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## The ideological effects of urban rehabilitation

### 1. Introduction – the city as an ideological statement

One of the more significant hypotheses of Marxist theoretical practise is the belief that solutions to social conflicts demand deliberation at their source. Thus we will have difficulty in explaining the thesis about urban transformation being conditioned by the nature of capitalist production and the ideological nature of urban rehabilitation without referring to the works of two French Marxists, whose theoretical approaches are nevertheless originally very different, but in conjunction still enable productive debate about contemporary social contradictions in cities. (Merrifield 2002) In his work Lefebvre directly linked day-to-day experiencing of city with capitalist production. He understood the city not only as a physical manifestation of social contradictions but also an expression of societal physical contradictions, as an expression of conflicts for space between various groups in the city. Because of interests of economic and political elites urban space has become a subject of colonisation, privatisation, commodifying, occupation, and thus also theft of symbolic representation of social power relations. According to Lefebvre production of urban space has a clear ideological role besides its economic role and cannot be considered outside capitalist social organisation. (Lefebvre 1991, 2003)

Furthermore, the central issues of Althusser's work are how capitalist society reproduces extant production relations and, which societal structures play the pertaining main role. Although translations of Althusser's work dealing with urbanism and urban sociology often recede into structural determinism <sup>[1]</sup>, his conceptual apparatus nevertheless offers suitable instruments for dealing with the city as an ideological text, as well as for evaluation of its ideological effects. Althusser understood ideology as a system of ideas and a representation of imaginary relations between the individual and real conditions for one's existence. (Althusser 1980) If we want to deal with the city as an ideological statement, we hypothesise that the latter interpellates and addresses the individual to achieve one's recognition and constitution as the subject of such an address. Therefore in the case of ideological activation by the city, one can self-recognise as its subject. Of course the city doesn't interpellate haphazardly, so we prefer to speak about ideological representations of the city in various discourse practices and ideological effects of particular places or buildings in the city that in the semiotic sense become legible as bearers of ideological messages. To discover these contradictions that hide behind dominant representations of city – or to really understand the nature of social conflicts in the neighbourhood Pobloneu in Barcelona, the subject of our further discourse – we have to determine, what are those practises and institutions that represent the place of production of »consensus«, which is the dominant method of legitimising interests voiced by dominant societal groups. All hegemonistic ideological practises try to relate to addressed individuals their selected representation of reality, which supports only sin-

gle interests, but is represented as the virtually only one. In the conclusion we will return to Ljubljana and show, how, similarly to Pobloneu, even in the case of Kolizej, such representations of city were exploited for enforcing and legitimising very private interests.

However, at this point the orthodox Marxist interpretation of city has to be complemented and at least two more points have to be elaborated, which are needed for our explanation of important findings: relations and conflicts in contemporary cities are not anymore a reflection of class-based, meaning social-economic relations, but the nature of antagonisms in cities is increasingly changing, which is ethnic, religious and cultural. The players perpetuating changes in dominant societal relations are new external institutional civil-social movements and local communities and not former institutionalised class-based movements and political parties. (Castells 1983) The Barcelona experience shows with certain precision that marginalised civil-social actors in conditions of social inequality often subvert and repeatedly determine contents, forms and significances of hegemonistic social discourses. Even for this reason local mutinies in capitalist cities are becoming increasingly more culturalised and aestheticised. (Bird 1993; Križnik 2005) The city is therefore not only the central place of social conflicts, but can also be the place of resolution and the place of future political changes and production of life alternatives.

### 2. Global pressures on the city

Before we look into the transformation of the Pobloneu neighbourhood, we surely have to describe the wider structural conditions affecting development and day-to-day experience of the city. Above all this implies consequences of globalisation on Barcelona's economy, society and environment. The purpose of this article is not give in-depth descriptions of global effects on Barcelona, which have already been analysed in detail in various researches (Balibrea 2001; Marshall 2004; Borja in Muxi 2004), we will limit our discourse to those globalisation effects that have directly marked living conditions in the Pobloneu neighbourhood.

Spain became part of the common European market in 1986, and Barcelona followed suit. An important aspect of the time was that before entering the common European market, Spain had one of the fastest growing economies in Europe, which of course had direct implications on economic and spatial development of cities in Spain. The intensity of Spanish and Catalan economic growth can be seen from a superficial illustration of changes in GDP: in 1980 the GDP of Catalonia was 2.909 EUR, 10.190 EUR in 1991 and 20.444 EUR in 2002. Furthermore the GDP of Barcelona is still almost 20 % higher than Catalonia. Barcelona however very quickly became aware of its global potentials and comparative advantages. Supported with wide consensus from numerous institutional, private and civil-societal actors concerning future development of the city, the Municipal Council of Barcelona (Ajuntament de Barcelona) embarked on an ambitious strategic action plan Pla Estratègic Barcelona 2000, the most remarkable manifestation of which was organisation of the Olympic Games in 1992. In fact this effort strengthened the international image and distinctness of the city, while internally unifying the city's population and promoting the city government and its mayor Maragall. For our further discourse there is another important fact, i.e. the plan established a common development

basis between all the city's institutions, which was needed for negotiation with the central Spanish government and major private investors. (Borja in Castells 1997) The first action plan from 1994 was followed by a second one, in which priority strategic tasks were stated, such as integration of the city's economy into the global environment, with its transformation giving advantage to the new economy and progressive services, as well as even more intensive international promotion of the city. The latter's successes can clearly be seen from various comparative indexes.<sup>[2]</sup> In 2004 Catalonia was runner-up to the wider area of London with 82 direct investment projects, meaning the second most attractive business environments in Europe. Simultaneously 29 % of all corporations participating in the survey already had their offices in Barcelona, meaning the third most desired location after London and Paris. Another significant indicator is that for six years in a row, Barcelona was chosen as the European city with best living conditions. (Ernest & Young 2004)

The next important step in strengthening Barcelona as a globally competitive environment was the transformation of its urban economy from industrial into post-industrial. The question is, whether such successful transformation was a consequence of domestic government measures or external influences, has no bearing for this article. What counts is the incredible efficiency and comprehensiveness of Barcelona's economic transformation. As late as 1977 the tertiary economic sector employed 42 % of all employees in the region, while in 1996 the share grew to 60.4 %. Growth of services in the region between 1991 and 1999 was 19 % in the city and 28 % in the Barcelona metropolitan region. Recent data shows that in 2002 the service sector in Barcelona already tied 80.7 % of all jobs. (Ajuntament de Barcelona, Departament d'Estadística, 2002) Such economic transformation of course has physical consequences. For example we can see that in 1998 service activities occupied more than half of all urban surfaces intended for economic activities, meaning 20 % more than in 1993. Consumption of space for services that period was on average 3.5 times higher than for other production activities. (Table 1) Thus the policy of the Municipal Council becomes clear: above all in the wider city centre of Barcelona they wanted to concentrate those economic activities, which need least surfaces of land to produce highest profits and thus higher income from taxes and revenues.

**Table 1:** Consumption of spaces for production activities in Barcelona

|          | 1993 (m <sup>2</sup> ) | %     | 1998 (m <sup>2</sup> ) | %     | Growth |
|----------|------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|--------|
| Industry | 5.000.821              | 23,75 | 4.166.545              | 18,70 | -17 %  |
| Commerce | 5.913.596              | 28,09 | 6.063.183              | 27,21 | 3 %    |
| Services | 9.473.953              | 45,00 | 11.413.211             | 51,22 | 20 %   |
| Other    | 666.840                | 3,17  | 641.949                | 2,88  | -4 %   |
| Total    | 21.055.210             |       | 22.284.888             |       | 6 %    |

Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona, Gabinet Tecnic de Programation (2000)

### 2.1 Districte d'Activitas 22@BCN

The project Districte d'Activitas 22@BCN (in continuation 22@) is one of the most ambitious long-term development projects in the Barcelona metropolitan region, its goal being the before mentioned spatial and functional concentra-

tion of the most successful and fastest growing production sectors, services, logistics and certain education activities in the wider city centre, or to be more precise, in the Poblenou neighbourhood.<sup>[3]</sup> (Figure 1) 22@ therefore represents one of those municipal projects, which in the strategic sense ensure Barcelona will keep up with leading World cities in the fields of technology and service activities, while in the functional, design and symbolic meaning provide the city with an »area of new centrality.«<sup>[4]</sup> (Figure 2) Besides creating conditions for faster economic development in the city, one of the more important goals 22@ is also integration of new production activities with housing and open public spaces and parks, thus providing a »multi-functional 21<sup>st</sup> century neighbourhood.«

From the planner's point of view, selection of the Poblenou area as the setting for such ambitious and long-term urban transformation seems a sensible decision. Besides beneficial transport position, low density built-up cover and adaptability of extant built structures, the key advantage of the neighbourhood is quantity of vacant building land, which became available after the obsolescence or removal of old industries from the neighbourhood during the mid-eighties of the last century. Estimates show that almost 2,4 million square meters of space can be produced, meaning 32 % of the total surface of 7,4 million square meters needed in Barcelona, if the city wants to successfully continue its competition with European rivals. (Ajuntament de Barcelona, Urban Planning Department, 2000) Garcíá-Bragado Acín, the head of the planning office at the time, presented 22@ as the »last possible large transformation in Barcelona«, which should ensure that the city would become the leading knowledge-based community in the international arena. (Garcíá-Bragado Acín 2001)

### 3. Hegemonistic representations of city

Intensive economic growth in the city spurred on by services in the late 90s pushed investors and the municipal authority to sharply increase pressures on the Poblenou area. Thus political significance of the 22@ project increased, which is nevertheless, seen from the wider perspective, a relatively successful merging of strategic, urbanistic, architectural planning and implementation of public-private partnerships, the answer to global pressures and rapid economic development of the city. At this point we are however more interested in social implications of long-term and fundamental urban transformations, as seen in the case of 22@, and above all with the linked process of social construction of the term »problematic«.

We have shown that the 22@ project should primarily be understood as a strategically and economically initiated undertaking, whereby, at least in the short term, the largest profits would be made by private investors, corporations and the city of Barcelona, which is the largest landowner in Poblenou. The questions, which are the real groups whose interests are hidden behind the term »interests of the city of Barcelona«, will temporarily remain unanswered. Nevertheless the fact stands that during formation of the 22@ project the Municipal Council rarely grounded the project in mentioned global pressures and economic rationale. On the contrary, the project was consistently legitimised by expressing the Poblenou neighbourhood as »problematic«. The public and media were systematically bombarded with »problematic« images of the extant condition in the neigh-

bourhood; it was seen as a place of dilapidated and abandoned buildings, poorly managed public spaces, poverty, delinquency and crime. The selection of themes, which probably wasn't coincidental, helped create a stigmatised image of Poblenou. If we review the results of public opinion polls done in Barcelona, amongst the most frequently given answers to the question, which problem in the city is most worrying, the before stated issues come clearly to the forefront. (Table 2) This constructed »problematic« image of the Poblenou neighbourhood amongst the general public of Barcelona called for outright changes and necessary rehabilitation. In the next phase the Municipal Council did in fact present the 22@ project as a »possible« solution for the neighbourhood while promoting numerous advantages and benefits, which the proposed transformation should bring to the local population. »In Poblenou, a new city is growing!« »we are the technologically most advanced neighbourhood in the city!« »Oh! @h! New neighbourhood 22@, come and be surprised!« were just some of the applied slogans used to communicate the carefully planned new neighbourhood to the populations of Barcelona and Poblenou. (Figure 3) The Barcelona Municipal Council's marketing activity <sup>[5]</sup> therefore hypothesised and represented the future neighbourhood transformation as a *fait accompli* and beforehand constructed the desired image of Poblenou in the population's collective memory. Furthermore we have to point out the exceptionally aesthetised nature of such discourse promotion practice, which in the case of 22@, besides mass printed and electronic media, also involved (and still do) numerous street-based advertising actions and exhibitions with public presentation of the project. (Figure 4)

**Table 2:** What causes you most grief in Barcelona today?  
(n = 800, >3%)

| March 2004                                    | %    |
|---|------|
| Diminished security, crime                    | 19,3 |
| Traffic                                       | 14,9 |
| Lack of housing                               | 13,8 |
| (Poorly) maintained streets and public places | 8,5  |
| Immigration                                   | 6,6  |
| Working conditions, unemployment              | 4,4  |
| Public transport                              | 3,1  |

Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona, Departament Estudis i Avaluació, Baròmetre Trimestral

Representations of city as »problematic« or »rehabilitated« neighbourhoods have a clear ideological background and try to directly legitimise pending social power relations. The hegemonistic and ideological nature of representations of »successful« rehabilitation of the Poblenou neighbourhood, is proven also in attempts at experimental use of selected urban representations, which are bearers of production of social »consensus« and regimenting the neighbourhood's or city's population. Success in such endeavours on one hand significantly depends on the individual's prior relationship to the rehabilitated urban space and material or symbolic conditions, through which one experienced the city's transformation. On the other hand, one was affected by how convincing the described discourse practices were, which allocate new meanings and significances to changes in the city. In the case of Poblenou the dominant discourses generally directly supported the Municipal Council's policies and the project 22@ itself. Balibrea thus warns that social consensus, which is a

consequence of such hegemonistic policies that isn't based on wider involvement of various social actors in the city, finally leads to even greater social polarisation, best proved by the latest conflicts in Poblenou. (Balibrea 2001)

Unfortunately there is not enough scope in this article to give detailed analysis of the rift between goals presented to the local publics and promised deliverables from the 22@ project, its actual implementation, perception of the latter and ensuing response by the local inhabitants. We can state that the apparently double-faced policy practised by the Municipal Council, its disrespectful attitude to local history and identity, aggressive and single-faceted marketing actions and, above all, absence of engaged social policy, which would cater to massive changes in the neighbourhood, were all understood by a major part of the local population as an expression of conscious policy that services corporative interests and ignores local ones. (Associació de Veïns i Veïnes del Poblenou 2003) The blossoming alienation of the city as a communal political institution triggered various forms of extra-institutional community organisation, local cultural emancipation and mutiny. Moreover, the inability of the Barcelona Municipal Council to face day-to-day perception of own policies amongst the local population is, together with the processes of seizing the local and social, as well as spatial fragmentation, the main reason for the present social conflict in the Poblenou neighbourhood. (Križnik 2005) The spatial consequences of such policies are presently expressed as structural domination of spaces of flows above those of places and in the loss of »democratic character of heterogeneous localities, at the cost of standardised instrumental spatiality«. (Hočevar 2000)

## 4. Back to Ljubljana

In conclusion we can consider, what can be learned from the Barcelona example for domestic purposes. Rather clearly, urban policy in Ljubljana is becoming an instrument of private capital, quite similarly to the Poblenou example. If not before, surely during the events around Kolizej. We can nevertheless clearly state that without private capital hardly any long-term urban rehabilitation could be considered today. Ljubljana is therefore not at all different from other European cities. Comparisons between Kolizej and the 22@ in Barcelona show another similarity. Without delving into details of the strategy employed by the private developer in Ljubljana to legitimise his interests <sup>[6]</sup>, the screenplay used to persuade the publics both places about necessity for urban rehabilitation was quite similar. When presenting the new proposal, even in Ljubljana attempts were made to stigmatise the old Kolizej, which apparently inexcusably occupies »one of the best sites« in the city centre, where people are still semi-legally living in »impossible living conditions, without bathrooms and toilets.« The old Kolizej had become »dangerous« for the city. The project for the new Kolizej therefore obviously emerged not only as a solution for its present residents, who will »in cooperation with the investor solve their housing problem«, but also as a long-awaited relief for Ljubljana and generally its inhabitants. The new project thus became »a new generator of development in the city centre« and nothing less than »the new cultural heart of Ljubljana!«

Our intent is not evaluation of the project for the new Kolizej. Quite the contrary, what we want to show is that for the future development of Ljubljana the significant circumstance will be, whether the city's politics will succeed in imple-

menting its development advantages, both the model of competitive city, which recognises the market as the only motor of urban transformation, but also advantages of an urban model devised with local participation and wide public consensus. In other words – Ljubljana will be recognised by her inhabitants as theirs only if the municipal authority successfully and dedicatedly enforces public interest. In the case of the Poblenou neighbourhood rehabilitation we saw, that such interest is truly public only in as much various and varied interests vested by civil society and local communities are successfully represented. In the opposite case achieving social consensus, which is a result of hegemonistic municipal or corporative policies and unprepared local authority for open discussion, can lead only into new social divisions and conflicts.

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**Notes**

- [1] In fact, early works by Castells (Castells, M. (1977) *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*. Edward Arnold, London; Castells, M. (1978) *City, Class and Power*. MacMillan, London) represent examples of practical application of Althusser's structuralism in the field of urban sociology. Castells later (Castells 1983), following Weber's understanding of city, declined from dogmatic Marxism and described the process of urban transformation from the aspect of dominant role of actors above structure and subjectivism over objectivism.
- [2] Refer to European Investment Monitor (Ernest & Young) or European Cities Monitor (Cushman Wakefield Healy & Baker).
- [3] Poblenou (literally new village) is an urban area in Eastern Barcelona lying between the Ciutadella Park, Seacoast and famous avenue Diagonal. Intensive development in this area was first experienced at the end of the 19th century and again in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, when most of Catalonia's textile and later machine industry concentrated there. The name »Catalan Manchester« is therefore not surprising. Poblenou is surely a part of Cerda's urban expansions; however the famous grid transformed most drastically here because of numerous property speculations linked to its production nature. Similarly the neighbourhood's specific social development, closely tied to the working class culture, still manifests itself today as a distinct local culture of Poblenou, which, together with the mentioned physical specifics, forms a distinct identity within Barcelona.
- [4] Josep Antoni Acebillo, town planner, during a lecture at the IaaC institute in Barcelona June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004). Amongst »areas of new centrality« Acebillo included the multi-modal terminal Sagrera, new Barcelona fairgrounds and the areas Forum of culture and Diagonal Mar.
- [5] The scope of marketing activities by the Municipal Council is best expressed by the figure of 24.539 EUR, spent daily for public relations and city marketing. (Catalonia Today, 15. 6. 2004)
- [6] Sufficient illustrations are provided by the commercial advertisement: *Kolizej, new cultural heart of Ljubljana*, published by its promoter Kolizej d.o.o. in November 2004.

**Illustrations:**

**Figure 1:** *The urban district Sant Martí in Barcelona. The area covered by the project Districte d'Activitas 22@BCN is marked black on the larger image (source: author)*

**Figure 2:** *Areas of »new centrality«. Forefront: the Agbar tower; middle: 22@ area; back: Diagonal-Mar with Forum 2004. (Source: The 22@ Project, Ajuntament de Barcelona, 22@ BCN, S.A.)*

**Figure 3:** *»Oh! @h! New neighbourhood 22@. And be surprised!« Poster issued by the Barcelona Municipal Council for the promotion exhibition 22@BCN (Source: Barcelona Comunica, Ajuntament de Barcelona)*

**Figure 4:** *»More than 100.000 jobs, 4.000 subsidised apartments, 75.000 m<sup>2</sup> of green surfaces. 22@BCN.« TV advertisement by the Barcelona Municipal Council and Barcelona Activa. (Source: Barcelona Comunica, Ajuntament de Barcelona)*

*For sources and literature turn to page 35.*