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City-Twinning in IR Theory: Escaping the Confines of the Ordinary

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ABSTRACT

This article sets out to explore the analytical utility of city-twinning for International Relations theory. It does so by recognizing twinning as a relevant category to be explored despite of being part of the “low” rather than the “high,” its inherently ambivalent nature as well as the leaning on some rather unconventional constitutive claims with twinning resting on togetherness and similarity that transcends national borders. In essence, it disrupts crucial foundational claims integrally part of traditional IR theory and invites for the exploring of alternative avenues as well as the testing of the applicability of various new conceptual departures needed in accounting for what has ordinarily fallen between the dichotomies and clean-cut categories part of those theories. The interrogation does not lean on alignment with any particular strand of IR theory, although some avenues such as those provided by the concepts of marginality, liminality and hybridity are probed as departures that might over time facilitate the integration of twinning into IR theory.

Introduction

City-twinning stands out as a moving target. It has taken a variety of forms pending time and place as also indicated by the many different labels such as friendship cities, border cities or partnership cities attached to the cooperative and border-transcending relations between cities. As pointed out by Nick Clarke (2009, 498), “there is little consistency in the way that local authorities conceive of their partnerships.” Some associate town twinning with jollies and junkets taken by town officers and members, or with little more than cultural exchanges between schoolchildren, while it may also be associated with quite formal partnerships amounting to much instrumental cooperation, he notes. The pairing of cities across and beyond national borders has related to idealist and symbolic togetherness sometimes in opposition to the policies pursued by states, but has over time increasingly pertained to quite concrete and instrumental efforts such as generating investments, improving infrastructure and reacting to environmental concerns.

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The lack of uniformity as to the goals and forms testifies to that cities have in general acquired considerable liberty in choosing their distinct mode of constitution. They are no longer confined to their traditional and nationally determined modes of being and acting. In reaching through their partnerships premised on solidarity beyond national borders into the sphere of the international they blur the borderline between the domestic and the foreign. They exemplify that cities are in general increasingly premised on bonding through togetherness and unfold thereby as a relational form of being rather than just by standing out as single, isolated and passive entities defined by moves of national bordering (Barber 2013).

In doing so and by abiding to the spread of an “urban logic” (e.g. Burnett and Sudjic 2007; Dunford and Kafarakas 1992; Hobbs 1994; Sassen 1991), the cities engaged in twinning escape their spatial fixations premised on a rather divisive constellations between self and other and thereby reach beyond the ordinary modes of constitution. Thus, while the constitution of national space usually rests on locating similarity inside and locating difference on the outside, city-twinning does not lean on such a separation between similarity and difference. Instead of coming into being through moves of differentiation and expressing what they are not as has ordinarily been the case, the pairing of “twins” takes place by emphasizing the virtue of similarity, of being alike. They do not abide to the ordinary division between “us” and “them,” one upheld by tightly delineated boundaries, and are hence not premised on separation along national lines, but aspire for identity by embracing sameness that transcends national forms of being.

In a sense, the quite defiant mode of constitution underlying city-twinning is notable as such, but it becomes even more challenging once it involves cities engaged in twinning across a shared national border. In entailing a down-grading of the divisive and difference-producing impact of national borders, their pairing unavoidably problematizes the nature and functions of the border, and thereby also the nature of the entities premised on the existence of that border. In short, their proliferation points to changes in statehood as well as changes in the character of international relations as well as a new beginning and renewal of basic departures underlying both the formation of states and the established international order.

In breaking with various dualities, opposites and clear-cut divisive distinctions through their transnational linkages and relational mode of being, city-twinning unavoidably raises a host of conceptual as well as theory-related questions. Some of these have been addressed, for example, by approaching twinning as a form of border-transcending if not border-infringing urban development (cf. Hobbs 1994; Jayne et al. 2011), but at large they remain void of any in-depth thinking.

Our aim here is therefore to tackle this shortage by exploring further city-twinning as a theory-related challenge, and to do so particularly for the part of International Relations theories, i.e. theories such as those of realism that have been mostly geared towards examining the world of arguably autonomous and sovereignty-driven nation-states. The integration of city-twinning into the sphere of IR theory is clearly warranted with the pairing of cities amounting to a global-local interface and in reaching beyond the domestic into the sphere of the international. Their pairing and use of togetherness as a site for articulating and pursuing joint interests stands out as challenges among other reasons in breaking with the clear-cut territorial delineations between the internal and the external, domestic and foreign as well as national and the international, i.e. delineations constitutive of the state-based system of international relations with security as a core concern. They are also

troubling in approaching the issues of security in ways of their own thereby contributing to what has been called the civilization of international relations (Neyer 2000, 188).

Yet, and in taking into account the fluid and variable nature of twinning, the challenges posed are not uniform in nature. They are instead variable both in terms of the form that twinning takes as well as to its contents. In order to deal with this variance, we firstly separate between those forms of pairing between cities that point to emancipation if not opposition and forms of revolt. For the second, we approach twinning as a particular form of transnationalization conducive to various new forms of cooperation across national boundaries and, finally, we employ it as something incoming pointing to new forms of relationality (cf. Taylor 2006), with this then allowing for the addressing of some future trends in the sphere of international and global developments.

Old Style Twinning

It has often been claimed that city-twinning emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War (Zelinsky 1991, 5–6). This is true in the sense that the destruction wrought by the war generated much critical thinking and was conducive to a search for alternative avenues also among local actors. Along these lines, communities in countries such as France, Britain and Germany aspired to develop friendships and cultural ties across previous lines of enmity in order to foster peace. It was also hoped that personal relationships forming a kind of people-to-people movement through the pairing of cities would lessen the change of future conflicts and form a barrier against interstate violence (Cremer et al. 2001, 380; Joenniemi 1998).

It may, however, be noted that some efforts to revive the ties between cities broken by war occurred already after the First World War. These efforts took place above all across the French-German border (Delbreil 1994; Vion 2007, 289) with proximity as a contributing factor. Yet, in some instances twinning also unfolded between French and British towns as exemplified by the signing of a twinning agreement in 1920 between Keighley and Poix-du-Nord. They established a relationship across previous lines of enmity by capitalizing on the state of exception brought about by the war with the extraordinary situation and crisis allowing and empowering them to open up radical questions about authority, break with the normal rules and step beyond the conventions ordinarily regulating the ways cities were expected to relate to national borders and polities located outside national space. In essence, their twinning contained elements of escape as well as creativity. Established certainties provided by national forms of being and national borders could be left aside with this then inviting for vicinity to be turned into affinity and togetherness. The aim was also one of staying aloof from the ordinary, and rather securitized, state-based discourse and the two cities on their respective side of a divisive border thus contested the logic of state sovereignty and eluded the nationally based identity-categories usually on offer. Overall, they were able to turn themselves into an exception as to various quite strict national forms of being customarily imposed on cities located at the vicinity of national borders.

Yet it may also be noted that the interest in city-twinning that took place in the aftermath of the First World War remained rather limited after the war and never evolved into any broader movement (Falkenhain, Hoelsche, and Ruser 2012). In fact, it took another world war for twinning really to establish itself more systematically and to mature as a

movement aspiring for relationships aiming at healing, reconciliation and long-term fraternity. The development was at this juncture spearheaded by cities located in Western Europe, but was then gradually extended also to include the eastern part of the continent in order to later spread to other parts of the world as well, also including other continents and America in particular (Széll 1998). It has thereby become quite global in essence with increased emphasis on its instrumental aspects.

As noted by Zelinsky (1991, 7), the spreading has taken place “either autonomously or as an offshoot of the European model.” This then also implies that twinning has diversified as the European way entailed, against the background of the war, a far more oppositional stance *vis-à-vis* the policies pursued by the states. In other words, the driving forces appear to have been different, although reconciliation has also figured in some cases as a crucial motivational factor outside Europe. The oppositional features as well as the relationality coined by stress on border-transcending solidarity implied that the initiatives remained for the most part local in nature. In essence, they contained features of liberation from the constraints usually imposed by states on local actors. States could, as such, engage in various ways in restraining twinning, but they could also chose to ride along or even in some cases encourage city-to-city cooperation, although their abilities to initiate and direct city-twinning has in general remained limited in nature.

It is interesting to note against this background that the initial US sister city movement that came into being through top-down rather than bottom-up type of endeavors and was largely a product of the state administration, “quickly degenerated into a fiasco” (Zelinsky 1991, 8). It thus appears that states may in some regards restrain twinning or they may support it, but their ability to influence and steer it seems nonetheless to be rather limited in nature.

At large, city-twinning emerged initially as a reaction to experienced wars, quite political in nature, although it also grew mostly alongside other efforts of enhancing cooperation (Köhle 2005, 16–18). It was political and moral in essence in the sense that the aspirations pertained openly to reconciliation, disarmament, various ways of promoting peace, but also stood out, in some particular cases, as a response to apartheid, economic decline, sweatshop labor and environmental degradation (Clarke 2009, 501; Vion 2007). Rather than opposing the policies pursued by states, the “old style of twinning” (Zelinsky 1991, 28) was premised on arguments that cities pursued their “municipal diplomacy” or “local foreign policy” either by complementing official policies or by doing things differently on their own. They could employ historical or cultural legacies in their efforts of bonding, aim at reducing hostilities and adding to mutual understanding by generating people-to-people contacts, or simply contribute to the generation of friendly relations through their often quite pragmatic way of doing things.

Stay Aloof from Issues of Security!

Although remaining in some sense innocent and indirect, the “old” style of twinning nonetheless raises some rather profound questions concerning the nature of international relations. These tend to remain dormant as long as cities restrain themselves to cooperation in economic, social, cultural and ecological fields, but emerge once they aspire, as local and sub-national actors, for competence and subjectivity in issues pertaining to war and peace. In doing so and by pursuing “peace through municipalism”

(Grosspietsch 2009, 1285), they unavoidably challenge the traditional foreign policy prerogative of national governments. In order for essential borderlines and competences not to be blurred, actors such as cities are expected not to jump in scale and interfere with crucial issues of “national security.” Through their interference, it is claimed, they would just add to the dark forces of anarchy assumedly always integrally part of the relations between states and should for this reason remain as subjugated and passive reflections of statist policies.

According to a Hobbesian type of reading, traditionally quite forcefully present also in the sphere of IR theory, the impact of local actors and their blurring of important lines of demarcation between the domestic and the foreign would merely add to the dangers present in the sphere of international relations. Their rather Kantian and therefore “anarchistic” interference would be quite harmful in complicating the endeavors of states to stem the danger of war. Arguably, the erosion of the authority of the states, including their control of space and borders, would bring about disorder and thereby also add to the probability of war and violence. States should therefore, the argument goes, remain unitary actors as well as the sole voice in the salient sphere of external affairs, and in particular issues pertaining to national security.

Crying “security” has therefore traditionally played into the hands of states and discriminated against actors such as cities. The credibility of the claim undoubtedly rests on historical experiences pertaining to war and violence (cf. Taylor 1995), with mainstream IR theory then contributing to the subordination of cities to the supremacy of states and more generally to a policing of the boundaries of statehood, territorially delineated sovereignty and international order at large. A similar restrictive and prohibitive approach has prevailed, it appears, in the field of national legislation in the sense that local actors have been granted quite restricted rights as to the conduct of any independent foreign policy of their own. This has been the case in many countries (Wagner 1998, 38), although the practices seem to have been relaxed over time with cities being gradually provided increased room for maneuver.

It is obvious against this background that there are elements of liberation if not mutiny present in twinning also from the perspective of traditional IR theories such as those of realism. It provides ground for arguing that local policies, if extended into the sphere of international relations through bonding, are harmful rather than helpful in view of their security-related consequences. In short, the idealism that aspires for peace and friendly relations between former adversaries integrally part of the “old” type of twinning is seen as unfounded. It does arguably not touch ground with the harsh realities of interstate affairs.

It is thus not surprising against this background to discover that city-twinning has largely stood out as a neglected issue in the sphere of IR studies and in contrast, for example, to political geography. It exists on ground and has over the years gained considerable significance, but has in a sense been papered over in the sphere of International Relations theory. The theory-related challenges have basically been settled by passing it over in silence. In general, the conduct of foreign policies and city-twinning have been viewed as if they operate on two different wavelengths and languages that do not translate into each other. While the logic of territorially premised sovereignty remains strong in the sphere of relations between states, cities do things in their own way through networking,

focusing on flows and coming into being through togetherness, bonding and the conduct of participatory politics.

Marginality as Agency

In departing from the somewhat exceptional and oppositional nature of “old” type of twinning, there is clearly a need to refrain from the application of many of the established and prefixed concepts operating at clearly separable levels of analysis such as domestic and international and instead employ departures that reflect and are in tune with the nature of twinning and its underlying aspirations. Arguably, the categories of marginality, liminality and hybridity offer such an option and they do so ontologically as well as epistemologically thereby providing city-twinning with some backing relevant also in view of IR theory.

All three are not there merely in order for actors and politics to be situated within given social orders. Instead, they are applicable in dealing with leaks and phenomena that tend to escape strict bordering as well as the dominance of binary and mutually exclusive categorizations. With the increase of leaks, flows and features deviating from the customary and standard expectations—as seems to be the case—the analytical need for the application of concepts that do not aim at catching and nailing down something timeless, stable and permanent, but pertain instead to states of exception, zones of anomie, in-betweenness, discontinuities and ruptures has clearly grown also in the sphere of IR theory.

Marginality as a concept has been favored by the proliferation of various discourses seeking to downgrade and even denigrate the construction of exclusionary categories premised on divisive borderlines. It seems to benefit from that borders and the difference encountered at borders still counts, but with the difference outlined by borders provided with a more positive reading. Marginality has thus been furnished with more pronounced and favorable connotations. The very choice of marginality as a concept and analytical category rather than operating with those of a “periphery” or “edge” is premised on the idea, we argue, that margins are not just inferior, passive and derivative in nature. They pertain instead to agency, impact actively the unfolding of space and direct attention to what is happening at the limit rather than the established centers of international relations. The concept thus appears to be quite applicable also in the context of situating city-twinning within a particular social and political order and articulating some of its core contents.

Furthermore, with changes present in the discourses constitutive of space, marginality is no longer seen as subordinated to and inferior *vis-à-vis* centrality. It is not just comprehended as moving away from the essence of whatever is bounded and restrained by outer limits as any order is constituted at the limit, via its own excess. It contains agency as all social orders are contingent and derivative outcomes of moves delimiting it from the outside, and this move takes place at the margins (cf. Parker 2008). It is also to be noted that centrality and marginality are co-constitutive in character, i.e. there is no centrality without marginality. They are relational in nature and margins do therefore not merely exist as extensions of the core. They do not just come into being by the centers extending their capacity of ordering over space also to include the margins as the latter actually have an autonomy of their own in being able, if they so decide, to refuse the

order proposed by the center. This refusal, opposition, jumping in scale and doing things differently is also, we suggest, what twinning is about in some of its aspects.

It may further be added that the autonomy of marginal actors tends to increase with the increasing permeability of borders as they are no longer categorically confined to the inside or the outside of the center's order. Due to their rather permanent standing of in-between and connecting various polities, they actually enjoy the option of belonging simultaneously to two or more political, social or cultural orders. In some sense, the option is there for the margins even to turn into privileged sites as they are closer to the border which, due its changing nature, tend to determine the character of any order (cf. Parker 2008). This implies that in the relationship between cities engaged in twinning and states, the cities are actually endowed with a considerable dose of constitutive power in being able to influence the conditions impacting the very nature of states.

Blurring Distinct Categories Through Liminality

Liminality, in turn, is not about adding to the concepts needed once various processes of disruption and multiplication creates a need to cover the increasing plurality of social orders, nor is it there in order to respond to changes in the relative weight between the existing categories. Instead, it reaches out with the purpose of covering various positions emerging in-between established and "pure" categories once their ability to generate and upkeep unambiguous and firmly bounded political and social orders are in decline. The breaks, ruptures and boundary-related conditions associated with liminality imply that it may generate feelings of unpredictability, insecurity and danger, although it can also be experienced as pointing to freedom, innovation as well as experimentation with new, unconventional and creative solutions.

Liminality directs, in being not just between, but also beyond the established social categories, the analytical gaze toward the transitional, incoming, non-established as well as anti-structural. It privileges becoming over being in focusing on entities that have left one category but still remain betwixt in the sense of hanging around without necessarily heading for association and unity with another (Mälksoo 2012; Rumelili 2012). Furthermore, there is emphasis on processes rather than outcomes. According to Victor Turner (1995, 248), the most characteristic aspect of liminality consists of the option of leaving and loosening up of previous constellations as well as a free recombination of the various elements part of that constellation "in any and every possible pattern, however weird."

At large, liminality entails that processes are preferred over structure as the concept pertains to globalization, integration and various modes of de-bordering, but breaks with structurally oriented efforts of nailing down and fixing the outcome. It denotes, in the latter sense, a threshold state and points to fluid and malleable situations and has in this vein been increasingly employed as a theoretical and conceptual tool to catch the limits and contradictions embedded in structures.

Notably, liminality is ontologically furnished with clear post-structuralist connotations in encouraging moves that reach beyond the hunt for latent structures underlying social orders. This also appears to be an essential feature integral to city-twinning. The concept of liminality revolts against and endeavors to escape the grip of too all-inclusive categories. It is therewith anti-structural in nature in regard to the established order of

things (Turner 1967, 1974). In conceding that there is no social world totally void of categories, and in this context, moves of bordering, it illuminates and directs attention towards the increasing number of processes and actors located at the fringes of scholarly attention, although still of considerable importance for the formation of contemporary political and social orders. This, then, also includes various processes unfolding in the sphere of international relations.

It is to be noted, though, that liminality points to in-between situations and transitional forms of being. It denotes entities and polities that have left a particular and established category of being, but have not—at least not yet—been included in another and new one. It represents in this sense a midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two distinct positions. While standing for an anti-thesis in view of an initial structure, it is also a source for a potential structure to arrive. The dissolution of the original implies that while in a liminal state, entities and polities are stripped from anything that differentiates them from any other entities and polities. All the options are open and they might, as in the case of twinning, also include entities unfolding in the sense that the properties defining them consists precisely of this lack of difference and categorical bordering.

Yet it appears that city-twinning is not a midpoint between a starting-point and an ending point. Notably, twin-cities have already arrived. They purport themselves as aspiring to become permanently similar to each other and they are embedded in a structure premised on bonding. For example, Keighley and Poix-du-Nord broke with the usual political and social constraints utilizing the openness of the post-First World War situation. In exploiting this openness, they made some rather unconventional if not oppositional choices by suspending the normal, reaching out for change and standing out as entities and polities that hoped to be able to inaugurate something new and different. They stood out as spaces of potentiality and aimed at initiating a process of renewal, although they had themselves already arrived and gained a rather stable form of being. City-twinning was, for them, a stable and quite permanent rather than temporary solution.

Similarly, many of the contemporary twin cities remain spatially in an in-between situation in bridging national divides and having already reached, to a large extent, what they have been aspiring for in temporal as well as spatial terms. The element of transition is no longer there to any significant degree for their own part and they do hence not remain in an in-between situation in order to arrive at some later juncture for them to be included in due time into some more final and structurally established category (cf. Stoicescu 2012). They do not present themselves for their own part as standing at a doorway leading into something quite different to be reached over time. In fact, what was initially liminal in nature has largely turned into something quite normal with twinning as an endpoint and a desired state of being (cf. Thomassen 2012, 31). It thus appears at large that liminality as a concept is applicable in the accounting for some aspects and phases of city-twinning, albeit it loses in purchasing power once twinning is deprived of its creative and oppositional features in turning into a rather established category of political space and integral part of international relations.

Hybridity: Reaching Beyond the Original

Hybridity points, as a concept, to a mixture, intermingling and transgression of established categories with new and unexpected combinations as a consequence. It has connotations

of increased ambivalence, multiplication, mutiny, contamination, impurity, lack of authenticity and disruption of the original. The concept pertains in essence to borders having lost their original ability to contain and provide a basis for firm categorizations. There are traces present of the original, but a hybrid state of affairs reaches beyond the original. In this sense, hybridity stands out as disruptive in nature and may even be viewed as anarchical in regard to an established order, although it can also be seen as liberating in breaking with the excluding and oppressing features of the initial and more bounded state of affairs. At large, hybridity resists from the very start any efforts to operate with and depart from fixed and essentialized categories.

The concept has made inroads in particular in the sphere of cultural studies in focusing on multiple identities, boundary-crossing experiences and styles, issues pertaining to migration, diasporas as well as intercultural communication (Nederveen Pieterse 2001). It has, in general, been applied to entities and polities that have not only moved and transcended borders, but also arrived. It is quite applicable in the sense of pointing to the way in which newness enters the world and then turns into something more established. The concept arguably applies to positions that do not only pertain to a blend of and secondary to the previous categories, but includes also positions that reach beyond the original. It has connotations of deviating from established norms and points to a destabilization of established identities and hierarchies as noted by both Chambers (1996) and Bhabba (1994). It does so in referring to positions that are in-between in the sense of defying pure categories.

There is much in the diverse nature of city-twinning that seems to resonate with and be in line with hybridity. Already the disruptive and relational constitution of twin cities through multiplication and an overcoming of the original would seem to testify to the validity of the concept as a relevant and quite applicable analytical category.

It appears, though, that also a quite different reading is conceivable. As indicated for example by the slogan “One city, two States” used by Valga (Estonia) and Valka (Latvia) in the context of their twinning (Joenniemi and Sergunin 2009, 28), that twinning has also connotations of a fusion, unity and return to the original. It is hence not about a mixture, but stands rather for purity and authenticity. In essence, the two cities do not aim at presenting themselves as both-and type of combination, but stress instead their nature as a rather unified polity. And more precisely, they stand for a return to their initial unity and aspire for a oneness that is played against the division that exists between the two states, Estonia and Latvia. They have arguably not lost their initial being by doing away with the divisive impact of the Estonian-Latvian border, but have rather re-gained lost unity by occupying a position closer to their allegedly true and authentic nature. It thus appears that they do not engage, through their twinning, in celebrating the proliferation of difference and impurity, but draw instead on originality, unity, sameness and homogeneity.

Twinning as a discourse is therefore in some of its forms about a return—or an aspiring such a return—to the original. It stands for break in the sense of endeavoring at initial unity and sameness that has been undermined and obscured by the divisive impact of the border-drawing between states. The increased hybridity of the political landscape might contribute to twinning in the sense of undermining the ability of the dominant, state-based discourses to reproduce their authority. The decline in authority then allows for some cities to view themselves in a different perspective and previously unexplored categories of cityness may hence emerge either in the form of new mixtures or as a return to

forms of being seen as authentic and original. Hybridity is against this background present as a precondition and allowing for a “third space” to unfold, and in providing an opportunity to rewrite the established rules and modes of being. It grounds twinning, we would argue, as a concept and an articulation, but does not necessarily impact the way city-twinning is being defined in the sense that twinning would also unavoidably amount to a mixture and an impure category of being.

At large, marginality, liminality as well as hybridity appear to be applicable, each in their own way, in accounting for some aspects related to the pairing of cities. They do so in the sense that marginality points above all to empowerment, liminality to moving beyond the original and hybridity to the plurality part of the outcome. They overlap and there are ambiguities, but they all seem to be needed as concepts and departures part of a comprehensive analysis. They are all relevant in the sense in pointing to leaks, flows as well as cases beyond the ordinary and therefore applicable in covering various aspects of city-twinning and appear to be analytically quite useful as twinning stands out as something quite slippery in view of the conceptual categories usually applied.

Part of the Post-International

It is to be noted, though, that the essence of twinning has changed over time. Above all the end of the Cold War implied that the oppositional features largely vanished and twinning turned—particularly in Europe—into one of the strategies for cities to enhance their international profile and competitiveness (cf. Clarke 2009). It is thus more in line with the rational and interest-oriented policies pursued by states in order to bolster their competitiveness and in consequence also less of an exception in standing for a particular aspect of the more general trend of transnationalization. It has become increasingly normal for various polities, including cities, to establish societal rather than communal (premised on felt togetherness) ties across national borders and aspire for a durable form of being as well as empowerment by reaching out, with sovereignty and territoriality losing out as key organizing principles, beyond the national into the sphere of the international (Hamedinger and Wolfhardt 2010).

It then also follows that twin-cities do no longer have the same need to present themselves as exceptional and unconventional or purport themselves as standing for protest and opposition. This implies that the various symbolic aspects of twinning have been in decline whereas the instrumental ones, including also issues of development, have increasingly been brought to the fore. As noted by Jayne, Hubbard, and Bell (2011, 37), the focus of the twinning programs at official city level “have generally moved away from facilitating relationships based on solidarity or humanism” toward “entrepreneurial governance.” Cities engaged in pairing stand out as increasingly normal ingredients and their reaching out as local entities into the international is no longer viewed as an unconventional challenge. They are not blamed for contributing to “fragmentation” and “chaos” or seen as recklessly endangering the rule-governed conduct of international affairs.

The normalization does, however, not imply that twinning can be integrated without problems into and accounted for on the basis of traditional IR theory. It reflects, in fact, broader changes in contemporary world politics and still calls for a quite different kind of theorization. Twin cities continue to remain *avant garde* in breaking out and in reaching beyond the ordinary. They continue to challenge the fixity and stasis part of

the old order and are thus integrally part of post-international developments to employ a term premised on knowing what the old order was about, but failing to fully comprehend the essence of the new and incoming. The change needs to be reflected in various efforts of theorizing city-twinning. Overall, new vocabularies, analytical concepts and theoretical approaches such as those suggested above are called for to substitute those having been traditionally available in the toolbox of International Relations.

In view of the old, twinning obviously points to relationality and is hence in line with the emphasis on both “inter” and “relation,” i.e. two concepts also integrally part also of traditional IR theory (Lapid 2001, 23). Yet it is important to note that the “inter” and “relation” that twinning stands for differs radically from the traditional divisive and binary, either-or ways of understanding the essence of these two concepts. The “inter” now stands for something thoroughly crisscrossed and “relation” points in essence to rather close and intimate forms of togetherness and an aspiring for similarity. The staying with traditional concepts and approaches may thus add to confusion, it appears, concerning the nature of twinning instead of offering clarity and grounding durable departures.

The positioning of city-twinning in a post-international context would then allow for twinning to be approached as one form of networking unfolding among various sub-national entities contributing, once unfolding across national borders, to the formation of transnational societies (Albert and Brock 2000). Another option opened up consists of the application of theories pertaining to global governance (cf. Rosenau 1995). It appears, however, that this option still remains largely potential in nature. This is so as scholarly attention has first and foremost been geared towards major entities such as global cities (cf. Curtis 2011), while the smaller and more peripheral cities engaged in twinning have often most been left without attention and void of theorization.

Another option, part of the efforts of accounting for twinning with the help of IR theories, has been opened up by the argument that the pairing of cities adds to the interdependence between states, and contributes therewith also to international security. Cities and states may act independently, but both still contribute to the emergence of an increasingly interdependent and safer world. By establishing contacts across borders, cities add to a downgrading of fears and enmity, but also the emergence of a we-feeling and hence development of communality between states. They are conducive to interdependence to a degree that war between states becomes unthinkable. As argued by Karl W. Deutsch (1957), the formation of security communities alters the nature of relations between states in changing and allowing for an overcoming of the traditional realist rules.

As such, the Deutschean theories have been extensively applied in the field of International Relations, but mainly by accounting for the unfolding of relations between states. Various sub-national actors such as cities have mostly been left void of scrutiny and attention. This is somewhat puzzling as the latter—including cities—may also significantly contribute to the building of trust and interdependence between states. A study on the twinning of German cities since 1947 by Beate Wagner (1995) stands out as one of the few works where theories pertaining to security communities have also been applied to twinning. In other words, she includes security—contrary to most other studies on city-twinning—as a key factor into her study and argues that twinning contributes to the generation of interdependence conducive to peaceful relations between states.

Yet a closer scrutiny may reveal that also the theory on security communities is quite imbued with the old. It resonates so extensively with a traditional understanding of international relations that one should perhaps not fall for the temptation to reaffirm it by integrating twinning into it as a new and somewhat unconventional form of cooperation, yet confirming the overall validity of the theory. It may for good reasons be claimed that twinning contributes in essence to security by focusing on forms of interaction that are not security-related. The aim is not one of facilitating the settling of conflicts within the established and power political logic of international relations by operating on a different and unconventional level but to challenge more generally the very logic of security that also underlies the theory of security communities.

Whereas the Deutschean approach seeks to advance communality with security and the settling of conflicts as key constitutive argument, city-twinning arguably stands for something rather different. It aims, instead of aspiring for the solving conflicts in a peaceful manner, at the creation of spaces of a-security, i.e. spaces that are not premised on arguments pertaining to security neither in a negative nor positive sense. Twinning thus contributes to peace by having an agenda of its own and through a bypassing and focusing on other things than security. The aim is to demonstrate with the help of a different agenda-setting that other and non-securitized approaches are indeed possible. By dropping the argument of security, twinning invites for a questioning of the centrality of security as core issue in the sphere of international politics and challenges, in doing so, at least indirectly the prerogative of states, one based on the argument of security, to set the agenda. Rather than abiding to the security-related views of states and their reading of security, twinning impacts issues of security by pursuing approaches of its own void of the usual centrality of security as a core issue to be settled and struggled over.

Arguably, the application of the concept of paradiplomacy in the context of twinning raises similar concerns. The concept refers to the international activities of non-state actors such as cities, regions and non-governmental organizations (Aldecoa and Keating 1999), although on local level and between sub-national entities. Again, twinning is not—we would like to argue—premiered on a sharing of the worldview and various departures integral to diplomacy between states, and then pursuing the same aims and policies through local contacts reaching into the external sphere of international relations. It is not, we assert, about communicating and cooperating across pre-given borderlines with the other seen as profoundly different from oneself. It stands instead for bonding by recognizing the other in a positive manner and communicating and acting within shared space void of the binary constellation and bordering essential for the conduct of diplomacy (cf. Mamadouh and van der Wusten 2016). Nick Clarke (2009, 496) is therefore justified in applying concepts such as “post-diplomacy” and “beyond diplomacy” in his analysis of twinning, although one may also raise the question whether the term diplomacy, one unavoidably part of heavy state-related legacy, is a proper term and concept to apply in the first place in the context of twinning.

Overall, the danger is there that drawing on established concepts and traditional IR theory makes it difficult to capture and posing the pairing of cities as relevant also in the sphere of international relations. In particular, it tends to obscure the creative, emancipatory, oppositional and border-transcending aspects of city-twinning. Instead of positioning twinning within some pre-given categories provided by established IR theory, it should be recognized that it reaches in various ways—in particular due to the stress of

far-reaching similarity—beyond the usual, and this fact should also be reflected in the choice of the analytical concepts as well as theories applied in accounting for city-twinning.

Concluding Remarks

The traditional state-base and security-gearred IR theories have in general not been helpful in sorting out and accounting for twinning. The ambiguous and fluid nature of city-twinning has presented urban sociology and political geography, but in particular IR theories, with considerable ontological challenges making it also epistemologically difficult to objectify, freeze in space and time, reify and box-in with the help of the mutually exclusive social categories generally available, i.e. categories prevalent in and integral to IR theory since the birth of the modern state system. It has been difficult to account for in appearing as something that is simultaneously both here and there and in taking forms that are local, transnational as well as international. Moreover, it has unfolded inside as well as outside and figured as domestic in essence, but yet also foreign in character. Importantly, twinning has not just transgressed and broken beyond the social positions provided by traditional IR theories, but it also disturbs much of the ingrained level of analysis thinking part of established IR theories, and in addition, it violates many of the norms underlying such theories.

Twinning has therefore been frequently down-played if not shut out by the use of characterizations such as “experimentation” or “laboratory.” Twin cities have not been acknowledged as subjects able to restructure existing realities and create new ones in any decisive manner. At large, they have been viewed as something peripheral as well as insignificant and hence not seen as worth of theory-based analysis. If nonetheless included, city-twinning has been depicted as a somewhat unconventional and emotive way of restoring bonds severed and damages caused by war or seen as an effort of remedying the problems part of a dangerously polarized international setting.

It is to be noted, though, that IR theory has also more recently been productive of some in-between positions allowing in principle for an inclusive approach to be applied, due to the social categories available and the structures based on these categories. Yet, for example, theories on cross-border cooperation or regionalization have in general not been conducive to an approaching and inclusion of twinning. If nonetheless included, twinning has—instead of being categorized as anti-structural and exceptional in essence—been treated as a rather normal ingredient of international relations. It has been provided with a taken-for-granted nature and twins and their alleged togetherness have been seen to exist along with many other entities and processes transcending state-related borders and to be accounted for by use of various rather universalistic IR theories.

Yet, as pointed out by Bahar Rumelili (2012, 496), international politics are increasingly, as a social structure, made up of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes competing discourses. Entities may be exceptional within one discourse whereas they stand out as standard and rule-governed ingredients in the context of another. With the nature of international relations and world politics displaying features of a paradigmatic shift, twinning is less on the threshold of something new or figures as a deviation in relation to mainstream IR theory. It rather appears as integrally part of the proliferation of various non-

sovereignty shaped processes that in many ways conflict with traditional IR theories such as that of realism. Cities engaged in twinning hence figure as entities that are less exceptional and instead stand out as part of broader border-transcending processes constitutive of an international system different from the traditional one.

This seems to imply that the twinning of cities and their asserted similarity and reaching across and beyond the borders of states does not unavoidably challenge the state-related logic as also states are increasingly constituted through discourses pertaining to competition, cooperation and togetherness in a world where borders have lost—at least until the recent counter-trends with borders and bordering being again on the increase—much of their previous divisive nature and impact in terms of ordering. Twin cities thus appear to be on the verge of losing their previously somewhat subversive and challenging nature in turning into ingredients part what is oftentimes called the global village. They seem to have turned less exceptional in no longer being on the threshold, but having rather arrived and matured into increasingly regular elements integrally part of the current international landscape. Yet they have retained much of their border-breaking nature and still come into being by combining elements not from one social category of being but several, and this has then also to be reflected in the approaches and concepts applied—such as those of marginality, liminality and hybridity—in efforts to capture the essence and meaning of city-twinning.

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