

The Economy of Urban Diversity

Veranstalter: Working group „Economy“ der Global Young Faculty

Datum, Ort: 13.01.2011-15.01.2011, Essen

Bericht von: David Passig, Historisches Institut der Universität Duisburg-Essen

„The economy of urban diversity“ – this was the main topic dealt with by an international symposium in Essen from January 13th to 15th, 2011. It was arranged by the members of the working group „Economy“ of the „Global Young Faculty“, an interdisciplinary research group promoted by the Stiftung Mercator, in collaboration with the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, Essen (KWI).

What does urban diversity mean in the present and what did it mean in the past? How is diversity communicated? Does it have a certain impact on urban development? And, is diversity in urban spaces only a challenge to be dealt with or is there also economic potential that can be taken advantage of? These were the main questions the academics of the working group wanted to consider with their international guests, as Steffen Brinckmann (Bochum), chairman of the group, stated in his opening speech. In an effort to find answers to them, two metropolitan areas, which have been quite strongly affected by the phenomenon „diversity“, were analyzed as case studies: the Ruhr area and Istanbul. Past and present of these two metropolises, both of which were European Capital of Culture in 2010, cannot be taken into consideration without including their diverse ethnic and religious minorities.

In her paper, MARIA CHRISTINA CHATZIOANNOU (Athens) proved, that in the case of the metropolis Istanbul, diversity has already been influencing the urban space and its economic development since the 19th century, when Istanbul was part of the Ottoman Empire. In this regard, Ottoman Istanbul can be seen as an example for the impacts of diversity and governmental behavior towards them. Giving the example of the district of Galata, where a sizable community of wealthy non-Muslim merchants, diplomats and bankers concentrated, Chatzioannou demonstrated the extensive economic net-

works of parts of the non-Muslim population of Istanbul. For instance, the bankers of Galata financed both commercial and private activities, even beyond the area of Istanbul. She argued that since the independence of Greece in 1830, the Greek Orthodox bankers in particular had participated successfully in a number of projects in the emerging markets of the young state. Chatzioannou stated further that in consequence in this period a new non-Muslim bourgeoisie was emerging in Galata: Especially the Greek Orthodox population began to build a novel middle class stratum that was to have a strong impact on both urban economy and architecture.

EDHEM ELDEM (Istanbul) defined the Constantinopolitan cosmopolitanism as a kind of Levantine identity, which was influenced perceptibly by such Greek merchant communities in the Mediterranean. It disappeared in the 19th century, at the same time as the flourishing city's bourgeoisie, which lost its access to power due to growing nationalism.

Another example for minority entrepreneurship and its influences on urban development was given by RENÉ LEICHT (Mannheim) and SABINE WECK (Dortmund), who focused on migrant business in the present-day Ruhr area. Leicht stated that both the rates of creation and of liquidation of migrant businesses were notably higher than those of the indigenous Germans. Thereby ethnic background seems to have a strong influence on the predilection to self-employment: Leicht suggested that more than 50% of the self-employed migrants were not members of the „classical“ migration groups, such as Turks, Russians or Italians. Altogether, he detected a strong relation between education, ethnic group and self-employment. The often quoted process of „ghettoisation“ was overrated. More than half of migrant businesses were not settled in areas of co-ethnic segregation.

Weck pointed to the strong North-South divide in nearly all of the cities in the Ruhr area and to the fact that districts of low prosperity generally had a higher percentage of migrants than wealthier districts. She argued further that two aspects of migrant business were remarkable. First, there was still a strong concentration on traditional busi-

ness fields among migrant groups. Secondly, in districts with a high percentage of migrants, such as Dortmund Nordstadt, the supply structure was mostly occupied by those migrants. To exhaust the economic potential of migrant groups, both Leicht and Weck demanded better access to education and the extension of specific consulting services for migrants. Huge, established institutions like the Chamber of Industry and Commerce lacked such offers, especially for small-scale businesses.

But what exactly is the impact of such commercial activities of minorities on the urban development? According to KORINNA SCHÖNHÄRL (Essen), the raising prosperity of the Greek Orthodox bankers of Galata in the 19th century was strongly linked to the so-called process of gentrification, which means the social upgrading of an urban area or quarter by acquisition of the buildings by wealthier people, thereby driving out low-income groups. In the district of Galata, the low-income population, mostly Muslim, was affected by displacement and crowding-out from the 1850s onwards. This effect, she argued, became even stronger when, in 1856, the Sultan allowed the residents to found a municipal, western-styled self-administration. Schönhärl explained that the fact that this council recruited its members mostly from the Christian community of the district led to a one-sided style of clientele politics without consideration of other social groups.

Against the background of this historical perspective the gentrification processes in present-day Istanbul, as described by DARJA REUSCHKE (Trier), seem to be a new application of an old practice. The paper showed that since the 1980s, a new wave of crowding-out of low-income groups has taken place in several districts of the city, labeled as governmental efforts to conserve and renovate historical architecture. Reuschke exemplified this with the eviction of 3,500 Roma people from their houses in Sulukule and their resettlement 45 kilometers away in 2009, or the displacement of several minorities from the district of Tarlabasi.

CEMILE NIL UZUN (Ankara) explained the way in which such a state-led gentrifi-

cation has taken place during the last three decades in the city. According to her, since the 1980s it has become common practice for the administration to initiate social housing in the peripheral areas of Istanbul and thereby to move low-income groups out of the central districts. Those central, historic areas were then upgraded and rebuilt in public and private partnerships. The consequence was a distinctive segregation depending on income level. DENIZ YONUCU (Ithaca, NY) added that in order to make the city attractive for foreign capital, the administration was acting extremely intolerantly towards the low-income stratum.

With the help of these examples it has become clear that diversity has notably influenced the urban development of the examined metropolises. But how is diversity perceived and communicated? Is it part of a kind of urban identity?

Considering the long history of migration in Germany – not just limited to the foreign workers – one could ask why there is still no migration museum. DIETMAR OSSES (Bochum) stated that all previous efforts to establish a permanent exhibition about migration in Germany have failed due to the lack of financing opportunities, the cliché of museums persisting in the past without giving any answers to recent questions, and the sometimes ideological current discourses about topics like Islamism, fundamentalism and integration. Nonetheless, Osses argued, a German migration museum is still possible. Examples of successful projects like the emigrant museums in Bremerhaven and Hamburg Ballinstedt confirmed this. From his point of view, the concept of presenting different „migration vitae“ and thus showing the impact of migration on the economy, as it has been sampled in a number of projects in the past, might also be a leading idea for a migration museum.

In present-time Istanbul, diversity has repeatedly been pictured as a problem, as Yonucu demonstrated by pointing to the discrimination of the lower strata of the city. Sometimes called „the other Turkey“, in terms of an uncivilized, underdeveloped group, the working class which consists to a large extent of Kurds and other minorities was heav-

ily stigmatized today. The media images of working class quarters as no-go areas or „bombs about to explode“ was linked to „ideological phantasies“ of a unified Istanbul, excluding „the other Turkey“. The eviction of informal settlements of the low-income groups called „Gecekondu“ by police forces became virtually media events. She argued that the criminalization of the working class had thus become part of the gentrification of Istanbul.

These processes entail the question about the legal status of minority groups. Although they were privileged in matters of self-administration, AYŞE OZIL (Istanbul) pointed to the legal difficulties non-Muslim minorities had to deal with in Ottoman Istanbul. Ozil argued that even in the second half of the 19th century, when non-Muslim entrepreneurs were still welcome, there were various problems and a degree of vagueness in matters relating to the legal status of the communal institutions of the minorities. Although several attempts were made to reform the legal framework for such institutions during the 19th and 20th century, their legal corporate status remained imprecisely defined, and, as Ozil suggested, this is still the case today.

The situation of the non-Muslim minorities changed rapidly during the final stage of the Ottoman Empire from 1912, as DIMITRIS KAMOUZIS (Athens) explicated. He argued that due to the emergence of Turkish nationalism and ideas of a Turkish national economy, the non-Muslim entrepreneurs were affected by several boycotts, discrimination and intimidation campaigns. These tendencies grew even stronger during the 1920s and 1930s after the founding of Turkey, when the trend towards economic nationalism intensified. Kamouzis explained that in order to create a new Turkish middle class, the Turkish administration enacted a number of regulations and restrictions that openly disadvantaged the non-Muslim body of entrepreneurs and caused many of the Greeks to leave Istanbul.

One of the main questions of the symposium – and also in the discussions of its participants – was whether the Ruhr area and Istanbul could be compared at all in terms of

the past and present of diversity. The results seem to prove that a comparison is at least problematic. Both the historical and the actual processes seem to differ too much. Maybe, as Maria Chatzioannou stated, it is rather the confrontation of phenomena than the comparison from which one can benefit.

In addition, YUNUS ULUSOY (Essen) indicated that Istanbul and the Ruhr area might not be seen in isolation from each other. Diversity in both Istanbul and the Ruhr area was strongly affected by the migration streams between these two metropolitan areas, he explained. Brisk movement between Istanbul and the Ruhr area had not only be seen during the period of foreign workers, but continued today. However, the migration streams seemed to have become far more complex over time. The current image of more and more Turks moving from Turkey to Germany had to be reconsidered. He argued that although there were legal opportunities, the number of Turks moving to Germany was falling rapidly, whereas the number of those leaving Germany increased constantly.

In a final analysis, one may conclude that Istanbul and the Ruhr area are entirely different and thus incomparable. However, they are linked by the phenomenon of diversity. In both cases there are several examples of certain economic potentials of diversity being utilized, while others remain unrecognized. In the Ruhr area as well as in Istanbul, diversity seems to have been a major challenge for a long time, right up to the present day. But in both regions, it has also always been and continues to be an opportunity. Maybe, in some ways, the metropolises can learn from each other. But the symposium showed that various questions need first to be solved. The researchers will, in fact, have to reconsider some of their theses and categories. They will have to modify their images of groups in order to destroy existing stereotypes whereby class issues often count for more than ethnical or religious disparities in urban development. And, finally, they will have to attain a transnational point of view in order to discover both a common past and a common future.

Conference overview:

Opening Event

Chair: Steffen Brinckmann (Ruhr-University Bochum)

Steffen Brinckmann (Ruhr-University Bochum)

Presentation of the Working Group „Economy“ of the „Global Young Faculty“

Korinna Schönhärl (University of Duisburg-Essen), Darja Reuschke (Trier University), represented by Jörg Plöger (Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development, Dortmund)

The Interchange of Economy and Urban Diversity – a Case Study of Metropolis Istanbul

Session: Chances and Risks of Integrating Economic Perspectives in Migration Museums

Chair: Jens Kroh (Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, Essen)

Dietmar Osses (Westphalian Industrial Museum „Hannover Colliery“, Bochum; Working Group „Migration“ of the German Museums Association)

A Migration Museum for Germany. Concepts, Efforts, Alternatives

Yasemin Yadigaroglu (ESTA Bildungswerk gGmbH)
Commentary

Udo Gößwald (Director Museum Neukölln, Berlin; Chairman ICOM Europe)

Commentary

Session: The Cross under the Crescent: Christians in Istanbul in the 19th Century

Chair: Korinna Schönhärl (University of Duisburg-Essen)

Ayşe Ozil (Boğaziçi University, Istanbul)

The Legal Framework of Greek Orthodox Communal Institutions in the Late Ottoman Empire

Maria Christina Chatziioannou (Institute for Neohellenic Research, Athens), Dimitris Kamouzis (Centre for Asia Minor Studies, Athens)

From Great Empires to National States: The Economic Activities of the Greek Orthodox in Istanbul, ca.1870-1939

Edhem Eldem (Boğaziçi University, Istanbul)
Commentary

Session: Self-employed with Migrant Background: Economic Potential of the Metropolis Ruhr?

Chair: Sabine Weck (Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development, Dortmund)

René Leicht (Institut für Mittelstandsforschung, University Mannheim)

Self-employed with Migrant Background: Characteristics and Determinants of an Economic Potential

Sabine Weck

Self-employed with Migrant Background in the Ruhr Area – Overrated Resource or Underestimated Potential?

Session: Handling of Cultural Diversity in Contemporary Urban Planning and the European Capital of Culture 2010 in Istanbul

Chair: Darja Reuschke (Trier University)

Deniz Yonucu (Cornell University, Ithaca/NY)

The Middle Class Takeover of Istanbul: Commodification of the City and Remarginalization of Poverty

Cemile Nil Uzun (Middle East Technical University, Ankara)

Urban Space and Gentrification in Istanbul in the 20th Century

Session: Human Streams and Interrelations between the Ruhr Area and Istanbul

Chair: Jörg Plöger (Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development, Dortmund)

Yunus Ulusoy (Centre for Studies on Turkey, Essen)

Migration from Turkey to the Ruhr Area up to the Present Day

Final Discussion

Chair: Monika Salzbrunn (University of Lausanne)

Tagungsbericht *The Economy of Urban Diversity*. 13.01.2011-15.01.2011, Essen, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 08.03.2011.