

how to occupy a building in zureich

squat

the

city



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# Chapter 1

# prologue

So you figured that living in Zureich would be nice, but you just can't afford rent? There's an easy solution: just occupy a house! Thoughts of fear probably cross your mind, the "what if"s, the "why should I"s and a general feeling of "isn't that dangerous and will make me end up in jail"... Well, I have news for you: Squatting buildings is free (almost), easy (or at least easier than finding affordable housing in this hellhole) and (believe it or not) the cops can't stop you (at least not successfully).

As affordable as it may be, squatting requires effort, time and should be attempted in groups. Though it may be relatively easy squatting remains a challenge without guarantee for success (especially not within a given time frame).

As you certainly noticed (either upon arrival in Zureich or when traveling abroad the first time) Zureich is so rich, it could be made of cash itself. In fact, people are so blinded by money, that even after more than 40 years of continuous housing crisis in this town, people still gaslight themselves into believing that it a) is just a temporary problem, b) the market will fix it, c) this is just because (insert scapegoat here) came and used up all the good and cheap housing, d) politics will soon find a way to fix it, or e) everything could be much worse because after all we live in the best country on earth and everybody else is off way worse than we will ever be.

On the other hand, truth lies openly on the streets, clearly visible for everybody at all times: There are always empty houses capable to provide shelter—some only for short-ish amounts of time, others for years or even decades.

## 1.1 about this booklet

This booklet does not aim to be a full-fledged comprehensive guide on successful occupations. It rather tries to get you (and your group) in the right head-space for such an attempt. It's about getting you to ask the right questions, hinting you towards alternative options and ideas, thus preparing you for an adventure you might have never attempted before.



your next home?

Thus nobody takes any liability for anything written or published hereby. Always do your own research, ask your friends and acquaintances, read up on shit. I merely try to point you in the right direction, take some anxiety you may or may not have and help you get started settling in this too-rich-to-fail hell-hole.

This booklet is written in English with the intention of lowering the difficulty to settle down and moving to Zureich to as many people as possible. Seriously, you guys, it is unbearable with these rich folks here. Please come and save us!

# Chapter 2

# spot

First of all you need a vacant building, henceforth called *the target*. Due to the nature of squatting different evaluation rules apply for occupation compared to renting. It is solid advice to not prioritize *exactly where* you would want to live (both district/region and type of house). You may find yourself living in a mansion far up on mount Zureich, building your own rooms in some unused industrial building or find yourselves move into an abandoned high-rise or breathe new life into an old building.

So best advice is to open your horizon! Roam through all districts and neighborhoods and continuously evaluate all options and possibilities—keep your eyes and mind open!

## 2.1 finding vacant buildings

Before you actually break into a building, you should be very confident that the target is actually vacant and unused. You may never be 100% sure—especially if you have no possibility of looking inside of it, talking to the proprietors (without raising suspicion or exposing yourself)—but there are means of reassurance.

### indications

Sometimes signs are rather obvious! For example:

- ragged, untended gardens,
- shuttered windows all day (and year) long,
- these poles indicating intentions of rebuilding houses are on display or

- no signs of use [e.g. no name] at the letter-box or the doorbell hint towards vacancy.



indications for planned construction

Other indications can be obituary notices, unhappy cats strolling around a place (that after a family moved to another part of town return to their former homes), well thought out appliances like timer clocks and motion detectors attached to lights, which either provoke the impression of a house not being vacant or fend off interested visitors.

Take note of all suspicious buildings to compare them later on. Rest assured that none of these indices are clear signs for vacancies, but they may be. Skim districts by bike or on walks, gaze at the buildings: you will soon develop an eye for these things.

## evidence

Sometimes it is even easier! If, for example,

- you hear of renters being evicted from a building (whether the proprietors intend to re-build or renovate),



- it is winter and there laid snow for weeks but no traces of any use of the building can be seen or
- neighbors assure you the place has been vacant for years

you should value these hints as clear evidence.

## further information

As soon as you have possible targets where you might (hopefully soon) be moving into, you should filter carefully.

Since occupying buildings can get tiresome with repetition, you may want to opt for mid- to long-term solutions. If a building is

- just about to get demolished or
- known to have been occupied and evicted multiple times before

drop it.

To adequately decide on where to try your luck, you will need further information. Luckily the modern nation-state is not only known for inner-class rivalries and putting good folks to prison while guarding the interests and lives of the enemies of the class but also for its extensive administrative bliss.

## ownership / land registry office

The land registry office (Grundbuchamt) of a district keeps track of lots and parcels. It is part of their *job* to tell you about ownership of a house at a specified address.

You can find out about the responsible office through this handy website here<sup>1</sup>. If that fails, you may just call one of the land registry offices of the city of Zureich and get redirected if you caught the wrong one.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cadastre.ch/de/cadastralinfo-online-zu-grundstueckinformationen>



**district architect's office**

Now that you know *who* owns the target, you want to find out what they're up to: why is the building empty?

If there are indications that the owners intend, plan or wish to do construction works at the site, get in touch with the *Kreisarchitekturbüro*. They too come with a handy form for finding the responsible office<sup>2</sup>. Call and ask about the intentions and the current state of construction at the target's site. Don't spill the beans by introducing yourself as potential future squatter of the house—as this could harm your intentions and obstruct your plans. Just make up some excuse (they shouldn't care too much about *who* is calling, for it is their job to give out information), why you as—for example—some neighbor want information.



opportunity becomes challenge

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<sup>2</sup> <https://gis.stadt-zuerich.ch/intersecttools/kreisarchitekt.aspx>



## 2.2 green flags, red flags

So what exactly are we looking for after having amassed this pile of information? There are conditions that favor successful long-term squatting solutions (green flags) and inherent vice that may prevent you from reaching your goal at all (red flags).

### **green flags**

Listed in order of descending saturation and also (possible) course of events (in order).

#### **old, nostalgic owners**

Maybe you find a lot with old owners who refuse to sell their property and can not afford (or are unwilling to) re-build or renovate their old home. It may take years (or decades even) until they die, delaying your potential future eviction.

Go for it!

#### **inheritance battles**

With owner's death come inheritance battles. It is an important Swiss tradition for disputes between siblings to be fought in one final battle after which they finally break ties. Law dictates that inheritance be split upon agreement of all heirs: if none of them can buy out the others and they won't agree to keep (and use) the target themselves they will have to decide on selling. But maybe some have money and want to buy out the others, so they *only* have to agree on fair sums, special rights, etc.

It is obvious why this process usually takes ages: Let's go!

#### **sale**

If owners decide to sell their property it can be considered a clear sign of having lost interest (or funds) to use the lot themselves.

Selling a property may not take too much time, but as soon as new owners come along they will first have to make up their minds: what should be built, what can they afford, who might invest in their venture, etc.

After the sale is the early stages of construction planning: Don't

wait up!

### **planning stages of construction**

In Zureich construction takes ages! Well, to be fair, the act of constructing is rather fast, but from idea to actually starting building houses takes a while. It is a well-known fact that from the mere intentions of (current or even future) proprietors until the destruction of an empty building and breaking ground many—often three or more—years pass.

### **red flags**

Ordered by increasing risk.

### **denkmalschutz**

Preservation of sites of historic interest (*Denkmalschutz*) is one of the reasons why the cops may evict you early on. Though not impossible, squatting a cite under protection requires some advanced level of sure instinct, confidence and diplomacy skills so beginners are discouraged from the attempt.

Be aware of the fact when attempting.



off limits?

**dubious proprietors**

Owners are supposed to obey the law as any other citizen. And—not unlike us—proprietors see some wiggle-room within the liberties our society grants them. Be careful: exposing yourself through illegal or gray-area activities may leave the impression that you are fair game. They may call their friends to "help" dealing with the situation. Especially houses in [former] use of illegal [or gray area] activities may come with unreasonable and extraordinarily defensive proprietors.

Watch out and take care!

**district 1**

For some obscure historic reason the city police thinks district 1 is off-limits - squatting in the old part of town or by the lake may result in extraordinary and/or violent official reaction which asks for adequate preparation.

Be cautious!



# Chapter 3

# prepare

preparation is better than rent

—ancient proverb

Preparation encompasses acquisition, group-building and planning. Do not only think about what you want to achieve and how this would optimally happen, but also on possible failures, probable occurrences and handling such mishaps. Safety of each and every member of your group is key.

## 3.1 group

Acting as a group is essential. Nobody can break into a building, hold it while fencing off foes (e.g. proprietor and their agents, police), while also managing their own personal life (hobbies, studies, other political activism, people, job, etc.) all by themselves.

Get together in a group adequate for the size of the target or find targets adequate for the group you want to act as.

If you have a target that is way beyond your capabilities (size-wise) you may want to cooperate with other groups, although I discourage beginners from such ventures.

### **social challenges and cohesion**

Acting in groups can be tricky at times. The composition of individuals yields versatile challenges depending on who is participating how.

The essence is social cohesion: you can only act as a team. Make

sure everybody feels heard (in a group you must always listen more than talk yourself) and find ways to elaborate consensus.

Be aware that not everything must be decided unanimously, that not all discussions must be held and finished as soon as they come up, that you don't need to become best friends with everyone and that in our metier affairs usually remain under constant construction.

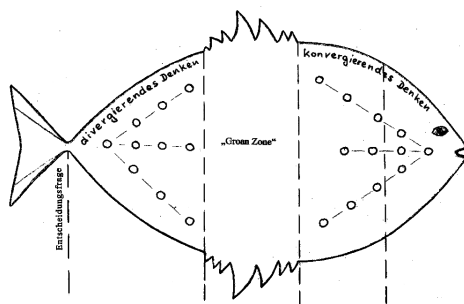
Bottom line: Get to know and learn to read each other, express your feelings, fears and desires! After all—when everything goes right— you will live with these people.

### finding solutions to problems

It is a common problem that solutions are being defined before problem spaces are explored. Often the first solution coming up is neither the only one nor the best.

The *Konsensfisch*-method can help you tackle issues that first seem overwhelming. It's a relatively easy recipe:

1. define a goal (name the problem),
2. openly talk about different needs, opinions, interests, etc. (diverging phase),
3. find possible solutions and
4. elaborate consent (converging phase).



fishy consent in action



### **voting for consent**

To make sure everyone in a group feels heard (some people are less talkative than others) establish a voting system to differentiate levels of agreement. Use color-coded cards for in-person meetings, define reaction emojis for chat-rooms. Define the following levels of agreement:

- agree with intent to take lead or work the issue,
- agree but no time or energy to invest in the matter,
- indifferent,
- disagree but ok if others make it happen without own involvement,
- veto.

The advantage should be clear: in addition to agreement you instantly get to know who can invest their time and energy.

## **3.2 plan**

Planning includes foreseeable, necessary activities as well as circumstances not necessarily (or: hopefully not) emerging: You will have to get into the target, then you probably want to barricade yourselves in there and hold out for some time (at least until the cops were there, the proprietor is informed and you feel safe to transition to a more normal phase of "just living somewhere").

You will want to think about best (and worst) times for operation, clothing, tools and logistics.

### **risk assessment**

Assess risk. Can goons show up and try to kick you out of the house themselves? Pay attention to barricading: do you need pre-cut boards for every window and door on the ground floor? How many electric drills should you bring to barricade the whole place in a comfortably short time? Are neighbors extra tacky and just waiting for opportunities to call the police? Choose appropriate timing for your actions. Are you uncertain about the break-in?

Research and acquire necessary tools to enter without a hassle and learn how to operate them.

### **failure**

Failure is imminent to life, so you better prepare for it. Think about possible failure in your plans, at least once for every step of action. Many failures can be fended off elegantly with adequate preparation, others may require to abort the mission as soon as possible. Discuss them in your group, define procedures and roles to observe the process and call for disbanding if—for example—cops arrive earlier than expected.

Solid action leaves little to no chance for repression. Lost tools and a quick run are always preferred over questioning, jail time, fines or deportation.

### **physical tools**

There is little sense in listing all the necessary tools—this depends completely on the target. You may not need any physical tools if you for some reason get a hold of a key to the building or a door or window is unlocked or wide open during some reconnaissance mission.

Depending on the target, you may want to choose adequate clothing: Are you operating at night or during office hours? Are you disguising as some workers or architects? As security officers?

Educate yourself on adequate use, train together, share your knowledge. There is no sense in postponing the action just because the only one who knows how to operate a crowbar is sick.

# Chapter 4

# act

First you get into the target. Then you communicate your intention—with banners for the neighbors and cops, with a phone call, an email, a fax or other means to the proprietors. Then you barricade yourselves. Depending on the situation you should first hang the banners or barricade the house.

## 4.1 breaking in

Try to prevent unnecessary damage, as you may need to repair it yourselves or live with the damage you caused. Take special care not to leave traces hinting the cops towards *who* personally damaged what. In case of criminal prosecution this matters a lot: a group of people can not be held accountable for the damage of a window or a door and it is not that easy to proof guilt without clear evidence or witnesses.

Always use gloves when handling tools like crowbars or breaking hammers, get rid of fingerprints on objects of interest or remove them from the site as soon as possible.

## 4.2 handling cops

This is the easy part: inform them (don't forget to obscure your identities) that you are not burglars but occupy the place and that you yourselves will manage the situation with the proprietors. This usually suffices! There were cases of roguish cops that tried to evacuate the building on the spot, that try to vocally pressure



try to use the right tools for the right jobs

squatters, threaten or actually inflict violence on activists, but that *should not* happen and has been rare. Don't hesitate to start filming them if they start with any funky business.

### **cops come, the situation escalates**

First and foremost: keep calm! Don't unnecessarily escalate the situation - keep yourself and your peers safe.

If you are detained and questioned, keep the following rules in mind:

1. Nobody talks to the police. You are not obliged to say anything, except your name, your date of birth and your residence address.
2. Nobody talks to the cops. Not you, not your bestie, not your uncle Charles.
3. Really. Don't talk to the bulls.
4. No talkie-talk, no ratting out. You are not smarter than they are—well, maybe you are. But this won't help you in that particular situation. All they want is to get any information so they can use it against you and your friends.

It is a good idea to know your rights by heart and to have the contact of one (or more) lawyers handy.

Your most essential rights for this venture are as follows:

- Cops can't detain you for more than 24 (48 on weekends) hours without a judge ruling.
- Breaking into a building is not punishable per se. Laws you may break are trespassing [Art. 186 StGB: *Hausfriedensbruch*, for which a landlady *first* has to report you], property damage [Art. 144 StGB: *Sachbeschädigung*, which you have to be convicted for] and violence or threats against officers [Art. 285 StGB: *Gewalt oder Drohung gegen Behörden und Beamte*].

Don't let the bulls provoke you to actions you will regret. Remember: you're acting from a moral high ground! You are trying to find a place to live and even the cops know how hard that is. Why not bond with them over the social misery we all have to endure?

More often than not they need the bogeyman to play bad cop all night.

### **how Zureich handles occupations**

Official regulations of Zureich can be found in this code of practice<sup>1</sup>

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## 4.3 handling proprietors

You will need to get in touch with the proprietors. Inform them of what happened, who you are, what your intentions are and how you will proceed with situation—i.e. that you will live there until demolition but are willing to pay for running costs that you cause. Depending on the proprietors (simple people, big corporations, etc.) you may want to address them differently. Simple people types often care for a more personal touch whereas corporations pay people to endure hostile to life work conditions who could not care less for *humane* communication in a squatter group's occupation notice. Maybe try to stay informal and tend a neutral or even friendly tone—or don't, I am not your mum.

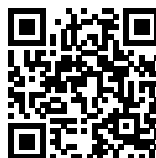
### **the landlord's goons show up**

Landlords—especially when frustrated from the official police's inability to handle the situation in a way they could favor—may over-react and send their goons to the target.

Try to deescalate while making sure you stay safe. Nobody wants anybody to get hurt over Zureich's housing situation and nobody needs to meet again years later in front of some court. Try to find solutions with the hotheads, try to appease them while keeping yourselves safe and secure.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://merkblatt-hausbesetzung.ch/>



If the situation remains uncontrollable and the landlords are unwilling to compromise consider moving on.

### **proprietors want traceable identities**

Sometimes proprietors choose to express their disrespect by directly asking for personal identification—don't fall for it. The only use for them is to have some idea of whom to criminally charge when the time has come.

### **example letter to the proprietors**

Here's what a letter to a proprietor could look like:

Hi

Yesterday night we successfully occupied your house at Somestr. 13. We are a small group of artists who were unable to find affordable housing in this city, so when we found out your house has been uninhabited for the past 2 years we took the chance and moved in.

It would be great if we came to an agreement in regard to bills you will most certainly be receiving—we do not wish to cause you any problems.

Kind regards

Or—if you prefer—in Swiss German:

ey du tätschbire

du glaubsch wohl bisch de sibesiech, hä!? ligschaft erbe aber kei ahnig ha was demit afange... was zum fick!? s gaht nöd allne so guet wie dir i dere dräcksstadt. wohnrum isch es grundbedürfnis und sött allne zur verfüegig stah. da mir ois no sälber um e fairi nutzig vo bestehende hüser kümmere münd hämmer gester abig dini hütte ade lrgendestr. 67 bsetzt.

UwU





# Chapter 5

# epilogue

Are you still with me? Do you still think it's a good idea to occupy buildings in Zureich? If you just read the whole booklet in one go you may think of all the problems that emerge, the time and energy it will consume and all the issues that you will face. But rest assured: it's proven to still be faster, cheaper and less painful than trying to find affordable housing.



unity is key

However you choose to go forward keep the most important things in mind: don't rush! Take your time, gather as a group, bond and act as one with a common goal.

Collective, anti-capitalist action poses enough challenges and threats as it is, so be at peace with your fellows, keep your mind free and your eyes open, don't let them get to you and remember:

alone they make you one

—Zureich autonomous proverb



Even though this may not be a direct step towards a global socio-economic revolution don't forget that questioning the idea of private property through collectivization shakes the pillars of capitalist society. Another world is possible! A society without commodification of each and every aspect of our lives, co-existence without the need for financial incentives, an economy designed for the satisfaction of people's needs instead of the profit of a capitalist class. As long as we are doomed to live in this capitalist hellhole every deed shall be at least a patch to ease the prevailing pain but at best a step towards a better world.

Always be excellent to each other, never fall for the bullshit and keep it real!

Zureich, September 2025





live better  
without rent

start  
squatting  
today