

# **The vulnerable middle class?**

Johannes Moser, Simone Egger (eds.)

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# **The vulnerable middle class?**

Strategies of housing in prospering cities

Johannes Moser, Simone Egger (eds.)



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## Contents

<b>Introduction: The Vulnerable Middle Class?</b>	
<b>Strategies of Housing in Prospering Cities</b>	
Simone Egger/Johannes Moser	7
<b>Dwelling in Postmodern Cities: Middle Class and Social Responsibility</b>	9
Simone Egger	
<b>Of Good Averages and Happy Mediums:</b>	
<b>Orientations towards an Average in Urban Housing</b>	
Stefan Groth	29
<b>New Housing Cooperatives in Munich:</b>	
<b>Two Scenarios for an Ethnographical Class Analysis</b>	
Laura Gozzer	49
<b>Help Yourself, but Build the Right Thing:</b>	
<b>A Collaborative Housing Project in Growing Berlin</b>	
Max Ott	69
<b>Strategies for Achieving the Good Life: A New Generation Becomes</b>	
<b>Summer Cottage Owners in Sweden</b>	
Susanna Rolfsdotter Eliasson	89
<b>Stattpark OLGA: An Alternative Way of Dwelling as a Critique</b>	
<b>of the (Rental) Housing Logic</b>	
Libuše Hannah Vepřek	103
<b>Who's the Master of the Plan? Exploring the Tempelhof Field</b>	
<b>as a Space of Non-Dwelling Moralizations</b>	
Sanda Hubana	121
<b>Authors</b>	145

## **Introduction: The Vulnerable Middle Class? Strategies of Housing in Prospering Cities**

Simone Egger/Johannes Moser

*the soft swoosh at the back of your head  
 you've got something to lose  
 the ghost that climbs the tower  
 you have the option to choose and falsely choose  
 Get well soon: (How to Stay) Middle Class*

Konstantin Gropper, one of the most interesting independent musicians of the last decade, sings about the fears of the middle class of insecurity and social decline on the latest album by his band Get Well Soon, tellingly titled “Horror”. This goes to show that the “crisis of the middle class” is no longer an exclusive topic of academic discourse but has arrived in the arts sections of leading media, in the arts in general as well as in many other contexts. This volume originates from the panel “The vulnerable Middle Class? Strategies of housing in a prospering city” which was organized by the two editors at the 13th congress of the Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore 2017, titled “Ways of Dwelling. Crisis – Craft – Creativity”<sup>1</sup>, in Göttingen. In ten presentations, seven of which are published in this volume, it addressed the question of how the rapidly rising cost of living in prospering cities affects the everyday life and life plans of the middle class. Particularly the depths of focus of a cultural anthropological, ethnographic view of the lived everyday life of people thus facilitates insight and understanding which is missing in certain macro perspectives in the social sciences. Therefore, in the following contributions which are based on examples from Germany and Sweden, colleagues will discuss the question of how members of the middle class deal with residing and living in today’s postmodern city, which tactics they develop and which strategies become apparent before the background of the processes sketched above. In her contribution “Dwelling in Postmodern Cities. Middle Class and Social Responsibility”, Simone Eggers takes a cultural anthropological approach to the question of which status the middle class currently occupies in the city. Before the backdrop of political, economic and social processes which can be observed worldwide, she focuses on specific practices and discourses in Munich, also using the example of artistic involvement with these. Social and cultural anthropologist Stefan Groth examines the middle class using the example of the Rathenauviertel in Cologne in

<sup>1</sup> Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF). 2017. “SIEF2017 13th Congress: Göttingen, Germany. 26–30 March 2017. October 16, 2017”. Accessed November 10, 2018. Available at: <https://www.siefhome.org/congresses/sief2017/index.shtml>.

his article. Based on the term class, he asks about the lifestyles and aesthetics of the middle to which imaginations of a good life can be attached. European ethnologist and cultural anthropologist Laura Gozzer looks at coalitions which can be observed in Munich as well as in other large cities. Life in a cooperative as a social and spatial organization of society offers a way of opting out of the financial jungle of the urban real estate market, yet at the same time is to be seen in an ambivalent manner because of its exclusivity. Architect Max Ott, in his contribution “Help yourself, but build the right thing. A collaborative housing project in growing Berlin” also deals with the ambivalence of collaboratively designed housing projects. On the one hand, these are about self fulfilment and achieving one’s dream of a good life, on the other, such concepts are indeed intended to offer impulses for a *better* society. European ethnologist and cultural anthropologist Libuše Hannah Vepřek examines the “Stattpark OLGA: An alternative way of dwelling as a critique of the (rental) housing logic” and asks in which ways an *alternative* style of living can be established in an economized city such as Munich and which shifts in meaning go along with such a self-chosen life design at the margins of the city. Cultural anthropologist Susanna Rolfsdotter Eliasson pursues “Strategies for achieving the good life” and focuses on a new generation of Swedes who come to own summer cottages in her text. The limited possibilities in the city can be compensated via the extended space in the country, and inheritance is also a central factor for the social middle class in Stockholm. Based on interviews, European ethnologist Sanda Hubana asks “Who’s the master of the plan?” and discusses what it means when an inner urban area such as the Tempelhof field in Berlin is not built on because citizens have voted against it.

On a final note, we would like to point out that this volume is published in a limited print version and simultaneously as an open access publication.

## Authors

**Simone Egger** studied European Ethnology, Ethnology and Art History in Munich and finished her PhD in 2011. From 2008 to 2014, she worked as a research associate at the department of European Ethnology of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU), from 2014 to 2016 at the Department of History and European Ethnology in Innsbruck. Since 2016, she is an assistant professor at the Department of Cultural Analysis in Klagenfurt. From 2015 to 2018, she was a co-advisor of the project *Living and Housing Policy in Munich* of the Urban Ethics Research Group (German Research Foundation, DFG) at the LMU. Main topics of her research are urban development, community studies, knowledge transfer, biographies and life worlds etc.

**Laura Gozzer**, M.A., studied European Ethnology in Vienna and Basel. Since 2016, she is working in a sub-project of the Urban Ethics Research Group (German Research Foundation, DFG) at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich. After conducting research in a project about housing policies (2016–2018), she is currently doing ethnographic research for her PhD-project about relations of support and ethical subjectifications in practices of volunteering. Research interests: anthropology of ethics, housing, volunteering, praxeological approaches.

**Stefan Groth**, Dr., is a senior researcher at the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies (ISEK) of the University of Zurich and head of the Laboratory Popular Culture Studies. His research interests include normative dimensions of everyday culture, methods in European Ethnology, linguistic analytical approaches, political anthropology, cultural heritage and cultural property and sports culture research.

**Sanda Hubana** is a Doctoral researcher at the Department for European Ethnology of the Humboldt University in Berlin. The working title of her PhD project is *Conflict or cooperation? Urban planning and civil society in Berlin. An Ethnography*. She has held a master's degree in European Ethnology since 2012 and worked for almost three years as a (network) coordinator and ethnologist of the NGO Gangway e.V. in an urban development project of the urban development program *Aktives Zentrum und Sanierungsgebiet Wedding-Müllerstraße in Berlin-Mitte*. She studied European Ethnology, Music and Media Studies, and Social Anthropology at the Humboldt University Berlin and the University of Seville. Her research interests are urban studies, migration and racism, political anthropology and europeanization – with a special focus on applied anthropology.

**Johannes Moser** studied European Ethnology in Graz (M.A. 1987, PhD 1993), did a post-graduate in Sociology at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna (1990–1992) and his Habilitation at the University Frankfurt am Main 2002. He worked as a researcher at the Bureau for Social Research in Graz; as Ass. Prof. at the Institute for Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology in Frankfurt. He headed the Department of Volkskunde at the Institute for Saxon History and Volkskunde in Dresden. Since 2006 he holds the Chair for European Ethnology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. He is president of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde and speaker of the Urban Ethics Research Group. His research interests include – among others – urban anthropology, everyday life, transformation processes in European societies.

**Max Ott** was born in Munich in 1980 and studied architecture at the Technical University of Munich (2001–2008). From 2009 to 2010, he was a project architect at Meili Peter architects in Zurich and Munich, and in 2011 he became a founding partner of STUDIO CNSTNT. From 2011–2016 he was a research associate at the Chair of Urban Design and Regional Planning at the Technical University of Munich. From 2015–2017, he worked as an associate member of the interdisciplinary research group Urban Ethics which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). In 2017 and 2018 he was a guest lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences Munich and the Technical University Munich. In 2014 he started his PhD at the TUM Graduate School.

**Susanna Rolfsdotter Eliasson** is PhD candidate in ethnology at the Department of Cultural Sciences, Gothenburg University. Her thesis deals with a new generation of second home owners in contemporary Swedish society narrating their lifestyles and identities in relation to owning second homes. She joint edited and published in *Vad passar sig på Gunnebo? – Berättelser om ett etablerat kulturarv* (2012) and published the article “Stugbloggaren – sommarliv på nätet” on Swedish second home owners and social media in the anthology *Sommarliv – minnen, drömmar och materialitet* (2016).

**Libuše Hannah Vepřek**, B.A., studies Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology as well as Computer Science in Munich. Besides, she participates in the workgroup „Digitization, Ethics and Society: An Integrative Analysis“ of the Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Kolleg of the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes. Her research interests include urban anthropology, anthropology of ethics, digital anthropology and science and technology studies.