

“The hidden planners?”

Academic knowledge production and urban planning”

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Introduction

Over the last decades, forms and practices of urban planning have substantially changed in many cities. Global inter-urban competitiveness, economic constraints and austerity, the neoliberalization and privatization of housing markets as well as new technologies aimed at effectively addressing climate change have been identified as mayor challenges for traditional planning. During the 1990s, public administrations in most European cities underwent a profound restructuration of their internal organization introducing a more flexible set of institutions adopted and badly copied from competitive and market embedded companies. New public management, new forms of governance, public-private partnerships, loose co-operations with private actors – sometimes not explicitly addressed to the public – were setting the ground for implementing a new urban politics. The field of urban planning, once exclusive responsibility of public administrations, is today crowded by new actors, whose interaction is highly professionalized but vaguely regulated. Market-driven co-operations between investors and public bodies are flanked by broad forms of citizens' participation, raising severe question regarding the democratization of urban planning. At the local level citizens and communities increasingly participate in planning processes leading to experimenting and exploring traditional top-down forms of urban planning. Participation or (self-)empowerment are commonly practiced and widely accepted notions that, at first glance, might hint at grassroot-oriented planning practices that empathize better with citizens' opinions. However, as we argue in this presentation, urban planning is still far from adopting radical and localized, place-based approaches that put citizens and their diverse and heterogeneous antagonistic representations about the urban in the center. Citizens' participation and the economization of urban politics are only “ostensibly very different interpretations of contemporary development” as Mike Raco has stated with regard to sustainable development and economic competitiveness in urban planning. However, they are strongly related, flanking each other and moderated by a third force in urban development that, as we argue in this paper, is slightly under-estimated in the critical literature: researchers, academics and expert knowledge.

We disagree, that urban planner's role is “associated with a place-based mobilization of and mediation between different perspectives on cities” as it is argued in the call for

papers of this session. In contrast, we propose that planners are more committed to neoliberal models of urbanization. By asking for the actors who construct and produce such models we shed light on a different societal force that is strongly dominating urban planning since some time: academics and expert knowledge that produces and legitimizes ‘planning *over* citizens’ within which the inclusion of citizens is reduced to stage-managed and selective forms of participation.

This presentation starts with the premise, that urban planning, more than ever, is shaped and influenced by scientific expert-knowledge and academics and researchers have become important yet still under-estimated drivers of contemporary urbanism. We discuss our perspective by drawing on empirical material gathered in two different research projects about protests, urban democracy and dissensus in two “post-political cities” that are internationally recognized and hailed as forerunners in their specific field of urban planning: Freiburg (Germany) and Barcelona (Spain). By researching both cities and their policy-making processes since some years (starting in 2011 resp. 2012), we learned that despite broad and heterogeneous citizen’s movements in both cities, urban planners mostly neglect this form of knowledge, but focused and legitimized their approaches by drawing on academic publications and statements by scientific researchers. The more their scientific ideas haven been adopted and implemented by policy-makers and planers, researchers and academics became more interested in researching both cities. There is an impressive amount of academics and scientist travelling to Barcelona and Freiburg each year and mobilizing policies. This includes the two authors of this presentation.

Participation and the new urban politics

The profound and dramatic shifts in urban politics during the 1990s involved the thinking of the “whole terrain” of urban politics. Facing fiscal problems, confronted with new challenges resulting from changed geopolitical constellations, threatened by the outcomes after an epoch of profound neoliberalization, cities and municipalities introduced new principles, institutions and forms of organization that are summarized and described by Cox as “new urban politics”. The ‘new urban politics’ aim at a significant reduction of local welfare measures, service provision and pursue the strict mobilization of local resources “in the scramble for rewards in an increasingly

competitive free market”. Facing fiscal constraints, cities placed emphasis on new forms of “place marketing” of the revitalization of the old scars of the fordist production sites. This new urban politics is equated with the total capitalization of urban resources and the unconditional subjugation of public infrastructure and services under the paradigm of economic growth. Hence, growth-orientation, privatization and bypassing democratic legitimation takes place. A “post-political consensus” (Macleod 2011) consisting of public-private partnerships and other forms of market oriented governance lead to increasing economic and social disparities (Mayer 2013) and the exploitation of natural and environmental resources. The attraction of (foreign) capital stands at the core of these new politics. In another branch of literature these processes have been discussed in terms of urban neoliberalization (Mayer 2007; Leitner et al. 2007; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Theodore and Peck 2011), which are obviously linked yet not coherently elaborated in the new urban politics thesis (Boyle 2011). In the 2000s the “profit over people” (Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer 2012) has not only lead to a radical transformation of the built environment and the urban landscape, a loss of public spaces (Nemeth 2012) or the physical exclusion of the “truly disadvantaged” (Wilson 1987), but also created new forms of social inequalities among those who could not benefit from “entrepreneurial and competitive styles of urban governance” (While, Jonas, and Gibbs 2004, 549). Being the new “superfluous” (Bude and Willisch 2008), these people were excluded and displaced to the “edge of society” (Häussermann, Kronauer, and Siebel 2004).

While the new politics is clearly characterized by daily practices of excluding opinions, ideologies and people, forms of “urban governance has become increasingly consensual” (Krueger and Buckingham 2012). Exclusion has been largely accepted and tolerated as the unattractive side of a necessary condition, at the same time a perfidious “desire for harmony” appears in decision-making processes (Mössner and del Romero Renau 2015). On the one hand society seems to accept and include symbolic and spatial displacement as a necessity to urban politics in times of globalization and competitiveness, on the other hand cities frequently employ “round-table”-metaphors for ostensibly inclusive decision-making processes. Consequently, any antagonistic representation about the urban is necessarily excluded from the political agenda in order to maintain harmonic conditions, and consequently considered a threat to society. Within this set of

organization, public participation processes become a strong instrument for both reducing opposition and resistance and maintaining the “peaceful” status quo of new urban politics. Regardless the rather problematic aspects of democratic legitimation, effectiveness and representation of all groups of society, participation in its various forms and practices is hailed as pacifying the conflicts and tensions resulting from different groups and ideas that express different perspective of the urban and a powerful means to implement more just and egalitarian modes of governance. Participatory planning tools have their roots in the community work (in Germany the *Gemeinwesenarbeit*) of the late 1960s and 70s (Hinte 2002; Mössner 2012). In Barcelona they are rooted in social struggles for urban infrastructure in marginalized communities between the 1960s and 1980s. Over time, however, participation has transformed as an instrument which is less focusing on community-building in a narrower sense, but on *cartographically* defined neighborhoods (Mössner, forthcoming). Participation seems also promising when searching for legitimating large-scale urban flagship projects that otherwise risk to be object to protests¹. Participation has become a complicated and technically sophisticated and ambitious instrument for public administrations. Consequently, most of the participatory planning practices are accompanied and sustained by academic and experts more familiar with the principles and practices of participation. Drawing on both case studies, which tell different stories of participatory urban planning, we show that participation is not aimed at counteracting the goals of neoliberal new urban politics. Both cities, Freiburg and Barcelona, are renowned for their large participation processes in planning practices. But in both cities, participation is not intended to contribute to a more radical form of citizens’ representation or question the limits of political participation in the sense of Rancière (Rancière 2010; Rancière 1995; Rancière 2004). Rather, participation in both cities is an important element of the “postpolitical city” (Swyngedouw 2009). While this aspects is important, some authors have already written about post-politics in Barcelona (Gomes de Matos, 2013) or Freiburg (Mössner, forthcoming). Our particular focus lies therefore

¹ See for instance the protests against the new underground railway station in Stuttgart. After immense protests the regional government implemented participatory elements that were not fundamentally questioning the project but left some details open to a *public* opinion. Since then, the new green-party regional government constantly repeats that the citizens *want* this station. Protests still exist, but media and public attention has ebbed.

on the important and under-estimated role academics, researchers and expert play in this process.

Expert knowledge in practice

Example 1: Freiburg

The city of Freiburg is internationally recognized as an “Eco-City” and besides dramatic forms of social exclusion, polarization and the displacement of lower-income groups, academics and researchers continue to attest the city a successful implementation its urban sustainability policies. Freiburg’s sustainable urban development starts in the 1990s, when the city tried to respond to a housing shortage and a growing demand for housing. Even though (or because) the city lacks a heterogeneous economic structure with the university being region wide the largest employer, the city still grows in terms of inhabitants. These new residents are mainly students and wealthier elderly people, who have second residency in Freiburg while living elsewhere during the winter term. The shortage of the housing market is also related to many apartments being transformed into tourist flat for economic reasons. In the 1990s the city was planning a new neighborhood called Rieselfeld, which was as a socially mixed neighborhood at the outskirts of the city. During the planning process, the French army decided to leave their barracks at the southern end of the city and the city started the development of a second neighborhood, Vauban, which later became the flagship for its green development. Before the city started officially the development of Vauban, the abandoned barracks of the French troops were squatted by alternative people and lifestyles. Consequently, after having experienced a decade of housing struggles with many buildings squatted during the 1980s, the city started to include these people into the planning process. Differently to Rieselfeld, Vauban became very attractive for a conservative green upper middle-class, leading to a socially homogenous and expensive neighborhood whose buildings are equipped with leading green technologies. Since 2010 Freiburg’s single initiatives in the realm of sustainable urbanism have been centralized and grouped around a strong ‘green city’-marketing aiming at an international positioning as an eco-city. In 2010, the city participated at the EXPO in Shanghai with an own pavilion named Freiburg Green City. In the same year, the city has generalized its urban development in a charter of sustainable urbanism, published

and promoted by the Institute of Urbanism in London (Daseking, Köhler, and Kemnitz 2010). Remarkably, the charter embraces 12 principles, which are mostly focusing at the social and political dimension of urban sustainability, participation, transparent and inclusive urban politics, “a city for all”, and cooperation with all parts of society. This is particular surprising, since the city lacks comprehensive participation processes including all neighborhoods. Also, the flagship projects of sustainable urban development, Rieselfeld and Vauban, have recently witnessed an increase of 10% in rents (Amt für Liegenschaften und Wohnungswesen der Stadt Freiburg 2013). In terms of housing costs, Freiburg is amongst the most expensive cities in Germany (at 4th or 5th position according to different sources and calculations). Still, planners hail Freiburg as a socially inclusive and sustainable city with particular regard to participation and transparent decision-making processes.

The international literature dealing with Freiburg states the city remarkable efforts in the realm of sustainable urban development. Despite the lowest net-income in the state of Baden-Württemberg (which is clearly related to the university being the largest employer, many part-time teachers and administrative jobs at the university below the average income), some sources state that the city has created “good jobs” for its citizens’ in the green economy (Hall 2013). Other authors hail the public transportation system that would enhance social equity in the city. There are few authors, who have obviously misunderstood the ticket price of the Freiburg tram system writing that trams would be free {Newman:2009un}. While a free tram system would certainly lead to a more “resilient city”, the Freiburg tram system is in fact quite expensive. There are authors that have hinted that „social equity is high since all parts of the city are easily accessible by public transport, cycling, and walking“ (Buehler and Pucher 2011). We agree with the authors that public transportation plays a crucial role for social equity, but disagree that all Freiburg neighborhoods have connection to the public transportation network which in fact is rather small and does not include those neighborhoods outside of the urban territory. More so, authors have mentioned the high proportion of bicycles in the city as a sign for sustainability, equating it to “safe” and livable environments: “The few cities that do provide good infrastructure for cyclists are the safest for cyclists, pedestrians and cars (for example, Amsterdam, Freiburg and

Copenhagen)” (Koglin 2011); official statistics state Freiburg the highest numbers of bicycle accidents in Baden-Württemberg with 547 accidents in 2011 (Sillgitt 2012). Surprisingly many publications rather uncritically repeat the imagination of Freiburg as a green city that has been promoted by the city marketing for some time. By doing so, these authors not only use “slippery words” (Marcuse 2015), they also uncritically repeat and in return contribute to the political manifestation of geographical imagination (Gregory 1994) of Freiburg being a sustainable, technically advanced and socially just city. This becomes even more dramatic when it comes to political processes that decide over who in society gets a voice or becomes excluded from daily politics. Freiburg politicians become not tired to repeating their efforts in participation and high level of equity in representing different groups, communities and people in urban politics. The logic behind that argument is complex and relies heavily on academic literature. The city has produced their own historical path towards sustainability by instrumentalizing a selective recourse on environmental protests around Freiburg in the 1970s (see Freytag, Gössling, and Mössner 2014; Mössner OAD forthcoming). The successful protests in Wyhl nearby Freiburg during the 1970s were aiming against the construction of a nuclear power plant and are today considered one of the foundational moments of the green party. Consequently, this event is normative charged as something positive, desirable and as a truly *political* moment. Referring to these events and connecting nowadays politics to then protests transfers the positive image to urban politics and legitimizes those policies as just and “grassroot”. Academics have contributed in manifesting this imagination: “ The beginnings of [Freiburg’s] dynamic development [...] were [...] driven by the ambitious vision to reduce the dependence on what were increasingly perceived to be dangerous energy sources: coal and nuclear energy. Plans to build a nuclear power plant nearby mobilised strong resistance in the mid 1970s [...]. Since then, a broad range of environmentally engaged civil society initiatives have been able to build up and keep up momentum for a local energy transition” (Rohracher and Spath 2014, 8). Such publications draw attention to the way “local initiatives” and “civil society” stand at the bottom of Freiburg’s green city transition and are very much in line with the mayor’s own statement during the sustainability awards on Dec. 6th 2012, when he explained that it’s the “engaged citizenry”, that is pushing him towards implementing these policies. Referring to these protests again, other authors state that “[t]he campaign

marked the birth and a formative early success for Germany's powerful anti-nuclear movement and, as critical side-effects, raised awareness on energy policy issues in the region, and highlighted the importance of community participation in political processes. Freiburg's role as a network node of grassroots activism consolidated [...]” (Scheurer and Newman 2009). Many more publications are to be mentioned, all arguing that the local initiatives have led to Freiburg's role as a forerunner of sustainable urban development. It is surprising that only one article deals with the investor of the solar settlement, a part of plus-energy buildings in the middle of sustainable neighborhood Vauban (Freytag, Gössling, and Mössner 2014). Rather than local initiatives, it is a multinational chocolate producer that has invested into the development and seeks for an annually increasing return of investment (Freytag, Gössling, and Mössner 2014). Participation in Freiburg exists beyond questioning the paradigm of growth, criticizing the “new urban politics”, includes mostly wealthier upper-middle classes and aims at protecting and securing the social polarization of society.

Example 2: Barcelona

On Barcelona's official web page, the city administration promotes their program towards a more ‘open government’. According to their own statement, the Barcelona City Council has responded to a call for changes of the way of *doing* politics. Open Government is a project aimed at cultural change within the administration and the relationship between the public and the city authorities. Under this label different instruments of urban planning such as citizen participation, transparency in decision-making processes and ‘open data’ are summarized to a coherent strategy.

In the last decades, participation programs and projects have increased in the city (Bonet i Martí 2012). In Barcelona, participatory politics aim at the co-operation of different actors in urban planning (Gomes de Matos 2013). By doing so, the city reconnects to a commonly shared narrative of a particular and historical “traditional consensus culture” (Fernández Sánchez 2007: 188) that connects nowadays participation programs to the 1970s when neighborhood associations became more important. Many publications refer to the ‘Plan General Metropolitano’ from 1976 as the starting point for a new restructuration of urban politics after the Franco era that has ended only in 1975 (Monclús 2003: 406). During the 1970s, there was great need to

restructure the inner city and the urban peripheries that had been abandoned from urban politics for some time. The implementation of the important 'Plan General Metropolitano' was forced by the neighborhood associations (*associació de veïns*), that were founded during the dark ages of repression in the Franco regime. By organizing protests and blockades, the neighborhood expressed their claim for public investments into the infrastructures and the built environment in the inner city but also in the peripheries (Kuhn 2012: 47f.). Between the 1970s and 1979 the activities of the neighborhood associations were characterized by non institutionalized forms of participation and protests (Bonet i Martí 2012: 16). Their goal was to give a voice to the persons, who were usually excluded from the political system and urban planning (Kuhn 2012: 48). Until the 1980s the neighborhood associations were recognized as official representatives of the local population and important actors in urban planning (Cruz i Gallach 2006: 188f.; Gomes de Matos 2013).

In the 1980s urban politics in Barcelona shifted towards regenerating old-industrialized urban areas and the planning of symbolic flagship projects. It was in this time, when Barcelona's urban planning was identified with the 'Barcelona model'. Oriol Bohigas i Guartiola, whose article "Reconstrucció de Barcelona" (1985) is considered the starting point for the development of this new type of urban planning (Montaner 1992), is a notable example for the fact that this shift was influenced by local architects and academics alike. Bohigas was a professor at the university before being appointed to the office of urban planning in Barcelona's city council and finally becoming one of the main figures of the city's regeneration in the context of the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. The debate about this new model of urban planning, to which authors later referred to as the 'Barcelona Model', had two key lines: First, drawing on an understanding of urban regeneration as 'urban and social laboratory', emphasis is given to citizens' participation as well as to social and local planning practices (Montaner 1992). This line of argument takes into account the important role of the civil society and the prominent position of the neighborhood associations in urban planning during the period of democratic transition (García-Ramon/Albel 2000: 1333). Second, mega events – in particular the upcoming Olympic Games of 1992 – were discussed as motors for urban *revitalization* that is not restricted to the areas of the new-build event

infrastructure, but integrates these areas into a city wide regeneration plan. At that time, urban planning aimed in particular at the revitalisation of abandoned inner-city public spaces and the restructuring of the city wide infrastructure (Montaner 1992: 2??).

Despite of a lively debate between academics and planners at the local level, the international interest in ‘learning from this new planning model’ was marginal during this first period of the Barcelona Model (Gonzales 2011). This has changed in the subsequent decade(s). The urban development in Barcelona in the 1990s, in particular the improvement of urban spaces and the social situation, were perceived as success in economic terms. This in consequence has attracted local, national and even international (academic) attention (Capel 2007). Delegates from all over the world visited Barcelona to learn about is specific form of urban regeneration, in particular planners and real estate investors which were involved in the organization of mega events at other places. Since the late 1990s, a growing number of delegates including planners, students, researchers and city managers visited Barcelona in order to learn about the now famous Barcelona Model (Gonzales 2011), a model that promises to maintain economic prosperity despite public participation.

In this context of international reputation and learning, in the 1990s the practices of urban regeneration in Barcelona were considered ‘best practices’ for other regeneration programs around the world. Despite profound processes of displacement the inner city, still many publications quote Barcelona as a shining example for a ‘socially inclusive regeneration’ (ibid.: 1406).

Driven by a network of different actors such as politicians, NGO’s, and last but not least academics, a picture of a specific Barcelona type of urban policy is drawn and distributed internationally. Academic literature, scientific discourses and researchers from around the world visit the city in order to study Barcelona and the Barcelona Model. Local planners and architects participate in promoting the Barcelona Model (Capel 2007). The Barcelona Model is not a set of theoretical or normative ideas, but rather perceived as an “experience of local management that is recognized internationally” (PIC 2004: 95, translation by the authors; see also a very similar citation of Barcelonas former mayor Pasqual Maragall in Casellas and Pallares-Barbera 2009: 1138). Since the beginning the local administration promoted the model as an

experience other cities can learn from. In academic and scientific publications as well as in political reports and semi-scientific literature published by the city council, the characteristics and ‘secrets’ of the Barcelona Model were discussed. Beside innovation, creativity and strategic planning, citizens’ participation is mentioned as a key characteristic.

Some scholars, however, criticize that the model is far from what it promises and does not implement participation as promised (Degen/García 2012). These authors claim that citizens are not the main beneficiaries of the model, but, according to Capel, are instrumentalized to “admire, consume and remain silent” (Capel 2007, translated by the authors). Gonzalez (2011: 1408) reveals in her empirical study of urban policy tourism that Barcelona was frequently described as an “almost semi-authoritarian governance regime with omniscient local leaders (...); there was no mention of public participation or civic engagement, which contrasted sharply with Barcelona’s external image”. Interviews in the context of own recent research reveal that including local participation in urban planning processes is considered a very useful tool, which, however, is only suitable when there are no concrete existing plans or interests in a specific area (Gomes de Matos 2013). As a counter-movement to mainstream politics, alternative forms of place-based approaches to urban development are co-produced by critical scientist and social movements. This form of knowledge, that claims for true and radical forms of participation, is neglected and ignored by the city’s planners (Gomes de Matos, forthcoming). Local planning in Barcelona is the outcome of ‘uneven power relations between actors engaged in the process [of policy learning, transfer and diffusion]’ and consequently unequal chances to define the Barcelona Model (Gonzales 2011:1399).

Conclusions

According to their own statements, Freiburg and Barcelona are forerunner in implementing participatory instruments in urban planning. Both cities have successfully produce narratives that help legitimizing their position by a selective recourse on events in past. While Freiburg reconnects to the protest movements in the 1970s that today are perceived as an important event for democracy, Barcelona draws on neighbourhood associations that emerged against the anti-democratic regime of the 1970s. Both cities are good examples for a new urban politics aimed at the economization of any resources

of the city: place, space and citizens. Participation therefore becomes an important element of neoliberal urban politics.

The role of academics in both cities is important, as the Barcelona model or the Freiburg charter have been mobilized and promoted around the world. In various academic and scientific publications the successful orientation of urban politics is repeated. In the case of Barcelona, a critical scholarship is addressing the ambivalence of the image of participation, while in Freiburg such publications are still rare.

Academics and researchers play a crucial role in urban planning. They transport and promote, distribute and facilitate urban narratives and images that help politics to legitimize. Moreover, academic publications are perceived and read by politicians, who in return quote and use them as a means to confirm politics. Consequently, urban research is not neutral but heavily involved in defining the direction and the content of urban planning. Few authors are aware of this influence. Still too often, many researchers visit a city for 24-72 hours and just repeat the official statements. Nearly 20.000 researchers visit Freiburg each year. Many of them spend less than 72 hours in the city. Critical research needs time and independency. Critical research also needs critical researchers who are reflecting their position and carefully and critically investigate the contexts of urban politics.

According to Gonzales (2011: 1399), in the last decades cities developed an increasingly positivist perspective on urban development. 'Best practices' play an important role and are widely promoted. It is important that academics and researchers contribute to a more critical view and contemporary urban development and resist the "quick and dirty" research results.

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