

## An historical and critical reconstruction of disciplines and interdisciplinarity in urban studies

Nina Gribat, Stefan Hoehne, Boris Michel und Nina Schuster  
Edited and translated<sup>1</sup> by Barbara Pizzo

### Abstract

Il contributo presenta una ricostruzione delle origini di quattro discipline (urbanistica, sociologia urbana, cultural history e geografia urbana), in particolare nei paesi di lingua tedesca, attraverso i contributi di Jacob Christoph Burckhardt, Friedrich Engels, George Simmel, Camillo Sitte, Max Weber (solo per citarne alcuni), e il modo in cui il loro lavoro ha dato forma alla cultura e ha contribuito alla sistematizzazione della conoscenza.

Usando una forma dialogica, studiosi con una diversa formazione discutono di come e quando diversi interessi e filoni di ricerca si sono cristallizzati in discipline, e come e quando nel tempo si sono avvicinati o allontanati l'uno dall'altro, a seconda della predominanza di questioni o problemi, ma anche in relazione con i cambiamenti nel contesto politico, o per ragioni ideologiche.

The paper offers a reconstruction of the origins of disciplines particularly in German-speaking countries, through the contributions of Jacob Christoph Burckhardt, Friedrich Engels, George Simmel, Camillo Sitte, Max Weber, just to name a few, and the way in which their work shaped cultures and systematizations of knowledge.

Using a dialogical form, scholars with different education discuss how and when different interests and stream of researches crystallized into disciplines, and how and when they have approached or moved away from each other over time depending on the predominance of questions or problems, but also in relation with changes in the political context or even for ideological reasons.

**Parole chiave:** urban studies; interdisciplinarity; cultural history.

**Keywords:** studi urbani; interdisciplinarietà; cultural history.

We introduce here, in this special issue of *Tracce Urbane* dedicated to interdisciplinarity, the first part of a longer article by Nina Gribat, Stefan Höhne, Boris Michel and Nina Schuster on that same topic, originated as a self-reflection on their commitment to *suburban*, the journal in which they are engaged. We will see how different interests and points of view have crystallized

---

1 A German version of this paper appeared in 2016 in *suburban*. 4, 2/3: 11-36 with the title: "Kritische Stadtforschungen. Ein Gespräch über Geschichte und Produktionsbedingungen, Disziplinen und Interdisziplinarität". Available on line at: <https://zeitschrift-suburban.de/sys/index.php/suburban/article/view/234>

in disciplines, and how these have approached or moved away from each other over time depending on the predominance of questions or problems, or even for ideological reasons. We conceived this paper as a sort of conversation among the two journals. Our aim is to make emerge and to compare common problems and issues we face in our editorial and research activity, in trying to overcome disciplinary boundaries and academic fences that prevent new and different perspectives - as well as interpretation, approach, methods, visions and, not least, proposals - to emerge. In this way, we want also to build a virtual bridge between two non-English on-line journals, with similar origin and scope, also for contributing at diffusing their approach and researches. This allows us to hope that maybe the time is a good one for pushing research in a different direction from the one in which the academic system has encapsulated it. The second part of this same article, which develops further the subject addressing the emergence of 'critical urban studies', will be included in the next issue of *Tracce Urbane* dedicated to that topic.

As editors of *sub\urban*, we see ourselves as an interdisciplinary editorial team that produces an interdisciplinary journal for critical urban research. When the journal was established, we discussed the concept of interdisciplinarity a lot, asking ourselves whether we are or want to be more trans- or post-disciplinary. In our editorial work, we encountered disciplinary questions surprisingly often, which was not always an easy task, for example in the review process. A quote from Lefebvre (whichever discipline he belonged to) summarizes this tension. In "La révolution urbaine" he writes in 1970 that the complexity of the urban makes "the cooperation of the individual disciplines indispensable. The phenomenon of urbanization cannot be mastered in its entirety by a special science. [...] If one admits or postulates this, the difficulties begin. Who does not know the disappointments and setbacks one experiences at the so-called 'interdisciplinary' or 'pluri-disciplinary' conferences? [...] Either a dialogue of the deaf, or a pseudo-encounter without common points of view."

Considering the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of urban research, as well as the difficulties of its implementation, we have mobilized the resources of our interdisciplinary editorial

staff to start a debate about critical urban research and interdisciplinarity, which we would like to continue in the future. The first step in this discussion was the reconstruction of a history of urban research in German-speaking countries. Through the perspective of different disciplines, we have tried to understand the development of urban research and to embed the emergence of an explicitly 'critical' reflection and its change into a broader historical context. On the basis of these initial results on the history of urban research, we outline the features of today's production conditions of critical urban research in the German-speaking world and formulate wishes for its further development. Representatives from geography (Boris Michel), architecture/urban planning (Nina Gribat), cultural history (Stefan Höhne) and sociology (Nina Schuster) took part in the discussion.

*s u b \ u r b a n (s\u): A debate on cities within social sciences, cultural studies and humanities began not only at a time when the rapidly growing cities in Europe start to emerge as a social problem, but developed when today's academic disciplines were arising. Given that the boundaries of the disciplines were not yet as clear, how did the various 'disciplines' discover city or urbanity as a theme and object of research?*

**Nina Schuster (NiS):** The emergence of urban sociology dates back to the time of the second industrial revolution and is closely linked to the emergence and growth of large cities. Häußermann and Siebel describe two opposite sociological attitudes towards the growth of cities and the emergence of a new social class in 19th century early capitalism. On the one hand, there is the dominant, conservative, sometimes reactionary urban criticism that blames the industrial metropolis for the miserable urban conditions they determined. It called for the abolition of large cities and the return to smaller towns and villages.

On the other hand, the 'progressive' city theory already existed, which begins with Friedrich Engels' "Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England" (1845) [Condition of the Working Class in England (New York 1887, London 1891)]. It saw in the new circumstances an opportunity for fundamental social upheavals and assumed that the social dynamic would increase up to the critical point, from which a revolution would eventually emerge.

A few years later, Ferdinand Tönnies developed a sociology that further strengthened this focus on the experiences of life in large cities: according to Tönnies' confrontation of community and society, individualisation and the anonymity and transience of encounters are typical of large cities [metropolises] and therefore peculiar to society. In contrast to the traditional community, society is characterised by the division of labour and by non-binding exchange relationships. At the beginning of the 20th century, contrarily to the dominant criticism towards the metropolis, Georg Simmel expanded this perspective by associating individualisation and anonymity in the metropolis with the possibilities of the city as a place of emancipation from traditional forms of life. In contrast, Max Weber's historical reconstruction of urban typologies in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Economy and Society)*, 1921, endeavours to abstain from an appraisal of the phenomenon of the metropolis. He refers especially to the economic, and subordinatedly also to the political and social aspects of the emergence of the various types of Western cities up to the time of industrialization. His presentation refrains from an assessment of contemporary urban developments.

**Nina Gribat (NG):** This is very interesting. In such varied interpretation of the metropolis in the industrial age I see a parallel with architecture and urban development, especially in the transition to modernity or functionalism. Indeed, these disciplines, which are shaped by the practice of planning and building, raise a basic question and namely to what extent their engagement with the city or with urbanity is acknowledged as 'research' by social sciences and the humanities – i.e. to what extent architecture and planning represent an independent contribution in terms of knowledge. Here, I would simply assume this (without, however, defining more precisely in what this contribution exactly consists). Thus, I consider drafts and manifestos of architecture and urban planning as parts of a history of ideas that also play a role in urban research. However, the recognition of the city or of the urban condition as an issue took place much earlier in architecture and urban planning – by this I now mean not only that building and planning have 'since ever' played a role in the urban context, but also the problematization of the urban condition or of the

city in architecture and urban planning. Furthermore, questions of domination and social order, as well as their representation, or the relationship between the public sphere and the private sphere were already important for ancient master builders – but with the exception of Vitruv's *Ten Books on Architecture* [*De architectura*], which mainly deal with questions of construction and engineering, very few writings have survived. That is why I would rather jump back to the very different assessment of the metropolis that NiS just talked about. For example, a very important stream was the artistic criticism of the industrial city. Camillo Sitte's (1843-1903) book "The Urban Development according to its Artistic Principles" (1889) is a model (and still – or once again – counts as one of the most important references). Contrary to modernism or functionalism, however, Sitte's book is less interested in the production conditions of the industrialized metropolis – for Sitte, urban planning was a form of art, and not a technical or a social problem.

The industrialized metropolis was assessed in a quite different way in the context of modern and functionalist urban planning and architecture.

On the one hand, planning and architecture have been greatly fascinated by the possibilities of industrialization, especially when it comes to building technology, for example for the construction of residential units. In fact, the solution to the housing question came within reach as a result of industrialized mass housing construction. On the other hand, they are characterized by a rejection of the poor living and working conditions in the industrialized metropolis. The Athens Charter, presented at the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM, International Congress of Modern Architecture) in 1933, sums up well the basic assumptions of the modern functionalist approach. In addition to the normative questions of how the new, modern city should be designed, how the functional separation of living, working and recreation should be achieved, there are also questions about the causes of the misery in the industrialized city, such as speculation in housing construction. At the same time, the claim to modernization was a social-reform claim, which, however, perhaps cannot be derived easily from the various ideal urban designs of the time (Le Corbusier, Hilbersheimer) or their implementation. Ultimately, the assumption underlying these designs that these goals

could really be achieved only through planning and building has simply turned out to be too short-sighted.

Interestingly enough, in dealing with the urban condition and the city in architecture and urban planning, both the modern and functionalist approaches as well as the artistic approach to urban planning have persisted at different intensities over a period of time.

**Stefan Höhne (SH):** For historical urban research, developments are somewhat different. We can claim that the history of cities has always been a central interest of historical science, long before it was institutionalized at universities in the late 19th century. The 1860 book “Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien” [The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy] by the Swiss historian Jacob Christoph Burckhardt can surely be considered as one of the first cultural-historical works on the city in the stricter sense. Among other features, Burckhardt observed in Renaissance cities of Northern Italy the emergence of the modern individual subject, favoured by a high degree of division of labour, the boom of mercantilist economies, and the density and heterogeneity of the urban population. In doing so, he makes a kind of urban sociological argument *avant la lettre*. If, for Burckhardt, it is above all the city that fosters the emergence of modern subjectivity and autonomous individuality (thus inventing also modern fashion, among other things), then an evergreen of urban research is already at stake here, one that has found its way into sociology through Weber and Simmel, among others, and is still in vogue today.

Beyond such rare pioneering studies by Burckhardt or Karl Bücher, however, the German-language history of the city around 1900 was largely pursued by lay historians or archivists and was accordingly strongly concentrated on local history. At universities it was more or less marginal too, and became effective primarily in the context of population studies, legal history, economics or early sociology. In these works, as in early sociology and folklore, hostile resentments are repeatedly expressed against large cities, which scourge the ‘un-nature’ and ‘excessiveness’ of the metropolises and look critically at the potentially revolutionary masses gathering there. One could argue that a form of critical city history is thus already emerging, albeit from a conservative-reactionary perspective.

**Boris Michel (BM):** With regard to geography, things are somehow different. Geography emerged as a science for which cities were not the focus of its interest. The significance of industrialization for a new way of thinking about space, which you have just mentioned, has long been suppressed in geography. This is certainly due both to its special position between the natural sciences and the social/cultural/humanities sciences, as well as to their connection with voyages of discovery and colonialism. Its focus was on human dependency on nature and the relationship between nature and culture, as well as the exploration of non-modern, 'primitive' and 'uncivilized' spaces. There was little space for cities.

In the 1890s, geographers such as Friedrich Ratzel and Otto Schlüter began to write about settlement geography. They were particularly interested in the location and form of the cities. The fact that cities are socially differentiated, contradictory and political was of course not visible for geography, which recurred to categories such as peoples and 'man'. Difference was rather emphasized between cities and this difference of cities was seen as an expression of something like 'cultural circles', natural spatial conditions or individual logic.

In 1903, Friedrich Ratzel published a text dealing with the *Geographical location of large cities*, interestingly enough in the same series in which Georg Simmel's *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* [The Metropolis and Mental Life] was first published. And I believe that this makes the non-simultaneity of these two disciplines in terms of an understanding of modern capitalist societies most clear. According to Ratzel, the city is somehow a universal magnitude in which people, transport and the economy are in some way concentrated. That is why Constantinople, the ancient Thebes and Stuttgart appear in Ratzel relatively similar. On the other hand, Simmel's large city is a place of condensation of a very specific, modern-capitalist experience. In my opinion, this expresses very different ideas and functions of the city. For geography this was one form of space among others and its interest was spatial and not social.

The concept of urban geography only prevailed over that of settlement geography after the First World War, and during this period numerous monographs on urban geography in the style

of regional geography were produced. This means: monographic descriptions of individual cities, which ideally first start with a physical geographical description of the natural space, then outline a historical genesis and finally come to a morphological description of today's 'city organism'.

Thus, Berlin's first urban geography contains both analyses about the terrain's height and rainfalls as well as a mapping of the density of pubs. Due to the strongly ideographical orientation of this geography, these cities are understood as spatial individuals and at first stand. One usually searches in vain for a question or a problem. It is rather a matter of collecting cities. What is particularly striking is the focus on cities that neither at that time nor now can be regarded as large cities. Small and medium-sized towns were more interesting. The first work on Berlin was not published until 1933. A concentration on large cities as with authors of the Chicago School, but also with Simmel, Benjamin, Marx and so on was alien to this geography. A small town in Thuringia was no more and no less interesting and significant than New York.

**NiS:** Also in sociological studies, which were numerous between the world wars and then again since the 1950s (on Darmstadt 1957, Euskirchen 1958, Steinfeld 1958, Dortmund 1958, Wolfsburg several times since 1959), large as well as small towns were object of research. In contrast to the geographical descriptions, the studies carried out in the 1950s were less concerned with the outer form of urban structures than with viewing the social fabric as a totality that stands for itself and in which everything that exists in society is represented. However, this approach was controversial in sociology, also because of its descriptive character, and was increasingly marginalized.

The early study of Marienthal by the working group around Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel from the 1930s is quite different. This extensive research, which combines quantitative with creative qualitative methods, is concerned with everyday life in the settlement of Marienthal, a small Lower Austrian town south of Vienna, but without ignoring the overall social context in which the object is located. The study is primarily focused on the effects of the newly emerging mass unemployment, the subjective mood, the coping with everyday life and the material provision of the inhabitants. The researchers, who lived in the settlement



for several months, also got in contact with the Marienthal residents through various activities they had organised, such as medical consultations, courses, children's competitions and clothing collections. So, research also had an active part to play – something should be given back to the people who were made object of the research, one would say. Yes, certainly the interests and research approaches of this sociological study were quite different from those of other disciplines. It is perhaps exemplary for the sociological orientation in the interwar period, even if it is unusual because of its demanding research work and taken up again more favourably only along with the new interest in qualitative research in sociology since the 1980s.

**BM:** Yes, exactly. In geography, the view of small towns had a different quality. I would also justify it rather from the point of view of epistemology than from that of research practice or empiricism, as I would assume is the case for sociology. One important reason, in my opinion, was that geography was often driven by the idea that nature and man had to be described in their mutual relationship, and mostly even as a moulding of man by nature. The big city was regarded as something too artificial, something which displaced nature too much. Thus, it is certainly not surprising that geography often has moments of criticism towards the city. This intensified from the end of the 1920s and especially in connection with the branch of geopolitics.

**SH:** If one looks at the development of research into urban history since the beginning of the 20th century, also in languages other than German, the research that has taken place there can perhaps be roughly divided into three categories. First, there are countless local city histories dedicated to the development of individual cities, often written also by 'lay historians' or chroniclers. Here, the main effort is devoted to the juridical development of city constitutions and hardly addresses the real social and economic realities of life, which already around 1900 brought much criticism to historical studies, for example by Werner Sombart and Georg Simmel. However, especially from the 1920s onwards, there was an increase in studies focusing on sub-processes of urban development considering also social dimensions, such as housing, or migration. These studies also represent important impulses for the establishment of social

history, not least in Germany and France.

Thirdly, historical research on urbanization also emerges in this period, addressing the development of cities as an expression of overall societal change, beyond local history. It then attempts to unfold the history of urbanization as a grand narrative in the sense of a *longue-durée* process that can encompass entire hemispheres and epochs. In the latter category, in particular, there are always really impressive works that are interested also in conceptual-theoretical debates and approaches. From the 1960s at the latest, this can be seen, among other things, in an increased interest in urban sociology and geography; from the 1980s, for example, Lefebvre was also taken up to some extent in urban history. This can be interpreted as an expression of the productive uncertainty of this discipline about the conceptual status of the object of investigation 'city', which today seems to generally identify 'urban studies'. In the research on historical urbanization, too, it started to be thematised and regularly leads to new debates and offers of definition around concepts such as 'urbanity' and 'urbanization' as well as their roles in relation to large-scale processes of (de)industrialization, modernization, the enforcement of Fordism et cetera. In this context, geographical and urban sociological studies are also increasingly involved. Thus, this research could also be connected to debates such as those conducted, among other, in sub\urban. But I am anticipating; we could perhaps go into the role of urban research in German during the first half of the 20th century in more detail, right?

*s\u: I would like to hear more about the role of the disciplines in National Socialism. For example, on the role of someone like Andreas Walther, who in the 1930s and 1940s translated his experiences with the Chicago School into an NS urban sociology. Geography, too, is not exactly known for its anti-fascist history.*

**NiS:** In the 1920s, after a research stay in Chicago, the sociologist Andreas Walther oriented himself in particular to the practical research orientation of the Chicago studies. While Robert E. Park in Chicago was concerned with an unbiased understanding of urban processes, Walther had in mind to influence his research object through his studies. As a professor of sociology in Hamburg, he and his students mapped some "socially harmful

regions” and “social hotbeds of disease” in the city during the period of National Socialism in Hamburg in his 1934 DFG-funded study *Notararbeit 51*. By this he meant inappropriate ways of life, behaviours and political orientations as well as physical hindrance, all of which he associated with inferiority, crime and a-sociality. Due to the allegedly “people-damaging effect” of the urban areas in which he had noticed an accumulation of corresponding lifestyles, Walther recommended their “renovation” and thus helped to prepare for the brutal National Socialist interventions in the policy concerning population. Walther thus adopted the procedures of the Chicago School, but oriented his research towards political goals and the practical applicability of the results. This can be read in detail in Ulrike Kändler’s recently published study *Entdeckung des Urbanen [Discovery of the Urban]*.

**BM:** What I indicated earlier as city-critical moments in geography between the First and Second World Wars radicalized in the 1930s in some authors. Especially a radical anti-Semite like Siegfried Passarge comes to mind, but also the line of geopolitics of Karl Haushofer, who saw in the process of urbanization the danger of an “eviction” of the rural. For both, urbanization is the materialization and intensification of a narrative of social decline, somehow in the sense of Oswald Spengler’s *Untergang ders Abendlandes [Decline of the West]*. Cities, or rather the people in cities, are regarded by these authors as ‘rootless’, liberal and spiritualized. And the big cities are also the seat of Judaism, the internationalist proletariat and financial capital. National Socialist geography, on the other hand, should contribute to the rootedness of man with the floe and national sentiments. The relatively conservative and often reactionary basic attitude in geography (one wanted the colonies back, saw an unnatural injustice in the borders decided at Versailles, had little sympathy for the workers’ movement, etc.) made the discipline, as is well known, quite open to the NS.

At the same time, what could be called ‘applied geography’ begins here for the first time, i.e. a kind of spatial planning that also plans cities. Walter Christaller comes to mind, who was supposed to put his theory of ‘central places’ into practice within the framework of the ‘Generalplan Ost’. There is also interest in Mussolini’s policy of ruralisation and in questions of

biopolitically optimal forms of settlement. However, I am unaware of geographers who would have commented on Albert Speer's 'Germania', a quasi-National Socialist metropolitan policy.

**SH:** In contrast to geography and sociology, German-language historical research on urbanization of the 1920s and 1930s seems to have produced hardly any influential works. Instead, it was above all the up-and-coming population studies that historically approached urban development and urban migration in Central Europe. Significantly, these researches were then continued also during National Socialism. As far as the function of urban history as a discipline in the narrower sense during National Socialism is concerned, there hardly seems to have been any determined research into this so far. It is now well established that German historians, especially from 1939 onwards, made intensive efforts to advance an interpretation of history that would serve the National Socialist policy of expansion and annihilation. To the best of my knowledge, however, urban history has hardly played an important role in this. This could perhaps also be due to the fact that it often mobilizes narratives that are not centered on classical historical actors such as nation, ruler or people, but rather on cities and their inhabitants. Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to take a closer look and, for example, to examine the role of city historians in the context of so-called 'Ostforschung'. However, during National Socialism there were of course a large number of works on the city that had a strong historical dimension, even if they were written primarily by researchers concerned with race and nationalist anthropologists. They then carry such eloquent titles as *Die Verstädterung – Ihre Gefahren für Volk und Staat* oder *Großstadt und Volkstum* [Urbanization - Its Dangers to People and the State, or Metropolis and Folklore]. In these works, the already widespread critique of the large city apocalyptically sharpened, founded on a biology of races – a true cabinet of horrors of urban research.

In addition, it can be said that not only has the city's history as history of a discipline under National Socialism hardly been researched as yet, but the urban development of this period has also received surprisingly little attention, apart from individual studies on Trier or Hildesheim, for example, and the countless publications on the long-running topic 'Germania'. There would certainly be something to discover here.

**NG:** As concerns architecture and urban planning, Werner Durth, in *Deutsche Architekten: Biographische Verflechtungen 1900-1970* [*German architects: Biographical interdependencies 1900-1970*] has reconstructed with reference to best known protagonists (as far as I can recall, not a single woman was among them), the astonishing continuities that characterized the disciplines, far beyond National Socialism. A whole series of the modern *avant-garde* indeed emigrated, but many simply continued to practice, sometimes with correspondingly different aesthetic principles. Actually, however, I wanted to briefly mention one of the crystallization points in disputes shortly before National Socialism: the *Weissenhof-siedlung* in Stuttgart, which was built as a *Werkbund* exhibition in Stuttgart in 1927. The most important representatives of *Neues Bauen* were involved and Mies van der Rohe held the leadership. The settlement consists mainly of white, modern buildings with flat roofs. It was quickly rejected by a large part of the traditionalist 'Stuttgart School' around Paul Schmitthenner and Paul Bonatz and dubbed 'Arab Village'. In 1933, the Stuttgart architects built at short distance the *Kochenhof-siedlung*, largely in timber construction and with gabled roofs, as a counter-design. The *Kochenhof-siedlung* was created as part of the exhibition "Deutsches Holz für Hausbau und Wohnung" [German timber for construction and home dwelling]. Modernism, often referred to as the 'international style', was contrasted in Stuttgart with the home style - these are not determined research projects, but for me they nevertheless fit into our conversation as an expression of a materialised debate.

**NiS:** For the 1950s, Ulfert Herlyn detects a 'static' sociology whose focus was on the documentation of the stability of social systems during the social reorganization and reconstruction of the cities in the FRG according to 'old, traditional patterns', and which was accompanied by urban research. Herrmann Korte acknowledges for the sociology of this time a strong need for stabilization and harmonization, which is also evident in the aforementioned community studies, which in turn were strongly oriented to community studies in North America (USA). For the 1960s, an economic primacy can then be observed that strongly adheres to a belief in progress and a comprehensive push towards modernization, accompanied by accelerated urbanization. What

was interesting at the time was the question of how the city could meet the growing demands of planning practice, as Herlyn puts it. Sociology was expected to provide answers useful in view of a solution, especially for housing and urban development. The disciplines of sociology and urban development thus moved closer together during this period, as is also shown by Hans-Paul Bahrdt's treatise *Die moderne Großstadt. Soziologische Überlegungen zum Städtebau* [*The modern metropolis. Sociological considerations on Urban Development*] from 1969. In its cooperation with urban planning, sociology became on the one hand the latter's auxiliary science, but on the other hand sociologists also tried to bring urban planners closer to the city as a social system. Here, then, urban sociology keeps on with its function as a supplier of urban planning and policy, but in contrast to the Nazi era without its inhuman political zeal.

**NG:** Similar trends can be observed in the mid-1960s in urban planning (or, at that time, also at architecture faculties): The students began to demand a scientific statute for architecture and urban planning. Drafts were to be evaluated and justified on the basis of 'hard' criteria – long-term planning based on demand (*Bedarfsplanung*) was high on the agenda, as were systems theory and cybernetics. And at that time there was in urban planning an unbelievable expansion towards other fields of study: in addition to the opening towards social sciences, the opening towards technical sciences, such as economics and building materials, was also demanded and in some cases achieved. Social psychology and pedagogy also became an issue for some. At the same time, many had high hopes of industrialisation in terms of overcoming the housing shortage. In this context, some also made contact with colleagues in GDR [German Democratic Republic] who were able to advance rationalization and standardization somewhat more radically.

**NiS:** This period also saw the founding of the urban and spatial planning faculties with strong roots in social sciences and interdisciplinarity, for example in Dortmund in 1969 and at the Technical University of Berlin in 1972. Through its close cooperation with urban planning, urban sociology made a decisive contribution to the functionalist reconstruction of the city in the 1960s. It provided social data to determine the

actual needs, for example on the basis of large social surveys in redevelopment areas. Its support helped to reduce possible conflicts ahead of time and to optimise the existing system and so to ensure that urban planners could more easily implement their technical-aesthetic optimisation attempts. The fact that this was less and less successful from a certain point in time is shown by the protests since the 1960s, which were against massive redevelopment interventions in many cities.

**NG:** Also before the separation of urban and regional planning from architecture that you described, there was much cooperation between architects and urban planners and sociologists (and partly also educators). I am thinking, for example, of the then still rather fresh format of the urban neighbourhood work, with which students of the Berlin universities, but above all the architecture students at TU Berlin, began to experiment in various groups from 1968 onwards. From a criticism of massive redevelopment interventions in Kreuzberg and the construction of the Märkisches Viertel, which was formed at the end of the 1960s, various groups of students in both Kreuzberg and the Märkisches Viertel became involved in this kind of work within districts, and gave advice to residents or developed so-called 'counterplans'. In Kreuzberg, for example, architecture students and a sociologist from the *Freie Universität* jointly founded the *Büro für Stadtsanierung und Soziale Arbeit* [Office for Urban Redevelopment and Social Work] in 1968, which, in addition to the work within the neighbourhoods, produced one of the most important publications on this activity: the book *Sanierung für Wen? [Redevelopment for whom?]*. In addition to criticizing the demolition of the old buildings, the students increasingly questioned the modern and functionalist mass housing construction in West Berlin, on the one hand with regard to financing and political entanglement, but also with regard to the social and psychological consequences of monotony and alienation.

All in all, a number of exciting books came out at this time, which show this great openness across disciplinary boundaries and in which - perhaps relatively surprising from today's perspective - a group of young architects and urban planners (some of whom will later work in the planning sciences, played a major role alongside the social scientists. I am thinking, for example,

of *Kursbuch Nr. 27: Planen Bauen Wohnen* [Course Book No. 27: *Planning Building Living*] or the volume *Kapitalistischer Städtebau* [Capitalist city planning] edited by Hans G. Helms and Jörn Janssen. The references were manifold and ranged from critical theory and social psychology to semiotics.

**SH:** The late 1960s and early 1970s are, remarkably, also the years in which an independent modern urban history establishes in German-speaking countries. It emerges with a clear claim to validity from the shadow of a general historiography. In this endeavour, the journal *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte* [Information on Modern Urban History] (IMS), which was founded in 1970, plays a central role. It is still published several times a year and, with more than 90 issues, is an impressive compendium of urban history research in West Germany. If one looks into the very first, rather thin editions written with a typewriter, one already finds complains about a crisis in the historical sciences in general and in urban history in particular, which would be reflected not least in countless “illustrated books with irrelevant texts”. The programmatic preface to the first issue already clarifies that a completely different kind of historical urban research was required: here the historian Hans Herzfeld postulates the claim of a urban history as the “history of a comprehensive urbanization process”, which wants to be far more than just local history or the isolating historical analysis of individual cities. From now on it was more about the history of urbanisation than about classical city history in the sense of a local history. This sympathetic program of understanding the development of cities in the 19th and 20th centuries as part of overall social transformations (such as for example industrialization or modernization) has proven to be a very successful and productive strategy.

Not dissimilar was the approach pursued by the very productive urban history research in the GDR, which addresses cities as places of social struggles and class conflicts on the basis of historical materialism. The fact that there was a strong focus here on medieval urban culture is due not least to the Marxist theory of history itself. Already for Marx and Engels, the flowering of European cities was an indication of the progress of feudal society as compared to antiquity. However, with the emergence of the bourgeois order, the nation state became the central



political authority. According to this interpretation, the modern cities were at best still the scene of this historical process, which was also reflected in the GDR historians' lack of interest in modern city history. This, in any case, is my impression – a more detailed investigation of historical urbanization research in the GDR is still pending and would certainly promise interesting insights into the limits and perspectives of classical Marxist urban research.

Interesting in this context, by the way, is also a research direction called 'New Urban History', which experienced a short and spectacular upswing mainly in the English-speaking world around 1970. Impregnated by the spirit of the qualitative revolution, historians attempted to reconstruct the everyday experiences of ordinary city dwellers with the help of new quantitative methods and sociological theory imports. However, this rather interesting macro-perspective approach had at best a marginal influence on German-language research and has now almost completely disappeared in the USA and Great Britain. Perhaps it is experiencing a renaissance due to the current hype about digital history and big data.

**BM:** In the 1950s we were quite static in geography – perhaps in the same way as was just described for sociology –, while trying to rejoin the old paradigm of getting free from an involvement with National Socialism (or to explain why one never had anything to do with it) and to modernise the perspective a little by a functionalist language. This was probably the first time that texts by sociologists had been read. So, there were first attempts to think of geography as a social science, and urban issues played an all-important role.

The late 1960s were also a central phase in geography for the more extensive modernization of the discipline. The term 'modernization' is certainly more appropriate here than to speak of a critical turn in German-speaking geography. In the late 1960s, the social conflicts of this period also became clear in geography. A role was played by circumstances taking place both within and outside universities, be it cultural change or the crisis of the educational system. One should not underestimate the role played by the introduction of diploma courses since the early 1960s. Geography was certainly already in an identity and relevance crisis and had increasingly sought its legitimacy

in teacher training. In the 1960s there was a shift towards quantitative methods and a strengthening of applied geography. The question of relevance, practice and so on was discussed by students in particular. Which practice and which relevance was at stake was, of course, the matter of dispute: urban and regional planning to improve the ties of capital accumulation in the Fordist state, or the formulation of leftist alternatives. But at least from anecdotes and reports it becomes clear that also geographers were aware of what happened in the late 1960s in West Germany.

**NiS:** The protests and movements at the end of the 1960s apparently also had a major influence on urban sociology and brought about a paradigm shift. Urban sociology is gaining in political relevance: *Community power* is becoming an important object of research, while the aesthetics of urban functionalism, perceived as one-dimensional, and the fragmentation and transformation of cities, are made object of criticism, as is the associated orientation towards capitalist exploitation. The focus of interest here is on the effects of structural-spatial changes on people and their behaviour. Alexander Mitscherlich's criticism in *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte* [*The inhospitability of our cities*] from 1969 moves precisely in this direction. He criticizes the separation of functions in cities, which results in "inhospitability", which has a "depressing" effect, deplors the destruction and urban sprawl of the urban hinterland, the growing "urban desert", the lack of a structuring urban development and the loss of classical urban structures. Here, then, a leftist, city-critical current is now arguing against 'alienation'. In the 1970s there was a strong expansion and consolidation of urban sociology research and teaching at universities, both in theoretical and empirical terms. For the US context, Herbert Gans identifies two theoretical currents in the 1980s that became more important at the time: the neo-Marxist and the neo-ecological analyses of the connections between capitalism, city and society. However, apart from Castells and Lefebvre, some of whose works were translated, it seems that at the time there was hardly any reception in West Germany of non-German critical debates on urban sociology.

**NG:** Interestingly enough *Luttes urbaines et pouvoir politique* von Castells was translated by architects and published in 1975 by VSA Verlag in the series *Analysen zum Planen und Bauen*. As

far as the reception of non-German-speaking urban sociological debates is concerned, I take it somewhat differently: *Sanierung für Wen?* (edited in 1970 by the Büro für Stadtsanierung und soziale Arbeit – see above) contains, for example, various contributions on participation, tenant initiatives or tenant strikes from the USA and England. The early ARCH+ books (at that time still *Studienhefte für architekturbezogene Umweltforschung und -planung* [Studies for environmental research and planning related to architecture]) included non-German debates of urban sociology on topics such as *advocacy planning* or neighbourhood work for a number of years starting from issue 9 (1970). In 1977, an early reception of texts by Lefebvre related to city and space appeared there, such as *La production de l'espace* and *La révolution urbaine*. In our research for the book *Vergessene Schulen: Architekturlehre zwischen Reform und Revolte um 1968* [Forgotten Schools: The theory of architecture between reform and revolt around 1968] (published by Spectorbooks in autumn 2016) I was surprised by the richness of international references that already existed at that time. For the book, we interviewed many contemporary witnesses who were enrolled or worked at the architecture faculties of Berlin and Stuttgart at the time. The protagonists reported on various journeys as well as on a lively international exchange, sometimes even far beyond Europe. However, the main focus was on the various movements that took place in the USA, England and France, be it in relation to tenant protests, design methods or participatory approaches to planning. Some also followed the Italian movement (e.g. with planning approaches in Bologna, for which there are relatively early works by Bodenschatz and Harlander).

But in the debates on urban planning I also see the division you mentioned into neo-Marxist and ecological approaches. The neo-Marxist approaches, however, were very nuanced, and this later resulted in a fragmentation of the movement: while one part of the debate was about neighbourhood work, participation and the improvement of living and working conditions, the other part was about the proletarian revolution. Neighbourhood work et cetera was styled by the revolutionaries as reformist and their actors mocked.

**NiS:** In West German urban sociology of the 1970s and 80s, the socio-ecological approach was associated with Friedrichs, Hamm

and Atteslander, among others, and later with Häußermann/Siebel and Dangschat, who used it to analyse the social and spatial organization of society. Their research on segregation deals with the social divide between the different classes created by spatial separation; participation in the social sphere becomes as much a topic as the cumulative disadvantage for certain social groups. Local decision-making and power structures are also involved in the analyses and a broader participation in political decision-making processes is proposed. Empirical research continues to focus strongly on urban and housing policy needs, which Häußermann/Siebel harshly criticized in 1978.

For the 1980s, Herlyn notes a decreasing interest in applied urban sociological research, “a profound scepticism towards economically unsubstantiated or ‘unquantified’ sociological constructs and concepts”. From the point of view of urban sociology, this is interpreted as a ‘crisis’. In addition, feminist women researchers in particular have been articulating a feminist critique of urban structures since the 1980s, showing their connections with patriarchy and heterosexual orders - for example Becker, Dörhöfer, Rodenstein and Terlinden, later for example Bauhardt, Breckner, Frank, Löw, Ruhne, Sturm and others, who are organized in the section Urban and Regional Sociology of the DGS, in their own working group, as well as in the FOPA (Feminist Organization of Women Planners and Architects), which was founded in Berlin in 1981. In both organisations, which are devoted to sociology and planning or architecture, personal overlaps exist.

**SH:** This is an interesting example of different upturns in the individual disciplines of urban research. If you already observe a diminishing interest in urban sociological research for the 1980s, then West German urbanization research is simultaneously experiencing a boom within the historical sciences that is still unparalleled today, including its own special research area, flood of publications, and so on. All in all, the 1970s to early 1990s saw an impressive boom in cultural-historical research on urbanization in Germany. It was certainly also the turning away from classical subjects of historical science, such as nation and state, as well as the turning to questions of social and everyday history, that favoured this interest. A two-volume bibliography on German historical urban research from 1996, which already

contains more than 14,000 items, testifies to this thrust towards the institutionalization of German-language urban history as a science. This is a huge amount of knowledge on urban history which, with a few exceptions, has been little acknowledged in other fields and disciplines of urban research.

**NG:** In urban planning, the 1980s were marked by the paradigm of *'behutsamen Stadterneuerung'* [cautious urban renewal] and, from 1975 (the European Year of Heritage Protection), also by questions concerning the preservation of old neighbourhoods. Basically, this was the turnaround against the modern and functionalist approaches that I described earlier - but which had already been criticised by "Team 10", the young organisers of the 10th CIAM Congress. An important reference with regard to 'cautious urban renewal' was Wolf J. Siedlers *Die gemordete Stadt. Abgesang auf Putte und Straße, Platz und Baum* [The murdered city. A swan song on putti and street, square and tree] from 1964 (perhaps as a counterpart to Jane Jacob's *Death and life of large American cities* in 1961, which was also acknowledged surprisingly early in the GDR (e.g. by Brigitte Reimann). In addition to the social claim of 'cautious urban renewal', other aesthetic categories and points of reference developed in urban planning at that time, such as the (re-)discovery of the European city and a growing interest in the identity-building power of symbols and references in postmodernism.

Basically, this turn towards postmodernism also marks the end of the opening of architecture and urban planning towards the social sciences that had arisen in the course of the 1968 movement. Postmodern architecture and postmodern urban planning would again refer more clearly to themselves.

**Nina Gribat** is a scholar in planning and urban studies. She works on international comparative research projects on conflicts related to urban development, on shrinking cities, and on study reforms and students revolts in architecture in 1968. She currently teaches urban planning in Cottbus.  
Nina.Gribat(at)b-tu.de

**Stefan Höhne** is a scholar in history and cultural studies. His research and teaching activity regard transatlantic city history, cultural history of technology and infrastructure, and more recently sabotage practices in the Cold War.  
stefan.hoehne@metropolitanstudies.de

**Boris Michel** is a geographer. His research interests concern the history of geography and, increasingly, the history of geographical engagement with the city. boris.michel@fau.de

**Nina Schuster** is a sociologist. She carries out researches at the interface of urban sociology and queer / feminist theories about the social and spatial-material production of social inequality.  
nina.schuster@tu-dortmund.de

**Barbara Pizzo**, PhD in Urban and Territorial Planning, teaches Urban Planning and Urban Policies at Sapienza University of Rome. barbara.pizzo@uniroma1.it