Voices From the Margin: The Stigmatization Process as an Effect of Socio-Spatial Peripheralization in Small-Town Germany[1]

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1 Introduction

> "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality […] at the opposite pole." (Marx, 1867/2007: 709)
> "Uneven development is the concrete manifestation of the production of space under capitalism." (Smith, 1984: 90)

The new globalized landscape of capitalist development is characterized by the "annihilation of space by time" (Marx, 1973: 539) with its specific historical-geographical "time-space-compression" (Harvey, 2001: 123ff.). This process involves the emergence of (new) centres of international trade and finance, and of economic and political power. At the same time it leads to the decline of cities in de-industrialized and marginalized regions, which lose residents, social and technical infrastructures and political influence. David Harvey describes this process as "a factory of fragmentation". Here, however, the term *peripheralization* is used: socio-spatial processes of demographic change (out-migration), the lack and decline of infrastructures (disconnection) and the growing constraints on achieving multi-level support for local development (dependence). These processes of uneven development are part of the "explosion of spaces" (Lefebvre, 1979: 289-290) and a new global landscape of spatial (in)justice (Soja, 2010a). Increasingly, they also affect the Global North and developed countries like Germany.

Peripheralization is far from a new phenomenon. Uneven development was always a feature of the geography of capitalism (Smith, 1984: xi). There has never been a situation of global socio-spatial equality. Conditions ensuring a generally non-precarious life for all have never existed in capitalism (Mitropoulos, 2004). Nevertheless, this is no reason to cynically naturalize socially unjust unevenness and "underdevelopment". Instead there is an ongoing need to analyze "how […]

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1 Many thanks to Sabine Beißwenger for her support, especially the debates with her about various topics of urban peripheralization and its dimensions in West Germany.

the geographical configuration of the landscape contribute[s] to the survival of capitalism" (Smith, 1984: xi). Moreover there is a need to search for approaches to achieve spatial justice in egalitarian societies (Soja, 2010a).

Peripheralization always emerges in specific spatialized forms. In this paper, a case study of transformation and regional decline in East Germany is presented. In so doing we will focus on the issue of stigmatization as an important element of constructing "peripheral spaces" in Germany. The paper begins, therefore, with a conceptual discussion of stigmatization as a discursive act of peripheralization. We will then describe practices of stigmatizing small towns and regions with reference to the example of Sangerhausen, a small town in East Germany. The paper is based on a broader research project on the practice of stigmatization in the making of urban peripheries in regions with a shrinking and aging population, fragmented infrastructure systems and economic decline (see Bernt et al., 2011). It is argued that stigmatization not only serves as a metaphor for uneven development but also as a strategy to blame the local inhabitants for the decline of their cities.

2   Stigmatization as a discursive act of peripheralization

Historically, "the Greeks […] originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, a traitor – a blemished person, ritually polluted to be avoided, especially in public places" (Goffman, 1963: 1). In the realm of Christianity – as Goffman points out – the metaphorical term stigma/stigmata referred to the wounds of Jesus. Today stigma has negative connotations, is rather immaterial and serves to designate individuals or groups that differ from the majority and find themselves in a marginal position in society (see Hohmeier, 1975). It is assumed that stigmatization strengthens existing structural disadvantages and barriers. Following Manfred Brusten and Jürgen Hohmeier, stigmatizations can be understood as:

> "social processes […] that are determined by the 'ascription' of certain – mostly negatively valued – characteristics (stigmas) or in which stigmatising i.e. discrediting and compromising 'labelling' plays an important role, and that in general lead to the social exclusion and isolation of the stigmatised group of individuals. Stigmatisation processes have considerable consequences for both the life situation and the identity of those affected by them" (Bruste/Hohmeier 1975: 2).

The stigmatization of spaces also frames local cultural perceptions and interpretations. It thereby affects the thoughts and behaviour of actors in a stigmatized space. Early stigma research spoke of a "spoiled identity" (Goffman 1963). Stigmatization with regard to cities and social space was discussed by the French sociologist Loïc Wacquant (1993, 2007). He argued that territorialized stigmatization is often performed in places delimited by the boundaries of administrative urban districts; housing complexes, *banlieus*, industrial estates and ghettos are often given as examples. Social objects and placements are seen as characteristic markers of a city, district or house that can have negative connotations (rubbish, ruins, wrecks, graffiti).

In this paper cities are not seen primarily as physically built spaces, but are rather understood as political communities in which people – through communication processes – repeatedly negotiate their collective identities, with certain groups gaining an upper hand in the (counter-) hegemonic discourses. Processes of stigmatizing particular cities have already been the subject of investigation in German urban research; for example, in parts of Berlin (Best/Gebhardt, 2001) and the small towns of Eisenhüttenstadt (Weichhart et al., 2006) and Johanngeorgenstadt (Steinführer/Kabisch, 2007). With regard to the latter the self-perception of its residents was described as "multiple peripheralization". As Annett Steinführer and Sigrun Kabisch write:

> "geographic fringe area, economic recession, demographic shrinkage and aging, insufficient redevelopment resources and mental self-images of being 'at the fringes' of society and with 'no future' come together in the internal image of Johanngeorgenstadt in an ominous alliance that manifests itself as a general lack of hope" (Steinführer/Kabisch, 2007: 120).

A perceiving and interpreting coalition of actors is always involved in processes of stigmatization. Both the stigmatized and the stigmatizing form part of this coalition. With regard to the stigmatization of urban space, those feeling stigmatized are often not those addressed by the stigmatizing acts. Rather it is the personal or collective representatives or defenders of a certain urban image, for example, political representatives, staff of an urban authority, representatives of local interest groups and locals or non-locals who identify greatly with a city. In different ways, urban actors perceive, interpret, scandalize or ignore stigmatization. This paper focuses on individuals or groups who feel directly addressed by negative ascriptions.

The stigmatization of cities occurs when individuals or groups make negative statements about a place, even if these statements are not intended to be nega-

tive. Such statements may be satires about one's place of birth or residence, or commentaries on experience and atmospheric impressions. The (national) media play a key role in the negative ascription of particular local conditions. Journalists often represent a city or urban district as deviating from the norms of society as a whole (see Döring, 2008; Ahbe et al., 2009).

In this paper urban stigmatization is understood as acts of the communicative construction of space. The process of spatial stigmatization involves discursive formations which scandalize certain topic "frames", such as unemployment, "brain drains", decline of the civil society, and use iconic markers of urban decay like empty shops, graffiti and derelict buildings. While the hegemonic discourse of "urban development" is influenced by the conception that local "endogenous potentials" can solve the urban problems arising from peripheralization, "weak" elements like the "identities of cities" become one key object in this debate. Commonly, urban studies regard stigmatizing discourses as the exteriorized production of negative images (e.g. by the national media) which contrast to the interior-image of the local, "authentic" debate (Zukin, 2010). Here the "foreign view" comes to dominate the locals' self-perception. A reflexive logic emerges in which negative thinking forms a feedback loop, bringing the population and structures into a downward spiral of increasing vulnerability. The mass media effect of stigmatization works through a labeling approach, creating symbolic frames of stigmas (as material and immaterial markers), "stigmatizers" (the dominant actors who talk "bad"), the "stigmatized" (the people who feel targeted by the negative talking and/or writing) and media and communication systems like advertisements, films and newspaper articles.

Imaginations and feelings about spaces – the mental maps, images and imaginaries of certain places – are not merely the ephemeral attachment to the hard-factors of the spatial (like location, climate, infrastructure, buildings and streets). They are in fact – as Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues in his theoretical work on the production of space – an essential part of this practice. The "trialectic" process of spatial construction (Soja, 1996) relies on the interplay between conceived, perceived and lived spaces. Perception is therefore embedded and intermingled with the other two elements. To perceive a space in a sensual and imaginary way is not a voluntaristic or a totally subjective act, even though it happens through the individual body of the perceiving person. The subjectivation of the social self is also not an outcome determined merely by the social position of a person, their class, "race" or gender, for instance. Perception and, especially in this case, the perception of places are also socially trained and habitualized outcomes of discursive practices about places. The stigmatizing narratives and imaginaries about peripheralized towns are only one example of this (Wacquant, 2007).

In German studies from a geography perspective, discourse analysis has mostly been focused on media coverage or newspaper archive articles (Glasze/Mattissek, 2009). Applying discursive analysis of media articles on the social fabric of some parts or even the whole city remains a complex and still unresolved problem because debates on urban districts are analytically complex assemblages and mixtures of discourses (see Jäger/Jäger, 2000: 4). In this article we are mainly interested in spatial representations of these signifiers of peripheralization, as the national and regional press produces them. Analyzing articles from the early 1990s to the present, there is also a focus on markers, iconic signifiers (the stigmas) and the circumstances in which labeling are carried out. Local actors were interviewed about their individual perception of stigmatization and their strategies for coming to terms with their town having a "bad press" and "bad" reputation. Based on individual talks and focus group discussions data on the process and markers of stigmatization were generated and stigmatizing statements decoded. It was observed that the process of stigmatization is linked to the hegemonic logic of "the locale" (i.e. "the city", "the region") as the only place with relevance to social change. The following section highlights how the "peripheral" location of the small German town Sangerhausen was produced by a varied set of practices, based on a dispositive/apparatus of urban development that makes local authorities and administration the actors most responsible for achieving urban growth.

3   Stigmatizing Sangerhausen

Sangerhausen, a town with a population of 30,000 in 2011, is located in a former industrial heartland of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), in the southern part of the German *Bundesland* Saxony-Anhalt (see Map 1). With copper mining as a basis, the Mansfeld region enjoyed sustained economic and population growth after 1945. As a result, Sangerhausen's population doubled from the early 1950s to the mid-1980s. However, due to the emergence of new geographies of resource exploitation and the logic of the globalized market it was already obvious at the end of the 1980s that copper mining would not have a future in the region.

The political change of 1989 accelerated and intensified the structural break. The copper mining industry closed overnight, leaving the miners unemployed. In the 20 years after "reunification" the local population shrank by more than 25 percent until 2009 (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012). Even with this decline the unemployed level is still significantly above the German average. Further effects of this rapid deindustrialization were the out-migration of young and

qualified graduates and school leavers, the breakdown of municipal government finances and the collapse of the former social and cultural life in the small town. The closing down of cinemas, schools and shops are orchestrated by a discourse about the self-reliance and responsibility of the locals for this situation, e.g. by a stigmatizing discourse about this now dubbed "German Capital of the Unemployed" (Mehr, 1998).

Map 1: Location of Sangerhausen   *Source:* Author's own illustration.

Already in the early 1990s, an article published in the German weekly *Die Zeit* defined Sangerhausen in the language common to the long and persisting discourse of stigmatization: it was represented as a small town – like almost all East German towns – confronted with the basic ruptures of systemic change, but without a clear perspective of how to adapt in sight. In almost Gramscian terms the journalist Christoph Dieckmann claims: "the old has gone and the new has not yet arrived" (Dieckmann, 1992).

With the decline of the mining industry, with its "proud and privileged" miners, new dangers to the social equilibrium emerge. An article published in the same weekly in 1998 had the headline "Capital of European Unemployment", referring not only to the still high levels of unemployment in the city but also to the troubling danger of a radicalization of parts of the local population and growth of right wing-extremism. The locals, that is, the people who did not migrate out, are said to live in "ghettos" and feel like "strangers in their own country" (Mehr, 1998). In the same year another German weekly wrote of "the broken neck of a whole region" (Hortskötter/Sauga, 1998) which is becoming, in a European regional perspective, the "Mezzogiorno of the East". Other articles of the late 1990s focused on the growing lack of development perspectives. Even the construction of a new highway was viewed in negative terms, as providing the opportunity to leave Sangerhausen even faster than before (Smoltcyk, 1999).

In 2004, *Die Zeit* began to observe changes in the appearance of the city. The reopened bike factory MIFA had some success, but only because of rising exports of cheap bikes to China, due to paying lower wages and the lack of trade union organizing in the factory (N.N., 2004). The German magazine *Der Spiegel* addressed the topic of the "toxic, special waste" in the mining ditch, the out-migration of over 10,000 inhabitants of the town, the right-wing party Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) representation in the local city council, the many empty shops and "bleak and deserted" "Plattenbau"[2] residential areas (Gorris, 2004). There were also, to provide an insight to life in the town, references to drunks at the train station kiosk. Other articles from the last decade made more flamboyant use of the same iconic and emblematic discursive markers, focusing on the "dying town" (N.N., 2006). In 2008 an article with the headline "shift in the mine shaft" revealed the continued suffering caused by the loss of the mining industries. A minor local scandal received coverage on one of the national public television channels (ZDF) in January 2010. Again, the theme was clear, with the headline "Sangerhausen – Capital of the Unemployed: highest rates of jobless people and no perspectives" (N.N., 2010). With monotonous music providing

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2 "Plattenbauviertel" is the name of a residential area constructed of pre-fabricated concrete walls, or "Platten" in German language

the soundtrack, this was aggressively illustrated through tracking shots of the "Plattenbau" residential areas, the ruins of the mining area and the huge ditch. This footage captures – in a nutshell – the entire discursive violence inflicted on the city.

The media coverage on Sangerhausen, with its dominant narratives, icons and images, has proved to be remarkably persistent. The articles and features on radio and television follow some kind of magic cycle of media attention. Since 1990, every few years reports on Sangerhausen as the "Capital of the Unemployed" accumulate. It is not clear if this is related to new facts and events in the town or to dynamics of the media production of attention and scandalized attraction. The core images of this discourse are old and derelict town houses, empty shops, the mining ditch and the former "Plattenbau" residential areas.

The stigmatizing discourse on Sangerhausen at the national level can be seen as an overlapping of two distinct narratives. In the first, Sangerhausen is seen as an example for East Germany. In the second, Sangerhausen is seen as a specific problem for East Germany. The discourse on East Germany in general can be identified as a socioeconomic and civil society scenario. Fueled by narratives of territorialized processes of deindustrialisation, demographic shrinkage and infrastructural cutbacks, Sangerhausen becomes emblematic of the situation in the former GDR as a whole; as an example par excellence of the "crash East" (Dieckmann, 1992) system. The losers of German reunification are located here, moving from "crisis into crisis" (Mehr, 1998). While West Germany recovered from the burden of reunification in the 2000s, the East remains but with "dismal prospects", as one journalist put it (ibid.). This laboratory of change is seen by the regional studies researcher Wolfgang Steinle – quoted in a newspaper article – as the "Mezzogiorno of the East": "Both regions (South of Italy and East Germany) have the same amount of unemployment and the same painful experiences: aid payments and subsidies don't fight unemployment" (Hortskötter/Sauga, 1998). East Germany has been described as a society in a long lasting and complex process of transition and transgression (Kollmorgen, 2005), "without knowing the goal" (ibid.: 10). Today the identity of that goal is even more unclear than at the beginning of the process in the early 1990s. The stories about Sangerhausen seem to draw mainly on this pessimistic scenario of the future of East Germany.

However, Sangerhausen is also represented as a single, specific locale in the former GDR, a location of social downfall and decline: central to the argument about the "capital of the unemployed" is the statistical proof of 15.5 percent jobless persons (N.N. 2010). Other contributions mention 18.6 percent (N.N., 2004) or even nearly 24 percent (Gorris, 2004) unemployment in Sangerhausen. In 1992 "the real rate of unemployment lies at 50 percent of the male and 90 percent of the

female population" (N.N., 2004). By referring to this range of statistical evidence, Sangerhausen is portrayed as an extremely unattractive place for the unemployed. During a period of nearly 15 years there has been no major success in dealing with the economic decline. This makes the town of Sangerhausen, in the eyes of many journalists, an outstanding example of the failure of local policy.

The stigmatizing media coverage of Sangerhausen seems to have had a particular influence on the local authorities and elites such as people working in the town government – its offices clerks, the mayor and representatives of the local authorities. Their perceptions appear to address directly the campaigns and media reports, while their conversations are full of references to earlier articles, journalists, lost "sons of the town" (like the author Einar Schleef, the comedian Nils Heinrich[3] and the journalist Christoph Dieckmann) and their "bad" conversations about the town abroad. Arguing against the persistence of the narrative in a helpless but angry way, local elites feel themselves targeted by these stigmatizing speeches and statements. In contrast, people on the street and in other local sectors are much more sarcastic and seem to ignore the "bad press" of the last two decades. The local elites' furious response to the stigmatizing press articles is somehow contradicted if not thwarted by their mix of defiance and passivity in relation to the negative ascriptions. When asked in a focus group discussion, conducted in June 2011, about possible ways of dealing with the "capital of the unemployed" stigmatization, a local politician answered:

> "You don't need to fight against these things, you won't manage it anyway. You also don't need to try to correct anything. You just have to continue consistently moving forward along your way. Why should the gossip that was in the paper yesterday bother me, I have to see that I produce better headlines by really achieving something. Corrections, discussions with journalists on this point achieve little in my opinion. That is just the experience that I now have"[4].

In the same focus group discussion in Sangerhausen other representatives of local authorities emphasized the "resistance" that had emerged against the media reports. The actors in the city also show signs of rejecting the norm through forms of self-stigmatization. This, for instance, is expressed in the media campaign "Sangerhausen – so what?". Triggered by a local graphic designer, who took the

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3 Heinrich wrote 2006 a song "Die Provinz" (The province) about his "ageing" hometown Sangerhausen in which he complaints ironically about the loss of workplaces and the destruction of houses and that there will be soon forest in the near future. This was regarded as a severe attack on the collective identity by local politicians and the mayor. Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nre4uJ–q4aQ&feature=related [Last accessed on 20 June 2012]
4 Focus group discussion, Sangerhausen, June 2011.

initiative and produced stickers and posters, the local decline of the mining industry and the social and infrastructural peripheralization was emphasized by a bold and ironic e.g. "Miners? So what!", "Sangerhausen: At the back of beyond? So what!", "Crap roses? So what!". The mayor and his colleagues in the municipality liked the idea so much that new posters and badges were developed. A series of campaign images are now on display in the local tourist office as well as on the official website of the town. The high unemployment in Sangerhausen has not been a feature of the campaign.

4   Peripheralization as a new metaphor of post-Fordist uneven development

Sangerhausen's situation must be explained with reference to the changing and contested competitive position of German regions and towns in their relationship to the state within the wider context of the uneven capitalist "model of development" (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 148) in Western and Central Europe. With the European Union Treaty of Maastricht of 1992, the goal of creating and supporting a "Europe of the regions", new forms of regional competitiveness (Kröcher, 2007: 152ff.) became fundamental to economic and social development. This re-territorialization has been discussed as the emergence of "new state spaces" (Brenner, 2004), as a result of a kind of "new regionalism" in the late 1970s and 1980s. This has been followed by the reemergence of cities as localized actors in relationship to the state, a form of re-scaling of local governance (Brenner, 1999).

    The broader context has been characterized with reference to the rhetoric of economic globalization – the displacement of the Keynesian "welfare nation state", and its spatial form in the context of "Atlantic Fordism" (Jessop, 2002: 73ff; Brenner/Theodore, 2002: 358) and the emergence of the post-Fordist, Schumpeterian competition "workfare post-national-regime" (Jessop, 2002: 93; Varró, 2010: 19). While it is broadly assumed in and outside academia that the process of globalization is weakening the role of the nation state, critical scholars like Brenner, Jessop and others have pointed out that the role of the state has not declined, but become decentred, deregulated and re-scaled on a multiplicity of (new) local and even bodily levels. The wellbeing of every citizen is now no longer the responsibility of the state – even if this is an idealistic reflection on history – but is, instead, the responsibility of the (localized) subjects themselves. This is at the core of the neoliberal re-scaling of state-spaces, what has been called the biopolitical "Governing of the Present" (Miller/Rose, 2008).

The Fordist welfare state in Western Germany was characterized by a specific spatial arrangement of capitalist production from the 1950s onwards, one that allowed the balancing of inequality to be handled at the level of the state – by a Fordist hierarchical socio-spatial regime in the "welfare state of a mass society" (see Fehl, 1990). The relation between Fordist welfare states and the global peripheries was based on a form of post-colonial economic divide between the metropolitan "centres" of the North and the peripheries of a global South. In a nutshell, the state capitalist systems of the Soviet Bloc had an "east-Fordist" (Matthiesen, 2003: 19) spatialized social balance, similar to the Keynesian welfare state, until its collapse in the 1980s. Following the approach of "territorial planning", "urbanization of the whole society" (Waterkamp, 1983: 161) became the guiding principle. Thus the management of social inequalities became spatialized as well; i.e. in the provision of goods, technical and social infrastructures, services and employment opportunities even in geographically marginal or rural places. While the Fordist paradigm of the complete urbanization of society lured with the promise of a "centralization of everything for everybody", the topoi of marginality has entered the discourse of post-Fordism. After the inclusive "welfare state" the society of exclusion entered the real world with new – as well as spatialized – social forms of marginality (Wacquant, 2007).

The post-Fordist regime of deregulation and privatization from the 1980s onwards changed the pattern of capitalist production of space fundamentally and at every spatial scale. The shifting "globalized" perspectives on new, formerly peripheral regions (with their cheap and mobilized labour forces, low ecological standards and oppression of trade unions), fueled by cheap fossil fuel transportation costs, triggered a new spatial configuration of mobilized and industrialized labour force, its manufacturers and its industries. After 1990 most parts of the post-Soviet countries became peripheralized in one huge, radical market shock-therapy (Klein, 2007). Likewise Central and Eastern European Countries (CEE) like Romania, Bulgaria, the Ukraine, the Baltic States, Hungary, Poland, and the former GDR were fragmented into regions, cities and towns. Their main disadvantage was to be labeled as a new global periphery and endure new regional inequalities (Light/Phinnemore, 2001: 293; Varró, 2010: 119ff.).

Reconfiguring "new state spaces" in the allocation and assignation of responsibility into forms of local governance is part and parcel of a structural change in the hegemonic thinking about the nation-state and the attitudes of its inhabitants towards the state and themselves. The invocation of an "entrepreneurial self" (Rose, 1992; Bröckling, 2007) is echoed by a larger discourse on the self-regulating "guiding hand" and "autopoetic" competitive forces of the market. The "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski/Chiapello, 2006) – not merely its "new

face" (Hirsch/Roth, 1986) – was rooted in these changes to the post-Fordist, post-industrialist productivity of the Western societies in the North. It was accompanied by local movements and social struggles for social justice, the right to be an autonomous individual and local identity politics.

The shift in hegemonic discourses about the responsibility of the state towards its inhabitants and their right to an existence within its territoriality has been accompanied by changing demands on the subject of productivity, the human body as a source of labour. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has spoken of the transformation of economic "human capital" in late capitalism: into the social and cultural capital of a single subject on the labour market trying to ensure a decent social existence. Permanent competitiveness and "life-long learning", the improvement of one's skills of self-management and self-discipline has its echoes in the arrangements of the socio-spatial. Places and locales also became subjectified (and even subjectivities if one regards the discussion on the intrinsic logic of cities) in itself. Socio-economic and cultural dimensions underline this kind of localized spatial turn. All of them refer to the potentials of an objectified collective self, based on a local identity of "the region" or "the city" or whatever. However, the processes and subjects, their interests and social backgrounds are never mentioned when these identities are discursively constructed.

Regional planning bodies, local, regional and state authorities – as well as political bureaucracies – have all been active in forming this "entrepreneurial self" with reference to "the city" and "the region" within the paradigm of a "new regionalism" (see Kröcher, 2007: 57ff.). Alongside talk about the entrepreneurial city the "hard" structural exogenous support for peripheralized regions from the state was increasingly accompanied by the discourse on the "weak, endogenous potentials" of a region, city or town. These "weak endogenous potentials" have been seen as an important focus of development. By creating attractive locations for economic activities but without specifying which kind of development by which kind of entrepreneurial initiatives and economic practices, responsibility for supra-local causes has been transferred to the local level. Hence, the former "margins of society" have changed metaphorically into the language games of peripheries and its polylocal new state spaces. The periphery and its inhabitants have become naturalized results of competitive conditions, forced to cope with the seemingly self-inflicted weakness and lack of effort to improve their own situations.

5   Blaming the victim? Functions of stigmatization

The socio-spatial production of peripheries follows patterns of multi-scalar trans-formations of the nation state in its relation to the global economy. The framework with which these processes of spatial re-configuration should be analyzed is the changing relations between so-called "centres" and "peripheries" in uneven capi-talist development. In this context, stigmatizing single towns and regions is about "blaming the victim" of new state-spaces. Although not intended as a conspira-cy, the nevertheless politically motivated dissemination of negative narratives about a place is in line with the struggles over the hegemonic discourses on urban growth and development as well as the debates on social justice in (even small) cities. Journalists, local elites and stakeholders make strategic use of (negative) labeling and narratives, following ideologically informed imaginations about the future. They can be seen – even in a small town – as a multi-scale "growth coali-tion": with their government units, publicly paid staff, consultants and "powers of home rule" (Logan/Molotch, 1987: 36), their discursive strategy aims to gain control over the definition of progress.

        In Sangerhausen the post-1989 structural break of deindustrialization seems to require a radical "new invention" of collective identity. However, even after two decades of post-socialist transformation the new forms of local collective identity are unclear, partly because the economic and social structures of the city are still weak. Today, the city administration publically describes and advertises the city as the "mining and roses city". This slogan represents a compromise be-tween the old working class position and the new invented identities, e.g. derived from tourist attractions as locations of new service industries. Or, as the former mayor of Sangerhausen comments:

> "At the moment you still certainly have to say that we're also a mining city. I say it
> just like that with a small smile. We use that too, although the tourism researchers
> say that it's rubbish to bring in two such value concepts: mining city, roses city.
> With the mining city we can work historically or with the monument that we have.
> But actually the mining itself is done with. But of course there are a large number
> of miners, whether they are retired or working in other professions, who still feel
> themselves to be miners. And that means then, there is an emotional connection to
> mining that exists here, exists in the families. And so the history, I say it deliberately
> again, of over 800 years of mining here in the Mansfeld coal field can't be ignored."[5]

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5   Interview SH 02, Sangerhausen, June 2011.

Today the only evidence of the "mining town" of the past is provided by a museum of mining history and the large mining dump on the edge of the town. The "roses city" refers to the "Rosarium" that in recent decades has been extended to house the largest collection of roses in the world. These days many rose lovers come to Sangerhausen, an emerging tourism. This provides urban policy with an important anchor for identification:

> "It is the most important Rosarium in the world, if you want to look at it that way. That's not just talk. We are the rose gene bank for the Federal Republic. That was officially recognized just last year."[6]

However, the "roses city" only appeals to a mostly older target group of rose lovers and has virtually no resonance for younger people. When asked about the development of a new collective identity in Sangerhausen in a group discussion, a local politician said: "The rose isn't it, the mine isn't it either."[7] This shows that neither old nor new interpretations are potent enough to overcome the local identity crisis.

In the bigger picture this identity crisis reveals the still dominant discursive formations, about urban development, for instance. It includes "stigmatizers" and the "stigmatized" in the same language game and spatial imagination. Both are locked into the same normative conception of development and (positive) urban futures (e.g. quantitative growth, urban competition, entrepreneurial towns attracting tourists and investment), whereby the expected response to negative branding is an invocation of local identity. This is clearly only possible as a communicative act if the stigmatized feel targeted, that their pride has been affronted.

The re-scaling of responsibility for social problems (unemployment, discrimination against migrants and other questions of spatial social justice) to the urban and local level makes urban residents accountable for localized problems. This approach is not only embedded in an emancipatory debate about "activating" communities and the empowerment of actors. It also has to be seen as a discursive construct to mobilize underpaid or even unpaid employment and engagement in the local community.

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6   Interview SH 03, Sangerhausen, June 2011
7   Interview SH 03, Sangerhausen, June 2011.

6   Conclusion

In Sangerhausen deindustrialization led to the sudden social decline of the mining working class, who had previously enjoyed an esteemed status. The closure of the mine meant that many of those who had been seen as privileged became unemployed and had to retrain or move away. The media seized upon the devaluation of the old identity, choosing to present the figure of the unemployed drunk at a kiosk as a typical case. This figure symbolized not only the lost pride and lowered self-confidence of those affected, but also their diminished ability to act. When seen from the perspective of today, the miners can actually be viewed as being amongst those that were better off in the years after the pit closure because at least they had a pension. Nonetheless, the image of the unemployed miner was seized upon and became a central icon in the stigmatization discourse. The "capital of the unemployed" stigma thus strengthened the already existing identity crisis caused by this massive structural change.

Discourses about the future of peripheralized towns and cities need to be re-politicized. They have to accept the conflict inherent to "development", leave the localist "we" and "them" positions behind and recognize that conflict can be productive and is not something that has to be denied. This might only be possible if counter-hegemonic discourses on urban development and its interests are fundamentally questioned. Examples of such counter discourses include: the rejection of local responsibilities for structural problems; the strengthening of city coalitions against the notion of the competitive market as the only form of urban development; the promotion of sustainable ideas on development and different ways of defining progress (e.g. quantitative vs. qualitative growth).

Overall, four elements are central to a re-politicization of peripheries and peripheralization:

a)   A re-politicization of the discourse on centres and peripheries to avoid shortcomings on the phenomenological level. A simple description of the effects of uneven capitalist development such as out-migration, infrastructural disconnections, growing dependence and stigmatized local identities leads to a misunderstanding of the sources of and remedies to uneven development.

b)   Capitalist accumulation is based on the dynamic growth and decline of towns, cities and regions. Local competitiveness, promoted as a natural response to this, only ever has a few winners, but always a lot of losers. Cooperative structures, the building of networks and solidarity structures are alternative means of dealing with this pressure for local competition. The challenge is to develop alternative utopian concepts for post-capitalist social justice and spatially even development on the global scale.

c)   The "we" and "them" position could be a strong element in the formation of strategic essentialist notion of class, gender and other interests. Collective identities are very often used as a reinforcement strategy by different national and local elites, to reformulate their authentic right to govern. However, the "power geometries" (Massey, 1984) of identities have to be reformulated along emancipatory and egalitarian lines, and more cooperative approaches promoted – in order to contest the cultural hegemony and identity politics of ruling (inter)national elites and local discourses.

d)   The struggle for cultural hegemony in discourses on development, urban futures and spatial social justice is a conflictual one and will not be won simply by writing academic papers. One step is to get involved in local struggles for social justice. Taking a position is a way of applying "standpoint epistemologies", which can especially useful to academics trying to unearth the ideological roots of, for example, urban development studies. Critical urban theory has to be active in seeking conflict with the hidden normativity of the debates on "peripheralization".

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