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Stream: Democracy & Migration

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Urban Citizenship – An Answer to the Democratic Deficit in Immigrant Societies?

Immigrant societies are facing a democratic deficit as immigrants become part of the society as tax payers, entrepreneurs, employees, parents who send their kids to school etc. They are thus affected by decisions in which a large part of the immigrant population cannot take part as they are not full members of the polity. Problematizing this problem authors working with the notion of local (or urban) citizenship point to the local level as a possibility to realize a space in the nation-state that is able to overcome exclusionary features of national citizenship more easily. They see the city as an emancipatory space, where democracy and citizenship can be more inclusionary than on the national level. Rainer Bauböck for example makes a concrete proposal for an "urban citizenship that is emancipated from imperatives of national sovereignty and homogeneity" and "may become a homebase for cosmopolitan democracy" (Bauböck 2003: 157). While he makes an argument that is mostly related to possible institutional reforms Monica Varsanyi looks at empirical examples of "sub-national policies" that "determine membership via the mere fact of presence and residence in a city or state, in spite of the powerful boundaries still surrounding formal membership in the nation-state" (Varsanyi 2006 : 244, similarly Holston 2006).

Referring to these discussions the presentation aims to, first, depict the central arguments and claims of authors using the notion of 'local' or 'urban' citizenship and, second, to scrutinize their central claims critically in regard to the ability of the local level to overcome exclusionary features more easily than the nation-state. While stressing that examining local manifestations of citizenship is a highly useful path of research, I will criticize mainly three points: First, the examples used to depict the city as an emancipatory space are not systematically collected and cases that do not fit the argument are hardly considered. Second, arguments on why the local level is or could be a more emancipatory space than the national level need more thought. More concretely, there is a need to specify conditions and characteristics of spaces that may be more inclusionary (or exclusionary). The third argument comes from the fact that the local level is also an exclusionary space – this needs to be connected to the picture of the local level as an inclusionary space if the latter should be analytically meaningful.

References:

- Bauböck, Rainer (2003): Reinventing Urban Citizenship. In: Citizenship Studies, 7(2), 139-160.
- Holston, James (2006): Urban Citizenship and Globalization. In: Lenz, Günter H. / Ulfers, Friedrich / Dallmann, Antje (eds): Toward a New Metropolitanism. Reconstituting Public Culture, Urban Citizenship, and the Multicultural Imaginary in New York and Berlin. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 109-138.
- Varsanyi, Monica (2006): Interrogating "Urban Citizenship" *vis-à-vis* Undocumented Migration. In: Citizenship Studies, 10(2): 229-249.

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Nihad El-Kayed studied Social Science in Düsseldorf and Bielefeld. Since March 2012 she is a PhD candidate at Humboldt University Berlin working in the realm of political participation, citizenship, migration and local context effects.

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