City and Urbanity in the Social Discourse

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Abstract. The aim of our article is an attempt to present the concept of urbanity that has been shaped throughout centuries along with the development of European civilisation and now entered a new phase of social production of space based on cultural dimensions. The future of the majority of World's population is connected currently with the urban life with the assumption that qualitative characteristics of life in the 21st century define the quality of civilisation itself. Contrary to many scientists' predictions of the decline of the city and urbanity, new reviving urban projects, social local activities and everyday urbanism appear which are connected with redefinition of the city as a community. The rebirth of cities, currently referred to as "urban renaissance", "urban resurgence" or "urban revival", can be also defined in terms of new urbanity regarded as an insightful and creative attitude towards the city and its culture. The elementary order of things was determined in the last decades not by the space but by the time and its acceleration and simultaneously the role of architecture alters. The course of thinking about the city is changing from a single space-time city towards a personalised city, based on individual identities and corresponding places in the physical and virtual space. That can mean a new role of the city in the creation of urbanity. In the era of advanced communication technologies, a question arises about the ontological status of the city when the emphasis is placed on independence and individuality in interactions between people. Social life becomes detached from traditional spatial patterns and practices. We are interested in the urbanity understood in the wider context of cultural urban studies which are focused on new ways of organising the communication space and social relations. We will refer in this article to the values constitutive for the city and urbanity that guided the idea of the city since the dawn of time as well as its new deconstructed forms (e.g. the pop-up city, neo-bohemia, the creative class, neighbour communities, urban guerrilla gardening, experimental urban farms, etc.).

1. Introduction

Cities in the global age are characterised by dynamic urban growth. Currently over a half of the world's population is living in cities which are the centres of political, economic and cultural events. They determine the way our life is paced and arranged and have a major influence over its social aspects. Even if the next generations will not consider this form of civilisation appealing on account of the concentration of poverty, disintegrated infrastructure, deprivation, unemployment, pollution and severe social tension etc., the future of the world will be determined by the urban. The quality of life in built environment will depend on the shape of our cities.

Urbanity, which is the focus of this article, has a very clear historical origin and derives from ancient heritage. The Greek agora is still repeatedly invoked as an ideal model of public space in the

European urban history and it was essential to every ancient city layout. After the decline of the ancient world the idea was reborn in a new historic reality. Urban structures were developed in the course of following centuries and new networks of streets, markets and squares were shaped along with new symbols and meanings. Public space, despite undergoing many transformations, played a key role in the integration and development of urban society in the often proud history of urban Europe. Although the Modern Movement undermined the importance of streets, squares, parks, backyards and other areas crucial to social life, the issue of urbanity has been revived in the past decades. It has been present not only in the academic discourse in disciplines related to architecture, but it also has attracted growing attention on the part of city residents. This concept, assumed discursive, is important to a wider social community and bottom-up shaped public opinion. Moreover, in the academic discourse it is subject to interdisciplinary analysis. In the search for cultural grounds of urbanity we can refer to the ninetieth and twentieth century concepts of the city created by William Morris, Ebenezer Howard and Louis Mumford and to the historical and sociological analysis by Carl Marks, Max Weber, Georg Simmel or Walter Benjamin.

As Louis Wirth wrote in his essay "Urbanism as a way of life", the contemporary world is urban to a much greater extent than indicated by the number of population that is living in cities and therefore their influence cannot be brought down to the urbanisation ratio [1]. The quality of urbanity is constituted by secondary rather than by primary contacts. Although urbanity is currently more often understood as Tönnie's society (*Gesellschaft*) rather than community (*Gemeinschaft*) [2], it does not imply that its sole components are population density and heterogeneity. A universal agreement does not exist in this matter. The appearance of this concept in urban narratives and discourses draws our attention towards the city residents and their journeys in time and space, the experience of urban everyday life, changing impressions and "intensification of nervous stimulation" as Georg Simmel would put it [3]. Spaces and landscapes, the spirit of the city and tangible and symbolic values of identity characteristics, cumulated and selected over time, are commonly recognised as constitutive of concept of urbanity. But apart from these, its new varieties appear outside the official discourse. The category of urbanity still remains valid, in the experience and intersubjective mental structures of residents, tourists and other users. This is phenomenon is being accelerated by the mediatisation of modern societies.

The aim of this article is an attempt to answer the question about the characteristics of contemporary urbanity and its new forms which do not erase the idea of a city itself but encourage us to reflect on the role of architecture and culture as a city-forming factor. In past decades an urban renaissance phenomenon has been observed. This term refers to some theoretical assumptions of Chicago School's "human ecology" suggesting that urbanity transcends the "physical mechanisms" of the city: infrastructure, pavements, lighting, streets [4]. Today it implies extending the prospect research to anthropological and cultural aspects of urban life (e.g. urban neighbourhoods and backyards, common spaces). The social discourse reviving the concept of urbanity is accompanied by the assumption that theoretical reflection is connected with practice and social activity. It comes down to co-operation between various urban actors in the process of design decision-making, exceeding architecture representative for the entire city and its residents. The attempt to explain how space serves and shapes human consciousness and practices was introduced by, among others, post-structuralist Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, the relation between subject and built environment is complementary. This relation is conveyed by the *habitus* – a set of individual dispositions to experience the world, cognitive and motivation structures and a certain grammar for human action. Thereby built environment becomes a reference system in which specific spaces are attributed with meaning. Both the environment and *habitus* remain in a dynamic relation [5].

In the neo-Marxist perspective urbanity gains special meaning and contains a wide spectrum of phenomena – from "city branding" (using monopoly rents as symbolic instruments reproducing "marks of distinction" connected with some places) to using this rent potential for urban resistance [6]. According to Harvey, the ideals of urban identity, citizenship, sense of belonging and consistent urban policy are threatened by spreading neoliberal ethics. Identity rhetoric is based on urban restructuring

which is nearly always class related. Moreover, the dynamic and radical urban expansion brings changes in lifestyles and permanently engraves "spectacle" economy and growing polarisation in the system of wealth and power distribution into the city space [7]. In the architectural discourse increasingly frequently a question arises about the place of new urbanity and its indescribability, openness, contingency and temporality. Architecture becomes more sensitive to those who want to participate and to human experience as a fundamental aspect of every definition of urbanity. Experiencing post-modern urban space requires being more open to multiplicity, distinctness and alienation where alien does not only mean "coming from different culture, e.g. ethnic or urban, alternative, visual or media, etc." [8].

2. Crisis of urbanity

Radical urban expansion contributes to changes in lifestyles and makes human needs more individualised and personalised. Consumerism, tourism and cultural industry become the main driving force of urban transformation. "This post-industrial hollowing of cities is well-known phenomenon. In terms of urban planning it has been a sorry thing, in terms of architecture a pathetic story, and in terms of civic identity nothing short of a tragedy", as Jonathan Glancey says [9]. Examples can be found in cities all over the world and they illustrate how difficult it is to keep local identity in the age of globalisation and symbolic industrial capitalism and to sustain the development of uncommoditised space value, keeping it inaccessible to the logic of market exchange. Even cities like Venice, as Glancey pointed out, which have a very clear architectural identity, are subjected to cultural and social erosion. The tourist market often kills the city and destroys the phenomenon of urbanity that was carefully shaped throughout centuries. Venice residents want to reclaim the city and they try to solve the urban identity problem using a mixture of technological development, craftsmanship and creative enterprises located in places unattractive and unappealing to global corporations. In texts by Sharon Zukin ("Whose Culture? Whose City?")[10] or Anna Minton ("Private spaces: who is the city for?") [11] an attempt to answer the role of sophisticated narrative marketing used in urban renewal strategies can be found. They are based on improving the quality of life which is understood as creating "clean and safe" environment' excluding the alien, loose, useless and "unholy" [12].

In the 1960s under different circumstances the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre expressed a similar critical thought about the right to the city [13]. The problem was also discussed in a widely publicised book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" written by Jane Jacobs, an American activist and critic of urban policy of the United States. Jacobs sought urbanity on pavements, in the diverse and dense social tissue and in the building developments with shops, bars and small workshops on the ground floor. As she focused on the most ordinary and at the same time the most important aspects of everyday life, she ranked shopkeepers, tradesmen and local leaders among important public persons [14]. When the functionalist urban concepts, bringing the range of human choices down to homogeneous spaces and grand identity narratives, discourses and doctrines were rejected, the re-orientation of sociological and urban thought has become more distinct. Also the role of subjectivism has become more valued in shaping social and spatial order.

3. Renaissance of urbanity

Renaissance of urbanity is accompanied by acceptance of an interesting everyday life perspective, underestimated in modernism, which in contemporary urban studies is connected with an attitude of insightful observance of time and space. It took profound changes in social sciences as well as in architecture and in urban planning to grant these categories a status of an autonomous and valid subject of study. Over a quarter of a century ago sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman investigated common knowledge in a work entitled "The social construction of reality". They were interested in everything accepted unthinkingly as natural and obvious facts of social reality. They argued that cognition of social processes is possible only through observation of interactions in which individuals start to share the same reality [15]. The most complicated social structures reflecting the space of common values, judgements and opinions are broken and re-expressed by drawing upon

"stock knowledge" and the "Lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*), according to Alfred Schütz[16] or Edmund Husserl [17]. Interpersonal space in a social dimension is space in action which has a certain potential to be transformed into social capital. These are the places identified by the users of the city. American researcher Ray Oldenburg calls them "third places" compared to the first (home) and the second (work) [18].

It is our belief the concept of Everyday Urbanism by John Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski is another interesting approach towards urbanity [19]. Its creators state that the purpose of architecture is to become involved in the process of social production of space by shaping everyday environment. It is formed from everyday spaces that should not be designed as nobody's and neglected. In the contemporary intellectual discourse, the importance of local values is gaining recognition because it is representing the search for identity and identification. The quality of being local is no longer an antinomy of globality as well as a place no longer bears the traits of cohesiveness but suggests a certain type of openness to changes. People and places remain in dynamic, variable relations and therefore there is no "basic place" existing in its real authenticity and still to be found [20,21]. Crawford, followed by other academics, started the important work to develop a typology for capturing the common dynamics of the countless practices of urbanism in different cities. According to her, some practices in the emerging Everyday Urbanism are for example: decommodification which re-establishes "use values over the exchange values in urban space", "alternative economies (such as recycling and gifting economies" or "collaboration across difference "involving" emergent rather than pre-constituted subjects" [22].

4. Space-time plurality as a fundamental characteristic of urbanity

The urban question in the 21st century is related to a problem, as Harvey rightly notes, of how time and space are produced and under which social processes it occurs. That is because the urban place is connected in social theory with a change in attitude towards time and space [23]. An alluring theory of one, and only one space-time did not survive the test of time. Space and time are subject to relational and processual attributes of the world which implies adoption of a concept of indefinite number of separate spaces and associated social activities. To understand the question of contemporary urbanisation and urbanity is to include various space-time for various individuals and social groups. The production of certain spatio-temporal solutions based on, i.e. global clichés, very often happens at the expense of marginalisation or exclusion of some people. Meanwhile everyday urban life proceeds at many levels, for example at the level of everyday routines and repetitive activities [19]. This vision of the city differs from the one which is conceptualised by the space governors. Henri Lefebvre described daily life as a "screen on which our society projects its light and shadow, its hollows and its planes, its power and its weakness" [24, as cited in 19].

Lefebvre's critic of the negative impact of modernity on the city inclined many urbanists to focus their attention on the problem of reclaiming prosaic elements and the order of routine which are difficult to discern in the built elements urban environment. Urbanity understood as space of everyday and special experience is a constant interaction between meanings influencing each other. The process of pursuing urbanity is constituted according to dialogue in which words, discourse, language and culture remain undefined as their definitions refer to themselves. Everyday life constantly provides new starting points for change because "it is grounded in the commonplace rather than the canonical, the many rather than the few, and the repeated rather than the unique; and it is uniquely comprehensible to ordinary people" [19].· Everyday Urbanism is not so much normative nor doctrinaire. It has grown from participatory design in which the designer learns empirically from common experience of urban users instead of creating ideal and pure spaces [25].

Another movement in contemporary urban planning – Post Urbanism, has grown out of post-structuralist architecture of the past decades: bold, distinctive and exceptional in form, "either broken and fractal or continuous and flowing". Its followers argue that "share values and metanarratives are no longer possible in the world increasingly fragmented and composed of heterotopian ghettos of the >>other<< (e.g. the homeless, the poor, minorities)". Although post urbanists see their "insertions into

the city as examples of open, democratic urbanism", they are criticised for its too formalistic and abstract language of architectural expression which does not relate to its physical context. They distance themselves from the New Urbanism movement and its orderly approach imitating the past and from the liveliness of Everyday Urbanism, "lacking aesthetic cohesion and ambition" [25].

The problem is, as the aforementioned Lefebvre underlined, that the historical city is no longer "lived" and "understood practically". It is becoming an aesthetic and picturesque "object of cultural consumption", "yet, the urban [*l'urbain*] remains in a state of dispersed and alienated actuality". Therefore, the right to the city cannot be simplified as a comeback to a traditional city- it should be formulated as a "transformed and renewed right to urban life". No matter the country life, only the urban - meeting place, priority of use value, time of paramount importance embedded into space – will meet its "morphological base and its practico-material realization" [13]· . Lefebvre's work finds very fertile ground and is consequently developed by many other authors [7,19,27–29]. They discern a certain potential in existing urban systems which can be re-used. That is because the production of space is a "trialectical" process in which concepts, perceptions and lived experience interact [30]. Having in mind that "the right to the city" leaves room for interpretation, we refer to its aspects which form a demand for some kind of authority over the way in which cities are created and transformed [7]. According to Peter Marcuse, it is primarily the right to wealth redistribution for those who are suffering from deprivation. It is not, however, an unconditional right. Burdened with ambiguity, it can become a political slogan [31].

5. Contemporary alterations of urbanity

The cities in the 21st century are changing very dynamically, influencing to a greater or lesser extent our identity choices and ways of satisfying our needs. They have skipped the frames of their urban form but they still fulfil the criteria of their sociological definition. When they exceeded compositionally controlled and compact spatial forms, their development based on the principles of the 20th century planning became no longer predictable [32]. We can observe that urban culture, bottom-up initiatives and pop-up projects are becoming increasingly significant, providing answers to the changing needs and aspirations of urban users. These new trends bring a new language into the process of urban planning formerly delivering plans for entire districts. Urban planners become interested in "the DNA of the city" and applying "urban acupuncture". New activities and creativity appear in empty lots and vacant buildings. These temporary and immediate strategies become an inspiration, despite the obstacles they encounter. In this perspective the city gains a certain kind of "hyper-connectivity" which exist beyond time and space [33].

This approach which is created with the participation of local residents is described using terms such as "guerilla urbanism", "pop-up urbanism", "city repair", "do-it-yourself urbanism" or "tactical urbanism". The tactical approach pertains to short-term, small-scale and low-cost interventions redesigning and reprogramming public space and including a wide range of actors. It is built on their creative capital and social interactions [34]. Tactical Urbanism answers the creativity policy which is lately a very popular political slogan as well as a successful tool in the creation of the city image. The discourse on creativity was started by Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini [35] and advanced by Richard Florida [36]. The critics of the creativity concept argue that it follows the neoliberal programme and deepens the process of gentrification [37]. Although the academic critique is often justified, it does not out-rule the idea of creativity as an important factor in urban policies and an element of urban creation. Urbanity emerge in cultural life so creativity, when skillfully employed in the process of urban development, may stimulate competition and civic involvement [38].

We observe in many cities a growing the interests in activities at the level of a micropolis. These activities include practices such as community gardening, housing and retail cooperatives, social economies, bartering schemes and "empty spaces" movements which appropriate space for a number of applications, subcultural actions, street art, graffitti etc. Those who try to order these practices, group them under names such as "insurgent", "do-it-yourself", "guerilla", "everyday", "participatory" or "grassroots" urbanism [22]. Efforts of these movements are intended to improve the existing

municipal infrastructure in public spaces. Unlike some forms of aesthetic or political expression they are most of all functional and their creators attempt to make urban environment more user-friendly [39].

A promise of a "take-away" city becomes an attractive form of creating urbanity. It fulfils the need for connection between people, being a part of a community, a resident and a citizen. At the same time, it does not involve any obligations which come with reluctance caused by the fact that urban "tribes" organize urbanity on their own terms. They establish clubs or coffee shops in decapitalised spaces, they organize rooftopping, swap parties, urban picnics etc. They fulfil their role as residents and citizens by individualised and personalised choices. New communication technologies reinforce this process. In the world of "personalised communities", as Mirosława Marody puts it, personal pursuits, aspirations and individualised ambitions of one's own become a factor determining interactions between people [40]. Yet it does not come down to the lack of bounds between people but rather to a change in their character. In result less and less communities are formed to which an individual belongs entirely and his aims and norms are subject to the aims and norms of this community to an extent which makes them impossible to differentiate. This observation will likely become increasingly evident and it will gain more attention in the public discourse given the social consequences of the new dimensions of citizens' relation with the city. It has a profound importance in the times of "de-spacing" human relations [41].

6. Conclusions

In conclusions we want to underline that urbanity does not have a clear character in the age of mobile technologies, individualism lined with narcissism and crisis of community values. The city is becoming a tool of impersonal life and the term "urban" refers more frequently to a group or tribal experience based on the principles of temporary community in which people assemble to solve a certain problem or participate in a certain event only to disperse after it is finished. Yet it does not mean that the need to interact with other people and to form social ties on a basis other than temporary will disappear. These terms refer not only to spaces of shared activities but also to the language of debates upon this matter. Heterotopies that are shaped in a dynamic, non-uniform and fragmented space-time are connected with time continuum or have impermanent and ephemeral character. Everyone can participate in these time events. Traditional spaces associated until recently with urbanity, such as cathedral squares or town hall markets, are no longer the only ones with structuring and identity forming function as new patterns of urbanity are developed in other spaces of auto-representation.

Urban communities are losing their traditional characteristics and functions and the former importance of civility and urbanity is under revision. The balance between the public and the private is difficult to preserve. Not only place and its physicality but also the sense of mental unity manifested in sharing of suitable views, demonstrating similar moods and declaring convergent opinions are becoming the signs of contemporary urbanity and the sense of belonging in the global age. Therefore, a need for flexible governing methods is underlined which are responsive to a specific context and renewed human needs. Urbanity is broadening its boundaries and altering its historically shaped foundations. Woven from webs of everyday and bottom-up practices, built from discontinuous fragmentary cultures and formed according to people's preferences, it is becoming increasingly challenging with the blurring of the responsibility for the city and appropriating forms of communal life.

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