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# **Metropolitan Research In Transatlantic Perspective**

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According to the German government, seven regions in Germany have been labelled "metropolitan regions" for the last ten years, among them Hamburg, Frankfurt, Munich, and of course Berlin. But just last month even the 130.000 Göttingers and the 160.000 Oldenburgers were officially included in the ranks of the metropolitans. According to the federal government's definition, Göttingen, Hanover, Braunschweig, Oldenburg, Bremen, Nuremburg and the Rhine-Neckar Region now qualify as metropolises so as to realize conglomeration advantages in the European competition<sup>1</sup>. Clearly, the concept of the metropolis has a political dimension, and the question is, to what extent and how we, in this Graduiertenkolleg, want to face up to this reality.

My contribution toward this end, today, will be twofold,

1. By comparing North American and European definitions of the metropolis and Metropolitan Studies, I want to identify similarities and differences in the academic discourse and epistemology,

2. I want to trace mutual influences in this transatlantic perspective, though for the recent past we have to admit that the direction of influence has mostly been from North America to Europe - with the import of concepts such as new regionalism, urban regimes, gentrification, LA school etc.

Already in the early 1990s, the historian Robert Fishman (on the history of urban form) wrote about how the contemporary city has radically broken with traditional urban spatial structures. It "lacks what gave shape and meaning to every urban form of the past: a dominant single core and definable boundaries"<sup>2</sup>. And it has reached a scale which so far had been unimaginable: while the leading metropolitan centers of the last century, e.g. NY, London, Berlin spanned about a hundred square miles, the contemporary metropolis covers two to three thousand square miles and its boundaries are far from clear. It is this geographic expansion of the city into a "metropolitan form" or "to the metropolitan scale" (Bender<sup>3</sup>), i.e. it is the metropolitan agglomeration, which has increasingly defined, in North American urban research since Jane Jacobs,<sup>4</sup> the metropolitan region as the appropriate focus for analyzing urban developments.

This "metropolitan turn" in urban research, this thinking in metropolitan categories instead of the traditional binary of city vs. suburb, implies

- that the old dichotomies of center/periphery no longer hold,
- and that therefore cultural as well as class and strata variables can also no longer be attributed along a center/periphery pattern or along the (Chicago School) concept of concentric rings,
- many features and practices that used to apply exclusively to cities (such as segregation, ghettoization, gated communities) are already widespread in the so-called suburbs (which actually are no longer sub-urbs), are in fact scattered across the whole metropolitan region,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. „Ein Land voller Metropolen“, *tageszeitung*, 28 April 2005, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Fishman, "Metropolis Unbound", 1995, p. 398.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Bender, "The New Metropolitanism and a Pluralized Public", 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life*, 1984.

- and so, conversely, the concept of the 'suburb' is no longer an adequate description for the expanding varieties of settlement forms outside of central cities; the relations between them are no longer hierarchical but lateral, in many respects the outlying settlements have become autonomous of the former center, their inhabitants no longer necessarily relate to the center at all.

In order to capture this demographic shift towards exurban regions, North American urban researchers have started since the 1980s to talk of “metropolitanization”. This new conceptual language is also reflected in “Metropolitan Studies Programs”, which, in their various self-presentations, assume that “urbanization” manifests itself in a variety of urban forms that transcend, in the current phase, that of the traditional, self-enclosed city. Their object of study is therefore no longer merely the core and its surrounding quarters, but rather the production of different spatial configurations and the new problems and questions thrown up by these new configurations, such as problems of political steering, of administrative coordination, and of adequate political representation across the multiply fragmented metropolitan region. Whether it is BA or MA programs in metropolitan studies<sup>5</sup>, all of these interdisciplinary programs share the focus on questions that have most explicitly been put on the agenda by the so-called LA School (Ed Soja, Michael Dear, Allen Scott): the transformation of urban form from monocentric to polycentric urban regions, to exopoles, edge cities, megacities etc., in other words, they inquire about, teach, and research the regionalization processes and the questions of political regulation and governance thrown up by these processes, the construction of local public spheres under such fragmented conditions, and the cultural transformations and sociopolitical contestations in these spaces. If you will, the question of *integration* within the context of the fragmented and sprawling metropolitan region is therefore very much on the agenda of this metropolitan concept.

In spite of its complexity, this concept of ‘metropolitan’ does not transport much more than the pragmatic claim to analyze the spatial transformations of urbanization processes, both historically and in the contemporary constellation -- and in this way differs significantly from the more normative concept tossed around in our debate here, which reserves the term (unlike our government) exclusively for cities that

- have a certain minimum size of population and density and a certain scale and intensity of economic and cultural activities,
- represent a qualitative degree of something cosmopolitan, which radiates a certain flair and atmosphere,
- possess significant symbolic power and an aura, or a collective memory of themselves, or what's often referred to as ‘metropolitan identity’ and a surplus of symbolic capital,
- which, in turn, makes them into a magnet attracting further immigration, further diversity and difference, for creative classes and creative milieus – the stuff that makes for “cosmopolitanism”.

Some of the proponents in this debate (present here) see these cities therefore as “central

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<sup>5</sup> See for example the BA at NYU (<http://www.nyu.edu/pages/metro.studies/>), the MA in Metropolitan Studies at ASU in Phoenix (<http://www.west.asu.edu/koptiuch/MetroStudiesMA/vision.html>) or the Great Cities Program at the University of Illinois in Chicago ([http://www.uic.edu/homeindex/ge\\_chancellor.html](http://www.uic.edu/homeindex/ge_chancellor.html)), but also the International Research Master in Metropolitan Studies that has been initiated at the Freie and Humboldt University in collaboration with the Universität of Amsterdam.

places of a society” (*Hauptorte einer Gesellschaft*, Kaschuba<sup>6</sup>), as the opposite of provincial-homogeneous localities (which would exclude significant components of if not whole North American metropolitan regions). This concept of the metropolis is strongly shaped by the Paris and London of the 19th century, the first European metropolises, which were succeeded by Berlin and Vienna: all of them showcases of their respective nation, defined by their identity-causing attributes, their citizen-culture, and by their projection of power.

The founding document of this Graduiertenkolleg<sup>7</sup> also described the metropolis as “obvious and fascinating special case (*Sonderfall*) of the urban” (p. 4), which dominates, on the basis of its special position (*Sonderstellung*, which it was able to develop because it was positioned “at the center of accelerated industrial change” p.4), “since the 19th century ... direction, speed and forms of social development”. (Again, metropolises such as Los Angeles, which reached maturity only after the fordist period, do not fit this description). The text defined these “particular big cities” as “locations of highest cultural achievements”, as laboratory and stage for modern forms of societalization (p. 5), as workshop and symbol of modernity (p. 6), as the most significant places of modern societalization<sup>8</sup>.

As far as I can remember we did not reflect on why this concept was not actually used during the era when Paris and Vienna and Berlin and London actually were the pride of their respective bourgeois societies and the stage of their representation; but why we use it today when these cities might have lost this former significance and function<sup>9</sup>. At a point where big cities are increasingly characterized by their disintegration and fragmentation, the concept seems to have advanced, instead, into a marketing concept, useful within the competitive strategies for image enhancement and “urbanity” design, for fabricating public spheres and for staging efforts of “integration”.

### Transatlantic metropolitan research

Why should we have anything to learn from the other side of the Atlantic, from North American urban research – where conditions are so drastically different than in the European city? <sup>10</sup> Far more pronounced market liberalism, far more pronounced social divisions and societal polarizations, urban structures (“doughnut”) that share little with those of the European city; ethnic heterogeneities which surpass those of any European city – the list of contrasts has often been pointed out<sup>11</sup>. And yet, the

<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Kaschuba, „Stadtluft macht frei?“, 13.10.2004.

<sup>7</sup> Transatlantisches Graduiertenkolleg, „Ausschreibung Transatlantisches Graduiertenkolleg: Konzeptionelle Grundlage und Forschungsschwerpunkte“. Berlin: intern, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> „Eine Metropole ist eine große, besondere und sehr komplexe Grosstadt mit einem weit ausgreifenden *Umland*, die von der Auseinandersetzung mit Fremdem lebt und dementsprechend offen ist... Das Graduiertenkolleg sucht gerade nach den Unterschieden zwischen einer großen Stadt (etwa Saarbrücken, Leipzig, Baltimore oder Portland) und einer Grosstadt mit Metropolencharakter im Sinn von New York und Berlin.“ (Ibid. p. 7). Our project is, in other words, supposed to be the exploration of the specific features of metropolises.

<sup>9</sup> This argument is made, e.g., by Zohlen: "Ziemlich exakt reflektiert der (Metropolen-)Begriff damit die Bedeutungsveränderung der Stadt in unserer Spätkultur. Beileibe ist sie nicht mehr der Stolz der Bürger-Gesellschaft, eine Bühne ihres Auftretens... die Stadt (ist) jetzt selbst zum Objekt der Vermarktung geworden ... Räume und, scilicet, Orte einer Öffentlichkeit sui generis sind sie kaum mehr". Gerwin Zohlen, „Metropole als Metapher“, 1995, pp. 31-32.

<sup>10</sup> There is a long tradition of ambivalence toward cities and urbanism in the North American settler societies. Europeans, by contrast, seem to take the urban more seriously and to value cities as places of culture and learning. Staeheli, in a review of urban journals, found that the importance of the urban as a political, social, and cultural opportunity was more pronounced in the articles by Europeans that she identified through the Web of Science than the articles by American, British, and Canadian authors. Cf. Lynn Staeheli, “Re-reading Castells”, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. William W. Goldsmith, “The metropolis and globalization”, 1997.

primary reason why European cities (and European urban research) are increasingly oriented to the US is because such tendencies have picked up and are becoming increasingly visible in Europe as well. And precisely because the urban problems associated with these tendencies are far more pronounced in the US, they have been researched more extensively. In fact, a broad and differentiated research landscape exists with a variety of theoretical approaches and multiple suggestions for intervention, from which urban and metropolitan research in Europe stands to profit, particularly in this era of convergent neoliberal trends.

In the recent past, German urban research has already sought to compensate for its comparative underdevelopment with Anglo-American imports in a variety of fields:

1) Already the founders of the 'Local Politics Section' signaled, in the 1970s, by borrowing this term ("Lokale Politikforschung") from Anglo-American research, their effort to distance and emancipate themselves from the traditional (more public admin and law oriented) German 'Kommunalwissenschaften', which at the time, did not conceive of their topic as embedded in and shaped by its broader social and political environment<sup>12</sup>.

2) The global city thesis as presented by Friedmann and Sassen was widely received in German urban research, and, more particularly, even their argument (as presented at the German Political Science Association Meeting in 1997) that the materialization of global processes in concrete places creates a regulatory void in these places, which cities and their actors attempt to fill with new modes of regulation. This has stimulated a series of research projects on local governance systems in Germany.

3) The analytic concept of urban regime theory (and, connected with it, of growth coalitions) has found many takers/adapters<sup>13</sup>; but in this case we still have a serious shortage of empirical studies on German cities<sup>14</sup>, particularly of studies that might productively assess the current role and transformations of urban forms of governance and regulation

4) Of course the gentrification approach has frequently been applied to explain and analyze recent German urban development processes, both by German (cf. Friedrichs, Blasius & Dangshat, Bernt<sup>15</sup>) as well as American (Levine<sup>16</sup>) researchers – but has also been critiqued as unsuitable (Häussermann<sup>17</sup>).

5) LA School – as successor of the Chicago School (concentric circles, city vs. suburb), which had limited traction for Europe, because urbanity and corresponding public spheres used to be more widespread across the European city and not just characteristic of the downtowns. The LA school emerged from studying the spatial and economic restructuring of Southern California, but argues that

<sup>12</sup> Hubert Heinelt and Margit Mayer, „Lokale Politikforschung in Deutschland“, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Studies working with the *urban regime* approach have been undertaken on the model of Clarence Stone's *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* for a series of further North American cities (cf. Mickey Lauria, ed. *Reconstructing Urban Regime Theory*, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> In spite of the interesting adaptations by Kleger, Lenhart and Strom. (Cf. Elizabeth Strom, "In Search of the Growth Coalition", 1996; Elizabeth Strom, *Building the New Berlin*, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen Friedrichs and Robert Kecskes, eds. *Gentrification*, 1996; Jörg Blasius and Jens Dangshat, eds. *Gentrification*, 1990; Matthias Bernt and Andrej Holm, „Gentrification in Ostdeutschland“, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Myron A. Levine, "Government Policy, the Local State, and Gentrification", 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Hartmut Häußermann, „Marginalisierung als Folge sozialräumlichen Wandels in der Großstadt“, 2001.

the trends observed here – from the demise of traditional manufacturing and the rise of high-tech industries, from reindustrialization on the basis of low-wage jobs and de-industrialization of certain regions, all the way to the emergence of new urban forms and social practices<sup>18</sup> – were paradigmatic for urban regions of the 21st century<sup>19</sup>: simultaneous de- and reindustrialization, growing income disparities, urbanizing suburbs, eroding political institutions, exploding crime rates etc. have become characteristic features of many North American cities, in some of which these transformations are said to take place even faster than in LA (e.g. Miami, cf. Jan Nijman).

6) New regionalism. Regionalization was another concept imported from the anglo-american debate, but it was also pushed within the EU – at first as a strategy to support economic revitalization and political empowerment on a regional basis, aided by regional networks and institutions; meanwhile, some progressive variants of the “new regionalism” have been migrating from the US and Canada to here, concepts that seek to limit excessive regional growth and to regulate it in social and sustainable ways, concepts, in other words, which critically challenge the idea of urban regions as “growth machines”<sup>20</sup>. This so-called “social regionalism” merges the assumptions of the Californian regional economic geography with insights from regional regime theory and neo-communitarian elements with third way rhetoric (social capital, social inclusion). In real life, this academic approach has its political correlation in the new regional (metropolitan) alliances for social justice sprouting up everywhere<sup>21</sup> and in the progressive political regimes that are gaining in numbers.<sup>22</sup>

All of these concepts and perspectives which had their origin within the North American context have served to productively inspire German urban research, in the past and still today. Obviously they are not to be imported uncritically, as the processes labelled by them manifest themselves in European cities in different forms<sup>23</sup>. In spite of all the transnational convergence, there remain many European and German specific features, resulting from such different constellations as the traditions of social democracy or the different positioning of cities within the respective institutional architecture of each nation<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Edward W. Soja, “Postmodern geographies: Taking Los Angeles apart”, 1994; Michael J. Dear, *The postmodern urban condition*, 2000; Allen Scott and Michael Storper, eds. *Pathways to Industrialization and Regional Development*, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Edward W. Soja and Allen Scott, *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 1996. The title is a deliberate echo of the book of 1925 *The City* of the Chicago School.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf and Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters*, 2001; Manuel Pastor, Peter Dreier, Eugene Grigsby, and Marta Lopez-Garza, *Regions that Work: How Cities and Suburbs can Grow Together*, 2000; Myron Orfield, *American Metropolitcs: The New Suburban Reality*, 2002; Annick Germain and Damaris Rose, *Montreal: The Quest for a Metropolis*, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> For example Metro Alliance/AGENDA in Los Angeles formed in 1993 as a reaction to the LA riots and is based on the concept of ‘community-based regionalism’. These alliances have been important preconditions for the successful electoral campaigns of progressive city council members and, most recently, of Villaraigosa’s election as mayor.

<sup>22</sup> Some authors have observed a left trend in US urban politics, aided by organizations such as ‘New Cities’, ‘Campaign for America’s Future’ and ‘Cities for Progress’ which have formed not only to help the recent progressive mayors (of Madison, Milwaukee, Salt Lake City, Berkeley, Chicago, Irvine, Los Angeles etc.) implement labor and environment-friendly policies, but also to influence national policy (John Nichols, “Urban Archipelago”, *The Nation*, 20 June 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Therefore Andrew Wood suggests European alternatives to regime theory & growth coalitions: regulation theory, actor and policy network, Foucauldian theories, social movement literatures. Andrew Wood, “Domesticating Urban Theory?”, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> European cities have more and closer connections with their central states than US cities (cf. H.K. Savitch and Paul Kantor, *Cities in the International Marketplace*, 2002), a far greater portion of their budget comes from national funds than in the US, where - as a consequence - the pressure to attract investors, high-income groups, and tourists, and to marginalize undesirable

Our task is, rather, to systematically identify, via comparative analysis, the influence of national features and differences on urban processes and problems (as, e.g. Alan Harding has done in applying urban regime theory to Great Britain<sup>25</sup>), so that we may develop a European “reformulation” of the empirical as well as theoretical perspectives on urban/metropolitan development – as indeed some of the projects within this Graduiertenkolleg are seeking to do.

The conclusion I would like to draw from this quick overview of conceptual diffusion and transfer processes for our metropolitan discussion is this:

Underlying all of these imports is the observation of increasingly convergent conditions and policies: on both sides of the Atlantic globalization and economic restructuring have impacted on urban development, pushing urban entrepreneurialism and city marketing, faster in the US, but undeniably also on the European continent. Cities and city regions, on both sides of the Atlantic, are transforming as part of neoliberal state transformation and welfare retrenchment, and as part of rescaling processes that are devolving many formerly higher level state functions to local and regional levels, and there often towards extra-state (private and civil society) actors.

And finally, the characteristics and accompanying features of metropolitanization or regionalization – such as urban decentralization, socio-spatial polarization, state rescaling and administrative fragmentation -- have become pressing problems in Germany as well, raising a series of new and urgent political, social and planning questions.

We need to decide whether by metropolitan research we seek to aid analysis and understanding of these very contemporary fragmentation and disintegration problems with their concomitant inclusion and exclusion problems, as is the focus of most metropolitan studies programs in North America; or whether we are interested in pushing a normative concept of the metropolis, which seeks to identify the contemporary features of cosmopolitanism (“Metropole als Inbegriff der neuen Urbanitätslust”<sup>26</sup>) – but that would be more like a marketing concept, to be instrumentalized in the serious game of strategic competition.

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groups is far stronger (Justus L. Uitermark and Jan Willem Duyvendak, “Civilizing the European city”, 14–17 August, 2004, p. 7). A reason for the stronger connection between urban areas and the central state in Germany is that a majority of the electoral population lives within urban agglomerations, and not as in the US outside of them.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Harding, “North American Urban Political Economy, Urban Theory and British Research”, 1999, pp. 673 – 98, especially 693.

<sup>26</sup> Gerwin Zohlen, “Metropole als Metapher”, 1995, p.33

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