Social Challenges of Cities of Tomorrow

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State of the problem

Large cities have always exhibited diversity. They have always been more than just densely built sites, centres of economic power or concentrations of population. They have also been market places and have attracted flows of diverse people who have traditionally exchanged goods and ideas. These inflows of 'strangers' have stimulated cities to become centres for the arts, for creativity and for innovation.

Today, however, the city's diversity takes a new dimension, not least because it has been reduced to ethnic diversity. A number of developments have contributed to this development: globalisation; political, economic and social restructuring; and rescaling of governance. Add to this the recent financial, economic and now societal crisis.

Globalisation and the increasing inter dependency of cities in a network society have led to the accelerated circulation of people, commodities, capital, identities and images through global space, as well as to the increasing mobility of ideologies, economic principles, policies and lifestyles. Consequently, transnational links between people and, therefore, between cities and countries are on the increase.

Political restructuring, of which the massive transformation since the beginning of the 1990s of and in the former socialist countries is t he most outspoken illustration, has led to new patterns of social and spatial inequalities (see Stanilov, 2007; Sýkora, 2009). The impact of this transformation has been accelerated by the inclusion of many of those countries as member states of the EU.

Processes of economic restructuring – first from an industrial economy to a service economy and further to an increasingly ICT -dependent society – have significantly altered the meaning of space and place in the lives of individuals. The very fast expansion of advanced business services and the increasing importance of creative industries and welfare services have created a complex society which hugely challenges socio-spatial theories and practices (Marston et al., 2005; Escobar, 2007).

Social restructuring is exemplified in the change from a class -based modern society to a more fragmented post -modern society. In essence, this means that (urban) society can be divided into an increasing number of different groups that sometimes are linked

in common networks but often are merely living side by side, without very much, if any, interaction or communication. International migration has largely contributed to this increasing diversity of the urban population (Mazzucato et al., 2004).

The so-called re-scaling of governance is a significant issue in this context. National, regional and local authorities are being complemented (supplemented) and sometimes replaced by supranational governments, such as the EU, leading to discussions and disagreements on where and how to regulate societal developments (Bulkeley, 2005; Rhodes, 2007; Jessop, 2008).

Finally, there is the present context of economic recession, which is developing into a societal crisis not least as a result of restrictive cyclical policies. Many assumptions of policy-makers (and academics) on economic expansion are being undermined, or at least challenged. Recession means declining labour market opportunities for many and the high probability of increasing intolerance towards minority groups and social disharmony and even polarisation between 'us' (who are paying taxes and contributions) and 'them' (who are profiting from social allocations). Creating a discourse on the positive aspects of diversity is far more difficult in a context of recession than in a context of economic prosperity.

As a consequence of these general developments, many cities in advanced economies have been faced with a significant loss in inclusive power and in cohesion and with an increase in forms of exclusion and polarisation. Questio ns have specifically been asked about the contribution of migrants to their host society and city. Various rounds of immigration undoubtedly have brought with them a number of advantages, in terms of maintaining current levels of employment and of countering the effects of an ageing, stagnant or even declining population. They seem, however, to be overshadowed by problems such as integration, increasing racist and xenophobic attitudes, polarisation and exclusion. More specifically, policy -makers are faced with the challenge of implementing policies to include immigrants (integration; assimilation; acculturation) in different sectors of society, as well as the need to develop a 'general culture' for the continued economic competitiveness and social cohesivene ss of cities. This has resulted in stigmatising the concept of diversity, which has been defined in terms of a social problem rather than as a bundle of opportunities. However, recently the positive effects of the interface between the social and the spatial, the benefits of social and ethnic mixing for social contact, social capital and more respect for each other have figured in many articles (De Souza Briggs, 2005; Arthurson, 2007; Van Eijk and Blokland, 2007) and have been reanimated in the literature on urban restructuring (Kleinhans et al., 2007).

These massive changes in the last few decades have not only resulted in new diversities, new social inequalities and new patterns of urban spatial segregation, but also led to a shift from government to gove rnance and to a concomitant increase in the importance of partnerships, between public bodies, private organisations and third sector groups. Across the EU there has also been a growing emphasis on active citizenship, a new localism, and the mobilisation of communities. It is expected that

within the new governance frameworks individual citizens and communities will take more responsibility for their own welfare and for the local policy processes that shape their lives and the places in which they live. Old models of representative democracy, associated with the era of powerful local government, are being replaced, albeit gradually, by more participative modes of democratic engagement and accountability. Those changes offer possibilities for new policies.

The Janus face of the city

Until about the second half of the 1990s, academics and policy-makers alike commonly stressed the city's problems and their complexity: cities were seen as places where a myriad of problems met: unemployment, deteriorating housing, concentrations of poor and minority ethnic groups, intolerance and racism, discrimination, social exclusion and environmental pollution. In short: cities were dumping places and so to be avoided

Only in the last decade or so, has a more positive view on cities emerged: cities were (again) seen as centres of creativity and entre preneurship. In short: as a bundle of opportunities and so to be fostered.

Both the more positive as well as the more negative approach are still prominent, but they tend to be integrated in a new paradigm. In both views, however, the exact role of urban diversity remains unclear. Will urban diversity lead to increasing economic competitiveness and to a growing understanding between different social and ethnic groups? Or will greater diversity produce enhanced inequalities, misunderstandings, racism, intolerance and xenophobia between the different groups that make up the urban area (see Putnam)? And, last but not least: what is meant by diversity and does diversity present specific features when applied to the urban (and larger, local) level?

Finding out how positive aspects of urban diversity can be stimulated, and its negative aspects diminished, should be the principal aim of any urban and even national policy – given the central role that cities still play in the nation's economic, social, political and cultural life and will continue to do so. Policy agendas and programmes at European, national and urban levels have been slow to recognise these possible positive contributions from urban diversity. The explanation could be that policies and actions aiming at positive outcomes of diversity always take place in a complex field of potential antagonisms and conflicts between groups of people (inhabitants and decision -makers) with different degrees of power – and that it is not always evident to take this complex field into account when developing policies and actions. The politicians' impatience and preference for short-term results probably has something to do with this.

I will, however, start from the rather negative sounding concepts that are often connected with diversity, such as exclusion and polarisation, and then gradually build up the argument to arrive at the conclusion that diversity might have positive consequences. Urban diversity may contribute to more social cohesion, enhanced economic performance and competitiveness, and greater social mobility for individuals and groups. To be convincing, we need to provide evidence that is lacking for the

outcomes of greater urban diversity, and to document and highlight the significant role that urban policy – in the sense of urban governance – can play in developing and stimulating those positive outcomes.

In brief, the core idea of this text is that socio-economic, ethnic and cultural diversity can positively affect social cohesion, economic performance and social mobility of individuals and groups. These issues (social cohesion, economic performance and social mobility) positively affect tolerance and respect between ind ividuals and groups. Current urban policies often lack a positive view on urban diversity, because they generally focus on the negative aspects of diversity, such as intolerance, racism, discrimination and insecurity.

The darker side of our argument: cohe sion and exclusion are a Siamese twin

Social cohesion refers to the internal bonding of a social system as it concerns the need of any group for social contacts, feelings of belonging through a common identity and a strong bonding with the place where one lives (Kearns and Forrest, 2000; Forrest and Kearns, 2001); so it is an important quality of urban society.

Kearns and Forrest (2000) identify five domains of social cohesion: common values and a civic culture; social order and social control; social soli darity and reduction in wealth disparities; social networks and social capital; and place attachment and identity. Various researchers have used a number of these dimensions in empirical research, such as the values dimension, the networks dimension and the attachment dimension (see, e.g., Dekker and Bolt, 2005; Dekker and Rowlands, 2005). The two others (social order and social control and social solidarity and wealth disparities) are dimensions that should be measured at higher spatial levels than the nei ghbourhood level.

Instead of this, social cohesion remains a fuzzy term with a range of meanings. In general it is about creating relationships between individuals and about empowering the individual as well as local communities through civic engagement. Cohesion refers to different characteristics, which at first sight are contradicting each other: solidarity and homogeneity, differentiation (or diversity) and heterogeneity. The common belief is that even though there are differences, communities can live together in harmony, although finding the balance between diversity and solidarity (or homogeneity and heterogeneity) seems to be a difficult mission. We will return to this relation later.

First, it is important to present what we called 'the dark side of cohesion', to identify the downsides of social cohesion. Let us mention three: cohesion may be constraining and oppressive; it may exclude 'the other' (and all forms of 'deviant' behaviour); it may prevent social mobility and innovation.

We agree with Healey's argument (Healey, 1998) that cohesion and exclusion are not opposite phenomena, but that they imply each other. Strong cohesion may exclude inhabitants from opportunities outside the group (community, neighbourhood). Also, cohesion on one spatial level may imply absence of cohesion on another: high levels of social cohesion within a neighbourhood (place attachment) may lead to lower social

cohesion on the city level, where the inhabitants of one neighbourhood become less interested in those living in other neighbourhoods (see, e.g., Vranken, 2004).

Even more so, the strong ties between people within communities may lead to social, racial and religious conflicts between people who belong to these communities and those who are perceived as outsiders. Social cohesion can thus easily breed intolerance. It means that if socially and ethnically diverse groups concentrate in certain areas, their internal cohesion certainly will be fostered but at the expense of their integration at a higher level, as it will also increase the risk of exclusion both of individuals from those highly cohesive communities and of these communities from the rest of society. However, if non-conflicting relations between these diverse groups could be structured at lower spatial levels (neighbourhood or district), high social cohesion is possible in the urban system as a whole (Vranken, 2004). Starting from this point of view, we could argue that if we concentrate on these non-conflicting relationships between diverse groups, a high level of cohesion in urban society as a whole could come into the focus of policy-makers.

It thus should be clear that social cohesion is not necessarily a positive feature for everyone, in all circumstances. As a result, we must specify the conditions according to which the including or the excluding mechanisms of social cohesion function, whe ther or not they keep each other in balance or operate in one or both ways ¹.

Polarisation no, marginal places yes?

The debate on segregation and polarisation is an old one but it still lingers on – because the underlying processes are still very much present in today's societies. Both phenomena are frequently supposed to be gene rated by the economic restructuring process on a global scale (Sassen, 1991; Wilson, 1987). Sassen -Koob (1986: 110) underlines the relation between globalisation and polarisation. She states: "new spatial and socio-economic arrangements that express the ec onomic restructuring contain the potential for great conflict. The increasing polarization in the job supply and the associated expansion of high income gentrified areas alongside deteriorated low wage areas are trends that do not fit elegantly into middle class aspirations and expectations". Elsewhere she refers to "growth of a high -income stratum and a low-income stratum of workers" (Sassen, 1991: 13) and to "a new high -income stratum alongside growing urban poverty" (1991: 337). She also wonders when the se tensions of polarisation will become unbearable: "How many times do high -income executives have to step over the bodies of homeless people till this becomes an unacceptable fact or discomfort?" (1991: 329).

Clearly, these visions fuel the fear of schol ars and politicians alike for a 'divided' city. That income inequality in most European countries appears to increase slightly, adds to this fear. However, despite its convincing argumentation, Sassen's thesis on rising polarisation (1991, 1994) has been s eriously challenged. Hamnett (1994) claims that her

¹ We need empirical research to assess the circumstances under which cohesion produces desirable results, such as tolerance and respect, and undesirable results, such as exclusion.

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conclusions about a growing polarisation of the occupational and income structures whereby there is absolute growth at both the top and bottom ends of the distribution and a decline in the middle of the distribution, might fit the U.S., possibly because of their very high levels of immigration and the creation of large numbers of low skilled and low paid jobs, but not European conditions. Instead, he emphasizes the general qualification level of the workforce and the importance of welfare structures for social stratification. In other cities, professionalisation appears to be dominant.

Some later studies also state that there is little empirical evidence of 'dual cities' (Buck et al. 2002), while some other analyses point out concrete examples of cities showing signs of increasing occupational inequalities (Fainstein, 2001; Kräter, 2004). The clearest evidence of polarisation comes from countries with a weaker and less universalistic welfare state and from c ountries that have experienced economic crisis (Szalai, 2005; Kessler and Di Virgilio, 2005; Maloutas, 2007). In Southern European countries, the weaker impact of global financial activities, the advanced services sector, the important role of state employ ment, the existence of traditional lower -middle class jobs, the fragmented working class and the high number of casual and informal jobs may have resulted in higher levels of polarisation than in other EU urban areas. In Eastern Europe, the collapse of soc ialist regimes in the early 1990s may also have led to an increasing concentration of poverty and the poor in urban slum areas. With the increase of an informal labour market, this might have had particular negative effects on the Roma community.

Even if the thesis of polarisation is refuted, it does not imply that there are no marginal areas in larger cities. The question is whether they are to be sanitised away. We should differentiate according to the role those deprived areas play in the city; they may function as alleys (dead-end streets) or as transition zones or simultaneously as both and only research can answer that question. Certainly today, a city needs marginal places ('transition zones') that function as social laboratories for the arts, economi c entrepreneurship and social relationships. They may act as sites of socialisation (places of integration) for newcomers who are not yet able to take part in all the formal institutions of mainstream society.

Has solidarity collapsed?

The sociological problem lies in the (hypothesised) collapse of traditional forms of solidarity, of routines that used to function as mediators, and of (informal) mechanisms of social control. Are these social mechanisms being replaced, and if so by which alternative modes of bonding, bridging and binding? For the moment we leave aside the gradual introduction of competitiveness in fields and activities where this principle was absent until recently or where it played only a secondary role. We will focus on the introduction of top-down initiatives by state actors and on the changing role of civil society (and of welfare society in the realm of social services provision).

Is it the weakening or even disappearance of these "spontaneous" routines and reciprocities that have opened the door for a number of "top -down" initiatives to replace or to complement them - from 'repressive' to 'protective' (social protection, social services) ones. The 'repressive' ones are most visible. It concerns initiatives to 'police the private and public sphere', and social and physical control systems to promote (certain forms of) safety: CCTV -controlled areas, private security services, a call for 'more police in the street'. Less easily identifiable but perhaps even more important in the long run because of their deeper impact on people's perception, are the success of mono-cultural discourses and the increase of legal and other mechanisms to preve nt or to combat forms of 'deviant behaviour' (including specific cultural behaviour). Integration debate is rather about: 'adaptation' ('adapt or leave'); treatment of beggars and other 'street folk' is less lenient; young offenders, considered as 'incorri gible', are put in special prisons with the prime function being to protect society, no longer to reeducate. These developments are not counterbalanced by initiatives to promote cohesion (or solidarity) - such as the financing of 'spontaneous' neighbourho od festivities.

These different forms of solidarity are not only complementary; they are often conflicting and in some cases even mutually exclusive. Being aware of this is of utmost importance when discussing at what level cohesion can best be preserved o r whether the replacing of forms of solidarity should be left to 'market forces' or be organised from above (and whether both approaches are not mutually exclusive).

The impact of market forces will of course increase if it is true that the (welfare) state has been retreating for some time now. The question then is how to compensate the changing of the guard. Is civil society filling in the gaps? Especially with respect to welfare provision for the poor and other excluded groups, the question is: is the welfare state being complemented by a stronger welfare society? What role will the increasingly successful faith-based NGOs (or FBOs) play in this context?

FBOs – now increasingly turned into professionalised service organisations – had the opportunity to fill the gap left by the retreating welfare state and they took it; one could say that they reoccupied the terrain lost to public initiatives in the 1950s. In very general terms, the welfare society – a part of civil society – has gradually complemented the welfare state in the provision of welfare services, if not taken over the state's responsibilities.

We identified two ways to fill this gap: either by the return of old fashioned charity or by the rise of a new type of welfare regime. In the former case, FBOs provide social help under relative autonomy from government through horizontal interplay between local government and a revitalised civil society; the latter case is characterised by decentralisation from central to local government and b y an expanded role for FBOs in particular.

It is, however, more than charity re-entering through the backdoor. Today FBOs are not exclusively of the charitable kind and they also include a range of non-Christian and non-Western faiths; whether their political and social impact is increasing, is less clear. Moreover; their approaches towards fighting poverty and injustice are diverse and range from advocating religious conversion to those of delivering social services as contracted out by public authorities, with combinations in between both extremes.

Common to most countries is that FBOs (like most other secular NGOs) generally tackle issues that are not profitable from the market perspective that increasingly orientates the activities of other private and a lso of public actors, such as childhood and exclusion, single mothers at risk, the elderly, migrants and undocumented persons in particular, homelessness, AIDS, prostitution and human trafficking.

The question remains: are new forms of 'mechanic' solidari ty needed to complement the 'organic' solidarity that is rooted in the division of labour (Durkheim)? This is at first sight a very abstract way to formulate the core of our question — but with a closer look it is very relevant in policy -making terms.

What is it with diversity?

What Durkheim termed organic solidarity – solidarity between diverse units – is today called diversity. Diversity is defined as the presence or coexistence of a number of specific socio-economic, ethnic and cultural groups within a certain spatial entity, such as a city of a neighbourhood. By socio-economic diversity is meant that rich and poor households and low-educated and high-educated persons live together in a city or neighbourhood. Ethnic diversity refers to the mix between minority ethnic groups and natives and to the mix between different ethnic (in many cases immigrant) groups. Cultural diversity refers to the coexistence of groups with different patterns of values, norms and goals – and behaviour.

Contemporary European cities are very diverse, but this has not led to a degree of spatial segregation like in the United States, where the spatial separation between rich and poor and between black and white is far more prominent (Musterd, 2005; Van Kempen, 2005). This can be seen as a major asset, from which European cities and countries should and could profit far more than is the case at present. At the same time, the degree of diversity has not yet reached the importance that it will have in the future – mainly as a result of the massive immigration that Europe needs, to ensure its sustainability as an economy and as a society.

The relation between social cohesion and diversity

Social, ethnic and cultural diversity have been considered by many as a threat to social cohesion; the more heterogeneous the population, the more fragmented it will be. Yet, there are many social divisions in society and most of them have become embedded into emerging social structures and relationships. However, major changes

that affect social structures in a relatively short period do produce tensions, which in turn raise particular concerns. Increasing and diversifying immigration have drastically altered the population structure of host cities. Often these migrants live concentrated in a limited number of urban neighbourhoods, because they cannot afford to live somewhere else in the city.

There are however important differences between different parts of Europe with respect to spatial segregation. While Western Europe received masses of immigrants from different corners of the world, Eastern Europe was hermetically cut off from most waves of international labour migration until the beginning of the 1990s (Ruoppila, 2005). But in the post-WWII period, cities of Eastern Europe were affected by the invasion of Roma from rural areas as an outcome of the socialist transformation of agriculture. Due to their low educational attainment and specific lifestyle, Roma people also concentrated in certain urban neighbourhoods, which resembled very much the ethnic ghettos of the West (Ladányi, 2002; Sýkora, 2007). Large-scale immigration has also only recently affected most Southern European countries (see, e.g., Pareja Eastaway, 2009).

Migrants are quite often considered as a uniform group of people; however, their population consists of a large number of different nationalities and ethnic subgroups, with very different skills, education, employment careers, family backgrounds or religions (see Özüekren and Van Kempen, 2003). Immigrants often have a relatively weak position in terms of economic resources, but looking on the brighter side, their social, ethnic and cultural diversity adds to the city's liveliness.

The importance of the neighbourhood for the social contacts of its inhabitants has been discussed in many different ways. Several studies have shown that the social contacts of many people, in particular those in the more highly educated and higher income categories, at present mainly take place outside the neighbourhood (see, e.g., Cowan and McDermont, 2006; May et al., 2007). Others assert that people in general have a variety of networks and these can be important at different times (only in the weekend, for example) or localised at different places; some networks are found more frequently at neighbourhood level than others (see, for example, Healey, 1997; Kearns et al., 2000). Neighbourhoods are also the places where family members, relatives and compatriots are concentrated. This is especially important for the migrants. Nevertheless there are also studies that put question marks against the assumed limited or decreasing importance of the neighbourhood. Even, or perhaps precisely, in a society that is becoming more international, the local level is of importance: "... day-to-day work, private life, cultural identity, and political participation are essentially local and territorial" (Castells, 2002, p. 550).

The importance of the neighbourhood

From the research literature, it appears that the importance of the neighbourhood may differ between groups. It appears from many studies that the neighbourhood is certainly of importance for poorer households (e.g., Henning and Lieberg, 1996; Ellen and Turner, 1997; Guest and Wierzbicki, 1999). Less well educated people and lower income groups often have more contacts within the neighbourhood than do those with a higher educational level and a higher income. Households with a lower income in general need some survival strategies and the neighbourhood can be of essential importance in that respect. From the European URBEX project, it appears that people on a low income often turn to and rely on the neighbourhood, because they do not have the financial opportunities to travel elsewhere (see, e.g., Botman and Van Kempen, 2001).

Ethnic groups are centrally featured in much of the literature on neighbourhoods. The spatial segregation of immigrants finds its cause in a multitude of factors, but for recent immigrants in particular the finding of mutual support is an important factor. It can be a matter of receiving help in finding a (temporary) place to live or a first job. Immigrants who cannot speak the language of the host country properly and those with a low level of education have a particular tendency to make in the first instance for a neighbourhood where many compatriots already live, in the expectation that they will be more likely to receive social, economic and emotional support there (Enchautegui, 1997; Fong and Gulia, 1999; Eraydin, 2008). A further concentration of people belonging to the same ethnic groups can lead to all kinds of positive developments, such as new shops (because there is a demand for specialised products), new public facilities and new religious facilities (for example: a mosque). The combination of all these developments may further enhance the construction of ethnic communities and develop into a seedbed for all kinds of new economic developments.

In a number of studies, it transpires that the neighbourhood is not important at all, or not so very much, for those who live there. Such studies usually investigate in a quantitative manner how the neighbourhood influence (on, for example, the social economic position) is related to the influence of personal and household variables. From other, often more qualitative, studies it becomes clear that for specific groups (low income, immigrants) the neighbourhood for various reasons makes a difference. In a positive sense, the neighbourhood can lead to support, reception and social contacts and in a negative sense, the development of 'deviant' norms and values as a consequence of contacts between people in situations of deprivation.

A situation can arise through strengthened social cohesion within neighbourhoods in which a city can consist of neighbourhoods which increasingly have nothing more to do with each other: "A city can consist of socially cohesive but increasingly divided neighbourhoods. The stronger the ties which bind local communities, the greater may be the social, racial or religious conflict between them. The point is that social cohesion at neighbourhood level is by no means unambiguously a good thing" (Kearns and Forrest,

2000, p. 1013). A neighbour hood functions for people on a low income more as a source of the previously mentioned bonding capital than as a platform for bridging capital (Burns et al., 2001).

Urban Governance: part of the solution or part of the problem?

The post-war model of urban politics in which urban gover nments dominated decision-making has given way to a new context of governance in which an increasingly heterogeneous conglomerate of actors and agencies, with various backgrounds and competencies, define and deliver services in a way that is independent from the territorial boundaries of the traditional local government structure (see Kooiman, 2003; Imrie and Raco, 1999). The reason is that (more) competition, more (ethnic) diversity, (less) cohesion and (more) spatial dynamics have led to more complex, dyn amic and diverse urban societies than ever before and governing such a society has not become easier.

Urban governance has come to dominate political and academic discourse on urban politics and decision-making processes. It is characterised by all or at least most of the following features – according to the perspective used (bottom-up or top-down governance): some form of active cooperation between a variety of stakeholders (state, civil society, private enterprises), several decision -making levels (EU, national, regional, city region, city, neighbourhood/district), and several domains (usually defined in terms of interdepartmental collaboration between employment, housing, education, health, culture, urban planning); relatively autonomous with the state as stage director; decentralised decision-making; a new political culture, and flexible and responsive administration; structural participation of citizens/clients/users (who – as individual citizens or organised in local voluntary associations – should be considered as stakeholders on a par with public institutions, technical experts, and other non government organisations.

An important point is the role of different partners in such networks. Who has the main responsibilities? How far are responsibilities shared? Who is accountable? Is it true that all participating partners have the same say when it comes to decision -making? And on which spatial level is policy the most effective? Networks are central in processes of (urban) governance and these networks are formed and maintained in interactions between all relevant actors. Because these actors almost always have different perceptions of reality, and different aims and strategies and habits to reach these aims, there is a constant process of redefining rel ations, interactions and interdependencies.

Not everybody is equally present in structures of urban governance. Research suggests that immigrant populations not only suffer from relatively high levels of socio economic deprivation but are also politically underrepresented and excluded from mainstream politics and decision -making processes (Mouffe, 2005; Dench et al., 2006). This brings us to the issue of participation. Let us for the moment just ask a number of questions. Is participation about the people's voice or about giving voice to the people? Is there a straightforward 'ladder of participation'? Does it suffice just to inform people

as 'clients' or should they participate directly in the conception and implementation of projects and programmes – as 'citizens'? What if only a minority occupies the different channels (acts as gatekeeper) and dissenting or weaker voices are made to shut up? Are the lower educated, single mothers, ethnic minorities and long-term unemployed silenced by the middle-class bias that usually governs participation processes? How important are 'strong (informal) leaders'?

Processes and practices of urban governance are critical in shaping the form, character and socio-economic impacts of urban policy initiatives. In this view, urba n and regional governance is seen as increasingly achieved through soft forms of cooperation, rather than through hard territorial institutions. Although there is no ideal model of urban and regional governance, it is clear that improving urban governance is not just about reforming institutions and finance, it is also about changing attitudes, the culture of governance, and questions of identity. The EU is also increasingly keen to promote nested multi-level forms of governance in which supranational and n ational agendas are congruent with regional, citywide and local/neighbourhood agendas. Effective policy delivery is increasingly seen as dependent upon introducing forms of 'good' governance systems. 'Good' (urban) governance then is understood as a politi cal task to redirect traditional values into knowledge -based actor networks, which are able to give social needs the attention they serve, to make use of the economic potentials of diversity as an added value, and to assess different reform strategies for urban areas. Different models and different scenarios of urban governance (from closed circles to very open and participative policy-making systems; from voluntary networks to institutionalised and formalised systems with legally-binding direct democratic instruments) should be assessed to find out how they best foster the relation between exclusion and polarisation on the one hand and cohesion, inclusion and diversity on the other.

Social innovation

'Our strengths in design and creativity must be better ex ploited. We must champion social innovation. We must develop a better understanding of public sector innovation, identify and give visibility to successful initiatives, and benchmark progress.'

'Social innovation should become a mainstream focus in the next generation of European Social Fund programmes. Member States are encouraged to already step up efforts to promote social innovation through the ESF'.

Both references come from the recent (October 6, 2010) 'Communication from the Commission to the Europe an Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions' ² referring to the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative 'Innovation Union'. They illustrate the importance of this new concept in EU policy. Although there is no direct reference to urban policies as such in this document, many topics concern topics that are very relevant for urban life and urban governance.

² COM(2010) 546 final

The social innovation approach in critical social science dates back further and it reflects a shift from attacking the established powers to a debate about desirable alternatives (see e.g. Sayer, 1997). It is a needs -based explanatory critique, which underlines the identification of frustrated needs and ways to address them. A social innovation approach thus presupposes that transformations, ruptures and qualitative changes are possible in capitalist systems. This view is also implicit in the regulation approach. According to this approach, social relations have to be maintained and reproduced, and therefore hold the possibility of transformation (Jenson 1987; Swyngedouw and Jessop 2006). This includes empowering innovations in social relations and thus opens options for the analysis of social innovation. From a regulation approach perspective, studying social innovation requires the identification of factors that shape regulatory practices and processes that benefit weaker social groups.

There is always need for social inventiveness but there are grounds to believe that "the scope for social innovation is particularly large at the moment when many existing institutions are showing signs of strain and when many social problems such as social cohesion, job creation, inner-city decay and youth unemployment seem resistant to orthodox solutions" (Mulgan & Landry, 1995: 41). Yet, social innovation does not just sprout from unaddressed social needs; conditions have to be favourable to creativity and open to empowering initiatives (Mulgan and Landry 1995; Garcia et al. 2009). In order to spread, innovations need an economic base, support and energy from many people, as well as a culture that encourages connections and ideas. This involves receptivity to what is new, financial resources, the presence of social entrepreneurs, and many other pre-conditions.

Social inventions moreover differ from technical inventions, in that the prospect of a return on investment is absent. This often complicates the launch of a -typical projects. Innovative ideas or projects do not fit into public funding programmes and the uncertainty of return on investment is not likely to attract private investors. Instead, tailor-made agreements have to be made on individual bases for each initiative and project.

Coda

Perhaps the most important question for the future of European cities is the following: how are cohesion and exclusion, polarisation and diversity related to tolerance and respect between the people and groups that are living in, working in and visiting our cities? We define tolerance as the absence of conflicts between individuals and groups, and respect as a concept that relates to a more active attitude with a much more positive connotation than tolerance. Do, for example, more social contacts between individuals of different social groups also imply that these individuals will develop a different perspective on these groups (less stereotyped, more tolerance or perhaps even respect)? Will the presence of firms in a neighbourhood affect the attitude towards minority ethnic groups? Will social mobility lead to a change in attitudes with respect to the presence of different kinds of groups in the immediate

