

## **Diversity as a political strategy in contemporary german urban development**

### **La diversidad como estrategia política en el desarrollo urbano contemporáneo alemán**

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### **Summary**

This paper wants to show new modes of urban governance in the field of diversity politics focusing on a case study in the German City of Essen. Diversity politics have a tremendous influence on the rapidly changing urban societies in Europe and occur also as strategic tool to implement post-politics in urban development and urban planning. How this process helps to strengthen neoliberal politics in the ongoing global economic competition between cities shall be demonstrated.

**Keywords:** urban governance, diversity politics, city of Essen.

### **Resumen**

En este trabajo se proponen nuevos modos de gobernanza urbana en el ámbito de la política de diversidad se centra en un estudio de caso en la ciudad alemana de Essen. La política de diversidad tiene una enorme influencia en las sociedades urbanas que cambian rápidamente en Europa y se producen también como herramienta estratégica para implementar después de la política en el desarrollo urbano y la planificación urbana. Se demuestra cómo este proceso ayuda a fortalecer las políticas neoliberales en la competencia económica global en curso entre las ciudades.

**Palabras clave:** gobernanza urbana, políticas de diversidad, ciudad de Essen.

### **Introduction**

Contemporary European urban society is changing. In-migration and forth going cultural and ethnical diversification is rapidly growing, also socio-economic, socio-demographic diversity and the diversity of lifestyle is changing. In Germany an evolving new mode of urban society had been criticized very often as negative and threatening for the values of the “European Civilization” as a whole and the stability of the “Fortress of Europe”. A positive connotation of diversity, which focuses at diversity as an asset to gain economic growth, social cohesion and social mobility became recently important in the discussion on urban governance. Especially on a local level new forms of urban governance prepare cities to contest in a global competition for human resources.

In this paper I want to show how diversity politics can be used as a political strategy to implement post-politics and neoliberal techniques into the field of contemporary German urban development. To accomplish that, I want to reconstruct the diversity politics of the City of Essen through a case study made in 2014. Which modes of urban governance had been used to attempt the described contents, will be of interest.

To explore the diversity politics of Essen I analyzed official documents of the local state authorities. Also, I interviewed local grassroots movements in Essen to see their involvement in the process of policy-making. After that, the formation of diversity politics between these two actors showed the general modes of urban governance.

The case study focuses on the City of Essen, in the Ruhr region in Western Germany. With 5.1 million inhabitants the Ruhr is one of the biggest multi-central agglomerations in Europe and with 577 802 inhabitants in 2013 Essen is one of its economic and cultural centers (City of Essen, 2013c). As former industrial heart of German coal mining and steel industry the Ruhr, and Essen in particular, is going through great structural changes, which can be described as an ongoing de-industrialization, a transformation to service orientated economies, and includes an overall loss of population, especially in the traditional working class environment (Wehling, 2006). On the other side the Ruhr is one of the regions in Germany with an outstanding cultural and ethnic diversity, which is growing since the in-migration of foreign workers and their families since the 1950<sup>th</sup> (for example from Italy, Turkey and Morocco). In 2011 23 % of the population of Essen were part of the growing migrant community, which had a big impact on the stabilization of the population over the last 5 years, after a decline of population from 731 994 inhabitants in 1963 to 574 948 in 2011 (City of Essen, 2013c). These ongoing socio-demographic, economic and socio-cultural changes make Essen an interesting field of research to analyze the practice of diversity politics in urban governance.

## **Materials and methods**

Two general methods of qualitative research had been used to investigate the diversity politics of Essen. The document analysis reconstructs the position of the local administration and the qualitative expert interview looks into the thoughts of the civil society, represented by self-organizing grassroots movements.

Within the document analysis I looked through official and open published documents of the administration of the City of Essen, which targeted diversity politics as its main goals. I decided to concentrate the investigation on 3 core documents of diversity politics considering urban development to show the key concepts of the use of diversity politics within the local administration (City of Essen 2012, 2013a, 2013b). All documents should not be older than 5 years and had been published under the current administration of Mayor Reinhard Paß (in office since 2009). Important for this document analysis was, next to the qualitative data research within the text, the process of production of the document. Especially the reconstruction of social relations between the author and the target group was necessary to see the purpose of the document (Flick 2007). I chose this method to reconstruct the intersubjective realities of the field described as diversity politics, focused on the point of view of the local administration.

The qualitative expert interview had been chosen to research the output of civil society for diversity politics. The focus had been laid on self-organizing grassroots movements, which are active in the field of diversity politics and urban development, mostly in housing and local post-migrant community organization. With the term post-migrant I

describe 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation migrants without own experience of migration, but hybrid intercultural identities.

8 different grassroots movements, also called initiatives, had been examined. Their work content ranges from tenant protection versus big real estate companies, through community based education (considering for example environmental issues or intercultural cohesion) to a committee of Turkish women which realize neighborhood gatherings.

The necessity to research the local administration and organized members of the civil society to know more about the constitution of diversity politics is due to evolving new modes of urban governance, which will be described in the following chapter.

## **Results & Discussion**

But at first I want to describe the theoretical framework of diversity politics, followed by urban governance, which had been the central concepts to answer the question, how diversity is used as a political strategy in contemporary German urban development.

To characterize diversity politics an explanation for what is diversity about is in need. I define diversity as the process of social production of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural practices, which are constantly in change and create a variety of possibilities. This definition focuses on the production of space social, reality by social actors (Lefebvre, 1974). The used categories "socio-economic", "ethnic" or "cultural" diversity had been constructed by authors and interviewees in a self-determining way and are used as intersubjective realities. This theoretical position helps to avoid a paternalistic point of view on the researched subjects and their production of social realities in general and of diversity in particular.

Now, I return to describe the term governance (in opposite to government), which became an important policy mode after the beginning decay of fordist economies in the 1970<sup>th</sup> in Europe and North America (Harvey, 1990). Chhotray & Stoker (2009) characterize governance as a setting with a plurality of actors, no formal control system and rule of collective decision-making.

Also in the field of urban governance a non-hierarchic interaction between local state authorities and actors of civil society to attain collective decision-making is evolving. The output of decision-making regulates the power of market forces, challenges higher-level state actors (on federal and supranational level like the European Union) and strengthens its own position in the international competition between cities (Häussermann, Läßle & Siebel, 2008).

In my research I looked for modes of urban governance, which could be interpreted as a so called governance arrangement (Swyngedouw, 2005; Divercities, 2014). Governance arrangements are horizontal modes of policy-making, which realize, through low hierarchies, a process of collective decision-making between local state authorities and self-determining grassroots movements to activate the local community. This mode of governance focuses not only on the results of diversity politics but also on the way they emerge. Results of the current development in organizing diversity politics in Essen will be shown now.

The main characteristics of local diversity politics are:

- horizontal cooperation.
- socio-spatial cooperation.

- elitism.
- economization.
- anti-racism.

The **horizontal cooperation** between the city administration and local self-organizing grassroots movements, called initiatives, is important to foster the exchange of thoughts. The city administration gain knowledge of local problems in the communities expressed by the initiatives and the initiatives gain better opportunities to implement their ideas in a bottom-up process of policy-making. Under the current situation in Germany, where the administration is generally dominated by white, heterosexual and often male middleclass people, it is necessary to get knowledge of social realities which are much more diverse than the people who are actually in charge to realize politics. To improve the situation, a few years ago the implementation of a diversity management got started to hire more people from the post-migrant communities.

Another aspect of the ongoing horizontal cooperation is the parallel effect of outsourcing. Activities formerly held by the local administration to realize politics and gain knowledge over the social realities were now made by actors of the civil society (the initiatives) because of budget cuts. The overall result is a smaller administration with less possibilities to act and initiatives which do their work mostly voluntary or poorly paid.

If influencing the process of policy-making becomes easier for the initiatives, also the competition between them, to get involved in the horizontal cooperation with the administration, becomes stronger. This form of competition weakens social cohesion between the initiatives in particular and the civil society in general.

The **socio-spatial cooperation** in the field of diversity politics focuses on place-based community and social work. Success can be achieved by long-term financing of community centers, where local cooperation and social work is situated. My research concluded that these centers are important for the formation and professionalization of self-organizing grassroots movements, especially in the fields of housing and post-migrant community organization. The reason is the existence of basic infrastructure in the community centers. That includes legal advice, open space to organize and networking with the help of social workers.

Despite the focus of diversity politics on cooperation, strong occurrence of **elitism** can be verified. It is extremely difficult for the city to activate people with low education, low income and without tight networks to participate in the arena of policy-making. Through the lack of social and cultural capital, people and initiatives become victims of *glass ceiling* inequality (Bourdieu, 2010).

The majority of the initiatives with strong ties to the administration and great influence on diversity politics have higher education and a wide network to call attention to themselves and their ideas of policy-making. This form of a *closed shop* supports the formation of an "urban regime", which is constituted by an informal but stabile group of actors with access to public resources to gain influence in local politics (Stoker, 1995).

A certain form of urban regime called "grant coalition" can be described in Essen (Bernt 2009). A grant coalition is a selective group of local actors, which dispenses and assigns intergovernmental grants. It comes to existence when the local administration faces dependence on federal or supranational public budgets. Due to the situation as an indebted city, with an ongoing long term economic restructuring and population losses

since the 1960<sup>th</sup>, such a form of an urban regime, which operates primarily through the access to federal or EU budgets via social capital, can be seen in Essen. A practice of exclusionary reproduction of access makes it difficult to incorporate new ideas into diversity politics, complicates well-balanced diversity politics for an urban society as a whole and widens social inequality.

The **economization** of diversity politics constitutes diversity primarily as an asset to develop the whole potential of human resources of a city for economic growth. This helps for example the city marketing to create an image of a city with great market opportunities or a wide range of creativity, which lies within the human resources (Landry, 2008).

An example of Essen can be given by the special public financed integration budget. It was installed by the local administration to support human resources in the post-migrant community development. Managerial methods like knock-on financing, short-term funding for 3 years, project work and heavy competition for the funding in general present the implementation of economization of diversity politics and urban development on a local scale.

Also, equal rights of participation in a diverse society as a main goal for urban development become less relevant. That shows the role of the initiatives as driving forces of the civil society in horizontal cooperation. In the language of administration they had been seen only as stakeholder, but not as shareholder with real power to participate in valuable processes of decision-making.

**Anti-racism** is an intrinsic and officially declared goal of diversity politics and both sides of the governance arrangements, initiatives and local administration. But the interviews showed that some initiatives represent xenophobic point of views concerning the post-migrant community of Essen. An existing gap between official diversity politics of the local administration and realities in the neighborhoods has to be mentioned, to demonstrate that a process of honor diversity in the practices of daily life is not finished yet.

In summary, diversity politics in Essen are successful if they are based on steady coalitions made by actors with high cultural and social capital. Governance arrangements with those qualities develop horizontal modes of policy-making, characterized by low hierarchies, which can articulate diversity through self-determination. Results are innovative solutions on a local scale to strengthen social cohesion. On the other hand structural exclusionary practices make it difficult for actors without cultural and social resources to become part of governance arrangements to affect the process of policy-making.

The results from the case study on diversity politics in Essen can be seen as examples to use diversity as a political strategy to implement post-politics and neoliberal techniques into the field of contemporary German urban development.

To describe post-politics more in detail it becomes necessary to define *the political*. Using Rancière (2004) in the field of urban development *the political* defines the social practice of articulating conflicts to oppose an actual urban regime. The current state of post-politics suppresses this form of articulating a wider range of point of views to initiate conflicts by a so called "strategic compromise" of enlightened technocrats and liberal multiculturalists to emphasize, that ideological barriers are of the past, actual policy-making has to be just output-orientated, managed by "objective" expert knowledge and that there will be no alternative to the current mode of (neoliberal)

politics (Žižek, 2000; Michel & Roskamm, 2013). As neoliberal politics in general I understand the implementation of economic rationalities (like laws and instruments) into the social sphere, to elide any difference between the economic and the social domain (Lemke 2001).

Now, I want to show which analyzed practices of my research in Essen can be seen as examples for post-politics and techniques which indicate neoliberal politics in the field of diversity politics in contemporary German urban development.

### **Post-politics:**

- The horizontal cooperation evokes only the illusion of *the political* and equal participation in policy-making. The superficial role of the administration changes to a style of moderation, but through their budget sovereignty they remain in power and on top of the local political hierarchy.
- The incorporation of political ideas from the civil society by the local administration helps to avoid conflicts, which are the key elements of *the political*. Especially when the incorporation works via hegemonization, what means that the local administration declares political ideas of the civil society as originated within their own.
- Through the structural discrimination of elitism non-elite initiatives without resources or outside of the political consensus remain unheard. This fosters an exclusion of conflicts and the decline of *the political* (Swyngedouw, 2007).
- The political practice of avoiding conflicts can lead to a repression and projection of unarticulated aggressions on marginal groups of the society, which in turn tends to racist resentments and xenophobia (Žižek, 2000). As the case study shows, the existing gap between official diversity politics of the local administration and documented xenophobic statements of some unheard initiatives supports that argument.

### **Neoliberal techniques:**

Horizontal cooperation can also be interpreted as a cheap form to develop political ideas, without having the costs of labor force of an administration body. The downsizing of the local administration by externalization of work to civil society (the initiatives) is one central technique of current neoliberal politics. It is too easy to mention only the positive effects of horizontal cooperation and participation for the people without seeing the unpaid workload they have. A workload, formerly managed by local administration and their paid officials.

The focus of diversity politics to develop human resources and to treat people as an asset is an example for the implementation of economic rationalities into the social sphere. That can be seen in a variety of techniques:

- People are seen as stakeholders who gain a higher economic output when the city invests in them and when they get started to perform productive and creative. The city gains surplus value for their local economy, but the participatory distribution of the produced surplus value by the people as shareholder does not exist.
- A higher diversity of people (socio-economic, ethnic, cultural, socio-demographic, gender and lifestyle diversity) within the urban society is crucial to create new local markets of consumption and economic growth.

- City marketing creates images of the city which focus only on qualities that can be sold, but reduces the complexity of urban systems and often neglects existing social inequalities.

Managerial techniques optimize a service-oriented administration, for example by diversity management. The use of managerial language (“asset”, “output” and “human resources”) rationalize communication in an economic way.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I wanted to show how diversity politics in German urban development are characterized and how diversity has been used as a political strategy to implement post-politics and neoliberal techniques into the social sphere. The case study of Essen shows, that diversity politics are organized via a new mode of urban governance called governance arrangements. It was characterized as a horizontal mode of politics, which realizes, through low hierarchies, a process of collective decision-making between local state authorities and grassroots movements to activate the local community. This mode of urban governance shaped diversity politics because of a post-political practice which strengthens neoliberal politics. The analyzed post-politics and neoliberal techniques of Essen support the argument of an ongoing economization of the social sphere in general and diversity politics in the field of urban governance in particular. The political strategy behind this process of transformation is the avoiding of political conflicts to enforce an unchallenged reproduction of capitalist economies which help to support the hegemonic position of European and North American cities in the international competition of globalization.

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