

## **Binding Forces. Old and New Dimensions of Belonging in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Metropolis. USA and Europe in Comparison.**

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Large cities, metropolises, on both side of the Atlantic are characterized by an erosion of integrating resources, expressing itself above all in three processes: the fragmentation of urban culture, social and ethnic polarization, and spatial exclusion. These disintegrating developments had a significant impact on urban studies, especially on the concepts, terms and metaphors used to analytically capture the social and cultural processes involved. The research literature talks about the “divided city”, the “fragmented city”, or even about “endangered urbanity” (Heinz Reif). At the same time we cannot deny that large cities and even metropolitan areas do function. They still are attractive. There is no mass exodus taking place because of unbearable social, cultural, economic, political or ecological problems in metropolitan areas. Hence the question is, what forces do keep large cities, or metropolises alive and functioning.

The organizers of the conference had three possible answers in mind which are reflected in the structure of the conference:

1. Inhabitants of large cities use certain social techniques to cope with the disintegrating forces at work in metropolises, techniques like the formation of networks and clusters.
2. City governments try to counteract the fragmentation process by certain political strategies, e.g. *Standortpolitik* or by fostering urban self-regulation.
3. Cultural industries support certain cultural practices of creating metropolitan identities and social cohesion.

According to these assumptions the conference consisted of three panels each focusing on one of the three possible answers: the panel “Logistik und Vernetzung: Die Metropole als ‘Entlastungsmaschine’” dealt with hypotheses number 1; the panel “Selbstregulierung: Neue Praktiken und städtische Räume” tackled assumption number 2; and the panel “Symbolisierungsstrategien: Imageproduktion, Identitätskonstrukte und Erinnerungspolitik” addressed the third assumption.

The papers of the first panel focused on two dimensions of the city as a socio-scape: a) the public transport system and infrastructure and b) non-quantifiable common goods like knowledge, social contacts, creative inspiration and communication. *Dagmar Schmauks* and *Deike Peters* analysed the public transport system and infrastructure provision as possible social binding forces in the “postmodern” metropolis. Whereas *Schmauck* argued that from an anthropological point of view individual mental maps of a city’s public transport system depending in individual habits emerging from spatial factors like location of workplace, home and leisure activities do indeed create a binding force, *Deike Peters’* arguments pointed in the opposite direction. She explained that so-called postmodern, or neo-liberal city planning and urban restructuring promotes processes of social fragmentation and petrifies the city’s traditional spatial division based on factors of class, race and ethnicity.

Starting from the particular role and function of large cities in the post-industrial society *Doreen Jakob* and *Pe-Ru Tsen* both addressed new spatial and social configurations of workplaces. By focusing on specific economic segments – creative industries and financial industries – they analysed spatial aspects of modern trading or workplaces. They concluded that spatial factors, like clustering and spatial concentration, are crucial for the industries analysed. Spatial factors do provide binding forces. The character of these forces is, however, very diffuse. They derive from the multi-faceted space system in large cities, consisting of an interwoven network of socio-spaces, economic-spaces and ideo-spaces. The binding forces described by the two papers emerge from a peculiar mixture of social ascription, social construction, virtuality and physicality of the city-space.

The second panel dealt with political strategies to counteract the disintegrating processes at work in metropolises. All four papers touched upon aspects of urban governance. The social science literature defines *governance* as a political mechanism based on public-private partnerships, on private initiatives, on non-hierarchical steering mechanism, and networks. Governance is characterized by communication processes based not so much on bargaining but on arguing and learning mechanisms. Governance must not necessarily involve state action but can be based on the cultural and social initiatives of private actors, like social movements, “Bürgerinitiativen”, or even youth groups. Urban governance thus comprises a broad spectrum of political action, starting from state initiatives like the ones addressed in *Neil Brenner’s* and *Claire Colomb’s* paper on one end of the spectrum. It also comprises

private initiatives of cultural apprehension of city-scape by youth groups, hiphop culture and graffiti spraying, that *Synnove Bendixsen* and *Susanne Stemmler* addressed in their papers, thereby covering the other end of the extreme. The latter one is particularly interesting insofar as it is looked upon by state actors, like city governments, as deviant behaviour that “official” urban governance has to address.

All four papers by focusing on very different aspects and modes of political and cultural apprehension and appropriation of city-space touched upon a broad range of political processes involved in urban governance. All four papers showed that urban governance because of its politically inclusive nature does indeed provide mechanisms of belonging and nurtures social, political and cultural binding forces. The panellists agreed that urban development and city planning has to take private actors and private initiatives into account. Reurbanisation and city development cannot be planned top-down. Both must rely on bottom-up mechanisms and the inclusion of private actors. The governance literature, however, pinpoints a governance paradox that is crucial in this context: Private initiatives and the involvement of private actors in political processes are enabled by the institutional framework of political systems. If the state is missing governance does not occur. So the question is: How much state does governance need? Or to put it in the context of the panel’s discussion: How much city planning and state intervention does urban governance need?

The third context – cultural practices of creating metropolitan identities and social cohesion – was covered by six papers that again touched upon a broad range of different ways and means of establishing cultural or mental bonds, binding the inhabitants of large cities to the city-scape. Among these are the production of images and the imaginary of the city; the “spatial” history of a city – landmarks and monuments; the self-referential literature on the city; the visual in and the visualisation of the city in art and photography. *Alexa Färber* and *Cordula Gdaniec* analysed everyday practices through which city images are produced. These practices are molded in a *longue durée* of historical images which are used as cultural capital to attract visitors but also investors and new inhabitants. The intervention of city-marketing in the production of urban imaginaries was the focus of *Farias Hurtados* paper. He underlined the significance of urban utopias, of visions of urban future, disseminated by city marketing, as a vehicle for the social construction of cultural binding forces.

The panorama of cultural and political strategies and mechanisms binding people to metropolises and offering belonging techniques presented during this conference unveiled a certain cultural bias. ‘Metropolis’ is a Western, a Euro-Atlantic cultural concept which perhaps is the most important binding force at work. This concept enables us – i.e. the West – to appropriate the global. We do this by semantics – *metropolis* – but also by a number of other social and cultural practices characterizing urban development since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In our discussions we referred especially to two aspects of the urban capacity of capturing the global: migration and self-referentiality.

Large cities and metropolises are and always were the center and the entrance point of migrants – migrants from other countries, immigrants, but also migrants from rural areas. Migrants with different cultural, religious, ethnic and racial background form the soil nurturing the development of new forms of social behaviour and cultural institutions. Cultural plurality and hybridity as well as cultural ambivalence reflect the character of metropolises as social laboratories (Wolfgang Kaschuba). The fluidity of urban culture produces self-referential discourses negotiating the multiple identities of large cities. Globality and “Weltoffenheit” are central elements of these discourses. They serve as common reference points and as umbrella concepts covering diversity, multiplicity und fluidity by constructing commonalities. It is in this discursive process that large cities become “metropolises”.

The metropolitanism of large cities is semantically constructed by the globality and the assumed inclusive character (“Weltoffenheit”) of large cities. It is institutionalized among others by specific ways and means of visualizing the metropolitan character of large cities going hand in hand with a specific visual culture of the city itself: exhibitions, guided tours, Denkmalpflege, pop culture (graffiti spraying) and even the urban transport system. All of these institutions serve the purpose of permanently reproducing an urban imaginary representing the global and connecting the local with the global. This reproduction process involves aspects of cultural transfer, processes of cultural apprehension and cultural rejection formenting the development of transitory strategies of belonging. As the migrant epitomizes “transit”, cultural adaptation, cultural hybridity and the existence of spatial clusters are expressions of transitory strategies of belonging, of urban borderlands and the fluidity of the social, economic and spatial character of cities. It is these phenomena which the concept of transculturalism tries to capture.

The fluidity of urban culture and its transitory and hybrid character questions the analytical quality of the concept of “identity” in the singular. Focusing instead on “binding forces” keeps us aware of the multiplicity of identities and the singularity and individuality of processes of identity building and the consumption of urbanity. Heuristically this will help us to escape the danger of essentializing cultural phenomena addressed by “the West” as being “typical” for a metropolis. As *Wolfgang Kaschuba* in his opening remarks underlined, there are no clear-cut categories helping us to define or operationalize a metropolis. Metropolises are very individual social, cultural and spatial entities, as are the people who live, work and consume the city according to very individualized lifestyles as well as material and cultural interests. According to *Wolfgang Kaschuba* metropolises are characterized by plurality, heterogeneity, difference and alterity but also by hybridity and ambivalence as accepted conditions of metropolitan life. Metropolises are social and cultural laboratories, “ein Ort der Gesellschaft und ein Ort vor der Gesellschaft”. “Binding forces” and the concept of “belonging” help us to sharpen our awareness for these deeply individualized processes of cultural and political apprehension of urban space. Whereas “identity” and “integration” is based on an analytical top-down perspective reducing the individual to an element of the larger whole, “binding forces” analytically starts from the bottom, taking individual life styles and the plurality and fluidity of city life as starting points for an analysis of metropolises thereby acknowledging their historical and cultural embeddedness.