

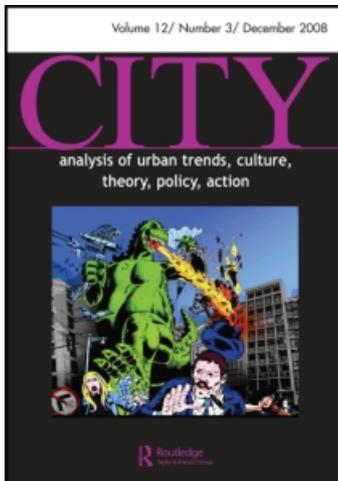
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The 'Right to the City' in the context of shifting mottos of urban social movements

Margit Mayer

In order to explain the traction, which the right to the city slogan currently enjoys within urban resistance movements and beyond, this paper contextualizes its emergence in the shifting framework of postwar political–economic regimes and then traces and compares the different versions of this motto, which has become a defining feature of urban struggles not just in the Euro–American core, but around the world—though with different meanings. It distinguishes a radical Lefebvrian version from more depoliticized versions as widely used in the global NGO context, problematizing the latter for limiting the participatory demand to inclusion within the existing system. The conclusion opens up the question of the implications of the current crisis for the right to the city movement.

Introduction

This contribution looks at contemporary urban movements and the politics of resistance in the context of the macro trends of the last 40 years, because these trends and changes have fundamentally transformed both the environment—the cities and political milieus—in which movements operate, and the movements themselves, at first slowly, almost imperceptibly, but in hindsight very drastically. It is crucial to understand these impacts on the trajectory of urban resistance, if we are to develop the potential of the Right to the City as a 'working slogan and political ideal' (David Harvey, 2008). To this end, the text traces, in a first step, the shifting mottos of urban social movements (in the Euro–North American core) from Fordism through the various neoliberal regimes—taking these rallying cries as shorthand memos that remind us of the

respective collective identity of the actors, their target and their concerns: that is, the particular forms of urban exclusion or oppression prevalent within each period. On this basis, it becomes possible to appreciate, in a second step, what is new and different about the current conjunction and about the contemporary slogan Right to the City, which seems to have the potential to bring together, maybe, the demands and aspirations (as Peter Marcuse differentiates the claims of the deprived and discontented, cf. Marcuse in this issue) which 1968 did not yet manage to bring together. The current conjunction, however, does not only open up new opportunities for movements, it also raises a complex array of problems, some of which will be addressed in the third step. Obviously, the Right to the City is not the *only* game in town, there are competing rallying cries such as the *creative city*, or the *livable city*, the *socially mixed city*, but also the *revanchist city*, to

name just a few of the currently hot slogans pushing different urban visions. The focus in this contribution on the slogan Right to the City might be questioned by another obvious reality: the contemporary global relations force us to consider whether the city, especially the city of the global North, really still represents the place that harbors the prerequisites for revolutionary forces of social change, as has been the widely held assumption from the Paris Commune until at least May 1968. Rather than deal with these equally pressing questions, this contribution (in its third section) concentrates on taking a closer look at movements rallying today under the banner of the Right to the City, and finds that there are a variety of versions afloat, including some seriously watered-down ones compared with what was originally defined by Henri Lefebvre as a radical concept. The conclusion points to the horizon opened up by the global economic meltdown, which in many ways validates and strengthens, but also threatens movements for the right to the city.

Urban movements from the crisis of Fordism to neoliberalism

Urban development patterns have become increasingly similar across the advanced capitalist countries, and forms of urban governance have converged so much that it is not surprising that the movements challenging and resisting them, across the global North anyway, have gone through similar cycles.

The first wave of broad urban mobilizations, in the wake of the 1960s movements, reacted, as so many of the mobilizations of the era, to the crisis of Fordism. Struggles around housing, rent strikes, campaigns against urban renewal (which drastically restructured cities and displaced many, particularly poor residents), against what the German psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich back then aptly called 'the inhospitality of

our cities'¹ (referring to the barrenness which Fordist zoning of urban space and suburbanization had brought about), and struggles for youth and community centers were all politicized in a progressive manner by the wider 'threat context' which the student, anti-war and leftist mobilizations of the 1960s and early 1970s had created, and by the political openings which governments (generally in the mold of a social-democratic compromise) allowed at that time. The protests, even those around public transport, schools, child care and other public services, all contested the cultural norms of the institutions of collective consumption, their price, their quality and the limited options to participate in their design. Even if the slogans of 1968 (many of which had been inspired by Lefebvre's work, such as: 'transform life, transform the city', 'under the pavement, the beach', 'be realistic, demand the impossible!') soon faded, the struggles in their wake often brought together rebellious middle-class students with marginalized groups, in claims for civil rights or protest against US imperialism, in a movement to build a more progressive, more democratic society.

The movement mottos at that time were more militant in Europe ('Let's take the city!', cf. Lotta Continua, 1972),² more pragmatic in North America ('Community control', cf. Fainstein and Fainstein, 1974) and the composition of movement militants differed somewhat as well: in Europe the movements were mostly spearheaded by youth, students and migrants, whereas in the USA the rebellions were led by those most excluded from Fordist prosperity, especially by Afro-Americans. But countries across Europe as well as North America saw a shift of activism relocating from the factory to the neighborhoods. Leftist groups, whether Lotta Continua in Italy or SDS/ERAP in the USA, discovered the 'reproductive sphere' as crucial in bringing about revolutionary change.³ There, they initiated projects to support and radicalize social and neighborhood struggles, arguing that the site of class struggle had moved from the productive to

the reproductive sphere.⁴ Here contestation revolved around issues of ‘collective consumption’, for instance, public infrastructure and services, and demands for improved collective consumption were embedded in a vibrant infrastructure of progressive alternative projects.

It was on the basis of such practice that urban scholar Manuel Castells developed his conception of urban social movements as not only articulating the structural contradictions of late-capitalist societies, but also as capable of bringing about, together with labor unions and political parties, fundamental change in politics and society (e.g. Castells, 1977, p. 432). Accordingly, his definition of urban social movements was rather normative: only when they combine activism around collective consumption with struggles for community culture and political self-management, could they be classified as urban social movements, that is, capable of transforming urban meanings, and to produce a city organized on the basis of use values, autonomous local cultures and decentralized participatory democracy (Castells, 1983, pp. 319–320). In fact, of course, there were many different kinds of urban movements active in that period, and there were still sharp national and regional differences between them.

The second phase of urban social movements was induced by the austerity politics of the 1980s. This politics initiated a global shift toward a neoliberal paradigm, which in its initial roll-back phase grinded away at Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions. These had provided, during the previous phase, a material base for much of the alternative movement activities—even if this was not widely admitted. This neoliberalization of policies brought the so-called ‘old’ social issues back on to the agenda of urban movements: increasing unemployment and poverty, a ‘new’ housing need, riots in housing estates and new waves of squattings changed the make-up of the urban movements, while local governments—confronted with intensifying fiscal constraints while expenditures

were growing—became interested in innovative ways to solve their problems.

These pressures led to a reconfiguration in the relations between movements and local states: they transformed from opposition to cooperation. Local governments discovered the potential of community-based organizations for helping them solve their fiscal as well as legitimation problems, and the movements shifted their strategies ‘from protest to program’ in order to put their alternative practice onto a more stable footing. The reorientation of both was urged on by a new generation of comprehensive programs for neighborhood and urban revitalization (cf. Mayer, 1987a). As a result, many formerly confrontational groups that used to organize rent strikes and public hearings or disrupt the authorities’ business as usual with militant actions, in the course of the 1980s turned towards development and delivering (more or less alternative) services. These activities ‘within and against the state’ encouraged the social movement organizations to professionalize and institutionalize their activities, which, however, had the effect of distancing them from newly mobilizing groups operating outside of these forms of increasingly routinized cooperation.

This created a bifurcation between the more and more professionalized development and service delivery organizations on the one hand and groups, whose needs were not addressed by these arrangements and who in turn radicalized.⁵ In addition, the movement terrain became even more complex in the 1980s due to the entry of a panoply of middle-class-based movements embracing a variety of concerns, and locating themselves across the political spectrum, from NIMBY to environmental, from defensive, even reactionary to progressive, from ‘Freie Fahrt für freie Bürger!’ (No speed control for free citizens) to less possessively individualist forms of self-realization. Squatting activities also continued, but here, too, a bifurcation had taken hold: while many of the first-wave squatters were now busy nesting in their sweat equity-liberated spaces and

became upwardly mobile, the new (rehab-)squatters in Europe were more needs-oriented (in Marcuse's terminology, they represented demands more than aspirations). In sum, cities experienced during this second phase more varied and more fragmented forms of urban protest, the movement milieu had split into distinct components, and there were no overarching battle cries or convergence in joint action.

Thirdly, a regime of radically prioritizing market mechanisms (roll-out neoliberalism) responded, since the 1990s, to the contradictions of the previous phase of retrenchment. While the basic neoliberal imperative of mobilizing city space as arena for growth and market discipline remained the dominant municipal project, it now emphasized more flanking mechanisms such as local economic development policies and community-based programs to alleviate what is no longer called 'poverty', but rather 'social exclusion' (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, pp. 26–27; Gough and Eisenschitz, 2006). That is, social, political and ecological criteria have become included (while also redefined) in the efforts to promote economic competitiveness; social infrastructures, political culture and ecological foundations of the city are being transformed into economic assets wherever possible. New discourses of reform (such as 'welfare dependency', which was to be ended, and the 'activating state', community regeneration and social capital, which were to be welcomed instead) as well as new institutions and modes of delivery were fashioned (such as integrated area development, public-private partnerships in urban regeneration and social welfare, all with an emphasis on civic engagement). These discourses and policies in many ways integrated earlier movement critiques of bureaucratic Keynesianism, and have been successful in seizing formerly progressive goals and mottos such as 'self-reliance' and 'autonomy'—while redefining them in a politically regressive, individualized and competitive direction. Through this hijacking of the language of earlier movements, their critical energy was harnessed

towards the development of a revitalized urban (or regional) growth machine.

The consequences of these new urban development policies and of the de facto erosion of social rights they implied have further fragmented the movement terrain: on the one hand they triggered the emergence of new defensive movements that would seek to protect themselves and whatever privileges they enjoyed from the effects of intensified intra-urban competition; on the other hand they politicized struggles over whose city it is supposed to be. Again and again, in the course of this decade, waves of anti-gentrification struggles swept across New York, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, and later Istanbul and Zagreb, and slogans such as 'Die, yuppie scum!' became literally global.⁶ 'Reclaim the Streets' and similar local mobilizations of the anti-globalization movement popularized the slogan 'Another world is possible', as well as 'Another city is possible!'

Since the dot.com crash of 2001 if not sooner we have been in a new (fourth) phase, where urbanization has gone global through the integration of financial markets that have used their flexibility to debt-finance urban development around the world (Harvey, 2008, p. 30). While economic growth rates began to stagnate during this phase (or, where growth has still occurred, it is increasingly jobless, as has been the case in the Euro-North American core), the sharper social divides have become expressed in intensifying socio-spatial polarization, restructuring of social security systems has replaced welfare with workfare.⁷ The new urban, social and labor market policies had not only the effect of 'activating' large parts of the urban underclass into (downgraded) labor markets, but they also impacted many (former) social movement organizations, which increasingly reproduce themselves by implementing local social and employment programs or community development—and are seen by many as doing a better job at 'combating social exclusion' than any competing (private or state) agency could. But their mobilizing capacity has eroded, and most have buried formerly

held dreams of 'the self-determined city' or even of liberated neighborhoods, as they limit themselves to what seems feasible under the given circumstances. And local governments which contract with these community-based service delivery and development organizations have come under enormous pressure, as more and more responsibilities and risks have been downloaded to municipal administrations, while their budgets are squeezed like never before.

These developments have restricted and narrowed the space for social contestation in many ways. But mobilization has continued to form at least along three fault lines, all of which turn on one or another form of the neoliberalization of urban governance:⁸ one important way of neoliberal urban governance works through the dominant pattern of growth politics. This has triggered protests by movements that challenge the forms, goals and effects of corporate urban development,⁹ they fight the commercialization of public space, the intensification of surveillance and policing of urban space, the entrepreneurial ways in which cities market themselves in the global competition, as well as the concomitant neglect of neighborhoods falling by the wayside of these forms of growth politics. Another fault line sparks mobilizations against the neoliberalization of social and labor market policies, against the dismantling of the welfare state, and for social and environmental justice, which increasingly come together in community/labor coalitions and (immigrant) workers' rights organizations. In Germany it is the local Anti-Hartz mobilizations,¹⁰ in Italy the Social Centers,¹¹ in the USA the workers' centers,¹² which bring worksite and community organizing together in new coalitions of social rights organizations and unions, and unite the demands of the precariously employed as well as the unemployed. A third fault line is addressed by transnational anti-globalization movements¹³ that have discovered 'the local', their city, as place where globalization 'touches down' and materializes, where global issues become localized. These movements demand not only

the democratization of international institutions such as the IMF, WTO, World Bank, EU, G8, etc., but are also mobilizing in defense of public services and institutions in the cities, discovering that issues such as privatization and infringement of social rights are actually connecting them with movements across the globe. They attack global neoliberalism in the form of global corporations, investors and developers (symbolically, as in happenings and street parties at Mayday protests, which *Reclaim the Street* organized in central business districts across Europe), but also entrepreneurial local governments as they help to implement the neoliberal corporate agenda. These global justice movements are bringing the slogan 'Another world is possible' to their home towns, to demand, for example, 'Another New York is possible!' Organizations such as the Social Fora or Attac¹⁴ have taken the message of 'global justice' to the local level, where they campaign against welfare cuts, rights for migrants as well as workfare workers and build alliances with local unions, social service organizations and churches. And a broad spectrum of local, more or less militant, anarchist, autonomous, leftist groups with various ties to regional and supra-national networks have regularly been converging at counter summits not just for blockading actions and demonstrations, but also to exchange insights and experiences with their national and international comrades, and to plan and coordinate upcoming joint civil disobedience and other actions. Since the onset of the financial crisis, these movements attract growing numbers of youth, whose hopes for a decent future are eroding as education systems and public infrastructures are crumbling, spawning their protest under the banner (not only in Athens) of 'money for the banks, bullets for the kids'. The movements increasingly come not only in the form of protest, but—strengthened by the numbers, intensity and frequency—also in the form of democratic *demands* on the government in this moment of legitimation crisis of neoliberalism.

Thus, while the neoliberalization of the city has in many ways created a more hostile environment for progressive urban movements, it has also allowed for a more global articulation of urban protest, and it has spawned a renewed convergence of some of these strands under the umbrella of the Right to the City slogan.

The contemporary urban situation and the 'Right to the City'

The Right to the City slogan has become a live wire material practice today. The demand merges and concentrates a set of highly charged issues, as more and more groups of urban residents see long-accustomed rights erode. Accumulation by dispossession has accelerated on heretofore unseen levels, which entails enormous losses of rights—civil, social, political, as well as economic rights. Cities have transformed into gated communities and privatized public spaces, where wealthy and poor districts are increasingly separated if by invisible barriers, and access of the poor to the amenities and infrastructures that cities once held for all have become more and more restricted. At the same time, the different movements active these days around the three fault lines sketched above have brought deprived and excluded groups on the one hand and anti-neoliberal or global justice movements on the other together in ways that were not quite possible in 1968, when both 'deprivation' and 'discontent' were key moving forces, but could not yet be merged (cf. Marcuse in this issue). Furthermore, connections between struggles in so-called first world metropolises and those in cities of the global South, where the fight against privatization, speculation, eviction and displacement is even more existential, have become quite tangible and real: it is frequently even the same real estate developers and the same global corporations that are responsible for the displacement, eviction or the privatization of public goods. The last eight years of dialogue, information

sharing and collective mobilization via the Social Forum process and the get-togethers of the anti-globalization movement at counter summits such as in Heiligendamm/Rostock (at the G8 meeting 2007) or in London (at the G20 meeting in 2009) have been used to explore the shared experiences and commonalities in the various struggles against privatization and dispossession. In this context, the slogan 'Right to the City' resonates with activists, as it makes sense as a claim and a banner under which to mobilize one side in the conflict over who should have the benefit of the city and what kind of city it should be. Peter Marcuse and David Harvey define it as a moral claim founded on fundamental principles of justice, of ethics, of virtue, of the good—not as a legal claim enforceable through a judicial process today.

But in fact the movements out there, in the real world, are invoking this claim in rather different ways. On the one side, movements are building on the Lefebvrian conception,¹⁵ where urbanization stands for a transformation of society and everyday life through capital. Against this transformation Lefebvre sought to *create* rights through social and political action: the street, and claims to it, are establishing these rights. In this sense, the right to the city is less a juridical right, but rather an oppositional demand, which challenges the claims of the rich and powerful. It is a right to redistribution, as Peter Marcuse once called it, not for all humans, but for those deprived of it and in need of it. And it is a right that exists only as people appropriate it (and the city). It is this revolutionary form of appropriation, which Lefebvre meant to discover in 1968 Paris and which contemporary groups such as the Right to the City Alliance in the USA and similar urban movements across Europe are referring to.¹⁶

At the same time the right to the city has also gained significant traction with international NGOs and advocacy organizations, if with somewhat different connotations. A variety of inter- and transnational policy networks and international NGOs, including

some that receive support from UN programs such as Habitat, have developed ‘Urban Agendas’. In 2003 some international human rights groups presented, together with UNESCO, a *World Charter for the Human Right to the City*;¹⁷ in 2004 the Habitat International Coalition (<http://www.hic-net.org/>) together with other organizations presented a draft of a *World Charter on the Right to the City* at the Social Forum of the Americas in Quito, and at the 2nd World Urban Forum in Barcelona; during the WSF in Porto Alegre in 2005 a ‘World Charter on the Right to the City’ was adopted.¹⁸ In order to harmonize the various efforts and declarations, UN-Habitat (www.unhabitat.org) and UNESCO launched a public debate in 2005 through a standing Working Group on ‘Urban Policies and the Right to the City’ and with regular annual meetings taking place either at UNESCO headquarters in Paris or municipalities of Barcelona and Montreal. Together with the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and international NGOs, UN-Habitat and UNESCO are seeking to create a consensus among central actors—involving, importantly to them, municipalities—about policies that are to guarantee sustainable, just and democratic cities. In Latin American cities, such charters (or parts of them) were widely circulated, and in Brazil a City Statute was even inserted in 2001 into the Brazilian Constitution to recognize the collective right to the city (cf. Fernandes, 2007). The organizations pushing this type of a ‘right to the city’ agenda see some of its elements as already implemented, as with the participatory municipal budget—not only in Porto Alegre, but in at least 70 cities around the world; further, they point to digital democracy implemented in the city of Bologna, which provides free Internet access to its residents; or to youth governments that have been installed in the Latin American and Caribbean region with the help of UN-Habitat.

All of these statutes and charters seek to influence public policy and legislation in a

way that combines urban development with social equity and justice. In their effort to put ‘our most vulnerable urban residents’ rather than investors and developers at the center of public policy, they enumerate specific rights which a progressive urban politics should particularly protect. Thus they refer to specific struggles for particular rights (not *the* right to the city), and combine, as in the text of the First Charter, ‘a bundle of already-existing human rights and related State obligations, to which, by extension, local authorities are also party’ (paragraph 7). According to paragraph 11 of the World Charter, the right to the city

‘encompasses the internationally recognized human rights to housing, social security, work, an adequate standard of living, leisure, information, organization and free association, food and water, freedom from dispossession, participation and self-expression, health, education, culture, privacy and security, a safe and healthy environment’;

and paragraph 12 specifies yet a further list: it ‘embodies claims to the human rights to land, sanitation, public transportation, basic infrastructure, capacity and capacity-building, and access to public goods and services—including natural resources and finance’. These rights are supposed to hold for all ‘urban inhabitants’, both as individuals and as a collective, but some groups are highlighted as deserving particular protection (poor, ill, handicapped and migrants get mentioned).

However, describing an amorphous entity such as ‘urban inhabitants’ as bearers of the right to the city is just as problematic as listing specific vulnerable groups. The problem with enumerating different disenfranchised groups is that every list invariably excludes those that do not get listed. And the problem with the generic category of ‘urban inhabitants’ is that it reflects a view of civil society as basically homogenous and, as a whole, worthy of protection from (destructive) neoliberal forces—as if it itself did not

encompass economic and political actors who participate in and profit from the production of poverty and discrimination; it thus obfuscates the fact that this entity is itself deeply divided by class and power.

In spite of this, one might still argue that, fully realized, these enumerated rights to access all that the existing city has to offer would still spell a significant improvement. But unlike the Lefebvrian notion of the right to the city, this institutionalized set of rights boils down to claims for inclusion in the current system as it exists, it does not aim at transforming the existing system—and in that process ourselves. The demands for rights as enumerated merely target particular aspects of neoliberal policy, for example, in combating poverty, but not the underlying economic policies which systematically produce poverty and exclusion.

These charters are actually proposed as blueprints for municipalities and NGOs interested in *good urban governance*, which are then proselytized in UN-Habitat campaigns such as the ‘Global Campaign on Urban Governance’, where toolkits on participatory decision-making, transparency in local governance and participatory budgeting demonstrate how these principles can be implemented in practice. In limited ways, these might be helpful guidelines, but they downplay that remaking the city is also a struggle about power, which cannot be left to (local) governments, not even social-democratic or ‘left’ ones.

While the public recognition through governmental and UN institutions obviously enhances the relevance and influence of these demands and of the movements raising them, it is also the case that these charters as well as the coalitions devising and promoting them, in the process modify the political content and meaning of the contested right to the city. They shift the nuances of the political stances and tend to dilute some of the radical demands of transformative movements. Both concepts of the right to the city are actually present at WSF gatherings, but some of the documents published¹⁹ tend to

reflect the institutionalized version of a ‘top down agenda agreed on by some NGO networks who already know what the rights are, but want to build a larger alliance ... for which they need a name and branding’ (Unger, 2009).

Some observers attribute this depoliticization to the ‘up-scaling’ of a formerly grassroots, locally based claim to the ‘higher’ realms of global political arenas and institutions. However, the experience of other, more radical forms of global-scale politics, as for example when militant activists converge at counter summits as in 2007 at Heiligendamm and Rostock, challenges such a causal relation. The dilution seems to result less from the scale-jumping of activities, and from a shift of contestation from social movements to NGOs and advocacy groups, which have expanded since the 1980s as the increasingly important site of oppositional politics. In their encounters with states and corporations, NGOs tend to frame their struggle as one for rights, and it is the proliferation of this rights discourse which implies certain traps—on all scales, but particularly where the inter- and transnational NGOs supported by UN organizations or the World Bank are prevalent.

In their world view, strengthening civil society networks is regarded as positive because it enhances efficiency; collaboration of urban residents and municipalities is good because it furthers endogenous potentials and local growth; in this perspective we can reconcile local autonomy with international competitiveness, and sustainability with economic growth, we can have neoliberalism with a human touch. This, of course, constitutes one of the most powerful mystifications of the contemporary era; exposing this mystification and proposing the radical right to the city instead, would seem to be the logical conclusion from the above analysis of the macro trends shaping the current period. The right to the city is definitely on the agenda today, it is a live wire issue as never before, potential constituencies to engage in this struggle have become visible all around, and

increasingly good possibilities for them to come together and coalesce have opened up. But there are also new and specific traps and pitfalls, illustrated by the example of the usefulness of a specific rights discourse grounded in a homogenous conception of civil society for broadening the legitimization of a more gentle neoliberalism. These obfuscating trends underline why a clear and radical definition of the right to the city is so eminently important.

The global recession as opportunity and threat for the 'right to the city'

The global crisis which spread from the US financial system around the world has made more visible the dispossession that has occurred over the last 30 years, turning the economic crisis simultaneously into a political and legitimization crisis. At the same time, it is not only the world economy which has become intricately linked (and dependent on US mortgage and consumer debt),²⁰ but a variety of social movements, including urban movements, are also increasingly linked. Across Europe, from Athens to Copenhagen, from Reykjavik to Rome, from Paris to London, from Riga to Kiev,²¹ cities have erupted in demonstrations, strikes and protest, frequently accompanied by violence. By the spring of 2009, these protests have become more coordinated and better organized. On 28 March many cities saw demonstrations and other actions under the banner of 'We Won't Pay for Your Crisis'. A following week of action under the banner 'Put People First', which concentrated on the G20 meeting in London, included a climate camp set up outside the European Climate Exchange, highlighting that the same financial system now in crisis is being entrusted to cut emissions through the artificial creation of a market in carbon credits. The camp has taken a key component of the globalization movement—the temporary autonomous zones of street parties and convergence centers liberated in cities during summit

protests—to a new level, creating a transformational space prefiguring the world we want, featuring everything from wind turbines and composted waste to decentralized decision-making and creative play (Ainger, 2009).

US cities are seeing, as in the past, more pragmatic and more needs-oriented movement activities in reaction to the accelerating crisis: as tent cities have sprung up across the USA (e.g. Nickelsville in Seattle,²² Ontario on the eastern outskirts of Los Angeles,²³ Riverside Tent City in Sacramento²⁴), activist and support organizations are pointing to the foreclosure and vacancy rates in these cities or stage rallies in front of vacant buildings, as homeless organizations have done in New York City. The national organization ACORN is putting local teams of 'Home Defenders' between homeowners and those who want them out, while other organizations are calling for limited-equity co-ops (instead of foreclosures) and cooperatively owned financial institutions to provide customers with low-cost services and communities with economic development funds (cf. Henwood, 2009). After sporadic demonstrations in individual cities, a nationwide day of action took place on 11 April, with simultaneous demonstrations in more than 50 cities to protest the government's handling of the economic crisis and to demand the nationalization, reorganization and decentralization of the banking system.²⁵

On both sides of the Atlantic, it is not just the anti-globalization movement and youthful activists who are upset with their governments' inadequate response to tumbling economies, and furious that huge amounts of public money are being doled out to the banks and little to laid off workers and foreclosed homeowners,²⁶ but more and more groups are beginning to see this is an illegitimate system. The rapidly unfolding recession is thus intensifying the breaking points around which urban social movements have been rallying, suddenly validating their claims and arguments about the lack of sustainability and the destructiveness of the neoliberal growth

model. Such a situation enlarges the window of opportunity for the Lefebvrian right to the city demand, which is not about inclusion in a structurally unequal and exploitative system, but about democratizing cities and their decision-making processes. What are now small, radical movements might grow quickly, as with the depression when powerful social movements formed within just a few years of the 1929 stock market crash.

This current widening window of opportunity for movements claiming the right to the city is located in an increasingly volatile world. The environmental, social and political limits to growth are now so glaring that struggles over divvying up the world's resources and over who gets to decide are getting fiercer, war machines to maintain and expand corporate control over the resources of the world are proliferating. With worldwide unemployment expected to be around 50 million in 2009, the US director of national intelligence presents the global economic crisis as the biggest security threat, outpacing terrorism (Schwartz, 2009), while French ministers worry about a 're-birth of the violent extreme left'. Preparations to control and crush potential civil unrest are well underway (cf. Freier, 2008). In exposing and politicizing the implications of the current global/urban crisis, movements seizing on its opportunities will therefore need to strategize carefully and make sure to build their own social legitimacy while pushing for a zero-growth economy and democratic cities.

Notes

- 1 Alexander Mitscherlich's important book *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte* (The Inhospitability of Our Cities) was first published in 1965 and recently (2008) republished, cf. Laimer (2008, p. 55).
- 2 Other, more overarching mottos were: *Vogliamo tutto! Wir wollen alles!* (i.e. We want it all!)—reflecting the stance of radical rejection of the Fordist model politically, socially and culturally.
- 3 Fainstein and Fainstein point out that in the USA, Saul Alinsky had shifted the locus of organizing

from the factory to the neighborhood even sooner (1974, p. 201).

- 4 Depending on the profile of the local Left, and on the particular contours of local conflicts, different types of movement milieus would emerge in these struggles of tenants, immigrants, citizens' initiatives, often with dense networks of self-managed centers and shops, alternative and feminist collectives, autonomous media, etc. These provided the backbone of a new political actor, a self-confident urban actor able and ready to intervene in urban development and politics.
- 5 As, for example, squatters did in protest against the development activities of community organizations on New York's Lower East Side, or autonomous activist organizations against 'alternative' renewal agents such as *Stattbau* in Berlin (cf. Mayer, 1987b).
- 6 Cf. also HipHop's motto of 'Bomb the suburbs' (Wimsatt, 1994).
- 7 This current phase is increasingly labeled as 'post-neoliberal' (cf. Smith, 2008; Brand and Sekler, 2009). While evidence of the crisis of neoliberalism is certainly overwhelming, neoliberal rule has yet to be overcome and replaced with a regime not characterized by the organization of all social relations 'in a way that makes markets and competition work', where 'market-like forms of governance' prevail in all sectors of society (Demirovic, 2009, p. 46). Even though neoliberalism no longer has the solutions, no longer guarantees sustained economic growth and no longer enjoys legitimation, it is still dominant.
- 8 Cf. for a more elaborate version of the following argument Mayer (2007).
- 9 Such as investments in glitzy new city centers, mega-projects for sports and entertainment, etc., cf. the contribution by Scharenberg and Bader on Berlin's Media Spree development in this issue.
- 10 The Hartz reforms (named after the head of the 'Commission on the Modernization of Labor Market Services', CEO and personnel manager of Volkswagen, Peter Hartz, which in 2002 was commissioned by the federal government to develop proposals for modernizing the Federal Employment Agency and for reducing unemployment, and on the recommendations of which the reforms are based) were implemented during 2003–2005 and represent the turning point in German social and labor market policy, affecting about 4 million people, many of whom have fallen under the poverty line. Coalitions of local social protest groups, unions and community organizations have been organizing demonstrations and rallies as well as civil disobedience-type actions against the more punitive and parsimonious criteria used against benefit recipients.

- 11 Over 250 social centers have set up, usually in squatted properties in Italian cities that became the venue for social, political and cultural events. They try to practice direct democracy in non-hierarchical structures while challenging the exclusionary effects of neoliberal governance (cf. Mudu, 2004).
- 12 They primarily serve immigrants who are low-wage restaurant workers, janitors, day laborers, garment workers, etc., for instance, groups that have so far rarely been organized by unions. Nationwide there are currently 134 worker centers. Most approach their goal of helping workers help themselves by drawing on broader communities of interest such as ethnicity and/or by linking workplace specific issues such as wages, benefits, working conditions and respect on the job, with some form of direct service such as legal aid, English courses, computer or other job training, workers rights education and leadership development (Leavitt, 2005, p. 10; Fine, 2006; also see Liss, 2008).
- 13 The mobilizations labeled by Europeans as 'alter-' or 'anti-globalization movements' and by North Americans as 'global justice movements' are most manifest in the protests against supra-national organizations such as the WTO and IMF and against summit meetings (e.g. of the G8), as they seize on the political opportunities and public attention which these meetings create. They are also manifest in the 'open space' of the World Social Forum and in the national, regional and local Social Fora, which have created novel transnational spaces of activism. Held simultaneously to the World Economic Forum annually in Davos, Switzerland, the WSF provides an 'open space' where activists from around the planet discuss alternatives to neoliberal, free market globalization. The Forums have been held in different parts of the world such as India, Venezuela, Mali, Pakistan and Kenya, but primarily in the home of its founding movements, Brazil.
- 14 Attac (Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'aide aux Citoyens), founded in 1998 in order to implement the Tobin tax worldwide, today constitutes a network of professionalized NGOs that is particularly well grounded in France, Germany and Switzerland with hundreds of local affiliate groups (cf. <http://www.attac.org>; Escola and Kolb, 2002). Attac membership in Germany has swelled during the fall of 2008 and as of March 2009 has reached 22,000 members (and around 50,000 sympathizers) (Lee, 2009, p. 4).
- 15 '... *the right to the city* is like a cry and a demand ... [it] cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life* ... as long as the "urban", place of encounter, priority of use value, inscription in space of a time promoted to the rank of a supreme resource among all resources, finds its morphological base and its practico-material realization' (Lefebvre, 1995, p. 158).
- 16 Initially such groups sprang up primarily in Western Europe, but recently a 'Right to the City' group has formed also in Zagreb, which protested an investor plan to develop a central square (Flower Square) into an upscale, exclusive, traffic-rich plaza with underground parking, to jumpstart gentrification of the surrounding area. When the group handed over 54,000 signatures protesting the development to the mayor, his response was: in four years you can elect someone else, in the meantime, leave us to do our job! (cf. Caldarovic and Sarinic, 2008). On the Right to the City Alliance in the USA, cf. Leavitt (2008), Liss (2008) and Perera (2008).
- 17 This was authored by groups that first came together in February 2002 at a 'World Seminar for the Human Right to the City' sponsored by the WSF.
- 18 Details are to be found on the website UNESCO.ORG
- 19 As, for example, the 'Urban Movements Building Convergences at the World Social Forum, WSF 2009', see <http://www.hic-net.org/content/convergencies-wsf2009.pdf>
- 20 Almost all countries were dragged into the downward spiral of financial meltdown and economic depression. Even export-dependent Germany (thought of as a bastion of relatively non-financialized industrial growth) contracted at a rate of 2.1% during the last quarter of 2008.
- 21 Though not as large as the disturbances in Greece or the Baltic, there have also been dozens of protests at factories in China and Indonesia, where massive layoffs have occurred (cf. Schwartz, 2009).
- 22 This tent city is named after the mayor of Seattle, cf. 'A 21st Century Hooverville: Seattle's Homeless Population Builds "Nickelsville"', *Democracy Now!*, 30 March 2009.
- 23 Cf. Woltersdorf (2009).
- 24 Cf. Seelye (2009).
- 25 See the website of A New Way Forward <http://www.anewwayforward.org/demonstrations/> and cf. *Democracy Now!* of 10 April 2009: 'Protests Scheduled Across the Country Calling on Banks to Nationalize, Reorganize, Decentralize'.
- 26 The US government has pledged trillions toward the crisis, most of it borrowed or printed in the form of new money. It is borrowing trillions more to fund the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and it is obvious that these loans can never be paid back. There is no coherent plan, and certainly none 'built around our severe limitations, to stanch the bleeding or ameliorate the mounting deprivations' citizens will

have to suffer (Hedges, 2009). From the people's perspective, the governments' response is inadequate because it merely seeks to recreate, with enormous subsidies, the system of inequality and dispossession characteristic of the last 30 years, if only.

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