

Constellations of occupation:

A typology of squatting for England - deetc@riseup.net

After examining previous typologies made for different European contexts (Aguilera & Pruijt), I assess their suitability when applied to the English context. I then suggest a new typology of squatting which works for England.

I term this typology constellations of occupation, since in every place the categories are drawn out in slightly different ways, but there are overall similarities which can be discerned. I present this eight-fold typology and discuss the various categories, which are: Residential / Cultural / Political protest / Social centre / Sites / Adverse Possession / Rough Sleeping / Fraudulent.

1 RESIDENTIAL - By far the largest proportion of squats in England are residential squats. This does not necessarily mean that the building itself is a traditional house, people also occupy a range of other buildings (for example cinemas, pubs, offices, shops, churches, mosques, morgues, factories and warehouses) which fit to their needs. Indeed, following the criminalisation of squatting in residential buildings in 2012, the overall trend appears to be that more non-residential buildings are being squatted to live in (although plenty of previously squatted residential squats remain occupied).

2 CULTURAL - Art events, galleries, punk clubs, tekno parties etc etc where the main focus is cultural rather than political.

3 POLITICAL - As a protest tactic, the occupation of space has been proven to be a very useful item in the activist toolbox.

4 SOCIAL CENTRES - In some ways subsumed under the category of protest, social centres are worthy of a separate category since they are a specific tool used by anti-capitalist activists from the 1980s onwards.

5 SITES - Some squatters (often known as travellers) reside in live-in vehicles and caravans on land, in places referred to as sites.

6 ADVERSE POSSESSION - Under English law one can gain possession of land after 12 years of continuous possession despite owner's knowledge

7 ROUGH SLEEPING - Covers a range of activities such as homeless people sleeping on the street or in doorways, drunk people crashing out, wayfarers staying the odd night in a derelict place and so on (Kesia Reeve has written several reports on squatting and vulnerable groups).

8 FRAUDULENT - In the 1990s, one reason suggested for the plans to criminalise squatting (which later watered down to specific measures in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994) was that so-called 'shop squatters' were occupying empty retail units at Christmas time. They would then open a fraudulent shop, stealing the electricity and selling sub-standard goods, then disappearing before the court case in which the owner filed for possession. No statistics were given and I have never heard of anyone doing it, so it is difficult to assess the scale on which this happened.



Type of squat	Type of building/land	Linked to squatters movement?	Public or private?	Residential?	Temporary or long-term?
Residential	Residential (house/flat) in main but also other types	Sometimes	Private	Always	Hope to be long, often not
Cultural	Large buildings eg shops, banks, pubs, cinemas, schools, offices etc	Sometimes	Public	Sometimes	Hope to be long, often not
Political protest	Large buildings eg shops, banks, pubs, cinemas, schools, offices etc	Always	Public	Often	Hope to be long, often not
Social Centre	Large buildings eg shops, banks, pubs, cinemas, schools, offices etc	Always	Public	Often	Hope to be long, often not
Sites	Land or yard of building	Sometimes	Private	Always	Hope to be long, often not
Ad.Possn.	Often land	Occasionally	Private	Often	Yes (12 years minimum)
Rough Sleep	Street, derelict building	Occasionally	Private	Always	Temporary
Fraudulent	Residential (house/flat)	Never	Private	Always	Temporary

These constellations are loosely defined and certainly not exclusive since for example a place defined as a Social Centre would in addition most likely fall within the bounds of Cultural, Protest and Residential. They merely serve to indicate the different forms which squatting can take. Overall, they do not necessarily contradict the work of other scholars but indicate that we cannot talk except in very general terms of a typology for Europe as whole, or even Western Europe.

This is a work in progress. Would anyone like to collaborate on drawing up a typology which can be expanded to other countries in Western Europe or indeed globally?? For plans regarding world domination please contact deetc@riseup.net...