

Stigmatisation of Cities. The Vulnerability of Local Identities

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Abstract The vulnerability of cities is often discussed in terms of physical hazards and disasters such as earthquakes, floods or terrorist attacks. In contrast, this paper opens up a social-constructivist perspective, describing the vulnerability of cities as a result of discursive based communications. The article looks at the extent to which collective identities in cities are vulnerable to stigmatisation in the media and the ways in which local actors find to cope with this. Key terms of stigma and identity research are presented and the transferability of stigma and identity concepts of social groups to cities is discussed. Taking the examples of Sangerhausen and Pirmasens, which have for several decades been affected by peripheralisation, the article describes stigma processes in the national media, how this is addressed in the city and what coping strategies the actors have developed. Finally the key findings are summarised and conclusions with regard to the vulnerability of collective identities are interpreted.

Keywords Stigmatisation · Identity · Vulnerability · Sangerhausen · Pirmasens

Stigmatisierung von Städten. Zur Vulnerabilität lokaler Identitäten

Zusammenfassung Vulnerabilität von Städten wurde bisher hauptsächlich im Hinblick auf physische Gefahren und Katastrophen wie Erdbeben, Hochwasser oder Terroranschläge erforscht. Demgegenüber nimmt der vorliegende Beitrag eine sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektive ein, indem er die Verletzbarkeit von Städten als Ergebnis sozialer Konstruktionen in kommunikativen Diskursen thematisiert. Der Beitrag behandelt, inwieweit kollektive raumbezogene Identitäten durch die Stigmatisierung von Städten im Strukturwandel vulnerabel sind und welche Umgangsformen die Akteure finden. Es werden zentrale Begriffe der Stigma- und Identitätsforschung vorgestellt sowie die Übertragbarkeit von Stigmatisierungs- und Identitätskonzepten von sozialen Gruppen auf Städte diskutiert. Am Beispiel der peripherisierten Mittelstädte Sangerhausen und Pirmasens wird beschrieben, welche Stigmatisierungsprozesse durch überregionale Medien transportiert werden, wie diese vor Ort wahrgenommen und welche lokalen Umgangsformen damit gefunden werden. Zentrale Ergebnisse werden zusammengefasst und im Hinblick auf die Vulnerabilität lokaler Identitäten interpretiert.

Schlüsselwörter Stigmatisierung · Identität · Vulnerabilität · Sangerhausen · Pirmasens

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1 Introduction

Urban research has to date usually considered vulnerability in cities in terms of natural catastrophes such as flooding and earthquakes, criminality and the risk of terrorism, and the safeguarding of infrastructural resources and catastro-

phe management (see Pelling 2003; Coaffee/Murakami Wood/Rogers 2008; Helms 2008). The main focus here is on physical danger to cities and material damage. In contrast, a social constructivist approach opens up a view on the perception and interpretation of catastrophes and dangers by acting subjects, giving insights into the way in which dangers are filtered, interpreted and constructed differently according to the social perceptions of individuals.

This paper considers cities not primarily as physical entities consisting of buildings, infrastructure and human bodies, but rather as elements of social constructions in the discourses of society (see Christmann/Ibert in this issue). The paper builds upon conceptual and empirical work undertaken within the framework of the project “City careers in peripheralised areas” (2009–2011) at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (IRS) (see Bernt/Bürk/Kühn et al. 2010).

The aim of this paper is to show that cities not only may be materially destroyed but that they are also immaterially vulnerable to stigmatisation on the level of social-spatial constructions. The application of the concept of stigmatisation to vulnerability in cities would seem appropriate as the term was historically first used in relation to bodily wounds or signs. “The Greeks ... originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted to be avoided, especially in public places” (Goffman 1963: 1).

In Christian times—as Goffman has pointed out—the term *stigmata* refers to the wounds of Christ. Today stigmas are negative—also immaterial—characteristics attributed to individuals or groups that differ from the majority and thus, find themselves in a marginal position in society (see Hohmeier 1975). It is assumed that stigmatisation—conceptually transformed to the urban debate—strengthens existing structural disadvantages and barriers to the development of cities in marginalised spaces, filtering local cultural perceptions and interpretations and thus in turn affecting the thoughts and behaviour of actors. Cities can become vulnerable to stigmatisation when the spatially related collective identity of a city is attacked and questioned. Early stigma research spoke in this context of a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963).

This paper first aims to briefly clarify the key terms “stigmatisation” and “local identities” and discusses the transferability of concepts of stigmatisation and identity from social groups to cities (Section 2). Initial theses about the vulnerability of local identities to stigmatisation are presented, which then guide the empirical case studies that follow (Section 3). The examples of the medium-sized cities Sangerhausen and Pirmasens, that for many decades have been

subject to structural peripheralisation processes, are used to describe which stigmatisation processes have occurred in the national media, how these have been taken up locally, and what coping strategies actors have found (Section 4). Finally, the conclusion summarises the key results and interprets them with regard to consequences for the vulnerability of local identities (Section 5).

2 Stigmatisation and Local Identities

2.1 Stigmatisation

At the heart of stigmatisation lies the ascription of negative characteristics that differ from the norm. Stigmas and stigmatisation are thus relative assessments of social attributes. Norms are created by hegemonial perceptions and paradigms via discourses. Stigmas were originally understood as being marks on human bodies such as tattoos, scars from wounds or burns, or injuries, i.e. negative characteristics differing from the social norm. They can be materialised or imagined. In the context of socio-psychological stigmatisation research, Goffman’s (1963) typology identifies three different kinds of stigma: the disfigurement of the body, negative character traits and signs of “race”, nationality and religion that mark an individual as not belonging to the mainstream of society.

Stigmatisations are ascriptions of negative attributes through processes of stigmatisation, i.e. through the discursive practices of communication, framing and labelling. They are characterised as “social processes (...) that are determined by the ‘ascription’ of certain—mostly negatively valued—characteristics (stigmas) or in which stigmatising i.e. discrediting and compromising ‘labelling’ plays an important role, and that in general lead to the social exclusion and isolation of the stigmatised group of individuals. Stigmatisation processes have considerable consequences for both the life situation and the identity of those affected by them” (Brusten/Hohmeier 1975: 2).

Stigmas and negative images have in common the ascribing of negative characteristics. However, the social consequences of stigmas are clearly greater than those of “branding” or “marketing”. Stigmas differ from negative images in that the process of stigmatisation involves social discrimination and the marginalisation of the affected individuals. Through the generalised ascription of negative characteristics a stigma becomes a master status that decisively determines the degraded position of a person in society. The stigmatised are thus in particular social groups that have little interpretive power in society and so have reduced access to or are even excluded from societal positions (Hohmeier 1975: 6).

Stigmatisation of Cities

Theories about processes of stigmatisation can be transferred from social groups to urban spaces only if the focus lies on the acting subjects in the cities. In the following discussion cities are primarily understood not as physical built spaces, but rather as heterogeneous social communities in which people in processes of communication repeatedly negotiate collective identities and in which groups gain an upper hand in the “fight over the sovereignty of interpretation” (Christmann 2010: 45).

Processes of stigmatisation that refer to specific cities have already been investigated for, e.g., parts of Berlin (Best/Gebhardt 2001), Eisenhüttenstadt (Weichhart/Weiske/Werlen 2004) and Johanngeorgenstadt (Steinführer/Kabisch 2007). In a case study of the small Sachsen settlement of Johanngeorgenstadt the self-perception of residents was described as “multiple peripheralisation”: “geographic fringe area, economic recession, demographic shrinkage and aging, insufficient redevelopment resources and mental self-images of being ‘at the fringes’ of society and with ‘no future’ come together in the internal image of Johanngeorgenstadt in an ominous alliance that manifests itself as a general lack of hope” (Steinführer/Kabisch 2007: 120).

The relation of stigmatisation to cities and social spaces was first established by the French sociologist Loïc Wacquant (1993, 2007). Here territorialised stigmatisations ascribed to places delimited by the boundaries of administrative urban districts, often connected to planned urban spaces (e.g. housing developments, *banlieus*, industrial estates and ghettos) are often cited as examples. In addition spatialised, symbolic stigmatisations are noted. Social objects and placements are seen as markers of negatively connoted characteristics of a city, a district or a house (rubbish, ruins, wrecks, graffiti).

Goffman’s three types of stigmas refer to people but may be heuristically applied to the stigmatisation of cities. They represent and (re)produce social structural categories of the hegemonic system on various levels of deviation from the societal norm:

- In relation to the physically built city, stigmas are visible, usually material deviations from normative aesthetics, for instance in terms of the regulatory images of a cared for and clean city (e.g. stigmas like dirt, mess, decay, odour, graffiti). But stigmas can also be assigned to entire urban districts such as prefabricated housing developments, suburbs, or industrial or military districts.
- Statistical quantitative information about socio-economic or political and cultural deviations and negative ascriptions, for instance, come in the category of stigmas that communicate “character” deviations from the norm. Through the relaying of economic and social-structural information (e.g. unemployment rates, life styles

and milieus, data related to social structure), essentialising and homogenising statements are applied to the whole area of entire cities and urban districts that put the residents of those areas under the general suspicion of negative deviation. Social problems are territorialised due to local crises (see Belina 2006). In the same way, for instance, visible instances of demographic (aging), social (homeless “junkies”), and regulatory or criminal (crime rates, feeling of insecurity, no-go areas) categories are viewed as stigmas in the city.

- Stigmas related to nationality, religion and ethnicity are also found in the German context of debate about socio-spatial concentration and ethnic segregation, e.g. in relation to stereotyped immigrant groups (“Turks” and “Arabs”) or specific built symbols, e.g. mosques.

Actors of Stigmatisation

A perceiving and interpreting coalition of actors is always involved in processes of stigmatisation. Both the stigmatised and the stigmatising form part of this coalition. Those that feel addressed by the stigmatisation are often not those that bear the stigmas, but the personal or collective representatives or defenders of an urban image. These can be political representatives, staff of the urban administration or other bodies, and also representatives of local interest groups and locals or non-locals who identify greatly with the city. Different urban actors perceive, interpret, scandalise or ignore stigmatisation. Of particular relevance here are individuals or groups who feel directly addressed by the negative ascriptions.

A stigmatising effect is had by people or groups who produce negatively connoted statements about cities, even if this is not necessarily done intentionally. Such statements may be satires about one’s place of birth or residence, or commentaries on experiences and atmospheric impressions. Common here are journalistic treatments of the way in which a city or urban district deviates from the norms of society as a whole, with reference to attributes. National media are assigned an especially key role in the negative ascription of particular local conditions (see for instance Döring 2008; Ahbe/Gries/Schmale 2009).

Dealing with Stigmatisation

According to Goffman (1963: 9 ff.) there are five patterns of dealing with processes of stigmatisation: conformation to the norm, a strategy of proving the opposite, generation of pity, rejection of the norm, and defence. In reality, they may be found in less clear forms and with overlaps or linkages between them. Each of the existing and deployed stigmas, their facticity and interpretation also play a central role for ways of dealing with stigmatisations.

2.2 Local Identities

In the social sciences a basic distinction is made between personal and collective identity. Personal identity relates to subjects, but collective identity corresponds to the self-concept of a group (Straub 1998). Personal identity consists of cognitive (self-image), emotional (self-esteem, pride) and motivational (ability to act) components.

Spatially Related Collective Identities

Collective identities often include spatially related elements—the identification of groups with spatial attributes to which they feel a connection (see Weichhart 2000: 51 ff.). A collective spatially related identity is a social construction that emerges, for instance, from the cultural-historic features of a space in the framework of communicative processes. Spatially related collective identities may thus be defined as “shared interpretations of ‘their’ space that a group has developed and that have crystallised into symbolic forms. (...) Collective spatially related identities thus repose upon human cognitive attainments introduced onto a more or less common denominator in the course of negotiation processes. (...) Identity development must always be seen in connection with the shared history of a society. It is based on a historical inheritance, is embedded in collective memory” (Christmann 2009: 3).

Threatened Identities and Identity Crises

Interaction processes play a key role in the process of the social construction of identity. According to Frey (1983: 71), the achievement of identity by the individual involves the integration and balancing of the private self (or the personal identity) and the social self (or the social identity). The constant demands of the individual are “(1) to safeguard the continuity of [his/her] private self-experience and (2) to balance or keep tolerable the inconsistency between social and private self-experience” (Frey 1983: 71). Through the activation of identity strategies the individual strives for continuity, consistency and positive self-experience. Identities are threatened by negative external ascriptions from outside. Unpleasant information, e.g. through stigmatisation, threaten the agreeability of the individual self and may lead to an identity crisis.

Identity Strategies in Dealing with Stigmatisation

Ways of dealing with stigmatisation are directed first towards protecting the individual self. Identity strategies on the cognitive level can be utilised so that perceptions of unpleasant information are selective, skewed or suppressed (cognitive dissonance). In this way a change of the social self is avoided despite the ascription of negative characteristics. On the level of action, identity strategies can be used by correcting the negative image, by questioning the credibility of the cri-

tic, by emphasising other qualities, by offering excuses or by trivialising/denying deviations (Frey 1983: 77).

It is only when such protective identity strategies fail that the individual self-image must be re-adjusted. This can occur through forms of self-stigmatisation. The stigmatised often adjust their self-image to match external ascriptions. “Frequently this is the beginning of a ‘career’ in which certain patterns of behaviour of the stigmatised and reactions to his/her environment are interdependent” (Hohmeier 1975: 7).

On the basis of the status of research as outlined, the following section presents initial theses for the empirical investigation of the stigmatisation of cities. These theses have been developed within the framework of the aforementioned research project “City careers in peripheralised areas”. Thereby empirical case studies were carried out in six medium-sized German settlements in order to research ways in which city politics deal with processes of peripheralisation. The investigative concept of the peripheralisation of cities distinguished between processes of emigration, de-coupling and dependence, which can be additionally strengthened by stigmatisation processes in media communication. With the stigmatisation approach then, processes of peripheralisation can be described and explained on a social constructivist level (“peripheralisation in the mind”) (see Bernt/Bürk/Kühn et al. 2010).

3 Theses on the Vulnerability of Local Identities

With regard to vulnerability of identities in cities caused by stigmatisation the following initial theses can be formulated:

1. Spatially related collective identities develop from the shared interpretation of the history of a space by a hegemonial group. In cities socio-economic structural change or a structural break often leads to an identity crisis of local inhabitants. Local identities thus become vulnerable as the self-image of a previously hegemonial group is questioned, their self-esteem or pride damaged and their ability to act weakened.
2. Stigmatisation occurs through discourse in the mass media. The stigmatising suspects are primarily journalists writing for national or international media. The stigmatised are primarily the victims of the structural change or break.
3. Stigmatisation is (perceived by the stigmatized) as an attack on collective identities in that negative characteristics are ascribed to peripheralised cities from the outside. These further weaken positive identification with the city. Stigmatisation processes exacerbate the vulnerability of local identities in the crisis.

4. Local handling of stigmatisation varies and is strongly determined by the interpretive power of the local elites in the cities. In contrast, previously hegemonial groups lose local interpretive powers through identity crises and stigmatisation.
5. New local identities can emerge from identity crises as new social groups bring new interpretations into negotiation processes. These interpretations then achieve hegemonial interpretive power in urban politics.

4 Empirical Case Studies: Sangerhausen and Pirmasens

This section presents the findings of empirical case studies undertaken in two medium-sized cities in East and West Germany: Sangerhausen (Sachsen-Anhalt) and Pirmasens (Rhineland-Palatinate).¹ Both are examples of peripheralised cities in which structural change or a structural break led to a crisis in spatially related collective identities and which were stigmatised in the media.

Sangerhausen (with about 30,000 inhabitants in 2011), the district town of the Mansfeld-Südharz district in Sachsen-Anhalt, was a prospering industrial city before German reunification. With copper mining as a basis the Mansfeld region enjoyed sustained economic and population growth after 1945. The number of inhabitants doubled from the early 1950s to the mid-1980s. Although the lack of future for mining in the region was already foreseeable at this time and first steps towards economic restructuring had been introduced, the political changes of 1989 accelerated and radicalised the structural break to a degree that was remarkable even among the regions of East Germany. The sustaining economic base closed quasi “over night”. As a result of this rapid deindustrialisation the qualified labour force and young people, in particular, turned their backs on the city. Alone in the first 15 years following the political changes of 1989, the number of inhabitants fell by 28 %. At 24.3 % (2008) unemployment levels remained nonetheless significantly above average for both the federal state and

the country as a whole. As early as the 1990s this earned Sangerhausen the stigma “capital of the unemployed” in the national media, a stigma that has since been repeatedly picked up upon.

The development of the city of Pirmasens (currently with about 41,000 inhabitants) has been closely linked to the history of footwear production since the beginning of the 19th century. In 1913 almost half of all footwear factories in Germany were to be found in Pirmasens, thus establishing the city’s reputation as the “German footwear metropolis”. Right into the 1960s/1970s the family-run shoe factories and their suppliers guaranteed the economic well-being of the city. From the mid-1960s, however, growing foreign competition led to a sustained structural crisis. The number of employees in the footwear industry fell from over 30,000 in 1960 to under 1,000 in 2008. The productive capacity of many companies was transferred abroad or outsourced, although administration, marketing or design functions remained in Pirmasens. Some companies became active in footwear retail. In the 1950s the largest footwear factory in Europe was “Rheinberger” in Pirmasens. It was closed in 1995/1996, but as an important built symbol of the footwear industry could be transformed into an office building and science centre. Pirmasens is today one of the settlements with the highest level of debt and one of the highest rates of private insolvency in Germany, thus earning itself the stigma “bankrupt city” in the national media.

With reference to the five initial theses the following empirical statements about the vulnerability of collective identities in the two cities can be made.

4.1 Crisis of Collective Identities in Cities

In both cities a historically evolved socio-economic and industrial monostructure forms the basis for the development of a dominant urban identity. In Sangerhausen’s case this refers to its 800-year history as a mining city. In the GDR the city became a copper mining centre as part of the Mansfeld combine and, due to the immigration of miners, the city’s population grew right into the 1980s. A local politician: *I can well remember that when I was a child practically the whole city here was driven by mining. That was the combine, thousands had their workplaces there, the families depended on it. After 1945 initially Sangerhausen was then quasi a flourishing city, in 1952 the shaft was sunk and then Sangerhausen grew to 33,000 inhabitants* (interview SGH 05). The miners in the GDR enjoyed high social prestige and a strong group identity and were accordingly privileged. In the group discussion a local politician refers to a saying of the time: *I’m a miner, who’s more?* Mining was thus associated with pronounced professional pride. The structural break after the political changes of 1989 *broke the pride* (Interview SGH 05) of those affected. The local poli-

¹ The Sangerhausen case study was undertaken by the Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (IRS) (Bernt/Becker/Liebmann 2010) and the Pirmasens case study by the ILS—Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development (Beisswenger/Weck 2010) within the framework of the joint research project “City careers in peripheralised areas”. The empirical basis was provided by transcriptions of interviews with experts from politics, administration and citizenship (number in Sangerhausen (SGH): 17, number in Pirmasens (P): 22) as well as document and literature analyses. The original quotes used in the following correlate to the list of anonymised interviews found at the end of the case studies. In addition, media analyses and a focus group discussion conducted on 16th June 2011 with five experts in Sangerhausen were used for the stigmatisation research.

tician also refers to a middle class with no mining roots that through the *Neue Forum* was able to emerge as a new local elite in Sangerhausen after 1989. The mining class thus almost completely lost their previously hegemonial position in the city. Their activities are today limited to the running of the mining museum as a tourist attraction.

In Pirmasens the monostructure of the footwear industry and the reputation of the city as the “German footwear metropolis” led to the creation of a collective identity as “footwear city” that persisted into the 1960s. *The footwear industry and Pirmasens, that was practically one thing. And that's what people still remember* (Interview P 2). The past splendour of the “German footwear metropolis” and the local pride connected to it are expressed in the following quote from an expert: *There were 300 shoe factories in the city with 60,000 inhabitants and 25,000 people employed in the area of the footwear industry. That's full-time employment. It was shoe production. Close by there was everything that had to do with shoe production, bundled here at this location (...), there was a specialist exhibition, at its peak 70,000 people from all over the world came to it* (Interview P 13).

The socio-economic basis for the hegemonial identity of Pirmasens as a footwear city was provided by family firms that were in some cases run by rich “footwear barons”. The other side of the coin were the over 30,000 mostly poorly qualified and usually female factory workers. Representatives of the city today interpret this social polarisation as the lack of a middle class in the city: *People undoubtedly struggle with building a community. Perhaps it's connected to the fact that there was always a very small upper class here (...) and on the other hand a large lower class (...) and in the middle there was relatively little* (Interview P 2). The working class in Pirmasens is at the same time ascribed a strongly subordinate mentality: *Well the region basically grew within a patriarchal structure, the shoe barons at the top controlled everything underneath, whatever it was, (...) and that is also the subordinate mentality that is relatively strongly developed, so not lateral thinking, provocative thinking, not even questioning something* (Interview P 18).

Localized identity in Pirmasens continues today to be characterised by a large distance between the working class and the local elites. Some of the earlier footwear manufacturers have managed to use technological innovations to restructure their firms and thus bring them successfully through structural change. Today they in some cases invest in the city to transform former factories into post-industrial services complexes. A local politician complains that the unemployed working class in the city continue to cling to the old identity of a city of the footwear industry: *In addition of course, in people's heads, (...) those that were working as the fourth generation in the footwear industry, of course nothing else at all exists. Their only question is,*

when will the mayor manage to get five new shoe factories to come to Pirmasens? (Interview P 1).

4.2 Stigmatisation Effects by National Media

The following section describes how national media report negatively—whether intentionally or not—about the two cities. The media refer in this context to national statistics and thus construct a deviation from the norm. Even when pertinent issues are thus addressed, the stigmatisation effects for the cities result from the fact that individual negative characteristics give rise to generally negative reporting about the cities. Through scandalising and generalising in the media the cities gain a “bad reputation” that makes a more differentiated perception difficult and that can affect the behaviour of actors.

4.2.1 Sangerhausen: The “Capital of the Unemployed”

Sangerhausen has regularly been the focus of national media attention since the early 1990s, with written reports in newspapers and occasionally also films. This was the background against which a content and media analysis was carried out in order to produce a stigmatisation analysis of Sangerhausen. Twelve reports from predominantly national newspapers and magazines² and a television report from the period between 1992 and 2010 form the basis of the evaluation.

As early as the beginning of the 1990s a report in the weekly paper *Die Zeit* equipped Sangerhausen with the central attributes for a local stigmatisation scenario (Dieckmann 1992). A city is presented that—like all East German cities since reunification—finds itself in a state of change. However, here the historical break of 1989 is also a watershed for the centuries-old mining town in which “the old has gone astray and the new [is] not yet there”. The future perspective of the city is said to be particularly influenced by the decline of the once “proud” and—in the GDR—privileged miners and the increasing unemployment figures. This would lead to the threat of the radicalisation of the already existing local neo-Nazis (Dieckmann 1992: 6). Their slogans were also classified as stigmas in a line of argument followed in another report published six years later in the same weekly paper (Mehr 1998). Here, with reference to a French weekly paper, the ascription “capital of European unemployment” was applied to Sangerhausen for the first time in the national media. Under this ascription both narrative and images established a scenario that was later repeated again and again.

² *Die Zeit, Focus, Der Spiegel, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, SUPERillu, Der Tagesspiegel, Berliner Morgenpost, Frankfurter Rundschau*. The media analysis was carried out in the online archives of the newspapers, so information on author and page numbers is unavailable for many articles.

Namely: the large share of votes for a radical rightwing party is fuelled by the “German misery” of the general economic decline in East Germany with local scenes of empty “pre-fabricated building blocks”, “debt counselling” and the “dirty grey-brown” of a former industrial region with a spoil tip in the picture (Mehr 1998). A report in the weekly magazine *Focus* in autumn of the same year also strived for a European comparison, citing the dismal prospects of the “Mezzogiorno of the East”, a city once characterised by privileged miners, and the economically “broken neck” of the whole region (Horstkötter/Sauga/Schumacher et al. 1998: 250 ff.). Other reports from the late 1990s emphasise the lack of economic prospects and the fact that even the building of the A38 motorway had not brought recovery (z. B. Smolczyk 1999).

Reports published after 2006, for instance in the magazine *SUPERillu*, also continued the old image of a “stricken homeland” characterised by emigration, low birth rates, unrenovated houses and pre-fabricated housing blocks and given the prognosis “the city is dying” (unattributed 2006). In 2007 the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published a “Map of Unemployment” on which Sangerhausen had the worst results in the whole of Germany (unattributed 2007a). Almost 20 years after the closing of the pits in Mansfelder Land discussion under the headline “End of shift in the shaft” continued to be of the “broken away” mining industry and its consequences in the shape of migration out of the area and low rents (unattributed 2008a). The increasing number of publications in the daily papers followed the same pattern: “6,000 employed in mining, pit closed after 1989, unemployment at 19 %, many young people leaving” (Eubel 2008).

The continuity of the crisis in Sangerhausen, the emphasis that here “not much has changed” since 1989, becomes in a newspaper report a “journey through a strange land” (Keseling 2009). 2010 again sees reporting about Sangerhausen in the mode of the “capital of the unemployed”. Local attention is particularly grabbed by a television report in the ZDF business magazine programme *WISO* on 11th January 2010. Under the title “Poor Sangerhausen—highest unemployment rates in Germany and scarcely any prospects”, a five minute report on the situation in Sangerhausen is broadcast. The introduction presents the city thus: “For decades in Sangerhausen in South Harz copper-mining has stood for the prosperity of the whole region. After reunification it is the end for the pit, mass redundancies follow”. These first sequences of the report are illustrated by a camera ranging over a large housing estate, individual pictures of hoisting equipment, the shaft area and historical mining machinery (ZDF 2010).

The national mostly negative discourse about the city of Sangerhausen confronts perception and reception on the regional and local scale. Even allowing for differences in the

comprehensiveness of the digitalisation of newspaper articles,³ it can be established that nowhere near such a negative picture of city and urban development is to be found in local and regional reporting. Only in passing do reports mention the national level communication of the Sangerhausen stigmatisation scenario.

4.2.2 Pirmasens: The “Bankrupt City”

The analysis of national media⁴ for the city of Pirmasens showed that negative articles about the city accumulate from about the mid 2000s. The stigma of the so-called “bankrupt city” is a repeated one, referring primarily to private poverty in the city. Pirmasens seems in this way to have become a West German counterpart to the East German crisis cities. However, in this case the media analysis does not reveal the same extent of stigmatisation through the generalisation of negative characteristics as in the case of Sangerhausen. The high density of private insolvencies is primarily associated with the downward trend of the city and the lack of a middle class. The “bankrupt city” stigma is at times interpreted as a failure of local politics. Indications of stigmatisation can be reconstructed using numerous press reports. In October 2004 the article “Where Germany is going bankrupt” in the magazine *Der Spiegel* (Bönisch 2004) emphasises that a national comparison shows that with 269 per 100,000 inhabitants private insolvencies in Pirmasens and Wilhelmshaven are four times as high as the national average.

The report entitled “Why the north runs up more debts” in the magazine *Der Spiegel* (Seith 2007) again takes up this basic tendency for household debt. The regional map of insolvency is not divided between East and West Germany, but between the North and the South. Pirmasens, in the south, is here presented as an “exception to the rule”. The references to the city become more concrete when attention turns to regional differences in the debt levels of private households. Here Pirmasens is presented as the frontrunner. “‘The situation in Pirmasens will be the most difficult’ said the chairman of the credit investigation company Schufa, Rainer Neumann. The city ends up in last place well behind Mönchengladbach and Wilhelmshaven” (unattributed 2007b).

In another article about the “bankrupt city of Pirmasens” the debts are taken as an opportunity to describe the gene-

³ The *Neue Nordhäuser Zeitung* (NZZ), a relevant regional paper here, allows digital archive research up to the year 2000, the local Sangerhausen supplement in the *Mitteldeutschen Zeitung* (MZ) is digitally archived up to 1994.

⁴ The media analysis was carried out with the support of Robert Barbarino. In the national media analysis for Pirmasens the online archives of numerous German daily and weekly newspapers were used for specific searches (*Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Rundschau*).

ral decline of the city. “My daughter often asks what still keeps me here,” says Petra Kaiser and shakes her head, “but she didn’t experience the good times in Pirmasens.” Those who knew the town in its splendour find it difficult to leave. In those days the streets were full of people. In the evening you went to the cinema or for a meal in Hotel Matheis, the best house on the square. During the footwear exhibition international guests stayed in the snow-white, late 18th century villa. In the past. Then the guests stayed away. In the nineties refugees from what had been Yugoslavia found accommodation here. When they also disappeared, the best house on the square decayed. Today windows and doors are nailed up with wooden boards. A tree is growing out of the roof. One of many ruins that depresses the psyche of the Pirmasenser” (Wilhelm 2008).

A few months later the topic is picked up upon by the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (unattributed 2008b). With reference to a study by the credit investigation company Schufa, it is brought to the attention that debt risk differs greatly from one region to another. However, in cities such as Berlin, but also in Wilhelmshaven and Pirmasens, private insolvency has been running at a constantly high rate for years. The causes of this continued private debt crisis are again briefly summarised in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*: “Today Pirmasens is a city without a middle class, that year for year registers many private insolvencies” (Funk 2010).

Local media was investigated using the same search terms as those used for the search of the national media. Similarly to the Sangerhausen results, no statements relevant to stigmas were discovered.⁵ However, local journalists have repeatedly reported negatively about the city and urban politics. Both case studies nonetheless largely confirm the hypothesis that the stigmatisation of cities initially occurs through external ascriptions by national media.

4.3 Attack on and Vulnerability of Local Identities Through Stigmatisation

When considered from a structural point of view, the identity crisis in both cities is an initial consequence of the vulnerability of socio-economic monostructures. The industrial structural break or change involved not only the disintegration of the socio-economic livelihoods of the cities, but also triggered a crisis in hegemonial identity. Stigmatisation processes additionally attacked the collective identities on the level of social construction and strengthened the exist-

ing identity crises. The stigmatisation through the media was particularly directed towards those groups in the cities affected by structural change. In Sangerhausen this mostly involves male ex-miners, in Pirmasens mostly female ex-factory workers.

In Sangerhausen the structural break caused by deindustrialisation led—as discussed—to an abrupt social devaluing of the previously highly esteemed mining class. The closure of the mine meant that many of those that had been privileged became unemployed and had to retrain or move away. The media seized upon the devaluing of the old identity, choosing for preference the figure of the unemployed drunk at a kiosk as a reference person. This figure symbolised not only the lost pride and weakened self-confidence of those affected, but also their weakened ability to act. When seen from the local perspective of today, in the years after the pit closure the miners can actually be counted among those that are better socially secured due to their occupational pension. However, the image of the unemployed miner was nonetheless seized upon as a central icon of the stigmatisation discourse. The “capital of the unemployed” stigma thus strengthened the already existing identity crisis caused by the structural break and led to a doubled social devaluing of those affected.

Structural change in Pirmasens is characterised by the gradual and thus insidious decline of the footwear industry over several decades. The poorly qualified female factory workers, as the pivotal social group, were those who were primarily devalued and attacked. In contrast to the miners this group was badly paid and little able to develop self-confidence or professional pride even during the phase of industrialisation. The deindustrialisation of the city involved the complete devaluing of their low skilled labour, because it became no longer required. Unemployment and poverty marginalises those affected in the post-industrial city. Indeed, the stigmatisation as “bankrupt city” and “city without a middle class” begins with the decline into poverty of many households.

In both cities the expert interviews reveal signs of a broken relationship between the inhabitants and their city, often described by the term “love-hate”. The hurtful effects of the stigmatising media reports can be seen in the following comment by an expert from Pirmasens: *After all it’s still like this, if something is being looked for in Germany then Pirmasens must be held up as a negative example. That upsets people here and on the other hand they have nothing good to say about the city. So that’s love-hate, that upsets them, it hurts them, because they actually do like their city, but on the other hand always having reservations* (Interview P 4).

The experts asked claimed in both cases that residents had little sense of identification with the city. One person questioned expressed it so: *From the point of view of the Pirmasenser development with its positive side is not really*

⁵ The local media includes *Pirmasenser Zeitung*, *Rheinpfalz*, *Eifelzeitung*, *Rheinlandzeitung* and *Eifeljournal*. Several newspapers such as the main one of the city, the *Pirmasenser Zeitung*, have no online archive for searches and the databases of the other media are either badly organised and give very inexact returns on searches or simply return no “hits”. Results were only available for the *Rheinpfalz*, but these were also very poorly structured and did not match the searches.

noticed, there is simply also this feeling that's developed over decades that it's going downhill with our city. That needs building up too so more positive categories of thinking come back again, to say ok something's happening in Pirmasens (Interview P 4).

4.4 Local Handling of Stigmatisation

In both cities the various actor-specific ways of dealing with stigmatisation described by Goffman und Wacquant (see above) can be identified: conformation to the norm, a strategy of proving the opposite, generation of pity, rejection of the norm, and defence. However, the urban elites in Sangerhausen und Pirmasens display different focuses here. In Sangerhausen passive defence and defensive resistance to media reports can be observed in many actors, while in Pirmasens the local elites seize upon the stigmatisation more actively by developing strategies to overcome the negative characteristics.

In Sangerhausen the local handling of stigmatisation is strongly characterised by reactions of truculent defence and passive endurance in relation to the negative ascriptions. When asked about possible ways of dealing with the “capital of the unemployed” stigmatisation, a local politician answered: *You don't need to fight against these things, you won't manage to anyway. You also don't need to try to correct anything. You just have to continue consistently moving along your way forward. Why should the gossip that was in the paper yesterday bother me, I have to see that I produce better headlines by really achieving something. Corrections, discussions with journalists on this point achieve little in my opinion. That is just the experience that I now have (Interview SGH 05).* In the focus group discussion other representatives from local politics emphasised the “resistance” that had developed to the media reports. The actors in the city also show signs of rejecting the norm through forms of self-stigmatisation. A self-stigmatisation is, for instance, expressed in the media campaign “Sangerhausen—so what?”. With the endorsement of local politicians, a series of posters and postcards were published by a graphic designer that responded to the peripheralisation of the city with an ironic “So what?”, e.g. “At the back of beyond? So what!”, “Crap roses? So what!”, “Miners? So what!”. In the group discussion local politicians also referred to a cabaret artist who had moved away from Sangerhausen and whose sketches included ironic references to the dreariness, the decline and the “depopulation” of his hometown.

In Pirmasens local politicians reacted to the many negative media reports with more active attempts to accentuate the positive sides of the city to the media. Such offers from the city to press representatives met with little response however (Interview P 21). Through the “Pact for Pirmasens” city politics endeavoured to tackle the origins of stigmatisa-

tion by qualifying the under-educated classes in a way that would capture the attention of the media. In both cities there are signs of strategically dealing with stigmatisation in ways that generate pity. In Sangerhausen local politics used the negative reports about the city to gain state finance for the development of a large industrial district. In Pirmasens a stigmatising media report was made directly responsible for a lack of investment, as shown by a quote from a local politician: *We had an investor for an inner city location (...) that was really final (...) and shortly afterwards came another one of these Süddeutsche newspaper articles on the topic of “dying city” and “debt-city of Germany” and “structural change tears people's feet from under them”. On that day, when that was in the Süddeutsche paper, (...) was the meeting where the decision about this investment was supposed to be made. And so it was dumped. (Interview P 1).*

4.5 Development of a New Local Identity

Stigmatisation can not only weaken social identification with the city, but can also strengthen the development of a new identity. In both cities there are signs of a revival of collective identity interpretations—albeit to differing extents.

In Sangerhausen the post-1989 structural break of deindustrialisation required a radical “new invention” of collective identity. However, even after two decades of post-socialist transformation the new forms of identity on offer are unclear, partly because regeneration of the economic and social structure of the city has been weak. Today, the city administration publically describes and advertises the city as the “mining and roses city”. This slogan represents a compromise between the old and new identities. The ex-mayor comments: *At the moment you still certainly have to say that we're also a mining city. I say it just like that with a small smile. We use that too, although the tourism researchers say that it's rubbish to bring in two such value concepts: mining city, roses city. With the mining city we can work historically or with the monument that we have. But actually the mining itself is done with. But of course there are a large number of miners, whether they are retired or working in other professions, who still feel themselves to be miners. And that means then, there is an emotional connection to mining that exists here, exists in the families. And so the history, I say it deliberately again, of over 800 years of mining here in the Mansfeld coal field can't be ignored (Interview SGH 02).*

Today the only evidence of the “mining city” of the past is provided by a museum of mining history and a large spoil tip on the edge of the city. The “roses city” refers to the “Rosarium” that in recent decades has been extended to house the largest collection of roses in the world. These days many rose lovers come as visitors and tourists to Sangerhausen. This provides urban policy with an important

anchor for identification. *It is the most important rosarium in the world, if you want to look at it that way. That's not just talk. We are the rose gene bank for the Federal Republic. That was officially recognised just last year* (Interview SGH 02). As the “roses city” only appeals to a mostly older target group of rose lovers though, it creates hardly any identity concepts for younger sectors of the population. When asked about the development of a new positive identity in Sangerhausen in a group discussion, a city politician said: *The rose isn't it, the mine isn't it either*. This shows that neither old nor new interpretations are yet sufficient to overcome the identity crisis.

In contrast, the lack of a complete structural break in Pirmasens means that a new invention of identity has not been necessary. Observation rather reveals the path dependency of the identity as “footwear city”. The identity anchor footwear is, however, no longer used by local elites in the sense of industrial mass production by unqualified labour, but is rather interpreted as a competitive field of competence for technology, innovation and training (e.g. Footwear Competence Centre, the science centre in a former shoe factory). A local politician emphasises: *The footwear industry in terms of know-how has never left Pirmasens, which means that an enormous proportion of the shoes sold in Germany and Europe are still processed in terms of design, technology, know-how and sales through Pirmasens. Of course not anymore with 30,000 but now with only 3000 workplaces. So footwear competence is still present, when there are any innovations in the footwear area then they still come mostly from Pirmasens* (Interview P 1). In Pirmasens the move from industrial city to post-industrial services city is in particular blocked by the existent milieu of the poorly qualified working class. A significant strategy of the local elites, also in working against the “bankrupt city” stigma, is the training and qualification of the badly educated and impoverished classes.

5 Conclusion and Interpretation

Socio-economic structural change or a structural break can lead to a local identity crisis, particularly in cases of an economic monostructure. Previously hegemonial interpretations of local identities are thus threatened and attacked. Monostructures promote, on the one hand, the development of e.g. class identities in cities, but, on the other hand, they render these identities particularly susceptible to structural change. Stigmatisation strengthens the vulnerability of collective identities, in that cities are ascribed negative characteristics that make identifying with the city more difficult for residents. Stigmatisations develop through media discourses ascribing individual negative characteristics to concrete places, which are generalised to form an overall negative

image of the city. In the cities investigated the ascriptions “capital of the unemployed” (Sangerhausen) and “bankrupt city” (Pirmasens) were dominant. Here the assumption is one of deviation from social norms. Statistics are a way of establishing such norms. The objects of stigmatisation in the national media are thus, in the case of Sangerhausen, the above-average unemployment rate and, in the case of Pirmasens, the highest rate of debt in the German city rankings. Although the stigmatising media reports refer essentially to those affected by structural change, they generalise the “bad reputation” of the city in question and so hinder a differentiated perception. Stigmatisation can thus be understood as a form of “peripheralisation in the mind”. Stigmas are causes and consequences of social spatial marginalisation.

The former “mining city” of Sangerhausen and the former “footwear metropolis” of Pirmasens are examples of cities that after an economic structural break or structural change possess only weak positive identity characteristics or indeed no positive identity characteristics at all. Identities that have grown up over time to become hegemonial are plunged into crisis by a structural break. The vulnerability of these cities to socially constructed stigmatisation develops because they have few positive characteristics to act as a counterweight to the negative ascriptions. The vulnerability of spatially related collective identities can be discerned in three dimensions:

- The cognitive self-image of previously hegemonial groups is attacked and undermined,
- Emotional self-esteem and pride pertaining to the city are damaged,
- Motivational ability to act is weakened by the low sense of identification that residents have with the city or, in some cases, by the broken relationship they have to it (love-hate relationship).

As the case studies show, local identities that have grown up over time survive a structural break or structural change in a city and can become a hindrance to urban regeneration. Stigmatisation is an additional attack on cities that are experiencing an identity crisis. A central role in dealing with the stigmatisation is played not by the groups affected but by local elites acting as representatives of the city. The extent to which stigmatisation is overcome depends on the extent to which new collective identities emerge within the framework set by the “fight over sovereignties of interpretation”, identities that are expressed in positive self-images, a strengthened self-esteem or local pride and a dynamic ability to take action.

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