Resourceful Cities

Berlin (Germany), 29-31 August 2013

"It is only because of the school. If it was not for the kids, we would have stayed here"

Residential choice in the light of educational aspirations of the Turkish-German middle classes in Berlin.

Christine Barwick

Paper presented at the International RC21 Conference 2013

Session: Education and the City

Department of Urban and Regional Sociology

Humboldt University Berlin /

Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development

Brüderweg 22-14

44135 Dortmund

christine.barwick@ils-forschung.de

Extended Abstract

In recent years more and more studies have been dealing with residential choice and its consequences, of middle class households in the city. One very important factor influencing that choice is the respective area's provision of 'good' schools. Since a good education for the children is the main means of ensuring social reproduction, the question of finding a good school is as important as the choice of a neighborhood.

In contemporary cities with their 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007), and increased economic competition (Ball, 2003: 19; Sassen, 2001; Vogel, 2009), middle class households are under pressure since retaining one's middle class status and transmitting it to the next generation is no longer as self-evident as it has been (according to many authors at least). Hence, middle class members try to avoid contact to unwanted groups, such as from minority ethnic backgrounds and from lower social strata, two dimensions that often overlap.

Research in Great Britain, but also in Germany and other European cities, shows that the white middle classes find ways to pool their social capital and through diverse strategies secure a good education for their children – even in a neighborhood that is not as resource-rich, or that is also home to other, unwanted groups, such as poorer and/or migrant households (Atkinson, 2006; Butler, 2003; Butler and Robson, 2001; Noreisch, 2007a).

Even when people from different classes live in a mixed area, contact between them often remains very limited. Even a general rhetoric of a taste for diversity is hardly translated into daily practices, such as in the form of networks. The avoidance of contact does not only apply to the person herself, but especially to the children. In terms of social reproduction, investment in children's education is crucial in order to lay the foundation for them to retain the middle-class status.

As Atkinson (2006) claimed, the middle classes are conspicuously absent from discussions on how to achieve social mix in neighborhoods. This has somewhat changed in recent years, and the above cited studies impressively show how living in mixed neighborhoods does not lead to mixed networks. In these studies, we see that the white middle classes equally draw boundaries to lower classes but also to migrant groups. Butler (2003: 2484) at least acknowledges that his respondents all belong to the white middle class, and that the non-White middle classes "do not live in largely iconic areas of gentrification amongst people who are choosing to live at the heart of a multiracial city". Although, hence, the middle

classes are meanwhile a prominent 'subject of study', still largely absent are studies that specifically deal with migrant middle classes.

What Butler and Hamnett call the new middle class in the London case "comprises many new entrants, often from minority ethnic groups and often the first in their families and to experience higher education, with ambitions for themselves and especially for their children. (…) unlike the established ranks of the white middle classes (higher and lower) (…), these groups are not well established on chosen career trajectories and their aspirations for a continued upward trajectory come across very strongly in the interviews" (2011: 121)

Hence, there is no reason to believe that finding a good school for the children is of any less importance for ethnic minority groups than it is for the natives, the 'white middle classes'. If there should be any difference at all, it would make sense that the strategy might be of even more importance to migrant groups. They are not yet established middle class, and that in times where social reproduction is by no means a secure process (Butler and Robson 2003: 164; Vincent and Ball 2007: 1074). For social climbers, choosing the right neighborhood – with a good school - is just one part of a "wider strategy of upward social mobility" (Butler and Hamnett, 2011: 101).

Where we might expect differences is in the consequences and / or the range of that choice. For example, research in the U.S. context has shown that Blacks who access majority white places such as college or work "consciously retain their connections to the black world as well; through their interactions in these black spaces, middle-class blacks construct and maintain black racial identities" (Lacy, 2004: 910). These bridges back to the 'black world' are something parents value for their children. A clear spatial encapsulation that avoids contact to 'socially unwanted' as we see it for the white middle classes is hence less likely.

We can expect several reference points for identification that may play a role in residential and school choice processes: on the one hand this may be the social group (based on class; cf. Archer, 2011), on the other hand, it can be the ethnic group (cf. Lacy, 2004; Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 2000; Foroutan and Schäfer, 2009; Foroutan, 2010). In addition there is the issue of discrimination – latent as well as explicit – that has real consequences on choice as well as its consequences (Hütterman, 2009; Sutterlüty and Neckel, 2012) .

With the example of middle class Turkish migrants in Berlin, Germany, I will show that people move out of a resource poor neighborhood mainly because they need to find good schools for their children. Subsequent practical and symbolic neighborhood use differs,

depending on whether or not the person succeeds in finding a neighborhood that still offers an urban atmosphere, characterized by ethnic and social diversity, public familiarity and sociability, and neighborly relations that have a community-like character.