Cities under observation: Social monitoring in integrated neighbourhood development in Hamburg

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Abstract

This contribution describes social monitoring in integrated neighbourhood development in Hamburg as an example of current observation tools for urban socio-spatial development. In the first instance, the relevance and objectives of such quantitative analysis tools are considered, then the scope and limitations of the index-method are set out along with their applications.

Keywords: social monitoring, socio-spatial development, segregation, neighbourhood, Hamburg, cities under observation, status index; dynamics index

1. Background: Changes in urban development

In recent years small-scale observations in German cities have become an increasingly important foundation for informing policies and administrative actions. Monitoring systems for social or integrated urban (neighbourhood) development are used in the observation of small-scale developments in order to identify local areas where action is needed, and to deduce appropriate measures founded on empirical analysis. Developments are the result of transformation processes taking place in society as a whole, including globalisation, changes from an industrial society to service society, demographic changes or reunification, which mostly occur on a small-scale in urban agglomerations.

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Since the mid-1980s in particular, socio-economic structural changes, immigration and growing unemployment in large cities has led to the transformation of the inner structure of cities. Social environments in cities have become more differentiated since then, neighbourhoods (districts) are becoming more segregated and many areas show a trend towards polarisation between affluent and poorer neighbourhoods. \cite{2,3} Polarisation processes can lead to divided cities, social and ethnic segregation as well as to the exclusion and isolation of certain districts. Generally, a strong trend towards socio-spatial fragmentation of cities is being attested, which raises the question of new types of city policies.\cite{4}

2. On the relevance of the topic ‘social (space) monitoring’

The theoretical background for monitoring socio-spatial development processes is founded on the assumption of context effects. This means that “… urban neighbourhoods, in their role as learning and socialisation environments, generate a spatial effect which can significantly affect the current and future circumstances of its inhabitants”.\cite{5} This assumption is explained by the fact that particularly in urban areas where segregation processes have led to growing social problems, additional neighbourhood effects may worsen the already difficult social circumstances of some residents even more and lead to further disadvantages.\cite{6}

This includes socialisation in an environment or milieu which is gradually moving away from the norms recognised by society as a whole. Reasons for this may be that “… a stable employment history and related daily routine are an exception or that some acts of petty crime are considered acceptable. These effects also have an impact on people who are not members of this milieu, but who are confronted with it on a daily basis. Children and young people are affected in particular, for whom the neighbourhood plays a special role as a ‘learning environment’.\cite{7} The second aspect mentioned is that insufficient infrastructure facilities in the neighbourhood’s physical material environment causes further discrimination. The third reason cited is the negative image that these neighbourhoods often hold. In the form of public image or self-image this can lead to further discrimination through stigmatisation.

At this point strategies for action come into play which were established in the context of urban regeneration programmes initiated by federal government and states. The ‘Social City’ programme plays a special role as its objectives address precisely the social deficits described. Consequently most funding goes to the stabilisation and enhancement of structurally weak districts and neighbourhoods which are economically and socially disadvantaged and have not benefited from regeneration. This scenario led to the early recognition of the specific importance of monitoring systems.\cite{6,7,8} Social urban monitoring has the goal of detecting accumulations of all types of social problems in urban sub-spaces and thus “identify disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In this way it serves as the groundwork and preparation of urban policy decisions”.\cite{9} Berlin is the trailblazer in ‘social urban development monitoring’.\cite{10} In Hamburg, the Framework Programme for Integrated Neighbourhood Development (Rahmenprogramm Integrierte Stadtteilentwicklung - RISE) provides a joint umbrella for the implementation of urban regeneration. “It pursues the target of strengthening social cohesion within the city”\cite{10} (www.hamburg.de/ris) and so integrates policy objectives for the ‘Social City’ into key objectives for the city as a whole. Small-scale social monitoring has been given a firm place within the programme and is an established programme control tool.

2.1 What is social (space) monitoring?

Social urban development monitoring is the systematic and regular analysis of spatially differentiated socio-structural developments in urban areas, using suitable indicators or indices which examine these developments relative to one another and/or to developments in the city as a whole.

Models for social urban development monitoring are characterised by the following points:\cite{6}:

- regular implementation (eg. annual);
- uniform, small-scale basis;
- continuity of indicators;
- comparability;
- relation and analysis of different thematic indicators to one another;
- clarity and transparency of the process.

The key objective of current socio-spatial monitoring systems in Germany is to observe developments in specific sub-spaces within the city, to compare them with one another and thus identify areas with a special need for social and urban development action.\cite{6} Correspondingly, the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg has defined its central objectives for social monitoring to be the mapping of the dimensions of social inequality within the city, by regularly
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