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Cities, Risk and Safety

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ABSTRACT

All over Europe, cities are undergoing processes of restructuring. Urban spaces are being revitalised and as a result cities have become attractive places to visit and live. The revitalisation of urban spaces is typically characterised by creating clean and safe environments. The city is also characterised by the growth of enclosed spaces such as shopping centres and malls. These semi-public spaces are posted by security guards and excluding particular users such as the homeless, alcoholics etc. Furthermore, public spaces such as streets, parks and squares are being closed off by gates and fences in an attempt to keep out dangers of various kinds.

Neighbourhoods are also characterised by the fencing off and exclusion of strangers. Gated communities are clear examples and reflect a desire or need to seek safety and security in the private sphere of ones home and neighbourhood. Safety and security is also sought by living in neighbourhoods without people who are socially and culturally different from oneself.

Whereas segregation is typically viewed from an angle of physical separation of people of different classes, ethnicity and culture the aspect of risk and safety is rarely addressed. Clearly, processes of segregation are not merely a matter of avoiding risk. However, visible signs such as the fencing off of public spaces, the security guards in private and semi-public spaces, the increase of video surveillance and growth of gated communities all reflect attempts to protect and safeguard which can be recognised at different spatial levels.

Risk has become an important aspect of life: from the global level to the level of the individual. Risk relates to external threats of terror, war and global warming but has also entered the private sphere and daily life. A core element in this respect is the fear and sense of insecurity in relation to unfamiliar or "strange" people and places. This paper discusses how risk and fear have become important aspects in relation to cities, urban space and private homes and as a factor in everyday life.

Key Words: cities, segregation and risk society