

Struggling for the right to the (creative) city in Berlin and Hamburg. New urban social movements, new 'spaces of hope'?

Johannes NOVY and Claire COLOMB

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Johannes Novy

Researcher

Center for Metropolitan Studies, Berlin, Germany

E-mail: johannes.novy@metropolitanstudies.de

Dr Claire Colomb

Lecturer in Urban Sociology & European Spatial Planning

The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, United Kingdom

E-mail: c.colomb@ucl.ac.uk

Extended abstract

We get the picture: We, the music, DJs, art, film and theatre people, the groovy-little-shop owners and anyone who represents a different quality of life (...) are meant to take care of the atmosphere, the aura and leisure quality, without which an urban location has little chance in the global competition. We are welcome. In a way. On the one hand. On the other, the blanket development of urban space means that we - the decoys – are moving out in droves, because it is getting increasingly impossible to afford space here. (...) We say: A city is not a brand. A city is not a corporation. A city is a community. We ask the social question which, in cities today, is also about a battle for territory. (...) We claim our right to the city – together with all the residents of Hamburg who refuse to be a location factor. (Manifesto *Not in our Name, Marke Hamburg!* NioN, 2010: 324-5)

'A spectre has been haunting Europe since US economist Richard Florida predicted that the future belongs to cities in which the "creative class" feels at home' (NioN, 2010: 323). This reference to Marx's *Communist Manifesto* marks the beginning of '*Not in Our Name*', a manifesto by Hamburg-based artists, musicians and social activists which was published in October 2009. It is an unsparing attack against their city leaders' increasingly growth-oriented and gentrification-friendly approach to urban development as well as their recent adoption of 'creative city' policies of the type championed by Richard Florida and Charles Landry. The manifesto's publication, as well as the enormous attention it sparked throughout Germany and beyond, are indicative of a broader conflict currently unravelling not only in Hamburg, but also in other German cities like Berlin over contemporary urban development often referred to as entrepreneurial (Harvey, 1989) or more recently, neoliberal (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). This conflict is, paradoxically, spearheaded by those whom many policies in place in Hamburg and elsewhere seek to appeal to: creative,

mostly middle class and well educated individuals such as design and cultural professionals along with bohemians and students, i.e. individuals that are today, following the works of Richard Florida (2002), referred to as members of the so-called 'creative class'.

In Hamburg the publication of the above-mentioned manifesto coincided with the formation of the 'Right to the City' network (Recht auf Stadt, 2010) and the occupation of the *Gängeviertel*, a historic, inner-city neighbourhood popular among artists that had been earmarked for wholesale renewal before the City Council, in response to the massive resistance, decided to redeem the property it had previously sold to a private developer. One year earlier in Berlin the *Media Spree* project, a large-scale led redevelopment scheme planned along the shoreline of the River Spree – a site where many music clubs and other sub-cultural spaces are located – also found itself confronted with massive protests, culminating in a local public referendum in which a majority of voters spoke out against the project and forced local authorities to reconsider (parts of) the existing scheme. Organized by a several local initiatives, the ongoing protests in Berlin, similarly to those in Hamburg, are also to a large extent driven by precisely those strata of society around which Berlin's politicians – similar to their counterparts in Hamburg – orientate much of their policies (Scharenberg and Bader, 2009).

These developments, regardless of how they will unfold in the future, deserve scholarly attention. They suggest that entrepreneurial or neoliberal policy agendas and particularly policy discourses and practices aimed at promoting 'creative cities' as 'soft' policy fixes that complement them (Peck, 2005) are increasingly coming under fire. And they seem to show that some 'creatives', in particular artists and other cultural producers, i.e. members of the 'super-creative' core of Florida's creative class formulation, have become a vocal voice in contestations of the present-day urban order. Yet their role in urban social movements has thus far not been sufficiently explored. What precisely characterizes and drives the emerging protests in Berlin and Hamburg? How should they be interpreted, and what implications can be drawn from them with respect to the current state and status of urban social movements in both theory and practice?

Exploratory in nature, this contribution seeks to address these questions by building upon recent scholarly contributions on urban social movements (USMs) and contestations to neoliberal urbanism, in particular in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (e.g. Pickvance, 2003; Koehler and Wissen, 2003; Pruijt, 2003, 2004; Uitermark, 2004; Leitner et al., 2006; Nicholls, 2008; Mayer, 2009), as well as on the critical literature on the role of creative cities policies in contemporary processes of urbanization (e.g. Peck, 2005; Montgomery, 2005; Krätke, 2010). Our analysis will draw particularly on the work of David Harvey who, in *Spaces of Capital*, emphasized the political and agitational powers of cultural producers and hypothesized that the increased instrumentalization of art and culture as productive assets in post-industrial economies and policy-making could 'lead a segment of the community concerned with cultural matters to side with a politics opposed to multinational capitalism' and in favor of some more compelling alternative based on different kinds of social and ecological relations' (Harvey, 2001a: 410; 2002). The objective of the following discussion is thus to assess whether or not the current struggles in Hamburg and Berlin lend support to Harvey's

claim, and to discuss the extent to which the developments in these two cities hold promise for real and sustained progressive urban change, i.e. to paraphrase Harvey, whether 'spaces of hope' within which alternative politics can be both devised and pursued are truly emerging.

Focusing particularly on the German context, the first part of the paper provides a brief discussion of urban social movements and their transformations over time, addressing in particular the recent appearance of new actors and coalitions engaging in urban struggles. Harvey's notion of 'spaces of hope' and his hypothesis about the potential role of cultural producers in urban mobilizations for the construction of such spaces are then elaborated upon. The paper's second part takes the discussion to Berlin and Hamburg. The two cities' turn towards urban entrepreneurialism and their adoption of what might be best described as 'creative city' approaches are discussed. The contradictions, tensions and conflicts these approaches have given rise to are then illustrated through two short case-studies of urban struggles in both cities. In the final section we discuss these recent developments as well as their possible implications in the framework of Harvey's hypothesis on the role of cultural producers in urban protests. Three particular aspects of these recent struggles are discussed: the *composition* of the movements, the *contributions* they make to the struggle for progressive urban change; their *agenda* as well as the *contradictions* that characterize the protests in the two cities.

In the conclusion we put forward a number of questions for future research on the role of artists, cultural producers and 'creatives' in urban social movements across the globe in the age of a hegemonic 'creative city' discourse and in the context of the ongoing transformation of urban policies. In our view, future research should pay particular attention to the following issues and questions:

- an analysis of the composition of the emerging protest movements to better narrow down its main agents stemming from the groups identified here loosely as 'creatives' as well as their demands, interests and preferences, with attention paid to possible internal divisions and struggles. This is important because, as mentioned above, we may hypothesize that such divisions will influence the protests' trajectories as well as particularly initiatives' capability to act in the long term;
- the strategies of the movements to cope with existing internal contradictions and divisions as well as their capacity to create coalitions with other social groups with a stake in the transformation of their localities.
- the specific resources which such 'creatives' bring to USM, and how they can use their 'symbolic power' and role in the 'branded city' to criticize, question and disrupt neoliberal urban policies. Can these resources help such movements achieve things that previous USM could not? Does the familiarity with the new media and the local and transnational mobility of (part of) the creative and artistic milieu involved in such movements have the potential to influence coalition-building efforts and linkages between USMs across localities?
- the risk which movements face to be co-opted or discursively mobilized as a colourful addition to the marketed image of the 'creative city'. This is particularly evident in Hamburg where the struggle surrounding the Gängeviertel has already entered the city's official marketing as expressed

by a statement of the Hamburg Marketing agency in April 2010, which described the struggle surrounding the Gängeviertel as a 'typically hanseatic, elegant and sophisticated kind of protest (Rote Flora, 2011). How the local state and other actors respond to such protests is therefore worth investigating, especially in light of the capacity of neoliberal restructuring strategies to undercut or accommodate sources of political opposition (Leitner et al., 2006).

- the role of local and national context in fostering the observed forms of mobilizations as well as the potential similarities and differences between them in different contexts.

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