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Contents

Urbanity as a term that describes the distinctiveness of the urban in contrast to the rural can also be defined in relation to particular social formations. The urbanity of the ancient polis (a place of leisure) is different from that of the medieval European city (the urban as another society) and the modern city (a place of individualisation). The conclusion considers the Janus face of urbanity, its emancipatory nature and its topicality for urban policy.

1   Introduction

Every social formation creates its own city (▷ *City, town*). The modern city has little in common with the ancient polis, and the pre-modern Islamic city differs fundamentally from the ▷ *European city*. Any attempt to define urbanity without referring to a specific culture in a specific historical epoch will inevitably remain meaningless. Etymologically the term *urbanity* can be traced back to the Latin term *urbs* (city/town). In general it means the urban – that which distinguishes the city from the rural. What this distinction comprises cannot be explained independently of the type of society that is being considered. In this article, urbanity is therefore only discussed in relation to the European city.

In everyday language, urbanity, like the Latin *urbanitas*, stands for education, a refined lifestyle and sophistication – basically for characteristics that urban dwellers believe distinguish them positively from the 'unrefined' farmers and provincials: 'Urbanity is nothing but the superior inability to be riled by the bad manners of others' (Stendhal 1947: 433 et seq.). In the academic discussion on urbanity, it is possible to identify an urban design discourse, a political discourse and a sociological discourse.

2   Definition of urban design

The term became current in urban design in the 1960s. Criticism of 'the loss of urbanity in urban design' (Berndt 1967) by authors like Jane Jacobs (1963), Wolf Jobst Siedler (1964) and Alexander Mitscherlich (1965) led to a return to the qualities of the bourgeois city of the 19th century which were lost in the ▷ *Urban design* of the modern era: the ▷ *Density* and diversity of the buildings, the juxtaposition of different architectural and historical building styles, the mixture of ▷ *Housing*, work, recreation and transport, the polarisation of public and private space, the emphasising of different urban spaces, streets and squares and an identifiable townscape. However, in practice not much remained of these criteria except for 'urbanity through density'. The dominance of an understanding of urbanity reduced to spatial-technical categories was also due to investors hoping for increased profits from the greater exploitation of the building plots and the larger construction series. But the higher density of population and building mass did not create an urban society characterised by urbanity. Consequently, mono-functional large settlements developed at peripheral locations, in complete contrast to the compact, mixed-use city that became the general guiding principle of urban design in Germany from the mid-1980s (cf. Zupan 2015).

3   Political definition

The political dimension of urbanity was introduced by Edgar Salin (1960) in his lecture on urbanity at the Association of German Cities *(Deutscher Städtetag)* in 1960 in Augsburg. He focused on an idealised picture of the Greek polis as a democratic, sovereign political subject, grounded in the virtues of urban citizens. 'Urbanity cannot be conceived without […] the active involvement of a city's citizens in the city's regiment [sic]. Urbanity is education, is being well-educated in body, mind and soul, but it is […] also the fruitful involvement of people as part of the polis, as political

beings in their own political space, which belongs only to them' (Salin 1960: 13 et seq.). Salin described this ideal sense of urbanity as existing only in Periclean Athens, in Rome at the time of Cicero and Caesar, and to a certain extent in the free imperial cities, in the Italian city states and in Paris in the 19th century. The city as a political subject and 'the civic virtue of active involvement for the benefit of the city and the state' are, according to Salin (1960: 13 et seq.), at the heart of urbanity. What remained of this in Germany is said to have been destroyed in 1933. The 'shameful day of 1 April' 'marks the end of German urbanity' (Salin 1960: 23). With reference to the cities of today 'it would be right to completely avoid the word "urbanity" for a long time in the future' (Salin 1960: 24).

The ancient polis was a patriarchic society of slave owners. The humanistic urbanity that Salin conjured up never concerned more than a small urban elite comprising men and free citizens. The free imperial cities of the Middle Ages were territorial authorities similar to sovereign states (▷ *Territorial authority*); after the Persian wars Athens was even a 'world power' (cf. Meier 2009), an unrealistic model for cities under the conditions of an increasingly globalised economy and politics. Bearing all this in mind, it is justified to ask whether, with decreasing participation in local elections and a trend towards the legal, financial and political hollowing out of ▷ *Local self-government*, it is even possible to still speak of urbanity in a political sense.

4 Sociological definition

4.1 The Ancient polis: Leisure

The distinctive quality of the city is sociologically defined as a distinctive lifestyle, which differentiates urban dwellers from rural dwellers. This definition must also be considered in historical terms. The distinction between leisure and work was central to the lifestyles of citizens of the Greek polis. In Ancient Greece the male members of the urban-based aristocracy, relieved of all necessary work by women and slaves, lived a leisured life pursuing public affairs and their own spiritual and physical improvement. Doing anything useful or necessary was a stigma. Aristoteles regarded all activities that were subject to necessity as being unfree. He viewed not only household work (Oikos) but also handiwork and trade, the basic functions of the medieval European city, as 'despicable and detrimental to virtue'. Women and slaves were occupied with the necessities of life, which is why they were not permitted to participate in the public life of the polis. Only men, who were freed from all the basic necessities of life (cf. Arendt 1983: 19), were allowed to enter the agora of the Greek polis.

4.2   The Middle Ages: Market and democracy

In medieval society the city became a revolutionary foreign body, politically through the development of self-government by urban citizens and economically through the establishment of markets at which residents could buy goods to satisfy their needs. According to Max Weber the paradigmatic European city can be distinguished by the fact that the settlements have at least a relatively strong commercial and trading character, as well as the following features: 1. fortifications, 2. a market, 3. a court of law and at least in part their own law, 4. a structure based on associations (of guilds) and, linked to this, 5. at least partial autonomy, and the existence of an administration and the participation of citizens in the appointment of that administration (Weber 1956: 934).

Weber's description of the paradigmatic medieval European city emphasises the role of the city as an agent of social change. Economic relations are produced via the market and thus via exchange-based transactions. The city is one of the decisive factors for the development of modern capitalism. The city as a revolutionary collective based on oaths is also an early form of democratic self-government. Political power was detached from the god-given membership of a class and tied to the economic and, in principle, acquirable determinants of profession and property. The individual became an urban citizen as an individual and not as part of a family or as the client of a lord. The European medieval city was both the midwife and the product of bourgeois society.

4.3   Bourgeois society: Public and private

Since the 20th century the urban has no longer been differentiated from the rural by its special forms of organising politics and the economy. The city no longer stands for a different social formation. Hans Paul Bahrdt (1998) therefore examined the bourgeois lifestyle and used the polarisation between the public and the private sphere that characterises its everyday life to differentiate between the urban and rural. His hypothesis is that 'a city is a settlement in which the whole of life, including everyday life, displays a tendency towards polarisation, which means it occurs either in the social aggregate of the public or in that of the private. A public and a private sphere emerge that are in close interaction, but the polarity between them is never lost. In contrast, the areas of life that cannot be characterised as either public or private lose significance. The greater the polarity and the interaction between the public and private spheres, the more urban (from a sociological perspective) life in the settlement is. Where this is less the case, the urban character of a settlement is less pronounced' (Bahrdt 1998: 83 et seq.). This polarity is also legible in the systematic differentiation between public and private rooms in the built form of the bourgeois city. However, in 1961 (first edition), Bahrdt (1998: 154 et seq.) conjectured that the disappearance of bourgeois society would also mean that the polarity between the public and private would lose its influence on the lifestyle of urban dwellers and on the built structures of the city.

4.4   Intellectual, blasé and aloof

Bahrdt explicitly related his definition of the distinctiveness of the urban lifestyle to the political and economic organisation of bourgeois society. This connection is no longer in the foreground in Georg Simmel's work. His famous essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903) opens with a description of the new phenomenon of the modern city: '[...] the rapid telescoping of changing

images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli' (Simmel 2002: 11 et seq.). The city is described as a space in which a surfeit of short, intense, rapidly changing and very different, primarily visual impressions overwhelm the observer, an effect which increases with the size and density of the population. Simmel deduces from this a specific form of socialisation in cities, which he outlines using three terms:

- Intellectualisation: Reason is said to be the organ that is least sensitive to the diverse stimuli. Intellectualisation is therefore 'a protective organ […] a protection of the inner life against the domination of the metropolis' (Simmel 2002: 12).

- Blasé: Simmel refers here to the blunting of the senses to the constant overstimulation of the city: 'The […] incapacity to react to new stimulations with the required amount of energy' (Simmel 2002: 14).

- Aloof: The city dweller adopts a detached attitude; from this 'slight aversion', 'strangeness and repulsion' can emerge (Simmel 2002: 15).

Intellectualisation, a blasé attitude and aloofness describe a specific quality of the relations between city dwellers and between them and their surroundings. This form of interaction among individuals is developed by Simmel on a number of levels:

- The urban lifestyle is said to be a defence mechanism against the surfeit of quickly changing impressions. If city dwellers wanted to react to each of these impressions emotionally, they would 'fall into an unthinkable mental condition'. (Simmel 2002: 15).

- According to Simmel, the size and density of the city determines the special organisation of urban life, which then in turn forces a certain rationalist type of behaviour. Calculability is a necessary precondition that allows life in the city to function, as revealed not only in the dominance of linear time but also in the rationalisation of spatial organisation.

Simmel thus argued not only with the direct sensory effects of the city but with the need for the city to function, which with growing size and density requires abstract, rational forms of organisation, which in turn force city dwellers to adopt the virtues of 'punctuality, calculability and exactness' (Simmel 2002: 13). Simmel's third level of argument refers to the particular economy of the city: the city is the seat of the money economy and the urban economy is the market economy. The money economy reduces all qualitative differences to those of the purely quantitative money economy and thus, according to Simmel, forces just that objectivity and indifference towards people and things that city dwellers adopt as an armour to prevent their sensory perceptions from being overwhelmed. The blasé attitude of the city dweller 'is the correct subjective reflection of a complete money economy' (Simmel 2002: 14). Urban production is production for the market and thus for unknown customers. This also strengthens the distancing that is typical of the city, just as it is unimaginable in the comprehensible, close and coherent social relations of the countryside.

4.5 Strangers as a fundamental experience of the city

For Simmel the totally unprecedented experience of the city at the beginning of the 20th century disguised another characteristic of life in the city: the way in which strangers become part of everyday life. This can, like the 'overstimulation of the senses', explain why the urban mentality can be seen as an armour against the demands of the city. The city can be defined as a place of

strangers (Siebel 2015: 285 et seq.). In the village there are only neighbours and relatives, while in the public space of the city everyone, including the locals, sees everyone else as a stranger. The stranger is the prototypical urbanite. There are three reasons for this: First, simply through its sheer size, the modern city limits the chances of strangers becoming confidants or even just acquaintances. Second, the city is the preferred destination for migration, which means that foreignness is being constantly imported. And third, the city itself produces very different ▷ *Lifestyles* and milieus (▷ *Milieu*), such that those who belong to different groups can find one another just as alien as an immigrant may find an long-established resident. All this makes the modern city a place of strangers. The constant encounters with strangers are, however, unsettling in two ways: because strangers are unknown their behaviour cannot be predicted, and because they are different they challenge habits and things that are taken for granted. Encounters with strangers create situations that cannot be completely controlled and unsettle one's own identity. The way in which people armour themselves against the overloading of their perceptive capacities, as discussed by Simmel, must also be understood as a defence against these unsettling experiences that are typical of the city.

5   The ambivalence of urbanity

Thirty-five years after Simmel's essay was published, Louis Wirth (1974) drew a differently nuanced picture of the modern city. Here the city appears as a place of loneliness, of disintegrating social ties, of a stark contrast between poor and rich, and of standardisation and massification. In many passages, Wirth's essay offers simply a less nuanced version of Simmel's analysis, one that returns to the topoi of the conservative critique of the city. The fact that it nonetheless became a standard work of urban sociology is probably linked to the way in which Wirth emphasised the negative sides of the urban lifestyle. Wirth's essay was written in 1938 against the background of the rapid transformation of the city of Chicago, then the centre of ▷ *Urban research*: the city's expansion due to the immigration of strangers, the Great Depression at the beginning of the 1930s, and the criminalisation that occurred in the wake of prohibition. The industrial city displays its Janus-faced nature: on the one hand it is a place of extreme individualisation and great economic and cultural productivity, on the other hand it is the location of all the pathologies of modern society.

These were the conditions that caused Wirth to focus on the issue of the integrative power of the modern city. If the anonymity and complexity of the city make direct social control impossible, if apathy and a blasé attitude are typical of city dwellers and if, finally, the city grows through immigration from far-off places, what is it that holds the society of such a city together? Wirth focuses on cultural homogeneity as the basis of the integration of premodern communities and therefore declares the loss of such integration. However, modern societies are integrated not only by homogeneity but also by their ability to deal with difference without conflict. This ability is urbanity. A self-armouring through apathy and a blasé attitude combined with a capacity for distanced reflection ensure the 'incomplete integration'(Bahrdt 1998) of modern urban societies, which removes the potential for conflict created by the dense juxtaposition of very different milieus and behaviour.

The urban indifference of the city dweller and the anonymity of the city are what enable individuals to live their lives as they choose, without being forced back onto the path of convention

by relatives, neighbours or the police. But these typically urban freedoms harbour the risks of loneliness and failure. The laxer social controls facilitate deviant behaviour. The urban city also provides complexity and anonymity which protect well-behaved citizens while they pursue less reputable propensities. Urbanity is more than democratic self-government, civilised manners and education. What would Hamburg be without the myth of St. Pauli? It is not just the broad boulevard of flâneurs that belongs to the urban city, but also the labyrinth of alleyways in which it is so easy to get lost. The red-light district, the semi-legal and illegal activities of the grey economy, the places of people's secret delights and lusts also belong to the urban city. It is often in the dirty, dingy places that all this gathers, pushed out of the sight of the well-ordered city. A history of European urbanity would be incomplete without tales of Golem and Jack the Ripper. There is also a dark side to urbanity, which Alfred Döblin described in *Berlin Alexanderplatz.*

6   Urbanity as a promise of emancipation

Without the promise of being able to lead a better life in the city, there would be no cities. Cities emerge, grow and are maintained through migration. As long as immigrants are free to choose then they head for cities, because they see a chance of improving their living conditions there. Urbanity as a term describing the special characteristics of the city is thus not a value-free description of the difference between the urban and the rural. It always implies the normative idea of a better life in the city. The encyclopaedias speak of an urban lifestyle as refined, educated and sophisticated, thus not just a different but in some ways a better way of life. Urbanity as the result and location of cultivation always has an element of emancipation, first from nature, and later from social constraints. Urbanity also comprises a liberation from something, a prospect of emancipation, from the dense social controls of the village neighbourhood, from personal dependence on a feudal lord, from the confines of self-sufficiency. The air of the city brings emancipation. Urbanity refers to the particular lifestyle of the urban dweller, which is seen from a utopian perspective as an indication of a better society that goes beyond the existing conditions. Four dimensions of emancipatory urbanity have emerged in the history of the European city.

6.1   Emancipation from work

Cities can only develop if people working in ▷ *Agriculture* produce more food than they require for their own reproduction. Urban life begins with emancipation from the need to occupy oneself with uncultivated nature in order to ensure one's own survival. In an agricultural society this means emancipation from necessary work. The slave owners of the 'soldier fraternity' (Weber 1956), the citizens of the ancient polis, came very close to this utopia. The division between urban and rural in antiquity was a division between leisure and work. Ever since, people's oldest emancipatory hope of a 'kingdom of freedom beyond necessity' (Marx) has been linked to an urban way of life. This notion recurs in the ideas of the early socialists. In their urban utopias the idea of the city as a machine appears for the first time, a machine that releases individuals from walking through the mud to the well to get water, from growing food, from cooking their own meals and from caring for the old and sick. Pavements, sewers, trams and social institutions are all urban achievements. The notion of the city as an ▷ *Infrastructure* in which all the work of everyday life is socialised and thus reduced to a minimum influenced the emancipatory hopes of the workers' movement from

the time of the early socialists to Bebel's visions in his work on women and socialism *('Die Frau und der Sozialismus')* (1879). After the First World War the avant-garde of Neues Bauen adopted this perspective. It is made reality in the modern city. A city like New York can be understood as an enormous machine for easing the burden of work and responsibility. Women and a host of slaves used to be required to achieve what the private and public infrastructure of the city is much better able to provide: satisfying the most obscure requirements at any time, as long as one has enough money.

6.2   Political and economic emancipation

In medieval Europe the contrast between the urban and the rural was no longer that of the contrast between leisure and work. The city was a different society. In medieval Europe the city was the subject of a social transformation in which the economic and political system of feudalism was superseded by a market-based or democratic organisation of the economy and political rule. Political power was detached from control by military force in favour of control of economic power and was thereby democratised. The political rights of citizens were not reliant on belonging to a (hereditary) nobility or the clergy, but on membership of a guild and thus of an economically-based association. Blood relations and class membership lost political relevance. Weber particularly emphasises that the ideal type of medieval urban citizenship comprised an oath-based collective of individuals. 'Thus, the citizen entered the body of citizens as an individual, at least in the new social formations. The oath of citizenship was sworn as an individual. It was personal membership of the local collective of the city, and not the family or clan, that guaranteed one's personal legal standing as a citizen' (Weber 1956: 948).

The free cities of the Middle Ages thus became places of double emancipation for their citizens. By joining the oath-based collective of urban citizens, individuals emancipated themselves from personal dependency on the family and from the feudal lord to become political subjects, citoyens. As economic citizens they freed themselves from the unproductive cycles of the 'whole house' (Brunner 1980) to enter the market as autonomous buyers and sellers.

6.3   Individualisation

Urbanity comprises a promise of individualisation. In the city of the 19th century, the urban mentality and the laxer – in comparison with village neighbourhoods – social controls provided opportunities for diverging forms of behaviour. The polarisation between a public and a private sphere guaranteed a protected space for the cultivation of individual distinctiveness, for living out emotion and intimacy. The increasing division of labour in the city required different qualifications and led to different professional situations. Both provided an objective basis for individual differentiation. The division of labour, the private sphere, urban indifference and laxer social control are preconditions for the development of individuality. On the positive side, this results from different professional options and opportunities for consumption arising for individuals, hence the opening up of individualised ways of life and the provision of protected spaces for personal development. On the negative side, it results from the liberation of the individual from traditions and social controls.

6.4   Integration without the destruction of difference

Urbanity as a way of life, as Simmel describes it, is more than just a defensive reaction to the demands of the city. According to Salin (1960: 15 et seq.), in antiquity urbanity was almost identical with humanity. Bahrdt similarly emphasises humanity and tolerance as normative for urbanity. He suggests that in the city 'the sort of behaviour is developed that we call urbanity and that adopts the character of a real virtue. The urban person assumes in any case that others – however peculiar their behaviour – possess an individuality which can make their behaviour meaningful. In urban behaviour there is also an assumption that individuals do have something in common. But this is reduced to the abstract law that the other is also a person and therefore also an individual. Behaviour is characterised by a resigned humanity which respects the individuality of the other even if there is no hope of understanding it' (Bahrdt 1998: 164). Urbanity is the precondition for co-existing with strangers, for integration without the destruction of difference.

7   The topicality of urbanity in urban policy

A given characteristic of urban life tends to be particularly valued when it is under threat. But mourning the 'loss of urbanity in urban design' (Berndt 1967) is not the decisive reason for the topicality of urbanity in urban policy. Rather the objective trend towards ▷ *Reurbanisation* is responsible. For some time it has been possible to detect reurbanisation in many cities where job increases and a growing population have led to increased tax revenues and the intensification of building activities (cf. Läpple 2005). The city is becoming more attractive as a place to work and live. This is due to a number of social phenomena that have very different causes (cf. Siebel 2015: 161 et seq.):

*   Migration and expansion of education: The new demand for the city is in many ways the same as the old. Students and immigrants have always preferred to live in cities, but today there are simply more of both. Increased immigration and the expansion of education to some degree explain the population growth in cities.

*   Weakening suburbanisation: Since the 1950s ▷ *Urban development* has been dominated by ▷ *Suburbanisation*, but the forces that have supported this trend have weakened in recent years. Suburbanisation was linked to the Fordist way of life: to regulated working times, a strict spatial division between the workplace and place of residence, and a traditional division of labour between the sexes. All of these factors have lost relevance, which is why fewer people are moving out of the cities to the surrounding areas.

*   Economic structural change: The transformation from an industrial society to a service and ▷ *Knowledge society* means that the proportion of jobs that are compatible with other urban functions is increasing. An automotive plant is more difficult to integrate in the small-scale structures of a European city than a designer's studio or an IT specialist.

- Urbanity as a factor of production: Cities are centres where information crystallises (cf. Hohenberg/Lees 1996: 201 et seq.). The tacit knowledge that is so important for innovation is produced, held and communicated in urban milieus (cf. Läpple 2005). A stimulating urban atmosphere is an important locational advantage that can attract a highly qualified workforce (cf. Florida 2002). Information, tacit knowledge and creative workers are the crucial factors of production for modern economies.

- Changes in the role of women: Organising a life around work is only possible if an individual is relieved of non-work duties. In the past a gender-specific division of labour made this possible, in that women acted as housewives and largely relieved the men of tasks related to housework and childcare. When increasing numbers of women lead work- and career-oriented lives and therefore require this kind of relief themselves, a dilemma arises. One way out of this dilemma is to live in the city. The modern service city can be understood as a socialisation of the private household. Goods and ▷ *Services*, which in the past would have been provided by households led by housewives, are provided by the urban machine in the form of public infrastructures or by private businesses. The opportunities offered by the city to more easily combine the changed needs of working and non-working life is one reason for the increased demand for the inner city as a residential location and as a place of work among both highly qualified workers and families (cf. Frank 2013).

These trends account for the attention that urban policy is paying to questions of urbanity and quality of life, the investment in culture as a locational factor and the renaissance of the compact, European city with mixed land use as a new guiding principle for urban design (▷ *Guiding principles for urban development*). Even in his day, Edgar Salin warned of the misunderstandings that can arise when the term *urbanity* is used to describe the cities of today. However, it can be used for the analysis of today's cities and urban policy if it is viewed as a critical term to judge the urban reality of today in the light of historical benchmarks. Such benchmarks include emancipation from the need to work, the development of democracy, the emergence of individuality, and integration which nonetheless preserves difference.

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