

Introduction: Globalization, unification and the changing politics of cities

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Manuel Castells has argued that “cities and spaces are unfinished products of historical debates and conflicts involving meaning, function and form” (1983:318). This observation encapsulates the notion of the city as a political space serving as an arena of ongoing struggles over power, resources and identities, as well as the space where the “Other” is encountered. The importance of these issues has increased with the growing influence of globalization. This special issue of *Hagar* summarizes a two-day international seminar on this topic, which took place at Ben Gurion University in May 2005.¹ The group of scholars gathered at the seminar focused on globalization and political unification in cities as two interconnected processes that have characterized the changing politics of cities over the last two decades.

The participants’ presentations demonstrated varied attitudes stemming from diverse academic disciplines, including geography, political science, planning, anthropology and sociology. All the discussions, however, placed considerable emphasis on the centrality of the urban in the ongoing political, economic and social dynamics that impact the process of globalization. This was dominant not only in theoretical discussions, but also in the variety of case studies referring to the socio-spatial results of globalization and unification, which are often considered as positive moves towards progress.

As a theoretical basis of the workshop, all participants were familiar with the recent academic discussion of globalization and urban space based on the work of scholars like Saskia Sassen (1991, 1994, 1998, 1999), Marcuse and van Kempen (2000), Manuel Castells (1997) and Peter Taylor (1994, 2000), to mention but a few. The significant contribution of these and other writers is in the analysis of globalization as a major factor in the production of urban space. Related to this analysis is the notion that an

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alternative network of strategic urban nodes produces a new economic, social and geographical order (and thus new centers and marginalities), which intersects national boundaries.

A focal point of this literature is the economic dimension of globalization and its effects on cities. One approach links the process of globalization to the growth of neo-liberal economies, seen as an indication of the end of national hegemony (Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999). This shift highlights the role of the "free market" in determining social relations and is thus seen as less (if at all) affiliated with the "old" national interests of advancing class or ethnic elites. A central argument of this approach is that the new global economy is borderless and empowers new efficient technologies, the creation of global consciousness (Castells, 1997) and the end of the nation-state and its territorial sentiments. Yet, as Newman (2006) has argued, this statement is inaccurate; while globalization does enable some cross-border flows (cyberspace and capital, for instance), borders still characterize our social and political hierarchy and are still part of our daily lives.

Indeed, contrary to this theory stands the claim that borders and territoriality are not diminishing. Rather, new scales of territorial affiliations and borders are recognizable, which may be flexible but are still selective. In other words, while discussing globalization and space in general, and in urban settings in particular, it is important to note that while borders are the very location of capital flow and labor power, they are also points of control expressing "moral panic about strangers and immigrants." Thus, they reflect "the contradictions of borders and boundaries in the age of global capital" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:34-35).

A more critical view of globalization places in doubt the promise of global forces to disconnect the market mechanism from the political structure of the nation-state, calling for a reexamination of the cultural dimension and everyday life within the global context (Brenner, 1999). Brenner's statement exposes the interrelations between cities and globalization: in the process of globalization, cities become the venue of a variety of ethnic groups, contrary to the relative provincial homogeneity, and thus produce transnational urbanism. An example of this process is the scope of transformation in urban niches where different ethnic groups (migrants or workers) are located and construct their everyday life in the city. The geographical location of these ethnicities is indicative of the correlation between the socioeconomic hierarchy and the quality of the urban environment.

Interestingly enough, the demographic heterogeneity of cities also appears in cases where strong ethno-national policies are still dominant (Tzfadia et al., 2005). This observation suggests the necessity to compare micro-scale transformations in different national contexts. This was one of the tasks of this special issue, which aims to reveal changes in urban landscapes following the process of globalization and to examine the production of new spatial and social forms and organizations, as well as the appearance of new internal and external borders.

This theme is discussed by Tovi Fenster and Ilan Vigel in their article, "Globalization, sense of belonging and the African community in Tel Aviv-Jaffa." The authors explore the establishment of a transnational urban experience by the African labor migrant communities in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. The paper focuses on the communal organization and spatial location of the African churches in the city and the way in which a multi-layered and flexible identity and sense of belonging are constructed around them. The new social networks are presented through the strong ties between these churches in Tel Aviv and the global network of African churches. This global network, argue Fenster and Vigel, is based not on capital or communication technologies, like other global networks, but rather on solidarity, belonging and shared religious, cultural and organizational norms. The case of the African workers in Tel Aviv contributes to the study of transnational urbanism by raising the issue of belonging, which is not necessarily a coherent and solid aspect of local identity. Rather, it may be a sense of temporary attachment that is full of contradictions, saturated in feelings of rejection and otherness.

Ethnic heterogeneity and cultural differences are characteristic of globalizing cities (Sandercock, 1998), and hence the ethnocentric national vision of purified urban spaces is doubtful (Sibley, 1995). This situation challenges many of the norms that shape urban policy and planning. It calls for a different focus, one which takes into consideration the city's variety of images, perceptions and social constructions as articulated by different users and actors (Fenster and Yacobi, 2005). Planners, politicians and "bottom-up" urban movements are reconsidering issues such as belonging, the reconstruction of symbols that attach individuals to collectives and, in more contested contexts, the organization of protest actions and political struggles in order to achieve a sense of place in the city.

This contested nature of cities is discussed by Laurie King-Irani, who deals with the consequences of global political and economic transformations and their accompanying regional and local repercussions (in the form of governmental, non-governmental and private actors and organizations). King-Irani examines the ambitious and multifaceted renovation plans for Nazareth, the largest all-Palestinian city in Israel, and for Beirut, the war-ravaged and divided capital of Lebanon. In "The millennial Medina: Discourses of time, space and authenticity in projects to market and renovate Beirut and Nazareth," she argues that, although the two projects were set in very different political and administrative contexts, both have relied on similar strategies and rhetoric. Each gave rise to similar unintended political consequences, such as totalizing discourses, polarized identities, growing class disparities and heightened conflicts that have troubled the temporal, sociopolitical and cultural definitions of each city. Linking her argument to the process of globalization, King-Irani shows how both Nazareth and Beirut illuminate some troubling unintended aspects of unification: the potential to silence, disenfranchise and alienate while creating new subtle divisions embodied less in physical and spatial barriers than in changing social structures and altered cognitive maps of each city.

Discourses and practices of socio-spatial division are an inherent part of present urban processes. Erez Tzfadia, in his review of the “*Hafrada*” (Separation) exhibition, suggests that, despite the rhetorical promise of globalization and European unification, separation remains apparent in urban life. Furthermore, he adds, separation becomes even less flexible due to globalization and unification—as both contribute to increasing socioeconomic gaps between ethno-classes. In a similar vein, Olga Demetriou proposes that the idea of “division” is a major point of reference in Cypriot conceptualizations of the political. In “Freedom Square: The unspoken reunification of a divided city,” she demonstrates how Cypriot political subjectivity allows an exploration of “the conflict” as a concept that structures everyday life. Through a detailed study of different nodes in Nicosia, Demetriou presents a set of locations in the city where the “division” is experienced in different ways. By so doing, she reveals how these experiences construct and normalize what is universally considered an abnormal situation.

A central geopolitical phenomenon related to globalization is the expansion of the European Union’s influence. Existing critical literature tends to agree that, in many European cities such as Vienna, Lisbon and Bilbao (Moulaert et al., 2003), the links between unification, globalization and social polarization have become clear. Similar to other globalizing cities in North America, global urban processes in such European cities as Paris, Amsterdam, Barcelona and Frankfurt are apparent both spatially and demographically, forming ethnic enclaves of “invisible” urban inhabitants; these are the migrants that live and work in the city, some of them illegally (Schnell and Alexander, 2002; Sassen, 1994, 1998). In this context, Swyngedouw et al. (2003:264) argue that urban development projects have above all filled the gap “for the higher middle-class real estate and consumption-good markets, but not for the other, usually poorer and/or immigrant sections of the urban population.” In contrast, urban policies and planning in cities with a more welfare-state oriented intervention, such as Copenhagen (although it, too, is undergoing dramatic transformations), reveal some tendencies which are more inclusive.

This special volume discusses the effects of globalization and unification, as interconnected political norms, on two major European cities: Brussels and Berlin. Both cities are characterized by a past (and present) contested history, ethnic and class differences, spatial division and significant symbolic meaning. In “Europeanization and socio-spatial polarization in Brussels,” Mathieu Van Criekingen deals with the “Europeanization” of Brussels, that is, the clustering of major EU institutions and a vast array of EU-related transnational protagonists in the city over the second half of the twentieth century. This process has thoroughly transformed the role of the city on a global scale, as well as its urban environment. Van Criekingen studies the interaction between the Europeanization process and existing socio-spatial and political configurations in the city. He points out that Europeanization is largely responsible for the increasing socio-spatial polarization in Brussels, notably through labor market restructuring and office and housing market dynamics. This outcome is linked to the

lack of a strategic and democratically negotiated form of governance of the EU and its transnational presence in Brussels.

In the next article, Hartmut Häussermann explores in retrospect the economic, social and spatial aspects of the transformation of Berlin from a divided to a united city. In his essay, "Berlin: From divided into fragmented city," he points out that the dramatic loss of economic functions in Berlin, caused by spatial isolation and ongoing threats during the Cold War, could not be reversed after unification. Only its function as the political capital of Germany has been restored. This leads to growing social problems and increasing poverty, paralleled by an increasing spatial segregation of the poor and the migrant population.

The transformation of European cities following globalization has some additional aspects which are often neglected. One such aspect is tourism, discussed by Mathis Stock in "European cities: Towards a 'recreational turn'?" Stock argues that tourism and recreation are essential features of many European cities, and should be considered as such in urban studies. Ignoring the role of tourism in urban studies is an obstacle to the analysis of cities. Through this discussion Stock re-thinks the notion of "cohabitation" in globalizing cities, and thus challenges the discourse that gives city residents priority over the "stranger," the "temporary inhabitant" or the "outsider," pointing to new social and spatial forms, where residents of a given city are the temporary inhabitants of other cities.

To sum up this introductory essay, I would suggest that the collection of articles in this issue emphasize the inherent tension of globalization. On the one hand, the nature of the urban in general, and the globalizing city in particular, is to be the locus of citizenship, where there are "multiple levels of citizenship as well as multiple levels of common destiny, from the city to the nation to trans-national citizenship possibilities" (Sandercock, 1998:183). On the other hand, although the cities analyzed in this special issue have all undergone major transformations following globalization "from above," as well as "from below" (Yacobi and Shechter, 2005), these are not detached from the "old" social and political structures, but rather stem from their historic structural-spatial division.

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