

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Becoming an Alternative Cultural and Creative Third Place Through Tensions between Space and Organizing

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## Abstract

Over the past years, third places have emerged worldwide. Being used as an umbrella concept, the term comprises various types of organizations without differentiating alternative organizations from capitalistic consumer spaces. This paper explores how cultural and creative third places (CCTPs) become alternative through tensions between space and organizing. It brings together two strands of literature, alternative organization and communicative constitution of organization (CCO), through the concept of counter spaces and uses ethnographic and process methodology to investigate an CCTP in a Paris suburb. Beyond two traditional tensions, individual work versus collective engagement and informal adjustment versus structuring, we find three specific ones: architectural constraints versus work needs, freedom versus institutionalization, and proximity to versus distance from local communities. These support the emergence of practices through which organizations become alternative. We contribute to the alternative organization literature by evidencing three tensions between space and organizing and the microprocess by which alternative CCTPs become counterspaces that are not a direct confrontation, proposing resistance through alternative practices. We also contribute to the CCO literature by stressing the key role of tensions in becoming alternative in artistic and creative organizations outside institutions.

**Keywords:** *Cultural and creative third places; Space; Organizing; Tensions; Alternative organization; Counterspaces*

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While the notion of alternative organization is not new, there is an increasing interest in management science research that investigates these organizational forms (Eynaud & De Franca Filho, 2019; Parker & Parker, 2017). The term 'alternative organization' is used to refer to the many and variegated attempts – some experimental, others well established, and most politically inspired – to create alternatives to contemporary mainstream capitalist modes of production, consumption, and collaboration (Parker et al., 2014a). Alternative organizations are

more attuned to human and environmental needs and are founded on human ideals of 'autonomy, solidarity and responsibility', operate 'within a framework of cooperation', and 'are attentive to the sorts of futures which they will produce'. (Parker et al., 2014a, p. 32)

There are different forms (social and solidarity organizations, hybrids, sociocratic societies, cooperatives, etc.), levels

(organizations, metaorganizations, etc.), and sectors (culture, health care, industry, etc.) in which the alternative character can be expressed, and there is no single alternative organizational model but rather a variety of different attempts to apply alternative principles (Béji-Bécheur et al., 2021). In the artistic and creative sector, research has been focused more on the functioning and formation of institutional creative and cultural clusters (Evans, 2009) and creative cities (Cohendet, 2010) than on alternative artistic and creative organizations.

Research needs to carefully define and understand the functioning patterns of alternative creative places (Simon, 2009), as some contemporary creative consumer spaces attempt to brand themselves as alternative (Holland, 2019). In challenging conventional assumptions of cultural actors situated upperground (Cohendet et al., 2010), cultural and creative third places (CCTPs) could be considered alternative, as they could propose a 'counterculture' (Pattaroni & Baitsch, 2015) and, by

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their intermediary position, be the source of innovations in the fabric of the creative city.

Even though CCTPs have flourished over time, the alternative organization literature has paid little attention to the process and modalities by which CCTPs could become alternative. Our research focuses on understanding how CCTPs become alternative.

In CCTPs, space for artistic and creative work is central because these types of places are spatially dependent. They often occupy abandoned spaces that were not initially conceived as carriers of artistic work. Space includes location, physical/material space, and physical geography. A space becomes a place through spatiotemporal events that are constructed and reconstructed continuously through relationships (Massey, 2005). Space is a relational, political concept and is continuously produced by practices, relationships, connections, tensions, and separations (Lefebvre, 1991). However, micro-organizing practices occurring on site and at the organizational level have not been well described in previous studies, and the interplay between organizing and space in the emergence and construction of a CCTP remains unclear.

To understand how CCTPs become alternative, this research is based on the interplay between two constructs: space and organizing. Two streams of literature have studied this interplay, studies of counterspaces, that is, alternative organizations (Courpasson et al., 2017; Daslakaki, 2018; Daslakaki & Kokkinidis, 2017; Munro & Jordan, 2013) and research on the communicative constitution of organizations (CCOs) (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019; Cooren, 2016; Malin, 2016; Marsh & Silva, 2022; Martine et al., 2015; Vasquez, 2016; Wilhoit, 2020). The two streams have studied this interplay in different but complementary manners. While the alternative literature brings a political element to what constitutes an alternative organization (Parker et al., 2014a) by linking space organizing to the production of resistance, CCO brings a dynamic, irenic view to the becoming of organizations in which space is constitutive.

Even if some researchers have a more critical view about the relationship between space and organizing (Bencherki & Snack, 2016; Cartel et al., 2019; De Molli & De Paoli, 2020; Otto et al., 2021; Wilhoit Larson, 2020), a main weakness of the alternative organization and CCO literature streams is the potential tensions between both constructs in CCTPs.

Our aim is to answer the following research question: how do tensions between space and organizing support CCTPs in becoming alternative?

To answer this question, this research builds upon a longitudinal study conducted at 6b, a CCTP of approximately 200 artists and creative workers in the Paris suburbs. We used an ethnographic method that involved collecting varied qualitative data (observations, documents, and interviews). This article is written in four parts. First, a literature review underlines that

previous studies have failed to explain the emergence and constitution of CCTPs, and that different tensions at different levels (individual, collective, and organizational) are involved in the construction process of CCTPs.

Second, we present the design of this study based on qualitative and processual methodologies. Third, we present our results demonstrating that CCTPs have the potential to constitute alternative organizations through their ability to articulate tensions and design alternative practices. Fourth, in the discussion, we highlight the role of different tensions emerging in the process. Our work contributes to the alternative organization literature by examining the interplay between space and organizing. We also contribute to the CCO literature by stressing the key role of tensions producing alternatives in artistic and creative organizations outside institutions.

## Theoretical framework

The core of our work is rooted in alternative organization literature, particularly emphasizing the interplay between space and organizing through counter-space studies as a crucial aspect of resistance. Expanding upon the alternative organization literature, we connect it with CCO (communication constitutes organization) adding a dynamic dimension layer to our exploration. This involves a dual investigation: one into the alternative literature, employing counter-space studies, and another into CCO literature, emphasizing the pivotal role of sociomateriality in organizational constitution. While both strands of research have independently but harmoniously probed the relationship between space and organization, we recognize this relationship as a constantly evolving and tension-filled process.

### **The interplay between space and organizing as a key element of resistance**

According to recent work on counterspaces (Marsh & Sliwa, 2022), the spatiotemporal context in which resistance occurs is key to understanding its effects. In this stream, resistance is conceived as an organizing process that takes place in and through spaces.

Resistance is built through spatial practices that interact with organizing and mobilizing (Courpasson et al., 2017; Daslakaki, 2018; Daskalaki & Kokkinidis, 2017; Munro & Jordan, 2013) through practices of spatial sociality, such as the symbolic and material coproduction of resources, solidarity, mobilization, and mobility practices. For instance, Daskalaki (2018) explored how alternatives enact economic and political experiments and collectively create spaces of civic engagement through the performance of spontaneous and ephemeral events. These events, which are referred to as *drases*, facilitate the establishment and evolution of transformative and prefigurative

organizing through three interrelated processes: the formation of resistance assemblages, the emergence of social learning, and sociospatial solidarity. Resistance is thus constituted through a reappropriation of control over the conditions of production and reproduction of sociospatial relations (Daskalaki & Kokkindis, 2017).

In parallel, in the literature on social movements, Haug (2013) conceptualized them as the organization of spaces rather than as processes through which actors are mobilized. Other researchers have also explored the interplay between organizing and space in the context of artistic interventions. Based on the analysis of the interactions between artists and activists in the everyday life of a social conflict, Schmidt et al. (2022) found that creative and artistic approaches contribute to this organizing/mobilizing reciprocal interplay through their capacity to favor spatiotemporal episodes that provide structure for struggles. Finally, Munro and Jordan (2013) even suggested that street artists use sound as a spatial organizing tactic in negotiating boundaries, as it supports the creation of smooth spaces in a hybrid workspace. In summary, research on alternative organizations has shown that the interplay between organization and space is necessary in the construction of resistance, with each feeding off the other.

### **The role of space in the becoming of organizations**

According to the CCO literature, communication not only is a human activity but also involves nonhuman entities, such as space. Indeed, this stream of research is interested in the *becoming* of organizations, and space is central to understanding it. This literature asks how interactions and materiality sustain organizing. As such, sociomateriality does not mean choosing between the social and the material but recognizing that everything has both social and material aspects (Cooren, 2016; Malin, 2016; Martine et al., 2015). For instance, research on *spacing* (Cooren et al., 2005; Vásquez, 2016; Vásquez & Cooren, 2013) has considered how organizing takes place through time and space in order to exist apart from present manifestations. Specifically, Vásquez and Cooren (2013) argued that three spacing practices have emerged: presentification, ordering, and accounting across time and space.

Research on CCO has also been criticized for having too flat an ontology and ignoring certain distinctions in order to privilege the understanding that everyone and everything contribute to action (Kuhn, 2014). Wilhoit Larson (2020) also drew criticism by stating that *spacing* does not conceptualize which spaces that are not organizational *per se* can play a role in the constitution of organizations. She argued that when someone appropriates features of a space to do work, that space becomes organizational. A photo elicitation analysis of different workplaces demonstrated that not all spaces are

equally organizational, and that not all members enact space in the same way.

In parallel, in their study of two creative hubs in Amsterdam, Cnossen and Bencherki (2019) showed that space and practice reflexively account for each other and contribute to organizationality, even for collectives that do not think of themselves as organizations (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). These findings stress the importance of considering the type of space being studied and the contextualized nature of work and organizing (Wilhoit Larson, 2020).

The synthesis of those two streams of literature highlights the strong interplay between space and organizing. While the alternative literature brings a political element to what constitutes an alternative organization (Parker et al., 2014a) and the link between space, organizing, and resistance, the CCO literature brings a dynamic view of the becoming of organizations in interaction with space and materiality.

### **Building alternatives in CCTPs: A tension-filled process?**

While CCO researchers have explored the interplay between space and organizing, they have focused on traditional forms of organizing, leaving aside the becoming of alternative organizations in the arts and creative sector: Indeed, Cnossen (2022) argued that art and management are still seen as separate, and that organizing in this context and beyond the cultural industries has been largely ignored and undertheorized. This is an important gap, as the anatomy of a creative city is now described as a three-tiered tangle of levels that allows new knowledge to move from the microinformal to the macroformal: the underground (exploring outside institutions), the middleground (intermediate structures that connect the underground with upperground), and the upperground levels (Cohendet et al., 2010).

This classification leads to considering the specific form emerging in the creative city, the CCTPs, which could be located underground or in the middleground as intersecting spaces (Weinfurtner & Seidl, 2019). They represent spaces with blurred boundaries (Dale & Burrell, 2008), in line with the definition of third places proposed by Oldenburg and Brissett (1982). Because intersecting spaces do not adhere to the norms (e.g., social customs and practices) that prevail in a clearly dominant space, they are a potential source of both uncertainty and creativity (Shortt, 2015). They influence creative activity by facilitating temporary collective experimentation by individuals who engage in new activities and have new ideas outside institutions (Furnari, 2014). CCTPs could also be places where different resistance practices are built. Cnossen (2021) argued that although spaces (art factories) may benefit creative production, their highest value is that they may create new possibilities for political organizing. Because of their specificity and the fact that this context remains understudied, we

focus on CCTPs to explore the interplay between space and organizing and the way to become alternative.

To date, the interplay between space, organizing, and the becoming of an alternative organization in the specific context of CCTPs remains a blind spot. The literature describes middle-ground organizations as based on common principles of self-management, horizontality, participation, or solidarity (Breviglieri, 2009; Pattaroni & Baitsch, 2015) without critically questioning or examining the process of space organizing to achieve an alternative character. In the case of CCTPs, the constitution of an alternative could involve *thirding*

which derives not simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstruction of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different. (Soja, 1996, p. 61)

In particular, a main weakness of both streams of the literature is the potential tensions that arise between space and organizing.

On the one hand, in the CCO literature, meaning is created through arrangements and connections, but this view does not consider the tensions arising from the process of creating meaning and the political dimension involved. In the case of space, as suggested by Lefebvre (1991), the production of space is dialectical; in other words, it is never free of contradictions.

On the other hand, research on artistic trajectories and collectives has already shown evidence of tensions at various levels. At the individual level, the literature shows that tensions of identity (creating and selling their work) run through artists. As Bérubé (2019, p. 152) pointed out, 'the concrete problem experienced by artists is that of combining the entrepreneurial aspect with their artistic practice, otherwise they cannot survive on the art market'. This identity-based tension among artists is alleviated 'when artists undertake collectively rather than individually, [because] they manage the identity tension and are better equipped to undertake it'. Leclair (2017) attempted to go beyond the discourse of economic tension to show that the daily practices of creative actors in the fashion industry are structured around three tactics (playing the market game, cultivating singularity, and seeking autonomy). It is only through the concert of these three tactics that a further tension is produced, specifically a creative disorder, defined as a state of permanent vagueness and ambiguity in which creative entities find themselves, as they have to simultaneously belong to an organization and break away from it to succeed in creating. This zone of ambiguity is understood as the space necessary for creative actors to create while maintaining an evasive position.

At the organizational and collective level, Menger (2002) showed the initial tension between the economy and creation, while Bencherki and Snack (2016) analyzed the case of a community organization in which many stakeholders *contribute* to the organization without being *members* of it. However, Wilhoit

Larson (2020) highlighted that some actors contribute more than others. They do more in the name of the organization, come to more meetings, and contribute more to the achievement of the organization's goals.

By analogy, in the context of CCTPs, we suggest that interplay between space and organizing could be a tension-filled process through which alternatives can emerge. On the one hand, CCTPs have the potential to create protected spaces where alternative ideas can emerge and flourish without the pressure to conform to institutional norms or early judgment (Bojovic et al., 2020; Cartel et al., 2019). On the other hand, there is evidence of tensions in creating experimental spaces in order to maintain an environment in which participants can emotionally emancipate themselves from dominant models (Otto et al., 2021). For example, the esthetic experiences of participants in these third places positively influence some of the dynamics of the creative process, but they also provide contradictions, such as the enforced closeness that helps to create a feeling of emotional proximity, making people feel more like 'friends' than 'coworkers' (De Molli & De Paoli, 2020).

In summary, the literature discusses the potential role that tensions could play in the interplay between space and organizing in the context of CCTPs. Moreover, while some work has evidenced tensions at different levels (individual, collective, and organizational), previous research has been limited mostly to identifying traditional tensions, such as formal versus informal, individual versus collective engagement, freedom versus economic constraints, and exploration versus exploitation, without exploring in depth the role of space and the different practices that artistic or creative organizations (situated underground or middleground) use to manage these tensions. As such, the role of tensions in the construction of the alternative organization has not been well studied. Furthermore, from the perspective of the alternative literature, the micropractices that occur on the ground and at the organizational level have not been well described, and the process (organizing space) of the emergence and constitution of CCTPs remains unclear. This motivates our research question, which can be formulated as follows: how do tensions between space and organizing support CCTPs in becoming alternative?

## Research design and methodology

### Empirical context

This study was conducted at 6b,<sup>1</sup> which is a CCTP located in the city of Saint-Denis, a Parisian suburb in France. The first author visited several CCTPs in the Paris region on numerous occasions and participated in many events and activities in these places. This first phase of the field research employed an ethnographic approach. This important phase of in-depth immersion in the field allowed us to observe the places and

<sup>1</sup> website: <https://www.le6b.fr/>.





**Figure 1.** View from building 6b of the facade overlooking the Saint-Denis Canal.  
Source: Nicolao, 2020.

activities, meet the actors, conduct informal interviews with them, and apprise them of our research interest, which allowed us to secure access to the field over time. Given the limited knowledge of CCTPs, this study is exploratory. 6b has been recognized as an emblematic and pioneering CCTP and a territorial factory.<sup>2</sup> It is a representative case of positioning between the underground and upperground levels. For Yin (2017), the single-case design is eminently justifiable in conditions where the case is representative or typical or where the case serves as revelatory. In addition, the 6b administrative teams and artists warmly welcomed our research and supported us throughout the data collection.

### **Case study presentation**

6b opened in 2010 as an associative place of work for multidisciplinary artistic creation and dissemination; it gathers approximately 200 artists and cultural and creative workers in

residence (visual artists, musicians, filmmakers, graphic designers, craftsmen, social workers, actors, dancers, painters, sculptors, architects, and others). The name 6b refers to the address of the building, which is located at the heart of an industrial wasteland in a former 7,000 m<sup>2</sup> building that once housed the offices of the Alstom Group. It is situated between the Saint-Denis Canal and the Seine River in the city of Saint-Denis (in the northern Paris suburbs, France) (Figure 1). 6b is thought of as a community and is structured through an association. Currently, each person or structure integrated into a workshop is selected by the existing residents and becomes a member of the association. Each resident person or structure can thus develop an individual project but is strongly encouraged to participate in and benefit from the collective dynamics of the place. The 6b website specifies that

everyone takes part in the collective by participating, for example, in the repair or development of common or external spaces, by investing in the structures that make up the association (programming committees, restaurant committee, board of directors, etc.), or by welcoming the public during exhibitions and events. (consulted on May 3, 2022)

<sup>2</sup> 'Territorial Factory' (Fabrique du territoire) is a label given by the French National Agency to territorial cohesion (<https://agence-cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/fabriques-de-territoire-582>).

Each year at the general assembly, the resident members of the association elect their representatives to the board of directors. An administrative salaried team of nine people coordinates the activities and the functioning of the place, including the management and reception of the residents and the public, artistic programming, cultural actions, mediation with local communities, promotion and diffusion of artistic production, hosting of events, and maintenance of the building.

### Data collection

All of our data were collected from 2018 to 2021. Our first data sources are linked to our deep immersion in 6b, a source of rich observation over time. We spent 10 days in 6b from the summer of 2018 until the first lockdown linked to the COVID-19 crisis (March 2020). Each observation lasted a day, and the three researchers met and spent the whole day on site. We walked around the space and looked for contacts in an impromptu way. We also met our known contacts on site with the aim of snowball sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This allowed us to meet a plurality of actors representing the place, particularly artists and creative workers. These meetings took place formally and informally in private and collective spaces (the restaurant L'Agora and the 'beach' located outside near the Saint-Denis Canal), particularly in their moments of individual or collective work and relaxation. To visualize the physical appropriation of space and its evolution over time, we took photographs and collected various types of secondary data (posters, documents, reports, etc.). At the end of each day, the group finalized the trip by exchanging ideas and findings and writing daily notes.

After this observation phase, we organized and conducted 27 semi-directive interviews with artists, creative workers, the administrative team, and urban planners identified during our immersion (Table 1). These interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours each, for a total duration of 40.5 h that were fully transcribed in 270 pages. The interviews took place between July 2019 and February 2020 based on sampling aimed at qualitative heterogeneity to best represent the organizational reality of this CCTP. These interviews are considered our primary data collection method.

An interview guide was used. The first questions were related to the respondents' background and individual artistic practices. Then, we questioned the participants on the design and use practices of the spaces as well as their evolution and impact on their work since their arrival at 6b. Additionally, we inquired about the organization and its evolution over time, the functioning of the collective, the organizational management systems in place, the atmosphere, and the work environment. To limit the risk of the

**Table 1.** Sample description

Code	Sex	Age	Specialty	Residence time
E1	M	75	Architect and painter	6 years
E2	M	42	Architect	10 years
E3	M	38	Violin maker	5 years
E4	F	50	Photographer	8 years
E5	M	70	Visual artist (sculpture)	5 years
E6	F	45	Artist painter	6 months
E7	F	38	Artist painter	2 years
E8	F	40	Visual artist	6.5 years
E9	F	36	Designer	3.5 years
E10	M	46	Photographer	2 years
E11	F	38	Visual artist	10 years
E12	F	45	Territorial development engineer	5 years
E13	M	37	Carpenter engineer – scenographer	5 years
E14	F	47	Artist painter	5.5 years
E15	F	37	Visual artist (sculpture)	2 years
E16	F	45	Visual artist	5 years
E17	M	35	Dancer and choreographer	8 months
E18	F	44	Artist painter	2 years
E19	M	50	Visual artist (sculptor)	10 years
E20	F	49	Visual artist	6.5 years
E21	M	60	President of Saint-Denis urban community	N/A
E22	M	64	Saint-Denis deputy major	N/A
E23	F	60	President of urban planning plain commune	N/A
E24	F	33	Cultural mediator, 6b	4 years
E25	F	35	Communication and production, 6b	4 years, 10 months
E26	M	33	Accountant, 6b	10 years
E27	M	38	Chief administrator, 6b	2.5 years

Source: own elaboration.

first author becoming 'indigenous' to the field (Gioia et al., 2013) or too close to the opinions of the informants (Van Maanen, 1979), the interviews were systematically conducted in pairs. Secondary data were used to triangulate the information obtained during the interviews (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Description of the secondary data

Type	Description	Source and date of collection by authors	Role(s) in the construction of the results
The 6b's website	Website	<a href="https://www.le6b.fr/">https://www.le6b.fr/</a> (2018–2022)	To obtain regular and precise information on certain elements of the life of 6b
Photographs	200 pictures	Researchers (2018–2020) Photographer/author of the book <i>Le 6b Saint-Denis, dans un tiers-lieu culturel</i> (2021)	To memorize how the space is organized, practiced, mutated, and appropriated by the actors and help the subsequent discussion between coauthors
Annual reports	2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020	The 6b administrative team (2018–2020)	To obtain precise information on certain elements of the life of 6b
Statutes of the 6b Coop	17 pages	The 6b administrative team (2019)	To obtain precise information on the creation of the cooperative
Book <i>Le 6b Saint-Denis, dans un tiers-lieu culturel</i> (Nicolao & Espinosa, 2021)	300 pages	Collective production by 6b members (2021)	To obtain precise information on certain elements of the life of 6b To triangulate certain aspects of our interviews using the numerous verbatim present in the book (especially the 40-page survey results part. i.e., answers of resident artists and administrative team members to the question of "What does 6b mean to you?")
Book <i>Infinite Places: constructing buildings or places?</i>	9 pages dedicate to the 6b	Institut Français in charge of the Venice Biennale of Architecture (2018)	To better understand the chronology of the evolution of the place
Press reviews	35 pages	<i>Enlarge your Paris</i> (Parisian newspaper published on the internet) (2018) National daily press (e.g., <i>Libération</i> , <i>Le Parisien</i> ) (2018–2022)	To obtain some information on certain elements of the life of 6b.

Source: own elaboration.

### Data analysis

According to Langley (1999), a variety of strategies for making sense of process data are available for researchers. We decided to use a grounded strategy, which consists of the thematic comparison of small units of data (incidents) and the gradual construction of a system of categories that describes the phenomena being observed. As the categories were developed, we deliberately sought out data to enable the verification of the properties of emerging category systems. A narrative strategy involves the construction of a detailed story from raw data. During this part, we observed that the 6b project had gone through different phases that we could describe with a process decomposition approach (Langley et al., 2013). The interviews with the founder of 6b, which focused partly on the genesis of the place; all the secondary data, particularly the textual data; and finally all the interviews revealed a temporal bracket that unfolded sequentially over time and was constructed as the progression of events and activities separated by identifiable discontinuities in the temporal flow (Langley, 1999; Langley et al., 2013). This temporal bracket was constructed in three phases of interplay between space and organizing.

A data analysis grid was developed by iterating between the empirical material and the literature. We developed a fine-grained coding scheme consisting of first-order codes, which

were based primarily on the informants' own language and terms. To see the data at a higher level of theoretical abstraction (refer to Gioia et al., 2013), we nested and grouped information using second-order analysis. To grasp the organizational aspects, we looked for elements that were constitutive of organizations (Ahme & Brunsson, 2011), such as decision-making, membership, hierarchy rules, monitoring, sanctions, value systems, and business models. We also looked for space evolution over time.

Data were coded manually by each of the three researchers individually. The three sets of codes were compared and discussed collectively. We used constant comparison techniques to assist in discerning second-order themes. In the third stage of our analysis, we assembled the second-order codes into aggregate dimensions of analysis (refer to Gioia et al., 2013). This process involved examining the relationships among first-order concepts and second-order themes that could be abstracted into aggregate dimensions in a data structure. After a final round of coding, five tensions emerged as aggregate dimensions by bringing together contradictory second-order concepts relating to the same general subjects. The main expression of these aggregated dimensions in space was revealed by observation during our in-depth immersion at 6b, the secondary data in particular the photographs, and the interviews. The set of aggregated dimensions and their main

expression in space, appearing during phases, allowed us to read the interplay between space and organizing over time. We then highlighted the emergence of alternative practices beyond these tensions by triangulating all our data. Our results are presented in the next section to 'narrate an informative story that is driving towards some new concept development and theoretical discovery with the careful presentation of evidence' (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 23).

## Results

In this part, we identify tensions between space and organizing during three occupation phases: The Dream Factory (2009–2015), activating 6b as a workplace (2016–2018), and the cooperative project (2019). Beyond the identification of two traditional tensions already identified in the literature, individual work versus collective engagement and informal adjustment versus structuring, our findings reveal three specific ones: architectural constraints versus work needs, freedom versus institutionalization, and proximity to versus distance from local communities. These five tensions support space-organizing movements characterized by the emergence of different practices helping the organization to become alternative.

### ***The dream factory – The emergence of tension 1: Individual work versus collective engagement***

In 2009, the project leader, an architect, saw the potential of the temporary occupation of this vacant office building and met with the promoter, who agreed to the occupation. Forty volunteers (friends and acquaintances) formed a group and established 'The 6b Association'. The main objectives were to create the 'Dream Factory' (a multidisciplinary festival that mixes architectural mutation, music, performing arts, and exhibitions in a friendly atmosphere conducive to meetings and discoveries) and to propose low-rent studio spaces for creative workers. The collective was focused on self-organizing. There were no procedures to rent the workplaces: people simply arrived in the place, had discussions with the collective, participated in a project, and ended up naturally occupying a space.

The first common space, the cafeteria, was then created, which allowed people to have a space to meet and socialize. Then, the collective focused on creating places as slightly more specific 'resources' to serve the community, such as a cinema, a wood workshop, a photo workshop, and a 'beach' (a large space outside the building bordering the Saint-Denis Canal and set up for outdoor events). In terms of commitment, some artists felt absorbed by the projects of the place. During this time, the multidisciplinary identity of the project emerged.

The Dream Factory festival attracted mostly the young Parisian public and became a place of entertainment on 'the beach', which was famous for its techno music parties (Figure 2).

The dominance of the festive events quickly became problematic for the place, both externally and internally: neighbors regularly complained about the related noise, and there was a disconnect between the festive events and the daily creative work.

This 'identity gap' led to residents lacking involvement in the Dream Factory, which ceased to operate in September 2015. Additionally, 6b started to have financial problems. The coordination team, exhausted by workload pressure and human conflicts, was experiencing high turnover. The association raised money to bring the premises up to standard and to improve the comfort of use (re-establishing heating and safety equipment and fitting out the communal areas).

When the format of occupation was a kind of squatting in the early years, the main tension arose around adapting the space to individual work needs for the development of personal artistic projects. The collective membership created through engagement in the collective dynamic, the common project, and individual actions (the development of personal artistic projects). Thus, a first tension emerged from engagement in the collective dynamic (the common project) and individual artistic work (see Table 1 'Tension 1: individual work vs. collective engagement' in the Appendix).

A new practice characterized by 'the acceptance of fluid engagement' emerges from this first tension and affects the way organizations evolve and consider their members. The collective will to participate in common associative work is indispensable for the activation of the place and its perennial functioning. However, instead of being an obligation, participation is fluid, and the levels of involvement change over time. The intermittent involvement in the collective is perfectly accepted and allows residents to keep an individual work time (which can be a few hours/weeks or last several months, depending on the nature of the projects) while participating in the collective. Representation emerges for residents who play the collective game and those who do not. The articulation of the diversity of residents and their commitment, which can change over time (collectivist vs. individualist), breaks down traditional hierarchical forms and encourages a new way forward that depends on the will of participants. Instead of being stuck between individual work or collective engagement, alternative CCTPs create a type of engagement that is fluid and adaptive to the will of individuals. There is a compromise between individual and shared interests.

### ***Activating 6b as a workplace – The emergence of tensions 2 and 3***

After a period of great difficulty, the board of directors took matters back in hand, reviewed the internal organization to 'gain in efficiency' (activity report 2018), became more involved, and recruited an administrator and a cultural mediation officer. Changes were made to the programmatic posture and





**Figure 2.** Festive event at the outside 'beach' space.  
Source: Nicolao, 2020.

the awareness of the vision of the evolution of the place. Additionally, the price per square meter rose from a symbolic euro to 12 euros in 2017. In May 2018, 6b, on its founder's initiative, took part in the 16th Venice Biennale of Architecture in Italy. 6b was presented as one of 10 pioneering and experimental places that were highlighted. The collective moments experienced in Venice also allowed a reflection to occur on the identity and future project involving the place and even its perpetuation as an 'infinite place'.<sup>3</sup> After this collective moment, the activation of the place truly began to develop. In this period, two other tensions emerged: architectural constraints versus work needs (tension 2), followed by informal adjustment versus structuring (tension 3).

### **Tension 2: 'Architectural constraints versus work needs'**

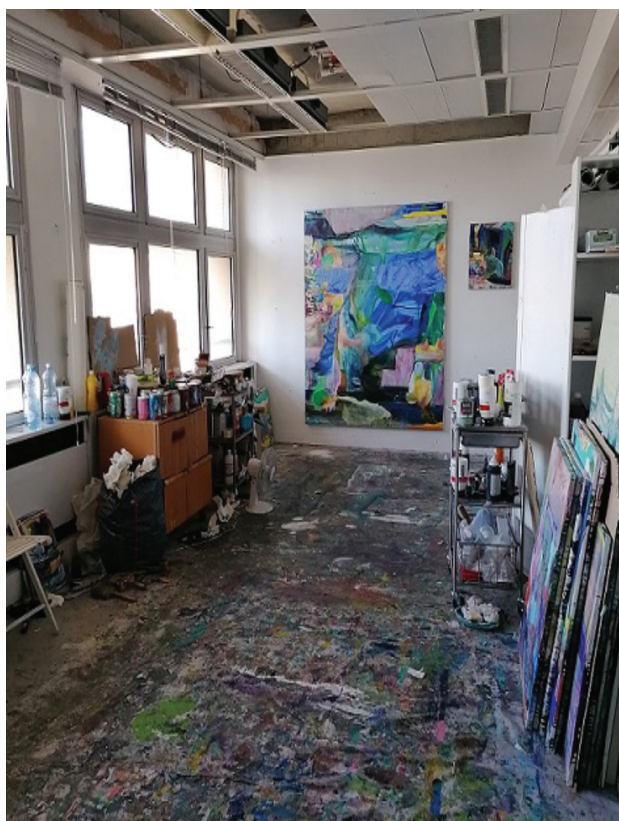
The architectural environment of an abandoned office building is an important source of tension (see Table 2 'Tension 2: architectural constraints vs. work needs and additional details' in the

<sup>3</sup> Defined as 'pioneering places that explore and experiment with collective processes to inhabit the world and build the commons. Open, possible, unfinished places that establish spaces of freedom where alternatives are sought. Places that are difficult to define because their main character is the openness to the unforeseen in order to build without end the possible to come' (encoreheureux.org, 2022, curator of the French Pavilion).

Appendix). In this case, artists and creative workers had to steer among the constraints imposed by the initial design of the building, their physical needs (heat, acoustics, hygiene, lighting, accessibility), the usage regulations and their desires to exploit the building through various usages (open areas open to the public, a restaurant, exhibitions, open days). The structural morphology of the building imposed private and enclosed spaces on its occupants, which allowed some to benefit from an isolated personal work space, but conversely, for others, the configuration of the building was perceived as a hindrance in social interactions because the spaces were difficult to access, thus creating a difficulty for the collective dynamics.

With painted floors and dilapidated ceilings, the workshops were shaped by the imprint and personality of the resident artists (Figure 3). Most residents converged on the usefulness of a place as a tool for working, and they stressed the importance of having access to a work space 24 h a day, 7 days a week, at a very reduced price compared to other Parisian spaces. In addition to the economic aspect, workshops were perceived as spaces conducive to the creation and development of work processes. The freedom for creation (individual and collective), experimentation, and the opening up of possibilities were aspects deeply rooted in the DNA of the place. The esthetic aspects of the wasteland do it yourself (DIY) attracted some artists, but for others, the level of the facilities, the precariousness of the place, and the lack of security posed a problem.





**Figure 3.** A painter's workshop.  
Source: own elaboration.

The canteen became an 'agora', a place considered by the residents to be a central point for socialization and the creation of links (Figure 4). Other spacious and open common spaces were heavily invested in creative work, such as the 'beach' for artistic exhibitions. New collective gardens were created. In this phase, there was a strong desire among residents to structure themselves in groups to generate collective artistic projects. It was up to the residents to carry out collective projects in the space (e.g., shared spaces: dance room, rehearsal studio for musicians, exhibition room, silk-screen printing workshop, photo laboratory, woodworking workshop, and publishing workshop), responding to calls for tenders and organizing event projects.

One can easily see the evolution of the place and its organizational model by focusing on the appropriation signs of the designed space. Over time, the practices of 6b were optimized and deviated from the use of the physical space. The architectural constraints of the building obligated the occupants to create new ways to live in the space and to find resources to rehabilitate it. The fact that the space was structured by floors, and mostly individual workshops fostered the need to create committees by floor, build common spaces, fix usages and activities over time, and invest outside the building. Additionally, legal obligations applicable to places open to the public forced administrators to bring the place up to standards.

Over time, residents managed to overcome some of the architectural constraints to allow them to live in the space and to develop common projects on several scales in large formats. The numerous collectives created made it possible to appropriate the space for creation through, for example, the organization of joint exhibitions in shared spaces. Thus, architectural constraints appear to empower collectives to activate space through the participation of social collectives.

In terms of techniques, this tension was attenuated by the responsible idea of preserving the building and reusing it instead of demolishing it. Additionally, such plans were presented through the use of DIY construction and more flexible spatial planning. Methods of appropriation, such as collage or assemblage, and practices, such as the reuse and recycling of materials, were among the most visible. They can be seen on walls and facades and are present in decorative elements, such as posters, building materials, objects, furniture or works of art, the organization of collective spaces, and the design of the exterior. Thus, artists and creative workers at 6b created a type of appropriation of the place that put right the use of space while encouraging DIY and sober approaches to space reconfiguration.

### **Tension 3: Informal adjustment versus structuring**

Over time, the organization became more structured and formalized (three divisions for internal organization, management tools: residents' guide, cost accounting system, management software, activity report, application files for residents, collective project file, etc.). Feedback and financial reports were produced after each event (show, exhibition, concert, etc.). Organizational practices were structured to become more efficient, allowing collective choices about the use of the space to be made.

The constitution of a team in charge of coordinating the place made it possible to consolidate a core group of residents. They developed numerous 'social/creative collectives', which were highly involved in the construction of common areas (more than 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>) that were heavily used in creative work and appropriated for socialization to conduct meetings and organize collective activities. On each floor, committees met with the administrative team to discuss collective projects that brought the place to life, thereby responding to calls for tenders and organizing event projects.

The improvisation of the early days was replaced by more structured organizing practices creating tensions (see Table 3 'Tension 3: informal adjustment vs. structuring' in the Appendix) in terms of membership, decision-making, and coordination. Divergent interests sometimes clashed with the democratic process, and the procedures put in place to slightly formalize processes.

The choice was made to overcome the tension between informal adjustment and structuring by relying on the empowerment of the collectives: the structured activation of the site by artists and creative workers was supported by the creation

of artistic groups and the recruitment of the administrative team, including a 'place concierge'.

In terms of monitoring and rules, the function of the 'place concierge' was fundamental in pacifying this tension. Rather than creating rules, the collective focused on the creation of spaces as 'resources' that were working tools and intermediary spaces that fostered collective and fluid exchanges. Having a physical space allowed the structuring and construction of common references that structured the group of individuals. The real estate opportunity and place appropriation allowed individuals and groups to constitute and organize themselves even further.

Formal and informal local organizing practices such as committees by floor or general assembly meetings encouraged solidarity, initiatives, sharing of experiences, knowledge, and collaboration. Thus, we observed that the material and symbolic coproduction of resources (creation of spaces for socialization and collective work) played an important role in supporting interaction, solidarity, and the creation of common projects.

After this phase of activating the place, the issue of perpetuating it gradually took on greater importance for the collective.

### **Cooperative project – The emergence of tensions 4 and 5**

The cohesion of the collective made it possible to envisage the future of 6b, that is, the move from association to cooperative. 6b was confronted with three issues: the perpetuation of the existence of the place; the rehabilitation of the building (in particular, upgrading to safety standards, which was a legal requirement to continue activities and open to the public); and the perpetuation of its 'spirit', mainly with regard to its characteristics as a democratic organization.

#### **Tension 4: Freedom versus institutionalization**

The lived dimension in 6b was powerful for its residents, and the representation of the place was important because it symbolized a place of freedom, play, experimentation, and resistance outside the institutional art world as constraints of the market. The identity of the place was marked by the inclusion of different artistic and creative fields, but sometimes the multidisciplinary identity was controversial and created tension between the artists and the coordination team; some wanted to specialize in a single



**Figure 4.** The restaurant transformed for an assembly meeting.  
Source: Nicolao, 2020.



artistic line, while others wanted to keep the identity of the place, which was mainly related to artistic diversity. The fight for space allowed creative workers and artists to have access to a workspace and thus develop their practices. Being 'in between' made it a place of alternative resistance to upperground institutions. However, the visions diverged and nuanced the current positioning of the place (see Table 4 'Tension 4: freedom vs. institutionalization and additional details' in the Appendix). There was fear that with project perpetuation, the place would become institutionalized because of the potential opening to investors and the fact of becoming less activated while the collective will was to maintain the site's exploratory activity.

Driven by the will to perpetuate the place and to overcome this tension between freedom and institutionalization, the collective chose to explore new forms of ownership through the idea of creating a cooperative, an organization owned, and controlled by the people who used it.

The creation of the 6b cooperative implied the drafting of statutes in 2019, discussed by the association board and the residents. A reading of the statutes shows that the creation of the 6b Coop was justified by the will to be strongly recognized within the territory and to structure a place that positioned itself as multidisciplinary. Thus, the statutes revealed the extensive organization of the project and a formal strategy of appropriation of the place, that is, by naming things and spaces and in particular by defining the object and the methods of coordination. The statutes stipulated, for example, that the 6b Coop had to set up a strategy for the exploitation of the building, encourage the emergence of work and creative spaces for the residents by fixing a minimum number of square meters of the building to be dedicated to workspaces, and participate through its activities in urban transformation.

The governance of the 6b Coop had to involve not only the residents, the employees, and the association but also new actors such as operators (e.g., restaurants, accommodations, training organizations, and businesses), communities, partners, and friends. The democratic principle was central (one person = one vote).

The admission of new members was subject to a strict process involving validation by the supervisory board. Most residents were enthusiastic about this solution, which seemed to be the best way to perpetuate the existence of their place of work by attracting investors while keeping collective control and low rent. However, a very small proportion of the residents rejected the project mainly because they refused to have it inserted in a legal framework and the operating rules formally written; these residents preferred 'a free run-space model' and did not see the point of seeking recognition within the territory.

### **Tension 5: Proximity to versus distance from local communities**

Over 10 years, 6b went through different successive stages of legitimacy. 6b was recognized by local public authorities, but the link with the urban context and inhabitants was still fragile creating tensions (see Table 5. 'Tension 5: proximity to vs. distance from local communities' in the Appendix). 6b is located in a Paris suburb that has suffered from deindustrialization but is now fairly dynamic economically, with a young, cosmopolitan population and numerous socioeconomic vulnerabilities (Chevrot et al., 2020). The question of whether the place is an actor for art and culture or an agent of gentrification has not yet been answered, and what 6b represents for the local population is not yet clear. As part of the reflection of the perennation of the project, there is a will to become closer to local communities as a social and ecological actor driving innovations in the urban area. In our case, the relation was built among artists and creative workers inside the place through work and the interest of a common project.

To respond to this tension, 6b put in place mediation devices and links through schools, universities, and associations. This new activity was not intended to replace creative work but rather to complement it. In that sense, the hiring of a 'cultural mediator' best illustrates the struggle that emerged in creating a relationship. The cultural mediator creates opportunities for people to meet and share with strangers, neighbors, artists, children, parents, migrants, people with reduced mobility, and craftspeople; promotes and facilitates guided tours of the building and artists' workshops; provides opportunities for artistic and cultural education; and facilitates visits to the gallery and exhibitions. Raising awareness among a population that is not accustomed to the practices of contemporary art or the codes of cultural spaces is a challenge for the coordination team and for the artists and creative workers.

The narrative approach adopted highlights the tensions revealed at different stages of the evolution of the place and describes the overcoming of these tensions through the emergence of new alternative organizational practices. In the next part, we discuss those results.

### **Discussion**

In this part, we discuss how tensions between space and organizing support the CCTP becoming alternative. First, we demonstrate five tensions in the interplay between the space and organizing support movements and the emergence of different practices helping the organization to become alternative. Then, we discuss the various practices that characterize the alternative. Finally, CCTPs are conceptualized as counter-spaces that propose a possibility of resistance that is not a direct confrontation.

## The key role of tensions in becoming alternative

Our research shows that the alternative nature of CCTPs emerges through new practices born of five tensions (see Table 3). Two traditional tensions are individual work versus collective engagement and informal adjustment versus structuring. Our findings reveal three specific tensions in CCTPs that are a key contribution of this research project: architectural constraints versus work needs, freedom versus institutionalization, and proximity to versus distance from local communities.

These tensions stress the importance of space as an important dimension in the study of alternative organizations and allow us to grasp space in its practical, lived, and political aspects. Thus, we go beyond the economic-creation tension described by Menger (2002) and Leclair's (2017) idea of a zone of 'fuzziness' or 'creative disorder' where artistic creativity is at best. The identified tensions account for the fluidity and ambiguity of organization in the arts (Cnossen, 2022) outside the institutions. An alternative CCTP is not constituted only by the reunion, the 'fortuitous juxtaposition' (Massey, 2005), at a precise point in space and time, of a multiplicity of individual human and nonhuman trajectories. Our results go over the reflexive relation between space and organizing (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019). In contrast to CCO, our results point out the key role of tensions in the interplay, as they support movement (activating collectives, creating a dynamic) and thus allow the emergence of new alternative practices in CCTPs.

Our work contributes to the CCO stream by investigating and demonstrating through a microprocessual view (Langley, 1999; Langley et al., 2013) constructed in three phases of interplay between space and organizing how CCTPs become alternative over time.

**Table 3.** From tensions to emerging alternative practices: summary of findings

Tensions	Emerging alternative practices
Tension 1: individual work versus collective engagement (traditional tension)	Accepting fluid engagement
Tension 2: architectural constraints versus work needs	Right of use of space DIY and sober approaches to space reconfiguration
Tension 3: informal adjustment versus structuring (traditional tension)	Empowerment by collectives
Tension 4: freedom versus institutionalization	Focus on exploration Exploring new forms of ownership
Tension 5: proximity to versus distance from local communities	Developing diversity and inclusion Cultural mediation with local communities

Source: own elaboration.

Beyond the contradictions and tensions found in alternative organizations (Béji-Bécheur et al., 2021), our research shows that it is not the space and its material aspects alone that stimulate creativity but the ability of artists and creative workers to appropriate space to build a common project. Alternative practices emerging through tensions are driven by the will to do and explore rather than by the normative goal setting found in traditional organizations. In this process, affordances make a difference (Wilhoit, 2018) as elements of language that help to create a sense of place and define a specific organizational alternative style based on freedom, solidarity, and inclusion.

Through the processual analysis of the 6b case, we demonstrate the emergence of various alternative practices.

## Accepting fluid engagement

Alternative CCTPs create a type of engagement that is fluid and adaptive to the will of individuals. There is a compromise between individual and community interests. Socializing and participation in place governance are possibilities in CCTPs but not an obligation. This participation model encourages the construction of rule-creating rather than rule-following individuals, thereby allowing them to collectively determine both the ends and the means (Kokkinidis, 2015). This distinction does not create exclusion and is not permanent. Who belongs to the community is not decided upon; rather, membership is latent and develops gradually. This new social standard of work also considers the freedom of artists to engage in an original organizing model that is 'self-organizing' (Cnossen, 2021).

## Right of use of space, DIY, and sober approaches to space reconfiguration

Occupation strategies (Dale & Burrell, 2008) seek to 'activate spaces' starting from user needs instead of imposing architectural programming or fixed assignment. The mix of activities gathered is chosen following a space logic. The alternative is giving the 'right of use' (Fournier, 2013) and allowing participants' individual actions (Anhre & Brunsson, 2011) to appropriate space. Another alternative is a question of reusing the existing, implementing sober approaches to space planning, and using spatial planning to meet the needs of the artists and the collective. Here, artistic production and socialization are the driving forces of the transformation of space (from individual workshops to collective spaces). Rather than controlling attention through standardized design, that is, the homogenization of meaning through standardized symbols and décor, CCTPs use DIY techniques to create their own workspace and atmospheres where affect emerges (Beyes & Holt, 2020).

### Empowerment by collectives

Artistic careers are characterized by nonstandard employment relations and precarity, labor markets are oversaturated with aspirants, and employment arrangements are unstable (Menger, 2002), which leads to constant failure. Skaggs (2019) showed the importance of socializing in occupational artistic communities as a helping tool for normalizing rejection, appropriately interacting, and developing collaborative relationships with peers. CCTPs offer artists protection by rehumanizing their work and developing a new social norm of collective organization that considers the fragility of independent artists, the fluctuation of creative capacities, and their dependence on others. CCTPs foster socialization strategies that allow creative workers to cope with and mitigate the uncertainty and challenges posed by their line of work. To facilitate this community, the emergence of the concierge role (defined as the process of hosting and animating a third place) is key to supporting socialization processes (organization, networking, animation, and artistic programming).

Formal and informal local organizing practices (Daskalaki & Kokkinidis, 2017), such as committees by floor or general assembly meetings, encourage solidarity, initiatives, sharing of experiences, knowledge, and collaboration. Thus, we observed that the material and symbolic coproduction of resources (creation of spaces for socialization and collective work) play an important role in supporting interaction, solidarity, and the creation of collectives.

### Focus on exploring new forms of ownership

CCTPs foster artistic and social experimentation, with an emphasis on exploration instead of exploitation (Shortt, 2015). Constant innovation and creation is one of the characteristics of alternative models (Fabbri & Charue-Duboc, 2016; Merkel, 2017), while inventing new forms of collaboration such as artists' collectives helps to build the commons (Aubouin & Capdevila, 2019). To avoid institutionalization, alternative CCTPs focus on conducting cultural production differently.

The artist residents appropriated 6b by producing the space. They transformed it into a place to work and live. This model prefers the right of use rather than the right of ownership, and it conveys the values of alternative models (Parker et al., 2007). Here, the building is not merely only a resource but also an artifact that allows microfoundations for a future common (Cnossen, 2021) to enable a collective to mobilize not only against expropriation (Cnossen, 2021) but also to perpetuate and protect its common working tool and living place (the building and the workshops). The cooperative project is an alternative outside

the binary of public control and traditional capitalistic private property.

### Developing diversity and inclusion

Through the inclusion of different communities and a wide range of artistic practices as a means to avoid homogenization and institutionalization, CCTPs continue to express their alternative character:

The place engages in a civic way with the reception of migrants in great precarity, showing its willingness to work with the inhabitants of Seine-Saint-Denis. By giving access to space to other minorities, CCTPs encourage groups that have themselves been 'neglected' to reintegrate into social life. The idea is to work among other people in a creative community while having the freedom to engage in their own practices so that the group does not represent a potential form of censorship/normalization. Here, the inclusion of different artistic practices and backgrounds creates multiplicity, or 'singularities that act in common' (Hardt & Negri, 2004). This multiplicity of artistic practices in time and space is necessary for political possibility and supports creativity, as it allows confrontation, otherness, and the surprise of chance encounters, which Massey (2005, p. 111) referred to as 'the chance of space', where 'the productivity of space' (p. 94) resides.

### Cultural mediation with local communities

For Oldenbourg and Brissett (1982, p. 271), 'a third place is a public setting accessible to its inhabitants and appropriated by them as their own'. This hypothesizes that third places perform an important function as a venue for social interaction (for inhabitants) is potentially persuasive but not empirically informed. Empirical evidence to actually confirm these optimistic views on social mixing is scarce and ambiguous. CCTPs are attentive to the sorts of futures that they will produce (Parker et al., 2014a, p. 32) within the urban fabric. However, inclusion and interaction among inhabitants are relationships that take time to build and need mediation to reduce the distance versus proximity tension. This finding is important, as it questions transitional urbanization projects whose rationale is based on the idea of fostering community-based activities. Additionally, the findings point out the problem of the reception of art and culture by the expected users and highlight the question of the accessibility of the place. This circumstance is not surprising because art-based interventions in local communities (in this case, poor and deprived cities) face tensions in the implementation process (Bobadilla et al., 2019), and building a relationship with the various stakeholders takes time. Over time, the place has increased the number of



performances given both inside and outdoors to get closer to locals; however, as Evans (2005) noted, it is not easy to measure the actual contribution of arts and culture to urban regeneration.

### Alternative CCTPs as a new form of counter space

The analysis of the 6b projects contributes to the alternative organization literature, as it encourages understanding of what is done well or differently (Parker & Parker, 2017). In this case, the idea of becoming owners and the shaping of the occupation strategy, from *accommodation* (Dale & Burrell, 2008) to exploration of *new forms of ownership*, can be seen as political acts in which the world of inspiration intersects with the civic world; together, these worlds take something away from the market economy's dominant logic.

We contribute to the current debate on new forms of resistance (Courpasson et al., 2017; Marsh & Sliwa, 2022) by demonstrating the microprocess by which CCTPs become counterspaces that propose a possibility of resistance that is not a direct confrontation; these counterspaces do not 'break free', as suggested by Furnari (2014), from existing institutions but instead include different and sometimes contradictory needs and logics. Contrary to underground institutions, CCTPs in this middle position cultivate their uniqueness and seek autonomy in the face of uncertainty while seeking security and engagement in the territory by performing creative work in collaboration with public authorities and remaining open to institutional portage.

CCTPs act as protected and emancipated spaces (Bojovic et al., 2020; Cartel et al., 2019), catalysts for creating strong relationships (Courpasson et al., 2017), juggling with tensions, and shaping public efforts. Their intersecting and political positioning allow collective experimentation, and alternative practices emerge from this experimentation. Alternative practices have a degree of 'organisationality' (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) but are not driven to challenge existing and proven organizational models. Practices are driven by human, work, and social needs of creating; sharing means, resources, and a common destiny; and producing and experimenting with new artistic forms. The values are based on freedom, solidarity, and responsibility.

Thus, we see that becoming an alternative CCTP organization is not a proper formation of elements but rather a funky combination of differentiations (characterized through practices) based on the need to alternate between what the organization shares with and what it rejects from (Del Fa & Vasquez, 2019). Over time, this collective organization does not involve defining and ordering *per se* in the sense of classical bureaucracies; rather, it arises in interaction with the need to do, work, socialize, and appropriate a common project materialized in space.

This research provides a microanalysis of the process that leads to these spaces of resistance in creative work outside institutions in the cultural sector. If counterspaces do not always correspond to empty spaces, they are nevertheless 'free spaces', and it is from this freedom and the void that is left behind that third places are born. The collective reappropriation of spaces transforms wastelands into resources. This reappropriation process involves the right to participate in decisions that relate to the use of space and thus brings spatial justice in the face of inequalities triggered by the so-called and criticized creative city (Mould, 2015). The physical, economic, and legal situation of the abandoned areas legitimizes inventive socialization (e.g., creation of new collectives, partnerships, open exhibition days) and new modes of artistic production beside the underground institutions.

On the margins, social processes develop, thereby allowing artists and creative workers to resocialize the very urban fabric that desocializes them. Thus, ownership by users and appropriation characterize alternative CCTPs as places of resistance, as testing grounds for micro-level forms of social security/protection, and as microfoundations for future common aims to improve the work conditions for independent workers in creative industries (Cnossen, 2021).

### Conclusion and avenues for future

This article demonstrates how CCTPs become alternative through tensions between space and organizing. Beyond the identification of two traditional tensions already identified in the literature, individual work versus collective engagement, and informal adjustment versus structuring, our findings reveal three specific ones: architectural constraints versus work needs, freedom versus institutionalization, and proximity to versus distance from local communities. Our findings reveal that these tensions support movement and the emergence of alternative practices in CCTPs.

Alternative CCTPs show the possibility of counterspace and constitute alternatives through the emergence of new practices: accepting fluid engagement, right of use of space, DIY and sober approaches to space reconfiguration, empowerment by collectives, focus on exploration, exploring new forms of ownership, developing diversity and inclusion, and cultural mediation with local communities. Our work stresses the importance of understanding the functioning patterns of artistic and creative organizations before considering them alternative. The fact that CCTPs are present in a neoliberal urban context does not necessarily mean that they constitute alternatives. Therefore, the members of alternative organizations articulate claims (through language) about the identity, mission, and aims of the organization, and how it is an alternative. It is through the development of different practices that

emerge through tensions that CCTPs have the potential to become alternative.

Despite these contributions, this exploratory research has certain limitations that call for further work. First, it is based on a single case study, and it would be interesting to extend it to a larger sample. Research was conducted in the French context, and comparison with CCTPs from other countries with different cultural and urban contexts and national policies would be pertinent. New ethnographic or art-based methods could be used to explore the role of other esthetic dimensions and materiality in place construction, especially the influence of affective atmospheres in creating organizational conditions for resistance to emerge.

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## Appendixes

**Table I.** Tension I: individual work vs. collective engagement

Code	First-order categories	Second-order categories	Main expression of tensions in space	Aggregate dimensions	
E12	This is the whole definition of the place. It is defined as a group of people, individuals who have energies, desires, individual projects but who form a mass that moves forward. [...] Once we understand that 6b is defined first and foremost by its units and individuals, governance is there to carry and organize the will of the individuals.	Need to isolate oneself to create	At first the workspaces were mainly composed of individual studios. Over time, the collective created new spaces as resources to stimulate the collective dynamic (workshops, restaurant, outdoor space called 'the beach', exhibition areas, agora...). The coexistence of individual and collective spaces creates a tension on the degree of use of each space.	Tension I: individual work vs. collective engagement	
E8	Yes, as an artist, I work alone. To really move forward, I can only work alone. And then you have to be in a world, not a dream world, but something like that. You can't be talking to one or the other all the time; otherwise, you can't move forward.				
E10	6b is the opposite of open space, it makes me think of a monastery where each monk has his own cell. What can be interesting is the balance between isolation, the somewhat individual side of the activity, which necessarily has to be there; I don't think you can be sharing all the time, you have to be able to isolate yourself, to hide.				
E15	Here, I have the impression that there is a kind of consumption of the place: we come, we buy a space, but we are not necessarily invested in the associative side, which is finally the 6b.				Willingness to work together to make the place more dynamic
E24	There are several important criteria. The fact of having understood the collective side of the project and not arriving only because we need a space, a cheap office. It is important for us to meet each person so that we can measure the desires of each one on a human level.				
E24	The common is relative. We don't really manage to make it common. It's a very important value that we insist on for each resident who comes to 6b, we really take the time to meet them individually with the members of the board. This is also one of the criteria for selecting residents, their desire to get involved in the territory and in the collective project. It's not just about cheap offices; it's about being part of a whole and everyone can give their time, their energy, something at some point for the community. Some give a lot and are very involved. Others don't give anything or will be present on an ad hoc basis for one thing or another. It's very disparate.				

Source: own elaboration

**Table 2.** Tension 2: architectural constraints vs. work needs

Code	First-order categories	Second-order categories	Main expression of tensions in space	Aggregate dimensions
E11	The physical configuration is not obvious to people. Those who are used to it will come. I know a lot of people who don't come because they think it is hard to access. Just the entrance... if the reception doors are closed, you wonder where you're going. If you don't know where you're going, don't you dare go upstairs.	Limitations of the physical configuration of the space	At the beginning of the project, the building was devastated and unsuitable for creative work. It was necessary to recreate essential spaces (toilets), to make the building sanitary (bring electricity, heating), to clear the outside of the building, and to arrange green spaces. Within the framework of the purchase of the building, one of the most expensive and important works is the removal of asbestos, which requires to temporarily closing off certain parts of the building.	Tension 2: architectural constraints vs. work needs
E12	It's the place. You've seen the structure of the thing, you have to know where the entrance is, you have to want to go there. And it's gotten better. At the beginning it was a squat. You have to be willing to go into the space. So we already have a first physical barrier.			
E12	It's a little bit like a hospital corridor, that's true. I had asked a writer to define 6b. He told me he would define it as corridors of doors. It's true, when you arrive and discover 6b, all you see are corridors and doors. Nowadays, buildings are not really made like that anymore. For example, that's how hospitals used to be built. Each cell had its windows. It's not pleasant to have corridors in the shade. When it's 6:00 p.m. and you leave in the night, it's not great.	Need to put the place up to standards		
E2	On the ground floor there was nothing and so there was no place to meet. So it was difficult to meet at lunchtime to discuss, to exchange. The spatial configuration created a retreat either by floor, wing or affinity. Before the restaurant opened, the fact that we didn't have a common place was a big factor.			
E1	Only one drawback to this place, for a painter there if there were a meter more height under the ceiling it would be better! It's a very technical thing in fact. In my work there are moments when I would like to see a little more and it's a bit difficult.			
E25	On a daily basis, there is something decisive, it is the setting up and the activation of the spaces. This is the lung, the central living space of 6b. The restaurant had to be renovated during 2018. The restaurant is an ERP, so we can receive members of the public up to 99 people. We are okay with the regulations; everything is in order: So we have something that is usable within the standards. We activated the restoration in October 2018. From the beginning, we knew it, we realized that it is precisely the place where we meet everyone, where we discuss, where we develop projects. It's the place where we can centralize requests and problems. It also makes daily life easier.			
E16	It's great to have a building, a pretty nice outdoor space. But it's also a burden because the building is becoming more and more dilapidated. Sometimes all the energy or all the money of the association goes into the building to the detriment of other projects. It's a burden. The building dates from the 1960s and is starting to fall into disrepair.			
E11	I hope that we will have a building that really corresponds to our ambitions in terms of artists and reflects all the investment of the last ten years. That it be felt, that it be seen in the building.			
E24	In winter, it's complicated; I'm very cold, we're in a building that doesn't meet the standards at all, with heating problems. Sometimes I find it really hard in terms of working comfort; working with your scarf, your hat, having your hands freezing, it's not always easy.			

Source: own elaboration



**Table 3.** Tension 3: informal adjustment vs. structuring

Code	First-order categories	Second-order categories	Main expression of tensions in space	Aggregate dimensions
E14	Finally, some form of structure allows people to find their way around more easily and not have to deal with forms of conflict that can degenerate because of poorly done or nonexistent organization. [...] I think that can be beneficial. If it closes the doors too much to certain options or to things that are a bit spontaneous, it's eventually less good.	Need for governance, mediation	At the beginning, the work spaces were available in number; occupied, and appropriated freely, following a 'first in' logic. Over time, the administrative team was formed and began to occupy the ground floor: A signage of the building emerged for the reception of the public, as well as a structured allocation of spaces. The administration, in order to encourage collective dynamics, has taken care to group the artists by discipline and on each floor; where the artists' meetings are held in improvised places.	Tension 3: informal adjustment vs. structuring
E19	The claims are a bit complicated. On the board of directors, things have always been a bit tense. The artists try to put forward certain grievances, certain desires. Personally, I would like someone to be there, at least part-time, to bring together the internal dynamics and to promote what is being done outside.			
E18	There are problems and we don't know how to deal with them. I think we need a social mediator to come and talk to people ... there's a woman who cooks over there who is extremely negative, she insults everyone she meets, she comes to squat I think ... there's a homeless man at the end who walks around naked with a dressing gown ... he's quite nice. ... I don't know if he's the one who puts his fags everywhere.			
E26	I think there were more problems when there were fifteen employees than when there were three. [...] At the time, there were no employees, the residents were among themselves; it was totally self-managed by the residents. All the work was done by the employees. There was a retreat of the residents from this idea of a collective. We are in an institution, there are employees; it is their job to do this or that. There were always residents who formed small groups to do things, but less and less. [...] It's becoming standardized towards a place that is much more regulated.	Willingness to perpetuate self-management		
E13	What is interesting is that this place remains this place. If it has this philosophy, it's because we don't want to change it. You can't try to control things too much. You have to let them be possible. When you freeze something and think it's good, the next day you realize that it was a shame to freeze it. In fact, you have to freeze things differently. What we want to freeze is our capacity to be free of our choices and our thoughts and to be able to control ourselves against our madness. We have to let the absurd express itself. What may seem absurd can be genius. That's what we're trying to control.			
E10	It's not structured. The restaurant was very much wanted by people who are actively involved in 6b, who design it. It is an important space for people to meet. There is a reception and management office which sends out calls for projects, calls for participation and calls for meetings via a mailing system. There are meetings by floor; meetings by discipline interest committee, a newsletter: It's something that tries to be guided but I don't think it's the most effective channel. Often things are done in an unstructured way. When you want to do it in a structured way, like sending an email to say I'm doing this, I need this, people tell you that they didn't see the email. It's not the most efficient way. It's a bit mysterious. These are dynamics that arise that you can't artificially provoke.			

Source: own elaboration

**Table 4.** Tension 4: freedom vs. institutionalization

Code	First-order categories	Second-order categories	Main expression of tensions in space	Aggregate dimensions
E8	For the artists, I think the strength of the place is the freedom it gives them, the fact that there are a lot of common spaces that complement their individual workspace, the freedom of access to the place 24 h a day all year round. They ask permission for certain things but if they want to paint a wall they do it. They have great freedom to transform and occupy the space. This is not necessarily found in more institutional places	Total freedom in the artistic appropriation of the place	At the beginning of the project, spaces were tagged, and installations and objects were made or brought in and then left to decay (especially outside). The whole was organized in an anarchic way. Little by little, the surfaces were decorated, painted with an obvious esthetic concern and homogeneity, which gives the impression of a place dedicated to visual arts. Above all, the furniture has evolved, the ephemeral installations have been replaced by self-made furniture more design, the visitor path is thought with a harmonized signage throughout the place. The institutional communication has also been developed, notably on the walls where we find numerous posters detailing the past and future exhibitions and the projects of the place.	Tension 4: freedom vs. institutionalization
E2	People feel good when they're free. If they're free, it means they have power. If they don't have power, they're not really free. By giving them the power to govern and decide you make things more possible. Everyone manages to redirect the project and feel good about it.			
E25	We don't have an artistic line. It is voluntary; the idea is to open a maximum of practices and esthetics. There is the discipline, and in each discipline, there are also trends or aesthetics. We don't close the door to more elitist or more amateur things. Isn't it an artistic line to say that we don't have an artistic line? It's a choice to leave the door open to many different aesthetics. It's still an artistic choice that is already in relation to the nature of the place. Given the number of residents from different disciplines, it would be complicated if you wanted to do it. We consider it a strength, a characteristic. For some artists, it's something they've had to put up with, but for the 6b management team, it's something we've taken on board. We don't defend this type of discipline or this type of esthetic or current.			
E16	It's a real issue that we haven't collectively resolved. [...] For places to exist, I have the impression that you need a precise identity. It has to be formed. It's a real question. For me, it's part of the vision.	Willingness to position the institution on a single artistic line		
E14	It is a place that welcomes artists from different disciplines, but there is no consensus for a very precise direction. It's an opening of the place, and at the same time, it's also something that I find complicated at times. In terms of visibility, it is not very clear.			
E20	When I joined the board of directors, I wanted to give a voice to visual artists and to make sure that there was something more professional in terms of visual art. As I had seen in other spaces that value and are recognized as places that are part of a professional artistic path of quality. I realized that this was not possible. 6b does not have this will. [...] 6b is neither a cultural center nor an artistic center but a space for creation and distribution. [...] There is no particular strategy or clear positioning of 6b. [...] There is no political will to make agreements with the regional directorate of contemporary art [...]. I felt blocked at one point by the structure itself and by what it really wanted to contribute. [...] These are the limits of 6b. [...] Many artists have left because they were looking for this. If you can make a space that is dynamic, that attracts curators and art critics, that's a plus. Many spaces are formed and work that way. We don't work like that. [...] It's not specialized and there's no such desire.			

Source: own elaboration

**Table 5.** Tension 5: proximity to vs. distance from local communities

Code	First-order categories	Second-order categories	Main expression of tensions in space	Aggregate dimensions
E11	The link with the territory is made with the mediation on the exhibitions.	Willingness to interest and involve locals	During the events, most of the public come from Paris and not from Saint-Denis. The Parisian public has a rather well-to-do profile, high level of studies, contrary to the profile of Saint-Denis. Through time, the place has started a work with the associations of the district which occupy the space, the link of the space with the inhabitants tries to be made through the associations.	Tension 5: proximity to vs. distance from local communities
E16	I don't know, but when I say that it's part of the fabric, we're there, it's part of the morphology of the city. There are the inhabitants, but there is also 6b. People know that we are there. There are events; Dionysians can come, many projects are done with the city. Not everything is rosy, there are people who don't like it either and who find that we make a lot of noise, but we are part of this city.			
E8	That's good, they sometimes do visits with the schools. I said yes. A teacher has to come with her students to certain workshops to present the work. I think that's very good. There are also open houses, I've done that several times. There are more people from the area who come.			
E26	There are city policies that try to get artists to take care of workshops for young people, but they often ask artists to take care of young people who are completely out of school, without training.			
E26	But it's very difficult to get people in Saint-Denis. There are city policies that try to get artists to take care of workshops for young people, but they often ask artists to take care of young people who are completely out of school, without training. It's very difficult to reach these young people today. They simply don't give a damn. This is a place of art. If you're not interested in art or culture, you don't belong here.	Difficulty in attracting locals who are culturally distant from the project		
E26	The relationship between the place and its territory is complicated, since many Dionysians consider that the place was stolen from them by Parisian bobos*, that it helps gentrification, that they could have done something else with these spaces, that money is made from renting out the studios. It depends on the Dionysians we meet, but some have a fierce hatred for the place and what it is.			
E8	Saint-Denis is very special because it's a very mixed city. It's quite complicated to address the population on cultural projects. I think it's complicated to bring them to the place. Last year, they had a carnival in the town of Saint-Denis. Maybe it makes more sense in the sense that they're the ones who go there. It seems simpler to me. We rarely see the population of Saint-Denis in 6b; it's more like Parisians who come to see exhibitions.			

Source: own elaboration

Note: \* 'Abbreviation of the colloquial term 'bohemian bourgeois'. Generally urban, wealthy and cultured person, claiming societal progressivism and environmental concerns'. (our translation, Le Larousse French dictionary).