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Heterotopia and cultural activism – the case of Hamburg’s Gängeviertel

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Abstract

This paper investigates the Gängeviertel movement in Hamburg and the place which the activists have (re)constructed since its occupation in 2009 through the lens of Foucault’s (1986) concept of heterotopia. In the light of the recent debate about the role of cultural activism in the contemporary struggle about urban development, it explores the question which spatial practices and structures have evolved as oppositional to or in alignment with the neoliberal status quo of Hamburg’s spatial policy. Based on a qualitative case-study approach, the research was carried out in 2013. By using the analytical categories built environment, social practice and neoliberal normalisation, it illustrates that the Gängeviertel is characterised by practices that position it simultaneously both in- and outside of the neoliberal logic.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Studie befasst sich mit den Aktivisten im Hamburger Gängeviertel und deren seit 2009 besetzten Räume und untersucht diese mit Hilfe des Konzeptes der Heterotopien von *Foucault* (1986). Im Zuge der Debatte um die Rolle von kulturellem Aktivismus in aktuellen, städtischen Widerständen wird die Frage gestellt, welche widerständigen oder angepassten räumlichen Praktiken und Strukturen sich im Bezug auf den neoliberalen Status quo der Hamburger Stadtentwicklungspolitik entwickelt haben. Die als Fallstudie konzipierte Untersuchung wurde im Sommer 2013 durchgeführt. Entlang der analytischen Kategorien Materialität, soziale Praxis und neoliberale Anpassung zeigt die Studie, dass das Gängeviertel durch Praktiken gekennzeichnet ist, die sowohl innerhalb als auch außerhalb neoliberaler Entwicklungslogik positioniert sein können.

Keywords Heterotopia, cultural activism, Hamburg Gängeviertel, neoliberal co-optation, space and place

1. Introduction

“The ‘Leitbild’ for the ‘Gängeviertel/Valentinskamp’ is a vivid inner-city quarter with affordable rents and a focus on artistic and cultural use for people from socially diverse backgrounds. It is open for all types of social groups that treat each other with tolerance and respect” (City of Hamburg)¹

Something has changed in Hamburg during recent years. If one was not familiar with the quite turbulent history of the Gängeviertel and its residents, it would easily be possible to stumble upon Hamburg’s official website (hamburg.de), read about the Gängeviertel, and perceive it as just another urban revitalisation project. However, knowing the events of the past five years al-

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lows a different reading of its story. In 2009, resistance and critique became manifest in Hamburg’s streets and targeted the city’s investment-driven and growth-oriented policy towards urban development generally labeled as “the neoliberal” or “neoliberalising city” (Peck and Tickell 2002; Brenner and Theodore 2005). These ‘right to the city’ protests culminated in the occupation of the Gängeviertel by 200 artists, students and other activists who successfully fought for the right to stay by gathering huge public support which prompted the city to buy back the property it had previously sold to the private investor Hanzevast in 2008 (Füllner and Templin 2011). Forming last remnants of Hamburg’s 19th and early 20th century working-class quarters, the 12 buildings are situated in the northwestern inner city, close to the Gänsemarkt commercial area. With its central location, the area is a highly attractive target for investment and redevelopment. Accordingly, Hanzevast intended the construction of upmarket office and apartment units, demolishing the existing buildings. However, financial constraints delayed the construction activity and the buildings were let to a collective of artists for intermediate use – the same group of activists who later initiated the occupation.

In this context of neoliberal policy and resistance, the case of the old inner-city neighbourhood and its occupation through cultural intervention reflects the paradoxical situation which exists in a similar way in many other cities across Europe: While it is one central growth strategy among urban developers to follow *Richard Florida* and attract members of the so-called ‘creative class’ (Florida 2002), contemporary urban development is increasingly contested by the same people these policies are supposed to appeal to (Novy and Colomb 2013).

In the case of the Gängeviertel, this paradox leads to two interrelated characteristics concerning the course and the reception of the occupation: First, the activists were successful in using the creative city discourse and its rhetoric as leverage against the city’s initial rejection of their demands. Second, the proximity to the creative city discourse and the forms of protest deriving from this have led to much critique from members of traditional activist groups such as the radical left (Birke 2010). Hence, both characteristics indicate the diverging roles played by artists and cultural producers in urban social movements (Mayer 2013; Novy and Colomb 2013, Marcuse 2009). While some authors see the artists’ political actions as ‘spearheading’ the ‘right to the city’ movement (Novy and Colomb 2013;

Kirchberg and Kagan 2013), others find the reasons for their success rather in the conformity and correspondence with the creative city brand (Changfoot 2007; Holm 2010; Mayer 2013). Especially, some of the latter criticise the artists’ movements for being primarily motivated by a struggle for self-management and self-realisation, rather than working towards the universal ‘right to the city’. Without dismissing either of these positions, their ambivalence hints at a general classification of movements that neglects the diversity within activist groups by summarising them either as ‘right to the city’ or ‘self-centred’.

Recent contributions from human geographers and other social scientists have underlined the important role of space and place in the formation of collective political action (e.g. Leitner et al. 2008; Nichols et al. 2013; Long 2013; Martin 2013). This engagement with activism as a form of place-making (Pierce et al. 2011; Martin 2003, 2013) can help to overcome such binary categorisations by uncovering the multiple meanings of place as well as deriving practices and ambivalences. Following this approach, this paper contributes to the debate by taking a closer look at the Gängeviertel movement in Hamburg as the specific place the activists have (re)constructed, through the concept of heterotopia. It explores the question, which spatial practices and structures have evolved as oppositional to or in alignment with the neoliberal status quo of Hamburg’s spatial policy. First, I will illustrate and discuss the concept of heterotopia and complement it with recent work about how elements of the neoliberal logic may reenter projects of resistance. Subsequently, I analyse the data along three categories (Hetherington 2003; Chatzidakis et al. 2012): built environment, social practices, and processes and mechanisms of neoliberal co-optation (Keil 2009; Harvey 2013; Long 2013). Exploring the site as a heterotopian space that fosters critique and new ways of conceptualising and thinking about urban space, I suggest that the Gängeviertel displays multiple overlapping constructions of place that enable alternative social practice in a sense of ‘right to the city’ on the one hand, but is under constant threat of falling back into an urban mainstream on the other hand.

2. Heterotopia, activism and neoliberal normalisation

The term heterotopia – in relation to spatial references – was first introduced by *Michel Foucault* in a radio feature called ‘Les hétérotopies’ (2013) in 1966, and later in a lecture manuscript called ‘Des espaces autre’

in 1967 (1986). In both instances *Foucault* refers to the existence of so-called ‘counter-sites’ – namely utopias and heterotopias – that distinguish themselves from ordinary places through their explicit otherness. Utopias are described as “fundamentally unreal spaces” with “no real place” whose fictional character usually shows places in an idealised or dystopian form (*Foucault* 1986: 24). Works like *Thomas More’s* novel ‘Utopia’ or *George Orwell’s* ‘1984’ – to mention two rather contrasting publications – are good examples for these types of socio-spatial imaginaries. In contrast, heterotopias are spaces that are inspired by utopian thought and actually exist in the ‘here and now’, but “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (*Foucault* 1986: 24). The otherness of heterotopias is constituted in their implicit function in relation to ordinary spaces. Hence, they represent separations from ordinary spaces and existing formations of power and knowledge that establish collective places of alternative social ordering, contrasting fundamentally with their surrounding environment through different forms of built environment, social practices and events happening there (*Hetherington* 2003; *Chatzidakis et al.* 2012; *Dirks* 2012; *Johnson* 2013). *Foucault* mentions a variety of heterotopian examples – such as nursery homes, honeymoon trips, graveyards, theatres, prisons, mental institutions, brothels and fairgrounds – that are capable of establishing a deviant social order and disrupting the traditional ordering of space.

As a consequence, the implications of this wide interpretation of heterotopia are twofold. First, the concept has been adopted in a variety of scientific fields such as social and cultural geography, cultural studies, architecture and literary science, which has led to a huge number of studies on heterotopias with different approaches and outcomes². In this context, human geographers and scholars of urban studies have mainly been concerned with illustrating heterotopias as marginal places of society (*Chatzidakis et al.* 2012), where marginal is either understood as physical at the edges of the city (*Doron* 2008) or – in a social sense – as resistance and transgression (*Cenzatti* 2008; *Allweil and Kallus* 2008). Second, the fuzziness and inconsistency of *Foucault’s* spectrum of examples makes it possible to label almost any place as heterotopia and raises the question “what cannot be designated a heterotopia?” (*Genocchio* 1995: 39). Hence, a major problem with *Foucault’s* heterotopias is the lack of differentiation concerning his definition of ordinary spaces and, therefore, his structuralist understanding of differ-

ence along the lines of normality and deviance (for a detailed critique see *Genocchio* 1995; *Saldanha* 2008; *Dirks* 2012; *Johnson* 2013, *Wesselman* 2013).

In order to overcome the structuralist notion of heterotopia, recent works have expanded the concept into the direction of approaches to difference that reflect contemporary thinking in social sciences (e.g. *Soja* 1996; *Hetherington* 2003; *Cenzatti* 2008; *Chatzidakis et al.* 2012). Correspondingly, *Henri Lefebvre* characterises heterotopias as places of alternative social practice where “something else” is possible (*Lefebvre* 1991; *Harvey* 2013: xviii). These ‘heterotopias of resistance’ (*Kohn* 2003) have the purpose of fostering some kind of social transformation by drawing on the political power of place. Theorists such as *Pierce et al.* (2010) and *Martin* (2013) refer to this as a process of place-making – “the set of social, political and material processes by which people iteratively create and recreate the experienced geographies in which they live” – that actively shapes political subjectivity by defining contexts of everyday practice, resistance, and activism (*Pierce et al.* 2011: 54). Hence, the potential for contention of heterotopias is grounded in their ability to challenge dominant norms through a reconfiguration of the social, symbolic and experiential dimension of place (*Kohn* 2003). Through creating new contexts of meaning, heterotopias can transcend traditional power relations and function as laboratories of new ways of social organisation. For example, *Allweil and Kallus* (2008) demonstrate in their study on the Tel Aviv shoreline as a heterotopia of resistance for the city’s gay community how such places are able to constantly challenge hegemonic constructions of masculinity in the Israeli society. *Stavrvides* (2007, 2010) conceives of such heterotopias as ‘threshold spaces’, effective ‘stepping stones’ that encourage the encounter with difference, thereby leading to potential emancipation and more political engagement. Hence, heterotopias do not resemble detached places with homogeneous social orderings, but rather places that juxtapose different social orderings, using tension and conflict as creative and radical potential (*Chatzidakis et al.* 2012). However, this overlapping of different social orderings, and therefore overlapping perceptions and meanings of place, also constitutes a risk for neoliberal normalisation, or as *Stavrvides* (2007: 178) points out: “[...] heterotopias may represent moments where otherness as a different form of habitation erupts as a counter-paradigm. This counter-paradigm, always ambiguous and sometimes still bearing the traces of the prevailing culture, may

either become demonised (confronted with attempts to delimit and control it), or may become seductively metastable, insinuating itself into the rest of society.”

What *Stavrides* describes as “traces of the prevailing culture” and “become seductively metastable, insinuating itself into the rest of society” has – in the light of contemporary neoliberal hegemony (*Wehrhahn* 2015) – been discussed as the challenges and risks of ‘roll-with-it neoliberalisation’ (*Keil* 2009). Using the term to characterise a third phase of neoliberalism – following ‘roll-back’ and ‘roll-out’ (*Keil* 2009) –, *Keil* conceives the normalisation and naturalisation of neoliberal ‘governmentality’ (*Foucault* 1991) and the self-regulation of subjects in tune with neoliberal norm as a defining feature of present-day urban policy and contestation that has led to a highly contradictory landscape for activism (*Changfoot* 2007). For example, *Changfoot* (2007) demonstrates how artists and cultural producers become activists by occupying public places and demonstrating against government policy, while simultaneously applying the neoliberal rhetoric of self-management and self-empowerment. Similarly, *Long* (2013: 65) exemplifies how a neoliberal policy possesses the ability to co-opt and commercialise local activism through ‘hijacking’ its language of resistance and “potentially transforming the [activists’] intentions [...] into conspicuous acts of consumption”. Thus, through cultural activism – that is activism “that calls upon art and creative practices to disrupt commonly held assumptions and expectations often by forging alternative spatial imaginaries or meanings” (*Buser et al.* 2013: 607) – it has become possible to actively resist and contend neoliberal policy while at the same time “performing good neoliberal citizenship” (*Changfoot* 2007: 130), or see one’s form of resistance slowly dissolve into neoliberal mainstream. In his sense, heterotopias of resistance can exhibit social orderings and practices that simultaneously resist and reproduce the neoliberal logic. As the production of place is a dynamic process that is constantly renegotiated between participating actors (*Martin* 2013), surely heterotopias can slowly be reclaimed by the dominant praxis (*Harvey* 2013).

Drawing on *Hetherington’s* analytical categories for the identification of heterotopic places, the concept of heterotopia outlined here as place of resistance and ambivalence offers the possibility to analyse the practices and outcomes in particular places of contention, thereby enabling a differentiated perspective on activists’ spatial productions. To illustrate this empirically, I

use the Hamburg Gängeviertel as an example for a heterotopia of resistance that is simultaneously disrupting existing social order and being pressed to fall back in line with the city’s neoliberal creative-city policy.

3. Methodology

Generally following a case-study approach, the research presented here is based on a study of the Hamburg Gängeviertel. Conceptualised and carried out in mid 2013 (June-September), the inquiry was motivated by the principal question of how do activists resist neoliberal urban policy and establish alternative spaces in contrast to the urban-political context in which they are embedded.

The collected data consist of four transcripts from interviews, approximately 40 pages of a research diary with field notes from observation and informal conversations, 30 photographs, as well as secondary literature such as activists’ publications and pamphlets (print and online), and more than 50 related newspaper articles, blog entries and research papers dealing with the respective subjects. Using snowball sampling and cold calling to establish contact with potential interviewees, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (*Longhurst* 2009) with activists served as the core of gathering situated knowledge about socio-spatial relations, backgrounds and interpretations of processes within the Gängeviertel. Additionally, informal conversations helped to contrast insights and experiences from the interviews with a wider range of opinions and standpoints. Similarly, taking in the atmosphere of the Gängeviertel through visiting its different public spaces, venues and events as a form of observation generated personal impressions which in turn were reflected upon during interview situations and linked to the context literature.

Following *Maxwell’s* (2012) understanding of qualitative science, research means a constant ‘tacking’ back between purpose, theoretical assumptions, research questions, methods and questions of positionality and validity. Therefore, data collection, interpretation and analysis were carried out simultaneously and repeatedly led to recapulating the literature and to modifications of the research design (*Strauss and Corbin* 1990). Accordingly, data analysis was realised through the processes of open, axial and in-vivo coding (*Cope* 2010), that is, the identification of categories, reoccurring themes and conceptual linkages within the data set for further interpretation.

4. Findings

4.1 Built environment

Walking down Valentinskamp from Gänsemarkt in the direction of St. Pauli, the contrast between the Gängeviertel and the rest of Hamburg's inner city becomes evident once one has reached the intersection with Caffamacherreihe. Greeted by the historical, run-down character of the old working-class neighbourhood, as well as the playful and artistic ways of anti-capitalist expressions through street art, graffiti and banners, visitors distinctly observe the break with the surrounding area and its consumption infrastructure, high-rise office buildings and modern urban architecture. Altogether, the 12 buildings of the Gängeviertel accommodate ateliers, galleries, exhibition and event areas, smaller gastronomy, bars, venues and, prospectively, 79 publicly subsidised apartments for about 180 people (Ziehl 2012). The backyards of the Gängeviertel also add to its contrasting character. For example, the numerous benches, tables, artistic installations and forms of street art form a type of public space which clearly dictates a different, slower rhythm than the hectic world outside. Stimulating rather activity and lingering, the materiality of the backyards resembles a patchwork of artistic expressions, community hub, stage, workshop, garden and working-class his-

tory (Photo 1). Additionally, some material elements are subject to constant change and, therefore, reveal the shifting character of the Gängeviertel:

“By now I know this place pretty well, but even for me it's always a new experience if I leave the Gängeviertel for two weeks ... I see new things and I think ‘wow, what happened here?’, or I think ‘shit, what happened here?’... if it comes to walls and art that happens all the time. Someone paints a wall and someone else crosses it. If something stays the same for three months, then that's a very long time” (male, artist, founding member).

What the interviewees circumscribe as “fluidity” (female, activist, artist, press communication) can be interpreted as what Kohn (2003) labels the experimental character of heterotopias. By ‘infusing’ place and urban space with meaning that is changeable and contestable (public space, artistic canvas, playground, venue), the Gängeviertel reveals a heterogeneous character that points towards the coexistence of different perceptions of place. In this sense, it not only contrasts with the surrounding area in terms of architecture, but through a disparity in how much ascription of meaning is possible or desirable within neoliberal spatial organisation. However, changing



Photo 1: Public space in the Gängeviertel



Photo 2: Renovation of the Gängeviertel: Kupferdiebehaus and Jupihaus

materiality can also be observed in the beginning process of renovation that started in 2013 (Photo 2). But since this kind of change refers to rather political influences, it will be discussed later in this article (4.3).

4.2 Social practice

Corresponding with the heterotopian understanding of contrasting social ordering, the Gängeviertel displays an organisational structure that reflects the activists’ claim to autonomy. Starting out from a model with a single person or a small group of people taking responsibility for only one building, the activists established a hierarchically flat system which includes the grassroots-democratic general assembly, the umbrella organisations ‘Gängeviertel e.V.’ and ‘Gängeviertel e. G.’, as well as a variety of working groups (Kowalski and Weiss 2012). Especially the latter demonstrate a huge degree of flexibility. Beside eight permanent working groups, new groups can easily be established which gives the activists the opportunity to react to unforeseen events. Additionally, the consistency of some working groups is highly fluctuant. If the preferences and likings of the members change, they can easily switch groups, create new ones, or drop out altogether. As the highest and most important panel,

the general assembly follows the principle of majority rule with its attendants deciding about all important aspects of the Gängeviertel. Dealing with the topics of inclusion and exclusion – or in Foucault’s terms, heterotopian rites of passage (1986) –, the panel also decides about who may participate:

“You could come to the general assembly ... and during the first slot you could say ‘well my name is ... and I am really interested in the ‘Viertel’ and I would like to contribute ... maybe I could help out in the association or I would like to have an open atelier’ ... anyway, you would have to explain what you want to do in front of everyone ...” (male, artist, founding member).

This opportunity to participate along personal preferences combined with an attitude towards majority rule where “everyone’s position will be heard” (male, artist, founding member) can be seen as a step towards radical democratic decision-making that embraces agonism on a very small spatial scale (Heil and Hetzel 2007). In a heterotopian sense, this contrasts with the relatively closed structure of the surrounding neoliberal governance arrangements which some authors have come to label ‘post-political’ (e.g. Swyngedouw 2007).

As pointed out earlier, heterotopias not only represent spaces of different social ordering, but may also display an overlay of different social orderings in one place. This aspect of heterotopias resonates with the heterogeneous character of the Gängeviertel. The narratives were imbued with the common theme of heterogeneity and creative scope that the place has to offer. Compared to other alternative or leftist forms of activism, the interviewees did not perceive the Gängeviertel as a singular entity but rather as a place where different scenes and discourses overlap:

“I love the diversity that exists here... some people just see this as an artist quarter, but I think that falls short of describing it. ... One evening I walk into a punk concert in the ‘Druckerei’ ... stumble out and find myself at a vernissage where everyone talks about art and I understand nothing ... making my way to the ‘Juppi’ where there is this singer-songwriter-we-all-love-each-other evening ... followed by a hip-hop event with screaming teenagers just around the corner. It’s so dense here and there is so much exchange here ... concentrated diversity” (male, association).

Correspondingly, the movement consists of a variety of professions (e.g. artists, urban planners, vegetable farmers, geriatric nurses etc.) that constitute different political views and differing opinions about how the development of the Gängeviertel should progress. However, members of marginalised social groups whom Mayer (2013) refers to as “people of colour” are generally missing in the Gängeviertel. Therefore, the characteristic heterogeneity is limited to sub-areas of the social strata. Nonetheless, the existing difference within the community is a constant factor of conflict. Arguments between leftist activists and other, less politically motivated, members of the group, divergent perspectives on the instrumentalisation of art between urban planners and artist, as well as less fundamental aspects like quarrels about everyday etiquette express an ongoing process of negotiating place-based identities (Martin 2013). Consistent with the heterotopian notion of tension and conflict as creative and radical potential, the activists view the coexistence of opposite positions and the plurality of opinions as positive effects that, although debilitating at times, helped to create innovative forms of organisation and mutually converging political positions:

“All these different professions that clash here ... this constant friction ... causes us sometimes to

discover new ways of doing things ... to choose different pathways we have not walked before. These different currents, they constantly merge and dissolve ... which helps to lower barriers in people’s heads which got there during their socialisation ... but this density and friction in the Gängeviertel helps to change people’s minds and makes us approach things differently” (male, association).

This common embrace of conflict and difference as something productive resonates with Stavrides’s argument about the emancipating and formative potential of threshold spaces such as heterotopias: The encounter with “fragments of a different life, experienced during the struggle” manifest in the construction of place has liberating effects “when people collectively realise that their actions are becoming different from their usual collective habits” (Stavrides 2010: 13).

4.3 Neoliberal normalisation

As mentioned earlier, the foundation of the Gängeviertel during its occupation relied partly on the use of creative city rhetoric. To name one example: When the mayor of Leipzig offered potential refuge to the Hamburg activists to establish their projects in his city (Hamburger Abendblatt 2009), they well knew how to stage this message in press conferences, the media and social networks in order to invoke the spectre of city competition and brain drain concerning creative professionals and artists. Although many activists accept the strategy as a means to an end, they partially stopped identifying themselves with the movement’s outward communication and political statements, or permanently left the Gängeviertel (female, artist). Notwithstanding the critique that the Gängeviertel has raised against Florida’s ideas it is argued that only through the “lens of the creative city concept did the city even acknowledge the group in the first place” (Kagan and Hahn 2011: 20), giving them an advantage in the negotiations for autonomy. In addition, the convergence along these lines enabled the city to co-opt the Gängeviertel’s own concept for the area’s development to present itself as open-minded for innovative spatial solutions and to stress the importance of culture and creativity for urban policy (City of Hamburg 2015).

Further, the activist group had to perform a certain alignment to neoliberal policy through institutionalisation. Institutionalisation refers to the processes of

forming the umbrella organisations in order to gain structure and reliability for the negotiations with the city. Yet, some activists equalled the gain of reliability with a loss of flexibility. In this sense, they pointed towards the naive approaches and readiness to try something new that characterised the movement’s early stages. Losing this kind of mentality is considered to be a major risk for the fluid and vivid character of the Gängeviertel (female, artist – b). Furthermore, the pending renovation of the Gängeviertel’s dilapidated buildings is a cause for concern. Since this has to be realised in cooperation with the city, the interviewees fear for a loss of self-determination. Accordingly, the costly renovation draws the activists back into traditional, neoliberal governance structures, although accepting their claim for self-organisation. The agreement that was reached between the Gängeviertel and the City of Hamburg aims for a successive refurbishment of the buildings with Hamburg’s urban development agency (steg) as building contractor, financed through public finances from federal, national and European funds (Gängeviertel e.G. 2013). Following *Coppola* and *Vanollo* (2015: 14) such an agreement can be interpreted as an urban governance tool that defines special rules and procedures for specific urban governance situations which gradually transforms an activists’ initial ‘insurgent’ concept of autonomy into a more neoliberal textured form of ‘regulated’ autonomy.

5. Conclusion

Through the lens of the heterotopia concept, I have illustrated how the Gängeviertel displays overlapping representations of place that position this specific space simultaneously in- and outside of the neoliberal logic. Along the categories of built environment and social practice, the activists have established experimental, alternative social orderings that contrast sharply with the surrounding neoliberal spatial policy. Described by the themes of fluidity, participation, autonomy and heterogeneity, the illustrated examples point towards the processual character of place-making through constant renegotiation. Overlapping constructions of place manifest themselves in this process as diverse positions that were described as being in a constant state of coexisting friction, rendering the Gängeviertel its threshold character.

Simultaneously, the Gängeviertel is characterised by processes of neoliberal normalisation. Its permanent use of creative-city rhetoric has made it attractive for

the appropriation through the City of Hamburg and its creative-city urban policy. In addition, the city has managed to embed the activists in the neoliberal governmentality through the pressure to institutionalise and the involvement in the renovation process, thus regulating several domains that the activists initially conceptualised as autonomous. In this sense, the case of the Gängeviertel reveals different characteristics of contemporary neoliberalism that, as *Belina* et al. (2013) have shown, vary between flexible co-optation of resistance (creative-city rhetoric) and the superimposed repatriation into modes of urban governance.

In sum, this research draws a differentiated picture of the Hamburg Gängeviertel in the context of neoliberal policy and alternative social practice. It highlights the activists’ new ways of thinking about urban space as well as the dangers that are involved in this kind of cultural activism. Investigating such a space of resistance as a heterotopia, insights can be gained about the variety of practices that constitute such places, while critically paying attention to activists’ “fraught with the struggle between an ideology of resistance on the one hand, and the daily practice of pragmatism and the need to ‘do something’ on the other” (*Buser* et al. 2013: 610).

Notes

¹ author’s translation from the German original

² *Peter Johnson’s* blog “Heterotopian Studies” documents a huge variety of different studies about heterotopia from all fields of social science (<http://www.heterotopiastudies.com/>)

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