

COOP
DESIGN
RESEARCH

—
M.Sc.
PROGRAM

THE DIFFERENCE IN THE ACCESS TO ARRIVAL'S CITY COM- MERCIAL SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE ACCORDING TO SEX

—
Author: Alina Oueishek

ABSTRACT

Cities around the world host a variety of urban cultures, practices and fabrics, shaping their built and lived spaces. With the growth of urban areas, many were established or reappropriated informally by residents, to accommodate them. Consequently, terms such as ghettos, ethnic enclaves and parallel societies have emerged in academic and political discussions, stigmatizing such areas as an ill product of migration (Hiscott 2005; Pötzl 2008). Still, some scholars have taken a more positive approach. Doug Saunders, a Canadian journalist, names the arrival city, as a place that hosts a group of migrants from the same place of origin. As he shows, by the informality of its social and economic structures, the arrival city and its commercial spaces function as an entry and establishment mechanism into the new city (Saunders 2010). Building upon Saunders's argument, many urbanists and politicians took interest in areas with dense migrant population, as places for positive change (Schmal, Elser, and Scheuermann 2016). However, who and how can they use the benefits of the arrival city in relation to sex boundaries, among many other social structures, appears to present a gap in such studies. Thus, in this paper I question how the access to arrival's city commercial social infrastructure is differentiated according to sex.

To answer this question, I study the case of Sonnenallee Street in Berlin, which became known as the "Arab street" in relation to the majority of businesses in it and implement both desk and field studies. While doing so, I approach commercial spaces of the arrival city based on Lefebvre's definition of space as a social product in line with society's production and reproduction systems (Lefebvre 1991). Building upon Certeau's theory of daily life practice, I approach practices of dwellers over time as well as those "prescribed" by designers (Certeau, 1984). Finally, when identifying those actors, I draw upon Smith's transnational urbanism theory, and investigate the role of transnational, national and local actors in the production of spaces studied (Smith 2001).

As I trace the historical development of the street, its representation in the local context, the diversity of its transnational Arab actors' identities and two main generations of migrants from different countries, have shaped a tense patriarchal reality in its daily life today. Consequently, though the street and its commercial spaces appear to provide economic and social establishment for new arrivals and growth for older ones, the access to commercial spaces has rendered to be highly conditioned. In a street identified by conflict, women presented themselves as the first group to be directly or indirectly excluded from working positions in social spaces that host both sexes. Thus I state, that though the arrival city does appear to provide entry and establishment, it bares the danger of reasserting social inequalities, which call for a special care and understanding of planners and governments when dealing with them.