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Many voices but no plan? Planning the city in the field of diverse narratives

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This article discusses the general possibilities of creating knowledge for urban planning. It assumes that planning as all other fields of knowledge production is embedded into the logics of narrative structures. This implies a certain type of knowledge that can be analysed as part of larger narratives of rationality and modernity. In a contemporary sociological understanding these narratives play a function in society and therefore reflect the societal positioning of planning. As programmatic, authoritarian and crisis narratives are dominating the planning field; new forms of knowledge production are yet to be comprehended. The article points out in which way planning will be confronted with new types of knowledge beyond the existing narrative structure and it will discuss what these innovations might imply.

Keywords: narrative, planning, cities

The city has been often compared with a text. This way the city has been described obviously by a metaphorical approach. It is part of the common jargon in architecture and urban planning to use different metaphors for describing, projecting and explaining cities. The use of the metaphor of the text therefore appears not to be of a different kind as metaphorical sentences which formulate the city in terms like “surface”, “stage”, “motor”, “noddle point” and others. The idea that the city is like a text that can be read and further written on however might lead more than other metaphors to more profound reflections on the very basis of knowledge on cities and its dependency of language in general. In this article, the intellectual debate from other fields of academic considerations about the metaphorical character of knowledge is translated to the area of urban studies and planning in particular. With a much focalized reading of some intellectual debates in the humanities about the conditions for creating insights, the very profound idea of knowledge about the “urban reality” is contested. As it will be argued, the assumption of having access and sometimes a professionalized and more privileged knowledge to the reality of the city will be challenged by an alternative attitude which insists on the plurality of approaches to urban life. These approaches, including the professional ones, are however all the same with regard to the “grammar” of its construction that is they are all considered as creating – in one way or the other – a narrative on the city. The very nature of narratives has implications on the perception, representation and creation of



knowledge (Mitchell, 1981). By identifying the narrative character of knowledge production in urban studies, by no means it is intended to state that then the so-created knowledge is irrelevant and fiction only. When observing the role these narratives have in society, the societal functions of them are becoming overwhelmingly clear. Despite their narrative character, these “stories” are imposed to society as a means of construction of reality that is believed to represent reality itself. In the history of urban planning different modes of constructing narratives can be contextualized with regard to the overarching frames of society in which they can either play an authoritarian, programmatic or a conservative role.

In the article, the logic of narratives and its impact on our understanding of the world will be developed first. It will then show which function narratives have in society in general, before applying these insights into the field of planning studies. The article thereby wants to promote a view on planning which leaves discussions behind on the “truth” of different narratives about creativeness, globalization, sustainability etc. It rather argues that all these are narratives which serve societal purposes but do not have a “closer” tight to urban reality than others. In a democratic manner of planning and urban life, the competition of narratives thereby is assumed to be a crucial factor. By focusing on prevalent and at this moment predominate narratives of crisis in all sphere of society and with regard to different aspects of social and political life, it seems to be important to show that they are as well to be understood in their narrative structure and their societal function as narratives.

In stepping away from the pure analysis of the construction of narratives, in a following step the author wants to contextualize the production of knowledge in times of the so called knowledge and information revolution. It is believed that the new forms of interconnectedness have a decisive impact on the creation of contemporary forms of knowledge production. A few mayor aspects will be identified which are deriving from very recent observations in the “knowledge society”. It will be discussed how knowledge on cities could be created in a way that enables planning cities again, beyond the character of its being bound to narrative interpretation and generation.

1. What are narratives?

Despite the fact that the visual appearance of the city seems to be the most direct and unfiltered appearance of urban life, the significance of the visual now appears to be accessible in a way that does not require any kind of pre-given context of understanding. This context mostly derives in different manners and can be composed of various forms of information. It seems to be, in the first place, a matter of knowing more or less about a place so we can understand its meaning more or better. This is the very basic argument for the installation of specialized experts who have the role of safeguarding the particular knowledge about urban space. The enthronization of experts might indeed be an effective manner to elaborate existing knowledge in an abstract process but it apparently is not the result of the existential aspect of the places themselves. In other words, physical and urban spaces do not inherit a knowledge that has to be discovered and decoded. They do not “speak” in one way or the other to the observers. Their significance only exists in the communication among the observers. In this way, the idea of a language of architecture is a misleading phrase as it implies that there is something existing as an objective truth about a place or architectural object that is embedded in the object itself and needs only to be interpreted in a sophisticated approach. If the assumption about the “essentialist” significance of place would be correct, than the understanding of how significances can change over time, because of personal differences and of cultural diversity would be lacking. If a place can be understood without language and communication in a wider sense, but instead by *prima facie* impression than it is impossible to explain why not all observers interpret these objects in the same way.

It is therefore apparent that the act of observation and of giving meaning to a place depends on the communication that has been joined before entering the situation of observation. For the analysis of the construction of meaning in cities and of places it will be thus important to take into consideration that presituative communication has set the frames for the acts of interpretation of concrete places.

Obviously, the logic of creating meaning is a complex individual and social process that cannot be

described in a elaborated manner in this article, as it would be necessary. Still, there are many different wide ranging intellectual debates attached to the question of signification. Nevertheless, it is necessary to shortcut the necessarily more differentiated disputes in the humanities and social sciences about the nature of communication and the way the construction of meaning has to be sketched. As a way forward, it will be suggested to relate the discussion in urban planning and architecture to those intellectual movements which are seemingly offering understandings that are close to the field of urbanism in its practical and analytical proceedings. A review of considerations from those other academic disciplines remains to be undertaken and will open up a critical reflection on the following proposal of thinking.

In line with especially those approaches in philosophy that are often categorized as neo-pragmatism (cp. Swartz, 2009) by authors like Hans Joas or Richard Rorty, the starting point for the explanation of the diversity of significances in the urban observation derives from the insight that there is no way of making a claim about a reality that is not part of the human symbolic system. Looking on mankind in an anthropological manner, than it needs to be recognized that although reality can be accessed in a non-verbal manner by using the given senses, the experience as such remains unimportant if it is not given a particular meaning. Human beings are considered to be – at least in our epoch – destined to sense making. This is apparently true for the daily life activities where an intrinsic logic of realizing objectives occupies most of our time in one or another way. Less apparent, this can be also said to the search of people for giving their life in general some, more general meaning. In many discourses, the assumption can be supported that between those two spheres (daily life and general sense making), the necessity of coherence appears to be crucial. As Bruno Bettelheim (cp. Hanstein-Moldenhauer, 2004) had worked out already long ago, this might be the reason why children need to fairy tales. Other authors who for example looked on how adults tell about their life, have noticed that the desire for autobiographies and the high interests of the public for the biographies of more or less celebrities is driven by the essential need of human beings to construct sense that gives life a coherent meaning (Bruner, 1987). In medical science, the lack of a coherent narrative is regarded as the psychosomatic reason for illness (cp. Gunaratnam, 2009). In literature, many examples are given about how important the finding of words is to rescue people from become insane and to be able to cope with atrocities of the most severe form. Shakespeare's story telling about Laetitia stands out as an example for the fictional narrating, while the writings of Jorge Semprum and his experiences in Buchenwald are a powerful testimony of the break of civilization of today. As all these examples from the wide fields of culture show, meaning is embedded into language not in a loose way but into the communicative act of storytelling. These stories are individually enacted but they are by no means to be regarded as arbitrary tools for sense making. In fact they are produced as "narratives" and need to be understood as paradoxical result of modernization.

Especially for the modern man, experiences are bearing less immediate understanding and consequently less importance. Modernity can be seen as a process where the symbolic interpretation of life becomes a crucial act of self-constitution. In a very contrastive perspective, the traditional society might be described as offering an understanding that does not require a kind of individual sense making, the emergence of the modern society can be characterized by its plurality of possible roles and its pressure on individuals to not delegate responsibility to external forces but to proclaim the emancipation of those forms of manipulation. With the European tradition of Enlightenment the responsibility for one's own intelligence lies in the hand of the person itself. This requests the reconstruction of existing narratives which has meant the appearance of the intellectual in a classical sense as writer in the 18th century. Victor Hugo or Charles Dickens and later other authors in Europe have soon discovered their role as not only describing contemporary and thereby urban life, but telling thereby a story that served the public to find new ways to give orientation in the chaotic days of early modern Paris or London. These narratives are at the same time real and fiction. They only "work" as they deliver an adaptable narrating of the life that the public sees developing in front of their eyes. The fictional part of it offers a possible way in the narrated city that the reader potentially could choose, like not following the rules. It is therefore also the birth place of detective stories as Edgar Allan Poe famously was celebrated for at that time. This fiction serves as reconfirmation for the reader that it is better to not follow a different track.

The construction of narratives in literature allows understanding their societal nature. They are part of the

more profound attempt of the modern reader to find orientation in a society which burdens each individual with the task of sense making. Society organizes sense-making in a way that routinizes these mental needs by defining roles (author, publisher, reviewer, reader and more) in its organizationally aspect and content wise. The more they seem to be close to reality the better they work. First of all, it is the genuine structure of narratives which are convincing readers of its truthfulness. This is especially grounded in the parallel order of time. Life and books have a beginning and an end. But this is at the same time a reduction of complexity, as nothing really happens in life with a clear starting point (On which day did you start to learn to read?) and endings are appearing before they come visible for which cancer is the frightening counter-experience. Time lines in stories thereby serve as lessening the complexity of (urban) life as do the personages described in them. Narratives thereby establish a limited set of actors, define their roles and set the agenda of the problems that they have to cope with. With these forms of lessened complexities, in sum, narratives enabling the mostly emotional and unconsciousness reflection of existing options how to make sense in modern life. They serve as defining problems, roles, expectations and are limiting the perception on what needs to be part of the story and what not. Attempts in modern literature to break with the limitations of narratives are today highly appreciated by literature connoisseurs and regarded as classics like James Joyce work on Dublin or Döblins Alexanderplatz, but their montage technique which breaks the timeline-structure to some extent, have never found a broader audience. Apparently those more avant-garde narratives do not serve the societal need for enabling decision making for the most people.

2. Narratives of planning

With the focus on the “narrative part” of modern life, urban planning and architecture in the modern city need to be recontextualised in some most profound directions. A call for the recognition of the narrative character of urban planning does not imply to suggest just another sort of narrative but to more profoundly argue in favor of future analysis of planning with regard to its principal and sociological foundation as acts of communication. To avoid any kind of misunderstanding, it has to be underlined that such an attempt does not argue in favor of existing theoretical approaches metaphorizing the city in one way or another. Another misleading idea would be to reduce the insight on the nature of society as being narratively constructed to merely the assumption that communication has influences on how planning is organized. In a more radical manner, the basic point of departure of a planning analysis in the light of the “narrative turn” implies that there is no alternative thinkable to the fact that all human activities are symbolic acts and create meaning only in the field of the communicative interpretation of these acts. For most of the existing approaches in urban planning, this will mean a profound blow. The underlying understanding of planning is that we can organize a cause-and-effect relationship with the reality outside of the communicative space. A plan in this way of thinking can be only – in different ways and to varying levels of outcome - realized or not. This idea of planning is correct in that regard that plans effect reality but it leaves unclear what reality is. In other words, the activities of planning are only understood in their intentions if they are embedded into symbolic representations that are communicated. Planning activities are always part of a larger communicative setting. The idea of a plan itself is the construct of a consensus that is pre-given that not only defines the reading of the legend but the meaning of planning itself.

Narratives of planning in general are not different than other narratives. The provocation of this thought lies in the fact that there are fictive and imaginary sides of planning which the tradition of rational planning would not have systematically reflected on. In the long run of proposing a planning philosophy which serves enlightened intentions, planning tries to avoid any kind of subjective, arbitrary or not-rational motives which would disable effectiveness and objectiveness. The history of this rational approach in the modern science world shows however that the prerogative of objectiveness is a narrative in itself. What it partly covers without any intention to do so or what it partly defends with a democratic legitimation is the question of power and its relation to the selection of certain narratives in favor of others. A longer argument needs to be worked out here, to place this insight into the analysis of the historical longitude of narratives and their persistence beyond biographical or situational importance. This thought can be linked



to the *gouvernementalité* that Foucault was considering (cp. 2003). Sociologically, the contemporary meaning of narratives in planning needs to be seen in the actual field – to use a metaphor of Pierre Bourdieu – of social forces as well, so that individual narrative in planning can be regarded as a societal part of the individual habitus that goes beyond pure personal experience.

It is especially in urban planning that narrative forms of knowledge production are predominant as they are reproducing the time line logic as in literature. Planning can hardly be thought of without the sequencing of different activities. The before-and-after-schemes of planning are seemingly not to overcome. It is therefore that Ruth Finnegan (1998) underlined that planning is intrinsically representing a story telling about the city that is based on binary codes. Besides the time lining, romantic evaluations of urban life are at the core of planning. The romanticism lies in the necessary judgment on the identification of perspectives to the better. No planning can be conceptualized that does not want to lead out of the dark to a better future. The narration of planning thereby implies a magical and partially mystical part as it cannot exist without any kind of dared idea about the future. In how far prediction about the future can be based on scientific knowledge remains not reflected and taken rather for granted, as the narrative of science seems to be the only plausible one that lessens the burden of simplifying complex realities to time lines. This process of simplification however makes planning narratives vulnerable for critic in a way that alternative planning narratives cannot simply be discussed but have to be accepted as more innovative because their using new magical words which are not to be found in the up-to-then existing narratives. New narratives (“gentrification”, “Zwischenstadt”, “creative city”, “smart city” etc.) are breaking ground not because of a more sophisticated understanding of certain aspects of urban life but rather as a result of an emerging new elite representing new powerful social groups. The new narrations are remaining vague and are often based on the story telling of single cities. The role of the new elites consists in the generalization of these local experiences and the interpretation of this general narrative in other local contexts.

Planning studies and theories so far have paid little attention to the narrative structure of their field of research. There are different reasons to be mentioned to explain this obvious lack. Here it should be mentioned only that many discussions in planning journals and at conference are trying to contribute to one or the other narrative, applying them to a certain case area or are critically rejecting one narrative in favor of another. Often, the discussion about the narrative structure of planning is opposed by the wish of many discussants to be “close” to practice and an analysis on a level of meta-theorization is regarded as complicating participation in planning processes. As a consequence, there is little self-observation in a systematic way about the similarities and differences about the prevalent narratives in planning. For a further research in this direction, however, it might be helpful to distinguish between programmatic, authoritarian and crisis narratives. The later will be given more attention here as it has become the overarching discourse since the threatening crash of the financial markets and the Euro crisis. These categorizations are argued for as they might give orientation with regard to the different roles and embedding they have and, at the same time, what kind of society they represent. In a rough manner, authoritarian and programmatic narratives differ mostly with regard to the free competition of narratives in a society. Programmatic narratives are presented by one part of society which either newly emerged with a single topic that has been so far neglected or was of lesser importance, or it needs to be seen as an attempt of a competition about the leading voice in planning and architecture. Since the appearance of single issue movements in the late seventies, the programmatic narratives have meant a step away from authoritarian narratives and authoritarian forms of planning. It has been proven successfully that single issue movements and elites can enter the upper level of society and planning if they are not attempting to “take it all” but look for their space in the governance structures existing. Although often claiming a “turn” and more ambitious ideas of change, social, environmental, gender, feminist, gay and other minority groups have been able to more or less extent to join planning discourses but generally have not altered the grand narrative of modern planning. In the later nineties however the programmatic narratives came less from up-to-then underrepresented social movements but from rather powerful groups of experts, councilors, academics, private business and growth coalitions. In short, narrating the city became a business and many social groups who firstly argued for narrative competition now see that more

resourceful elites use the opening of the planning discourse for their particular interests. Academics are – sometimes unwillingly and unconsciously – a crucial role in it. In the years 2000, the construction on local identity politics as a way to sell the city in marketing and promotional terms sometimes is the only area where the competition on the best programmatic narrative has been left. It is apparent that little or no deliberative element can be found in that. In cases where as in Germany many cities have undertaken broad discussions on their urban narrative (Leitbild), the results have had nearly no practical outcome and the narratives were replaced by simple slogans (City of Science Göttingen, Documenta Stadt Kassel, Green city Hamburg etc.). These narratives are constructed to give legitimation for single projects or for public support for one particular field of urban life, mostly in economy or culture. The critical discussion about programmatic narratives remains as an all-including narrative no longer appears to be realistic, although their rhetoric always to the “bonum commune” and pretends to be positive for all. Programmatic narratives therefore are creating a myth, as they are hiding the fact that the programmatic approach always legitimizes a choice between different options and consequently creates winners and losers. No one asks about the future of those people who are not creative in the “creative city”-discourses. When priority is given to, for example, culture investment, how can social burdens existing or newly created by this narrative be buffered? A new narrative implies a shift in the public spending priorities. This is exactly the point of critic possible than for the next narrative or the next elite group with their narrative, demasking the existing as too expensive, not in the benefit for all and as being ineffective. In this way, programmatic narratives could become measurable and the merging of programmatic narratives is possible, if political arenas are present to syncretize competitive narratives. Modern societies however are always at risk, that these forms of competition are set to an halt when narrative elites are having the chance to define the role of the competition and thus declaring newly arriving narratives as “irrational”, “illogical”, “not scientifically”, “too expensive” and so forth. If a political culture of a city monolithically believes in the modern narrative of progress than paradoxically it starts to produce its own idiosyncrasies and tries to systematically exclude factors that could disturb the simplification of the time line of modern planning, always improving urban life. Authoritarian narratives are trying to convince the public with a very precise and at the same time total planning. Master plan and detailed plan are the two sides of the same coin. As part of the rational planning however these plans remain strangely vague when it comes to the argument of planning at all. While programmatic planning is required to make a better argument in competition with others, the authoritarian planning avoids this kind of competition in either not giving any kind of reasoning – why does Stuttgart 21 really needs an underground station, why Istanbul a third bridge – or they remain mystically unclear and there is glance in the eyes of politicians and planers when they talk about it. The authority does not stem from argument but rather from their centralized role as having a better access to and understanding of the urban realities than the general public has. Like mystical priests, a promise for a better life (Slogan of the Shanghai expo: Better life, better city) is given which cannot be measured and does not proliferate us with potential criteria for controlling the fulfillment. Today’s most authoritarian planning narratives can be found in the area of techno determined planning as it is the case of the e-city or smart city.

3. The crisis narrative

A third category of narratives appears to be of a different kind and becomes increasingly important. Since the reports of the “Club of Rome” and the recognition of the ecological limits of growth, the impression that the modern societies are undergoing a more or less visible phase of crisis, have become a powerful narrative. The visibility of the crisis is subject of permanent reflection and has become a kind of constant subtle emotional background which steps forward from time to time. The narrative of crisis is, as also programmatic and authoritarian narratives are, not a narrative of planning as such, rather is planning deeply embedded into it. It is important to underline that this is not simply a reaction of planning departments on fiscal limitations that are occurring when a crisis is declared. Of course, this is happening as well and this part of the crisis narrative is the most sensible for actors in the field of planning. What

remains without much reflection is the fact that the narrative of crisis is the very basis of planning in general, as it is part and consequence of the modern narrative from the beginning.

This becomes obvious when a closer look on the idea of “planning” is taken in the history of modern ideas. When in the year 1755 the city of Lisbon was destroyed by an earthquake and presumably more than 100,000 people lost their lives and daylong fire bursts destroyed the Portuguese capital in a horrible manner, the foundations of the European intellectual world were also trembled. Due to the then arriving public sphere in the European capitals and beyond, the reports about this disaster were the first which required a narrative of understanding and explanation. Not before has a broader European public been informed about such a tragedy beyond national borders. What is apparent is that the reports did not only lead to intellectual reactions of Goethe, Voltaire, Kant und Lessing, but that the intention to report on something that lies far beyond the world of experience so far appeared only in fairy tales and even Goethe asked (in a rhetoric way) in his “Faust” why one should take note of those faraway people of Turkey. Reporting about the Lisbon earthquake was already the result of a new narrative in Europe which sought to construct concrete reports to exercise the new way of reflecting sense making. In the 18th century, the narrative of the ancien regime faded out slowly and the request for a new way of giving sense to the individual and common life grew stronger. Natural catastrophes were for Voltaire and others the sign for the lack of the intellectual authority of the aristocrats and the church as they cannot explain why within a few minutes time such a disaster can happen. A call for modern and rational explanations of earthquakes and natural disasters in general would be more adequate and so the reasoning was given for seismography and geography to be developed. The starting point for rational explanation was motivated by the belief that nature and its horrors can be tamed and controlled. Science needed to be seen as a tool for human planning that overcomes the tragedies caused by nature. Still, the optimistic belief and the positive effects of scientific approaches rests in the hope that human suffering can be lessened or even avoided. Rational planning is in this regard not different from medicine and engineering. What followed historically seemed to support the optimistic view on the rational abilities deriving from scientific approaches, so that we can say that people are no longer without protection in the face of disasters and catastrophes. Obviously many products of disaster planning and management are seemingly helpful in the event of catastrophes. The rational narrative has produced a broad vocabulary of rescue plans, flight points, emergency stations etc. The financial part for the infrastructure that is part of this narrative can be regarded as impressive also. In many planning projects, the prerogatives for these kinds of spatial arrangements are given highest priority. The narratives of crisis, catastrophe and disaster have been little contested since the early days of its establishment after the Enlightenment and rationality have become the mayor narratives of the modern society. In a way they can be understood as variations of the same grand narration on the idea of a society that can be planned and controlled not to suffer from nature. The ecological critic that the idea of controlling nature has the perverse effect of destroying the natural basis of human life conditions, did not alter the predominance of it, as the critic is integrated by beliefs in more effective technologies. The sociological reflection, most prominently by Ulrich Beck (1986), showed that the idea that the rationalization of life can be further uphold and that only the “side effects” needs to be targeted, however, leaves out the omnipresence of risks deriving from a technological construction of our world.

The emergence of the “risk society” emphasizes the transformation of crisis into risks the basic rationale remains the same. Both, crisis and risks are part of a larger narrative that human behavior is the basic factor to be controlled. The notion of probability, introduced by the enlightened science in general, goes to the extreme as it puts responsibility of the taming of and coping with crisis on the individual. The risk thereby dissolving the communality that crisis situation are mostly implying. Having failed to calculate risks can have disastrous consequences for individual and they have to learn to manage the probability balances every day. Passing the street now, taking up this mortgage now, marrying this partner etc. This reasoning is permanently repeating individual risk balancing which in case of failure can be harmful. A crisis however is not based on this risk individualization but constructs a narrative for ordering a socially interrupted functionality. As in modern society, functionalities are constantly reshaped and thereby creating “disorder”, the crucial question is when, why and by whom such a situation can be defined as “crisis”. The alternatively available narrative of risks that identifies personal responsibility needs to be set



apart. This implies that “disorder” cannot be traced back to one or the other decision or responsible person. The appearance of a “crisis” therefore needs a surprising starting point, the narrative starts as a hard boiled noir film with the scene of the victim lying on the ground. What now needs to be done is qualified as “reaction” and “emergency”. There is no alternative to calling the doctor and trying to save her – it is mostly a beautiful woman who is in danger. For establishing the crisis narrative this moment of a shared understanding of the situation is decisive. It is a shared situation which individual victims. The role division in this narrative needs to be implied without ambiguity. The observers, the victims and the forces of rescue are narrowing down the complexity of the role diversity of the citizen. The implications of the crisis narrative are manifold, in principal it can be said however that an intrinsic logic is followed that leads to the restoration of the challenges social order. In this way, the crisis narrative serves as a kind of conservatism especially for existing authoritarian ways of planning. It stops the competition on what the best planning narrative would be and reemphasizes believe in the rationale of modernity and the control of nature, even when it is about social crisis. Moral support for the identified victims, increasing research on technological solutions and the assumption of potential warning systems are sophisticating the rule of the challenged narrative. As Martin Voss (2006) worked out, the narrative of crisis follows always a well know dramatology: Missed warnings, growing thread, underestimated impact, dramatic rescue, difficult restoration and finally emphasis on prevention. In this sequencing, the discussion of alternative ways of planning is systematically excluded. This narrative is so convincing because it might be the deepest rooted way of telling a story about suffrage in life. The crisis has not altered the experience of the catastrophe as it is mystically narrated in the antique world. Earth, Olymp and Hades have been regarded as unsepartely space which unites human life, the empire of the gods and the underworld. Catastrophes have been the moments where a sudden event (katastrophein) – for which the individual was not responsible – felt from one part of the world into the other. This led to permanent fear and mystical rituals. Alternatively the Greek drama offered a form of symbolical rescue which the individual could use to find a symbolic release. In the same manner, the contemporary narratives of crisis are constructing a line of storytelling that mountains in a dramatic moment. Emotional participation is ensured this way and the heroes of rescue can be followed as allowing the observers to let them act in an Ersatz way. Today, the stages of the drama are televised or blogged. The drama of the global spectacle allows us paradoxically to further pursue a life of “normality” where the social order in general needs not to be changed. In this regard the crisis narrative destroys the very precious moment of acts and feelings of solidarity which often happening in times of catastrophe and which bear potentially the chance for creating a more solidary city and society (Solnit, 2009). Instead, the dramatization of the crisis offers quick release by letting the heroes succeed and cleaning thereby the fears of the observers in an act of classical theatre (katharsis).

Knowledge today

The development of new information and communication technologies as such does not alter the structure of knowledge creation. Furthering, it will remain observable that the grand narratives of society are proceeding to be more detailed and sophisticated by these new means. Overoptimistic estimations of the liberties given by facebook and google etc. have certainly no longer backing when the interference with the existing state and market forces is seriously taken into account. While rejecting any kind of naïve technodeterminism, the opposite assumption that with these new technologies society loses its democratic basis might also be missing the point. What can we really observe so far about the consequences about the vast emerging knowledge society? It goes beyond the scope of this article to work out any systematic answer. What cannot be ignored that for both tendencies in modernity, which is: for a more emancipatory and at the same time a more authoritarian way of politics, there is evidence. The situation can be rather described by this very ambitious “use” of the new media.

When looking at the prominent examples of the last years like the Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring and the Brazilian and Turkish protest movements, one is likely to forget that these kind of social uprising have occurred in the West since the early eighties with the Peace Movement, then later with the Fall of the Socialist system and the tragedies of Tianmen Square and elsewhere. Without oversimplifying all these movements and their different agendas and coalitions of actors, it remains however a clear distinction to



the class struggle of the modern society. This has been noticed early by Manuel Castells who now looked on the contemporary movements in this way: „There were first a few, who were joint by hundreds, then networked by thousands, then supported by millions with their voices and their internal quest for hope, as muddle as it was, that cut across ideology and hype, to connect with the real concerns of the real people in the real human experience that had been reclaimed. It began on the internet social networks, as these are spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations (...) By sharing the sorrow and hope in the free public space of the Internet, by connecting to each other (...) individuals formed networks (...) They came together.” (Castells, 2012, 14). With different graduation, certain aspects can be regarded as genuine parts of a transforming world society which is enacted by a subtle „participatory revolution“ based on a demand for direct democracy, postmaterial values, pragmatic issues (often only one) and a reanimation of the urban realm. Seen as a weakness, these movements seldom have charismatic leaders (which they often refuse consciously), no wider range of subjects and they do not integrate into the existing political system as “opposition”. It might take long but in this way, the impact on the logic of diffusion knowledge is altered in a more profound way. The new information and communication technologies jump into the altered scheme of knowledge production. The creation of new social networks, forms of exchange and the omnipresence of “information” – which needs to be differentiated from knowledge – are firing on the process of creating a different kind of society, but they are not their origin. What can be observed is that these movements are most prominent urban and especially there powerful where middle class societies are left to seek a new narrative after they have achieved what the classical modernity offers as “happy ending”: house, family, money. Sense making with this cliché modernity of shopping malls and gated communities apparently is not sufficient. Contemporary knowledge production is not simply proceeding by getting a formerly modern education and access to information. Knowledge today becomes embedded into the personality of the individual where it creates a superdiversity of options to progress with the question of making sense of life. The knowledge city in this perspective is not characterized by an economic predominance of those branches producing high tech or information equipment. It is rather a place where people construct a billion of new narratives with a new scheme of telling it. The dimensions of these new schemes are: Firstly, it is a personalized manner of reproducing oneself as a profile on the net, for various other opportunities and as a bearer of a life story. Secondly, this narrative schemes are local. This implies that the reterritorialisation of generally available ways of seeing the world becomes a necessary act of constructing one’s own biography. It needs to be legitimized why one lives here (and not somewhere else), what that exactly means and how it fits into the profile everybody claims to be self-constructing. Thirdly, this knowledge production is urban. This means that it is highly mobile and does not continue on existing knowledge traditions but praises itself to be an outcome of meeting the others in the city, meaning: that it synthesizes the knowledge of especially those who are different. The new social networks are the most tangible aspect of it but the urban lifestyle in general functions as a motor for the permanent incorporation of otherness into the personal understanding of the city and oneself. Synthesis rather than specialization creates the innovative aspect of the urbanity of knowledge (cp. Wood, 2013). Fourthly, knowledge is something that is no longer a mere abstract „know about“ or „know how“, but it becomes an experience and a feeling. It is more correct to say that the city is transforming the feelings of the narrative - as the drama in the crisis narrative, which overwhelms as, control and clarifies fear and unites as a community - into the emotionalisation of the city (Eckardt, 2013). In this regard, emotions are individualized offers of communication to other people and not directed to form “knowledge communities”. Knowledge as emotion is personally directed and incorporated. It is a form of movement and depends on the act of synchronization with other bodies. In sum, knowledge today appears to be partially still pre-schematized by the existing grand narratives of modernity, rationality and technology. A few counter or alternative narratives have altered important parts of this master narrative like the sustainability or ecological narrative has done. More profound changes in the knowledge production seem to occur from the ongoing radicalization of modernity which leads to a knowledge production that explodes by the processes of individualization, localization, re-urbanisation, emotionalisation and incorporation.

4. Planning beyond narratives

As it has been made clear in this article, the contemporary situation in many fields of urban planning can be characterized by a contradictory and paradoxically observation. On the one hand side, there seems to be a wide opening door for enabling more participatory and direct way of planning. Citizens in the most diverse cities like Belo Horizonte, Stuttgart, Istanbul, Alexandria, Madrid and others have raised their voice for alternative views on the sense of planning. On the other hand, these protests do not critically review the existing narratives of modern planning as such. Mostly, to say this in a much generalized way of observation, they are arguing for a competition of narratives: schools according to FIFA standards in Brazil, a Taksim square for public life and not for shopping etc. Paradoxically, the overall narratives in many (Western) societies can be characterized as a crisis narrative which is then translated into urban frames by reducing the impact of narrative competition and thereby reestablish authoritarian planning. Restraining from the idea of a “hidden agenda” and all-explaining meta narratives, at least for the moment these contradictions and paradoxes might be left further unregarded. What might be more interesting to be discussed, what is really new in the long lasting participatory development in the progressed modernity. Here, there are new forms of knowledge production to be identified which partly allows to create insights into city life beyond the modern narratives of progress, conflict and community. The embodied, personalized and radically individual manner of knowledge production which we can see developing to some extent in all cities around the world, surely complicates the formulation of a new planning approach. What seems to be more the consequence of trying to understand this phenomenon, is that planning needs to be understood as a more personalized, emotion sensitive, body oriented field of communication which seeks tools for enabling experiences of connectivity, for learning from individuals on how to move in the city, and integrate the various narratives into one single life time that follows its own pattern of sense making. A new agenda for planning interrupts the competition of narratives as it includes this form of knowledge from everyday life in the unknown city of knowledge. The knowledge on how to plan the city is “out there” and not part of any kind of selective new form of telling about the city. In this way, the preparation for danger and to cope with risks is something that also is already developed by citizens but of course in their different margins of maneuver. The planning institutes have to get knowledge about the different ways of these risk management strategies. “Muddling through” might be the most important part for planners to learn from the citizens. It can be assumed that the identification of patterns and rituals the citizens develop will be a good starting point. The danger is thereby that planning cannot rest with a one time-shot on these patterns but need to closely communicate their observation and in this way opening up chances for alternations. If to avoid the reintroduction of authoritarian narratives, this communication needs to be self-reflective and transparent about the ideas of the planners about the sense of their doing.

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