Sustainable diversity and public space in the city of Bratislava, Slovakia

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to study a specific indicator relevant to sustainable diversity in post-socialist Bratislava – urban public space and its transformation – from a social anthropological perspective. A comparative approach was used to examine important historic periods of the 20th and 21st centuries in order to examine the (dis)continuous development of a post-socialist city. The analysis is built on qualitative data collected from city council documents, local newspapers, reports of governmental and non-governmental organisations over the previous ten years, and ethnographic research based on participant observation and interviews over a period of four years. The results show that urban public space in the socialist and post-socialist periods differed significantly by its *closeness* and *openness*. After cities were given the power of decision-making in public administration reform, they introduced new urban strategies and policies. One of key elements of these policies in Bratislava was to invest in public spaces in the historic city centre with the aim of revitalising urban life, integrating diverse urban populations, reviving the residential function of the centre and attracting foreign investors and tourists. Despite the attempts of local government to create public spaces of integration for all, growing commercialisation in the historic centre makes it inaccessible for many people.

KEYWORDS: sustainability, diversity, public space, Bratislava

Introduction

Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, like other cities in central and eastern Europe, has been going through a rapid and complex transformation since 1989. Previously, a typical grey socialist city with grey urban life and grey people, it has changed in recent years into a vivid and colourful European capital with a strong and specific urban identity of the *Little Big City*, as tourism slogans call it. One of the new and most obvious features in the city is diversity: diversity of people, diversity of lifestyles, diversity of public and private activities, diversity of commodities, advertisements, shops, goods, restaurants, food, ways of living and housing: none of which existed under the conditions of the state socialism.

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Dealing with human diversity and valuing it has been the central dilemma of our age (Wood & Landry 2008). With increasing migration, countries and especially their cities are becoming more heterogeneous than ever. The challenge is to manage diversity in a way that it can be used as an engine for the societal growth and prosperity instead of being a source of conflict and violence. The concept of sustainable diversity has been used in urban planning in many urban communities (e.g., Toronto, Montreal, Miami, Barcelona, Geneva or Rotterdam; see Polese & Stren 2000), but it is rather unknown in Slovakia. The country has been building its own history as an independent state only since 1993 after the split of Czechoslovakia. During the socialist period, pluralism, heterogeneity or diversity were considered a threat to the totalitarian regime by Communist leaders. The democratisation of Slovak society, the marketisation and privatisation of economy, the formation of a new independent state and joining the European Union caused significant changes in people's lives and identities.

This paper compares the socialist and post-socialist developments in the city of Bratislava with the main focus on the transformation of public spaces and their relation to sustainable diversity. We suggest that public spaces, if they are managed properly, are open bridges that may bring people from diverse groups of people together; support their interaction, communication, and the sense of belonging and pride; help creating shared meanings of spaces; promote mutual understanding and build trust between groups. The aspect of integration and openness is one of the keys to sustainable diversity in the urban environment. The Bratislava case study is built mostly on qualitative data collected from city council documents, local and national newspapers, reports of governmental and non-governmental organisations published over the last ten years, and ethnographic research based on participant observation, multiple visits to central public spaces, and interviews conducted with city dwellers and leaders in the period of 2004–2008.

Sustainable diversity and public space in the urban setting[1]

Cities are where diversity is born, lives and flourishes. Although diversity in the city is often referred primarily to different ethnic or migrant groups, we understand it in a broader meaning that in addition to ethnicity includes categories such as religion, language, gender, age, social background, class, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, lifestyle etc. According to Stevenson (2003: 41), cities are places where difference is not only created, but also most likely to be tolerated. The management of diversity in its broad sense is one of the crucial tasks of contemporary cities. Diversity can be seen either as an enriching possession, an asset and an engine of the sustainable development of the city, or as a liability and a source of potential tension and conflict. To use the power of diversity in a positive manner for the good of the community, it is important to understand it and work on it. Even if there is no conflict between groups living in the city, management of diversity is necessary in order to make groups living, communicating and working together

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instead of living, communicating and working next to each other. As abundant literature suggests (Welz 2003; Landry 2006; Lownsbroughh & Beunderman 2007; Florida 2008), the approach based on the active interplay of different groups can stimulate the exchange of new ideas and thus, encourage creativity and innovation, promote mutual interactions and lead to the improvement of the quality of life in the community and the city.

The key to understanding and managing diversity is the strategy for urban social sustainability. Polese and Stren define social sustainability as the 'development (and/ or growth) that is compatible with the harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conductive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population' (Polese & Stren 2000: 15–16). To achieve social sustainability in cities, Polese and Stren identify six political strategies that are crucial for the management of social and cultural diversity in the city:

1. *governance* (the involvement of various state bodies as well as civil society in decision-making processes);
2. *social and cultural policy* (support of institutions working with diverse ethnic, religious, cultural, regional and other groups, and of cultural and educational events that play an important role in the formation of urban identity, being a source of pride and attraction);
3. *social infrastructure and public services* (access to all groups of inhabitants including marginalised and disadvantaged groups, immigrants or people on the margins of society);
4. *urban real estate and housing* (elimination of spatial segregation and social polarisation, and integration of immigrant groups into an urban lifestyle);
5. inclusive *city public transportation* (support of access of various groups of city dwellers to employment and housing and facilitation of geographic mobility of all groups of inhabitants, including the poor or disabled);
6. *employment rate, economic revitalisation and building of public spaces for integration* (Polese & Stren 2000:16–34).

This paper examines one selected indicator of sustainability in the city of Bratislava that has shown significant changes in the last decade: public space and its role in the processes of integration of diverse populations. The study focuses on public spaces in the historic city centre and their revitalisation and transition to places of integration as well as on the transformation of public spaces on the waterfront of the Danube River. As Polese and Stren remind us, the design of public spaces, and land and housing management are considered to be a significant part of sustainable development strategies in every city. Successful policies emphasise the importance of the integration of all sections of the community into city life: the elimination of residential segregation, socio-spatial differentiation and ghettoisation; and the creation of public spaces of integration and inclusion (Polese & Stren 2000).

According to Wood and Landry, 'public space has been accorded a formal status within the city since the Greek agora and Roman forum, and our modern city spaces are influenced particularly by the great piazzas of Italian renaissance cities such as the Campo

in Sienna' (Wood & Landry 2008: 172). They assert that public places are not only formal areas of democratic gathering created by city leaders and their architects, but it is the people, urban inhabitants themselves, who create public spaces, often unexpectedly: a street corner, a piece of grass or riverside etc.

Urban public spaces have been discussed in numerous academic as well as political debates. We are witnessing a period of the rebirth of localism as a response to global forces. This trend, supported both by local governments and by civil society, leads to the renewal of urban public spaces and the creation of their new meanings, the reconstruction of city squares and streets, return to the symbols of history (often selected symbols of selected history), the revitalisation of urban life, the re-establishment of local festivals; and the formation and reformation of urban identities based on collective memory (De la Pradelle 1996; Hebbert 2005; Sorensen 2009).

However, growing diversity in cities leads to increasing polarisation and division of the urban space into 'ghettos of homogeneity'. Stevenson shows that urban inhabitants, especially members of the middle and upper classes, increasingly actively seek to avoid contact with difference, to elaborate strategies to control their environments and to avoid unexpected encounters with the 'other', where they can keep social control in their 'own' territory (Stevenson 2003). Similarly, Low sees the spread of gated communities as a sign of enclosure and control of space (Low 2003). As the 2007 report for the Commission for Racial Equality in the UK states, the search for relatively homogeneous micro-communities and the model of gated communities is becoming very popular in the UK, especially amongst the higher social classes, and choosing neighbours is now as important as choosing a place to live (Lownsbrough & Beunderman 2007: 6, based on Atkinson & Flint 2004). This polarisation also emerges in city centres and public spaces, which have until recently served various social groups of city dwellers, but from which the members of lower and marginalised classes are now excluded. Many public spaces (e.g., parks, gardens, playgrounds etc.) are privatised and regulated in response to middle-class unease about the presence of 'diversity' (Stevenson 2003: 45). Members of ethnic groups with lower socio-economic status, the homeless and beggars, people that were for different reasons pushed to the margins of society and that have been until recently tolerated by the urban society, are dislocated from public spaces. In contrast to the recent past, the contemporary city is no more a place where diversity is celebrated, but it is a place of watchfulness and suspicion, a place where mingling with strangers is to be avoided (Stevenson 2003: 47).

Bratislava: a research locus

Bratislava, with almost half a million inhabitants, is the biggest city in Slovakia. Situated on the banks of the Danube on the border with Austria and Hungary, it used to have the reputation of a grey and dowdy neighbour of Vienna. Historically, Pressburg, Pozsony or Presporok (old names of Bratislava in German, Hungarian and Slovak, respectively) was one of the most significant cities of the Hungarian Kingdom, and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire; it was the royal city of Hungarian monarchs, and the centre of trades, arts and education. For centuries, it was a multiethnic and multilingual city: a mixing pot of

various ethnic groups and nations living and talking together in Slovak, German, Hungarian, Yiddish and the 'Pressburgian Mishmash' (a mixture of all these languages). An old joke emphasises the multicultural character of the city:

> In the morning when people went to the market, the city was called Presporok, because it was the Slovak language which was dominant at the markets. At lunch it was called Pozsony; that is when Hungarian-speaking civil servants went for lunch. And in the evening when the German-speaking theatre- and opera-lovers filled the city centre, it was Pressburg.

Several political changes in the 20th century (with historic milestones almost every twenty years – 1918, 1938, 1948, 1968, and 1989) had a major impact on the ethnic and social composition of the urban population. Until 1948, in each political regime a different ethnic group was in power and a different ethnic composition existed. This changed after the Second World War and after the Communist coup in 1948. The city lost most of its Jewish population in the Holocaust, and the majority of German and Hungarian inhabitants were deported (or moved) after the liberation. The historically multicultural character of Bratislava was rapidly disappearing.

Year	Slovaks	Hungarians	Germans	Other incl. Czechs	
1910	14.9%	40.5%	41.9%	2.7%	
1930	29.8%	16.2%	28.1%	25.9%	
1950	90.2%	3.5%	0.6%	5.7%	
1970	91.5%	3.5%	0.4%	4.6%	
Year	**Slovaks**	**Hungarians**	**Germans**	**Czechs**	**Other**
1991	90.8%	4.9%	0.3%	2.5%	1.6%
2001	91.3%	3.8%	0.3%	2%	2.7%

Based on official Census Statistics

Table 1: Bratislava – Population by nationality[2]

During the period of state socialism (1948–1989), Bratislava (and the country as a whole) experienced no immigration and very limited activities of existing historic minorities (mainly the Hungarians, the Ukrainians/ the Ruthenians, and the Roma). The political regime oppressed all bottom-up initiatives with different ideologies or values, including most civic, ethnic and religious movements, declaring them hostile and anti-socialist. The Constitution formally declared the equality of all citizens including members of minorities, but the state officially recognised and supported only selected minorities, mainly Hungarians, Ukrainians and representatives of other countries of the Communist

[2] Jews comprised a significant part of the Bratislava population, but it was only in the 1930 census when they were asked about their Jewish ethnicity. In 1930, 12% of the inhabitants in Bratislava claimed Jewish the religion and 3.8% claimed Jewish ethnicity.

Bloc. The first post-socialist census (1991) in Bratislava showed 90.88% of the inhabitants were Slovaks, 4.59% Hungarians, 2.59% Czechs, and 0.29% Germans. Other minorities constituted 1.65% of the population (Roma, Polish, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Russians, Romanians and others).

The democratisation of society with the strengthening role of civil movements as well as the establishment of the new independent state (1993) had a strong impact on the rebirth of ethnic and religious minorities' identity. In addition, the processes of post-socialist political and economic transformation were accompanied by narratives on *Europeanisation* and *Westernisation* (often described by media as the return to Europe), and the political process of the enlargement of the European Union. These processes provoked the reconstruction of post-socialist identities, often very controversial and ranging from nationalistic pro-Slovak identities built on the memories of the First Slovak Republic (the Nazi-puppet Slovak State in 1939–1945) to European and cosmopolitan identities often formed as an opposition against the split of Czechoslovakia in 1992 and against aggressive Slovak nationalism. Historic minorities, formally renewed and reformed after 1989 and 1992 (particularly the Germans, the Jews and the Roma), celebrated revival and return to their identities and roots. All existing minorities openly declared their demands and rights, and intensified their activities.

With the increasing political and economic stability of Slovakia in the late 1990s, new immigration started to increase as a new phenomenon in the country. Bratislava, similarly to other global or globalising European cities, has become the destination and the gateway for most immigrants coming to Slovakia. According to data from the Office of Border and Alien Police, the number of registered foreigners legally living, working or studying in Slovakia has been growing every year since 2004, when Slovakia joined the European Union (from 22,108 foreigners in 2004 to 52,706 in 2008). Statistical data on foreigners are available only at the national level. Various indirect indicators from Bratislava (such as a high number of registered civic associations of foreigners (159), several international schools, the presence of a high number of international companies, many work opportunities, the highest GDP in the country, surveys among foreigners etc.) indicate that the majority of foreigners choose Bratislava as their place to live.

Socialist Bratislava and its public space

The socio-spatial development of post-socialist cities had its specific features. As Enyedi notes, the principles of socialist urban planning – egalitarianism and planned urbanisation – were identical in all countries of the East Bloc (Enyedi 1996). The objective of these principles was to equalise living conditions for all by producing large state housing complexes in suburbs and moving together families of different social groups and classes in order to diminish class differences. Decision-making about urban planning was in the hands of central state bodies. Cities lost their self-governing power and independence, and could not make any decisions about their growth. Discontinuity in the urban development of Slovak cities was caused by planned industrialisation and extensive urbanisation, connected with *social engineering* after 1948. Socialist urbanisation intended to equalise the city and the village, rural and urban way of life. As a result of these policies, immigrant

rural populations from all over Slovakia started to prevail over the original urban population in Bratislava and other cities. Rural newcomers, following the motto *Every Bratislavan–a bricklayer,* were expected to build positive identity with the city.

> What is it that we, the inhabitants of Bratislava, are unable to build a real and active love relationship with this city? You have to realise that all of us newcomers, who may have lived here for about ten years, create the core of the new Bratislavans. There is only a minority of old locals living here, and therefore, it is us who now represent the healthy, Slovak blood of our city (Večerník 1957: 2).

The *proletarisation* and *ruralisation* of Bratislava, the diffusion of the rural into the urban way of life, the low identification of rural immigrants with the city, and a gradual disappearance of traditional urban lifestyle that was very dynamic during the inter-war democratic period were the consequences of this development.

Political change in 1948 had a significant impact on Bratislava's socio-spatial structure and architecture. After the Second World War, Bratislava was connected with Vienna by a train line, but from 1948 onward, the Iron Curtain physically divided some parts of the city situated on the border between the two worlds – East and West, socialist Czechoslovakia and capitalist Austria.

Spatial development followed political and ideological needs. Nationalisation of private property went along with projects based on the demolition of old urban neighbourhoods. In Bratislava, the majority of historic localities in the castle area, as well as several parts of the city centre and its related quarters were completely destroyed in the name of the socialist planning. The most visible example of this ideologically-based approach was the demolition of the whole Jewish quarter with its border areas at the Danube River (in the 1950s & 1960s) and their replacement with a motorway and a bridge connecting the Old Town with the new Petržalka housing complex on the other side of the river. The demolition of this historic part was described as highly necessary due to the bad condition of old buildings that were unsuitable for the modern housing of a socialist man. The Bratislava newsletter *Novosti Bratislavy* wrote in 1953:

> As as in other places, also in Bratislava the Capitalists left an upsetting heritage to us. This heritage has now been replaced by new modern flats for the working class people in Bratislava. And that is how the new socialist city of Bratislava is being born. It gets rid of everything old and anti-progress, and this goes hand in hand with the rebirth of a new working class man (Novosti Bratislavy 1953: 2).

The ideological invasion into the life of the city significantly influenced the development of the socio-spatial structure in the centre, originally occupied by families of the upper and middle classes. It was these classes that were seen as the main enemy of Communist ideology and the working class – the 'leading power of the socialist society'.

After the deportation of most people of German and Hungarian origins (shortly after the Second World War), ideological pressure turned against representatives of the

former bourgeoisie and intelligentsia who were considered unreliable by the new ruling Communist power. Many of them were arrested, accused in trumped-up trials or forced to move from the city to the countryside at the beginning of the 1950s in the so-called B Action.[3] Their family businesses were wiped out, their houses confiscated by the state. The empty houses were filled with Communist party cadres and functionaries – new elites of proletarian origin. In addition to the forced evacuation of potential enemies of the regime out of the city centre and its close neighbourhoods, central parts suffered from a general decline due to the lack of financial resources for the reconstruction of historic buildings. Remaining residents of old houses gradually moved into concrete blocks of flats in newly built suburbs, and empty flats in the old town were given to representatives of low social strata, mainly unskilled and uneducated people, socially dependent, many of them Roma. This development led to the social degradation of the most important urban areas. The declining number of shops, restaurants, cafes, wine-bars and cultural institutions only slightly reflected the original vitality of the city centre. The result of more than 40 years of socialist urban planning had a major impact on the socio-spatial structure of the city, its architectural design, and property rights and relations. These factors significantly influenced the development in the first periods of the transition to a market economy as well as current urban strategies.

Post-socialist Bratislava and its public space: The historic city centre

Shortly after 1989, the first and most important initiative of the City Council was a project to revitalise the historic city centre. It was the inhabitants of Bratislava themselves who demanded the renovation, both the physical reconstruction and the social and cultural revival (as numerous articles in local press demonstrate). Privatisation, restitutions and changes in property rights led to a rapid restoration of a number of buildings by new owners. The City Council presented and approved the idea of a revitalisation of the promenade, and invested in the physical reconstruction and/ or the creation of open public spaces, such as historic squares, pedestrian zones, pavements, outdoor stalls and street furniture in the city centre.

The promenade used to be the site of the most popular urban public activities. Since the 19th century, it was a common and main meeting place used every evening and on Sundays by younger and older generation; the urban custom of walking on the promenade was still alive in the 1960s. After the period of the attempt of introducing democratic changes during the *Prague Spring* in 1968,[4] a dogmatic period of communism called

[3] The B Action (1952–1953) targeted members of former bourgeoisie; factory and small/ medium business owners, and intelligentsia that received a label of unreliable citizens damaging the socialist state. Most of these people lived in the historic city centre and their houses and flats were needed for new Communist officials. Therefore, the properties of these people and their families were confiscated. They were given small flats in other parts of Slovakia (mostly in the countryside) where they had to work in factories and other low-paid jobs.

[4] 1968 in Czechoslovakia, known as the *Prague Spring*, was an unsuccessful attempt of political liberalisation, led by a Slovak political leader Alexander Dubcek, to introduce 'socialism with a human face', i.e., democratisation in Czechoslovakia. It was suppressed by the Soviet-led invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies on 21 August 1968. The country was occupied until 1991 when the last Soviet soldier left Czechoslovakia.

'normalisation' started. The promenade as a public meeting place of mainly young liberals became dangerous for the regime. Regular police patrols discouraged people from walking and talking. The promenade was officially designated as a place of illegal gathering and vanished at the beginning of the 1970s (Luther 2003).

The idea behind the project of revitalisation of the promenade was to attract city dwellers and to bring the urban way of life back to the Old Town by reviving the socio-cultural as well as the residential functions of urban spaces. Despite all attempts by the City Council and urban planners to follow this strategy, political and socio-economic global pressures during the transition to a market economy slightly changed (or challenged) their original ideas. The high costs of reconstructing historic buildings, the shortage of spaces for new embassies and consulates, and the increase of tourists from all over the world limited the new functions of the city centre, especially its residential functions. The majority of buildings have been inhabited by companies, enterprises, banks or embassies. Commercialism and tourism have been the main driving force of most business plans: expensive as well as fast-food restaurants, pubs, cafés, souvenir shops, jewellers and designer shops – famous symbols of globalisation – remind every visitor of any other big city in any other country. Only some buildings have managed to revive and preserve their original pre-socialist identity and function (e.g., Café Mayer or Antiquariat Steiner).

Urban symbolism

Urban symbolism of the historic city centre, its quarters, architecture and buildings contributes to the identity and collective memory forming of city dwellers. Hebbert shows that a shared space can be a locus of collective memory and can express group identity through architectural order, monuments and symbols, commemorative sites, street names, civic spaces, and historic conservation (Hebbert 2005: 592). The memory of each city dweller reflects memories of different physical spaces and their symbols in different periods. Previous generations' memories play an important role in the reinterpretation and redefinition of these spaces. Dramatic changes of physical structures or functions of public spaces and buildings can lead to discontinuity and loss of memory, validating certain memories and forgetting others.

During the first Czechoslovak Republic in the inter-war period, trilingual shop names, advertisements or public announcements (Slovak, German and Hungarian) were a communication norm, and a diversity of images of all private businesses was a common feature of the urban scene. After 1948, the world of private business disappeared, and all public spaces, places and buildings became showcases of communist propaganda. Heterogeneity was replaced by uniformity with political slogans and symbols of communism (red star, Soviet hammer and sickle, Soviet flag, statues and portraits of communist leaders, workers, 'heroes of socialist work' etc.). Socialist realist style influenced the image of all cities and gave them a homogeneous concrete grey face. Monumental buildings (Communist Party headquarters in each city and each region, houses of (socialist) culture, memorial and symbolic buildings connected with communist history; thematic shop windows, posters and advertisements, and identical residential exteriors and interiors, were results of

a unified mass production, a lack of retail industries and the non-existence of any original and free individual production.

The first sign of the collapse of communism and regime change was what Verdery describes as a 'parade of dead bodies', which meant that 'statues began falling from their pedestals' (Verdery 1999: 4–5). In the case of Bratislava, the most spectacular example of the destruction of a political symbol was the demolition (explosion) of the giant statue of the first 'labour president' of Czechoslovakia Klement Gottwald, followed by the destruction of the Lenin statue at Jacob Square in the early 1990s. Bratislava witnessed parades of 'dead bodies' many times in its history, but the 20th century was particularly turbulent in this sense. Each of the political regimes selected a historic figure as a political symbol to worship, and the successive regime destroyed it and replaced it with another figure. This was, for example, the case of the statue of the Empress Maria Theresa that was demolished in 1921 and then in 1938 replaced by the common statue of a lion (a symbol of Czechoslovakia) and the statue of the Slovak politician Milan Rastislav Štefánik (one of the founders of Czechoslovakia in 1918). In 1939, the lion was destroyed, followed by Štefánik's in 1954. The present statue of Štúrovci (the heroes of the National Revival in the 19th century) was erected in 1973. The latest plan (2010) is to remove it to another square and to bring the statue of Maria Theresa back to its original place. It is important to emphasise that all these statues succeeded (or were desired to succeed) each other at one single square and place.

The death of statues was followed by the change of names of streets and squares that were ideologically motivated. Many streets and squares in historic parts of the city returned to their older, mainly inter-war names. Some of them had still been alive in the collective memory, while others received new names. After the era of the destruction of old symbols (both 'dead bodies' and street names), the erection of new ones started.

With the fast transition of the society towards a market economy, global businesses and their characteristic visual symbols arrived. A McDonald's restaurant in front of the historic building of the National Opera is the most vivid example.

With the arrival of global cultural patterns and symbols, the concept of localism has been strengthened and reflected in two ways: as an expression of the specific symbols of Bratislava or an expression of national symbols of Slovakia. After 1989, a number of historic buildings, fountains and art monuments were restored to their original image as part of place-making strategies. Trends towards historicism and localism are visible in the décor of public or private building interiors (mainly in the use of historic photographs, old local maps, graphics, pictures etc.). Local identity has been symbolically supported by the erection of a statue of Schöner Naci, a famous character from the inter-war and post-war Bratislava streets, on the renewed promenade.[5] Numerous cultural events and festivals organised in public spaces of the Old Town are built on local traditions with the aim of reviving local identity, of creating new shared meanings of space, of integrating the urban population and attracting the attention of foreign tourists (Coronation Celebrations, Cultural Summer, Christmas Market, New Year's Party and others).

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[5] Schöner Naci was a favourite and well-known eccentric character in Bratislava public spaces from the 1930s to the 1960s. He was unemployed, but behaved courteously and was always dressed up as a gentleman, and greeted ladies in three languages.

Waterfront of the Danube River: A new public space

Reconstruction and revitalisation of waterfronts has become an important strategy of urban planners all over the world. This approach is described by Bianchini and Schwengel (1991) as *Americanization* (as opposed to *Europeanization*). According to them, *Americanization* means reconstruction and transformation of redundant, decaying urban sites into spectacular spaces with theme-park entertainment, markets, restaurants and leisure shopping, usually located on the waterfront (e.g., Boston's Waterfront, New York's South Street Seaport, London's Docklands or Sydney's Darling Harbour; Stevenson, 2003: 100–101). *Europeanization* focuses on urban cultural planning and cultural policy, and its main objective is local cultural development and support for local creativity as the basis for strategies to revive local economies (Stevenson 2003: 104).

The development on the waterfront of the Danube River in Bratislava is reminiscent of *Americanization* projects aiming at utilisation of attractive areas on river banks. The Danube waterfront used to be a harbour area and an unused public space until recently. The part of the harbour close to central areas of the city lost its main functions due to limited ship transportation, and offered opportunities for new property developments. As in many other parts of the world, pressures from foreign developers (often called 'land sharks') challenge the processes of redevelopment in the old city and may alter the city's image. The River Park Project with luxury apartments and a five-star hotel, or the Eurovea Project with upmarket apartments, shopping malls, Sheraton Hotel and leisure parks that should extend the historic city centre down to the banks of the Danube, are just a few examples of the new development. These areas represent urban spaces that used to be closed to the public during the socialist past, do not appear in the collective memory and play no role in the formation of the present identity of city inhabitants. According to the development projects, new neighbourhoods should become important areas of urban communication and integration; however, they seem to target only upper-class residents and are reminiscent of a gated community.

Inhabitants of Bratislava are very much attracted to the development of another historic part of the waterfront called Vydrica, which was destroyed in the 1960s. The developers have tried to enforce projects designed in the spirit of new modern architecture, but this orientation has been strongly opposed by local inhabitants, represented by civic initiatives and organisations (e.g., Obnovme Podhradie; SAHI; Society for Sustainable Development; or Bratislava) trying to advocate historicism against modernism. Civic activists are afraid that new architecture and new design in these historic waterfront neighbourhoods will not lead to the reconstruction of local identities in this public space.

Large property developments are also occurring in other parts of the city. Many new skyscrapers[6] do not respect local urban structure, topography or link themselves to local identity (e.g., Twin City, Millennium Tower, Polus Center, Green Tower, Obydick, Panorama City, Emporia Towers, Residence Tower etc.). Only a few buildings show some relation to local identity by using names that still exist in collective memory of city dwel-

[6] According to www.skyscrapercity.com, 20 skyscrapers were built since 1989 in Bratislava and almost 60 are under construction or planned.

lers: Aupark, Apollo, Slovany or Klingerka. Civic activists warn of a new architectural uniformity of glass-aluminium buildings that does not contribute to the uniqueness of the place, does not respect local symbolism and damages the local image of the place. The traditional features of urban spaces in Bratislava may slowly disappear.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the analysis of an indicator related to diversity and sustainable development in the city of Bratislava, its public space and its transformation. A comparative approach was used to look at the most important historic periods of the 20th and 21st centuries in order to explore different stages of the development of a post-socialist city. A comparison of public spaces and their functions in totalitarian and democratic societies demonstrates that openness/ closeness of public spaces is related to politics and governance of the city. State socialism with its Communist ideology led to an aggressive oppression of all democratic rights and to ideologically-driven egalitarianism and homogeneity. A dramatic decline of open urban spaces, ideological censorship and state control of every public place and activity resulted in limited or almost non-existing open street life. The social activities of city dwellers moved from public to private sphere. Any manifestation of ‘otherness’ that was not in line with Communist ideology was forbidden and punished.

The *Velvet Revolution* in Czechoslovakia in 1989 was accompanied by a general rebellion against socialist uniformity and a request for the right for diversity (especially political, ethnic and religious diversity) and the right for equality in diversity (gender equality, equal rights for people with disabilities or ethnic groups). Urban public spaces, especially city squares, became symbolic battlegrounds for the first time after more than forty years – open arenas for the free expression of people’s rights, and places of hope and belief. It did not take long, and urban public spaces ‘opened up’ to the whole diversified social structure of the city and turned into places attracting diverse groups of urban people. Political changes in society brought public administration reform, which mainly meant decentralisation at the municipal and regional levels. Cities were given the power of decision making. This resulted in the introduction of new urban strategies and policies. One of the first elements of these policies in Bratislava (the development was also similar in other Slovak cities) was investing in urban public spaces in the historic city centre with the aim of revitalising urban life, integrating the diverse urban population, eliminating polarisation, reviving the residential function in the centre and attracting foreign investors and tourists. These objectives can be considered part of the sustainable strategies of the city.

However, despite the attempts of the City Council to create and open public spaces for everyone, growing commercialisation in the historic centre makes it too expensive and inaccessible for many people. Rapid property development and pressure from foreign investors have a strong impact on decision-making at the local level.

This is a test for civil society and its power to control decisions made by local politicians. It is obvious that democracy with the rule of law and strong civil society is a precondition for the sustainable development of the city and society. Sustainability cannot be achieved ‘for now and forever’. It is a continuous process of looking for a compromise between new interests of different groups: investors, policy-makers and local civil society.

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POVZETEK

Namen prispevka je iz socialno antropološkega vidika proučiti urbani javni prostor in njegovo preoblikovanje, ki je posebni indikator, pomemben za trajnostno raznolikost v post-socialistični Bratislavi. S primerjalnim pristopom smo obravnavali pomembna zgodovinska obdobja 20. in 21. stoletja, da bi preučili (ne)prekinjen razvoj post-socialističnega mesta. Analiza temelji na kvalitativnih podatkih, zbranih iz dokumentov mestnega sveta, lokalnih časopisov, poročil vladnih in nevladnih organizacij v zadnjih desetih letih, pa tudi na etnografskih raziskavah opazovanja z udeležbo in intervjuji v obdobju štirih let. Rezultati kažejo, da se urbana javnna prostora v socialističnem in post-socialističnem obdobjih močno razlikujeta glede na svojo *bližino* in *odprtost*. Ko so mesta po reformi javne uprave dobila moč odločanja, so uvedla nove urbanistične strategije in politike. Ene izmed ključnih elementov teh politik v Bratislavi, so bile investicije v javni prostori v zgodovinskem mestnem jedru z namenom oživitve mestnega življenja, vključevanja raznoliko urbano populacijo, oživitve bivalne funkcije centra ter privabljanje tujih vlagateljev in turistov.

Kljub poskusom lokalnih in regionalnih oblasti, da bi oblikovale javne prostore, ki omogočajo vključevanje vseh, pa je naraščajoča komercializacija v zgodovinskem središču tega naredila nedostopnega za mnoge ljudi.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: trajnost, raznolikost, javni prostor, Bratislava

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