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Tagungsbericht: UrbanTopias. Discussing the Challenges of Changing Cities

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Tagungsbericht: *UrbanTopias. Discussing the Challenges of Changing Cities*

Veranstaltet von DFG International Graduate Research Program Berlin – New York – Toronto "The World in the City: Metropolitanism and Globalization from the 19th Century to the Present" vom 27. bis 29. Oktober 2016 in Berlin¹

What is the future of the urban? Looking back at twelve years of joint discussions, scholars of the DFG International Graduate Research Program "The World in the City", together with invited academics, artists, and activists went far beyond the classical divide of utopian versus dystopian visions. Under the title of "UrbanTopias", the particular relations of time, space, and urban imaginaries were approached from three broad lines of analysis: (1) by investigating urban societies between fear and solidarity; (2) by scrutinizing materialities and practices of resistance and transformation in the city; and (3) by showing the entanglements of metropolitan colonialism and futurism, creativity, and activism.

In his opening keynote lecture, PHILIPP MISSELWITZ (Berlin) productively confronted existing imbalances between theorists and practitioners in urban knowledge generation. The architect and planner shared his insights from the recent UN Habitat III conference in Quito, pointing specifically to the underrepresentation of academics at the event. Misselwitz re-interpreted the term "UrbanTopias" as a chance to overcome a seeming incompatibility of utopia and *Realpolitik*. Warning that such artificial distinction would further marginalize their roles, he called for a stronger engagement of present researchers during the upcoming implementation of the New Urban Agenda. During the discussion that followed, DOROTHEE BRANTZ (Berlin) emphasized that the co-production of knowledge was vital for understanding cities. Besides a need for the global funding of cross-comparisons between the so-called "global north" and "global south", Brantz pointed out that also within institutions, less national-centric research was needed.

¹ Eine erste Version des Berichtes wurde mit Aljoscha Hofmann und Hannah Schilling für HSozKult verfasst. Die vorliegende, gekürzte Fassung wird mit freundlicher Genehmigung von HSozKult veröffentlicht.

Potentials as well as limits of “UrbanTopias” were also central topic of the conference’s first section “Urban Societies between Fear and Solidarity”, introduced by JOHN MOLLENKOPF (New York). Arguing that both fear and risk were endemic to the urban, he made a strong call for studying the political incorporation of today’s mobile city-users. In response to this, GESA TROJAN (Berlin), co-organizer of the first panel, introduced the concepts of “hospitality” and “hostility”, thus setting the stage for a vivid discussion around their analytical potential for studies on urban mobility.

From a human geographers’ point of view, NILS GRUBE (Berlin) reacted by showing how pro-hospitality transformed into hostility towards tourists in Berlin. Warning against the threat of racism, he pointed to the blurring lines between tourism and other forms of mobility, mainly migration.

From a different perspective, SARAH BECKLAKE (Lancaster) demonstrated how anti-hostility strategies could result in forms of (forced) hospitality. Drawing upon the case of Antigua Guatemala, she pointed to the performativity of touristic securitization strategies, showing how locals were disciplined into performing as hospitable “others” in order to make tourists feel safe. Taking a critical stance towards the sessions’ theme, Misselwitz asked for shifting the perspective from host societies and “welcoming cultures” to those that were supposed to be hosted. The case of Berlin, he argued, showed that refugees were not part of 21st century urban policies. Instead of taking into account existing migrant infrastructures, the new residents were mostly placed outside neighbourhoods such as Neukölln.

Providing a more positive example of solidarity, DYUGU KABAN (Berlin) presented a set of interventions by the “Spacedigger Research Collective”. Through a collection of mundane objects, the group of artists, social scientists, and designers had shown the materiality of exclusions and inclusions in an Istanbul neighbourhood.

Touching upon issues of urban mobility in a broader sense, the second panel led over to a discussion on the ideals behind forms of dwelling that are “wanted” – and those which are not. While BILL OSGERBY (London) elaborated on the criminalization of youth in Britain, pointing also to how migrant youth are used as scapegoats in current “Brexiteer” debates, JENNY KÜNKEL (Weimar) drew a more complex picture of the ordering of deviance. With the extension of gentrification over the city of Frankfurt, she argued, displacement of marginalized groups became less feasible. Instead, Künkel showed how policemen and -women were flexibilizing containment, by introducing so-called toleration zones or by taking over roles that were traditionally assigned to social workers.

Another current strategy of coping with deviance was addressed by NIKLAS CREEMERS (Berlin), who asked how digitalization impacted on the rhythmicity

of urban security landscapes in New York. Comparable to the game of “whack a mole”, Creemers argued, police were chasing statistical patterns of crime, rather than criminals.

The second day of the conference, entitled “Materialities and practices of resistance and transformation”, was introduced by MARGIT MAYER (Berlin) with a sharp analysis of the current urban situation. From Mayer’s point of view, “UrbanTopias” were intrinsically intertwined with the concept of the commons. Forms of direct access to urban infrastructures that provide basic needs such as water, food, or public transport were essentially emerging out of social struggles, she argued.

Following up on Mayer’s introduction, the third panel on “Remerging Infrastructures” explored how small-scale practices of provisioning relate to large-scale organizations of basic needs. Focusing on struggles for access to water, both MARCELA LOPÉZ (Berlin) and MARCELA ARRIETA (Berlin) elaborated how Colombians challenged neoliberal policies in their cities. While López showed how a differentiation between non-/commercial types of water shaped the forms of community organization in the case of Medellín, Arrieta approached water in itself as a central actor that dis-/connected human and non-human actors in Bogotá’s marginalized areas.

Opening out the discussion to a less established field of research, BEATRICE WALTHALL (Berlin) introduced her work on food governance in Berlin. Premised on the observation that Germany’s capital was governed by “food politics without food policy”, Walthall pointed out how civil society actors successfully influenced government discourses.

Finally, discussant TIMOTHY MOSS (Berlin) made a call for taking the entanglements of the social and the material in infrastructures seriously.

In the fourth panel a historian and a mobility consultant discussed “Changing Mobility Patterns. Progress and Reluctance”. Focusing on the case of Berlin, CHRISTOPH BERNHARDT (Berlin) drew a pointed history of the car friendly city. Starting with an illustration of the dramatic increase in the use of public transport at the end of the 19th century, he reminded that ironically, the co-existing utopia of the automobile city had become dominant. Taking on this latter point, WOLFGANG AICHINGER (Berlin) brought the debate into the present and future of urban Germany. Making clear that air quality in major German cities did not comply with EU standards, Aichinger criticized the passivity of government institutions, thus confirming Bernhardt’s hypothesis of the over-protected car industry. Finally, the panellists agreed that analysing the utopian dimension of infrastructures was important. This implied considering ambivalent notions of progress, by analysing for instance how tramways have recently

been rediscovered, while they had been abandoned as hampering modernity in the previous century.

The third day stressed the topic “Entanglements of metropolitan colonialism and futurism” and was opened by a panel on “Artivism in Urban Imaginaries”. How could art and activism change present thinking, panel moderator JANET MERKEL (London) asked. KATE BREHME (Berlin) hypothesized that the Berlin Biennial was out of sync with the city, lagging behind actual socio-political realities, while at the same time struggling with the constraints of having become an institution.

Tackling the challenges of archiving digital borne material in New York’s “Occupy Wall Street” and Istanbul’s “Occupy-Gezi” Movements was at the centre of ELIF ARTAN’s (Berlin) presentation, which discussed the role of video activism for producing alternative historiographies.

FRIEDERIKE LANDAU (Berlin) drew from the example of the “Koalition der freien Szene” in Berlin to discuss the challenges of trying to influence cultural politics while acting as a lobby for groups that partly reject representation.

The sixth panel “Tempor(e)ality. Racing Time and the Racialized Urban” critically discussed “UrbanTopias” against the backdrop of their dystopian realities. MARLÈNE DE SAUSSURE (Berlin) revealed the colonial legacies inherent to the concept of metropolis. Whereas de Saussure drew from the case of the first colonial exposition in Marseille in 1906, PATRICIA SCHOR (Utrecht) showed the continuities of a “White Order” in Dutch cities until today.

The long-lasting patterns of exclusion of blackened subjects from the public sphere incited PEGGY PIESCHE (Bayreuth) to ask whether the digital space could open to new forms of alliances across continental divides. What if “black people had a future?” Piesche concluded with a provocation that pushed the audience to reconsider their intellectual boundaries and called for decolonizing utopian projects.

The current knowledge boundaries of urban studies were also at stake at the final roundtable. Opening the discussion, DANIEL TÖDT (Berlin) asked the participants about their estimations of the most relevant topics for urban studies in the next ten years. Importantly, ROSEMARY WAKEMAN (New York) called for coming back to the original endeavour of urban studies to break down the borders between university and the city. Leading over into the discussion, she added a self-critical note on the Euro-American dominance within the graduate school. Finally, two current PhD students from the graduate school steered the debate into a more positive direction. Sharing her enthusiasm on the sound walk with artist ANDREW BROWN (Nottingham), Friederike Landau called for opening research to more encompassing sensual experiences in learning the urban.

The conference ended with a Final Roundtable about “The Future of Urban Studies” which was moderated by NOA HA (Berlin) and DANIEL TÖDT (Berlin) and brought together DOROTHEE BRANTZ (Berlin), KANISHKA GOONEWARDENA (Toronto), FRIEDERIKE LANDAU (Berlin), ANNIKA HINZE (New York), and ROSEMARY WAKEMAN (New York) for an elaborate exchange of thoughts on the topic. Underlining the progressive aspects of the graduate program, de Saussure stated that the fact that more women than men were participating on the roundtable left her with an optimistic outlook on the future of urban studies.

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Normen von Oesen

Tagungsbericht: *Pfade des Urbanen – Herausforderungen und Potentiale von Pfadkonzepten für die historische Stadtforschung*

Workshop des DFG-Projekts „Industriestädte – Krisen, Krisenwahrnehmungen und Entwicklungsalternativen in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts“ der Universität des Saarlands und des Instituts für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung in Erkner, vom 19. bis 20. Januar 2017 an der Helmut-Schmidt-Universität, Hamburg

Vom 19. bis 20. Januar 2017 wurden in der Helmut-Schmidt-Universität (HSU) in Hamburg die Herausforderungen und Potentiale von Pfadkonzepten für die historische Stadtforschung anhand zahlreicher Beispiele interdisziplinär diskutiert. Der im Kontext des DFG-Projekts *Industriestädte – Krisen, Krisenwahrnehmungen und Entwicklungsalternativen in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*