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**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF MODERN URBAN  
SPACE GENTRIFICATION**

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**Abstract**

Modern cities play a special role in globalization processes. They are like the living reflection of the transformation processes taking place in our society. Such processes find expression in changes of infrastructure space of the city, and social and economic weight of urban areas. This paper deals with the processes of transformation of urban space. We consider gentrification as one of trends of modern city development, and we discuss its role as a social, economic and cultural issue. The work focuses on European and Russian examples of gentrification examining aspects such as culture, squatting, creative clusters, or Disneyfication. Based on the analysis conducted, we draw conclusions on the positive (settlement of vacant buildings; renovation buildings; revitalization of the community, etc.) and negative (increase in the cost of living, uncontrolled change of the architectural appearance of the space, etc.) consequences of gentrification in modern urban spaces. We also suggest the necessity of implementing successful practices of gentrification in urban policy for Europe and other regions of the World.

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**Keywords:** Gentrification; urban space; creative cluster; squatting; cultural integration; sustainable development

## 1. Introduction

Today we can clearly highlight the role of cities in the on-going processes of globalization and integration. A city is not only an economic and industrial centre of a country, but also a place where it is possible to observe many of the transformation processes occurring in modern societies.



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Cities grow, or occasionally decline, and continuously transform themselves in their history. They can well be seen as complex, adaptive, self-organizing systems, in which the many natural, artificial and social elements continuously interact in interdependent and often unpredictable ways. Cities are places where human life is present and the study of cities crosses boundaries among economics, finance, engineering, ecology, sociology, anthropology. Practically almost all forms of knowledge. Such systems cannot be understood by considering them as traditional linear cause-and-effect systems, but we rather need to see them as dynamic systems where all the elements (people, communities, businesses, governments) are constantly creating nonlinear feedback loops that either promote or reduce the environmental variables upon which their futures depend. All phenomena occurring in a city are thus complex phenomena, encompassing many different aspects and can be described only by taking into account these varied features, mainly if then we want to forecast its evolution or create scenarios that can help governance and policy setting (Baggio, 2015).

The urban space is not static. In the contemporary changing environment, we can identify two major trends. One is connected with the displacement of industrial activities outside the city borders and the use of the former industrial areas for other purposes. The second one is gentrification: the process of transformation of urban lower-class districts (or free areas) to zones designated for middle or higher classes (Gratz, 2008). In dealing with this phenomenon, many attempt at forming policies of sustainable maintenance decision-making for improving the social and economic prospects of the city. «Through urban redevelopment, the state attempts to regularize informal areas into new production spaces for its revenue maximization» (Wu, 2016). On the other hand, for its very nature, gentrification is increasingly recognized as a social problem (Marcuse, 2016).

In this paper, we deal with gentrification, and, as a first approximation, we consider the most important facets of this phenomenon: its social and cultural aspects and its role in city development.

## **2. Research methods**

The research methodology is based on theoretical principles of social and cultural analysis of the city and modern urban planning. In this paper, we highlight gentrification on the basis of European and Russian examples. We study gentrification from the perspective of cultural dimensions upgrade of urban space due to the inflow of investment in free or existing areas of a low value. We aim at showing that gentrification could be a general-purpose instrument for the social and cultural development of the city.

## **3. Discussion and results**

The concept of gentrification during the history of its development has undergone a number of changes. This allows us to identify several stages in its formation and even find the practice of reengineering the process.

The study of gentrification processes has gained prominence in Europe in the 80s of 20th century and gradually spread abroad. In London, for example, «gentrification and social cleansing of low income tenants from inner London has been on going since the late 1990s and continues today» (Lees, & Ferreri, 2016). Sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term gentrification in 1964 (Glass, 1964). This term was used to describe the processes of resettlement areas with minimum basic facilities, low standard of living and high

level of crime with the aim of addressing issues of urban policy and adding value to the concrete territory (Glazychev, 2011). In this case, we talk about the resettlement of the depressed areas with a poor environment where working-class occupiers, racial or national minorities lived. Such people moved to the outskirts of the city and in the suburbs. This free area was improved, became nobler. In consequence of that, there was an increase in the cost of housing and rents.

Further on, gentrification is accompanied by the movement of the «squatters» and involves the seizure of the quarters for a symbolic payment, with the «subsequent capitalization of cultural and social assets generated by their inhabitants» (Afanasiev, 2014). Berson (2011) marked that the world's largest squats existed, or exist now, are mostly situated in European cities. Until recent times in London there was a «rampArt» - centre for the arts and creativity, social space in the East End. It held various cultural events, as well as provided housing to the poor. In Amsterdam until 2006, there was squatted social centre ASCII - Amsterdam Subversive Centre for Information Interchange. In Spain, «Can Masdéu» - the famous squatted social centre, founded in 2001 in Barcelona- has become popular by bringing together anti-globalization activists and followers of ecological lifestyle.

Among the Russian practice, there are also examples of a squatted social centre. In St. Petersburg, for example, there is a squatted social Art centre «Pushkinskaya, 10». It is located in an abandoned house, where independent painters, musicians and other artists found a lodgement. Later, a non-profit organization, now called the Partnership «Free culture» was officially registered at this address. Since 1995, this art centre became a member of such international organizations as Trans Europe Halles, Res Artis. Partnership «Free culture» represented the contemporary art of St. Petersburg at a country level at festivals «St. Petersburg in New York» (1996) and «St. Petersburg in Warsaw» (1997). Some other squatted social centres are Gallery in Trehprudny pereulok (Gallery in Three-ponds Lane) (Moscow), Actor's House (Rostov-on-Don).

Further, gentrification began to spread to industrial areas, because of the displacement of many productive establishments and the consequent degradation of the areas. This situation led to the creation of different art galleries, museums, etc. at places where factory floors existed. Later on, the processes of globalization and integration contributed to the variability and mobility in the production sphere that allows gentrification to be the basis for economic development of the territories in these conditions. In addition, among the main reasons of transformation of urban space, the experts note the growing importance of the sphere of consumption and services, so that enterprises in the sphere of culture and services are beginning to play a significant role in the transformation of urban space (Makarova, 2007). In essence, gentrification is the result of a shift in the economy from production to services.

Thus, today, gentrification is positioned as a possible solution for the development of urban space. However, no unambiguous assessment of this process can be found in the research literature. In other words, there is no single answer on whether gentrification is a universal tool in the implementation of urban policy or not (Chum, 2015).

Gentrification has its pros and cons. Among the positive aspects these can be noted: transformation of areas through investment in real estate and landscaping of the adjacent territories; settlement of vacant buildings; renovation buildings; revitalization of the community, and also change in the appearance of the urban space due to new architectural solutions, design of storefronts, signage, creation of art objects, etc. (Gaffney, 2015).

It is possible to exemplify a number of practices to enhance the attractiveness of the city through world-class sport events and urban space transformation caused by these events. For example, the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, 2014; the Olympic Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro, 2016, etc. So, when Rio de Janeiro was announced as a host of the Olympics and the football World Cup housing prices began to increase sharply. Due to these facts, residents of the central districts had to move to the outskirts of the city (cheaper areas). The municipal government of Rio de Janeiro initiated the project «Porto Maravilha» (5 million in the port area). It was oriented to restructuring the infrastructure, upgrading and improvement of the public transport system, foundation of two museums, cableways and etc. The project was to cover an area of 5 million square meters and received about \$ 5 billion financial support (Ibid, P.7-10).

However, it is incorrect to reduce gentrification to the economic effects only. It also brings social and cultural changes. This is paramount in this paper. Modern metropolitan cities are bustling not only various architectural solutions, but also cultural diversity. Here arises the need to preserve rich cultural heritage and new traditions. Thus, gentrification brings new cultural patterns. They carry information about identity, class, traditions, etc. In connection with these trends appear such phrases as: culture-led-regeneration, creative city, creative cluster, etc. Thus, the results of the development processes of industrial sites become a part of the territories' image, the implementation of brand strategy, when the «creative clusters» are the tool for increasing tourist attractiveness of the territory.

As examples of the successful implementation of the image strategy of the city at the worldwide level, London, Bilbao, Sheffield, Essen often lead. Here, former industrial sites become now attractive for investments and tourism. E.g., Essen, in the past, there was a place supplying coal to all of Germany until the 80s of the 20th century; today, it is the exhibition centre of Germany. One of the most technologically advanced mines in the world Zollverein redesigned into a Museum. Also, the city hosts the headquarters of major German companies. This city is a bustling tradeshow where designers and engineers demonstrate new products in lighting streets, houses, etc. Here, in October, the annual «Essen light weeks» was held when the entire Central part of the city was decorated with festive lights. Themes of light figures vary from year to year. In 2010, Essen was named as the cultural capital of Europe.

It is also worth noting the practice of creating special «cultural quarters» such as Soho, East End (London) or the Rive Gauche (Paris). It is a kind of social platform for multicultural communication. Thus, the area of Soho had previously been a small village settlement, which was mainly inhabited by immigrants and the lower class. Since the mid-20th century, Soho became the centre of a London Beatniks, young people who deny traditional cultural values of the nation. Currently, Soho is a prime shopping and entertainment centre of London with a large number of cinemas, pubs, theatres, etc. In other words, it has become a platform for communication between musicians, artists and other cultural representatives, as well as residents and guests of the city.

The Russian case of gentrification «through the culture» is a project «Winery» (Moscow). It is an example of the identity and values of urban space because of topic, specific forms of space using, which is organized around culture and consumption. The project «Winery» shows the transformation of the old brewery «Moscow Bavaria» to the centre of contemporary art. On this territory, modern boutiques are located now. Nearby unattractive panel buildings built in the 1960s-1970s, which belonged to the factory «Manometer», became the headquarters of the architecture and design centre «Artplay». Not far from the

site, a factory «ARMA» for the production of reinforcement adjoins with gas-holders. Geographically, the project is located in an area that had never been considered as prestigious because of the large number of industrial enterprises (East direction of the Garden Ring Road in Moscow). With the consideration of the on-going transformation and that the area is located near the city centre, its economic and sociocultural value had increased significantly (Makarova, 2007). Similar examples of «gentrification through the culture» can be found in many cities around the world. Such examples cannot be considered effective because they become like a magnets for the further development projects. They create a positive, well-recognizable image for a place that attracts investors and the desired social class of potential customers.

Of course, gentrification in European and Russian practices has also negative consequences. It may be noted that the increase of real estate prices is a cause of increases in the cost of living. Therefore, local inhabitants and enterprises are forced to leave these areas and search cheaper districts. This situation gives rise to a wave of discontent and protests. The most important of the negative effects is the enormous and uncontrolled change of the architectural appearance of the space. «So, the restructuring of Ostozhenka, which is the most prominent case in Moscow and Russia as a whole, resulted in destroying a large number of historic buildings that were afterwards replaced by new ill-planned buildings» (Akishin, 2014). To minimize the negative effects of gentrification Liu, C. & O'Sullivan, D. (2016) recommend using a combination of rent gap theory, filtering theory and household life cycle theory for implementing a combined cellular automaton and agent-based model of gentrification: «This abstract model has good potential for simulating urban development. It exhibits a distinctive relationship between the spatial dynamics of gentrification patterns and different rent gap thresholds and rent gap impacts: at low rent gap thresholds and limited rent gap impact, renovation events occur in all locations leading to a mixed rent map distribution» (Ibid.).

As for the European and US experience, the authorities monitor the processes of gentrification quite seriously in order to avoid such results as those in Moscow. For this purpose, special funds that follow the approval of such projects are founded. E.g., the Fund of the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks, UK Department of the Environment. Also, various national level departments and divisions are dealing with these problems (such as departments of development, transport and the regions, operating in the UK, Spain and other countries).

However, in the globalization era, these problems require solutions at a supranational level. In this regard, in 1998, the European Commission adopted the document «Urban Sustainable Development in the EU: a Framework for Action». Thanks to this, cultural diversity has been included in the list of the most important dimensions of the sustainable development strategy of cities. At the supranational level, exchange programs on solving urban problems have been developed. E.g.: «Eurocities», «URBACT», created for the exchange of experiences of member countries of the EU's struggle in the cities against discrimination on ethnic and cultural differences. Thus, in the framework of the «Eurocities», the DIVE project (Diversity and equality in European cities) was realised. It brought together representatives of the administration of Amsterdam, Rome, Berlin and London, as well as independent experts in the field of migration. Their goal is the effective implementation of the policy of multiculturalism and cultural integration in cities. The program «URBACT» takes place at several stages: URBACT I (2002-2006), URBACT II (2007-2013), URBACT III (2014-2020). E.g., the total eligible budget of URBACT III is 96,3 M€ for the maintenance of cities in Europe.

Gentrification analysis also detects variants of urban environment transformation through the distribution of the so-called «sugar-coated space», where historic places are used for pure commercialization. This is so-called «disneyfication» when destination/territory is considered as a sterile and tightly controlled space. It is organized like a Disneyland, where the pseudo-historical environment is mainly aimed to stimulate consumption (Boyer, 1994; Sorkin, 1992).

In contemporary urban planning, there is an interesting inversion. Though the basis of contemporary cities was an attempt of order, what we see now is an attempt to destroy the order set (Marcuse, 1995).

China is a vivid case of urban development processes. Over the past two decades, in China, there has been a sharp increase of the number of urban projects, organized like Disneyland (Campanella, 2008). He explained such rapid development due to the sharp social changes. On their background, the theme parks seemed as Islands of order in the flow of change. Besides, they aim at regaining the past national and cultural heredity which was lost during the period of cultural collapse (Ibid.). In Chinese cities, some streets are dedicated to the needs of historically furnished consumption. The Heritage Urbanism, one of the most common post-industrial urban developments in the US, have become extremely popular in the contemporary China.

As seen from the analysis made, contemporary cities go through positive and negative social changes. We note the following main points:

- the economic aspect is manifested in increasing values of the reconstructed areas through increasing the cost of housing and rental, as well as due to the development of new infrastructure services;
- the social and cultural aspects are that such environments can combine a cultural diversity and make the so-called “art clusters”;
- the organization should be regulated by non-governmental bodies, municipal authorities, and urban communities.

#### 4. Conclusion

Economic, social, and cultural aspects are all represented in the gentrification processes of urban space. It is obvious that the solution to problems related to cultural and ethnic conflicts are more successfully implemented in the framework of cities at the local level, where there is no opportunity for them to grow to a global scale. However, without the support of the national and supranational level, and without the active participation of urban communities, the city becomes a territory of economic, social and cultural conflict. We can hardly predict the conflict resolution. However, further comprehensive gentrification analysis (including social and cultural aspects) can provide more data for the city authorities and local residents to make responsible and wise decisions as to sustainable urban development.

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