

Physical Space and Collective Identity- Making: DIY Cultural-Political Centers in Times of Lockdown

This project focuses on DIY cultural-political centers and squats situated in the Netherlands and examines the role that physical space has in the practices of collective identity formation in periods of strict lockdowns. More specifically, this thesis explores the changes and alterations that DIY centers had to face during the implementation of strict lockdowns that were introduced by the Dutch government so as to stop the fast-spreading of COVID-19. Hence, the starting point is the hypothesis that the absence of physical space intervenes in the collective identity-making of members of DIY centers and the broader community. The formation of collective identity is achieved through the cultivation of a common cultural and political ground between the members of a center, the socialization practices that are hosted in a center, based on its cultural activities and finally the daily routine and communication of the community. Following this stream of thought, the following research question is posed: What role does physical space play in the collective identity-making of DIY cultural-political spaces in times of lockdown? For the exploration of the research question, the qualitative method of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of Dutch DIY centers is utilized since it allows the extraction of deep meaning regarding their collective identity- making practices.

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Introduction

In March 2020, the first lockdowns and stay-at-home orders were imposed in many parts of the world for the prevention against the further spread of SARS-CoV-2. Lockdowns initiated a “social experience of making people stay home, avoid public gatherings, avoid interacting with strangers except when wearing masks and staying six feet apart” (Collins, 2020, p. 477). Following epidemiological statistical models, the argumentation for restricting social relations was the prevention of deaths while many governments around the world were also considering the financial costs of lockdowns as potential drawbacks. While the costs of lockdown with respect to the financial sphere are considered significant, social costs should be also taken into account. Social life in terms of establishing face to face relationships, going to work and socializing was significantly minimized. On a similar note, restrictions on the “use of public space and physical distancing have been key policy measures to reduce transmission of COVID-19 and protect public health” (Honey- Roses et al, 2020, p.1). As an outcome, societies around the globe entered a “new period of social pain with high levels of social suffering related to isolation and severe costs of social distancing” (Singh & Singh, 2020, p.3). Hence, the consequences of the lockdown are not only physical and financial but also social and psychological.

A social consequence of paramount importance was the minimization of physical cultural activities. Lockdowns implemented by governments led to the cancellation of cultural events, such as gigs, theatrical performances, and film screenings. All cultural spaces and venues such as libraries, museums, galleries, film theatres and concert halls, were forced to close while the online edition of cultural activities was initiated by some venues. Engulfed within the umbrella term of cultural venues, self- managed spaces such as DIY cultural and political centers had to close too. The focus on DIY centers and squats lies in the fact that they systematically host accessible cultural activities with breadth and diversity as opposed to mainstream, commercial venues which are “profit- oriented places of capital accumulation, targeting cash-rich groups” (Chatterton & Holland, 2003, p.93). By doing so, DIY

centers prove their significance as hubs for community support and art creation with low barriers-to-entry compared to other commercial venues. Secondly, the focus on such venues is derived from the fact that by organizing accessible cultural activities, they become open to the local community and are able to create a sense of collective identity that then feeds into collective action aiming towards social transformation.

Additionally, their users can be distinguished from those of the commercial venues since the “former are not solely consumers but are also producers and act as self-regulators that maintain order” (Hanninen, 2020, p. 25). In contrast, the latter are mainly consumers who conceive the venues as a “playground for pleasure-seeking” (Chatterton & Holland, 2003, p.93). Hence, DIY cultural and political centers shall be mainly understood as “small, locally-bound, interpersonal networks where members engage in political socialization, boundary marking, and other cultural practices” (Futrell & Simi, 2004, p. 17). These networks are grounded in the everyday face to face communication between individuals and help “nurture strong interpersonal solidarity” among participants” (Futrell & Simi, 2004, p. 37). The nurturing of strong interpersonal ties is an important manifestation of deeper identity formation practices which highlights the communal aspect of DIY activities. Building upon this line of argumentation, lockdowns and stay-at-home orders do seem to intervene with processes of socialization as well as identity formation practices since all the cultural centers were closed and there was a loss of physical space that could host cultural activities.

Subsequently, if lockdowns affect the formation and maintenance of collective identity, then there might be a loss of radicality and political orientation which wishes to transform society through interstitial strategies of transformation (Wright, 2010). Moreover, lockdowns may affect practices of collective identity associated with DIY cultural venues, since “censorship and surveillance of online spaces create friction that slows activists’ use of particular platforms” (Croesser & Highfield, 2015, p.148). This means that DIY spaces and squats seem hesitant to go online and maintain their collective identity or political socialization since the commercial nature of social media platforms is a “greater source of friction for many activists who see capitalism and social media as intertwined” (ibid). As a consequence, given the lockdown has reduced face-to-face social contact and broader connections undermining social well-being, this thesis aims to study the role of physical space in collective identity-making

practices. More specifically, it focuses on do-it-yourself (DIY) cultural centers situated in the Netherlands and explores the essentiality of physical space with respect to the formation of collective identity in periods of restrictions. Following this stream of thought, the following research question is posed: *What role does physical space play in the collective identity-making of DIY cultural-political spaces in times of lockdown?*

This project is a result of recent calls for social scientific responses to the pandemic (Van Bavel et al., 2020) which demand an epistemological approach to the pandemic's effects on the societal chain. Despite the fact that many social identity theorists have highlighted the inherently collective nature of the experience of the crisis (Jetten et al., 2020), it seems that lockdown affects every day in-person communication. Moreover, it minimizes every aspect of social life while at a first glance may disrupt the process of identity-making, which takes place in the physical space. Hence, it appears that there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the social consequences of the pandemic. Recently, most studies have researched the pandemic as a medical and governmental crisis. More specifically, there have been studies upon the effects of lockdown which focused solely either on the macro-level of politics and finance (Coibion, Gorodnichenko, & Webber, 2020) or the micro-level of individuals and their psychological responses (Sibley et al, 2020). However, it should be noted that the pandemic is also a social crisis with multifold consequences for the general public. Despite that, by now, no research has explored the societal meso-level which focuses on cultural activities. Notably, there is no research that studies how physical space, which plays an important role in identity-making practices, is affected by lockdowns.

Moreover, this thesis contributes to the field of cultural sociology by bringing together sociological theories regarding the physicality of space (Chatterton 2010; Lefevre, 1974) and its role on meeting people's needs with respect to spatial practices of socialization (Memarovic & Langheinrich, 2010). Based on these spatial practices, the notion of collective identity (Melucci, 1989; Jasper & Polletta, 2001), which is attached to the social movement theory, is firstly taken out of the context of social movements and is applied to members and users of DIY spaces. In this way, collective identity is not perceived as an outcome of certain characteristics of new social movements, but as the outcome of collective action within cultural centers. It is

also combined with the notion of community of practices (Lave, 1996) and together, these theories are attached to DIY centers and their function as counter-examples of alternative, radical social relations within capitalism (Pusey, 2010; Wright, 2010).

The development of this theoretical framework contributes to the existing literature by enabling the conceptualization of collective identity formation as based on physical, shared practices of community-making. Secondly, it highlights the fact that these practices are mainly facilitated by DIY cultural centers and squats, since those are easily accessible and inclusive networks of collaboration and solidarity. Thirdly, the combination of the aforementioned theories draws a direct connecting line between identity formation and physical space, given that the space's importance is grounded on the fact that it hosts identity-making practices and provides an outlet for people to come together and socialize. Hence, the notion of collective identity seems to be attached to the physical space and an absence of the latter might disrupt the formation of the former. That is the contribution of this paper; it provides new theoretical insights upon the viable bricolage of empowering cultural activities of DIY spaces, utilized for collective-identity practices. For their exploration, in-depth, semi-structured interviews are instrumentalized.

Theoretical Framework

a. Identity formation and collective identity

Identity is actively constructed when situated between the internal and the social world, because it involves both reflection and self-observation (Best, 2011). It becomes meaningful through social interactions (West & Fenstermaker, 2002). For sociologists, identity is produced based on cultural narratives, frames and repertoires of meanings (Pascoe, 2007; Perry, 2002 as cited in Best, 2011, p. 913). Hence, identity formation practices are facilitated by both social situations and social relations, as Goffman (1961) argues, and identity shall be perceived as the by-product of collaborative actions between agents (Blumer 1969). Contemporary sociological thought (Cote, 1996; Best, 2011; Pozarlik, 2013) highlights the argument that identity cannot be approached as an object which an agent possesses, but rather as processes-things that agents do (Anataki & Widdicombe 1998 in Best, 2011, p. 909). Conceived as a process, identity is shaped and performed based on social activities and social interactions. Therefore, the social world becomes a space “where the individual and

the collective gain concrete meaning as they emerge as a consequence of social role-playing” (Pozarlik, 2013, p.79).

Trying to conceptualize upon the interrelation of different identities, Snow (2001) manages to highlight the existence of three forms of identity; a personal identity, which is attributed by an actor to themselves; a social identity, which is imputed by others when an agent is situated in social space and, finally, collective identity, which is situated at the nexus of social space and collaborative actions. However, it should be stressed that these identities tend to interact and overlap with each other. Snow’s (2001) theoretical framework informs this research by allowing the conceptualization of overlapping identities. Since these three forms of identity interact with each other, it seems that each form can incorporate functions of the other. Collective identity can incorporate the personal identity of agents, as well as their social identity, as it takes place in the social environment and is created when it is built upon the personal identity. Based on this stream of thought, the notion of collective identity is primarily utilized in this research since it facilitates the exploration of identity practices which exist in-between social space and the collaboration of agents.

Building upon the idea that identity is created and performed mainly in social space through different activities and interactions, new social movement scholars (Melucci,1995; Mueller, 1994) have instrumentalized the notion of collective identity to explore the common ground of actors who contribute to new social movements. By focusing on the context within which new identities are developed, these scholars conceive the collective identity as a product of a group of people who reflect upon their orientations and actions (Melucci,1995). However, Polleta and Jasper (2001) acknowledged the fact that this conceptualization significantly neglects the practices of communication, negotiation and connection between individuals. For that reason, trying to elaborate on the work of new social movement scholars, they define collective identity as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practices, or institution” (p. 285). The definition directly connects the individual and the community and describes the ways that this connection is successful, by focusing on shared spaces and becoming linked to collective agency.

The notion of community infused within Polletta and Jasper's definition (2001) should be situated in a specific social and spatial setting in order to facilitate a process of collective identity production. Hence, McMillan and Chavis (1986) approach the notion of community as incorporating feelings of belonging or membership to a group, a collective sense of mattering to the center and to other members, the capacity for the center to meet some of the needs of its members, “and shared affective experiences based on participation in the same space and in similar activities” (Griffin, 2010, p.69). Hence, the formation of a community promotes the “values of trust, commitment and solidarity” (Delanty, 2018, p. 98). On a similar note, Lave (1996) brings together the identity formation practices and the sense of community by coining the term ‘community of practice’ and highlighting the importance of active participation of members when building a community.

Within communities of practice, the crafting of identities becomes a social practice that involves the understanding of “who you are becoming and what you know. {...} “Knowing” is a relation among communities of practice, participation in practice, and the generation of identities as part of becoming part of ongoing practice” (Lave, 1996, p. 157). Hence, the generation of identities in a community is understood as a practice and many communities experience numerous identities among their members which usually tend to be conflicting (Whooley, 2007, pp.2-3). The communities aim to build solidarity across these various identities, since solidarity is “experienced by challengers of those in power” (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, p.105). Hence, when within a DIY community, social actors tend to form numerous identities which are based on solidarity and radicality. The identity formation is based both on community practices as previously stated, and socialization practices which are quintessential for social actors.

Socialization practices can be perceived as “modifications produced in individuals’ relationship with their environment (physical, material, social) as a result of their interaction with others” (Camilleri & Malewska- Peyre, 1997, p. 43). People’s experiences and interactions, developed based on their active participation in a physical space, create ties between them which then enable the process of socialization (L’Aoustet & Griffet, 2004). Thus, when existing in a community of practice and engaged in socialization practices, people tend to develop stronger

commitments in order to confront and balance the “multiple tensions involved in participating in group activities” (Anderson et al, 1999, p.139).

b. DIY and cultural spaces

Identity formation is an important aspect of the DIY community which tries to build new forms of cultural resistance to the dominant capitalist forces. The notion of DIY is linked at its core to cultural spaces, as the majority of them are self-organized and self-managed, meaning that they have a horizontal work structure, based on equity and respect between members. However, the epistemological approach of the notion of DIY as a defined term seems difficult. Often DIY is used as an ‘umbrella concept’ which involves grassroots and independent cultural initiatives. Notwithstanding its traditional meaning connotes different styles and home improvements executed by non-professionals (Talen 2015).

In an attempt to approach the notion of DIY in connection with the countercultural scene that emerged during the ‘70s and ‘80s, several scholars offer a broad definition of the concept. Mackay (1998) touches upon the broad concept of DIY by arguing that DIY culture is a combination of inspiring action, narcissism, youthful arrogance, and creativity (pp.3-8). Based on the words of one of his research participants, he later notes that DIY culture was born when people got together and realized that the only way forward was to do things for themselves (p.4). Purdue et al (1997) define DIY culture as “a cultural movement which challenges the symbolic codes of mainstream culture or as a family of self-organizing networks, with overlapping memberships and values” (p. 651). This definition seems more appropriate for the current research since it offers a wider understanding of DIY culture as a network of people who share common values and identify themselves within the counterculture. Moreover, it is instrumentalized since it manages to grasp the radicality of the movement as well as the rejection of mainstream culture by a self-established network.

DIY networks can be found in contemporary urban landscapes, given that in this environment, social and political relations are dominated by neoliberalism and are constantly subverted by a multiplicity of resistance forces (Lefebvre 2003). According to Harvey (2007), the city is the main locus where capital is accumulated through

practices that exist within the nexus of enclosure and privatization of urban areas. By building upon Harvey's perception of the enclosure as a force of commodification, De Angelis (2019) "conceptualizes enclosure as a continuous and subtle process of subjectification and control of social relations" (Dadusc, 2019, p.171). Against this dominant stream of the urban enclosure, DIY centers and squats emerge as counter-examples of social relations. The formation of DIY centers and autonomous spaces produces new commons which engulf "experimental and prefigurative demonstrations of self- management and are examples of the 'new cooperativism' in practice" (Pusey, 2010, p. 177). These new ways include forms of collectively organized social labour and horizontal governance of commons (Avdikos & Petas, 2021). Hence, DIY centres generate autonomous modalities of organization which prefigure social and political practices of resistance.

Based on the above, the role of DIY centers is mainly to provide radical responses to the need for "independent, not-for-profit, politically plural spaces where participants can meet, discuss and plan" (Chatterton, 2010, p.1209). More specifically, they are safe spaces which allow members to develop progressive ideas and social relations. In this way, these centres try to "build new forms of social empowerment in the niches, spaces and margins of capitalist society" (Wright, 2010, p.211), while they do not pose any immediate threat to the dominant elites. They are counterhegemonic networks of solidarity as well as spaces for forging radical instruments able to decode the complex synthesis of capitalism. By trying to build counterhegemonic networks, DIY cultural spaces highly resemble free spaces which utilize trans-movement practices in order to prefigure the society that they wish to build. Polletta (1999) defines free spaces as "small-scale settings within a movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization" (p. 1). This definition is beneficial for the research seeing that it relates free spaces to cultural ones. Both form relationships that differ from those that characterize a mainstream society and connect local networks as part of a larger cultural movement which reinforces solidarity and commitment to a cause (Futrell and Simi, 2004).

Several examples of DIY venues and squats situated in the Netherlands instantiate this close connection between free and cultural space. According to Pruijt

(2016), the first squatting attempts in the Netherlands took place in 1963 and 1964, when empty houses on Amsterdam's Kattenburg Island offered unique opportunities for an alternative housing strategy for people who had no chance of finding a rental apartment (p.258). As squatting started to be socially institutionalized in the Netherlands, there was a combination of squatting, subcultural art projects and cultural spaces. Many cultural venues emerged from and were made possible by the Dutch squatters' movement. Existing squats, such as Stroomhuis in Eindhoven, and cultural centres, such as OCCII in Amsterdam, serve as successful examples of this trend.

c. Role of physical space

According to Memarovic and Langheinrich (2013), physical space is essential since it is attached to several needs fundamental to socialization and identity formation practices. Firstly, there is comfort which is "a deep and pervasive need that is attached to a space" (p. 4). Secondly, relaxation is of paramount importance when existing in space, as it sets the body and mind at ease. Thirdly, active engagement with the environment engulfs an active and direct interaction with the space itself and the people in it. People tend to socialize in physical places with others, such as friends as well as strangers, when an event is going on. "Ultimately, public space is a place to bump into friends and neighbours, share news, gossip, and lobby officials" (Memarovic & Langheinrich, 2013, p.5). Finally, discovery produces the desire for enjoyment and challenge which comes along with the exploration of new activities in a physical space.

Centers like Stroomhuis and OCCII have created spaces where these needs can be met. They also instantiate the quintessence of radical self-organized venues which prefigure new social relations based on their physical presence within the DIY community. As an outcome, their collective identity becomes manifested in the day-to-day activities as expressed in the physical environment. For Sarabia and Shriver (2004), the physicality of space is essential for members of DIY centers, because they engage in communication. Additionally, the physical environment "can facilitate the creation of identity and encourage its adoption" (pp. 273-274). Therefore, it can be argued that spaces are produced in action, based on a synthesis between people and objects arranged relationally (Low, 2016). This synthesis of objects and people taking

place in spatial arrangements illustrates the fact that the physical locations where cultural activities, such as concerts or theatrical plays, are expressed alter the relation between the cultural activities per se and the built environment (van de Hoeven & Hitters, 2020). According to Wood et al (2007), cultural activities have a strong material dimension “which is embodied and technologized (p. 89).

In that way, it seems that attention should be drawn to the materiality of cultural centers, in which activities are performed, as most of them have not been constructed to host live shows. However, they manage to project a cultural and musical ideology engulfed in their physical and acoustic design, which interacts with the physical symbolization of DIY communities (Brennan et al., 2016). Compared to commercial venues, DIY centers offer spaces “within which individuals act in relatively autonomous ways, not following the dictates of the logic of the system” (Wright, 2010, p. 229). As such, DIY spaces are not controlled by the dominant power structure and relations that exist within capitalism, but utilize interstitial strategies of transformation expressed solely in their physical space. As an outcome, these centers represent spaces where actors can engage in dialogue and establish a political agenda. In a way, DIY spaces can be transformed into “discursive communities” where individuals, based on their common goals and shared values, negotiate and produce meaning (Cutting 2000). These meaning-making practices within discursive communities are directly linked to identity construction, because members are able to negotiate and reaffirm their identity as part of, in this case, a DIY cultural space.

Despite the possibility of collective identity-making in each and every aspect of people’s lives, it is the everyday practices of a DIY center that can accommodate it primarily. By performing the mundane daily routine alongside comrades through cleaning, taking care of financial responsibilities, cooking and organizing cultural activities, the members of a cultural center give form to radical social relations. This daily routine can be conceived as Lefevre’s (1991) spatial practices, which are “the material spaces of daily life where social production and reproduction occurs” (Chatterton, 2010, p.1210). Lefevre (1991) argues for the essentiality of space regarding the lived experiences of social actors and, by building upon the notion of spatial practices, he highlights the importance of the spaces of lived experience which

are “lived through their associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’ (Lefevre, 1991, p.39).

Situated within the conjunction of spatial practices and lived experiences, social agents build and rebuild social relationships based on “emotional responses, solidarity, trust and shared practices of working and learning together” (Chatterton, 2010, p. 1211). Within this political process, humour, deviance and radicality create an amalgam which constitutes a sense of a collective and a caring community of resistance (ibid). The latter relies upon processes of socialization by people who have a common cultural and political ground. Hence, the strength of DIY centers does not lie solely on direct political actions, but rather on socialization forces which are open and fluid. Based on this strength of DIY centers, there is little understanding of the ways that physical space interacts with identity formation and socialization practices; particularly in DIY spaces, there are different social relations grounded on solidarity and close collaboration between members of a community. For that reason, a strong methodological framework is developed.

Methodological Framework

Trying to generate data regarding the collective identity of people engaged with DIY cultural spaces, and the role of physical space in this process, semi-structured, in-depth interviews are instrumentalized as the most beneficial research method for this topic. According to Kvale (1996), interviews can be perceived as “an interchange of views between two or more people which sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data” (p. 14). Based on the aforementioned definition, and following Rapley (2011), the efficiency of the interview’s design encourages participants to give “detailed and elaborated answers” (p. 17) that offer authentic insights upon their values, perceptions and ideas. Rapley’s position establishes a relationship with the concept of ‘active interviewing’, as expressed by Holstein & Gubrium, (1997). Being an active interviewer and facilitating the discussion, the researcher aims to make meaning that “is constituted at the nexus of the how’s and what’s of experience” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p. 121). In terms of the design, a pre-decided but not strictly followed interview guide benefits a more flexible approach that enhances the flow of the conversation without any interruptions. This flexibility allows the

researcher to probe for the participant's opinion. The technique of probing facilitates a process of exploration of new paths that are not addressed in the first part of an interview, as Gray (2004, p. 217) suggests. Despite that, it is central to the research that both main themes and questions are developed in advance to be utilized as a map of the conversation.

Following this method, 10 interviews were conducted with members of 9 DIY cultural venues around the Netherlands. Specifically, the members were selected based on the criterion of the role that they fulfilled within their center. Hence, the members were either volunteers or employees who actively participated in the centre's daily routine. In the case of DIY centers and squats, the status of employee' implies that there is a paid, full-time working position of a person with more responsibilities than a volunteer. Duties include taking care of the center's financial agenda, of paramount importance for its longevity. The status of volunteer indicates a person affiliated with the center, providing support to each and every aspect (from organizational matters to cooking to bartending) without financial compensation. Moreover, the technique of internet recruitment was utilized because, following Morse (2002), it greatly facilitated two fundamental principles of qualitative sampling; appropriateness and adequacy. Appropriateness is focused on "the identification and use of participants who can best inform the research question" (Hamilton & Bowers, 2004, p.823). Appropriateness is increased through the selection of specifically focused internet sites. Hence, in the case of the search for DIY centers and squats around the Netherlands, the site radar.squat.net was instrumentalized, as it included a detailed list of non-commercial venues and spaces. Radar.squat.net is an online meeting place for groups that are going against the dominant capitalist discourse, such as DIY, anti-capitalist, autonomous, non-hierarchical, anti-fascist and queer centers and squats.

The radar squat list facilitated the principle of adequacy, since it provided enough data for the rich description of the research question. Consequently, emails were sent to the main accounts of several places. The places were selected based on several criteria. Firstly, the chosen centers were self-managed and had a horizontal organizational structure. According to Wright (2010), cultural spaces aim at cracks within the dominant social structure of power and try to build counterhegemonic networks of solidarity outside the state. Hence, they must position themselves against

the dominant vertical hierarchy that the capitalist system reproduces. Secondly, the capacity of the venues that are explored was small, as a bigger size may not facilitate processes of bonding and collective identity-making practices (Dines et al., 2015). More specifically, the biggest center that was chosen had the capacity to host up to 400 people in its live music stage, while the smallest one facilitated approximately 50 people. This choice was made since “small live music venues are particularly noteworthy as hubs of social activity and exchange” (Strong & Whiting, 2017, p.153). Simultaneously, they appear as the perfect setting for engaging conversations between people. Thirdly, the selected spaces hosted a variety of cultural activities and were not focusing exclusively on the organization of music concerts. This criterion is essential, given that a wide range of events welcomes a variety of people who might be different, but tend to socialize within a space.

The centers that were approached are situated all over the Netherlands, but the majority of venues exist in the broader area of Amsterdam. Het Fort Van Sjakoo , OCCII, OT301 and Cafe de Ruimte are situated in Amsterdam, while Haunted House is in Maastricht, Pier15 in Breda, De Grote Weiver in Krommenie, Stroomhuis in Eindhoven and finally Anarchy Art in Rotterdam. As far as De Grote Weiver is concerned, two interviews were conducted with both paid and volunteer personnel. Given that sensitive personal data were collected with respect to the participants’ social, cultural and political identity, the ethical requirement of anonymization was instrumentalized. This means that all participants are anonymized, mentioned as either ‘members’ or ‘volunteers’.

For the exploration of the research question, interviews with the members of these spaces were conducted between 3/4/2021 and 1/5/2021, given the imposed lockdown and travel restrictions in the Netherlands. The restrictions were eased during spring due to mass vaccinations. However, due to the British variant and the feeling of unsafety that caused, the interviews were conducted via the online platform Zoom. Given the lockdown, Zoom offered the “opportunity to talk to otherwise inaccessible participants” (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014, p.609) and record both video and audio simultaneously. This was an important benefit of Zoom, since a researcher has the opportunity to re-watch the interview and reflect upon its content, while aiming to produce its main themes. On the other hand, informants were “more diffident about being interviewed online since it appears to be more difficult to obtain

in-depth responses to sensitive questions” (Seitz, 2016, p. 233). As far as the intimacy and rapport are concerned, technical issues created an awkward vibe with some participants who had not used Zoom before and did not have access to a stable internet connection. Nevertheless, these problems were rapidly resolved and online liaison was established through the communication of some personal stories and other information.

Regarding the data collected, thematic analysis, understood as “a process of making explicit the structures and meanings that the participant embodies in a text” (Gavin, 2013, p. 281), was utilized. It is a descriptive qualitative method that limits the data creatively and constructively and “provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Thematic analysis of “open-ended responses from transcribed interviews can explore the context at a level of depth that quantitative analysis lacks while allowing flexibility and interpretation when analyzing the data” (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 808). Based on Gavin (2013), the steps that were followed for the analysis of the interviews were five. Firstly, there was the transcription of the interview alongside their upload on Atlas. ti. Secondly, the process of thematic overview was utilized for the interviews’ comparison. Later on, texts were highlighted for linkages and sub-themes were generated based on the linkages. After the generation of sub-themes, they were named and compared for the production of common themes. As soon as the generation of themes was completed, they were named and linked to the theoretical framework (ibid, pp.283-284). As far as the Atlas ti. is concerned, many codes were created with the use of open coding. They were narrowed down and merged and a coding scheme graph was produced. Finally, a table of codes was produced for the generation of themes.

Results and Analysis

a. Spatial practices and community before lockdowns

The discussion with respect to the function of the centers before lockdown generated several themes; collective identity, openness of the centers, cultural activities and daily routine. Most interviewees stressed the importance of a strong identity which allows the creation of an open community center. A member of OT301 stated that “this place was squatted in 1999 and it is a collective of artists. We run this place

collectively and put our efforts towards the arts and politics and the DIY culture”. On a similar note, a member of OCCII highlighted the collective aspect of the center by saying that “OCCII is situated in free space. It is a collective of 10-15 groups that are situated in both buildings since the 80s. So, we are a collective that runs the whole thing together”. This collective ownership and management manifest the collective alternative relations and politics of centers which translate their collaborative togetherness into the physical space.

Based on a broader understanding of collectivism, many members of DIY spaces fight to create an open and safe space for all. For example, Café de Ruimte functions as a space “open, also to people who are not thinking like us. Those, who are normally the people who would not come to a place like ours”. This intimate openness to individuals who might not be like-minded is articulated by De Grote Weiver as well, which aspires to be open to people “who have never been there before and have nothing to do with the whole political background or whatever. These people usually go away with a really good feeling about the place, so that’s very positive”. This position echoes Chatterton’s (2010) claims regarding DIY centers which aspire to be socially and politically plural spaces where people can meet and socialize based on respect and solidarity.

However, being open to different people does not mean that several DIY centers have a loose political identity that welcomes people who have far-right political leanings or opposing views on social issues. Most DIY spaces do make claims which oppose the far-right ideology, fascism and Nazism. They go against both overt and covert manifestations of racism and sexism by setting rules which reject homophobia in their space. Haunted House’s political background was influenced more by trans and queer ideology. It was “very feminist punk, anarchists, queer”. Based on this political identity, when “some guy did something that was dodgy, the entire house was like ‘Get the fuck out’. We didn’t tolerate any bullshit and I think that’s why the center was so important”. Hence, the spaces set some basic rules and ask people to abide by them. These rules are based on human values, as De Grote Weiver states; “we don’t want any racism, sexism or bullshit, we want people to treat each other with respect from whatever background and origin”. In this way, these DIY centers provide the ground for radicalization based on the embodied practices, as well as the strong social and political agenda they promote. Through this strong

political identification, they potentially produce a sense of community across different people, intolerant of extreme conservatism.

b. Daily Routine and Spatial Practices

Within this radical framework of collaboration and collectivity in making and being, people tend to engage mostly in shared practices within the spatial context of DIY centers. Most centers host a wide range of cultural activities which extends from music gigs to theatrical plays, bars and kid's programs. Pier15 in Breda has a broad function since it hosts "a skate park, a basketball court, a terrace and the cultural program". Similarly, OT301 has "one floor with a bar where all the concerts, parties and dinners are, and then there's another floor with workspace and offices". These activities signify the fundamental role of occupied or legalized social and cultural centers that turn buildings "into self-organized cultural and political gathering spaces for the provision of radical social services and experimentation with independent cultural production of music and art" (Hodkinson & Chatterton, 2007, p.305).

Based on these cultural activities, the members of DIY centers develop several day-to-day practices playing a fundamental role in their communication and management of the space. Before the lockdown in the Netherlands, many centers organized in-person members meetings in order to discuss the practicalities of self-management and the necessities of the place. Fort Van Sjakoo had "meetings where there were discussions about how we should do things because there is no formal hierarchy, there is no boss here". This absence of formal hierarchy is a quintessential feature of DIY spaces, allowing for the existence of a horizontal structure and self-management. This facilitates the expression of different opinions regarding the everyday practices of the center. The rejection of bureaucratic hierarchy signifies that DIY centers are instances of a new cooperativism which is grounded on participative, horizontal forms of decision-making (Pusey, 2010). Cooperativism is also reflected in the organizational form of OT301, which organizes member meetings every month in order for important topics about financial matters or maintenance to be discussed.

These day-to-day practices based on self-management develop a cultural and political common ground between members and volunteers, facilitating the process of collective identity formation. A member of Haunted House stated that the members

“are all open to each other, like a melting pot, where we all came from different places and experiences but we were curious about each other. We operated in a similar political sphere, but we evidently all had our own backgrounds and experiences”. Similarly, based on the everyday routine of Anarchy Art in Rotterdam, a member said that “we're pretty much on the same line with everything, so those things would always fall together. It was never an issue that we have contradictory opinions. That would almost never happen”. Alongside Haunted House and Anarchy Art, volunteers of De Grote Weiver have “the same political orientation. Of course, there are some people who do have kind of different ideas but we do share the left side of the fence”.

Taking into account this common ground, members of DIY venues are socialized alongside the community by cleaning, talking and organizing dinners together. Following Chatterton (2010), cooking, cleaning or making decisions collectively, as illustrated previously, is a form of doing politics which give rise to the social relations of DIY. Consequently, it is Lefevre's (1991) practices which take place in the spatial context of the spaces that enable members to sit together, exchange ideas and socialize. A member of OCCII manages to provide an empirical background to the argument by stating that “when I go to the place, I help out with just cleaning and packing stuff, setting up stuff and then, when there's a concert you meet like 4.35 o'clock with people from the sound and the bands, and then we cook for the artists and the bands. There are 10-15 hanging around and talking until the opening”. In a quite identical way, De Grote Weiver's kitchen cooks large meals for the community and the members of the centre so as to bring people together, while Stroomhuis organizes “dinner evenings where you just all have drinks together and socialize”. These meals instantiate a communal way of acting which is self-consciously enacted through “on-going performances of communal social practices, such the sharing of possessions and space, and the material adjustments or arrangements reinforcing them” (Yates, 2015, p.249). Based on these practices, members develop a sense of collective identity which is expressed through their strong commitment to the centre, as well as their common ground.

Accordingly, within the spatial formation of DIY centers, practices of community creation are facilitated. Through the discussion with several members of these DIY centers, it seems that they all take seriously into account the local

community and want to contribute to its growth by providing a safe space for socializing. Pier15 is always open to the local community, since its main function is to provide a platform to locals coming from Breda. “The main function we have for our region is to bring all those great creativities together and then give them a podium. If you look at our community today there's a lot of creativity, and we just go with the flow of what the community brings”. By supporting the community and giving space to local creative minds to flourish, Pier15 manages to create strong ties with local people and builds a relationship based on commitment, trust and solidarity. In that way, a community, created and reproduced around a DIY center, is kept alive not only in a shared vision about society, but also in practices of solidarity.

For De Grote Weiver, this communitarian aspect grounded on its spatial practices is also highlighted. One of its members states that “we are part of the whole community, and people know we exist and that we do stuff. We need physical bodies to turn up to do the events, to come in and eat the food, come and see the movies, come and listen to the music, come and buy the second-hand clothes, or just come and sit and meet other folks. You know, just hang out”. Based on people’s participation in spatial practices and events which are hosted in cultural spaces, shared affective experiences are created between the community and members of the spaces. These affective experiences of space are conditioned by previous experiences generated by someone’s existence in a place and produce feelings of belonging. Hence, De Grote Weiver and Pier15 create a communal emotion through their spatial practices and interaction, unifying a community (Hall & Ross, 2019).

c. Lockdowns and role of physical space

When the first lockdown restrictions were implemented, all the cultural centers tried to find ways to cope with the new reality and continue their activities in physical space. However, this was not achieved, as the fear of spreading the virus dominated every sphere of people’s social life. As a consequence, gigs, theatrical plays, dinners and other events organized by the DIY venues were postponed, as a member of OCCII admits; “you know the concert, the vegan kitchen and the gallery are closed for, like, you know, more than a year already, so this is shit and something we share with other spaces. It's also, I would say, more boring, and nothing is happening in the building”. Lockdown had severe consequences in the physical space of DIY centers,

as it removed the lively atmosphere and vibe from places where people were always welcome and could socialize within.

The most significant consequence was the absence of physical space and the element of physicality that gave the centres the opportunity to grow based on the communitarian sense that cultivated their openness as far as the visitors are concerned. This position is echoed by Anarchy Art which could not organize events anymore due to the restrictions. As a member of its team said, the physicality is missing, “just physical space, physical art to me, you know, this means just having a band in front of you, feeling that power you get seeing them on stage, you know, seeing them sweat”. A member of the Haunted House was on the same wavelength when stating that “we miss this place, which is now abandoned, because we spent iconic and most of our happiest moments in the city alongside the people who were around the squat”.

The one-and-a-half-meter distance, as well as the lockdown, did not allow people to talk to each other safely in a center or drink and exchange ideas with each other. The interactive element of physical space was taken away violently and spatial interaction became impossible. Hence, Memarovic and Langheinrich's (2013) needs of a physical space could not be met by the DIY centers any more. More specifically, the comfort and the relaxation that the spaces provided to their visitors and members were minimized since people had to wear masks and keep sufficient distance. People started to feel unsafe and uncomfortable, while this condition caused a feeling of alienation with the center.

Moreover, it was not possible for visitors to actively engage with the centers' activities anymore, as they were all postponed. Finally, centers were deprived of the element of discovery which is usually met by socialization practices. These needs of people when existing in physical space were highly minimized because of lockdown and stripped DIY centres away from their interactive character. A member from OCCII instantiates this argument by saying that “what I miss is mostly the interaction between people. You know, dancing together or drinking at a bar together, talking together and meeting new people, seeing new things, you know, that's more spontaneous and more intuitive. You know, this completely different experience is missing”. This absence of socialization and communication in physical space is

echoed by De Grote Weiver as well. According to one of its members, what made the center different from commercial venues and is now missing is that “within the community the center became a meeting place. A place where people could carry out and pull off ideas that they had in their heads and use this place as a space where they could let those ideas flow”.

During the first and the second lockdown, the daily routine of members changed as a consequence of the minimization of cultural activities. A member of Haunted House comments, “We had been existing for a while based on the day-to-day routines, and we had our lives. These changed and we were people in a falling down house”. Many members tried to stay involved with the center’s activities. However, this choice was difficult since they could not work from home. Several centers tried to go online and organized members meetings through Skype and Zoom. A member of Fort Van Sjakoo admits that the communication and daily routine of volunteers changed drastically: “We communicate over mailing lists, but it's not the same as talking with somebody in person”. The absence of physical space which did not let volunteers and members meet in person and have regular discussions about their lives as well as their affiliation with the center had severe consequences in their communication. For instance, OT301 decided to organize meetings through an online platform, but this choice caused tension between the members. A member of the center said that “lockdown definitely changed the communication because it's different to have a meeting online compared to one in a space. There, we sit together in a circle and talk about things. Now, it is more difficult because half the time you're watching a screen people are blacking out their videos, you don't know what they're doing, and if they're listening”.

This problematic online communication that happened because of the absence of physical space made a lot of volunteers and members become inactive and not prioritize the center’s needs anymore. Lockdown created a difficult reality where people stayed home and decided to invest their time in personal reproductive strategies, which would allow them to organize their survival outside the center. As a consequence, this stream of individualization caused severe cracks in the collective identity of members who are now divided into active and inactive, as a member from OCCII admits: “Everybody focuses on either their own lives, or other work, or other hobbies, or just try to keep sane. OCCII is not a priority anymore. Some people said

fuck it, I quit... And they quit their agency, or they were independent bookers who went back to universities or work at their fathers and they just don't give priority anymore to the DIY spaces”.

The fragmentation of collective identity practices during the lockdown is also expressed by a member of De Grote Weiver, which struggled in order to financially survive when all of its cultural activities stopped. Due to the lockdown, as he states, a lot of volunteers became inactive, as there was nothing to do, and this created an impression that De Grote Weiver can survive without its members. “We miss people”, he said, “who now think that the Weiver is for granted, they think it's always going to be there and function, but what they don't realize is that it takes a hell of a lot of work from a dedicated group of volunteers to keep the whole thing still running. What I miss sometimes is that other people get involved from outside”.

d. Dealing with absence of physical space

In order to overcome these difficulties that the lockdown caused, many centers decided to go online and organize live streams of gigs. Haunted House organized a radio show called Amoeba Fm “and we would be live streaming from the House, that was quite fun”. Similarly, De Grote Weiver did live streams with local bands from other parts of the Netherlands, which were quite successful. Vandenberg et al (2020) suggest that live streams during the first lockdown created a collective focus which turned into collective emotions. However, in the case of DIY centers, where their live-streams reached only a limited number of people, everyone acknowledged that this effort was just for gaining certain visibility. These live streams were not a regular activity that they would like to continue, as physical experiences cannot adequately “verbally translated to the online environment” (Vandenberg et al, 2020, p. 149).

Many volunteers stated that live streams are completely different; as De Grote Weiver state, “they are pretty weird because you don't have this interaction, you really see that the interaction is not there, and that the band is not used to that”. On the other hand, this absence of physicality was an important factor that made other venues not go online. Pier15 said that “the signals that we were getting from our community was like, it's not that interesting, we don't look at it, don't bother to do it, we just want to come here in person”. Similarly, Anarchy Art did not organize any live-stream since

they could not get “that atmosphere that we wanted. I mean, you will not get the familiarity, the bond, the connections”.

It becomes clear that, for many of the centers, there were significant difficulties in their effort to stay in touch with the local community. A member of Café de Ruimte comments that “it's hard to stay in touch with everybody. The biggest part of what we do is managing a community of musicians and you're seeing a lot of people a lot of times. We don't get that chance now”. The strong ties that Café de Ruimte has developed with the local community seem to fade away as the center is closed for months and this situation causes a feeling of fragmentation, not only to the center, but to the community as well. A member of the Anarchy Arts highlights this fragmentation by mentioning that “Lots of DIY communities are suffering so much from what's happening. We're kind of surviving by connecting and being connected and that is not happening right now”.

Moreover, all the interviewees directly stated that they miss their place being open to the community and serving a broader function. It is this communitarian aspect that distinguishes a DIY center from commercial venues. DIY centers did not function as profit-driven venues but as community-focused hubs which offered meals to those in need and provided space for those who were feeling loneliness or isolation. There, they could have a drink, attend a concert and talk with others. In this trend, lockdown caused a collective trauma that can only be ameliorated based on socialization practices and interaction in physical space. A member of OCCII was clear about that, stating, “I miss all my friends from the center. I'm alone behind the bar, you miss the whole routine, the human communication”. Complementing this feeling of isolation expressed by OCCII, a member of De Grote Weiver comments that the center used to be “a place where everybody felt at home and they now miss a lot”. This was manifested when the center decided to organize take away meals in order to support the community and try to help those in need who relied on De Grote Weiver for their living. “When we organized these meals”, a member argues, “people were just so happy to return and see someone again, and talk for five minutes”. However, after a few times, many “were like that doesn't really work for me, because the whole idea of the meal is that you come together to eat with others”. Hence, DIY centers could not function anymore as hubs of social activity, community support and exchange.

Similarly, a member of Anarchy Art expressed her fears regarding this absence of physical space and how it affects the community by stating: “We want to be this open place for people where they can go to and talk. I know a lot of people who are quite lonely right now because we are not open”. These concerns are shared with De Grote Weiver and one of its volunteers, acknowledging that “the mental health damage caused by this year of isolation will have profound effects for a number of years. If you keep taking people out of their stream you just don't know what's going to happen. With lots from the community, it went the wrong way”.

Conclusion/ Discussion

In light of the above, this thesis examined the role of physical space with respect to collective identity-making practices of members and volunteers affiliated with DIY cultural-political centers and squats around the Netherlands in times of lockdown. Undeniably, the lockdown has caused severe changes to people’s communication and socialization practices which need to be put under a scientific microscope in order for safe conclusions to be drawn. Therefore, this research project, based on a significant gap in the literature regarding the lockdown, decided to turn the epistemological spotlight from the consequences of lockdown in the financial or health field to the meso-level of identity, exploring the alterations that restrictions caused to the field.

Based on the theoretical and methodological framework, it can be stated that lockdown had severe repercussions on the collective identity practices of people affiliated with DIY centers. Restrictions and stay-at-home orders closed all centers and postponed their cultural activities. During this time, the necessity and importance of physical space were brought to the surface since, at that time, everyone was taking it for granted. According to Lave (1996), a community of practice is created when people are engaged in everyday activities in physical space. When the restrictions were implemented, the members of the centres, as well as people who were regularly visiting the places, could not organize and engage in any activities due to fear of spreading the virus.

Slowly but firmly, many volunteers started to become inactive based on the centers’ closure. Members prioritised their personal health and security, which created fragmentation in the collective identity forged during everyday interactions and communications prior to the lockdown. Communication difficulties started to appear

due to the use of online tools which could not substitute physical interaction. By not being able to perform their daily routine based on self-management, such as, cooking, cleaning, taking care of financial responsibilities, organizing cultural activities and having regular meetings, the members of cultural centers could not reproduce the radical social relations that they had formed. These social relations were based on solidarity, community, friendship and trust, and not on the vertical power structure that commercial music venues adopt.

Next to DIY centers, discursive communities were created as they could find a place that was open and inclusive to all. Within these places, local people and strangers could be their true selves, exchange ideas, socialize and be treated with respect. Thus, many centers were functioning as cultural hubs of socialization and interaction since they provided a range of activities that brought people together. However, restrictions took away the comfort, relaxation, active engagement and discovery (Memarovic and Langheinrich, 2013) of DIY centers and fragmented the community which lost its connection with the physical place. Despite the fact that many centers decided to go online and organize live streams, the physicality of space was missing from both the members and the community.

Concluding, throughout this thesis, the importance of physical space in people's identity and socialization practices is highlighted. Without the use of physical space, people cannot properly socialize, interact and form collective identities. Therefore, these collective identities are unable to become radicalized and distinguished from the dominant identities that capitalism cultivates. By bringing together insights from the social movement theory, the notion of identity formation and the conceptualization of DIY centers and community, this research created a theoretical framework, complemented by empirical data which suggests that there is an inherent interconnection between the physical space and the collective identity forged within it.

Although several intriguing findings were reported and concluding observations were presented in a way that stresses the role of physical space in identity formation, it should be highlighted that this research project adopted a micro-level approach. It put under examination only a small sample of DIY centers and squats situated in the Netherlands. A collection of a representative and a bigger sample was not possible

due to the unforeseen circumstance of COVID-19. Many members from squats or DIY centers were not willing to talk online, as they raised concerns regarding the management of their personal data. This situation was at times the outcome of the questionable legal status of several squats which exist in between the state.

Thus, as a possible limitation of the research, it can be said that the sample is not representative, as it consists solely of 10 DIY centers and squats. Thereby, no general conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, the findings are important because they provide enriched information on the condition of several cultural and political centers around the Netherlands. Additionally, the one-sided approach with respect to the data collection can be perceived as a possible limitation. Data was collected based on interviews with members and volunteers of DIY centers. A more rounded image regarding the research question could have been drawn if attendants of DIY centers and people of the community were available for interviews as well.

A future study should focus on the long-term plans and agenda that many centers have and how COVID-19 affected these plans. This study would allow the conceptualization of a post COVID-19 countercultural scene with respect to its alterations. Moreover, research upon the financial and legal status of centers should be conducted, because many spaces faced, and are still facing, severe financial problems due to the lockdown. The cultural activities were their only source of income and restrictions caused problems in their independence, as many DIY spaces accepted financial help from municipalities. As a concluding remark, I hope this study will help the under-studied sector of DIY cultural and political centers and squats in the Netherlands to achieve significant visibility among the sociological scientific field. DIY spaces do play a significant role in local people's socialization practice, identity formation and human interaction.

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Appendix A

Overview of participants

Participant	Gender	Occupation	Area of Residence	Center
1	fluid	student	Maastricht	Haunted House
2	male	Musician	Krommenie	De Grote Weiver
3	female	Personnel of DIY center	Krommenie	De Grote Weiver
4	male	Technician	Amsterdam	OT301
5	female	Silk factory employee	Eindhoven	Stroomhuis
6	male	Personnel of DIY center	Amsterdam	OCCII
7	male	Employee in private sector	Amsterdam	Fort can Sajckoo
8	male	Personnel of DIY center	Breda	Pier15
9	female	Personnel of DIY center	Rotterdam	Anarchy Art
10	male	Personnel of DIY center	Amsterdam	Café de Ruimte