Introduction: Spaces of Everyday Life

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Standing on a terrace in the Galata neighborhood, Istanbul is all around me: a panoramic view of the historic silhouette, mosques and minarets on seven hills. It is all there, as if printed in the pages of a coffee-table-book. Turning slightly, my gaze travels across the Bosporus, countless ferries cross the water to Üsküdar and the Asian side of the endless city; under the bridge, toward the modern towers of the Central Business District in the Maslak and Levent quarters. Between my position on the terrace and the downtown towers lie hotel complexes displaying advertisments on screens and high-rise congeries, rooftop bird cages, clotheslines and other useful things. A closer look at the rooftops and buildings around me reveals a multitude of construction sites. Behind refurbished art-deco facades, dwelling structures currently inhabited by large (immigrant) families are transformed into spacious homes for wealthy urbanites. The building right in front of me houses a huge loft with large windows. It is full of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and heavy wooden furniture.

My perspective on the terrace corresponds with a panoramic view of the city and its urban meta-structures, or with the strategic view of urban planners. But there are other perspectives on the city. At street-level there are human densities; flows of commodities, interaction and communication. »Walking in the city« is experiencing the repetitive, situative and strategic ways urban actors create spaces by interacting with the architecture and with each other (de Certeau 1984). These everyday practices are a significant dimension in the production of urban space.

At first, Istanbul amazed and intrigued me. The diversity and complexity, the metropolis' permanent state of movement, transformation and urban life was surprising, irritating, fascinating and challenging. The way historical layers and contemporary economic structures manifest themselves, compete and interfere with each other in physical and social space was challenging. The usual tenets of social and cultural studies for research of urban phenomena seemed inadequate. »Modernity«, »tradition«, »globalization«, »center«, »periphery«, »religion« and »public space« seemed insufficient, abstract concepts, which refer to dichotomies – obviously these have to be questioned with regard to Istanbul and other urban agglomerates. Intellectuals in Istanbul and other urban scholars confirm my impression that its urban complexity and ongoing processes of transformation compete with persisting clichés as part of the imaginary representation of Istanbul.

Urban space is an ongoing and dynamic process of social and cultural construction, which materializes in physical sites, social interactions, imagery and narratives. Urban space is thus variable and temporary and has differing criteria for meaning (Wildner 2003). The constitution of urban space is a social process based on spatial structures and space constructing activities (Löw 2001). Accordingly, this means thinking of spaces less in territorial terms, but as a process of creating social and discursive meanings. Looking at these spaces of interaction and flow, brings the micro-cultures of everyday life into greater focus (Rogers 2005:406).

Most scientific approaches investigate urban transformation processes as calculable and structural principles in the context of global and neo-liberal conditions on a macro level. A focus on urban phenomena as specific implementations, informal practices, local characteristics and symbols opens up another perspective on processes of transformation that are not always predictable (Flusty 2003). Contemplating everyday life on the micro level, where global conditions are finally translated into material spaces and interpreted into cultural practices; more or less hierarchically disputed, experienced and lived, seems not only appropriate, but necessary. It is the move from a panoramic perspective to street level, to »reading the urban texture« (de Certeau 1984), concentrating on the routines, banalities and practices of everyday life (Lefebvre 1991). The quotidian dimension of urban life, the »coping with« and sustaining of life in complex situations – embellished by material details, social strategies, narratives and symbols – manifests the diversity of cultural knowledge and its significance in the production of urban space.

Focusing on the complex phenomena of everyday life in cities like Istanbul requires appropriate methodologies. Ethnographic approaches

do provide a spectrum of research objectives and instruments. Doing urban ethnography signifies the investigation of space as a material site or »built environment«. It composes physical boundaries, as well as symbolic meanings. The investigation of these physical places, and the ways different actors experience, perceive and appropriate, is part of ethnographic work. The social spaces created by networks and cultural practices, as well as the notions of space manifested in city models, in narratives, imageries and urban representations are also possible objects of investigation. An ethnographic approach focuses on micro situations in order to understand the meanings and contradictions inherent in spaces in the wider context of the urban condition. The object of study, the micro situation might be a contested neighborhood, a social network as part of an urban movement, discourses surrounding a public event, a dispute about urban planning projects, the biography of a migrant family or a specific urban location like a restaurant. The different trajectories of »multi-sited ethnographies« allow us to observe and interpret the complexity of local, everyday practices in their respective contexts (Marcus 1995). Thick descriptions of places, practices, and discourses provide a range of material for the analysis of temporary constructions of space. Applying the main techniques of urban ethnography – systematic descriptions, extended interviews and participant observation – means to take part in everyday situations, leaving the distant, amazed view from afar, being in the urban situation, listening and observing, talking and discussing, and learning about everyday practices in their urban contexts. In this case the observer cannot maintain the position of a neutral outsider. In participating in the situation the ethnographer describes. The interpretation must include a reflection of the researcher's role in the field. Subjectivity is not to be excluded, but to be reflected (Burawoy 1991).

Not all of the contributors in this part of the book describe their approach as ethnographic, but I still think it is appropriate to embrace historical analysis, cultural description and subjective interpretation of urban phenomena as ethnographic approaches to understanding the constituent aspects of everyday life in the processes of urban space. All of the articles presented here emphasize everyday experiences, daily routines and urban rhythms as a frame of reference. By focusing on specific sites, practices and social networks these authors study fields in which urban spaces are constantly reproduced and reinvented.

A study of labor migrants in the 19th century leads us to the significance of the appearance of urban institutions like newspapers, theaters and cafes to provide new public spheres in the formerly strictly territorially organized city of Istanbul. In another article, it is a small restaurant

run by ethnic entrepreneurs, which might take the role of a place of refuge and contact for »strangers«. These are examples of how specific migrant groups create their own urban spaces to exchange information, trade goods, gather and communicate. Especially under dominant global conditions of spatial and social segregation and the ever-increasing fragmentation of cities, research on a local level reveals the complexity of everyday practice as it creates niches through spatial appropriation and invention.

On the other hand, a look at contemporary transformational processes in Istanbul also provides examples of heavily contested spaces. This becomes obvious through the establishment of a public beach, where middle-class inhabitants blame the working-class and rural immigrants for invading public space with the culture of their everyday lives.[1] Further, in a case-study on the transformation of a whole street into a private consumption area, images of cosmopolitan, urban culture are reinvented.

Focusing on gender roles, female spaces – evidently accurately defined as private or public – are challenged by the activities of the women themselves. As a background for representations of urban »modernity«, the analysis of movies from the1950s reveals the construction of gendered space. Places for women are spatially limited but even more significantly, they are defined by behavior patterns and styles of dress. The style of dressing, especially the scarf is still an important element in the supposed distinction of the private and the public. A study about women migrants from the country shows that they create their own independent networks and challenge images of »modern« urban life. In this case, veiling is an open demonstration of the emancipated, public self (Göle 2004: 23), defiance of governmental rules, or the everyday assertion of one's »right to the city«.

Following Henri Lefebvre and his visionary concept, it becomes apparent that »the right to the city« not only demands access to urban infrastructure and institutions; but also refers to participation in social activities and discursive spaces, to the creation of spaces of representation, and last but not least, to the experience of desire as an active position in the production of urban public space (Lefebvre 1996).

In Istanbul as elsewhere, there seem to be different meanings, vivid discussions and even conflicts about the definition of public space, locality and identity. There are still ongoing »ideological battles over the control of public space and its function as a symbol of public morality«

1 Derya Ozkan, paper presented on the conference »Public Istanbul«, Weimar 2007.

as described by Çağlar Keyder nearly ten years ago. The potential is greatest in those spheres where »public space cannot be privatized where interaction is unavoidable« as in schools, on sidewalks or when confronted with billboards (Keyder 1999: 25). Following Nilfür Göle, Istanbul's urban space seems to be organized and ruled by strategies for anonymous public life, limiting spaces for strangers, organizing the city in *mahales* (neighborhoods) and controlling the body in public. The multiple mechanisms for controlling public life are quite different from definitions of an emancipated, liberal, modern identity and the principles of public space as postulated in western contexts (Göle 2004: 42). It seems difficult to overcome polarization or »dismanteling binarism« (Kandiyoti 2002: 3). But there do seem to be some proposals for spaces »in-between« as articulated in the contemporary, heterogeneous discussions about qualities and representations of public spaces – keeping in mind that the discussions themselves should be read as public spheres (discussions on the conference »Public Istanbul«, Weimar 21st and 22nd of January 2007).

Doing urban ethnography shows that urban public space cannot be analyzed as a given established space, but has to be examined within the processes of its own constitution and the continuous negotiation of everyday practice. The challenge faced by contemporary urban studies is to examine and focus on differences, not as insuperable conflicts, but to look at them as constructive friction, in the interest of overcoming dichotomies and exclusive definitions of self and space.

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