

Urban identity making in Germany: the case of Bamberg

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Urban identity is one of the most important characteristics of the urban community and an understanding of the characteristics of its formation is necessary to determine urban development strategies. This paper seeks to examine the current situation concerning urban identity in Germany, a late capitalist society: has urban identity weaken or has it remained significant for people and can it even be used as a resource for new solidarities and intercultural dialogue? Within the framework of this article, the author identifies the main actors forming the urban identity in Bamberg and the factors that have had a major influence on this identity. Empirically, the study is based on a series of semi-structured interviews with experts in urban history, city development and placemaking from Bamberg: school teachers and supervisors involved in the adjustment of students, representatives of city administration, urban activists, and coordinators of UNESCO projects. The results of this work will help to contribute to the research field about the phenomenon of preserving local identity in small cities. Thus, the scientific relevance of this study is that the identified factors can be further generalized onto other cases.

Keywords: territorial identity, urban identity, local communities, UNESCO, case study

It is often argued that under the pressures of globalization territorial identities weaken, as individuals grow increasingly mobile and cosmopolitan. Many of the financial, economic, and humanitarian functions of some states were delegated to intergovernmental alliances and international institutions. This significantly reduced government barriers and facilitated the development of direct interactions between cities. The relevance of the chosen topic is based on the following. First, contrary to the logic of globalization, local, regional and national identities still exist, influencing the development of both the domestic and foreign policies of modern states (see, for example, Batterton, Sherri, 2016; Phinney, Ong, 2007). Secondly, Germany is now experiencing the aggravation of adaptation problems and is thus

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searching for valuable forms of human coexistence in a socio-cultural space in the modern changing world and trying to develop new patterns and ways of life instead of the old ones, urban identity being one of the instruments in this process. Bamberg was chosen as a case for the study due to the fact that, despite being located near larger cities, it was able to retain its particular urban identity. Furthermore, over the past 20 years, there have been no large changes in the population in this city and neither has Bamberg become the economic center of the region.

The research is based on the understanding of identity as a complex phenomenon with multiple elements and layered structure (see, for example, Agier, 2001; Goffman, 1959). From this, collective identities (local, regional, national, European and others) existing within German society are seen not as alternative to each other but rather as complementary and sometimes even competing (see, for example, Astafiev, Semenenko, 2013; Preser, 2017). This paper considers urban identity as a territory-based component of individual and collective identity that embraces both the feeling of belonging to a place and attachment to a place. Identity production could be at the level of neighborhoods, districts, or whole towns, and sometimes overlaps with the existing territorial divisions. Importantly, in this analysis, a distinction is made between regional and urban identities, as the area of a region (land) in Germany is much larger than the local residential area which is the focus of this inquiry.

This study adheres to the constructivist approach to identity, in which identity is considered not as a “natural” sense of belonging determined by a set of primordial attributes but rather as an outcome of how people and groups (re)interpret the boundaries between themselves and others. This approach shows that urban identity might be a product of strategic efforts taken by various actors in the drive for certain economic or political resources.

Identity is the product of not only personal but also collective experience, consensus reached in assessing past and present events, the proximity of the views and perceptions of many people. Although this work focuses on urban identity, the traditions of research on national and ethnic identity have influenced the methods of exploring urban identity (see, for example, Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 1964; Gellner, 1983). The field of urban identity is studied through various research directions (memory studies, environmental psychology, media studies, STS, etc.), which share the same background and methodological approaches but still lack a substantial framework and common analytical vocabulary. P. Bourdieu’s concept of social habitus and social space (Bourdieu, 1989, 1992) allows us to treat identity as an individual defining the coordinates of his or her own world changing in the process of social interactions. Urban identity can be interpreted as the internal binding of a person to the place of his or her life, as an emotional and at the same time social connection which is formed as a result of multiple interactions both with the urban environment and with society.

According to John C. Turner and Penelope J. Oakers, the authors of the work «Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory», identity forms the cognitive basis of group behavior (Turner et al, 1987). The process of categorization accentuates both perceived similarities between stimuli (physical objects

or people, including oneself) belonging to the same category, and perceived differences between stimuli belonging to different categories (Oakes, Haslam, Turner, 1994). For example, when locals who believe that the residents of the neighboring cities are more aggressive than the people from their city categorize themselves as nonaggressive locals, they tend to exaggerate their neighbors' bellicosity and extrapolate this evaluation to all outsiders, tending to underestimate the differentiation within their own group and the category of outsiders, and to overestimate differentiation across groups.

Cognitivists have recently focused much on the impact of the ethnic factor in collective identification and appealed to national consciousness as a subjective form of ethno-social manifestations. For example, it is argued that individuals are aware of their ethnic origins (originally tribal and clan affiliation), identify themselves with their group, sharing its values, and thus also identifying themselves with positive attributes ascribed to this group. This positive identification is only possible through the juxtaposition of the in-group with some out-groups which contributes to the realization and symbolic reproduction of ethnic differences. The cognitive mapping of boundaries between «us» and «them» where the former necessarily gains better evaluation in terms of economic development, cultural norms and values, political structure and ideology makes a tool for strengthening the in-group (Oakes, Haslam, Turner, 1994).

The concept of urban identity suggests that there are common character traits typical of citizens. Urban identity is associated with the idea of citizens about the uniqueness of the place. The approach used in this article is related to the idea of the urban community as an integral and culturally distinctive group, to which the following characteristics apply: rootedness, presence of a particular culture, language, lifestyle and sacral values. Within the framework of this study of urban identity, emphasis is made on this phenomenon as a process, rather than a result.

Materials and Methods

Speaking about identity in general (and urban identity in particular), in using qualitative methods, emphasis is placed not only on such methodological and substantive aspects as locality and collectivism in the definition of urban identity. As research practice shows, the theme of identity, and its types, is a rather complex object for perception, discussion and conceptualization (see, for example, Gudkov, 2000, Gao, Zhang, Mittal, 2017). Therefore, not only the organization of the conceptual part of the research is fairly challenging, but also the question of the method. In the case of identity (especially in the case of a specific kind of identity), it is important to have a sufficiently definite focus of research in order to obtain information on the researcher's key points of interest (which make up the structure of the complex phenomenon of identity), which are set by the research agenda and the order of questions.

On the other hand, a discussion of identity requires a certain kind of "freedom", both for the interviewees and for the researcher, to enable them to focus



specifically on those aspects of the discussion that seem to be fundamentally important. And in this case, the semi-structured interview method seems the most optimal for this purpose, because, if necessary, it allows for changing the sequence and structure of questions, to choose the most appropriate strategies for obtaining information, to make the interviewer's approach more individual, to enable different interpretations of the urban identity of cities being studied. The application of this method is usually effective in the analysis of social processes, sociocultural changes, public practices, the transformation of institutions and communications, and of the implementation of certain courses in public policy (Alexiadou, 2001). The issue of urban identity and its impact on the development of the cities considered in this paper is presented as a search, which to a degree affects the topics listed further.

Contact was established with several categories of informants who were considered experts in urban history, city development and placemaking. Four main groups of informants were identified: (1) school teachers and supervisors involved in the adaptation of students; (2) representatives of city administration; (3) urban activists; (4) coordinators of UNESCO projects.

The interviews occurred in a natural fashion, lasting between half an hour and two hours. English is not the native language for the respondents from whom data was collected. The collected narratives were transcribed and subjected to open and axial coding. The total number of collected interviews amounts to 15. The interviews were conducted in January 2017. The status of these scientific centers helped in communicating with experts at the initial stages.

Actors of Urban Identity Making

In this part of the paper, the case of the formation and maintenance of urban identity in Bamberg will be considered. Primarily, the nature of Bamberg residents' urban identity, and its general features, characterizing its understanding of the local urban community. The next object will be a group of eight factors, which, in my opinion, primarily affect the formation and maintenance of the urban identity of Bamberg. Within this section, the main groups of actors involved in the process of formation and maintenance of urban identity will be considered, the roles of these actors and the significance of their positions in the structure of the reproduction of urban identity described. In the final part of the section, focus will turn to the practices of urban identity actors which form and support it.

Experts note that urban identity is recognized by the inhabitants of Bamberg as a necessity:

... it's such an old city and any citizens are living here with generations and we are lucky enough to have that beauty of the city. I think that's pretty important. [Administration 2].

The interviewed experts are convinced that in the representations of city dwellers the city has its own, expressed identity. Thus, in the opinion of the experts interviewed, residents are well aware of their connection to the city and its impact on them:

I think that people in Bamberg are very aware of where they live, have an idea or have a very close relationship to the City. [Teacher 2].

To a large extent this is facilitated by the activities of international organizations aimed at the preservation of cultural heritage, which have a significant impact on decision-making in processes related, for example, to the changing architectural appearance of the city.

Urban identity and strategic urban development plans in the case of Bamberg are interconnected. This connection, based on cultural practices, architectural heritage and significant historical events (anniversaries, in particular) is reflected in the information and communication positioning of the city:

We look what are the important dates. Next year there is the date of 500 years, no 700 years of the Bavarian law for making beer. Yeah, It's a great



Fig. 1. Historic city center of Bamberg. *Photo:* Iuliia Eremenko



event, too. But we also look at Michael's church, and it is 2000 years old now. This time there are also great events and parties and so on. Special exhibitions in museums, etc. And every time we do it this way. [Administration 1].

In general, with regard to the definition of urban identity and its significance for the development of the city experts attach importance to urban identity. With regard to the nature of urban identity in the case of Bamberg, based on the historical and cultural value of the city confirmed by the status of a World Heritage City. "Town of Bamberg" received the status of world cultural heritage in 1993 as a city whose architecture from the 12th century had a great influence in Northern Germany and Hungary.

Factors of Urban Identity Making

Based on the data obtained during the expert interviews, it is possible to determine those factors which contribute to the formation of what is called "urban identity" in this paper. A significant part of these factors in the structure of the urban identity is connected in such a way that the factors complement each other. The revealed factors make it possible to see what historical forms (including material ones, such as urban architecture), which cultural practices or policies of the city administration play a role in the formation of urban identity.

In this case, as one of the first such practices, the active positioning (branding) of Bamberg (the old city center, first of all) as an object of world cultural heritage can be distinguished:

It is a very unique town to find medieval houses and buildings and baroque (so Absolutismus in German) and modern houses and we belong to the world heritage. [Teacher 1].

The branding factor is closely related to the historical factor, which serves as the basis for the branding strategy. This factor is based on specially articulated moments from historical memory. These moments are carefully chosen so as to appeal, for example, to the emotional components of the urban identity, to the antiquity of the origin of the city, to its independence in relation to larger administrative-territorial units:

Bamberg as a town, as a medieval town. [Teacher 1],

They have a Duke, they were the same ... So, Bamberg 200 years before and Cobourg came 100 years before to Bavaria. So, this town did not belong to the state of Bavaria until 1803 or 06 and Cobourg did not belong to Bavaria until 1921, I think. In 1920 there was the document and then they changed to Bavaria. [Coordinator of UNESCO projects 1].



Fig. 2. Old Town Hall. Photo: Iuliia Eremenko

Influential components of the branding strategy are also symbolic resources of positioning Bamberg as a religious center. — *Christian town. The Church was always important for this area.* [Teacher 4] — it is especially interesting for tourists.

The religious factor singled out here into a separate group in the structure of the urban identity is closely connected with the architectural heritage of the city. Today, the influence of the Catholic Church on Bamberg can be easily seen from a large number of surviving churches in the city center. The church and religious



Fig. 3. Bamberg Cathedral. *Photo:* Iuliia Eremenko

faith, as experts say: *still has a big influence on town inhabitants.* [Teacher 1], and the Catholic faith still remains dominant.

The cultural factor is related to the spatial location of the city. Experts say that despite the territorial affiliation of the city to the federal state of Bavaria, it is possible to identify local cultural and territorial characteristics. There is a clear territorial division in which the residents of Bamberg and the surrounding lands particularly distinguish themselves: it is a different culture, the form of upper countries, who come to Bavaria, they say:

Uh, Munich, Oktoberfest and all these things, Leather trousers of Lederhosen and they think – uh – it's Upper Bavaria but it's not our culture. So different culture. [Teacher 3].

The presence of their own well-known cultural institutions also enhances the emotional sense of pride and urban identity as a whole:

We have a lot of culture – we have a theater, we have a world symphonic orchestra – Bamberg philharmonic. I think it's the second best in whole Germany after Berlin philharmonic. [Administration 1].

Nowadays, the cultural business card of Bamberg are breweries and concerns the external positioning and branding strategy of the city.

The territorial factor is connected with the peculiarities of the localization of the city. Here experts note the varying administrative-territorial position:

Bamberg is Bavarian because we belong to the state. We are the Franconia because we are a special region. We have to say I think it's a little bit different between Franconia and Upper Bavarian, for example. [Teacher 1].

Experts also note that for urban identity, an essential determining element is the natural-geographical conditions (a city on hills), the size of the city and the characteristics of urban development:

... urban identity. I like it very much here because it's not a flat city. [Teacher 2].

The economic factor distinguishes Bamberg as a local community with a developed economic specialization — the production and sale of farm products, fruit and vegetables. This specialization in no small measure determined the “locality” of the community:

Bamberg was for the gardener, so Gotner and Hecker, they had lots of fruits and vegetables, they are sold, they are famous for selling or for the hunt and craft [Teacher 3].

The aesthetic factor is closely related to historical factor and the brand of the city, based on urban administration policies and the emotional attractions of the inhabitants of Bamberg, referring to the historical memory, the aesthetics of urban buildings, the environment, the kinds of city as a whole:

they like the city and the way it looks [Teacher 2].

At the same time, in building a urban identity and corresponding policies, experts note the need to focus not only on the historical heritage, but also on contemporary forms of human expression and leisure, especially for young people:

I think that people in Bamberg should not be too focused on the history on what was given to them thousand years ago. This is beautiful but it should not be highest and the only priory to think about your old heritage. It should also have more room, not only more room but also give more possibilities for young people to have their own in a way modern lifestyle in an ancient city [Administration 1].

A significant role in the formation of urban identity is played by a sport factor based on the respective achievements of Bamberg's city teams in certain sports, such as basketball. Emotional perception and pride in the city team, acting at the national and international level, form a strong sense of urban and urban identity:



...it's also a great question for identity of the basketball. We are 8 times German cup winner. In the last years – 8 time. We are the on top-list team in the whole Germany who plays in Euro league against Moscow, Athens. And we are very proud of it here [Administration 1].

Research Findings

A comparative analysis of the urban identity, as well as of practices that form and maintain urban identity, allows for identifying common and different elements related to the structure of urban identity. Common elements refer to identities that are built on: (1) the administrative and geographical characteristics of cities, (2) the “profile” socio-economic development areas, (3) the historical memory and architectural forms that support members of the local community with certain ideas about the past that are the source of solidarity, and (4) conducting special policies aimed at including “the other” in the structure of the urban community.

The analysis of empirical data makes it possible to draw the following research results:

1. Urban identity is not shaped exclusively in a bottom-up fashion, in and through everyday interaction, but is also shaped through the strategic efforts of various actors who see such identity as a resource which can be converted into economic and political capital, and a tool of urban policy (for instance, as leverage to retain highly qualified specialists who graduate from the local universities). Moreover, in Bamberg urban identity is considered as a means for attracting tourists.
2. The core efforts aimed at urban identity-making are made by such actors as city administration, educational institutions, and local activists. In Bamberg, UNESCO is an important stakeholder of identity formation and reproduction: as this organization realizes many projects in the city that is included in the World Heritage List. Interestingly, educational institutions actively contribute to identity-making, specialists involved in this process are still different across cities. In Bamberg, which attracts pupils from the whole region of Franconia, the strategic efforts of identity-making are predominantly targeted at school children, and, correspondingly, the major actors are school teachers/the school institutions of schools. Meanwhile, Bamberg does not see the adaptation of migrants as an expressed and politically recognized priority. On the one hand, migrants are less numerous, while on the other, refugees only stay in the city for one month before being sent to other German cities. Thus, that they are introduced not so much into the history and culture of the city, but rather the language and culture of Germany in general.
3. Experts describe urban identities as very strong, which is explained by several factors such as historical, religious, cultural, economic, and territorial,

as well as the existence of stable city brands. For example, in Bamberg actors predominantly refer to the history of the city before it was conquered by Bavaria in the 19th century. As to religion, Bamberg bases its identity of its role of an influential Catholic center and a destination for pilgrims.

Conclusion

Based on a constructivist approach, in which identity is considered not as an inborn sense of belonging determined by a set of primordial attributes but rather as an outcome of how people and groups (re)interpret the boundaries between themselves and others, the author argues that urban identity might be a product of strategic efforts taken by various actors in search of certain economic or political resources. Empirically, the study is based on interviews with school teachers and supervisors involved in the adaptation of students, representatives of city administration, urban activists, and coordinators of UNESCO projects. The collected narratives are subjected to sequential analysis.

Analysis shows that urban identity does not form exclusively bottom-up, in and through everyday interaction, but is also shaped through strategic efforts of various actors who see this form of identity as a resource that can be converted into economic and political capital, and as a tool of urban policy. Experts describe urban identities as very strong, which is explained by historical, religious, cultural, economic, and territorial factors, as well as by the existence of stable city brands. Here, all experts emphasize such constraints in the events and programs aimed at identity (re)production as the absence of sustainable strategy, lack of supervisors and deficient funding. Another challenge revealed in the course of the research is insufficient coordination of efforts taken by different actors. In particular, the city administration is not informed about the educational and enlightenment programs initiated by universities, and adaptation centers are not aware of administrative programs.

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Городская идентичность в Германии: опыт Бамберга

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Городская идентичность является одной из важнейших характеристик городского сообщества. Понимание особенностей ее формирования необходимо для определения стратегии развития городов. В данной статье рассматривается вопрос о том, что происходит с локальной городской идентичностью в таком позднекапиталистическом обществе, как Германия: ослабевает ли эта идентичность или остается значимой для людей, а также может использоваться в качестве ресурса формирования новых оснований солидарности и межкультурного диалога. На примере города Бамберг автором определены основные акторы формирования городской идентичности, а также факторы, оказавшие существенное влияние на этот процесс. Эмпирическое исследование основано на серии полуструктурированных интервью с экспертами в области городской истории и городского (ре)девелопмента: представителями городской администрации, городскими активистами и координаторами проектов ЮНЕСКО, школьными учителями и специалистами, способствующими адаптации иногородних студентов. Данная работа может внести свой вклад в исследование феномена сохранения местной идентичности в малых городах.

Ключевые слова: территориальная идентичность, городская идентичность, локальные сообщества, ЮНЕСКО, кейс-стади

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