

Speech: City 2.0 : Interface in Face-to-Face

Does a city merely manage physical bodies whose human communication necessities are to be organized mainly through computerized media? Does the economic market logic fragment urban environments, which then again are recombined to an individualized city via the media? Will everybody soon live together and alone in his or her dream city?

Urbo Kune – A City With or Without Agora?

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1. European cities as commodities.

European cities are a commodity. They compete amongst each other on the global market. They use all available means to court for those individuals who wish to consume them at the highest price. From 1995 to 2013, the overnight stays of tourists in Vienna has nearly doubled to 12,72 Million. In Cologne, the overnight stays have almost tripled from 2002 to 4,9 Million in the year 2012. **The brand value of a city may be calculated in Euros. Its image has a value that is of monetary advantage to companies and individuals.** In a monetary assessment, a sociologist from a small town will have a lower rate than one from New York. I myself am from Hamburg ;) Even though no city in Europe has yet to be sold as a whole, its parts are naturally merchandized in the form of buildings and property. **Many people have so far taken for granted the commodification, i.e. the commercialization, of all the parts of a city.** In an attempt to suggest that even the entire city could possibly belong to all of its residents, there were a few house occupations in Europe since the 1960ies, but in the long run even these critics have accepted the state regulations of ownership structures as contributing to their own wellbeing. This approval of property ownership is highlighted by the public

campaign “A Right to City” (*Recht auf Stadt*), which desires to alter legislation as to allow for participation in the distribution of property in terms of common interest. **In the year 2013, the home ownership rate in Germany was 52,6%, in Austria 57,3%, and in the Netherlands 67,4%. However, the home ownership rate in larger cities was significantly lower: In Hamburg it was only 23%, in Cologne 24%, and only 15% in Berlin in the year 2012.** Obviously tenants make up the majority of residents in German cities. This distribution could also have advantages for municipal administration, as far as ownership structure also include many cooperatives and municipal carriers. In the last 2000 years – as far as I can see – the question “Who lives in the city and whose city is it?” was addressed in a similar way with different weightings.

2. An unanimously monetary city completely destroys its social systems.

Obviously it could be clear to everybody that city residents are more likely to be unhappy the more the city belongs only to a selected few and the farther society becomes removed from a high Gross National Happiness, i.e. roughly the average amount of all individual sensations of happiness. No society has yet been able to stabilize happiness as a social system and therefore, up to this day, we have not established any social institution that would selectively exclude unhappiness and guarantee a proper distribution of happiness. Neither love nor marriage were successful in differentiating their social function into sustained happiness. Even drugs have failed our expectations of enduring happiness. Human happiness seems to be something temporary and – just as in the case of love – it would seem good if everybody had their share. Love is a good example for the fact that in our cultural environment many people know that it would not serve happiness if it were completely available for sale or commercialization. **Therefore I want to ask if it is not equally necessary for the city to give people the freedom to participate in spaces that are not for sale and free of cost, because otherwise they will not experience moments of happiness?** If however the city together with all of its social relations, its cultures, its identities, and its love affairs is completely commercialized as a commodity on transnational markets, it is more likely that its promise of happiness is periodically pretended just as in the case of love that is entirely for sale.

3. An unanimously monetary city destroys its social systems. Such a city would act up in an even more contrived way than for example the tourist part of Las Vegas, where happiness is found at most by gambling addicts.

4. Google Earth and Google Maps demonstrate the economically motivated densification of an interest in added value, which took its beginning with picture postcards of plentiful city images.

Of course the previously mentioned older marketing interests will remain in place in the near future. Ownership relations will at best change in the context of established laws or democratic politics. However it is to be noticed that new potential added value will accrue to the traditional added values of a city, which so far only very few people are capable of calculating correctly. **Even the owners of a city are surprised that with Google Earth and Google Maps the facades of their buildings, their gardens as well as “their” streets have become objects of interest for added value which however priorly were not included in their calculations and in which monetary participation was a rare exception.** Without a doubt the rich as well as the cities can afford their real estate to be commercialized by a transnational company through digital media. After all, already those spaces of a city which were accessible through a photo camera were priorly commercialized and thus turned into a commodity by means of picture postcards. **The complete pictorial representation of a city is therefore an economically motivated densification of an interest in added value which was not to be achieved by means of a printed postcard.** In this respect, the many municipal surveillance cameras as well as personalized facial recognition of pedestrians can be understood as a densification of public order and security, since “intelligent” media now eventually can and should detect more irregularities in public life than humans.

5. Nearly all abilities and possessions of the city resident obtain a computer-assisted market by means of mediatized densification.

I also want to assess as the densification of an entrepreneurial interest in added value those cases in which for example Facebook commercializes the social network structures of city residents, since occasionally these then read about each other on social media

more often than they meet each other face-to-face in urban environments. Companies surely make money based on how a city, a building, a restaurant, or a human being is publically rated and whether or not the desire is created to see this location or person again. Real estate and territorial contexts are increasingly merchandized by the traditional commercialization of a city. **In the meanwhile, the mediatized commercialization of a city increasingly merchandizes mobility in physical, spatial, social, and cultural contexts.** Especially those previously inalienable areas of social and cultural life, such as photographic views, announcements, friendship, hospitality, neighborhood, friendly advice, inside tips, helpfulness, orientation, or love turn into marketplaces as a result of the mediatization of a city. In this mediatized marketplace everyone, even those without many possessions, can now sell his or her orientation, friendship, bed, cooking skills, family, friends, and culinary, artistic, or musical taste to the highest bidder for hours or days. **Nearly all abilities and possessions of a city resident obtain a computer-assisted market by means of mediatized densification.** It is surprising that these urban mediatized marketplaces belong neither to the city itself nor to a few local owners but rather to transnationally operating stock corporations anywhere in this world. Without these mediatized markets however, nobody could have sold his or her friends, family, love, cooking skills, or taste. **It would be unusual to us if in the future people would no longer receive friends, family, love, happiness, hospitality, cooking skills, and taste from others free of charge, but if they would rather assess their value in a monetary currency.**

6. Does the economic logic of the market fragment the urban environment, which we then again recombine to an individualized city by means of our media?

Maybe it is insignificant whether or not the monetary profit of added value through communication no longer belongs to the city or its residents but to transnational stock corporations. **Therefore I would rather like to ask whether the city merely manages physical bodies whose human communication necessities are to be organized mainly through computerized media? Does the economic logic of the market fragment the urban environment, which we then again recombine to an individualized city by means of our media? Will everybody soon live together and alone in his or her dream city?**

These are the three questions I want to pursue. But first I want to remind you of the function the city had until now from a sociological perspective.

7. The city increasingly cedes its economical, political, and cultural center of power to transcultural media monopolies.

From a historical perspective, the city qualifies as an economical, political, and cultural center of power. It privileges its citizens, who make use of its (military) superiority to dominate over the periphery and acquire its products. Undoubtedly the metropolises still command an economical, political, and cultural power structure. The German cultural and creative economy even raised its revenues in the last 5 years. This increase however is essentially owed to the software and gaming industries. As regards the political exercise of power, voter participation has decreased since the beginning of the 1970ies. A tendency to undemocratization is also evident in the crisis of the newspapers, which are superseded by media formats of the public relations of diverse companies. **Also churches lose their audiences. If I look at these three developments, then with the penetration of urban environments by means of computerized media comes a delegitimation and erosion of those claims to orientation which once were established by politics through municipal administration, by religion through churches, and by economics through marketplaces.** The crisis of trust and confidence regarding our established institutions creates a power vacuum which is increasingly filled by commercial media platforms. The visitor frequency as well as the sales density of retail businesses is continuously decreased. Marketplaces as well as the centering of manual skills are located less in the city and more often in mediatized commercial centers. While in historical retrospective the city was there to preserve and make accessible sacred sites and objects, nowadays even the temples of consumerism have a declining chance to an increase in costumers. Computerized media in which the city's commercialization and orientation structures are organized remain as the major attractions. It actually allows for optimism that citizens continue going to theaters and restaurants, as is evident from their increasing revenues in the last years.

8. In the mediatized city „urbo kune“ everybody soon lives together and alone in his fictitious dream city.

Fewer and fewer people meet someone to fall in love with in the city. They rather find somebody with great precision on a dating website. In the year 2013, 8 Million Germans have registered with an online dating provider. Politics in the form of pamphlets have also become less common in the city. Churches are empty. Stores close and shopping centers shut down. The city is full of people but eventually they seldomly talk to each, unless they are paid to do so. German city residents atomize into an increasing number of single person households, half of which live with a salary below 1500 Euros. In the meantime, single person households occupy a share of 40 % of all of the almost 40 Million households in Germany – in Hamburg they make up 50 %. Hamburg may for example have more and more cars, however they are driven less and less. This is called resting traffic. The time budget of audiovisual media use per head in Germany amounts to 8,1 hours. **The mental absence in media with a simultaneous physical presence in urban environments promotes a city in which people orient themselves more along mediatized sense provinces and less among each other.** The invisible hand of the free market and of political will fragments the urban environment, which the residents then recompose to an individualized city by means of the media. The collective city, or urbo kune, assembles itself into socially networked sense provinces in the urban environment by means of computerized media. Residents of the future city find in social media their shopping streets, their banks, their online doctors as well as their favorite neighbors and nice guests who can produce a presentable rating history and thus are verifiably trustworthy. **In the mediatized city “urbo kune” everybody soon lives together and alone in his fictitious dream city.** All social contacts have been optimized and clicked together in respect to their social, economical, or cultural assets. Everything seems harmonious in the sphere of the socially desired optimum, it is just happiness that doesn't seem quite right. The history of the city is passed on in such a mediatized way. For a long time, this was what was alienated from God and the earth, that which was independent, in which by means of his culture the city resident became the creator of his own, now mediatized, world (cf. Schäfers, Stadtsoziologie, 2010). In the future, the mediatized and the urban life flow together and in both of these living environments individuals are almost exclusively mirrored in that which is produced by them.

9. We can formulate the challenges the contemporary city should respond to without reference to the repeatedly problematic utopia.

The utopia of the city organizes a problem, as far as it formulates its own unattainability and therefore a blockage. If we assume that the respectively present society is the solution of its problems, then every problem may be understood in terms of a social challenge. **We can formulate the challenges the contemporary city should respond to without reference to the repeatedly problematic utopia. According to Kant, the question “What should I do?” belongs to morals and ethics. Insofar as no institution of society can distinguish the good from the bad life, we presently leave it up to the economy to answer such questions as “How do we want to live in the city?” And the social system of economics has decided that the rich life is the good life.** Utopia in this case would be an even richer life. The economy however has noticed that it undermines its own necessary survival resources if it would completely dominate such social systems as politics, arts, truth, spirituality, love, justice, and wellbeing. It is however also uncertain that the presently inferior social systems would offer a better basis for decision-making of the future city.

10. The logic of growth of social systems.

In a general view, all social systems follow the logic of the growth of wealth:

The wealth of politics for example would be a stronger power or a greater majority.

The wealth of the arts consists in even more beautiful irritations.

The wealth of spirituality aims at increased awakening or liberation.

The wealth of justice strives for more truthful righteousness.

The wealth of ethics is a more proper good life.

The wealth of the sciences demonstrates new „truths“ in order to overtake those of yesterday.

The wealth of love is a more satisfied irrationality, maybe even more sex and kids.

Community wealth pertains to increased social stress, more regulation and standardization. In respect to social media this is called oversharing.

11. The logic of the future growth of happiness must be that less in these nine social systems is perceived as an increase in happiness.

The logic of growth of these nine social systems mentioned above in no way leads to an improved city or a better public welfare economy. These nine social systems efficiently take up many societal challenges, but their growth also promises increased effort. It seems to me that exclusively the still to be developed social system of “happiness” together with the wealth promise of the equal distribution of common good will lead the way to the future city. It must then be the logic of the growth of happiness that less in these nine social systems must be perceived as an increase in happiness in the future. That may sound lofty, but it seems obvious to me in order to tackle problems as societal challenges. In the 2015 World Happiness Report of the UNO, among 158 countries Germany is ranked number 26, as already in the previous year. German media have described this placement mainly as unhappy. **Netherland ranked much better on number seven.** [World Happiness Report 2015: <http://worldhappiness.report>]