

International Symposium
Urban Citizenship Revisited
Rights, Recognition and Distribution in Berlin and Tel Aviv
September 15 & 16, 2011

The goal of this symposium is to survey and theorize current practices of urban citizenship through a comparative and multidisciplinary survey of two cities: Berlin and Tel Aviv. During the symposium, we will discuss current forms of inclusion and exclusion into the political, civic, economic and cultural spheres of both cities, as well as more theoretical questions concerning the analytical and normative framework of the “local citizenship” concept.

Since T.H. Marshall’s seminal essay on citizenship from 1950, the concept of citizenship has become an important analytical and normative category for the understanding of various dimensions of inclusion beyond the mere question of legal political membership (nationality): the right to personal freedom and social and political, as well as cultural inclusion. But while Marshall analyzed the concept of citizenship as a set of rights in various domains against the backdrop of the rising welfare state, the political and social context has changed in at least two important ways: Today, citizenship in a broader sense has to be discussed in the context of welfare state retrenchment, structural unemployment, new dynamics of international migration, and discourses and practices of exclusion of non-European immigrants. Currently, the dynamics that allow for, challenge, or prevent citizenship rights seem quite different from the 1950s and 1960s. Secondly, within the process of political and economic globalization, scales of politics have changed profoundly. While national governments/nation states withdraw from certain areas but hold on or even strengthen others, the supra-national as well as the sub-national (regional and city level) have gained importance. In this context, the concept of citizenship has become crucial in order to understand the *local* and especially the *urban* dimension of codification and institutionalization of rights and recognition. However, it also has to be critically revisited at all scales as well as within the various dimensions that Marshall defined. Given our special interest in Berlin and Tel Aviv, we focus this workshop primarily on these two cities, and how the transformation of urban governance has affected urban policies in areas relevant to the question of local or urban citizenship. What does it mean to be an “urban citizen” in Berlin and Tel Aviv today? What institutions and mechanisms mediate or produce new forms of inclusion and exclusion in both cities? Are Berlin and Tel Aviv “livable” cities? What are the (local) conflicts over questions of political

participation, welfare, and cultural diversity? The conference is organized around three workshops, during which scholars from Israel and Germany will discuss the question of urban citizenship in both cities based on their specific research projects and expertise:

Workshop 1) Public Space, Urban Culture and the Right to Diversity (Chair: Talja Blokland)

Do minorities and subcultures enjoy a moral and/or legal right to the city in Berlin and Tel Aviv? Through which local practices and institutions are collective identities negotiated and recognized? How do discriminatory discourses and practices relate to place-specific history? And how do national discourses and practices manifest themselves locally in both cities? What are the “practices of diversity” in Berlin and Tel Aviv?

Workshop 2) Human Security as a Local Public Good (Chair: Talia Margalit)

Are Berlin and Tel Aviv “livable cities”? What are the current “politics of welfare” in both cities? How are problems of housing, health care, mobility etc. tackled in both cities? How are goods and services distributed socially and spatially in both cities, and which groups suffer from exclusion?? What are the place-specific mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion?

Workshop 3) Participation in Urban Politics (Chair: Henrik Lebuhn)

Which rights and practices in Berlin and Tel Aviv allow residents to participate in local politics? To which degree is political power distributed unequally in both cities, and what are the mechanisms and structural constraints through which certain groups or agendas are being privileged or disadvantaged? What forms of “insurgent citizenship” do residents of Berlin and Tel Aviv practice? How do minorities participate in local politics?

While we have a strong interest in Berlin and Tel Aviv, we also believe that a systematic comparison between these cities will lead to important insights that can significantly contribute to the broader debate concerning the expansion and retrenchment of urban citizenship. Despite their different histories and national contexts, Berlin and Tel Aviv share many similarities – with each other and with other cities. They both portray themselves as ‘global cities’ and struggle with urban problems such as rising rents, gentrification and neighborhood change, the contested use of public space, politics of privatization, questions around the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants, etc. In Tel Aviv, of course, many of these conflicts have to be understood against the backdrop of the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, negotiations and conflicts over claims of entitlement, belonging, history and collective

identity are not unique; in fact, they always shape the locally specific sets of rights and obligations. Hence we believe that observations from Tel Aviv can contribute significantly to an understanding of conflicts over urban citizenship in Berlin and vice versa.

Additionally to the empirical survey of local citizenship in Berlin and Tel Aviv, we also want to tackle the concept of urban or local citizenship on a more theoretical level. In the context of “de-centering” urban studies, we are especially interested in the question, whether we have to think of citizenship as a universal (analytical and normative) concept or as a rather regionally, historically and culturally specific one -- or as both, and if so, to what extent. Marshall’s conception in its details may be Eurocentric. But as Isaiah Berlin has argued, the notion of a “decent life” to which it refers is universal. Where, however, do we then enter the realm of specific cultural and historical conditions? And in which way do we have to critically rethink the universal claim of citizenship?

- Does the concept citizenship allow us to grasp current dynamics of unequal distribution of rights and the conflictive negotiation and recognition of collective identities? What were and are the lines of inclusion and exclusion and how have they changed?
- Does citizenship help to understand the provision of rights, obligations and feelings of belonging in an urban setting, in which a particular ethnic or religious group clearly dominates the political and discursive arena?
- What other concepts and theoretical tools can we use to survey the provision of rights and obligations in highly fragmented and polarized cities?

The two-day symposium will be hosted by the Georg-Simmel Center for Metropolitan Studies and the Urban and Regional Sociology Program at Humboldt-Universität Berlin. The planning committee comprises of Talja Blokland (Berlin), Henrik Lebuhn (Berlin), Talia Margalit (Tel Aviv), and Oren Yiftachel (Beer Sheva). The symposium is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), by the International Office, the Georg-Simmel Center for Metropolitan Studies and the Urban and Regional Sociology Program at Humboldt University Berlin.