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Inclusive communities, local policies and their spatial dimensions

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The political debate on inclusion spans a wide range of demands to improve the lives of those, in particular, who evidently have few options for responding to higher requirements in terms of mobility and education or to the negative effects of rising housing and energy costs. Depending on the national context, these demands are being addressed in different ways, with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2015) and the New Urban Agenda (UN 2016) regularly cited as important, but not the only, global milestones for achieving inclusion and equal opportunities. They were preceded by other landmark discussions and legal resolutions, such as the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which laid down in law the right to self-determination and equal opportunities for people with disabilities (UN 2006).

From a systems theory perspective, *inclusion* is usually discussed in conjunction with its opposite, *exclusion* from social subsystems (Kronauer/Häußermann 2016), whereby inclusion and exclusion are not so much mutually exclusive as dialectically interrelated (Stichweh 2009). This pair of terms can be traced back to research conducted in English and French, which has been dealing with socio-spatial exclusion and poverty since the beginning of sociology and social work (cf. Schütte 2012). Attempts have been made to theoretically distinguish the concept of inclusion from that of *integration* and *participation* (Kastl 2018). Following the idea of a functionally differentiated modern society, inclusion encompasses the aspect of the "structural involvement of persons […] in social contexts (systems), in particular in functional subareas of society, which are covered and protected by fundamental rights" (ibid.: 675)[1]; whereas the concept of integration refers to the type and extent of "the inclusion of persons […] in social relationships or in the cohesion of social contexts". Albert Scherr (2019:1) states that the concept of integration is linked to an assumption of "a society-wide standardised regulation of the participation of individuals", which is replaced with the concept of inclusion as an "understanding of independent and heterogeneous structures of inclusion/exclusion of the subsystems". "Inclusion does not take place as a comprehensive integration of individuals, but as a selective utilisation and regard for individual abil-

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1   Within this chapter, all German quotes were translated into English by the authors.

ities and achievements" (ibid.: 1). According to Kastl (2018), participation is primarily focused on the aspect of participation in "social resources (e.g., education, economic resources, political participation, 'connections', prestige, social recognition in various forms)" (ibid.: 675). He goes on to argue that it is not individuals but structures that put in place certain arrangements (dispositions) to ensure access to social systems. These dispositions include human rights, fundamental rights, civil rights, and the distribution of social roles. Based on these definitions, inclusion can be understood as the totality of social processes in which dispositions must be utilised and necessary resources must be accessed by those involved to actually be able to experience an equal distribution of social roles and the right to political, social and socio-spatial participation (in the respective subsystems of society).

1. Inclusion, intersectionality, disability

Notwithstanding the critical importance of this theoretical framework and the political demands, the practical implementation is challenging. According to Degener and Mogge-Grotjahn (2012: 67f), this is not least since inclusion has so far "neither been perceived as a political cross-sectional task nor as a joint professional challenge and task of various professional groups but has been addressed in different functional systems." This manifests itself in the allocation of inclusion projects for different target groups to different ministries or municipal departments. Moreover, expert knowledge is still limited to individual fields of action, such as anti-racism, intercultural communication or accessibility, instead of several fields at the same time. As a result, questions of multidimensional discrimination, which often affect one and the same person in everyday life, are overlooked (ibid.: 71). In addition, in the context of a profit-oriented economic model and the associated reorganisation of social services, cultural and physical characteristics run the risk of being "industrially and politically exploited as a growth-promoting consumptive and productive factor" (Raab 2011: no page). New forms of appropriation of 'the other' are developing that exoticise people rather than actually including them.

Based on these findings, the addition of the issue of intersectionality to the concept of inclusion was long overdue (cf. Penkwitt 2023). Initial research on intersectionality was already undertaken in the US Black Feminism movement from the late 1980s onwards, with Kimberlé Crenshaw as its central representative. In the German-speaking world, several researchers have initiated and carried out studies on intersectionality since the early 2000s (Dederich 2014; Schildmann/Schramme 2017). Degele and Winker (2007), for example, propose researching accessibility to social systems through an intersectional multilevel analysis of structures such as local government institutions, while at the

same time relating them to identity narratives. Identity narratives are socially constructed in the context of unequal power relations as valuated categories of difference such as gender, disability, age or migration background. Thus, the concept of intersectionality "explicitly focuses on the social position and the social inequality that accompanies it […]. At the same time, through a performative perception in the sense of 'doing', difference is understood as socially constructed and not in an essentialist sense as a supposed 'given'" (Penkwitt 2023: no page). Socio-cultural constructions of difference are thus also social practices that (re)produce categories of difference in relation to the body and the space surrounding it, and in interaction with social structures, resources, and places. This interaction is also reflected in the WHO's International Classification of Functioning (ICF) and the CRPD in relation to the category of difference 'disability': Disability arises from the interplay between a person's impairment and barriers in the environment. The accessible design of the environment thus has a direct impact.

The socio-cultural construction of disability as a category of difference is also widely discussed in the field of Disability Studies. At its core is the question: Why and for what purpose is 'disability' produced, objectivised and practised from a historical, social and cultural perspective? Impairment and disability are seen as the product of social and cultural mechanisms of exclusion and oppression and not as the result of medical pathology. In this context, the production and reproduction of disability in everyday interactions is discussed as 'Doing Disability'; the structural embeddedness and social objectification of ability and disability as dispositions as 'Making Disability' (Waldschmidt 2011). These perspectives are supplemented by the additional dimension of 'Being Disabled' or 'Being Able', which refers to the habitual encoding of the category of difference in the context of symbolic power. This allows us to observe how disability and non-disability as habitually encoded forces enable the acceptance of attribution and thus become a category of the self and of the way of being. Such an internalisation of symbolic power generates, in a sense, an acceptance of difference. In this way, socio-culturally constructed difference and the exclusion and inclusion associated with it are turned into something supposedly 'natural' and, to a certain extent, removed from the realm of critical discourse (ibid.).

Considering these aspects, socio-culturally constructed difference has a structurally exclusive effect when people with certain attributed characteristics are systematically and permanently denied access to structures, spaces and resources. Conversely, this means that there can be no inclusion without inclusive spaces and cities, communities and local policies that provide the necessary resources and access for people to be able to assume social roles and for fundamental rights to become effective.

2.   Inclusive cities and localities

What inclusive cities, communities and structures should look like has been discussed on an international level at the latest since the Global Report (UN 2001) was published by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. Here, the concept of *inclusive cities* was introduced and, as the second main topic of this Habitat Agenda, was applied to sustainable urban development strategies: "Sustainable urban development will depend largely on the capacity of cities to manage efforts to redress" problems such as "rising poverty, violence, unsustainable environmental practices and social exclusion of the poor and minority groups". These are problems which are "closely linked to the functioning of urban governance and the active participation of citizens in it" (ibid.: 211) and therefore there is a need for legal frameworks and policy reforms that are above all decentralised and democratically organised. Fifteen years later, the OECD (2016) published the report 'Making cities work for all: actions for inclusive growth' in which, in addition to possible tools for evaluation, a 'framework for action' is proposed to ensure improved access to work, education, housing, health and public transport. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 'Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (UN 2015) also refers to the particular importance of local public-sector goods and services for inclusive development. It is estimated that 65% of the 169 goals underlying the 17 SDGs cannot be achieved without the effective involvement of stakeholders at the local level and effective coordination by local governments (cf. Cities Alliance 2015; UN Sustainable Development Solution Network 2016). The UN Habitat III New Urban Agenda (UN 2016) further differentiates this requirement and addresses the particular importance of inclusive local planning and change processes. It calls, firstly, for inclusive forums and local policy measures that enable the effective participation of all people in local decision-making and planning. Secondly, the capacity of local parliaments and administrations needs to be increased in order to be able to cooperate better with self-advocacy organisations and with science in the design of local governance processes. Thirdly, local self-advocacy organisations of vulnerable population groups need to be supported to effectively involve them in local development processes. In addition, the New Urban Agenda calls for more science, research and innovation in the area of local planning, including the collection of disaggregated data on the living conditions of vulnerable population groups. The Asian Development Bank also published a report entitled *Inclusive Cities*, which focuses on addressing the fight against poverty, housing shortages, and pollution in the context of the rapid urbanisation of many Asian metropolitan regions (Steinberg/Lindfield 2011).

Looking at these policy agendas, cities and metropolitan regions appear to play a key role in countering processes of exclusion (OECD 2016; Steinberg/Lindfield 2011). In this context, cities are understood – mostly implicitly – as geopolitically and administratively clearly delineated territories with a certain degree of governance. However, the extent of this governance depends on a variety of factors and, not least, on global developments. This is why some urban researchers argue that cities should rather be understood as *localities* consisting of multiscale levels of power and governance (Brenner 2019: 263ff). A locality is not only determined by its geographical location and legal, political or economic function (Cooke 2009). From a multi-scalar perspective, locality refers, on the one hand, to a physical place where everyday practices take place and through which it is simultaneously formed. On the other, locality is continuously changed by globally organised accumulation (or withdrawal) of economic capital. Besides, supralocal policies and laws can enhance or hinder local developments and scope of actions (Gebhardt 2016). These supralocal aspects influence investment decisions, local governmental budgets and the extent to which public services are provided. Building on this understanding of locality, it is worthwhile to analyse the development of inclusive cities and communities not only from a governmental perspective but also to consider other dynamics of the localities where social inclusion and participation ought to realise (Çağlar/Glick Schiller 2018). This understanding of cities as localities confirms the view stated above that research into processes of inclusion and exclusion should be concerned with the way in which resources are distributed and/or made available, how resources can be accessed by those involved, and the effect this access has on the distribution of social roles and participation.

A review of English language academic literature shows that the concept of inclusive cities consists of numerous dimensions that are increasingly being researched. In a recent paper, Liang et al. (2022) have compiled conceptualisations of the most significant publications between 2000 and 2020. Based on cluster analysis of high-frequency keywords, they first extracted different thematic clusters, each of which discusses two thematic areas and how they interact, such as spaces and rights, participation and citizenship, community (infrastructure) and financial arrangements, segregation and economic regeneration, or migration and access to basic services. Liang et al. (2022) also review relevant studies that analyse forms of exclusion. The first aspect that stands out is that segregation is a driver of exclusion, which is reproduced in cities through habitual strivings toward distinction and the formation of social groups (such as scenes or milieus), as well as through the continuous gentrification of real estate (see Dangschat 2007; Bürkner 2011). Secondly, urban violence, especially in rapidly urbanising cities, counteracts inclusion. Socio-spatial exclusion can only be curbed by "properly designed policies, laws and social institutions, regulated labour markets and honest state officials" (Liang et al. 2022:

71). Thirdly, urban poverty is the result of rapid growth and neoliberal land policies, which steadily reduce investments in affordable housing, basic public infrastructure and inclusive public spaces. In this sense, Waquant (2006) and Bourdieu et al. (2008) also show in their studies that people affected by urban poverty are also criminalised and their places of residence are stigmatised as 'ghettos', thus additionally exposing them to symbolic violence (Meier/Steets/ Frers 2018: 211ff.).

In addition to these studies, an increase in specialised literature can be observed that focuses in particular on social groups with a particularly high risk of exclusion, such as people with disabilities, immigrants, or women (Pineda/ Corburn 2020; Whitzman et al. 2012). Liang et al. (2022: 7) summarise solutions in a multidimensional conceptual framework of the inclusive city, in which the social processes of inclusion are divided into five dimensions: social inclusion as well as spatial, political, environmental and economic inclusion. Each of these dimensions of inclusive cities, which overlap to a great degree, is called upon to provide, for example, more opportunities for political participation (for vulnerable groups), affordable housing, good urban governance focused on sustainability, sustainable urban planning, and economic regeneration and a fairer distribution of labour and resources (OECD 2016; Steinberger/Lindfield 2011).

German-language research on the topic of inclusive cities analyses some of the above-mentioned dimensions, although at the beginning of the 2010s hardly any mention was made of the spatial, environmental or economic dimensions. Initially, inclusion was researched primarily in contexts of (educational) policy, i.e. with regard to social policy, educational infrastructures and policy and their accessibility for people with disabilities (Balz/Benz/Kuhlmann 2012; Bognar 2014; Ottersbach/Platte/Rosen 2016). In addition, we increasingly see studies on local politics and urban governance, which examine the implementation of various requirements of the CRPD at the local level (see below). The connection between the concept of inclusion and cities has only been made sporadically in German-language urban research, whereas processes of inclusion or exclusion of various vulnerable groups are playing an increasingly important role in local planning practice (see Netzwerk Innenstadt NRW 2016). In urban research, these processes have always been discussed using other terms, such as 'Right to the City' (Recht auf Stadt) or a 'City for all/many' (Stadt für Alle/Viele) in the context of gentrification, segregation and urbanity (Holm/Gebhardt 2011; Weiß 2019; Meier/Schlenker 2020). The latter, urbanity, can be seen as a positive precondition for inclusive social processes. Along these lines, Cudak and Bukow (2016) consider the approach and organisation of urban societies with regard to *diversity* and *mobility* as a measure of their capacity for inclusion. In their studies, they prefer the term mobility to migration, as migration is nothing more than a temporary, repeated or irreversible form of mobility (across national borders). In the history of the devel-

opment of the European city, diversity and mobility are the basis for urbanity, and dealing with diversity (at least in many inner-city, metropolitan neighbourhoods) is an undisputed everyday experience. However, this is overshadowed by discourses in which categories of difference are repeatedly emphasised and, above all, culturalised (Bukow 2020). An urban society is inclusive when a public sphere is created that provides "room for the presentation of different social interests" (Cudak/Bukow 2016: 11). At the same time, a degree of open-mindedness must be developed that, depending on the "context […], allows "typically different ways of dealing" with lived mobility and diversity (ibid.). Spaces of opportunity for diversity and mobility as experienced in everyday life and recognised in discourse thus form the core of an inclusive urban society, which are (or should be) effectuated by municipal institutions, other organisations and civil society.

3.   Inclusive local policies

Taking a closer look at urban societies and urban policy in practice, it is striking that since the publication of the Global Report (UN 2001), many small and large cities around the world have taken up the concept of inclusive cities and have developed action plans. In 2006, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2006) provided an important impetus for local policy debate on issues of inclusion. The Convention has been ratified by 186 states worldwide (status: July 2023). It focuses on barriers in the interactions between individuals and their social and physical environment and the resulting barriers to full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Such barriers usually manifest themselves directly in the person's physical and social environments; in the places where they live, go to school, work, spend their free time, use social and health services, etc. – in other words, the places in which the majority of activities that sustain and support people physically, psychologically and socially take place (De Filippis/Saegert 2012). These are places of reciprocal relationships between people with similar and also very different interests and ways of life. They thus become *shared places* where the co-existence of people has to be managed (Healey 2006). This means that questions of inclusion are inevitably topics of urban and local policy. Local public-sector goods and services and the development and maintenance of a local infrastructure that is equally accessible, affordable and of high quality for everyone are all areas often concerned with questions of co-existence.

Thus, questions of inclusion at the local level arise in the political debate on various areas of local development, such as housing, mobility, education, the labour market, health, politics, culture, etc. These are specific questions of