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(dir.)

Designing Sustainable Urban Futures Concepts and Practices from Different Countries

KIT Scientific Publishing

Gender & Diversity

Issues and Challenges for the “Just City”

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Publisher: KIT Scientific Publishing
Place of publication: KIT Scientific Publishing
Year of publication: 2016
Published on OpenEdition Books: 13 September 2019
Serie: KIT Scientific Publishing
Electronic ISBN: 9791036538223



<http://books.openedition.org>

Electronic reference

HUNING, Sandra. *Gender & Diversity: Issues and Challenges for the “Just City”* In: *Designing Sustainable Urban Futures: Concepts and Practices from Different Countries* [online]. Karlsruhe: KIT Scientific Publishing, 2016 (generated 12 janvier 2021). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/ksp/4225>>. ISBN: 9791036538223.

Gender & Diversity

Issues and Challenges for the “Just City”

Sandra Huning

1 Introduction

This paper aims to address issues and challenges that arise when gender relations and diversity are considered in sustainable and just urban and neighbourhood development policies. Cities and neighbourhoods can be built and organized to become resources for different social groups and lifestyles, but they can also set limits for others. Gender, class (income, education), ethnicity, and other categories of social differentiation have an important impact on the ways that urban spaces are appropriated, used, and shaped. The transformation of gender and other social relations over the last decades has led to new spatial demands. This paper argues that understanding both these transformations and the ways they have been reflected in urban development strategies is an important precondition for promoting sustainable and just urban development.

The paper starts by discussing the path of gender and diversity issues into urban development. Afterwards, it discusses what justice may mean when it comes to the acknowledgement of these issues in urban planning and development. Justice is a normative concept and its definition not uncontested. Therefore there are not precise technical answers, but rather an adaptable framework for policies that strive for just and sustainable urban development.

2 From Feminist Interventions to Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Development

In recent urban studies and politics, diversity issues get much more attention than gender relations - for several reasons. One argument for the use of diversity instead of gender concepts is that gender is automatically part of and has been integrated into diversity politics. Another argument, frequently disguised as “common sense” in spite of its obvious ignorance of facts and figures, is that gender equality has made so much progress over the past decades that a specific focus on this particular category of so-

cial differentiation can no longer be justified (cf. Greed 2005). The different “careers” of the concepts of gender and diversity are actually quite revealing in terms of which perspectives are recognised as legitimate and which are not, and they give different insights for the idea of just urban development.

Feminist research in urban sociology and urban planning started in the 1970s (cf. Dörhöfer/Terlinden 1998; contributions in Fainstein/Servon 2005a; Fainstein/Servon 2005b; Roberts 2013) and emerged from the second women’s movement which claimed that women’s socio-spatial needs were neglected in patriarchal post-war societies and had to be considered more thoroughly in architecture and planning. From then on, feminist architects and planners researched the needs of women and the ways women appropriated space, and analysed how spatial structures made women’s everyday routines difficult. Based on this research, they suggested how planning could become more sensitive to women’s needs.

One key issue from the very beginning was the functional division of urban space. For example, in the rapidly growing late 19th/early 20th century modernising cities in Germany, under the conditions of early capitalist development and industrialisation, women not only had the chance to gain an independent income in new industrial or office jobs, but they also experienced new liberties in the appropriation of public spaces (cf. von Saldern 2004; Wilson 1991). Working women, however, were considered a threat to the moral health of the working class in general and the family in particular by the bourgeois upper classes. Therefore, the subsequent functional division of urban spaces and the process of suburbanisation were inspired not only by requirements of capitalist production, but also by the desire to re-establish gender orders and to locate women and the whole sphere of reproductive work in the safe environments of suburbia (cf. Frank 2008) – not only in Germany, but also in the United States (cf. Hayden 2002; 2005; Markusen 1991). These environments provided housing for the individual household of the nuclear family, but only rarely did they also offer local retail and other services, leisure facilities, adequate public transportation, or any job opportunities for women. Evidently, they established and reproduced a dominant gender order of a male breadwinner and a female housewife.

In West Germany, this gender order was reflected in post-war social housing in a particular layout of the housing unit, but also of the housing estate as a whole (cf. Dörhöfer/Terlinden 1998). Funding schemes prescribed clearly defined apartment sizes and standardised norms for the apartment layout. The Frankfurt kitchen which had been developed by Viennese architect Margarete Schütte-Lohatzky in the 1920s in accordance with workflow studies by the American Christine Frederick is one example of the rationalization of housework. It made work in the kitchen easier in certain regards compared to earlier, less practically equipped kitchens, but it prevented an equal share of household tasks among household members and the combination of kitchen and care work. Furthermore, the standardised apartment layout of social housing was criticized by the second women’s movement for not taking into account alter-

native household types such as one-parent families whose spatial needs and financial resources differed from the nuclear family so that they had no chance to qualify for social housing (cf. Becker 1992).

The public-private divide which was represented in the functional division of space both in the apartment and in residential urban areas was also criticized in more general terms. First of all, it stipulated the gendered division of labour and the ideals of “public man” and “private woman”, and it relegated reproductive work to the private sphere without taking into account political “public” responsibility. Secondly, the division contributed to the common perception that public spaces were considered inappropriate and unsafe for virtuous women, and this notion continued to be reproduced in spite of all statistics showing that assaults on women were generally located in private rather than in public spaces. In the use of open spaces, gendered ways to use and appropriate space could be observed (cf. Huning 2012).

Based on this knowledge, the transformation of housing and settlement patterns over time can be better understood. Suburban single family housing has until today been the spatial symbol for the ideal type of modern housing: living together in a nuclear family in accordance with the breadwinner-housewife-model. This model still exists, but it is no longer prevalent which can be attributed to the diversification of gender roles for women and consequently to changed gender relations. The number of children per family has decreased, and household types and lifestyles have multiplied to: DINK (double income no kids), LAT (living apart together), or YUP (young urban professional) households. Suburban areas have lost their appeal and other settlement patterns have become much more attractive. The demand for housing has changed, and central inner-city locations have become much more attractive for these new household types, because, among other factors, the accessibility of urban functions has become a more important location factor. Changing gender roles for women (and partly for their children and/or for men) were found to have a considerable impact on gentrification processes (cf. Berg 2014; Bondi 1991; 1995).

Feminist architects and planners suggested ways to overcome the spatial manifestation of traditional gender orders and the gendered division of labour by designing spaces either with a particular focus on women’s needs, with a stronger user-orientation in general, or with a focus on overcoming structural barriers (cf. Hayden 2005). In the late 1990s, the concept of gender mainstreaming entered the feminist discourse in a situation where the limits of the strategies that had been employed became visible (cf. Becker 1998; Dörhöfer/Terlinden 1998; Rodenstein 1998). Feminist claims had until then been integrated into the planning mainstream to an extent that their feminist origin had become more or less invisible, and paradoxically the successes of the second women’s movement made the specific consideration of women’s needs to appear less urgent. But in spite of this early type of “mainstreaming”, equity had still not been reached. The heterogeneity of women’s needs was increasingly recognized so that it seemed no longer possible to speak of women as one collective subject. This

made it much harder to draft powerful claims. In this situation, gender mainstreaming promised a new approach with a strong formal top-down commitment. In planning it was welcomed by many as a promising approach to tackle gender inequalities (cf. Bauhardt 2003; Roberts 2013).

In the meantime, this optimism has partly faded (cf. Caglar 2013). One key objection towards gender mainstreaming approaches has been that it is not, or not adequately, taking up feminist's critical stance towards power relations and domination and might even stabilize traditional gender orders. Gender mainstreaming as a political approach has not always been clear in what it aims to achieve. The equal consideration of men's and women's needs does not automatically lead to an overcoming of the two-sex binary which has been criticized by gender and homosexual studies for quite some time (cf. Hark 2001). Critics fear that the social construction of sex and gender is not always adequately addressed. There are, however, gender mainstreaming strategies which explicitly aim to address these criticisms (cf. Greed 2005). At this point, it seems that there are many discourses on gender planning which are more or less linked to each other. A single commonly recognized and accepted approach does not exist (cf. Huning 2013).

3 Managing Diversity in Urban Development

In comparison with the gender discourse, the concept of urban diversity has come into focus of urban research only recently, although, social differentiation and social inequality in cities have been key topics in urban sociology ever since the Chicago School. Urban inequalities were tackled by much research which aimed to inform urban planning and development to fight poverty and urban decline. The recognition of the social and cultural differentiation of cities' populations increased over the last two decades (cf. Sandercock 2003; Waltz 2014) so that the need to deal with "diversity" came up in cities in the U.S. and Canada, but also in Europe and Germany. Diversity management is not yet a common tool in urban development but it is, at least in many German cities, particularly employed to deal with the integration of population groups of different ethnic backgrounds. Although in theory, diversity can refer to many other categories of social differentiation and is seen as "potential" for urban development, in urban politics it refers mainly to "new paths for integration" (cf. Bohle et al. 2004; Schuster 2014).

Diversity management was developed for businesses with reference to their heterogeneous staff and their diverse clients (cf. Vedder 2006). It was seen as a tool to improve a company's economic performance because barriers due to different cultures, genders, and other social categories were supposed to be dismantled and addressed, while at the same time new clients were supposed to be reached through more

inclusive and diversity-sensitive production and marketing. This economic argument was also prevalent in the further dissemination of “diversity” in urban policies. The ideal of the “creative city” promoted by urbanists such as Richard Florida, Charles Landry, and others, made population diversity a desirable urban feature (cf. Florida 2005; Landry 2000). These authors argued that urban diversity and a high degree of mutual tolerance for different lifestyles provide an inspiring environment for the so-called “creative” middle classes whom they found to be important for economic growth in today’s urban economies. In this view, diversity is a location factor for economic development in an increasingly competitive urban system under the influence of globalization, inter- and transnationalisation (cf. Smith 2000).

Diversity in practice has been employed in a variety of ways. In Germany, it has inspired integration policies in cities such as Frankfurt/Main, Hamburg and Göttingen (cf. Bohle et al. 2004). While the German chancellor Angela Merkel claims that “multiculturalism has utterly failed” (*Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 16 October 2010), diversity politics is based on the new hope that social and cultural differentiation of the population must not be seen as a problem to be solved, but can actually be a benefit for urban societies. “The diversity politics concept offers cities the opportunity for an individual and flexible reaction to change. It is detached from typical fields of action and rather describes a working and action principle for the municipal administration... Diversity politics presents a theoretical framework for cities which they can fill and employ according to their needs” (Bohle et al. 2004, p. 203; translated by the author). This quote reflects the openness of the concept which has also affected debates on affordable housing, social mixing, and residential de-segregation (cf. Blokland/Eijk 2010). In this context, it has been argued that cross-cultural communication is a critical competence for planners in today’s diverse societies. Some authors define it as a specific mode of thinking and a kind of self-reflection of a planner’s own everyday work (cf. Agyeman/Erickson 2012; Reeves 2011).

The definition of diversity and the question of which categories of differentiation actually constitute it (ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.) is not self-evident. Any definition bears the risk of essentialism when characteristics are attributed to specific groups without taking into account the social construction of these attributes (cf. Schuster 2014). Here we can see a parallel to some gender debates explicitly referring to men and women. Debates on diversity also tend to highlight the potential gains of a diverse population without taking into account strategies to overcome social inequalities, which in many regards cause expressions of diversity in the first place. Critics plead to bear in mind that diversity (just as gender) is not “natural”, but that it is a consequence of differentiation processes, and it is therefore not banal to analyse power relations and forms of domination which determine whether a category is considered as relevant or not.

What follows from such diversity goals for urban politics? “The decisive question is how a city can be designed materially and symbolically, socially and spatially so

that all residents have the most possible opportunities and chances for self-fulfilment” (Frank 2004, p. 212), no matter what their gender, sexual orientation, cultural/ethnic background, or age may be. This is a goal which is hard to reach, in particular in inner cities which have become more attractive recently because of the above-mentioned transformation of gender relations and the increasing recognition of diversity as potential for a creative urban environment. Affordable housing is one challenge which derives from the new focus on inner cities, as are climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies for more sustainable development. As a consequence, the question of justice (not only) in the transformation of inner cities is an important one. It may be a coincidence (or not) that planning theorists re-entered the debate on the “Just City” only a few years ago (cf. Fainstein 2010).

4 The Just City and Just Diversity

Several planning theoretical models have addressed the question of how social differentiation and social inequality can be better taken into account in planning processes. In the 1960s, Paul Davidoff’s advocacy planning model aimed for a better representation of minorities and low-income households in planning processes (cf. Davidoff 1965). The model raised attention to deprived groups and made planners’ norms and values more transparent. The question of redistribution was addressed by the equity planning model of Norman Krumholz and John Forester (cf. Krumholz/Forester 1990) who stressed the responsibility of planners to “speak truth to power” and to present planning outcomes which contributed to equity (recently also discussed by Susan Fainstein with reference to the “just city”; cf. Fainstein 2005). Patsy Healey focused on fair shares of different stakeholders in collaborative planning processes and argued for a communicative rationality which recognizes differences: “We see things differently because words, phrases, expressions, objects, are interpreted differently according to our frame of reference. It is this point [...] which underpins the strength of the relativist position” (Healey 1992, p. 152). Theoretical approaches which understand planning as “persuasive storytelling” (cf. Throgmorton 2003) stress the importance of giving room to different, competing stories from a variety of stakeholders to reflect the complexity of social relations. In this perspective, it is important to create as many opportunities as possible for a variety of storytellers and stories (cf. Sandercock 2000; 2003). Many theories take a social constructivist view when they highlight that social realities do not exist outside social relations, but that they are constituted in the context of stakeholders’ relative positions, identifications, interpretations, and resources.

But what would a just city be like? This question is particularly difficult to answer since the definition of justice in socio-spatial terms is by no means self-evident. Most cities are characterised by diversity and inequality – in terms of settlement and build-

ing structures, socio-spatial, and socio-economic functions, but also in the distribution of different social and demographic groups throughout urban space as they are reflected in debates on segregation, polarization, and de-mixing (cf. Bridge et al. 2012). These inequalities are not always interpreted as injustice. Rather, justice depends on the respective context, is a rather relative concept, and also has to do with who is actually able in a certain situation to enforce a certain definition of justice. When the Greek Thrasymachos told Sokrates that what is just is what is beneficial for the strongest, he raised attention to power relations which coin understandings of justice and the way these are institutionalised.

Harvard professor Susan Fainstein, a key protagonist in current just city debates, has argued (with reference to Martha Nussbaum) that justice relates to equity, equity being defined as the proactive ensuring of certain indisputable capabilities which everyone should be entitled to. These capabilities may comprise life itself, to make a living, health, bodily integrity, access to education, and influence on one's own political and material environment. To ensure urban justice and the "right to the city" (Lefebvre) for each individual urban resident is for Fainstein a key aim of urban politics and planning, and independent of higher goals and any kind of common welfare. Fainstein certainly acknowledges conflicts of interest in capitalist societies. To reach equity in the sense of a positive action, established democratic procedures are not enough and planners need to pay special attention to ensure minorities' rights in the political process.

The recent financial crisis and changes in the global environmental pose quite difficult conditions for the realisation of equity planning and politics. If natural resources become scarce, who will be able to develop coping strategies will depend highly on financial resources. Rising energy costs may make cars, heating and electric devices unaffordable for poor households so that their "right to the city" may be affected. As long as resources are distributed along social categories such as gender and ethnicity, current crises affect social groups in different ways, but there may be contradictory goals and interests which make it difficult to realize key capabilities for all. The Australian planners Ruth Fincher and Kurt Iveson introduced the term "just diversity", hoping this might lead planners to reflect their role in the reproduction of urban inequality and make their normative standpoints more transparent: "If planning is to craft more just cities in a context of diversity, then this cannot be simply a matter of accommodating or embracing diversity as such. Rather, it is a matter of disentangling the different kinds of diversity which characterize city life and distinguishing between those forms of diversity which are just and those that are unjust" (Fincher/Iveson 2008, p. 3).

In contrast to diversity management in the narrower sense, "just diversity" is broader in that it means that planners should consider three interrelated social logics: "redistribution, through which attempts are made to plan for the redress of disadvantage; recognition, through which efforts are made to define the attributes of groups of

people so that their needs can be met; and encounter, through which the interaction of individuals is planned in order to offer opportunities for increased sociality” (Fincher/Iveson 2008, p. 3). This inclusive perspective is based on feminist and diversity claims and not only addresses the needs of different population groups, but also the mechanisms through which they are reproduced.

5 The Role of Participation

“The role of planners in facilitating the participation of these different groups of citizens in matters of urban policy has become a key concern for planning scholarship and practice” (Fincher/Iveson 2008, p. 3). Participation is a key element in gender and diversity discourses, but it is as such not considered sufficient to promote just diversity by those authors who are interested in just urban development. The focus on the “communicative turn” in planning ever since the 1990s oriented towards the procedures of urban planning and put less emphasis on substantial outcomes. Although for planners it is still common sense that participation improves the results of a planning process, not to speak of its legitimacy; the danger of selective participation and of the reproduction of power inequalities prevails, no matter how well-intended the participation processes might be (cf. Huning 2014). Lately, authors introducing the concepts of post-politics or post-democracy (cf. Crouch 2008; Wagner 2013) have claimed that participation is very frequently employed as a means to stabilize power relations and not to change them.

Fincher and Iveson therefore argue: “to create more just cities, planners need a framework for *making judgements between* different claims in the planning process, as well as for *facilitating* them” (Fincher/Iveson 2008, original emphasis). They argue that planners still tend to see themselves as neutral experts who are able to act in some kind of common interest instead of understanding their role in political terms, and suggest that this may not do justice to today’s complex governance systems. Participation must then employ a broad range of methods not only to make different voices heard, but to actually elaborate which needs and conflicts lie behind the stories that are told. In order to make participation strategies in particular and urban development more integrative, some urban researchers are in favour of participation strategies which do not only consist of traditional procedures of discourse and verbal exchange, but include opportunities of spatial appropriation. The Dutch environmentalists Esther Turnhout, Severine Van Bommel, and Noelle Aarts understand participation as performative practice where identities, knowledge, interests, and needs are not represented, but shaped and articulated (cf. Turnhout et al. 2010). They aim to overcome essentialist identifications of target groups with special needs, and to offer different arenas for action and partaking in urban development. One prerequisite, however, for

a successful exchange is in any case the openness and transparency of the process; if the scope of decision-making is too limited, the results may be discouraging instead of enhancing (cf. Bernt/Fritsche 2008).

The “just diversity” discourse argues that participation does not necessarily lead to more “just” planning outcomes. In many cases, it may mean no more than private interests (legitimate or illegitimate) trying to make their point to the disadvantage of others who remain silent. Accordingly, participation does not replace structural compensation such as affordable housing policies. However, to open up opportunities participation may help to develop visions for new forms of sharing spaces in cities and for cooperation, important prerequisites for sustainable urban development.

6 Conclusion

This paper addressed a few of the issues and challenges that arise when gender and diversity are taken into account in the context of just and sustainable urban development. Early feminist approaches stressed the need for positivist action in favour of women whose socio-spatial needs had been neglected or subsumed under the one-dimensional role of a housewife; i.e. in favour of one collective subject or target group. When it became more difficult to argue for women collectively, gender mainstreaming opened the discussion beyond women to include all genders. But this is difficult to implement. Some gender policies are based on essentialist gender definitions and contribute to a stabilization of gender roles instead of their dissolution. This danger is also apparent when it comes to diversity policies which define diversity along certain attributes and themselves contribute to differentiation processes, instead of focusing on the processes’ social construction and addressing social inequalities and power relations that can stabilize them.

The concept of “just diversity” proposes that planners should be concerned with three interrelated social logics: redistribution (of resources and power), recognition (of diversity), and encounter (for increased sociality). It links procedural and substantial goals, is open for adaptation to different planning situations, and makes the decision-making process transparent. Planners are not neutral experts, but players in a political arena characterised by power relations and inequalities. Thus the concept puts individual planners in charge of designing the best procedure and at the same time responding to inequality and injustice (cf. Forester 2009). Planning is not or at least not primarily a technical discipline which can derive what to do from scientific knowledge. It is important to stress its political character and the individual responsibility of urban planners and policymakers. The awareness of the gender and diversity debates may be helpful to make individual positions and structural constraints visible and to reflect one’s own position in the complex web of actors, identities and interests.

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