

Strategic and Prefigurative Politics Merged: A Pragmatic Approach to Social Movements¹

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Strategic and Prefigurative Politics Merged: A Pragmatic Approach to Social Movements. The paper explores the analytical benefits of the pragmatic sociology of critique for the study of autonomous movements. Based on a case study of public disputes concerning the Klinika social center in Prague, it merges conceptual notions of social movement studies and the analysis of prefigurative politics. These approaches differ in the data involved in analysis, researcher position, relationship between critique and hegemonic institutional order, and the publicity of the political actions. However, if understood from the pragmatic perspective of engagements, the two approaches feature different ontic levels of politics – strategic and prefigurative. The paper claims that pragmatic sociology has much analytical capacity to include a wider range of data, emic and etic perspectives, and ontically different types of politics. It also interprets institutional order as having agency and brings to light a plurality of urban meanings embedded in different levels of reality. However, the pragmatic approach is limited by its neglect of the spatial and temporal conditioning of public disputes.

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Introduction

Post-1989 urbanism in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is characterized by rapid change. In the Czech Republic, it has been based on the liberalization of housing policies, privatization, speculative investment, large-scale development, the financialization of housing, and the commodification of public space and, technocratic attitudes inherited from the previous regime (Horák 2014; Jacobsson 2015; Samec 2020, 2018; Temelová 2009, 2007). These changes however cannot be explained using a single logic – urban meanings are controversial and appear as subjects of justification, compromise, and tests (Holden – Scerri 2015). Politicians, local and foreign developers and investors, state officials, citizens, and social movements pursue their interests and try to influence the way the cities appear (for a country-by-country analysis, see Jacobsson 2015b). From the 1990s onwards, urban activists in the Czech Republic and other CEE countries started to challenge the new urban development, as well as beliefs concerning the weaknesses of the post-socialist

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civil sphere (Císař 2013, 2008; Jacobsson 2015; Pixová 2020; Pixová - Sládek 2016). This article analyses the public dispute about urban space involving the autonomous movement surrounding the Klinika social center and state officials between 2014 and 2019 and explores the meanings of urban space articulated by critical and institutional actors.

The approach to the public dispute analysis involved in this paper – pragmatic sociology – aims to analyze critical operations applied by human beings in moments of uncertainty (Boltanski 2011; Boltanski – Thévenot 2000, 2006; Thévenot et al. 2000). It includes analysis of the references to common good that actors articulate in the public disputes, of the formats of engagement (with justification and familiarity) and of the types of politics that appear in connection with these formats (Boltanski – Thévenot 2006; Thévenot 2007, 2015, 2019).

In current Czech sociology, there are two main approaches to the study of social movements – social movement studies (SMS) and analysis of prefigurative politics. Following Smucker, the paper proposes to comprehend the difference in analytical approaches through the ontic difference between strategic and prefigurative politics (Smucker 2014). Interpreted through the lenses of the pragmatic sociology of critique, two different types of politics presuppose distinct levels of publicity and engagement and different conceptualizations of urban space. Rather than raising demands of the institutional order or being fully autonomous of it, autonomous social movements pragmatically use hegemonic meanings on the level of strategic politics and create prefigurative meanings of urban space when they are engaged with familiarity. State bureaucracy in turn publicly articulates efficiency and profit-making, however in the course of everyday work, state officials follow complex rules and regulations of the civic order that contradict a public image of an efficient and quick state. Legal language gains importance in public disputes about urban space, leading to depoliticization and increasing opportunities for or threat of economic violence. The paper presents a novel approach to the analysis of social movements based on a public dispute analysis and exploration of the meanings of urban space articulated by institutional and critical actors. It puts a question: what are the benefits of the pragmatic sociology of critique for the study of urban movements in CEE? By answering this question, the paper seeks both to demonstrate the analytical benefits of PSC and zoom into the meanings of urban space present in public disputes in the Czech Republic, as well as to find the reasoning behind them.

The paper starts with an introduction to the pragmatic approach and continues with a reinterpretation of social movement studies, after which it analyzes prefigurative politics from the pragmatic perspective. The case analysis of the Klinika social center dispute follows. The paper concludes by noting the analytical advantages of the pragmatic approach as well as its limitations.

Pragmatic sociology

In this section I speak about theoretical and methodological assumptions of pragmatic sociology of critique (PSC) related to the ontological nature of reality, the data analyzed, and the formats of engagement in a sense of the plurality of dependencies between humans and their environment, apprehensible by means of a certain cognitive format (Boltanski 2011; Boltanski – Thévenot 2006, 2000; Thévenot 2019, 2015; Thévenot et al. 2000; Thévenot – Moody 2000). The section finishes with a brief review of the studies on social movements that apply PSC.

Firstly, PSC presupposes that reality is ontologically uncertain (Boltanski 2011; Boltanski – Thévenot 2006). Doubt is ontologically given, and certainty is proved through tests, of which there are several types (*ibid.*). While truth tests are implemented into an institutional order, consist of a ritual and affirm institutionalized reality, reality tests make uncertain the way the institutional principles are implemented, but they do not question the principles as such. Reformist critique is based on these test formats. In contrast, existential tests use semantic operations and practices that are alien to the institutional order and question the order as a whole. Radical critique is based on this test format.

Secondly, PSC analyses public disputes - moments when social actors refer to legitimate forms of common good and justice, accepted in society as universal (Patriotta et al. 2011). Social actors participating in these disputes might be institutions or human beings. Institutions are conceptualized as being enacted by individuals who do the symbolic work of perception, interpretation, justification, and maintenance of meanings implemented within the institutional order and engaged in conflicting definitions of the common good in the public sphere (Patriotta et al. 2011; Zilber 2002). Institutional change happens *inter alia* through discursive struggles for meaning (Suddaby – Greenwood 2005). In their original project, Boltanski and Thévenot referred to six types of common good from which they developed six orders of worth (2006). In the market order, the price appears as the worth, while in the industrial this is technical efficiency. The civic order is based on collective

welfare. In the domestic order, reputation is valued, while in the inspired order, grace, singularity, and creativeness are appraised. While referring to the worth of opinion, social actors usually refer to the value of fame. The orders presuppose test formats (e. g., in the market, it is a test of market competitiveness) and a form of relevant proof is presented (e. g., a measurable and countable format of proof in the industrial order). Following PSC and due to the object of study (an urban dispute), this paper includes the notion of space that is articulated in each of the orders. Importantly, the space in the orders of worth (e. g., globalized space in the market order or detached space in the civic order) is used as an element of justification. The orders of worth themselves are not spatially embedded and their (controversial) universality is especially convenient for the comparative studies (see below).

Thirdly, there are different types of engagements with the world (Boltanski – Thévenot 2006; Thévenot 2014, 2019). Engagement is a cognitive format through which reality is grasped, and information is understood as relevant to the situation. In the most general type of engagement – critique and justification with reference to a common good that benefits all (Thévenot 2014) – social actors dispute or make compromises in the context of a plurality of forms of worth. The opinion of the public or a third party is especially important in the course of using this grammar because the legitimacy of reference to one or another common good depends on the social conditions in which the dispute takes place. Common good is historically given, constructed, and assessed by the wider society as a good for all. SMS explores activists' public demands and claims to focus on this type of public engagement. On the contrary, engagement in familiarity is based on the feeling of ease, affinity, and attachment in the environment. The grammar of personal affinities to common places is based on the familiar format of engagement (Thévenot 2014). Contrary to justification, it does not presuppose detachment from the personal while being in public. It is a space where personhood is dialogized and intersubjectivity emerges in the course of communication. "In such a locus communis, various personal expressions find a common ground to communicate deep concerns, attachments and feelings" (Thévenot 2014: 20). Prefiguration appears in this format of engagement (Thévenot 2014).

Pragmatic sociology of critique is used for comparative studies of social movements and/or for urban disputes analysis. Thévenot, Moody, and Lafaye (2000) show the difference in public argumentation between green movements in the USA and France. The study of Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio (2016) makes a comparison not only between the states but also between the struggles (media

debate on globalization in Finland and disputes between citizens and local politicians in Finland and France). Both studies come up with conclusions about predominant orders of worth present in local political cultures. Holden and Scerri (2015) conducted an analysis of a dispute over urban development and showed which justifications and tests are used by a developer in order to find a compromise between market, green and civil order. In the Czech context, Konopásek, Stöckelová, and Zamykalová (2008) analyzed the dispute over a bypass around Plzeň however with the main focus on purification of expertise and politics in Latourian and Callonian sense. In this paper, I continue with this line of research by applying pragmatic sociology for both analysis of social movements and urban disputes.

The following chapter analyzes two Czech approaches to studying social movements from the perspective of these two types of engagements.

Radical movements in Czech sociology: two approaches, two engagements

There are two approaches currently present in Czech sociology that explore the critique of radical social movements. Following Smucker, we can attach this analytical difference to the ontic distinction between movements' strategic and prefigurative politics (Smucker 2014). Smucker makes this distinction with reference to the Gramscian analysis of hegemony and the Habermasian notion of the lifeworld. While strategic politics relate to the hegemonic contest of power structures and considers the accomplishment of the goals, prefigurative politics reflects the need to take refuge from the logic of bureaucracy and capitalism and the desire for a "intact lifeworld". SMS conceptualize movements as strategic social actors participating in the processes of public critique and the justification of their demands. Analysis of prefigurative emphasizes the creation of locus communis – places where autonomy and other desired values can be prefigured and lived in everyday experience. Engagement with a familiar environment and transformative forms of personal relationships are distinctive of prefigurative politics.

Engagement with critique and justification: social movements as public actors and political opportunity structure as an agency

The critique and justification of demands in the public sphere is essential for strategic politics. Protestor actions take place in the public sphere where social problems are constructed and public opinion is formed (Beyeler – Kriesi 2006; Koopmans – Statham 1999). SMS operates under the notion of public space or the public arena, where the demands of the movement meet the structures of

power and a wider audience. Construction of public problems is essentially a question of presenting particular elements of reality as real and others as unreal, in other words, putting reality to a test with a necessity to justify the newly constructed reality in moral terms (Boltanski 2011; Boltanski – Thévenot 2006; Chateauraynau 2018; Konopásek et al. 2008; Latour 1988; Thévenot – Moody 2000; Thévenot et al. 2000). A strategic goal – fulfilment of critical demands – depends on the extent to which the claims of the movement are recognized by the public as legitimate and justified. Protest event analysis sees protests as a form of interactive collective action which considers the third party (political adversaries, sympathizers, decision makers, and the wider public) who assesses the legitimacy of the claims raised by a movement (Koopmans – Rucht 2002; Tarrow 1989; Tilly 1995). Protests are “episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects” (McAdam et al. 2001: 5), where the objects of claims are hegemonic structures of government or other institutional political structures, for example, on the transnational/global level (Beyeler – Kriesi 2006; Císař – Navrátil 2017; Keck – Sikkink 1998; Tarrow 2001).

Based on the presupposition of the public nature of movement politics, Czech SMS claims that the Czech radical movements’ demands are beyond the institutional order and general public (Císař 2008, 2017, 2013; Císař – Navrátil 2017; Císař et al. 2011). Their capacity for cooperation is limited, and they cannot mobilize a large number of people (“few participants, militant strategies” (Císař 2013: 6). This is “activism without participation” (Císař 2008: 29). In addition to other things, this is explained by the prioritization of militant strategies, including violent actions (Císař et al. 2011). Contrary to this analysis, the latest research claims that part of the radical movement has changed its ideological stances, mainly toward the state, and has become more open in terms of cooperation with institutional actors, use a bigger variety of non-violent actions and a strategy that seeks to pull the movement out of a cultural ghetto (Böhmová 2018; Novák – Kuřík 2019).

Pragmatic sociology proposes a reassessment of the role of the institutional structures in the processes of critique and justification. SMS conceptualizes political opportunity structure (POS) as a stable structure of the state (Kitschelt 1986), a flexible structure that depends on a field of politics which is either close or open to a different set of actors (Berclaz – Giugni 2005). POS might include the cultural or discursive conditions of a movements’ actions (Gamson – Mayer 1996; Koopmans – Statham 1999, McAdam et al. 1996). In the Czech context, radical movements (right and left) face a closed POS (understood as an

institutional and cultural environment), and they also perceive it as such (Císař 2008, 2013, 2017; Císař et al. 2011). However, this analysis neglects the active role of institutional actors in the perception, interpretation, and justification of meanings implemented in this order (Patriotta et al. 2011; Zilber 2002). This paper aims to draw attention to this process, mainly with regard to the controversial process of urban meanings production in the state bureaucracy.

Prefigurative politics: engagement with familiarity

Prefigurative politics differ from SMS in terms of analyzed data, the role of a subject, and relations between the hegemonic institutional order and the movement. Firstly, the analysis of prefigurative politics focuses mostly on the “decolonization of everyday life” and the exploration of “a combination of culture and politics as a means for the creation of a new person and new forms for living” (Katsiaficas 2006: 3-4). Activists’ communication through emotions, senses and passion, friendship, and affinity in spaces of protest are opposed to the functional/instrumental role of space as a site for making demands (Epstein 2002; McDonald 2002). Urban space has become a site for prefiguration where desired political meanings and ideas became tangible here and now, and non-hierarchical structures redesign the way hegemonic power operates (Maeckelbergh 2011, 2016; Smucker 2014; Van de Sande 2015; Yates 2015, 2020). The prefigured and prefiguring everyday life during the direct action or in autonomous zone is at the analytical core of the study of prefigurative politics (Epstein 2002; Graeber 2009; Squatting Europe Kollektive 2013, 2014).

Secondly, the political in prefigurative politics is not found in the public sphere where demands towards the institutional politics are raised but rather in the everyday interaction (Farro – Lustiger-Thaler 2014; Katsiaficas 2006; Munro 2014; Rebughini 2014). In the course of these interactions, the creation of new subjects is important. Subjectivation in Touraine’s sense as an action of freedom that opposes the domination of economic rationality over a human being, when the subject itself becomes an object of struggle (McDonald 1994; Touraine 1995; Touraine in Pleyers 2010). Rather than affiliation with a collective identity, this is the “public experience of self” (McDonald 2002: 111) and “personalized sense of political responsibility” that brings about political commitment (Lichterman 1996: 3). Rather than individualization, formation of the free subjects means creating common places where the subjects can fully express themselves and “where everyone’s personhood is

dialogized to produce a common intersubjective sociality” (Yurchak in Thévenot 2014: 19).

Third, political structures do not entail opportunities but constitute a hegemony that could be overcome by the creation of autonomous structures. Ideas of anarchism such as winning urban spaces for building autonomy or Bakunin’s destructive creation of alternatives are at the core of thinking of and about autonomous and radical left movements (Graeber 2004; Jordan 2002; Van de Sande 2015). Internal dynamics is as important as the dynamics between the movement and the political opportunity structure (Novák – Kuřík 2019). Rather than acting within the cost-benefit logic as the American tradition of rational choice claims, radical movements create “different logics of struggle in particular socio-historical circumstances” (Day 2006: 717). The goal of such a struggle is not to conquer a hegemonic center but to challenge and disorient the very logic of hegemony through direct action, prefiguration, affinity groups and other strategic and organizational means. The Czech analysis of prefigurative politics confirms this logic: radical activists act beyond state and corporate power structures and seek autonomy but not the opportunities provided by the political system (Novák 2017, 2020; Novák – Kuřík 2019; Pixová – Novák 2016). What is interpreted as an inability to construct meaningful public justification appears as the choice of the autonomous activists within the framework of prefigurative politics (Novák – Kuřík 2019). Autonomy is defined in its complexity: as a prefigurative practice of self-rule, as a value of a new non-consumerist and non-individualistic society, and as part of the creation of a new subjectivity suitable to such an imagined society (Novák 2020).

Case and method

The Klinika social center existed in Prague from 2014 until 2019. The social center was first occupied by a group of young people who cleaned the space and stayed there for several days. After the eviction, the owner of the building – the Office for the Government Representation of Property Affairs (hereinafter, the Office) – held a public competition for the space, which the Klinika collective won after a visit by the minister of finance (Andrej Babiš). One year on, the Office did not extend the agreement, but the collective remained in place until their final eviction by a private debt collector in 2019. Activists went through several lawsuits that included accusations of illegal enrichment (with a threat of a fine € 37 500) and appeals against the amount

demanded by the private debt collector, which reached almost € 36 000. (Klinika collective 2019)

The following text analyzes the public dispute that took place in 2014–19. Official documents, press releases, annual reports, and Facebook posts published by the Office as well as press releases, web content, and the Facebook page of the Klinika collective are included in the analysis. The claims of state officials and activists in the records of the municipal assemblies are also included in the analysis. Mass media articles are incorporated only when written by the activists themselves or by state officials. The data is analyzed in the Atlas.ti program according to the orders of worth grammars (worth, test format, form of relevant truth, and space formation utilized in each order). Another data set consists of 24 in-depth interviews collected from state officials both from the Office and other state departments such as Ministry of the Environment and Ministry for Regional Development dealing with urban space and relationships with civil society (seven), activists (eight), and municipal politicians (nine). Some of the state officials are no longer employees in the public sector.

Controversy analyzed: dispute between an autonomous movement and state officials over the nature of public property

State bureaucracy: circulating space and fixed space

The data demonstrates that institutional actors, in this case state officials, operate on two levels of meaning-production associated with two different sets of tests. On the level of justification to the public, institutional actors articulate a compromise between market and industrial orders. These meanings are present in the public documents, annual reports, etc. Values of cost-cutting, record profits, efficiency, and good management are presented to the public as proof of the state bureaucracy's success. Reality tests are based on market competitiveness and competence. On this level, space formation appears to serve as proof of success; it is simultaneously material, measurable, flexible, and circulating. On the level of everyday bureaucratic work characterized by familiar engagement, the reality is tested by truth tests provided via the controlling mechanisms of interconnected state departments. Insight into this level of meaning production was accessible mainly through the interviews and not in the public documents because it questions publicly presented effectiveness. Rules and regulations of the civic order embed space into networks of requirements and limit its flexibility. Long-term abandoned buildings testify to the fixed nature of space and its embeddedness in

bureaucratic qualifications. The Office employees know that transfers take long time and thus urban space becomes an ironic sign of impossible efficiency, “When we drive through the cities and see abandoned houses, ruins, we know it is connected to the state, to the restitutions. We know how hard it is (to do anything with them). This is an internal joke – professional deformation” (Maria, a former Office employee).

Market-industrial complex performed to the public and reality tests

The market and industrial worth of the state bureaucracy is proven by the monetary criteria of profit-making, cost-cutting, and constant progress on the one hand and by the countable criteria of efficiency on the other. The notions of “record profits,” “record savings,” “first in history,” and “the lowest expenses in history” attest to the Office being successful as a “public real estate agency (...) and a manager of administrative buildings” (Arajmu in ÚZSVM 2016: 3). The singularity of the Office in terms of profit-making is emphasized: “2017 was an extraordinary success for the Office. (...) Profits were the second biggest in history” (ÚZSVM 2018). The efficiency of public property management is proven by the measurable form of relevant proof (number of dislocations). “Dislocation” here means the reduction of state property to the necessary minimum – the transfer or sale of unused property and optimization in the functioning of remaining buildings. State officials associate “dislocation” with a “tightening of the state” (in Czech: *zeštíhlování státu*); the effort to economize is presented as “the rationalization of the state department” (Radek, former lawyer for the Office). Maria points out that dislocation is a “relatively new trend.”

The Office’s presentation is an interpretative choice of the state officials, who chose between “conflicting requirements stemming from a plurality of forms of legitimacy” (Patriotta et al. 2011: 1809) and express disenchantment with the image of the state bureaucracy as an “ossified institution” (Ivan, the head of the department). The presentation of the officials’ work respects perceived requirements to justice that are monetary and measurable. The monetary and measurable criteria of “record profits” and the “lowest expenses in history” were substituted for the long and complex descriptions of the Office’s legal agenda in the 2015 annual reports after the 2014 parliamentary elections. State officials connect this change with the change in institutional politics that happened after Andrej Babiš became minister of finance and later prime minister of the Czech Republic. Leader of the political movement ANO 2011, Andrej Babiš appeals to the ethos of a state being a good manager with

the slogan “We don’t dawdle. We work hard.” This ethos penetrates the state bureaucracy through the perceived need for good performance, which gives rise to the rhetoric of extraordinary economic results and new test formats coming from the market and industrial orders.

This perception led to a shift from pressure on following complex bureaucratic rules towards public performativity. This change in meanings guided a change in the internal institutional functioning, as was already claimed in previous research (Suddaby – Greenwood 2005). As a state official emphasizes, “A large amount of work has been added. It deals with the creation of materials for the minister’s performance in different forums – marketing presentations. I would rather prefer to dedicate myself to conceptual work than to marketing storytelling” (Pavel, architect at the Ministry). Space formation in this order of worth is as a disembedded object moving from one state department to another, being sold or dislocated. It serves as a proof of the state’s efficiency and market competitiveness, which is presented to the public. As Radek describes, an agreement with the activists from the Klinika social center was part of the public presentation proving the efficiency of the Office: “Klinika was an example of political hypocrisy and farce. (...) Providing property to a project for a good price could not be done other than for political purposes, for political PR.”

Common place in bureaucracy and truth tests

On the one hand, the main activity of the Office does not bring profit – on average, 80% of its property is transferred free of charge each year, and state institutions have priority in acquiring the property managed by the Office. The functioning of the state bureaucracy is hidden from the public eye, and its complexity was mainly emphasized in interviews rather than in public documents. As part of the state’s functionality, this level of reality is still public; however, it is attached at a personal level through everyday practice and knowledge (Thévenot 2014). It features the “common place” in bureaucracy, where the known reality differs from public requirements and is shared by the employees. The state officials perceive the lack of knowledge about this side of their work: “There are a lot of tasks for the ‘long run.’ It seems that there are no results, but this is not true. I would like to see the change in the perception of the state” (Irina, a state servant). There is a variety of self-referential truth tests implemented within the state bureaucracy: The Office is controlled by the Ministry; the Ministry is controlled by the Supreme Audit Office. The complexity of rules and regulations in the decision-making process on property

becomes more “confusing,” “complicated,” and “involving a bigger number of subjects” (Maria, former employee of the Office). The nature of the state institution with its implemented systems of mutual control is alien to the managerial logic of rapid decisions: “These controls are given by firmly given rules and laws... and Babiš’s style of politics does not respect limitations appearing from these rules” (Radek, former lawyer at the Office). On this level, fixed and thoroughly defined urban space is embedded in complex norms and regulations that must be followed, as well as in the network of institutions that mutually control each other. Long-term abandoned houses, the subject of professional jokes among state officials, appear on this level of reality.

Autonomous movement

Klinika activists articulate two different space formations with reference to engagement in public disputes and affinity for common places. On the level of public justification, activists raise a demand for urban space, putting the state to the test and disqualifying its managerial role. This level reflects the strategic need to justify the occupation to the general public and sustain the material infrastructure that is key to the movement’s growth. The social center, moreover, has a semiotic function as a symbol for the whole radical left movement, giving it a voice in the media. On the level of familiar engagement, the space plays a role as a site for prefiguration and as infrastructure that enhances the movement’s growth.

Engagements with justifications and tests: strategic politics

On the level of strategic politics, the autonomous social movement creates a public problem by challenging the market-industrial complex of the state bureaucracy and legitimates its demands for the urban space to the general public. This level of politics is public, mediated, and could be studied through claim and discourse analyses used in SMS.

Through occupation of the (publicly owned) abandoned building, squatters test the reality of the state bureaucracy’s efficiency and market competitiveness by challenging the managerial role of the state. The activists present themselves as more efficient in the urban space’s management: “We think that the Office, which failed in its role as a good manager, now should be more open to civic activity that aims to bring abandoned space to life” (Klinika collective 2014). While the actual activity proved the efficiency of the activists in comparison with the state bureaucracy, the DIY social center project was presented as a cheaper way of using urban space in comparison with the project proposed by

the state. In one of the documents, the activists referred to the “statement of an independent broker” who evaluated the state’s proposed project as “financially unviable” (Klinika collective 2017). Efficient and cheap use of the building personally supported by Andrej Babiš in the beginning of the project aligned with the performative market-industrial complex implemented within the state bureaucracy. An open discursive opportunity structure (Koopmans and Statham 1999) gives change to strategic politics where the urban meanings present in the hegemonic order are interpreted pragmatically. Activists, in such a manner, challenge the hegemonic role of the state in public property management by the principles of legitimacy implemented in it. The public critique of the state is related to the strategic need for legitimization rather than the genuine ideological stance of activists: “Klinika was criticizing things according to the current need and tried to connect it with the media narrative. (...) Critique is a means for legitimization” (Nikola, an activist).

Radical reformism based on the idea of the independent citizen acting beyond the bureaucratic rules of urban management is further developed in testing the civic order of worth. It refers to the legal responsibility for one’s property (Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms) and the assumption that public property is even more binding and must embrace responsibility towards all citizens. Instead of the embeddedness of public property in legal regulations, its public nature implies obligations: “The state must serve us, because we are a part of it. The legitimization in media was based on the idea that the state must provide a space to citizens” (Nikola). Again, this legitimizing argumentation finds support among the wider public and thus, “when something is under public ownership, this is of all of us. State ownership is ours. It is collectively owned” (Vaclav, a politician).

When speaking about the strategic politics of the social movement, it is important to emphasize the role of material infrastructure in the movement’s growth, as well as the significance of the semiotic value of agency that raises demands within the public sphere. Firstly, the social center has a strategical meaning. In comparison with previous, more subcultural squats, Klinika was more open (Novák – Kuřík 2019). It was infrastructure which attracted people, providing free space for meetings, communication, and creation through contributions to the movement’s growth: “The topic of squatting is about having some physical space for the movement. There were many collectives that emerged at Klinika,” commented Nikola. “It inspired them and helped them to emerge.” In the context of the general lack of non-commercial space in Prague, another activist emphasizes, “You need a space to be able to create

something together. (...) But today there is nothing for free in the cities we live in” (Marketa, an activist).

Secondly, visibility in media made Klinika into a sign that could carry the messages of the collectives who did not have such access to mass media: “Klinika was a talking head of the movement because of its media fame; it was able to articulate things... while other collectives did not have a media space. In this way, Klinika was very important” (Nikola). Klinika’s Facebook page served as an informational channel for events of the left-wing scene; some of the activists emphasize the lack of inner informational channels after its eviction. The social center managed to shift the image of squatting in mass media (Novák - Kuřík 2019).

Familiar engagement with prefigurative politics: “you need a space to be able to create”

Revolutionary politics that goes beyond the demands to the institutional order and focuses on creation of autonomous structures exists on the level of familiar engagement with reality. Here, the “decolonization of everyday life” in Katsiafikas’s words and the process of subjectivation in a sense of being a true Self are merged with the construction of alternative structures. The “feeling of belongingness,” of “meeting people with the same opinion,” often emphasized by the activists, creates the feeling of being at ease and intersubjectively constructs personhood. As Marketa highlights, “We want to create space (...) based on a sense of belonging, solidarity (...) understanding of oneself in the context of other people (...) a space) where everybody could feel good.” “Understanding of oneself in the context of other people,” in other words, building intersubjectivity, is combined with the collective process of prefiguration: “It is about the realization of some anarchist principles, a prefigurative attempt to live an anarchist world inside this building (...). People could live feminism in praxis, (...) democracy realized during the assemblies” (Nikola). Subjectivation as an action of freedom as well as prefiguration happens in one material space – the social center – which appears to be the locus communis of the radical Left. In comparison with SMS, this level of politics might be studied through the emic perspective, where the researcher is simultaneously an activist (see for example studies of Arnošt Novák (2017, 2018, 2020).

Legal language of public disputes

Before concluding, it is important to note that it is not only the content of the arguments in the public debates that plays a role but also the dominant language used. Public disputes about urban space in the 1990s were obstructed by the technocratic approach of state officials reluctant to take into account the interests of activist groups and by close ties between municipal politicians and private interests (Horák 2014). In comparison with this finding, nowadays public disputes involve a plurality of actors as well as more legitimacy extended to activist groups and NGOs. Local politicians emphasize that the disputes have become more “democratic” in terms of more sophisticated arguments used by previously radical civil groups instead of “dogmas and fear” (Petr, a politician). The same respondent continues with an explanation that expressing disenchantment with the state of affairs is “idealistic” and leads to the “blocking of projects.” Instead, specific “democratic and friendly” arguments in the framework of law are required. In such a manner, the possibility of existential tests questioning the system as a whole shifted to requirements of reality tests that challenge the ways institutional principles are implemented. An effort towards compromise and agreement is presumed to lead to a higher quality of urban environment; however, this effort is “attacked” as “idealism or corruption” (Petr, a politician).

Not only has the nature of tests changed but also the language requirements. “Mastery of (legal) terminology” enables participation in public disputes, and legal subjectivity defines possible arguments: “Each of the participating groups has different interpretations of the current law. Each group sees it from its professional point of view – developers, planners, constructing engineers. (...) The) municipal government favors the interests of the citizens. (...) each of these groups (...) perfectly masters the terminology. (...) Everyone fights for themselves (...) in the framework of the law” (Maria, former employee of the Office).

The use of pragmatic arguments in the dispute (e.g., efficiency of urban space use and the low cost of the project in comparison with poor state management) and its legal status enabled the Klinika social center to gain public support at the beginning of the project. However, public support decreased with the agreement’s end and related change in legal status. Pragmatic legal arguments and legally given subjectivities limit the possibility of emancipation of those who do not master the legal language. The requirement of consensus depoliticizes urban disputes. Urban politics becomes “managerial consensual governing” in a post-political city (Swyngedouw 2009:

605), “cleansed of the contaminating influence of (...) dissensus” (Deas 2014: 2287). “The public space becomes a bureaucratic and professional issue,” claimed one of the involved politicians (Vaclav, a politician).

Finally, the expansion of legal language and having a legal subjectivity is associated rather with economic than police violence. Klinika was evicted by a private debt collector, not by police – as was the case with previous social centers. The activists pointed out the change in police interventions, from threats of physical violence towards the expansion of fines, including the exemplary threat of an approximately € 36 000 fine in Klinika’s case: “I think it is the first case when economic repression was used on activists instead of police repression” (Kristina, an activist). The threat of economic violence challenges the movement’s resistance tactics. Fines are individualized and target particular subjects, and they are not as public as police violence. Collective passive resistance and blockades using bodily involvement make less sense when there is no possible physical force targeted against this body. “When you use money directly, you can’t really say anything... This is frightening, and I do not know how to resist it,” emphasizes an activist (Marketa, an activist).

Conclusion

Social movements studies and an analysis of prefigurative politics might seem to have an unbridgeable theoretical gap in terms of methods applied (protest events and the “decolonization of everyday life”), level of publicity of analysis (public demands and struggle for subjectivity; McDonald 1994, 2002), and the conceptualization of the hegemonic order understood either as POS or as a formation from which autonomy is sought. The first advantage of pragmatic sociology is its ability to merge these two levels into one analytical framework based on the notion of engagements. Thus, a wider range of data, ontically different types of politics (strategic and prefigurative, radical and reformist) could be included in analysis. Moreover, pragmatic sociology is a shift from the notion of habitus (Boltanski – Thévenot 2006); thus, it interprets the difference in politics in reference to the pragmatics of actions. Politics is different in different formats of engagements; it is situational rather than identarian.

Secondly, pragmatic sociology proposes to analyze institutional order as an acting agency rather than environment for the movement as SMS does (Berclaz – Giugni 2005; Gamson – Mayer 1996; Kitschelt 1986; Koopmans – Statham 1999; McAdam et al. 1996) or a hegemony from which pure autonomy is

sought (Day 2006; Novák 2017; Novák – Kuřík 2019). The institutional order of state bureaucracy is dynamic and multilayered; it produces different and opposing meanings on different levels of reality depending on the format of engagement. Its interpretation of meanings changes with political change; thus, it is itself political. On the level of public justification, state bureaucracy seeks to produce fast moving, flexible space as proof of extraordinary success. This space formation is so flexible that the minister of finance can force an agreement concerning a building's rent onto squatters because they have proposed its efficient use, despite the building having been stuck in regulatory (and other systems of) control for many years. Activists use these meanings strategically and construct public problems of efficient public property management. They put the state bureaucracy to the test with test formats it itself creates – efficient use and low cost. Through these tests, activists challenge the role of the state as a public property manager and, contrarywise, upraise the role of citizens unrestricted by bureaucratic rules of urban management. These radical reformists' tests are supported by the test format coming from the civic order of worth – the public nature of public property on which citizens must have a say. The analysis of prefigurative politics ignores this level of reality with which activists are strategically engaged. It is based on an idealized, narrow, and pure understanding of radical political agency (Beveridge – Koch 2019) and ignores the necessity to act strategically and pragmatically and to justify the demands for urban space. It comprehends the space as a site for prefiguration rather than an object of struggle for meanings. This understanding is especially limited if we remind ourselves that urban space is a site of production and reproduction for power relationships (Castells 1983; Harvey 1973, 2010, 2013; Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1989, 2010).

Thirdly, the pragmatic approach helps demonstrate the plurality of urban meanings that exist in different layers of reality all at once, conflicting and merging in one building. The social center has a semiotic meaning in the media and on social networks; it is a “talking head” of the movement. It enabled the movement to publicly articulate a critique. The space has a strategic, infrastructural meaning that enables the movement's growth. It is a site for prefiguration but also justification, demand, and struggle. The same urban space is proof of efficiency and good management, as well as an object embedded in regulations and rules.

However, pragmatic sociology has its own limitation, namely its conception of the orders of worth as disembedded and universal. As Simon Susen makes clear, “Irrespective of the spatio-temporal specificity of a social situation, there

are no practices of meaning- and value-laden interaction without both grammars and processes of justification” (Susen 2014: 9). But could the processes of legitimization be studied without spatial and temporal dimensions? Indeed, their grammars might seem universal; however, the context of the public disputes in which they appear is spatially and temporally defined. In the case of the Czech Republic, these disputes are strongly influenced by legal language, which is a matter of mastery and is crucial to the recognition of the speaking subject. Can a subject fully articulate the orders of worth when its position is not considered legitimate? Moreover, the language of dispute implies a threat of violence, which is not purely semantic. In turn, the threat of economic violence, as the Klinika case demonstrates, challenges strategies of resistance, which the Czech autonomous movement is about to reinvent.

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