

Surveillance and spatial exclusion in German Cities

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In a similar way to cities in the United States, German cities are likewise affected by polarization processes of socio-spatial nature. These are becoming increasingly expressed in the form of divided cities - even if the divisions are by no means of the same quality as those in the U.S.A.. Nevertheless, there are increasing gaps between rich and poor that become also spatially evident and lead to the real or imaginary conflicts reflected in discussions on crime. De-regulated employment, the dismantling of the welfare state, and mass redundancy have created social and economic instability, which lead to the fact that the less security there is in one's social well-being, the more importance is given to physical security in form of protection against violence and property rights offences. Furthermore, governments are still trying to demonstrate their competence in combating crime – a competence they are either lacking in regard to social security, or that they are lacking the will to pursue

Processes of social exclusion and the emergence of an underclass highlight the vulnerability of the individual. Efforts to dispel the arising fear of personal social descent, transform it into a fear of the poor, which is projected spatially to those areas where one could come into contact with them.

The tradition of the European city was, however, characterized by the principle of an integrative city and an emancipatory public space. Market mechanisms were and are only one aspect that influences the use of the city, and increases segregation. Town planning and communal policy are highly involved, even though economic power has also influenced the structure of the German city since time immemorial. Today, the market is gaining a higher relevance in the course of a forced tertiarization, of the shortage of finances in the local government bodies, of a general emphasis on subsidiarity, and of the popularity of public private partnerships. The primacy of the economy is gradually replacing that of politics.

City policy today is mainly determined by location policies. Besides a common infrastructure, this includes security and an appealing ambience. Trends towards privatization of cities are accompanied by intensifying security measures.

I should first like to deal with some of the specific types of surveillance and mechanisms of spatial exclusion in German cities, and then to show their implications of the processes of social exclusion.

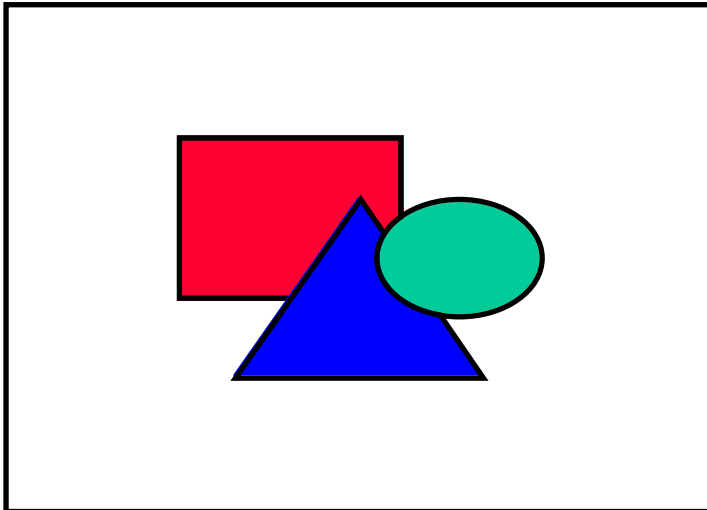
Privatization and the Surveillance of the city

One of the most pronounced signs of this development is the emergence of de jure private gated communities. If one should wish to investigate the proliferation of gated communities in Germany, however, it is first necessary to define these in a different way than has been done in the U.S.A. It is not „community“ in the sense of a spatially defined „Gemeinschaft“ that has to be stressed, but rather the term „gate“, i.e. security and barrier (Wehrheim 2000b). Extreme technological security measures for safe-guarding the privacy are still restricted largely to building complexes or skyscrapers.

Engaging doormen and installing closed-circuit television are the most evident forms. This is true, however, not only for the upper-class housing market, but also for state-subsidized housing. Whereas in the former case the dominant feature is to exclude non-residents, in the latter case, it is to keep the residents themselves under surveillance. Or rather, the concern is to improve the residents' subjective feeling of security and to reduce damage caused by vandalism (Wehrheim 2001b).

The topography of higher income-gated communities in the centre of Berlin is as shown here:

Doormen Buildings / Gated Communities in Berlin.



Glasze 2001

There is only one fenced-in residential area in Berlin, in the Tiergarten triangle. Besides exclusive condominiums it also incorporates the Mexican Embassy. Nevertheless, the diagnosed proliferation of gated communities in the broader sense of the definition is a sign of sealing oneself off from the public city and its inhabitants. Security installations are no longer designed individually for one home, but for an entire residential complex. „Personal integrity“ is becoming a marketable product and is being advertised under the label of exclusivity in both senses of the word.

Gated communities are, however, only one specific form of the sociological and legal privatization of the city, or rather an expansion of private spheres of power: The German railway became privatized and the stations along with it; the first private parks are now to be found, and since German reunification landscapes of consumption and „artificial“ indoor cities like shopping malls and urban entertainment centers, have been emerging at rapid pace (Wehrheim 2001a).

The best known example of these tendencies towards privatization of the city is the new Berlin Center at Potsdamer Platz where Sony and Daimler Benz have erected architectural icons portraying their economic power. In a demonstrative way, the economy occupies the city center of the new capital.

Surveillance in and exclusion from these private spaces always follow the same pattern, although the intensity of surveillance and exclusion does vary greatly. Specific norms determine the range of possible ways to use these former public spaces. Video cameras serve for deterrence and surveillance purposes and also represent the basis for spatial exclusion (Norris/Armstrong 1999; Wehrheim 2000a). At present, the number of cameras in German cities is estimated at approx. 500,000 (Gössner 2000) - although it is difficult to verify this figure. In addition, private spaces create the conditions for employing commercial security services that are oriented towards particular house rules. Correspondingly, the number of employees in this sector rose from 97,000 in 1992 to over 130,000 last year (BDWS 2000). Ultimately, it is the architecture of „exclusive spaces“ that decides upon aesthetic appearance as well as structural closure – as a further elevation of the defensible space concept of Oscar Newman (1972) – and that has influence on its access and utilization. The use of materials such as marble and granite symbolizes an exclusiveness of a place in the same way as reflecting glass does, thereby indicating to the so-called „pariah population“ that this is not „their“ area. In contrast to non-enclosed public spaces in cities, a door alone – even if it is open – takes away from the merely coincidental entry and provides that one has to make a decision on whether to go in or not (Wagner 1993; 1999).

Yet, architecture is not only relevant to the enclosed spaces like shopping centers as the prototype of privatized urban space. Public places and parks also present themselves increasingly as defensible spaces, or by means of their aesthetic enhancement (see also Mitchell 1995, Zukin 1995). Despite differing „strategies“, the consequences are always similar, as can be shown in examples of the North German city of Bremen.

Enclosed “Weberpark” in Bremen

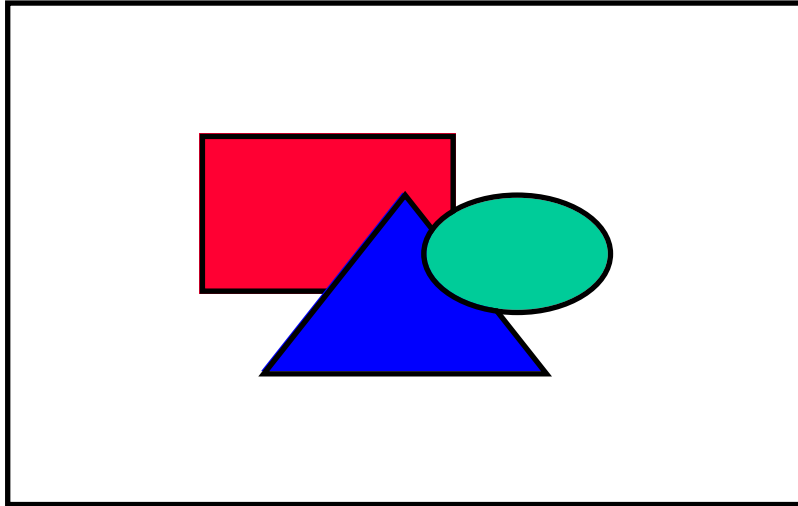
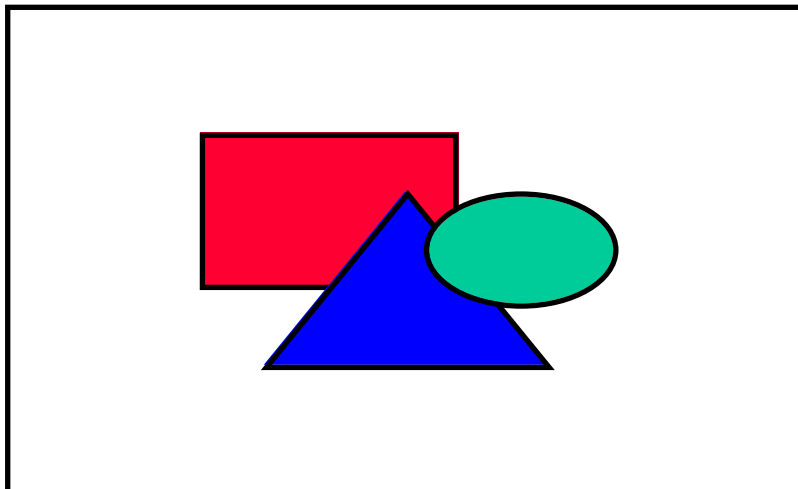


Photo: Jan Wehrheim

Firstly, the Weberpark, located in a residential area and closed due to the presence of an open drug scene. Today, access is restricted to those, that have been permitted and handed-over the key by a communally co-financed residential association. The real estate, however, is owned by the city. In this case, constructional closure and therefore exclusion dominate.

In contrast, the newly designed square in front of Bremen's railway station is not enclosed, but illustrates the ideal type of a surveillance area.



<http://www.bremen-tourism.de/frame-webcams.htm>

In this case, there are no obstacles blocking the view for the numerous security services present there, or for a Webcam. There are neither bushes nor walls; all activity on the square is immediately discernible, just as is the mere presence of marginal groups. Here, therefore, surveillance is of major importance and exclusion is merely an option.

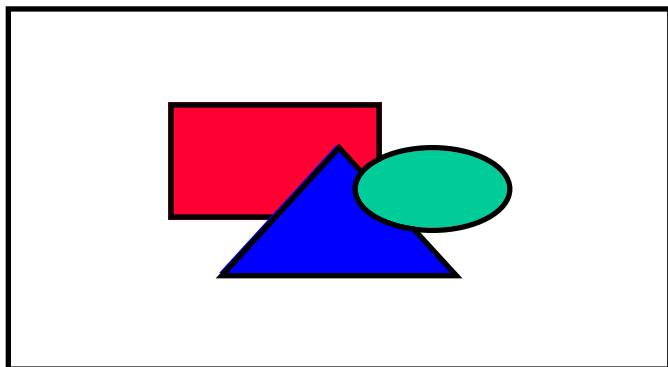
Area bans as mechanisms for regulating the city

The federal police continue dominating in public spaces, being liable to the relevant legislation. Particularly in the past few years, this legislation has undergone a tremendous tightening at local level. When criminal law became liberalized in the 70s, begging, for example, was accepted as being „socially tolerable“ and, therefore, the corresponding prohibition was being deleted from the criminal code. Today it reappears in German police law at communal level. The police are vested with additional authority: this includes the use of video cameras and the possibility of imposing displacement measures in specific

areas, such as banishment orders or area bans (Kant/Pütter 1998). These measures are implemented in connection with open drug scenes, begging offences, loitering, and alcohol consumption in public (which is not prohibited in general). Even if it is primarily the homeless, drug users, punks, and refugees who are mainly affected by these measures, the decisive factor for intervention is, nevertheless, the specific place, and not the person or the person's activity as such (Wehrheim 2001b).

One has to imagine banishment from a public space in the city as something similar to being sent off the soccer field during play. Violation of a regulation leads to a temporary exclusion, i.e. the „player“ in the public space has to leave the scene. In Berlin there are more than 30 so-called „dangerous location“, which are defined by the police (see Rada 1997). In these places, police intervention does not even require any kind of explanation, police control and banishment order can take place irrespective of any suspicion. In general, banishment is valid for 24 hours, and can be enforced by means of so-called „transportation custody“, (i.e. the police drop off the person concerned outside the city limits), or even by arresting the person. In case of violation of police order, banishments sum up and fines are imposed (Seifert 1996). This can finally result in prison sentences or in long-term banishment from the place concerned. The number of banishment orders in German cities amounts to hundreds of thousands every year (for Berlin see Eick 1997)!

Up until the revision of communal law in the mid 90s, police relied on statutes specifically concerning foreigners and asylum seekers, when expelling individuals and certain categories of person from parts of the city. Using these statutes helped the police to get around the courts' denial of any legal basis to expel German citizens from public space at that time. In Bremen, city maps indicating prohibited areas were sent to asylum-seekers, who mainly came from African countries (FFM 1997). These city maps were sent to persons suspected of being involved in drug-dealing. Charges or convictions were not necessary to justify this. Meanwhile, these measures have also been legalized for German citizens.



Area bans in Bremen

The map shows the area extending from the front of the afore-mentioned railway station along a street car route to an urban area which is characterized by its heterogeneous social structure and incorporates the previously noted Weberpark.

The example of Bremen clarifies how some open places are turned into de jure no-go-areas. This term goes beyond the fact that certain places are being avoided for fear of crime. It, furthermore, incorporates the fact that entry is being denied to individuals or marginalized groups.

From social to spatial exclusion and back

Those affected by selective surveillance and spatial exclusion are the „usual suspects“: socially marginalized groups that are visually conspicuous because of their clothing, skin/hair color and/or their behavior. That these are in fact the groups is nothing new in history. The poor have always been the ones who were watched more closely and who regularly carried the stigma of dangerousness.

The development is, however, tagged by a new quality. Firstly, privatization and innovations in technology create new possibilities to enforce surveillance and exclusion. Secondly, the policy described also stands to the fore, because today there are more socially marginalized groups in the cities than there were in the 70s during the era of Fordism, and they are visible in public spaces. Thirdly, the repressive ousting strategies are implemented against the background of a phase of approximate all-inclusion. Society as well as local policy were oriented - particularly in Germany - towards the model of being safeguarded by the welfare-state, and towards integration. Exclusion occurred only exceptionally when social

institutions and market mechanisms had failed, and the people oriented themselves towards an attainable prosperity. Those who did not have an employment and social security, had at least the hope of attaining these, and their disadvantages could often be compensated by job-training offers, low-income housing, etc., that provided a relative, social equilibrium (Kronauer 2000).

Today the tables have turned. As in discussions on a new urban underclass in the United States, social exclusion in Germany is a process that has not only become a big issue in the scientific community: one can actually see it happening and experience it. More and more people are becoming affected not only by a new form of poverty but by exclusion from opportunities of participation. Of concern here is access to sectors of society and finally, also, access to places that are symbols of social wealth and inclusion. Shopping malls are a perfect example! But especially railway stations and their surroundings – places where surveillance and exclusion are becoming more and more predominant – as well as public parks have been the traditional locations of marginal groups. To banish these groups from these places, means a more significant form of social exclusion in terms of spatial and social isolation, than their exclusion from „traditionally, elite spaces“, such as golf courses, for example - just to emphasize the point.

Social exclusion processes are being given their significance on the one hand by the massive, geographical increase in exclusive places and those under surveillance, and on the other hand by the imminent political dimension of dispelling: Exclusion has a strong symbolic function that illustrates who belongs to society and who should not! At the same time, poverty and heterogeneity cannot anywhere be seen more clearly than in public spaces in the city. The less visible poverty is, the less it will be put on the political agenda. What we do not see and register does not have to be fought against. All in all, the present development is merely a displacement of social problems and not a solution. Crime will not be reduced; instead, the underprivileged will be excluded in order to give the impression of security.

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