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## *Locating Cultural Practice: Territorialisation and Legitimation in Prague's Cultural Centres<sup>1</sup>*

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Based on ethnographic research, this article explores how space territorialisation is practised by cultural producers and, in particular, Prague's cultural centres. Fieldwork began as insider research. Conducted in two popular venues — Fabrika in the city centre and Kotelna in a peripheral socialist modernist housing estate — the fieldwork is examined through a perspective combining the spatial dimensions of cultural practices legitimisation and Kärholm's concept of territorialisation. I argue that such a strategy enables an observer to identify basic regimes of belonging, professionalism and sustainability whereby the competence of local 'cultural intermediaries' and their right to occupy space is demonstrated, shared, contested and negotiated.

**Keywords:** City of Prague; cultural industries; cultural capital; space; territorial (re)production.

### **Introduction**

It was an evening in early November 2020. The second wave of the pandemic was on the rise in the Czech Republic, and I was interviewing Samuel, the unofficial head of Fabrika,<sup>2</sup> a cultural centre that has legally rented, settled and transformed the courtyard and garages of an abandoned industrial building in the centre of Prague. Samuel — a philosophy graduate and the project's spokesperson — leads a fluid collective of more than 60 people. The interview was online. Samuel was sitting in front of his laptop on the floor of the former workspace that Fabrika uses for exhibitions. We mostly discussed Fabrika's current plans and negotiations with the owner of the building — the Czech state. For Fabrika, being forced to leave was an omnipresent threat. But Samuel also reflected on his production team, its social and cultural background and on general relations with other venues.

Our interview was interrupted several times when Samuel's phone rang. Each time it was the same staff member asking Samuel for advice about buying wooden materials for the maintenance of the cultural centre. After the third call, I asked a final question: 'Where would you like to see Fabrika in two years?' Samuel replied, 'That's a good question [...] Would you mind if I interrupted our interview for a moment? I really need to write down a shopping list for the guy I was speaking to. I'm really sorry'. 'Of course, no worries', I said. And for the next several minutes, we shared our quiet 'online office', sitting calmly in front of our cameras. A few minutes later, Samuel made his final phone call and dictated to his colleague all the things that needed to be bought. He then added, 'I chose a four-metre stick so you'll be able to fit it into the car.' He said goodbye and, shifting his attention towards me, started to answer the question I had almost forgotten:

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2 The names of individuals and venues are anonymised.

‘When local urban planners asked me for a crucial recommendation concerning a public tender for Depo<sup>3</sup>, I repeatedly emphasised the contract length. It makes a big difference if you can count on a one- or two-year contract as we now have at Fabrika. Altogether we’ve had five years of rent-free contracts. The owner is still threatening us with a commercial tender, which can start whenever they want it to. An ideal contract is for ten years. In my opinion, a decade enables you to create a serious strategy, including a coherent and meaningful business plan as well as a project with a vision of sustainability. I would sincerely love to stay here for ten years. But that is only one point. The second point is that the current situation prevents us from engaging in any long-term planning. Luckily for us, we’re hardworking, handy and smart. We are able to transform waste material into usable stuff. We use things ten times. We use them again and again, and that is the reason we haven’t fallen apart. What’s more, we are developing [...]. I would really love to plan several years in advance, to be able to decide that next year we’re going to have a big screening or a particular concert. Safe planning in advance helps to avoid devastating consequences, such as what happened with last year’s concert by the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra. It cost us a lot of effort, and, in the end, the outcome was so bad that we had to cover the expenses through earnings from beer and other stuff. The Prague Philharmonic Orchestra did not turn out to be an ideal partner for such an unusual outdoor performance.

What is also crucial is being able to maintain the whole building. The owner, the Czech state, should allow us to repair and maintain the rest of the complex, at least for some time.<sup>4</sup> It would be a win-win situation for us as well as for the state. For us, there will be more options to fulfil the potential of the building both spatially and conceptually. For the state, it increases the likelihood of taking it back in far better condition. If we had ten years to be able to get the building into good shape and transform it into a coherent complex again, we would make meaningful use of every last square metre of the barracks. We are already prepared for that.’

Samuel always has a plan, and he seems to do everything in Fabrika. Later, as we continued talking, it became more and more clear that Samuel was already thinking of his postponed duties, so I wrapped up the interview in order to let him go.

A few days later, when I went through the recording and notes, I realised that this part of the interview revealed his practice, roles and relationship to Fabrika in multiple analytical contexts. His eclectic performance and concepts uncovered important aspects of creating, maintaining and negotiating the care and operation and legitimacy of a cultural centre through both physical labour and cultural production knowledge and skills. Therefore, his actions and ideas can be interpreted (perceived) as an interconnected set of territorialisation practices which require and demonstrate a certain level of cultural competence.

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3 Depo is a former tram and trolleybus depot. The Prague Transport Company has not used it for nearly twenty years. The city recently introduced a plan to transform it into a cultural centre.

4 The rest of the industrial building includes forty thousand square meters of abandoned rooms and offices that were vacated in 2001.

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In what are referred to as the cultural and creative industries (Gibson 2003, O'Connor 2010), factories and other industrial buildings and centres remain an important feature of contemporary modes of urban entrepreneurialism (Florida 2002, Harvey 1989, 2005, see also DeMuynck 2019). The creative industries are therefore based on claims that they bring life back to the city's abandoned or neglected areas through leisure time activities, concerts, cinema, exhibitions, workshops and so on. In critical urban studies, those processes have been explored using terms such as gentrification (De Sena and Krase 2015, Huse 2014, Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, Slater 2021, Smith 1979), art-washing (Tunali ed 2021), displacement effects (Marcuse 1985, Atkinson 2015), the creative class (Florida 2002, 2017) or authenticity in public spaces (Zukin 2010). Such venues shape urbanites' relationship both to leisure time in the city and the consumption/experience of the omnipresent, commodified cultural production. In this way, they therefore create a framework for their legitimisation through the (re)production, sharing and spreading of particular cultural tendencies. This is why I would like to explore which features of (un)conscious demonstrations of individual and collective appropriation can be identified in the processes of the socio-material production of cultural centres. In other words, I seek to demonstrate how and why a place or space is territorialised and legitimised through the production of cultural activities and programmes, that is, through specific cultural practices.

For the purpose of this article, two cultural centres are analysed as one strategically-situated urban field: the previously mentioned Fabrika and the Kotelna community centre, located in a modernist housing estate on the periphery of Prague. I assume that both cultural venues are physically and symbolically spatialised (Lefebvre 1991, Soja 1989) and territorialised (Kärrholm 2012) by their participants' conceptualisations and practice originating in a wider field of values and tastes. This means that the producers, the maintainers and other such individuals act consistently with their origin and status as well as the constellation of their actual social and cultural competence created around/within/among those collectives and venues.

### **Fieldwork, Methodology and Theory**

The data used for this article come from fieldwork conducted in Prague between 2017–2021. Within this period, I was able to realise hundreds of hours of observation as well as more than twenty unstructured or semi-structured interviews. The findings presented are part of the research project 'Cultural Capital: Legitimation Mechanisms and the Reproduction of Cultural Hierarchies'. The interdisciplinary research team is based at Charles University and consists of two sociologists and two anthropologists carrying out interviews, media analysis and fieldwork among young urban citizens.

My research develops in the context of urban anthropology (Pardo and Prato eds 2012, Pardo and Prato 2018) and the mainstream literature on legitimacy and the complex dynamics of legitimisation (Pardo and Prato eds 2018: 1-8; 2019); in particular, I describe the use of cultural practices to 'legitimise' the appropriation of urban space. This context provides a suitable framework for deeper insight into these complex urban phenomena. In other words, ethnography in the city represents a fruitful way of recounting current issues in urban

environments through an emphasis on the intersectionality of such phenomena. Within these processes, the city itself is almost impossible to define. In her search for an appropriate definition and perspective on the urban, Prato (2015) suggests that city should be taken rather as urban community, a Weberian ‘ideal type’ that consists of multiple spheres: *urbs*, *polis* and *civitas*; that is, the physical built-up space, the social association of citizens and the political community (Prato 2015: 19-20). Within this epistemological position, one is easily able to trace partial yet multiple connections between cultural practices (on the level of *polis* and *civitas*) and the territorialisation of space (level of *urbs*).

My fieldwork focuses on two niches in this ideal-typical city and methodologically refers to what Marcus labelled strategically-situated (urban) ethnography (Marcus 1995: 110), a softer ‘foreshortened’ version of multi-sitedness where the time-space scale is not so geographically dispersed. However, the ethnographer’s task is still to follow the phenomena, to be virtually present ‘there, there and there’ (Hannerz 2003). It is designed to allow the researcher to shift among the fieldwork sites and follow strategies, practices, concepts, things or ideas while crossing spatiotemporal boundaries and to incorporate macroprocesses as well (see Falzon ed 2009). It opens a meta-space where all significant findings that originate in spatially detached urban places can be put together. It creates a new space for examining what the socio-material fields surrounding Fabrika and Kotelna community centres have in common.

Both centres were the loci of some of my previous research activities. Thus, my research in these places can be defined as insider research. Close fieldwork relationships can bring both conceptual and ethical benefits as well as problems, especially when it comes to issues of intimacy, trust and the question of publicising some findings.<sup>5</sup>

My decision was however not simply instrumental. I chose Fabrika and Kotelna primarily because both venues are (trans)locally recognisable, and they represent a typical and visible example of mainstream cultural meeting points which fuse together a wide range of cultural supply. My fieldwork in Kotelna started in 2014 when I was hired as community coordinator. The goal of the applied researcher position was to analyse local practices and report on the cultural needs of local communities to Kotelna’s production team. When the project was finished in 2016, Kotelna remained a long-term focus of my academic interests.

The inner world of Fabrika’s production was opened to me in 2018 when we chose the former factory’s workshop as a venue for an anthropological exhibition focusing on migration to modernist housing estates in Prague. My current ethnographic research into both urban spaces started in early 2019. Its theoretical setting revealed new perspectives on the sharing and negotiation of cultural competences within and through the occupied spaces of cultural production. Let me briefly then describe the stories of Fabrika and Kotelna.

#### *Kotelna Community Centre*

Kotelna, located on the modernist estate of Dlouhé Lávky, was established in 2013. The building itself is a boiler station which was designed as a heating source for the surrounding prefabricated buildings but was never used for its intended purpose. Throughout the 1990s and

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<sup>5</sup> Hence why both the toponyms and names of my communicative partners are anonymised.

2000s, it was used as a storage and car service facility. In 2012, the new mayor of the local municipality started to implement a vision of cultural development based on strategic community development, creative placemaking policies and participation. As a result of this new cultural strategy, the municipally-owned building was chosen to be transformed into a community space.

The pioneers of Kotelna's cultural production came from two different backgrounds. The first group gathered around skateboarding subculture and the production of local sporting events. In 2013, they had been locally active for more than five years. The second group consisted of incoming cultural producers and staff gathered around the designated director of a new cultural organisation established by the municipality to ensure stable funding and the development of local cultural centres. Together these groups made a coalition which predetermined Kotelna's further development and also its future instability.

Kotelna was projected to be the cornerstone of the cultural facilities to be located in the municipality. Nonetheless, the first years of its existence could be best described as a struggle to reconstruct a neglected building while, simultaneously, desperately trying to establish a good relationship with the local inhabitants. In 2016, the reconstruction was finished. The cultural centre opened and experienced a few years of local acclaim and relative stability. Things changed again in 2018. After the municipal elections, the long-time director left his position in the cultural organisation for a political career elsewhere. Kotelna's staff was therefore left with an interim director who was immediately forced to negotiate with a new municipal council. Disunity within the local cultural milieu then started to reappear, which in early 2020 led to significant changes in Kotelna's cultural direction.

#### *Fabrika Cultural Centre*

Fabrika started to transform a former industrial factory on the edge of the Prague city centre in 2016 when a group of cultural producers — who had previously led another successful but unstable venue—negotiated a peppercorn rent of 1 CZK for two years with the Czech Ministry of Justice. From then on, a diverse group of people around Samuel and his wife Delilah started to use, reconstruct and maintain part of the factory, especially its spacious yard, workshops and garage. The fluid production team consists of people who produced a previous venue, a few student scouts, former drug addicts and other people recruited via the snowball effect. After a pivotal year, Fabrika established itself as one of the most popular cultural and recreation centres in Prague. The large and flexible factory building offered a multifunctional space that satisfies the needs of several target customer groups. Inclusivity, affordability and a low threshold is the main cultural framework of Fabrika's production ideology. This influences its financial sustainability model, which is 95% based on income from food, drinks, services and programme. Only 5% of Fabrika's budget comes from public subsidies. At the city-wide level, the cultural centre has become widely known as an example of a successful and inclusive venue that eventually also became a destination sought out by tourists. In 2018, this story of success was interrupted by a new series of events. Without prior notice, the Ministry of Justice handed the building over to the State Property Maintenance Office (ÚZSVM), which later launched a tender for a new commercial operator. Fabrika's team was put under pressure because the proposed rent for the building was around 100,000 CZK (2,600 EUR) per month. For them,

such a monthly rent is unaffordable. Therefore, for the last three years, Samuel and his friends have been trying (so far without any visible effect) to negotiate with the state, the city and other institutions, advocating for the centre's contemporary and future (trans)local importance.

### **Tracing Similarities: Territorialisation and Legitimation of Cultural Practice**

We might seem to be looking at two separate cases. Fabrika and Kotelna, after all, have different institutional origins. Kotelna is funded by the municipality and located on the periphery of Prague, whereas Fabrika is an entrepreneurial venue in the very heart of the city. But there are several similarities which make simultaneous analysis of both centres extremely productive.

The first analytically important circumstance is that both centres were, from their very beginnings, led by people of similar social and cultural status. These actors can easily be labelled members of a 'creative class' (Florida 2002, 2017). These ideal-type inhabitants of post-industrial cities are best defined by variable work strategies, progressive liberal and globalist values and production strategies oriented towards various modes of cultural production (in the art, design or marketing industries). Recent research also identifies these individuals as significant agents within the processes of gentrification and displacement (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, Florida 2017). Despite the trendiness of the creative class label, one has to note also the broader and more neutral Bourdieuan expression 'cultural intermediaries', which represents a 'group of taste makers and need merchants whose work and parcel is part of an economy that requires the production of consuming tastes and dispositions' (Bourdieu 1984 quoted by Smith Maguire 2014: 15). Scott (2017) sees it today as an ephemeral group that disseminates symbolic goods (ibid: 61). These symbolic goods are usually co-demonstrated materially in physical space and intertwined with the broader phenomena of the previously mentioned gentrification, displacement, art-washing and the like. In other words, individual or collective agency lies in variable modes of production and labour, which are demonstrated and (re)produced socio-materially in the specific contexts of each cultural venue.

Secondly, both Fabrika and Kotelna must contest and legitimise their values, practices, strategies and conceptions, even their (non)materialised taste against both 'internal' and 'external' cultural (economic, social, etc.) forces. In accordance with Chan, it is not only cultural consumption but also production that is differentiated and stratified (Chan 2010). From a critical distance, the position of those collectives is extremely complex. On the one hand, they can be considered gentrifiers, while on the other, they live under high risk of being gentrified (Huse 2014) or even physically (Marcuse 1985) or symbolically displaced (Atkinson 2015). They can also take part as (un)conscious agents in art-washing strategies performed by private stakeholders or developers. Moreover, they face the internal discrepancies and politicised efforts of official institutions, which put into question their ideological and cultural orientation and even their formal existence in the building.

These processes create a specific set of individual and group practices and competences that enable us to grasp their embeddedness in the cultural consumption economy. In other words, no matter whether actors identify themselves with (or are aware of) the broad labels 'creative class' or 'cultural intermediaries', they identify themselves with a space that is defined and

territorialised by cultural practice, competence and expertise.<sup>6</sup> It can thus be shown that those individuals and groups share and publicly contest their everyday practices and concepts, arising from not only their origin and social background but also from features of cultural practice that are adopted and (re)produced spatially in both the physical and symbolic sense.

The origins of these perspectives can be found in Bourdieu. He simply claims that we tend to transform our cultural abilities into various forms of profit (Bourdieu 1984: 12). Parts of this profit are materialised and physically demonstrated. The framework of cultural practice is therefore always spatialised and territorialised. In this context, Glevarec and Pinet (2017) go beyond Bourdieu's theory while emphasising various levels of contemporary eclecticism — put simply, the ability to recognise relevant cultural trends in a wide range of activities which, rather than a sign of distinction, are a matter of differentiation. While examining the spatial dimensions of such processes, the notion of eclectic differentiation can be easily connected with social space (re)production and spatial turn concepts (Holston 1989, Lefebvre 1991, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003, Soja 1989). More recently, it resonates with Kärholm's notion of territorial complexity (Kärholm 2007, 2012; Mubi Brighenti and Kärholm 2020), which enables the researcher to grasp the broader impacts of cultural practice within the territorialisation of space.

To be precise, this perspective helps us to grasp the processes of territorialisation and space appropriation via cultural practice. Within this context, it should be emphasised that space is being socio-materially produced (Lefebvre 1991) so as to be appropriated culturally. This is revealed through the individual and collective spatial-cultural capacity to claim either symbolic or physical space. These competences are essential for one's orientation in the local cultural milieu. In other words, we need to turn to the (re)production of cultural fields, to what Doreen Massey rightly sees as 'essential to an adequate theory of spatiality' (Massey 2005 cited by Savage 2011: 511).

In order to illustrate these processes on multiple levels, it is suitable to see territorialisation and space appropriation via cultural practice as part of what Mattias Kärholm describes in his concept of territorial complexity (Kärholm 2007, 2012). He claims that territories are a network of spatially defined, controlled and conceptualised socio-material practices that are (in)visibly inscribed into particular spatial configurations (Kärholm 2012:12). Kärholm sees the making of territories as subfields—processes which (re)produce a landscape of relations (Kärholm 2012: 137). Actors and objects are actively (re)producing this landscape in the background of their everyday lives. Instead of focusing on demonstrations of hegemony or dominance, Kärholm wants to observe the positionality and relationality of both human and nonhuman actors. For example, (in this way) Kärholm would refuse to classify physical displacement simply as a negative process connected with gentrification, he would trace the neighbourhood change as a set of social and material forces (or vectors) which

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<sup>6</sup> In my interpretation, cultural practice and competence stand for an assemblage of actions, strategies, narratives and discursive or even material features which help an individual to demonstrate and claim his/her cultural 'literacy' and ability to (re)produce cultural traits that are in some way attractive/consumed (at least for/by a few members of society) in order to achieve a certain goal (e.g., operation of a cultural centre).

(re)configure the spatial organisation and the landscape of relations while taking gentrification's push and pull factors as input features.

In accordance with Kärholm, my goal is to observe the relationship/contestation of an individual's efforts and practice in interplay/cooperation with their surroundings. I want to demonstrate that territorial networks are constantly (re)produced by cultural practices, strategies, appropriations and associations (Kärholm 2007: 441). These categories are overlapping and orientational; in fact, some territorial (re)production can be labelled using each of the four subtypes at the same time, depending on the perspective. For greater clarity, I will use the framework term territorialisation because it encompasses the fluid character of cultural practice legitimisation features.

### **Territorialising the Space of Cultural Practice**

Conceptualising territorialisation and legitimisation as intersectional processes within the wider context of gentrification, displacement and other current urban phenomena enable me to show how the space of cultural centres is changed, settled, negotiated and contested by their producers. Let us now empirically demonstrate how both the symbolic and physical space of Fabrika and Kotelna is territorialised and legitimised through cultural practice.

Kotelna and Fabrika opened after negotiations with official stakeholders in 2013 and 2016 respectively. In each case, the cultural venues were 'settled' and operated by a group of people with different backgrounds but with a similar view on what should be done with neglected and abandoned buildings: buildings like these should be transformed into places that can bring new life to their surroundings, the city and so on. Most of these people had previous experience with placemaking and cultural or sports events production, whether in the vicinity or elsewhere. Although today the recruitment of new people differs according to the status of each centre — Kotelna has an official hiring procedure, whereas Fabrika's human resources are recruited more organically — in the early years, both places assembled production teams informally. Willy, a former production manager at Kotelna who grew up in the surrounding housing estate, reflects on it thus: 'I was one of the first people to be addressed because I had five years of experience producing my festival'. Similar to others, Willy also sees the pioneering years as a time when everything was loose and punk, and things were done with lots of enthusiasm and open-mindedness.

At Fabrika, people are still hired in a similarly casual and open way. Lou, a 30-year-old social scientist and former bartender at the cultural centre, came to Prague from Slovakia and tried several social work jobs. He describes the typical way of becoming a member of Fabrika's team:

'I didn't have previous experience as a server, but I considered that option. When Fabrika had been open, I think, for a half a year, my friend forwarded me an advert that they were looking for bartenders [...] It was written in such a human way that I said, okay, I'll try it. I worked there for at least a year and a half, and they treated me well because I was still able to study at university.'

These pivotal months and years of existence in both cultural centres were not only a time of team consolidation. The staff had to immediately make contact with various groups of



potential users, visitors and, of course, detractors. Being new in the locality, they had to carefully introduce their cultural skills and plans in order to build a base for further territorialisation. Team members needed to search for a scheme that would attract people. They tried cinema, theatre performances, concerts, subcultural activities, festivals, workshops, hobbies and so on. The programmes were also filled with ad-hoc activities. A rigorous strategy was continuously evolving. The biggest threat at the very beginning was predominantly the negative feedback from people living around the cultural centres. Willy sees it as an important and formative part of his experience, one that increases an individual's cultural practice resilience:

‘It was me and Youri [leader of the local skateboard community] who earned recognition for Kotelna among the public. It was we who were sworn at because people felt it was a place for Gypsies. We were to blame for displacing the car service centre and destroying its business and for building a den for junkies.’

Fabrika's situation was similar. Employees and producers were aware that they needed to be absolutely strict and careful about night-time noise. Its proactive attitude led to a situation where, today, most of the neighbours are satisfied with Fabrika's impact on its surroundings. Similarly, continuous complaints about Kotelna's noisy operation (caused especially by music events and skaters) resulted in the official creation of a local taskforce consisting of local councillors, police officers, citizens with complaints and members of the cultural centre production team. From a long-term perspective, this strategy calmed the situation, and the relationship between Kotelna and its surroundings grew closer.

The situation of both cultural centres therefore seems to be gradually stabilising. Obviously, this was not only a matter of time but also of the producers' territorialisation — becoming more accustomed to the local space and more attuned to the local habits and sociocultural needs. Tamara, a cultural-studies graduate and former interim director of Kotelna, put it like this:

‘A significant change came when we started to offer draught beer [...]. It was at this time that social housing was discussed at a participatory planning meeting for three hundred people. The situation had changed. They didn't yell at us anymore. On the contrary, we became a shelter where they could yell at the mayor. For me, it is a big result—from an island of deviation to a place where problems are solved.’

One might get the impression that beer and time are all that are needed to help a cultural centre and its producers to accelerate its legitimisation and public recognition in Prague. But Fabrika's Samuel puts it in a very similar manner when referring to searching for consumers in a heavily gentrified neighbourhood:

‘For a year or so, we wandered around the neighbourhood [...] In the end, we realised that there are still a lot of long-time residents, but they have no places to go. Here, it's one bistro after another, apartments rented on Airbnb and traditional shops such as locksmiths or ironmongers have disappeared [...] And here we are. People tell us, ‘It's fantastic you have beer for 29 CZK.’ So, if you're a student with empty pockets and you only tip 1 CZK, you can be sure that our bartenders won't be offended.’

In fact, Tamara's and Samuel's reflections illustrate that neither local centre wants to be an 'island of deviation'. Rather, they want to be part of the neighbourhood and react to broader issues. Thus, we can identify two separate but interconnected ways of being able to understand the impacts of structural phenomena such as gentrification: (1) that it is experienced in the city centre by Fabrika and defined by Samuel through issues of affordability and displacement of people, services and so on and (2) its consequence in the form of a need for social housing in Dlouhé Lávký's modernist settlement for the displaced (possibly from the surroundings of Fabrika) mentioned by Kotelna's Tamara. Part of the cultural competence and practice of Kotelna's and Fabrika's staff can be seen as a reaction to similar problems, no matter what one's physical or symbolic position is towards the displacement. In other words, part of each venue's territorialisation and legitimisation practice is an ability to demonstrate that it understands the struggles of its surroundings.

Beyond those proclamations, there lies a synchronous layer of strengthening the position of cultural practice. Within this layer, sets of strategies and conceptualisations of physical and symbolic territorialisation can be reduced to three 'contextualised' (Pardo and Prato eds 2019: 2-3) legitimising categories: (i) sharing, (ii) contesting and (iii) negotiating cultural competence. These are, in turn, connected with particular sets of social phenomena: (a) mutual care and belonging, (b) demonstrations of professionalism and (c) practices and claims focused on sustainability, growth and pre-occupation.

### **Sharing Cultural Practice: Closeness, Belonging and Mutual Care**

Samuel once told me with genuine excitement that he had bought all the members of his team a Fabrika-branded hoodie and that 'all the kids were really happy about it'. He also referred to the local collective as a 'nomadic theatre company' or 'family enterprise' that has 'a particular flow that grabs you and brings a strong feeling of belonging'. A similar sense of closeness, loyalty and belonging can also be observed when we turn our attention towards Kotelna's affiliates' and employees' practice and its general narrative. Some of the observed cultural producers — mainly those in higher positions — tend to refer to the venues, employees or even their visitors as if they were their children or relatives. Along with this strategy, it is stated and believed that every feature/member of the whole operating mechanism needs proper care, and they must be dealt with even when employees' personal issues come into play. Thus, short-term observers can get the impression that local production collectives are coherent organisms, and the ties among their members are similar to kinship. People are very close, and everyone tends to be sensitive to each other so that they can share a common view on making a cultural centre. This closeness consists of a quasi-intimacy: if an individual wants to profit from that closeness, he/she must adopt a certain set of informal social/cultural competences.

Although it differs from a regular contractual employer/employee relationship, a lot of beneficial workplace relations are offset by (and, at the same time, strengthened by) a great deal of precarity. Personal precarities differ mainly according to the status of each of the centres. After several years of existence, the position of people working for Kotelna became more formalised. During the early days, it was common for pioneer affiliates to be paid informally or even off the books for a particular task such as cleaning or another manual activity. Those strategies were later accompanied by part-time jobs, external partnerships or internships, which

were, in the end, replaced by stable part-time or full-time jobs similar to the contracts that officials of the municipality have.

Fabrika's situation and status allow its producers to combine a pioneer and semi-formal strategy. The nonmonetary part of Fabrika's staff reward system is based on improving both individual and collective know-how about cultural production and offering the opportunity to be part of a collective in the position you want to be. Similarly, in the early years, the pioneers of Kotelna, Willy and Youri, spent most of their time taking care of the newly opened cultural centre. The underpayment for their loyalty was non-monetarily 'repaid' via benefits, such as the opportunity to borrow a sound system or to organise birthday parties at Kotelna.

From time to time, individuals tend to raise the question of possible exploitation: They ask how the budget or earnings are allocated. But those rare suspicions and accusations do not become public. Therefore, most of the time, staff members demonstrate that being part of it is more than building loyalty through money. This rather symbolic level of territorialisation and legitimisation shows the role that cultural practice plays when it comes to the self-esteem of a particular cultural production group. Individuals' cultural competence and collective integrity is therefore strengthened and demonstrated by strong affiliation with an ensemble, place and ability to understand and produce culture whenever and wherever in the future.

### **Contesting Cultural Practice: The Issue of Professionalisation**

The previous section introduced symptoms of another feature of territorialisation and (self-) legitimisation: sets of practices and strategies oriented towards conceptions of professional cultural production. They are co-defined by consumer needs and competition practices and strategies.

Based on this, three interconnected spheres of territorialisation can be identified: (1) the ability to attract wide audiences, (2) the way someone or something happens to be too alien/unskilled/unfriendly to be part of the centre's production milieu and (3) the distinction of sociocultural differences and position that is held by the cultural centre in the wider field of local cultural production. Put differently, these are the ways through which cultural producers seek to prove that they deserve the 'ownership' of 'their' space.

Firstly, both Kotelna's and Fabrika's ambition is to be literally for everybody. Although it is not explicitly stated, both places are designed and produced for the non-existent but ideal-typical cultural omnivore (Peterson and Kern 1996) — they perform cultural eclecticism (Glevarec and Pinet 2017). Through this strategy, Fabrika and Kotelna demonstrate their broad cultural knowledge and ability to commodify countless variations of taste. The scheduled programmes, features and leisure time opportunities prove how sincerely the producers work to attract and care about all kinds of consumers. The programmes therefore consist of offering a variety of drinks and food; activities such as cinema, open-air screenings, exhibitions, theatre, concerts, hobbies and sports; activities for parents and their children as well as for socially-marginalised people; clubs or programmes for elderly people; free playgrounds for kids and more. Everyone can find a place in the plethora of attractions.

Secondly, this wide range necessitates course rationalisation and the professionalisation of cultural production and basic team operation. It means that each centre has an internal and external operation scheme, a shift schedule and a subordination system. The disciplined modus

operandi puts pressure on individuals who, in the end, do not fit the ethos of the ‘family’, its dynamics and the cultural scheme of the venue. The demonstration of insufficiency differs. We can observe innocent claims that some people on Fabrika’s staff did not fit in and were forced to leave the team because of their slowness, laziness or unreliability. Likewise, similar stories of ‘lazy’ and ‘incapable’ workers were identified in the conceptualisations of Kotelna’s pioneers.

Those stories inform staff members and ensure they realise that it is extremely crucial to perform the activities necessary for a stable operation — bartending, cleaning, doing what one is supposed to do, being on time for one’s shift and so on. Obeying the rules is the main framework that enables those who cannot keep pace to be distinguished. Lou, a former bartender at Fabrika, told me that the main principles of the centre’s operation were based on hygiene, production skills and reliability. Anyone who repeatedly failed to achieve a certain level of competence in any of those categories would sooner or later be forced to leave the space because such a person increases pressure, in turn, on his teammates, the shift and the team as a whole. Internal mutuality and closeness thus cannot be established without obeying the operation’s rules.

Instances which have the character of cultural contestation and legitimisation are the third sphere of territorialisation and legitimisation. The stories of Willy and Youri, Tamara and Margaret offer a suitable illustration of conflicting strategies and conceptualisations. Their story shows that, sometimes, differences based on locating oneself within a cultural practice can remain unnoticed for a long time and later escalate.

As I described earlier, Willy and Youri are locals whose activities played a key part in the upheaval of cultural life in the Dlouhé Lávky modernist housing estate. Among others (who are no longer locally active) they were the first locals to introduce the vision of community development based on Kotelna’s activities in 2012/13. For some time, Willy worked for Kotelna as a cultural producer, and Youri led a skateboard club and took care of the technical operation. For them Kotelna was simply fun. They really admired the punk vibe and the contingency of its initial operation. But as the municipality wanted Kotelna’s operation to become more and more formalised, its directors found themselves in conflict with pioneers such as Willy and Youri. Both men grew up on the housing estate and became visible members of the local skateboard and street subculture. They felt that Kotelna was somehow stolen from them; they became symbolically displaced, de-territorialised and delegitimised. The alienation grew so strong that they started to claim that Kotelna had become dull and was no longer for the local community. On many public or semi-public occasions, they expressed significant anti-gentrification qualms, such as the following example from Willy:

‘Kotelna’s current vibe and label are that it was never led by people from Dlouháč<sup>7</sup>. The building was always lent to someone specific; there was never any opportunity to give space to Dlouháč people, even if this was the original idea. This was meant to be a cultural centre for Dlouhé Lávky [...]. They established a board of girls who do not respect us, and they take lots of things personally. You still had to beg for

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7 Local nickname for the Dlouhé Lávky socialist modernist estate.

everything. [...] It was too much pressure. It was not suitable for an estate. You know, I understand that they have a hipster vision, but when you're on a housing estate, plenty of other visions have to be taken into account.'

On many occasions, I asked Tamara, Margaret and other members of Kotelna's staff about their perspective on that problem. It turned out that they saw it as a clash based on cultural knowledge and practice. Tamara and Margaret negotiated their position as professionals in cultural production and emphasised that they changed the cultural centre into a well-functioning and formalised organisation. In fact, in the last five years, they became extremely popular locally, and, indeed, their professional skills became specifically territorialised. As they became more and more oriented in production, their conceptions of cultural practice gained a broader structure. Tamara once told me that besides their 'ordinary programme' oriented towards locals, they are able to produce events of 'cultural excellence'. When I asked her what this meant exactly, she said it was a cultural programme that goes beyond the social and cultural boundaries of a housing estate. For Kotelna's 'gentrifying hipsters', Tamara and Margaret, locals such as Willy and Youri held the culturally subaltern position of people unable to produce and achieve such excellence, although both men had plenty of experience with big nationwide events. In other words, Willy and Youri held a local subcultural mindset with its loosened attitude towards production and leadership, whereas Tamara and Margaret claimed themselves to be professionals and labelled the collectives and individuals around Willy and Youri as a 'bunch of losers'.

No matter who the winners or losers are or which type of production is more suitable for Kotelna, similar territorial (re)productions can be observed when members of Fabrika's team talk about their relationship with other centres. When talking about the Cyclo\_Shrine venue, a nearby club that combines a bike repair station with a pub and progressive music club, Samuel mentioned that the individuals gathered around Cyclo Shrine called Fabrika 'brown', because they were 'sissies who aren't capable of causing a proper commotion'. He later stated, 'We would cause a commotion if we wanted to make a living from that commotion, but we don't want to because we're in a residential locality.'

When I discussed this distinction with another person close to Fabrika, Lou told me that the counterpoint to this tension emerged when they occasionally helped in Cyclo\_Shrine as bartenders. The level of organisation there was much too loose and disorganised:

'You don't want to be on a shift when you're suddenly out of beer [...]. Places such as Cyclo\_Shrine are fine, but actually they force you into some kind of posse, like that there's a coherent group of people.'

Again, we see that the logic of good or bad cultural production and practice lies in cultural/subcultural recognition. This sphere is defined by cultural practice, which is connected with and demonstrated through an ability to territorialise and legitimise their use of place thanks to authentic know-how and a specific and coherent level of declared professionalised skills.

Negotiating cultural capital: Sustainability, growth and pre-occupation This contestation illustrates the varieties of territorialisation within a wider cultural field. But this significantly changes when an official institution comes into play.

So far, Kotelna and Fabrika have illustrated the great variety of ways in which cultural practice acts as a territorialisation and legitimisation feature for individuals and collectives as

well as for ideologies inscribed in a socio-material space. Both teams have built their strength and reputation on close internal team relations, a sense of belonging, solidarity and shared beliefs in nonmonetary rewards. When Samuel said that Fabrika ‘does not want to cause a commotion’, the same goes for Kotelna: Both centres have been able to feed the cultural and leisure time demands of the urban masses in order to demonstrate that they understand what it means to be culturally skilled and eclectic enough. Their operations became professionalised, allowing them to recognise practices and strategies that would weaken their collective abilities. Last but not least, they were prepared to strike back when their cultural competences were put into question by their teammates or rivals.

The situation significantly changes when a state institution is the judge of the cultural centre’s future. Official institutions have the exclusive right to decide on Fabrika’s and Kotelna’s existence. Suddenly, we realise that the strength and persuasiveness of claimed and practised territorialisation and claimed legitimisation are limited and much more open-ended.

Fabrika faces a long-term threat of being forced to abandon the part of the factory in which it operates. Despite frequent negotiations, the state property office remains relentless, unwilling to officially appreciate Fabrika’s merits. Instead, in 2020, the state launched multiple tenders for a new tenancy. Due to the COVID-19 situation, two tenders have not been finished as the winner could not afford to pay a monthly rent of approximately 100,000 CZK. Fabrika refused to take part in both tenders, publicly claiming that a rent of around 100,000 CZK was too much for them.

The longer the Fabrika team stays, the more the physical shape of the barracks is materially transformed and therefore heavily territorialised, not only symbolically but also because the space has been changed by financial investment and the force of Fabrika’s cultural practice. Samuel and his teammates’ strategy is to fill the space that has been rented to them and demonstrate that they are able and willing to extend it in the near future and potentially make use of the whole building complex. As he mentioned in the introduction, the only thing they need is time and a fair contract. Part of Fabrika’s unspoken anti-eviction strategy is therefore to adjust its claim to being a suitable long-term renter of the space by showing that Fabrika’s collective is capable of successful operation and good maintenance. At the same time, the culturally-driven material transformation of the physical space and heavy installations (such as a sauna, pieces of contemporary art, a beach, children’s playground, open-air cinema screen, stages, exhibition hall, etc.) illustrate a strategic physical pre-occupation. Although Samuel is openly critical of the local squatter’s movement, which, in his opinion, worsened the position of everyone ‘who wants to enter abandoned buildings formally’, it still seems that his strategy of maintaining neglected buildings has several quasi-squatter features which work as a reliable territorialisation strategy for everyone not in an ownership position.

The things that happened in Kotelna from spring 2020 onwards show rather different territorialisation consequences. The conflict between the producers and pioneers seems to be finished. In March 2020, a new director took the place of Tamara. The lack of transparency in the tender and the new director’s perceived lack of competences created a backlash. The professional skills of Kotelna’s leadership were again a frame argument against the newly established board. By the end of 2020, most long-term employees more or less voluntarily quit their jobs at Kotelna as a demonstration of disagreement with the new cultural direction. The heavily territorialised

space and its surroundings (yard, gym, community henhouse, urban garden) became, in quick order, a place without people occupying it. Although Tamara and Margaret took it as a predominantly political decision and the destruction of their ‘baby’, it is clear that the public critique of Kotelna’s operation and cultural direction cannot be basically overturned by an emphasis on professional competences. Local authorities therefore showed that the strongest position in the territorialisation and legitimisation of space is held by the creator and owner: the municipality. Indeed, the centre survived, but its cultural practice is being reframed.

## Conclusion

Both stories demonstrate that any example of the territorialisation and legitimisation of cultural practice remains unstable and dependent on the structure of the local sociocultural field. I have tried here to demonstrate that efforts to prove the capability of becoming a competent ‘cultural intermediary’ must be put into the context of urban life’s multiple spheres. Tracing the processes of territorialisation and legitimisation as regards Kotelna and Fabrika using the urban ideal-type triad — the *urbs*, *polis* and *civitas* (Prato 2015) — can help us to demonstrate how cultural practice is materialised, shared, contested and negotiated.

Firstly, people such as Samuel, Lou, Tamara and Willy must constantly prove their ability to *understand* and address local problems from the wider perspective of contemporary urban phenomena. Besides these basic skills, teams at Kotelna and Fabrika must demonstrate and practice their ability to create more or less a coherent collective of people based both on *sharing* and commitment to the cultural values their venues seek to embody. These values include closeness, belonging and mutual care. Such internal cultural practices are accompanied by a layer of contestation on the ground of the local cultural field, both on individual and institutional levels. Within this layer, cultural market tensions and competition becomes immanent as a way of territorialising and legitimising cultural practice through proclamations of professionalism, reliability and implicit demonstrations of eclecticism.

Things change when an external actor, such as the local municipality or state institutions, able to displace temporarily territorialised and legitimised cultural practices, such as those of Kotelna and Fabrika, enters the process with its formal powers and political force. In these situations, the Kotelna and Fabrika collectives faced the issue of communicating their cultural practice within the context of pre-occupancy, growth and sustainability.

Given these circumstances, we can identify two interesting modes of territorialisation: (a) Although Fabrika’s territorialisation is heavily demonstrated in a physical space that has pre-occupation features, the collective does not fully depend on this physical space. Despite not being publicly stated, Fabrika’s ‘nomadic theatre company’ is ready to take off and land somewhere else. Before they do so, however, they will try whatever it takes to preserve their spatially territorialised and ‘legitimised’ cultural practice. (b) Kotelna, contrariwise, has remained in place, but the people who gained locally-embedded cultural practice and competence have almost entirely disappeared. Although Kotelna’s cultural direction seemed culturally dominant and allegedly legitimate, it was, for a long time, weakened by its formal structure and political tensions. The departure of Tamara therefore led to the departure of many others. A collective which seemed deeply devoted to its mission was destroyed and scattered within a few months. Thus, we see that the territorialisation and legitimisation of cultural

practice is a tricky process (Pardo and Prato eds 2018, 2019). Kotelna's collective was displaced because its cultural competence lost political legitimacy, while Fabrika's only certainty is—no matter where they are currently settled—the independence, tightness and coherence of its cultural practice. Who is then going to answer what comes first? Substance or idea?

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