



Multiculturalism, Integration and Bazaars

This article seeks to understand the connection between bazaars and multiculturalism, and to investigate the influence of bazaars on urban experience

By Irina Watts and Costina Mihaela Knudsen

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, more people tend to live outside their homeland. At present more than 150 million people live outside of their home countries and an estimated 70 million of these live in industrialized countries. Cities like Berlin, Bucharest and - on a smaller scale - Aarhus naturally attract people on the move, with their established networks, dynamic labour markets and relatively higher tolerance for diversity. Therefore these are the places where initial debates of integration and immigration take place.



Stand at Bazaar Europe, Bucharest, March 2004.

This article will focus on the bazaars in Berlin and Bucharest with references to Bazaar Vest in Aarhus. It seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms, effects and perceptions of bazaars, the bazaars being seen as meeting places of Eastern and Western cultures, a thriving market with modern lifestyle and chaotic traffic, a place where Orient and Occident fuse.

Our investigation is a result of the project "Innovating European Cities - experience economy and culture", a cooperation between the Department of European Studies, Aarhus University, PLS Rambøll and the Kaos Pilots. The objective of the partnership was to investigate how actors in the European "experience economy"¹ contribute to the current renewal of cities in Europe.

¹ Experience economy is an advanced service economy which has begun to sell "mass customization" services that are similar to experiences — events, trips, places, sights, sounds, tastes that are out of the ordinary, memorable in their own right, precious in their uniqueness and fulfilling in a way that seems to make us more than we were.

There is an ongoing discussion in Denmark with regards to the possible forming of bazaars, and which consequences these might have for integration. Many Danes believe that ghettos and isolation follow naturally from the formation of bazaars, viewing these institutions as a way for ethnic minorities to avoid contact with the rest of society. Whether these widely held views are correct is presently difficult to discern, as no real research into the matter exists – thus public opinion rules the debate. In order to rise above heated, uninformed arguments, research needs to be done into the nature of such institutions as bazaars, in order to disclose their effect on integration, positive or negative, so that decisions may be made from an informed basis.

Using participant observation and semi-structured interviews with shopkeepers, customers and city authorities we have sought to understand the connection between bazaars and multiculturalism, and to investigate the influence of bazaars on urban experience and to find out the factors that contribute to making the bazaar successful and attractive to people. Different countries create their own special kinds of bazaars and markets. The reasons for this are different immigration histories, ways of integrating immigrants and the countries unique cultural heritage of the respective countries. The focus of our analysis differs from city to city, because the stories vary. Each of the cities and the bazaars that we have investigated has its own characteristics and the functions also differ.

Berlin

Turning our eyes to Berlin, we find a city which has a modern history of immigration dating back after the Second World War, and also a city that has absorbed all of its newcomers. The largest ethnic community is that of Turks and Kurds – 30 percent of all Non-Germans living in the city. The city seems to have succeeded in integration of the ethnic minorities by forming a reasonable amount of the bazaars in good locations. Berlin in many ways symbolizes the meeting of cultures; with the reunification of the East and West parts and the large immigrant communities.

Immigration to Germany began a decade or two before we experienced it in Denmark and because of the relative size of Germany, congregations of immigrants were and are much larger than we see in Denmark. There are entire neighbourhoods in Berlin where even the road names and street signs are in a foreign language and alphabet. Berlin in many ways is a picture of a possible future Denmark with the increasing mix of



cultures, and as such is worth a study with regards to how integration has turned out thus far, as we ourselves will most likely be investigating the same projects and problems in a few years that Berlin has already experienced.

Our experience of Berlin is of an open and cosmopolitan city, allowing for almost every kind of life style. In Berlin, there are 450,000 citizens registered of non-German nationality from 184 nations. There are 1.8 million Turks in Germany, 139,000 of them in Berlin, making them the largest group of foreign workers. Turks constitute one of the most significant post-war groups of migrants in Europe, particularly in Germany. The shopkeepers of the bazaars bring their products to both Turkish and German customers in Berlin, finding the German customers to be their main source of their income. There are about 112 public or private street bazaars in Berlin. Not all of them are open every day of the week. We decided to focus on one of the most popular and largest Turkish bazaars, which is located in the Reuterplatz area. We also looked at some small markets in the Alexanderplatz area, which has a population of 18.459, 69.7 per cent of them Germans and 30.3 per cent non-German.

Overall, there are a great amount of bright signs, small markets and stalls, which remind one of bazaars of the East. Fast food cafes where döners (Turkish fast-food) are served have become an integral part of the city landscape. The majority of the Turkish women wear Muslim headaddresses. The districts are characterized by a lower sanitary level than predominantly German parts of the city.

Many second and third generation Turks born or raised in Germany have only limited exposure to Turkey (based on our interviews with young Turkish people in Markt am Winterfeldplatz). The second, and to some extent third generations, grew up in these often socially and culturally not too well integrated homes, and had to find a compromise between the traditional ways of their parents and the modern ways of the society they live in. In comparison to Bazaar Vest in Aarhus, where the command of the Danish language by the sellers is quite poor, these generations have a much better command of the German language, often having been educated in the German school system. Some have begun to rebel against the traditional ways of their parents, which often leads to generational conflicts. Their German is fluent, manners and traits of behavior are in many ways German, and they are picking up a more European social code. The difference is seen clearly in comparison with the less integrated Turks at their market stalls. If most self-employed German-Turks started with small family businesses, there are now huge differences between them. These correspond to the growing divisions in terms of socio-economic achievements that have superimposed themselves on previous religious, ethnic and rural/urban differences. German-Turkish entrepreneurs differ in the size and duration of

their business, and in the skills and qualifications they have. 30.2 per cent of all employees in Turkish immigrant-owned business, typically the bazaars, are not of Turkish origin, but of German or another nationality. According to Zentrum für Türkeistudien (1999), Turkish entrepreneurs have thus gone 'from the niche to the market' and speaking of an 'ethnic' or 'enclave' economy therefore does not make sense for the vast majority of them. German shops and German-Turkish customers have mutually adapted their supplies and demands to one another. Very few businesses can therefore survive by relying exclusively on ethnic customers.

The face of Germany is changing. Wherever one goes, evidence of a new cultural influence is apparent. Moreover, an important evolution of German customers' consumption habits has also taken place, especially in the food sector. 'Ethnic' food is now purchased by nearly everybody, and this obviously fuels the growth of restaurants held by immigrants, giving them opportunities to leave the niche and deal extensively with Germans. The diversification of tastes is only one aspect of this multiculturalism. Moreover, it must be noted that products themselves are also becoming hybrid. In Germany, this is exemplified by the emblematic *Döner Kebab* story, a 'typically Turkish' product that was actually created in Germany, thus illustrating the mutual adaptation of German customers and Turkish food. Restaurants specializing in döner kebabs are located next to traditional beer halls serving wienerschnitzel and pretzels on the main streets of small towns across Germany.

In Berlin tourists wander across bazaars filled with women wearing colorful headscarves. Berlin wants to recognize those immigrants who carry their culture on their sleeve, whereas Germany in general resents such an attitude as emphasized by the country-wide debate about headscarves. Immigrants are therefore caught in the middle of a country-wide battle called "integration" that has many different and contradicting meanings.

Our studies of Berlin show that the city allows spaces for *outsiders* to belong - it makes it possible for otherwise excluded people to identify with the place. For the people living there, what looks like a dissonant space (a ghetto), is in fact a transnational, global community with cross-cutting belongingness that is not just Turkish revitalized Turkishness or Islam, or intentional disintegration, a refusal of state expectations. Rather for them, it is a case of being defined as the product of the locale and their interaction with this environment. The degree to which origin is important to a second generation person's identity is closely related to the status of the particular immigrant community and the concept of membership in the host context. Since it is harder to become a full fledged "German" it is less of a choice for an immigrant to define him/herself as such.



"I love my family and I want to raise my children in the same way I've been brought up. I am a Berliner, and that is very special. Berlin is a multicultural place, where people can be themselves. But my cultural background is and will remain Turkish. I hope my children will share the same love and understanding of where they come from."

Kemal Kosar, 45

Whether or not increased membership in the host context, which is of particular interest to this paper, will turn out to be the case remains to be seen, but our studies show that the bazaar functions as a means for various ethnic groups to gain a foothold in society by means of a job. From this job follows money, better opportunities for the family and thus a way out of the ghetto that perpetuates the problems of the typically low-income ethnic groups. As such the bazaar in itself does not seem to promote integration, as ethnic population and tourists alike shop for primarily cheap goods, not culture.

Indeed the ghetto-like atmosphere of the bazaar may cause the various ethnic groups to have less to do with society outside the bazaar, as it facilitates most of their daily needs with regards to shopping and social interaction. However, as our studies have also shown, the ethnic groups and around and in the bazaars are not happy with their situation, and move as soon as they have the means. In this sense the bazaar serves as their foothold, the stepping stone into "normal" society, something which would otherwise be very difficult for them *vis a vis* their problems with entering the German job market.

Bridging cultures in Bucharest

Bucharest is the capital of Romania and the centre of the Eastern Roman world. Placed in a space of confluence of civilisations, Bucharest evolved assimilating European and Oriental influences, displaying a natural capacity for integration that has changed its status as a city between the Eastern and Western Worlds. With a population of about 2,5 million and important economical and cultural resources, Bucharest is a European metropolis, despite its tumultuous past.



For bargain hunters or those who are just happy to browse, a stroll through one of Berlin's bustling bazaar is a great way to spend a sunny Sunday morning. Beside the usual stock of second hand books, clothing, records and bric-a-brac which you would expect to find at flea markets across the world, keep an eye out for Russian icons, or freshly pickled gherkins. And if you want to try out some authentic German leather shorts (Lederhosen), you will save a few euros (and a lot of chafing) if you buy a pair which has already been broken in.

As noted, immigration is a rather new phenomenon in the Romanian landscape, and bazaars are just as new elements in the urban environment. They are the object of stereotypical representations, being connected to illegal workers, uneducated immigrants, crime, and low social status. If you were to travel through Bucharest, the bazaar would definitely not be a place you might easily find. However, many people also see the bazaar as being a mixture of cultures, rituals and traditions that can only enrich the area, with very different dress codes, public behaviour and a wide variety of foreign languages. Unlike countries like France or England that have historically hosted large populations of immigrants, the totalitarian regime prevented any kind of migration in and out of the country before 1989. After the collapse of the Communist Block in 1989, Romania has received an increasing number of migrants, both from Western countries and from the Far East (Chinese and Arabs), settling businesses in Romania. The Chinese minorities in Romania represent the majority of shopkeepers at the bazaar. One of the main problems for immigrant shopkeepers is the rent on stalls, which is very high for a small concrete room and sidewalk space.

There are two categories of migrants into Romania: those who search for a home in Romania (political refugees and economic refugees from Iran, Iraq, Bangladesh, Congo etc.), and those who are just passing through Romania on their way to the Western countries. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees World Refugee Survey 2001, Romania, at the end of 2000, hosted about 2100 refugees and asylum seekers in need of protection. The largest number of asylum seekers comes from Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The total number of asylum seekers for the last decade is rather low: 11658 applicants for asylum in ten years, which is indicative to the fact that there is a rather small amount of foreigners in the coun-



try. Many of the Eastern people with commercial or business activity in Romania have integrated into Romanian society by marriage with Romanian citizens, establishing business and personal relationships with Romanian partners and/or demanded Romanian citizenship.

Bazaars are a rather new phenomenon for the common Romanian, who has not been used to seeing so many products and people from all parts of the world gathered in one place. It has brought into the city space the first foreigners trying to gain new market segments by promoting exotic products unknown to the Romanians. From the beginning, Bazaar Europe has taken upon itself the role of a promoter of "imports" from the Oriental civilisation and initiated successful cooperation with partners from the country and from abroad like China, Japan. Throughout its existence, the bazaar has expanded its business and today within the Complex there are 17 companies in various activity fields and a permanent representative office in Beijing- China.

What is really interesting about this specific bazaar, is that it aims to promote a "cultural product". It offers goods that are manufactured in China in specific surroundings, because it believes that these ethnic products have added value. The bazaar tries to present the act of trading as being framed in an Eastern ambience. It gives you a glimpse of the Asian traditional civilisation in Bucharest's landscape.

Our observations show that bazaars in Bucharest can be seen as bridging the culture of local people and immigrants. Many of the customers we observed in the bazaar obviously enjoy the interaction with the shopkeepers, and are happy to try some of the exotic flavours of the foreign products. The customers' consumption habits show that 'ethnic products' are now purchased not only by foreigners and immigrants, but also by the local people. The emergence of the bazaar has obviously influenced the consumption and production patterns to a certain degree. The bazaars in Bucharest are likely to be looked at from two perspectives: they can be elements that encourage integration of the immigrants, mainly Chinese people, but also Arabs, Turks, Indians etc., and, in the same time, a step towards a deeper isolation and marginalization.

Walking through the dim, crowded halls along the streets of Chinatown and on the Middle Eastern strip, buying exotic products and ingredients gives you a very special feeling. A feeling of the market stalls full of ripe-smelling peaches, melons, figs and tomatoes. A feeling of the hospitality of the shopkeepers. A feeling that being different is not a hindrance, rather, on the contrary, a plus. This mixture of people, wonderful colours of red and yellow, combined with the intoxicating smell of spices that tickle your nostrils, distinguishes this bazaar, makes it an authentic ethnic supermarket.



Entrance of "Bazaar Europe", Bucharest.



The emergence of the "Bazaar Europe" has brought another social category to Bucharest's urban environment: Chinese merchants, producers and shopkeepers, who sell a wide diversity of Chinese-manufactured products. Bazaar Europe is simply a little piece of China, uprooted and replanted, smack in the heart of Romania.

Yin Xiao-Ping, who came to Bucharest in 1992, sees Romania as the land of the future. He has just finished building a 400-stall, all-Chinese market just outside the gates of the Europe Bazaar. He is president of the Union of Chinese Businessmen in Romania, and a white stretch Lincoln Town Car sits outside his office. Romania, he said, can be China's gateway to the former Soviet Union. Already, some 40 percent of Chinese imports to Romania go on to three former Soviet republics - Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova - Mr. Yin said. The key, he said, is to take a long-term view. He is in Romania to stay. For many Chinese, home is where one's ancestors are buried, and last year, Mr. Yin's father died in Bucharest. "Now," Mr. Yin said, "Romania is the land of my ancestors."

*Bazaar Europe, Bucharest
April 2004.*

"Bazaar Europe" is a large market, established in the late 90's, which can be found on the outskirts of Bucharest. "Europe" is a large, improvised labyrinth of narrow alleyways, with hundreds of Chinese traders operating their small stalls, selling Chinese-manufactured goods. Here at the bazaar you can find almost anything. Nails, carpets, auto spare parts, bicycles, motorcycles, furniture, clothing, shoes, cosmetics, household products - all placed in between food, spices and other specific products. The merchandise you can find here is cheaper than what you can buy in normal shops and



supermarkets, and for this reason business has flourished.

The initiative for the establishment of the bazaar was taken by a private person: Dumitru Nicolae, a Romanian business-man who is presently the president of both "Europe Complex" and "Niro Complex". Chinese people also played a large part in the creation of the bazaar. At present, there are between 10,000 and 40,000 mainland Chinese traders settled in Bucharest, and about 99 per cent had or still have stands in the bazaar "Europe". Chinese traders were quick to capitalize on the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, and are now ubiquitous in the bazaars of Bucharest. They dominate the low-price retail business across the region, offering goods from their home provinces that are cheaply made and cheaply sold. Chinese traders are without a doubt a new immigrant class in Romania seeking to make its fortune.

An important characteristic of the shopkeepers is reliance on family rather than banks. Most of the shopkeepers said that they use their own personal savings or borrowed money from relatives and friends to start their business, highlighting "family role" in the informal networks. The importance of "family business" is very evident. None of the shopkeepers we spoke to ever use bank credits. Almost all of the shopkeepers interviewed expressed a very low level of trust in the state, be it the municipality, the police or the tax collectors. When asked what the state can do for them to improve their trade, many asked to be "left alone." Many shopkeepers complained about the arbitrary practices of the tax collectors who visit the bazaar more often when the market appears to boom about, the municipal officials who change the rules and regulations on a regular basis and about the police who fail to provide security for the shopkeepers and traders.

For customers the bazaar is an authentic experience and happily purchase the exotic products offered by it. A 23 years old student loves visiting the bazaars because: "you're engaging with people in a unique, lovely way. I suppose what interests me the most are exotic products - whether they are Chinese, Italian, Arabian, Turkish or others". She loves the diversity of products and ingredients one can find in bazaars: "It's fascinating because it tells a story about a place and a time that has been developed and perfected over the years".

A 41 year old economist, living in the neighborhood of the bazaar prefers the bazaars to supermarkets:

The markets are often my inspiration. Shopping, for me, is about selecting the best products; and seeing, smelling or tasting before buying is essential. I enjoy, too, the interaction with shopkeepers, who are usually more than happy to chat about where things come from and what's happening in the season. I don't enjoy shopping at supermarkets; mainly because all these things are lacking - but sometimes you can't avoid them, can you?

From Bucharest to Aarhus

There are many striking similarities between Bazaar Vest in Aarhus and Bazaar Europe in Bucharest. Both bazaars have been established recently, during the 1990's, so they are rather new in the environment of the cities. Moreover, in both cities the initiative in the creation of the bazaars was taken by private local businessmen, Dumitru Nicolae in Bucharest and Olav de Linde in Aarhus who saw the idea of creating a bazaar as an excellent opportunity for bringing foreigners to the labour market. It is important to stress that both businessmen have been rather successful in the local business environment and have managed to extend their businesses, presently being the owners of important companies in their cities. They have gained strong economical and financial positions on the local market, and have a solid reputation.

Further similarities between the two bazaars refer to the placement. Both are placed on the outskirts of the city, which renders them somewhat isolated from the rest of the city. Peripheral areas are likely to be connected with social problems such as crime, uneducated immigrants, low social status etc. For this reason the bazaars have mostly bad reputations, being associated with "ghetto areas". The poor language skills of the shopkeepers are also evidence of the bazaar as a declining/ depreciated place. Moreover, the houses in the neighbourhood have decreased in value after the construction of the bazaar in the area. All these factors contribute to making the integration of immigrants difficult, and can be seen as obstacles for their full integration into local society. Despite all these problems, the bazaars can still be perceived as integrating elements as they create employment for a large amount of foreigners, something the bazaars of Aarhus, Berlin and Bucharest share. Another important similarity is that neither of the bazaars of Aarhus or Bucharest is promoted by the cities. They are not advertised in any way, which leads us to the conclusion that the places are not perceived as tourist attractions by the local people or authorities. On the contrary, they are considered marginalized areas, where most customers are foreigners and some locals living in the vicinity of the bazaars. There are, of course, also some exceptions: now and then tourists visit the bazaar looking for exotic souvenirs, happy to taste the "ethnic" food and try the merchandise. Another common characteristic for the bazaars in Berlin, Bucharest and Aarhus is that some of the customers perceive the bazaar as an authentic experience and happily purchase the exotic products offered by it.

The bazaars represent advantages for the surrounding area; not only economically, but also socially. The wide variety of cultures and rituals that are united at the bazaar enrich the areas the bazaars are located in. In many ways, the immigrants present at the bazaars are the promoters of their own cultures, through distinctive appearance, styles of dress, ritual and public behaviour. They express, more or less consciously, a wide variety of cultures and traditions which could easily benefit the



civil society by helping the minorities be integrated into society.

Bazaars in Europe still remain a little understood phenomenon, with their shopkeepers - beings, subject to stereotypical depiction from outside observers as a band of venal, close-minded, uneducated, secretive wheeler-dealers. As shown in our study, it is important to stress that bazaars need to be reinterpreted as being also creative spaces where people can afford to be different and express themselves, and in the same time be able to promote of their own culture.

Irina Watts and Costina Mihaela Knudsen are graduate students in European studies, University of Aarhus.

The participants in the Bazaar Group are also Ulrika Guld-bæk Arentsen, Gitte Elisabeth Ravnholt Madsen, Louise Vestergaard Skøtt Poulsen, Jens Dlugosch Sonne, Xiuhong Yan, Lixin Tang, and Maria Vandborg,

References

Aldrich, H.E., Jones, T.P. (1984): "Ethnic Advantage and Minority Business Development" In: Bayly, C. A., "*Rulers, townsmen, and bazaars: North Indian society in the age of British expansion*". Paper presented to the roundtable on "Entrepreneurs between two worlds", Paris, 6 December.

Appadurai, A. (1990): "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" In: Featherstone, M.: *Global Culture. Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, London: Sage Publications, pp. 295-310.

Baumann, G. (1996): "Contesting Culture. Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Jenkins, R., Ward, R. (1984): "Ethnic Communities in Business. Strategies for Economic Survival", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 189-210.

Kennedy, G., Benson, J. and McMillan, J. (1988): "Managing negotiations", London: Hutchinson Business press.

McMillan, J. (2003): "Reinventing the bazaar: a natural history of markets", W.W. Norton & Company.

McMillan, J. (2002): "The Central Role of Entrepreneurs in Transition Economies" In: *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, red.: Christopher Woodruff, Kluwer.

Zentrum für Türkeistudien (1999): "Die Regionalen Transferstellen für ausländische Existenzgründer und Unternehmer in Nordrhein Westfalen" In: *Ökonomische Daten der türkischen und ausländischen Selbständigen in NRW und Deutschland*, Essen University: Zentrum für Türkeistudien.