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The Socially Spatial Conditions of the Open City – a Theoretical Sketch[1]

Abstract:

Without additional immigration of approximately three hundred-thousand people within the next decades, the demographic development in Germany will lead to a considerable decrease in the population. Because such a reduction to roughly half of the current population during the ext fifty years is neither desirable nor realistically possible, the cities especially will be the target of increasing immigration and hence undergo a qualitative change. Today, there are large ethnic and cultural minorities in many cities and suburbs; in the future, whole cities will become international, respective suburbs will become ethnic-cultural communities. This essay presents a theory for the discussion on how such a change can be managed productively. The concept of the „Open City" is understood as both a danger and an opportunity. The essay pleads for a socio-cultural segregated division of the urban space if it is possible to prevent discrimination of any kind. The multitude of separate cultures must be supplemented by a „Hyper-Culture" in order to integrate the urban culture as a whole.

Introduction

The question of the conditions of the open city leads into a contradictory field of ideas, perceptions and evaluations, opposite of which is a diverse social and physical sphere of life as it is lived everyday.

On the one hand, the open city is an „imagined" space in Lefebvre's terms: City is thought of as a unity of the diverse, it is capable of functioning, and dependent on the presence of the foreign. Since Simmel, the overlapping of social groups, the communicative potency of the marginal, are seen as the social basis of the modern, innovative, complex, colorful, and enticing city. And it was also Simmel who pointed out that the distance and communicative coldness of the city-dweller is a necessary reaction to the contact with this overload of stimuli and differences. The inhabitant of the open city appears thus not only as one to „live and let live", but also as one to live and let suffer.

Not only does the mere utopian positive concept of the open city contain the paradox of tolerance and ignorance; city-dwellers have been, and still are, evaluating the same urban reality very differently depending on their respective socio-economic environments. What some appreciate as a colorful variety, others view as a dangerous chaos. What some praise as the basis for innovation, others see as an existential threat. It is the same reality of urban life that evokes curiosity as well as fear.

As much as the perceptions and evaluations of the open city differ, as diverse is its living reality. It extends from the far-removed shelter of asylum-seekers to Chinatown; from Arabic ghettos in the Grands Ensembles on the outskirts of French cities to the social mixtures in parts of the subsidized housing projects in Germany, which were created based upon administrative criteria; from the traditionally Jewish-Arabic Marrait in Paris to the German-Turkish milieu in Berlin-Kreuzberg.

It is obvious that such a diverse, contradictory field, which evokes contrary evaluations, is accompanied by societal debates. In German cities, the tightening of inner city laws is being discussed; not only social distance, but also violence against foreigners and those who are mistaken for foreigners, are issues in many cities. At the same time, the supporters of the open city broadcast their messages on posters, in functions and political events. The external factors of this debate are the steadily increasing poverty and social imbalance in the cities, a frightened middle class whose future is threatened, and the „suburbanization" of city politics, which is a result of politicians living in the suburbs, trying to make their ideas of order the norm of urban development. Changes in the regulation logics of capitalism are possible sources. It must be stressed, however, that the debate surrounding the concept of the open city is a constant companion of urban development, and phases of a broad consensus and high integration are an exception rather than the rule in the history of the open city.

Not the urban development and the culture of a city, but rather macro-political factors are largely responsible for the prospects of development and progress. The regulation of immigration, the laws for residency permits, the possibility to obtain citizenship, are very effective external conditions for the blossoming of an open society. Still, there are different degrees and forms of openness or separation in different cities, despite identical external conditions. The question of typical urban forms of regulation, which we understand as socially spatial, is therefore important to us.

When we hence ask about the socially spatial conditions of the open city, we should look for theses which include this contradictory field, but which will not dissolve it. The open city is not a structure, it is not a system, but either a configuration which creates itself, or a project which lives in and through its contradictions. The posed question becomes thus more precise as we try to understand the logic of this configuration in order to improve the chances for a policy of „keeping the city open".

When we speak of an open or a closed city, we address more precisely a continuum, one pole of which is the exclusion of anything new and foreign; on the opposite pole, there is the city which welcomes new ideas, people, and goods without obstructions. Both poles are ideal types of a construction, the real life cases lie somewhere between the opposite ends of the imagined scale. The degree of openness refers to people, things and ideas which are new, regardless of whether that which is new comes from the outside or whether it was generated within the city. To combine these two aspects suggests itself because empirically, innovation will probably come from the interaction of „imports and importers" as well as the city's inner distinction and its subculture.

Migration and Generating Cultural Milieus

The modern city is not logically or necessarily identical with an open city. We should take notice of the fact that there are fast-growing cities in Africa and Asia which do not correspond to the concept of the open city; however, these cities are not only modern, they are also representatives of the process of modernization in these countries.[2] We should also consider that a number of European and American cities show signs of a development which hints at the closure of certain milieus (Davis, 1990), but nobody would think that those cities are not modern cities.

However, there are at least two structural characteristics of modern cities which indicate that the concept of the open city has objective fundamental principals. For one, there is migration

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[2]   Cities like Singapore come to mind, and in part also the latest urban developments in China.

that arises from generative imbalances. Modern cities emerge and grow over long periods of time through immigration. The usually young immigrants have children in their new homes and thus contribute to the growth of the cities (Pfeil 1972, Bähr 1995). Obviously, these are not continuously ongoing developments. When the growth of the city decreases, the significance of migration usually diminishes. On the other hand, we observe a situation, especially in Europe, where even cities that are not expanding depend on immigration. In many major German cities, the relation of deaths and births is not sufficient to maintain the population, and certainly not to achieve a population growth.[3] Each migration results in generating new urban cultures or contributes to the modification of existing cultures.

Secondly, the modern city defines itself as a system based on the division of labor. The fact that concrete life situations are differentiated and thus constantly create new cultural patterns on a real as well as a symbolic level corresponds to this formal description. In this context, those youth cultures are especially conspicuous that at first remain excluded from the already established school system which is based on labor division; they in particular display their own (life)style in the public sphere. The symbolic differentiations are also apparent in large migrant cultures that have little or no power, as is the case with the Turks in Germany.

If one can thus state that modern cities continuously generate new everyday cultures from their own logic, oppression would be necessary on a large scale in order to suppress its development. In other words: the modern city demands openness for the development of new urban cultures, and extraordinary repression is required to stop or suppress these tendencies. However, heated debates and clashes between the cultures, and repressions originating from the dominant culture, go along with the history of the modern city. The oppression of Polish-Catholic cultural practice through the Prussian State in the Ruhr Region, and recently the debate surrounding the representative space which is granted to the Moslem Community in Germany, serve as examples for that phenomenon.[4]

The tension between the openness of the modern city and the simultaneous conflicts between cultures, debates concerning the occupation of spaces, and the repression of cultural practices are *the* important topics of the modern city. Walter Siebel recently posed the central question: „It is the essential prerequisite that this precarious coexistence of two cultures will result in intellectual profit and economical productivity rather than exclusion and psychosis" (Siebel 1997, p. 34). But where do we look for the prerequisites for a „productive culture of difference" (Siebel)?

Do we find the answers in the arrogance of the city-dweller as Simmel points out, which, as is repeatedly stated, serves as a protective mechanism. Is it the public sphere which makes communication between foreigners possible, as Bahrd postulates? Do the „natural areas" of the Chicago school provide „safety and protection from the lawless overcoming of tensions between the cultures" (Siebel 1997, p. 36)? Can the conditions of the integration of the foreign

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[3]   The circumstances are certainly different in each individual case. In 1996, Frankfurt had 647,304 citizens of German nationality, and 165, 926 of other nationalities. In this case, the significance of migration for the city as a whole is undeniable. The birth/death-balance is negative (-742); in this case, it contributes to the decrease in the population by 2,752, especially through the migration of non-Germans. The population of Kassel also diminishes because of decreasing births, but this decline would be even larger if it was not for the immigration of foreigners. In both cities, the changes in the birth/death-balance are rather small, which means that both cities can be considered stable with regards to the population statistics. (Source: Community Statistics of Hesse 1997).

[4]   The construction of the mosque in Mannheim can serve as an interesting example for that debate. See Alboga, Bekir: „Symbols of Integration of Turkish Culture," in: *Die Stadt*, in Brech, J. and Vanhúe, L. 1997.

be sufficiently described as „a long, contradictory process full of conflicts" (Siebel 1997, p. 37)?

Surely, the two exemplary factors which are mentioned here are important aspects of an open city and are based on still valid observations and theoretical assumptions. Still, those theses cannot really be considered satisfactory. For one, the theses are rather socio-psychological mechanisms and not conditions. The question remains, how and where do protective mechanisms, ignorant tolerance, and communicative competence emerge? How does one cope with the „controversial integration"? Secondly, the theses do not form a theoretically consistent formulation which would then facilitate a thorough analysis of certain developments in specific cities during particular periods of time. Only thus could one develop an experimental urban policy which promotes and facilitates an open city.

If a theory of the open city exists, I think it would have to fulfill three criteria. First: The definition of the conditions of an open city has to be structural, which means it has to apply to the organizational structure of the city as a whole. Secondly: The conditions found on this basis have to relate to the reality of live, which means that they also have to reflect the socio-psychological mechanisms. Thirdly: The conditions have to be ordained social-spatially because urban policy is largely spatial policy. One could actually add a third condition but it seems to be self-evident. A theory of the open city has to utilize existing sociological knowledge on this topic. It cannot be about finding especially original terminology, but rather about presenting suggestions to the discussion on how thinking about the open city can become more coherent, empirically checkable and therefore more relevant for a possible practice of the open city.

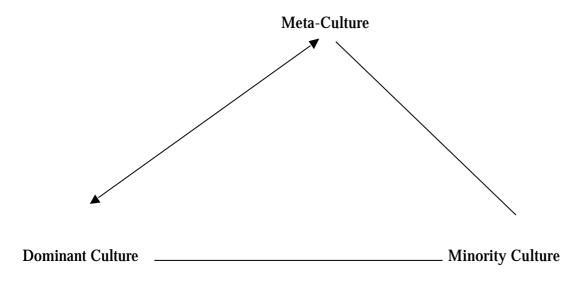## Three Cultures as Structural Constellation

The problem of the open city, and there is agreement on this aspect, lies in the interaction of the different cultures, even if the political views differ on „how" they deal with one another. But if we initially disregard whether it is acculturation (assimilation), integration or pluralism, it suggests itself to view the relationship among the cultures as a structural constellation of the open or closed city. It makes sense then to ask how this network of cultures is structured. Often, perhaps in order to simplify the discussion linguistically, one speaks of two cultures. Implied in this term, however, is the relationship between a dominant culture and various other cultures. Empirically, many different aspects are combined under the heading „foreign" or „other". Not only are the migrant cultures very different from one another and quite often view one another as enemies; even those cultures which were generated from the inner differentiation of the city have only one thing in common with the migrant cultures: they are minorities. However, this common status as minority is not insignificant. Not only do competition and conflicts regarding issues like housing and labor emerge, but also common interests and solidarity in the resistance against repressions, general xenophobia and discrimination develop.

One has to ask whether there will always be, or has to be, a dominant culture. The question whether hierarchies have to emerge necessarily—after all, the dominant culture is only one end of a hierarchy—can remain unanswered. It seems to me, however, that there is hardly any city in the world where there is not one dominant culture. Even in Brazil, which is considered pluralistic and anti-racist, it is not only the common Portuguese language that indicates the dominance of one culture. Perhaps there are cases where over a long period two cultures could coexist as equals, as for example in Beirut where the Moslem and the Christian cultures had equal significance until the war. When a network of cultures within a city is constructed, one

can assume a relationship between one dominant culture and several minority cultures as one element. The relationship among the minority cultures can be closer or more distant, but it seems to be correct to assume that they themselves are organized according to a hierarchical pattern. The criteria for the creation of such a hierarchy are the manifestations and privileges of the dominant culture. These hierarchies, however, are far from being stable. The history of cities repeatedly shows the changes of cultural hierarchies that can even lead to the replacement of the dominant culture. Let us take as an example the development of Istanbul from the East-Roman Constantinople to the Greek-orthodox Byzantium to the Ottoman and republican Istanbul under the influence of Kemal Atatürk.[5]

The relationship between the dominant culture and the minority cultures can be more or less liberal. That alone, however, is only a necessary but by no means sufficient condition for the open city. We develop the hypothesis that the significant criterion for the openness of a city is the development of a third culture; that third culture transcends all individual cultures, including the dominant one.[6] We suggest to call this culture the meta-culture. Its dominant characteristic is that it is built upon each individual culture and differs from each one at the same time. In other words, it contains elements of all the individual cultures; these elements are dispatched from their respective origin and build a new configuration along with different elements of other cultures.

Diagram of Cultural Relationships of the Open City

The hypothesis of the open city does not presume that particular cultures will dissolve, but that an energy field develops in which the three types influence one another. The integration does by no means simply take place through the meta-culture, although its existence is an essential condition for the openness of the city, but rather through the internal development each culture and the partial acculturation of all cultures.

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[5]   For a detailed portrayal of this development with a rich collection of materials, see Batur, Efife (ed): *Istanbul-world city* Tarh Vakfi Yayinlari. Istanbul 1996.

[6]   Edward Soja dedicates his book to the opening of dualistic spatial relationships. He also deals with urban cultures, but if my judgment is accurate, not in the same sense of transcendence as is intended here.

It is obvious that this hypothesis has to be empirically checked and „filled“, but several central research questions emerge already. Is there a meta-culture in a city with several different cultures; and if so, how coherent and manifest is this culture, which aspects of life does it cover (language, food, clothing, consumer preferences, relationships between the sexes and generations, leisure activities etc.)? Does the meta-culture create its own symbols and models? How liberal or repressive is the relationship between the dominant culture and the minority cultures, are there one-sided or reciprocal acculturations, which issues play a role in the conflicts between the cultures?

On an imaginary stroll through various European cities, one can assume to find significant differences in that respect between cities like Frankfurt, London, Paris, Berlin and Warsaw. Even within a country, differences between individual cities, due to their history and their specific roles, seem very likely.

Spaces of the Cultures

As suggested in the beginning, it is important to apply the hypothesis on the developmental conditions of the open city, which was established on the level of relationships and configurations of cultures, to actual spaces, but even more so to the spatial structure in order to make the connection to the political and social practice of the open city. In that respect, it is not the spatial distribution of cultures that is central—although this is crucial information for urban policies and planning—but rather the issue of the spatial conditions of generating the open city. This question is divided into two parts:

First: Which spatially typological conditions have to or should be fulfilled so that new particularistic cultures can develop? This question is central because the „test“ of how open a city is cannot be carried out by evaluating how balanced the relationships of already existing cultures are, but rather by establishing how likely the formation of new cultures is. Second: Is it advantageous or even necessary that there are spaces which represent the meta-culture, and what characteristics could such spaces have?

Let us turn to the first question. A new culture is rather weak within the context of already existing cultures. Power structures, which dictate the possesion and accessibility of spaces, have been established within the existing cultures. The conflicts and dependencies, which have been caused by that, give the space its structure. Thus emerges a first spatially typological condition for the development of new cultures. There have to be spaces which are not occupied—or at least not to the same degree—as are the usual areas of a city. Two types of spaces fulfill these criteria: the niche and the outskirts. Both are less formally regulated, they have not been occupied or at least not to a large extend. However, niche and outskirts are only suitable for the development of new cultures if they are not socially and economically isolated spaces which have been cut off from the development of the city. Niche and outskirts are advantageous, to put it in positive terms, when they can be associated with the expectation that they will gain value.

Niches develop because most urban spaces go through cycles of „value and waste“ (Thompson 1981). Spaces become „urban waste“ because their dominant architecture has gone out of style or because it is no longer of economical use. This leads to a devaluation of those spaces which results in decreasing property values. The spaces thus escape the view of public interest so that there is less formal regulation in comparison to other urban spaces. If spaces

like these have even the slightest chance for improvement and future increase in value, they are ideal for the development of new cultures.

Outskirts have similar characteristics at least in growing cities. They are not yet occupied, and in many countries the degree of formal regulation in those areas is small. In cities like Athens or Istanbul, but also in many South American cities, a unique type of urbanization is developing, which we have previously called peripheral city development (Chtouris, Heidenreich, Ipsen 1993). Through illegal construction, and sometimes through the unauthorized occupation of property, immigrants build their own house as a basis for production and reproduction. The growing city develops significant centripetal forces. Spaces that are considered outskirts today will be within the city tomorrow. This raises land prices, which is reinforced through the legalization of ongoing construction. The new immigrant cultures, often with regional and rural characteristics, can thus obtain urbanization, both materially (through the construction of new urban houses) and culturally; they get involved in the city. The outskirts, however, also function as an example for how easily the same geographical situation can become an unfavorable location if it is excluded from the general urban development. The so-called Favelas in the large Brazilian cities show this double form. One can find extremely ambitious areas as well as those which, as relatively permanent islands of poverty, allow only for a marginal existence.

Niche and outskirts have another characteristic in common. Within them, the everyday social and economic life is very much influenced by a sense of community. Families and regions of similar origin, but also shared housing and cooperatives constitute a network of communal economy and survival strategies. This way a new culture can develop rather autonomously. At the same time, these communal forms of living offer a retreat, security and safety in the modern city that focuses on society and relieve the senses from the overload of encounters with the foreign by providing a world where everything is familiar.

Here is the starting point for the social psychology of the open city. Communal forms and relatively homogenous milieus create the counter pole to the heterogeneity and complexity of the open city. Between these poles are situated the different levels of adaptation, which allow for an ideal relationship of complexity induction and reduction on the level of the individual (Berlyne 1974).[7]

Let us turn to the second question. Does the meta-culture need a space, and if so, how could this space be characterized? First of all, one has to notice that there is little research on this topic and that the theses are therefore highly speculative. However, I would like to make three statements.

The meta-culture can consist mostly of mental elements, and in that case the spatial element is secondary at best. The „citizen of Lodz" can serve as an example. Lodz evolves as an industrial city on the basis of Jewish, German and Polish culture in the 19th century. Focusing on the textile industry and a few large enterprises, the idea of a special type of person develops, namely that of the „citizen of Lodz". The citizen of Lodz is, if we follow the image, hard-working, punctual, neat and modern, neither Polish nor Jewish nor German, but rather the collective good of the particular cultures of this city. This image does not need a special space within the city, the city itself is its space. Similar things apply to the linguistic forms of the meta-culture as they appear in the movie „Blade Runner", for example. A slang has

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[7]   The essential thesis of Berlyne's stimulation theory connects the attractiveness of a situation with the complexity and newness of the information which characterizes this situation. The relationship is: a very low level of complexity is considered unpleasant, and so is a very high one. In between lies an optimal level which varies in each individual.

developed in the city which represents the meta-culture overall in the urban space. It is thus one possibility that the space of the meta-culture is the form of the city as a whole.

However, it is also conceivable that the meta-culture develops symbols, which have a spatially material effect, that relate to a specific place. Thus, the conception that New York is the world has specific places. Little Italy or Chinatown are not Italian or Chinese, but rather the element which goes beyond the particular culture which all share. An element separates from the context of the particular culture, but it still has a place. These places become a stereoscopic image, a symbolic expression of a commonly shared vision of the urban world. The space of the meta-culture is in this case the space of a particular culture which no longer represents the particular features of a culture, but rather the generalized contribution of that culture to the meta-culture.

Thirdly, it is possible that the various cultures of a city have one common space in which they represent themselves not as an „ethnological museum", but rather in a form of unity which transcends their own respective culture. In New York, this could be the pointed individuality which is present in Central Park. If there are such common spaces, then they are highly sensitive towards domination by one or the other culture (and this also applies to demands from the dominant culture). The persistent civil endeavors for the openness of Central Park could hint at the empirical existence of such common spaces within the meta-culture.[8]

As a result, we have three possible spatial types of the meta-culture: the form of the entire city, a transcending specific place of a particular culture, and places of commonly shared representation.

Concluding Remarks on the Political Practice of the Open City

Without a doubt, the thoughts and theses that have been presented until today, demand a thorough and critical discussion as well as empirical examination before one can draw conclusions for the policy and planning of an open city. Therefore, this essay can only point out that from the thoughts presented here, practical hints can be gained. I would like to point in the direction of my thoughts by two remarks.

Based upon the presented theses to the cultural constellation of the open city, it is plausible to think about the practice of social intermixing. Our thesis would suggest to not only allow for culturally homogenous urban spaces, but to encourage them. Planning and local governments would have to ensure that these areas will not turn into spaces of discrimination because of their provisions and the condition of conservation, their access to public transport and their public image.

The presented theses also suggest that local government and urban planning accept spaces of devaluation to a certain degree, and that those spaces will not be controlled and regulated as rigidly. This entails the difficulty to design such measures—or the lack thereof—so that there is no room for the impression that these places are neglected permanently or that they are even unhitched from the rest of the city. This could be ensured by local governments and planning: there could be consulting and support for the development of a community-based economy.

Both thoughts that are presented here as examples, have one thing in common. Government and planning have to accept ambivalence. Between decay and salvaging, there would have to be a third element: inner urban boundaries, utilized fallow land-niches. Between the social

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[8] See „The Thrill of the Uncanny", *Der Spiegel* 29, 1998, p. 134ff

intermixing and the „ghetto“, cultural areas develop with their own symbols and self-regulation of social and economic life. Market economy and communal economy go side by side.

It becomes apparent now that the open city is probably not a clearly structured and thus abstract place, but rather a string and combination of inhabited spaces which connect paradoxes within themselves. Ambivalence is an essential feature of the open city; that has, as one can imagine, considerable consequences for the methods of planning.

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