

Revealing the Gentrification Patchwork in the City of Cluj-Napoca. Architectural and Urban Patterns

Sebastian Ionescu^{*1}

¹ Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, 72-76 Observatorului Str., 400489, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

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Abstract

Gentrification, the controversial and contested issue even in urban planning theory and practice, is present, more or less visible, in the city of Cluj. Becoming (part of) a Global City and being in a transition state from a post-socialist industrial core to a – perhaps just „self” proclaimed – IT Center, the city of Cluj shows different patterns of gentrification, some of them one of a kind. These patterns range from the „classical” commodification of the historical town area to a soft „hipster-esque” gentrification through art in some of the peri-central zones and the „mall-ification” of the peripheries and rise of gated communities. This paper sets its goal to reveal some of the spatial properties (not only) of these patterns of gentrification, by presenting the phenomenon through zooming in and out on micro (buildings), mezzo (city blocks/neighborhoods) and macro (metropolitan) urban scales.

Rezumat

Gentrificarea, chestiunea foarte controversată și contestată în planificarea urbană – deopotrivă teorie și practică – este prezentă, mai mult sau mai puțin vizibilă, în orașul Cluj. Devenind – parte a – Orașului Global și aflându-se într-o tranziție de la un nucleu industrial post-socialist către – poate doar autoproclamat – centru IT, orașul Cluj prezintă diferite tipologii de gentrificare, unele unice. Acestea variază de la clasică comodificare a orașului istoric până la o gentrificare „hipsterească” prin artă în unele zone pericentrale, și de la „mall”-ificarea periferiilor și până la ascensiunea comunităților îngrădite. Lucrearea de față își propune ca scop relevarea unor proprietăți spațiale – și nu numai – ale acestor forme de gentrificare, prezentând fenomenul prin mărire sau micșorare a micro scării clădirilor, mezzo scării cvartalelor/cartierelor și macro scării metropolitane.

Keywords: gentrification, Cluj-Napoca, transition, post-socialist economy, postmodern city

1. Introduction. Definition and general characteristics of gentrification

Gentrification is the socio-economic process that comes along with globalization and the climax of neo-liberalism [1]. Being a controversial and contested issue even in urban planning theory and practice, ultimately triggering urban, this now global phenomenon is present, more or less visible,

* Corresponding author: architect

E-mail address: sebastiones@yahoo.com

in the city of Cluj-Napoca.

Basically, gentrification is transforming an old inner city area into a neighborhood for a more financial capable population that has gained a certain social status through building renovation. This process triggers increase in property value and in displacing of the old owners. However, today we can also talk about suburban and even rural gentrification, as direct consequences of globalization.

Anyhow, almost all definitions of gentrification gravitate around the interrelated concepts of social class (Ruth Glass, 1964 [2]; Chris Hamnett, 1984 [3]) and capital (Elijah Anderson, 1990 [4]; Neil Smith, 2002 [5]; Liviu Chelcea, 2000 [6]). However, when talking about space and urban setting, the concept of gentrification becomes less impregnated in socio-political connotations and therefore more neutral, dealing with notions such as urban renewal, regeneration and restoration. Still worth mentioning that gentrification does not mean not only renovating old buildings, the *cliche* image, but also bringing the whole infrastructure of retail and amenities and, indeed, in the end, urban zoning.

The first and most dramatic negative consequence of gentrification is the displacement of the poor populations – through increase in rents, property taxes - and therefore social polarization, all the destroyers of community. However, being mostly a deprecating term, still, this advancing process coming along with neo-liberal urbanism can't be entirely repudiated, since zoning of poverty is not generally desirable.

2. Gentrification in post socialist Romania – „primitive accumulation” [7]

In Romania, there is a *meta* form of gentrification, in spite of a certain lack of real capital and also in spite of clear property rights, characteristics that define the western capitalist form of gentrification, according to Dana Nițulescu [8]. Still, descending from communist times, the gentrifiers rely more on social capital – which is a technical term for social network – more than on economic capital. This social network is based on relations with the institutions of the state, actions that brought fraud and corruption. So, in post-socialist state, gentrification is accumulation, while in genuine capitalism there is a distribution, thus synthesizing the ideas of Liviu Chelcea [9]. There are many cunning strategies and juridical engineering procedures that drive the poor and/or old tenants to practically lose their houses in favor of the voracious real estate agents. Also there are many more gentrifying agents or actors involved, ranging from speculators to the disadvantaged and from the state itself to new yuppies.

Like the magazine *Arta Politică* states “In the context of Romanian post-socialism, especially in Bucharest and Cluj, gentrification has often been accompanied by direct aggression aimed at forcing the eviction of “undesirables” – forced evictions under various pretexts, from property returned to its pre-socialist owners (real or fabricated) to urban landscape changes.” [10]. The book “Evicting the Ghost. Architectures of Survival” [11] by studioBASAR is accurately and vividly graphic describing this malignant process.

The difference between the western type of gentrification and the Romanian version of it is – according to Chelcea [12] – the sense of determination between space and capital. In post-socialist countries, the battle over urban space and shift to private property leads to accumulation in capital, while in neo-liberal democracies is the other way round. These economical and social local “laws” draw quite unique spatial patterns of gentrification in the post-socialist built landscape.

3. Gentrification in Cluj-Napoca – fast transition

Cluj is a good example for this “landscape change”, as being on the path of transition from a nationalist/communist “regime” to a neo-liberal one. Moreover, as becoming part of the global city, Cluj is experiencing the shift from industrial pseudo-capitalist city to the postmodern consumption oriented one, the latter being almost unpredictable because of couples of opposed processes like recentralization and decentralization, segregation and polarization, and so on. But, before moving to a more readable scale, it is necessary to mark some of the general transformations in Cluj that are defining gentrification.

i) Economical changes

The economic changes were firstly brought by building the industrial parks like Tetarom I, II, III and maybe will be by the futures Tetarom IV and V. These parks partial boosted the local economy, demanding larger incomes in the tertiary sector and generated a need for both white-collars and blue-collars, meaning educated or basic workers. However, Cluj is lacking qualified basic workforce. in spite of the vast unemployed mass resulted from the bankruptcy of the industrial giants like C.U.G..

For the rising middle educated class it was an urge to build large consumption “places”. Both the large shopping malls built at the both ends of the city bespeak of the form of gentrification called *mall*-ification. As a direct consequence, the malls are preventing the commercial gentrification in the historic central area.

In connection to the two causes described above, also for the upcoming middle-class, the “popping-up” of a sprawling like neighborhoods like Bună-Ziua, Borhanci, Baciului and the “suburb” Floresti, or the future “more planned” Cartierul Tineretului show the gentrification symptoms of all urban zones. Including residential.

ii) Socio-demographical changes

According to Andreea Motoc [13], what we encounter in the case of Cluj when reading in a sociological key is a spatialisation of the occupational structure because of the rise of the middle class. There is a need for commercial spaces and consuming spaces, then building of suburban type of neighborhoods as a direct consequence, unfit local adaptations of the American model. There is a continuous loop in this type of economy that leads to a certain type of individuals that generate afterwards new types of social behavior and therefore new spatial patterns. This is illustrative for the network of complex relations that shape the city when gentrification is taken into consideration.

iii) Political changes

This type of changes consist in shifting from a nationalist communist rooted economy during the Gheorghe Funar administration to the neo-liberal of Emil Boc. In communist times, before real gentrification, the building process resided in erasing of the historical areas and building of peripheral dormitory neighborhoods for the working class, which would have to become the new alternatives to the medieval center. The contemporary exclusion of the workers from the city center is triggered by, paradoxically, the symbolical recentralization of the historical district, under commercial and consuming “domination”, according to sociologist Norbert Petrovici [14].

When all these change vectors are composed, post-socialist gentrification comes a result of privatization of the residential. This is a two folded process, according to Andreea Motoc [15]:

1. privatization of the apartments in large mass housing estates (the blocks of flats).
2. restitution of the nationalized homes – houses and land – a “painful surgery”.

4. Case studies

i) Central gentrification of the historical core

The second process from the ones mentioned above poses interest for this paper, because it bespeaks of the gentrification process in the historical central city area. In old buildings, there is the problem of space related to structure; the old buildings can hardly accommodate new functions because of the wagon-like distribution of. The residential gentrification meant dislocation of some part of the old population from the historical core. The residents are aged people, some of Hungarian descent. Others left because of the noise, pollution, dirt and settled nearby the more peaceful suburbs. Because old buildings almost always mean co-housing and shared spaces, there are often conflicts between the numberless apartment businesses and the residents sharing the same inner courtyard. In 2007 there was a 30/70 percent ratio residential versus commercial and services [16]. Figure 1 shows the process of functions occupying the historical buildings before and after post-socialist economy.

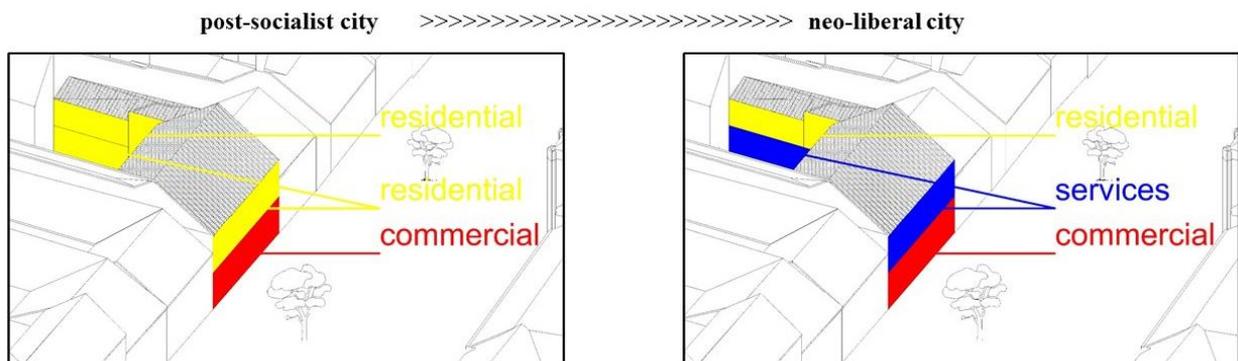


Figure 1. Migration of functions in a historical building in transition

Aside from the residential gentrification, regarding commercial gentrification, there can be strongly noticed after the year 2007 a decline of the central area because of *mall*-ification of the peripheries. This was translated into vacancy of many storefronts, presence of second hand shops and fast-food and, maybe the worst, physical decay of old buildings. When presented an image from Cluj compared to a similar one from, for example, Braşov, it is not the same situation, where the famous brands grew roots and thus changed the city’s “looks”. In the case of Piata Muzeului in Cluj there is a general tendency to grab the entire public space and turn it into outdoor private space. Speaking of museums, the touristic gentrification is also present, not only at a general district scale, but also in small buildings. This is achieved through the commodification of history, like Cluj Apartments for example, apartments being rented in a hotel manner. The inner design shows the “true” origin by exhibiting nude scraped brick walls in 8 of the 9 cases, even if the walls have always been plastered. It is the well known museification.

The smallest spatial pattern of the central building is commercial – storefront Services – situated at

ground level, but in the inner courtyards, rarely first ground. Some are private, some belong to the administration, but coming with very high renting prices. There were famous brands which practically sold the space of the brand. Because of rent increase, all these mega brands gradually disappeared or moved to the malls. And there is a certain speed of changing of ownership and thus space, with social inequity as a result. Speaking of inequity, here is presented the next case of gentrification, located in the suburbs.

ii) “Hard” gentrification: gated suburban and gated urban

Although not typical for Romania, the Terra Progressio gated community development in the pseudo suburb of Florești resembles to a certain extent the North-American pattern of sprawl. First of all, unlike the Romanian version of the dispersion, it is planned. Second, it has the character of a precinct; it is closed, introverted, kind of fortification form, almost a logo: a parallelogram. However, here is not the case of the typical western suburban gentrification, which means the “renewal” of suburban developments. The process dealing with here is about gentrification of an already gentrified form. It is what Saskia Sassen proclaimed: the divide between „urban war” zones and „urban glamour” zones [17].

The first form of „hard” pseudo-gentrification is well known: creating a gated community in an suburban - almost rural – landscape. The second form of gentrification is grafted on the first one. As it can be seen in Figure 2, one financial potent gentrifier penetrated the surrounding protective wall and extended its property outside the precinct with building of a summer house, garage and barbecue, thus assimilating unconquered territory. Both the order and control of gated gentrification are contested through Romanian sprawling type development, which is individual housing popping randomly out of the plain field. So here is a continuous cycle from chaotic to supreme order and back to chaotic, but, as stated here, on the marketing billboard, the accent is major put on safety [18].



Figure 2. Private extension of the Terra Progressio gated community
<http://www.terraprogressio.ro/preturi/harta.html>
 (Google Maps)

However, here will be presented another case of hard gentrification, but this time gated urban: the Central Park Ensemble, as seen in Figure 3. As in the suburban type mentioned above, the gated community tried to enlarge its territory by swallowing the neighboring space and placing an illicit gate, outside their territory: in this case the banks of the Watermill’s Chanel (Canalul Morii), a

public space mainly. Regarding the design of the building: the trilobite concave shape of floor plan alludes to enclosure, but also embraces the surroundings, being centripetal, self referential. This is the common strategy in both cases of gated Romanian gentrification: enclosure and fortification, but always on the verge of appropriating new territories, more or less legal. This kind of gentrification, is by its nature, visible. However, there are other types of “softer”, camouflaged forms of gentrification, presented as following.



Figure 3. The Central Park Ensemble and the appropriation of Watermill's Chanel
(source: owned photos)

iii) Gentrification by artists in former industrial spaces: Flacara factory and Cluj Makers

A more interesting case than the well known Paintbrush Factory Art Center is the case of Flacara clothing factory. After its bankruptcy and divide, it is finally sold to a German real estate company which planned to build a multi-functional center mixed with residential. The plans of Albert Speer Jr. were selected among others, with an iconic proposal of five towers. The renewal plans were dumped because of the global crisis and the idea was to rent the existing building to some artists - first pioneer gentrifiers - looking for a quiet place to work (Figure 4). Unlike the Paintbrush Factory, the artistic community had not formed. The lack of interactions and social relations between the renters and the lack of dynamic failed to make the Flacara factory a place like Williamsburg in Brooklyn as described by Sharon Zukin [19]. In this case there was a vicious financial cycle: the German owners needed the money from the artists and vice-versa. Finally, the artists moved out and the owners sold the space.



Figure 4. Flacăra factory and its artistic usage

(<http://www.monitorulcj.ro/social/38236-planuri-noi-pentru-flacara-artistii-din-cladire-nevoiti-sa-se-mute#sthash.wgX5Ag9k.dpbs>)

The second upcoming wave of gentrifiers consists of the so called “micro-serfs” – IT specialists. A successful local IT firm is planning to install its headquarters in the new refurbished building, but also accommodating retail, services and other amenities like kindergarten, fitness and maybe educational spaces. The industrial aesthetic is preserved integrated in the carcass of the new one. There is an interesting contrast between the exterior rectangular of the industrial building and the interior circular vortex-like design. This must probably remind the IT gentrifiers that they are among the creative class and thus will borrow some style and imagination from the former artist residents.

However, there is the case of another industrial site in Cluj which tends to gather other the creatives: the buildings on the Traian Street, which shelter the Cluj Makers, the Zug theater and maybe another multi-functional center (Figure 5). The whole site is actually a collage of more or less finished buildings, some used or half ruins. In this case, the organic and alternative character of place is a key ingredient in marketing gentrification. Grafitti and other urban incivilities are the billboards of this “hipster-esque” gentrifiers.



Figure 5. The ZUG Theater and a student project for social housing (owned photos)

5. Conclusions

Although the classical image of gentrification is the one with aged people moving out of their old ornamented brick house in order to make space for the new rich owner or the Versace store, in this study have been presented more types of gentrification which are intricately interrelated. So are the causes that trigger them: for example, the demand for new services determines the rise of the middle class which, in turn, creates an increase in consumption. So this is a economic to social and back to economic loop, which can be translated into space, from the micro scale of the building, the mezzo scale of the neighborhood and the macro scale of the city and its metropolitan zone and territory. The relative quick shift from a post-socialist industrial economy to a “Information Age” through an increase in consuming and commodification is the main driving force in altering the urban tissue, made also visible by the patterns of unique types of gentrification.

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(<http://www.terrafloresti.ro/index.php/en/despre-noi>)
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