

UrbanTopias. Discussing the Challenges of Changing Cities

Veranstalter: DFG International Graduate Research Program Berlin-New York-Toronto „The World in the City: Metropolitanism and Globalization from the 19th Century to the Present“

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What is the future of the urban? Looking back at twelve years of joint discussions, scholars of the DFG International Graduate Research Program „The World in the City“, together with invited academics, artists and activists went far beyond the classical divide of utopian versus dystopian visions. Under the title of „UrbanTopias“, they considered both negative and positive narrations of the city’s future as part of the same reality. During a three-day sequence of panels, excursions and roundtables in Berlin, the organizers of the 5th annual conference remained faithful to their graduate school’s program and provided an outlook on the interrelations of historic metropolitanism and globalization. The particular relations of time, space, and urban imaginaries were approached from three broad lines of analysis: (1) by investigating urban societies between fear and solidarity; (2) by scrutinizing materialities and practices of resistance and transformation in the city; and (3) by showing the entanglements of metropolitan colonialism and futurism, creativity and activism. The conference was rounded out with a keynote on the recently adopted United Nations (UN) „New Urban Agenda“ and a final roundtable discussion on the future of urban studies, thus leaving the audience with a comprehensive overview on the theory and praxis of changing cities.

Existing imbalances between theorists and practitioners in urban knowledge generation were productively confronted by PHILIPP

MISSELWITZ (Berlin) in his opening keynote lecture „To Quito and back. Lessons from Habitat III“. The architect and planner shared his insights from the recent UN Habitat III conference in Quito, pointing specifically to the underrepresentation of academics at the event. Misselwitz re-interpreted the term UrbanTopias as a chance to overcome a seeming incompatibility of utopia and *Realpolitik*. Warning that such artificial distinction would further marginalize their roles, he called for a stronger engagement of present senior and young researchers during the upcoming implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Misselwitz underlined that around 65 percent of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were of urban relevance. During the discussion that followed DOROTHEE BRANTZ (Berlin) emphasized that the co-production of knowledge was vital for understanding cities. Besides a need for the global funding of cross-comparisons between the so-called „global north“ and „south“, Brantz pointed out that also within institutions, less national-centric research was needed. „How optimistic can we be?“, one audience member asked, criticizing that it was in the nature of grand declarations to introduce fuzzy concepts such as sustainability, without touching upon structural causes to current problems, namely colonialism and capitalism.

Urban Societies between Fear and Solidarity

Potentials, as well as limits of UrbanTopias were also at the heart of the conference’s first section, which was introduced by JOHN MOLLENKOPF (New York). Arguing that both fear and risk were endemic to the urban, he made a strong call for studying social cohesion in contemporary cities and metropolitan areas. To counter current conflictive and fragmentary tendencies, he argued that the political incorporation of today’s mobile city-users had to be put under scrutiny. In response to this, GESA TROJAN (Berlin), co-organizer of the first panel, introduced the concepts of „hospitality“ and „hostility“, thus setting the stage for a vivid discussion around their analytical potential for studies on urban mobility.

From a human geographers’ point of view, NILS GRUBE (Berlin) reacted by showing

how pro-hospitality transformed into hostility towards tourists in Berlin. Warning against the threat of racism, he pointed to the blurring lines between tourism and other forms of mobility, mainly migration. From a different perspective, SARAH BECKLAKE (Lancaster) demonstrated how anti-hostility strategies could result in forms of (forced) hospitality. Drawing upon the case of Antigua Guatemala, she pointed to the performativity of touristic securitization strategies, showing how locals were disciplined into performing as hospitable „others“, in order to make tourists feel safe. Taking a critical stance towards the sessions' theme, Misselwitz asked for shifting the perspective from host societies and „welcoming cultures“ to those that were supposed to be hosted. The case of Berlin, he argued, showed that refugees were not part of 21st century urban policies. Instead of taking into account existing migrant infrastructures, the new residents were mostly placed outside neighborhoods such as Neukölln. Providing a more positive example of solidarity, DYUGU KABAN (Berlin) presented a set of interventions by the Spacedigger Research Collective. Through a collection of mundane objects, the group of artists, social scientists, and designers had shown the materiality of exclusions and inclusions in an Istanbul neighborhood. In a concluding statement panel organizer KATHARINA KNAUS (Berlin) called for more sensitivity towards the temporality of hospitality. The consequences of producing both tourists and refugees as temporary city users, she argued, were manifest in the immobilization of alleged strangers.

Touching upon issues of urban mobility in a broader sense, the second panel lead over to a discussion on the ideals behind forms of dwelling that are „wanted“ – and those which are not. While BILL OSGERBY (London) elaborated on the criminalization of youth in Britain, pointing also to how migrant youth are used as scapegoats in current „Brexit“ debates, JENNY KÜNKEL (Weimar) drew a more complex picture of the ordering of deviance. With the extension of gentrification over the city of Frankfurt, she argued, displacement of marginalized groups became less feasible. Instead, Künkel showed

how policemen and women were flexibilizing containment, by introducing so-called toleration zones or by taking over roles that traditionally were assigned to social workers. Another current strategy of coping with deviance was addressed by NIKLAS CREEMERS (Berlin), who asked how digitalization impacted on the rhythmicity of urban security landscapes in New York. Comparable to the game of „whack a mole“, Creemers argued, police were chasing statistical patterns of crime, rather than criminals. Summarizing the panel, HANNAH SCHILLING (Berlin) hypothesized that the urban sites where „order“ is supposed to be found were less clear-cut than expected. Schilling concluded that a more constructive outlook at the fluidity and messiness of the urban could be provided by the next days' analytical lens on emerging infrastructures.

Materialities and practices of resistance and transformation

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

Following up on Mayer's introduction, the third panel on „Remerging Infrastructures“ explored how small-scale practices of provisioning relate to large-scale organizations of basic needs. Focusing on struggles for access to water, both MARCELA LOPÉZ (Berlin) and MARCELA ARRIETA (Berlin) elaborated how Colombians challenged neoliberal policies in their cities. While Lopéz showed how a differentiation between non-/commercial types of water shaped the forms of community organization in the case of Medellín, Arrieta approached water in itself as a central actor that dis-/connected human and non-human actors in Bogotá's marginalized areas. Opening out the discussion to a less established field of research, BEATRICE WALTHALL (Berlin) introduced her work on food governance in Berlin. Premised

on the observation that Germany's capital was governed by „food politics without food policy“, Walthall pointed out how civil society actors successfully influenced government discourses. Whereas all three panelists had carved out counter-narratives, discussant TIMOTHY MOSS (Berlin) made a call for taking the entanglements of the social and the material in infrastructures seriously. Finally, Lopéz's case served as an example for the ambiguous meanings of single infrastructural elements, which by granting access to „formal“ citizenship could simultaneously pave the way for new forms of individualized consumerism.

The fourth panel of the conference brought a historian and a mobility consultant together to discuss „Changing Mobility Patterns. Progress and Reluctance“. In his introduction, panel co-organizer ALJOSCHA HOFMANN (Berlin) encouraged the audience to think together past and present driving forces in order to understand the hopes and frustrations caused by urban transport infrastructure. Focusing on the case of Berlin, CHRISTOPH BERNHARDT (Berlin) drew a pointed history of the car friendly city. Starting with an illustration of the dramatic increase in the use of public transport at the end of the 19th century, he reminded that ironically, the co-existing utopia of the automobile city had caused strong effects despite the real number of circulating cars being very low. Bernhardt identified a network of politicians, managers and academics as very active in promoting auto mobility from the 1910s until today. Taking on this latter point, WOLFGANG AICHINGER (Berlin) brought the debate into the present and future of urban Germany. Making clear that air quality in major German cities did not comply with EU standards, Aichinger criticized the passivity of government institutions, thus confirming Bernhardt's hypothesis of the overprotected car industry. Both commentator DIETRICH HENKEL (Berlin) and Bernhardt agreed that analyzing the utopian dimension of infrastructures was important. This implied considering ambivalent notions of progress, by analyzing for instance how tramways were being recently rediscovered, while they had been abandoned as hampering modernity in

the previous century.

Entanglements of metropolitan colonialism and futurism

The third day was opened by JENNIFER JENKINS (Toronto) who introduced the section „Create Futures“ by offering a distinction between topics as the global city and tourism which had their own times, and the „lived time“ of residents, artists and activists. The latter were at the heart of the fifth panel on „Artivism in Urban Imaginaries“. How could art and activism change present thinking, panel moderator JANET MERKEL (London) asked provocatively, while at the same time being subject to commodification. KATE BREHME (Berlin) hypothesized that the Berlin Biennial was out of sync with the city, lagging behind actual sociopolitical realities, while at the same time struggling with the constraints of having become an institution. Tackling the challenges of archiving digital borne material in New York's Occupy Wall Street and Istanbul's Occupy-Gezi Movements was at the center of ELIF AR-TAN's (Berlin) presentation, which discussed the role of on video activism as producing alternative historiographies. FRIEDERIKE LANDAU (Berlin) drew from the example of the „Koalition der freien Szene“ in Berlin, to discuss the challenges of trying to influence cultural politics while acting as a lobby for groups that partly reject representation.

The sixth panel „Tempor(e)ality. Racing Time and the Racialized Urban“ critically discussed UrbanTopias against the backdrop of their dystopian realities. Panel organizer NOA HA (Berlin) argued that the power to memorize and to imagine was not equally distributed, taking effect in the racialization of urban life. Drawing upon the example of Marseille, MARLÈNE DE SAUSSURE (Berlin) revealed the colonial legacies inherent to the concept of metropolis. Whereas de Saussure illustrated the materialization of these processes during the first colonial exposition in Marseille in 1906, PATRICIA SCHOR (Utrecht) showed the continuities of a „White Order“ in Dutch cities today. Racialization in her perspective questions the very possibilities for blackened subjects to become full citizens. Those long-lasting patterns of dispos-

session from the public sphere incited PEGGY PIESCHE (Bayreuth) to ask for possibilities of re-appropriation by blackened subjects. The digital space could open to new forms of alliances across continental divides. Importantly, Piesche pointed to the need to decolonize utopian projects and temporal racism. What if „black people had a future?“, Piesche concluded with a provocation that pushed the audience to reconsider their intellectual boundaries.

The current knowledge boundaries of urban studies were also at stake at the final roundtable. Opening the discussion, DANIEL TÖDT (Berlin) asked the participants about their estimations of the three most relevant topics for urban studies in the next ten years. Curiously, the panelists seemed to be more decided than expected by the organizers, as all of them focused on rather one big issue. Speaking as an environmental historian, DOROTHEE BRANTZ (Berlin) raised the issue of climate change. Scholars should envision a more inclusive environment, she argued, and take the post human seriously to start thinking across the species, animals, and plants. ANNIKA HINZE (New York) provocatively quoted Donald Trump’s recent issuing of „inner cities“. This was „a 90s term“, the political scientist argued, instead calling for finding new ways to engaging the state in governing the fragmented metropolis „from within“. Adding to the political science perspective, Friederike Landau introduced a post-foundational perspective as way of thinking UrbanTopias. Understanding meaning as never fixed, she argued, could be liberating for discussing notions like space, society, and democratic institutions. Continuing on the theoretic level, KANISHKA GOONEWARDENA (Toronto) argued that scholars had to tackle the question „how can we get from the city we have to the city we want?“, considering especially the role of urban social movements. Underlining this last point, ROSEMARY WAKEMAN (New York) called for truly interdisciplinary urban studies. Scholars had to find a public voice for their work, she argued, coming back to the original endeavor of urban studies to break down the borders between university and the city. Leading over into the dis-

cussion, she added a self-critical note on the Euro-American dominance within the graduate school. Finally, two current PhD students from the graduate school steered the debate into a more positive direction. Sharing her enthusiasm on the sound walk with artist ANDREW BROWN (Nottingham), Landau called for opening research to more encompassing sensual experiences in learning the urban. Underlining the progressive aspects of the graduate program, de Saussure finally stated that the fact that more women than men were participating on the roundtable left her with an optimistic outlook on the future of urban studies.

Through touching upon a broad range of topics, from politics of territories and populations to the history of urban imaginaries and basic needs, the three days of discussion on UrbanTopias ultimately pointed to the importance of urban studies to remain political and hence open to re-write institutional boundaries of knowledge production.

Conference Overview:

Section I: Take Risks

John Mollenkopf (New York): Introduction

Panel I: Threatened Hospitality / Threatening Hostility

Gesa Trojan (Berlin) and Katharina Knaus (Berlin): Panel Coordination and Moderation; Chaghaf Howayek (Berlin): Panel Coordination

Nils Grube (Berlin): Welcome to Berlin – now go home! Hospitality and hostility in Berlin’s New Tourism Areas

Sarah Becklake (Lancaster): Global Tourism Mobilities, (In)securities, and the Making of Hospitable/Hostile Experiences in La Antigua Guatemala

Duygu Kaban (Berlin): Blurry Borders in Anxious Times – Art and Urbanism between Turkey and Germany

Philipp Misselwitz (Berlin): Refugee Accommodation Strategies

Panel II: Fear the Streets! Street Crime, Moral Panics, and the Metropolis

Niklas Creemers (Berlin) and Felix Fuhg

(Berlin): Panel Coordination; Hannah Schilling (Berlin): Moderation

Bill Osgerby (London): The „Criminal Disease“ of „Broken Britain“ – Youth Politics and Moral Panics in the UK

Jenny Künkel (Weimar): Policing Disorder in the Gentrifying City – an Intersectional Perspective

Niklas Creemers (Berlin): A Game of „Whack-A-Mole“ – Policing New York City through Stats, Maps and Trends

Keynote

Philipp Misselwitz (Berlin): To Quito And Back – Lessons From Habitat III

Section II: Act Changes

Margit Mayer (Berlin): Introduction

Panel III: Remerging Infrastructures. From Small Scale Practices of Provisioning to Large-Scale Organization of Basic Needs

Hannah Schilling (Berlin) and Beatrice Walthall (Berlin): Panel Coordination; Hanna Hilbrandt (Berlin): Moderation

Marcela Arrieta (Berlin): Water and Power Organizing Practices at the Urban Fringe of Bogotá

Marcela López (Berlin): Infrastructures, Citizenship and Public Water in Medellín, Colombia

Beatrice Walthall (Berlin): Revealing Civic Actions in Urban Food Governance in Berlin

Panel IV: Changing Mobility Patterns: Progress and Reluctance

Aljoscha Hofmann (Berlin) and Robin Kellermann (Berlin): Panel Coordination; Aljoscha Hofmann (Berlin): Moderation; Dietrich Henckel (Berlin): Commentator

Christoph Bernhardt (Berlin): On Transitions and Persistences of Urban Mobility in the 20th Century

Wolfgang Aichinger (Berlin): Cycling Boom, Dieselgate & Co.: Reflections on the Inherent Inconsistency of Mobility Policies in Germany

Excursions/Tours led by artist Andrew Brown (London) and Aljoscha Hofman

(Berlin)

Section III: Create Futures

Jennifer Jenkins (Toronto): Introduction

Panel V: Artivism in Urban Imaginaries

Kate Brehme (Berlin) and Elif Artan (Berlin): Panel Coordination; Janet Merkel (London): Moderation

Kate Brehme (Berlin): Temporary Urban Space Aestheticized: What is the Berlin Biennale's Right to the City?

Elif Artan (Berlin): Documentation and Urban Witnessing

Friedrike Landau (Berlin): Complementary Critiques – Collective Artist Formations in Berlin's Cultural Politics

Panel VI: Tempor(e)ality: Racing Time and The Racialized Urban

Noa Ha (Berlin): Panel Coordination, Discussion and Moderation

Peggy Piesche (Bayreuth): Memory, Time Travel and Post-City Spaces: Decolonizing African/Diasporic Futures

Patricia Schor (Utrecht): White Order and the Colonial Archive – Racialization of Public Space in the Netherlands

Marlène de Saussure (Berlin): Producing the „Colonial Metropole“ in Marseille through Materialized Processes of Racialization

Final Roundtable

Noa Ha (Berlin) and Daniel Tödt (Berlin): Moderation

Dorothee Brantz (Berlin), Kanishka Goonewardena (Toronto), Friederike Landau (Berlin), Annika Hinze (New York), Rosemary Wakeman (New York): A Final Discussion on „The Future of Urban Studies“

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