

From intersecting to intersectional spaces: critical appreciation of urban (super-) diversity

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the intersection of superdiversity and intersectionality, this paper advances the discourse on urban diversity with a spatial perspective. While Steven Vertovec's concept of superdiversity has significantly shaped migration research, its engagement with intersectionality remains rather limited. Conceptually differentiating "intersecting spaces" as places of encounters, such as marketplaces or central business districts, from "intersectional spaces", it critically examines the structural inequalities and multi-level discriminations embedded in urban superdiversity. It highlights temporal, functional and socio-spatial dimensions of diversity and inequality and emphasizes the importance of addressing both visible and invisible aspects as well as encounters and non-encounters in urban diversity. Arguing for a multi-scalar approach to intersectional spaces, it connects local, urban and global dynamics to better understand the spatial configurations of migration-led diversity. This spatial lens reveals how superdiversity and intersectionality complement each other, offering a more nuanced framework to address urban inequalities and foster inclusive policies in superdiverse cities.

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One of the most valuable contributions of Steven Vertovec as a scholar is perhaps the sensing of trends in international migration, bringing different existing strands and discourses within migration scholarship together, and making them approachable for larger societal discourses even beyond academic discussions. While contributing to research on cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, he coined the term superdiversity to give a name to a societal phenomenon observed especially in global cities. As he notes himself in his seminal work on superdiversity: "Much of the material and data (...) are certainly not new or unknown to specialists in the field; what is hopefully of value, however, is its assemblage and juxtaposition by way of re-assessing how diversity is conventionally conceived" (Vertovec 2007, 1035). Such crucial synthesis of discourses and giving novel impulses into "conceiving" issues within migration research differently than before have also led to agenda setting in some cases of municipal policies and are reflected in urban discourses even now after almost two decades since his coining

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the term of superdiversity. One such example is Frankfurt where he had consulted the city administration on their integration and diversity concept in 2009 and where nowadays through the Office for Multicultural Affairs (AmKA), the multidimensional societal diversity is thriving in the *stadtRAUM*frankfurt, a third place of urban conviviality inspired greatly by the idea of superdiversity. Through organizing workshops and knowledge exchange events of formal and informal nature at the Max Planck Institute in Göttingen or at the Schloss Ringberg and the Harnack House, he has laid important grounds for debates within and beyond migration scholarship, substantially nurturing the field and creating an inspiring academic environment for his fellow researchers and students alike. The key skill for this successful and impressive career is his sense for identifying trends and catching on with novel perspectives and the openness to be inspired by the vibrant academic community that he has contributed substantially also to build.

Introduction

Vertovec's versatility in catching important trends and perspectives whenever deemed necessary or crucial can also be seen in taking in the critique on the very concept of superdiversity regarding its neglect of inequalities and particularly intersectionality. While he had repeatedly at least alluded to issues of unequal power structures already in the 2007 work and further publications, such as in Nowicka and Vertovec (2014), and also proactively adopted the term intersectionality as part of the superdiversity discourse in his long-awaited monograph on superdiversity (2023), a proper engagement with issues of intersectionality seems not to have followed so far, or at least appears to leave space for more discussions. While there is a brief section discussing "intersectionality and complex inequality" (ibid. 180), intersectionality within the superdiversity debate is largely equated with the multidimensionality or simple "intersecting" of categories, primarily focussing on migration. This perspective extends beyond the commonly analysed dimensions of gender, race and class (ibid. 6 and 8). However, it fails to theorize the complex nature of intersectionality, which involves not only additive multidimensional factors but also the specific and multi-level forms of intersectional discrimination individuals experience in urban spaces.

Taking this as a starting point of this piece, I will draw out the potentials that the superdiversity debates bring into developing further perspectives into the not synonymous but, as Vertovec notes on Khazei's work (2018), "complementary, and not competitive" (ibid. 69) approaches of these two concepts of superdiversity and intersectionality. This paper argues that integrating a spatial lens into the study of superdiversity and intersectionality reveals the deeper structural inequalities embedded within urban landscapes of diversity. By shifting focus from the recognition of "intersecting spaces", where people from different social categories encounter and engage in conviviality, to the analysis of "intersectional spaces", this research uncovers the ways migration-led diversity interacts with socio-spatial inequalities. It builds on Vertovec's foundational work, drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from urban sociology, human geography and feminist theory, to propose a novel understanding of how diversity manifests in urban spaces.

Through detailed analysis of specific urban contexts using three vignettes taken from own previous fieldworks in Tokyo and Frankfurt – a marketplace, domestic worker's workplace and home and a financial business district – the paper demonstrates how spatial

configurations both reflect and reinforce broader societal hierarchies. Moreover, it highlights the critical importance of addressing invisibilities and non-encounters in the urban fabric, thereby challenging narratives that solely celebrate diversity without acknowledging its accompanying inequalities. This paper sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how superdiversity and intersectionality can together inform a more equitable understanding of urban life.

Gaps or potentials of superdiversity debates

Superdiversity has never been a theory, as Steven Vertovec himself notes, but rather a concept, a description of emerging societal phenomena in the migration age we live in. Indeed, a concept is not a theory and thus it gives leeway for further empirical research and theoretical debates to concretize it further. Often enough in academic history, great thinkers have left us with thought-provoking ideas that were not fully fleshed out and consequently been used as a vehicle to create larger discourses that last until today. How far the concept of superdiversity or the more recent theoretical engagement with the “social organization of differences” (Vertovec 2021) might take us in the future is unforeseeable, but there are at least three elements or gaps that bear potentials for further research into superdiversity. These are also related to the spatial argument I would like to propose for the future especially human geographical but also urban sociological research into superdiversity.

First, while the concept of superdiversity has found substantial resonance in migration research and beyond – especially in the European and partly also in the Global South and East, but not much so in the North American context – one core critique of the concept and simultaneously the reason for its limited outreach in the US debates – but which is also globally relevant in its argument – is the missing intersectional approach (cf. Foner, Duyvendak, and Kasinitz 2020 and in this Special Issue). Inequalities in the traditional immigration country along the lines of class and especially race are more in the foreground than the inherently superdiverse nature of the US-American immigrant society. Such critique has also emerged over the time also in the European scholarship (Back and Sinha 2016). In fact, larger parts of the urban diversity studies that build on Vertovec’s seminal concept of superdiversity have also not yet extensively and especially not conceptually looked into the flip side of the coin, so to say, which are issues of intersectional discrimination and societal frictions when diversities come together in urban space. Intersectionality has become an important societal phenomenon as well as a crucial analytical lens to engage with the increasing diversity along with the significant dissonances and disparities in contemporary societies (cf. Collins and Bilge 2020). Especially the study into the impact of intersectionality on urban space, respectively, the spatialization of intersectionality in superdiverse cities is a highly relevant research venue for our future cities.

Second, the other interesting phenomenon is that while Vertovec is strongly associated with the proliferation of the term transnationalism and also the creation of the concept of superdiversity, these concepts have not much been theoretically connected. Certainly, transnational migration is an inherent aspect of current migration phenomena, thus also obviously part of the migration-led diversity, respectively superdiversity, but besides mentioning them as terms in the overall narrative of contemporary migration,

the precise connection remains rather unclear. Perhaps, the connection might have been taken as a matter of course because of its intuitive relatedness, yet there is still a theoretical gap on how transnational migration – patterns or practices – fit into the phenomenon of the creation or emergence of superdiverse cities. The direct theoretical link between transnational migration and urban superdiversity actually becomes tangible when superdiversity is looked at from a spatial perspective. The spatialization of different transnational migrations is urban superdiversity.

The third aspect that links with Steven Vertovec's passion project in the past years is the aspect of the visual or the visibility. Vertovec's data visualization projects (Vertovec et al. 2024; see also homepage MPI-MMG) have been trying to catch the trend of superdiversity at different levels – making diversity visible – and by doing so, they also implicitly bring in the issues of the above-mentioned intersectionality into the mapping of diversity at the city level. While the point of making the complexity of urban diversity more visible and tangible – at least data-wise – is an important demand, I would even go one step further and question the conceptual approach of the visibility of urban superdiversity. Superdiversity has been predominantly studied in urban spaces where diversity was demonstratively visible, with places of encounters where different ethnicities, nationalities, religions and generally visible minorities come together. However, what needs to receive more attention beyond data visualizations on the one hand and the focus on such places of encounters is where invisible or invisibilized diversities are also present in urban spaces. Such an approach could also contribute to understanding what the elements in the urban landscape are that make a superdiverse city diverse at all; or, in other terms, where the threshold from the diverse city to the superdiverse city in the perception of the urban space is.

Before delving into suggesting further theoretical developments of superdiversity, what needs to be clarified is the special standout feature of Vertovec's concept. In fact, as it happens often in academia and beyond, novel terms and concepts start to take their own way and also often become blurry by their vernacular usage as mere buzzwords. The very distinctive feature in the idea of superdiversity remains the migration context (Vertovec 2007, 2023). While discussions on urban diversity along with urban segregations have almost always been including the migrant or ethnic minority populations as well as class issues, what superdiversity brings into light is the complexity of migration-related factors. Rather than having the clustered migrant population or ethnic minority, it directs the focus on the novel dimensions of migration-related aspects in urban diversity. It is not about only the factor of ethnicity or citizenship, but more about the subtle but substantial differences of lived experiences and structural constraints that the diversifying nature of migration brings along. Within the same (constructed) group of co-ethnics, the realities of taking part and living urban diversity drastically change with their background of migration categories, legal statuses or the migrant, respectively, social networks in which the people are embedded. It is such migration-related diversification and finely grained interwoven factors connected immediately to the migration phenomenon that makes superdiversity distinctive to the notion of societal diversity regarding individual diversity dimensions, or urban diversity in the tradition of urban studies. It is this distinct perspective from migration research that also needs to be further

considered when discussing venues of development into issues of intersectionality. This would also be the distinct difference to debates on race- and ethnicity-based urban segregations and marginalizations in the long tradition of urban studies.

Bringing spatial perspective as the nexus of transnational migration and superdiversity

One possible viable approach to push the research agenda on urban diversity forward at these above-sketched out three larger openings into issues of superdiversity is the spatial or human geographical approach. Due to the social anthropological nature of Steven Vertovec's own work and most of his immediate students who have carried on with the urban (super-)diversity research, the debates surrounding superdiversity especially in its beginnings were largely dominated by urban sociological and anthropological researchers. As his own review of his work one decade after the initial paper on superdiversity shows (Vertovec 2019), the concept has been adopted in an impressive array of disciplines, reaching to business studies and social linguistics. The concept of superdiversity has been adopted indeed very well in further migration research-related fields, particularly in political and social sciences at large, but recently also in human geography.

Issues of social differences and urban inequalities have been very early on discussed in critical urban geography, especially within feminist geography, where so-called power geometries and inequalities in the spatial context have been a core debate (led by scholars such as Massey, McDowell, Valentine). In these strands of feminist and critical urban geographies, perspectives into intersectionality in the spatial context have also been developing. However, the migration perspective was merely part of the overall narrative on ethnic and racial segregation in cities. As geographical research on migration is still relatively young (Hardwick 2014; King 2012), it is no surprise that it is only in the very recent years that human geographical studies have begun looking into spatial issues of superdiversity, which debate derives from migration research.

Urban and migration studies are both inherently interdisciplinary fields where the disciplinary boundaries are blurry and where theories cross-fertilize. For example, sociological urban and spatial theories are being the substantial backbone of urban anthropology and also urban geography, but also feminist geographical theories have spilled over to sociological discussions on mobility and space. What I am highlighting, therefore, is not that urban diversity has been overlooked in geography. Rather, the migration-related and migration-led diversification, expressed in the concept of superdiversity, has yet to be fully merged with geographical approaches. There is a clear need for further conceptual bridge-building to connect urban superdiversity with the spatial perspective on inequalities, particularly issues of intersectionality, which are an inherent part of the phenomenon of societal diversification and be understood as complementary to superdiversity.

As I had pointed out in the Oxford Handbook of Superdiversity (Meissner, Sigona, and Vertovec 2023), the actual spatiality of migration-led superdiversity has been overlooked in the research on urban diversity (Yamamura 2023). Not only does it remain rather unclear what these superdiverse cities entail in the spatial context, it is also the spatial or socio-spatial connection between migration phenomena such as transnational migration and the spatial expression or specification of urban superdiversity that is

underexplored. Bringing the spatial perspective into the debates on the nexus of migration and cities has proven to contribute to closing the gap between Vertovec's works on transnationalism and superdiversity. What I have pointed out and developed in that chapter is the creation of transnational spaces (in plural) by the different forms of transnational migrations from above, from below and the middling, that actually also theoretically find the spatial expression in urban superdiversity.

As urban phenomena are all spatialized and can be found in specific places in cities, it can be an important and potent approach to empirically nail down the locations of superdiversity. This can also lead to specifying which elements in the urban landscape make a city "more diverse" or superdiverse compared to the other, and thus contribute to the further theorization of superdiversity. Such potential of geographical perspective for dealing with migration-led diversification has also been pointed out by Ye (2019) when discussing the differential inclusions in Singapore. Differential inclusion highlights how various migrant groups are selectively, – according to the migration-related social categories, such as race, citizenship and skill status, integrated into the urban space by the governmental policies and how they are also normatively (not) integrated or included in public spaces. These are phenomena of (transnational) migration that are not solely societal but clearly also spatialized in the urban space. The spatial perspective, thus, bears the potential to theoretically connect Vertovec's work on transnational migrations and urban superdiversity.

In fact, in another chapter of the above-mentioned edited book by Meissner, Sigona, and Vertovec (2023), Katherine Stansfeld also brings a highly engaging geographical debate on superdiversity, embedding it into the aforementioned feminist geographical approaches of power geometries and other urban studies debates. There, using Massey's terminology, she warns against "the danger of a-spatial narratives of superdiversity" (Stansfeld 2023, 32). An analogy to the critique of a-historical analysis of societal phenomena, an a-spatial narrative of superdiversity would be ignoring the simultaneity of different lived experiences within the urban population and the urban space. They can be characterized by high mobility and diversity, but also include those who do not relate to them. Such geographical approach also theoretically connects the phenomenon of mobility and migration with the urban phenomenon of superdiversity.

Places of encounters as a socio-spatial phenomenon of superdiversity

Without the spatial approach, the application of superdiversity as a concept might either remain a rather descriptive venue for characterizing generally "diversifying" societies in times of increasing migration and globalization – be it on the policy level or even at the street level looking into linguistic landscapes or superdiverse streets-, or remain focussed on the anthropological and sociological insights into urban conviviality and encounters. These strands are undeniably crucial in understanding current trends in society and also substantial in finding a better way to deal with urban diversity. Yet, anthropologists and sociologists have also been pointing at the importance of the spatial aspects of superdiversity.

Wessendorf (2016, 410) notes, "social spaces [...] play an important role in the process of familiarization with people who are different and in getting accustomed to communicating across difference" and furthermore as De Noronha (2022, 169) notes "race was lived

through class, age, gender and *place*" (emphasis mine). While these critical works on urban diversity and conviviality have actually also identified that there are crucial spatial aspects of looking into micro-publics (Back and Sinha 2016 as well as Berg, Gidley, and Krausova 2019) and speak of specific convivial places or streets (Wise and Noble 2016), a clear spatially analytical debate is still missing. The notion of the spatial is that of a social space and the actual complexity of the interwoven physical material elements of space and the social space shaped by interactions, networks, and human connections that create unique urban environments is not looked into. Especially when it comes to discussing the differences between diverse and superdiverse cities or even issues of intersectionality as a complementary phenomenon to superdiversity in cities, there is still a clear need to look into the geography of superdiversity.

In the following discussion, I aim to explore the intersection of intersectionality and superdiversity from a spatial or broader human geographical perspective, addressing the significant point raised by Gill Valentine in her 2007 work on the geography of intersectionality – a perspective published concurrently with Steven Vertovec's coining of superdiversity. I will outline how a research focus on the inherently diverse nature of cities and their spaces of encounter in superdiversity risks becoming tautologically confined within positively connoted debates on diversity, potentially neglecting critical issues of intersectionality that also manifest in these diverse urban environments. While Stansfeld brings the feminist geographical approach of power geometries into the picture to "distinguish superdiversity from intersectionality" (2023, 37) and moves into issues "beyond human relations", I propose to stay with the distinct focus on migration which superdiversity brings and put this in direct relations to intersectionality within urban (super-)diversity.

From intersecting spaces ...

Taking the notion of Steven Vertovec on the "multidimensionality or intersectionality of categories" (2023, 8) of the superdiversity concept, any place where different social groups meet and encounter becomes an intersecting space. In fact, these micro-publics (Amin 2002), such as parks, markets, playground or even public transport (Wilson 2011) are where coexistence or even conviviality (Gilroy 2004) flourishes. In superdiverse neighborhoods and cities, such "commonplace diversity" (Wessendorf 2010) becomes an inherent part of the urban diversity. Much of superdiversity research thus has focussed on exploring these encounters and coexistence in what is understood as superdiverse cities by focussing on such specific places within cities where different social groups along multitude axes of social differences encounter (Heil 2020; Padilla, Azevedo, and Olmos-Alcaraz 2017; Wessendorf 2014). The focus of these studies after the convivial turn is on the everyday experiences of conviviality and the interactions in the social differences. Thus, they are focussed on and require the co-presence in a physical space; with their togetherness they create a novel quality of social spaces in the cities. These works, when interpreted from an intersectional perspective, might indeed have some notions of intersectionality, as Crenshaw's original proposing (yet focussing on Black women in the US context) was that "intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (1991,

1296). Yet the overall dimensions of structural contexts of discrimination and intersectionality have not sufficiently been in the analytical focus of these urban diversity studies (see also Olwig 2013 on potentials of theoretical developments regarding the ethnography of diversity).

While highly important to understand the possibilities, challenges and potentials of different social groups living in the limited urban spaces and sharing culture and space, the spatial perspective has been rather ancillary. Most works on urban diversity focus on the social space in these public spaces, discussing issues of places of conviviality, encounters or micro-publics (see above). However, they do not go into the discussion of the actual geographical notion of space production, which entails aspects of space that go beyond the social dimension and also bring in important aspects of the intertwining of social with physical material spaces. The engagement with the spatial production could then also lead to questions of designing and planning inclusive and equitable urban spaces. With the current approach, the intersectionality of space is somewhat reduced to a space where identities encounter and merely intersect. Thus, it creates a notion of *intersecting spaces* rather than an intersectional space where a spatial understanding of intersectionality itself is being analysed and problematized.

The intersectional perspective has been adopted in geography as early as in the early 2000s (Valentine 2007; Valentine et al. 2010; see overviews in Peake 2010 and Longhurst and Johnston 2014), yet empirical works focus on specific neighborhoods and locations of intersections of categories, primarily on sexuality, religion and class (Rodo-de-Zarate 2017; Schroeder 2014; Valentine et al. 2012) and also age (Hopkins and Pain 2007). Additionally, they are not much related to the urban diversity debates in the narrower sense. What needs more attention in the discussion on urban diversity thus is the fact that “cities are the sites of negotiations of differences” (Geldof 2016, 127). As Ye notes: “a narrative of urban diversity and coexistence that emphasizes play, hybridity and inbetweenness obscures the injuries of class, race and ethnicity and filters out the structural richness of space” (Ye 2019, 479). In the overview piece on the geography of intersectionality, Hopkins writes (2019, 942):

Whether it be about understandings of scale, appreciations of place or time–space relations, spatial belonging and identities, social geography could usefully advance how intersectionality is theorized, applied in research and used in practice.

In the same vein, I call for a more spatial perspective into the interlinkage between intersectionality and the migration-related (super-)diversity in urban space. This could also lead to better understanding mechanism of inclusion and exclusion in the dynamics of social differences, helping policy-makers also in their support and design of public spaces. After all, societal phenomena of inclusions or exclusions, be it on the basis of class, race, gender or any other dimension, are spatially embedded – it deals with displacements and exclusions from one specific place within the city to another.

... to intersectional space

Taking the above-sketched out issue of the notion of intersecting spaces, which does not encompass a proper analysis and discussion about the multi-level intersectional

discrimination that comes into space, what I propose is the move to the notion of an *intersectional space*. Three vignettes are presented by which I would like to illustrate how intersectionality in urban diversity can take shape. These vignettes are taken from previous empirical research conducted on the spatiality of superdiversity in Tokyo and Frankfurt, and each illustrates different spatial dimensions of intersectionality, which are the class-related, temporal-spatial and functional-spatial inequalities in urban spaces.

I. Marketplace in urban diversity

As early as 5AM in the morning, the pedestrianized street is being set up for the weekly farmers' market in the quiet hours of the urban neighborhood. Early morning dog walkers pass the growing number of colorful stalls of vegetables and fruits from the regional farmers, the Italian fresh pasta with a red-yellow Sicilian flag with the three legs of Medusa as a decoration, but also a smaller stalls with Turkish sweets and other delights next to the carefully stashed South Asian spice stands. Under the morning sun, these market stalls are lining up meticulously in an oval shape over the cobblestone pavement space which is on other days simple crossings of small alleys with retailers ranging from the drugstore chain, a local optician, a French bakery, a Greek restaurant and a Vietnamese restaurant. At 8.30AM customers have started flocking in, a Spanish speaking mother with a baby cart next to the older German lady with her walker, next to a French speaking young couple in leisure clothes. Through the queues and the market, a tall man in an elegant suit makes his way through to the subway entrance, probably rushing to his first meeting, while speaking already business loudly into his AirPods in English.

This is an exemplary scenery of a marketplace in Frankfurt but could be placed in any other superdiverse city, especially in the Western European context. What is seen here might be, as mentioned above, a classic case of a place of encounters, a micro-public where different social groups meet and, mostly transactionally, but interact with each other. While it would indeed be an interesting study to look into the who and how of interactions, the choice of speech and where beyond a transactional chat a more personal interaction develops, what this space also signifies is the spatial intersectionality on the axes of class, ethnicity and functionality. While all might appear as being simply superdiverse, with different ethnicities, ages and person groups coming together, what plays into this space is also the different hierarchies and, from a sociological perspective, power differences of social groups.

The same place of encounter is – from the perspective of the customers and other visitors of the market – a pleasant experience of diversity in consumption that can be enjoyed in larger cities where the cultural diversity is reflected in the farmers' market. While in other smaller and peripheral cities or towns, weekly markets are full with quite homogenous sets of stalls selling the seasonal and regional vegetables and other food, the variety of fruits, vegetables and other edibles in superdiverse cities is impressive, ranging from regional producers to migrant businesses with other regional specialties reaching to gourmet imports. Yet, what are happening on the other side, i.e. the perspective of the vendors, are the highly diverse experiences and efforts of migrant entrepreneurs and other minoritized business makers. Those who might not have had the chance of labor market integration and been thrust into entrepreneurship as discussed in ethnic minority and migrant entrepreneurship. The space is also the difference of

gender and class when it comes to the question of who is there as a domestic worker or nanny being asked to tick off the grocery list for their employers, who are at home or elsewhere going after their own businesses. It is about who can be there as a leisure activity, enjoying a sunny day on a superdiverse market, and who is there as a means of survival for economic activity, serving the customers.

Such a perspective, which looks more into the structural differences of the social groups present in these places of encounters, turns a merely intersecting space into an intersectional space. Research on looking at diversity and conviviality in street markets (e.g. Watson 2009; Alex Rhys-Taylor 2016) have pointed out such complexity in urban diversity; however, what I would like to point out here is the specific migration-related diversity issue in place. While there is no need for changing the place of analysis, what the study of intersectional space in the context of superdiversity brings is sensitivity to issues of social inequalities and power dynamics with relation to migration aspects. As the vignette has shown, the superdiversity lens opens up not only the identification of diversity regarding the presence of different persons of different origins and their mingling (i.e. intersecting space), it also helps to identify the migration contexts of privileged migrants and minority entrepreneurs, and, thus, the complexity of intersectionality that is inherently part of the urban space (i.e. intersectional space).

II. Home of a domestic worker

"I work here, I live here, but this is not my home. It's their home" – Jenny says, cleaning up after the kids that have just gone to school. She has been living in the home of McAllister's in Tokyo for one year, but has actually been with the family more than four years. She has come to Tokyo with them from their previous home in Singapore. As a Filipina domestic worker, she could join them. They wanted to keep her as the children had come attached to her, and as she proudly accounts "I'm doing a good job, I'm part of the family", being an integral and necessary part of the overall family dynamics and organization of everyday life that they did not want to miss when moving to their next global city hopping. In fact, as the McAllisters tell me, they were lucky because Tokyo has just recently introduced a scheme where they were allowed to bring domestic workers; they were lucky because with other cities, for example back to Europe, this would not have been possible. Back to Jenny, she recounts how difficult it was to leave Singapore where she had built her friendship network, the familiar parks they would meet on the weekends when they didn't work. Here, in Tokyo, she says, she "need[s] to build it back up", but "I know people from my network" and shows me the extensive WhatsApp groups of overseas workers who are socially networking across borders and exchanging important information and news amongst them.

Similar issues of the temporal–spatial perspective can be also observed with domestic workers. Where home has been much discussed in the gendered space debates of feminist geography, what is important here to look into is the functionality of space. The functionality here refers to the social geographical understanding of so-called basic existential functions (*Daseinsgrundfunktionen*), referring to spaces used for essential activities or needs that form the foundation of human and social life (Maier et al. 1977). Used to analyse spatial structures and interactions of human activities with their lived and built environments, it characterizes the spaces by the core functions of living, working, education, provision, recreation, mobility and community/belonging. While home might be

a place of leisure and private time for most people, where they come home from the strenuous everyday life of work and social interactions, the same home can become a constricting and oppressive place of labor, where a strict regimen can control one's not only work but also living conditions. In fact, feminist geographers have been pointing out that home can become places of oppression, abuse, and violence for women.

The expatriate family living in global mobility employs another highly mobile domestic worker from the Global South is a common phenomenon researched extensively. In this vignette, gendered spaces and power geometries laid out by feminist geographers become contextualized into an issue of migration-related diversity and specifically intersectionality. It is again not only a matter of the mixing of people from countries of origins and ethnicities, but also their hierarchized migration contexts, making it an issue of superdiversity. The approach to intersectional space from a superdiversity context reflects class issues of migration at the individual and societal level, but also global inequality connected to different forms of migrations. This multi-level contextual embeddedness of social differences and inequalities is exactly what critical geographers have been pointing out at.

Domestic work is only one such example, but the same functional differences of the space, where it is also a place of encounter, can be seen in restaurants or other migrant businesses as the marketplace as shown. For one group of society, it is a space of leisure and cultural enrichment, whereas the same space becomes a place of endurance and survival for the other – while the crucial perspective is the migration-related phenomena of these intersectional spaces. Indeed, it is also a space of empowerment through economic activities and opportunities, too. Yet, the research into migrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship clearly shows the ambivalence of minority entrepreneurship between the narratives of necessity and opportunity. The “ambivalence of space” as Ye (2019) had noted, becomes visible especially in such places where different migrants encounter and are embedded in intersectional spaces.

III. Building in a Central Business District

“No, no, we don't see them and they don't see us”, says Agnieszka, when she briefly finds time to chat with me after she is done with her cleaning job. Having packed her bag swiftly and changing back to her streetwear, she swiftly also leaves the building of one of the big global banking firms from the side door shortly before 8AM, when the first of suit “uniformed” professionals flock into the security entrances. She calls them “uniformed” as it is a requirement for these financial professionals to dress up in these elegant, but also, especially observed from a distance, uniform suits. Like “bee hives bzzzz” she laughs, seeing the flocks of similarly dressed professionals buzzing in and out of the building, where she comes very day to clean. She and her colleagues from other Eastern-European countries are here, at the building and in the building, before the business people come in and come back when they are leaving. While there are also enough occasions when they encounter on the floors, while emptying a bin or just crossing their ways in the hallway, they “stay invisible”.

As a semi-public space, the office building in the central business district, in this case in the Westend of Frankfurt am Main, illustrates how and where so-called transnational migrations *from above* and *from below* encounter. While the transnational migrants

from above in the form of transnational financial professional are in themselves an ethnically highly diverse group of migrants, they are also characterized as being very homogenous regarding their high education, high mobility and high affluence. As noted by Agnieszka, they can be perceived very uniform also in their outward appearance. These transnational professionals are often overlooked as migrants and, as “expats” or expatriates, they are seen as part of the groups in privileged mobility rather than what has been associated as being a transmigrant. These transmigrants that are more often associated with the term are those transnational migrants from below, in menial jobs, labor migrants from less privileged backgrounds, such as the cleaning staff in this above case. While the transnational migrants from above are highly ethnically diverse, the transnational migrants from below are diverse, too, yet, depending on the location, showing certain patterns, such as Eastern-European migrants in the German case or South-East Asian or South Asian migrants in cities such as Singapore or Tokyo.

Looking at the office building as a place of urban diversity, what becomes interesting is not only the intersecting of these two contrasting groups of transnational migrants and their specific backgrounds in the migration industries leading to their patterns. It is also the temporal–spatial perspective and yet again the different contexts of migration. It is the same building, the same place, in which these social groups meet, consciously or unconsciously. Yet, what makes the intersecting and intersectionality visible or invisible is the timing of the space. One group comes in to serve the other before they come to work, while they return for another cleaning round after the core working hours when the others have left. The observation not only brings interesting empirical evidence but also an important analytical perspective on the intersectionality in space. Geographies of night work or night geography (Shaw 2018) and also some debates on the patterning of diversity across the day time and so-called hidden communities (Berg, Gidley, and Krausova 2019) have touched upon this topic, but this vignette demonstrates how the intersecting of migrant groups take place but through intersectionality in the temporal–spatial dimension does not become visible.

The important perspective that all three vignettes have shown is the focus on the encounters and their larger contexts of intersectionality. Though the focus on the places of encounters and the interactions between persons along different axes of social differences are crucial in understanding the dynamics of such urban diversity, what is left out by such focus is those who are not actively or consciously involved in these encounters. This can be the case of those staying at home and not going to the market, for whatever reason – be it a disability not allowing going to the market or a privileged stay at home person delegating the shopping to a nanny – or those who are “not seen” in the same place despite being physically present as no interaction is intended or desired – from either side. Such places of encounters which have been the focus of urban diversity also come with non-encounters that are connected and are also an inherent part of the dynamics of socio-spatial inequalities and intersectionality.

Intersectional spaces of non-encounters

The issue of the non-encounters in urban diversity also brings in another important analytical dimension into the discussion of intersectional spaces, i.e. the multi-scalar embeddedness. Even though Steven Vertovec has mentioned issues of scales later in

his works, primarily in the context of visualization of superdiversity data, a theorization and conceptual development of the scales onto the actual issue of superdiversity did not emerge. The crucial scalar perspective on intersectional spaces is paralleled by the multidimensionality of intersectional discrimination. These discriminations occur not only interpersonally but also institutionally and structurally, from the micro over meso to macro-level of societal contexts (see also Yamamura and Lassalle 2022 for a multidimensional and multi-scalar analytical framework). The focus of anthropological works at the nexus of intersectionality and urban diversity is the urban level and thus at the predominantly interpersonal and local level. The sociological view brings in the larger societal contexts, translated into encounters between people of differences and its relation to larger society. What the geographical perspective brings into the analysis of the spatial expression of intersectionality is the overall embedding of the phenomenon at different context levels and using the space as the medium for the analysis.

The larger societal and spatial contexts of institutional and structural discriminations of individuals with different diversity dimensions not only create the different usage and presence at places of encounters. The absence from the space – be it temporarily or generally – is the spatial expression of such intersectionality, too. This means that if intersectionality is only researched at the local level and in places of encounters, the approach misses out crucial aspects of intersectionality that are not found in the non-encounters.

Intersectional spaces are also existent when there is no encounter of diversity because some individuals or social groups – especially in the context of migration-related diversity – are institutionally (such as through mandatory residence of refugees on the communal levels) or structurally (disabled persons) excluded from these places of encounters. Further dimensions of marginalization, such as gender or sexual identities, religious beliefs or racialization, further contribute to an even more complex constellation of exclusion dynamics within spaces of urban diversity.

Multi-scalar contextual embeddedness of intersectional spaces

Indeed, the fact that an intersectional space analytically encompasses the non-encounters of urban diversity comes with empirical difficulties for research into urban superdiversity as it has been conducted until now. Yet, to direct the researchers' view from the obvious of ongoing encounters to the less visible or the invisible in these spaces would be a crucial turn for more intersectional urban diversity studies. Questions about why certain groups of people or individuals, who are otherwise either at different times of the day or as residents registered in the city administration residing and living in the neighborhoods, are invisible or partly invisibilized, can bring novel and important notions of superdiversity. In a similar manner, also taking immobile persons into the perspective of mobility research and also to include those who do not migrate themselves but are affected by migrating individuals as family and friends or the overall migration dynamics into transnationalism research, the non-encountering needs to be taken into research of urban diversity, too.

Moreover, zooming another scale out of the micro-level, the question of the places of encounters and non-encounters actually also becomes interesting when mobility patterns of the privileged and non-privileged are taken into focus. As my own research into urban diversity of transnational migrants from above and from below in global cities have shown (Yamamura 2024), certain groups of highly privileged transnational migrants

from above socio-spatially concentrate in urban centers, too, parallel to phenomena discussed as transnational gentrification. In contrast to that, transnational migrants from below – due to different levels of spatial expressions of exclusions – cluster in the outskirts of the city centers (although they might be well working in these transnationally gentrified and central areas). Such issues of decentralization and peripheralization from the vibrant high-streets of the city center are part of an intersectional approach to urban diversity. In fact, suburban or outskirt areas of a city can be as diverse or even more so as an obviously diverse neighborhood. The individual perception of diversity when it comes to the social categories of urban poor or the transmigrants from below tends to differ from the perception of diversity of the mostly positively connotated expatriates, international students or highly skilled and highly mobile individuals. The mechanism in society is that the diversity of a larger population group categorized as minorities or marginalized tends to be associated primarily with this specific notion of the constructed group (e.g. BIPOC or LGBTIQ*) and neglects the varieties of differences and the intricate intersectionality of these persons that actually exist.

As a last step of zooming out to the global macro-scale on the intersectional space, the interesting perspective is the connectivity of superdiverse cities over the globe. Moving from singular ethnographic cases of superdiverse neighborhoods or cities, what becomes interesting and also crucial for a future-proof research into urban diversities, is to understand the global dynamics not only of migration but also of these specific spatialities of superdiversity, which are connected to them. Migration as we know bridges physical distances, and the emergence and proliferation of new communication technologies and social media bring social proximity at distance, creating new dynamics of intersectionality on a global scale. The network of superdiverse cities has been explored (Yamamura 2022) but needs more discussions also from the intersectional spatial approach. Questions connecting the dots between not only global mobility and superdiversity but also between global inequalities of immobilities and superdiversity become increasingly important to look into.

Visibilizing the invisible

The third point of this piece is to also address the issue of visibility. As mentioned already above when discussing issues of non-encounters or even in specific cases of invisibilization (with the vignette on the cleaning staff in office buildings), there is an important perspective on visibility and invisibility that needs more discussion in urban diversity research.

Steven Vertovec has been passionate in recent years in bringing multidimensional data on urban diversity on the table and making superdiversity visible with his colleagues from the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. By “developing compelling new ways of ‘seeing’ this multidimensional superdiversity in the available data” (Vertovec et al. 2024), the urban complexity should be made more visible and understood in its complexity. While these indeed compelling and partly complex visualizations bring in a new notion of superdiversity into otherwise flat administrative data, the actual phenomenon of urban diversity is not much in focus. Statistical data however unfortunately remain abstract and might even make the indeed complex lived experiences and perceptions of urban diversity rather invisible or intangible behind numbers and colorful maps.

Beyond such data visualization, which is a rather abstract visibilization and also requires such data, which are not available for most cities beyond those Anglo-American countries, it is also important to reapproach the visibility from a conceptual side. As Collins and Bilge (2020) as geographers dealing with intersectionality have pointed out the “lived and embodied experiences of intersectionality” in the spatial context is crucial. And moreover, “[d]ifferent locations along social and economic axes are often marked by different embodied signifiers, such as colour of skin, accent, clothing and modes of behaviour” (Yuval-Davis 2011, 13). What I am getting at by these perspectives from geographers on intersectionality is to call for new methodological approaches into urban diversity research which can bring in a more holistic understanding into the visible nature of urban diversity, requiring a novel methodological take to the study (see also Wessendorf 2022).

The importance of visibility of differences is key to understanding the spatiality of urban diversity. As pointed out in the study on the staying in superdiverse places, “visible diversity of the population and the diversity of infrastructure that had developed over time, for example, local shops; religious institutions; cultural services” (Pemberton 2023, 917) were crucial elements for the interviewees who had not left their neighborhood. The point of “visible minorities”, as also used in Canada as a demographic category, is crucial for the perception of diversity in society. In fact, as current discourses on racism and migrantization reveal, discriminations such as racism and migrantization often stem from the perception or perceived visibility of an individual’s migrant status or race. Meanwhile, those who are not visibly minoritized are less likely to encounter xenophobic or racial backlash and have different lived experiences of urban diversity.

Ye questions what constitutes the “knowing” of strangers and of difference as a basis of understanding issues of conviviality and coexistence in space (Ye 2019, 479). The constitution of this knowing or the mechanism of the perception of urban diversity can be an important key to unlock the question of better grasping urban superdiversity and specifically intersectional spaces. Such spatial perspective could give important insights into the dynamics of power relations of urban diversity, i.e. the spatial expression of actual intersectionality in the urban conviviality or the lack thereof, and make issues of intersectionality and diversity visible in the actual sense.

Conclusion

Steven Vertovec’s legacy in migration research reaches farther than merely coining the term superdiversity. His valuable and lasting contribution can be seen especially in synthesizing existing debates in the originally rather niche scholarship on migration and making migration topics approachable and tangible beyond the niche and to the broader public discourse. The migration-specific lens to urban diversity, expressed in the concept of superdiversity, is an approach that is crucial and topical now than ever in times of global mobility and urbanization. While superdiversity has been criticized for its lack on incorporating issues of inequality and particularly intersectionality, this paper suggests that a spatial approach to urban superdiversity can demonstrate how superdiversity and intersectionality are indeed “complementary, and not competitive” (Vertovec 2023, 69).

Adopting a spatial lens bridges the theoretical and empirical gaps between these concepts, moving from merely recognizing intersecting social categories found in urban spaces (intersecting spaces) to addressing the structural inequalities embedded within “intersectional spaces”. These spaces not only reflect the co-presence of diverse groups but also reveal deeper power dynamics, exclusions, and hierarchies tied to migration and social stratification. Taking a geographical lens, the three vignettes show the different spatial dimensions, such as class-related, temporal–spatial or functional–spatial, that are specific to the migration-related diversity and find its expression in the “intersectional spaces”. By focusing on how urban superdiversity intersects with spatial inequalities, we can illuminate the ways in which discriminations and privileges are spatially configured and contested.

The shift from intersecting to intersectional spaces emphasizes the necessity of critical spatial inquiry to unpack how superdiversity and intersectionality interact within the urban landscape. At the same time, the paper also points out how research into intersectionality in urban superdiversity also needs to shift from the setting of encounters to issues of non-encounters and the invisibility of differences as an integral part of intersectional spaces. Such a shift from intersecting to intersectional spaces challenges us to move beyond the celebration of diversity to address the inequalities often obscured in such narratives. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of urban diversity, making visible the invisible dimensions of exclusion and marginalization.

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