

Urban Images and Representations during the 20th century in Europe and beyond

Introduction

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Urban images and representations during the 20th century in Europe and beyond -- this title might require some explanation.

The topic of modern cities and their images has been dealt with in many ways and by several different disciplines during the last forty years. In the beginning, there were the classics in the field, such as Kevin Lynch's „The image of the city” (1960), Henri Lefèbvre's „The production of space” (1974) or Andrew Lees' „Cities perceived” (1985). The majority of urban historians in those years, however, were rather occupied with „hard facts” - such as the social history of urbanization. Only recently urban images - as understood in this session - have gained more attention again. They are studied in several different ways and with emphasis on different topics.

Town marketing and the promotion of tourism - a prime way of producing images - is one of the fields that have attracted much attention, Peter Borsay's „The Image of Georgian Bath” being a recent example. Another approach has been to analyze attempts to strengthen local identities by referring to (historical) images of that community. Adelheid von Saldern's projects looking at local festivities and cities' anniversaries, especially at the performances staged during these events, can serve as a recent reference. Finally, architecture and town planning as means of shaping a city's image has been a long established field of study which still strives, as Gavriel Rosenfeld's work on Munich and Memory has shown lately.

When research on urban images gained momentum, new concepts and theoretical approaches were developed and integrated. More and more urban historians realized that space is a fundamental category for analyzing both the city and images of cities. Simon Gunn has underlined the insights which this „spatial turn” can give on topics such as inclusion, exclusion and social boundaries. Links with cultural geography become evident here. Generally, Urban History is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, and many disciplines have looked at cities and their images from a historical perspective. Urban anthropologist Rolf Lindner, for example, works on what he calls – referring to Pierre Bourdieu - a city's „habitus”. Urban sociologists have dealt with a „festivalization” of urban politics or with the process of cities' shrinking and its implications for their image.

During this session, we want to address some of the points mentioned above by focusing on different manifestations of urban images in some chosen cities. By “urban images” we understand all ways in which a given city is represented, on purpose and involuntarily, by the city’s inhabitants and by people from outside. More specifically, in our terminology „images” of a town are directed to the outside world, whereas „urban self-images” stand for all those representations of a city orientated towards internal discourses.

References to a “collective identity” always point to a phenomenon that is only presumed or constructed. Local leaders sometimes try to exploit this construct for the purpose of social integration. This “politics of identity” is often based on a specific way of evoking a given place’s history which - as an attempt to translate the German concept of *Geschichtskultur* - we want to call “culture of history”. “Urban topography“, finally, refers to the built environment that can be read as a literally petrified image of a city, and often as a petrified self-image as well.

Urban images and representations can be traced in several different media. Official narratives about the city - such as speeches by members of local elites or contributions in local media – are an important source for analysis. Communal policies like town marketing or municipal development projects also carry valuable information about urban images, as do all kinds of architectural projects and town planning. A last medium, finally, are the personal apprehensions of urban images and self-images by the individual inhabitants - as well as their related social practices in everyday life.

In this session, we contend that the urban images traced in these media can be read as representations of social order and power relations in that specific community and in society at large. Following the French historian Roger Chartier we understand these propagated and built images as representations of mentalities and political cultures of those in the position to formulate them. Reading urban images allows us to gain insights into fundamental societal structures and processes.

For this purpose, urban images will have to be analyzed with regard to several aspects: we will ask for internal influences on them, such as competing images or self-images and conflicts of interest. Then, external influences have to be kept in mind, i.e. developments in society at large that might challenge (self-)images and ultimately change them. The process of cultural

urbanization, as Sandra Schürmann calls it, is just one example of how inhabitants of cities can deal with this. Furthermore, urban images have to be examined for voids, the aspects of local reality not represented by them. Thus, phenomena of exclusion and inclusion as well as social boundaries become visible. Besides all this, different functions of both urban images and self-images must be questioned, e.g. the quest for a strengthened identity or an increase in attractiveness for investors. Moreover, the way in which images create the spatiality of a city and define the social topography have to be investigated. Finally, the images can be questioned with regard to a community's relationship to its past and traditions as well as with regard to its visions for the future, its relation to modernity.

One last task of this session will be to draw the conclusions from historical comparison. First of all, case studies from nine countries will allow us to distinguish between general developments and specific problems of certain regions. Then, the period under consideration covers the whole twentieth century so that important changes or phenomena which are typical for only a short period of time can be discerned from general trends and continuities. Finally, examples from the North and South, from the East and West of Europe as well as from Africa highlight the importance of the regional location of a town.

According to the main topics studied with regard to urban images, and corresponding to the different media mentioned above, in this session, we will focus on three main aspects. In the beginning, we will deal with the production of images and consequently with their use for town marketing and tourism. Three examples will highlight different aspects of this subject. *Heiner Krellig* shows how the city of Venice has clinged to an image that is useful for touristic marketing, first by creating it, than by trying to avoid visible changes to it. *Patricia van Ulzen* emphasizes how the city of Rotterdam can be interpreted differently at different times and which consequences this has for official town marketing. Thus she points to the importance of a certain *zeitgeist*. *Astrid Wonneberger* looks at radical changes in the city of Dublin, concerning both the built city and its image. She underlines the conflicts of how to represent the city, in fact, the simultaneous existence of radically different images.

The second part of our session deals with the use of urban images for all kinds of intended politics of identity. Here one aim can be to foster social cohesion or to integrate new immigrants. The hegemony of certain urban self-images or specific interpretations of the city's past often are

the necessary conditions of these enterprises. *Zeynep Kezer* directs our attention to the political will behind such shifts in images. She shows how the new republican elite of Kemalist Turkey deliberately changed the image of the new capital Ankara in order to symbolize the victory of modernity over traditional Turkey. *Tanja Vahtikari* shows the importance of external esteem for the self-image of a town: the selection of Finland's city of Rauma for the UNESCO list of World Heritage challenged and reshaped urban representations. *Alexander Shevyrev* deals with the function of cities' images within a state. By comparing Moscow and St. Petersburg during the early years of the 20th century he can illustrate how the new soviet government used descriptions transported by travel guides, public monuments as well as names of streets and places to implement the new images that were designated to these cities.

The third aspect of our session deals with urban space and the use of architecture and town planning to fashion urban images. *Chris Ealham* introduces the concept of moral geographies and sees the images ascribed to Barcelona's working class area Raval as an attempt of the local elites to secure and extend their control over an unruly quarter and thus emphasizes the dimension of power in urban topography. *Simon Som* looks at the fundamental differences between European and African ideas of "town" and the corresponding concepts in urban planning. By describing what happens when they clash - as they did ever since colonial times - he underlines the importance of power relations when it comes to representations of urban order.

Analyzing contemporary discourses about East-German high rise apartment blocks (*Plattenbauten*) *Katrin Grossmann* shows how differing images are used for political purposes. While inhabitants often see these *Plattenbauten* as livable neighborhoods, an often West-German public tends to describe them as horrible and thus wants to delegitimize symbolically the regime that built them.

At the end of the session, Anthony McElligott will present some more theoretical reflections to us. He will show how today's cyberspace is described in images that correspond to the early 20th century's European city and its descriptions. Predictions about the end of locality and the state therefore might not become true all that soon.

Looking at these papers, several important points for discussion come to mind. First of all, the role of individual actors seems to be crucial and needs more detailed analysis: what are the reasons for their behaviour, what means do they use to achieve their goals, and how successful are they at achieving their intentions? In the second place, some developments seem to be taking

place at the same time in different locations. What kind of common challenges are responsible for the actions we have seen? Possible answers might be: the necessity for new regimes to invent new symbols, the need of cities to sell themselves in a highly competitive environment, the wish of political rulers to represent their values in urban topography. Finally, the crucial role of different interests in shaping urban images and self-images needs to be discussed. What kind of interests are clashing and why do some of them prevail? How are conflicting images negotiated, if at all? Can there be at all just solutions if urban images are representations of the ideas of those in power?

– We hope that some of these questions can be discussed during the next 170 minutes.