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11 Urban Individuality and Urban Governance in Twentieth-Century Europe¹

Moritz Föllmer

At first glance governance represents the softer side of power in twentieth-century European cities—certainly compared with air raids, military invasions or politically motivated street battles. Yet the activities of urban planners and municipal agencies are often identified with top-down disciplinary power and consequently seen as the opposite of bottom-up rebellion. Leif Jerram in his survey of twentieth-century urban Europe treats dictatorial intervention in stark narrative contrast to popular politics.² Other urban historians have extended this view to democratic systems, and criticised reformist as well as conservative forces for their use of disciplinary power. Helmut Gruber has faulted Social Democratic councillors and planners with coercing working-class families on the new housing estates of 1920s Vienna into a narrowly prescriptive behavioural model.³ Rosemary Wakeman has explored the vibrant left-wing culture of post-war Paris with its street demonstrations, popular songs and café intellectuals—before arguing that this culture was ultimately sidelined and submerged by the technocratic urban policies of the 1960s.⁴

Without wishing to detract from the merits of these important studies the present chapter proposes a different reading of how urban governance worked in twentieth-century Europe. Loosely defined as ‘a set of institutions, rules and procedures by which an area is governed’ the concept has served to broaden the picture of decision-making and social control in modern cities beyond the realm of municipal government proper.⁵ Governance means that a wide range of ‘social actors’, including private ones such as associations and companies, can determine ‘the formulation and pursuit of collective goals at the local level of the political system’.⁶ This chapter branches out further to include city dwellers’ needs and ambitions, whose complexity made it difficult to define collective goals in the first place. Foregrounding the interplay between urban individuality and urban governance brings into sharp relief that residents were not merely the objects of various policies but put municipal governments under pressure by making all sorts of demands upon them. Conversely it expands on the classic view of the modern city as a site of both personal freedom and impersonal anonymity. This was conceptualised in 1903 by

the German sociologist Georg Simmel.⁷ Simmel, however, did not include politics in his seminal analysis of the urban condition. His subjects move swiftly through the central areas of the metropolis, anxious to avoid each other. They benefit from an environment that neither controls them much nor offers them recognition. City dwellers in Simmel's account do not seem to be affected by municipal politicians or institutions; in turn they do not vote, complain to the authorities or make demands. In order to analyse the interplay of urban individuality and urban governance, therefore, we need to look elsewhere for theoretical inspiration.

Such inspiration can be found among German theoreticians of social systems. Without necessarily entering the rather complex intellectual edifice they have built⁸ one can borrow the simple notion that individuality is first and foremost a matter of expectations: in modern times persons conceive of themselves more and more as individuals, and demand to be acknowledged and treated as such. Systems such as health or education are confronted with the expectation that they will foster individuality and they, conversely, provide blueprints of how individuality should be formulated and where it should be directed.⁹ Niklas Luhmann has aptly characterised the modern regime for including individuals into society as a 'historically unprecedented synthesis of freedom and organisation, of independence and dependence'. Systems and organisations, Luhmann explains, have become more and more relevant to actual lives; but individuals have in turn become 'capable of retreat and unreliable', developing and dissolving ties in rapid succession.¹⁰ Consequently urban individuality needs to be viewed not just as the preserve of commuters trying to avoid each other or bohemians stressing their voluntary marginalisation. It is also the product of myriad interactions between demanding city dwellers and institutions of governance that claim authority but are just as often defensive or compromising.

For this analytical approach to be applicable, institutions of urban governance need to be reasonably developed and responsive. This is why the following provisional attempt at synthesis focuses on Central and Western Europe, albeit complemented by comparative looks to the south and east. The introduction of democracy in cities greatly increased the pressure on municipal institutions and politicians to cater for individuality. But the Nazi and communist dictatorships were tacitly faced with similar expectations and responded to them to an often underrated extent. Moreover, it will be argued that urban individuality itself changed and hence the needs and demands associated with it. Crucially, what city dwellers wanted in the 1950s and 1960s differed from the new expectations of the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter is based on an interpretative reading of the extant historiography; along the way, it incorporates empirical research, especially on Berlin and Amsterdam.¹¹ This somewhat eclectic approach places the present analysis within the crucial yet underpopulated space between broad-sweep surveys and detailed case studies

of modern cities. The argument is that the interplay between urban individuality and urban governance spanned the twentieth century in much of Europe, but in different guises and with complex spatial, social and political effects.

From the First World War to 1945

The early twentieth century saw increasing pressures for the democratisation of urban politics. To be sure, such pressures could be stubbornly resisted, but with increasing difficulties that became painfully evident during the First World War. Tasked with the distribution of scarce resources, municipal authorities were faced with insistent popular demands, chiefly for food, and blamed for the inevitable shortfalls. Democratically elected representatives in France were arguably somewhat more responsive than their conservative or liberal counterparts in Germany with its restrictive suffrage laws.¹² But in any case, consumer protests of varying levels of intensity undermined the established powers in Berlin and Vienna as well as Paris.¹³ In the course of the 1920s, the picture became much calmer: across Central and Western Europe, reformist municipal democracy prevailed. Liberal democratic or social democratic mayors and councillors endeavoured to make their cities more liveable for both middle- and working-class citizens by expanding the provision of public infrastructure and social housing. Their principal aim was to secure a simultaneously stable and flexible framework for legitimate individual pursuits.

This project was defended against conservative criticism with vigour and confidence. Berlin's mayor Gustav Böß, a staunch left liberal, argued that his city was shaped by a lively municipal democracy based on the principle of individuality: 'The tyranny of the mass is avoidable if the mass is dissolved into individual persons. Municipal government dissolves the masses into citizens.' These citizens, Böß argued, felt responsible for the common good and accepted leadership of their own volition. In return, they could expect municipal government to cater for their personal needs. Given the workplace pressures men and, increasingly, women were under, the city strove to spare them lengthy and inconvenient commutes by investing in public transport. Those who found themselves in dire straits did not thereby lose their right to have their needs acknowledged: 'The key principle of modern welfare is the specific, personal treatment of the individual client, elimination of any schematic approach, no general regulations that go into detail . . . repeated assessments of the individual case, never mass treatment!'¹⁴

This was a grand ambition. Still, Mayor Böß and his social democratic allies were able to offer more than optimistic rhetoric. From 1924, when the chaotic German post-war period had ended and American loans began to arrive, they worked hard to improve education, health and well-being through schools, social housing, transportation and recreation.¹⁵

They aimed for a city whose residents were entitled to generous provision, from the suburban train compartment through the public swimming pool to the social housing estate. This meant that city dwellers were being catered for and simultaneously enabled to pursue their interests and realise their potential. Contrary to what conservative critics asserted, rational planning did not lead to an impersonal amalgam of bureaucratic agencies but to a harmonious interplay of collective and individual aspirations, stretching across wide sections of the metropolis. This ambition, to be sure, was far from being fulfilled in practice. But it needs to be taken seriously and the scholarly criticism of reformist politicians and welfare practitioners as enthusiasts for social technology and disciplinary power warrants qualification, to say the least.¹⁶

What has been described here for Berlin was a much broader trend of the interwar period. A vocal movement in favour of technocratic governance emerged, but its practical influence remained limited.¹⁷ Far more significant was the assertiveness of individuals and municipal authorities' attempts to cater for their interests. The social housing estates, commonly associated with architectural innovation and social democratic politics in Amsterdam, Hamburg or Vienna are the most prominent example. However, other currents were no less important. Under electoral pressure from Labour, Liberals and Conservatives in British cities joined a trend towards municipal provision of housing, transport and leisure facilities—the latter including public tennis courts.¹⁸ Even more surprisingly, communists sometimes championed their constituents' rather individualist needs, as in several working-class suburbs of Paris. In Bobigny to the north of the city Mayor Jean-Marie Clamamus and his comrades on the council did not simply organise ideological schooling and demonstrations in favour of the Soviet Union but strove to improve a situation marked by self-built housing. They made it a priority to provide drinking water, paving for the roads, gas lighting and electrical power, thus balancing out the deficits of private development and supporting homeowners—who, conversely, began to turn to the mayor with their everyday demands. In many ways, the card-carrying communist Clamamus in Bobigny acted no differently from his left liberal (*radical*) or socialist colleagues in other Paris suburbs.¹⁹

This expansion of municipal provision was predicated on the assumption that individual and collective interests did not contradict each other. In an age of urban optimism, policymakers seemed able to meet the personal needs of working-class homeowners near Paris and middle-class tennis enthusiasts in England alike, starkly different though they were. However, a closer look at interactions between citizens and authorities reveals considerable friction between urban individuality and urban governance. In interwar Amsterdam, for instance, the municipality desired but clearly struggled to control the immense variety of city dwellers' trajectories and pursuits. The line between respectable publicans and

owners of clip joints was often difficult to draw; motorcycle races were accident-prone and stretched the boundaries of what the local head of police was prepared to accept as legitimate sports; drivers on the streets kept using their horns to an annoying degree; and it was difficult to regulate who was entitled to pilot incoming ships through the harbour or take pictures of tourists between the Central Station and the Royal Palace.²⁰ When one entrepreneur approached various municipal agencies with the idea of placing a petrol pump between his garage and the adjacent street, the police reported in a somewhat exasperated tone: 'It is very obvious that the confusion, incompleteness or incorrectness of the petitioner's attempts always fits with the framework of his argument and the goal he apparently wants to reach.'²¹

These and many other small-scale conflicts might simply be seen as part and parcel of governing a city. As stubborn as urbanites could be, granting or refusing them permissions was a powerful instrument in the authorities' hands. Provided that it was employed with the right mix of authority and flexibility, it helped to secure a balance between controlling and fostering individuality. However, around 1930 the situation in major German cities began to differ drastically from that in comparatively tranquil Amsterdam. In Berlin, media reports of suicides or marriage dramas sidelined discussion of the city's economic growth and infrastructural achievements, as Councillor Ernst Reuter, the future mayor of West Berlin, aptly remarked.²² They also amplified concerns and disappointments that would otherwise have remained on the level of personal experience. Tabloid newspapers campaigned against speed limits for car drivers, changes to public transport tickets, badly designed bus stops or delays to trains. Readers could write to the editor and ask, for instance, why the newly introduced metal grab bars in underground train carriages were so difficult to reach: 'To hold onto them requires a bodily contortion for people of small or medium height that is not exactly experienced as a pleasant gymnastic exercise on the way home from an exhausting day at work.'²³

In addition to this kind of mundane complaint, relations between Berliners and their municipal government were poisoned by drastic economic downturns. The experience of losing their savings during the hyperinflation or their job during the economic depression turned many people into embittered welfare clients. In the early 1930s, petitioners accosted officials on the street or accused the authorities of corruption. Some even threatened to take their own lives, thus triggering negative publicity for the authorities. The tone was frequently unconditional: 'There has to be a possibility of work for me,' one Berliner exclaimed, 'there has to be space for me. There must not be operational or administrative grounds . . . those are all . . . unfounded apologies that I refuse to accept.'²⁴ The newspapers of the extreme left and right—which in late 1929 had fatally undermined Mayor Gustav Böß with false corruption charges—were only too happy

to take up such stories. Two communist tabloids vividly described how working-class people were mistreated by brutal police officers, humiliated by a cynical welfare machine or constrained by municipal regulations when trying to settle on the outskirts of the city. Joseph Goebbels's newspaper *Der Angriff* ('The Attack') depicted ordinary Berliners as victims of social democratic corruption, which, it alleged, was behind the closure of bus lines and humiliation at the welfare office, and of an economic 'system' run by Jews.

Citizens' high expectations and dire circumstances, in conjunction with hostile media coverage and severe budgetary constraints, undermined the interplay between individuality and governance in Berlin and other German cities.²⁵ Welfare practitioners became increasingly desperate, to the point of hoping that drastic action against putative scroungers would free up time and money to care for the truly needy.²⁶ Such hopes, however, proved futile at a time of economic depression and a full-blown assault on municipal democracy. Nazism prevailed in Germany for a number of reasons, but it is important to consider that it had been electorally successful not just in rural areas and small towns but also, if less so, in major cities. In contrast to a widespread yet superficial assumption, the sea change of 1933 only partly resulted from, or ushered in, an era of 'collectivism'. The restructuring of power relations in the Third Reich needs to be understood differently. The new regime arguably fostered certain versions of individuality while sidelining or eliminating others. Berlin newspapers, for instance, went to considerable lengths to depict the regime as responsive to citizens' personal concerns and interests, in stark contrast to the previous rigidly bureaucratic 'system'. It offered personal attention to the deserving poor, organised cooking or swimming courses, expanded cycling paths and supported suburban homeownership. Nazism even appeared to be on the side of exhausted commuters. 'The railway administration's view that the public is entitled only to transport without regard to comfort', one letter to the editor boldly stated, 'no longer applies to the present period'.²⁷

All this was propaganda to be sure, but it clearly influenced how urban governance in the Third Reich was perceived and approached. Witness the numerous and often astonishingly confident requests directed at municipal institutions, party organisations and, most importantly, their prominent representatives.²⁸ The authors exploited the regime's anti-bureaucratic self-image and adopted the official ideology in a way that suited their respective individual purposes. It would be *unnationalsozialistisch*, a failed coffee salesman exclaimed, to refuse him support since 'any further delay could destroy my existence and life!' A woman already looking back on a protracted 'struggle for my rights' with the welfare office turned to propaganda minister Goebbels and reminded him 'that we live in a well-ordered Hitler state now'.²⁹ The tone of such letters led exhausted functionaries to complain frequently about troublemakers.

However, historians should not dismiss these letters as marginal phenomena but recognise them as the tip of an iceberg of individualised expectations and demands. One did not need to be a crank to turn to state institutions and party organisations for personal support. On the contrary, this pattern was repeated on a mass scale and well into the second half of the war. Nicholas Stargardt has persuasively argued that even after the severe bombing campaigns of 1943 there was little sign of social dissolution in the cities of the Third Reich. The regime's institutions and organisations were still sufficiently intact for Germans to be able to request places in shelters, food rations or indeed cinema tickets rather than engage in mass protests—in stark contrast to the dystopian and rebellious picture presented by Italian cities at the same time.³⁰

Of course, only politically loyal and racially fit 'Aryans' could benefit from the continuous interplay of urban individuality and urban governance. The Third Reich was a period in which millions of city dwellers in Germany and later occupied Europe found themselves deprived of personal entitlements. After 1933, social democrats or communists were kept in desperate isolation, first during their captivity in concentration camps in and around major cities, then after their release, when they were carefully avoided by their fearful neighbours in working-class areas. Those considered 'asocial' were subjected to the harsh discipline of work camps or even physically eliminated. During the war foreign workers had to live in barracks, brutally exploited and in no position to make any requests. The urban population that came under direct German control due to occupation was under similar strain. The residents of Amsterdam still had to request permission from the municipality to operate a taxi, sell hot waffles or live on a boat. But such semblances of normality could not obscure the increasingly dire reality of confiscated bicycles, reduced food rations and deportation for forced labour.³¹ However respectable their intentions, Dutch mayors and councillors became the executioners of Nazi policy.³²

The experiences of Amsterdammers under occupation shows that articulating one's legitimate individuality and demanding appropriate governance was now limited to Germans defined as 'Aryans'. This represented a sea change, the withdrawal of an option that most city dwellers across Central and Western Europe had come to take for granted. That option had marked a key distinction between them and non-Europeans, who had never been able to make legitimate demands as individuals. The Algerian migrants confined and harshly treated by the Paris Police in the 1920s and 1930s exemplify this just as much as the residents of colonial Bombay, who were at best recognised as members of a religious community.³³ The painful withdrawal of an established mode of governance in favour of blatant exploitation and brutal discipline became increasingly characteristic of urban life under the Nazis in cities such as Amsterdam, Brussels or Paris—and

reached its most extreme form in the experiences of the various Jewish minorities.

After 1933 German Jews found themselves increasingly deprived of any legal protection and even basic entitlements such as being able to see a film or sit on a park bench. They could only turn to the vastly overburdened and powerless associations and councils set up by their own minority. Some held unrealistic expectations of the support these organisations could provide and hung up when their query was not immediately dealt with over the phone.³⁴ Jewish newspapers depicted such behaviour as a personal failure to adapt to drastically altered circumstances in which the only option left was to prepare swiftly and carefully for emigration and to display self-reliance in Paris or Palestine, South Africa or Shanghai. During the war, those who had not managed to leave Germany, as well as the millions of European Jews who abruptly found themselves under Nazi domination, faced much more extreme conditions in crammed ghettos and camps. In Łódź, renamed Litzmannstadt, the ghetto with its starving inhabitants formed a vivid contrast to the redevelopment of the city for the benefit of resettled ethnic Germans. Chaim Rumkowski, Chair of the Jewish Council, once warned new German-Jewish arrivals to subject themselves to his orders, lest he employ ‘the sharpest means’ against them.³⁵ Rumkowski’s brutality has tarnished his reputation to this day, but he arguably brought Nazi ghetto policy to its logical conclusion—a deliberately lethal urban environment in which individuality had become meaningless.

From the Post-war Years to the 1980s

When the end of Nazi Europe finally came, cities were faced with the challenge of physical and social reconstruction. Public discourse presented this as a simultaneously collective and individual endeavour: local spaces and identities needed rebuilding, as did the nations of which they were a part. Appeals to patriotism were intimately linked to appeals to self-reliance. The good citizen did not ask for government support but rolled up his—or indeed her—sleeves and got to work. Stories abounded of people clearing away rubble, repairing windows or growing vegetables on patches of empty ground. Still, tensions between individual and collective interest kept resurfacing, as shown by the numerous newspaper reports or films about black marketeering and crime. Thus Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* narrated the moral ambiguities of self-reliance in post-war Vienna, where it was all too easily pursued at the expense of others. Vittorio de Sica’s *The Bicycle Thieves*, by contrast, foregrounded honest poor people in Rome, and the severe difficulties they had in feeding their children without resorting to petty theft.

Against this backdrop, relief and support were widely expected from municipal institutions that were themselves under reconstruction.

Agencies and officials, notwithstanding their frequent appeals to honest forms of self-reliance, were caught between citizens' high expectations and their own ambition to police popular behaviour. Where a governing party was firmly established, as in social democratic Vienna, requests for employment or other assistance could be addressed but also held in check. In the absence of a viable political alternative, a culture of patronage dating back to the interwar period was revived and extended to those who had previously sympathised with the Nazis.³⁶ Another, more common option was to contain urban individuality by moving against sexual minorities and putatively deviant youth with renewed vigour. And it is worth emphasising that Jewish survivors found themselves in an especially precarious position. They were at best tolerated, but only provided that they fitted seamlessly into the narrative of collective reconstruction by way of individual self-reliance. Their requests for restitution of, or compensation for, things that had been taken away from them were often ignored or rejected—as were their calls for support given their physical and psychological weakness. 'Jews are exhausted and intimidated', one of them wrote to an American newspaper in occupied Berlin, 'the German administrative agencies are doing precious little for them'.³⁷

The demands of millions of city dwellers, however, could not be dismissed so easily, and few municipal governments sat as firmly in the saddle as the Viennese. The worry was that individual frustrations would feed into, and be reinforced by, a powerful narrative of class struggle. In Paris, as also in Amsterdam and Hamburg, communist parties had a strong presence, and it was initially by no means clear that isolated West Berlin would emerge as superior to the communist east of the city. Pent-up demand for housing resurfaced after two decades of depression, war and reconstruction, and was couched in a language of democratic entitlement. In West Berlin, articles and readers' letters criticised scarce and family-unfriendly flats, bad street lighting or inadequate transport connections, thus increasing pressure for a more responsive municipal government. To the palpable relief of the half-city's politicians, the provision of both consumer goods and housing soon turned out to be superior to what East Berlin had to offer. Still, it was feared that the growth of expectations would overtake the pace of construction. 'For as long as we were unable to build', Willy Brandt mused in 1958, 'there were not the myriad possibilities for comparison that now virtually encourage dissatisfaction'. The social democratic mayor of West Berlin and future chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany added that 'the man in the back of a tenement in the Wedding district can now draw a comparison with the new developments and ask: why other people, why not me yet?'³⁸

Politicians who pushed for rapid housing construction in the 1950s and 1960s were driven by massive popular pressure. To get a place of one's own with central heating and an indoor bathroom was, given the imperfections of the property market, the most widely articulated

personal expectation of what governments ought to deliver. The prominence of this expectation coincided with an unprecedented availability of public funds, cheap building materials and methods as well as expert planners and developers. Furthermore, national governments became far more important to social or subsidised housing than they had been before the Second World War. There was undeniably a ‘technocratic’ side to all this, but it should be seen in the context of a large-scale effort to cater for individual needs and preferences. Even in France, often cited as the principal site of utopian housing schemes that later turned dystopian, the *usager* (‘user’, a notion blending the citizen and the consumer) was at the centre of planning discourse, as Kenny Cupers has recently demonstrated. Experts took an interest in what prospective inhabitants actually wanted from their flats, attempted to reconcile this with top-down modernisation and generally retained a humanistic motivation—although in the end they saw the *usager* simply as the generic, classless, white and male head of a nuclear family.³⁹ Much the same goes for other countries in Western Europe. In his recent memoirs, one Amsterdam planner confesses that ‘all the pre-programmed places and activities’ on the new housing estates that he helped to bring into existence appear ‘somewhat silly at a time of individual freedom’—but this is a decidedly retrospective view of a period when it was by no means evident that there was such a contradiction involved.⁴⁰

In the 1950s and 1960s modernist planning schemes appeared perfectly reconcilable with, and indeed a logical consequence of, democracy. They promised to resolve the thorny problem of how to reconcile urban individuality and urban governance. It looked as though citizens’ preferences would soon be satisfied not through conflict-ridden exchanges between persons, groups and institutions but by expanding the city horizontally and/or vertically, redeveloping many of its areas and building roads. Automobility was crucial in that it enabled urbanites to move rapidly and flexibly around an entire conurbation and beyond for purposes of work or leisure, making it much easier for them to turn into suburbanites. How this was to be achieved depended partly on the respective political system but also on cultural preferences. Gaullist centralism endeavoured to make the whole region of Paris car-friendly in the name of ‘freedom of choice’ while also expanding public transport. In Britain, car ownership was comparatively widespread and the ‘motor society’ or ‘car-owning democracy’ was hailed by politicians, but road construction remained patchier than in other Western European countries. In the Federal Republic of Germany too, automobility and suburbanisation advanced at a rapid pace, albeit counterbalanced by a broad preference for urban living, public transportation and shopping in city centres or residential neighbourhoods.⁴¹

The interplay between urban individuality and urban governance thus retained distinctly national features. It also had a European outlook, with

respect to the marginal status of immigrants from Turkey, the Maghreb or sub-Saharan Africa and by comparison with the much more suburbanised United States. In the present context, Europeaness means Western Europeaness, due to the presence of simultaneously advanced and responsive institutions in conjunction with market influences. A comparative look at Southern and Eastern Europe reveals stark differences but also some limited convergences. The Soviet Union shifted its emphasis to building housing estates on an unprecedented scale instead of the imposing boulevards and squares of the Stalin era, and it arguably granted tenants a quasi-right to property. In East Germany, petitioners demanded the satisfaction of their personal housing needs and thus put significant pressure on the communist system, although the reality of long waiting lists for flats on the new estates and dilapidated buildings in central districts remained frustrating.⁴² Southern European cities were distinctive for their blend of self-built suburban housing, patronage relations and unfettered capitalist development.⁴³ Against this backdrop, Europeanisation was a powerful ambition. However, it meant different things and had only a limited impact. Urban planners in Franco's dictatorship looked to Western Europe but saw a tradition of authoritarian modernism there, not the importance of individual demands and responsive institutions; in any case, their visions could hardly influence the rapid urban migration and real estate development of the 1950s and 1960s. Protest movements in Lisbon during the Portuguese Revolution aimed at the radical transformation that many contemporaries feared or desired, but chiefly at the provision of affordable housing and infrastructural goods—in other words, an urban governance that would cater for their individual needs along Western European lines.⁴⁴

The historical irony was that just when a balance between urban individuality and urban governance appeared not only to have been established and integrated in the framework of democratic nation states, but to have attracted admirers beyond Western Europe, it was increasingly questioned from within. The reasons for this abrupt shift are complex, but crucially the understanding of individuality itself had changed. All through the 1950s and 1960s, there had been lingering doubts about whether the rapid modernisation of urban spaces was really conducive to personal development. Did state institutions and capitalist developers foster individuality, as they incessantly claimed, or did they, at bottom, promote and enforce conformity? That was the criticism put forward by intellectuals, artists and emerging radical movements, who challenged the authorities in imaginative ways. At that point, the police had begun to treat people as legitimate consumers: even in West Germany with its authoritarian tradition, youth wanting to attend a Rolling Stones concert were carefully controlled but not beaten as Bill Haley fans had been in the 1950s.⁴⁵ But situationist artists and political radicals undermined this kind of conflict prevention, since they neither desired consumption nor

voiced any demands that could have been satisfied at a local level. In central Amsterdam in 1966, for instance, protesters against the Vietnam War gathered and dissolved flexibly so as to avoid forming old-style rebellious crowds or letting the police isolate them from each other. Others clapped their hands and whistled, attracting public attention and ridiculing the officers present without giving them sufficient cause to make an arrest. The police adapted and refined their repressive tactics, but protests continued. Slogans such as ‘Amsterdam police city’ or ‘police stop sadism’ aimed to undermine the tolerant reputation of the Dutch capital.⁴⁶

When radical students occupied the university’s main building on one of Amsterdam’s central squares, the mayor anticipated that the event would have wider repercussions: ‘What happens there affects the whole climate of governance in the city, and the big problems it needs to solve.’⁴⁷ The 1970s and early 1980s were to prove him right. Leftist movements put a strong emphasis on transforming urban life in conjunction with their global concerns. Street demonstrations kept challenging the authorities. New ways of blending individuality and collectivity were probed in communal flats, squatted houses and alternative cultural centres. This subverted the whole logic of turning to municipal institutions and politicians with personal demands. ‘What I want keeps clashing with the authorities’, was how one Amsterdam squatter explained his need to live outside the boundaries of normality. He also revealed his desire to throw stones at the police occasionally, thus avoiding ‘the feeling of continuing to live without having resisted’.⁴⁸ Self-empowerment through violence fitted into a broader concept of spontaneity entailing all-night parties, naked sunbathing or brunching on public pavements.⁴⁹ Leftists also tried to connect with their neighbours in run-down inner-city districts, including ethnic minorities and drug addicts who had hitherto been denied the status of legitimate individuals.⁵⁰ The simple demand was for municipal institutions to refrain from intervening and grant plenty of ‘autonomous’ space. Tellingly, Italian cities appeared attractive not despite but because of their deficient urban governance, as this enabled greater self-organisation by leftist groups.⁵¹

This was a challenge above all to the social democrats who governed most Western European cities and stood like no other party for the expansion of municipal provision. Housing shortages, the Amsterdam squatters’ newspaper pointed out in rather drastic language, could not be resolved within the framework of established governance but needed to be tackled through autonomous action at the neighbourhood level: ‘This is why it sucks for [Mayor Wim] Polak and his friends that so many people stand up for themselves, that they don’t let themselves be taken in any longer by nice promises and instead just squat.’⁵² As if this was not enough, post-1968 protests galvanised a much broader uneasiness with modernist planning and capitalist development. Leftist and conservative concerns overlapped, and new forms of involvement emerged.

Not just youthful radicals but city dwellers of different ages and persuasions doubted whether their individual needs and desires were taken into account by decision-makers. In West Berlin, even the centre-right tabloid *B.Z.* berated the administration for its inability to respond to increasingly critical citizens and the various local initiatives they founded.⁵³ But criticism also applied to institutions' supposed failure to ensure public safety. Thus the conservative press gave a voice to shopkeepers who lost customers because of drug addicts in the neighbourhood or had to have their windows repaired after violent demonstrations.⁵⁴

The period of apparent homogeneity had waned and urban individuality itself became decidedly complex in the 1970s. This trend resulted in contradictory expectations of urban governance, ranging from old-school authoritarianism to the toleration of 'autonomy', from the satisfaction of basic needs for housing or infrastructure to the incorporation of a much broader range of preferences. Expressing a widespread anxiety that Western societies could no longer be controlled and directed as had seemed to be the case in the 1950s and 1960s, Hamburg's social democratic mayor Hans-Ulrich Klose even raised the spectre of cities' 'ungovernability'.⁵⁵ What Klose underestimated, however, was the broad need for urban governance and its concomitant capacity to adapt. Fierce opponents of public institutions could all too soon end up being integrated by them. This the West German terrorists of the Red Army Faction saw clearly, deluded though they were in most other respects. From their vantage point as self-appointed revolutionaries, integration was a worrying tendency as early as 1970. Hence their invectives, not just against capitalist and 'fascist' oppression but also against 'reformism', 'social democratic bullshit' and 'social workers who kiss ass'.⁵⁶

One did not need to hold similarly extreme views to realise the increasing incorporation of 'alternative' lifestyles and subjectivities into a transformed, more diversity-friendly urban governance. In 1984, a Frankfurt leftist observed that his friends were doing all kinds of jobs after their utopian hopes had faded away, but typically ones that were publicly funded. An Amsterdam councillor quipped about 'tolerated subcultures', whose proponents used the left parties as umbrella organisations for their respective needs rather than vehicles for social change. He added that the prevalent 'anti-state attitude' sat oddly with the keen use of student grants and subsidised workspaces: 'No group turns to the parties represented in the council as often as the squatters.'⁵⁷ The squatters' not-so-radical behaviour was indicative of a broader cultural and political shift. The tenants' movement in Amsterdam, for instance, became less activist in the 1980s than in its founding years, due to a change in political context but also a different attitude on the part of its members. They used their association, much like parties and public institutions, more pragmatically, as a point of call for advice and support by trained professionals.⁵⁸

The interplay between urban individuality and urban governance was thus challenged by leftist movements and other, partly related trends of the 1970s but revived in a different guise in the subsequent decade. City dwellers did not stop turning to municipal institutions and politicians with their respective demands, nor did these institutions and politicians stop catering for them as individuals. In Britain under Margaret Thatcher, a shift occurred towards treating citizens as simultaneously economic and family-embedded agents to be freed from government interference—or else penalised.⁵⁹ However, this approach had a limited influence on the continent and contributed to increasing the distance between the respective types of urban society. And in Central and Western Europe municipal institutions were much stronger than in Southern Europe and more responsive than in the Eastern Bloc. How precisely urban individuality and urban governance evolved and were intertwined in the late twentieth century awaits historical analysis.

Conclusion

In analysing the interplay between urban individuality and urban governance, the present chapter has attempted to enhance our understanding of how power worked in twentieth-century European cities. It has drawn the conceptual consequences of much recent empirical scholarship while also adding some original research. In the light of both, to hail ‘rebel cities’ may be politically defensible, but appears to have limited analytical value.⁶⁰ City dwellers in Europe resisted their governments in many cases, but just as often asked things of them. They demanded that institutions and politicians take their personal needs and preferences seriously and act accordingly. In so doing, they exerted pressure and enforced changes, precisely by demanding that the authorities should get involved. Urban governance should consequently not be conceptualised as if it were somehow separate from the urban population. On the contrary, scholars should explore the interplay between both, while recognising that this population was not merely divided into collectives but increasingly driven by individualist expectations.

To be sure, all this required reasonably developed and responsive institutions. These took until the early twentieth century to emerge. Once that was the case, the interplay between urban individuality and urban governance could only be rolled back through massive discrimination, as the history of Nazi rule in Germany and much of Europe demonstrates. Such institutions were much more present in Central and Western than in Southern or Eastern Europe. This said, demands for better housing and infrastructure provision were also addressed in Russia after Stalin’s death, and were clearly articulated in Lisbon during the Portuguese Revolution. Crucially, city dwellers’ own needs and preferences, too, were liable to change, leading to a much more complex and diverse political

landscape by the 1970s and 1980s than could have been anticipated in the previous period of apparent homogeneity. The interplay between urban individuality and urban governance thus spanned the twentieth century while undergoing important shifts.⁶¹

In at least three respects, the topic warrants further research. The first concerns the relationship between claims to individuality and collective categories such as class or race. The present chapter has pointed out that during the interwar period, communists and social democrats aimed to satisfy workers, while liberals and conservatives directed their efforts at middle-class citizens. After the war, by contrast, attempts to address city dwellers as individuals were inseparable from hopes for a classless society. Furthermore, individuality was granted or denied along racial lines—atrociously so in the Third Reich and much more tacitly in the 1960s. But how exactly individuality and collectivity were intertwined is far from clear. Second, we know too little about how, to what extent and with which effects city dwellers in different parts of Europe perceived themselves as individuals. The evidence presented here is admittedly patchy, all the more since vocal groups such as radical youth are easier to grasp than older and less politicised citizens.⁶² Third, the corresponding changes in urban governance need to be established with greater precision. The argument here has been that municipal authorities often found themselves overwhelmed but were also able to exploit that urban citizens needed them for their own purposes—to the point of managing to incorporate a broader range of preferences by the 1980s. But how this was achieved, with which techniques, services and modes of engagement, remains largely unresearched.

Analyses along these lines can benefit from the work of Niklas Luhmann and other sociologists. They contend that individuality is principally a matter of expectations, which put pressure on systems and institutions and are conversely reshaped by them. Albeit not formulated for cities specifically, this crucial insight is adaptable to fit urban contexts. It has some parallels with Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality, which also highlights the interplay between institutions and subjects.⁶³ But the latter, developed in order to trace the intellectual antecedents of neoliberalism, has so far been applied mainly to the Victorian city, suggesting that municipal institutions largely succeeded in transforming city dwellers' behaviour so as to make them comply with their own governance.⁶⁴ In such an account, the interplay between institutions and subjects appears too smooth to apply to the twentieth century with its democracies and dictatorships, its demanding citizens and hand-wringing officials. It is also at odds with Luhmann's argument that different systems have emerged in modern times. Law, politics, and the economy react to new challenges according to their own respective logics rather than any overarching pattern as a range of thinkers including Marx and Foucault have tended to suggest. Luhmann has made this point forcefully in regard

to the environmental question,⁶⁵ as well as, more implicitly, individualist expectations. In any case, the issue of how the modern ‘synthesis of freedom and organisation, of independence and dependence’ played out in European cities merits further exploration and debate.⁶⁶

Notes

1. I should like to thank Rüdiger Graf, Simon Gunn and the anonymous reviewer for their pertinent criticisms and suggestions.
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6. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre, ‘Urban governance’, in Peter John, Karen Mosserberger and Susan E. Clarke (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Politics* (Oxford, 2012), 71–86.
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10. Niklas Luhmann, ‘Individuum, Individualität, Individualismus’, in Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik: Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt, 1993), 149–258, here 253, 255. See also Armin Nassehi, ‘Exclusion individuality or individualization by inclusion?’ *Soziale Systeme*, 8 (2002), 124–35.
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20. See various correspondence in Stadsarchieff Amsterdam [hereafter SAA], 5181, nos. 4411, 4672, 4828, 4838, 5020.
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25. See David F. Crew, *Germans on Welfare: From Weimar to Hitler* (New York, 1998); Uwe Lohalm, 'Die Wohlfahrtskrise 1930–1933: Vom ökonomischen Notprogramm zur rassenhygienischen Neubestimmung', in Frank Bajohr, Werner Johe and Uwe Lohalm (eds.), *Zivilisation und Barbarei: Die widersprüchlichen Potentiale der Moderne* (Hamburg, 1991), 193–225.
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