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TAKING PART AND BEING THERE: A SMALL INSIGHT INTO THE SPATIAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG ADULT IMMIGRANTS IN OLDENBURG'S PUBLIC SPACES

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ABSTRACT

Taking Part and Being There: A Small Insight into the Spatial Participation of Young Adult Immigrants in Oldenburg's Public Spaces

Examining the role of urban spatiality for the integration of young immigrants is an emerging research field with the potential to provide important foundations for the implementation of integration policies and urban design. Current research in Germany on this subject focuses on large cities; this study adds insight instead into the context of a mid-sized city. The study asks: How do young adult immigrants participate in public spaces in Oldenburg? Results from five interviews show that the city center is connected to consumer purposes and social encounters in semi-public spaces. Study participants rarely use the public spaces in the city; instead, they favor the public green spaces on the outskirts.

KEYWORDS: participation, public space, young immigrants, mid-sized city, green spaces

IZVLEČEK

Sodelovati in biti zraven: Bežen vpogled v prostorsko participacijo mlajših odraslih priseljencev v javnih prostorih Oldenburga

Analiza rabe urbanega prostora pri integraciji mladih priseljencev postaja raziskovalno področje z velikim potencialom za implementacijo integracijskih politik in oblikovanje urbanega prostora. Trenutne raziskave tega področja se v Nemčiji osredotočajo na velika mesta, pričujoča študija pa prinaša vpogled v kontekst srednje velikega mesta. V njej se avtorici sprašujeta, kako mlajši odrasli priseljenci sodelujejo v javnih prostorih Oldenburga. Rezultati petih intervjujev kažejo, da je mestno središče povezano predvsem s potrošništvom in socialnimi stiki v poljavnih prostorih. Udeleženci ankete le redko uporabljajo javne mestne prostore; ljubše so jim zelene parkovne površine na obrobju mesta.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: participacija, javni prostor, mladi priseljenci, srednje veliko mesto, zelene površine

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INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the city of Oldenburg published a city development plan for 2025 (Stadt Oldenburg, 2014). Two of the main objectives declared in the report caught our attention: (1) embracing and using the diversity of Oldenburg's population as a potential for future development, referring to immigrated inhabitants; and (2) improving the quality of and creating new open urban spaces to stimulate public life (Stadt Oldenburg 2014: 46). But the objectives of the action plan do not reflect on the connections between migration and public urban spaces, and employees of the Office of Immigration and Integration of Oldenburg stated that young migrants receive little attention when it comes to social interventions and policymaking. However, it is of crucial importance to take the opinions and lived realities of the younger generation into account, because their participation in society and their civic engagement is formed by the spatiality that surrounds them. In contrast to major metropolitan German cities such as Berlin, Hamburg, and Hannover, there is a lack of literature concerning mid-sized or small cities, let alone concerning the experiences of young migrants who reside here. Therefore, located in Lower Saxony, the mid-sized town of Oldenburg is a particularly interesting site to be studied.

This paper contributes to human geography and migration studies by exploring the topic of the spatial participation of young adult immigrants in public spaces. Examining the role of urban spatiality for the integration of migrants is an emerging research field with the potential to provide important foundations for the implementation of integration policies and urban design. By putting these public spaces into focus, this paper wishes to add the perspectives of young immigrants through the following research question: How do young adult immigrants participate in public spaces in Oldenburg?

This research adopts a definition of participation as used by the PARTISPACE project: "Participation is a term for an individual's actions and practices in public space and the public sphere. This definition of participation entails taking part (= doing something with others) and being there (= being with others and being visible)" (Zimmermann et al. 2019: 13). For this study, we decided to adopt the following definition of public space: The PARTISPACE project defines "public spaces" as spaces that are "open and accessible", for example, "streets and squares in central parts of cities […]" (Weintraub 1997; Lieberg 1992 as cited in Zimmermann et al. 2019: 21).

In Oldenburg, as in most cities, the city center accumulates a high number of semi-public places, whereas a lower density of semi-public areas characterizes the residential neighborhoods.

BACKGROUND

The trend to elaborate social issues through their spatial dimension has a long academic tradition in the social sciences. Yet, the main focus has shifted from mainly analyzing power structures to approaches that turn the attention on the agency of people and their daily activities.

Since the late 1990s, the spatial experience of youth has become a specific field of interest within the research on human geography and youth studies (Zimmermann et al. 2019). Researching youth participation in public space is essential, because "space is a (social) product" (Lefebvre 1991: 289). Spatial practices guarantee the (re)production of space, and therefore, space always embodies social relationships and is an expression of power relations.

De Certeau (1984) suggests a comprehensive distinction between "space" and "place". Place is characterized by its stability, whereas space is conceptualized in relation to the movements which take place in it: "In short, space is a practiced place" (De Certeau 1984: 117). De Certeau (1984) further points out how any kind of experience, even a simple being-there or seeing, is situated in a spatial context, which will influence the experience. All social practices take place in social spaces and are shaped by them.

An important theory in this context is the concept of "the right to the city", according to Harvey (2008), based on Lefebvre's initial conceptualization from 1968, which emphasizes the right of every inhabitant of a city to appropriate and transform space. For Harvey (2008: 23), the possibility to shape and transform our cities and ourselves is a fundamental and widely neglected human right. In his article, Harvey argues that urbanization leads to radical transformations in lifestyles (Harvey 2008: 24). Urbanization today is mainly guided by private interests: "Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of urban political economy" (Harvey 2008: 31). Freedom of choice is left solely to the ones who can afford it. Harvey concludes by claiming that the capital-driven developments of cities all over the world these days limit, even suppress, people to exercise their freedom of making and remaking their cities and themselves (Harvey 2008: 31). While Harvey does not explicitly focus on young people, Zimmermann et al. (2019) emphasize that it is vital for young people's participation to have free and open public spaces available to them.

In the past few years, a growing number of studies has adopted this perspective to the field of migration studies and explored questions such as: How do migrants make use of public spaces? How do they move within and use public spaces in their daily activities? What kind of obstacles or potentials do public spaces open up for them? (Breitfuss et al. 2006; Hertzsch 2010; Stapf, Siegert 2017).

Some researchers have analyzed the potential of public spaces in Germany to facilitate social integration for newly arrived people in urban settings. Overall, the

existing literature about public spaces in small German towns and villages is limited, while one could say that the literature taking state capital cities as study sites, such as Hannover and Hamburg, is abundant.

One study, by Belloni (2013), analyzes the spatial exclusion and appropriation of space of asylum seekers and refugees in Hamburg. Belloni (2013) defines three rings in the city: Places of control are in the central areas, places of socialization are in the second ring, and places of alienation, such as refugee accommodations, are in the third ring, far from the city center. Belloni finds that being present in and using public places can lead to a re-appropriation of the inner city and thus overcome spatial concentrations of marginality (2013: 119).

In line with this, another study by Janßen and Polat (2005) looked at the integration and marginalization of second-generation Turkish migrants in Hannover. Amongst other factors, they analyze the material, social, political, and symbolic dimensions of two neighborhoods. Their findings indicate that social networks within the neighborhoods, social and commercial infrastructures, and symbolic factors, such as the image of the neighborhoods, translate into the living conditions of the migrants.

Another metropolitan study in Berlin, by Stapf and Siegert (2017: 2), discusses the role of public green spaces for newly arrived refugees in the city. Public green spaces are thought to contribute to the mental and physical well-being of their users (Stapf, Siegert 2017). The study credits public green spaces as especially meaningful for socially and economically excluded people, as they are open to everyone and mostly free of charge. This research examines the potential of public spaces as meeting and recreation points for refugees. The aim is to illustrate how public areas can facilitate the social participation and integration of refugees within Berlin. On the other hand, Stapf and Siegert (2017) emphasize how public spaces reflect dominant power structures of society and, therefore, come along with certain fears and obstacles, especially for people with undecided residence permits.

While the research above looks explicitly at public space, our study includes the dimension of semi-public space. As argued by Zimmermann et al. (2019: 22), "public space is very much connected to a normative idea of inclusiveness. Everyone should be entitled to participate in the public on an equal basis". While the opposite of a "public space" is a "private space", spaces which are "intimate and close" such as homes (Weintraub 1997; Lieberg 1992 as cited in Zimmermann et al. 2019: 21), most spaces do not fall into either of these categories. Often occurring in literature is the example of restaurants with outdoor seating, where the seating space is in a public space. Yet, only restaurant paying clientele have full access to the seating spaces. Jones et al. (2015 as cited in Zimmermann et al. 2019: 21) point out that to mark this "limitation in publicness"), the prefix "semi" is often used. Following this pattern, this study uses the same definitions to refer to "public", and "semi-public" spaces.

METHODS

We selected the research participants according to the following inclusion criteria: (1) the participants must have themselves migrated to Germany; therein, our research thus does not include second-generation migrants; and (2) the participants' ages should be between 18 and 25 years old. Further aspects, such as the legal status or the country of origin, were not criteria.

To recruit the research participants, we made efforts to gain access to the social networks of our target group in informal, interpersonal ways by attending several gatherings (either non-organized or organized by others) in public and semi-public spaces, such as: the community center of the Red Cross Oldenburg; a meeting for immigrants at the TV and Radio Station in Oldenburg; various restaurants; and the University of Oldenburg. In all these spaces, we randomly approached potential research participants, explained our research aim, and asked whether they wanted to participate.

We conducted four in-person, semi-structured interviews with young immigrants in Oldenburg. Two of the research participants are male and two are female, all aged between 22 and 25. They migrated to Oldenburg between 1.5 and 10 years ago from Iraq, Vietnam, and Iran.

At the time of the study, the research participants were the following ages: the first, a male Kurdish refugee, was 25 years old and had migrated from Iraq 1.5 years earlier; the second, a 23-year-old male Vietnamese student, had migrated to Oldenburg 3.5 years earlier; while the third, a 22-year-old female Vietnamese student, had migrated to Oldenburg 1.5 years earlier. Finally, the fourth research participant, then a 24-year-old student working at a bar, had migrated from Iran with her family as a child 10 years before the time of the study.

We also conducted an expert interview with two employees of Oldenburg's Office for Immigration and Integration. The two employees work in the field of Integration Service, focusing on the principles and concepts of migration and participation in the city of Oldenburg. We interviewed them to obtain additional information about existing initiatives directed at young adult immigrants and the use of public spaces in Oldenburg. The information gained in the latter interview is used as additional information in our research discussion but is not part of the primarily analyzed material.

A SMALL INSIGHT INTO LIVED REALITIES

Using the City's Spaces: The Outskirts Versus the City Center

Participants stated that the city center is a place to go to, and the outskirts are a place in which to live. When they talk about Oldenburg, they distinctly divide it into these two areas. The following quote illustrates this: "In the city center, more

people walk outside. On the outskirts, where I am living, few people go jogging; they mostly stay indoors."

All the participants said they live away from the city center; however, they did not mention a feeling of marginality or alienation in connection to their residence on the outskirts, as suggested by Belloni (2013). A research participant stated: "I am living on the outskirts, but it is also near the city center. I still feel comfortable."

According to the research participants, they mostly move within their own and their family and friends' places of residence, the university, and workplaces. These private and semi-public places seem to be the main sites of social interactions and are situated outside of the city center. According to Belloni's (2013) conceptualization of the three rings of the city situated between social inclusion and exclusion, this would be the second ring of the city. However, the research participants did not mention the third ring, places of alienation.

This phenomenon can be explained by the interview statements of the two employees of Oldenburg's Office for Immigration and Integration. For example, Oldenburg is described by them as a decentralized city, with different community centers in each neighborhood. According to the employees, many inhabitants of Oldenburg stay within their neighborhoods since each area could be a city in itself, having all the necessary infrastructure. They explain that for many residents, there is no need to go into the city center as the neighborhood provides the basic necessities – except for extensive shopping. The decentralized structure is connected to Oldenburg's investment into quarter management, the employees from the Office of Immigration and Integration concluded.

Granted, the sample of this research is very small. Still, we can assume that an asylum seeker would have perceived the reception center in Oldenburg as a place of alienation because its location is far away even from the city outskirts.

Nevertheless, the research participants did not provide specific information about their neighborhoods. This omittance could indicate that they do not identify with their neighborhoods, but rather with the overall city of Oldenburg. While Janßen and Polat (2005) emphasize how the material, social, political, and symbolic dimensions of the neighborhoods translate into the living conditions of migrants, the research participants did not address these aspects.

While Stapf and Siegert (2017) emphasize the tensions that can emerge in public spaces due to the reflection of dominant power structures of society, such issues were not brought up by the interviewees. Our findings suggest that the interview partners prefer public spaces outside of the city center, because of the peacefulness.

Participants spoke positively about the quietness and comfort of the town, stating, for example: "It's, ah, a nice city and it's very [pause] ah, for example, when, if you want to live in silence, then it's a good choose [sic] to live in Oldenburg. Even if you go to the city center, everything is ..., is like, ah, there is no, no mess."

They describe Oldenburg as a calm and peaceful place, and there were no experiences of danger brought up in the interviews. Rather than the perception of

dominant power structures or social struggles, our participants expressed fear in public spaces such as streets at night, more explicitly, fear in dark and lonely places. One research participant said the following: "I live on the outskirts of the city, so biking home or through the forest at night is scary. I see some people sitting on benches smoking. I suppose they are kind of a gang." Another participant gave a similar statement: "Empty roads at night is a little scary to me. There are low light and few people outside, so we cannot get help if some bad accidents happen."

Unfortunately, the scope of our research did not allow us to further look into the topic of feelings of unsafety. Doing so might help us understand the cause of such feelings and perceptions. In any case, the issue of unsafety is often closely linked to the question of power relations and institutional power structures (Stapf &Siegert, 2017). Feelings of unsafety could derive from an unfamiliarity with the environment, but equally from a lack of trust in local institutions, such as the police. Therefore, we conclude that local policymakers should investigate the origins of feelings of (un) safety. This way, policies can be adapted to provide orientation and support newly arriving people in Oldenburg.

The City Center: Semi-Public Places for Functional Practices

When asked about public spaces, the participants spoke on multiple occasions about cafés, shops, and other facilities, in particular, in the city center. Strictly speaking, such places are not public but rather semi-public spaces. Participants did not mention any public spaces in the city center other than the city library and a language café established by the Red Cross.

We asked our participants whether they exercise any particular daily activities and had specific locations that they regularly frequent within the city center. The young immigrants we spoke with directly stated they spend very little time in the city center, because they live on the outskirts and are not familiar with what there is to do in the city center, and do not have any favorite restaurants or bars to visit. None of our interview partners referred to the city center as the location of daily activities. Instead, they portrayed the city center and its facilities as semi-public spaces of functional purpose. The participants frequent semi-public places in the city center when they have a specific task to complete, for instance, buying new shoes, and for social encounters, such as having a meeting in a café. One participant stated, "I don't go to the city often, because I focus on studying and exercising. On the weekend, I sometimes go shopping or [to a] café with friends." Another participant mentioned: "I sleep actually mostly till eleven and then meet up with some guys for coffee in the city [...]. Or just hang out in the bar, eating somewhere something." From the participants' accounts, they seem to be spending more time in semi-public spaces than in public spaces. Another participant shared: "I have little time in public spaces. I usually stay at the university and the sports center."

Participants' answers were uncertain in relation to when they considered which public spaces to frequent in Oldenburg. Participants said that they do not spend much time outside the home or workplace in Oldenburg, and by traveling to other cities or staying in places of nature on the outskirts on weekends, there is a general unfamiliarity with the city center of Oldenburg. One of these statements is as follows: "Because I was wondering when my family is going to visit me. What shall I show them, because, in Oldenburg, I don't know, there is not much stuff to show somebody. [Both laugh]. We have a castle; there is a museum. But yea, it looks like a house, it is not a castle! Then you have a park, and yea, that is it."

Furthermore, another participant expressed great knowledge and affection for things to do in other cities, but not in Oldenburg. The statement reads: "Yeah, and sometimes I … go there [Hannover]. When I have time, I, maybe … [go to] to Cologne. Sometimes, [...] other cities like Osnabrück and Bielefeld and Essen – Ah, I have planned to visit some islands here in the North."

The city center does not seem to hold any personal appreciation, nor any kind of emotional attachment or particular importance for the daily activities of our participants. The data suggests that social ties and emotional attachments are primarily located where the participants interact with family and friends. Such ties seem to be mainly in the areas of residence, so on the outskirts and not in the city center of Oldenburg, except for going to a café; as noted by a participant: "I have friends, they live in a village, it's also close to Oldenburg, it's about ... twenty minutes or maybe fifteen. And sometimes I went to them, I go to them and, yeah, but I always want to ... to not be in the city and around."

Participants also recounted that activities related to pursuing a hobby, such as taking walks in nature and photography, two of the mentioned hobbies, were done in public spaces on the outskirts of the city. When asked why they enjoyed these activities and hobbies, participants answered in various ways that it is because they spend time with friends and families. But it was directly stated by participants that they do not see the city center of Oldenburg as a place to practice these hobbies and activities.

Henceforth, we will point out the following connection between our findings and Harvey's (2008) considerations about "the right to the city". According to Harvey, urbanization has turned many city centers into hotspots of consumption, especially in the past few decades; most activities offered in city centers are based on monetary involvement. Free and unrestricted spaces for social encounters and activities have become more and more scarce. This shift seems to be the case for Oldenburg, too. Our participants link the city center with consumerist activities. Social encounters in the city center are connected to café visits and thus are based on monetary involvement in semi-public spaces.

While Belloni (2013) finds that being present in and using public places can lead to a re-appropriation of the inner city and thus overcome spatial concentrations of marginality, none of the participants expressed a feeling of marginality or the wish

to be more present in the city center. However, as the example of Oldenburg shows, places in nature offer the possibility of free and unrestricted spaces for social encounters and activities**.**

Being in Public Green Spaces

The analysis of the data disclosed another interesting finding: besides semi-public spaces and social interactions, the participants, on several occasions, spoke about places outdoors, in nature, such as parks, lakes, and the countryside. Interestingly, most of the mentioned places were situated outside of the inner-city circle, even though Oldenburg offers various green places in proximity to the city center. The participants experience these places as relaxing, as places in which to have a fun time at or to do some physical exercise. Some of the mentioned activities include biking, walking, taking pictures, camping, chilling, drinking with friends, and watching the sunset. For example, a participant said:

> Pretty cool, you can just chill there (the Utkiek) in the summer. Some people are running there, that's it. And yea, it is pretty cool, you have beautiful sunset[s] mostly, or you can see the whole city. This is my favorite point… yes, in summer! But now it's too cold to be outside. But it (the Utkiek) is my favorite part; then, otherwise, we have the "Dobbenwiese". It is in this direction, [toward the city], there is like a huge grass place and old people are just hanging out and playing music.

The experiences connected to these public green spaces are mostly pleasant and linked to positive feelings. Diverse dimensions were expressed, including the aspect of keeping and respecting personal space, fresh air, and the presence of people. Overall, as put forward by Stapf and Siegert (2017), places in nature serve as meeting and recreation points. The public green spaces seem to contribute to the well-being of its users. Instead of wanting to spatially re-appropriate the inner city, as Belloni (2013) suggests, our participants seem to prefer the green outskirts to the inner city: "I always prefer to ... when I want to get out I don't want to be in the city center and ah, I want to, as I said, I like nature, and I want to see the, ah, [the countryside]", says a participant.

According to our research participants**,** climate conditions play an important role in their participation in public spaces. One participant expressed dislike for the cold season because it makes certain activities harder to do. Another participant's activities differed clearly throughout the seasons: "In winter, I go to the café or go shopping for clothes and necessary stuff. In summer, I join my friends to go camping around the lake and parks." In contrast, one participant mentioned being more likely to go to the city center in summer than in winter: "I spend more time there in summer than in winter. I go shopping, eat at some restaurants and go to the city library."

The usage of public space arises here where the city library is mentioned. However, the weather conditions this usage.

Social Participation in Different Spaces

While the interview participants did not express a particular appreciation for the city center of Oldenburg, they did relate many of their experiences in Oldenburg with people rather than with the materiality of the places themselves. The participants frequently refer to people when describing an experience in or about Oldenburg. The relationships expressed include friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances, or unknown inhabitants of Oldenburg.

The interviewees mentioned educational, employment, and social institutions as an important form of "semi-public" spaces used, for example, the workplace, the university, and the sports center, and it appears that most relationships established are born in these semi-public spaces.

For example, one stated in the interviews: "Yes, I meet many friends at the university and sports center." Another participant explained: "In general, I mean the most people I know are from my classes or work. And mostly I think they are very friendly and open-minded, mostly. Except for maybe older people? [Laughs] Maybe like very old people. They are, I don't know, maybe sometimes rude and stuff, but mostly I like the people."

The data could, therefore, suggest that practices that involve other people are of greater importance to the participants than the specific place in which the activities occur. The places mentioned, therefore, can be seen as platforms and resources for social interactions.

Another key finding refers to the aspect of "being new", or the experience of being a "migrant", in Oldenburg. The participants emphasized the contact with people from Oldenburg and whether or not interactions with locals make them feel welcomed and included in Oldenburg. The participants often brought up the social aspect of public spaces. "To me, places don't matter, but people there matter. If they are welcoming to me, I can feel included, and vice versa," states one participant. Furthermore, another participant admits: "However, there are many older people here, so I feel a little isolated." This account hints at possibly a disconnection between the youth and older generations.

A wish to learn the German language was also brought up as a means by which relationships are built. For example, through the language café in the community center of the Red Cross Oldenburg, a participant mentioned positive experiences of individual interactions with people in Oldenburg who taught him German:

> The people that live in Oldenburg, ah, that I met, they, they, they made me feel, love the language because at first, I thought the language is very difficult, and they said if, because some people say, ah, German people are very, ah, very angry with other[s]

> and here I saw the different things, and I saw that they are very good and friendly and want to help. And this way, I, I love to learn the language and ah, now I ... I speak German ... but not that good, but I will definitely, I will speak it very good.

In the context of Hamburg, Tenbuss (2017) observed that – despite adolescent refugees' efforts to participate in social spaces – they often remain outsiders. Although a certain awareness of "being new" is mentioned in relation to social interactions by our research participants, they did not explicitly state that they perceive themselves or feel that others perceive them as outsiders. In this aspect, our findings do not correspond with the observations of Tenbuss (2017). At the same time, we have to keep in mind the limited comparability of the target groups of our research and Tenbuss's research that focuses specifically on refugees. Moreover, Tenbuss (2017) discusses different barriers to societal participation, which are mainly cultural and linguistic limitations. One of our interview participants commented on language, however, not as a barrier, as suggested by Tenbuss (2017), but rather as a way to connect with the people of Oldenburg in the process of learning the language.

CONCLUSION

The research explored the participation of young migrants in public spaces in Oldenburg, guided by the following research question: How do young adult immigrants participate in public spaces in Oldenburg?

The participants mentioned only two public spaces in the city center: the city library and the Red Cross community center. Overall, they brought up semi-public spaces much more than public spaces. The data suggests that the research participants define their spatial practices in relation to the social interactions which take place within these spaces. Participation in public and semi-public spaces is linked to social encounters and activities with other people. Rather than the city center, the outskirts constitute spaces of daily activities (e.g., studying, working, and doing sports). The findings of this research emphasize the importance of public spaces in nature for participation; this contradicts the initial assumption of this research that public spaces would occur in the city center. Green public places are spaces for hobbies, leisure, and social activities; however, participation within these public spaces depends on climate conditions. The research participants hardly expressed any particular emotional attachment, or any daily activities attached to the city center. The city center and its facilities are mostly portrayed as semi-public places with a functional purpose and linked to consumption. The research participants did not experience feelings of marginalization or alienation, and they portrayed Oldenburg as a city and its inhabitants as welcoming; however, they described interactions with older inhabitants of Oldenburg as less friendly.

Due to the limited scope of this research, the findings do not aim to generalize the perceptions and experiences of young immigrants; instead, they intend to give a small insight into the experiences of these immigrants' in a mid-sized town and to lay a basis for further research. If this research were to be conducted on a larger scale, the findings of the study could have several practical implications, especially for local authorities and institutions to adapt their policies to young immigrants' perspectives and desires. Continued efforts are needed to make Oldenburg more accessible to newly arrived people, in addition to promoting their participation.

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POVZETEK

SODELOVATI IN BITI ZRAVEN: BEŽEN VPOGLED V PROSTORSKO PARTICIPACIJO MLAJŠIH ODRASLIH PRISELJENCEV V JAVNIH PROSTORIH OLDENBURGA

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Analiza rabe urbanega prostora pri integraciji mladih priseljencev postaja raziskovalno področje z velikim potencialom za implementacijo integracijskih politik in oblikovanje urbanega prostora. Članek k študijam migracij prispeva raziskavo o udeležbi mlajših odraslih priseljencev v javnem prostoru. Dosedanje raziskave vloge javnega prostora v življenju priseljencev v Nemčiji so se osredotočale na večje deželne prestolnice, kot sta Berlin in Hamburg. Literature o srednje velikih in manjših mestih primanjkuje še zlasti v povezavi z mladimi priseljenci. Članek želi to vrzel zapolniti, zato obravnava percepcije in vsakdanje življenje mlajše generacije v srednje velikem nemškem mestu Oldenburg na Spodnjem Saškem. V študiji, ki izhaja iz de Certeaujeve konceptualizacije prostora (1984) in Harveyjeve »pravice do mesta« (2008), si avtorici zastavljata vprašanje: kako v Oldenburgu mlajši priseljenci uporabljajo javni prostor?

Študija temelji na analizi štirih poglobljenih intervjujev z mladimi priseljenci, starimi med 22 in 25 let, ki so se v mesto pred poldrugim letom oziroma desetimi leti priselili iz Iraka, Vietnama in Irana. Avtorici sta intervjuvali tudi dva zaposlena na Mestnem uradu za priseljence in integracijo. Intervju je razkril, kako malo pozornosti so mladi priseljenci deležni pri družbeni intervenciji in oblikovanju urbane politike. Po rezultatih sodeč udeleženci študije le redko uporabljajo javne prostore; mestno središče je namenjeno predvsem zadovoljevanju potrošniških potreb in družabnih stikov v poljavnih prostorih, kot so npr. kavarne, življenje in dnevne dejavnosti pa se dogajajo na mestnem obrobju. Bolj kot mestno središče mladi priseljenci v prostem času uporabljajo zelene površine na obrobju. Lahko bi rekli, da je socialni vidik prostora pomembnejši od njegove materialnosti.

Intervjuvanci so Oldenburg in njegove prebivalce opisali kot prijateljske, kot manj prijazne doživljajo le stike s starejšimi meščani. Avtorici z dobljenimi rezultati ne želita posploševati izkušenj mlajših odraslih priseljencev, temveč podati le bežen vpogled v njihove izkušnje z življenjem v srednje velikem mestu in z njimi prispevati k nadaljnjim raziskavam. Rezultati širše zasnovane študije bi lahko imeli številne praktične posledice, še zlasti bi z večjim upoštevanjem potreb mladih priseljencev lahko vplivali na krajevno politiko.