

ON URBAN SAFETY IN THE OCCIDENT: SOME RELEVANT OBSERVATIONS

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Abstract. Recent decades have witnessed an accelerating population movement from Africa and Asia to Europe and North America. This trend has interfered with the stability of Western urban life, thereby eroding a relatively homogeneous Western urban culture and traditional European urban values. And more worryingly, this process has also decreased safety due to violent gang related crimes as well as potential terrorist threats, mainly in big cities across Western Europe and USA. One could therefore argue that the role of urban scholars should be to question and critically inquiry this harm being caused. Therefore, this contribution discusses the issues of safety and trust (and lack thereof), amid intensified mass immigration and related security threats in urban neighbourhoods across the Western world today.

Key words: diversity, immigrants, multiculturalism, safety, trust.

1. Introduction

When a city aspires to improving the quality of life of its inhabitants, several factors play a role. Some of these factors are positive and need strengthening (green areas, walkability, services and so forth), whereas others are negative and need combating. This is by no means a new argument: even classical urban theorists such as Durkheim and Simmel recognized that, despite the excitement of urban life, compared to its rural counterpart, the city can also be perceived as a threatening environment. While focus may shift between particular issues, the spatial variation of violence and perceived insecurity constitute real problems, when examining cities and neighbourhoods (Nae, 2008). Fear of physical and material violence is furthermore often related to unfamiliarity and distrust of immigrants or juvenile

gangs of immigrant background. It is notable that these groups prefer urban environments where they might already have social networks in place, despite prospects of potentially easier assimilation into rural areas. This tendency would, in itself, be acceptable, but, unfortunately, with time, these targeted neighbourhoods – usually either in the inner city or in suburban housing estates – tend to form ghettos of socially marginalised communities. In the absence of sufficient policy measures, this escalating social unrest then contributes to a vicious spiral of urban turmoil.

On the other hand, *in lieu* of the safety angle above, our attention is directed towards the current ideals of maximum tolerance, multiculturalism and diversity worship in cities across Europe and Northern America – something Gottfried

(2002) contributes to American Protestantism. His argument is that, because of the notion of collective guilt, good protestants need to redeem themselves, and that the form of government in West today – ‘the therapeutic state’ – with its mission to prohibit ‘improper thought’ fits with this religious sentiment. Because of the lack of scientific evidence concerning the alleged benefits of multiculturalism or extreme diversity for the host society (cf. Hocking, 2012), the present study set out to investigate the issue, by asking openly about this at the networking website Research Gate. (A documentation of the precise method is obtainable from the author upon request.) The exercise proved relatively conclusive, and confirmed the initial assumptions. That any contrary evidence would exist somewhere is a delusion, based on wishful thinking and misinterpretation of the situation. (Some respondents even considered the costs paid for multiculturalism and diversity training as such positive evidence in itself. Their logic seems to be that, since these things happen anyway, we must make an effort to make them work.) Unfortunately, such ideals set by moral criteria alone are to blame for one of the common misconceptions of our times.

The remainder of this article attempts to rectify this misconception. Unfortunately, we can observe devastating consequences of multiculturalism and diversity in cities across Western Europe and North America. Only by recognizing these issues can a constructive way of combatting them be found. This study aims at identification of these problems, and also suggests a number of solutions for them, on the basis of academic literature together with the small internet based survey referred to above.

2. Overrepresentation of immigrants in crime

In today’s Western Europe, the situation has moved far from the relatively benign starting point of, say, 1970s urbanity. The fact is that the recent newcomers are mostly uneducated economic migrants from countries in Africa and Middle East (cf. de Haas *et al.*, 2019). Here it is to note that these groups are also overrepresented in violent and sexual crime by a factor of up to 40, depending on specific circumstances and ethnic background (e.g. Kauko, 2020; cf. Salmi *et al.*, 2015). In some European countries, this overrepresentation of ethnic immigrant groups, including those of second generation, has increased strongly in the last decade or two – Sweden being worst hit in this respect (<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/14819/>)

In Sweden, even the absolute number of crimes committed by first or second generation immigrants has exceeded the corresponding figure of native perpetrators, despite the fact that the latter group still represents approximately two-thirds of the total population (<https://detgodasamhalletdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/>) Malmö, a city of merely 320,000 inhabitants, where gang related shootings and explosions have become worryingly frequent, is often seen as the worst city in whole (<https://quillette.com/2019/11/15/abandoning-malmo-to-its-criminals/>). In neighbouring Denmark (<https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/Publikationer/>) and Norway (<https://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/artikler-og-publikasjoner/>) the situation is similar.

3. Community spirit and trust

One of the main basic arguments against mass immigration is that we cannot change the behaviour of harmful

immigrant groups without force, if the community spirit that would help integration into the host society is missing (cf. Mead, 2019). One of the most famous proponents of this view, Philip Rushton (1995, 2000) famously concluded that Africans, Europeans and Orientals have different levels of intelligence and physical endowments. Evolution speaks: it is about adaptation to different climates and other circumstances during millennia (cf. Duchesne, 2005). While obviously part of an alternative paradigm, this principle cannot be refuted on scientific grounds. Fortunately, some behavioural researchers have recognized this debate on group differences, and are trying to solve it based on improved research, rather than engaging in bitter arguments (cf. Hunt and Carlson, 2007a,b; Brody, 2007; Gottfredson, 2007).

So race is primarily a biological fact, rather than only being a social construct, as the latest pseudo-scientific argument goes (Hocking, 2012). Evidently the conceptualization goes wider than merely the study of human groups. Like all diversity, ethno-cultural diversity is beneficial only up to a turning point, diversity threshold, when it turns into a destabilizing influence (Petrișor 2008). After that the continued multiculturalism trend and increased ethnic diversity becomes a threat, as it weakens the bonds between people, social trust, and community attachment (Dinesen *et al.*, 2020; Kauko, 2020).

As such, diversity is a measurable concept, insofar as we stick to the mathematical definition: number of different subpopulations within the total population (Petrișor, 2014). In this theoretical framework different levels of diversity can then be defined as low, moderate, and high. In that case, a

moderate level of ethnic diversity could still be beneficial for existing communities and cities, whereas extremely high levels would be deemed harmful for them (Kauko 2020; Bitušiková and Luther, 2010). This argument is also part of the discussion on social and cultural (or socio-cultural) sustainability within the built environment (Kauko, 2017). What it boils down to then is the cultural distance and compatibility between incoming and native residents. The main issue here is that sense of community and community spirit require a like-mindedness and shared values. Thus, people moving in to a given neighbourhood where trust exists need to respect same or reasonably similar values as the original residents of the community – in other words, it is about trust even if we stick to the purely social theoretic concept of diversity (cf. Putnam, 2007; Dinesen *et al.*, 2020).

4. Voluntary segregation

If we assume that voluntary separation of ethnic groups is a natural tendency, the issue of social and cultural segregation becomes easier to accept. Namely, it is not about ranking groups in some order of privilege, but about the preferences of members of a given group for relocating close to one's own kind. Curiously, at an aggregate level, already relatively weak preferences for self-segregation may lead to segregation (cf. Hocking, 2012).

If we also assume unconstrained mobility, this issue can be examined formally through percentages of predefined groups for sorting towards segregation (tipping-points). First we select a random starting point in terms of mixing two different groups across a board. Then let a sorting mechanism begin (using some predetermined thresholds for relocation related to

neighbourhood preference). While the speed of this sorting obviously depends on selected mathematical parameters, eventually, we will discover that the board is arranged onto a totally segregated pattern. One group covers all of one half of the board; the other covers the other half. This really is a valid general model (going back to at least early 1970s). It is naiveté to believe that our elites are somehow different in this respect – after all, they tend to practice self-segregation themselves.

Often tipping points for *white flight* from an area are said to occur when 20% of an area becomes populated by ethnic groups (i.e. Schelling hypothesis). Fossett and Warren (2005) found support for the Schelling hypothesis: indeed, even modest preferences may lead to segregation, as integration tends to be an unstable state. The key point in this analysis is that, when preferences for co-ethnic contact exist, segregation between groups occurs naturally. When the dissatisfied ethnic minority households move to areas where their group is better represented, a tipping point is reached on aggregate level, and development towards segregation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, segregation merely represents equilibrium outcome. The urban segregation issue is much about ideologies. While we agree that cities such as Detroit, where the population has changed from mostly white to almost exclusively black in less than half a century, indeed are dramatic failures, authorities and lawmakers cannot do much to change the situation, unless the white flight somehow can be stopped. And even if the theory of white flight was developed in the USA, as the Malmö-case referred to earlier showed, exactly similar problems have emerged in Europe too. [But Wessel and Nordvik

(2019) use the concept of ‘native out-mobility’ as a broader category than ‘white flight’ which they consider associated with cities the USA.] Insofar as white flight is considered a problem, it needs to be tackled in the context of the broader issues at stake, in which case, the relationship between ethnic mixing and maintaining trust and community spirit is the key.

5. Reverting the policy framework?

As observed earlier, immigrants from developing countries tend to be overrepresented in crime and unemployment statistics. The situation regarding non-white people in North America is similar. When we admit that it is relatively easy for a trained eye to judge if someone is a member of said group based on appearance, a difficult question arises: would this justify a case for ethnic profiling policies and practices? This is something we dare not talk too loudly about.

Most research on this topic tends to be against racial profiling: Meng (2017), for instance, notes that the police stops blacks most excessively in white neighbourhoods of Toronto. It takes guts these days for any objective researcher to suggest anything in that direction. [Although this kind of counter-terrorist policy has been tried (cf. Kydd, 2011; Smith, 2017).] At least Taylor and Whitney (2002) manage to offer a perfectly reasonable argument for such a criminal policy (cf. Kauko 2020). After careful examination of comprehensive crime statistics in the USA, they conclude the following: “Blacks are as much more criminally violent than whites, as men are more violent than women. Therefore, just as police stop and question men more often than women, they should stop blacks more often than whites.” So a

rational analysis based on factual evidence, but, given the current consensus of academia, definitely a heretic view – especially in strongly politicized fields such as urban affairs and urban planning.

6. Concluding remarks

When framing the urban social problems of our times, some of them, such as excess inequality, can be approached in a consensual manner, whereas others, such as the security situation of residents, cause deep divides. Within the realm of the latter kind of issues, are we even allowed to discuss safety concerns against an ethnic or mass immigration backdrop? This study has offered an alternative argumentation which can be summed up as follows:

1. Large groups of immigrants from developing countries are potentially dangerous for the host societies.
2. Certain groups of people do not integrate into entirely different circumstances, if they have been adapted to their own environment for centuries.
3. Therefore, it is true that mass immigration from developing countries usually does not benefit developed countries anymore.
4. Diversity and multiculturalism has no real benefit for average Europeans. A blind belief in *doing-good* alone is never enough.
5. However, we should not be afraid to expand the set of possibilities to deal with these problems; even racial profiling has to be discussed openly.

Lastly, a final comment on the geographical and institutional context is necessary. The observations and arguments in this paper to a large extent exclude countries of former Communist Eastern Europe. In these countries,

immigrants from developing countries have not managed to set up notable communities such as in their Western European counterparts. Even big Eastern European cities are still free from this influence, and as a consequence, provide a rather safe urban environment for their residents and tourists, despite certain areas having bad reputation (cf. Nae, 2008; Mionel and Neguț, 2011). This is because trust among neighbourhood residents is still not eroded. Here the urban experience is one based on familiarity. The urban managers of major cities in these countries can now learn from the failed social engineering experiments of their Western European counterparts. They can still avoid those mistakes. (In Eastern Europe urban areas and city regions have, for sure, their own ethnic tensions, but that would be a topic of follow-up.)

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