DISCUSSIONS AND COMMENTS

Forum

'Urban Anthropology'

This Forum on 'Urban Anthropology', started last year in *Urbanities* (Vol. 3 No. 2, 2013: 79-132), stimulated several scholars to contribute their reflections and comments. Below, in alphabetical order, those that have reached us in time for publication in the present issue.

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The detailed essay by Giuliana Prato and Italo Pardo on the history and development of urban anthropology (2013) raises important theoretical and methodological questions regarding disciplinary divides and influences, research contexts and foci. I suppose I am commenting from the position of someone who occupies the blurred space between disciplines: theoretically influenced by sociology, methodologically inspired by anthropology and substantively located in social policy. I would like to offer my reflections and brief comments on a particular cross-disciplinary influence highlighted by Prato and Pardo and to contribute to debates on whether the sociological distinction between urban and rural life remains as salient in an era of globablisation and international migration. I suggest that studying 'community' *(Gemeinschaft)* within the context of 'society' *(Gesellschaft)* has the capacity to illuminate processes of social continuity as well as social change. Community can be understood as multiple and overlapping forms of belonging (Ahmed 2011) and thus can be used to explain different forms of belonging in the modern world (Delanty 2003). My main argument here is that using community as a lens to understand how and to what people construct belonging — in urban as well as rural settings — highlights social continuity as well as social change. Further, how people experience belonging has significance in relation to how they see themselves in temporal as well as spatial contexts.

Conceptually, community is characterised by ambiguity, although it is broadly considered to be a positive feature of social and institutional life (Crow 2002a). Community studies characterise a range of academic disciplines and community is also a feature in UK policy circles, evidenced by New Labour's 'Community Cohesion' project and the Conservative-led Coalition 'Big Society' initiative. Focusing on community allows us to contextualise individual agency and social relations and processes within wider contexts (Crow 2002b). The discourse underpinning community is often one of loss: modernity and social change are seen as destroying community (Delanty 2003) and this leads to an idealisation of the past. Nostalgia too is a feature of community rhetoric and imagined community (Anderson 1983, 2006) can provide a sense of belonging to multi-dimensional communities and social continuity within the context of social change.

Community can refer to places, networks and identities and there is a reinforcing relationship between these different representations. Traditionally, research on community as place has involved studies which occur in particular locations and has historically focused on specific problems (Gillies and Edwards 2006). Networks, or relational belongings (May 2013), are also an important part of community and can be explored through focusing on social interaction (Amit and Rapport 2002). Identity is also significant in discussions of community and there is a relationship between identity and belonging, place and networks (Anthias 2008).

Examining how people experience and construct belonging to places, networks and identities through ethnographic and life-story methods allows us to gain knowledge of the social and material circumstances of their lives. Significantly, it is studying the intersection, or interplay between these different representations of community which has the capacity to illuminate social continuity in multiple settings. In summary then, community represents an ideal and an often imagined rural past. Because of this it is often presented as a panacea to the problems associated with modernity — or society — located in urban settings. However, exploring how people belong and to what they belong can illuminate the contexts in which peoples' lives are lived and processes of social continuity as well as social change.

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Prato and Pardo's piece (2013) is an excellent and useful introduction to the field of urban anthropology, as other commentaries have already noted. It is especially useful for someone like me, who came to urban anthropology indirectly, after many years of straddling the divide between scholarly and practical development anthropology. Having first worked on forced displacement and resettlement caused by development projects in rural areas, I was drawn to cities by the recent rapid urban growth in developing countries. As developing countries become majority urban, their cities confront new problems, including the disruptions caused by initiatives to improve infrastructure and neighbourhoods. These efforts include new roads, rail, bridges, watershed preservation and responses to climate change, as well as urban renewal to 'upgrade' slums and gentrification. These changes virtually always displace and relocate at least some of the people who live in the affected areas. Scholars and practitioners have shown that displacement and relocation disproportionately affect poorer groups and that the process of forced relocation disrupts economic and social ties with often disastrous results (Cernea 2000, Koenig 2009).

Just as anthropology itself began in rural areas and only later came to cities, so too did international development practice. This is especially true for development-caused forced relocation and resettlement, where international safeguard policies to mitigate the worst effects of displacement were formulated largely to avoid the negative effects of dam construction on rural people living in relatively isolated areas. The essential focus of many of these policies is reconstituting the land-based assets of rural residents so they can re-establish natural resource-based livelihoods. In urban areas, however, most people live from activities that depend upon other kinds of assets, including skills, social networks and technology. Existing policies are not always sufficient to reconstitute their lives and livelihoods.

Those who want to address the negative effects of urban forced displacement and resettlement need to understand not only how people live in cities but also how cities work. As in other fields of development practice, anthropology and its local focus offer the possibility to correct some of the blind spots of existing policy. As Prato and Pardo show, urban anthropology links the macro-processes of urban change to the lived experiences of urban residents. An anthropology of the city as well as the knowledge gleaned from anthropology in cities are both key to conceptualizing the impacts of urban displacement and relocation.

While the strength of anthropology remains ethnographic analyses of individual cases, good policy depends on accurate generalization based on comparative analyses of urban experiences internationally, within and between developed and developing countries. As developing countries build new infrastructure to improve cities, they are undertaking processes, including displacement and resettlement, that have occurred in similar, if not identical form, in developed countries. In the U.S., anthropologists began to carry out problem-oriented work in cities following new urban policies linked to the U.S. War on

Poverty (Silverman 2005: 307). This included the impacts of urban renewal, which began earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, with predictably negative results for many relocatees. Yet those working on forced relocation in developing countries today rarely turn to developed countries to learn from their experiences. Indeed, just as Prato and Pardo note how urban anthropology grew somewhat independently in Europe, the United States and elsewhere, so too has international development practice grown separately from concerns about similar social issues in the global North. In contrast to policy makers in international organizations, who must focus on developing countries, scholars can carry out comparative analyses to outline common urban social processes, regional differences and city particularities.

Scholarly comparative analyses can also build on knowledge of the deep past. While the macro-processes of urban change today are linked to the growth of global capitalism, capitalism is not the only economic force that has led to the growth of cities or to forced movements of people. Archaeologists have shown that people were obliged to relocate to cities among the Inka as well as in ancient Anatolia (Morris 2008, Stone 2008). Indeed, archaeologists have pursued an anthropology of the city even longer than have socio-cultural anthropologists, looking at patterns of planning, growth, and long-term change (Smith ed. 2003, Marcus and Sabloff eds 2008). Thus comparative analysis of many topics, not just urban forced resettlement, would be enriched by systematic comparison of historical and archaeological materials to contemporary ethnographies.

The insights from urban anthropology facilitate practitioners' understanding of the effects of coercion. In rural areas, displaced residents often express shock at leaving the places where their families have lived and their ancestors are buried, but displaced urban residents do so less often. Although some people subjected to urban renewal have expressed strong place attachment (see, for example, Fullilove 2004), today's urban displaced often include significant numbers of recent migrants. Urban residents voluntarily change their place of residence to take up new economic opportunities or show changing social status. However, even for people willing to move voluntarily in their own interests, a coerced move is quite different. The coercion itself compromises the ability of the relocated to reconstitute the social networks that underpin economic, social and psychological well-being.

In spite of the problems that usually accompany forced displacement, evidence shows that some people can use the new resources, especially monetary compensation, to create substantially better lives. When urban residents are forcibly relocated during strong economic times, a greater number may be able to benefit than when forced relocation occurs during an economic downtown. To keep pressure on international organizations to implement and maintain strong safeguard policies for the forcibly resettled, development practitioners have not often looked closely at those individuals or groups who do well. Nevertheless, scholarly approaches can and should do so. Theoretically important in themselves, these findings may also suggest how to improve strategies for the less well off, building on what enterprising individuals have already found effective.

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In their essay recently published this Journal (2013) Giuliana Prato and Italo Pardo have offered a useful summary of what urban anthropology is all about, explaining its origin and current diverse outlook. Since Eastern Europe falls outside their scope, I provide here information about my research in Budapest, Hungary. Because current urban anthropological concerns throughout the region are diverse with many national strands complicating the picture from Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovenia (see, for example, Kürti and Skalnik eds 2009, Mihailescu 2009, Soukupová 2010). Since I came to study that city as an American PhD researcher my subsequent publications reflect mostly Euro-American anthropology, but since I have been living now in Hungary for two decades, both teaching and researching, I also know how my colleagues in Hungary approached the subject of urban studies. However,

I do not wish to discuss the entire gamut of Hungarian studies related to urbanity here for that would require a separate and substantial treatment on its own (see Kürti 2003). Instead, I want to explain my own urban by providing a few ideas concerning my fieldwork experiences in Hungary.

While the term urban anthropology (*városantropológia*) currently is in vogue in Hungary, other terms such as 'settlement study' (*településkutatás*) and urban sociology have been also utilized to make them distinctly up-to-date and different from the more traditional rural or village studies (*falukutatás*) or ethnography (*néprajz*). This exciting tradition evolved from a mixture of urban sociology, regional or urban geography, and urban planning with a strong foundation in history and peasant ethnography connected to the names of such pioneers as Robert Braun, Tibor Mendöl and Ferenc Erdei. Ethnographers of the twentieth-century have studied the so-called Hungarian agro-towns (Cegléd, Debrecen, Hódmezővásárhely, Kiskunhalas, Szeged, and so on) which are of considerable size in Hungary (ranging between 50,000 and 100,000 people), with their usual mixture of various classes, diverse economic, industrial, religious and educational institutions (Hofer, Kisbán and Kaposvári eds 1974). Smaller towns also have their 'own' ethnographers as well, but many of these studies do not discuss anthropological (or urban anthropological) issues *per se* but remain within the confines of standard local ethnographies about the changing nature of peasant society. Already in the 1980s, some keen-eyed ethnographer-folklorists turned their attention to 'ethnographies of towns' but only scratched the surface of what anthropologists have been doing in urban environments in the West and, what is more important, investigated how could traditional ethnographic practice evolve into full-fledged urban anthropology (Fejős and Niedermüller 1983; Niedermüller 1984a, 1984b). Aside from a few attempts to grasp the new possibilities of research in urban context (Gergely 1993, Letenyei 2004), most of the recent work published in Hungary under the heading urban anthropology are either translations of Western, mostly English, urban studies or continue to be produced in the traditional ethnographic-folkloristic style (see, for example, Jelinek, Bodnár, Czirfuszand and Gyimesi eds 2013). Granted, both are necessary, especially for lower-level university teaching, but neither can stand for real urban anthropology (Prato and Pardo, 2013, discuss current concerns). However, it must be emphasized that many recent studies are conducted in an urban environment, population and institutions — for example, ethnic enclaves, migrant camps, or hospitals — without them being labelled urban anthropology or relating to theoretical orientation(s) of that area (Lázár and Pikó eds 2012). While in history, sociology and geography new trends have been the order of the day, ethnography has not developed along the same lines and, sadly, in cultural anthropology there is no specialized degree program in urban anthropology although some of the program allow urban-centred research to be included in its orientation.

As part of my doctoral dissertation I decided to study Budapest, Hungary's capital of two millions (Kürti 2002a). This was not without the influence of John W. Cole at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) who was especially pleased because of my choice. There were two main reasons for his decision to support my fieldwork. For one, American and British anthropological interest in Eastern Europe concentrated on villages, an orientation

that is still the hallmark of social anthropological studies. The US and British anthropologists who embarked upon anthropological fieldwork in Hungary (P. Bell, C. Hann, S. Gal, E. Huseby-Darvas, M. Sozan, I. Vasary) all studied the countryside and published unique village monographs. Finally, here was somebody who wanted to conduct research in an urban area, in Hungary, in 1985, and that really pleased my advisors. Importantly, John Cole's previous doctoral students conducted fieldwork in Transylvania to study the changing rural landscape of Ceausescu's Romania. In the early 1980s, Cole entered a furious debate with some Hungarian scholars including anthropologists as to the actual Romanianization plan of ethnic communities in Romania, and received a good amount of criticism of his, and his students', pro-Romanian perspective on that issue. The possibility of someone studying in Hungary and producing a PhD dissertation on a Hungarian topic surely came as a blessing to him and his programme.

To me, studying Budapest anthropologically seemed ideal at that time, and I believe it is an ideal research even today. Hungary's capital was already at its peak population boom with two million residents, now it is somewhat below that figure, but most of the outer districts, and some blocks of the notorious eighth, were dilapidated exuding the feeling of either the inter-war or the 1950s Stalinization periods. The 21st district of Csepel was a perfect choice to select for a fieldwork site (Kürti 2002b). It has been expanding both in its size and industry with a heterogeneous labour-force, its connection to downtown Budapest was ensured via tram. However, the district, with several high-schools, churches and large housing complexes, managed to avoid anthropologists before. It was not only ideal, but remained a *terra incognita* and there was a lot to be done. In the 1980s, it was still referred by its residents as Red Csepel, an epithet preserved from the 1920s and 1930s, mostly because of the working-class movement. Since WWI, Csepel was Hungary's number one factory town, thanks to the skilful Jewish entrepreneur, Manfred Weiss, who established his steel-mill there. Csepel became even more marked as a hotbed of industrial movement after 1945 as the Stalinist state magnified its symbolic power. By World War II, Csepel's population increased to 65,000, most working in the district's several factories. After the war, Stalinist political economy brought dramatic changes to workers and to Hungarian industry as a whole. Consequently, factories were nationalized and state control was established throughout the economy and as I was able to witness, through central control, mass housing projects and the implementation of Stakhanovism (a work-competition to speed up industrial output), Csepel became a 'model' socialist city (Kürti 1990).

Following the reorganization in the post-Stalinist era, the original Weiss factories were incorporated into a 'socialist trust' employing more than 40,000, most commuters from the countryside who were offered cheap housing in one of the apartment complexes. In 1968, the New Economic Mechanism was introduced to reverse the crisis caused by Hungary's re-entry into the capitalist world-system and the deficiencies of a centrally planned economy. By the late 1970s, it was evident that the 'reforms' could not buttress the serious of external economic shocks (primary associated with the high oil prices) and their internal ramifications. After a wave of political turbulence, the Csepel factories were facing yet another transformation: the trust was eliminated completely and independent production units were created under a new system of

company executive council (*vállalati tanács*). By the time I arrived, talk about socialist economy was passé and most people mentioned second economy as the real force to be reckoned with. Studying both the formal and the informal but legal second economy was a real challenge; youth spent more and more time in the factories and obviously earned more money. Some of my young informants were asking about the best and latest VCRs they should buy!

Complex organizations create complex and highly structured bureaucracies that offer anthropologists new possibilities to study inner-workings of institutions. At one of the company executive meeting I was able to sit through, I noticed how personal conflicts were solved through hours of negotiations. Surprising happenings also occurred. As usual for anthropological fieldwork method I was ready to take notes of the discussions taking place. In no time, one of the managing directors came informing me that I should not bother. My initial reaction must have shocked him because he immediately explained that I will receive complete written minutes of the meeting the next day. This is not something one gets while conducting participant observation in a village setting. Photographic fieldwork techniques were also lot more challenging than I expected. Although I had some previous uneasy situation with my camera, especially in Romania but also in Hungary, factory management asserted the no-photography-rule inside the factory gates. No people, no machines, not even seemingly innocent bystanders in an alley-way were considered proper subjects by my guides (Kürti 1999). Industrial plants were considered, after all, military installations as most industries in state socialist societies were considered as such. What this entailed was that the foreign anthropologist's technological violation of the workplace added a considerable distance between natives (them) and outsiders (me). Such a limitation was no more present during the mid-to-late 1990s when I returned for a follow-up fieldwork.

By 1985, when I first arrived to conduct my research, Csepel's population reached 90,000, and Csepelers faced yet another crisis period. The leadership, for its part, was desirous of finding ways to cope with the declining workforce in metallurgy and boost production by initiating various new forms of second economy activities. To alleviate the shrinking workforce new labourers were hired, many of them unskilled Roma from the countryside. Although there were Roma migrants living in rather squalid conditions in Csepel, new ones were not really welcomed. Interethnic strife and rivalry became vicious and open. The situation further deteriorated as high politics became overtly nationalistic.

One fundamental aspect of urban fieldwork is that anthropologists are able to witness how industries are facing and responding to challenges both from national as well as international players. As I found out from living in Csepel, local and national politics often clash in multi-ethnic working-class urban neighbourhoods suddenly with unexpected results. In the intervening months, these critical issues, taken together with international economic instability, contributed to the escalation of a crisis that catalysed the situation at hand. On October 23 1989, Hungary declared itself to be a Republic; a multi-party system was legalized and free elections took place on 25 March 1990; the socialist (formerly communist) party lost its monopoly in the industrial enterprises; joint ventures between Hungary and the West began to proliferate in an attempt to invigorate the country's sluggish economic performance.

Such a transformation of Csepel's sense of itself was accomplished in incremental stages that invariably reshaped not only the town's self-image but also workers' own consciousness of themselves. Local political processes followed immediately and communist leaders had to react accordingly. Until the mid-1980s, there was in Hungary a single minor political opposition to the socialist government known as the 'democratic opposition,' a loose coalition of two factions often identified as including the 'urbanists' and the 'populists'. Strange as it may sound to urban anthropologists, that intellectual disparity, dating back to the 1930s, refers to the tension between a more conservative political stance with regard to Hungary's external relations, and a more liberal one. For their part, the populists stress the importance of the country's history and culture as a mobilizing force and advocate a more gradual integration into a privatized, Western-style market economy. On the contrary, the 'urbanites' have advocated a liberal, Western orientation that emphasizes civil liberties, stronger political and cultural ties to the West, and complete free-market liberalization.

The political economic turmoil has caused not only a complete rearrangement of party politics locally, but wreaked havoc in the industrial structure of the entire country. This has been reported by others as well, but I was able to participate in the very process of industrial closures, factory sales and massive unemployment that followed in their wake. Many of my young informants in the city of Csepel lost their jobs and were searching for other possibilities to earn money. Disillusioned and without any institutional support, kids on the streets joined far-right organisations and took up occupations outside their skills. It was not a pretty picture for sure, but it was the reality of the 1990s in most of the industrial cities of Hungary (Kürti 1998). In the cultural sphere the mindless international popular culture exacerbated some of the national issues that I also reported on earlier (Kürti 2011). Such a manipulated political field soon made its way to Csepel working-class neighbourhoods and the once proud 'red heritage' slowly was fading out from conversations. By the late 1990s, when I conducted the last phase of my Csepel study, the new left-liberal party was barely making a dent in the political tapestry of the district. It is not surprising then that by 2010 a right-wing mayor was elected backed up by a majority of right-wing councilmen on the local council.

Conducting fieldwork in an industrial area of a city involves many institutions that are far from local. From day one, my fieldwork took an interesting turn as I had to navigate between different institutions, both political and civic that transgressed district boundaries. Contributing to the existing hierarchical politics that went up to ministerial level, was the heterogeneity and size of various offices and agencies that seemed chaotic at first, but became more and more manageable as my fieldwork progressed. One of the factories I studied was the Machine-Tool Factory, the other the Non-Ferrous Metal Works, both with large constituency of labour force and extensive export capabilities. Both factories were truly global, an aspect that also ramified into various local civic events and symbolic actions. In 1986 for instance, Mikhail Gorbachev visited Csepel; less than ten years later, an American group of executives came, but I saw even African businessmen trying to secure a deal with the local government bent on privatizing various state factories. By the mid-1990s, several Chinese shops, restaurants and laundries opened together with Turkish (Arab) fast-food places. Extended networks are also an everyday reality that one has to face with. Although my

target group was the younger generation, to study them alone was impossible; soon parents, grandparents and distant relatives were brought in and the original sample was expanding day by day. Focussing on, say, only political socialization, which was my first and foremost topic, did not last long, young informants drew me into their leisure activities which revealed their different personalities. Networks, as I found out, reached well beyond the immediately observable. I also came to notice very soon that while most of my informants were 'city-kids', their parents and grandparents had strong linkages all across the region and well beyond that, and relatives sometimes visited from far-away villages.

Opposed to my Csepel study, I also embarked upon another research area that concern a comparative study of national and local level cultural processes, such as nationalism, symbolic politics, education and youth culture, by engaging both with 'locals' in large cities, such as Budapest, as well as a smaller towns, like Lajosmizse (population 10,000) or Ladánybene (population 1600). The latter two are neighbours actually; Ladánybene grew out from its larger neighbour at the beginning of the 20th century. This process is a unique aspect of modernization and urbanization: the splitting of areas from agro-industrial centres. In this case, a distant farming area split off from the agro-town forming a new independent town on its own. Local politics and economic differences as well as religious infighting all contributed to such bifurcation. I have been able to untangle such processes with great difficulty, requiring not only in-depth interviews with extended families split between the two settlements but also arduous archival research (Kürti 2004). This community development study also gave me a fantastic possibility to study not only urban and rural interaction but national as well as international ones as well. I have published an analysis about the creation of a Western venture in Lajosmizse when at the beginning of the 1990s a Swiss meat-packing plant opened in the town (Kürti 2009).

In comparison to research in such small regional towns, conducting fieldwork in Csepel thought me numerous aspects of community life that one cannot witness in agro-towns or peasant villages, not on such magnificent scale and complexity for sure. I have learned about large housing construction deals that were really ugly and witnessed how from one minute to the next a cultural institution could be destroyed by powerful party bosses. I have even seen a court case of a toxic dump, but also was involved with a family feud and tried to help as much as I could. Not only bureaucracy, hierarchy and population density, but crime, corruption and vandalism are also part of the city life that one cannot find, certainly not on such scale, in rural smaller settlements. The size and multifariousness of the urban milieu really require anthropologists to manage many things at once, and to be able to organize their life accordingly.

Edmund Leach once noted that social anthropology is packed with frustrations, and, surely, this could be a proper motto for the urban anthropology of East Europe, a region sandwiched between the prestigious anthropology of the Mediterranean and Western Europe, and a subfield which is a minuscule part of the anthropology of Europe. This hiatus should be countered for the simple reason that research conducted on Eastern Europe has the potential, while contributing to the more general anthropology of Europe, to offer excellent glimpses into societies both planned and unplanned, and provide ethnographies which replicate neither those

written about Third or Fourth World nor those describing Western states. The accounts of what went on in existing socialist countries, how they have been transformed and how anthropologists have been able to record and analyse them belong to the very core of the discipline's epistemological make up. Anthropologists studying first hand urban processes of state socialist legacies — the anthropology of socialism and post-socialism to use the phrase fashioned by Chris Hann — could be extremely valuable for various issues within the anthropological enterprise, not the least urban anthropology. Unfortunately, despite the many excellent recent studies published, it is obvious that the region has remained marginal in mainstream anthropology (see Kürti and Sklanik 2009). Urgently, we need more sound analyses that can redress this problem.

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Just a few comments and reflections to add to this Forum. Twenty years ago I joined an interdisciplinary research team working on port cities. It was mostly composed of historians, and my role was to approach the topic from an anthropological perspective. Most of the information we worked with derived from written historical sources and reports and documents relating to port agencies, ports and urban planning. We were far from the field in chronological and spatial terms. It was quite a challenge, yet one similar in some respects to those experienced by those who built this subfield.

As I started this project, I was familiar with the historical dimension thanks to my doctoral work on a classic subject: Northwest Coast Indians as seen as by Eighteenth Century

Explorers. So I knew how to talk with dead 'informants' and to approach a field that was 'far away' in more than one sense. Moreover, living in Madrid, 'ports' as an anthropological subject were for me as exotic as the Eighteenth Century Northwest Coast of North America. I was born and lived most of my life far from the sea.

Nevertheless, as the work progressed, I realized that there was a huge divide in the field; namely, between those who *make* the port — stevedores, sailors, ship officers, port authorities, administrators and so on — and those who *study* it. Port agencies, managers and administrators were not interested in the heritage of the city, they just wanted to run an efficient and profitable node of commerce and distribution. Old buildings were useful as long as they had some economic function. Sometimes, heritage buildings were torn down in order to make room for a shopping mall or a five-star hotel. Once aware of this division, I realized that ports and port cities were not only strategic, vantage points for dealing with the transformations related to urbanization and globalization; they were an excellent topic to apply, develop or challenge what we know about 'urban anthropology'.

What did I learn dealing with port cities? It seemed to me that most of the cross-disciplinary influences Giuliana Prato and Italo Pardo so clearly show in their essay (2013) are related to a historical moment. By the end of the nineteenth century cities were entering a new modern configuration and the then new social sciences defined that moment particularly well. The bias when we carry out our fieldwork is not just ethnocentrism, there are also methodological and theoretical problems. We should be aware of the way that both theory and our own understanding of the field may be inadequate to address current problems. An example, to put it simply: the Chicago School of Urban Ecology naturalized a moral dimension in their theoretical orientations. Most of the scholars of that School dealing with Chicago were concerned with social problems and with the future of the city. It is not my intent to criticize their moral grounds, yet cities are not moral creatures with 'ordinary' neighbourhoods and not so 'ordinary' slums or ghettos. The clash of different class moralities were a paramount field of contention in port cities, at least from the middle of the nineteenth century to the first third of the twentieth. Why impose our moral reading over those we find in the field? Today this Chicago School-style moral reading of urban life is still present, too present I would dare say, in many of my American colleagues' work. Good urban ethnographies do not need that dimension to be enlightening or useful from an activist point of view.

The city, as seen by Nestor Garcia Canclini in 1990, is approached on a very specific level of observation. He writes, 'The anthropologist arrives in the city by foot, the sociologist by car and via the main highway, the communication specialist by plane. Each registers what he or she can and constructs a distinct and, therefore partial vision. There is a fourth perspective, that of the historian, which is acquired not by entering but rather by leaving the city, moving from its old center toward the contemporary margins. But the current center of the city is no longer in the past.' (Garcia Canclini 1995: 4).

There is another concern, well outlined by Prato and Pardo and (2013), which I would like to stress. Entering the city on foot, that is, by means of an ethnographically grounded approach, we should be mindful of the peculiarities of the cross-disciplinary and early

anthropological influences that have shaped our practice, as well as of the hype surrounding the newness and innovative character of the city in an increasingly globalized world. A critical approach is needed. As I have mentioned, cities are not constituted by moral narratives but by individuals. Cities are not smart themselves. Cities are made efficient or better organized, as human artefacts — by human action. Theorization arising from fieldwork is the backbone of our work and facilitates the dialogue anthropologists could maintain with other disciplines which also deal with the city. Nevertheless, we should be well aware of the specificities of theories and perspectives born in precise moments and how this corpus was shaped by places and concrete problems.

‘Urban Anthropology’ is no longer a ‘poor man’s Anthropology’, to use A.P. Cohen’s (1986: 15) expression. It has become one of the more dynamic and promising areas of Anthropology, both because of the relevance of the city and of the urban transformation fuelled by globalization, and because of its ability to engage ethnographically with the complex, global world we live in. For once, urban anthropologists or just anthropologists doing research in urban settings seem to be in the right place at the right time. Cities and the urbanization processes related to globalization are arguably two of the defining forces transforming the world.

One final point, the essay written by Prato and Pardo (2013) deals mostly with the ‘urban anthropology’ produced in English-speaking world. As other commentators have pointed out, there are other traditions or ways of dealing with the city inside the anthropological discipline. In the case I am more familiar with, there is a tradition, well acquainted with the French, British and American anthropological traditions, but nurtured by Latin American and Spanish History and academic traditions. In this increasingly globalized world we should try to open up a debate as much as possible. There is a lot to share out there.

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Giuliana Prato and Italo Pardo’s exhaustive account on the developments of Urban Anthropology as a field of research (2013) accurately show the complexity of carrying out ethnography in urban contexts, both in terms of identifying the research subject and developing a specific methodology.

The definition of what is to be considered an urban environment (usually as opposed to rural areas) proved as well to be a complicated issue, bringing to a head the implications of an heritage left by 'classical Anthropology', which often tended to consider small groups of people as a closed system, and treated them as representative of much wider realities.

What particularly caught my attention in Prato and Pardo's essay is an evident tension between the study of micro- and macro-processes which, though not often made explicit, seems to have always been latent in the discipline. The implications of studies about globalization and transnational movements pose the issue of reconsidering the urban context as a whole. Suburbs and neighbourhoods, as well as whole cities and extended metropolitan areas, cannot be considered as closed and self-legitimating groups of people, neither as limited spaces of significations, they need to be understood as poles of a transcultural and transnational continuum which operates at multiple levels. The tension between micro and macro, which probably has caused the arousal of a feeling of inadequacy towards the means and methodologies of the anthropological research, has been possibly the reason that led to the temptation of considering such processes as separated from each other, and not as constantly interrelated. On the other hand, as the authors report, the attempt to provide a holistic understanding of the many processes at play have often produced superficial ethnographic accounts.

Furthermore, and here I agree with the authors, I consider the traditional anthropological methodology to be the most fitting for the study of urban environments (Pezzi 2013). If it is true that one of the core aims of the discipline is to 'translate' cultures into an intelligible broader discourse, participant observation and interviews are the best ways to put the points of view of the citizens into their own context and to comprehend how their sets of values, moralities and identities cohabit and are (re)negotiated in a specific reality. Not only is Urban Anthropology an anthropology of the city, but to my understanding it is also an anthropology of how people inhabit their social space. I do consider the city to be a place that constitutes both the significant and the signification of peculiar social interactions and modalities of the existence.

Secondly, interdisciplinary tools could come in handy when trying to grasp the complexity of the interaction of micro- and macro-processes in a specific area, as well as the dynamics which might lead to the creations of different behavioural patterns and how they are perceived in a fast changing environment. Having assumed that the anthropological methods are a definitive plus-value, dialogue with other social sciences (but not only) could help with providing a more in depth analysis of the available data. On the other hand, having accessibility to a wider range of information, particularly on the quantitative side, could lead to the tempting exercise of getting engaged in comparative efforts, which should be carefully undertaken.

For what concerns my personal interest and engagement with tourism anthropology applied to urban environments, I do believe that an anthropology of the city offers a variety of tools and ideas which helps understanding the consequence of tourism development in urban contexts, a phenomenon which has known a great expansion in the latest years, even in areas which would not be considered to have tourism appeal in the classic sense.

Tourism and urban change are two phenomena which are often interrelated, since the first tends to shape up the ways in which an environment is signified, as well as the modalities in which its inhabitants (and tourists) do interact with it, with all the consequent social and cultural implications.

Since tourism became a mass phenomenon that interests more or less every area of the world, to consider its impact on the studied reality on the basis of urban anthropology could help to understand processes of social and spatial stratification better, as well as the impact on economic practices, that is, those which originate or are influenced by the existence of a tourism market in a spatially restricted area. On the other hand, researches like the study by McKean (1989) on how tourism in Bali has changed power relations, access to wealth and social stratification on the island, clearly show that urban and urbanized environments are often the result of transnational and transcultural forces which cannot, and should not, be considered as independent from the area in which they operate.

A study of urban contexts based on the dialogue with other disciplines, as well as with other fields within the anthropological research, with their methodologies and approaches, shall definitely help individuating what makes changes possible in urban environments and how do they affect people's lives. Prato and Pardo provided us with an excellent account of the developments and current achievements of the discipline, which will surely stimulate further discussions and serve as an indispensable tool for anyone approaching Urban Anthropology in the future.

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Peripheral Observations as a Source of Innovation[1]

Each fieldwork project has its own soundtrack of background noise. Anthropologists record some of this soundtrack in their field notes, and integrate a few snippets into their articles and books, but many interesting observations remain unpublished.

Here I would like to make the case for dedicating precious space in a peer-reviewed journal such as *Urbanities* to peripheral observations. While the idea of a periphery is associated with the expansion of knowledge, here I would like to make the more ambitious argument that the proposed section has the potential of being a source of innovation. Tentatively titled 'Choice Notes', I envision this section to be a source of innovation at three levels: the discipline, individual practitioners, and their tools. Firstly, at the level of the discipline, sharing peripheral observations imply a new ethic of transparency with regards to field notes. Secondly, scholars might encounter in the proposed section descriptions of marginalized categories of people or experiences that they would like to explore further. Thirdly, some contributions to 'Choice Notes' might introduce new concepts for organizing our observations in the field.

For these innovations to manifest themselves, it is not enough for a peer-reviewed journal to feature a section dedicated to peripheral observations. The mechanisms of including (and excluding) potential contributions, the reach and professional status of their authors and the structure of the discipline are all important factors (Silverstein 2012). However, this broader context is outside the scope of this essay. Instead, I would like to address potential reservations to the proposed section, and then share an example of a peripheral observation, a short description of an unplanned visit to a rabbit exhibit in Potsdam, Germany. I then conclude with some reflections on the innovations that a section dedicated to peripheral observations might yield at the level of the discipline, its practitioners and their tools.

Addressing Possible Criticism

Firstly, some might argue that the proposed section would feature impaired fieldwork techniques by distracted urban anthropologists whose peripheral observations would capture seemingly interesting, but unfocused and poorly researched experiences. Anthropology journals have the difficult and necessarily exclusionist task of enforcing high standards in keeping with the discipline's mission, which is, to follow Didier Fassin, making 'sense of the world that subjects create by relating it to larger structures and events' (Fassin 2014: 53). Peripheral observations do not meet this standard.

[1] I would like to thank the DAAD and the Herder Institute, Leipzig, for the opportunity to study in Germany and conduct preliminary fieldwork. I would also like to thank Josué Ramirez for his ideas about 'the new' and innovation in anthropology. I am grateful to Odelia Ghodsizadeh for her incisive comments. However, I alone am responsible for any mistakes or errors found in this text.

Secondly, contributors to the forum would presume themselves to be original and creative, yet their observations would likely overlap with the main research interests of other anthropologists. In the context of the pre-existing body of scholarship, the forum's selection would likely be trite, misleading or both.

Thirdly, a section dedicated to interesting asides would derive its academic prestige by association, rather than merit. Contributors to this section would be riding on the coattails of hard-working scholars whose full-length articles establish the journal's reputation.

These reservations do not offer sufficient grounds for dismissing 'Choice Notes.' Firstly, while the contributions to this forum would be vulnerable to the charge that they represent poor research, the editors would select submissions that distinguish themselves by the quality of the writing, so that the published material would serve students and inspire scholars. Secondly, when the peripheral observations would tread on the terrain of other scholars, the authors and/or editors would acknowledge this fact, pointing to the areas of overlap. Thirdly, to ensure fairness, the editors could include in the introduction a statement that clearly sets apart the scholarly merit of full-length articles from the scholarly merit of peripheral observations to the advantage of the former.

Lastly, whether subject to editorial and/or peer review, I propose that contributions to 'Choice Notes' should be evaluated on the basis of whether they touch upon one or more aspects of the city. As I define it, the city has three key aspects. Firstly, the city is an emergent phenomenon, an outcome of many actions and interactions. Secondly, the city as a setting is a causal factor, shaping feelings, thoughts and actions. Thirdly, the city is an idea, a representation and an object of reflection that informs and is informed by people's concern with their place in the world (Touval 2011: 43).

An Example of a Peripheral Observation

Below is a potential submission to 'Choice Notes.' I do not presume that it is exemplary. I recorded the experience and my reflections on its possible significance, but I have not integrated this text into any of my scholarly writings. In retrospect, it exemplifies the vulnerability of individual peripheral observations:

July 1995. Just outside the Potsdam train station, I see a sign on a telephone pole with a colour photograph of rabbits and an arrow. I am familiar with the word Ausstellung, or exhibit, but the world Kaninchen, or rabbit, is an amusing novelty. I follow the arrow, first under a railroad bridge, and then, next to a canal, down a staircase, to a ticket booth where I pay the five-Marks admission fee.

Fibrous plastic sheets protect the cages from the sun, yet let in a gentle breeze. The ventilation tempers the smell of straw and rabbit pellets; the air inside the exhibit space is fresh, calm and bucolic. The exhibit conjures a rural past, leaping back and away from the twentieth century with its two world wars and the division of Germany into east and west, to a time when Potsdam was about Prussia and its rulers, and many political divisions cut across Germany. Situated near Potsdam's city centre, right next to its busy train station, the exhibit implies that Potsdam oversees the geographic regions from which the rabbits originate, positioning the city as an important centre of trade and commerce.

As my eyes adjust to the shade, the most stunning rabbits come into view. I did not know that rabbits could reach the size of large household cats. I dutifully read each label, and then stare to my heart's content. The names of some rabbit breeds — Sachsengold, Mecklenburger Schecken and Thüringer — invoke specific regions in Germany. Anticipating the public's curiosity concerning the names of breeds which do not contain a geographic reference, the organizers included the rabbits' place of origins on the labels, matching specific breeds of rabbit to different parts of Germany, much like cheese or wine. I speculate that participation in the rabbit exhibit could lead some breeders to consider their breed in relations to other breeds. More generally, the exhibit could serve as a place where people would consider their regional identity and the meanings that others attribute to it. Some visitors might discover gaps between their community's self-conception and others' perceptions of their identity, gaps that are productive of additional layers of self-referential commentary.

The rabbits look at me sleepily; they do not mirror back surprise, delight or astonishment. Some have eerie folds and strikingly colourful fur: blue, black, red and purple. A few have long feet, while others are as small as hamsters. They are fantasies of uniqueness, furry ambassadors whose pedigreed claim to purity suggests long-standing regional peculiarities. Are the regional differences as dramatic as the differences between the breeds of rabbit? At what point do breeds that have their origins in other parts of the world become local, German, breeds? What does it mean to be German? As an anthropologist, I doubt that the exhibit's rhetoric of speciation has any purchase in geography. Saxony, Mecklenburg and Thuringia are not isolated islands. The roads that crisscross these lands had ferried trade and ideas since Roman times, bastardizing everything in their wake: ploughs, crops, lexicons, coins and people.

Admittedly, my peripheral experience and reflections at the rabbit exhibit touch on the main research focus of other scholars who have written about Potsdam and its history, the anthropology of farming, agriculture, animal husbandry, animal exhibits, zoos, collections, museums and tourism. My contribution calls for more extensive fieldwork and a thorough familiarity with this scholarly literature. Nevertheless, I believe that urban anthropology has much to gain from curating and publishing short descriptions of peripheral experiences from the field.

Firstly, contributions to 'Choice Notes' might encourage the sharing of field notes. Currently, the discipline does not incentivize us to make our field notes available to other scholars. The proposed section is a step in the right direction: Setting an example of sharing notes from the field. This example points to an alternative horizon in which there would be more transparency with respect to the evidence that we collect in the field than there is today. This, in turn, could bring anthropologists to collaborate with each other across skillsets, giving rise to a division of labour, and perhaps careful succession planning with respect to particular field sites.

Secondly, at the level of the individual scholar, innovation is often couched in moral terms as an effort to document, and thus somehow liberate, marginalized people and experiences. Peripheral observations that would focus on previously ignored categories of people and or spheres of activity would help this effort.

Lastly, the urban setting is rich with peripheral experiences that are difficult to capture, let alone verbalize. 'Choice Notes' would acknowledge the difficulty of managing the relationship between background and foreground, with contributors drawing on the notion of a periphery for the purpose of either carefully delimiting or problematizing the boundaries of specific research projects. Following the former approach, some authors would invoke the ideal of holism in a manner that is consistent with current practices, such as demonstrated by Italo Pardo's work 'as a participant observer' (Prato and Pardo 2013: 96). Pardo '"followed" his informants in their dealings within and without the neighbourhood, thus providing an in-depth, articulated understanding of the ways in which local people relate to the wider social, economic and political system…' (96). Authors who would follow the latter approach, and problematize the boundaries of specific research projects, might sacrifice holism's aesthetic and analytical logic of completeness for the purpose of innovating our conceptual toolbox. Acknowledging the allure of distraction as a feature of both urban anthropology and, more generally, city life, the authors of these peripheral observations would conjure new metaphors for describing and expressing the urban experience.

To conclude, a section dedicated to peripheral observations might lead to innovation at three levels: the discipline, individual practitioners, and their tools. It could become a creative space for launching the '…generative first steps in the emergence of … new developments of … expertise, and new modifications of … conduct and its generative principles' (Ness 2011: 83). But would the proposed section deliver on this promise? This depends on the broader context. Each 'journal and its publication program…' is '…an institutional nodal point in a complex disciplinary conversation…' (Silverstein 2012: 575). The disciplinary conversation may or may not shift in favour of paying more attention to peripheral observations and their innovative potential. Yet as I argue here, the peripheral observations in our field notes are assets that we could play to our individual and collective advantage, making urban anthropology the richer for it.

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