

## – BETWEEN NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: Participatory politics in Berlin and Tel Aviv

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### Abstract

*Based on a comparison of Berlin and Tel Aviv, this article investigates the ways in which ensembles of participatory instruments mediate between neoliberal urban regimes and political agency shaping differentially the meaning of participation and the types of claims that can be advanced. The article gives an overview of the recent history of both cities through the lens of participatory politics. Two in-depth case studies further examine the relationship between participatory politics and claim making in each setting: the recent conflict over a social center in the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg in Berlin and the Levinsky tent city of 2011 in Tel Aviv. In the concluding section, the article suggests that, rather than assuming that participatory tools either co-opt movements or can be appropriated by them, we need to rethink the relationship between participatory tools, rights and recognition, and ask how participatory structures and political agency constitute each other in interwoven dynamics.*

### Introduction

When, on 14 July 2011, a handful of activists decided to set up their tents on Rothschild Boulevard, in the heart of Tel Aviv, no one expected that this would quickly evolve into one of the largest protest movements the country had ever seen. Initially, the protests were triggered by rising real estate and rent prices—between 2007 and 2011 property prices in Tel Aviv went up more than 65%—and consisted mostly of students and younger members of the middle class (Rosenhak and Shalev, 2013: 54). But only a few weeks later, on 3 September, ‘The March of the Million’ poured hundreds of thousands of protesters into the streets of Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities. The urban occupiers from Rothschild Boulevard merged with earlier protests over rising food prices (the famous ‘cottage cheese boycott’), reaching out for other movements and issues, and expanding their agenda towards fundamental questions of justice and inequality in Israel. The protest initially reflected a specific urban context and limited agenda—namely, the lack of affordable housing in Tel Aviv. However, as it materialized and expanded in public space, it also became more inclusive, incorporating more marginalized publics and places, addressing longstanding socio-spatial inequalities between Israel’s ‘center’ and ‘periphery’, and advancing a message of ‘social justice’—with the noted exception of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (Marom, 2013).

At the same time in Berlin, public protests were heating up too, as the city was heading into the election cycle of 2011. Just as in Tel Aviv, rising rents and the gentrification of working-class and immigrant neighborhoods triggered public resentment and debate. Against the background of ongoing privatization of public housing enterprises and the lack of an effective rent control policy, new grassroots groups were formed in many parts of the city, and on 3 September 2011, several thousand protesters marched through the neighborhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukölln chanting slogans like ‘Hopp! Hopp! Mietenstop!’ (*Chop-chop! Rental stop!*) and ‘Wir bleiben hier’ (*We’re staying here*). However, despite the fact that Berlin has a strong and longstanding culture of grassroots movements, the housing and rental protests of 2011 never gained a momentum even

remotely close to the one in Tel Aviv and, more importantly, they never managed to overcome thematic and organizational boundaries and to merge with protests around other political issues in the city.

Our article takes these observations about the recent urban protests in Berlin and Tel Aviv as a starting point for addressing questions of political participation and urban citizenship amidst new liberal configurations. Regarded as a central dimension of urban citizenship, political participation has been a core issue in both the urban governance and urban social movement literatures. While the former relates to political participation as an issue of local democracy and attendant values of accountability, representation and trust, the latter is mainly concerned with power differentials between political actors and the ability of social movements to preserve their autonomy vis-à-vis institutional responses (for an overview of these debates see Silver *et al.*, 2010).

Notwithstanding analytical and normative differences, both strands of literature seem to share common ground in their neglect of one central aspect of political participation that seems to go beyond the questions ‘who participates’ and ‘to what effect’—what type of political agency is shaped through participatory devices or as their result? More specifically, how do place-specific ensembles of participatory instruments and opportunities—or the lack thereof—impact the types of claim making that political actors advance on the local scale?

These questions are especially relevant against the background of changing governance—civil society articulations associated with the rise of a neoliberal governmental rationality and the transformation of the technologies of government (Swyngedouw, 2005: 1992). In the context of our article (see also the introduction to this symposium), we understand neoliberalization as a bundle of political (counter-)strategies that aim at (1) introducing an entrepreneurial and market-oriented logic into spheres formerly dominated by the welfare-state (Harvey, 1989; Hubbard and Hall, 1998); and (2) shifting, formerly state-driven regulatory competences towards ‘responsible’ and ‘rational’ individuals and/or civil-society stakeholders (Swyngedouw, 2005: 1997; Rose, 1996). As these strategies often focus on the urban realm as a crucial arena for the enforcement of economic and socio-political restructuring (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Jessop, 2002), they lead to intense urban struggles over rights, recognition and the distribution of resources (Künkel and Mayer, 2012).

Starting out from our observations on urban protests in Berlin and Tel Aviv, we will argue that participatory instruments tend to pre-structure the political field along situated grievances and, as a result, constrain the framing of and mobilization around categorical ones. To put it simply: the stakes of political participation in urban politics involve not only the possible cooption of movements or unbalanced power differentials (not to downplay either of these effects), but also the tendency to frame and to fragment political issues and subjectivities in a way that obstructs the organization of grassroots alliances around more fundamental questions of social justice.

In what follows we survey central debates on participatory politics in urban governance, urban citizenship and rights to the city literature. We then present an analysis of participatory politics in both cities. We first give a brief overview of their recent history through the lens of participatory politics and highlight some of the historic landmarks. Second, we discuss in more depth two case studies to further examine the relationship between participatory politics and claim making in each setting: the recent conflict between a local grassroots coalition and the municipal government over a social center in the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg in Berlin and the grassroots Levinsky tent city of 2011 in Tel Aviv. Both cases will help us to illustrate how different forms of participation and claim making are structured and shaped, and how they relate to protest movements and mobilizations in each setting.

### Urban governance, citizenship and the right to the city: debates and perspectives

In light of neoliberal rescaling processes that have shifted political dynamics and responsibilities formerly concentrated at the level of the nation-state towards supranational as well as subnational and local levels and entities (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Jessop, 2002), scholarship has increasingly focused on the urban dimension of political participation and the provision of rights. As Peck poignantly observes: 'At the local level, front-line offices and delivery agencies now find themselves engaged—often self-consciously—on the continuous process of policy development. No longer just the territorial outposts of a centrally managed system, they now play a role in making policy as well as implementing it' (Peck, 2002: 358). Against this background, a key debate has evolved over the emergence of new urban governance regimes, which open up the political arena for civil society actors to participate in various areas ranging from planning and budgeting procedures, to neighborhood revitalization programs and profit-oriented public–private partnership projects. Mainstream academia has viewed this trend 'as empowering, democracy enhancing and more effective ... compared with the sclerotic, hierarchical and bureaucratic state forms that conducted the art of governing during much of the twentieth century' (Swyngedouw, 2005: 1992). Critical scholars, in contrast, have pointed out problems of representation, accountability and power relations that are embedded into procedures and arrangements of political participation taking place in an 'institutional void': 'There are no clear rules and norms according to which politics is to be conducted and policy measures are to be agreed upon', as Maarten Hajer points out (quoted in Swyngedouw, 2005: 1992). While this literature is mostly concerned with power asymmetries between political actors and the problem of (un)democratic rules and procedures, another research line examines participatory instruments and dynamics from a Foucauldian perspective: Nikolas Rose has coined the term 'governing through community' (Rose, 1996) in order to describe how new governance structures aim at the production of social coherence and individual responsibility.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, new urban governance regimes not only respond to the macro-economic dimension of the Fordist crisis, but also target neighborhoods, families and individuals by replacing the idea of state-centered welfare and anti-poverty policies with a 'human/social capital' approach (Mayer, 2003).

It is within this context that scholars like Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that the neoliberal project has not been limited to an attack on the 'old institutions' of the Keynesian welfare state, but that it also encompasses the making of counter-institutions, which respond to the contradictions and crises of the neoliberal project itself. For our case it is interesting that the process of 'rolling out neoliberalism' (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 12) has blurred the line between political protests 'on the street' and institutionalized political participation. Margit Mayer (2000) states that the opening up of the urban political system to social movement organizations as legitimate stakeholders in post-Fordist urban politics yielded ambivalent results. On the one hand, new opportunity structures emerge that allow grassroots groups to successfully channel their claims into the political arena and to participate in the development, design and execution of urban policies and projects. On the other hand, this trend leads to the transfer of social

1 Silver *et al.* (2010: 458) point out that 'those who emphasize deliberation ... suggest that by reasoning together, treating everyone with respect, giving everyone a chance to speak and learning from different opinions, interest- or identity-based conflict can give way to consensus'. It is not surprising then that most participatory instruments emphasize the notions of 'partnership' and 'community' and tend to downplay or even ignore the effects of antagonistic interests in the city. A noteworthy exception is the *referendum*, which is an important participatory instrument that draws from the idea of direct democracy. In contrast to instruments such as the roundtable or participatory planning procedures, it emphasizes conflict and dissent over partnership and allows for the direct enforcement of a particular policy by majority vote. We would therefore argue that the *referendum* with its antagonistic character should be discussed separately from what we call partnership-oriented participatory instruments.

services and responsibilities formerly provided by the local state to private or semi-private entities, and it puts the pressure of Realpolitik on social movement organizations, which increasingly share the 'burden of political responsibility'.

The increased significance of the local scale has also altered the urban dynamics of citizenship politics, leading to growing academic interest in urban citizenship. Studies about the local codification of rights, recognition and belonging, as well as on 'acts of citizenship' (Isin and Nielsen, 2008) have proliferated since the late 1980s (Garcia, 1996; Holston, 1999; 2007). Like the work on urban governance, much of this literature is effectively looking at local regimes that produce specific regulatory frameworks, which are embedded into larger national and regional contexts (García, 2006), but can differ significantly from each other depending on factors such as institutional arrangements and political culture. Normatively, most authors in this field start out from the idea that access to rights and entitlements should be based on residency rather than on national citizenship (Bauböck, 2003), and they seem rather optimistic that the local scale offers a viable alternative to the nation-state when it comes to an inclusive agenda and access to substantial rights for citizens and denizens alike.

The debate over the right to the city takes the struggle for rights and recognition a step further. Scholars and activists committed to this discourse understand the city as an arena for popular struggle and revolutionary change. Rooted in the work of Henri Lefebvre and the urban revolts and countercultural activities of the 1960s and 1970s, the right to the city re-emerged in the 2000s as an umbrella concept to bundle the various urban movements responding to the polarizing inequalities of the neoliberal city. As Peter Marcuse (2009: 195) put it: 'A critical urban theory, dedicated to supporting a right to the city, needs to expose the common roots of the deprivation and discontent, and to show the common nature of the demands and the aspirations of the majority of the people'. However, despite its Marxian roots, this literature provides a relatively broad analytical framework for scholars interested in other than class-based urban social movements. Recent publications range from Marxist analyses of anti-capitalist struggles over the city as a site of (re)production (see for example Harvey, 2012) to immigrants' rights struggles (Nicholls and Vermeulen, 2012) and case studies on environmental grassroots groups that channel their claims through local participatory structures (Purcell, 2012).

Although the debates presented here look at participation in urban politics from various perspectives, they share common ground insofar as they are mostly preoccupied with questions regarding *who participates* or questions regarding *power relations and power differentials* that impact on the ability to participate in meaningful ways. In fact, although urban politics have taken a strong entrepreneurial turn and urban governance regimes usually privilege corporate actors vis-à-vis other civil society groups, many authors seem quite optimistic concerning new local opportunity structures for social movements and citizen participation.

Against the background of this (cursory) literature review, we would like to turn our attention to one aspect of political participation that seems to be neglected by the aforementioned approaches, in particular when dealing with the political meaning of neoliberal participatory mechanisms. Regarding this we wish to ask: how do neoliberal participatory mechanisms aimed at activating residents and integrating them into urban politics, planning and development, impact the process of finding and defining political goals vis-à-vis the local state and vis-à-vis other local stakeholders? Furthermore, which types of political agency emerge as a result of this activation process? Borrowing from the conceptual vocabulary of urban regime theory (Fainstein and Fainstein, 1983; Stoker, 1995; Stone, 2005), which looks at local coalitions of public and private actors that push for a specific urban agenda, we use our case studies of Berlin and Tel Aviv to analyze the ways in which participatory ensembles mediate between neoliberal urban

regimes and political agency shaping differentially the meaning of participation and the types of claims that can be advanced.

### **Claim making and the politics of participation in Berlin and Tel Aviv**

Despite their different histories and national contexts, Berlin and Tel Aviv share many similarities—with each other and with other cities (see also Blokland *et al.*, 2015, in the introduction to this symposium). They both portray themselves as ‘global cities’ and struggle with urban problems such as rising rents, gentrification and neighborhood change, the contested use of public space, politics of privatization, questions around the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants, and so on. However, if we look specifically at the question of participation in urban politics, the political dynamics ‘on the ground’ differ significantly from each other in both cities.

Berlin can be described as a city that is strongly characterized by participatory dynamics. The city not only applies the municipal and state referendum, but also disposes of various participatory instruments that allow for civic participation in urban planning and decision making, and for the negotiation of conflicts over the use of urban space. However, participatory politics in Berlin are also significantly constrained by legal and institutional as well as fiscal and electoral parameters; and as the political structure of Berlin encompasses the municipal level (Berlin consists of twelve districts or *Bezirke*) as well as the state level (Berlin is a state or *Land*), local authorities not only have to respond to residents’ claims, but also need to maneuver conflicting interests within the city’s state apparatus itself.

Conversely, urban politics in Tel Aviv are characterized by minimal or ill-developed participatory instruments alongside a substantial amount of mobilization and claims for a ‘right to the city’. While some of these struggles have been ongoing and divisive (Cohen and Margalit, 2015, this issue), others, like the Levinsky tent city, have crystallized around categorical claims for social justice amidst a wider wave of social protest. There is a scarcity of statutory participatory tools and frameworks, no use at all of referenda, and a prominent lack of instruments to negotiate urban conflicts. The few participation mechanisms that do exist in the city tend to be hierarchical and far from conforming to a deliberative model of participation, and therefore often miss their appointed goal. As we will argue below, the faults and weaknesses of the formal channels have led to a lack of confidence in them and to a search for alternative venues that either clash with governance frameworks or bypass them altogether.

#### – Berlin: a brief historical overview

Many of the participatory instruments we can identify today in Berlin were developed over the course of the 1990s and 2000s. However, their roots often go back to the urban struggles of the New Left during the 1960s and 1970s (Mayer, 2010). In West Berlin, the 1968 movement, and the local grassroots movements that nurtured and evolved from it, created political dynamics that were characterized by militant urban protests, bottom-up demands for participation in local politics, and top-down strategies to incorporate grassroots groups into urban planning and policymaking procedures.

Holm and Kuhn (2011) argue that the squatter movement that emerged in the early 1970s played a prominent role in the democratization of urban politics as it forced the local state to respond to the political pressure on the streets. A landmark for this process was the International Building Exhibition of 1984, which the Berlin government itself initiated. The exhibition explicitly addressed the squatters and aimed at developing forms of cooperation between grassroots groups, residents and local authorities. The goal of IBA Berlin, laid out in twelve principles, was to organize urban redevelopment in a democratic way that would take locally evolved spatial and social structures into consideration (Hardt-Walther, 1990). Based on this idea, the city started to systematically call for negotiations, extend permits, and make public subsidies

available for squats that wanted to legalize their projects, and were willing to cooperate with the local government. As Matthias Bernt points out, the legal parameters were preserved, but ‘decision making was moved down a level, to the centres of conflict, and activists were integrated into a consensus-seeking process with the aim of gaining more acceptance and identification with decisions in the neighbourhood’ (see Bernt, 2003, cited in Holm and Kuhn, 2011: 649; see also Lebuhn, 2008: 96–8, 102–3).

In fact, many of today’s public spaces in Berlin like Görlitzer Park in Kreuzberg (a public park located on the site of a former train station and garbage dump), and alternative neighborhood projects such as the Schokofabrik (a feminist neighborhood center, which started in the squatted building of a former chocolate factory) have their origins in activists’ claims for open space and social infrastructure during the 1970s and 1980s. The particular mix of repression, negotiation and participatory offers with which the city responded to these claims—often in a spontaneous and experimental rather than a strategic way—laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of more formalized channels for citizen participation in local politics.

In contrast to West Berlin, the eastern part of the city experienced a very different history and dynamic. More centralized and authoritarian governance structures restricted neighborhood activism and the development of local participatory structures until 1989.<sup>2</sup> However, things changed rapidly in the aftermath of the fall of the Wall. The 1990s account for a boost of political and (counter-)cultural urban activism and new forms of governance structures in East Berlin, and it was also during this period that the term ‘roundtable’ was coined, which has been used since then to describe the partnership-oriented negotiation of urban conflicts (in Berlin and other German cities).<sup>3</sup>

West Berlin’s ‘careful urban renewal policy’ and its governance structure were extended to East Berlin, but were operationally much more market driven than their precursors of the 1980s, turning parts of the districts of Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte into ‘battlefields’ of rapid gentrification (Holm, 2006). At the same time, dissidents, activists, artists and bohemians from East and West moved into run-down buildings with no clear ownership, taking advantage of the often chaotic process of restructuring in the former socialist part of Berlin. During the 1990s and well into the 2000s, counter-cultural activities in East Berlin ranged from militant squats in Mainzer Straße, to illegal techno clubs in Mitte, informal open-air locations for electronic music parties along the River Spree, and underground fashion shows on Stralauer Peninsula (to give just a few examples). While openly politicized projects like the militant squatting movement in Friedrichshain were quickly met with the notorious mix of conditioned legalization plus heavy police repression, activities labeled as ‘underground culture’ were more likely to encounter ad hoc responses of *laissez-faire* policies, half-hearted negotiations, and informal agreements with local authorities, breeding Berlin’s international reputation as a cultural hub (Lebuhn, 2008: 92, 98; Bader and Scharenberg, 2010) that is ‘poor but sexy’, as Berlin’s Mayor Wowereit stated infamously in 2003 (Focus, 2006).

During the time that Berlin was celebrating its reunification, the city’s new/old status as the German capital, and the prospect of becoming a truly global city, generous state subsidies from the West German central government were drastically cut back and de-industrialization devastated the local labor market (Krätke and Borst, 2000). Additionally, Berlin’s corrupt conservative city government (CDU) speculated heavily on a lucrative real estate boom and effectively maneuvered the city into the so-called

2 However, bottom-up participation was not rendered completely impossible. A famous—and successful—example of local claims in East Berlin is the resistance of residents to the demolition of old tenement buildings in the neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg. In the 1980s the project became known as the ‘Hirschhof’ and famously served as a dissident grassroots center for art, film, theater and for various neighborhood activities (Mosch *et al.*, 2011).

3 In December 1989, the East German revolution led to the establishment of a ‘Central Round Table’, which included civil society groups and politicians and was moderated by delegates of the Church. It played a crucial political role until March 1990 when the first democratic elections were held. Subsequently, a number of roundtables were established working on various scales, including on the municipal level.

'banking scandal' and bankruptcy (Ugarte Chacón, 2012).<sup>4</sup> The structural economic and fiscal crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s accelerated the entrepreneurial turn Berlin had begun to take after the fall of the Wall. Practices ranging from full privatization to formal outsourcing as well as public-private partnerships drastically changed Berlin's topography of formerly state-supplied goods and infrastructure.

The fiscal crisis and its political management, then, became a driving force behind the further development of participatory instruments, adding to the element of conflict resolution and institutional responses to grassroots claims discussed above. Today, city authorities and local politicians not only make regular use of roundtables that bring various stakeholders together, but also draw on a range of participatory planning procedures, such as charrettes, workshops with local target groups, and e-participation (Rösener and Selle, 2005). Berlin's official Handbook of Participation (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt Berlin, 2011), a 340-page hands-on guide for the city's administrative staff, provides step-by-step information on how to get local residents and actors involved in urban planning and on methods for responding to claims and conflicts on site. On the one hand, the new methods and procedures account for a significant democratization of 'city making'. They give residents an active role in urban planning and design and allow for the bottom-up articulation of conflicting needs (e.g. gender, age, religion, etc.). On the other hand, this process is explicitly embedded in a neoliberal 'lean-state' approach. Berlin's Handbook of Participation points out that administrative action should turn towards 'activating', 'moderating' and 'coordinating' residents and civil society partners in order to mobilize 'resources and knowledge', and it underlines the financial advantages of participatory planning as well as the need to produce social cohesion and political legitimacy against the backdrop of shrinking public expenses (*ibid.*: 36–39, 59–60).

The latter logic strongly overlaps with the third trend of participatory politics identified in this section—a policy shift towards the idea of what Nikolas Rose (1996) has famously termed 'governing through community'. At the center of this development lies the Federal-State-Program 'The Socially Integrative City' (*Soziale Stadt*), an area-based policy that Berlin started to implement in 1998, and that has been extended to 34 neighborhoods since then (Krummacher *et al.*, 2003). The Socially Integrative City program relies on the diagnosis of a 'loss of integrative power of the European city' and responds to it by setting up professional agencies at the neighborhood scale, where 'quarter managers' (*Quartiersmanager*) act as 'mediators' and 'activators' for the local population (see Häußermann and Oswald, 1997; Häußermann *et al.*, 2004) stimulating and funding local projects, partnerships and networks in order to mobilize the area's 'endogenous potentials' and produce social cohesion (DIFU, 2002: 32–33; for a pointed critique see Mayer, 2003 and Lanz, 2008).

In sum, we can differentiate between three major dynamics. First, the mediation of conflicts between urban social movements and the local state—a highly ambivalent victory, won by Berlin's squatter movement of the early 1980s. Mediation usually takes the form of roundtable negotiations through which the city can respond in an ad hoc manner to political protests. Second, the democratization of urban politics and planning procedures, historically driven by bottom-up participation of residents and neighborhood groups, but also by neoliberal top-down practices and discourses. Third, a decisive policy shift towards a 'governing through community' approach that especially targets marginalized neighborhoods and populations of the city. Starting in the late 1990s with the Socially Integrated City program, it represents a top-down strategy that replaces former anti-poverty and social housing policies and has to be understood as a technology of crisis management and production of social cohesion.

4 In 2001, the so-called *Berliner Bankenskandal* led to the fall of the CDU government and to the election of a coalition between social democrats (SPD) and socialists (PDS—today, the Left Party).

– The conflict over a social center in Berlin: challenging participatory structures

Recent high-profile conflicts over urban issues in Berlin include the struggle over the investment project Mediaspree, protests against the banking scandal, the campaigns for the remunicipalization of Berlin's (privatized) water supply and electricity grid, and the conflict (and referendum) over the future use of the now closed inner-city airport Tempelhof. In all of these cases, residents engaged in an unintended 'division of labor' (Kuhn, 2011) and made use of various claim-making strategies ranging from local referenda to militant protests. Local politicians in turn have responded with participatory instruments such as roundtables as well as with traditional top-down policy and decision making. We want to take a closer look at the conflict over a social center in the neighborhood of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, which started in 2001 when a number of Berlin-based grassroots groups mobilized local protests around a (public) building for the use of a social center.<sup>5</sup> Like many other cases, the conflict is situated at the crossroads between urban protests and participatory politics, which will allow us to look specifically at the relationship between participatory and partnership-oriented governance instruments and right to the city claims.

At the core of the conflict were (post-)autonomous groups, former squatting activists, and initiatives broadly associated with the anti-globalization movement—most of which had emerged over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s—claiming a place for community work, social and political projects, and for local grassroots groups to meet. As a first step, activists founded the Initiative for a Social Center (ISC)—an open network institutionally linked to the Social Forum Berlin (see Bahn and Haberland, 2004; felS, 2004).<sup>6</sup>

ISC then launched a campaign that took place against the background of strong national and local protests: the restriction of unemployment and welfare benefits via the so-called 'Hartz IV' legislation, passed by the social-democratic and green party government under chancellor Gerhard Schröder, had triggered mass protests in many German cities. In Berlin, the so-called 'banking-scandal' of the conservative city government and the subsequent cutbacks and privatization policies led to additional outrage and public dispute. The politically loaded environment provided fertile ground for the ISC. Moderate groups that were protesting workfare policies in Berlin approached more radical, anti-capitalist groups organized in the ISC; vice versa, many radical left and autonomous grassroots groups turned towards local welfare protests looking for new political alliances. Direct action and guerilla theater groups like 'The Superfluous'<sup>7</sup> and 'Berlin for Free',<sup>8</sup> which developed in proximity to the Social Forum and ISC in Berlin, received national media attention and were duplicated in many other German cities. In this context, the ISC and its mobilization for a social center quickly expanded to various political currents within the Berlin Left, such as self-organized migrants' and jobless' groups, which had previously been acting apart from the anti-globalization movement.

Despite Berlin's austerity policies, the chances of obtaining a building for a social center actually didn't look too bad. At the beginning of the ISC's campaign, the city's recently installed property trust (*Liegenschaftsfonds*) was administering several thousand vacant real estate objects, trying to channel them onto the market for privatization. Hence, there were more than enough public buildings available to accommodate the activists' needs. The ISC therefore decided to 'mark' suitable buildings by occupying them and drawing public attention to empty houses that could easily be used for social purposes. In November 2001, the first occupation targeted an empty

5 For an extensive discussion of the case see Lebuhn (2008).

6 The Berlin Social Forum is a local branch of the global Social Forum structure. After its initial heyday of the early and mid-2000s, it lost significantly in meaning.

7 See <http://www.die-ueberfluessigen.net> (accessed 9 August 2012).

8 See <http://fels.nadir.org/de/tag/berlin-umsonst> (accessed 7 July 2015).



building owned by the service union *Verdi*, but activists were immediately evicted by anti-riot police and political responses failed to appear. Two years later, in October 2003, the ISC decided to occupy a former pre-school in the neighborhood of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, then sitting empty and awaiting private bids through the public real estate trust.<sup>9</sup>

It was this second occupation that local authorities responded to. The district's mayor, a member of the socialist party (then PDS, now Leftparty/Linkspartei), was called to the scene and managed to negotiate between police and squatters. As a result, activists agreed to leave the building voluntarily; in exchange they were allowed to use the site for a public event that would promote the idea of a social center. More importantly, all concerned parties agreed to meet at a roundtable in order to negotiate the long-term use of the former pre-school by the ISC. A first victory—or so it seemed.

It is these negotiations that we want to draw attention to. Between fall 2003 and spring 2004, several meetings between activists and representatives of the District (municipality) and the City (state) took place, but discussions turned out to move slowly and led to no results. In April 2004, ISC tried to increase political pressure via a third occupation—this time activists targeted an empty building owned by Humboldt University—but did not manage to win public support or give the roundtable meetings new momentum. Not only was Berlin's Secretary for the Interior, Ehrhart Körting (SPD), voicing concerns about the ISC's links to radical left groups,<sup>10</sup> but two additional points turned out to impede an agreement.

First, due to the city's precarious fiscal situation, the District administration insisted on renting out public buildings at market price. If buildings were given away for less, the District's Mayor argued, Berlin's Senate would deduct the difference from the District's budget. This was partially due to an ordinance put forward by the Senate of Berlin, and partially the effect of recent public management reforms (Lebuhn, 2010). The ISC, in turn, insisted that activists should only be charged for the maintenance of the social center, but refused to pay a profit margin to the city. Hence, a major part of the roundtable negotiations was spent in highly specialized debates over various models of how to finance the social center.

Second, besides campaigning for the actual social center, ISC pursued another goal: politization/mobilization against Berlin's privatization policies. Crucially, in their view, the neoliberal privatization consensus within the local state apparatus suggested a non-parliamentary strategy, which also included means of civil disobedience such as occupations. Through these kind of 'politics of the first person' the ISC wanted to encourage other neighborhood groups and initiatives to voice their need, too, and to articulate their legitimate political demands for space and resources. The idea being that if others followed the example of the ISC and claimed public means and spaces 'for free' or for a 'political price', then this would have a political impact beyond the mere establishment of a social center. As an ISC activist and delegate at the roundtable negotiations stated in an interview:

Should we actually get a building for a social center from the city, then there is the potential for other social projects to approach the city administration too, and say: 'Why not us? We want space and facilities, too!' And that's exactly what we want. And then they [the District and the Senate] are in trouble.<sup>11</sup>

9 See *Berliner Morgenpost*: Attac-Aktivisten besetzen ehemalige Kita, October 10, 2003, URL: <http://m.morgenpost.de/printarchiv/berlin/article102466791/Attac-Aktivisten-besetzen-ehemalige-Kita.html> (accessed 23 September 2015).

10 *Ibid.*

11 Interview with ISC-activist and delegate at the roundtable negotiations (anonymized), 1 June 2004.

Accordingly, the District and the Senate saw the ISC's demand for a social center not only as a fiscal problem, but also as a highly inconvenient political gesture. And indeed, the Mayor of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg openly criticized the ISC for not playing the game of the roundtable negotiations by the rules:

They unlawfully occupied a building. And that makes it really difficult. We have regulatory rules for good reasons. Imagine everyone doing this. You wouldn't believe how closely other organizations pay attention to how we handle this conflict. They are all lining up here too, saying: ... "And what about us? Do we also need to come up with criminal actions and put pressure on you and then we get everything we want?" I talked to the people from the Social Forum about this. And it makes me angry. I told them: Dear friends, you define yourself as 'left'. I understand your point, but we must act *in the interest of the entire District*. There are many other good projects that want the same thing (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup>

According to this logic, the group was instrumentalizing the roundtable. While the negotiations were meant to focus on a particular claim and respond to it via partnership-oriented dialogue, the ISC was trying to politicize the issue of the social center and use the roundtable to put a more fundamental issue onto the agenda: the commodification of public space in Berlin. Consequently, negotiation over the empty pre-school eventually ended without result.<sup>13</sup> Although the ISC never officially dissolved, the campaign for a social center fizzled out over the course of 2005. Some of the participating groups found individual solutions and decided to rent smaller spaces on the private market; others turned towards already existing subcultural spaces such as the Mehringhof.<sup>14</sup> The successful occupation of a former hospital, the Haus Bethanien in the neighborhood of Kreuzberg, took additional drive (and need) out of the campaign for a social center. The ISC's original goal, to find a space that would allow a number of younger grassroots groups to create a shared socio-spatial infrastructure, remained unrealized; and so did the alliance with other neighborhood groups the ISC had hoped for.

To summarize, despite the fact that Berlin accounts for relatively strong and effective participatory tools, our case hints at the limits of participatory local democracy in the German capital. Even so-called roundtables, which explicitly serve to negotiate conflicts between urban stakeholders and the local state, do not seem to lend themselves to addressing categorical claims. Given the specific structure and logic of participatory urban politics in Berlin, urban movements and activists' coalitions that try to address 'right to the city' issues and fundamental questions of urban social justice through participatory tools, may be faced with isolation and fragmentation rather than with realistic opportunities to channel their demands successfully into the urban realm.

– Tel Aviv: a brief historical overview

In Tel Aviv, the systematic development of channels for bottom-up participation in urban politics and planning did not gain momentum until the mid-1990s. Although the city, established in 1909, underwent extensive phases of urban growth and renewal, processes of urbanization were dominated by national and municipal top-down policies as well as by private companies for many decades.

12 Interview with the Mayor of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, 22 September 2004.

13 See *Initiative Berliner Sozialforum: Verhandlungen um Soziales Zentrum gescheitert? Initiative lehnt Schein-Angebot ab*, Press Release, 28 April 2004; URL: [http://www.soziales-zentrum-goettingen.de/foren\\_zentren/berlin\\_ablehnung\\_haus.pdf](http://www.soziales-zentrum-goettingen.de/foren_zentren/berlin_ablehnung_haus.pdf) (accessed 23 September 2015).

14 See <http://www.mehringhof.de> (accessed 10 August 2012).

During the early 1960s, ‘needs of the hour’ alongside specific political circumstances led to the establishment of development and regeneration companies, which were run in joint ownership and management by the Tel Aviv municipality and the Israeli government (Carmon, 2001). These companies quickly formed a vast variety of partnerships with the private sector and came to operate based on financial interests, while commonly ignoring social aspects. In the name of ‘development’, large construction projects were initiated, for which thousands of people were evicted from areas designated by the authorities as ‘slums’ (Margalit, 2009). Relocation was carried out carelessly, with little regard to the residents’ social and financial problems—so it wasn’t long before the trouble and distress of the old neighborhoods came to be reflected in the new neighborhoods that were formed (Marom, 2009). While some residents agreed to relocation, other neighborhoods—such as Kfar Shalem in south-east Tel Aviv—resisted and entered a long struggle with the housing company in charge of it (Carmon, 1999). Over the course of the years, these struggles underwent numerous transformations and resurfaced in the 2011 social justice protests, as will be shown below.

The Israeli Planning and Building Law of 1965 determined that inclusion of the public in planning processes will be conducted via the right to object to deposited plans and/or appeal planning decisions. However, this right included several ‘built-in’ limitations and reflects a rational and hegemonic planning approach that leaves little room for raising claims (Alexander, 2008): it can only be exercised near the end of the planning process; the right to object is limited to ‘everyone with an interest in the land, building or any other planning item who sees himself injured’ (clause 100),<sup>15</sup> and the law mandates administrative procedures to ensure appropriate participation in the planning institutions’ deliberations.

Further development of public participation tools did not take place until the late 1970s. In 1977 the first right-wing government in Israel came to power; a significant share of its electoral support came from distressed neighborhoods. Hence, soon after its establishment, Prime Minister Begin announced the Israel Urban Renewal Project, a national program for neighborhoods regeneration (known as ‘*Shikum Schoonot*’). The principals of this program included working with existing population in an existing environment, as well as including the neighborhood’s residents in the planning, financing and implementation of the project. The neighborhood regeneration projects were administrated by the central government in collaboration with the semi-public organization of the Jewish Agency; some power of decision making was to be conferred on local residents (Carmon and Hill, 1988; Carmon, 1999).

A few of Tel Aviv’s neighborhoods were included in the list of areas fit for this regeneration project, which was perhaps the country’s first attempt at administering public participation of this sort. Yet it was steered in a second-rate manner and received much criticism from various sources, including official criticism of the state comptroller, for the unprofessional way it was run, and for the low level of public participation it involved in practice (Menahem, 1994).

Not surprisingly, anger and frustration over top-down regeneration programs and the lack of venues for residents to participate in planning procedures and policy-making triggered new forms of protests and mobilizations in Tel Aviv. As mentioned above, the neighborhood of Kfar Shalem in south-east Tel Aviv illustrates these dynamics: since the mid-1960s, it has been targeted by the central government (in partnership with private and public companies) with eviction campaigns. A 1965 law commonly known as ‘*Pinui Binui*’ (literally: ‘eviction-construction’) encouraged the eviction of run-down areas for the purpose of rebuilding, as one solution for the growing need

15 Alexander (2008) notes that Israeli courts’ decisions have been generous in giving standing to objections or appeals by giving a broad interpretation to the category of potentially injured parties: they generally allow any parties who see themselves injured, in terms of any personal interest or a specific group interest, to object to a plan without having to prove violation of legal rights.

of housing. Over the years, some of Kfar Shalem's residents agreed to leave the area and were relocated by the municipality (mainly in the adjacent neighborhood of Neve Eliezer), but many others resisted relocation. The conflict reached a peak in 1982 when a Kfar Shalem resident who tried to resist eviction and protect his home was shot by a police officer and died (Carmon, 1999).

In the 1980s, former Kfar Shalem evictees who had been resettled in the neighborhood of Neve Eliezer found themselves again subject to eviction attempts. Bitter with the taste of their previous struggle, the residents declined. Some simply resisted relocation, others pressed for higher compensation than what was offered—even though they were not the owners of the land or the buildings. During the protests, new methods were developed and adopted such as the strategic use of the media to promote claims to urban space (Carmon, 1999). The evictions of Kfar Shalem and Neve Eliezer have not been completed since, and the struggle has persisted through the years and even reached the Israeli Supreme Court (Carmon, 1999).

It was not until the 1990s that the issue of public participation gained visibility in city council debates. Mayor Millo (administration 1993–98), for example, declared that 'there has never been a municipality that allowed people's participation in decisions relating to their living area, to the extent that we have this term' (1997, cited in Kedem-Sheklar, 2009: 48). This declaration anchored itself in a few actions that were entirely new for the Tel Aviv municipality, one such case being the mid-1990s survey among residents of a specific area that sought their opinion regarding the future use of a deserted military site bordering their neighborhood (Alfasi, 2002).

The voluntary form of public participation that followed this shift can be perceived as a reaction to the structured exclusion of the public from involvement in official actions. Yet 'participation' was perceived as a discretionary prerogative of the municipality and not mandatory. Indeed, the only statutory venue for citizens' participation in planning decisions that were 'mandatory' was the right to submit objections anchored in the 1965 Planning Law and the right to participate as 'entrepreneurs'. In 1996, amendment no. 43 to the 1965 Planning and Building Law was passed: while the original law limited the right to prepare and submit statutory plans and planning proposals to state bodies (clause 61.A), the new amendment extended this right by permitting private individuals to propose local outline plans and thereby become active participants in planning (Alexander, 2008). Potentially, the 1996 amendment opened planning to a variety of stakeholders (citizens, private-sector developers, academics, NGOs, etc.) as well as to an assortment of participatory actions—plans at different stages are published in print or online media and people are invited to familiarize themselves with them and to comment; public opinion surveys are carried out; informal planning committees meet occasionally with affected residents, for example. But, as critics note, in spite of these various efforts, it is doubtful to what extent voluntary participation has actually promoted planning democratization (Carmon and Alterman, 2011).

Over the course of the 1990s, Tel Aviv also experienced an opening up of the local political arena to non-state actors. Although the local state as well as the national government retain strong roles in planning and policymaking procedures, various NGOs have started to serve (in a declared manner or as a secondary goal) as promoters or mediators of public participation in urban matters in a way symptomatic of neoliberal urban politics. Haim Yacobi (2007) has termed this development 'the NGOization of space'—a process which may allow wider public participation but also fragments grassroots activism.

From 2000 on, under Mayor Huldai's administration (1998–to date), the issue of public participation has gained further visibility. This trend can be traced in official declarations as well as in municipal actions. Tel Aviv's strategic master plan from 2000, for example, was conducted in a long, unprecedented and elaborate attempt to involve 'the public' (see Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, 2001; Gavriely and Segal, 2007). Targeting

impoverished areas in south Tel Aviv, mainly the Central Bus Station (CBS) district and in the neighborhood of Florentin, several instruments such as early-stage open surveys, neighborhood meetings, quarter councils and a special website for the purpose of spreading information were used to involve ‘the public’.

In sum, Tel Aviv operates a hierarchical, top-down, centralistic planning system (Alfasi, 2000; 2002; Rimlat, 2006; Fenster, 2009) within what some scholars regard as the most planned of all Western countries (Ben Alya, 2000; Alterman, 2001). Participation mechanisms seem underdeveloped when compared to Berlin and citizens are more likely to be perceived as a ‘passive audience’ rather than ‘active stakeholders’ in political reforms and change.<sup>16</sup> To a large extent, officials’ talk of ‘the importance of public participation’ in Tel Aviv has remained at the discursive level without translating into significant actions. More significantly, neoliberal participatory mechanisms in Tel Aviv ‘activate’ residents, not in their capacity as ‘urban citizens’ but as ‘property holders’, by granting them small-scale development incentives for house enlargement and so on. Given the type of participatory channels offered and their limited impact on urban change, it is not surprising to find deep levels of mistrust among urban residents, especially those residing in the distressed and neglected areas of the city (Fenster and Yacobi, 2005). As we will show in our case study of the Levinsky tent city of 2011, mistrust in the power of institutional channels to bring about effective change has been crucial in shaping the search for different venues for political action and for advancing categorical claims for social justice through the city (see also Cohen and Margalit, 2015, this issue).

– The Israeli 2011 social justice movement and tent cities in south Tel Aviv

While the Israeli social justice movement started off in July 2011 with the erection of a first tent camp on Rothschild Boulevard in the affluent and cosmopolitan center of Tel Aviv, similar encampments quickly mushroomed, sprouting also in the socio-economic and geographic periphery.

One of them was the Levinsky encampment in the CBS district of south Tel Aviv, which became the second largest ‘tent city’ of the summer 2011 protest. Two salient features distinguished the Levinsky tent activism from the outset. First, its definition as a ‘no choice’ encampment: in contrast to the demand for affordable housing aired by the leaders of the July protest movement in central Tel Aviv, the Levinsky activists presented their struggle as one for survival. Second, the Levinsky tent city showcased an unlikely mix of ethnic and social groups with seemingly clashing interests, some of which have been forced in recent years to share the same urban space, living on uneasy terms with each other and competing for material and social resources. This eclectic mix of social groups that, according to the media, represented the ‘wounded soul’ of Israeli society brought together side by side veteran Mizrahi residents and activists, low-income single mothers, transgender people, Ethiopian Jews, Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers and a mix of ‘radical’ activists. Indeed, the main characteristic of the Levinsky tent city and others that emerged in south Tel Aviv was the opportunity they created for the articulation of categorical claims on behalf of marginalized and disadvantaged people in ways that crosscut ethnic and national divisions. Diverse and even opposing interests that tend to prevail in the neighborhood (see Cohen and Margalit, this issue) were momentarily overcome through the common grievances against ‘the system’ and brought together in an unlikely coalition.

Social protest and mobilization are not new to the Levinsky area (Marom, 2009: 287–97). Yet, as will be shown in the following, many of previous grievances raised by the neighborhood have barely been addressed by urban authorities. Indeed, despite

16 See, for example, Tel Aviv-Yafo City Council Meeting on 22 March 2010 (available at <http://www.tel-aviv.gov.il/Cityhall/Protocols/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%98%D7%95%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%9C%20%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%91%D7%AA%20%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A2%D7%A6%D7%94%20%D7%9E%D7%A1%2022.pdf>).

neighborhood regeneration plans that included public participation tools, the situation of the neighborhood substantially deteriorated throughout the years, increasing the local residents' sense of disempowerment. Years of neglect and the failure or lack of determination to implement urban policies that would take into account the community needs and wants were all exacerbated by neoliberal roll back urban policies that put a premium on for-profit development as a major strategy of urban growth and regeneration (Menahem, 2005).

The CBS area was historically constructed as a housing district for middle-class Jewish migrants from central Europe in the 1920s and 1930s and later declared an industrial zone. Yet its urban fabric changed dramatically when it became the major transit area for public transportation in the 1950s and 1960s and the affluent population and commercial activities began leaving the neighborhood. The living conditions of the local residents worsened with the building of a new central bus station starting in the 1960s (it was completed in the 1990s). Emblematic of the entrepreneurial megalomania of private capital, this largely dysfunctional mega-structure created environmental hazards and perpetuated the image of the area as a neglected slum where low-income populations, drug users and sex shops cohabited uncomfortably (Rotbard, 2005).

During the 1990s the CBS area became a 'global immigration neighborhood', a downtown commercial area in which low rental prices and rundown infrastructure acted as a pull factor for large numbers of labor migrants to settle in and create their own communities (Schnell and Alexander, 2002; Kemp and Raijman, 2004). Devoid of citizen and social rights, labor migrants have become a demographic majority in the CBS area (Fenster and Yacobi, 2005). The relationship between veteran residents and the newcomers has been complex, fueled by the veteran residents' strong sense of threat and competition over urban resources with migrants (Raijman and Semyonov, 2005).

The municipal response to the changing social and ethnic landscape of the CBS has been ambivalent. On the one hand, upon taking office in 1998 Tel Aviv mayor Ron Huldai declared that 'Tel Aviv will be no stranger' to the new residents (Kemp and Raijman, 2004). One of the first steps he took was opening Mesila, an information and aid center for the migrant workers, which recognized officially the presence of a large community of undocumented migrants, but performed by and large as the sole welfare agency to cater to their needs.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, very little was done in practice to improve the physical and social situation of the veteran residents and to facilitate the integration of the newcomers.

The lack of municipal intervention was most conspicuous given the strategic plan that the municipality developed in 2000 for the area which was presented as a flagship of the new administration and a major step towards rendering Tel Aviv into a globally competitive city (Kedem-Sheklar, 2009). The CBS strategic plan comprised four focal points and proposed a holistic view of the district renewal, taking into account economic, infrastructural and social aspects. For these purposes, it stressed the need to change the stigmatized image of the area as one of 'crime', 'prostitution' and 'transitory populations' and instill a sense of personal and public security. Based on the socio-demographic and physical characteristics of the neighborhood, the planning team proposed to brand the area as one of 'encounter' between different social groups and cultures. By leveraging the 'cosmopolitan' qualities rather than the 'dangers' of heterogeneity, planners foresaw a 'soft' gentrification process, which would attract ethnic businesses, restaurants, and young Israeli populations, while catering at the same time to the image of Tel Aviv as a vibrant 'non-stop city' (*ir lelo hafsa*) (Fenster and Yacobi, nd).

17 The provision of welfare and education municipal services was also extended to the large new constituency of asylum seekers, despite a lack of clear national asylum policy and great hostility on the part of government officials and coalition politicians (see Mesila Annual Reports: <http://www.tel-aviv.gov.il/Tolive/welfare/Pages/Mesila.aspx>).

The 'strategic planning' also introduced participatory tools which the planning team regarded as central to the goals, practice and legitimation of the renewal of the district. The participatory component exemplified several of the elements that, according to Alfasi (2003), render the link between 'participatory tools' and 'participation' rather tenuous and problematic. First, participatory efforts suffered from a 'knowledge trap'. Although different visions were discussed and brought to the neighborhood's residents, including the newcomers, it was planners' knowledge that finally prevailed in deciding which alternative best fit the otherwise diverse visions of the area's heterogeneous population. Second, the CBS strategic plan suffered from a poor definition of public participation. Despite the municipality's rhetoric that encouraged the involvement of different communities in the making of the plan, in practice it allocated neither budgets nor enough personnel to carry out the social community work needed in this area that had been neglected for years (Fenster and Yacobi, 2005: 207). Third, the CBS strategic plan raised the perennial question regarding participation: Whose city is it? The heterogeneous constituency of the CBS and the apparent clashing interests between different groups created tensions that the participation process failed to address.

But the greatest blow to the CBS strategic plan was that little or none of it was implemented, thereby emptying participation of any substantive meaning and rendering it inconsequential. Upon its completion in June 2004, major parts of the ambitious plan remained on paper. To give but one example, a crucial part of the CBS strategic plan regarded the CBS building, which is perceived by all as a major environmental and social hazard. The plan envisioned opening up the building to the street and adapting the built space for public and communal use, among others (*ibid.*). While from time to time new ideas and programs for the CBS are voiced up by the city planners and local politicians try to accrue electoral clout around them, the gigantic 'white elephant' stands still without change.<sup>18</sup> The only part of the plan that has been thus far implemented was the building of a public garden on the ruins of the Bialik school, a historic building that was, according to the original plan, meant for conservation.

Between the time the plan was submitted in 2004 and the 2011 protest, new 'unwelcome' residents had joined the CBS and adjacent areas when thousands of asylum seekers and refugees hailing mainly from Sudan and Eritrea settled in. For the first time, anti-foreigner sentiment was translated into anti-migrant mobilization (Kemp and Kfir, 2012) rendering the 'right to the city' into a bitter battle over it (see Cohen and Margalit, this issue). At the same time urban renewal projects flourished in the Northern and affluent parts of the city and on the coastline of Jaffa, where bureaucracy and financial feasibility did not seem to pose a problem to private-public coalitions' political will (Margalit, 2009; Monterescu, 2009). Thus, the urban renewal and development of the CBS district have followed the geography of power/money typical of the Israeli planning and land system that renders effective public participation mechanisms into a privilege of 'strong' urban populations. According to this geography, national and municipal authorities show a great interest in investing in development and renewal in areas that they own or from which they can extract considerable revenues. Consequently, planning deals tend to obliterate all private-owned parcels in areas created during colonial times, such as the CBS, as well as old landmark buildings, where authorities have no expectancy of revenue (Margalit, 2009).

Against this background, it seems that the Levinsky camp and the 2011 protests in south Tel Aviv built up on deep processes that preceded the wake-up call initiated by the Israeli middle class, giving voice to the particular history of the place and its forgotten marginalized people. As one of the tent dwellers explained:

18 For the latest proposal, see Bosso, N. (2015) Shnei metzi'im le'rechishat Hatachana Hamerkazit Hachadasha be Tel Aviv [Two new offers to buying the Central Bus Station in Tel Aviv]. *The Marker* 9 March 2015 (available at <http://www.themarker.com/realestate/1.2584379>).

No one will force us to Rothschild, our home is here, and there is no reason we shouldn't be able to protest here ... There are homeless in the streets here, refugees who have nowhere to live, elderly in need of housing assistance, here are the single mothers, the drug addicts, the Sudanese refugees who sleep here in the day and night on the benches and the stairwells (Israel's Protests Part 2: the revolution).<sup>19</sup>

The introduction of 'communicative planning' did nothing to mitigate the residents' grievances. On the contrary, the gap between the participatory discourse that bore a promise of change and effective participation and the actual policies that perpetuated stagnation and deterioration, encouraged more militant and non-institutionalized forms of protest such as the 'body politics' of occupying public space. As explained by Shula Keshet, a well-known activist from south Tel Aviv and one of the founders of the Levinsky tent compound:

I live in the backyard of all the backyards in Israel ... I've been advocating on behalf of the neighborhood residents, both men and women, since the 1980s, either through protest or through the legal channel. I've been trying ever since to change the CBS as it is poisoning all of the south of Tel Aviv (Shechter, 2011).

More significantly, as the type of 'body politics' that developed in the Levinsky tent camp refused to yield to urban fragmenting politics that had been characteristic of the area, it also challenged fundamental social divisions pervasive in Israeli public discourse. During its short-lived existence, the Levinsky tent camp was hailed by the media and observers as one where 'inter-ethnic solidarity' prevailed. While this depiction might have been overstated, the camp dwellers showed their resistance to 'divide and rule' policies on several occasions, such as in May 2012 when violent demonstrations against African asylum seekers in the nearby Hatikva neighborhood were quickly met by counter-protests from tent camp activists.

Waving banners that called for 'social justice for the [neglected] neighborhoods' and urged Prime Minister Netanyahu 'Bibi, wake up', the counter-demonstration organized by activists from several southern quarters was consciously geared to express 'the other face of the neighborhoods', unyielding to national and racial divisions. So was the petition they addressed to the prime minister in which they condemned incitement against refugees led by the politicians from the governmental coalition and demanded a clear policy that will not be at the expense of the social peripheries: 'We religious and secular, left and right wingers are all united in the opinion that the no-solution and no-policy situation is a catastrophe for asylum seekers and especially for the veteran residents of South Tel Aviv ... The duty of the government is to govern and not to blame others for its lack of capacity to act' (translated by the authors from a now inactive web link).

In September 2011, the police, accompanied by municipal inspectors and cleaning workers, raided the tent cities in Tel Aviv, effectively putting an end to this stage of the protests. Despite several comeback attempts, the Summer 2011 protest has to a great extent faded away. The 'specialists' committee ('Trachtenberg Committee'), set up by the government to devise reforms in housing, childcare and social services, played an important role in dissipating social mobilization, as have police surveillance and harassment targeted at prominent activists. Some reforms have been implemented, including cutting the cost of education, but all in all the core issues raised by the

19 In setting itself apart from the main camp, the Levinsky tent city allied itself with the joint Jewish-Arab Jaffa and the Hatikva camps, calling themselves 'The Roar of the South'.



protest have not yet been addressed (see Marom, 2013). Yet, while massive collective mobilization has receded, the public discontent that catalyzed tent camps such as the Levinsky into action and the categorical claims for ‘social justice’ that they invoked left many traces in the form of new grassroots coalitions, a search for cooperative forms of action, and persistent demands for greater accountability and redistribution of public resources.<sup>20</sup>

To summarize, the 2011 mobilizations brought, for the first time in the history of collective protest in Israel, the effective politicization of social and economic issues (Rosenhak and Shalev, 2013). As it focused on housing issues, the protest also placed at the center of the public agenda the pervasive power of planning, budgeting and housing policies and their impact on the everyday lives of citizens. Whereas the protest was identified mainly as a protest of the Ashkenazi and secular middle class, whose younger generation has not benefited from the promises of neoliberal economic reforms, marginalized groups at the intersection of class, ethnicity and legal status were also active participants (Misgav, 2013). Given the limited opportunity structure posed by the Israeli urban planning regime and the absence of effective participatory venues for marginalized groups in south Tel Aviv, most of the attempts to assert their right to the city have been channeled throughout the years into localized forms of resistance or disengagement from urban politics. The 2011 social justice protest gave them a first time opportunity to merge ongoing urban struggles—associated formerly only with ‘the neighborhoods’—with wider agendas and cross-group constituencies that defied the fragmenting logics of neoliberalism.

### **Berlin and Tel Aviv: comparison and conclusions**

The rescaling of citizenship and the introduction of participatory instruments in both Berlin and Tel Aviv have resulted from a crisis of Fordism, conflicts over top-down urban planning and renewal projects, as well as the entrenchment of neoliberal configurations of governance. In both cases, governing the city is also increasingly based on activating individuals and communities and encouraging them to assume a pro-active role in participating. But while these processes might explain the recent surge of claims to *cityzenship*, they cannot explain why and how urban struggles over redistribution and recognition take fundamentally different shapes endowing urban participation with very different meanings.

From a comparative perspective, we want to draw attention to the role played by participatory ensembles in mediating between neoliberal urban regimes and particular types of claim making and political agency. Based on the assumption that the political agency of citizens develops in interaction with participatory structures, our cases show how particular urban political settings impact the process of finding and defining political goals and ultimately the types of claims that can be advanced in the public sphere.

In Berlin, participatory procedures are well developed, but, not surprisingly, they operate within a given political and economic framework. Budget constraints, legal parameters and institutional jurisdictions provide the framework that all participating actors have to respect if they wish to remain part of collective bargaining processes. In the case of the social center, the city’s fiscal and economic crisis—partly self-inflicted by the former (conservative) CDU-government and its speculative operations—and the way the city government decided to manage it (through neoliberal cutbacks and privatization of public goods and assets) clearly drew the limits for negotiations. Activists would have had to agree to pay the market price for renting the social center,

20 For a recent example see ‘Power to the Community’, a recent coalition of South Tel Aviv residents, citizens and refugees, struggling against ‘institutional discrimination against neighborhoods and their residents’. See <https://www.facebook.com/Powertothecommunity> (accessed 7 July 2015).

or at least find a solution for this problem, for instance by recruiting a sponsor. As they refused to pay a profit margin to the city, the Mayor's hands were tied (independently from any political affiliation)—and the building they claimed remained in the 'property trust' in order to be sold on the private real estate market. In this context, it is especially interesting that the attempt to mobilize other grassroots groups and organizations that were also suffering from the city's austerity policies, was interpreted by the Mayor as 'selfish' behavior: activists were told they were not acting in the 'interest of the District as a whole', as the Mayor put it. The premise of this statement is that one has to accept Berlin's neoliberal policies including financial restrictions and the way budgets are calculated between the municipality and the state. Through this mechanism, the ISC's goal of mobilizing other neighborhood groups against the city's neoliberal policies was effectively reversed into its opposite: into a particularistic claim that ignored the interests of other local stakeholders. Furthermore, participatory procedures in Berlin require that stakeholders focus on solving a particular problem or issue. An important aspect of this process is the development and application of expert knowledge of financial and legal questions. In the case of the social center, the ISC tried to politicize the issue at stake and to 'instrumentalize' the roundtable for the articulation of a more fundamental discourse. By doing so, it violated the 'rules of good conduct' that define roundtable procedures and overcharged the participatory process, eventually leading to inconclusive negotiations with the representative of the local state and a deflated protest movement.

The Tel Aviv case stands in clear contradistinction to Berlin. While participatory mechanisms have been devised mainly in the planning system, they are fairly underdeveloped, voluntary and reactive. Despite the centrality of Tel Aviv as the economic engine of Israeli society and the significance of planning as a redistributive mechanism in Israeli society, urban politics still operate within a hierarchical and top-down national system and within a centralistic planning system (Alfasi, 2000; 2002; Rimlat, 2006). As we showed, to a large extent public participation in Tel Aviv remains at the level of 'symbolic discourse', conspicuously disconnected from actions on the ground. On the other hand, urban politics and policies have been fueled by a strong entrepreneurial modality which privileges private interests and 'strong populations' (Hatuka and Forsyth, 2005; Margalit, 2013). The latter has led during the last two decades to a dramatic fragmentation of social struggles and to competition over rights and resources. However, it is precisely out of the gap between a 'roll out' participatory discourse and 'roll back' privatization and gentrification policies on the ground, that the Summer 2011 social protests emerged and managed to bridge the differences between highly diverse groups of residents and call for systemic change. While the tent camps that formed the stronghold of the protest were dismantled, the categorical issues they articulated and the explicit challenge to 'divide and rule' neoliberal and conservative politics, still loom large in the new urban citizenship discourse. Moreover, distrust of formal participatory mechanisms which have remained at the symbolic level has rendered grassroots mobilization the main form of political participation deemed effective by citizens, mainly from marginalized social groups, at voicing grievances and advancing claims to redistribution and recognition.

A comparison of participatory urban politics in Berlin and Tel Aviv thus shows that participatory instruments can have a strong inclusive effect and can make a significant contribution to the democratization of city making. In turn, the lack of participatory elements in urban politics can translate into political and socio-economic exclusion; it can lead to an escalation of urban grievances and undermine urban citizenship in fundamental ways. However, drawing from our case studies, we also find ourselves uneasy with implicit assumptions shared by otherwise very different theoretical bodies such as those concerned with right to the city movements, urban

citizenship and urban governance. When analyzing both the possibilities and pitfalls of participatory tools, much of this literature tends to assume that the political agency of social movements precedes their interaction with the political structures and urban regimes in which they are embedded. In addressing the significance of participatory and communicative urban politics, critical scholars like Purcell (2012), for example, suggest that urban social movements can make use of governance structures in order to pursue their goals. Pointing at the unintended effects of participatory mechanisms, he argues that neoliberal reforms can actually be ‘appropriated’ and ‘put to work’ for progressive politics. Ferguson (2010) argues similarly, though in a national context. Yet, the emphasis on the strategic use that social movements can potentially make of neoliberal participatory instruments to dismantle the ‘master’s house’, relies on the assumption that social movements are autonomous entities to begin with, decoupled from the political field where they operate.

Based on our case-studies we would rather argue that right to the city movements and participatory instruments are part of the same political field and constitute themselves in closely entangled relationships. Their mutual constitution may lead to democratizing moves but it also disciplines and imposes substantial restrictions. In Berlin and Tel Aviv, neoliberal mechanisms for urban participation (or lack thereof) pre-structure the way claims can be made. On the one hand they offer venues of inclusion hitherto non-existent or non-accessible; on the other hand they channel urban stakeholders’ various concerns around specific issues and particular(ized) interests, formatting participation in ways that privilege situated claims over more fundamental questions of urban social justice. Moreover, as they require specific knowledge, expertise and resources to have access to participation, they shape not only the movements’ foci of action but, more significantly, their collective identities which are more akin to interest groups than to social movements. By doing so, participatory instruments in fact might obstruct exactly those elements that Castells (1983) identified as crucial for the successful development of broader urban social movements: the ability to make the connection between a particular issue and the underlying political and economic roots and dynamics; the formation of broad alliances with groups and organizations beyond the immediate particular issue; and the connection of various fundamental problems (poverty, ecology, nationalism) with each other and with universal claims for recognition and redistribution.

Based on our analysis of urban protests and their participatory mediation, we suggest that critical urban research and urban activists need to rethink the relationship between participatory tools, rights and recognition, problematizing emerging tensions between sweeping claims to the ‘right to the city’ and participation, and their concrete manifestations as situated and fragmented. Rather than assuming that participatory tools either co-opt movements or can be appropriated by them, we need to ask how participatory structures and political agency constitute each other, and how participatory and activating mechanisms mediate between particular urban structures and regimes on the one hand, and particular modes of protest and participation on the other.

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