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Urban Conflicts in Functional Perspective

Cities are the collective future of humankind, has Kofi Annan once noted. This sentence implies the obvious truth that the city belongs to its city dwellers. Such view is nothing new and it has been theoretically expressed by many contemporary critical social theories (P.Marcuse, D.Harvey) in the form of “right to the city” demand. However, we must be aware of this perspective has normative character, focusing rather on conditions for ideal urban community “to be” than giving us some idea of what the city in the social context looks like. In other words – “right to the city” serves us as a weapon in empowerment struggles.

Following directly Weber and Habermas one must be assumed that modern processes of reification are equal to bureaucratization of daily experience: such technocratic logic and domination of instrumental reason takes place also in urban reality. In this context, “right to the city” demand becomes part of sociopolitical struggles against technocratic urban (and public in more general) management and oligarchic reality. Main subjects on a frontline are frequently network-organized dwellers (or their vanguard of political representative) unified against “bad power” that act rather in business elites than dwellers best interests.

Above mentioned perspective, although close to commonsensical point of view, is based on a non-lyrical concept of society: it puts the emphasis on divergent perspectives and interests. We assume here that conflicts are fundamental to the society, but it must not lead into disintegrative tendencies. I am interested in numerous local-based conflicts that took place in Poznań last years (2006-2010). I would like to ask about such eufunctional/dysfunctional tendencies for both sides: social forces and local power elites. I furthermore assume that my query about functionality is also a question about rationality. Consistently – it is about benefits of conflict to adversary interest groups.