

Abstract

This research investigated the perception and patterns of use of public space of Palestinian immigrants in the city of Berlin. The main research question was **"What are the attitudes towards, and patterns of use of, public space by Palestinian immigrants in the city of Berlin?"**. Three sets of hypotheses were developed to guide the process and structure the research. The hypotheses addressed histories and biographies of Palestinian immigrants and their roles in informing their socio-spatial behavior, culture and cultural differences between Palestinian and German cultures with regards to socio-spatial practices, the issue of hybrid identities and adaptation strategies of Palestinian immigrants in their new spatial environment, and the influence of that on the host city of Berlin. The analysis was applied to the city, neighborhood and home levels of Palestinian immigrants.

The research was implemented to address three knowledge gaps in the current literature on socio-spatial behavior of immigrants in host societies of a different culture of perception and use of public space. Most research available on the use of public space investigates communities in their own built environment, which is produced -at least partly- by their culture and according to their cultural elements and norms. Few researches address the use of public space of immigrants in a different spatial environment with a different background culture regarding the perception and use of space. Most literature available addresses spatial behavior from a sociological point of view and omits the important role of the physical space, the existing built environment and the cultural norms and regulations related to that in shaping the socio-spatial behavior of immigrant groups in their host cities. In addition, there is a knowledge gap - on all levels - about Palestinians, one of the largest and most specific group of Arab immigrants in Europe. Most Palestinian immigrants in Europe are refugees who have not arrived in Europe from their homeland, but after they have been refugees in second and third countries suffering a series of wars and massacres for decades. The specificity of their situation as a group leading a life of 'permanent temporariness', their strong national identity related to their refugee status and the lack of information about them in general made them a prominent target group for this research.

The research used a combination of qualitative research methods: participatory observation; open ended semi-structured interviews; and a literature review on multidisciplinary themes including migration, public space, culture, identity, and ethnicity. The participatory observation in the public spaces of Berlin lasted four years, from 2010 to 2014, in which the researcher observed several open public spaces such as parks, gardens, playgrounds, markets and streets in the neighborhoods with the highest Palestinian concentration and presence -Neukölln, Mitte and Kreuzberg. The open-ended interviews; took place in three phases; the first phase interviews were conducted in 2011 and 2012 with prominent Palestinian and German social workers and persons involved with the Palestinian community; the second phase had 32 in-depth interviews with Palestinian immigrants from different generations and socio-economic backgrounds most of which occurred in 2012; and the third phase was executed in 2014 with selected members from the first two phases; it focused on additional issues that had surfaced from the in-depth interviews and also discussed and confirmed the findings thus far established.

There are various multi-disciplinary and multi-level findings concluded in the research. A summary of the findings regarding perception and use of public space by Palestinian immigrants in Berlin follows.

- There is no Palestinian homogenous ethnic group. Behavior, perception and use of space vary for different categories or individuals. From 32 interviews, 9 categories or patterns of use of space by Palestinian immigrants were identified. These categories show that Palestinians are not homogenous regarding their perception and use of space, and although the categories attempt to find similarities among Palestinians and make generalizations about their socio-spatial behavior, they are too numerous for this relatively small number of interviews; this indicates that socio-spatial behavior is -to a great extent- an individual matter.
- The history, biography and cultural background of Palestinian immigrants determine their present use of space, where the built environment in which one was born and raised, socialized and where their identity was built plays an important role in perception of space. In addition, other aspects of the biographies such as the generation, gender, age, level of education, amount of time spent in the host environment, socio-economic level all play a role in the individual's use of space.
- Different cultures have different perceptions and uses of public space. When people of different cultural backgrounds appropriate the same space, or one of them re-appropriates it for a specific use, those perceptions and uses may overlap in some cases, or may result in frictions and potential conflicts in others.
- Migration causes the creation of hybrid Identities, especially among the second and third generations who develop complex cross-cultural identities with different levels of loyalties, and enact different ethnic roles in the way they perceive and use the space. Migration, and living in a different spatial and cultural environment, results in the development of adaptation strategies and tactics to deal with the new environment; this results in the creation of new socio-spatial practices and 'life-styles' that have not existed before in the immigrant community.
- The migrant's socio-spatial practices cause new unique spatial cultures to emerge in host cities, not only by the immigrants, but also for the locals. This demonstrates that spatial culture is flexible and changing, and evolves with the changing populations who construct the mosaic of the city culture, and which is unique to this city.

In addition to addressing the knowledge gaps mentioned above, this pioneer study opens the door for further research on the Palestinian immigrant community in Berlin, especially the differences between different generations and the way their perception and use of space evolves with time. It also encourages further research on the perception and use of public space by other immigrant groups in their host communities, from a socio-spatial perspective that takes the physical space and the built environment into consideration.

The findings of the research are relevant to decision makers regarding their perception of immigrants and policies of immigration, to urban planners and their processes of planning and designing successful inclusive public spaces in multicultural cities, and to the media which significantly contributes to creating the public opinion of the host society, which in turn plays an important role in the inclusion or exclusion of their immigrant communities from the public space.

Approved 2015-09-09, Prof. Dr. Peter Herrle

