

Project Group (Number and Name): 37 - Urban citizenship: how changing spaces reshape contemporary democracy

Comment

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The space in which we live & the way in which we use it are highly influential on our society and democracy. Currently, we are facing various challenges on different levels: As cities become crowded, living space grows scarce, forcing certain social groups into surrounding villages. This causes increasingly unequal distributions of social classes. There is also insufficient exchange between these urban and rural areas, both culturally and politically, leading to polarisation in many aspects. As a consequence, our democracy is threatened as opposing sides of society are established. It is our responsibility as urban citizens to shape our spaces in a way that benefits our society, the first step of which would be to recognise these challenges. Our approach to evaluating & finding solutions to these challenges was mainly collecting ideas & key terms as a group. On the basis of that there were discussions in pairs or smaller groups. There was even a podium discussion towards the end, debating the importance of each individual challenge. During these activities we increasingly became aware of some of our approach's limitations. For example, that the majority could not empathise with the perspective of rural communities since most of us grew up in bigger cities. Therefore, it was difficult from time to time to authentically debate the challenges at hand. However, the few people who have lived in rural areas were able to satisfyingly explain their side of the story. Another of the limitations was our focus on a Western, European point of view, which is not representative of other parts of the worlds. This led us to develop theories more relevant to Germany. The results of our work show that space is a massively important and impactful part

of democracy that isn't talked about enough. We strongly believe that the growing importance of space needs to be addressed more in politics in order to reduce social disparities that disrupt the unity of society. A concrete solution would be to encourage more political discourse and an exchange of ideas between the urban and rural population. This would create a bridge between their different living situations and divergent perspectives. The importance of dialogue was demonstrated to us in our own discussions that made us realise the limitations of our personal experience, which shape our subjective view on life. The concept can also be applied to people from different social classes, age groups, religions and more. And no matter whether it is within a city, a village or among them both, reducing social disparities and connecting people is vital to the health of our democracy. And to do so the importance of space in a democratic system such as ours needs to be debated.