Davos²⁰¹⁸ Declaration

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Diversity and inclusion in urban societies

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Following our European history and its paradigms, we tend to imagine, that "urban" is describing a world of masses, malls and migrants, while "rural" stands up for a world of natives, neighbours and natures. In societal terms, the first might represent "diversity", the second "inclusion".

In those differing views, a deep opposition of "city" and "countryside" seems to manifest itself – stereotyped indeed, but not really incorrect. And even today, there is a really asymmetric perception of those two spheres of our society: also in the diverse terms of a social, cultural and architectural "Baukultur" – understood in a broader and wider sense. In my short paper, I wish to contextualise these two keywords anew, by reflecting some of their historical pre-requisites as well as their actual coinings.

1. Diversity

It´s obvious that the beginning of the actual conflicts about "diversity" leads us far back in the past. For we know that all premodern village communities had always and everywhere to defend their fields, their meadows and their homes against any external influx of people, to preserve their local resources against "strange" mobility and diversity.

The historical starting position of the cities, however, was clearly a different one. From their beginning, cities developed in an ambivalence of social closure and social opening. That means on the one hand, that the number of buildings, businesses and markets in the medieval towns remained limited to those within the town walls. Insofar, the protection of local resources could thus also still be considered an urban survival strategy. But on the other hand, cities began to change their course in the European early modern era at the latest. And this caused a transition from the concept of "social closure" to that of "social opening": with the evolution of trans-regional markets and of the labour migration new people came with new ideas and new products. As a result, the big commercial cities then started growing in a rapid and dramatic way.

That´s also why Max Weber in his book "Economy and Society" characterised the growing cities as new spaces of "settling down together", as he said – and not any more as old places of "local natives".

Thus, our modern cities are ultimately the product of a dynamic interaction between migration and market, between mass culture and citizenship. And it is only by opening their gates and walls physically as well as symbolically, that towns could grow and develop in this manner. This course of opening could also be witnessed within urban society und culture: instead of being coined only by localism, convention and stagnation, they were now increasingly shaped by cosmopolitism, diversity and dynamics.

So in the cities, the premodern principle of belonging to a family and a place for a lifetime is more and more confronted by modern identities, by identities of changing living environments and of different ways of living. And it is out of this urban diversity of ethnic origins and social milieus, of cultural patterns and varying lifestyles, that this complex and diffuse urban mixture emerges, which today we call "superdiversity".

In any case, diversity thus describes a concept in the history of cities and their self-presentation that is indeed fairly old and well tried and tested. Since the early modern period, big trading towns in the Netherlands, Italy or Germany have promoted themselves as "diverse". Of course, they did not use this modern term yet. But they referred to corresponding characteristics of their cities. By emphasising the plurality and variety of trading houses and craftsmanship, of merchants and costumers, of urban architectures and

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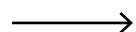
cultural institutions. Or by praising the variety of native as well as foreign actors who contributed with their knowledge, technology, merchandise and money to the local market. So, diversity – and that´s my first point – hence appears already in the past as a pivotal principle: in designing the cityscape and its population, as well as the urban economy and culture as spaces and practices of exchange and transfer.

And this increasing entanglement of native and foreign, of the inner and outer world, of economy and culture – all this is also reflected in the new urban topography. For this impact can be observed at special symbolic places and buildings in the cityscape: at the market square and the harbour or at the trade court and the business offices. Diversity therefore is already the historic "genetic code" of our cities' architecture, society and culture. It is out of this process, that in the 19th century the "urbanity" of the industrial and capitalist modern era results: as a specific composition of architecture and traffic as well as of working and living, of communicating and thinking – in short: of a specific urban mentality.

What began after 1900 as a new "urbanity" regarding modern city architecture, new ways of housing, living and spending leisure time – broken then in the following decades by wars and crisis - that urbanity has been continued in a new rise of urban culture and civil society since the 1970s. And this rebirth is due to the conscious introduction of expensive cultural programmes and campaigns, in order to save cities after their deep crisis during and after the Second World War. We all remember this T-Shirt "I Love New York", which then, in 1971, signified both a dramatic call for help for a dying city as well as a renewed spirit of change.

And this idea of help and change meant in those days: to save the cities "through culture"! Ever since, festivals of music and literature, museums and opera houses, open air concerts and lightshows, or a culinary culture and extensive sports facilities have again created attractive inner cities. And this "postmodern" urban culture receives new accents and outlines *because* of the augmenting influx of immigrant groups and tourists. It appears to be more diverse, more colourful and more international.

At the same time, new art scenes, local history societies, ecological movements and neighbourhood initiatives were formed. Together, they initiated new strategies of thinking and acting in terms of civil society. Like this, urban spaces and urban cultures should be shaped by the active participation of the civil society in order to avoid administrative planning mistakes as well as harmful economic developments.

At any rate, the impact of this new "culturalisation" of the inner cities is - at any rate - really dramatic. It means that the postmodern urban society forms itself in new and various shapes of a social opening as well as of a cultural communisation. Urban spaces and municipal politics are renegotiated from a new, moral position. And urban mentalities are reoriented from the strict focus on economic efficiency to the open values of a cultural hedonism.

In short, during the past few years, our towns have been experiencing a proper "cultural revolution", which has made them indeed the stage and the arena of a new and manifold urban culture on a large scale. This, too, is and means: the basis of urban culture ´as´ a long and strong tradition of diversity – until today.

2. Inclusion

Therefore, my second keyword is "inclusion". It is on this public stage of the urban spaces, that we present ourselves with our lifestyles and our life plans. It is where we live out our ideas and search for our social networks. And it is where we enjoy the new freedom to portray ourselves as autonomous individuals and as authentic identities: it's staging culture!

However, we also increasingly notice the social inequality and injustice in our urban societies. And we assume responsibility for those issues on behalf of civil society: for immigrants and refugees, for homeless and socially deprived people. In the last few years, there has been an outright explosion in the numbers of civil society initiatives. They all are, to a new degree, politically and culturally engaged in European towns. And they do represent the societal majority – despite all that yelling coming from those Gaulands, Orbans and Kaczynskis, who try to dissuade us from being empathetic, and from taking care of others.

Here, too, I can recognise a distinctive trait of urban society and culture: as the modern city has been created through continuous migration and through various minorities, it has also been obliged at an early stage, to
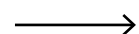
develop special concepts for integration and inclusion, in order to tame social heterogeneity and difference.

On the one hand, this concerns strategies for dealing with urban immigration and the resulting transformations of the economic and social cityscapes. Migrant spaces and minoritarian lifestyles have played a crucial role in shaping European cities over centuries. And since 1989 at the latest, they have been making an essential contribution towards the actual international and cosmopolitan profiling of our urban cultures. There, "foreign" music and fashion, body politics and greeting rituals, as well as culinary cultures and sporting activities have long been integrated and even ennobled there. So that chi-gong, Caribbean sound and sushi now have long been representing (so to speak) local and everyday culture.

On the other hand, the historical urban culture already featured numerous means and rituals of social integration, in the form of public meetings, religious holidays and ceremonies and of commercial fairs and markets. These examples demonstrate both the principle of negotiation and communification and the principle of competition and conflict.

So, in essence, it is about the tradition of both: of an urban integration policy as well as of an urban lifestyle of social inclusion, which has always been open for social immigration and cultural change. This process has its foundation in the great heterogeneity of ethnic origins, of social experiences, of cultural lifestyles and of political interests. Therefore, it is not local convention and normativity that are its aim, but open and negotiable diversity and plurality.

Thinking about urban culture thus means thinking of those old shooting matches and carnival processions, of town anniversaries and craftsmen's fairs, of ceremonials and memorial days, that have long been established elements of the urban tradition. But nowadays, above all, we also have to think about the broad variety and the new urban institutions and formations: about music events and theatre festivals, culinary cultures and farmers' markets, about clothing and food banks, sports associations and football fans, about youth culture and urban gardening, about aid for refugees and the elderly – basically, about all these new and young "urban traditions".

This, too, means urban inclusion in the very sense that the systematic evolution of urban forms of social knowledge and cultural practices are organised and performed in the everyday life of neighbourhoods and quarters. And all this in order to organise the daily negotiation of urban affairs.

And thanks to this new liveliness, the public space itself begins to produce new experiences and demands, new institutions and infrastructures. Through street cafés and music bars, art events and demonstrations, urban gardens and parks, civic organisations and neighbourhood initiatives: it is being transformed, more than ever before, into a "lived", and not just a "built" space. As a spatial and symbolical "We" and a place of succeeding inclusion.

But in fact not without problems and obstacles: for example between generations. This is due to the urban lifestyles, often changing between generations, bringing about distinctions between parents and children. Because the idea of individual autonomy includes the ability to choose and design one's own way of living. And this comprises a free decision about the question of which social, cultural, ethnic and religious elements of the "parents' heritage" should be retained.

In this respect, the urban space offers a wide range of cultural concepts of identity, particularly to the younger population: from fashion to body culture, music and food trends – from ecology to neighbourhood or from the ego-selfie to a community event. It seems that the individual components can be chosen freely and randomly.

However, this seemingly boundless "anything goes" also manifests itself in the social divide of our late modern societies: the increasingly different visions of society in younger and older generations as well as in urban and rural milieus. Whereas the first apparently have long lived in this society of lifestyles, the latter tend to meet this idea with fear and distrust.

Because the big city means also and especially this: the traditional home base of all the minorities! From an historical as well as a civic point of view, the city represents the only place where social minorities can

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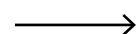
gather and organise themselves as communities. Only in the city can they reach the size of a "critical mass", which allows them to publicly show and establish their own divergent lifestyles. Only here, they can develop their own cultural means of expression, in which they can even attempt a political emancipation and in which they can practically improve their new legal status. Thus, it is true that the modern city is just as well the birth place of minority groups and cultures, as the minorities have deeply influenced the urban culture for generations.

All this can be observed in very different times and contexts. And it can apply to working class cultures as well as to migrant groups, to Jewish communities or free thinkers, to the LGBT or the feminist movements, to ecological initiatives or subcultures of music or fashion, to vegetarian milieus or to refugee initiatives. In short: today's urban culture is strongly and sustainably influenced by minoritarian ideas and values, by their practices and rituals, their music and styles: from street food and world music to pride parades and migrant carnivals. And that´s why they also actively and publicly produce urban tradition and inclusion.

However, there is at the same time a downside: Whereas we praise the new diversity or even super diversity of the urban society and a cosmopolitan urban culture, and whereas we celebrate the city as a place of mutual tolerance between minorities and majorities, other groups perceive this as a red cloth to a bull. The "social divide" in Western societies, caused by right-wing populists, has been linked directly with the rise of the minorities after 1968 and the resulting dissolution of the authoritarian post-war societies. For some might argue, that the "social and national divide" has been caused by the new pluralism of the generation of '68: as a result of the social and political establishment of environmental and pacifist initiatives, of minoritarian and feminist movements, and also as a result of the political acceptance of migrants and refugees.

And all this shows us that some of those opinions have long been adopted by the new conservative middle of society, heading a "conservative revolution". So, it´s obvious that we have to ardently defend and to strengthen our urban traditions of diversity and inclusion against all those attacks of nation-first politicians and of racist politics. And that is in fact to convey "urbanity" as a product of cultural diversity and as a space of freedom, as an invention of generations, migrants and minorities, and as the basis of a new open as well as common "We". This "We" has to be defended as an open society, living and performing the urban freedom of "diversity" and the urban tradition of "inclusion". And this – at last – means "urban quality"!