is the city where this alliance formation has had significant outcomes. The cooperation between Warsaw's squatting scene and the tenants' organizations in the city is interesting as the urban activism that emerged in the capital city since 2000 has been intensifying in the recent years, and tenants and squatters have played an important role in this intensification. Moreover, the tenants' and the squatting movement in Warsaw have reached some considerable achievements in the city in the last five years that need closer scholarly attention, especially when examining the emergence of an alliance and cognitive processes behind it. The cooperation between squatters and tenants in the city gained in a short period of time significant recognition in the politico-institutional context and possibility to influence local housing politics, as it will be discussed later on in the text. Furthermore, the capital city is interesting as it offers a landscape of diversity, larger number of people, greater access to resources (material, symbolic and cultural), closeness to the political institutions and educated and skilled individuals, and the presence of a variety of social movements and a specific sort of dynamic on the social movement scene that is harder to find in smaller agglomerations. Nevertheless, the selection of this kind could entail biased information on the character of alliances undertaken by social movements. Yet, the cognitive processes behind alliance building between social movements, although triggered by external conditions, could hopefully be generalized to other contexts.

### **The development of squatting and tenants' movement in Warsaw**

The first squatting attempts occurred in the capital city in the second half of the 1990s (Żuk 2001). The number of squatters in Warsaw was limited in the end of 1990s and the beginning of 2000s, but over time it increased<sup>2</sup> The squatters are closely connected to the anarchist environment (but not entirely) in the city and consist of young adults, most often students or graduates in precarious

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<sup>2</sup> The very first squatting attempts in Warsaw were initiated in 1996 by the Student Autonomist Action that squatted a vacant building, owned by the Warsaw's University, at Smyczkowska Street. The building was re-squatted several times during a two-year period until eviction in 1996. The following squatting attempts in the city were rather short-lived and located outside of the city centre (*Twierdza* 1998, *Czarna Żaba* 2002, *Okopowa* and *Spokojna Street* 2002-2003, *Furmania* 2003, *Spółdzielnia* 2005; *Czarna Śmierć* 2011-2013 ). The most long-lasting squatting attempts in Warsaw to be mentioned are the *Fabryka* squat 2000/2002-2011 and *Elba* squat 2004-2012. *Skłotpol* is at present an association, where ex-members of *Elba* negotiate about a new location with city authorities.

employment positions (short-term contracts, under-employed, un-employed) and with clear links to sub-cultural lifestyles (predominantly leftist, anarchists, punks).

There are four squats known to the public existing in Warsaw, at the time of writing (Autumn 2014). Among them there is *Syrena (the Mermaid)*, a symbol of the city of Warsaw), a centrally located squat, active since 2010 and working with housing and tenant's issues, workers' rights, food cooperatives, and the Street university: workshops covering teaching of foreign languages, bowling, singing, yoga classes, bicycle reparations, massage instructions, and so on. Not far from *Syrena*, there is *Przychodnia (the Clinic)*, located in a former medical clinic), opened in 2012, mainly focused on cultural activities, but also on right-to-the-city-activism. *Wagenburg* (trailer camp and eco-village), is a residential squat, existent since 2007-2008. It does not organize any cultural activities, and is mainly working with sustainable and ecological living. The fourth active squat is the newly opened A.D.A ('Aktywny Dom Alternatywny/Active Alternative House') (April 2014), concentrating on alternative social and cultural activities.

The general ideology that is shared by the present squatting environment in Warsaw is to create a space for radical anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist, anti-fascist, anti-homophobic, environment-friendly, feminist, LGBTQ-conscious, DIY(Do-it-yourself)-inspired action. What is common is that the membership in these squats is based on commitment and the most committed members are either included as residents in the squats, or as members of the 'collective', the team. Warsaw's squatters' goals are to offer alternative cultural activities (cf. Lowe, 1986) and to provide housing alternatives (cf. Wates 1980). However, as it will be discussed later on, the main focus of squatters' activism in the city has since 2010 shifted towards political activity and the cooperation with the tenants' movement. Ideological and political motives form the basis of such actions and are furthermore fuelled by the severe housing shortage and increasing socio-economic inequalities in the country along with national and local housing policies (increasing evictions, vacant housing buildings, re-privatization processes, rising costs of housing, shrinking municipal housing stock, and so on).

The very first tenants' association in Poland was founded in 1989, the *Polish Association of Tenants*. At present, about 40 associations working with tenants' issues in the entire country are registered, and the most active ones are located in Warsaw. There are three large and widely known associations working with tenants' issues in Warsaw: *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. There is also the *Polska Unia Lokatorów (Polish Union of Tenants, hence PUL)* established in 1994, however the association is struggling for existence due to the high age of its core members and an inability to attract new members.

Tenants' associations' main activities encompass providing legal counselling 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. Tenants' activism in Poland is of grassroots character; however it is quite limited in numbers. It organizes around a core of activists and most often takes the form of associations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and is different from the squatting activism in the city as it functions within the politico-institutional order and is formed along a formal structure with representatives and specific rules on financing, regulation, membership, and so on. Tenants' movement in the capital city started off as a self-help movement of tenants of re-privatized buildings, municipal and social housing, but has especially since the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010 focused its activities on political activism, increasingly addressing the national level in their demands and claims.

### **The emergence of cooperation and defining common goals**

The cooperation between squatters' and tenants' movements in Warsaw can be dated to the emergence of the squat Syrena in the city in 2010. Syrena's emergence established a somewhat different profile among the squatters in Warsaw. At the time that Syrena was founded the squat Elba and Fabryka were still existing in the city. Syrena consciously and strategically developed a profile different from the profiles of the existent squats (perceived as mainly concentrated on cultural activities), concentrating on tenants and housing issues in the city. According to the activists involved in the Syrena squat there was a gap in the local squatting scene not covering housing activism that was regarded as superior to cultural activities (perceived as not "serious" enough) dominating the scene:

Because I simply feel that we are burning ourselves out and if there were also other places, there would be some rotation, mutual support and inspiration and getting engaged in each other's activities, building larger coalitions for different serious goals. And at the moment I have this feeling that we are doing important things, that since Syrena exists and we have been opening flats for people, we have opened more of them than the city has opened municipal flats, or almost the same number. So I have this feeling that more could be done, and at a smaller cost. We could do more if there were more places like this [squats or other left-wing spaces] (13).

The depth of the housing crisis was overwhelming to the activists and Syrena-squat became the leading actor in this matter. The driving force was to broaden the scope of activities and develop the squatting movement further. Cultural activities encompassing organization of concerts, workshops, and classes were aimed to be broadened to political activities involving tenants' rights, but also migrants' and other minorities. More practically, in the case of Warsaw squatters, this meant that tenants' organizations were invited to cooperate with the squatters and the Warsaw Tenants' Association (WSL) to hold their

meetings and weekly counselling with tenants at the Syrena squat. Since then squatters and tenants began to coordinate their actions and participate in each other's meetings, demonstrations, eviction blockades, and so on. However separate organizational structures were kept. This rapprochement of Syrena and one of the largest tenants' associations in the city successively established links between the squatting scene and the tenants' organizations active in the city. Mutual trust was built over time and positive views of the unification of squatters' and tenants' struggles were spread among the activists. Tenants perceived squatters as 'unconditionally supportive' and squatters perceived tenants as fighting the consequences of the economic (and housing) system they opposed. In the interviews the squatters were expressing positive views about the activity and cooperation with tenants and described the two movements' as intertwined. When asked about the connection between the squatting and the tenants' movement the link was outlined by one of the squatters:

Because in declarations such a connection [between squatting and tenants' movement] is for sure there. When we were publicizing squatting, we were always trying to bring attention to that. For example there were meetings of tenants' groups in WSL... and on the other hand for example in Przychodnia – and Syrena does that a lot too – we admit people who were evicted from their flats or houses. If we assume that squats are a part of the tenants' movement, then for sure their PR activity is to sensitize the public to the issue of unoccupied flats, to the fact that there are many municipal buildings that are standing useless. It for sure is laying foundations to the tenants' movement. The tenants' movement can criticize municipal policy, while the fact that there are unoccupied flats is an expression of this policy. So the fact that these unoccupied flats are getting occupied indirectly is also a criticism of municipal policy. I treat it as one and the same (6).

The struggle of both movements was portrayed as the struggle for the same goals, although some of the tactics and the causes of mobilization differed. From the tenants' point of view the link to the squatters' activity was portrayed in a similar way as by the squatters. Moreover, the tenants emphasized similarities in goals and action repertoires. Here in the words of a tenant activist highlighting the complementary characteristics of both tenants' and squatting movements:

I would definitely include it [squatting] in the tenants' movement. All the more since a great movement is taking place at the squat. It makes you think. However, I think that squatters add some freshness and fast acting. Besides, they have a similar action structure, I don't know how to call it. It is a kind of incidents, quick organization, action, or something like the blocking of an eviction, it complements perfectly here (14).

The complementary character of the cooperation of tenants' and squatting movements was also recognized by the interviewed squatters. Some even portrayed both movements as parts of a bigger whole (urban movements), where squatters and tenants fight for their rights side by side, by filling different functions.

I think it [squatting] 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 (6)

The definition of common goals of the squatting and the tenants' movements in the city has since 2010 been developed and presented by both movements under different occasions. Two such important occasions have been the solidarity action and participation of the tenants' movement in a demonstration against the eviction of a squat in 2012 (Elba) that gathered 2000 participants, and the initiation of meetings with local authorities (meeting with district authorities of Śródmieście and Żoliborz, but also city authorities in meetings with the Center for Social Communication and the vice-president of Warsaw). The common demand of tenants and squatters, brought to the meetings with authorities, was to establish Tenants' Round Tables, where the representatives of tenants' organizations and different squats along with the city authorities would take part, and this demand was met in 2012 when the round tables in the city took off. There were some other demands posed during these meetings, but these were specific for the needs of each movement (for instance on new location of squats in the city).

Since 2012 the cross-movement alliance has solidified further and the field of activity broadened to the national level when Warsaw's tenants' organizations and squatters entered formal meetings with the minister of Transport, Construction and the Maritime Economy, Piotr Styczeń, responsible for housing policy in Poland in 2013. Housing policy and the situation of tenants in the country was discussed at a series of meetings with the minister. The very initiation of the meetings, where tenants' and squatters' representatives were invited to speak to the minister on issues concerning housing, gave recognition to the movements as important political actors. The outcomes of these meetings still remain to be seen, as the meetings are planned to continue in 2014.

### **The underplaying of differences by identifying enemies**

The most evident differences between the squatting and the tenants' movement in Poland are their organizational structures, their social composition, and their motives of activism. Previous studies show that movement structure can play an important role for the probability of cooperation between movements (Beamish and Luebbers 2009). However, this seems not an obstacle to the cooperation of squatters and tenants in the Polish case. Squatters organize in informal

networks according to the principle of horizontality and non-hierarchy. Tenants organize in NGOs (non-governmental organizations or associations with formal leaders), following the politico-institutional order. Many of the tenants' formal leaders are also very charismatic and well-known persons in the local environment, while squatters avoid hierarchical structures and are mostly cautious when choosing spokespersons for the movement. In the interviews the differences in organizational structures are mostly reflected in the respective movement's reflexivity where tenants' formal leaders reluctantly admitted that they were the leaders of the movement, continually repeating that the decisions were made among a larger group of members (in this way addressing the critique of squatters of hierarchical organizations). As for the squatters, most of them admitted difficulties involved in a horizontal model of decision-making, in particular if it required that all of the members of a collective were to be satisfied by the decision taken (in this way addressing the issue of inefficiency pointed out by more formal and hierarchical organizations).

Moreover, interviewees' emphasize age differences between the movements and squatters are generally described as young adults in their 20s and 30s and tenants are described as older generations. Despite that the organizational structures and the perceived age difference between the two movements, they perceive themselves as sharing common goals. Here in the words of a tenant activist:

I admire these people [squatters], I need to admit. I admire them because they are young people that sacrifice their free time for cultural activities for children or for organizing foreign language classes. They do a lot. You can always count on them. Whenever we need their help, if it is about a poster, or something else, they never deny. They are up-to-date with tenants' issues. They always join us whenever we need them. I simply admire them. I have very good contact with them, even if I call them the "third generation". First there is me, then there is my son, and then the grandchildren. And they are children, for me they are children, and so are you. I have kids older than this, they are in their 40s (10).

The age difference between the squatters and the tenants' activists is more often brought up by the tenants in the interviews, than by the squatters. The interviewed tenants express amazement with the young age of the squatters and their engagement, loyalty, energy and readiness to act. They connect tenants' more mature age with some specific life experiences leading to insights that they are surprised to find also among squatters. What is focused then is the common ground of neo-liberal critique and critique of Polish and local housing policies and the will of doing something collectively. Whenever the age differences are mentioned in the interviews, they are immediately put in relation to the similarities between movements and positive and complementary characteristics of their activists.

As to the motives and goals of both movements, tenants' organizations oppose the neoliberal logic prevalent in the housing sphere and demand the right to housing and dignified living conditions. Both movements' consider housing as a public matter (not private), even if they differ in their views on how housing should be managed (commonly versus taken care of by the municipality).



Similarities in views are emphasized, and in particular, in what is demanded from the local authorities.

The authorities wanted to break up the movement and close it in the shape of lifestyle, alternative culture. And us, different persons from the tenants' and squatters' environments wanted to act against it, to do the opposite, to broaden the area of criticism as much as possible, to show the common denominator – that it's about the right to the city, about the city budget and spending more on needs and not on some spectacular trinkets (8).

Few of the interviewees mentioned differences in how the solutions to the housing situations are perceived by both movements. Instead, they stressed the importance of the demands put on the local and national authorities. This strategy, of change of focus from possible differences in views to similarities in demands was expressed in interviews with both movements.



Picture 1. The portrait of Jolanta Brzeska on the wall of Syrena squat stating "To the memory of Jola Brzeska. You will not burn us all".

The squatting and the tenants' movement share some alignment in demands/goals and in the views on sources of inequalities. An example of this ideological alignment and rapprochement between the two movements is the shared icon of Jolanta Brzeska (born 1947), who was the founder of the WSL, and was burned to death in 2011 and has since become the symbol of both movements. Tenants' and squatters' interpretation of Brzeska's murder<sup>3</sup> is that she was murdered due to her activism and her picture has become an icon for

<sup>3</sup> The investigation of Brzeska's death showed that she was murdered, but the evidence in the case was lacking and the main suspect could not be sentenced. Also the investigation included a psychological profile of Brzeska excluding the possibility of suicide.

the both movements and a symbol of common ideology (of the weak fighting the unjust system).

In a situation where squatters rely on an ideology allowing only self-accumulated resources and tenants find it difficult to attract external resources (in the form of economic support) the cognitive processes stressing similarities and the mutual exchange of resources: symbolic, material and economic, favours both movements by empowering them and making their activities more effective. In this way some specific weaknesses are turned into strengths and ideas are exchanged. Here in the words of a squatter:

Squatters – if they are for example connected with the anarchist environment – in my perspective have less experience in negotiations, they don't go to meetings with bureaucrats, they haven't gotten the hang of different municipal resolutions, they don't follow it or write official letters. And on the other hand I see the people from these associations in that way, so we could learn that from them, but also they could learn from us an open formula of meetings, or that... well, no, actually they also go out on to the streets a lot and do a lot of things that could be called direct action, so it would be difficult to say that it is something that they hadn't known (15).

The aspect of underplaying of differences and emphasizing similarities plays an important role in the process of alliance formation. It allows the collective actors to focus on similarities and in particular in cross-movement alliances, compared to within-movement alliances, it holds a bridging function. The differences are left aside, at the same time as the movements can keep their specific characteristics (social, motivational and ideological) and organizational structures. In Figure 1 the above mentioned arguments used in the bridging of differences between the tenants' and the squatting movement are summarized. We can see that more instrumental and pragmatic arguments are highlighted by both movements in the process of alliance formation, over the more ideological ones.

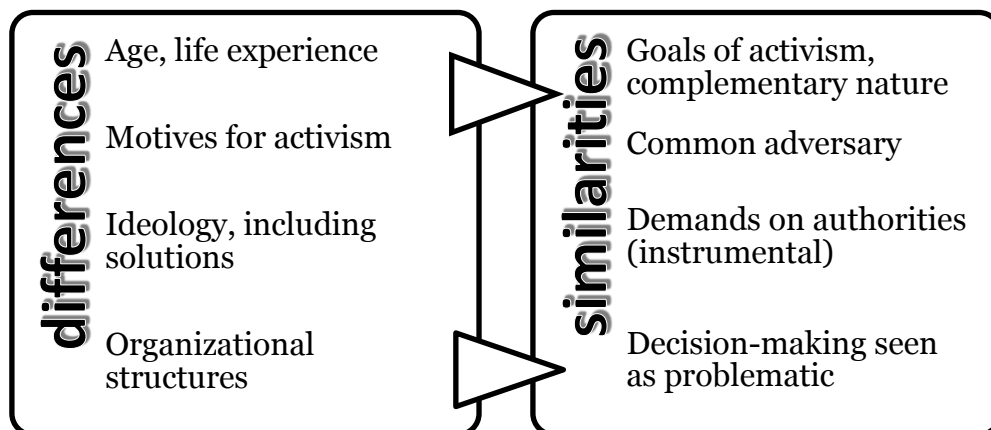


Figure 1. Arguments used in the process of bridging differences between movements

## **Recognizing common strength and empowerment**

The cooperation and solidarity between the squatters and tenants was put to test in 2012. The ultimate external threat was directed towards the squatting environment in the city with the eviction of the squat Elba in March 2012, and I argue that it resulted in a culmination of squatters' and tenants' struggles and a further rapprochement between them. Despite that the eviction of the squat was unavoidable (and not fully unexpected) the squatters' demonstration organized days after the eviction succeeded in gathering a considerable number of participants, among them supportive tenants' organizations. In the Polish context, where tenants' demonstrations usually gather between 100 to 300 participants and where the most well-established and long-lived squat, Rozbrat in Poznań, had succeeded in gathering at most 1500 supporters when the squat was threatened by eviction in the 2009, 2000 demonstration participants is a considerable, if not exceptional, number for such a radical left-wing social movement. The eviction of Elba was shortly followed by the opening of a new squat, Przychodnia, and a wide coverage in local and national media. Many of the interviewees described the events following the eviction as the most successful in the history of squatting in the city. For the first time, the media was perceived as positive towards the phenomenon of squatting in the city and the subject was given considerable coverage. The interviewees recognized a change of attitudes in the dominant perception of squatting. In the citation below one of the squatters of Przychodnia described how the attitude of authorities changed due to the successful mobilization of participants in the demonstration, but also due to the links to Western examples of squatting made in the media:

But we could see that they [the police and local authorities] slowly started to back off, someone thought that maybe we could talk and not be thrown out by force. I think that the reason for this was the demonstration which showed our strength. And they were a little overwhelmed with the size of the event, they expected a small group of bums that live in a den and smoke cigarettes. Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz [the then president of Warsaw] made her famous statement about the fires in Wawer. Suddenly the media started to report about Elbląska [Elba squat] and talk about squatting. They began to take out all the material, show what squatting looked like in the West, the examples of Berlin, Christiania and all that is the most commonly associated with squatting. And I think that someone in some office began to understand that it wouldn't be a good decision to kick us out by force. Because people started considering squatting as having some value. And we started talking (2).

The main change in the perception of squatting, as described by the interviewees, was the move from the stereotypical perception of "bums that live in a den" to a view of squatters, as civilized actors making clear political statements. The demonstration was followed by an invitation of squatters to the talks with district authorities (of Śródmieście and Żoliborz districts) and eventually to a dialogue with city authorities (Center for Social communication and Warsaw's vice-president). For the first time, since the first squat was established in Warsaw in the end of the 1990s, city authorities were open to a

dialogue and willing to negotiate with squatters. An alliance with tenants' organizations in the city was formed when the opportunity opened and the squatters became invited to talk to the district authorities. Prior to that only Syrena was in close collaboration with tenants' organizations, but as the squatters were invited to a dialogue with the authorities an agreement was reached between the different squats in the city and the tenants' organizations on which conditions to pose, when, at that point in time, the negotiating position of squatters was perceived as favourable by both movements. The squatters described the demands posed as combining tenants' (Round Table) and squatters' (new premises) particular interests:

So we [the squatters and tenants] developed this stand, through very long and emotional debates, that we issue the city an ultimatum: that we would give the building away [of Przychodnia] 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 (5).

The process of arriving at the final demands to be posed was described as challenging and different conflicts within and across the movements were mentioned in the interviews (mostly encompassing disputes on which claims to prioritize, what conditions were acceptable and what risks could be faced, but also on whom to include/exclude from the talks). However, these were once again smoothed in the overall strategy to stand together vis-à-vis the authorities. The focus was shifted once again towards the authorities (local) and squatters' and tenants' attitude towards the authorities remained cautious through the process of negotiating. They were perceived as a threat to the squatters' and tenants' movements and as their strategy was interpreted as 'divide and rule', making the alliance between the movements inevitable. Here in the words of one squatter:

It seems to me, that it was quite uncomfortable for them [local authorities] that we stood up together with tenants about the same issue and insistently connect these matters as pointing out flawed legal solutions, while they wanted to talk separately about culture and separately about flats, which they gave us to understand very clearly. So from the city's perspective it is probably uncomfortable, and for us it's cool because it is an alliance in which we can support each other (15).

The initial purpose and reaction of the city authorities was described in the interviews as a success of the alliance of tenants' and squatters' movements. The strength of cooperation was emphasized as the crucial factor behind local authorities softened and welcoming attitude. The situation, following the demonstration, required some strategic decisions on claim-making and alliance formation on the part of squatters, in order not to be reduced to a definition of a cultural phenomenon or a lifestyle. For the tenants the alliance also opened up an opportunity to enter the discussions with the local authorities, side-by-side with squatters and to practice pressure politics, by showing a coherent and coordinated position vis-à-vis the authorities.

The aspect of recognizing common strength was described in the interviews when both the authorities, but also the squatters were overwhelmed by the support the demonstration against the eviction of Elba gets, and also by the subsequent reaction of the authorities and the recognition of strength of joining forces. In the interviews the squatters consequently used the term “ultimatum” given by the squatters to the authorities, and interpreted their position as favourable in the negotiations with the local authorities. Tenants on the other hand recognized a renewed opportunity to pose their claims in a joint action, and stressed the number of participants in the demonstration as extraordinary and interpreted it as significant pressure put on the authorities. Two years before, in 2010, the tenants’ movement in the city succeeded in calling for an extraordinary meeting of the City Council that in 2011 resulted in the Warsaw Housing Meetings organized by the City Council. The goal at that point in time was to initiate Round Table meetings where the tenants’ organizations could take part and influence local housing policies and the outcome (Warsaw Housing Meetings) was perceived as a failure within the tenants’ movement in the city and was heavily criticized in the interviews. The opportunity of reaching the goal of Round Tables opened again when the squatters entered the talks with city authorities in 2012 and brought tenants with them. The tenants’ activists did not conceal their gratitude towards the squatters in the interviews. Here in the words of one tenant activist:

Warsaw Tenants’ Association owes the squatters for these talks. [...] 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 today (1).

Hence, in order to form an alliance the strategies in internal movement relations became to underplay the role of differences between tenants and squatters in an environment where different threats and powerful enemies were facing them. Instead, similarities between the movements in repertoires of action, demands or goals were emphasized as a strategy. The process of recognition of common strength was described by the interviewees as an important step towards alliance formation. In describing this process the decisive point in alliance formation is the shared belief in the ability of the alliance to make a positive change, in the potential power of collective and collaborative action.

## **Conclusions**

The alliance between the two movements could be explained as a result of the interaction of environmental, cognitive and relational mechanisms (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001), but the aim of this study has been to focus on hitherto neglected dimension of social movement studies, the cognitive dimension behind alliance formation. My argument does not exclude the different kinds of environmental mechanisms, including political opportunity structures and access to resources, that are important facilitators of cooperation. However, the crucial point in the alliance formation between the tenants’ and the squatting

movements was the threat and opportunity included in the invitation of squatters to formal meetings with the local authorities (first on district level, later on city level) that were the result of the demonstration against the eviction of a squat and a successful squatting attempt of a building in the city. This threat and opportunity was translated in the movements into an awareness of a favorable position and a perception of empowerment. Once the definition and goals of the movement were aligned and differences handled by focusing on the adversary, the only tipping point for the decision to form an alliance was to interpret the common position of the movements as enough powerful to make a difference.

This article contributes to the field of research of cross-movement alliances by filling in an important gap on the cognitive mechanisms behind alliance building in social movements. The article has highlighted cognitive mechanisms involved in alliance building by distinguishing perceptions, along with the choices made by collective actors involved in cooperation in relation to these perceptions. Three aspects have been distinguished in the formation of an alliance: *defining common goals*, *underplaying of differences*, and *recognizing common strength*. The three aspects can be seen not only as cognitive elements of alliance formation processes, but also as reflections and articulations of collective identity processes. The first aspect- the defining common goals - is a crucial part of collective identity formation and collective action as it requires a presence of a “we” that is characterized by common features and solidarity (Della Porta and Diani 1999). Moreover, as the “we” is created, it is always constructed in relation to an “other” or several “others”, where the “other” might be an adversary “against which the mobilization is called” (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 94). Melucci defines collective identity as created between individuals and recognizes adversaries as important for the creation of collective identity (1996). Moreover, the creation of collective identity is not only a negotiation of boundaries between different groups of actors, but also within groups (Gamson 1997) and this negotiation can bring together different and even contradictory definitions (Melucci 1995). An invaluable ability when negotiating common identities and goals is the skill to underplay differences and focus on similarities. Melucci (1996) emphasized the benefits of negotiating differences in collective identity formation. The pointing out of similarities and differences functions as a negotiation between which qualities and values are to be seen as acceptable and important, and which not. These values form a base for solidarity and underplay the risks of collective and collaborative actions when solidarity and collective identity are consolidated (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 94) and thus allow for the recognizing of common strength on the cognitive level.

The main argument put forward here has been that in order to reach the point when the alliance is formed the cognitive process of recognizing common strength needs to be successful and the perception of empowerment shared among the involved actors. It might be true that ‘since people tend to work more aggressively to avoid losses than to achieve gains, grassroots mobilization is more likely to flow from the emergence of new threats than from the prospect of

beneficial opportunities' (Heaney and Rojas 2011: 48). However, in the case of alliance formation between the Polish tenants' and squatting movements the interesting part of this process has been the cognitive dimension that reveals the ways in which movement process information and make decisions to form alliances based on collective interpretations.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the changes that are evident in the successes of the tenants and the squatters' movements in Warsaw, but can easily be generalized to the whole situation of urban social movements in Poland. The emergence, persistence, cooperation and influence of these movements, point to some significant changes that are going on in the field of urban activism in Poland since 2009 and 2010. These changes deserve close scholarly attention in the future, especially the more radical and informal forms of urban activism, as these are still unexplored. What are the causes of these changes? What role do alliances between different actors play in these changes? What causes and conditions these coalitions and how are they handled within and between the movements?

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## Appendix

	<b>SQUATTING interviewees</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Lenght of squatting activism</b>
1.	Syrena	Woman	38	6 months
2.	Outside of Warsaw/Elba/Przychodnia	Woman	28	5 years
3.	Fabryka/Elba/Wagenburg	Man	28	10 years
4.	Abroad/Czarna Smierc	Man	26	2 years
5.	Elba/Przychodnia	Woman	33	9 years
6.	Elba/Przychodnia	Man	27	6 years
7.	Outside of Warsaw/Elba/Wagenburg	Woman	32	13 years
8.	Abroad/Syrena	Man	27	8 years
9.	Czarna Zaba/Elba/Wagenburg	Man	26	11 years
10.	Elba/Syrena	Man	27	8 years
11.	Twierdza/Czarna Zaba/Okopowa/Fabryka/Elba/Wagenburg	Man	35	14 years
12.	Elba	Woman	35	4,5 years
13.	Fabryka/Czarna Zaba/Elba/Syrena	Woman	27	11 years
14.	Elba/Przychodnia	Man	36	5 years
15.	Elba/Syrena/Przychodnia	Woman	32	4 years
16.	Elba/Sklotpol	Woman	34	6 years
17.	Elba/Sklotpol	Woman	44	4 years
18.	Przychodnia	Woman	26	2 years
19.	Syrena	Man	26	2 years
20.	Elba/Syrena	Woman	27	6 years
		Count: Men=9 Women=11	Mean: 30,7	Mean: 6,55 years

	<b>TENANTS interviewees</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Lenght of engagement</b>
1.	Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów	Woman	65	5 years
2.	Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów	Man	58	6 years
3.	Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów	Man	34	8 years
4.	Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów	Man	44	19 years
5.	Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów	Man	27	4 years



6.	Komitet Obrony Lokatorów	Man	55	6 years
7.	Komitet Obrony Lokatorów	Man	39	6 years
8.	Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości społecznej	Man	64	10 years
9.	Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości społecznej	Man	57	19 years
10.	Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości społecznej	Woman	40	9 years
11.	Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości społecznej	Man	36	4 years
12.	Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości społecznej	Woman	64	6 years
13.	Stowarzyszenie Hoża 27	Man	46	6 years
14.	Polska Unia Lokatorów	Man	58	16 years
15.	Stowarzyszenie Grunt to Warszawa	Woman	35	2 years
16.	Tenants' activist, un-associated	Woman	30	7 years
17.	Tenants' activist, un-associated	Woman	35	2 years
18.	Tenants' activist, un-associated	Woman	29	6 years
19.	Tenants' activist, un-associated	Man	27	4 years
20.	Tenants' activist, un-associated	Man	60	20 years
		Count: Men=13 Women=7	Mean: 45,2	Mean: 8,25 years

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### **About the author**

Dominika V. Polanska is a sociologist affiliated to the University of Gothenburg and Södertörn University, Sweden. Her research interests encompass the emergence and development of civil society and social movements (above all urban movements) in Central and Eastern Europe, and in particular Poland. Email: dominika.polanska AT sh.se