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The gentrification approach as an analytical tool in assessing the effects of participatory urban policy

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Abstract

The objective of the article is to present the assumptions of the gentrification approach, which allows one to assess the impact of public spatial actions undertaken by various actors in the process of social production of space. The study proposes a research methodology that distinguishes the social, economic and spatial dimensions of gentrification. The author makes use of source literature on the subject of gentrification and public policy theories as well as the results of the author's gentrification research conducted in Warsaw, New York and Istanbul on examples of places that were planned using various types of participatory techniques. The study performs the operationalisation of the measurement of gentrification as a useful analytical tool in policy science.

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Introduction

Some authors tend to perceive public policy as the opposite of deeply ideologised politics. As Wedel et al. (2005: 34) describe it, 'policies may be clothed in neutral language [because of] their ostensible purpose merely to promote efficiency or effectiveness'. It seems that such assessing of efficacy is gaining a growing importance in the contemporary world. A similar approach is compatible with social expectations regarding the effective spending of public funds. An additional context is the austerity policy conducted in numerous fields, especially after the global crisis of 2008-2009. Against this backdrop, R. Drozdowski and M. Frąckowiak (2015: 411) suggest that there is something like 'the sorrow of the concrete', an orientation that 'is visible today nearly everywhere', inter alia, in the contexts of economy, social activism, and science.

The concept of gentrification is not new. This process of transformation of urban areas from a state of degradation into a neighbourhood inhabited by affluent residents was first described more than half a century ago. The fiercest theoretical debates among researchers in this field took place over thirty years ago (Glass 1964; Smith 1979; Ley 1986). However, outside the Western world, such processes of urban transformation began to appear much later. This is typical for example for states located in Central and Eastern Europe described as so-called dependent market economies (Nölke & Vliegenthart 2009). For the process of gentrification to occur, large amounts of economic capital are necessary, which was not available there in a quantity comparable to western countries. There was also a lack of a free real estate market that limited the scope for speculating on property.

The article's objective is to present the assumptions of the gentrification approach as a tool that is possibly useful for the purposes of evaluating urban policy. Gentrification seems to be one of the most important contemporary urban processes, even though it is judged in different ways. Plenty of public actions, including those performed by public sector, privately-owned companies and grassroots movements, seem to have an effect on the emergence of this process. Gentrification, understood as a multidimensional urban transformation, has both a positive and negative impact on different aspects of urban life. Even if there is no common agreement in relation to the assessment of the process as a whole, there are fewer doubts in relation to its various dimensions. It seems that distinguishing between the social, economic, and spatial aspects can make it possible both to simplify the measurement of gentrification and to elucidate its influence. This means that introducing such a division can be helpful for the purposes of evaluating urban policy in terms of 'deciding among alternative ways of resolving

controversies regarding what should be done to deal with economic, technological, social, political, international, and legal problems at the societal level' (Nagel 2002: xi).

This article uses source literature in the fields of public policy and urban studies as well as the results of the author's research on gentrification conducted in New York, Istanbul and Warsaw. The latter was primarily based on the research presented in another publication (Drozda 2018a). That study included various types of secondary sources, such as source literature, census and commercial data on real estate prices, as well as primary sources obtained through field research, such as semi-structured street interviews with users of the urban space and different spatial analyses, including some associated with GIS.

Public action as a trigger of gentrification

The social production of space should be understood as a continuous process of spatial transformation. Each settlement form constantly changes its shape. For example, it is not possible to find the final form of the social and spatial structure of a city. It is essential to remember this in order to properly understand the nature of urban policy, which is the sum of policies related to the management of urban development processes. Although the main producers of this policy are representatives of the public sector, others, including representatives of civil society, are also involved in the process. This indicates the possibility of using various techniques of a participatory nature within this public policy. The process should not be considered a rational and closed public programme that can be managed in a limited time and within a closed cycle of action. Such an attitude is specific to so-called linear theories of policy science (Lasswell 1951; DeLeon & Martell 2006). Urban policy is not conducted in laboratory conditions. Such a way of thinking gives this policy a clearly reactive character and prevents it from anticipating appropriate actions in relation to important problems and threats. This makes the policy chaotic and ineffective, regardless of whether financial efficiency or equity is assessed as the criterion of its effectiveness (Just, Hueth & Schmitz 2004: 10). This means that urban policy should have a predictive function and, rather, be non-linear. In fact, this policy resembles the so-called garbage can model of public policy. As J. Pierre and B.G. Peters (2005: 52) point out, 'the fundamental assumption driving this model is that, rather than being programmed or predictable, decisions in many situations are more the result of the confluence of opportunities, individuals and ideas'.

Each urban policy seems to be conducted in that way, because it is the result of actions performed by its different actors and their contradictory interests. It is possible to divide such stakeholders, for example, on the basis of

social class distinction or due to their specific roles in the production of space process (Yusof & Kozłowski 2015: 82–83). The perspectives of groups like individual citizens, urban movements including organised associations of inhabitants, ad hoc informal initiatives, and various protest groups, real estate development companies or local authorities differ significantly. In this paper I want to consider four examples of the actions performed by different types of actors such as these.

The first one applies to large scale public investments. The general rule when introducing such urban projects is to design investments whose objective is to ‘leverage’ key urban resources, and by the same token, the entire urban development. The biggest difference between private and public-led investments is that in the second case the official aim declared by the promoter is not only to make a profit but also to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants in the immediate neighbourhood. Nevertheless, even public policy is influenced by the game of interests of different stakeholders, or at least its results are not as clear as could be expected. In this paper I use the example of the High Line Park in New York (David & Hammond 2011; Millington 2015; Reichl 2016). This urban space is an example of so-called privately owned public space (Kayden 2000): a mixture of a real public area with space that is managed by a non-governmental organisation called Friends of the High Line. The park is built on a former industrial railway line in the western part of Manhattan. In the past it was very dilapidated, and both local authorities and property owners wanted to demolish it to create some vacant lots and improve the use value of the land. At the beginning these groups were firmly opposed to the idea of preserving the railway line. However, over time they changed their attitude. The park, inspired by the actions of urban activists but mainly built thanks to support from public funds, is now perceived as an attractive public space. Also from the perspective of the real estate industry the High Line has become a tool that has raised the value of the adjacent lots. By the same token, this green infrastructure device has increased local economic gentrification. In S. Lang and J. Rothenberg’s (2016: 4) opinion, the ‘celebrated high profile designer ecology is quite superficial and serves as little more than an aesthetic veneer for the underlying processes of neoliberal urbanisation, gentrification, and lavish consumerism’. However, it is the park’s influence through social gentrification that is particularly criticised. Displacement most strongly affects the sphere of services, and so-called ‘whitewashing’ is observed. As A.J. Reichl (2016: 9–11) showed, 84 percent of visitors to the park are white, although they make up only 64 percent of the population of the neighbourhood. Blacks

and Latinos (22 percent of the population of the neighbourhood) only form 7 percent of the visitors.

The second example is connected to urban renewal programmes understood as planned public policy instruments. As has been shown in different examples, very often regeneration programmes not only fail to provide social inclusion, but also introduce its antithesis. Sometimes gentrification can even be found among the official objectives of such programmes. For example Polish municipal regeneration programmes very often already treat gentrification as the unofficial objective at the stage of formulating the general assumptions of the programme. This has been proved by a comparative study of such programmes in 10 of the largest cities in Poland. This trend was visible in almost all of the cases analysed with the exception of Krakow, and it was particularly strongly in the case of Lublin (Drozda 2017a). Very often the influx of groups like artists, students or tourists is treated as the official aim of urban regeneration. These are sometimes called the pioneers of gentrification, who raise the level of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) in a given area, but with time are replaced (together with the previous residents) by the holders of greater economic capital. Policy-makers want to attract the most creative individuals in degraded spaces, applying the theory of trickle-down economics. Unfortunately as a result members of the precarious service class emerge – for instance in R. Florida’s (2012, 2017) creative class reversal – as well as more highly developed spatial segregation and the privatisation of the urban commons (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015). As R. Fitch (1993: 98) jokingly points out in relation to various urban renewal programmes carried out in New York: ‘while [McCarthyism] may have been terrifying New York intellectuals, it was urban renewal that most frightened poor and working people’.

A similar impact can be associated with other spatial interventions carried out by grassroots actors in the process of the social production of space. Even though urban movements have very often ‘been defensive reactions against state-directed urban planning’ (Mullins 1987: 366) or are directly opposed to urban renewal programmes, including the most well-known initiatives led by Jane Jacobs (Zipp & Storrington 2016), they usually represent first and foremost the interests of their own activists. As the Fainsteins point out (1985: 189), such groups of activists ‘are the products of social collectivities, which consist of members with shared statuses or social conditions’. Whereas sometimes they are able to unify excluded groups, in other situations they strengthen the exclusion of the already excluded social groups. The case of Jane Jacob’s Greenwich Village in New York seems to be a good example of such a situation. The aim of the actions taken by her and her allies was to counteract the total destruction of the local community

by blocking large infrastructure projects conducted in the field of so-called bulldozer urbanism (Anderson 1964; Caro 1974). Paradoxically, the effect of actions aimed at the preservation of the neighbourhood turned out to attract rapid gentrification. As J. Moss (2017) revealed in the example of the aforementioned city, even social struggles and counter-culture can be commodified. Luxury boutiques and restaurants eagerly make use of the rebellious outlook of some parts of the city. They tend to sell t-shirts with revolutionary and punk slogans for several hundred dollars or expensive drinks with rebellious names. Their desire to support the local undesirables displaced by the gentrification processes is nominal and superficial.

A similar arrangement is also repeated in the case of artistic projects that increase the resources of cultural capital. The building up of such resources, however, serves the needs of the more advanced gentrifiers. It is not only that artists tend to search for the cheapest parts of cities which are later exploited by greedy estate agents with a desire for high profit. A similar process is seen in their actions performed in the public space. The impact of large-scale cultural investments, such as the influence of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao on its surroundings (the influential part of the so-called 'Bilbao effect' process) is already well recognised. However, projects carried out on a smaller scale in the field of landscape architecture can also lead to similar results. The transformation of Grzybowski Square in Warsaw is similar to that of the High Line Park mentioned earlier. The conversion of the local former Augéan (1995) 'non-place' was initiated by the design of a meeting place around the artistic installation of Joanna Rajkowska called *Oxygenator* (Borkowski 2010; Erbel 2012). This led, within a few years, to the thorough reconstruction of the neglected square, which in turn attracted large-scale development projects. These include, for example, the construction of one of the most luxurious apartment buildings in the city designed by the globally renowned architect Helmut Jahn, as well as the development of infrastructure designed for the needs of white-collar workers, high class representatives and hipsters, including trendy cocktail bars and premium office space. The original, temporary artistic installation made great use of the involvement of the local community, but has influenced the final and permanent plan for this area. In this context it seems that it is not only great museums of contemporary art, but even small artistic installations that are able to enhance or significantly accelerate gentrification processes.

On the other hand, urban movements also have a different image than those steered by representatives of privileged social groups in more developed states. An example analysed in this article is the *gecekondu*-type (Usta 2015) neighbourhood called Karanfilköy in Istanbul (Billig 2013;

Isanovic 2014). Initially this slum housing estate located in the Beşiktaş district was an informal area in which poverty was concentrated. Over time it has gained a number of characteristics so that it can be counted as a place with a high quality of urban life. In contrast to many similar areas which have been transformed on the basis of bulldozer planning into the form of more orderly blocks of flats rather than the houses of the former shanty town, Karanfilköy remains a decent area. It has undergone some partial and bottom-up modernisation of the built environment; for example, some of the former shanty houses were transformed into small mansions. Through closing off the possibility of decanting the population, real estate speculation has not been felt here, and no significant displacement of the local population has been observed in the preserved part of the neighbourhood; moreover, no short-term high-priced rental market, nowadays typical of heavily gentrified urban areas, has developed (Drozda 2018a). Like each Turkish *gecekondu*, this estate was created as a result of the activities of informal grassroots groups in opposition to official housing programmes. The term *gecekondu* means 'built overnight', which makes it possible to do it without the necessary permissions.

Assumptions of the gentrification approach

Gentrification is a difficult process to put into practice and induces fierce debates on its consequences. Opposing research approaches treat it as an extremely negative practice associated with the displacement of the local population or as something inevitable that brings many benefits. However, it is nevertheless agreed that there are four main aspects to this process. These include the three most important groups of repercussions: social (displacement of population and changes in the structure of local services), economic (an increase in property prices) and spatial effects (improvement of the quality of the built environment) (Drozda 2017b).

The possibility of measuring these transformations depends on the scope of the data available to the evaluators. The varying spatial contexts, such as urban, rural or so-called *Zwischenstadt* (Sieverts 2003), should be studied in different ways when examining the progress of gentrification. The exact indicators used in the gentrification approach should not, therefore, be universal. However, it seems that by combining various positions in the research on gentrification, it can be considered as associated with (1) particularly negative social consequences, (2) differently interpreted economic phenomena (positive enrichment of property owners, but lower accessibility to the whole area for tenants or the migrant population), and (3) positive transformations of space in terms of its technical condition (Table 1).

As a result of the above observations, it can be pointed out that public action in relation to a given social space,

TABLE 1
Impacts of different dimensions of gentrification
Source: own study

Dimension	Symptoms	Social impact
Social	Displacement of people, services and weakening of the social community	Negative
Economic	Increase of rents for tenants and less economic availability of the area to them	Negative
	Increase in affluence of property owners	Positive
Spatial	Improvement of the quality of the built environment	Positive

regardless of its character, can be assessed as effective if it does not lead to social gentrification, but initiates its spatial aspect. The most problematic thing is the economic dimension. In this context the Pareto criterion should not be the only determinant, because in the vast majority of cases it is absolutely impossible to benefit all interested parties, which is what the general assumption of this criterion specifies (Just, Hueth & Schmitz 2004). A situation that leads to only a limited increase in property prices seems to be the one that is most to be desired.

Application of the gentrification approach in practice

Based on the assumptions of the gentrification approach formulated above, it is possible to apply this methodology to specific public projects conducted by various actors in the social production of space process.

With reference to the High Line Park, it should be stated that the appearance of this investment influenced the social gentrification of the adjacent area. This is particularly evident when one looks at the social structure of the park users, who are better off than the dominant groups of local residents, as well as when one observes the changes in local services. However, local real estate prices did not grow faster than in other parts of the city (Drozda 2018a). The impact of this investment on the

spatial gentrification of the nearby area is unambiguously positive. Municipal Regeneration Programmes (*Gminne Programy Rewitalizacji*) in Poland are already supposed to lead to gentrification in all the three dimensions cited on the basis of the assumptions they adopt, both in the positive and negative aspects of spatial 'enrichment'. The functioning of the Karanfilköy estate in Istanbul has not led to the displacement of the population, because blocking the circulation of the real estate market makes it impossible to use it for speculation. The greater part of the built environment within the neighbourhood remains relatively neglected, although some parts of the local resources have undergone modernisation. In the case of artistic installations in Warsaw, partial social gentrification is observed just like that seen in relation to the High Line Park. The mechanism for the displacement of the existing population has not been implemented so extensively, although displacement has a significant effect on local services. Property prices in the periods preceding and following the artistic intervention changed in a similar manner as they did across the entire city, which does not suggest economic gentrification (Drozda 2018a). Nevertheless, the launching of positive spatial gentrification seems to be indisputable in this case. A summary of the above considerations is presented in the table below (Table 2).

TABLE 2
Impact of public actions in terms of initiating gentrification
Source: own study

Type of spatial intervention	Perceptible elements of gentrification		Total Impact
High Line Park, New York	Social	Yes	Partially negative
	Economic	Partial	
	Spatial	Yes	
Municipal Regeneration Programmes, Poland	Social	Yes	Partially negative
	Economic	Yes	
	Spatial	Yes	
Karanfilköy neighborhood, Istanbul	Social	No	Positive
	Economic	No	
	Spatial	Partial	
Oxygenator, Warsaw	Social	Partial	Partially negative
	Economic	Yes	
	Spatial	Yes	

To conclude these considerations, it is possible to present the general impact of individual public activities on the occurrence of different aspects of gentrification. In the third case (Karanfilköy estate) it is definitely positive, but in the other three it is rather negative. In line with previous comments on the impossibility of using a zero-one criterion in relation to the evaluation of public actions, the decisive factor in assessing the positive or negative impact of individual investments is to observe what types of impacts prevail.

Conclusions

The gentrification approach seems to be a useful tool in academic policy science and in the evaluation of the public policy conducted, in particular, by various public sector institutions as well as 'watchdog' non-governmental organisations. This kind of research approach enables more specific analysis of the impact of different public actions than propaganda-like declarations uttered by the representatives of local authorities or commercial investors. The ambiguity and complexity of the social production of space very often allows them to present the effects of their own policies as the desired ones even if the members of local communities experience their impact as negative. This is especially clear when urban 'renewal' affects the built environment, but not the social context of the city.

These kinds of anti-democratic actions by the strongest actors in the process of social production of space do not belong to such a distant past as the well-known large-scale projects implemented by Georges Haussman, Robert Moses or any similar 'demiurges' of urban planning. Also contemporary 'urban entrepreneurialism', as described by Harvey (1989), can be extremely antidemocratic. This is because its main purpose is not to provide urban services of a high quality to the local inhabitants, but rather to attract external investments. Social struggles inspired by projects that lead to the gentrification of the commons still appear in the contemporary urban space, as exemplified by the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul (Farro & Günce Demirhisar 2014), 'wild reprivatisation' in former real socialist cities (Drozda 2018b) or different kinds of spatial unrest currently seen around the world (Harvey 2013; Castells 2015). Increasing social inequalities and the market value of real estate in many regions of the world with a less stable level of development than is the case of Western states suggests that such conflict seem inevitable and will probably only increase in intensity.

'The choice of income distribution', just like each type of public policy, 'is a political matter that can only be solved by value judgments through the political process'

(Just, Hueth & Schmitz 2004: 10). However, the gentrification approach allows one to reconcile the application the criteria of equity and of efficiency. This shows that it is possible to bring effective evidence-based policy together with a dismissal of urgent social problems such as the economic exclusion of disadvantaged sections of the population. Counteracting gentrification and its negative effects enables the bypassing of opportunity expenditure such as avoided costs. The latter method of evaluation is, in D.L. Weimer & A.R. Vining's (2009) opinion, particularly accurate in relation to social programmes. Urban policy is certainly an example of a very sensitive social programme.

The advantage of the proposed method of analysis is the ability to balance the assessment of the effects of gentrification. This is possible after dividing its aspects into the positives and negatives of the 'enrichment' process, even though it can also be viewed as a little too simplistic for the messy reality of public policy. This kind of balance immunises the approach presented against the potential criticism associated with the allegation of a negative interpretation of any changes that occur within urban areas (Vigdor, Massey & Rivlin 2002; Davidson 2014). Under market conditions, any change in urban space leads to an increase in its use value, and is also conducive to the occurrence of property speculation in the conditions of free trade in the property market. The only conceivable situation in which any negative aspects of the gentrification process disappear is probably a situation in which there is a total collapse of the capitalist system. However, even in the eyes of one of the most ardent critics of this socio-economic model, the 'adaptability and flexibility of capitalism' is 'evident' (Harvey 2010: 138). After the global crisis of 2008–2009 it is visible in a notably clear way.

Another advantage of the gentrification approach is its ability to verify the real effects of public action, not their idealised assumptions. This applies to the phenomenon of the so-called nightmare of participation – a situation in which the participatory nature of public policy becomes an end in itself, instead of becoming a technique that increases its real social impact (Miessen 2010).

In currently existing conditions, as mentioned above, it is very hard to use the zero-one criterion as a method of evaluating public policy. The model proposed in this article is therefore primarily of use to public policy makers. It allows them to objectify the ways of evaluating public policy, which of course is not always possible. However, it does seem to be a desirable ideal unsurpassed to date and also a possible source of guidelines for all evidence-based policies.

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