EUI Working Papers

SPS No. 2007/04

The City without Qualities
Political Theories of Globalization in European Cities

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Abstract

While urban political economy tends to generalize the functional economic pressures upon socio-political transformations of cities, European research has stressed the importance of historical context and political institutions. Both perspectives' references to urban culture imply either an economization or an essentialization of urbanity, and thus an underconceptualization of political agency. Whether defined economically, politically, or socio-culturally, most research of cities implies – more or less implicitly - a common ideal of urbanity which lies in the integration potential of plural societies. Urbanity, the spatialized ideal of modernity, and cities, its contextual realizations in place, are the two complementary sides of a reflective process which is locally specific as well as globally entangled. At least to enable a counterfactual to either the economic-functionalist globalization hypothesis or the historic-culturalist European assumption, empirical research should conceptualize this urban process as plural, contextual, and thus open-ended collective action. To approach the structure and agency aspects of urban culture in mediating state transformation, the debates about new institutionalism, social movements, and modernity serve to conceptualize a comparative framework of urban politics beyond the European context. Instead of adding yet another competing model or even a 'meta-model', the 'City without Qualities' aims to reduce the complexity of the contemporary urban debate by dismantling some of the fashionable urban 'buzzwords' to their basic analytical concepts

Keywords

Contents:

1. The urban debate: in search of global modernity

Robert Musil's 'Man without Qualities' illustrated how, the feeling of crisis characterizing Viennese society at the end of the 19th century motivated a general search for a meaningful future. What began initially as a cultural project celebrating the Austro-Hungarian empire developed a symbolic dynamic that in spite – or because - of its lack of common contents gave rise to structural conditions for a 'Parallelaktion' that undermined the political legitimacy of the old order. At the end of the 20th century, the legitimacy problems of representative mass democracy and the nation-state have brought a renewed crisis of modernity. As illustrated historically by the emergence of modern sociology, cities offer again a focus of theoretical and political reflection about the possibility of a collective future. In its search to grasp the future of our cities the contemporary urban debate has developed a complex variety of new concepts such as global cities, informational cities, entrepreneurial cities, European cities. More keywords than fully developed theories, it is not always clear whether these terms describe specific types of cities, specific aspects of urbanity, or rather some new tendencies concerning some, many or all cities. In any case the described scenarios are identified as specifically urban as well as representative of a future where globalization processes make these changes in central places universally relevant. As in the past, cities attract various images of modernization like mirrors of our hopes and fears concerning an uncertain future which is presently associated with globalization.

The diverse scenarios range between celebration of cities as the places of globalization and fears of an urban future determined by uncontrolled capitalism. Whether associated with media and transport technology, knowledge and information exchange, financial markets, decreasing trade barriers, the management of corporate capital, or regional and transnational political integration, globalization is interpreted as a functional paradigm change from state government to economically determined urban development. This economic turn seems to be omnipresent in the privatization of urban politics, the fragmentation and polarization of urban societies, the commercialization and medialization of urban culture, the suburbanization, gentrification, and ultimately the homogenization of places. In sum, globalization results in the decline of cities as central places, where people of diverse cultural and political belongings meet and interact. In a

more positive way, the socio-cultural processes accompanying economic globalization can be identified in an exemplary way in cities and therefore contribute to sustain them as future centers of an otherwise spaceless global realm. They are celebrated as the central places of an emerging corporate culture, of new anti-globalization movements, of cosmopolitan citizenship and transnational communities, of deliberative democracy and political participation. Thus cities are identified as the centers of a global future where the utopian ideas of modernity can be lived in a global future that is unaffected by the deficiencies of existing representative institutions of mass-politics and nation-states.

Contrasting these often too general and exaggerated claims about the emerging role of cities with the diverse, and yet little systematically researched empirical reality, the strength of the debate lies in addressing - more or less implicitly and from diverse perspectives – the idea of 'urbanity'. As a specific cultural character of cities 'urbanity' is mostly identified with a sense of collective identity and lively creativity stemming from the social exchange of plurally structured populations meeting in public space. Through investment competition, media, and migration, globalization gains dynamics that can be destructive for the historically grown urban culture as well as it can bring new creative potential to cities. In alternative to a defensive response that closes off local societies against external influences and thus constitutes the path-dependent end of urbanity as a creative political resource, urban theorists – as well as policy makers - deal with the problem of political organization of increasingly plural and deterritorialized interests. As nation states get questioned as exclusive organizations of modern self-government, citizens feel increasingly disembedded due to apparently automatically functioning institutions and economically determined networks. The search for new imagined communities focuses the attention - among various other territorial and non-territorial identification frames - also on cities as centers of social interaction and on urbanity as their ideal model. By claiming the possibility of collective action in a plural society, the idea of urbanity addresses the core of the debate about modernity. It addresses the hopes and deceptions associated with the modern project of combining individual freedom and collective organization through society, politics, economy, and culture (Wagner 1994; Delanty 1999). In the context of globalization, the urbanity

debate addresses the question of meaningful social belonging and collective political action in a plural world, a basic problem of modernity exemplified so well by Musil's 'Man without Qualities'.

This 'urban hype' has emerged out of a quite recent interdisciplinary debate which has drawn on geography, political economy, sociology as well as urban design, planning and architecture to approach globalization in the context of cities or cities in the context of globalization. Although this discussion addressed the role of power in the construction of social space, only the recent turn to the European urban context questioned the mostly economic bias by focusing on the political institutions embedding cities. Despite the long implicit references to urban public space and the recent attention to the political sphere, the theoretical foundations remain conceptually unclear. In order to develop an analytical framework of urban politics, many new fashionable terms have been coined without considering the usefulness of existing concepts used in political science. Particularly, the debate about new institutionalism has tackled similar problems about the relationship of territory, level of government, and political organisation with regard to EU integration and the new regionalism. These conceptions of European state transformation might help to 'bring the state back into' urban politics and thus put the emerging role of cities into perspective. On the other side, the urban contribution to the political science might be a highly open and plural, and yet territorialized context of collective action. The often ambiguous and implicit references to culture in the urban debate provide a relevant case for discussing the hybrid role of culture mediating agency and structures in the institutional practices of state-transformation.

This introduction will be followed in the second chapter by a critical overview of the political economic theories of urban globalization in the European context. The third chapter contrasts the functionalist perspectives of urban political economy with the historic-institutional approaches to European urbanity and draws a critical light on the so-called neo-Weberian model. Problematizing the concepts of culture implicit to the contemporary debate, the fourth chapter discusses the notion of urbanity as a spatialized version of the modern idea of a public sphere of plural collective action. Thus turning to concepts of power in political theory, the fifth chapter brings the state back into urban

analysis by discussing the multi-level theories of European integration. This enables in conclusion to address some of the analytical and methodological challenges of conceptualizing cities as symbolic and functional centres 'without qualities', which are contextually constituted by urbanity as a plural and globally entangled political process.

2. European cities and globalization: political economic theories

Opposite to assumptions about the homogenization of spatial differences in globalization, urban political economy research identifies cities in terms of their central functions in the capitalist economy beyond state territories. This functional perspective implies various conceptions of political and economic structures, local and global structures, the complementarity or tension of which constitute cities as places in an otherwise homogenous global space. The emerging empirical importance of culture for urban regeneration has led the political economic approaches to speak of culture, often by way of implicit references to urban characteristics such as 'global', 'entrepreneurial', or 'European'.

Conceptualizing cities as nodes of corporate networks, capital, and information flows, the global city concept (Castells 1989; Sassen 1994, 2000) stresses the leading role of some cities as economic power centers controlling the transnational service economy. These cities attract the allocation of corporate headquarters and around them a broad range of industries and corporate services. The territorial dispersal of economic activity on a national and world scale creates a need for expanded central control and management. The more globalised the economy becomes the higher the agglomeration of central functions in global cities, turning them into the control and command centers of the global economy. Their corporate power tends to be represented by such globally recognizable symbols as office skyscrapers, flagship architecture, corporately sponsored arts in semi-public spaces, and arts foundations (Crane 1992; Miles 1998).

From the neo-marxist perspectives shared – amongst others (Harvey 1985; Molotch 1976; Logan & Molotch 1987; Marcuse 2002) – by the global city theorem (Castells 1989; Sassen 1994, 2000), the economically determined perspective implies a critical focus on the social and political consequences. As shown by the fragmentation of urban

space, urban life is directly structured by global economic forces resulting in extreme contradictions between global management elites and poor immigrants, corporate and informal economies. As the global power of corporate capital reduces the territorial institutions of state and government to an insignificant notion, public politics and citizenship can shift to new informal forms of civic activism at the neighbourhood or the local level. These anti-globalization movements use large cities merely as the symbolic arenas for expressing their discontent with the contradictions of corporate capitalism. But their motive is merely the exclusion from socio-economic power, without any territorially bound identification or engagement with the city as a polity (Sassen 2004). Urbanity, if it ever existed, becomes an idealized memory of the European past, which is experienced through commercial installations, global media images, or artificial design trends such as the 'new urbanism'. The variety of ethnic goods and services offered for consumption coupled with the growing socio-spatial segmentation of ethnic communities in large cities indicates that cultural regeneration might be based more on uncontrolled market processes than on active civic engagement. The realization of an authentic public sphere becomes increasingly difficult in face of such cultural phenomena, which simulate an urban experience so alien to the divided social reality of economic globalization (Davis 1990; Marcuse 2000; Sorkin 1992; Zukin 1995).

Independent of the original social critical intentions, the economic theorems developed from empirical study of American cities found application in the European context as normative political models of successful globalization strategies. Theoretically more similar to urban public choice (Peterson 1981) and territorial growth clusters (Porter 1990), the term of the 'entrepreneurial city' achieved considerable reputation during the 1980s and early 1990s. It claims to combine social cohesion and economic activity through the political mobilization of all urban resources for collective growth strategies. In response to increasing economic competition pressures, the political, economic, and cultural elites take the future of their city in their own hands. Like a firm, the urban political economy acts as an entrepreneurial entity in which social conflicts are subordinated to the collective good of economic growth. The urban competition for investment and employment turns public politics into market management and business gains the role of political interest mediation. The personal, institutional, and normative

entanglement of the public and the private sector enables an optimum public choice in line with an economically determined world (Cheshire 1999; Lever 1999). Cultural characteristics of cities are important competitive advantages because they are territorially specific and cannot be easily transferred as part of corporate globalization strategies. Culture is not only an important income source for the tourism sector, also the political promotion of the so-called 'cultural industries' sector focuses on the creative milieu of small and medium entreprise in the so-called knowledge or information economy. Moreover cultural offers play an important role for the quality of life rankings attracting internationally mobile labour and capital. In response to the urban competition for investment and employment, cultural policy turns into city marketing and business interests decisively influence cultural production (Keating 1988; Molotch 1996).

Many writings about the entrepreneurial city take a critical view regarding its conceptual problems, empirical basis, and normative implications when used as a policy strategy. Rather than solving interest conflicts, the economic orientation undermines public politics and the representation of social interests. As the writings on American growth machines showed (Molotch 1976; Logan & Molotch 1987) social marginalization and poverty are necessary side effects of growth oriented policies, and even aggravated by their exclusion from public attention. This growth gap concerns not only specific marginalized urban groups, but also whole cities that do not have the necessary capital to succeed in economic competition. As growth oriented policies tend to increase existing structural differentials, only the economically strong profit from the entrepreneurial turn of urban policies. Against the public choice assumption about a general economic good, the critics of the entrepreneurial city stress the impossibility of an urban collective based on merely rational, socio-economic interest. The entrepreneurial city theorem is disguised as an ideological construct serving a few urban elites, who often refer to cultural representation to mobilize the general public in support of their partisan interest. According to the neo-Marxist critique of ideological superstructures, the political manipulation of culture plays an important symbolic role in mobilizing political support for an alienated growth consensus that actually serves a small elite (Philo & Kearns 1993; Hubbard 1996; Hubbard & Hall 1998).

Beyond these economically determined perspectives on local interest constellations, urban regime theory (Kantor 1987; Stone 1993) embeds cities in a broader and more abstract framework of political and economic interest structures. Introducing the state back into the analysis of urban politics, regime theory allows for a more open-ended analytical perspective on the plural interest constellations constituting urban governing coalitions. Beyond established notions of the state and the community, regime theory provides a highly elaborated concept of power as the capacity to combine resources for collective action. As opposed to the authority of the state, which is based on a hierarchical sanctioning and control capacity, regime theory conceptualizes urban politics as a relatively open and horizontal structure of mutual rational interests. Opening up urban research to a comparison among different historic and geographic contexts, regime theory links political and economic power, plural and elite interest within collective action. But the all encompassing approach ultimately falls short of any methodological instruments capable of linking external and local interests, structures and agency within a more stable institutional arrangement. Except for some exceptional examples of anti-growth (Molotch & Logan 1984) or hyperpluralist regimes (Judge 1995), the empirical focus on macro-developments in the US resulted in findings proving the dominance of the market forces in an urban culture of 'privatism' (Barnekow & Rich 1999).

On the contrary, the European context shows relatively strong local social and political institutions constituting 'European cities' as a counter-model to the socially fragmented and culturally homogenous urban landscape in America. Historic-institutionalist approaches link this to the specific, long-established characteristics of the European urban system, characterized by a diversity of relatively small towns with old – and still visibly remembered - historic roots and intact urban centers. This opposite urban development is part of a general difference between American and European institutions. European cities are embedded within a more elaborated welfare state administration than American cities who suffer financially from their autonomous constitution. Generally, political institutions in Europe are driven more by political parties and less by business lobbies, more by social-democratic or environmentalist

values and less by liberal state-skepticism (Keating 1991; Harding 1999). Despite a recent turn to 'neoliberal' policies in the context of market integration, European cities are still strongly embedded by varying local and national state frameworks with diverse paths of cultural policy and cultural regeneration (Bianchini 1993; Keating & de Frantz 2004). Some also propose that it is rather not the path-dependency of the central state but of local societies responding to the retreat of the state that explains the diverse political responses to economic globalization pressures. Therefore, the question posed by urban political economy in the European context is not one of state versus market, but one of urban collective action against state or market domination (Bagnasco & Le Gales 2000; Le Gales 2002).

So which of the different models is relevant? Does globalization result in post-modern arbitrariness as indicated by the apolitical reality and social fragmentation in big American cities? Is the global future a mostly economic modernity where some potent cities combine their economic and cultural resources to become collective actors competing with states? Or is there hope that some European cities become the local centers of collective political action capable of determining their own destiny and – to a certain extent - controlling the forces of globalization? Each of the models seems logical and right in describing certain aspects or tendencies of urban globalization, but in sum the various definitions of urban culture used in contemporary urban research seem to have little in common: if cities exist as polities, they are based either on unitary governing coalitions based on a collective public interest (Peterson 1981) or at least on a representative elite (Logan & Molotch 1987), on a rational compromise among plural interest groups (Stone 1993), or on path-dependent institutions (Le Gales 2002). Where culture is not merely reduced to a specific local characteristic associated with 'place' or 'community', a unifying aspect might be found in local institutions as a set of habitual practices imposing a rigid historic 'corset' against presentist external pressures. But if cultural instruments are used for the legitimation of elite interests, this integration strategy might contribute to short-term stability but gains social polarization potential in the long-term. From a plural perspective, culture appears only as a hyperpluralist fragmentation causing political disintegration and undermining the rational compromises underlying urban regimes. These contradictory explanations of the

empirical importance of culture in urban politics show that merely structural conceptualizations such as used by urban political economy do not grasp the complex reality of contemporary urbanity. Considering the lack of cultural aspects in the rationalist plural regime theory and the lacking consideration of plural and externally linked interests in the path-dependent model, the question arises how urban institutions can accommodate plural interest politics emerging from a changing environment.

3. A European model: urbanity as a historic institution

Despite the increasing competition pressures affecting urban political economies as a result of globalization, the obvious diversity of contemporary European cities has stressed the importance of institutional context. Apart from the institutional embeddedness of cities within states, these claims about a specifically European model point to a historical heritage of European urbanity motivating autonomous local policies. Therefore, the question posed by urban political economy in the European context is not one of state versus market, but one of urban collective action against external domination enabled by the changing structural relationship of state and market. Despite various implicit references to culture, the political economic literature remains rather vague with regard to the theoretical concepts, which might explain the motives and processes establishing urban societies as political entities. The neo-Marxist literature assumed a place-specific local interest as a motive of common political resistance against the homogenization pressures in a global market economy (Castells 1994). More recently, the Weberian urban model has come to dominate the European discussion about the common values of a historically emerged urban citizenship reemerging in response to the retreat of states (Zijderveld 1998; Bagnasco & Le Gales 2000; Le Gales 2002).

Emerged as the basic condition for European civilization, the model of the bourgeois cities of late medieval and early modern Europe is deemed to experience a revival in the present context of European integration. Cities, due to their smaller size and historic heritage, might show the cultural preconditions for combining economic entrepreneurship, social solidarity, and civic engagement, and might therefore be better suited than states for a collective survival in an increasingly flexible global economy.

The integration of the European market and the search for political legitimacy accompanying construction of the EU might offer a structural opportunity for cities to regain their old historic role as cultural-economic centers of political emancipation associated with a common European identity (Zijderveld 1998; Le Gales 2000; 2002; Boehme 2002; Hassenpflug 2002). Reviving the urban heritage might allow some European cities to establish themselves as collective actors, defined by (1) common interests within the city, and those perceived as such, (2) collective decision-making, (3) internal and external representation, (4) integration mechanisms, and (5) capacity for innovation (Le Gales 2002).

These socio-historical perspectives often refer to the so-called Weberian model derived from Max Weber's 'The City of the Occident', contained in his collection 'Economy and Society' (Weber 1922, 2000). According to Weber, it was only in the Occident, and particularly during the middle age, that cities developed the character of a 'Gemeinde', an autonomous territorial body, comprising the elements of (1) fortification, (2) market, (3) a tribunal with at least partly its own legislation, (4) an associational character and (5) partly autonomy and self-government. In addition to the plurality of statuses characterizing urban populations everywhere, the medieval cities of the Occident were founded as fraternities of individuals who, based on their ownership of property and their military power, ended their feudal kin ties and gained personal rights as citizens. As a unique milieu combining cultural, social, economic, and political structures, bourgeois urbanity served as the historic origin of the concept of a public space enabling personal freedom and collective self-determination.

In the context of Weber's socio-economic theory, the medieval city constituted an ideal-type illustrating the political, economic, and cultural conditions for the emergence of a value system associated with European modernity. Beginning with urban autonomy and plural self-government in medieval cities, the path was set for the development of the capitalist market economy and the secular political institutions characterizing modern societies. Opposite to the affirmative analysis of the late-medieval European city, Weber's writings about state bureaucracy contributed an important critique of the structural deficiencies of modern mass institutions. His definition of state power as

holding the monopoly of violence indicates that military power, an important aspect of bourgeois emancipation in the medieval city, had been structurally transformed and integrated with the state. Weber's work implies neither that urban societies might be excluded from these structural transformations nor that cities might remain the leading forms of political economic organization throughout the changing history of modernity. Therefore, Weber's interest focused not so much on urban sociology, but rather more generally on the historically varying forms of societal institutions of which the 'City of the Occident' represented just one, however important, typology (Bruhns 2000).

Rather than an empirical model of contemporary urbanity, Weber's contribution to urban sociology can therefore be seen in a methodological conception of social development guided by cultural values along specific development paths. Tracing-back these historical paths the researcher can understand contemporary empirical phenomena by analyzing their underlying ideal models (Weber 1991). Weber used the model of the medieval city in order to understand capitalism as a social institution based on cultural values that have survived and guided political economic organization throughout history. When researching contemporary cities, the problem lies in the analytical use of Weber's typology as a path-dependent explanation for local autonomy in a context which has come to be historically dominated by the institutional structures of states. At the most, a historic-institutionalist model of the European city can replace the presentist economic bias in urban political economy by stressing the urban embeddedness within state institutions. As the relationship between local and state institutions remains unclear, the concept of path-dependency alone cannot explain the revival of a bourgeois value-system combining economic citizenship and social cohesion. On the contrary, Weber's historical-institutionalist methodology requires a counterfactual questioning of alternative development paths that might have influenced cities throughout European history.

Seen from a merely structural perspective of urban history, the urban heritage of the late medieval city by itself explains little the local variations of medieval urbanization and even less the present diversity of European cities (Bruhns 2000). The emergence of capitalist economies in medieval cities lay an important foundation not only for the

development of urban autonomy but also for the development of modern states and the territorial structures in Europe. The interdependency of market capital and military power led not only to competition between urban elites, landlords, and the Church but also to their cooperation, and ultimately their integration in various forms of states (Tilly 1990; 1994). Feudalism was followed by state-building with modernization tendencies including monarchic absolutism, state mercantilism, mass industrialization, nation-building, democratization, welfare states, as well as recent globalization and flexibilisation tendencies. These historic transformations have complemented and transformed the original bourgeois city by various other urban types such as national or regional capital cities, industrial towns, university towns, metropolises, as well as various mixed forms (Benevolo 1993). The different historical formations of urbanity emerged because cities were never fully autonomous but always embedded in varying structural contexts constituted. These historical phases of the European urban system in combination of their various historical and geographical paths created the diverse, specifically local characters of cities.

In using the city as a spatial metaphor or ideal type of social imagination, Weber's work finds prominent company throughout history. The Antique philosophers Plato and Aristotle discussed the ideas and reality of the political public with reference to the Polis, the city-state they actually experienced and participated in. In the early Middle-Age, St. Augustine shifted his City of God (410) into the symbolic sphere of religion where the perfect Christian order desired by humans transcended the material power of pagans in the City of Man. Over thousand years later, Thomas More's Utopia (1516) gave rise to a series of literary projections of the city as an idealised imagination of a place of enlightened society, which were initially merely literary forms contrasting the perceived injustice of the absolutist rule without intention for realization (De Frantz & Hoelzl 2005). Responding to the so-called 'urban question' of industrial modernization, Friedrich Engels' (1845) described the social marginalization of the working class to seek the solution not so much in urban design but more fundamentally in the structures of modern society itself. Tackling these structural inequalities, a practice oriented model of a perfect city was the *phalanstere* which was also realized by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier. George Eugene Hausmanns' design of the capital city Paris in the

1860s became the most influentuous model for an all-encompassing urban planning that symbolized bourgeois nation-building. Ebenezer Howard's garden town aimed to extend the achievements of bourgeois liberalism by building qualitative suburban housing for the poor (1898; 1902). Georg Simmel's (1896) analysis of social anonymity and alienation in the mass society illustrated the insecurity of the individual disembedded from the traditional collective roots by the rapid industrial metropolization processes. Le Corbusier's (1929) international architecture intended the perfect spatial organization of social relations as part of the welfare-state, whose postmodern critics revive bourgeois urbanity now under the banner of the 'new urbanism' (Hoffmann-Axthelm 1993; Hassenpflug 2002). Weber's affirmative model marking the rise of modern sociology in reflection of the historical roots of modernity, meets intellectual competition from all these contemporaries whose work focused on the urban reality in their historical contexts.

All these ideas originated – at least to a certain extent - in Europe and represent ideational reflections of the social and political problems of their time. Most were also realized in some way or other and while each might be associated with a specific historic time and architectural form, they have also contributed to reconstruct and reinterpret the preexisting ones. Even most old city-centers have not been preserved in their original form but are the results of historical changes, and this emergence over time is what makes them so diverse – or 'urban' - today. As implied by Weber's definition of the state, contemporary urban governments have passed the military autonomy of medieval cities to the monopoly of the state. Also local real estate and small and medium enterprise have been integrated into national economies, which are increasingly structured now by global corporate capital. The formerly closed local societies and later nationally integrated urban populations are now part of a globalizing world characterized by social mobility and cultural diversity. As a result, the historical paths structuring the institutional contexts of contemporary European cities are plural and so are the choices urban decision-makers face when looking for guidance to history and finding a contradictory set of institutional constraints and opportunities.

The model of the European city subordinates these diverse socio-economic and cultural influences to a common set of values maintaining the path-dependent institutions which historically provide for the economic welfare of the urban society. But in order to establish urban collective action as a valid counter-hypothesis against structural-functionalist explanations, economic development must be questioned as one of many urban models guiding decision-makers today. Even if the emerging dominance of the global market might weaken the state in favor of a locally embedded capitalism, this fails to establish a model of local public politics. And on the other side, even if political institutions in European states are strong enough to allow for urban cohesion despite strong economic globalization pressures, this does not imply a shift from the state to a local political arena. In absence of an analysis of local politics the claims for urban autonomy boil down to yet another functionalist assumption, merely complementing the political-economic antagonism by a spatial one. In other words, the structural break provoked by globalization and European integration can affect states as well as local institutions. Path-dependency is not sufficient a theoretical ground for explaining urban collective action based on a shift from the state to the local scale as well as one from economic functions to political agency.

4. Urban public space: the modern ideal of collective action in a plural world

While European urban societies might show less abrupt transformations than their American or Asian counterparts, path-dependency does not provide a sufficient explanation for how interest conflicts resulting from a changing environment might be solved internally. The question is how Europe's urban institutions respond not only to external economic globalization but also to increasingly plural and changing societies characterizing smaller cities as well as the large metropolitan centers. Rather than the search for a common history or a characteristic essence, the cultural turn of the European debate brings back the core problem of social theorizing: the idea of a public space enabling collective self-organization in a world characterized by diversity. So what does the renewed urban debate specifically contribute to this fundamental question of modernity, and is there a common denominator underlying the different theoretical models as a definition of urbanity?

As a common realm where diverse groups meet, exchange, and confront each other, the market place or its antique version of the political 'forum' or 'agora' associate urbanity with a real public space. Due to their size, density, and relative closedness, these urban archetypes incorporated historically by the polis or the medieval town link a compact and centralized spatial form with specific cultural structures of political self-government, civic equality, or personal autonomy. However, the extension of social processes beyond the local scale of personal interaction problematized the link between place and politics incorporated by these archetypical cities (Habermas 1990). The institution of the nation-state linked political power to larger territorial functions, what gave rise to a functional dissociation of knowledge between spatial and societal disciplines. On one side, spatial design such as architecture and urban planning focused on the creation of built space. On the other side, sociology continued to research the city as a separate cultural milieu, and political science studied the public sphere in the form of the nation state. Modern political theory developed a large body of ideas about the public sphere, mostly different models of democratic self-government, e.g. representative democracy, participative democracy, discursive democracy, constructivist perspectives. Urbanity turned from a historical reality into a theoretical idea used as a normative model and radicalized typology to criticize (Simmel 1896; Sennett 1983; Habermas 1989; Beck 1995) or reflect (Weber 1922, 2000; Hunter 1953; Dahl 1961) the general societal conditions of the time. Only with the questioning of the nation-state as a quasi-natural political form and the territorial dissociation of organizational functions and public representation, the various disciplines come back together over the urban question. Either an object of projection and intervention or a representative case study, urbanity links public space with a spatial idea of centrality. The revived interdisciplinary engagement with urbanity contributes to question the relationship of form and function, aesthetics and power, place and politics in the empirical reality of contemporary cities.

Normative conceptualizations of the public sphere experience a recent revival also at a different spatial scale, namely the EU, a multi-level polity that challenges the political sovereignty of nation-states and their representative political institutions. The search for a democratic legitimacy base carrying the mostly bureaucratic European project has

resulted in a debate about a European public sphere (Trenz & Eder 2004; Eriksen 2005). Architecture has become an important discourse linking universal expressions of postnational or cosmopolitan identity with particular places and thus signifying cityscapes as lived spaces of European identity (Delanty 2000; Delanty & Jones 2002). But the emerging discrepancy between supranational policy-making and strongly embedded national identities has become apparent particularly in the recent referenda on the European constitution. Challenging the idea of a common cultural, spiritual or religious identity (Burgess 2002) and that of a cosmopolitan post-national self-understanding (Delanty 2005), the debate about European identity exemplifies the difficult search for common interpretations. European identity is deconstructed as a fiction without essential proportions which is highly ideologically loaded with contrived notions of unity and therefore contested (Delanty 1995; Strath 2002). This changed context of plural, flexible, and even hybrid identities undermines the unitary meaning of history and constitutes collective memory as a construct of plural power constellations. Cultural heritage is not an essentially fixed categories but – despite deep symbolic connotations – its meanings are constructed in power contexts and are therefore inherently contested in past and present (Ashworth 1998; Assman 2002; Graham 2002).

The heritage of the medieval city is not only one of many normative values structuring urban institutions in Europe, but these values are also reinterpreted in diverse ways in the contemporary context. The historical references to the model of a relatively closed bourgeois urban society can have a political mobilization effect, but this can also provoke contestation instead of the intended integration. Still, some urban sociologists detect the original Weberian model at the core of all the historical variations of European cities and their resistance against capitalist homogenization pressures. While also admitting that it is nothing more than a historical myth, they advertise the Weberian city as a theoretical model with the normative force of guiding social, economic, and political action in a congruent way (Hoffmann-Axthelm 1993; Hassenpflug 2002; Kaelble 2002; Haeussermann & Haila 2005). Their interpretation of the Weberian model stresses less the path-dependency of historically established institutions, but rather the political force of cultural values presently associated with this urban heritage. Some even go so far as to assume that the reconstruction of a small-structured historical

city center could create a place similar to those enabling the social interactions constituting the bourgeois values of early modern European societies. The Marxist relationship between power and its cultural representation is reversed, in that the values associated with architectural form are assumed so fixed that its aesthetic reconstruction could bring back the social conditions that had originally mobilized urban collective action despite an adverse structural context.

The strongly normative claims of its proponents should draw our attention to the political context framing the discourse about the bourgeois European city. While individual entrepreneurship and social responsibility certainly remain guiding values of capitalist societies, the dissociation of political and economic power has given rise to various institutional settings. With the historical and institutional contexts also the meaning of the bourgeois values has been transformed. In the early modern city, the bourgeoisie constituted an important force of social and political emancipation against the traditional power of kinship anchored in the feudal system. But in the meantime a range of social and political reforms, including the socio-economic rise of parts of the bourgeoisie, its participation in nationalist movements and the liberal-democratic revolutions, the later emancipation of the working class, the rise of a broad middle class, and of new social movements have identified the 'bourgeois class' with diverse social functions. One of the most instrumentalized concepts of modern history, bourgeois liberalism has taken on so many meanings that its strongest normative force might be the potential to integrate diverse interests and ideas under one political keyword. If one attempts to link this programmatic strategy to a specific part of today's political spectrum, then bourgeois liberalism stands mostly for a cultural conservatism associated with private ownership of small and medium enterprise and political skepticism against state intervention. Its emancipatory claims refer at the most to an all comprehensive idea of civic engagement – recently also advertised as 'public-private partnership' - , which tends to ignore the power differentials limiting equal participation in the public sphere. The many references to a 'new urban middle class' and the analytical neglect of interest conflicts by the European city model seem to comply with this normative agenda of an integrative and power-free bourgeois liberalism.

The urban debate about economic-rationalist versus political-culturalist globalization could be understood as a contemporary version of the classical controversy between Marx's materialistic and Weber's ideational view of the social process at the end of the 19th century. The revived debate about urbanity can be understood to reflect the hopes and deceptions associated with the modern project of combining individual freedom and collective organization in a plural public sphere. The critical insights in the limits to the normative ideal of the public sphere had resulted in a so-called postmodern tendency which retreats from any general knowledge claims to merely subjective and arbitrary cultural observations. Opposite to the implicit skepticism against the idea of a public sphere as a collective basis of social organization, historical sociology reconstructs the history of modern self-organization as an open-ended process of cultural-political reflexivity. Instead of stopping with the critique of structural failures of modernity, the idea of human self-determination through the collective organization of individual freedom and plurality is shown an incomplete project. Different historic phases have seen different theoretical ideas and social realizations, with different political strategies of inclusion, exclusion, and ultimately extension of the modern project. The institutionalization of the modern state implied a closing of modernity, as the liberal and pluralist hopes for self-determination were given up for the security of collective organization. The present crisis of modernity opens up the established collective institutions again toward more flexible and pluralist agency without predefining any specific institutional or territorial form of collective organization (Wagner 1994; Delanty 1999). Economic determinism or cultural path-dependency might be two extreme responses to these profound flexibilization challenges, but the choice between these two interpretative models allows for a political act. Thus, modernity is still an incomplete project and urbanity an open-ended process based on the spatial ideals guiding political agency with diverse contextual realizations in place.

Embedding urbanity within the debate about modernity draws our attention to the modernization critical perspectives on sustainable growth and the culture of place. Starting from the idea of Europe as the origin of civilization, critical modernization theorists have stressed the power differentials constituting and reconstructed by these perceptions (Said 1978). The idea of diverse modernization paths resulted then in the

concept of multiple and entangled modernities which combined universal claims for progress and autonomy with contextual particularity. Overcoming the limitations of Eurocentric concepts the modern process is constituted of knowledge transfer and the resulting interwovenness of spatial constructions constituted of plural interacting local and global realities (Appadurai 1996; Eisenstadt 2000). The European city debate reflects the cultural diversity of modernity in a new context of European opposition against American hegemonialism. Contesting the generalizing claims about economically determined globalization developed in the American context, the debate about European cities has constituted a first academic reflection of alternative modernization paths based on different urban conditions. The focus on the European context has provided empirical prove that it is not only global capital, but also diverse institutional responses to market pressures, that transform cities as centers of multiple processes associated with globalization. It revived the model of urbanity as public space against that of global economic modernity and thus posed the old question about personal autonomy and collective self-determination in the reopened 'global' context of state-transformation. Yet, the hypothesis of plural collective action remains European-centric and undertheorized in its focus on the – also empirically questionable - historic-institutional foundations of urbanity.

Urbanity represents centrality and thus a spatialized idea of universalism, which becomes the focus of theoretical and political debates about a global future emerging in the contemporary reopening of modernity. The theoretical debate about the universal ideal of urbanity interacts reflectively with multiple contextual practices realizing this ideal in different places and thus again feeding the urban debate with diverse cultural conceptions and political interpretations. As the diversity of knowledge and identifications with urbanity challenges the institutional paths of urban policy-making, cities can become arenas of conflictive political claims. Conceptualizing urban globalization as an entangled modernization process and urbanity as a modern ideal, replaces historically and economically determined perspectives by a constructionist approach to urban collective action. This also implies that urbanity turns from an essentially European characteristic into a modern ideal with universalist claims for urban collective action. While increasing economic competition pressures are certainly

a universal aspect of global modernity, globalization is also a contextually entangled process constructing different situations of urban collective action beyond the original historic context of European urbanity. Certainly the European origins of the urban idea might influence these choices more along historical paths, which might even be promoted by the structural policies supporting the political project of market integration carried by the supranational EU institutions. Also the European integration debate shares the search for a public sphere which might turn functionalist state transformation into a socially based process possibly nurtured by cosmopolitan urban milieus. However, the potential for collective action also implies the capacity for change and therefore can result neither from a historical structure nor from an essentially European culture. It rather emerges from the contested idea of urbanity as a public space which can be transferred and reinterpreted in different urban contexts within Europe and beyond.

5. Bringing the state back in: urban politics and European integration

The institutional transformations associated broadly with globalization have initiated an urban hype which proclaimed cities to replace or compete with states as territorial structures. Despite shifting territorial functions, flexible identities and a reduction of state regulation in certain areas, this characterization seems exaggerated regarding the continued dominance of state governments in international as well as subnational relations. The various economic, cultural, or political perspectives of cities have not yet provided a common model that would combine territorial functions, identities, and institutions within a compact organizational form such as the nation state. Yet, state transformation is an important institutional setting of urban politics, and cities have retained specific territorial structures providing for a more or less autonomous role through out this process. The political science studies about European integration contribute a well elaborated body of theories about the new institutionalist and multi-level aspects of state transformation embedding urban politics.

Such as illustrated by the local-global and political-economic tension in the urban political economy debate, state-restructuring is often conceptualized in functionalist terms, namely as an automatic spill-over effect from larger structural changes.

Globalization, EU supranational policy, and European market integration are parts of a changing external environment exerting transformation pressures upon states. Functional state-transformation is thus beyond the reach of human agency - or politics – because it is an automatic mechanism of shifting interest constellations and networks. The new institutionalist debate, on the other side, draws the attention to the relationship of structures and agency in state-transformation by questioning the rationality of interest structures. Institutions are more or less formalized sets of rules creating not only political and economic but also cultural structures as normative legitimacy bases of political power. To the conventional opposition of states and markets, the institutional perspective particularly contributes a focus on informal social relations establishing cultural norms as a basis of political economic power. Contrasting agency versus norms based approaches questions how functionally based interest constellations transform institutions as a result of rational agency; and how such rationally established collective action can be institutionalized as a more permanent structure with the power of guiding path-dependent policies or even autonomous agency (Peters 1998; 1999).

Applied to state-transformation in the European Union, the new institutionalist question has provoked a controversy between intergovernmental and supra-national integration theories. The intergovernmental view retains political-decision power with the member states as the only sovereign actors capable of establishing, vetoing - and possibly dropping out - of international organizations such as the EU. On the other side, supranational bodies such as the Commission and the Court of Justice based on the supremacy of EU law urge member states into a functionalist drive for integration which is not fully in their sovereign control. Since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 introduced a competence for structural cohesion and regional development, European state-transformation has come to be seen as multi-level governance. The EU policies for a balanced territorial development between the member states addressed particularly subnational entities as potential partners of supra-national policy-making. Thus the interplay of intergovernmental and supranational dynamics resulted in a redistribution of political power from the state to supra- and subnational institutional levels (Marks, Hooghe & Blank 1996; Hooghe & Marks 1996).

While proposing a solution to the new institutionalist controversy on European integration, the concept of multi-level governance also transferred the function-agency debate from the state to the subnational level. It implies that territorial reorganization allows for functionalist solutions to sectoral interest conflicts. But the question is whether sub- or transnational structures are merely produced by changing functional networks and thus contribute to the deterritorialization processes undermining states; or in how far this multi-level relations lead to a more permanent reterritorialization and thus – to a certain extent separate – autonomous structures of self-government (Bache & Flinders 2004). Territorial reorganization is not necessarily based on political economic interests and can be promoted by preexisting identity structures. Traditionally, European regionalism has drawn on preexisting administrative institutions or on a common historical culture, and only more recently economic competition has given rise to 'new regionalist' development coalitions. These various structural incentives as well as a political discourse about an emerging 'Europe of the Regions' have motivated sub-national actors to mobilize territorial strategies autonomously from state administrations. Giving up their subordinated positions as mere implementation arms of the central state, sub-national authorities lobby actively for EU funding, influence EU policies in their own favor, and develop cross-border relations. Even though this might create new territorial structures, these do not necessarily compete with state institutions, but can also be complementary parts or integrated state policies. Functionalist state-transformation thus turns into a complex multi-level process involving diverse, more or less institutionalized constellations including various actors, power resources, and territorial entities at the sub-, trans-, supra- and state level (Keating 1998; Paasi 2001).

Since the nation state is not necessarily the exclusive form of statehood and co-exists historically with various other public spheres (Habermas 1989), the delinking of sovereignty and territory poses the problem of defining power and the quality of statehood. Here the concept of governance in European integration shares conceptual and normative ground with the urban regime theory. The conceptual shift from government to governance refers to a differenciation of power structures which challenges the idea of state power toward a more flexible and horizontal conception of politics. State government devolves the authority for control and command over

subjects and territory from a sovereign demos, originally a god-given monarch and later the 'quasi-natural' nation. Against this 'power over' the concept of governance – or regime - poses a 'power to implement', the capacity to coordinate diverse resources for the achievement of a common political objective (Stone 1993). These dual aspects of power could be seen to reformulate the community power debate about elite versus pluralist structures in local politics (Hunter 1953; Dahl 1961; 1971). But the older debate took the local context simply as a case study of political representation and neglected the question of scale posed by mass democracy at the state level. The debate about urban globalization addresses this enlarged external context (Harding 1996) characterized by functional market pressures as well as by plural political interests and fluid cultural identities emerging in the structural break opened by state restructuring. The openness and flexibility inherent to the concepts of multi-level governance and urban regimes question the territorial conditions of collective action and the institutional foundation of a representative public sphere.

From the globalization perspective on urban movements, collective action is the structural product of class struggles inherent to capitalism and representatively fought out over the socio-spatial contradictions present in the large urban centres (Fainstein & Hirst 1995). Particularly the growing anti-globalization protests might support the Marxist conception which associates each historic context with specific structural conditions establishing one dominant class movement as actor of social change. But often various citizen initiatives and neighbourhood movements develop merely local motives, partisan interests and one-issue agendas which cannot be easily accommodated under the roof of a globally shared anti-growth interest. The multiple identifications emerging above all in the urban context provoke symbolic conflicts over the social production and appropriation of meaning and the creation of group identities in everyday life. As some of these struggles for recognition lead to symbolical contestation of the public sphere, this politics of identity displaces collective action from the cultural into the political sphere (Touraine 1974; Melucci 1989; Delanty 1999). Though coordinated and sustained by social movements, these cultural-political confrontations are triggered by rational incentives posed by changing opportunities and structural constraints such as state-restructuring. In such periods of generalized disorder, a

widening logic of collective action leads to 'cycles of contention' where the initial challengers have less and less leverage over the political outcome. As government authorities respond to the general context of political contention, political change results rarely from the realization of one movement's goals. Rather the institutionalization of arbitrary aspects of the larger contention spectrum results in the political integration of social movements or their more or less permanent institutionalization outside the formal realm of power (Tarrow 1998). Motivated by diverse contextual combinations of rational interests and cultural identities, collective action processes can result in diverse situations of integration and fragmentation. The reflexive and plural nature of these collective action processes leaves their outcome open-ended, leading only in some exceptional situations to more permanently stable power constellations (Eder 2003).

Depending on the research interest, this process of state-transformation can be analyzed from diverse territorial perspectives – supranational, national, regional, local, or urban - always just grasping a tiny part of the whole picture. One relatively permanent power constellation constitutes the modern state-system where the idea of the nation locks organizational structures, cultural identities, and political agency within compact territorial boundaries (Anderson 1983; Tilly 1990). New regionalist movements base the political legitimacy of sub- or transnational coalitions on a similar concept of bounded space, but within alternative symbolic frames that challenge the territorial constitution of the state. The concept of the region is based on some unifying characteristic(s) - economic, political, or cultural (Keating 1998) - which can be symbolically mobilized as group identities distinguishing the region by a territorial division from the outside. While regionalism might not be all-encompassing as nationalism, the link of some common aspects of social life with territory helps to organize collective action within a relatively stable institutional base. But the unitary and bounded conception of the region fails to implement the regionalist critique of nationalism which is based on the insight that territory is constituted of diverse overlapping spaces and thus rarely an exact division of social space.

Opposite to this bounded conception of territory as a container of social relations, globalization views space as a deterritorialized relationship of functional networks and

information flows. However the functioning of the global economy depends also on territorial agglomeration economies and their institutional regulation and thus a reterritorialization of statehood (Brenner 2004). Cities are more or less central functional nodes turning these networks into hierarchical relationships beyond territorial spaces such as states and regions. This relational notion of space tends to disregard that cities still exist within territorial boundaries, which are also relevant for defining their functions as capital city or regional center. As spatial intersections of multiple functional networks they are also plural centres associated with multiple meanings and identifications. This symbolic centrality makes urban boundaries contextual, referring multiple territorial notions to a common core which defines cities as centers of a multi-level space. The territoriality of cities is less defined by closed boundaries than by their functional and symbolic centrality established through the interaction of diverse interests contesting urban public space. Due to this plural centrality, particularly larger European cities or capital cities might offer specific places for analyzing the complexity of collective action in the context of state restructuring (de Frantz 2004; 2005; 2006).

By combining the urban and the regional debate, it might be possible to integrate economic functionality and political institutions, pluralism and territory, rational and cultural aspects of collective action. Opposite to the unitary cultural basis of regionalist or nationalist movements, the political agency capacity of urbanity might stem from the plural, contestive, and open interaction of diverse groups in central places. But the capacity to integrate diverse meanings and functions is also based on a territorial path-dependency constituting urban centrality and the rational insight in the mutual interest of establishing an urban regime and permanently reterritorializing the boundaries of a city-region. These territorial conditions of cities are also contingent on the institutional structures of the state, varying from highly centralized as well as fragmented urban governance such as in the UK to the constitutional autonomy of municipal governments in Germany or Austria. European state-transformation might thus give rise to diverse, contextual and open-ended collective action processes, which interact in these more or less institutionalized central places and transform them in different ways. Opposite to the regionalist challenge to the centre-periphery relations within or between national territories, the concept of urbanity reintroduces a hierarchical notion of space. The

regional complexity of diverse, overlapping bounded spaces is structured by the innovation and integration capacity of plural collective action based in central places such as cities. On the other side, a new periphery might be constituted by such monocultural or function-specific places lacking this hybrid symbolism and therefore considered from a national perspective as territorially integrated areas.

As state transformation provides opportunities for the mobilization of imagined communities new and old, urbanity, though not the only alternative, offers a place identification that is more open and plural than the unitary nation or the region. Cities are commonly occupied or claimed by diverse social groups including lobbyists as well as migrants and other transnational communities with interests and symbolic identifications beyond the local or national realm. Thus, diverse 'external' actors claim participation so that access to political decision-making cannot be limited to a territorially defined sovereign such as the state or the devolved municipality. This contestive interaction can give rise to hyperplural ungovernability (Judge 1995) or to cosmopolitan identifications enabling political integration and the institutionalization of global – or European - public spheres 'on the ground'. The emerging political contestations raise legitimacy problems of representative democracy and can cause transformation demands for urban governments and the embedding state institutions. Apart from varying structural conditions, it is also decisive for integration or disintegration how the political leadership can fulfill the dual role of governmental authority and mediator of partnership-based regimes.

5. The 'City without Qualities': reconceptualizing urban collective action

Based on a theoretical review of the literature on urban political economy and its reception in the European context, this paper developed an analytical framework of urban globalization as a plural political process. Introducing debates on new institutionalism, collective action, modernity and identity discussed in the context of European integration, it questioned the conceptual understanding of culture and politics implied by the idea of European urbanity. Introducing a political science perspective on urban globalization, it conceptualized the political aspects of urban globalization and the urban context of state transformation. Challenging the economic-functionalist global city model and the historic-culturalist European city model, this paper poses the

counterfactual claim that cities are 'without qualities'. It conceptualizes urbanity as a potentially universal, yet contextual political process where the plural as well as unifying aspects of culture mediate structures and agency in an open-ended collective action dynamic. This contributes to close the gap between the cultural turn in political sciences, the spatial turn in the European integration debate and the political economic turn in urban studies.

Analytical preciseness such as criticized with respect to a 'vulgar regionalism' (Lovering 1999) poses a problem also regarding the complex new terminology in the urban field. A methodological danger concerns (1) exaggerated and partial economic claims; (2) an analytical reduction of culture to an economic instrument or an undefined notion of 'place' implying the absence of power and interest conflicts; (3) the philosophical and methodological looseness of theory in an undefined context, which mingles analytical idealtypes, normative models, and empirical phenomena. Replacing the imagined national community by an immagined unit of competition at the urban level, the transfer of urban success models to different contexts assists to hollow-out the national state, the redistributive welfare-state and democratic economic governance. These analytical and normative problems imply not only epistemological difficulties but also political consequences, shared in different ways also by what could be called a 'vulgar urbanism'. In view of enabling the development of a comparative framework of urban politics, this paper aimed to clarify the theoretical assumptions about political economy, culture and power, and the context of state transformation employed by the urban debate in the European context.

Urban political economy represents a highly theorized body of literature discussing various functionalist perspectives of globalization in different empirical contexts. The overemphasis of structural mechanisms and under-conceptualization of agency probably stems from the research focus on little institutionalized sub-national coalitions and horizontal forms of political coordination. Institutional change is analyzed as an automatic shift from state to market and to subnational regulation mechanisms of a flexible global economy. Alternatively urban institutions are defined as fixed local structures based on a path-dependent protectionism of state government or on an urban

heritage that is strengthened by external competitiveness pressures. On one side, there is a presentist overemphasis of the external changes to materialist interests, on the other side, an exaggerated stress of unitary historical institutions. The former neglects the local institutional structures and their persistence based on the formal constitution, the established informal practices, and a historically emerged collective solidarity; the latter reduces the complexity of history, the plurality and mobility of contemporary societies, and the political mobilization of culture in these plural interest constellations. In sum, the relatively recent interest of urban research in globalization has led to a functionalist focus on the external structures of state and/or market producing urban policies. But little theoretical attention has been attributed to the question how interest constellations and discursive processes prepare political decisions from within urban institutions.

Conceptualizing cities as territorial institutions means to ask how changing interest constellations motivate collective agency against path-dependent government practices and how urban governance coalitions can establish relatively permanent institutional structures at the local level. It is only with regard to the plural and global context of contemporary urban societies that the new institutionalist question introduced by European city research can be reformulated along a collective action hypothesis. Whether cities change or remain relatively stable, both cases are the results of political choices enforced by such contradictory forces as globalization, state-transformation, and history. The plural ways how this incoherent environment is interpreted in various local contexts opens a capacity for political action by those claiming or contesting the power to define these urban meanings. These cultural mobilizations interfere with established identity structures, causing institutional disembedding and social fragmentation processes that remind us of the long lost urban ideal of a personalized public space. But the meanings of urbanity have turned global with the growing reach of urban images, architectural symbolism and knowledge carried by various scholarly models. Instead of real public places of personal exchange, cities have become symbolic places combining particular and universal meanings, local and global – as well as national – interests (Delanty 2000; Delanty & Jones 2002). As urbanity remains a focus of our social imagination even more in the plural contemporary context, this symbolic centrality can cause contestation opening cities as political arenas of real interest conflicts.

The cultural turn in urban political economy leads beyond functionalist or essentialist conceptualizations to introduce an intersubjective and creative dynamic mediating structures and agency (Giddens 1984; Delanty 1999). On one side a pluralist and fluid identification, on the other side a rigid identity, social practice, and collective good, culture is highly complex. As an outcome and a motive of political mobilization, its impact on urban political economies goes beyond its representational function. Offering a power resource other than state authority or market capital, culture can develop a separate dynamic, which due to its plural social base is outside the control of any one actor. The reflexive and plural nature of these collective action processes leaves their outcome open-ended, leading only in some exceptional situations to more permanently stable and possibly even consensual power constellations. Cities are contextual outcomes of diverse collective action processes guided by different interests in and identifications with urbanity which interact in central places and thus transform them in different ways. In order to operationalise culture as an intervening variable mediating structures and agency, process-tracing can serve as a methodology to analyse how political decisions come about in specific urban contexts (Tilly 1995). It links the public sphere to specific political decisions guided by the urban models mobilized in the process of discursive exchange and contestation about the future of the city. Political argumentation strategies turn use elements of these models as cultural themes for collective mobilization, mostly with the result of polarization and contestation. Urban change results from the interaction of these discursive strategies interpreting functional transformations through a diversity of models and entangled cultural themes interpreting urbanity in specific power contexts. Where the functional interest constellations can be linked with a relatively unitary cultural basis of norms and identity, this might challenge or strengthen the institutional legitimacy base of urban power structures.

The locally specific as well as globally entangled character of urbanity means that cities cannot be analysed as representative cases of larger transformations with generalizable tendencies such as capitalist globalization. Only the ontological transcendence of capitalism as the only determinant of urban change allows for political agency as a

counterfactual prove of the economic globalization paradigm. Therefore, urban collective action might be conceptualized as a triangular relationship of structure, agency, and culture, whereby the open-endedness of the urban process results of the variable operationalization of this dynamic in different urban contexts. This might include some of the following factors (1) structural aspects such as market forces, political institutions at different levels, territorial structures or physical and social space, and the cultural frames of interpreting these structural conditions; (2) agency based on political choice between different partisan or collective, sectoral or territorial, rational or cultural interests and identities; (3) Culture as a normative thinking, aesthetic expression, a process of cognitive reflection or one of material creation and knowledge transfer, represented by a plural political discourse mediating structures and agency reflectively. The multiplicity of these variables provides methodological problems for the operationalization of a comparative empirical study. One way to illustrate the diversity of collective action would be to identify structures and agency as given from a political economic view, and then focus on how the cultural dimension diversifies these variables according to context. To illustrate the interaction of state-transformation, urbanity, and globalization, European capital cities provide a particularly plural context for studying collective action. But to specify the role of urbanity in state-transformation, a counterfactual analysis would need to draw on similar cases of collective action from various smaller cities, compared to border regions and national public spheres. Most importantly a comparison with non-European contexts can show the global relevance of the urban idea and how, despite its origin in European modernity, urban collective action has become entangled across the world.

It is important to distinguish the use of the various urban models either as descriptive representations of specific empirical realities, or as normative models with political force as new urban ideologies, or as analytical idealtypes for comparative research. Instead of general representations of a global urbanity, the various urban models should be understood in the Weberian way (Weber 1991), as ideal-types constructed from a complex empirical reality. The political-economic antagonism of the European city and the global city implies also a cultural one of institutionally consolidated versus fragmented society. But in the complex empirical reality of plural urban societies this

antagonism is neither exclusive nor is the causal link necessarily given. In the structural break caused by state transformation, the search for new models and policy claims has led to a close interaction of politicians and experts. Thus, academic debate itself contributes to the dissemination of various cultural models constituting the ideational material for political decision-making. These models are not implemented one-to-one, but elements of them get reinterpreted in the specific power context and then serve to mobilize collective action or – the other way – provoke contention and conflict. In this search for new political structures and contents, cities, as if they were 'without qualities', serve as central spaces for theoretical reflection as well as practical test-cases of diverse societal scenarios.

While the outcome of such mobilization processes is rarely controllable and even less predictable, it is the responsibility of academic experts to address the societal role of academic discourse as meta-theory as well as real social intervention in a so-called 'knowledge society'. Therefore, this paper aimed to clarify the theoretical assumptions underlying the various models employed in the academic debate as part of a creative and self-reflective cultural dynamic. It reflects on the theoretical understanding of culture as academic knowledge with real social relevance and as empirical object of academic knowledge production. In researching the concept of culture in urban globalization, there is a triple reflexivity inherent to this work: (1) the reflective moment of political agency responding to the larger institutional context and thus possibly transforming it; (2) the reflective relationship of academic and political practice in the larger process of urban collective action; (3) the reflective theoretical contribution of this work contributing a new perspective as cultural material to the political process of urban globalization. Stressing the plurality of collective action, it was the author's motivation to contribute an idea of the city as potential place of political participation to the urban globalization debate. Given the diverging opinions about the essence and characteristics of urbanity, it is exactly this plural uncertainty of cities 'without qualities' which constitutes them as real contested places of contextualized and entangled globalization processes. From a normative point of view, the plural conceptualization of urban change also implies a potential for political agency based on cultural innovation that is inherently democratic. Opening representative democracy to

the participation of new actors, culture can become a resource of political agency for structural change used by political economic elites as well as by less privileged groups within or amongst cities.

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