Culture, policy and the transformation of the urban space in Bucharest

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The Romanian society has been shaken by major events throughout the past decades, revealing, among other transformations, the emergence of the creative society, as well as new forms of urban expression such as revitalization and gentrification. The urban development in Romania was analyzed more from a policy perspective and less in terms of a cultural process. But culture is part of everyday living and represents an essential element of the urban transformation.

This paper addresses the change of the urban space in Bucharest within the context of both housing policy trends and cultural lifestyle changes. The gentrification of the central area of Bucharest is considered to be a holistic process which cross the boundaries between sectors and policy fields and simultaneously address social, cultural and economic aspects in sustainable development of the city. The method combines the desk research (the analysis of relevant documents and of statistical indicators) and empirical study (in-depth interviews with inhabitants and key actors).

The transition period to a market economy has favored a spontaneous process of urban developments strongly determined by the private sector, with less restrictions of public spatial planning. The chaotic growth of the 1990s was followed by a more politically driven development after 2000s. The struggle between the new buildings and heritage, between the new and the existing infrastructure, has shaped significant redefinitions in the professional and social strategies over the last years. A growing civil society is increasingly involved in decision-making processes for better policies regarding urban life and culture. Three sets of factors were put into debate: economical (the growth of the house investing potential), political (city hall involvement in the modernization of the central area through urban projects) and cultural (the changing customs of the built space, the new forms of sociocultural initiatives of the community).

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