

WARSAW SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
COLLEGIUM OF SOCIO-ECONOMICS
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL ECONOMY

mgr Łukasz Drozda

THE VALORIZATION OF SOCIALLY PRODUCED SPACES –
CONCLUSIONS FOR THE POLISH URBAN POLICY

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dr hab. Maciej Cesarski, prof. SGH

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The so-called top-down approach in housing policy and spatial development programs, as it is now believed, is a rather non-effective way of running urban policy. On the one hand, a paternalistic and anti-democratic character of such programs is indicated. They prove ineffectiveness in responding to social needs and do not encourage social inclusion of economically excluded groups. Another possible source of restrictions is the high capital intensity of top-down housing policy. The opposite paradigm connected with the privatization of public goods and the free market approach towards housing also engendered similar criticism. Both policy types seem to be ineffective, especially after the global financial crisis of 2007-2008: while austerity policies implemented today impairs state-led programs, the financialization of the real estate market is commonly blamed for inducing the economic breakdown.

In order to solve the problems mentioned above participatory techniques associated with the social production of urban space are recommended. This trend is also highly visible in Poland. It manifests in the growing popularity of various forms of public consultations, participatory budgeting, the so-called tactical urbanism or even more advanced participatory techniques. *Bottom-up urbanism* (pol. *urbanistyka oddolna*) is also to be found here. It refers to organizing, adapting and designing urban areas through advanced social participation of local community representatives. The latter include especially informal groups of inhabitants and more organized urban movements. This raises questions about what really motivates the use of participation techniques, how successful these solutions are and which users of urban areas are the real beneficiaries of these processes.

Valorization of socially produced spaces understood as spaces that are created as a result of different types of social activism is the subject of this dissertation. It addresses valorization in the sense of urban planning – far different from the most commonly associated economic option. This type of valorization (synonymous to landscape evaluation) is generally

a valuation of the quality of space that plays a key role in urban planning and spatial development. This allows to find different features of a given space and to describe the advantages and problems that require appropriate spatial interventions.

The basic aim of this elaboration is to valorize consequences of social actor's interventions, illustrated by the examples of selected fragments of metropolises located on different continents in search of conclusions for the urban policy in Poland. The dissertation presents three case studies of urban areas transformations initiated by grassroots actors. These are: Grzybowski Square in Warsaw, High Line Park in New York City, and Karanfilköy neighborhood in Istanbul. The first example illustrates the transformation of a specific inner city public area in Warsaw inspired by the artistic spatial intervention. The second one presents altering usage patterns in case of degraded space of the former industrial railway line in Manhattan. It was transformed for the purpose of creating a green area as a result of urban movement's actions. The third refers to the informal city form called 'gecekondu' – slum housing estate of Turkish type.

By the same token the basic aim implies seeking answers to the following questions:

1. Are bottom-up activities more effective than the rigid programs of top-down urban planning?;
2. How effective the mechanisms of social participation in urban management are?;
3. How is the local real estate market affected by this type of the social participation?;
4. To which extent the effects of citizen activities in shaping the urban space are measurable?;
5. How effective were the activities based on social participation in Poland after 1989?

This thesis assumes that spatial interventions of social actors significantly affect the quality of urban life of local communities as well as capital valorization of real estates. Not

only it doesn't necessary lead to improving the quality of life, but it also can result in increased spatial segregation and gentrification of the neighborhood.

The dissertation is divided into seven parts – the introduction, main part composed of five chapters and the final part with conclusions.

The first chapter describes theoretical aspects of the valorization of urban space. It describes its interdisciplinary connections with particular emphasis on approaches specific to environmental psychology, sociology, and urban planning. The following sections refer to theoretical determinants of urban policy as an example of the public policy specific for the areas of intensive urbanization, basic problems and notions of the valorization process, and rulebooks of the quality of life in urban environment research. The last one describes the theoretical aspects of the process of the social production of space.

The second chapter presents the assumptions of the proposed authorial method of multidimensional valorization of socially produced spaces. Subsequently, it is used in the form of a unitary matrix applied to each of the three case studies. Unlike one-dimension methods, the author's approach is characterized by a lower level of objectivity, resulting from discretionary selection of factors analyzed. This method, however, significantly improves the capacity of capturing the complexity of environment of intensive urbanization. The multidimensional valorization consists of seven specific methods that use various indicators of “objective”, subjective and behavioral character. These methods embrace the local real estate market, settlement infrastructure analysis, gentrification research, aesthetic evaluation, mental mapping, safety assessment and monitoring of the online behavior based on the Instagram actions.

Chapter three, four and five present how to apply the multidimensional valorization to the previously described case studies. It uses quantitative and qualitative techniques, as well as desk and field research. The references include source literature in Polish, English and

German, various types of secondary sources, such as census and commercial data, as well as primary sources obtained through field research. Spatial analyses connected to GIS were also used.

The involvement of social actors varied among the analyzed urban spaces. Grzybowski Square in Warsaw is a place of high use quality. It is willingly used as a public and recreation space by both residents of the nearby neighborhood as well as visitors or tourists. This area is still moderately gentrified, but some symptoms have already been observed. In other dimensions, this place neither varies much from similar squares in the same inner city area, nor offers better living conditions. The case of High Line Park in New York City is very similar. This urban space is also willingly and variously used. It arouses positive feelings among its visitors and is assessed by many people as a very valuable place. Here, gentrification processes seem to be even stronger than in the case of Grzybowski Square. The park produced as the result of bottom-up urbanism has hitherto become an additional accelerator of parallel processes in social, economic and spatial dimensions. There are more urban areas in Manhattan deprived of similar social impacts and functioning comparably well as public spaces. The case study of Karanfilköy is much different in terms of its genesis. It has a far more informal character than its both counterparts. Nevertheless, this neighborhood is positively perceived by its users and reveals a high quality of urban life. It is very efficient in resisting gentrification, which in other places analyzed in the elaboration was caused or supported by the grassroot interventions undertaken by social actors. One negative aspect of the 'gecekondu' is the relative lack of provision of some basic social services. Nevertheless, this area is not worse in the context of living conditions than many spaces produced in a highly formal way.

One of the key conclusions resulting from this research is that blaming bottom-up urbanism for inspiring the process of gentrification is not always fair, although, in many cases

it is also unable to prevent it. It seems that sometimes such way of the social production of space is not egalitarian and turns out to hindering social inclusion. Therefore, the main conclusion for the Polish urban policy is that the formalization of spatial production that emphasizes the meaning of social participation does not necessarily bring benefits to all of the users of urban areas. It very often distorts its original idea and acts only on behalf of the most-privileged groups.

In some cases, bottom-up urbanism evokes the so-called nightmare of participation, a phenomenon described by Markus Miessen. From the point of view of Polish urban policy it means that such solutions tend to fail. Such phenomena definitely require formal activities combined with the political will of the most influential actors in the process of the social production of space. It questions the accuracy of contemporary urban policy in Poland, based on activation of local communities and the implementation of advanced participatory forms. Furthermore, sham meritocratic and evidence-oriented bottom-up urbanism is not free from ideological involvement with its constraints. It seems that in spite of democratic character and flexibility that are the main advantages of such approach, it is not possible to apply it into every possible urban context as a universally effective mechanism of the social production of space.

Bottom-up urbanism is not always more responsive than rigid programs of top-down urban policy. The effects are different in relation to the various types of individual stakeholders with antagonistic interests. Such type of urbanism affects the local real estate market, although its direct impact is definitely stronger on commercial premises than the housing market. Measuring the effects of such method of social production of space seems to be possible, too, even if the assessment of participatory mechanisms related to the Polish urban policy has not, led to unequivocal conclusions. Despite some doubts regarding the concept of bottom-up urbanism and its effectiveness, it seems that some of its aspects are

interesting from the point of view of revitalization policy. The latter is nowadays an intensively developed instrument of contemporary Polish urban policy. It seems that such a 'grassroot' revitalization together with bottom-up urbanism can be far more useful than the traditional top-down urban renewal approach, which has dominated the Polish urban policy so far.

The considerations contained in the dissertation show a growing importance of urban policy as a strategic public policy for reaching the sustainable development goals. The multidimensional valorization of socially produced space seems to be a useful analytical tool for the purposes of this policy.