

Walter Prigge

MENTALITIES AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The first approach to an international comparison of the paths by which cities shrink diagnoses varying mentalities and cultures of societal transformation, which partially overlap in eastern Germany.

Vital/open: Russia/transformation

The transformation of society in Russia is a chaotic transition: The formalistic order of the communist system rapidly collapsed, leading to chaos and poverty in which now each person is responsible for his own individual survival – even if by planting food crops on empty urban spaces. The introduction of a state-capitalistically regulated market economy mobilizes individuals to undertake informal actions (in Moscow, for example, every car is a taxi) that compete with received forms of collectivism. Among the latter are not only socialist operations with hidden unemployment, but also re-nationalization as an element of a globalized construction of identity.

The planned economy of the USSR organized society's life directly and without any filter; now, the globalized elements of industry, trade, and service are also directly exposed to international competition, without the mediation of, for example, any urban civil society. This unstable collision between formal continuities and informal beginnings provides no supporting societal structures, but creates many open ends and thus releases many vital individualities into risky dynamic modernization processes that are characterized by hard social differences.

Melancholy/withdrawn: eastern Germany/marginalization

The historical break in the former East Germany (GDR) was faster and, in its short-term dynamics, harder. But it was cushioned by the transfer of overarching societal institutions and culture from the West, which organized the establishment of the democratic order of a capitalistic market economy. The latter's principles had, however, already come to the surface in the GDR through the erosion of the homogeneous normality of everyday life in the GDR's labor-society long before the break – as its utopian elements. But the republican revolt could not be carried through to the end; it vanished with the ungrouped opportunity to carry out a historically possible reform of the society of the entire Federal Republic.

Instead, the fake normality of the GDR was converted to the formal normality of the free market order – precisely at the moment in the 1990s when the latter's structure was transforming in the crisis of de-industrialization and globalization. This doubled transformation depresses the search for societal reform alternatives and ratifies the "failure of the revolts" with their depressive processes of closing, in which many withdraw into local milieus of peripheral marginality: vital openings were closed again, the open ends of the outbreak are trickling away in the sedated cultures of administered unemployment, small garden plot pleasures, and shopping mall urbanity.

The ebb and flow of waiting: England/de-industrialization

The eastern German path of shrinking is thus confronted with marginalization phenomena that have long been observable in England. The erosion of industrial cultures (extended workbenches in the processing industry with low-wage sectors, lowered social standards, long-term unemployment, etc.) is increasingly overlaid with global practices (services, informationalization, new

entrepreneurs, etc.), and this creates the normality of the self-contradictory post-industrial transformation in the perforated European city: small-scale dynamics of growth and shrinking in one and the same city, segregation, and social-spatial polarizations between endogenous and exogenous strategies in which state subsidization and privatization, social climbing and disadvantaging, urban glitter and neighborhood decline lie in close proximity. The post-proletarian cultures are characterized by a "waiting" individualization resulting from the dissolution and de-spatialization of homogeneous milieus and social networks - only soccer, enthusiasm for technology, and popular consumption of the media still recall the collective socialization practices of the industrial mass culture.

Written off: USA/suburbanization

He who no longer finds employment becomes mobile, leaves the city, and starts anew somewhere else. In the USA, the city is left behind: written off landscapes of ruins with abandoned property that is occasionally burned down. Private urbanization in the USA gets along without urban consciousness (therein resembling the state-socialist "urbanization without any city"): in the city in the USA, centrality is merely an economic advantage; if this is lost, it is sought elsewhere.

The winner is always the surrounding region. The ratio between downtown and regional population, for example in the Detroit area, is 20 to 80. There, against the background of the specifically American racism, suburbanization creates homogeneous settlements on the edge of the city, with the rigid regulations of gated communities or common interest developments, in which the middle classes, fleeing the city, practice the family-centered model of society: "American Beauty" between highway, swimming pool, and shopping mall.

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