

European City, American City:

The Function of a Conceptually Oriented Duality

“The European city is dead — long live the European city”: this sums up the defining perspectives of the current discourse on the “European city” in German-speaking urban research. In recent years, the extent to which European cities have retained historically evolved spatial, social, and political structures different from those of urban agglomerations on other continents has again been attracting increasing attention (see, for example, Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000b; Siebel, 2004b; Lenger and Tenfelde, 2006): To assess current critical developments of the European city (1), to establish the “revitalization potential” (2) and to argue for the revival of the ideal socio-political properties attributed to this category of city (3).

Max Weber's studies on *cities of the Occident* (1985 (1921)) have been one of the major points of departure for present discourses on the subject. Current interest has concentrated on five ideal-typical properties Weber identified for medieval cities in Europe (Weber 1985: 737 f.; Häußermann / Haila 2005: 50f.; Häußermann 2001a: 245). *Fortification with walls* (1) manifested the social, material, and spatial demarcation of the city from surrounding rural areas. The *market function of the city with autonomous supervision of trade and industry by city authorities* (2) constituted its economic independence and allowed the population to engage in capitalist economic activities. *Independent lawmaking and administration of justice in the city* (3) provided the basis for self-government by the urban

bourgeoisie. *The associational character of the city and the social organization of the city (4)* have directly to do with the “confederation” principle. *The political autonomy, self-government, and self-determination of the citizenry (5)* also found expression in emancipation from external feudal rule.

Weber's analysis has found its way in two fashions into current concepts on the “European city.” Some studies directly adopt and develop Weber’s idea of the European city as a collective political actor (e.g., Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000a; Häußermann, 2001, 2005; Le Galès, 2002). This is closely associated with invocation of a “revitalization potential” to be drawn from history for the future development of European cities.

Many other studies (including Hassenpflug, 2000; Siebel, 2000, 2004a Kaelble, 2006) integrate individual aspects of Weber's ideal type into more comprehensive conceptions of the European city. They do not treat the city primarily as a political actor. Instead, they compare the material-spatial and socio-spatial structures, as well as urban political institutions and action orientations to characterize this type of city. Siebel (2004a), for example, stresses that research into the specificity of the present-day European city can no longer fall back on “Weber's answer” (p. 12). Nevertheless his categorization explicitly and repeatedly alludes to the properties of Weber's ideal type (ibid., pp. 12ff.): European cities, he claims, are characterised by their urban past in the sense of a history of emancipation. Furthermore, he asserts that it was the existence of urban markets for goods and services that made the urban way of life possible in the first place. Siebel points out

that the physical and material design of European cities has to the present day been shaped by the course of city walls and moats and by the central places of city hall, market, and church.

The two approaches, essentially concerned to capture the qualities of the “European city,” frequently thematize the “American city” both explicitly and implicitly. It constitutes a projection surface, a mirror, a benchmark for analysis and assessment of how European cities have developed. The vast majority of the studies under consideration are by European and in particular German-speaking authors. There are two main reasons for this: first, literature research shows that European discourses on the urban development more frequently draw a comparison with American agglomerations than vice versa. Second, a determining characteristic of the European discourse proves to be a strange, clearly normative connotation inherent in many comparative studies of the two city types. The (German) urbanist Roger Keil, who works in North America, suggests that the European discourse generates an image of the American city that has little to do with reality: “Vacillating between scandalised rejection and fascinated attraction, Europeans have created their own American city, which often tells us more about the authors and their projects than about the American city itself”. (Keil, 1999, 62)

It is an initially curious duality that, according to the central thesis of this paper, is generated discursively because it is functionally necessary. It involves the assumption of fundamental, persisting divergence between two development paths that is resistant to global developments: certain

processes and phenomena are seen as typical of the European city while others are judged to be characteristic of the American city. This “divergence assumption” also invites us to examine the opposing development, in other words convergence scenarios. Formulations such as the “Americanization” of the European city (Häußermann, 1999, 76) or the “disappearance of the European city to be replaced by an ideal type of globalized city” (Marcuse, 2004, 113) stand for the comprehensive and numerous convergence scenarios that are also part and parcel of the discourse on the European and American city.

In the urban theoretical discourse, divergence and convergence postulates are not always contradictory, for they complement and relativize one another¹.

For our analysis, we adopt the perspective of sociology of knowledge discourse analysis (Keller 2003, 129ff.). The underlying assumption is that interpretations and knowledge stocks are produced, legitimated, communicated, and transformed through the spoken and written word (ibid., 115). From a discourse theoretical point of view, social reality is determined by a multitude of discourses in the public sphere, in the media, in the political sphere, and in the sciences. The focused debate on the European and American city can be assigned to the sciences. The discourse-analytical investigation of a social scientific discussion reflects the assumption that influential scholarly treatments shape perspectives and structure action. The dominant substantive positions, concepts, and

¹ This explains why the same authors can be cited in both contexts.

paradigms in a social science directly determine the research issues and perspectives addressed by the discipline and thus indirectly determine the influence findings exert on social reality.

This paper provides a theoretical reconstruction of the main argumentation patterns in the discourse on the European and American city. It can be assumed that the subject matter under study feeds — to some extent — into societal and political discourses and is taken in, modified, and also instrumentalized by the actors conducting the discourse. Comprehensive, methodologically well-founded discourse analysis should thus, in accordance with Foucault, examine the extent to which this debate constitutes and reproduces scientific and societal power structures. However, the authors seek primarily to reconstruct the explanatory patterns of a selected social science discourse and to show its relevance for augmenting knowledge in the discipline.

We therefore focus on basic aspects of the social scientific debate on the duality between the European city and the American city². We trace and systematise the most important lines of argument on the basis of an analytical differentiation of various substantive dimensions. The concept developed for this purpose is based on an analytical distinction between the material-spatial and socio-spatial dimensions in the development of cities, and on the urban political influence over of such development. The

² The majority of texts under study are urban sociological studies. However, we draw on other disciplines in the human and economic sciences where this proves relevant for describing the discourse.

material-spatial divergence category subsumes differences between the European and the American city in the structure and extent of the developed area and the type of development, and thus in the physical fabric: buildings and technical infrastructure. The *socio-spatial dimension* of urban development, in contrast, covers all processes affecting the distribution of social groups within the urban space. Although the *urban policy* dimension primarily covers the micro-level of local government, the national, macro-level is also taken into account.

We begin by examining the discourse on the alleged fundamental divergence between the European city and the American city. We go on to consider the argumentation patterns positing a convergent development of the two city types. This takes us to discussion of the legitimation and self-reassurance functions of the European/American city discourse.

1. Development of the European and the American City: Dimensions of Divergence

In what follows we consider arguments employing different approaches and concepts for continuing and resistant divergence between the European and the American city.

1.1. Material-Spatial Divergence

The prime reason for the divergent development of material-spatial structures that has persisted to the present day is seen first of all to lie in the significant difference in age between European and American cities

(Häußermann, 1999, 80; Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000a, 9ff.; Jessen, 2000, 197ff.; Schubert, 2001, 282). According to Jessen, “Almost every major European city ... can look back on almost a thousand years of history” (2000, 200) whereas American agglomerations developed largely under the conditions of industrialization and subsequent tertiarization (ibid. 197).

Many studies add a second distinguishing criterion: whereas European cities took shape at a time when residents travelled on foot and later by rail and tram, American cities did not experience strong growth until the automotive age (Häußermann, 1999, 80; Lenger, 2006b, 445ff.). In Europe this produced dense, compact spatial structures and in America extensive, dispersed development. Siebel (2004, 42) points out that the material-spatial structures of cities are “astonishingly stable.” This suggests that historically evolved characteristics such as those dealt with in this section have had a significant impact on the development of cities to the present day. European cities are characterized by the persistence of their built structures; compared to American ones.

The different historical contexts for the development of the two types of city are closely associated with another aspect that plays an important role in the discourse on material-spatial divergence: the form and extent of suburbanisation in Europe and America are claimed to differ (e.g. Lanz, 2002, 63f.; Lenger, 2006c, 2; Nivola, 2008, 1f.). The spread of the European city into the region surrounding it is described as moderate in comparison to the urban sprawl to be found in American urban regions. The

discourse is not limited to theses of quantitative difference. Despite progressive suburbanisation in European agglomerations, some authors continue to see the core city as an important centre in the functional complex of the urban region (Kreibich, 2002, 49ff.) while emphasizing the functional independence of suburbia and exurbia in American metropolitan regions (ibid. 44 ff.). In this context, the *edge city* concept (originally Garreau, 1988; Beauregard, 1999, 53 ff.; Jessen, 2000, 207) has found its way into urban research discourses. On the edges of sprawling American agglomerations economic, commercial, and cultural functions had concentrated, often at freeway intersections, forming suburban centres completely independent of the historically evolved core city. Ronneberger (1999, 83), for example, has refuted the thesis that such edge cities had also formed in Europe and Germany.

A related material-spatial distinction between the European and American city lies in the differing function and importance of the city centre (e.g., Häußermann, 2001a, 249; Kaelble, 2001, 269; Lenger, 2006b, 1). In European cities, it is assumed, key aspects of urban life result in a multifunctional, historically evolved centre: housing and workplaces, administrative institutions, consumer and cultural facilities concentrate in the city centre. It's also seen as the place where the history of the city is spatially reflected by often imposing historical buildings (Siebel, 2004a, 13). City center therefore enables residents and visitors to identify particularly strongly with the city. The centres of American metropolises, in contrast, are seen as playing a far less important role in the overall urban functional

context: “In American cities the city centre is not a place with which the population identify, where the history and most important social institutions of the community are architecturally represented; the centre is rather a central business district devoted solely to commercial use and where culture and housing play practically no role” (Häußermann, 2001a, 249).

This thesis overlaps with one addressing the quantity and quality of public space in the centres of European and American cities (Lenger, 2006c): far fewer areas are claimed to be accessible and available for use by city-dwellers in American metropolises than in European cities. This is illustrated by reference to oversized shopping malls, which — accommodating consumer, leisure, and cultural facilities under one roof — are seen as the American equivalent of the multifunctional centres in European cities (Lenger, 2006c, 2). Although these shopping centres are given the outward appearance of public spaces, it is argued that access is in fact regulated by the operators and their house rules. Visits to shopping malls are therefore claimed to be reserved for specific (consumer) purposes and consequently for a certain category of persons. This aspect can accordingly be set against Siebel's thesis of a “polarisation of urban space into public and private spaces” (2000, 31) as a characteristic feature of European cities.

Furthermore, the divergence of material-spatial structures is explained in terms of the differing geometry of settlement structures and road networks (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000a, 8f.). The organically evolved road networks in European agglomerations are compared with the grid structure

typical of American cities. Whereas most agglomerations in Europe manifest no geometric structure apart from orientation on the centre, the grid constitutes a network of systematically planned streets in orthogonal and parallel relation to one another.

Differences between transport systems in American and European cities are also a key element in arguments for divergence (Häußermann, 1999, 80; Lenger, 2000b, 445ff.; Nivola, 2008, 3). The associated differences in mobility patterns are claimed to be a major cause of divergent development in material-spatial settlement structures. In Europe a compact spatial structure is seen to have arisen along the axes of historically evolved public transport systems. This in turn facilitates present and future access by public transport. In the younger agglomerations of the USA which have developed under the conditions of comprehensive motorization, extensive and dispersed settlement structures have arisen (Lenger, 2006b, 446) that make it almost impossible to establish an effective public transport system post factum. The dominance of the automobile is thus considered a key driving force of urban sprawl in American urban regions.

In sum, our review of the *material-spatial dimension* shows individual studies to have emphasized a number of different but interdependent developments and characteristics. Moreover, arguments take a long-term perspective: the structures to be found in European cities are explained in terms of the processes by which they came into being, dating back to the Middle Ages. They are compared with the more recent processes of American urban development and their material-spatial outcomes. The

postulate of persisting *material-spatial divergence* is, in sum, explained primarily by one independent variable: the age of the cities concerned.

1.2. *Socio-Spatial Divergence*

Continuing divergence in socio-spatial structures between the two types of city can consequently be explained initially in terms of differences in the development of material-spatial structures (Bagnasco und Le Galès, 2000a, 8f.): the spatial compactness and density of the European city encourage a distribution of heterogeneous social groups in the urban space that differs from that in the spatially diffuse, dispersed structures of American metropolises. This has produced the empirically proved thesis that the material-spatial structures of the American city reinforce residential segregation (Jessen, 2000, 206 ff.; Lenger, 2006b, 452).

In addition, divergent societal processes are said to shape socio-spatial development. In comparison to most European countries, for example, income structures are strongly polarised in the USA, causing socio-economic polarisation of (urban) society. Moreover, American society is much more strongly characterized by immigration and by the discrimination of immigrants than are European societies (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000a, 13; Häußermann, 2001a, 248). In the metropolises of the United States, such societal structures lead to far more marked *social and ethnic segregation* than in European cities. The socio-economic polarisation and ethnic fragmentation of American society are reflected in the urban space

and thus determine the spatial concentration of ethnically and socially homogeneous population groups.

Not only analysis of societal differentiation patterns at the macro level invites the thesis that population groups in American and European cities are differently distributed in the urban space. A look at the horizontal differentiation of urban societies and thus at what typifies the lifestyles of particular population groups suggests that members of comparable lifestyle groups have different preferences in their choice of residential location — depending on the type of city where they live. Whereas milieus with a distinctive lifestyle in European cities favour urbane, inner-city areas, such social groups in American cities tend to opt for suburban homes (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000a, 14).

To explain *socio-spatial divergence*, we must hence consider not only structural factors but also the mentalities and value systems that prevail in a society (Kaelble, 2001; Ronneberger, 1999). In European cities, an **urban way of life** (Wirth 1938) and the physical and social density of the immediate residential environment it requires are important elements in the lifestyle favoured by city dwellers. People living in American cities manifest largely different values. The ideal of the *community* in the sense of a small-scale collectivity based on personal contacts, it is claimed, fosters the desire to live in a homogeneous, village-like (suburban) neighbourhood (Ronneberger, 1999, 84). This is seen as closely associated with the ideology of *privatism* (ibid.): social withdrawal into the immediate environment coupled with a belief in the responsibility of individuals for their

own life situations. It is argued that these differences in prevailing values contribute to socio-spatial fragmentation and residential segregation in European societies being defined as problems, whereas many Americans see them as natural and wanted structures (Krämer-Badoni, 2004, 440f.).

1.3. *Divergence in the Field of (Urban) Policy*

Overall, societal processes and existing structures are not seen as the sole factors influencing urban development: urban policy above all is considered to play a major role. If we look at the discourse on divergence in the material-spatial dimension of urban development, it is apparent that many of the processes analysed can be attributed to action or omission at the local government level and to the presence or absence of urban political institutions and regulatory mechanisms. Furthermore, key strategies and institutions at the national level affect the development of cities.

Many studies of divergent development in European and American cities place great emphasis on the role of urban planning (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000a, 14f.; Häußermann, 2001a, 248f.; Kaelble, 2001, 269f.; Kreibich, 2002, 47ff.; Häußermann and Haila, 2005, 53; Nivola, 2008, 2). While the material-spatial development of European agglomerations is said to be based on comprehensive urban planning for the use and settlement of urban land, such political influence is far weaker in the cities of the USA. Nivola stresses the importance of the preparatory land-use plan (*Flächennutzungsplan*) as the concrete urban policy tool for steering

material-spatial development (2008, 2). However, he relativizes the comparison between such plans in Europe with the less fully developed tools in American cities (ibid.). He points out that the form taken by binding regulation of urban land use varies from case to case. The lack of urban planning tools characteristic of American metropolises is seen as relating to the market-driven development of material-spatial structures in the USA (Häußermann, 2001a, 250).

In this connection the influence of urban policy on the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of suburbanisation processes is addressed. It is argued that whereas moderate suburbanisation in European cities is due, among other things, to local political regulation, the immense urban sprawl in many American metropolitan regions can largely be attributed to a lack of planning rules (Kreibich, 2002, 44; Lenger, 2006b, 442). Moreover, political action orientations and programmes at the national level are seen as responsible for urban sprawl in the U.S. For example, the low taxes on homes and far-reaching government subsidisation encourage house building in suburbia (Nivola, 2008, 4).

The differing role of urban political institutions with respect to home and land ownership is also emphasized (Häußermann, 2001a, 250; Häußermann and Haila, 2005, 56). Unlike in America, much of the land in European cities is in public ownership. Urban policy actors are accordingly responsible for deciding how it is to be used. With regard to the socio-spatial dimension of urban development, particular attention is paid to social housing (Häußermann, 2001a, 252). It is on a much greater scale in

Europe than in America, enabling deprived groups to obtain affordable accommodation in the inner city.

Characteristic of American cities, in contrast, is absentee ownership (Häußermann, 2001a, 249). Much real estate belongs to private, non-local landlords. As a consequence, such areas are often subject to speculation. Their use and design, not to mention their physical state hence depend directly on the development of their economic value.

In this connection, divergent development of the inner city can also be seen in relation to differences in political and administrative contexts between the two types of city. Whereas the importance of the city centre in European cities as a cultural and social focus of urban life is fostered by the municipal ownership of central sites, such areas in American cities are privately owned and are on the market. This produces typical use patterns: the *central business district (CBD)* is often juxtaposed with less valuable sites used for parking or standing vacant (Häußermann, 2001a, 249).

A final point concerns urban transport systems. The divergence authors describe between the predominance of private motorisation in American cities and well-developed public transport systems in European cities is explained to a large extent in terms of differences in political institutions and action orientations. In the second half of the 20th century, government invested massively in expanding American urban road networks, not least of all under pressure from the lobby, whereas little weight was placed on extending public transport systems (Lenger, 2006b, 447; Love, 1995, 56). This contrasts with European cities, where providing adequate public

transport for the urban population has continued to be considered a prime municipal service (Jessen, 2000, 212).

In analysing the policy framework for socio-spatial development processes, many studies include the national level. This suggests explicitly or implicitly that the socio-spatial structures of cities are shaped by the given national case of the welfare state (Ronneberger, 1999; Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000a; Häußermann, 2001a). The duality between the two models, the European and the American city, is hence also seen in relation to the duality of two models of the social state – which also influences the social-scientific discourse. European structures are mostly judged to be the outcome of the comprehensive regulation of market-driven processes. Reference is often made to the regulation theoretical connotations of Fordism (e.g., Häußermann, 2001a, 251f. and 2001b; 43; Mingione, 2004, 324f.).

Even if the traditional Fordist model of society is closely associated with a past period of recent history and since the 1970s has been increasingly hybridised by “post-Fordist” forms of regulation, the political and social situation in European countries and cities is still characterised by a higher degree of welfare-state regulation (Siebel, 2004a, 11) than in the United States. In the U.S.A., in contrast, unadulterated capitalism is claimed to prevail: the almost total absence of welfare-state structures means that economic processes affect people's living conditions directly and without cushioning (Bagnasco and Le Galès, 2000a, 13). As we have seen, the background is an understanding of society that differs fundamentally from

that in European countries (Krämer-Badoni, 2004, 438f.): individuals and not the welfare state are felt to have primary responsibility for their own lives.

These different models and conceptions affect the structures of society in the United States and European countries. Socio-economic polarisation and income poverty are taken to symbolise the situation in the United States. The structural differences at the national cases described have a direct impact at the urban level, establishing the general setting for local political action. Actors in American cities face an urban society that is much more polarised and fragmented than in European cities.

Against this background, differences in programmes and action orientations at the urban policy level are considered to cause divergence in socio-spatial development between the two types of city. Concrete measures are cited that influence the social development of cities (1) and thus the local living conditions of certain population groups, their socio-spatial development (2) in the sense of the spatial distribution of certain social groups, and the provision of urban areas with social and technical infrastructure (3).

(1) Even if national welfare state systems have largely replaced the local welfare state considered so vital in Max Weber's understanding of the European city, current analyses stress programmes for urban policy actors in European agglomerations effectively to combat social problems (Häußermann, 1999, 2001a, 2001b).

(2) In the predominant view of urban sociologists, socio-spatial problems are frequently caused by *residential segregation* and the concomitant concentration of certain population groups. As we have seen, it is widely claimed that American cities are more strongly *segregated socially and ethnically* than European agglomerations, a divergent development that a number of authors believe has been caused or reinforced by differing urban policy measures and action orientations. Thus characteristics of the European city — such as the far-reaching municipal ownership of real estate, social housing construction, and the comprehensive regulation of building development by means of local authority urban planning — make it possible for socio-economically deprived groups to live in various parts of the city, hence avoiding their spatial concentration (Häußermann, 2001b, 48). The background to this argument, as we have seen, is the differences in societal attitudes towards residential segregation. They are also reflected in the action orientations of urban policy actors. The assumption that the population of American cities “wants” segregation implies that local politics does not regard it as a problem.

(3) The provision of urban areas with social and technical infrastructure must be assigned to the dimension of material-spatial urban development. It nevertheless has an impact not to be underestimated on living conditions in these areas and hence on their socio-spatial development. As mentioned above, the discourse under study largely adopts the view that these facilities in European cities are largely provided directly by local authorities. This, it is argued, helps avoid the infrastructural endowment in residential

areas reinforcing existing individual and group inequalities in living conditions.

Futhermore, as Wacquant (2002) stresses, greater attention needs to be paid to the links between urban policy action orientations, socio-spatial development processes, and infrastructural spatial endowment. His empirical comparison of two deprived social areas in the Paris and Chicago conurbations established that targeted political intervention has ameliorated the social and technical infrastructure in the Paris area whereas in Chicago such facilities have steadily declined (Wacquant, 2002, 176). Wacquant's findings invite the thesis that European urban policy has a special awareness for the importance of infrastructure in deprived neighbourhoods. In sum, the divergent material-spatial and socio-spatial development paths in European and American cities imply different baseline conditions and problem fields for local political action. Political intervention, in turn, is seen as the condition for material-spatial and socio-spatial development. In the case of the European city, this implies that politics exerts regulatory influence on development whereas in the American city development is the outcome of market-type processes.

2. European City, American City: The End of Duality? Dimensions of Convergence

We now turn to development processes which the urban theoretical discourse considers to drive convergence in the development of American

and European cities. The majority of argumentation patterns describe scenarios in which developments bring conditions in European cities closer to those found in the United States. We reconstruct explanatory patterns whose point of departure is not continuing divergence but common trends in the development of the two types of city.

2.1. *Material-Spatial Convergence Scenarios*

As we have seen, comparative studies argue that compact, dense settlement structures are characteristic of the European city. American cities are associated with dispersion and with extensive and steadily growing development areas. This must be considered in the light of the considerable suburbanisation noted in European urban regions (for Germany: Sieverts, 1995; Brake, 2001; Brake et al., 2001). In the German-speaking discourse on this issue, the concept of the *Zwischenstadt* or *in-between city*, a term coined by Thomas Sievers (1995) has gained considerable currency. He describes a change in the material-spatial structures of German agglomerations that can be considered typical of developments in Europe. He posits that present-day German urban regions form network-like functional complexes, spatially diffuse and without an identifiable centre (Sieverts, 1995, 15). Core cities, he claims, have merged with surrounding regions to form urban landscapes (ibid.). Sieverts thus argues against authors who stress physical density and compactness as characteristics of today's European city. His descriptions of the

Zwischenstadt recall urban sprawl in American cities. This is associated with the notion of marked functional polycentricity (Fishman, 1987). The centre or core city is said to have lost its former position in the urban regional functional context (ibid., 14f.). In the light of this argument, the often assumed qualitative difference between suburbanisation in the European city and urban sprawl in the American city can be reduced to a purely quantitative distinction. A “generalisation of the American urbanisation model” (Fishman, 1994, 92; quoted from Läßle, 2005, 399, translation R.B.) can consequently be posited.

The arguments described thus implicitly adopt a position contrary to the background assumption of conceptual duality between the European and American city: the particular importance of the city centre as a characteristic of the European city is confronted by the thesis of the decentralization of key functions.

Suburbanisation was the predominant process in material-spatial urban development until well into the 1990s. Since then, however, contrary trends have been noted in both European and American cities. Dieter Läßle (2005) writes of an “urban turnaround” or a “renaissance of (inner) cities.” In many American metropolises and in the centres of the conurbations to which they belong, a significant growth in population has recently been recorded after decades of outmigration to suburbia; a similar development has been noted in German cities (Läßle, 402).³ The reasons Läßle gives

³ However, this must be strongly relativized: population growth in German cities is primarily limited to economically prosperous cities and surrounding regions in the west and particularly in the southwest. In most East German urban regions, in contrast, the population is declining. In America, too, a double development has been noted: whereas the economic strength of urban regions in the southern and

for this significant growth of core cities include not only migration flows in the case of American metropolises but above all fundamental transformations of economic production systems and the consequent changes in employment conditions (p. 403ff.). Far-reaching tertiarization in Western industrial countries, he states, has meant that a large proportion of people now work in so-called *knowledge-based sectors*. Work in these segments requires greater temporal and spatial flexibility. Long and irregular working hours and fixed-term jobs are the rule. Under these conditions, living in the urban core offers people a number of advantages. One is the role of the city as a “random generator” (Läpple, 2005, 405): the social density of the core city facilitates social contacts and the exchange of information useful for job-seekers in a flexible economy (cf. also Siebel, 2004a, 46). Secondly, the short distances between place of work, home, and consumer and cultural facilities make it easier to organise everyday life where working hours are long and irregular (Läpple, 2005, 405; Siebel, 2004a, 46).

This argumentation pattern already implies a theoretical concept that underlies many scenarios of convergence between European and American cities: development trends in a post-Fordist society. The end of the *Fordist* model based on industrial mass production is seen as entailing the end of the societal formations associated with it (Gornig, 2004, 386f.). New structures arising from a tertiarized, knowledge-based and globalised economy are regarded as key factors influencing societal and urban

western sunbelts has brought rapid growth in population, the old industrial centres of the eastern and northern rustbelts have been losing population as economic structures decline.

developments. Convergence scenarios at the material-spatial level, as well as in the dimensions of socio-spatial development and urban policy (Häußermann 1999, 2001b), are consequently placed in the context of the economic and social shift from Fordism to post-Fordism.

Another convergence scenario can be derived from Saskia Sassen's (1994, 2001) *global city approach*, which is also (implicitly) based on an analysis of the post-Fordist transformation. Sassen's central thesis is that, while the knowledge-based sectors of the post-Fordist economy are organised in globalised network structures, spatial concentration is manifest in precisely these sectors in the centres of certain cities: "The growth of information industries has made it possible for outputs to be transmitted around the globe instantaneously. And the globalization of economic activity suggests that place — particularly the type of place represented by cities — no longer matters. This is but a partial account, however. ... Alongside the well-documented spatial dispersal of economic activities, new forms of territorial centralization of top-level management and control operations have appeared." (Sassen, 1994, 2)

Sassen distinguishes between three economic functions that concentrate at the centre of a few metropolises. First, cities serve transnational groups as control centres in global economic networks (Sassen, 1994, 20). A central location is advisable for prestige reasons, to be close to producer services, and to facilitate informal contacts between important actors. Second, these centres develop into marketplaces for financial instruments and producer services (Sassen, 1991, 5). The spatial concentration of large transnational

companies, she claims, creates demand for producer services and hence attracts them to the area. In this regard, too, the criterion of direct spatial proximity is stressed. Such service providers set up in the immediate neighbourhood, i.e., also in the centres of cities, so that they can be constantly available. Thirdly, Sassen emphasizes the function of *global cities* as production centres (ibid.). She points out that service provision, too, is based on concrete production processes located at spatially fixed production sites. For reasons of economic efficiency, they are also set up in close to one another.

The approaches described, give rise to the fundamental thesis that the centres of both European and American cities are becoming increasingly important residential and business locations and that central urban functions are once again concentrating there.

However, Sassen's approach is also problematic. Her original empirical study (1991) addressed a concrete and clearly defined area of research. She examined two sectors, namely finance and producer services, in three metropolises on three continents (New York, London, and Tokyo). This study triggered a broad discussion in the social sciences. The empirical findings were discussed primarily in thesis form, their applicability to other cities being examined. An ideal type, the *global city*, thus emerged from the discourse. Without more precise differentiation, many socio-economic development trends were subsumed under the global city paradigm: "Urban scholars around the world started to analyze their home towns to see whether they satisfied the criteria of global city. In this frenzied hunt for new

global cities, the critical attitude ... was forgotten and the structures Sassen postulated for a specific city type were understood as general and universal effects of globalization“ (Häußermann and Haila, 2005, 49).

The global city approach was thus adopted too indiscriminately as a theoretical basis for a wide range of urban sociological studies. The development of a city into a global city was accordingly often equated with the development of Post-Fordist economic structures. This shows that the concepts of *global city*, *post-fordist city*, and *post-industrial city* have often been used almost synonymously in the social science discourse.

Summarizing this chapter, descriptions of material-spatial development trends that support the thesis of convergence in urban development between Europe and America have also drawn on ideal-typical models of urban development to explain such scenarios. The key underlying processes posited are transformations in the global economy, captured theoretically under the headings *fordism* and *post-fordism*.

2.2. *Socio-Spatial Convergence Scenarios*

Transformations in the economic sphere are regarded as the forces driving change in the socio-spatial dimension of urban development. Studies refer directly to either Sassen's *global city approach* (Hamnett, 2007) or to more general reflections on the structures of the *post-Fordist economy* (Marcuse, 2004). It is assumed that the growing importance of the tertiary sector in the urban economy, the concomitant development of new sectors and

simultaneous de-industrialisation cause far-reaching structural changes in the labour market. A large number of positions are available for very well qualified people as well as many badly paid jobs for the low-skilled (Sassen, 1994, 55). Moreover, it is claimed that not everyone formerly employed in the industrial sector can find work in the new tertiary structures. This comprehensive economic structural change gives rise to the thesis of social polarisation in urban societies (e.g., Marcuse, 2004, 112). The new employment structures produce a growing sector of the population with very high incomes and an increasing segment of low earners and unemployed.

The next step authors take is to throw light on the spatial implications of this social structural development. The thesis of an increasing spatial concentration of socio-economically homogeneous population groups — and hence growing *social segregation* — is put to the test (e.g., Häußermann und Kapphan, 2002). This line of argument implies convergence in socio-spatial development between European and American cities, as well as approximation to a path of development characterised as typically American.

In his study of London, Hamnett (2007) examines whether this convergence is actually taking place in social reality and whether social polarisation is apparent in European cities. Although, according to Sassen, London manifests the economic and social structures of a global city, Hamnett found no clear trends towards polarisation in income development. He attributes this essentially to the influence of welfare-state mechanisms

(2007, 42f.), accordingly arguing for differentiated application of Sassen's theses. Greater account needs to be taken in case studies of the national embeddedness of global cities, an issue she ignores. Hamnett's perspective implies that, despite convergent trends, socio-spatial development in American and European cities continues to diverge. The influence of European welfare states, an often cited characteristic of the European city, is believed to prevent any far-reaching convergence in the socio-spatial dimension driven by economic forces.

The economic transformation of cities and the growing importance of new service industries that is its focus also provide the background for a discourse on the emergence of new urban milieus (in the German discourse: Ronneberger, 1998; Noller, 1999) and socio-spatial developments driven by it. Closely overlapping with the *renaissance of cities* thesis outlined above is the description of the young, highly qualified elites of service enterprises and the particularly distinctive and expressive lifestyle they are said to cultivate. These milieus increasingly favour centrally located old housing areas as the stage for realising their lifestyle, more and more at the cost of displacing the old-established population. The so-called "new urban professionals" (Noller, 1999, 5) are said to place great value both on living in the inner city and on access to the consumer facilities located there in both European and American cities (Lenger, 2006b, 470; Siebel, 2004a, 45).

Instead of summarising the convergence scenarios reconstructed so far, we turn to the comparison between the *European city* and the *global city*⁴ proposed by Peter Marcuse (2004). He considers both the material-spatial dimension and the socio-spatial dimension of urban development seeing the European city as characterised by its historically evolved, low-rise urban core and the social and functional mix in its component areas: “The contrasting form of the global city can be defined as a concentration of office towers in a central business district, gentrification of the adjacent older residential areas, the quartering of the entire city⁵ along a new configuration of class and race — new to the extent that the importance of the professional managerial class is growing and polarisation between higher and lower income groups is increasing” (Marcuse, 2004, 112).

With regard to the socio-spatial dimension of urban development, it can be said that convergence in development trends between the European and the American city has many causes. Nevertheless, the economic transformation of industrial societies into knowledge-based service economies is attributed particular explanatory value. In the sense of a global process, it is believed to influence the development of cities on both shores of the Atlantic. At the same time, however, some studies adopt a complementary perspective. Welfare-state regulatory mechanisms that filter and modify the influence of global market forces are taken into account,

⁴ Although Marcuse's concept of global city derives from that of Sassen, it is broader, applying to a general socio-economic development of the post-Fordist city.

⁵ At this point Marcuse refers implicitly to the concept of the quartered city he developed together with Roland van Kempen (2000), in essence an ideal type of city in the sense of an analytical tool.

prompting the thesis of the basic continuance of two, diverging development paths.

2.3. *Convergence Scenarios in the Urban Policy Dimension*

In the German debate, Häußermann has been foremost in developing the thesis of the growing “Americanisation” (1999: 82) of European and especially German cities in the urban policy dimension (1999; 2001b; 2006). He bases his arguments on the regulation theoretical fordism concept (Häußermann 2001b: 41ff. and 2006: 512ff.) claiming that the *fordist model of society*, intact in the Federal Republic until the mid-1970s, had generated a political and societal awareness of the need to redistribute economic resources and consequently produced far-reaching welfare-state regulatory mechanisms at both the national and local levels. Since then, however, government including urban politics had increasingly reduced social-policy intervention in obedience to a now prevailing *neo-liberal* ideology (2001b: 41ff.). From Häußermann's point of view, urban development in the ensuing *post-Fordism* epoch was not only abandoned to market-type processes; local government had itself joined this “growth game” (ibid.: 42).

According to Häußermann, this found expression above all in the privatisation of municipal property and local government functions (1999: 77 and 2006: 516). He examines both the reduction of local authority housing stock and strategic partnerships between local government and

private investors in urban development, and so-called public-private partnerships. The reduction of the housing stock makes it difficult to provide accommodation for socially weak groups and encourages uncontrolled socio-spatial development in cities (Häußermann 2001b: 57). *Public-private partnerships* for planning and developing extensive urban areas with the primary goal of establishing economically efficient uses — so-called “big projects” (Häußermann 1999: 82) — have, he notes, become far more widespread in response to local government financial straits. Häußermann's diagnosis of increasingly market-driven urban policy for the benefit of particular interests has pronounced social critical connotations. He sees the emergence of American conditions as a danger for social cohesion in European cities (2001b: 59; 2006: 520f.).

This chapter presents theoretical approaches and empirical findings that support the thesis of similar development in European and American cities. Studies have been discussed that describe convergence of development paths in the two types of city and studies that give an account of development trends applying equally to both.

3. European City, American City: The Function of a Discourse

The descriptions of divergence and convergence in development between European and American cities presented by the studies under investigation capture the complex and contradictory reality of these two types of city only indirectly. This is basically not the goal of the discourse. The assumptions

of divergence and convergence are not in controversial opposition: they complement and relativize one another. Hence, adopting one of the two perspectives does not mean opting for divergence or convergence: it merely provides the author with an analytical point of departure for categorising divergent and convergent components of actual development patterns with greater precision.

Roger Keil (1999) takes the corresponding view that studies diagnosing divergence in development between the European and the American city and scenarios covering convergence of their development paths stand in dialectical relation to one another. With regard to American cities, he notes: “Every finding of divergence from the historical city of Europe can easily be countered by converging dynamics” (1999, 65). Conversely, the concept of the European city is also reflected, relativized, or refuted when held up against the American city. Such comparisons enable European scholars to reassure themselves about the specificity of their own cities.⁶

The principle underlying the majority of arguments is to establish leitbilder enabling the reduction of factual complexity. Nevertheless, they are not — as Schubert, for example, notes — “ideologically motivated” (2001, 271). Nor is the aim of the discourse to reduce Europe to one of its regions, as Baumeister and Liedkte write, “by equating the continent with certain parts of western and northern Europe” (2009, 7).⁷

⁶ Not only comparison with American cities can serve this purpose. The post-colonial cities of South America, for example, also offer a promising frame of reference.

⁷ Nevertheless, the clear regional focus in the European discourse cannot be ignored. Most of the studies are German, French, and British in origin and hence frequently cite local examples. Studies and case examples from southern and eastern Europe are rare.

Scenarios of a continuing, independent development path for European cities often take recourse to Weber's ideal type of the Western medieval city, but also compare a wide range of processes in the various dimensions of urban development with those in American metropolises. In the European discourse, the latter thus serve primarily to assess certain developments in selected European agglomerations.

Studies diagnosing convergence between European and American cities also make theoretical use of ideal-typical concepts. The economic, social, and political consequences of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism are conceived as ubiquitous determinants of urban development on both sides of the Atlantic.

Analysis of the global city discourse in particular shows that scenarios of convergent development are also relativized and countered by reference to continuing divergence, for example, embeddedness in different forms of welfare-state regulation.

There are many plausible arguments for increasingly convergent development patterns in the various dimensions of urban development between the cities of Europe and America.⁸ The characteristics of post-Fordist urban development as outlined have much in common with patterns many authors have discussed as typically American. In the debate under study, convergence is consequently largely equated with Americanization.

⁸ For example, in their comparative study of current urban development in New York and Berlin, the American urban sociologists Elizabeth Storm and John Mollenkopf state that, "Despite the different discourses on urban development in the two cities and despite the contrast between the power of planning expertise in Berlin and the predominance of the market in New York, the similarities and not the differences in the outcomes of urban development strike the observer" (Storm and Mollenkopf, 2004, 297).

This suggests that divergent urban development has been succeeded in the course of time by convergent development and that the analytical value of corresponding city models (European city, American city, post-Fordist city, global city) has also changed over time. The discourses under study tend rather to manifest dialectic of diagnostic perspectives: Especially when comprehensive and globally determined development trends predominate in the various dimensions of urban development, the analytical concept of the European city gains in importance to allow assessment of the extent and precise effects of these developments for cities in Europe.

Thus, comparisons of the two city models do not imply simplified assessment, for example of whether differences between European and American cities are increasing or decreasing. They serve rather to sharpen the eye for the specifics of the two city types. On this basis, more precise evaluation of the development of European cities can be obtained; on the extent to which local specificities of European agglomerations persist despite convergent global development trends and hence whether the thesis of continued divergence can be maintained.

Furthermore, the discursive confrontation of the European city with the American city can be assigned a legitimating function. From this point of view, descriptions of the European city prove to be contributions to a discourse on desirable future development. The reference to history — whether of material-spatial or socio-spatial structures or of urban policy — which has often been criticised as normative (Krämer-Badoni, 2004; Lanz, 2002), lends models specifically European contours and provides a wider

“strategic orientation for civil-society urban development” (Hassenpflug, 2000, 13). This requires recourse to the specific historical development paths of European cities, explicitly presented as leitbild and strategic action orientation, in order to relativize the not unjustified reproach of normativity. In view of socially highly problematic development trends in European cities the convincing definition of the concept “European city”, as an alternative discourse to American, capitalistic or neo-liberal urban development, remains a theoretical necessity of decisive importance for urban planning practice and thus for the future of the European city as it actually exists whether in the east, west, north, or south of the continent. For the “European city” has been the “most important point of reference for urban planning and development” (Jessen, 2004, 92) for more than a quarter of a century.

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