



Istanbul; a barricade during the Gezi park protests.
Taksim · Beyoğlu, 2013



Mexico City; a diablero carrying merchandise through the streets. Centro Historico, 2023



Los Angeles; Bunker Hill with Walt Disney Concert Hall designed by Frank Gehry. Downtown LA, 2023

INCORPORATION OF URBAN DIFFERENCES

THE COMMODIFICATION OF URBAN VALUE

Tokyo; Shimokitazawa South, Setagaya Ward, 2013



Differences endure or arise on the margins of the homogenised realm, either in the form of resistances or in the form of externalities. [...] Sooner or later, however, the existing centre and the forces of homogenisation must seek to absorb all such differences.

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1991 [1975]

URBAN DIFFERENCES

Reinvestment and intensification are common processes in many urban areas across the world. These transformations are often analysed using concepts such as urban regeneration, urban renaissance and gentrification. However, when we were analysing Shimokitazawa (Tokyo), Wan Chai (Hong Kong), Beyoğlu (Istanbul), the City of Paris, Centro Histórico (Mexico City) and Downtown LA we realised that these concepts do not fully grasp the qualitative changes to everyday life and the contradictory character of the urbanisation processes that we observed. While existing concepts focus on the upgrading of urban areas and often also highlight the resulting relocation and displacement of residents and users, they do not take into consideration the far-reaching effects of these processes and they do not address questions about the production of urban value and people's access to centrality and thus the issue of the social wealth of a society.

Therefore, we have chosen a different analytical entry point by focusing on the production, reproduction and incorporation of the intrinsic qualities of the urban. We found Henri Lefebvre's concept of urban differences and Raymond Williams' concept of incorporation particularly useful for analysing our empirical results. In this chapter, we compare the incorporation of urban differences in Tokyo, Paris, Los Angeles and Istanbul and offer this concept for further discussion and application. For reasons of length we do not present the case studies on Hong Kong and Paris here (see Chapter 4).

This chapter starts with a theoretical discussion of urban differences and gives a first outline of the concept of incorporation of differences. Using the examples of Shimokitazawa, Centro Histórico, Downtown LA and Beyoğlu we then analyse the dynamics of this process over the long term and develop a periodisation for each case study. The last section of this chapter presents a detailed comparison of the four case studies and positions the concept of incorporation of differences within the larger context of urban theory, particularly in relation to the concept of gentrification.

The question of social differences has played a salient role in urban studies for several decades. It has been used in various ways; sometimes to discuss diversity or multiculturalism and sometimes to describe the simultaneous presence of various social realities in urban spaces. Poststructuralist and postmodern approaches, as well as feminist, queer and psychoanalytic discussions made the concept of difference a key category in urban studies as well as a valuable lens through which to focus on urban space. (Bondi and Rose 2003; McKittrick and Peake 2005; Valentine 2008).

In *Cities of Difference*, one of the key works on this topic, Fincher and Jacobs (1998: 2) ask: 'What happens to studies of housing, suburbia, the inner city, ghettos, gentrification, social polarisation and urban social movements when framed not by a theory of the "city", but by theories of difference?' In a poststructuralist context, the term 'difference' is usually taken to be similar to terms like diversity, heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism (Fincher et al. 2014). In Anglo-American discourse in particular, the term difference is closely linked to the concept of identity (and identity politics), and both concepts are understood to be constituted, constructed and contextualised in processes and discursive practices related to dominant frameworks of power. Typical aspects of difference discussed in these studies are ethnicity, race, gender, class, sexuality and sometimes also age and disability, all of which are seen as fluid and multifaceted. In this understanding, different subjectivities can be privileged or marginalised, included or excluded, which raises questions of their rights and their access to resources (Fincher and Jacobs 1998: 3–7). Scholars have examined how difference is constituted and negotiated in various contexts, focusing primarily on socio-spatial differentiation, segregation and place-making in urban areas. This leads directly to the question of an emancipatory potential for a politics of difference that could help forge alliances among actors in diverse urban social movements (Keith and Pile 1993).

Difference also became an important concept in the postmodernist strand of the Los Angeles School of Urbanism, which examined the differentiation of socio-spatial structures as a result of uneven development and urban restructuring (Dear 2000; Nicholls 2011). Los Angeles, which around the turn of the century had developed into a polycentric urban patchwork formed by various processes of immigration and by the initiatives and struggles of residents, appeared to be the ideal place for studying Foucauldian heterotopias (Soja 1996a).

These contributions focus on the constitution of difference in various urban contexts and its consequences on urban restructuring and everyday life. Scholars usually conceptualise urban space as an arena in which differences unfold. They analyse

the conflicts that arise from the constitution of differences and explore political strategies for forming alliances between different actors and social groups in urban contexts. They do not, however, understand difference as an active social practice shaping urbanisation itself. As Goonewardena and Kipfer (2005) note, certain culturalist conceptualisations of difference uncritically promote cultural diversity and a 'food-and-festivals' brand of aestheticised difference, leading to a commodified 'bourgeois urbanism' that absorbs subcultural practices and popular milieus.

A THEORY OF URBAN DIFFERENCES

There is also another strand of theorisation; one that considers the production of differences as being central to and constitutive of the urban process itself. This perspective was theorised by Lefebvre. His theory of differences is a key element of his theory of the production of (urban) space (Goonewardena et al. 2008; Schmid 2022). Here, differences are rooted in active social relationships and 'differential space' is the horizon, the concrete utopia of urbanisation. As Buckley and Strauss state, Lefebvre's conceptualisation may also offer 'a productive opening for feminist, queer and other urban scholarship on the socio-spatial processes producing difference' (2016: 633). While Lefebvre remains vague about the concrete specification of differences, he uses the concept in a very productive way to analyse the dialectical relationship between urban space and the interplay of different social realities in everyday life.

In Lefebvre's view, difference is a relational and dialectical concept: differences are socially produced and relate to each other. They are multidimensional and dynamic. Differences arise from particularities, which relate to biological and physiological characteristics and to kinship and origin. Such particularities remain isolated yet confront each other in all sorts of struggles that traverse history. These struggles, however, may create awareness and a consciousness of others. Thus, differences emerges as enacted practice and ultimately as mental acts: differences connect with actions, situations, discourses and contexts; they relate to multifarious networks of interaction that overlap, interfere with and change as a result of the influence they have on each other. In this way, a movement is set in motion that ultimately may change the totality of social relations (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]: 64, 126, 129; 2008 [1981]: 111).

In contrast to poststructuralist approaches, Lefebvre distinguishes between difference and 'diversity', 'heterogeneity' and 'distinction', because he understands differences to be enacted contradictions that may also involve conflict and struggle (Lefebvre 1970, 66–68). In other words, the point is not that a variety of people are in the same space

at the same time, but that there are relations and interactions among them. Note that this concept is not intended to romanticise or legitimise social disparities, poverty and precarious living conditions. On the contrary, in Lefebvre's understanding, difference includes processes of emancipation and presupposes recognition and equal rights (Lefebvre 2008: 88). This conceptualisation has many similarities to Iris Marion Young's call for an 'egalitarian politics of difference' (1990).

DIFFERENCE AND CENTRALITY

Urban life strives for differentiation, as Simmel demonstrated in his seminal text *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1950). He observes that the concentration of people in large metropolises not only leads to an increased level of social interaction but also makes the money economy much more significant and hence also exchange values and the market. This in turn forces individuals to specialise in order to make a living. The agglomeration of a large number of people with different interests leads to an increase in the division of labour, which is not limited to the economic differentiation of products and services but also leads to a differentiation of livelihoods and personalities. Thus, urban differences emerge based on immigration or the residents' different origins but they also result from the social division of labour and the related production of cultural, economic and social inventions in large metropolises. Along this line of argument, we emphasise that urban centres have a crucial effect on societies: they both attract differences and they themselves become sites where differences are produced.

Lefebvre sees the productive aspect of difference in a similar way but goes one step further: differences become productive in that they generate a new quality of social interaction and transcend the existing boundaries of daily life (1991: 372–375, 295, 372–375). Therefore, the specific quality of urban space results from the simultaneous presence of people from different historical, social and economic backgrounds, from their activities and functions and from the ideas that meet in an urban space, interact and generate all sorts of social inventions. Urban space opens up the possibility of bringing the differences of a society together and making them dynamic: this space becomes a productive force, continuously destabilising existing modes of coexistence and creating new ones (Schmid 2015). Accordingly, we can understand differences as productive instabilities within the urban condition (Hanakata 2020).

Difference implies encountering and meeting and is thus directly linked to centrality. Lefebvre notes: 'Centrality as a form implies simultaneity and it is a result thereof: the simultaneity of "everything" that is susceptible of coming together—and thus of

accumulating—in an act of thinking or in a social act, at a point or around that point' (1991: 332). Centrality is a precondition for differences to unfold because they can emerge only when people come together, meet and encounter each other. It is illuminating to see that Lefebvre's famous call for the 'right to the city' (in *The Right to the City*) evolved into the 'right to centrality' (in *The Urban Revolution*) and then into the 'right to difference' (in the *Production of Space*), which attests to the intrinsic relationship between these key aspects of the urban.

We need to note that Lefebvre developed centrality and difference as formal concepts: centrality means that a variety of different elements in a society come together and interact with each other. In the same way, he does not specify the concrete qualities and modalities of difference. The identification of the specific characteristics of centrality and difference in a particular urban space always requires concrete empirical analysis. Using this Lefebvrian understanding, the concept of difference became a key element of the territorial approach of ETH Studio Basel, which integrated it into a theoretical framework to analyse the specificity of urbanised territories (Diener et al. 2006, 2015; Schmid 2014, 2015).

HEGEMONY AND INCORPORATION

The production of differences is contradictory because it has the potential to transform existing social relations. It is therefore always confronted with and challenged by dominant political and social forces which try to contain, tame and reduce these differences. This inevitably leads, in Lefebvre's words, to a 'titanic' confrontation between homogenising powers and differentiating capacities (Lefebvre 1970: 49). This confrontation may become apparent in uprisings or remain implicit in the 'interstices of everyday life' (Kipfer 2008: 203). Lefebvre further distinguishes between minimal and maximal difference and between induced and produced differences. This is less an empirical than an analytical distinction: while minimal differences are integrated into a system and are constitutive of that system, maximal differences have the capacity to generate all sorts of surprises: they are unpredictable, potentially explosive and question the existing system (Lefebvre 1991, 372–375, 395–396). Referring to Gramsci, Stefan Kipfer (2008) links the question of difference to the question of hegemony, which tries to reduce maximal differences and incorporate minimal differences.

Departing from this interpretation, Andrew Shmueli (2008) regards Lefebvre's concept of minimal difference as analogous to the process Williams refers to as incorporation. In 1977 Williams developed a dynamic and open interpretation of Gramsci's concept of hegemony that has striking parallels with Lefebvre's conceptualisation of

political processes. In Williams's understanding, 'a lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure' (1977: 112). He defines hegemony as a realised complex of experiences, relationships and activities, and therefore it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance, but it has to be continually 'renewed, recreated, defended, and modified' (Williams 1977: 112). It is also continuously being challenged by the active presence of resistances and various forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and practices. Therefore, any hegemonic power must be especially alert and responsive to alternatives and oppositions that question or threaten its dominance. It must strive to control, transform and incorporate the efforts and contributions of those who are at the edge of the established hegemony. Much of this incorporation is not directly enforced but may look like recognition, acknowledgment or acceptance (Williams 1977: 113, 125).

URBAN VALUE AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE URBAN

Incorporation is related to the commodification of urban space. Differences constitute assets that can be drawn into market mechanisms and thus be transformed into a commodity (Gibson 1998). In this process, urban life as such is tied into the commodification process. As Lefebvre noted, urban space itself becomes a commodity to be bought and sold (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]: 154). This includes both the sale of parcels of land and the commodification of the entire social space—including the people living in it—as well as the social resources and the economic effects they produce (Schmid 2012). Thus, it is a process that turns the use value of urban space into exchange value. The use value of the urban, and thus the urban value, is produced by people; by the residents, workers, visitors and users who create it through their activities and interactions. It is based on a wide variety of social, economic, cultural and political networks anchored in specific urban places.

Urban value, understood as the use value of the urban, is potentially open to everybody and thus is related to the urban commons (see e.g. Harvey 2011; Stavrides 2016). It includes both material assets and potentials, and also immaterial values and imaginations. However, as a result of commodification processes, most of these lively urban areas full of different people with their practices and uses, which are often but not exclusively located in central areas, are turned into spaces for consumption for privileged residents and users, and are thereby incorporated into the logic of the market. At this moment, the exchange value of urban space is realised and extracted (see Theurillat 2015).¹

On a general level, Lefebvre (1991) understood the commodification of space as a process

of abstraction that leads to abstract space, while the creation of maximal difference tends towards differential space (see Schmid 2022).

CONCEPTUALISING INCORPORATION OF URBAN DIFFERENCES

With the concept of the incorporation of urban differences we try to bring together several contradictory aspects of urban transformation. First of all, the production of differences is a key aspect of the generation of urban value: encounters and interactions of people become productive because they have the potential to generate all sorts of social inventions. In this way, differences constitute the social wealth of an urban society. A central question is whether these differences are allowed to flourish and to whom they are accessible. This refers directly to the use value of urban space and thus to the creation of places that are accessible to all social groups, open for all sorts of experiments and extend society's capacity to produce new differences through meetings, encounters and exchange. An urban space can thus be defined as a place where differences emerge, recognise each other, respect each other and enter into productive exchange. These differences are dynamic: they are not something a place has, they are something that it constantly produces and reproduces. It is crucial that all people have the opportunity to live these differences and generate new differences (Schmid 2015; Meili 2015). We understand these differences as relative and variable; they are constituted by various processes and always imply power relations. Because of its potentially emancipatory character, the production of differences is subject to political interventions. While differences may be seen to be a desirable urban quality by political authorities, they are also often defined as a problem and as leading to conflicts and social unrest, therefore calling for appropriate measures. As Fincher et al. (2014) show, political strategies addressing difference often oscillate between celebrating diversity and regulating or even repressing difference.

The incorporation of differences has thus a double nature: homogenisation and commodification. State actors often play key roles in incorporating differences: they may push for homogenisation by controlling and policing public spaces and support commodification processes using all sorts of policies and strategies in the name of upgrading neighbourhoods. The dialectics between the production of differences and their incorporation sets a process in motion that may result in phases of closures and openings, with alternating moments of deep incorporation and those where differences flourish. In the following we explore this dynamic of the production and incorporation of differences using the examples of Shimokitazawa, Centro Histórico, Downtown LA and Beyoğlu.

SHIMOKITAZAWA: THE PRODUCTION OF AN ALTERNATIVE CENTRALITY FOR TOKYO

Shimokitazawa is a neighbourhood in the south-west of Tokyo with a population of approximately 18,000. It is situated at the intersection of the Odakyu and Keio Inokashira railway lines, putting it at the centre of one of the low-rise housing commuter belts stretching out from the central area into the region. It is located just outside Tokyo's central Yamanote railway line, which marks the limits of the central district of the metropolitan region, including Shibuya, a major centre for commerce, creative industries and fashion, and Shinjuku, the seat of the city's government and a commercial, entertainment and business centrality. Over the past three decades Shimokitazawa has transformed from being an intimate local neighbourhood, known for its music and theatre scene, into a destination for people from all over the region who are seeking an urban experience they can no longer find in any other centre of Tokyo (Hanakata 2020: 261).

THE ROOTS OF AN ALTERNATIVE ENTERTAINMENT CENTRALITY

Until the end of the feudal system in Japan in 1868, the area where Shimokitazawa is today was mainly agricultural land. Its gradual urbanisation began

with the industrialisation and modernisation of the country in the late 19th century. In 1878 the Komaba School of Agriculture was founded (today it is the Komaba Campus of Tokyo University), followed in 1917 by the Seijo Academy (which is today Seijo University). In 1932 the Tokyo Takarazuka Theater Company, today known as Toho Company, opened nearby and together, these institutions attracted many young and creative people to the area. With the rapid expansion of the metropolitan railway network in the 1920s and 1930s, connecting Tokyo's core with the constantly moving edges of the metropolis, Shimokitazawa became a well-connected town.

Shimokitazawa was spared from the devastating air raids of the Second World War, which ended with the almost total destruction of Tokyo. With its basic infrastructure still intact, the town began to flourish after the war: a commercial centre emerged around the railway station selling imported goods from the USA and with cheap restaurants and drinking places (Hanakata 2020: 263).

One of those places was run by Kazuo Honda, a former Toho Studio actor, who recalls: 'Back then, Shimokitazawa was not that bustling. There were no neon lights and at night it was rather a bizarre atmosphere' (Okashima et al. 2001). With the beginning of the Japanese post-war 'economic miracle', Shimokitazawa became increasingly popular among young people who discovered the area as an alternative to Shinjuku, Tokyo's famous main entertainment centre, which faced intense redevelopment at the time including the demolition of many popular gathering places, open spaces



Tokyo, Shimokitazawa. Setagaya Ward, 2013

and restaurants. The first bars performing rock and jazz music opened in Shimokitazawa in the early 1970s and attracted a new generation of fashion-conscious young people in a booming economy.

Youth magazines named Shimokitazawa as one of the trendy new places in the city (*Magazine World* 2020). In the summer of 1979 owners of music clubs organised the first Shimokitazawa Music Festival, which contributed to the regional fame of the neighbourhood as a place for music clubs and record stores. Shimokitazawa became a flourishing centre for young people, yet it remained out of reach of the centripetal forces of the much larger centralities of Shinjuku and Shibuya that were shaped by mainstream culture and mass consumption.

IN SEARCH OF THE NON-COMMODIFIABLE

Its increasing popularity changed Shimokitazawa's commercial landscape, attracting a wide, leisure-seeking audience from the entire Tokyo region. This trend coincided with the collapse of the economic bubble in 1990, which ended Japan's long-standing economic boom and marked the beginning of its lasting economic stagnation. At the same time, consumer culture changed. Just because everything had been turned into a commodity during the economic boom, the increasing search for the non-commodified made places like Shimokitazawa with its vibrant, locally embedded community, its original shops that had not yet been replaced by chain stores and its narrow alleys that were not overshadowed by skyscrapers an attractive and desirable place (Hanakata 2020: 265).

The neighbourhood responded to nostalgia; to the dream of a space seemingly untroubled by economic crises and untouched by 'modernisation'. As the historian Sand notes: 'Yet although the objects of late twentieth century Japanese nostalgia were various, they reflected a certain consistent sensibility that valued notions of rootedness and community, preferred low-tech, small and intimate spaces and sought to mark out territory outside the dominance of the state, capitalism, or global culture centred in the West' (Sand 2006: 86). However, because it attracted growing public attention and through its representation in the media as an additional 'feature' in a diversified 'city portfolio', the unique local atmosphere of Shimokitazawa itself became a commodity to be consumed in the same way as the famous illuminated streetscape of Shibuya. The distinct urban qualities that had been produced by local people were incorporated into leisure, shopping and tourist itineraries complementing the comprehensive 'urban offer' by Tokyo for residents and visitors.

MOMENTS OF INCORPORATION OF DIFFERENCES

In the early 2000s Shimokitazawa became famous as the 'Greenwich Village of Tokyo'. Simultaneously, spaces of consumption encroached further into quiet residential zones. Homeowners converted parts of their detached houses into small commercial spaces accommodating shops, boutiques or cafes which celebrated a 'slow' and 'alternative' lifestyle, offering an atmosphere that people sought out but could not find in the bigger centralities. Formerly distinct urban qualities were thus being reproduced to be sold. Waley describes this as the process by which urban histories are being 'wrapped up, bottled, translated into images and sold in a myriad of products appearing in shops all over the city' (2011: 60).

A resident who grew up in the area is now the owner of the Toyo Department Store, a car park converted into a bazaar-like collection of stores, or what he calls a 'retail incubator' that provides small spaces for young entrepreneurs to rent cheaply to test new product ideas and reproduce successful sales concepts. He highlights the challenge Shimokitazawa is facing today: 'Today, Shimokitazawa really is a brand' but 'what we are struggling with right now in this shopping area is, that there are too many second-hand shops. [...] Many of the second-hand stores today are in fact run by large companies' (Koshimizu 2013). His comment reveals the residents' awareness of Shimokitazawa's growing popularity, which large companies are exploiting to their advantage.

This popularity leads to growing consumerism and has resulted in a rise of commodification: urban values are turned into exchange values, depriving Shimokitazawa of its initial character as an alternative space. In this change in the use of spaces, popular ideas and venues are copied and repeated with only minor differences among them. The result is a homogenised landscape that accommodates mainstream demand and deprives local people of crucial conditions for everyday life within the area. Small corner shops that provide daily necessities, and which constitute a central element of the internal community network, are slowly disappearing. A traditional sweet shop, which opened after the Second World War, was shut down by its second-generation owners after they retired in 2014; now they are renting it out to yet another second-hand shop.

A corner shop established in 1927 on the ground floor of a two-storey building, selling vegetables, fruit and tobacco and forming a daily meeting point in the neighbourhood, was redeveloped by the owner, who had run the shop for many years, into a seven-storey building with three commercial floors and apartments on top. The owner moved into the top floor of her redeveloped building. Like so many other property owners in the area, she has capitalised on the increased value of her land and

realised the rent gap by creating new commercial spaces while remaining as a resident in the place. This shows that the local property owners are directly involved in this process of commodification. However, the transformation of the neighbourhood was largely limited to changes in its commercial landscape, while tenure structures remained unaffected. This was possible because of the powerful legal protection of property ownership rights, which prevented large-scale acquisitions from being made by private companies.

THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE URBAN

The state was not completely absent during the urban development of Shimokitazawa. By 1986, in response to the oil crisis a decade earlier, the national government had launched an urban renaissance policy for the central area by relaxing zoning regulations there. More planning measures followed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in an attempt to revitalise the stagnating economy after the economic crisis of 1991. The Urban Renaissance Agency (known as the Housing and Development Corporation until 1999 and the Urban Development Corporation until 2004) deregulated the housing market and offered the construction sector various incentives to increase the supply of central housing (Douglass 1988: 440). This deregulation led to a temporary increase of rental prices for commercial spaces in Shimokitazawa during the late 2000s. But, as most of the housing was owner occupied, most residents were not really affected (Sonobe 2001). As a result, however, more and more large retail chains relocated to the neighbourhood, particularly in the area of the South Exit. Small shops nevertheless kept emerging and continued to reproduce the unique atmosphere of the neighbourhood.

Today, all these new places, venues and events are accessible to visitors through numerous channels: local merchant associations introduce new members, announce events and give an overview of their various shopping streets on self-administered websites. Commercial web platforms such as 'I love Shimokitazawa', 'Shimokitazawa Broiler' or 'Burari Shimokitazawa' as well as various mainstream print magazines like *Popeye*, *Anan*, *Tokyo Jin* and *Setagaya Raifu* list commercial novelties to ensure that they may be discovered by people hunting for new urban adventures. Alternative and free events produced by local residents and shop owners are incorporated into these promotion schemes and absorbed by the mainstream. A curry dish, for example, initially served by a few out-of-date diners, became personified in the Curry Man, who became an ambassador for the town and its annual curry festival, first held in 2011.

CONCLUSION

Shimokitazawa is an example of the commodification and incorporation in the mainstream of 'something that lies outside the mainstream'. These differences emerged in and through everyday life, having been created by the complex interplay of individual local shop owners and the theatre and music communities, transgressing cultural sectors and producing a different culture. The incorporation of these differences was initiated and promoted by the same actors, as well as by the larger metropolitan audience—creating a kind of 'new metropolitan mainstream' (see Schmid and Weiss 2004). This kind of urban transformation is fundamentally different from situations in which high-income groups enter a neighbourhood and displace former residents and users: in Shimokitazawa, it was the long-established residents and shop owners themselves who drove this process of urban transformation. This illustrates the contradictory dynamics of the production of urban differences. In this case it was produced as an alternative to mainstream culture but became incorporated into the commercial entertainment apparatus of the metropolitan region.

CENTRO HISTÓRICO: THE STRUGGLE FOR A POPULAR CENTRE FOR MEXICO CITY

Despite many attempts to turn Mexico City's Centro Histórico into a mainstream space of consumption, a major change was achieved only recently. What used to be a vibrant and busy popular centre full of people is today in large parts a domesticised shopping zone closely monitored by hundreds of surveillance cameras. At the same time, a fundamental change of the urban imaginary could be observed: Centro Histórico, that for a long time had been portrayed and stigmatised as run down, unruly and unsafe, is now seen as a desirable symbolic and cultural centrality; and after many years of population loss new residents and users are moving in (Streule 2006, 2008; Díaz Parra and Salinas Arreortua 2016; Delgadillo 2016). How could such a profound urban transformation come about?

THE EMERGENCE OF A POPULAR CENTRALITY

Only a few years ago, thousands of street vendors installed their booths every morning on the pavements to sell everything from household articles and clothes to DVDs and cheap electronic devices made in China. Around one million people, known as a floating population (*población flotante*), came

every day to purchase a wide variety of goods (Silva Londoño 2010; Alba Vega and Braig 2013). This specific urban quality of the central area of Mexico City known as Centro was deeply rooted in its changing history. After Mexico's independence in 1821, the Centro with its large colonial residential buildings became the favourite place for the criollo elite. In the late 19th century Mexico City expanded beyond its colonial core and in the 1920s, in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, the Centro slowly changed from being a bourgeois city centre into a *barrio popular*, notorious for its dancing halls, cantinas and *vecindades*² (Monnet 1995). The urban elites found new residential areas to the west of the Centro, close to the central axis of the Paseo de la Reforma and the newly built tramway lines (Ward 1991) and the Centro became the principal space used to integrate immigrants, poor residents and refugees from the civil war into urban society (Davis 2004; Hiernaux 2013: 380).

In the following decades the housing stock in the Centro gradually deteriorated, mainly because landlords stopped investing in it as a response to the rent control that was introduced in 1942 in central areas to mollify heavy social protests against the housing crisis (Urbina Martínez 2009). Moreover, as part of a comprehensive modernist restructuring plan for Mexico City, the city government relocated numerous factories from the Centro into new industrial parks, constructed a new campus for the national university UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) in the south of the city and a number of market halls in order to concentrate former commercial activities scattered throughout

Mexico City, warehouse and shops. Centro Historico, 2023



the Centro in a fruitless attempt to remove street vendors from operating in public spaces (Streule 2018). At the same time, many working-class people left the vecindades in the Centro and moved to self-built houses in the urban periphery (see Chapter 12). All these developments opened up space, which soon was taken over by shops and other commercial uses. As a result, the Centro turned into a popular meeting place for the entire region.

In 1985 a devastating earthquake hit the Centro. Large parts of the central areas of Mexico City were affected, thousands of residents killed and many of the poorly maintained old colonial buildings were severely damaged. Many residents, businesses and institutions left the Centro, including major parts of the financial sector and of the government administration. However, many shops and venues for low-income groups remained and by organising widespread social protest, the residents successfully fought for their right to centrality and resisted being relocated to newly built state housing in remote areas (Massolo 1986). They even eventually succeeded in making the government rehabilitate and reconstruct buildings in the area (Esquivel Hernández 2016). Thus, in the late 1980s, the Centro consolidated its role as a popular centrality for low-income groups of mainly mestizo and indigenous people, and as a place to live and work (Oehmichen 2007).

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND INCORPORATION

In the 1990s the urban imaginary of the Centro changed and a process of incorporation slowly unfolded. A decisive starting point had been the establishment in 1980 of the conservation zone of the 'Centro Histórico' by the city government, which covered only a fraction of the entire central area. UNESCO supported this strategy by declaring the Centro Histórico a World Heritage site in 1987, thereby also imposing traditional conservation strategies that forbade street markets or the alteration of façades. Soon thereafter, the city government launched a large-scale urban regeneration programme called '¡Échame una manita!' ('Lend a hand', 1991–1994) (Delgadillo 2016: 1166). A programme to address the damage from the earthquake was widely seen as necessary but the proposed programme, and particularly with the production of heritage as its main goal, was disputed (Mantecón 2005; Melé 2006; for a similar case in Puebla, see Jones and Varley 1999). Furthermore, in the wake of a neoliberal turn in Mexico the city government deregulated rents in 1992 and established a public-private Historic Center Trust Fund to attract private investment. Another attempt to relocate street vendors failed. Despite all these efforts to attract investors, only

a few real estate projects were built and these were mainly in the Alameda corridor in the western part of Centro Histórico (Streule 2006; see also Parnreiter 2015).

FROM INTEGRAL REGENERATION TO SELECTIVE INVESTMENT AND FESTIVALISATION

In the wake of the rise of a strong urban social movement in Mexico City, which had also been very active in the Centro ever since the successful struggles for housing in the mid-1980s, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas became the first elected mayor of Mexico City in



Mexico City: food stall. Centro Histórico, 2013



1997 (previously, the city mayors had been appointed by the President of Mexico). Cárdenas succeeded in involving activist groups and tenant organisations, which had mobilised for political change for many years, into the campaign for an inclusive city agenda. Many of the leaders of these social movements—like Superbarrio Gómez, the charismatic activist fighting for affordable housing in the Centro—even accepted positions in government. Cárdenas envisioned an integrated regeneration of the Centro, which sought to avoid social exclusion and prevent the displacement of local residents (Coulomb 2004: 75).

However, in 2000 the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (who was elected president of Mexico in 2018) as city mayor resulted in another decisive turn for the Centro. While pretending to continue Cárdenas' strategy to create an inclusive city, he introduced a neoliberal agenda and forged a close collaboration with Carlos Slim, one of Mexico's most powerful entrepreneurs. Together, they created an Executive Consulting Council to restore the Centro Histórico. This body claimed to represent civil society but was headed by Slim and included other conservative celebrities of the political, scientific, religious and media establishment, such as the cardinal of Mexico City (Walker 2013: 177).

To complement this development, the city government launched a new 'revitalisation' programme, which also established a cultural and tourist corridor in the south-western part of the Centro Histórico, in the same area where Slim had purchased 63 buildings between 2002 and 2004 (Delgadillo 2016: 1167). Slim also created two foundations that worked closely together to manage his investments: the Fundación del Centro Histórico, a non-profit organisation aimed at enhancing living conditions

through social, artistic and cultural programmes and the Inmobiliaria Vivir en el Centro, a for-profit corporation that bought and renovated buildings for housing and commerce, with the goal of reactivating the real estate market in the area (Leal Martínez 2007: 29; Streule 2006). By sponsoring novel tourist and artistic venues and providing art scholarships, both foundations attracted young people from all over the world. Additionally, microcredit was made available for small entrepreneurial activities to promote the local production of popular and artisanal products, which had so far not been introduced into the tourist market in the Centro Histórico.

Meanwhile, the government launched a strategy of festivalisation (Streule 2008) by organising enormous free events in public spaces that 'sought to foster a collective identity' (Coulomb 2004: 82). This was complemented by a zero tolerance security strategy (Davis and Luna Reyes 2007) that included a formidable police presence on the street and the installation of CCTVs. A beautification programme further promoted the cleaning of streets, the refurbishing of parks and an illumination plan for the Centro. Many of these projects, e.g. the new police station, were financed by Slim (Streule 2006).

MAINSTREAMING CENTRO HISTÓRICO

All these vast urban regeneration efforts were accomplished in parallel with a fundamental change in the real estate market. Landlords started to offer lofts in renovated buildings for rent and transformed the upper floors of former warehouses into apartments. While low-income residents generally aim to own their homes, this new rental market explicitly focused on a new type of resident: well-off young couples or singles who were not (yet) interested in buying property and who wanted to live in an attractive urban environment. They would tolerate certain inconveniences in exchange for the 'lifestyle offered by the centrality' (Coulomb 2004: 80; see also Hiernaux 2003). The revitalisation strategy and the change in the real estate market had far-reaching effects: after decades of population loss a new urban milieu entered the Centro Histórico. Fancy cafés, bars and galleries opened and new cultural and tourist corridors on recently pedestrianised streets were created, often triggering conflicts between established and new residents or visitors (Leal Martínez 2007). As a result of this process, the privileged south-western area of the Centro Histórico turned into a trendy neighbourhood in the mid-2000s, while other parts were able to escape the vast public-private investments as tenants and street vendors challenged the official restoration programmes.

In 2007, with the creation of an 'Authority of the Centro Histórico' under the Mayor and former police chief Marcelo Ebrard, urban regeneration



Mexico City; street market. Centro Histórico, 2023



policies became more widespread: as reinvestments had affected less than 10 per cent of the Centro Histórico by that time (Delgadillo 2016: 1167), the new programme targeted the northern and eastern neighbourhoods that had escaped renovation. For the first time, street vending was effectively banned from the Centro Histórico (Crossa 2009; Silva Londoño 2010). At Plaza Garibaldi, which was famous for its Mariachi bands, a Tequila museum opened in 2010 and homeless street kids and prostitutes were displaced (Becker and Müller 2011; Moctezuma Mendoza 2016). In contrast, regeneration plans for the huge public market La Merced have been delayed by protests since 2013 (Delgadillo 2018; Lara-Hernandez et al. 2020).

CONCLUSION

Mexico City's Centro Histórico is an example of the constant struggle to maintain a popular centrality in a situation in which the globalisation and metropolisation of the urban region creates a conflict between the existing low-income residents and users and the ambitions of the government and investors to create a commodified centrality for tourists and visitors. These long-standing attempts to incorporate the historical centre of Mexico City proved to be deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, they have clearly diminished the vitality and openness of large parts of the Centro. As in many other Latin American cities, such as Lima, La Habana and Bogotá, this recuperation of historic colonial centres has been closely linked to an urban heritage discourse, which is then instrumentalised for comprehensive urban transformation.

On the other hand, despite all these attempts by private and state actors, through various forms of everyday struggles the Centro has to this day remained an important economic, social, cultural and symbolic centrality on the metropolitan scale. It is one of the few urban spaces in the increasingly socially segregated metropolis of Mexico City that is still visited by a remarkably wide range of different users and enables encounters and meetings. Centro Histórico remains a highly contested urban space, in which access to centrality is at stake (Streule 2008, 2018).

DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES: A METROPOLIS IN SEARCH OF A CENTRE

After more than a century, Los Angeles finally seems to have a real downtown. A place that has embodied the definition of placelessness and has been the very symbol of a core without content (Bogart 2006: 13; Banham 1971: 208; Lynch 1960, 35; Mollenkopf 1983: 31) has come roaring into a state of urban transformation. A significant marker of this change may be the relocation of high-tech companies from Silicon Beach (Santa Monica, Venice, Manhattan Beach and Redondo Beach) to Downtown LA in the mid-2010s. Their explanation for this move was that the rents were cheaper, cool and creative spaces abounded and their employees wanted an urban experience (Chang 2015). How can this significant urban change be explained?

A HORIZONTAL METROPOLIS

The struggle for metropolitan vibrancy, and its corollary, the displacement of those left out of the vibrancy equation, is not something new to Los Angeles. For over a century, civic leaders and urban planners have been grappling with the scattered urban form of the metropolis. Los Angeles's

Los Angeles; arc of gentrifying neighbourhoods. Boyle Heights, 2014
Los Angeles; Fashion District. Downtown LA, 2023



polycentric structure was primarily a consequence of the construction of electric urban and interurban railways connecting the dispersed settlements in the vast plane between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, which opened up vast tracts of land for real estate—yielding huge profits for the railway owners (Fogelson 1967: 86). This decentralised urbanisation model had vast implications for the development of Downtown: by following a horizontal rather than a vertical urbanisation pattern, Los Angeles developed many cores instead of one. However, in the first three decades of the 20th century efforts to build a viable city centre proved to be at least partly successful, as is testified by a range of representational buildings and dense neighbourhoods: the City Hall with its Art Deco tower from 1928, which replaced the old central business district; the financial district at Spring Street with its high-rise buildings; and Broadway Street, which developed into a district with vibrant shopping, nightlife and entertainment facilities and where a whole range of movie palaces attracted thousands of people. But by the 1920s Downtown LA showed its first signs of decline: new department stores opened along Wilshire Boulevard west of Downtown and over the following decades Wilshire Boulevard developed into a new horizontal downtown (Keil 1998: 145). Hollywood Boulevard became the new movie district and tourist attraction and more new downtowns developed in Pasadena, Beverly Hills, Westwood, Santa Monica and Santa Ana (Fogelson 1967: 147; Garvin 2019: 28).

DECENTRING THE METROPOLIS

Los Angeles's decentralised growth pattern was reinforced after the Second World War, when the railways were replaced by boulevards and freeways and the Los Angeles model of car-oriented urban sprawl fully unfolded. This decentralised model was not only promoted by powerful land-owners and developers but was also the result of a Fordist-Keynesian compromise in which the predominantly white trade unions supported suburban housing and metropolitan freeways (Parson 1982: 406). Soon afterwards, businesses and retailers followed white middle-income families to the growing suburbs scattered all over the metropolitan region and shopping malls mushroomed. The new freeways pushed further decentralisation and hemmed in and suffocated Downtown, which was turned into a kind of lost island in between the main traffic arteries. It experienced a slow but steady decline for several decades, resulting in underused and vacant buildings. But at the same time it also developed into a centrality for a wide variety of low-income groups (Sambale 2007). At Broadway Street many of the movie palaces became venues for Spanish-language movies and variety shows, and the neighbourhood developed into a lively area for Latino Americans (Roseman and Vigil 1993). Skid Row, the adjacent neighbourhood north-east of Downtown and close to the terminus stations of the transcontinental railroads, became a point of entry for migrants with its low-price hotels, apartments and retail stores and it developed into



the main place for homeless people in Los Angeles. These central areas were surrounded by several labour-intensive, low-waged industrial clusters, such as the fashion, toy, flower, warehouse and central industrial districts. They formed specific agglomeration economies connected to global markets and also to a local network of firms and shops (Sims 2016: 35). Thus, Downtown may not have developed into a metropolitan centrality but it became a popular centrality for a broad mix of middle- and low-income groups.

CITADEL AND GHETTO

The slow but steady decline of Downtown did not remain unchecked. The Central City Association of Los Angeles, founded in 1924, became a key player in the efforts to recentre the rapidly suburbanising region in the 1960s (Davis 1990: 72). They initiated the redevelopment of Bunker Hill, a once wealthy residential area in the north-west of Downtown, which had developed into a vibrant mixed neighbourhood. In what was a classic modernist urban renewal project the newly founded Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) began to acquire property, and by the late 1960s Bunker Hill had been cleared of more than 7000 low-income homes and a large number of small businesses, while in their place rose an 'acropolis of corporate headquarters and culture complexes' (Parson 1993: 235). But this business satellite with skyscrapers directly linked to parking structures and freeways did not generate any form of 'vibrancy'. The opening of the postmodern Bonaventure Hotel in 1976, highly debated for its iconic architecture by urban thinkers and postmodern theorists (Davis 1990; Soja 1989, 1996; Jameson 1991; Baudrillard 1996; Joseph-Lester 2008) also did little to create the sense of a viable downtown but resulted in what Soja called 'Citadel LA': an pure spectacle of business, commerce and power. As he argues, '[M]any residents of the City of Los Angeles have never been downtown and experience it only vicariously, on television and film' (Soja 1996a: 297).

The Citadel remained architecturally separated from the adjacent Hispanic district on Broadway Street, and guarded from the homeless in Skid Row (Parson 1993: 236). The epic battle for Skid Row cannot be told here in detail (Reese et al. 2010; Gibbons 2018). During the 1980s the relatively small group of mixed, but mainly white homeless men at Skid Row grew to a much larger number of predominantly African American men as a consequence of the massive wave of deindustrialisation after the crisis of Fordism and the 'collapse of affordable housing' following neoliberal changes in Los Angeles (Wolch 1996). Plans to bulldoze parts of Skid Row were prevented by advocates of homeless people, support groups and community organisations as well as by

neighbouring communities fearing they would become the 'new' Skid Row. Instead, the city government applied a dual containment strategy: on the one hand, the LA Police Department launched aggressive sweeps to remove homeless people from public sidewalks and open spaces, while on the other, activists successfully campaigned for improvements to provide support structures, services and shelter (Deener et al. 2013). The shocking contrast between the ascending towers on Bunker Hill and the depressing reality in Skid Row is well expressed by the metaphor of 'Citadel and Ghetto' so powerfully evoked by Friedmann and Wolff (1982) in their seminal paper on the world city hypothesis.

THE 'SUCCESS STORY'

The situation of Downtown changed gradually during the 1990s, during which the proverbial non-urbanity of Los Angeles slowly gave way to an increased interest in urbanity. A range of new cultural venues and flagship projects, such as Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall on Bunker Hill (1997), the Staples Center, a multipurpose sports and event arena at the western edge of Downtown (1999) and the adjacent entertainment complex L.A. Live (2009) gave the entire Downtown a new feeling of centrality. Trendy bars, restaurants and hotels opened, while urban parks were built to produce an impression of 'urbanity'.

Meanwhile, art galleries moved into the former financial district of South Spring Street, which soon became known as Gallery Row. Broadway Street also underwent great changes and the mix of stores for Latino Americans came under serious pressure. In the 1990s Downtown became a centre for the evictions and displacements of homeless people and merchants selling cheap goods (Sims 2016: 37). A decisive turning point was reached when the city passed the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance in 1999, permitting developers to convert vacant office and commercial space into residential use. In the following years many former bank, storage and factory buildings, as well as cheap single room apartment hotels were converted into expensive lofts and luxury residences (Deener et al. 2013). A critical moment seemed to have been reached when *Los Angeles Magazine* ran a front-page story in 2011 on the glories of Downtown living (Sullivan 2014: 87).

Coordinated planning efforts led by the CRA, which brought together government actors, planners, developers, property and business owners in various projects, played a key role in this 'urban renaissance'. The main instrument for urban upgrading became the creation of business improvement districts (BID), a model imported from other cities in North America (Garvin 2019: 99–101). The first BID in Downtown was Miracle on

Broadway, founded in 1987. On the east side of Downtown, in the former Warehouse district, an Arts district BID was installed in the mid-1990s. In this area a lively art scene had developed as early as the 1970s, epitomised by the legendary punk venue in the American Hotel. As the art scene got established, artists became developers and started to rehabilitate industrial buildings and the city launched an artist-in-residence programme. Since the 2000s more and more expensive residential and mixed-use projects have fundamentally changed and streamlined the district (Darchen 2017). Today, Downtown LA forms a patchwork of nine officially recognised BIDs, each with their own private security guards, refuse collection, marketing and beautification efforts. Partially funded by public subsidies, they offer advice and support to commerce and real-estate developers, advertising a safe and clean space with a unique 'edgy urban atmosphere' (Marquardt and Füller 2012: 156-157). Their efforts include placing constant pressure on small businesses selling cheap goods and on anyone who disturbs the idealised picture. Many of those pushed out of Downtown end up in the streets, emergency shelters and transitional housing of Skid Row.

RECENTRALISING LOS ANGELES

In about two decades Downtown LA has been transformed into a new magnet for the urban middle classes. Between 2000 and 2018 the number of residents almost tripled from about 24,000 to 65,000. In 2018 the median age of these residents was 36 and their median income was almost \$ 100,000 (City of Los Angeles 2018). Why did this 'urban renaissance', after so many failed attempts for almost a century, finally take hold? From the perspective of the metropolitan region, the change may be interpreted as a turn towards a denser urbanisation model, as some researchers suggest (Soja 2014). However, this transformation also reflects a paradigm change from a decentralised and polycentric urbanisation model to one that is much more oriented towards the production and commodification of urban value based on the huge interventions and concerted efforts of state and corporate actors. This recentralisation of Los Angeles is thus much more than gentrification in the classic definition of the term: it can be understood as the production of an entirely new urban configuration, serving as the new strategic centre for restructuring the entire region with far-reaching effects. An arc of gentrifying neighbourhoods developed north of Downtown in recent years, stretching from a western outpost in Silver Lake to Echo Park, Cypress Park and Lincoln Heights to an eastern outpost in Boyle Heights (Schmid and Sullivan 2020).³ As Scott (2018) has argued for the 2000-2015 period, these

gentrification processes followed the concentration of white collar jobs in central areas, which in turn reflects a fundamental change in the socioeconomic structure of Los Angeles: the centre of gravity has moved along the central axis of Wilshire Boulevard eastwards towards Downtown.

CONCLUSION

The example of Downtown LA shows that the contradictory process of creating centrality and urbanity via state strategies not only results in a commodified and domesticated urban space, but also destroys existing forms of popular centrality. The 'urban renaissance' of Downtown LA may be understood as the simultaneous production and incorporation of urban differences as part of a top-down strategy to produce an 'urban experience in a secure and clean urban environment. This is a classical form of 'bourgeois urbanism' that tries to produce urban spaces without contradictions. This strategy deprives many communities of their access to centrality and impedes their efforts to create their own distinct forms of urban value. The remaking of Downtown LA is a striking example of both the incorporation of differences and its opposite, the rejection of differences.

BEYOĞLU: CONTESTING INCORPORATION IN ISTANBUL

The incorporation of urban differences always targets the collective actions and products of residents and users of space and it is therefore often contested by various urban social movements and advocacy groups. In some cases, the top-down efforts to constrain maximal differences or reduce them into minimal differences may even spark huge backlashes, unexpectedly opening up new spaces for the creation of even more threatening maximal differences that have been unforeseen by the hegemonic powers. This possibility is amply illustrated in the case of the June 2013 revolts in Istanbul, which were directly triggered by the government's decision to intervene in what is arguably the most central public space in Istanbul in the historic Beyoğlu district. Here Taksim Square, together with İstiklal Avenue that feeds into it, constitute a major metropolitan centrality.

THE CREATION AND DECLINE OF A COSMOPOLITAN CENTRALITY

Beyoğlu emerged as an alternative and largely non-Muslim centrality in the 19th and early 20th century in contrast to the traditional centrality on the southern side of the Golden Horn. Originally inhabited by non-Muslim merchants, bankers and diplomats, İstiklal Avenue (formerly known as Cadde-i Kebir or the Grande Rue de Péra in French) and its immediate surroundings became a salient cultural and economic centre with a European orientation during the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. However, the area entered a long and slow period of decline in the 1920s with the founding of the Turkish Republic, the exodus of non-Muslim groups and the loss of economic vitality. By the 1970s it had become a blighted zone, characterised by congestion and a compromised reputation, and hosting illicit activities and low-profile commerce, while at the same time providing cheap housing for rural immigrants (Ozus and Dokmeci, 2005: 148, 149; Türkün 2021: 178-207).

HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND PRODUCTION OF DIFFERENCES

As in the three case studies we discussed in detail above, in the 1990s Beyoğlu experienced an upturn based on culture-led revitalisation by public and private initiatives. It was declared a protection zone due to its rich architectural heritage featuring exquisite examples of

19th and early 20th century European art nouveau and art deco. İstiklal Avenue was pedestrianised; bookshops, art and entertainment venues opened, catering to a secular, art-loving, intellectual and politically left-leaning user base. Events such as the Istanbul Film Festival and Istanbul Jazz Festival, organised by Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, raised the profile of the area even further (Türkün 2021: 208-220). After decades of decline, the latter half of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s constituted a new golden age for



Istanbul; Taksim square with recently constructed Taksim Mosque. Beyoğlu, 2023



Beyoğlu, which was marked by a more or less peaceful balance between the production of differences and commodification.

INCORPORATION THROUGH MAINSTREAMING

Starting in the mid-2000s commodification intensified, manifested by market-led gentrification, investments in commercial real estate (mostly hotels and shopping facilities) and government-led regeneration and redevelopment projects. The then mayor of Beyoğlu, Ahmet Misbah Demircan from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), underlined the importance of turning Beyoğlu into a respectable destination for tourism and culture, instead of just a place for 'nightlife and young people' (Türkün 2021: 221). Similar to Centro Histórico and Downtown LA, Beyoğlu was then subjected to disciplinary measures, including restrictions on outdoor sitting areas for cafes, bars and restaurants and the prohibition of political demonstrations and art performances in public spaces (Adanali 2011). Taksim Square—marking the north-eastern end of İstiklal Avenue—was the centrepiece of the envisioned tourist-friendly transformation. According to the Taksim Square renovation plan, the public green space known as Gezi Park adjacent to the square was to be transformed into a commercial complex with cafes, shops and a 'city museum'. Various activist groups raised objections to this project, as it would deprive residents and visitors of respite from the busy surroundings of Taksim. These



Istanbul; main façade of the Atatürk Cultural Centre during the Gezi park protests. Taksim, Beyoğlu, 2013

objections were brashly dismissed by the authorities and the then prime minister (and now president), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

URBAN REVOLT AND THE PRODUCTION OF MAXIMAL DIFFERENCES

On the evening of 27 May 2013 a handful of activists gathered in Gezi Park to stop the incursion of construction vehicles into the park. While they managed to stop them uprooting a few trees and occupied the park, the following day they were met with overwhelming police brutality, which in turn sparked widespread public outrage that quickly surpassed the scale of the small circle of activist groups and associations. The security forces' attempts to contain the outburst with more violence proved fruitless. In a few days Gezi Park and Taksim Square had become the centre of nationwide protests against the AKP administration and the increasingly authoritarian rule of Erdoğan. People set up camp in the park and for two weeks 'Gezi commune' became a site for maximal differences, a place for intense exchange between people voicing diverse political demands in opposition to the regime. Even though the revolt transcended its initial cause, one main point of opposition remained the economic growth model based on the provision of debt-financed infrastructure and real estate projects extending from major metropolitan centres to remote valleys in Anatolia. As argued elsewhere (Erensü and Karaman, 2017), the Gezi revolt stood out for articulating social movements across the urban-rural divide and hence could be considered as being an urban revolt of the planetary age (Brenner and Schmid 2011; Merrifield 2014).



NORMALISATION

The Gezi commune was eventually dispersed by a major assault from the police. Demonstrations across Istanbul and the whole country were repressed and the resulting casualties were severe. Plans for the construction of the museum-commercial complex were eventually withdrawn and today Gezi remains a public park. Yet after a decade the memory of the Gezi revolts remains contested. While the opposition views it as a spontaneous, legitimate and beautiful act of democratic expression, Erdoğan and his supporters have condemned it as an orchestrated attempt at a putsch. Eventually eight people—including prominent figures from associations related to urban planning and architecture—were sentenced and imprisoned for attempts to overthrow the government. During the decade following the protests, Beyoğlu kept losing its customary user base, as well as many of the stores and businesses that are inscribed in collective memory (Adanali 2017).

In this case, the open use of disciplinary measures and the unfolding of highly commodified processes excited in the public the feeling that these moves were unjust and their passions erupted, resulting in an exceptional and unforeseeable political explosion.

INCORPORATION OF URBAN DIFFERENCES IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The comparison of the four centralities in this chapter reveals that the process of the production and incorporation of urban differences may take very different forms and trajectories. In the 1950s Shimokitazawa was a small regional centre and marketplace located at a node of Tokyo's metropolitan railway system. Differences originally emerged from the presence of a variety of institutions and venues such as university departments, a theatre company and film studios, which attracted a mix of curious and adventurous young people. In contrast, Mexico City's Centro, which constituted the entire city until the late 19th century, developed towards a popular neighbourhood after the Mexican revolution, when bourgeois families relocated to suburban neighbourhoods and increasing numbers of immigrants from rural areas moved in to the Centro. Beyoğlu was an emerging cosmopolitan centrality and a prestigious residential area in the early 20th century but went through a long period of decline and stagnation. Downtown LA was a thriving and mixed North American downtown at the beginning of the 20th century but soon faced a slow but steady loss of importance due to the decentralised urbanisation model of Los Angeles.

During the postwar boom, all four places developed into specific centralities with characteristic differences. In Shimokitazawa these differences were rather subtle: resisting the proliferation of global influences over decades and largely unnoticed by the wide public, venues, shops and meeting places created a new productive ground for differences to emerge and the neighbourhood became an alternative cultural centre for a small, mainly young segment of Tokyo's cultural milieu. At the same time Mexico City's central zone developed into a lively and popular centrality, with all sorts of shops and venues and thousands of street vendors selling a great variety of mainly low-priced goods. These places constituted nodes in various social networks, offered possibilities for encounter and exchange and played important roles in the everyday life of the entire region. As a result of the vast destruction caused by the earthquake of 1985, the Centro became a place where mainly low-income people lived. While many left the Centro, others fought for their right to centrality and resisted being relocated to peripheral neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, Downtown LA did not turn into a mainstream centrality although many new buildings were constructed by private companies and state actors. Instead, it developed into a centrality for low-income groups and a place for

homeless people. This centre possessed many urban qualities, but they were not recognised by the mainstream discourse. During the same period Beyoğlu lost its significance as a prominent economic and cultural centre, especially with the dispossession and exodus of non-Muslim populations. It nevertheless became a low-profile popular centrality for rural migrants coming to Istanbul to work (Türkün 2021: 178–207; Ozus and Dokmeci, 2005: 149).

Until the 1990s specific urban differences developed in all four centres, and all of them formed accessible and affordable places for encounters and exchange. In collective everyday processes, residents and users generated urban values that formed important resources for various social groups living in these vast metropolitan regions.

INCORPORATION PROCESSES

In the course of the 1990s, incorporation processes intensified in all four urban centres. Ironically and significantly, one starting point of incorporation was that what appeared to be impossible to be commodified was turned into a cultural heritage asset offering nostalgia and identity as a product to be consumed. In Shimokitazawa this process of incorporation was based on the presence of specific material qualities: its narrow alleys and low-rise buildings evoked an early modern time, and small local shops run by their owners offered unique ‘pre-loved’ items for sale. Similarly, the Centro Histórico was officially proclaimed to be a cradle of authentic local culture in the wake of the UNESCO declaring the area a World Heritage site. In the following years, several consecutive mayors implemented urban regeneration policies using the classical arguments that by so doing they were rescuing Centro Histórico from decay and conserving its colonial heritage. Beyoğlu’s cultural heritage and the nostalgia for its former glory were also used as arguments for official revitalisation efforts, which were quite successful in transforming the district into an attractive area for upscale art and entertainment. This incorporation strategy nevertheless opened up possibilities for the creation of differences and in the early 1990s, Beyoğlu became an attractive place for an alternative, intellectual, politically conscious and predominantly young group of Istanbulites. In contrast, the construction of postmodern icons and flagship projects in Downtown LA did not succeed in creating ‘urbanity’ and ‘vibrancy’. The fact that urban qualities cannot simply be manufactured via urban regeneration schemes and architectural interventions is a lesson that planners and developers in many regions of the world have had to learn time and again. Urban value is generated by the people, by residents, users and various kinds of producers, which together create places of encounter and exchange.

In the 2000s attempts and efforts to incorporate differences intensified in all four places. Shimokitazawa became a brand and attracted affluent people and large retail chains. Local shop owners and residents actively sought to benefit from this increased popularity and participated in the development of entertainment and shopping facilities for a leisure-seeking audience. As a result, Shimokitazawa turned from an underground off-place into a mainstream space for consumption offering a ‘different lifestyle’ and was gradually deprived of its specific urban values. Nevertheless, displacement of residents has been limited in scope, largely because homeownership is so widespread in the area.

At the same time, after intense struggles, large parts of Centro Histórico were fundamentally transformed: successive city governments, in partnership with private investors, implemented a range of revitalisation, beautification and security measures, leading to the active displacement and eviction of people and—after several earlier attempts—to the banning of street vending. With the conversion of warehouses into lofts, the opening of new cafés, bars and art galleries and the influx of young professionals, entrepreneurs and artists, a part of the Centro Histórico became a mainstreamed centrality, a commodified and heavily policed shopping, leisure and tourist zone. Nevertheless, through various forms of everyday struggle another part of the Centro has to this day remained an important economic, social, cultural and symbolic centrality for the metropolitan region.

Downtown LA finally experienced a kind of a ‘take off’ after the great economic and financial crisis of 2007. The urban region of Los Angeles experienced great socioeconomic change, which led to a revaluation of its urban qualities by companies and employees in the knowledge economy. Powerful incentives and curatorial efforts by public and private actors aiming at generating an ‘urban experience’ to attract visitors and investors proved finally to be successful, resulting in the rapidly increasing number of new luxury housing, arts projects, fancy restaurants and venues for affluent residents and visitors, while streets were cleaned up and policed to meet the standards expected of a metropolitan downtown. In Beyoğlu, starting in the mid-2000s commodification intensified as real estate prices increased steeply as a result of major investments in the hospitality and retail sectors. The local municipality was unambiguous about its intention to turn Beyoğlu into a mainstream tourist and shopping area, and implemented measures to discipline its public spaces. However, these efforts ended up triggering an unexpected and massive urban revolt in 2013.

As these examples show, the process of incorporation is marked by unevenness, non-simultaneity and various contradictions. In Shimokitazawa it was characterised by nostalgia

and alternative culture; in Mexico City and Istanbul by heritage, real estate and tourism; and in Los Angeles by a political project to create a 'vibrant downtown', which marked the beginning of the revalorisation and commodification of these places. The main actors in these processes differed considerably from each other. In Shimokitazawa, incorporation was mainly an endogenous process driven by the owners of the houses and shops and who also lived in the neighbourhood, as well as by the visitors and users themselves. In contrast, in the Centro Histórico as well as in Downtown LA, close alliances of local governments and corporate stakeholders implemented strategies to upgrade and commodify them, with remarkable effort and intensity.

There are striking parallels: both places were transformed by an openly declared strategy to control and exploit centrality and to produce a 'new' urban centre as a space of representation that re-presents and re-constructs the urban according to the template of an idealised bourgeois urbanity that is at the same time strongly controlled and safe.

In Beyoğlu, incorporation was in large part driven by the local authorities and there was also major investment by the private sector in the hospitality and retail sectors. The goal here was not to create 'urbanity' but to turn Beyoğlu into a domesticated, tourist friendly and consumer-oriented space. Like Centro Histórico and Downtown LA, it manifested the attempt to install a new metropolitan mainstream that fully exploited urban values for commodification and normalisation (see Schmid 2012).

This incorporation of differences has salient effects, not only for the actual locations themselves but also for the wider urban regions in which they are situated. It has deprived large parts of the metropolitan populations of unique, place-specific urban values, as in Shimokitazawa, Mexico City and Istanbul. Additionally, it often has far-reaching restructuring effects, particularly in leading to urban transformations in surrounding low-income neighbourhoods, as we have shown in the case of Downtown LA. The production of a 'vibrant downtown' thus reveals the full ambitions of incorporation: the reorganisation of the entire urban region.

In this process of incorporation, urban differences are absorbed and commodified, with the result that the places and venues open to the unexpected, to unplanned encounters and interaction for a wide range of different people are transformed and mainstreamed and in doing so maximal differences are reduced to minimal differences. This is not a strategy aimed at the political inclusion of neglected areas or at opening up neighbourhoods to more diverse social groups, as is often pretended by policy-makers and journalists. It is, on the contrary, a process that creates new forms of exclusion and deprives large parts of the population of their centralities. The consequence

is not only that existing differences are deprived of their potential revolutionary power, but also that hegemonic alliances define the conditions and modalities of urban life.

GENTRIFICATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN VALUE

Do our observations justify the creation of a new concept? Have they not already been explained by other concepts? As has become clear during this discussion, concepts such as urban renaissance, urban regeneration, urban revitalisation and creative city are not analytical concepts that allow us to understand and address the question of urban differences, but they are strategic concepts to promote and implement planning instruments that aim to reduce differences and are thus part of the incorporation process itself (Peck 2005; Porter and Shaw 2009).

It also has become obvious that the incorporation of differences goes beyond the conceptual reach of the term 'gentrification'. We cannot enter here the broad debate on this widely used concept, which is applied in very different contexts and covers a wide range of aspects. In its most general definition it comprises (1) the physical upgrading of the built environment; (2) the change in the social composition of land-users, in which the new users have a higher socioeconomic status than the previous ones; and (3) the related displacement of people and users (Clark 2005; Lees et al. 2016). However, this definition fits so many situations that gentrification becomes almost identical to the generic term 'urban restructuring' and thus loses much of its explanatory and generative power. Originally, the concept of gentrification was developed to address a specific process of socioeconomic urban change: the piecemeal takeover and transformation of working-class neighbourhoods by predominantly white middle-class residents and users in western cities (Glass 1964; Smith 1996; Slater 2009). A considerable part of the earlier literature conceptualised this process explicitly as a form of class struggle. This aspect became blurred in recent years as strong deindustrialisation affected many urban regions, combined with widespread attempts to render the working class and the urban poor invisible (Wacquant 2008).

Economically, the concept of gentrification grasps one important process: the realisation of the rent gap, which measures the difference between the current ground rent and the rent that could be achieved by the most profitable use of the land (Smith 1996, 2002). However, as some scholars note, the concept of the rent gap illuminates only one side of gentrification, while the often powerful interventions of state actors to support and promote gentrification remain understudied (Wacquant 2008; Bernt 2022). This observation raises further

questions: what motivates state actors to support and even initiate gentrification? What makes certain areas desirable to affluent people and businesses? And finally: how is the rent gap produced? A range of answers to these questions has been put forward in gentrification studies so far. One line of argument highlights the importance of the fundamental socioeconomic transformation of urban regions and the concomitant change of middle-class lifestyles towards a type of 'urban gentry' (Zukin 1987; Hamnett 1991). A second line focuses on the growth of the knowledge economy in central urban areas, which leads to 'a major social re-evaluation of inner-city locations as sites of white-collar housing and neighbourhood formation' (Scott 2018: 20). These conceptualisations allow for a more precise definition of gentrification as a specific urbanisation process in which urban middle classes turn certain areas into privileged spaces, thereby displacing lower income groups—a process that has become widespread in many urban regions across the world. We have mentioned the arc of gentrification developing north of Downtown LA and also a range of former working-class neighbourhoods in the central parts of Mexico City that match this definition.

In recent years, however, the concept of gentrification has been extended and applied to processes such as urban renewal, urban mega-project development, the transformation of peri- and ex-urban areas and the upgrading of informal and popular neighbourhoods (Lees 2014; Lees et al. 2016). However, it is questionable how useful it is to stretch the concept of gentrification to the point where it can be applied to all sorts of urban transformations, because this not only reduces its explanatory power but also leaves many related, but nevertheless distinct urbanisation processes unnoticed (see Chapter 4). With reference to experiences in Hong Kong, Tang (2017) and Smart and Smart (2017) argue that the mainly state driven, large-scale process of urban renewal cuts across class distinctions and that framing it as gentrification erases alternative conceptualisations. In a similar way, Shatkin (2017) criticises the application of the concept of gentrification to urban real estate mega-projects in Southern urban peripheries where state actors use the generation and extraction of the rent gap to consolidate and expand their power (see also Chapter 14). Ghertner (2015) mentions that the application of the concept of gentrification to processes of urban upgrading in informal and popular neighbourhoods in mainly Southern urban regions neglects the regulatory and legal changes that underpin the most violent forms of displacement and divert attention away from more fundamental changes in the political economy of land in much of the world. Another process that sometimes is framed under the term 'gentrification' is plotting urbanism; a process that involves physical upgrading and reinvestment. However,

in most cases this process does not lead to displacement but creates additional housing for low-income groups (see Chapter 13).

Another example is the French concept of *embourgeoisement*, which is often translated as 'gentrification' in English. Nevertheless, this concept is clearly distinct from gentrification, as some scholars argue (see e.g. Préteceille 2007; Clerval 2016). It highlights the role of centrality as an economic, social and symbolic value that attracts middle- and upper-class groups who aspire to be in the urban centre and to be part of the urban centre. This term was also used by Lefebvre in his famous argument that the bourgeoisie takes over the centre and relegates the proletariat to the peripheries, as exemplified by Haussmann's radical transformation of Paris in the middle of the 19th century (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]: 109–110). Following this argument, Merrifield (2014) sees similar processes unfolding in many contemporary urban regions across the world that he calls 'Neo-Haussmannisation'. However, Lefebvre had insisted on the dialectics of centrality. It is, on the one hand, a productive force that constitutes a crucial resource for the people, but on the other, it may also be monopolised by affluent social groups who turn centralities into privileged spaces from which many people are excluded. In a similar and related way, the 'dialectics of difference' can be understood as a contradiction between the production of urban value and the dispossession of urban value. The incorporation of urban differences, therefore, goes far beyond gentrification, because it affects the production and appropriation of urban value.

All these concepts and the related debates indicate that a range of different processes may generate and realise rent gaps, involving different actor constellations and resulting in quite different urban outcomes. The term 'gentrification' may not be adequate for all these processes. The point, however, is not to give up the concept of gentrification. It remains indispensable for understanding a specific process of urbanisation and it has become a political rallying cry that has for decades mobilised innumerable protests and actions across the world. However, gentrification may be used in a specific sense with a clearly focused definition: as a gradual and piecemeal urbanisation process in which the rent gap is realised and captured by mainly market mechanisms, in which state actors play an important role but are not the main drivers (and beneficiaries) of the process.

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE URBAN

In a broad historical perspective the question of the incorporation of differences is linked to the long-standing rediscovery of the urban or the 'reinvention of the city as a positive socio-cultural category' (Kipfer et al. 2008: 293). For a long time, modernist

planning has tried to dissolve the urban using a functionalist and rationalist approach to demolish inner-city neighbourhoods and replace them with new city centres, as the example of Bunker Hill in Downtown LA illustrates. Against such attacks to centrality and difference, a wide range of urban social movements have formed in many places, demanding and fighting for urban life, centrality, exchange and encounter. However, the rediscovery of the urban is a contradictory process, as the demands, efforts and struggles for difference are constantly confronted with the double process of homogenisation and commodification. As has become clear in our case studies, especially in the case of Istanbul, it is not only the search for profit that drives this process, even if this may often be a strong motive, but it is also the intention to control and reduce the unpredictable power of the urban. It is a constant battle for access to the urban and also a struggle for the very content of the urban.

The concept of the incorporation of differences focuses on these contradictory processes of the production of urban value and the transformation of use value into exchange value. It thus problematises the extraction of urban value and links it to debates on 'urban extractivism' (Viale 2017; Streule 2023). It also highlights the crucial role of state actors. The cases of the Centro Histórico and Downtown LA show clearly that there is no general force that attracts affluent social groups to places full of difference. Such places are not desirable for urban elites—it needs a huge amount of intervention and the efforts of state and corporate actors to not only turn them into spaces of consumption but to prepare them for the consumption of space, as Lefebvre (1991: 353) notes. This implies the mainstreaming and incorporation of urban spaces that have been open for encounter, exchange and interaction. These spaces are significant to many people who are not only visitors and consumers, but also participants in the production of an urban space that forms a resource, a meeting point, a node of social networks and an urban commons where people can find things, jobs, friends and manifold opportunities. Often, such places are not replaceable; they vanish and with them vanish the social qualities they embody.

With the concept of the production and incorporation of differences, we would like to direct attention to the aspects of urban areas that are so crucial for everyday life: who has access to the main centralities; who has the right to difference? This is a question of social justice, in a broad sense: not only individual houses, streets or even neighbourhoods, but the entire urban region is targeted and affected by strategies of incorporation. With this concept we hope to make a useful contribution to the development of an enriched urban vocabulary to understand processes of urban transformation from a broad perspective.

- 1 We would like to thank Jennifer Robinson for her very valuable and helpful comments on this question.
- 2 Vecindades are Mexican tenement houses mostly located in former residential colonial buildings with basic rooms with shared facilities for rent to extended families.
- 3 See Scott (2018: 16). See also Ahrens (2015), Huante (2019), Kahne (2019) and Roy (2019). Recent gentrification is taking place close to the centrality of Pasadena, in Eagle Rock and Highland Park (in 2019).

