

The Multible Geographies of Protest in Times of Crisis and Austerity: The Blockupy Movement's "Resistance in the Heart of the European Crisis Regime"

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Theory

- *Cultural political economy*: how do actors construe economic imaginaries discursively? (Sum & Jessop)
- *TPSN framework*: multidimensional spatial approach: Territory, Place, Scale, Network (Jessop, Brenner & Jones)
- Sympathetic but important criticism of TPSN:
 - Spatial > social; theorizing > doing
 - TPSN “primarily offers a means for assessment *of* contentious politics, rather than analyses of socio-spatial relations produced *by and in* contentious politics”; we must “refocus our investigations *to how activists respond to, shape, and alter the socio-spatial relations* that produce the grievances, the identities, and the strategies (and outcomes) of contentious politics” (Martin)

Research question

- *How do subaltern actors in Blockupy discursively (and performatively) construe of a multidimensional economic and sociospatial imaginary?*
- Data and method: discursive material and participant observation
- Analytical premises: Blockupy as *network*, austerity Europe as *territory*, the ECB/Frankfurt as *place* of contention

Network: the Blockupy coalition

- Network: flat ontology; horizontally connected nodes
- Constructing and reproducing network
 - (1) Importance of (centralized) place-based action
 - Genschel: there is a need for "strategically decided central and common spaces on the streets. Through those we can experience what it means to confront power together, experience a lively transnational physical space, and work for medium-term goals. [...] it is important to share physical space in confrontations on the streets and the squares. Further, it is important, since – given the transnational character of state and corporate power – one of our main objectives should be to bring back onto the agenda the crises that are supposedly solved[.]"
 - (2) Importance of common narrative
 - Main strategic question: how to "translate separate struggles into a transnational movement" and "frame our heterogeneous struggles within and against the newly consolidated governmental regime based on the status quo of austerity and its enforcing institutions"?
 - Answer: counter-narrative around austerity and the ECB
 - Dialectically intertwined

Territory: austerity Europe

- Territory: sovereignty and demarcation; globalization and crisis management as *reterritorialization*, not (just) *detrterritorialization* (c.f. Brenner)
- Europe 'from above' (Mario Draghi)
 - Against a split Europe; "formal sovereignty" of the nation-state
 - For a united, integrated Europe, ruled by "effective sovereignty" of austerity
- Europe 'from below' (Blockupy)
 - Nation-state not primary terrain
 - "We don't want to go back to national sovereignty"; "Europe is our minimum space of political action and initiative"
- Continued importance of the nation-state: unequal distribution of power and wealth on territory and in network

Place: ECB/Frankfurt (I)

- Place: heterogenous, contested, relational, symbolic
- Draghi: the ECB as a territorial unifier
 - “The euro, our single currency, has become the most tangible symbol of European integration [...] This building will inevitably become known as the ‘house of the euro’. [...] The building is a symbol of the best of what Europe can achieve together.”
 - “But it is also a symbol of why we can never again risk to split apart. We are standing here today in what used to be Frankfurt’s former wholesale fruit and vegetable market, a state-of-the-art functional building from the 1920s that has largely been preserved and incorporated into the new structure. Between 1941 and 1945, more than 10,000 Jewish people from Frankfurt and nearby were deported from here to the concentration camps. A memorial on the east-side of the building has been built to remind us, and those who come after us, of deeds that cannot and must never be forgotten.”

Place: ECB/Frankfurt (II)

- Blockupy: the ECB as a symbol of a split Europe
 - “The heart of the European crisis regime”
 - “This intimidating architecture of power is a perfect symbol of the distance between the political and financial elites and the people”
 - The ECB is “one of the central agents of the blackmail and the normalization of austerity”
 - The protest as “the radical critique of [the ECB’s] work – the planning, enforcement, the normalization of austerity measures”
 - A protest that “hold[s] the ECB accountable for its policies and to powerfully demand a different political direction”

Conclusion

- Privileging one sociospatial category means losing sight of complexity
- Network, territory and place all matter in and of themselves...
- ... but they are also intertwined
 - Network: resisting territory; contingent on place-based action
 - Territory: contingent on place-based (re-scaled) organization
 - Place: site for organization from above and resistance from below

Thank you for your attention!

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Comments are welcome!

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