

INFLUENCES OF GENTRIFICATION ON IDENTITY SHIFT OF AN URBAN FRAGMENT - A CASE STUDY

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This paper discusses the process of gentrification, researched through a perspective of its positive and negative aspects. It underlines the importance of reasonable proportioning, sensible structuring and long-term planning of transformation of urban spaces, which contributes to an upgrade of living conditions and qualitative advancement of social consciousness and development of needs of the local inhabitants, regardless of their socio-economic profile. Despite not perceiving gentrification as an a priori negative process, influences of alterations of urban tissue carried out through radical and narrowly interpreted modifications of their character may cause undesired changes in the perception and use of the space and were analyzed as well. A case study of the gentrification of Grbavica, an urban fragment in Novi Sad, Serbia, is presented. The goal of this research was to critically valorize the over-all transformation of the aforementioned fragment, taking into account architectural, urban, social, cultural, economic and other facets.

Key words: gentrification, urban transformation, socio-economic impact, identity

INTRODUCTION

Dynamic changes in contemporary urban tissue under the controversial name of 'gentrification' have been a vexed topic among international circle of scholars for more than two decades now. However, the process started spreading its tentacles in urban society almost half a century ago.

Today, the vast term of gentrification is a subject to numerous interpretations and presents a process highly dependent on an entire spectrum of aspects, such as the spatial, social, political, economic, contextual, historic, cultural, etc. After numerous alterations along the course of years since it was initially noted, gentrification today may be defined as a process by which economically declined inner-city neighborhoods encounter a "reversal, reinvestment, and the in-migration of

a relatively well-off, middle- and upper middle-class population" (Smith, 1998, p.199) and experience a comprehensive identity change.

Formally derelict neighborhoods are "rediscovered" and either refurbished or by erecting new structures in attempt to "recapture the value of place" (Zukin, 1991, p.191), the real-estate value is increased. Rather than identifying gentrification as an "inner-city phenomenon" (Badcock, 2001, p.1559), in this paper gentrification is viewed as a long lasting process or a continuum which enables it to be comprehended in all its complexity, especially concerning those aspects referring to its immediate context in terms of space and time.

All analyzed aspects of gentrification are elaborated and critically valorized through a case study of Grbavica, a gentrified district of Novi Sad, Serbia.

GENTRIFICATION AS A PROCESS

Complexity of Perception

The term gentrification was initially coined in 1964 by Ruth Glass, a British pioneer of urban sociology in Europe, who tried to depict changes of central London neighborhoods formally inhabited by the working class. By gentrification, Glass entails a process by which local lower class residents are displaced by developers and higher class home buyers, while the area in question is rehabilitated from the spatial and economic aspects (Glass, 1964). She refers exclusively to transformation of the existing dilapidated structures in

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residential areas. Such a view is today known as 'classical gentrification' (Lees *et al.*, 2008).

Up until the mid 1980s, while trying to comprehend what was causing the process to start, as well as its consequences, the international circle of scholars was tightly sticking to Glass' original definition which, despite the effort of the media to promote the process as positive, still had mostly negative connotations. The displacement of the working class was in the limelight as well as 'gentrification', the word itself, implying class-based segregation which was not sounding too politically correct.

Nevertheless, in 1985, the discussion on this topic was spurred and the perception of the process changed. Beginning with now legendary Real Estate Board of New York advert with a catchy name: "Is Gentrification a Dirty Word?", published in *The New York Times* (New York Times, 1985), gentrification was stoutly defended, at least for the time being. In the advert mentioned above, social consequences were cleverly by-passed by emphasizing economic benefits of the neighborhood change.

For the next few years, radical resistance to the process was almost silenced and gentrified neighborhoods, scintillating with prosperity, were eagerly greeting their new residents. Shedding lurid light on positive effects that the change brings and even partially romanticizing the process with effusive propaganda, the economically driven gentrifies deflected negative aspects into the closet. However, the complexity of the process and inability to be one-sided to its results and consequences was already back then sporadically spotted: "gentrification [is] complex and multifaceted, being simultaneously a physical, economic, social and cultural process" (Hamnett, 1984, p.284). The critical discussion on gentrification intensified again in the 1990s, continuing to the present day.

Though few emotionally colored and extreme perceptions of gentrification still exist, today every segment of the process is being revalorized separately and in relation to gentrification as a whole, taking into account both negative and positive aspects, no matter whether the process is being perceived with support or opposition. The complexity of the process has been fully realized and no sensible black and white conclusion is possible.

Most of the authors emphasize negative consequences of gentrification, primarily in

relation to the local lower class residents, although a number of them agree on the fact that the process also has certain positive effects, primarily from the economic point of view. Namely, gentrification has a potential to induce revitalization and reinvestment in depressed inner-city neighborhoods (Shaw, 2008; Freeman, 2005), as well as to increase property value and reduce vacancy rates (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). While some of these views of gentrification were subjective and thus extreme, one thing that most agreed on was the need for a broader definition, what Neil Smith already recognized in 1986: "Gentrification is a highly dynamic process ... not amenable to overly restrictive definitions" (Smith, 1986, p.17).

Nature of Physical Changes

The other topic of disputes was the nature of physical changes that the neighborhoods were experiencing and whether these changes could be described as gentrification. The classical definition was referring only to renovation and restoration of older housing stock, while neighborhoods around the world were transforming their physical structure and, thus, their characters in many diverse manners. By tightly sticking to early interpretations of the process' invariables that comprise solely of renovation and upgrading of the existing residential buildings, change of urban tissue that encompasses demolition and replacement would not be considered as gentrification (Redfern, 1997), as that would mean, according to some, "stretching the term and what it set out to describe too far" (Lambert and Boddy, 2002, p.20).

On the other hand, taking the initial definition of gentrification verbatim would exclude comprehension of the fact that the process mutated over time. The narrow perception of gentrification would omit all previously considered under-populated inner-city neighborhoods with low construction density and mostly sporadically positioned single-family homes that have undergone restructuring process in the sense of erection of new town houses and high-rise apartment buildings. However, as gentrification has evolved to be understood in all its complexity, nowadays it includes demolition of existing houses and new-built structures as well (Shaw, 2008).

Being that gentrification also questions the outcomes of the transformation, from the social, cultural, economic and the aspect of

overall identity shift, and being that these neighborhoods over time accumulated similar if not the same characteristics and suffered consequences as the ones that had faced only renovation, one should not fail to advert to such neighborhoods, including the non-residential ones, as gentrified.

Beyond Just Housing

While before there was a genuine agreement that gentrification was "the residential component of urban redevelopment" (Deutsche, 1996, p.IV) and thus affecting only such central city quarters, as the process was further spreading regardless to the land use, location within a city or even character of the built environment, it became apparent that non-residential areas may also be a subject of gentrification (Ley, 1996). Gentrification evolved in more ways than one: rural gentrification, new-built gentrification, super-gentrification, and other descriptive variations of the process are increasingly being accepted (Lees *et al.*, 2008). However, for a process when housing replaces other non-residential land uses within the city centre, a term 'residentialization' was proposed (Lambert and Boddy, 2002).

Economic Aspect

When discussing gentrification, the economic aspect asserts itself as an initiator and, perhaps the most influential component of the process, and can be viewed through the models of supply and demand. From this point of view, according to some, urban centers are more and more financially gaining power due to demand rather than supply (Zukin, 1995). Then again, it was the developers, property owners, banks and real-estate agencies who paved the way for gentrification (Smith, 1986). The process today cannot be fully comprehended without analyzing both of these perspectives (Lees and Ley, 2008) and the economic aspect as a whole, as the process presents a "movement of capital rather than people" (Smith, 1987, p.165).

If gentrification were to be solely observed through the lens of influx of investments and their influence on the physical improvements of the neighborhood and increasing of the property value, it could have been considered as a solely positive urban change. Yet it is also the economic feature that triggers socially related problems in the gentrifying neighborhoods and the complexity of the process does not permit its simple evaluations.

Social Aspect

On the mention of gentrification, the first thing that comes to mind is usually displacement of the lower income residents of a neighborhood by higher income households and, thus, was frequently in the focus of public attention. Even explicit renaming of the process into 'yuppification' (Van Criekingen and Decroly, 2003, p.2452) is clearly pointing out class distinctions. Although the existence of displacement is commonly acknowledged, some argue that "measuring displacement is like measuring the invisible" (Atkinson, 2000, p.154) and that the reason why it has been so closely related to gentrification, or even considered as its synonym, is not the empirically unconfirmed high quantity of the displaced, but rather the trauma that these residents experience (Freeman, 2005).

Gentrification is often promoted to the public as a process that stimulates social mixing and diversification of neighborhood population, which creates more livable communities. On the other hand, social mixing is sometimes presented as a "social wallpaper" (Butler and Robson, 2003, p.18) that might lead to covering up of displacement, socio-spatial segregation and polarization among local inhabitants. Little analytical evidence which directly connects gentrification with greater levels of social blend at the neighborhood scale is present (Walks and Maaranen, 2008).

While social mixing is trying to be induced into transforming areas, perhaps one should not yearn to implement such a practice, but rather leave the choice of mixing open to the residents themselves (Lees, 2008). Social mix is frequently being tightly linked to the displacement process, since, if interpreted through the classical definition, it is the lower class residents that are being displaced to make room for the new more affluent groups, to whom social mix is usually referring to. Even if the local inhabitants are not displaced, the percentage of those who stay in the transformed and newly formed community is so insignificant that it does not contribute to diversification and social mixing among different classes on a larger scale. To summarize, social mix is something that cannot be developed if the residents are no longer feeling at home in such neighborhoods, even if they have received certain benefits which would financially enable them to further reside in the same area.

The Term Issue

Authorities and planners use a set of various expressions to depict improvements of cultural, economic, physical, social and other appearances of neighborhoods that go through gentrification. The reason for this is that the process and the word itself accumulated much negative attention by the public over the course of years and that the perception of its definition is somewhat heterogeneous. To illustrate, in the book called "Houses in Transformation", prepared by prestigious NAI Publishers in 2008 (Berg *et al.*, 2008), almost every author uses a different term to describe similar processes that gentrification may enclose. In order to avoid eventual controversy, alternative terms such as: 'urban regeneration', 'urban renewal', 'urban renovation', 'urban revitalization' or 'urban renaissance', are being used in some international academic circles, city planning documentation and urban policies (Lees *et al.*, 2008). These expressions do not all implicate the same process, some of them may qualitatively be differentiated (Nikezić, 2006, p.12), yet gentrification is the most inclusive term.

Sometimes labeled as "cappuccino urban politics, with plenty of froth" (Peck, 2005, p.760), gentrification, displaced as a word and renamed to 'urban regeneration', somewhat narrower term, has worked its way through to become what "is now not only the policy of various European states but also the official urban policy of the European Union" (Smith, 2008, p.17). As an illustration to this, through the European Urban Charter adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992, the 'urban renaissance' was recognized as a guideline for future urban development (Stojkov, 1996). Even further, gentrification beginning as a minor urban process in some western cities during the 1960s is now gaining in both prevalence and popularity and turning into a "global urban strategy" (Smith, 2002, p.440). Governments of the First World countries are nowadays encouraging gentrification through urban regeneration projects with the aim to solve the problems of aged infrastructure and evident poverty (Atkinson, 2004).

On a local scale, in order to avoid class connotations and be accepted by the public, ruling structures were simplifying the word 'gentrification' and depending on the city, different more easily understood and remembered terms were used. Labels such as: 'back-to-the-city movement', 'neighborhood revitalization', 'brownstoning', 'homesteading',

'whitepainting', 'whitewalling' and 'red-brick-chic' (Williams, 1986, p.65; Lees *et al.*, 2008, p.6) were introduced by the media.

Heterogeneity and Complexity

Gentrification as a highly complex and contextually inclusive does not insinuate that all neighborhoods on a global map or within a single city will go through all stages of the process or "that they will reach the same end state, nor, indeed, that they can only travel in one direction" (Shaw, 2008, p.1714). Characteristics of each stage of gentrification of a certain site may significantly vary when compared to the process happening on another location. Also, differences regarding temporal and spatial context in the sense of various political, cultural, economic, social and other backgrounds influencing the process, can contribute to two global gentrified sites to be delicate for comparative analyzing when put side by side.

Critical Standpoint

A propos the term-dispute, although the name-disguising of the process may be noted, it can be concluded that, in relation to architectural and urban planning modes of action, the process of transformation may be differentiated according to what it entails into a few specific terms, such as those mentioned in Chapter 2.6. Some of them also include aspects other than those narrowly collocated with engineering disciplines. However, gentrification presents a most inclusive term in sense of impacts of external forces on the construction-wise form of operation. Concerning that the aim of this paper was also to emphasize the significance of interdisciplinary approach, i.e. to stress the importance of correlation, coordination, cohesion and consistency between all the other dimensions affecting urban transformations, the term 'gentrification' was adopted.

Gentrification, as argued here, includes transformations of both residential and non-residential depressed areas that previously suffered disinvestment which, when their physical structure has improved or was demolished and re-built, experience an inflow of a more well-off group of inhabitants or users. It represents a highly complex, multifaceted and long-lasting process by which neighborhoods change their characteristics and flavors on the course of time due to a large number of influences.

GENTRIFICATION OF GRBAVICA, NOVI SAD, SERBIA – A CASE STUDY

General Background

Grbavica, a part of Novi Sad, Serbia, presents a neighborhood that has experienced rapid changes in character of its tissue, conditioned by the fast pace of development of the city.

Located on the former outskirts of Novi Sad which, due to urban growth during last sixty years, found itself in the city's geographical centre, Grbavica today represents a district which is in the process of gentrification. The first renewal after the Second World War back in the 1960s was forth-shadowing the beginning of the process. Nevertheless, the analyzed area went through a hibernation period, until, influenced by post-socialist economic revolution in the 1990s, the conditions altered in a way that its transformation was made possible. Ever since then, Grbavica has been, first subtly and during the last decade more and more intensely gentrified.

Boundaries of the Analyzed Area

Grbavica is understood as the area bound by: Futoška Street to the north; Oslobođenje Boulevard to the east; Cara Lazara Boulevard to the south and Vojvode Kričanić and Kolo srpskih sestara streets to the west. Part of Grbavica between: Braće Ribnikara and Futoška streets on the north; Oslobođenje Boulevard, EPS' complex and Limanska Market on the east; part of Puškinova and Alekse Šantića streets to the south and Krilova Street and Jewish and Catholic cemeteries to the west, has been researched and critically revalorized in this paper and from this moment on will be referred to as 'Grbavica'. This fragment was chosen for analyses due to the fact that it contains, all for this area typical, characteristics of a gentrifying neighborhood.

Wider Context

Novi Sad, a city on the river Danube and on the borders between Pannonian Plain and the hills of Fruška Gora, was continually developing since it was established. Not intending to further elaborate the complete history of its origin and development, one should emphasize that Novi Sad has been undoubtedly experiencing a highly intensive period of urban sprawl, especially in the last decade of the

twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Forth-Shadowing Gentrification

Background

As a consequence of its predominantly agricultural character after the Second World War, Novi Sad had small residential density and represented a unique "combination of a city and a village" (Technical Report on the Master Plan of the City of Novi Sad from 1950, 1950, p.44). Distribution of the construction land within its boundaries was inconsistent, transportation system was not adjusted to the growing needs of the city and the housing conditions in majority of residential areas were inadequate. Due to irregular disposition of parcels and their diluted layouts, it was difficult to provide necessary infrastructure for all city districts.

For those reasons, as well as due to constant migrations from the rural parts of Vojvodina, recommendations listed in the Master Plan for the City of Novi Sad from 1950 included an

increasement of residential density of the existing neighborhoods by making use of their disposable construction land through a process of "reconstruction" instead of developing greenfield areas (Technical Report on the Master Plan of the City of Novi Sad from 1950, 1950, p.45). Hereby, the city turned to the policy of intensifying construction of housing, densification and creation of compact urban fabric. This was also an initiation for the gentrification process to start in the decades to follow.

Local Context - a Reflection

Grbavica as a conveniently located district on the outskirts of the city's core, predominantly consisting of ground-floor single-family and complex housing of diverse quality (Novi Sad – Master Plan from 1963, 1963) became an attractive location for the construction of multi-family buildings in a regime of reconstruction, thus forth-shadowing that the area could be gentrified in the future.

The most important alteration within the urban fabric originating from this period was the



Pictures 1, 2 and 3: the former rural character of Grbavica.



Pictures 4 and 6: tour-de-force Oslobođenje Boulevard was thrust through the organically structured urban tissue; Picture 5: Intersection of Oslobođenje Boulevard and the new Vojvodanska Street.



Pictures 7, 8 and 9: the new residential slab blocks and towers erected in Oslobođenje Boulevard and Vojvodanska Street.

construction of the 23rd October Boulevard (Oslobođenje Boulevard today), with the intention to connect previously relocated railway station on its northern end with planned stadium on the south. This had a strong effect both on the upcoming city development and the urban character of Grbavica.

Before this intense change, Grbavica, especially on its outskirts, was comprised of town houses with spacious individual yards. However, in the incipient stage of gentrification, so to say, which followed, the identity of small, placid streets with hawthorn trees planted along their sides was starting to modify under the impact of great aspirations of the Modern urban planning ambitions carried out when the aforementioned *tour-de-force* Boulevard was stroke through the existing, organically structured urban tissue. Formerly interwoven into the old city *nucleus*, from this moment on, Grbavica was completely cut-off, forced to adjust its socio-spatial character and its communicational spines to the city's new physical organization. Consequently, radial streets in the Boulevard contact area were converted into an orthogonal network, while one of the strongest transportation veins of Novi Sad, the Željeznička Street, was mutilated and left dead-ended on both sides.

The creation of the new transportation artery gave the impulse to pre-war concepts of urban development which were inspired by competition entries for the Regulation Plan for Novi Sad from 1937 and thus the area surrounding the Boulevard was intended to mark the beginning of an era of extensive construction of housing. Unfortunately, this verve was short-breathed, starting and ending with erection of two (of which one was in Grbavica) out of six residential towers with fourteen floors that represented urban landmarks, city gates of that time.

As the city's population was rapidly increasing, reaching 110,798 inhabitants (by the census from 1961; previously documented was the one from 1953, according to which Novi Sad had population of 83,180; Novi Sad – the Master Plan from 1963, 1963), construction of housing became an urge. In order to accelerate the process, in the beginning of 1960s city officials adopted general designs for multi-storey residential buildings in Grbavica, a district in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Working title of these designs was accepted by the locals, and therefore the area in which they were implemented in 1961 was territorially defined for the first time and, as an urban

entity, named 'Grbavica'. Construction of residential slab blocks and towers in the spirit of the Modern Movement, with hundreds of apartments, began almost synchronously in a number of different parts of the neighborhood.

Hibernation

In the beginning of 1970s, the conditions for the city's sprawl were acquired and the conquering of vacant urban land (Liman and Novo Naselje) and stretching the city limits towards the west and the Danube had begun. This resulted in a hiatus of reconstructing the existing built environment and, thus, Grbavica as well. Still fashionable designing and planning based on the Corbusierian principles were soon to encounter their zenith.

According to the Master Plan from 1973, Grbavica had around 7,400 inhabitants in 1971. Level of intervention within its tissue defined by the Plan implied that residential blocks may be restructured but that inherited street network must be preserved (Master Plan for the City of Novi Sad 2000, 1973). Politics of reconstruction of neighborhoods that was favored by the authorities in previous decades was prolonged, but in much lesser extent. Grbavica was in the state of hibernation up until the end of 1980s, when it entered the phase of its 'renaissance'.

Gentrification Analyzed – Grbavica Reexamined

Background

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, capacities of the available construction land were depleting. Due to great migrations and a further population increase, it was an imperative to turn to extensive transformations of the already inhabited areas, especially in relation to a modification of residential types, from single-family or complex into multi-family housing of middle and high densities. Namely, the development of residential quarters could also contribute to the evolution of more compact cities by recycling derelict land and buildings (Bromley *et al.*, 2005).

The essential novelty deriving from this period was, primarily from the perspective of architectural designing and urban planning (although it could also be analyzed through a number of other parameters), was the introduction of the term 'permanent reconstruction' into the city's planning documentation (Master Plan of the City of Novi Sad until 2005, 1985). It mustered all,

perhaps, most radical transformations of the urban tissue – replacement of the existing buildings, characterized as deprived, with new structures in order to improve the quality of housing conditions and organize dwelling spaces in a more rational manner. Gentrification asserted itself as a solution.

Strong demand for living in the city, i.e. for an urban lifestyle, led to mass-production of housing stock in already urbanized areas owing to their attractive location in vicinity of the old city *nucleus*. The concept of permanent reconstruction (which partially overlaps with the term 'gentrification') was introduced to the newer urban terminology no sooner than in 1985. Yet, already back then it was recorded that certain parts of the city have been "dehumanized", but that this form of transformation still "offers a possibility to increase the quality of the city as a whole" (Master Plan of the City of Novi Sad until 2005, 1985, p.11/60). Despite noting potential problems on account of alterations of the existing or entirely new-built housing that lacked additional amenities, the reins on dynamic 'densification' of the area in or close to the city centre were not tightened.

Local Context – A Reflection

In spite of random construction of residential towers and blocks in the 1960s, Grbavica in the late 1980s still possessed an almost intact character. Back then, complex and a certain percentage of single-family housing was most prevalent in the area. Blocks defined by a slightly modified street network had a range of typologies: complex housing in directions of the city core; complex housing on the area outskirts, enriched with new-built multi-family buildings; multi-family housing in the new street network; single-family housing which included the city's oldest houses of this type and somewhat newer villa-type assemblies (Plan of Detailed Regulation for the Complex Housing of the Miše Dimitrijevića Block in Novi Sad, 1988). Most of these structures were located on clearly defined parcels and had only few floors. The area surrounding the Braće Ribnikara Street was comprising of a few distinct ambiances with kindred characteristics.

Nevertheless, during the 1990s, multi-family residential buildings were subtly 'creeping into' Grbavica, gradually forcing single-family or complex housing off of their parcels. In the late 1990s, gentrification took off and began to spread on a larger scale than the analyzed area could handle. By the turn of the century, the



Pictures 10, 11 and 12: Braće Ribnikara Street: "My favorite buildings are all falling down, Seems like I dwell in a different town ..." (part of a song by Robyn Hitchcock called "My Favorite Buildings").

number of newly erected residential buildings and, *ergo*, the population started increasing, albeit the vital supplementary infrastructure works were for the most part omitted. Some parts of Grbavica, among which also the Braće Ribnikara Street mentioned above, began to lose their former features.

Structure of Investment in Residential Construction

In order to truly comprehend the stimulus that the economy shift gave to the gentrification of Grbavica, it is necessary to explain the changes of the structure of investments in the residential construction on a national level.

In the decade following the Second World War, construction of housing was strictly state sponsored. After 1956, numerous collective residential funds were established and housing construction was financed from their budgets that were obtained through the mandatory contribution of 5.8 percent of the gross labor income. They acted as investors and were responsible for distribution of apartments (Pajović, 1996). The law concerning the management of residential construction funds in state and collective ownership, brought in 1965, marked the beginning of transformation to the market economy with the aim of encouraging private investments in housing construction (Popov, 2005). However, there were few initiatives from the private sector. The state authorities still held the monopoly over housing construction, thus controlling city planning as well. They were also in charge of the allotment of housing units which remained in collective ownership, i.e., residents were only given the right of use. From the perspective of development of Grbavica, in order to fulfill extended residential needs during this period, massive blocks and towers in the *Moderna* style that were erected, were viable only through this method of financing.

Late 1980s brought great revisions of the economy which manifested through a general decrease in investments. Given that under

these circumstances the state founded collective residential funds were no longer capable of funding construction of housing alone, residential construction became market-orientated and to a great extent sponsored by the private sector. By the beginning of 1990s, housing in communal ownership was almost completely privatized and all further construction of residential buildings was subjected to preconditioning by the market.

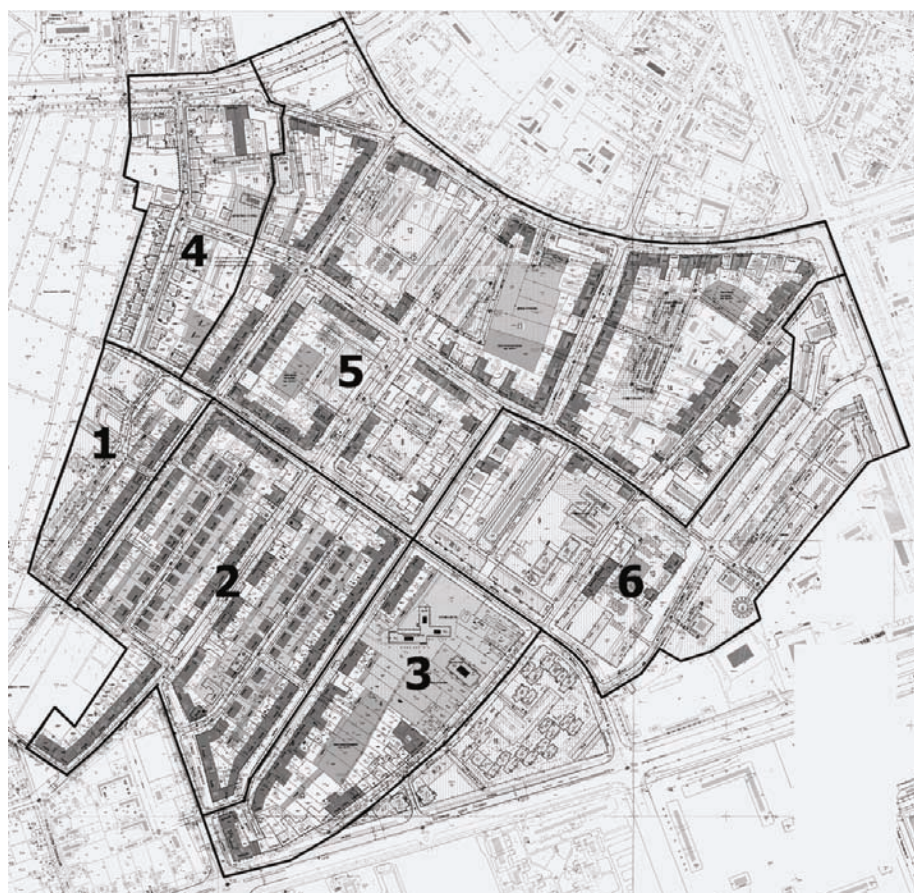
Permanent reconstruction as such suited individual initiatives of the new wave of private investors who did not have enough capital to join several parcels and undertake a residential project of a larger scale, but were constructing

buildings on single, narrow parcels that were previously occupied by single-family or complex housing. Being that this regime was allowing demolition of the neglected buildings, the investors were given the opportunity to buy them off and thus obtain construction land for multi-family housing. This was also beneficial for the previous landlords according to the 'rent-gap theory' (Hamnett, 1991), since most of them let the property deteriorate even further as it became apparent that their houses, more specifically the land they were on, would attract new capital either way and that it did not pay off to invest in their maintenance.

From all the above mentioned, it may be concluded that the changes that occur in the built environment also depend on who invests in its housing stock, and that economic rather than other forces are of greater significance to the initiation of the gentrification process (Smith, 1996).

Aspect of Physical Structure

With the aim to understand changes of physical structure which greatly contributed in modifying the existing or gaining a completely



Picture 13: Plan of the analyzed part of Grbavica, divided into 6 segments.

new identity of some parts of Grbavica, the researched area is divided into four fragments: I – between Futoška, Braće Ribnikara, Dože Đerđa streets and the Catholic and Jewish cemeteries; II – between Braće Ribnikara, Dože Đerđa, Puškinova and Lasla Gala streets and Oslobođenje Boulevard; III – between Puškinova, Alekse Šantića, Krilova streets, the Jewish cemetery and Dože Đerđa Street, IV – between Puškinova, Lasla Gala streets, Oslobođenje Boulevard and both sides of Vojvođanska Street.

I – Groups of buildings, comprising of slab blocks and free-standing structures, erected in the 1960s (parts of segments 1, 5 and 6)

Past: During the 1960s, there was a need to swiftly construct new multi-family housing, positioned in a way that it could easily be connected to the existing infrastructure. Hence, these structures were located either on vacant outskirts of Grbavica (segments 1 and 6) or on expropriated parts of gardens of single-family or complex housing parcels within the blocks (segment 5). The two residential types, single-family or complex and multi-family housing, were shape- and function-wise incompatible and “inadequate to respond to the urban matrix” (Plan of Detailed Regulation for the Complex Housing of the Miše Dimitrijevića Block in Novi Sad, 1988, p.6). These instant solutions disabled further rational development of the adjacent blocks and structures in the immediate vicinity of the slab blocks. If the reconstruction were to be continued in the same manner, hefty demolition and restructuring of the street network would be necessary.

Present: Gentrification of this part of Grbavica, beginning in the late 1990s and up to this day, has had mostly negative effects. Despite the fact that the rehabilitation of the buildings mentioned above was carried out, main principles of Modernism, which constitute their core, were not respected. By further increase of the construction density, only few of them are still surrounded by greenery (segments 1 and 6), while the others have been shrouded by multi-storey buildings erected on the parcels framing the blocks (segment 5). While structures built in groups still possess a certain sense of identity, randomly located slab blocks have been ‘islands’ in the urban tissue ever since they were erected.

II – Oldest single-family housing (parts of segments 2 and 3)

Past: The oldest single-family housing in Novi Sad was structured along three linear strokes that evolved on what used to be outskirts of the city. These traditional rural linear houses were typical for the periphery.

Present: The planning documentation from 1988 enabled future gentrification of the area by permitting demolition of this single-family and complex housing stock to supply land for construction of three- and five-storey buildings (Plan of Detailed Regulation for the Complex Housing of the Miše Dimitrijevića Block in Novi Sad, 1988). It also provided a modified street network for Grbavica by introducing dead-ended access streets inside the blocks. Further densification of physical structure was

suggested by the documentation from 2003 through planning construction of terraced “family housing” (Regulation Plan for Blocks surrounding the Danila Kiša Street in Novi Sad, 2003, p. 251), while omitting to define whether that term refers to single- or multi-family structures. This terminology gap was taken advantage of by the private investors and, instead of public spaces and greenery, construction of terraced multi-family buildings and garages within already condensed blocks had begun. In parts of segments 2 and 3, strong polarity between the old and the new urban fabric was detected. In sporadic groups of single-family houses which were left intact, rural identity timidly still exists, but the



Pictures 14 and 15: three typical blocks as they were in the 1970s and as they are planned to be by the Regulation Plan from 2003.



Pictures 16, 17 and 18: architecture in today's Grbavica – a potpourri of shapes, colors and styles.



Pictures 19, 20 and 21: Old urban tissue juxtaposed with the new-built multi-family housing.



Picture 22: the serene Antona Čehova Street; Pictures 23 and 24: two now deprived structures declared as cultural heritage.

question is for how long.

III – Heterogeneous area (segment 5)

It can be noted that the most prevalent characteristic of Grbavica is heterogeneity of its housing construction, and thus the segment 5, as a typical sample, has been singled out and analyzed.

Past: With a variety of housing typologies, from single-family to complex and later multi-family, this area has been representing a unique combination of a typical rural and a typical urban dwelling.

Present: Even though the most recent city planning guidelines stated that “recent reconstructions that have been carried out frequently cause great contrasts in height and architectural design, and therefore ... should be discouraged” (Master Plan of the City of Novi Sad until 2021, 1999, p.53), this has seldom been followed and the area is nowadays abundant in disparities. The extent of today’s heterogeneity of Grbavica, especially that of the here analyzed segment 5, illustrates negative influences of gentrification. Old urban fabric has been juxtaposed with the new-built multi-family housing, making it difficult for most of them to co-exist and establish a joint identity.

Enabling dense construction of housing, without having a coherent vision of its impact on the immediate surroundings and the area as a whole, led to creation of narrow streets, framed by multi-story buildings, thus, making them physically canyon-like, burdening the old tissue and generating contrasts which are visually difficult to bear.

IV – Resisting houses (segment 4)

Past: Segment 4 was and still is characterized by detached single-family or double-family housing on small parcels. Originating from different periods and owing their features to a variety of styles, these houses are different in height and volume, but together they compose an ambiental entity of high physical and visual quality.

Present: This area is the only part of Grbavica that has resisted the temptation of gentrification. By “vary[ing] in age and condition [of its buildings and] including a good proportion of old ones,” this fragment is one of few in Grbavica which is managing to generate “exuberant diversity” (Jacobs, J., 1993, p.196) and still possesses a unique and coherent sense of identity. Some structures have also been declared as cultural heritage

and put under special protection (Plan of Detailed Regulation for the Complex Housing of the Miše Dimitrijevića Block in Novi Sad, 1988, p.14).

Social Aspect

Population structure of Grbavica comprises of a number of layers that clarify its developmental origins. From its foundation, until the instigation of the gentrification process, this area, having mainly rural character, had been inhabited by residents of predominantly Hungarian nationality engaged in agriculture. Due to constant migrations from rural Vojvodina into the city, the multi-family housing erected during the 1960s was mostly occupied by the new working class. In accordance to subtle transformations of the analyzed area that followed in the next 30 years, social mix of rural and urban dwellers did not significantly change.

Political changes and economic decline in Serbia during the last decade of the twentieth century reflected on the population structure of Grbavica. Frequent and uncontrolled alterations of the urban fabric in the sense of replacement of the single-family and complex housing by multi-story residential buildings containing *petite* units (mostly studios and single-room apartments) provided sufficient conditions for settling of small households. In return for their parcel, indigenous inhabitants were receiving apartments in this or other parts of the city. However, even if they decided to reside in Grbavica, unprecedented changes of its structure caused by gentrification would make their dwelling unpleasant. Compared to current practice in which inhabitants are given an opportunity to choose, during the construction of multi-family housing back in 1960s, property-owners of nationalized parcels were forced to move to apartments allotted to them in various parts of the city.

Social composition of Grbavica is nowadays mostly made of students, young professionals and married couples. Along with mutations within the area caused by gentrification, which

primarily affected its physical structure, its flavor has changed. Given that identity of a neighborhood does not constitute solely buildings but its residents as well, social relations also control the process of urban transformation (Pušić, 2004) as sudden changes of the social composition lead to displacement of the people that once created its ambiental character. In order to avoid them, beside the necessity of having a clear vision of urban development of a city as an entity, the transformation of its neighborhoods cannot be successfully conducted without active or passive involvement of the local residents (Vaništa-Lazarević and Đukić, 2006).

Pros and Cons of Gentrification

Grbavica was analyzed through Freeman’s guideline for defining the state of a residential neighborhood in relation to its gentrification potential or its involvement within a process (Freeman, 2005). Since Grbavica is a central city district that was populated by lower to middle income households and was not being significantly invested into during previous decades, it may be concluded that, during the 1980s, it did have a potential to be gentrified. Other criteria determining whether the neighborhood is already going through the process of gentrification include the aforementioned and further refer to the arrival of relatively affluent newcomers and increased investments in the area. Beginning with the socio-political changes and intensified construction in the 1990s, Grbavica was completely fulfilling Freeman’s model, and starting representing a truly gentrified neighborhood.

Gentrification, as an inevitable byproduct of city development and as a “double-edged sword,” can have either clearly positive or negative, or both positive and negative impacts (Kennedy and Leonard, 2001, p.14). Being that all transformations in Grbavica have been carried out without a strict, clear and tangible long-term plan, today’s gentrification of this



Pictures 25 and 26: Grbavica’s courtyards rapidly becoming shrouded with garages;
Picture 27: Novi Sad’s district of Nova Detelinara – eventual future of Grbavica’s inner-block open spaces?

area, despite displaying some good sides, has mostly had negative consequences.

Positive aspects of gentrification on Grbavica can primarily be observed through its input in the urban sprawl of Novi Sad. In spite of being conveniently positioned, this district previously had rural character, and the process brought re-connecting of this area with the city *nucleus* into being. By increasing the construction density, more housing stock was provided, which also commenced additional investing in the renewal and modernization of the infrastructure. With this, Grbavica gained popularity and became a very attractive for residing of young, educated inhabitants.

Following the above mentioned, a few negative aspects of gentrification can be remarked as well. Namely, construction in the last decade has been insufficiently regulated by the planning documentation and, directed almost exclusively by profit, investor-oriented urban planning disregarded the volumes of residential buildings defined by the latest Regulation Plan (Regulation Plan for Blocks surrounding the Danila Kiša Street in Novi Sad, 2003). The construction density raised to an extent much larger than that that could be borne by the existing street network. Moreover, the adequacy of maintaining same street sections inside the frames of the old transportation scheme within which mostly single-family and complex housing was formerly located and positioning multi-storey buildings in their place is being questioned.

Architecture in the gentrified parts of Grbavica is appearing as a mere by-product of 'one-square-meter-more' motto and depends almost entirely on the private investor's affinities, which completely marginalizes the influence of an architect. Narrow street frontages variously colored, enriched with a wide spectrum of randomly organized elements originating from a variety of historical styles prompted the loss of visual aspects which could be easily recognized and remembered. Landmarks easing orientation in the analyzed area are nowadays mostly few old(er) buildings or ambiental entities, which possibly could, under the next wave of investor-oriented construction, soon be wiped out as well.

Absence of high-quality public spaces within the residential blocks was observed. Excluding few examples such as those surrounding the structures built during the 1960s, greenery and open spaces intended for socialization of inhabitants of all ages, as their value could

hardly be charged by the square meter, have been neglected. Residents of the analyzed area dwell almost exclusively inside their apartments, while streets and inner-block courtyards serve merely as communications. Today, people do not spend time on the streets of Grbavica anymore; rather, they are just passing through.

To conclude, one must again turn to the fact that careful structuring of the identity of each residential quarter, can be essential in establishing a successful long-term strategy of city-branding. But, if done tactlessly, it could become an "urban bomb that has the potential to destroy the whole city" (Pušić, 1984, p.121). This is exactly what gentrification is turning Grbavica into.

CONCLUSION

Even though gentrification continues to be a subject of theoretical disputes due to heterogeneous visions of its definition and its comprehensiveness, in this paper the term was put into limelight in attempt to demystify it and to draw attention to the importance of its holistic concept for urban transformations. In order to avoid manifestations of its negative consequences which would shroud its positive sides, continual, active, controlled and not simply *pro formae* interdisciplinary teamwork is of utmost importance.

Public and private sectors may be sufficiently co-ordinated, however the civil initiative should give its contribution to every process of urban transformation in a greater extent. Despite the fact that the local residents of the gentrifying neighborhoods may not be able to be involved in the decision-making, interactive civil programs could guide them to widen their horizons and more enthusiastically experience their immediate surroundings. As today's "human being is not a man of action anymore, but a player" (Flusser, 1999, p.89), some more drastic methods of gaining their interest for participation could, perhaps, be required. Nevertheless, in the purpose of reaching synergy between the three sectors, it is the acme of significance for the inhabitants to get engaged in any process that would change the character of their neighborhood.

Through gentrification of residential areas in form of a total makeover, *ad hoc* generated identities of the new physical structure can bring the feeling of selflessness, alienation and other modes of urban pathology about. Neighborhoods are not simply containers of

buildings, representing settings such as those from a theatre play, in which urban life 'happens'; they embody an invaluable component of the identity of every human being dwelling within its frames. By actively participating as users of space, rather than consuming it and taking everything 'served' to them for granted, i.e., by changing the appearance of their neighborhoods in accordance with their needs, desires and abilities, residents may contribute to the creation of their urban space, enriched with meaning. And that's precisely what it's all about.

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Picture sources

- Pictures 1-9 and 13 - Archives of the J.P. "Urbanizam" - Zavod za urbanizam Novi Sad, Novi Sad
- Pictures 10-12 and 16-27 - by the authors' team (D. Nedućin, O. Carić and V. Kubet)
- Picture 13 - from the *Regulation Plan for Blocks surrounding the Danila Kiša Street in Novi Sad* (2003)
- Pictures 14 and 15 - by the authors' team (D. Nedućin, O. Carić and V. Kubet)