

• *Reurbanisation – City concept – Urbanity – Ideals*

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## **The “Concept” of Reurbanisation? Discussion of a Many-Faceted Term and its Variations**

*„Konzept“ Reurbanisierung? Diskussion eines vielschichtigen Begriffes und seiner Ausprägungen*

This paper discusses the various connotations, lines of development and origins of the term reurbanisation. In this discussion deterministic process models that describe the process of reurbanisation in a statistical-empirical way as a trend away from suburbanisation and exurbanisation complement and are complemented by complex theories that include and assess spatio-economic and sociological aspects in their arguments. The term reurbanisation is based on an idealised city concept from the past the meaning of which needs to be rediscovered. A complex communication between various groups of actors is connected with this in order to achieve the desirable ideals of reurbanisation and to ensure their sustainability.

### **1. Introduction**

The so-called ‘urban crisis’ appears to be a perennial topic of public discussion. Recurrent waves of academic publications, occasionally employing varying terminology, affirm the ‘decay’, ‘demise’, ‘decline’, or ‘loss’ of urban living (cf. the contribution by *Glatter* and *Siedhoff* in this issue). Contrasting with this are concepts of reurbanisation, revitalisation and urban rehabilitation that conjure up an ‘urban renaissance’. How did this ‘turn away’ from the city come about and to where did it go, and why should this trend reverse itself and, moreover, in a sustainable way?

### **2. Development and Interpretation of the Reurbanisation Concept**

*Christ* (2006: 66) postulates a growing “disintegration of the ‘city’ concept” which, as it is used in special discourses, is increasingly frequently being aimed at different goals and target groups. Whereas, for instance, the discourse about ‘urban renewal’ tends to refer to the welfare state and social conditions and to be pessimistic in tone, real estate or marketing specialists are more likely to talk about ‘urban development’, an ‘urban renaissance’, or the optimum and optimistic positioning of the city as a ‘brand’ with sales and recall value. Both the pessimistic and the optimistic

variant have in common that they aspire to a change in urban developments, because the present situation is assessed as deficient, inadequate, unjust, inefficient and dysfunctional. The unavoidable subjective implication is that cities used to be more interesting, vibrant and urbane and how we can return them to the 'right path'. This leads to the question as to what caused the cities to leave this path; who is 'at fault' and whether and by whom the causes can be repaired or regulated. Was there in the past (in what time frame?) such a thing as an optimum development path, or do cities or parts of cities or even only individual real estate objects in city districts go through a 'product' life cycle of their own? This again raises the recurring question: How can a city remain liveable for its residents, develop profitably for investors, appear unmistakable and central to visitors, remain governable for politicians, indeed even improve these urban positions in a time of unarrested growth of prosperity? Is the current discussion about reurbanisation and revitalisation therefore new, or is it rather a topic that keeps recurring in the vicissitudes of historical development? In a time of clever multimedia processing is a 'rediscovery' of the city therefore only a slogan or a political objective? Not all of these questions will be answered in the following. Nevertheless, a glance at the literature shows that the discussion of the demise of the city is several decades old and refers primarily to North American and European cities.

Already since the end of the 1950s there has been an animated debate (not only in Germany) about the increasing 'inhospitality' of cities (*Mitscherlich* 1965), the 'murdered city' (*Siedler et al.* 1964) the 'demise of cities' (*Jacobs* 1961), or the 'deconcentration' and 'erosion' of cities (*Deutscher Städtetag* 1960 cited after *Kuhn* 2007: 122). The criticism centred around the concern that as cities 'flowed out' into the area around them they might lose their traditional compactness, their social and functional mixing, their urbanity (understood as consisting in manifestly urban activ-

ities and atmospheric concentration) (*Haase* 2008). Legions of books on urban geography and urban sociology have dealt with such unfortunate developments as urban decay, urban blight and urban pathologies and with the fact that entire city cores or districts have degenerated into ghettos, no-go-areas or skid rows, leading to an unarrested flight of the disillusioned inhabitants into suburban and periurban areas that offer financial and residential alternatives. Already in 1960 *Bahrtdt* (cited after *Kuhn* 2007: 121) called for a goal of re-urbanisation in order to transform the 'subdivided and decentralised city' of the reconstruction period after World War II, which adhered too highly to Anglo-American and Nazi planning ideologies, into an 'urbanity through density' approach. Since the middle of the 1970s the historical-cultural value of the traditional 'old' town for the character of the city has been redefined in such a way that urban development should no longer aim only at urban expansion, but also at urban rehabilitation, not only at 'comprehensive redevelopment projects', but also at 'socially responsible, cautious urban redevelopment that preserves' (*Kuhn* 2007: 123).

The first process model of reurbanisation devised to verify empirically the actual resumption of urbanisation dates to the end of the 1970s and can be found in *van den Berg et al.* (1982). The authors describe four phases in the changing distribution of population and jobs between the core city and the periphery:

- the first phase of urban development: urbanisation, essentially fueled by rural-urban migration; increasing population concentration in the core of the still young city;
- second phase: suburbanisation and decentralisation; growing agglomeration disadvantages such as rising land prices or traffic jams make the periphery increasingly attractive for population and for businesses; the core city loses more population than it gains; this re-

sults in a typical differentiation of large and small, family and non-family, households between the periphery and the core;

- third phase: phase of disurbanisation; no longer only the inner city, but the entire core city including an inner ring of older suburbs, stagnates or loses population in favour of exurban 'hinterland' developments;
- fourth phase: reurbanisation, phase of population reversal; in the core the thinning out of the population and the demolition of old building substance have advanced so far that reconstruction, redevelopment, conversion plans and 'backfilling' can slow down the out-migration trend in comparison with other urban areas, resulting in a 'relative centralisation' of the population in the core (*Bourne* 1996: 695).

The question why these 'inner city stabilisation and upgrading processes' should occur at all, thus reversing the 'success story' of suburbanisation, and how they can be demonstrated empirically has prompted a large number of studies since the 1990s. Not only do different theories exist to explain reurbanisation (*Kujath* 1988; *Bourne* 1996; cf. *Haase et al.* 2006: 169), the criteria drawn on in these studies as measures of reurbanisation, such as repopulation, 'enhancing the attractiveness' of the inner city, or economic revival and gentrification, also differ, which greatly complicates the comparability of the findings (cf. *Brühl et al.* 2005). Additionally, because of a lack of large-scale data (counter-examples in *Herfert* 2002) often only small-scale or segmented investigations are performed (revitalisation of harbour areas; renewal through sports, culture or shopping centres) (*Priebs* 1998; *Gratton et al.* 2005; *Weist* 2006; *Wood* 2007; *Dziomba* 2008). This dynamic-positive image of reurbanisation therefore often exists only for small individual pieces of the urban mosaic within a simultaneous discussion of so-called quartered cities, of fragmented and socially polarised cities. Parallel

to this, stagnation and decaying quarters continue to exist (cf. *Haase et al.* 2006: 169).

### 3. Starting Position: The Ideal of the 'Heroic' City

In a historical comparison there is an image of the (European) city that heroises it and seems to be ideal. A city came to symbolise a 'special place' that served as the functional and cultural centre of its hinterland (*Christ* 2006: 70). The city became a centre of representative buildings, of people of varying backgrounds and abilities, of fellowship and communication, of privacy and the public, of authority, control, security and insecurity, of hopes, chances and 'visions of a better life' (*Christ* 2006: 69ff.). Before the city began to 'sprawl' as a result of technological progress in transportation and telecommunication since the end of the 19th century and 'broke up' or fragmented at the end of the 20th century, it was above all 'compact' in its building fabric, in its uses and trade relationships.

*Christ* (2006: 71f.) captures these elements in the "7 C properties" that still characterise the ideal of the European city (though at times in a romanticised museum-like manner) and that play a major role in the current discussion of reurbanisation. Thus, deriving from its medieval function, the city is spatially *compact* and nevertheless *contoured*, functionally *complex* or mixed on a small scale and nonetheless interrelated in *coherence*, centre of *culture* and *capital*, a place for meeting or *communication*. *Jessen* (2000: 210) additionally stresses the tradition of an urban consciousness that views the city as something worthy of being preserved. This appraisal expresses itself in the aspiration to preserve the centre of the city with its functions or to renew it through revitalisation measures. Ideals, ranging from local to supranational sources, postulate that the (European) city is a synonym for tradition, urbanity, compactness, density, mixed usage and a meeting place in public space (*Schubert* 2001: 270).

#### 4. Abandoning the Urban Ideal

Rather negative terms such as expansion, segregation, functional segregation, suburbanisation and exurbanisation indicate that the heroic image of the city discussed in Section 3 began to disintegrate fundamentally from the middle of the 20th century on. Growing prosperity, tax policies such as home owners' allowances and commuter compensation (Kuhn 2007: 124), new residential ideals, increasing motorisation, low land prices and 'simplified' building (e.g. without special requirements for listed buildings) made the urban periphery attractive for several waves of suburbanisation (Sieverts 1998; Brake et al. 2001). Because of the physical lack of space, but also because of the relatively strong state with its building regulations, however, these waves did not nearly spill over in Europe as far as they did in North America with its *laissez-faire* philosophy.

Further internal development was, however, hampered in all cases by the historical building stock of an 'aging city', i.e. there was a 'produced geographical pattern' of residential buildings and factories and above and underground areal and linear infrastructure with its 'sluggish adjustment response' that encouraged the moving of operations to sites without such handicaps at the periphery (Kujath 1988: 25f.). With their rising consumption and residential needs, and encouraged by convenient building conditions, by banks, insurance companies and real estate dealers, more affluent groups moved away from the core city and left behind 'inner-city quarters that were percolating down economically' (Kujath 1988: 26). A phase of disinterest and disinvestment in inner-city regions contrasted with dominant centrifugal powers that not only promised growing prosperity but also found in the single family home the appropriate residential form for the 'family concept'. The disintegration of the Fordist city into atomised individualised residential cells in search of privacy and spatial dissociation from the working world, which can be seen especially impres-

sively in the standardised Levittowns in the USA, turned simultaneously into a financial and demographic depletion of the inner cities that triggered further social selection in a self-reinforcing process.

#### 5. The Rediscovery of the City

Since the 1980s a development path can be observed that is being celebrated as a 'farewell to urban pessimism' (Kuhn 2007: 125). Underlying this is a first paradox: The return to the core city is based on the pessimistic insight that the limits to growth and the extent to which the future can be shaped are exhausted. No longer is the stress being placed on replacing what exists, but on a renewed consciousness of the historical heritage of a city (Albers 1995: 119). In many cases, however, this renewed consciousness was only evoked by planners and politicians and did not result in any appreciable return migration into the inner cities in the form of so-called pioneers.

Kujath (1988: 29) cites Alonso in this regard: "If people behave as they always have, we shall have an explosive suburbanization. If behavior changes, we shall have clustering and reurbanization." What took centre stage for Alonso was a rational consideration of cost-benefit structures or opportunity costs, travel times and costs and land prices, which make it possible to 'calculate' an optimum combination of income and place and type of residence. Lacking as a premise, however, or perhaps impossible to calculate, were changes in consumer behaviour, in household size and structure, lifestyle and attitude, age structure and the growth of prosperity. In a matrix with multiple fields these indicators can be combined with each other to record the current mosaic-like image of sociodemographic living arrangements, which – highly abridged here – represent the result of postmodern and post-Fordist developments (cf. Haase et al. 2006: 169) and gave reurbanisation a new impulse (cf. the contribution by Haase in this issue).

In these 'new' living forms the traditional nuclear family with its residential ideal that focusses on a single-family home no longer plays a role. Residential preferences shift from 'open space and suburban amenities' to 'accessibility and urban amenities' (Bourne 1996: 697); urban entertainment becomes a 'surrogate' (Kujath 1988: 33) for disintegrating family and kinship networks. 'New' types of households emerge that no longer have only family but also family-like structures and that find experimental scope in which to develop in the old towns with their overlying and underlying functions, their great variety of types of housing, individual floor plans and infrastructure that would not be found in standardised suburbia (cf. the contribution by *Sandfuchs* in this issue). This gives rise to a second paradox, namely that the traditional old town is becoming more trendy and modern than the originally modern suburbs (Kujath 1988: 33).

What this refers to is not only the often-described influx of higher social classes, combined with building and social upgrading and/or displacement, which have contributed in deindustrialised cities to a conversion of business space to swank residential space. *Haase et al.* (2006: 177) identify more and more flat-sharing communities that follow the trend towards reurbanisation, which makes sense as it allows people to split the rent in fashionable residential areas with rising rents. The observation that migrants, persons with low income and persons in transitional situations, both private and professional, also still find their way into the traditional 'zone of transition', the former mixed working class/commercial zone described by *Burgess* (*Haase et al.* 2006: 177), only documents the fact that reurbanisation cannot be equated per se with gentrification but that it represents a mosaic of upgrading and 'mere' stabilisation measures. Nonetheless, reurbanisation remains more of an option for certain social classes than for others to whom no other residential alternatives are open.

*Bourne* (1996: 698) emphasises that the mere aspect of repopulation in the sense of a demographic replenishment of the inner city is not sufficient for reurbanisation. Replacement of buildings, conversion of unused and underused buildings and areas, restructuring of the local economy, qualitative upgrading of private and public infrastructure, ultimately the spatial concentration of urban uses and functions are prerequisites with a multiplier effect for a master plan for 'reurbanisation'.

## 6. The Sustainability of Reurbanisation

In view of the long-term negative demographic growth that is projected and of imponderable economic crises, if urban regeneration is to be devised sustainably so that it may be carried over into the future, 'institutional creativity' is required (*Keim* 2004). Economic, cultural and local political actors or other stakeholders, i.e. groups of actors who engage in local affairs, independent of where they reside and how they are organised (*Keim* 2004: 213), can mobilise such local qualities. The networks and communicative patterns that exist between these actors and the negotiating power and skill they show in pursuing a common goal demonstrate that reurbanisation can be a complex process of negotiation. Reurbanisation therefore is subject to a holistic total of social, (real estate) economic, cultural and political interests, if it is open to a sustainable and socially responsible bottom-up approach. This indubitably will require tedious consultations and the weighing of different goals, for which there is no equivalent in the meanwhile so out-dated term 'planning'.

This explains why reurbanisation tendencies, whether in London, Tokyo, Leipzig or Detroit (*Wehling* 1994; *Lütke Daldrup* and *Weigel* 2001; *Hohn* 2002; *Meyer* and *Muschwitz* 2008), are often only small-scale and sectoral, and why finance and planning become more and more involved, the more the process affects pre-existing building and sociodemographic stock (cf. the contribution by



*Megerle* in this issue). Because of their size, their consolidation of derelict land and their role in urban policy as new city landmarks, in a sense as 'small green-field' sites, so-called major urban renaissance projects like *HafenCity Hamburg* (*Dziomba* 2008) are subject to a master plan, which rather corresponds to a kind of 'laboratory' reurbanisation.

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banisation in a statistical-empirical way as a trend away from suburbanisation and exurbanisation complement and are complemented by complex theories that include and assess spatio-economic and sociological aspects in their arguments. The term reurbanisation is based on an idealised city concept from the past the meaning of which needs to be rediscovered. A complex communication between various groups of actors is connected with this in order to achieve the desirable ideals of reurbanisation and to ensure their sustainability.

*Zusammenfassung: „Konzept“ Reurbanisierung? Diskussion eines vielschichtigen Begriffes und seiner Ausprägungen*

Diskutiert wird der Begriff Reurbanisierung in seinen unterschiedlichen Konnotationen, Entwicklungssträngen und Ursachen. Deterministische Ablaufmodelle einerseits, die den prozessualen Ablauf von Reurbanisierung als Abkehr von Sub- und Exurbanisierung statistisch-empirisch beschreiben und komplexe Theorien andererseits, die raumökonomisch und soziologisch wahrnehmend und bewertend argumentieren, ergänzen sich hierbei. Der Begriff der Reurbanisierung orientiert sich an einem idealisierten Stadtbegriff der Vergangenheit, dessen Inhalte wiederzuentdecken sind. Damit verbunden ist eine komplexe Kommunikation verschiedener Akteursgruppen, um die erstrebenswerten Leitbilder von Reurbanisierung zu erreichen und nachhaltig abzusichern.

*Résumé: Discussion du « concept » de ré-urbanisation et de ses multiples formes*

La notion de ré-urbanisation est discutée sous ses connotations, trajectoires et origines diverses. D'une part, des modèles déterministes décrivant par la méthodologie statistico-empirique le processus de ré-urbanisation en tant qu'abandon des notions de péri- et d'exurbanisation et, d'autre part, des théories complexes qui perçoi-

*Summary: The "Concept" of Reurbanisation? Discussion of a Many-Faceted Term and its Variations*

This paper discusses the various connotations, lines of development and origins of the term reurbanisation. In this discussion deterministic process models that describe the process of reur-

vent et évaluent la ré-urbanisation par la perspective de l'économie spatiale et de la sociologie, ces deux approches se complètent. La notion de ré-urbanisation repose sur une notion idéalisée et révolue de la ville, dont les contenus sont à redécouvrir, en lien avec une communication complexe de différents groupes d'acteurs et afin d'accéder aux modèles désirables de la ré-urbanisation et d'en assurer la durabilité.

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Manuskripteingang: 03.11.2008

Annahme zum Druck: 01.12.2008