

Urban  
Quality  
of Life  
at  
Risk

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# Urban Quality of Life at Risk

Urban quality of life is currently conceptualised in principally economic terms. As the decline in manufacturing activities, the rise of the service and knowledge economy, the growing importance of accessibility and globalising processes continue to reconfigure the economic competition between cities, quality of life enters the discourse primarily as a means to attract high-skilled workers and improve the cities economic prospects. Local governments increasingly seek partnerships with local and foreign capital, reorganising institutions and tasks to attract capital, including the “selling of place,” strengthening place promotion and marketing efforts. The rhetoric clearly welcomes wealthy, creative, high-skilled people, whereas disadvantaged and low skilled groups receive less attention in the making of places. Especially in inner city areas, high quality of life is promoted as spaces for ‘clean’ and convenient consumption with positive atmospheres and shiny images.

Yet a plethora of theoretical engagements with urban everyday life reminds us that the variety of jobs, the quality of public spaces, the range of shops and services, the cultural facilities and public transport are important place characteristics, but that more subjective aspects such as safe neighbourhoods, well-being, community prospects, social cohesion, happiness, satisfaction and social and spatial justice are equally crucial determinants of urban quality of life. These elements of urban quality of life – and how they are experienced by diverse formations of urban inhabitants – seem to be absent from, if not at odds with, the dominant discourse in rankings, policy and practice. Urban life, social cohesion and complexity are at risk in the dynamics of modernisation and adaptation strategies of cities.

This collection of essays emerged from an Anglo-German conference that was held in Frankfurt in June 2015, funded by the Research Centre “Region and City” at the University of Kaiserslautern and supported by the German Sociological Association, Section Urban and Regional Sociology (GSA; DGS). It focuses on tracking urban quality of life at risk. Gentrification, the occupation of inner-city districts by hyper-rich people, segregation and displacement of lower and middle classes can be observed as a consequence of these strategies. Questions addressed included

Which aspects of quality of life are affected by which trajectories of cities?

What does a stronger segregation mean for quality of life for different population groups?

How satisfied are people with their living conditions in different parts of the city?

When and why do people move into or out of cities?

In which way is personal quality of life affected by place-based images and concepts of quality of life within cities?

Which aspects can be observed as social innovations to improve quality of life?

For example, housing projects with new architectural patterns, community space and multi-generational living can be regarded as a coping strategy for housing, job and family related risks and new quarters for healthy environments and good quality of life. The extent of social stratification is limited and narrowed in certain city spaces, which may have a positive as well as negative impact on subjective well-being.

We do not know much about the quality of life in globalised spaces, or about transnational areas within city life, (asylum seekers and refugees, illegal inhabitants). Neighbourhoods are perceived and evaluated according to different criteria (diversity, neutral contacts, friendliness, openness), but neighbourly help as a substitute for municipally provided social services is mostly discussed with a critical stance. Regarding risk, infrastructure is included in research on urban quality of life. Cities have to cope with worn-out infrastructure (water, sewerage, public transport) in need of renewal and renewed and technical upgrading, as well as with rising temperatures and water levels. Typically, the poorer strata of the population are more affected by pollution, waste, noise, crime, poor hygiene and climate change than more affluent population groups. With this collection of essays we want to contribute to the discussion and explore whether more inclusive forms of quality of life can be achieved under current economic and political conditions.

# Gentrification under Question

## Conceptual Risks and Political Consequences

Gentrification, the class-based upgrading of neighbourhoods, has been a prominent topic of urban studies since the term has been invented by the British-German sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964. Tons of books and papers have been published, controversial debates held, and empirical studies have explored causes, patterns and dynamics of gentrification all around the world. This prominence of gentrification as a research subject is not only due to academic fashion. Gentrification has in fact become a risk for low-income households in numerous cities of the world. In this context, Smith (2002) has even gone so far to designate gentrification as “blueprint of urban strategies” applied worldwide.

In the last years however, the concept as such has come under increasing attack. Echoing the call of postcolonial thinkers to ‘provincialise’ Western theories, more and more scholars today tend to see gentrification as an urban phenomenon rooted in rather specific experiences made in a handful of Western metropolises in the last century. More and more often, the concept of gentrification as such is thrown into question and blamed for being overstretched and no longer able to integrate different trajectories of urban change into its theoretical framework (see for example Ghertner 2015).

This article picks up on these debates. I argue that gentrification has indeed become a term which is often used in a simplifying and universalising way. I see the major reason for this in the reductionist conceptual core of gentrification research which leaves aside the actual regulations existing in many housing markets. Based on an empirical study of the relations between gentrification and public policy in London, Berlin and St. Petersburg, I sketch alternative conceptualisations of gentrification which might open the way towards new research designs.

“Much too simple  
and definitely obvious”

This was the comment of David Harvey (then PhD Adviser) when Neil Smith (then PhD Student) presented his “rent gap”-argument to him back in 1979. Since then the rent-gap theory has become the arguably most prominent supply-side explanation of gentrification which is now taught in every undergraduate course on the subject. The essentials of the rent-gap argument are easy to explain:

“To summarise the theory, gentrification is a structural product of the land and housing markets. Capital flows where the rate of return is highest, and the movement of capital to the suburbs along with the continual depreciation of inner-city capital, eventually produces the rent gap. When this gap grows sufficiently large, rehabilitation (or for that matter, renewal) can begin to challenge the rates of return available elsewhere, and capital flows back.” (Smith 1979: 546)

Whereas I agree with Tom Slater (2015) that the elegance of the rent gap argument lies exactly in its mix of simplicity, critical edge and normative thrust, there is also a major downside to this explanation. While the “rent-gap” has indeed superior explanatory power with regard to the economics of gentrification, it necessarily leaves aside institutional, social, cultural and political factors limiting gentrification. As a consequence, studies based on this theory have often either found it difficult to include actual patterns of gentrification in their empirical fields into the theoretical argument, or produced alterations of the rent-gap theory which tended to fit only the actual case under discussion. It needs to be emphasised that problems with bringing together universal

explanations with empirical realities are not unique to supply-side explanations of gentrification. Rather, the contrary is true as explanations based on a double cycle of “invasion and succession” have remained central to much research, but also led to numerous difficulties when applied in empirical studies (see Bernt et al. 2010 for a critique of this strand of research in Germany, where demand-side approaches have remained dominant until now).

The main problem here is the essentially universalising and simplifying undercurrent which is at the core of both strands of gentrification theory:

Why universalising? The plethora of both supply- and demand-side theories was developed against the background of experiences made in a handful of British and North American metropolises in the 1960s to 1980s – and is widely influenced by the conditions underlying urban change in these contexts. In these contexts, individual property as the dominating form of tenure, the availability of capital, a rising middle class and many other factors were self-evident. Yet, when going outside these contexts, much of these “independent variables” become less obvious. Consequentially, the application of a conceptual framework originating in the specific urban experiences of Anglo-Saxon cities at a particular moment in time, has caused numerous irritations when applied in regions with divergent constellations.

Why simplifying? Both demand- and supply-side explanations of gentrification share a conceptualization of real estate markets in which owners have near-monopoly control over land, capital is available and markets work (by and largely) unchecked. In reality this is, however, a neoclassical fiction which does not exist even in the most neoliberal countries in the world. In reality, there is no such thing as a ‘free market’, but markets are politically organised and only made possible through a set of institutional arrangements and social relationships. Polanyi (1944) has described this entanglement of markets and societies as a ‘double movement’ and argued that Western civilization would be subject to a dialectical process of commodification and disembedding as well as decommodification and re-embedding of markets, with markets and societies existing in related tension. While housing is produced, valorised and traded as a commodity under capitalism (and this is well covered by gentrification research), it is at the same time a social right regulated by the state. The realisation of profit made from capital investment into housing is thus embedded into complex regulatory frameworks.

## Gentrification and the double movement in London-Barnsbury

The relevance of this argument to the study of gentrification is apparent: The commodification of housing and its decomposition are closely connected and need to be studied together.

In the following, I present how this nexus impacted on the dynamics and patterns of gentrification in Barnsbury, a “super-gentrified” (Butler and Lees 2006) neighbourhood in north London. The argument is based on an empirical study on “Gentrification and Public Policy” which was financed by the Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation and conducted between 2014 and 2016 in London, Berlin and St. Petersburg. With regard to gentrification, Barnsbury is a particularly interesting case, as this neighbourhood has been experiencing upgrading since the late 1960s. Here, gentrification can be studied over a very long period in which the policy-environment changed repeatedly and fundamentally. Altogether, three phases can be distinguished in which gentrification unfolded and subsequently mutated:

In a first phase which lasted from the 1960s to the mid-1970s, Barnsbury experienced a fundamental change from a deteriorated, working-class and immigrant inner-city neighbourhood with an overproportional share of rental flats to an area inhabited by a population of educated, white middle-class owner occupiers. The political economy underlying this change has been described in detail by the British geographers Chris Hamnett and William Randolph (1988) who then introduced the term “value gap” to the gentrification literature. In short, the “value gap” can be described as the gap between capitalized property value in rental and owner-occupation. The “value-gap” reflects the changing fiscal and financial structures for housing investment in Britain at that time which resulted in making the sale of property for owner-occupation far more lucrative than renting out. The background for this were complex changes both in the taxation of properties, the structure and policy of mortgage institutions and rent laws which squeezed the profitability of rental housing on the one hand, while making the appropriation of property for owner-occupation advantageous for households with a high taxable income. When the gap between the “tenanted investment value” and the “vacant possession value” grew large enough, developers bought up properties, pushed out the tenants and resold the flats to owner-occupiers. Within a very short period







of time, this resulted in a fundamental change of Barnsbury's population structure.

In a second phase, gentrification was consolidated through the "Right to Buy", a statutory right for sitting council tenants to buy their home introduced by the Thatcher government. Until 2014 the "Right to Buy" resulted in the sale of 2.5 million council homes until 2013 (all UK), making tenants themselves the main agents of privatisation. In Barnsbury, where the Borough of Islington had embarked on a municipalisation policy in the 1970s and extensively acquired properties in renewal areas, the introduction of the "Right to Buy" had extremely severe consequences as it brought hundreds of properties to an already heated market. In a situation in which more than half of the total housing stock was state-owned and could have formed a massive barrier limiting gentrification, the "Right to Buy" managed to successively raze this protective wall and fuel gentrification through a continuous new supply of flats. This resulted in the consolidation and expansion of gentrification.

Currently, Barnsbury experiences a third phase of gentrification which Butler and Lees (2006) have termed "supergentrification". The main characteristic of this phase is not only that the original gentrifiers are now displaced by a strata of "super-rich" in-movers, but most of all that the economic environment of gentrification has changed essentially. Three processes make current gentrification different: the increased importance of property purchased as an asset (in contrast to a place for living), the growth of private renting, and state-induced displacement in the social housing sector. All these developments are backed by the neoliberalisation of the British housing system which has been proceeding under various governments for the last 30 years. Here, the ongoing privatisation of council housing, the introduction of new mortgage products ("Buy-to-let schemes") and the deregulation of rent laws have worked together in making gentrification more exclusive, but also more unstable and contradictory than ever before.

## Barnsbury compared

How does this history of gentrification in a North-London neighbourhood compare to cases of gentrification studied in Berlin and St. Petersburg? While this is not the place for a detailed analysis, it is obvious that the visual expressions of gentrification as they present themselves through a different population, an upgraded housing stock and a consumption landscape designed for affluent

inhabitants are widely comparable in the three cities. Yet the essence, underlying this change is hidden from view. Here, a closer analysis reveals very different processes at work.

Thus, gentrification in Berlin is by and large takes place within a (comparably) strongly regulated rental sector. Here, tenants have rights and this has resulted in a “splintered” and “delayed” gentrification (see Bernt and Holm 2005). In Russia, the privatization of flats to the sitting tenants has led to a “micro-ownership society” and a widely dysfunctional real estate market (Zavisca 2014) in which investors find it very difficult to implement regeneration projects on a larger scale, even within the most central and most prestigious locations. The outcome is a landscape where commercial gentrification is clearly visible, but poor and rich strata of the population still tend to live cheek by jowl.

Summing up, there are fundamental differences. While these differences do not make established theories useless, they imply a change of perspectives: First, we should understand gentrification as a generic concept (see also Lees et al 2015) pointing at a pluralist world of gentrifications, instead of a singular phenomenon. This complex landscape cannot adequately be grasped with a “one-size-fits-all” approach, but calls for context-sensitive research designs. Second, while gentrification studies have focused on the commodification of land and housing, the differences between the cases discussed can only be understood when they are put into relation to different institutional environments, histories and regulations. Thus, the state needs to be put into the centre of gentrification research.

### Analysis at risk

Far beyond academic splitting of hairs, this reorientation has fundamental implications for the role gentrification research can play in guiding political action. A research strategy which treats social, cultural and historical constellations as mere “specificities” overruled by a common underlying structure will do well in uncovering capitalism as the basis for gentrification – but get stuck when it comes to explain specificities. Policy advice, based on such conceptualisations, can only be difficult and any guidance for political change which goes beyond stating that capitalism should be abolished, can only be developed in an ad-hoc way.

Bringing in policies, however, implies a wide-reaching change of academic practice, not only with regard to the theories applied,

but also with a perspective on sources of data, publication formats, and the positions of scholars vis-à-vis politicians and/or activists. This implies new risks – but also new prospects.

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# Avoidance, Exclusion and Enclosure

## The Management of Risk by the Super-Rich

One way of thinking about risk in urban contexts is not to focus on the source of risk itself but to consider how people respond to the city around them and the sources of danger they believe to be there. The paradox of fear, that many groups with low rates of victimisation experience high levels of fear of crime, underscores the way in which emotional responses are shaped by media narratives, mythologies attached to particular urban groups and places, as well as indeed the reality of violent crime in many locations. Fear can be experienced as a raw emotion in its own right but also witnessed in avoidance behaviours around public transport use, the time of day at which streets or particular areas are navigated. Another way to look at these issues is to scale-up these concerns and look at the way larger urban systems operate in ways that support the avoidance strategies and desires of many social groups to avoid danger and embrace diverse modes of security. In this way we can consider how perceptions of risk are engaged via the housing market as a means of more managing or avoiding stress and danger in everyday life. As urban historians have long pointed out, processes of suburbanisation

contained within them a desire for the avoidance of social difference as well as an interest in displays of social status and circumventing the negative environmental amenity of the city. Of course these responses require resources to be mobilised – the search for a nice house in a safe area is likely to be a more scarce resource. These issues are complicated still further by the way in which the risks we perceive, violence, abuse and theft, for example, are generated by inequalities in social opportunities and material resources.

Material inequalities in wealth and income, as is now well-known, have been rising and in tandem with new technologies and new kinds of real estate developments that facilitate attempts at social withdrawal and risk management. For the very wealthy the combination of gated communities, domestic security systems and powerful and co-ordinated mobility systems enable a deepening response to crime and disorder that is difficult to disentangle from motivations of conspicuous display. This may seem to beg the question of why we should concern ourselves with those social



groups, elites and they wealthy, who may not appear to present a danger to others or a problem for the cities they live in? Such questions betray a lack of interest in the very inequalities that generate many forms of acquisitive and violent crime. Similarly, to ask why we should take an interest in urban elites ignores the increasingly apparent way in which the wealthy lobbying political parties to retain material privileges, re-shaping and partitioning cities in line with their desire to avoid social difference and opposing political agendas focused on redistribution and access to core resources, like housing health and education. In short, the idea that the wealthy are not a social problem or unnecessary to urban and sociological studies can be dismissed but it can also be seen as an attempt to deny debates about the means by which deeper forms of community and social security might be founded. This short contribution focuses on the mobilities and strategies of the very wealthy as mechanisms for avoiding risk and danger in divided urban centres.



## Iceberg homes and secure nodes

The Daily Telegraph recently gave coverage to a £4.5m home for sale in Hampstead. The house was distinctive because most of it was underground, sporting, in iceberg fashion, a barely noticeable street-level presence that concealed an extensive home and gardens below. Yet homes like this are not a new phenomenon, they are a 'bunker' aesthetic that writers like Bauman observed some years ago. One way of thinking through the implications of these kind of fortress homes and the rise of gated communities in traditionally open European urban landscapes is to consider what these spaces say about social practices and patterns of sociability – why are such homes created; what fears and aspirations do they respond to; how indeed might such spaces come to reinforce existing inequalities? Of course this is now a world of pronounced inequality and one in which the public realm and social investment are increasingly at stake in a political vision of the world in which trickle-down economics and naked personal ambition are widely supported by politicians, think-tanks and publics. The presence of these trophy homes in the middle of social distress and poverty reinforced by government austerity programmes, like other European centres, produces if anything grater anxiety among those within them who see the risk of an envious mob outside. As the affluent residents of the street described in Lanchester's novel *Capital* learn 'we want what you've got'.

To say that such anxiety is new is of course untrue, indeed it is widely shared and present among those who are less securely employed or rewarded and for whom the risk of burglary, to take one example, is much higher. The point here is that as the gap between the very wealthy and others grows domestic space has become increasingly private and inaccessible with wealth being used to seek out an almost invisible position in the city by the wealthy. Is this because of a fear of crime, a fear of intrusion, perhaps even a worry about public visibility, envy and a celebrity culture? In many ways it is a complex combination of all of these factors. Certainly much has happened to make London rather different city from what it was even a decade ago. Some of this change can be seen in the moving frontier of gentrification and displacement, previously in inner areas of the city and now more often via the demolition and re-modelling of public housing estates in the city. As many have suggested, these changes appear also to signal a kind of social risk management







strategy, with some commenting that processes of social cleansing are taking place and with the urban poor being further excluded from the city. In many ways then the city is being re-designed according to a plan to respond to the fears and desires of the very affluent, encouraging their confidence and presence by removing unsightly forms of poverty and social distress.

The changes we have seen in London and the appropriation of positional homes by international capital says something about the desirability of this particular city for those looking to invest and make further gains (the argument of economics), but they also say something about the nature of London's urban culture and built environment which facilitates a lifestyle conducive to a group whose steps into public space are often timid, or at least wary of where and who is safe (an argument of the role of culture). For those not from London the development and purchase of respectable and trusting relationships is critical since, as many wealthy people suggest, when one has money the character of the world around them becomes more potentially threatening and grasping of their resources.



## Fortified domesticity

In the context of these material, social and political changes questions have arisen about London is for and who its political class really serves. How do the wealthy move around and through these spaces and what, more importantly, do these mobilities say about their own social politics and connection to the wider citizenry of the capital? Certainly having money confers the ability to occupy a home that is a fundamental base from which forays into public and other private spaces can be made. Here we find elaborate security systems, a supporting cast of staff and other service providers who enable a seamless engagement with space. The ultimate goal of many buyers is indeed to find a home with underground or drive-in car parking with internal exits (common in many of the newly planned skyscrapers for the city to come in the next decade). The so-called 'poor doors' of apartments alongside Versace interiors at the Battersea power station (Nine Elms) development are another example of the ways in which the wealthy flow around the city almost in tandem with its wider population yet which are impermeably separated by tinted glass, locked taxi doors or in lifts that piggyback on those used by lesser residents. In this sense the wealthy are not an extra-territorial presence in cities like London but enjoy the sense of being threaded through the fabric of the city while being able to negotiate or avoid what are seen to be more risky groups and spaces. Co-ordinated forays using personal drivers are an essential element of these networks and allow the conspicuous trappings of wealth, in any case relatively unremarkable in such an affluent capital, to slip from view via co-ordinated pick-ups organised by mobile phone. In this way the risks of urban life can be transformed into a lifestyle that celebrates the city as a delightful and open system whose resources and services they can pick and choose.

## A politics of invisibility

With the ongoing privatisation and re-working of London's public spaces and ongoing debates about the forced expulsion of the homeless, those on welfare and modestly paid workers, London certainly feels as though it embraces the wealthy. The renewed politics and apparent legitimacy of austerity measures is simply not part of the world of the monied, indeed it has helped to protect it.

Yet the mood of the city can only remain bullish to the extent that it really denies an interest in those struggling with over-priced homes and crowded transportation. The search for a space that is safe leads to London for many international buyers and those with money more generally, the sense of danger found in many other national capitals fades from view even if the instinct for safety never dies. London works for the wealthy because feelings of social exposure and personal risk can be limited and because districts and schools can be found that match their uncompromising needs. The implication, to return to the example of the iceberg home, is the existence of a fortress archipelago of gated and fortress homes linked by sealed mobilities and encounters only with those areas of the city that perceived to be safe zones. Whether we care about the qualities and feel of this increasingly securitised form of urbanism is one thing, whether the excesses upon which it is built will be challenged is perhaps quite another.

# Is Low Mobility an Important Factor in the Persistence of 'Enclave' Low- Income Communities in the UK?

## Introduction

The issue of low mobility is one that has remained largely unexplored within the social policy and poverty literatures. Similarly, the issue of transport justice has been a subsidiary consideration within transport decision-making. Only within the United States has there been a long-standing tradition social impact evaluation of transport policies and programmes. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act requires that all government spending be subject to an environmental justice assessment, including Federal and State level investments in transportation. Even with this mandatory requirement in place, however, there has been very little *systematic* evaluation of the social consequence of in transport and travel inequalities more generally.

Outside of the US, evaluation of the social consequences of transport decision-making is more rare. Part of the problem at least lies with a lack of understanding when 'low mobility' becomes a constraint on people's ability to participate in activities within different social and geographical contexts. Recently, there has been renewed concern amongst local transport policymakers in the UK in light of the current cutbacks in public spending for new

and subsidised public transport services (Campaign for Better Transport, 2013). There is a risk that people living in areas with high concentrations of deprivation and structurally low levels of physical access to employment can become excluded from mainstream society (Mandanipour et al, 2003).

Deprived enclaves  
or excluded individuals?

The issue of whether different social outcomes are brought about as a result of our personal autonomies and freedoms or arise from the social contexts and structures surrounding our actions is an old one (Goodwin, 2005). As Kellerman identifies (2012: 35), "... power manipulations may bring about differential production and consumption patterns of mobilities, as well as growing flexible and permanent immobilities", with quite a different implication for reducing the transport poverty of socially disadvantaged populations. In practice, it is often difficult to differentiate between factors of agency and structure and the two often become so intertwined that there is little point in attempting to untangle them. The most important issue for transport poverty is whether it is better for policy makers to seek to address the demand-side constraints of socially disadvantaged individuals, such as affordability or the supply-side failures of the transport system, such as an inadequate supply of transit services.

Our previous studies have identified that many socially disadvantaged individuals do experience an inadequate supply of services in the areas in which they live (Lucas et al, 2001). However, many of these individuals also reported very low levels of *motility* in terms of how far they personally take 'possession of the need to be mobile' (Kaufmann 2009: 58 cited in Kellerman, 2012) and appropriates the 'field of possibilities' to be mobile (Kaufmann and Montulet, 2008:45 cited in Kellerman, 2012). Indeed, many of the individuals we interviewed undertook very little travel outside their immediate neighbourhoods. Even when the level of local employment and the availability of goods and services in these areas were negligible, people mainly conducted their daily spatial mobilities within them. This low motility amongst socially disadvantaged population groups has been referred to in the social policy literature as 'low travel horizons' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

This leads to a question of whether these communities have effectively become 'enclaves' because of the immobility of the

individuals living within them. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of an *enclave* is 'a piece of territory that is entirely shut in by foreign dominions'. Within the contemporary academic literature, however, *enclaves* have been more loosely defined to refer to groups or areas culturally distinct from the territory around them. This condition can be understood in either positive or negative terms depending on the nature of the enclave and/or the positional perspective of the viewer. For example in their study of young Turks and Kurds, Enneli et al (2005: 27) discuss how Turkish enclaves in London may on the one hand be a form of protection from racism, whilst also partly the cause of further isolation from the economic mainstream:

“There is clearly an ethnic enclave present, consisting not just of sandwich and kebab shops but many other family businesses that provide extensive services and, in many ways, a parallel micro-economy... But it has to be stressed that this resource comes at a price. Its presence may be a contributing factor in the young people’s relative disengagement with the broader structure of labour market opportunities and can lead to them being trapped in the ethnic enclave.”

Thereby another definition of an enclave community is one where the economic, social and cultural activities of certain groups are occurring separately from the rest of the society in which they live. Conversely, the literatures on transport-related exclusion have tended to focus more on the ability of different socially disadvantaged groups to meet their accessibility needs outside their immediate neighbourhoods (e.g. Department for Transport, 2006).





Geurs and Van Wee (2004) identify four important components of accessibility in this respect:

1. The individual component

reflects the needs (depending on age, income, educational level, household characteristics etc.), abilities (depending on people's physical condition, availability of travel modes etc.) and opportunities (depending on people's income, travel budget, educational level, etc.) of individuals. These characteristics influence a person's level of access to transport modes (e.g. being able to drive and borrow/use a car) and spatially distributed opportunities (e.g. have the skills or education to qualify for jobs near their residential area), and may strongly influence their total aggregate accessibility levels.

2. The land-use component

reflects the land-use system, consisting of (a) the amount, quality and spatial distribution of opportunities supplied at each destination (jobs, shops, health, social and recreational facilities, etc.), (b) the demand for these opportunities at origin locations (e.g. where inhabitants live), (c) the confrontation of supply and demand for opportunities which may result in competition for activities with restricted capacity such as jobs, school places, health services, etc.

3. The transportation component

describes the transport system, expressed as the disutility experienced by an individual when covering the distance between an origin and a destination; included are the amount of time (travel, waiting, parking), costs (fixed and variable) and comfort-related variables (such as reliability, level of comfort, accident risk, etc.).

4. The temporal component

reflects the temporal constraints, i.e. the availability of opportunities at different times of the day, and the time available for individuals to participate in certain activities (e.g. work, recreation).

Lucas (2012) suggests that it is also important to consider other cultural, social and behavioural factors, which may also serve to exclude some socially excluded population groups from mobility and participation, such as illiteracy, low-cognitive skills, lack of confidence and experience, mental ill-health and even drug abuse and other anti-social or violent behaviours.

## Case study description

Merseyside is a metropolitan area situated in the north west of England with a population of approximately 1.3 million people, densely spanning an area of approximately 645 km<sup>2</sup> on either side of the banks of the River Mersey. Specifically, the study focuses on the two deprived areas (see maps below).

Anfield is in North Liverpool, which is close to the inner city and thus has reasonably high levels of access to entry-level employment, key activities and public transit services.

Leasowe is on the opposite side of the River Mersey in the Wirral, which is further from city-centre activities and services and also has lower access levels of public transit partly due to the lack of river crossings.

The aim of the study is to compare the travel behaviours of the socially disadvantaged sub-sample with those identified for the average population sample residentially located within the same study areas.



## Local survey method

The data collection for the study was 'piggybacked' onto the regular Merseyside Countywide Survey (MCS), which has been run at irregular intervals since 2002. This randomly samples approximately 2,000 households across the five Merseyside local districts. It collects household information, personal characteristics and a retrospective one-day of travel diary data from each person in these households over the age of 11 years. For the 2013 MCS, an additional sub-sample of 750 individuals, age between 16–65 years was identified within two different local areas; one with relatively high access to city centre jobs and amenities and a good local public transport services to other areas of the city region, the other with much low levels of access to activities and public transport supply both locally and regionally.

## Early results

A total of 502 people successfully completed the survey across the two case study areas, 230 of these were from the Liverpool area and 272 from the Wirral. Of these 241 were men (106 Liverpool and 135 Wirral) and 261 were women (124 Liverpool and 137 Wirral). The income profile of the sample was also well in range for the purposes of the study with more than half the sample that reported this information (58%) claiming a combined household income of £20,000 or less and only 18% a household income of £30,000 or over, across the two areas. In addition, approximately 50% of the sample (229) did not have a car available at all within their household and a further 38% (191) only had one car. Only 14 people had access to more than two cars within their household.

## Travel data

The whole sample completed the one-day retrospective travel diary that was conducted as part of the main survey interview. In addition, everyone was asked to complete a further two subsequent diary days and return them by post (a 7-day diary would have been preferred but was not possible within the programme budget). A total of 1286 weekday trips were recorded in the 488 valid dairies and were fairly evenly spread across the 5 different diary days. Of these, the Anfield (inner city) participants made 525 trips, while the Leasowe (city periphery) participants recorded a much higher level

of 871 trips and also tended to walk less and registered much higher levels of car use as both drivers and passengers and used more taxis than public transport.

## Next steps

We are currently undertaking detailed GIS-based analysis of the revealed travel behaviours of participants in the survey and comparing these with measures of the potential accessibility of different key land uses using different modes of transport in Merseyside. The main analytical aim is to identify mismatches between the places people can potentially reach within their fixed 'time-space' commitments and where they actually travel. The results of this analysis will then be combined with destination choice modelling to weight the attractiveness of key destinations across the City of Liverpool, with particular emphasis on the types of activities and locations that are important to socially disadvantaged groups, such as entry level employment, welfare benefits offices, health and childcare centre, affordable supermarkets, etc. The hope is that although it is not always possible for policymakers to undertake such detailed and data rich analysis in practice, proper dissemination of the results of a study of mobility and social disadvantaged of this kind will help to provide an improved general standard for their more future decision-making for this important policy based on the new understandings it brings.

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Malte Sanger

# Ben-Gurion-Ring, Frankfurt am Main

## Photo-Essay

Ben-Gurion-Ring is a large-scale housing estate in Frankfurt built in 1975/76. It contains roughly 2500 system-built housing units, mostly constructed with ELEMENTA '72. Like many housing estates of that time, Ben-Gurion-Ring quickly acquired a bad reputation and is currently being regenerated under the "Soziale Stadt" programme.



















# Living in the Inner City

## Strategies to Cope with its Specific Qualities, Challenges and Restrictions

Only 20 years ago, urban researchers proclaimed the end of the city and anticipated its dissolution into the suburbs. It seemed to be an unchangeable matter of course that households with many options, such as well-off middle-class households, would leave the inner cities sooner or later, whereas the poor, the unemployed and migrants would stay. Today, we discuss the renaissance or the reinvention of the inner cities; in many cities the strong demand for inner city dwellings has started processes of gentrification and social displacement. What are the reasons for this fundamental turnaround, for this shift in housing preferences? What is the explanation for the new affinity to urban life of middle-class-households?

Most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially the time following World War II, was dominated by Fordism, a specific economic and social system based on industrialised and standardised mass production and mass consumption. But Fordism also includes a very clear and dominant way of (private) life, with a fixed gender-based division of labour, with a male breadwinner and a female housewife. Economically individuals experienced a high degree of

stability and financial security, a constellation which facilitated consumption activities such as the purchase of privately owned homes. Furthermore, this era was dominated by the rigid separation of different urban functions, by car-based mobility, and by increasing urban sprawl. Eventually, this specific way of life turned hegemonic: the ideal living environment offered green surroundings, functional and social homogeneity, it was dominated by the perspective of child-rearing, and it implied a decidedly long-time perspective. The best place to deliver this concept was and still is suburbia.

Today, this type of suburban life still has a lot to offer, but for many it has lost its attraction because our society has changed fundamentally. Most importantly, in the post-Fordist era, working conditions have become more unstable: especially members of the educated middle class tend to work in project-oriented constellations, often with rather meagre earnings. Working life is dominated by permanent availability, blurred boundaries between work and private life, and it increasingly demands speed, flexibility, and the ability to network. Furthermore, women's aspirations completely changed: most middle-class-households consist of two earners. Due to these changed lifestyles the city has gained a new attraction as residential location offering short distances, close proximity of working and living, and a multitude of supporting services necessary to combine job, life and family. Mixed use and socially diverse inner city neighbourhoods also appeal to lifestyles based on contacts, networking activities, and on creativity.

For educated middle-class-households in the post Fordist era, inner cities offer more advantages and opportunities than suburban life, and urban living has become acceptable also for families. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the new urban dwellers will also be willing to accept the darker sides of the city, the challenges and impositions of urban life: higher density, noise, diversity, reduced control, encounters with foreigners and homeless people and other unforeseeable situations. From my point of view, the emerging new love for urban life has clear limitations, despite the indisputable trend to stay in or to return to the city. Hence I am going to argue that middle-class urban households adopt a number of strategies to cope with the complexity of urban life, with the variety of their specific residential demands, and with everything the urban reality asks from them. I will argue that many households tend to create hybrid ways of life. Their commitment to the city is much weaker than many observers claim. In many cases living in the city is simply the most







practical choice and without feasible alternatives – but that does not mean that all urban dwellers are dyed-in-the-wool urbanites. Often, an urban housing choice is a compromise, combining an affinity to urban convenience as well as an appreciation of some rural or suburban characteristics. In my empirical research I have found four coping-strategies or arrangements relating to these hybrid ways of life:

Type 1      Fighting  
                  for privacy and control

The first coping strategy is a way to react to specific inner city stimuli. This type of urban dweller is fighting for privacy and control. The aim is firstly to control the immediate surroundings of the own dwelling and to prevent unacceptable disturbances such as noise, disorder, and unwanted people; and secondly and at the same time, these people tend to maximize their private space as well as their personal “benefits of space”, including the environment, an unobstructed view etc. (Bourdieu 1991).

For this type of household, living in the city becomes increasingly ambivalent over time. They feel under pressure to fend off potential, real or perceived threats in their environment, which throw into question their residential aspirations and their decision to move to this place.

Type 2      Separating  
                  from the city to  
                  increase security

These households are looking for segregated residential islands within the “urban jungle”. They prefer places which combine the amenities of urban life with individual residential demands – although these demands might be anti-urban. In Germany, these areas are not actual gated communities but they form more or less clearly separated communities.

The inner conflict of these city dwellers is obvious: On the one hand, they want to be part of the urban life and appreciate the closeness to jobs, social networks, urban opportunities of education and culture. On the other hand they are striving to distance themselves from urban life and its related inconveniences such as heterogeneity, strangeness, and unwelcome contacts. Their strategy is to reduce contact and to create a kind of hideaway in the middle

of the city, which is not typical for cities: a place which guarantees security, privacy, homogeneity, control, and exclusiveness.

Their commitment to urban life can only be maintained through this anti-urban supplement, which attenuates and compensates the impacts of urban life. At the end, the coping-strategy of separating bears many similarities to the suburban residential concept: It resembles a commuting constellation, a life in two worlds, inside and outside of the residential hideaway.

Type 3      Getting involved  
                  to adapt the local structures  
                  to the own way of life

The third coping-strategy focuses on persons who are committed urban dwellers. They have not only rational ties to their residential location but they are also socially and emotionally involved. In principle, they esteem the complexity of inner cities and are willing to add to urban life through their own activities. They wish to become increasingly involved, and act as co-designers of their neighbourhood.

Although positive, this strategy bears one important problem: the involvement of this type of resident is usually strongly related to their own way of life. Hence these urban dwellers tend to engage in activities which adapt the local structures to their own needs, regardless of the rest of the population. Examples for this type are the transformation of urban places into playgrounds or the adaptation of local retail and restaurants to the needs of family-orientated middle-class-households.

Some observers call this “family gentrification” or “inner gentrification” (Frank 2011) because the drivers of this process are long lasting residents of the neighbourhood. They often moved in as students and after having established themselves professionally they may start a family. Consequently their lifestyles and their requirements regarding local retail, restaurants, public spaces, culture and child care are likely to change. In the past, households in this phase of life often moved to the suburbs; nowadays, they remain in the inner city neighbourhoods and seek to adapt them on their new way of life.

The most challenging characteristic of this coping-strategy is that these people fundamentally identify with their urban surroundings, appreciating diversity and social inclusion. However, by starting their well-intentioned activities and by making their

neighbourhood more liveable (from their point of view) they accelerate the very processes of social homogenization and gentrification they disapprove of. Eventually, this coping strategy has to be considered ambivalent.

Type 4      Doubling  
to satisfy all demands in  
different locations

The last strategy is becoming increasingly popular: to add a different way of life. Instead of making one complex locational decision that would either lack conviction or involve a flawed compromise this group is trying to achieve both: 100% city as well as 100% countryside. These households combine different locations: During the week they live in an inner city dwelling; during the weekend they move to a permanent weekend home in the countryside.

There is no doubt that these households comply with the structure of modern urban life (job orientation, permanent availability, blurred boundaries of job and life, high speed, flexibility, etc.). However, in order to balance the intensity and the pressure of the urban rhythm they create a radical contrast at the weekend – far away from the job and the intensity of urban life, the weekend is exclusively family time, time for gardening, DIY, for intensive contact to nature, deceleration and recreation. Deliberately, this group abstains from work, Wi-Fi-connections, and other amenities of modern urban life. Consequently, spatial distance and the necessity to commute between the two locations are crucial to this coping strategy: a separate place helps to pursue the other, the non-urban life concept.

This can be seen as a strategy to compensate the work load and the highly embedded urban life. These individuals are attracted by the promise of an idealised counter world without time pressure and heteronomy, where they are seeking to establish a second, a more self-determined identity and to complete or to balance their complex way of life.

The four different coping strategies illustrate the multitude of challenges and inner conflicts the new urbanites are facing. In the future we will see more and more diverse and complex ways of life emerging (including contradictions and enforced compromises), but also inner cities that change and partly reinvent their specific character. The new urbanites offer a lot of chances for our cities but they also bear the risk of losing or weakening their specific urban character. Understanding the new urbanites coping strategies may help us understand the imminent changes and possibly direct them in useful ways.

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# Post-war Housing as an Urban Resource

Large-scale post-war housing is often seen as a burden, compromising cities' visual, spatial and even social integrity. Whilst in Eastern European countries and also in the Eastern parts of Germany large-scale pre-fab housing estates are traditionally desirable and respected neighbourhoods, in Western German housing policy has contributed towards their long term marginalisation, despite various programmes trying to achieve the exact opposite. The last German report on large-scale housing estates found that in Eastern Germany around 25 percent of all available housing units are situated in large-scale estates, whilst in western parts of Germany, which are the focus of this paper, this applies for only 2 percent of the housing stock,<sup>1</sup> implying that only a small proportion of the West German population is living in this type of housing. But a closer look reveals that the report only considered estates of 2500 units or more, whereas many smaller neighbourhoods were built along the same design principles. The very large estates considered in the report were often built following ambitious design competitions and aspiring at creating an entirely new and modern type of neighbourhood, community, way of life. Looking backward, the opposite seems to be true: many of those new, very large scale neighbourhoods are experiencing harsh difficulties: segregation, multiple deprivation, anti-social-behaviour, violence etc. Authors like Alice Coleman<sup>2</sup> and Oscar Newman<sup>3</sup> have argued that these are actually caused by the physical appearance of such neighbourhoods.

Today, the notion that modernist large scale housing is deficient as such obscures how enormous the improvements were that residents experienced when they first moved into the new settlement. For many of them central heating, fitted kitchens, indoor bathrooms etc. were luxuries unknown before. Also many residents describe a sense of community, at least for the first years, and despite the bad reputation large scale modernist housing has attracted, many still love their neighbourhood and their home.

The bad reputation of large scale modernist housing can be traced back to the fundamental shift in German urban policy in the 1970s. At this time, the extreme hardship experienced after World War II including an extreme housing shortage had been largely overcome. The new generation of young adults had not experienced the post-war distress and their aspirations were markedly different from their parents', for whom food, warmth and privacy had not always been something to take for granted. Contrary to their parents' generation, who were grateful for a warm, bright and safe home, they rediscovered the run-down neighbourhoods with their historic housing stock and mixed communities earmarked for redevelopment. These not only offered a living environment totally different from the modernist housing estates, but the often large flats also enabled new lifestyles such as home shares.

In Frankfurt, the West End was one of the neighbourhoods intensely fought over by different interest groups. As one of Frankfurt's few historic areas not damaged by the war, it became a site of speculation for new developments. Historic villas were evicted and demolished to make space for new office towers. In the late 1960s, students as well as long standing Frankfurters started to fight for the historic neighbourhoods by squatting and repairing (*instanbesetzen*) the evicted houses, but also by physically opposing demolition.

### Constructing a negative image

The overall political plan had been to re-house the inhabitants of the run-down historic neighbourhoods in newly built modernist housing estates like the *Nordweststadt*, but quite different from a few years earlier this option was no longer attractive. On the contrary, those estates were seen as the counter-point to refurbishing existing inner-city neighbourhoods prone to physical decay and social disintegration. Sociological interpretations inspired by neo-marxist







theory criticised that “The [...] atomisation of society in housing estates is not only an unintended side effect of bourgeois city planning ideology, but is consciously planned for as means to instill bourgeois and petit-bourgeois values in the working class. This does not only impede solidarity among estate dwellers, but makes them vulnerable for ideologies and patterns of behaviour propagated by bourgeois mass media”.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the neo-marxist critique the reputation of large scale housing estates was affected by the scandal-ridden break down of the *Neue Heimat*, a union-owned property holding engaged in the building of large scale estates, and also by the subsequent rise of neoliberalism.

These developments lead to a fundamental shift in the federal German housing policy. The responsibility for social housing was delegated to the *Bundesländer* (federal states) and funds were increasingly re-allocated towards urban renewal and small scale refurbishment projects. In addition to this, continuing subsidies for single family homes enabled many better-off families to move from modernist housing estates to newly built, suburban detached homes. The flats they vacated were taken by new groups on the German housing market, e.g. *Gastarbeiter*-families, who moved to Germany after the (mostly low-skilled) breadwinner had decided to stay for good. The associated rise of welfare recipients, migrants and low skilled workers in the social composition was not perceived as an outcome of various policies and constraints, but rather as something inherent in the estates themselves.

Today, our view on the large scale housing estates built in the 1960s and 1970s is still dominated by these developments. Many programmes have been set up, geared specifically to improve large scale modernist housing estates<sup>5</sup> and most of them now are unremarkable in terms of crime and anti social behaviour. Accordingly, the main criticism these estates are confronted with today is not so much the insufficient quality of housing itself, but the lack of urbanity these neighbourhoods show when compared to the inner city areas they were once built to replace and which have been refurbished now. Most people, lay people as well as planners and architects, tend to see modernist housing estates as anomalies, planning mistakes or as neighbourhoods that ideally should be rebuilt.

Unfortunately the positive aspects of modernist housing are obscured by this. In the large conurbations, the pre-war housing stock is now sought after by middle and even upper class residents and the much criticised housing of the 1960s and 1970s provides

relatively central, affordable options for those with constricted financial means. In addition to that, much of the housing stock in question is still belonging to publicly owned holdings, which adds security for the tenant. Also, most tenants within these estates do not share the negative view of the outsiders. They appreciate the often well laid out flats, the convenience of their living arrangements and especially the greenery around them, which otherwise is often criticised as wasted space with no qualities.

## Reality check

In a small research project in the Frankfurt Rhine-Main Region, an attempt was made to catalogue virtually all housing which is large scale in the sense that it has a markedly different scale setting it apart from its surroundings. This takes into account that during the 1950s, 60s and 70s many smaller municipalities also built modernist housing, albeit on a scale much smaller than considered in the 1994 national report on large scale housing estates with its 2500 unit threshold.

The outcome of this exercise was rather surprising: in many relatively small municipalities in the region, more than 20 percent of the housing stock is in large scale modernist housing, in many more this number exceeds 15 percent. This poses a number of questions that have yet to be answered: What are the specific planning histories of these developments? What is their role in the local as well as the regional housing market? How have they been integrated into the local urban fabric? What are residents' experiences? Do some of them qualify to be listed?

However, it is obvious that the sheer number of units in relatively large scale modernist housing estates means that these structures are not "anomalies" which should be erased whenever possible, but that they constitute a large piece of our built environment. For their residents they offer high quality urban life that combines the pleasure of suburban greenery with the efficiency and the amenities of modern flats. The currently overheated real estate market in many urban centres make these housing options more important than ever, often remaining the only viable choice for those unable to afford either a more central locations or a car to commute. But whilst markets make modernist housing more important for many urban dwellers, they also create new pressures: Housing companies might feel tempted to cash in on their stock to fund new projects or to clear debts.

In other cases the lush greenery around the buildings attracts new attention as “unused” land that could be turned into plots for new housing, thus not only alleviating the current shortage, but also adding some of the “urbanity” these neighbourhoods are allegedly lacking. Whether the residents require more urbanity or just improved maintenance arrangements remains open. After the shortcomings of modernist housing have been researched extensively, research into its qualities remains scarce. However, in the current climate of urban growth and booming property markets, residents of these until now not very sought after locations are in danger of losing the qualities their housing arrangements have provided so far. And as they still belong to the least well-off parts of urban societies they have little choice to move elsewhere and will feel the unmitigated impact of upcoming changes.

#### Notes

- 1 Deutscher Bundestag (1994, Hg.) Großsiedlungsbericht 1994. Drucksache 12/8406, Bonn
- 2 Alice Coleman (1984) *Utopia on Trial. Vision and reality in planned housing.* Hilary Shipman, London
- 3 Oscar Newman (1973) *Defensible Space. Crime Prevention Through Urban Design.* Macmillan Publishing, New York
- 4 Grüttner, Michael (1976) *Wem die Stadt gehört. Stadtplanung und Stadtentwicklung in Hamburg 1965–1975.* Hamburg, p. 213.
- 5 E.g. the programme *Soziale Stadt*: see “Leitfaden zur Ausgestaltung der Gemeinschaftsinitiative ‘Soziale Stadt’ (zweite Fassung vom 1. März 2000)”, in: Holl, Christian (2002, Ed.) *Soziale Stadt. Ein politisches Programm in der Diskussion,* Stuttgart/München, p. 98.

# The Migrant City Revisited

## For an Urban Sociology of the 'New Mediterranean Migration'

When urban sociology first began in Chicago in the 1920s most of its key practitioners were ethnographers of urban migration. At that time Chicago was one of the fastest growing cities in the world and this could only have been possible through the addition of tens of thousands of new residents from the United States (and especially the African American communities of the South) as well as Ireland, Poland, Germany and Southern Europe. To understand this complex pattern of exogenous settlement required new methods of social enquiry – such as the neighborhood survey pioneered by Jane Addams at Hull House, as well as participant observation and urban reportage, the 'dirty hands' research made famous by the former journalist Robert Park (Parker 2015).

A century later and with the mass primary migration into America's exploding metropolis largely confined to history – urban sociology also moved from being a dynamic to a more static discipline and quite naturally shifted its attention to *sui generis* issues such as crime, housing, employment, poverty and more recently to social issues surrounding race, ethnicity and gender. In Europe where post-war migration from former colonies in Africa, Asia and

the Caribbean contributed significantly to the presence of ethnic minorities in France and the United Kingdom, and in West Germany where the main incomer populations were from the German speaking populations of Eastern Europe together with Southern European migrant and Turkish 'guest' workers – there has been a more long running engagement with the study of new migrant communities. However, apart from some very community and often geographically specific ethnographic studies of urban migrant populations – there has been little in the way of theoretical or methodological innovation at least in term of urban migration in the Global North. This contrasts with an increasing body of important and exciting work on migration and urbanization in the Global South that is encouraging urban scholars elsewhere to look more closely at western cities and territories for symptoms of post-colonial segregation and control, while listening more attentively to the voices of a growing subaltern resistance on the part of those that European states deem 'illegal' from Lesvos to Idomeni to Calais.

At the same time, while the national and supra-national scale of government has developed ever more exclusionary forms of bordering and biopolitical sorting beyond, at and within the frontiers of 'Fortress Europe', there has been a growing humanitarian solidarity and the embrace of a new civic cosmopolitanism on the part of city administrations on the front line of the Mediterranean migration



crisis. In Palermo, the mayor, Leoluca Orlando prefers to refer to the city as 'Arab-Norman' and a city of the Middle East rather than a European city. Describing the 20,000 deaths in the Mediterranean since 1990 as a state orchestrated genocide, he directly implicates the European Union's refusal to provide safe and legal routes for those fleeing persecution with mass homicide. Orlando is frequently to be seen on the quayside of the port welcoming hundreds of refugees – often the only survivors of appalling mass drownings. At his insistence the first people to greet the new arrivals are not armed police but aid workers from the Red Cross and Save the Children. The emphasis in terms of the local authority is very firmly on 'accoglienza' (welcome) rather than the anti-smuggling and 'illegal entry' focused border policing of the Italian and EU authorities. But while Palermo does not have as significant a population of asylum seekers as some other Sicilian cities where initial and second stage reception centres are more present, there has been a significant change in the ethnic make-up of the city due to various forms of migration since the 1980s.

The City Council has shown its commitment to recognizing Palermo's increasingly diverse population by instituting a Council of Cultures (Consulta delle culture). The council's members are elected from among the city's some 125 different nationalities and 100 spoken languages. The President of the Cultural Council defines









its mission as “promoting the richness of culture and the capacity for dialogue among the various communities, uniting political representation with different cultural and social activities. It is also responsible for ensuring that new residents of the city are able to take their place as full citizens in the city’s political and institutional life, regardless of their nationality or immigration status.

This ambition has been severely challenged recently by a near fatal gun attack on three young Gambians (one of whom who remains in a coma) in the centre of Palermo following a series of unprovoked assaults by locals from the Ballarò neighbourhood who have suspected links to the city’s criminal underground.<sup>1</sup> A demonstration against racist violence sponsored by local political leaders, civic associations and migrants in Ballarò failed to attract participation from local residents some of whom, according to local newspaper reports, abused and insulted the demonstrators<sup>2</sup>. If as Mayor Orlando has declared – the presence of a cosmopolitan city of migration constitutes an existential challenge for the Mafia because it can no longer rely on the historic ties of dependence among the close knit communities that it has dominated for generations – then it is no surprise that organised crime has declared war on Sicily’s more recent migrants.

Meanwhile in the small fishing town of Riace on the Calabrian coast, which had been suffering from a declining population and economy for many years, the decision of the city’s mayor ‘Mimmo’ (Domenico Lucano) to welcome over 6000 refugees to his small town of only 1500 inhabitants has brought the municipality global attention.<sup>3</sup> The initiative happened almost by accident when on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1998 a ship with 218 Kurds on board became shipwrecked on the coast close to Riace. The refugees had been planning to head for Greece but had gone off course with disastrous consequences. Suffering from hypothermia and nearly dead from starvation most of the refugees had given up any hope of survival when Riace’s mayor decided to respond to the emergency and called on the town’s inhabitants to take in the survivors. Many of the survivors decided to stay in Riace and from then on other new residents have arrived including young single men from Tunisia, Senegal and Eritrea and women and children from Syria and Algeria fleeing war and poverty. Each new resident receives 600 Euros a month from the municipality and is given an older abandoned house to occupy. In one case a young Afghan woman was able to have her house made habitable thanks to a local builder and in exchange she provides child care and looks after her neighbour’s elderly relatives who have Alzheimer’s.

In Calais and Dunkirk, by contrast, informal encampments of refugees seeking to escape to Britain to join families or friends on the other side of the Channel face violent racist vigilantes, often no less violent and racist policing and extremely hostile public authorities across this uniquely extended and protected Anglo-French frontier. Agamben's term 'bare life' is often overused by sociologists who want to depict some generic form of abjection but this deliberate suspension of even the most elementary forms of human dignity – a place to wash and to perform bodily functions, to sleep without the threat of water inundating you and your family or strangers tearing down your shelter, being able to stay warm and heat one's dwelling, deciding when and what or even if you eat – these are the experiences not just of adults but often of unaccompanied and orphaned children for whom no state authority or international aid organisation feels any type of responsibility.

The anthropologist Michel Agier has described the process by which the camp has literally been 'containerised' with half the inhabitants forced to live in adapted shipping containers and kept under round the clock surveillance – a 'tuigdorp' (scum village) strategy previously used by local authorities in the Netherlands to separate out 'unruly' social housing tenants from their respectable neighbours.<sup>4</sup> Here, arguably for the first time we are witnessing the creation of a type of state sponsored *bidonville* in the heart of the affluent continent of Europe in which the inhabitants are distinguished not only by their relative poverty but also by their right even to be resident within the territory.

Social scientists with an interest and concern for the changing nature of the city are thus confronted with a new set of theoretical and methodological challenges that I would summarise as follows

The need for an understanding of how precarity and vulnerability is becoming a feature of many European towns and cities with migrant populations as a deliberate act of public policy

Thinking through the implications of these forms of fractured citizenship in terms of strategies of inclusion, community relations, health, security and well-being

Accounting for the burgeoning of what we might call 'black sites' of population management including immigration detention 'hotspots', closed camps and segregated areas for those with limited or unrecognised immigration status

Devising research methods capable of capturing wider geographies and histories of displacement and social harm and the micro, meso and macro lifeworlds of these new forced mobilities

Contributing to a research praxis that is supportive of humanitarian and rights-based solutions to the challenge of global conflict, poverty and economic security, which nevertheless retains a critical and rigorous evidence-based approach to the furtherance of social knowledge

This research agenda is challenging not least because it requires us to step outside the confines and frontiers of our own disciplines and sub-disciplines and really listen to the voices and experiences of those 'new urban subjects' who represent the human face of the disaster capitalism of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### Notes

- 1 [http://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2016/04/04/news/rissa\\_con\\_sparatoria\\_tra\\_giovani\\_di\\_ballaro\\_e\\_del\\_gambia\\_un\\_fermato-136868284/?refresh\\_ce](http://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2016/04/04/news/rissa_con_sparatoria_tra_giovani_di_ballaro_e_del_gambia_un_fermato-136868284/?refresh_ce)
- 2 <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2016/04/10/in-1500-sfilano-per-yusupha-la-gente-di-ballaro-non-cePalermoo1.html?ref=search>
- 3 <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/11/20/immigrazione-profughi-salvano-riace-dal-declino/419833/>
- 4 <http://www.dezeen.com/2012/12/05/scum-villages-planned-for-amsterdam/>

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# Co-housing – a (lost) Utopia?

In urban and rural environments, grass-root organisations and self-help approaches, especially by senior citizens, are emerging to create co-housing projects. These initiatives aim for active and supportive neighbourhoods and communities, where adults live together voluntarily and purposefully. Affordable living conditions, barrier-free units with high environmental standards and social cohesion promise to enhance the individual quality of life as well as developing a sustainable society. As such, these utopian ambitions appear to be a showcase for ageing in place, overcoming isolation and seeking sustainable lifestyles.

Usually one or more individuals have the idea of starting a co-housing project, but lack fellow campaigners, sites or structures. By a rather lengthy process they try to establish a group, form a legal company, go public, and engage other stakeholders such as local authorities, planners, lawyers and financial institutions. Over time they gain recognition as they make demands on land use or existing structures which may be supported or rejected by towns or villages. They depend not only on their own resources – not least financial contributions, high commitment and power of endurance – but also external resources, such as local support, acceptance within the population, and support from consultants, bank loans and competent architects. The whole process results in new or remodelled dwellings, or a place that matches ideas of sustainability and community life.

Members of housing communities endure many difficulties and challenges during the long planning phase. Faced by long and complicated group processes and the challenges of going into business and constructing buildings, many initiatives do not make it

into real life. Nobody knows whether and when the planning efforts will become reality and where they will end up. In most cases the planning process takes more than five years, including occasional setbacks. Managing the time frame is very difficult, especially for seniors who need a clear perspective for their health and mobility. “We already lost three members, because it’s not fast enough.” (Mainz. L. 215–216)

These insights are based on a research project “Cooperatives and Co-housing of older people. German Case Studies in the Rhineland-Palatinate”. The goal of the research project (6/2013 – 5/2015) was to help identify hurdles and success factors for co-ops with older people. Which social, financial and organisational circumstances help initiatives succeed and when do they fail?



We conducted 25 narrative interviews with emerging, completed or failed initiatives in Rhineland-Palatinate. Semi-structured interviews with political actors in villages and cities were added to include the institutional, administrative and political perspective. During the last years, 32 cohousing projects were completed in the mainly rural Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany), and the same number again is in the process of formation (see map on p. 70).

The availability of a meeting room and access to land are crucial factors for the group-process and the realization of the ideas. A piece of land matching requirements is both a very pragmatic precondition and a major challenge in dense housing markets. Properties are often highly contested and initiatives are normally unable to compete with private investors or larger housing companies. Success depends on local authorities handing out land below market prices. "I have learned how people think and how they act if they really aim to maximise profit, and that is why they exploit others for their interests. That is a bitter experience I have made." says a representative of an initiative, having experienced that the developer with whom they cooperated overbid the co-housing initiative and purchased the land itself. (Wittlich. L. 776–779).

Some existing projects have successes in achieving their utopian ideas: co-creating high quality buildings and architecture, shared spaces, barrier-free apartments, common gardening, neighbourly support and self-management. Successful co-housing projects are important as they provide advice and serve as role models for other initiatives. In many cases they develop activities



for the wider local population and can be seen as incubators for new forms of social life. Tummers (2015) characterises this kind of co-housing and community life as an oasis, in opposition to co-housing as an island. In our research one urban project acquired a piece of land in an undesirable neighbourhood, stepping up to the challenge: “We are building in an inner urban area with a bad image. We are trying to attract people interested in living together and demonstrating a degree of solidarity in coping with the surroundings.” (Trier. L. 124–128).

Self-organised, creative and sociable co-housing projects may develop the power to interrupt local routines and challenge local authorities. This social innovation may be one reason for the local authorities’ reluctance to embrace housing communities on their territory – at least in fairly rural environments. Some initiatives try to





become accepted year after year, but in several cases remain unable to convince the relevant persons in charge. Bottom-up processes in neighbourhoods do not necessarily correspond to administrative and political actions and procedures. Co-housing projects are regarded as demanding and/or proclaiming alternative lifestyles, e.g. trying to introduce sharing economies, ecological food production, becoming energetically self-sustaining and changing local power structures, may not be appreciated in local contexts and lack support in planning and delivery.

An essential driver for the desire for co-housing projects is the ideal of a peaceful, secure, socially homogeneous and community-orientated neighbourhood. Caring for one another and for one's surroundings is linked to a strong place identity, something felt to be missing in inner cities and in large cities generally. Co-housing initiatives imply a high level of social capital as they form an alternative to family and traditional support structures and engage in public life. As Putnam (1999) argued in his book "Bowling alone", social problems may be solved if people work together as friends, neighbours or in networks. Social capital can be activated to get along and progress – or on the contrary – missing networks fail to overcome deficits and needs. Social capital is a focus especially in regimes that follow neoliberal ideas, holding the view that non-profit organisations or private associations should provide social services. Single parents, families with small children, older people and people with an alternative lifestyle benefit most from housing projects (Fedrowitz, Gailing 2003). But it can be questioned, to which extent co-ops and initiatives represent a reliable backbone for service provision and whether these groups are able to challenge local politics and influence governance structures.

Exclusiveness and middle class orientation are named as negative outcomes of housing projects. For financial reasons, co-housing can be fairly exclusive: "Well, that's it, that's only for the well-off. Others are not there, that's a co-op. ... Because of costs, very simple, you have to pay a fee and rental prices are also extremely high" (Speyer. L. 198-208). In the Rhineland-Palatinate, the focus is on mixed communities and housing for older people, but nevertheless, criticism of homogenous social groups with a fairly high social status was mentioned in the interviews, which also implies high levels of social control. Foreigners, for example, are clearly underrepresented, if not non-existent. Urban oriented people may miss social diversity and the mix of social classes and cultures in the nearby environment (co-housing as an island).

In many cases, co-housing projects bring new life to communities as a whole. They may be regarded as an instrument for integrative planning and innovative bottom-up strategies for urban and rural development. Co-housing projects and cooperatives may even gain importance for social change not only on the project or local level, but also on the societal level, if they are able to reach out and promote social innovations (Szypulski 2008). On the one hand, ecological, economic and social aspects of sustainability are more central to housing projects than to “normal” neighbourhoods. On the other hand, local projects are clearly limited and unable to take over state responsibility for social support, organisational backbone and the reduction of social problems mainly linked to inequality and a lack of opportunities to take part in society.

Members of co-ops gain experience and knowledge in ways never considered before embarking on the project. Persuading authorities of their idea creates a sense of empowerment and confidence in trying new ways of problem solving. Completed projects prosper, where the stability of members is given, different roles are accepted, and the sense of place and community is well developed. If projects reach out, cities and villages profit from new activities, networks and interesting dwellings with communal space – even if they don’t share the co-ops residents values and lifestyles. Urban quality of life may be at risk where closing-off strategies and exclusion of otherness gain the upper hand.

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