Chapter 3
The Identity of the City

Ali Madanipour

Abstract In the age of globalisation, urban populations have been concerned by the intensification of urban change, being overwhelmed by the pace and scale of change imposed on localities from the outside, eroding local identities at the expense of alien ideas and forces. The sense of identity across time and space is a social process drawing on the relations of similarity and difference, developed as narratives told from a perspective. Identity processes pose particular anxieties and challenges: whether and how a place can remain the same through time while going through necessary change; how a place can remain unique while also belonging to a group of similar places under the pressure for homogenisation. The way to manage these pressures and develop a secure sense of identity, the chapter argues, is through democratic management of change, which should facilitate democratic control over the substance, pace and representations of change, made possible through 'dynamic multiplicity', which is purposeful involvement of many voices over time.

Keywords Urban identity • Personal identity • Globalisation • Homogenisation • Dynamic multiplicity • Democracy • Cartesian dualism • Narrative • Similarity • Difference • Urban transformation

Much has been said about the loss of identity in the age of globalisation, whereby cities and localities are increasingly looking alike across the world, where people apparently behave in the same way and consume the same goods and services. This has caused much anxiety about the emergence of 'clone cities' and has given rise to the idea of asserting local identity as a form of resistance to global pressures. Identity,

A. Madanipour (✉)
School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, UK
e-mail: ali.madani@ncl.ac.uk

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therefore, finds a crucial role in the cultural and political life of a place. However, cities are historical collections of objects and people, material and social facts and institutions and memories, whose identities across time and space are always multiple and contested by the process of change and representations of change. Identity cannot be easily pinned down or be reduced to its visual qualities. Is loss of identity only to be equated with loss of distinctiveness and visual diversity, or is there more to the notion of place identity? How do we make sense of the notion of city identity? This chapter is an attempt to find an answer, aiming to work out a theoretical framework with which to think about identity, in particular about the identity of cities.

The main argument of the chapter is that a city's identity lies in its relations of similarity and difference with other places and times, that is, how it resembles other places as well as its unique and continuous features that could give it a relatively stable sense of itself and how, and by whom, this sense is narrated and change is managed. Identity is a narrative told from one perspective, and therefore, to understand this narrative, we need to understand the nature, dimensions and representations of change. Anxiety about identity rises when the pace and size of change seem to be beyond control. As evident from the fast-growing urban areas around the world, now or in the past, in the developed and developing worlds, we see signs of concern about social stability and environmental quality. The chapter argues that the ability to have some control over the substance, pace and representations of change is essential for a city's inhabitants to have some sense of security in their identity. This would show the significance of a democratic process for managing this change.

3.1 Cities Through Ages

Many cities are a testimony to a long history. If we stand on the riverside in Newcastle upon Tyne, for example, we can look around and see the remnants of 2,000 years of history. What is now called Swing Bridge has replaced a Roman bridge over the river Tyne, a node on the wall that the emperor Hadrian built to protect his northernmost territories from the ancestors of the Scots. The straight and long streets such as Westgate Road are built along the wall, which ended in Wallsend further east. From this vantage point, we can see the Castle Keep, which was built a millennium ago after William conquered Britain and built many castles to dominate the country. We can see the remains of the medieval walls and streets of the city and buildings from medieval, Georgian and Victorian periods, as well as twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

What we grasp in a 360° panorama has been in the making for two millennia. Each building, bridge and road has had an impact on the city, introducing a new element into an existing context. Two particular tensions can be easily visible on Newcastle quayside. One is the dramatic range of bridges that cross the river. They show how through the changing technologies of transport from the nineteenth century onwards, the ancient low-level crossing lost its role to the high-level railways, motor cars and metro. This change took over the medieval city, turning the riverside into a place of industry, a backyard to the city that was growing uphill. A new pedestrian bridge, however, shows a new life for the riverside. With the

decline of the industries, factories were abandoned and the quayside was turned into a rusty no-go area. As regeneration activities in the last 20 years have brought these areas back to life, people have moved back to the river for work or leisure. Some industrial buildings have remained, and some have been converted to new uses. But most have been erased, to make way for the new entertainment and work places that have changed the character of the riverside. The city once moved away from the river and has now partially returned there. In the process, many tensions have arisen and many lives flourishing or wasting. A combination of economic and technological change transformed the city that had grown before at the meeting point of a hill and a river, resulting in a city that bears features of all of its historic periods to varying degrees.

Like all long-established cities, Newcastle is formed of a multiplicity of temporal layers; each layer consists of a large number of objects and institutions developed during a different historical period. As new generations emerge, and the city goes through cycles of growth and decline, only some elements are left from each period, by chance or by design. As its layers have multiplied, the city today is more complex than ever before. Like all other complex phenomena, the difficulty is how to represent the city. On the one hand, this is a city that has survived the test of time, has continued to be a major city for a long period of time and at least for the past 1,000 years has had a continuity of name and identity. On the other hand, this is a city that has changed beyond recognition, and apart from a few elements, there is not much that can compare this city to its previous periods.

When confronted by this multiplicity and complexity, the question is how do we analyse the city and represent it? How do we account for a complex historical phenomenon that has gone through so many changes?

A traditional way of analysing the complexity of urban form has been urban morphology, which draws on historical geography (Whitehand 1987; Conzen 1960). The urban form is divided into three elements of street pattern, building form and land use. Each element is changing according to a different logic. So the land use may change from 1 day to the next, depending on how people decide to use a particular place. Building form is more resilient to change, as buildings have a longer life, which may last for generations and even centuries. Once built, a particular building form is likely to remain more or less the same for a longer period of time, while the use of that building may change several times. The third element, the street pattern, is the most resilient, as it can remain unchanged for centuries. In many European city centres, medieval street layouts can be identified. In some cities, the Roman street patterns have persisted. In this way, the many layers of the city can be analysed into functions and types, to see how the city is a tapestry of physical elements from different ages, woven together through the overlapping of different textures and threads. As urban morphologists have shown, it is then possible to identify character areas in the city, where the streets and buildings may be traced back to a particular historic period.

This is a descriptive analysis of the physical environment, to link its complexity to different historic periods. But when it comes to the modern day, we need more

complicated tools that can explain the current dimensions of change. We also need a tool that would enable us to connect the physical and social environment of the city. The city's social environment is also formed of many layers, embedded in its particular norms and habits, its local use of language, its own history of people and events, its institutions and its memories.

3.2 Identity Across Space

We often hear complaints about the loss of identity in a place, where rapid development and lack of attention to the quality of development have produced a bland environment. Modernist redevelopments of historic cities are thought to deprive them of their character, while many new parts of cities are criticised for their inability to claim any sense of identity. Globalisation is thought to be creating pressures for homogeneity and loss of local character and identity. From these accounts, it would appear that the loss of identity is equated with reduction in difference. The question then becomes about the distinctive features of a city, asking what distinguishes one city from another; what is unique about it? Increasingly, the response has been the establishment of iconic features and complicated marketing strategies to discover, or invent, new markers. Cities are treated as goods on the shelves of supermarkets, hence the significance of product differentiation and the need for standing out in a crowded marketplace.

Identity, however, is not only about distinction. It also deals with features that are similar to others. Here we can draw on social philosophy's definition of identity, which sees social identity as the result of the relations of similarity and difference (Jenkins 1996). Individuals define their identity by defining who they are similar to and who they are different from. The same can be seen in cities and their parts. How can a city be similar to and different from other cities?

Relations of similarity often take place within similar cultural and historical contexts. We can talk about medieval European cities or medieval Middle Eastern cities, where the internal interactions of a civilisation would lead to similarities among its cities. We can, therefore, identify a city as belonging to a group of cities with similar features. The identity of the city, therefore, is partly based on its similarities. But even within a relatively homogeneous context such as the medieval cities, we will see unique features. The best examples are Gothic churches: whereas they all belong to the same European cultural, geographical and historical context, they are all different. Each city has applied the same set of ideas in a different context, with different combinations of architectural elements; the result is diversity as well as unity. Each city has tried to stand out by virtue of its greatest artefact while using the same alphabet to stress its similarities with others like it.

In the modern period, this question is often raised in reaction to worldwide styles such as modernism, which seemed to promote a universal pattern across the world, which was turning cities to be similar everywhere, eroding local and regional distinctions. With globalisation, this concern has intensified. What is a locality's

identity in the face of homogenising forces of globalisation? Large companies that work across national boundaries, global networks of information and communication, and intensified movement of goods, services and ideas have contributed to the emergence of global patterns of similarity.

The way the constituent parts of a city are shaped and related to one another creates a unique identity for that city, which makes it identifiable from other cities. By the emergence of global brands, retail chains, multinational corporations and international styles of architecture and urban design, many of the distinctions of cities are being eroded. However, psychological wellbeing of people in localities seems to require the establishment of some distinctive character. This is why a heightened attention to memorable objects, institutions and events has emerged. In the past, public buildings such as museums and libraries, or private ones such as skyscrapers, were erected as monuments by cities which had the necessary wealth and ambition. Now, flagship projects, football clubs and festivals are some of the devices that help establish a relationship of similarity and difference with other cities. The current competition for building the tallest building in the world, in cities such as Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, Dubai, London and New York, shows that the concern for status has been intensified. Status secures not only a cultural sense of uniqueness; it also fuels a sense of economic competitiveness in a global economy that has become increasingly interconnected.

The sense of uniqueness and status has a clear economic logic: claiming to belong to an elite set of cities which can hope to play the part of a node in the global economy. Iconic architecture is not merely a sign of cultural and social distinctions but also a sign of economic similarity, bidding for the membership of an elite club. Even when cities bid for distinction, therefore, they are asserting a relation of similarity at the same time. Local authorities decide who they wish to compete with, set them as benchmarks and try to find out what they have done to succeed. If they had a Norman Foster or Frank Gehry building, so should we. This is a process in which differentiation is desired, but assimilation may be the outcome. A sense of identity is established through the relations of similarity and difference. These relations, however, are not only across space but also over time.

3.3 Identity over Time

The problem of a city's identity has some similarity to the classical philosophical problem of personal identity over time. How is it possible that, over a period of time, a person remains the same? Is it through physical continuity or psychological persistence, or both, that a person's identity over time is established? (Olson 2003) The same questions can be posed about cities. How do we say that a city is the same as it was a century ago? Is it through the persistence of its physical elements? Or is it through the memories and feelings of its inhabitants that the city keeps its identity? Or is it a combination of both? But there is no single account for these interpretations, and so the questions become: What are the accounts of the physical and social-psychological continuities, and whose account can we accept?

There are, however, some important differences between the notion of personal identity and the collective identity of a city. In the case of individuals, the physical body may change over time, but it remains a single unit which ages and transforms. The city, however, is formed of many units, which change according to different patterns and paths and are interpreted by different people and at different times. While some grow old, others are renovated. The result is a complex set of objects and relationships that are constantly evolving, with many possible and competing identities, as seen from different perspectives.

One of the problems of identity over time is the distinction between body and mind: Is it the body's persistence over time that constitutes identity, or is it the psychological continuity that is the ground for identity? The general attitude seems to prefer psychological continuity as the basis of identity. However, in cities, this will be more complicated than in personal identity. If we take the psychological approach, we soon realise that memories are about people as well as about places. The mental states that determine identity are, therefore, not self-referential, but intentional, directing towards outside events and objects.

The way personal identity is analysed appears to draw on dualism of mind and body. In the modern period, the ancient dualism between the mind and the body was reaffirmed by Descartes and hence has since been called Cartesian dualism (Cottingham 1992a). He argued that the mind (or soul) is non-physical and is distinct from the body or other material objects: '… this 'I', that is to say, the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body' (Descartes 1968, p. 54). This gave him a solid rational foundation for knowledge, which was thinking: 'I think, therefore I am' (Descartes 1968, p. 53). This separation has been challenged by later generations, to the extent that now most philosophers consider themselves anti-Cartesian in this respect, adopting a kind of materialism which integrates the mind and the body (Cottingham 1992b; Žižek 1999; Searle 1999). Psychoanalysts have argued that the body can influence the mind (Freud 1985), and neuroscientists have shown a two-way traffic between the brain and the body, and how the way people behave can change if their brains are damaged, hence challenging the divide (Greenfield 2000).

By separating the social from the physical dimensions of the city, we are in danger of applying a version of dualism to the city. By asking whether the city is what it is due to its material objects, or to the people who live there, we are using Cartesian dualism to analyse the city. Identity, therefore, is not entirely about the physical or entirely about the social continuity, but it is often a combination of the two. If we move new people to an old city, of which they know nothing, as, for example, after bloody conquests, can we talk about the continued identity of the place? On the other hand, if we move the people of a city to a new city, for example, rebuilt after a disaster or a major urban renewal scheme, can we talk about their continued identity? Are they the citizens of the same city or of a new city? In both cases, a new set of relationships will be gradually established between people and places, and a new identity for the city will emerge.

3.4 Interrupted Identities in the Age of Speed

Cities are large agglomerations of people and objects. At any moment in time, some of these constituent parts of the city are changing: babies are born, new people come to the city and new roads and buildings are built but also some people leave, old people die and aging buildings are demolished. It would be impossible to imagine a living city without these changes. In the short term, these small changes cannot have a major impact on the city as a whole; a complete change of the city does not take place. Over time, however, the accumulated effects of these changes may largely change the city. In extreme cases of change, the city, and even its memory, may be wiped out altogether.

This slow historical change seems to be expected as part of the natural cycle of human settlements. Problems emerge, however, when the pace of change is fast and its dimensions are large. Many European cities grew in the nineteenth century as a result of industrialisation. The speed of urban growth in Victorian Britain was so alarming that many of the elite were worried about the possible impact of this growth on the future of society (Briggs 1968). The anxiety and fear that accompanied the urban growth led to many efforts to instigate new forms of solidarity, whether based on religion, on tradition or on collective work. Similarly, some of the anxieties of the past 30 years can be attributed to the large-scale move out of the industrial era. Cities that were once the seat of industries started to lose their functions and rationale. The Newcastle quayside is the prime example of these changes of entry into and out of industrial period. Urban growth now accompanies anxieties for the degradation of environment and quality of living of places. In the United States, the pace of growth, particularly in fast-growing sunbelt areas such as Arizona or California, has troubled the city authorities who are interested in managing this change, but are unable to keep up with its pace.

In the developing world, urban growth is often phenomenal. The pace and dimensions of change are such that the authorities seem unable to cope with its demands. A new infrastructure of roads, schools, hospitals etc. is needed to serve the urban growth. However, the financial and institutional capacities of the local or national authorities are limited. The pace of change also worries the urban middle classes, who feel their safety and security are under threat. Gated neighbourhoods from China to South Africa to the United States are developed on the basis of an argument for safety and security.

The pace of change also threatens the sense of identity that urban societies have, especially in the age of globalisation, when the pace of change has intensified. This has been felt in western cities, where the international styles of architecture and the spread of international goods and services have produced ever more similarity than before. This has been more strongly felt in the developing world, where these international symbols have had the dual character of modernity and loss of identity and control.

Powerful players are able, with the help of new technologies, to move ideas, resources, goods and services around the world at ever faster speeds. This has speeded up social processes and routines. Technological change has transformed social behaviour, creating a fast pace of life, faster than ever before. However, there are objects around us that constantly remind us of the longer scales of time, a sense of continuity that defies the speed of social life. Astronomical and geological times are extremely long range, measured in millions and billions of years, even light years, which are beyond our grasp and even imagination. And yet these long spans can be observed in humble pieces of stone that we see around us. A sense of permanence can be detected in the building materials that we use to build our cities.

The artefacts that humans create bring with them a measure of permanence and durability to human life and at the same time condition human existence. '[H]uman existence' Arendt wrote, 'is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence' (Arendt 1958, p. 9). The integration of humans and things in the construction of public space endows the public realm with permanence. As Arendt (1958, p. 55) wrote,

> Only the existence of a public realm and the world's subsequent transformation into a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends primarily on permanence. If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men.

In this way, the world of artefacts not only mediates between the present members of the public, it also links them to other generations through time. This integration of people and objects in the analysis, and the appreciation of how social relations are mediated through objects, is a key point in Arendt's analysis of public space who uses this notion of the world to embed the social world in a particular context. There are others after Arendt who have attempted to integrate people and objects, although some have gone as far as giving the objects presumed power of agency (Latour 1993). The significance of objects is indeed dependent on a process of collective symbolisation, in which we allocate meaning to objects and events (Searle 1995).

The historical scale is much faster than astronomical and geological scales and yet slower than technological and social changes. Much of the city, particularly its old parts and historical monuments, remains the same even after decades of rapid change in social habits and technological innovation. We may use computers in medieval buildings, without feeling uneasy about the discrepancy. These old objects, places and buildings are signs of a relative permanence, defying the speed that dominates social life. In this capacity, they can reassure the citizens that there are some focal points that remain constant, even if everything else changes. Even at the social scale of daily life, speed is being resisted. The Slow Food movement, for example, which boasts over 80,000 members in 100 countries, came into being in 1986 with the aim of protecting 'the pleasures of the table from the homogenization of modern fast food and life' (Slow Food 2006; Knox 2005).

3.5 Identity in Society: Tensions of Representation

Identity is established through the relations of similarity and difference. But it crucially depends on the process of representation of these relations. There are many disparate elements in anyone's memory, and the way they are brought together to make sense of their experiences is through narrative. Personal identity, therefore, is a narrative identity (Ricoeur 1995). The way I establish the relations of similarity and difference to my own past and to others is through telling stories and describing the elements of continuity and disruption, my similarities with and differences from others. But a human being has a complex memory and a large mental capacity. Which features of my past should I choose to compare to my present? Which features of my mental and physical makeup should I choose to compare to others? These elements all go through a process of selection, consciously and unconsciously, resulting in a narrative that is at best selective and partial and subject to change from time to time. A similar process can be applied to the representation of cities and societies.

A city is a complex and multilayered spatial-temporal phenomenon. Which features are adopted as symbols with which to specify and describe a place? This is closely related to who is the agent in charge of this selection and description and the methods of narration and representation. Through different representations, we may hear completely different stories about a place.

The process of representation is thwarted by a multitude of problems and contestations. One problem is the selection of symbols with which to identify a place. Here the problem of stereotyping looms large. How do we describe a people? This often takes place through ineffective and prejudiced symbolisation, as famously exemplified in national and regional stereotypes. But if we look from within these communities, we may not recognise the stereotype at all. The other problem is a political one: Who tells the story and to what end?

In both cases, identity across time and space, the question remains as to which elements of the city we choose to represent as its distinctive features. In the case of individuals, deciding who we are similar to and different from is a process that mixes real and imaginary features, creating a social construct that is often contested but also necessary for the psychological wellbeing of individuals. As individuals are pulled apart by biological impulses and social pressures for conformity, they develop a mask, a stable appearance that they use in social encounters (Goffman 1969). Even though these pressures may be inscribed on their body as their character and so difficult to change (Bourdieu 2000), they try to wear a mask that would hide what they consider as weak, choosing the best appearance that they wish to show to others (Madanipour 2003).

As the city is a place of diverse people and physical spaces, the choice of what to represent is fairly open. To avoid essentialism, we cannot rely on a single narrative and a rigid identity to describe all these differences. The result would inevitably be multiple and dynamic identities, changing over time and across space, not only in relation to other places and periods but also to the city's present time and space.

Even here and now, we can find these differences that need to be included in our accounts of the city. The reality of the city, therefore, is always multiple, and depending on the narrator, we can hear different stories about its identity.

Nevertheless, we come across representations of the city all the time. Some of these are targeting particular audiences. For example, city marketing, which has become one of the main forms of competition in the global economy, puts forward a promotional profile for a city or a region, with the aim of attracting investors and visitors. Some fiction writers have presented cities in a specific light, so that there are themed visitors who search for the places mentioned in their novels, as, for example, tourists searching for the Da Vinci Code in Paris or Inspector Rebus in Edinburgh. Heritage trails go through cities in a particular order, to tell a historical story or to take visitors through the main tourist attractions, as exemplified in Boston. City maps show places that are likely to be interesting for visitors and edit other places out. Depending on who has provided the map, the locations will be shown with different emphases, as, for example, the map of Paris by Printemps department stores. Histories of cities are similarly coloured by the choices that the historian makes: what stories need to be told and for whom, which periods are more important and which characters need to be introduced. What are thought to be the causal relations determine the instrumental uses of representation.

From a mass of information, there is always a careful selection of stories and symbols to tell a particular story about a city's past or present. These would amount to a wealth of material and a richer profile for a city. But tensions may arise if people disagree on a profile. What city marketing material presents may be at odds with the realities, as well as hopes and desires, of local communities. The act of representation, however, gives the provider a degree of power, to tell the story in the way that may serve their aims, which may be exclusionary towards others.

These are relatively softer forms of representation. When they are turned into buildings and streets, they become strongly embedded in a place, and any change may become difficult. Over centuries, city centres have become the place in which powerful people and institutions have struggled to control and shape. By placing a church at the centre of the medieval European city, the control of the city's representation has been clearly given to an institution. By building high-rise towers at the heart of the American city, representation has been secured for the business elite. Accumulation of these controls has created an urban landscape, especially at the centre of cities, which is a map of power, and how the powerful have stamped their mark on the city, ensuring that its representation bears their presence.

3.6 Dynamic Multiplicity: Many Voices, over Time

Many critics of globalisation, or of the fast pace of urban change, talk about identity. For them, cultural identity appears to be a form of resistance to the fast movement that is transforming their familiar landscapes and norms. Cultural

identity becomes an instrument of injecting a degree of fixity into what appears to be fluid and ever changing, and doing so beyond our control (e.g. Castells 1996). And yet we know that this fixity is in danger of becoming too rigid, rejecting the possibility of change that is needed for social vitality and the possibility of change through dialogue with others. These rigid interpretations of cultural identity, as something essentially the same and unchanging, however, can lead to forms of intolerant tribalism. Some have celebrated this tribalism as a route to social renewal (Maffesoli 1996), but the consequences of heightened tribalism are now increasingly apparent in multicultural societies. After all, social identity is a process, which systematically establishes and signifies the relationship of similarity and difference between individuals, between collectivities and between individuals and collectivities (Jenkins 1996). Therefore, it is both through similarity and difference, and allowing for the possibility of change, that identity can be interpreted and understood.

Rather than a static understanding of space from a single perspective or a disembodied understanding of time, we need to be able to draw on different perspectives and combine an understanding of time and space together (Lefebvre 1991). Dynamic multiplicity, therefore, is an investigation of the city through time and through the different perspectives of embedded and embodied agents interacting with each other and with their physical environment (Madanipour 2007). It is crucial that the process of giving an account and accepting one as reasonable is not one simple exchange but an ongoing conversation, which can only be successful if a critical question and answer conversation is possible. As J. S. Mill insisted, human wisdom could only result from the 'steady habit of correcting and completing his own opinion by collating it with those of others' (Mill 1974, p. 80). This required an environment in which freedom of expression was guaranteed, as well as appreciating that the truth may have many sides: 'the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind' (ibid.). Nietzsche says almost the same, but in his own words. He warns us that any rational analysis is an interpretation from a viewpoint, but to counter the effects of entrapment in a single perspective, Nietzsche suggests we 'employ a *variety* of perspectives and effective interpretations in the service of knowledge' (quoted in Schacht 1996, p. 159). As he puts it, 'the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity", be' (ibid.). Therefore, a multidimensional viewpoint is required, which draws on different perspectives, integrating political, economic and cultural aspects of urban transformation. This viewpoint needs to be dynamic, so that it can address the process of urban change: incorporating a time dimension into the process of spatial change, rather than only focusing on a particular place or a single moment in this process. Ultimately, however, its role is not just mapping the diversity of views but also showing what may be missing and what has remained unsaid, making visible what often remains invisible.

3.7 Control over Change: From Stories to Practices

Any situation in a city is a display of a set of relationships and power hierarchies. Any change is a challenge to these relationships, undermining some and privileging others. The key questions, therefore, will be who initiates the change, who is affected by it, who benefits and who loses out? In other words, the main problem is the problem of control over change. Control over change includes treating the palimpsest, deciding on what to keep and what to dispose of, which is always a contested process reflecting political and cultural power of different social groups. This would include control over change as well as control over representations of change. In other words, it is control over both substantive and symbolic change that is at stake.

When the pace and extent of change is considerable, it seems that no-one is in control, which worries almost all stakeholders. What would be the outcome of such a forceful but uncontrolled process? But even within such strong currents, some are better placed to steer the process, or to benefit from it, than others. Those who feel they can manage the process are empowered to influence it further. If the process is democratically open to influence by the citizens, then the control of the process can be negotiated upon. If the process, however, is closed, it is likely to generate a sense of alienation in some, a sense of hopelessness.

Influencing the conditions in which we live and work is essential for the social and psychological wellbeing of individuals. Without the power to make at least some decisions, we will feel socially excluded, without a stake in our cities, and not wishing to invest in it with our energies and emotions (Madanipour et al. 2003). However, when change is imposed from outside, against our express wishes, the sense of powerlessness sets in.

The problem of managing change has challenged both developed and developing countries, wherever cities have grown fast. The difference is often in the presence or absence of the institutions that can manage this change effectively and in the responsiveness of these institutions to the public. In developing countries, the problem of managing growth has been a major challenge for the urban and national administrations. The necessary resources and institutions for collection of information, planning for change and implementation of plans have often been weak. The result has been a shared sense of being overwhelmed by change, both for the authorities and citizens. Furthermore, the degree of democratic responsiveness to the needs and desires of citizens has also been weak. So whenever change is managed, it may not be in the directions that the population can know about or approve of. Rather than being able to work with change, and channel it as much as possible in the desired directions, change itself becomes the enemy for some, who wish to revert to a golden age when change was slow or non-existent. Especially if these changes are associated with agencies from other countries, which are typically western, then a resistance to change agents and their cultures borders on resistance to all necessary change.

In the developed countries, the possibility of blaming another country is less possible. Agents of modernisation are all local as well as international. Resistance to change becomes associated with class and wealth, so that some see imposed change

as benefiting the elite at the expense of the poor. Others blame the mindset of science and technology for this change. Neighbourhoods are redeveloped, roads constructed and schemes implemented that radically transform cities. These schemes, however, often avoid demolishing better-off areas and seem to concentrate on the poorer neighbourhoods. In these places, the sense of helplessness prevails, as change is imposed from outside, without their participation.

Part of the problem of control is how it is represented. Whoever is in charge of representing change would do so in a particular fashion, which may undermine others. What one group presents as success is regarded by others as failure. What one group sees as modernisation of the housing stock, the others see as losing their homes to an abstract idea. The most important element in dealing with change, therefore, is to be able to feel in control, even if to a very limited extent.

Control over change includes deciding on what to keep and what to dispose of. In part these decisions are based on social, economic and political considerations. In part, they are also decided upon aesthetic considerations, which are rooted in social conventions and paradigms (Madanipour 1996). Depending on the paradigms of the time, one place may be judged to have historic and cultural significance, while others may be demolished as worthless. Who makes these decisions and on what basis is a key tension in change. This reflects the relations of power of individuals and institutions but also the power of ideas and conventions.

During the early modernist period, Victorian buildings were mostly considered as worthless, eclectic and built in poor taste. Many were pulled down to make way for new additions to the city. However, as modernism came under attack, interest in Victorian styles grew, which were now seen as colourful and with character. A new wave of modernism is turning the page again and new attitudes have emerged. The idea of harmony or contrast, which distinguished modernists from others, was a contested notion at the heart of many decisions about urban change.

If approaching the context is based on individual cases, we may see the city changing on a case-by-case basis. Each new addition may have its own logic, which may add to the aesthetic richness of the city, but it may also increase its sense of disorder. When the approach to new developments follows a particular style, however, the sense of harmony among the new additions may increase, but the contrast with the context may intensify. The nature of the process and the quality of the results will be different if new additions are based on a conceptual scheme, on an ideological basis or on a democratic process of decision making. It will also be different if change is introduced with the participation of people and stakeholders or through the imposition of some ideas by the elite on others.

3.8 Conclusion

The identity of cities can be studied at the interface of the relations of similarity and difference: how a place is similar to, and different from, others. These relations are articulated through narratives which connect disparate pieces and integrate them

into a unified and apparently coherent whole. Narratives, however, are themselves diverse, told by different people, situated in different parts of the society and towards different ends. The process through which a narrative emerges, through which the identity of place is articulated, is subject to tensions and power struggles, resulting in a diversity of trajectories for the future of a place. These narratives of identity both reflect the political structures and cultural preferences of a society, as well as the efforts of individuals and groups to introduce new stories and more complex identities. The only way a multifaceted story can be heard is through dynamic multiplicity: listening to many voices over time, but always with an eye for fairness.

As the speed of global change has intensified, a major problem is a concern for a degree of continuity. By tracing the processes of similarity and difference, with an analysis of identity over time and across space, we can identify how cities are similar to, and different from, one another and their own past. A combination of social and physical environments seems to enable city dwellers to keep a line of communication with the past. But when the speed of change is beyond control, which is often accompanied by a sense of powerlessness and alienation, the result of change can be resisted by people. Through ensuring democratic involvement in change, however, this can be partly addressed. A sense of continuity is more likely to occur if change is responsive to people, rather than imposed on them.

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