

From ‚Social City‘ to ‚Just City‘
Social Movements and the Integration of Urban Society

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Abstract: One of the crucial aspects of Hartmut Häußermann's work has been the increasing fragmentation and social polarization within cities. In many of his books and articles he describes – along with co-authors like Dieter Läßle, Andreas Kapphan, Martin Kronauer and Walter Siebel – the processes of social exclusion and socio-spatial divisions, which have been taking place in cities and neighborhoods since the 1980s. This phenomenon is not specific to Germany, however. In the early 1990s, Mollenkopf and Castells, for instance, looked at social divisions in New York and suggested the analytical concept of the 'Dual City' in order to grasp these tendencies. Peter Marcuse, to quote another example from the Anglo-American debate, used a taxonomy of ghettos and enclaves and focused especially on the concentration of disadvantaged ethnic groups in poor neighborhoods typical for US-cities.

In the 1990s, the work of urban sociologists dealing with this subject was incorporated in a very direct way into urban policies and discourses of the European Union and in many European countries. This led, for example, to the 'New Deal for Communities' in England, the 'stedelijk beheer' in the Netherlands, and the 'Contrats de Ville' and 'Développement Social des Quartiers' in France. The German government developed an area-based and integrative urban policy as well: the federal program 'Social City' (Soziale Stadt). Since 1998, this policy provides funding for interventions in disadvantaged neighborhoods. It is based on the idea that 'the European City' has lost much of its ability to integrate urban residents, prominently championed by Häußermann, Oswald, Siebel and others. To put it simply, then, the federal program Social City tries to intervene with a mediating and activating policy that aims at mobilizing endogenous potentials within poor neighborhoods and quarters; the basic idea being that this will restore social cohesion in the city.

Our article aims at a critical review of the Social City program resp. some of the underlying assumptions, diagnoses, and theses. We will argue that an urban policy based on the principles of the Social City will not be able to overcome the tendencies of urban fragmentation. Our central theses are that the Social City policy...

- is partially based on problematic concepts and assumptions, such as the existence of 'ethnic enclaves' in German cities, and in turn tends to ignore concepts like 'race' and 'class' necessary to understand the root causes of current processes of urban fragmentation;
- (implicitly) uses the 'system city' as an important point of reference, and as a result focuses too much on social cohesion instead of social justice;
- aims at mobilizing endogenous potentials within neighborhoods instead of addressing fundamental problems such as poverty, exclusion etc.;
- is based on the idea of a 'top-down' policy instead of trying to channel grassroots impulses from different neighborhoods effectively into the parliamentary and administrative political arena of the city (bottom-up).

We will develop our theses by looking in more detail at the areas of 'housing' and 'migration and integration' in the city. In order to do that we will build on the existing literature, but we also would like to 'confront' the Social City policy with a number of concepts prominent in the Anglo-American debate such as the Just City (Fainstein), the Livable City (Gottlieb et al), and the Right to the City (Harvey). This will allow us to work out alternative perspectives, especially concerning our argument that we need a greater emphasis on bottom-up and justice-based urban policies. By contrasting different discourses and concepts we hope to show that a) the Social City policy suffers from a number of conceptual gaps; b) current tendencies of urban fragmentation need to be analyzed as conflicts and processes of negotiation between various social groups and political actors in the city; and c) we need an urban sociological analysis that pays more attention to grassroots movements and non-parliamentary impulses and takes up the challenge to debate what a 'just city' might look like.